

Ian Ellasante Joins the True Colors Fund as First-Ever Chief Program Officer

by Nick Seip | posted in: News |



We're so proud to introduce the newest member of our team (drum-roll please) Ian Ellasante! It's a special honor to welcome Ian to the True Colors Fund, as he's been a member of our family for years, serving on our National Advisory Board.

While he may be new to our team, Ian's commitment to ending lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth homelessness is nothing new. He's demonstrated his dedication to LGBT young people time and time again through his direct service work in Tucson, his leadership in the city's LGBT Commission, and his role on the board of the Southern Arizona Gender Alliance, as well as Equality Arizona's Transgender Advisory Council. And now, he continues that dedication by moving across the country to New York City to join our team!

But I don't want to spoil it all, so I'll let Ian tell the story himself...

Tell us a bit about your life and work prior to joining the True Colors Fund. Whatcha been up to?

Until a couple of weeks ago, I was living in Tucson, enjoying the summer monsoons and sunsets while trying not to complain about the heat. I was working as the Program and Evaluation Coordinator for the ANCHOR Project, a collaboration of three organizations built around advocacy, stabilization, empowerment, and community building for LGBTQ young adults experiencing housing instability. From a homelike drop-in center called the ANCHOR House, I led a team of amazing folks and worked with some equally amazing young adults. Before the ANCHOR Project, I coordinated programming and staff for iTEAM, a collaboration of six organizations, which was also focused specifically on LGBTQ youth and young adults. And, before that, I was at Wingspan, where I got my start in direct service with LGBTQ youth. I started there at the Eon Lounge, a drop-in center for LGBTQ youth, as a Youth Outreach Specialist and eventually became Youth and Family Programs Manager.

Throughout most of that time, I've also been a grad student at the University of Arizona, earning my MA and now (almost!) my PhD in American Indian Studies. In spite of all that keeping me pretty busy, I still managed to build some lasting friendships in Tucson and surround myself with a vibrant and multifaceted queer community, particularly within arts, social justice, and QTPOC spaces.

Why the True Colors Fund? Tucson to New York City is a big move!



True! It's such a big move. I made the drive here over several days with my dog, Flower, as my trusty sidekick. We made a fun and exciting road trip of it. Of course, it's big for more reasons than just distance. For one, Tucson is such a laidback town with a much different pace than NYC. I'm not yet familiar with the city, so everything here is new and different. I think I'm doing a pretty good job at playing it cool and not looking like a tourist. I definitely have not stopped in the middle of a busy sidewalk to snap a pic. (Okay, there was the one time... but it was Radio City Music Hall. C'mon.) Still, for the time being, when I need to see something familiar, I can only look in the mirror or at Flower!

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Thankfully, it hasn't felt like such a big move in terms of the work at True Colors Fund. I've been a part of the national advisory board for a few years and seen clearly that many of the philosophies and truths that have guided my own work are also built into the framework of the True Colors Fund's mission. As I watched the organization grow, it's been inspiring to see it move even closer to justice-oriented practices like centering the most marginalized, amplifying the

voices of youth, and a truly intersectional understanding of the causes of homelessness. Then, I attended last year's 40 to None Summit in Houston where I saw young people who'd had experiences with homelessness involved in every aspect of the Summit. That sealed the deal for me!

Chief Program Officer? What's that all about? What sort of work will you be up to in your new position – and what are you most excited about?

There's already so much good work happening here, so a big part of my role is to uphold and enhance the vision, keep us connected to why this work is important, and hone those justice-oriented practices already at the core of what we do. Especially important to me is that we always deeply consider intersectionality and the multilayered causes of LGBTQ youth homelessness.

My particular areas of focus are community organizing, youth collaboration, and public policy. Out of the gate, I'm most excited about our youth collaboration, which we describe as a separate program area, but is really at the heart of all of our program areas. Though we are not a direct service provider, I'm proud that we do directly engage young people affected by homelessness to work alongside us on these issues that impact their lives. Just as important is our commitment to non-exploitative practices, reciprocity, and always compensating our youth for what they bring to the table.

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I've always been an ideas person. Over the years, I've been sharpening strategies to be good at more than ideas – to focus on implementation and turning good ideas into successful projects. Here, so many excellent projects are thriving and I'm glad to see that there are solid foundations in place for growing new ones. More importantly, there's a brilliant team here! While I've been doing direct service and program management within and alongside LGBTQ youth communities for several years now, I still have so much to learn. I am beyond thrilled to join up with this team of folks who are focused, mobilized, and have a wealth of expertise on these issues!

What do you geek out about?

Poetry is my thing! Writing is a medicinal practice for me. I've been writing poems for awhile and have published a few in recent years. I love to immerse myself in writing by other poets and dwell in their words. My all time favorite poet is Lucille Clifton, though there are about a dozen genius poets also on my list of favorites.

I appreciate most genres of music, but I geek out about blues music, Old School soul, and RnB from the 80s and 90s.

It turns out that I also really love geography... not so much the social aspects of geography with borders and populations and such, but the natural attributes of the landscape. For instance, my favorite part of my road trip from Tucson to New York was watching the topography change as I drove across the country. I drifted out of the mountains of the Sonoran desert up through New Mexico, where the

mountains morph into mesas, then across the Southern Plains and all kinds of valleys and countless bodies of water. I noticed so many shades of green and shifts in temperature and humidity along the way. It was stunning!

Got questions for Ian about his new position? Or just wanna geek out over geography? [Join us in welcoming Ian on Twitter!](#)

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When he's not working at the True Colors Fund, you can find Nick somewhere in Brooklyn, listening to, making, or talking about music.

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