Sunshine Pride provides welcoming home for displaced LGBTQ young people

By Christiana Lilly
New Pelican Writer



The Sunshine Pride House in Fort Lauderdale. [Courtesy]

Fort Lauderdale - Homeless LGBTQ youth in South Florida will now have a home where they can not only feel safe, but feel seen.

Located in a duplex that can accommodate up to a dozen young adults as they get back on their feet with support and guidance, Sunshine Pride House was made possible thanks to two generous donors as well as the partnership of four community organizations.

"I was profoundly moved and greatly saddened after witnessing numerous young people getting kicked out of their homes," Michael Kalb, one of the donors, said in a press release.

"Inspired by the compassionate nature of my two daughters, I committed myself to taking action and am incredibly heartened with how we've been able to work together to provide safe housing, as well as the critical wrap-around services."

LGBTQ individuals make up seven percent of America's youth population, according to Covenant House, but they comprise 40 percent of the nation's homeless youth population.

Some queer youth are still thrown out of their homes when they come out to their parents, and living on the street is dangerous and traditional homeless shelters are not always equipped to welcome them.

"There's a lot of personal stories that are involved in this," says Rev. Robert Griffin of Sunshine Cathedral, a church rooted in the gay rights movement. "A lot of our folks have backgrounds who have been turned away from homes."

Just a few blocks away from Sunshine Cathedral - a serendipitous find - the duplex is a little more than 2,800 square feet and has six bedrooms and four bathrooms for its residents to share. Each resident has a case manager and undergoes physical and mental health exams. They also have access to life skills coaching, mental health counseling, educational training, and assistance with job placement, and the church hosts SunServe's teen support groups, which residents can easily walk to.

"It's not just about the house; it's also about the wraparound services," Griffin says. "By being an out, open and affirming gay church - that speaks to young people who have been hurt by religion."

The path to making Sunshine Pride House a reality began back in 2020, when Kalb went to the Our Fund Foundation eager to support a space for homeless LGBTQ youth. Our Fund Foundation supports philanthropic causes in the LGBTQ community through grants, scholarships, and fundraisers. David Jobin, the executive director of Our Fund Foundation, says he spoke with homeless shelters and organizations throughout South Florida and found that even with the best intentions, most were not equipped to handle LGBTQ youth.

"It became more and more apparent that we were going to have to start something on our own," he says.

The organization then reached out to SunServe, a nonprofit that serves LGBTQ youth and adults, and the FLITE Center, which assists young adults in transition from foster care. Together, they had the experience with intake and providing resources to youth in need. Then a second donor, Terry Merlin, also approached Our Fund about supporting a project for homeless LGBTQ youth.

For one year, the groups ran a trial program - the FLITE Center rented a six-bed home off Davie Boulevard to serve as a temporary home for homeless LGBTQ youth and it was a resounding success.

In November 2023, Sunshine Cathedral was the final piece of the puzzle; the church was provided with the donations in order to purchase the duplex and be the official owner of the Sunshine Pride House property.

"We've been in the community for over 52 years and this was one of the strategic needs that we've wanted to do," Griffin says. "It's been on our radar for some time and when the opportunity came to work with these different organizations to make this happen, it was a hand-in-glove opportunity that we did not want to miss being a part of."

All 12 rooms are currently filled and Jobin estimates it will cost about $250,000 a year to run (donations can be made at our-fund.org).

"That's not a heavy lift when you consider the impact it's making on young people's lives," Jobin says. "They were instantly sheltered and provided a safe house and a promising future that may not have been in store for them until they were introduced to Sunshine Pride House."

Deed Fraud

Deed fraud occurs when a property deed or title transfer is executed and recorded illegally without the permission of the legal owner. Once deed fraud is successful, criminals try to mortgage, lease or sell the property. The Broward County Property Appraiser offers property owners the chance to sign-up for a system that alerts property owners when it receives any documents related to a change in ownership for their property. Visit web.bcpa.net/owneralert for more information.