



JEFF GRAHAM: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GEORGIA EQUALITY



By Marcia S. McNeill

Humble Beginnings. Jeff Graham, executive director of Georgia Equality, reflects on his 25-year participation with the Rustin/Lorde Breakfast. As one who has been with the Breakfast from day one, Jeff is honored with joy to watch it grow and become the powerhouse it is. He is amazed to see how it started, how it has developed, how it has resonated throughout the community, and how it got so big so fast. Now it is one of the most important traditions that exists in the Atlanta LGBTQ+ community today. What's exciting to Jeff is that there are new people who find out about the Breakfast every year.

He shares that the Breakfast is a living thing that changes with the times, grows with the community need, is important, and fun. Jeff appreciates that the Breakfast makes sure communities and people could come together across the division of race, gender, and economics to really focus on creating the reality of what Dr. King talked about, the beloved community. People coming together on King Day and doing it through a queer lens is amazing!

One of Jeff's fond memories of the Rustin/Lorde Breakfast is the first year there was programming to include the children. It was recognition of how our community was evolving and adapting to the changes of our lives with growing families. It showed a need to create a safe space for families to participate together, providing volunteers to focus on the youth during the Breakfast.

Jeff remembers that in the beginning with the partnership between AIDS Survival Project, Positive Impact, and AIDS Treatment Initiative, they leased the building where the first Breakfast was held. Jeff said they were asked to host and they gave their yes. They had the community gathering space that could hold 50-60 people. The three organizations created the space for the first two to three years of the Breakfast. The basement was renovated into a community space which restrooms were added. The Breakfast was the first big event that was held in the space. Right as people were leaving and going to the King Day march, the toilets in both bathrooms overflowed. Jeff and another person stayed behind and were mopping and keeping the water from flooding out of the bathrooms. They tried to find an emergency plumber on a federal holiday. Doing all this in such a way, that no one would know all this was going on. Jeff recalls not wanting to ruin anybody's day because it had been such a great and perfect day.

Jeff is looking forward to the emotional boost that he will get by attending the Breakfast and being with such a beautiful and diverse community to start the year off. It will be good seeing people and a community come together that he cares so much about. Jeff says the Breakfast is always an expression of joyfulness. With all the difficulties predicted for this year, the Breakfast will provide fuel and grounding needed to do this work another year.

