Volunteering

Bocholt Pride e.V.

For a more diverse and open Bocholt

How open is Bocholt to people who live, love or define themselves differently from what social traditions dictate? It's a question that isn't always easy to answer. But things are changing: since March 2024, the non-profit organisation Bocholt Pride e.V. has been working to raise the profile of queer life in our town, break down prejudices and encourage people to engage in dialogue with one another. What began as an idea shared amongst friends has since developed into a vibrant community offering a wide range of activities and events.



© Stadt Bocholt

Thorsten Jansen

A personal journey towards openness

Thorsten Jansen is at the helm of the club. The 38-year-old was born and raised in Bocholt, though he has already lived in a number of other places. After completing his A-levels, he studied sports and event management in Iserlohn. During his studies, he spent a semester abroad in Madrid. He was so fascinated by the city that, after graduating in Iserlohn, he went on to complete a further degree in Madrid in the field of marketing and commercial management. Following his studies, he gained professional experience in Düsseldorf and as a crew member on a ship in the Aida fleet. For personal reasons, his path eventually led him back to Bocholt. Today, he works in a supervisory role at Euregio Personaldienstleistungen.

Madrid and Düsseldorf as role models

His personal life journey has also shaped him. Thorsten Jansen became aware of his sexual orientation whilst still at school. Nevertheless, it took some time before he found the courage to be open about it. His time in Madrid, in particular, changed his perspective. There, he experienced how it is entirely possible to interact with queer people as a matter of course. Right in the heart of the city, there is a neighbourhood where diversity is openly embraced and different ways of life are accepted. He also came to see Düsseldorf as a city that is open-minded towards people whose gender identity does not conform to traditional norms.

Dancing as an important step

Back in Bocholt, this open approach wasn't easy for him at first. "It's quite a step to come out", says Thorsten Jansen. At first, he kept his sexual orientation largely out of the public eye.

He had particularly positive experiences through his hobby, competitive dancing. Within this relaxed community, he realised how liberating it can be to show oneself without reservation and to embrace one's identity as a matter of course. Through contacts with queer communities in other cities, he eventually came to realise that even in Bocholt, more should be possible than merely a reserved or conditional acceptance.

An idea becomes an organisation

The decisive impetus came during a cosy get-together with friends. The idea of founding an association to raise the profile of queer life in Bocholt quickly gained support. Bocholt Pride e.V. was founded in March 2024. Alongside Thorsten Jansen, the founding members included three heterosexual couples who remain actively involved to this day. Even when choosing a name, it was important to the founders not to reduce the association solely to Christopher Street Day (CSD). That is why they deliberately opted for the term "Pride%$. The English word means 'pride' and is an international symbol of self-confidence, diversity and the right to live one's identity openly.

Five guiding principles form the foundation of the association's work:

- Diversity and inclusion
- Self-determination and empowerment
- Solidarity and community
- Education and awareness-raising
- Political advocacy

Bocholt Pride now has 22 active members. Together with the executive committee, they organise events, social gatherings and various projects. As with many charitable organisations, sponsors and partners are indispensable here too.



© Bocholt Pride e.V.

The association's information stand

Programmes for different target groups

A great deal has been achieved since the organisation was founded. Bocholt Pride sees itself not only as an advocacy group, but above all as a point of contact for people seeking dialogue, community and support. Various group initiatives are aimed at different target groups: the self-help group "Pride Positivity" is designed for queer people and their families. The focus here is on dialogue, understanding and support. The ally meet-up "Side by Pride" is aimed at people who wish to stand by the queer community as so-called allies - that is, as supporters. At the regular get-together "Queer Connection", the focus is on meeting others, getting to know one another and casual conversation. There is also the youth club "Queeriosity" for teenagers and young adults aged 16 to 25 who want to meet other young people, share experiences and enjoy a sense of community.

Key supporters

The association is also becoming increasingly visible in the public sphere. Information stands, for example at the associations' fair or neighbourhood festivals, have been part of its activities to date, but the idea of illuminating the town hall in rainbow colours on 'Light Sunday' also originated from the association. Support from the town is vital for events in public spaces. In this

regard, Bocholt Pride works with, amongst others, Jule Wanders, Head of the Culture and Education Department, and Ludger Dieckhues, Managing Director of the Town Marketing Association.

Furthermore, the executive committee maintains contacts with queer communities in other cities, including Cologne, Düsseldorf, Münster and Berlin. The exchange of ideas and the experience gained there proved particularly helpful in the run-up to a major event: Bocholt's first Christopher Street Day in 2025.



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A large crowd in front of the stage at CSD 2026

CSD - A demonstration for acceptance and tolerance

Christopher Street Day is far more than just a colourful parade. All over the world, people take to the streets on this day to stand up for the rights of queer people, draw attention to discrimination and call for social acceptance. In Bocholt, too, the CSD was intended from the outset to combine both: a joyful event and a clear message.

Thorsten Jansen describes the thinking behind the organisation of CSD 2025 and 2026 as follows:

"The event was deliberately designed to be relaxed and cheerful, without losing sight of the actual purpose of the demonstration. The main aim was to engage with people, to discuss issues and to provide information." He is particularly pleased that this concept has proved successful.

"Organising such an event was, however, a massive undertaking", admits Thorsten Jansen. Phone calls, arrangements, coordinating those involved and inviting artists are just as much a part of it as securing funding. "We cannot manage something like this on membership fees alone," he says. "Without sponsors, we wouldn't be able to book artists such as *The Only Naomy*, a very well-known German drag performer, or *Ludi*."



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Panel discussion at CSD 2026

Hendrik Wüst as patron

The support of the city is also essential for an event of this scale. Appropriate permits and arrangements were required for the parade and the subsequent celebration on St. Georg Platz. The St. Georg parish hall made its forecourt available as a stage. The programme there featured a mix of speeches, music, a panel discussion with politicians and various performances. Hendrik Wüst, as patron, and Sophie Koch, the Federal Republic's Queer Commissioner, supported the event with video messages.

Goals achieved thanks to a great response

Jansen is particularly proud of the response. A good 1,000 people attended the event. Among them were members of queer communities from Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Cologne and the Netherlands, as well as numerous Bocholt residents with their families. There was celebrating, laughter and dancing. The atmosphere was relaxed and open. Serious discussions also took place; many visitors took the opportunity to ask questions and engage with the concerns of queer people.

That was precisely one of the key objectives: to bring people together, break down barriers and foster mutual understanding.



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A special award: the 2025 Grenzland Prize

Recognition and new ideas

A special award demonstrates that Bocholt Pride's commitment is recognised even beyond the town's boundaries. The association received the "Grenzland Prize 2025 for a German-Dutch Pride initiative".

But that's not all. The members are constantly coming up with new ideas to bring people into contact with their work and the theme of diversity. One unusual example is the interactive crime mystery rally "Operation Pride%$. Anyone wishing to explore Bocholt and the surrounding area in a different way can set off on a treasure hunt. One route is currently available, with a second due to follow later this year, and there are already ideas for two further stories. Anyone interested in this exciting, hands-on treasure hunt can get in touch via Anmeldung(at)bocholt-pride(dot)org . -ah