

Expanding the circle

Heidi Duss has always been passionate about creating connections, building spaces of inclusivity and helping others understand the importance of diversity. This mindset recently helped her realize that the way we travel through life and through society is not always linear.

"I think that too often paths are set out for us. When we're young we're told to go to college, find a spouse, buy a house, have children," she says. "Over the last few years, I have really defined my normal and started to question who gets to define what my normal is."

About two years ago, she found the opportunity to channel this passion into her professional career as the manager of diversity and inclusion, wellness and community engagement at Summit Credit Union. In that time, she spearheaded three new employee resource groups: Summit Pride and Inclusion Network (SPIN), Summit Sustainability Champions and Summit Employees Empowering Diversity (SEED).

Duss also had a strong voice in the planning for the new Summit headquarters in Cottage Grove.

"I was able to help construct what our building looked and felt like, but most importantly, I wanted our employees to come to work every day and see themselves in the artwork and feel safe and comfortable with everything from the furniture to the collaborative spaces," she says.

Last October, Duss was honored by Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce as the Advocate of the Year, highlighting not only her work at Summit, but across the broader business community to redefine how companies think about diversity and inclusion.

Jody Stollendorf, community giving and event manager at Summit, works closely with Duss and sees the impact she's making.

"Heidi is changing how we view wellness at Summit. Often, we think about wellness as only fitness and nutrition," Stollendorf says. "She blew it open and introduced other parts of wellness like inclusivity and mental health. She under-

stands that how safe you feel at work to be your authentic self, and if you feel included, impacts your overall wellbeing."

In 2020, Duss plans to expand the employee resource groups at Summit with more lunch and learns, on-site speakers, and awareness kits for branch managers to easily facilitate discussions and decorate for events like Hispanic Heritage Month, Black History Month, Pride Month and more.

"I want to create that intersection and collaboration between multicultural, LGBT and other groups across the organization, so from our tellers to our executive management," she says. "It goes back to creating welcoming environments and

knowing that your view matters and you can make a difference no matter what your role is."

Her vision is to empower Summit employees to create authentic relationships with their members and ultimately filter out to the broader community. She also wants to take the connections she has made through her work as a board member with Out Professional Engagement Network (OPEN), and membership with the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Dane County and Madison Black Chamber of Commerce to create networks and resources for people to more easily define their own normal. —Emily McCluhan

