

Steve Starkey ~ Nominated by OutReach 2014 Winner of the Liesl Blockstein Community Leadership Award



"Like a runner carrying the Olympic flame, Steve has been carrying the torch for peace and justice, and he hasn't shown any signs of slowing down. Let's stand and cheer this local hero and then join him in his work for a better today and a much better tomorrow."

— Glenn Mitroff, Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator, WORT-FM

"Under Steve's leadership we have not only survived the hard financial times at OutReach by diversifying our funding, we have made it a better organization. His leadership is a major reason why I am not only a donor, but I donate many hours of my time to Outreach."

—Roger Hansen, Board Member, OutReach

Steve Starkey has been an advocate in the nonprofit sector for more than 32 years. As one of his first ventures into advocacy, he co-founded the first statewide gay and lesbian newspaper, OUT!, in 1982. "In the early 80s homosexuality was a strongly taboo topic, so very few people were out publicly," said Steve. "In fact people asked us to leave the name of the publication off the mailing envelope, so that they wouldn't be targeted with violence. I think OUT! served as an important liaison at the time, connecting LGBT people in small towns and rural areas with activities in larger communities. OUT! was also a member of Community Shares of Wisconsin [CSW]."

From the 1980s onward Steve worked at, or served on the board of, nonprofits such as New Harvest Foundation, Citizen Action of Wisconsin, Workers Independent News, and Wisconsin Community Fund (WCF). While at WCF he was involved in helping fund small grassroots groups supporting Native American treaty rights, opposing the Exxon mine in northern Wisconsin, and supporting cleanup of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant (Citizens for Safe Water Around Badger, CSWAB). "We were funding groups that were too small to apply for CSW membership, but we sometimes served as a sort of nonprofit incubator—and CSWAB went on to join CSW."

Becoming OutReach's Executive Director in 2006, Steve in some ways came full circle—since he used OutReach's services in 1981 when he came out. At OutReach Steve worked tirelessly to strengthen the organization's programs and finances—he greatly increased the number of grants and boosted revenue by 50%.

Today, to provide more services to groups with specific needs within the LGBT community, Steve works with other nonprofits. "We offer training and education to groups like Rape Crisis Center, Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and Domestic Abuse Intervention Services," said Steve. "We offer similar training to the Madison Senior Center to address the needs of LGBT senior citizens. It's great to work with these organizations to make sure that their services are LGBT friendly, are culturally competent, and serve the entire community."

He noted that one of his most notable accomplishments was co-founding the Social Justice Center with Nan Cheney in 2000. The Center has housed dozens of nonprofits such as CSW member groups Tenant Resource Center, Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools (GSAFE), and Fair Wisconsin. "After we opened the Center Nan and I were sometimes asked to speak. We took a document with us: side 1 showed the order of steps we took to create the Center. Side 2 showed the order we **should** have taken. It was a huge amount of work. But I enjoy working with all types of social justice issues—since ultimately they're all related," said Steve.

"I'm really excited that gay rights and environmental protections have moved forward to the extent that they have in the past three decades," he concluded. "However given the strength and financing of our opposition, we need to keep fighting for positive social change. After all if we hadn't fought the good fight for the last 35 years, where would we be now?"