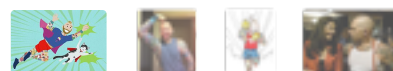


# Tapping superpowers: Meet the art therapist who is using superheroes to help LGBTQ+ youth

KEN SCHNECK | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2021



Courtesy of the Buckeye Flame



"Comic books saved my life," Mike Boyce says without hesitation.

The northeast Ohio-based art therapist was born and raised in the rural Midwest, not unlike the upbringing of a young Clark Kent. And like the young refugee-from-Krypton, Boyce (they/them) felt like they were living in a world where they didn't belong.



**Mike Boyce as drawn by Mike Boyce**

Discovering the world of comic books provided the escape they so desperately needed as a lonely and scared queer youth.

“On those pages, I saw colorful characters who did not fit in,” Boyce remembered. “X-Men who were hated. Spiderman who was poor and didn't have the best family life. Daredevil who had a disability. They had struggles, but they kept trying to be the best people they could be to try to help others.”

After high school, Boyce left Ohio as soon as they could, ending up first in New York City and then later in California. They enrolled in art school out west and created two children's books inspired by their

experiences living experiencing homelessness. Some of their art professors took notice and encouraged Boyce to pivot in another direction: art therapy.

“With art therapy, I would be able to help give any marginalized population somebody to listen to them,” Boyce says. “And I could do it by creating a nonjudgmental space where they experienced unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding.”

Boyce returned to Ohio for graduate school and was able to channel their passion for drawing into preparation for a career as a counselor and art therapist. They admit that while they had been successful as an artist, art therapy really helped Boyce click into their superpowers.

“I always used drawing as a way to cope with my own fears as a child and young

adult,” Boyce recalls. “Through art therapy, I am now able to help people find patterns when they are struggling with using words. I can find out a lot of information from a client through a picture that they draw that I might not be able to find if only they speak about their story.”

With an art therapy graduate degree in hand, Boyce now works with a wide variety of clients in Ohio. That includes a host of LGBTQ+ youth, both through their private practice and their association with Colors+ Counseling.

It’s not just any drawing with which Boyce has clients engaged, but superhero-related activities: finding their “superyou,” exploring their origin story, drawing their superpowers, and delving into their secret identities.

“Queer people can resonate with superheroes,” Boyce explains. “Wearing a mask, having to be two different people, struggling with feeling oppressed, misunderstood, or misrepresented...by drawing themselves as superheroes, queer people can gain knowledge and perspective as to what they may not see in their everyday life.”

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#### The many tattoos of Mike Boyce

Working right alongside the clients is a striking physical canvas of superheroes: Boyce’s whole body is covered in superhero tattoos that Boyce drew and placed.

“Each tattoo tells my story through the stories that I turned to in comic books,” Boyce says. “They’re a reminder to fight, find value in yourself, and to be a hero in all regards.”

For Boyce, this work is all about the hero’s journey: using art therapy to support individuals trying to be better in a world that isn’t so black and white.

“A lot of times, supervillains become superheroes,” Boyce says. “Especially in today’s world, trying to be better is a superpower that we can all utilize.”

As for Boyce’s favorite superhero, that’s a no-brainer: it’s Wonder Woman all the way.

**Lynda Carter (left) and Mike Boyce**

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Boyce marvels at the power of a woman fighting crime in 1941 in a bathing suit, beating all the men around her and being as

popular as Superman or Batman.

Plus, there's the incredible part of Boyce's own origin story where they actually met Wonder Woman herself: tv's iconic Lynda Carter. Boyce once went to see Lynda Carter singing in a concert in New Mexico and met her after the show.

"I ran up to her, so excited to see my hero, and I showed her all of my Wonder Woman tattoos," Boyce laughs. "She grabbed my hand, took me backstage, showed me off to the musicians and the background singers, and was just so proud of me. I was able to tell her that she was how I got through childhood. It was a real full-circle moment."

*This story was originally published in the Buckeye Flame on Tuesday, Dec. 22. Reprinted with permission.*



**Read more articles by Ken Schneck.**

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