BETTER TOGETHER

Stories of Healing and Hope

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Thank you to Dan Tracy for the storytelling that brought each individual story to life.

Thank you to Judy Watson Tracy Photography for the care and attention that went into the photography for this book. All photos © Judy Watson Tracy Photography unless otherwise noted.

A Report of the **Better Together Fund**

DEAR FRIENDS,

Within these pages, I invite you to dive into the photos and stories of the lives of individuals, families, mental health care providers, advocates and others who have been affected by the Pulse tragedy. You'll find a glimpse of their perspective, the goals they're working towards, and for some, their extreme pain. You'll also read their stories about healing and hope.

The Better Together Fund was established after the Pulse tragedy to support survivors, their families and others affected by the events as they took the steps to stabilize and ever so slowly move forward. Simultaneously, the fund has brought to fruition ideas and plans for a more cohesive and understanding community than before.

I don't believe the job will ever be done, but it feels as though noteworthy progress has been made. Lastly, and most importantly, I'd like to say **thank you** to every single person who has made this work possible and thank you to those who have shared their deeply personal stories in these pages.

All My Best,

Mark Brewer
President/CEO
Central Florida Foundation

THE DAY
EVERYTHING CHANGED

Like the rest of the nation and Metro Orlando, the donors and people who make up Central Florida Foundation were stunned when they awoke to the horrors of that muggy June morning eight days before the official start of summer. How could this unspeakable act happen? What can we do to help? Can we prevent it from ever happening again?

*"I want **my son** back."*

MINA JUSTICE While asleep in her Ocoee apartment, Mina was awakened by the buzzing of her cell phone. "Mommy I love you," said a text from her son Eddie.

The time was 2:06 a.m. The date was June 12, 2016.

Eddie Justice, 30, was trapped in the Pulse nightclub, where Omar Mateen was shooting anyone within sight. Justice was hiding in the women's bathroom with several other cornered clubgoers.

"I'm gonna die," he wrote at 2:08 a.m. Mina called 911 on another phone and continued frantically texting Eddie.

The exchanges became more harried and dire. At 2:49 a.m. she told Eddie the police were at the club. "Hurry," he replied. "He's in the bathroom with us."

> *"She would cry and I would just listen to her."*

"Is the man in the bathroom with u?" she asked.

"He's a terror," Eddie wrote, then a minute later, answered her question: "Yes."

She would never hear again from Eddie, who was one of 49 young men and women killed by Mateen. Nearly 70 other Pulse patrons were injured. Mateen died in a crossfire with Orlando police officers after a three-hour standoff.

Mina shut down in the days and weeks following what was then the largest mass shooting in the country's history. She could not eat, sleep or think clearly. She dropped half her body weight and lost her job because she continually broke down in tears.

She fell behind on rent and utility bills, an eviction and electricity cutoff in the offing. Try as she might, Mina could not function, the duties of daily living beyond her grasp. Her grief was all consuming.

"I wouldn't open up to anyone," she said.

But Marie Cuello, a caseworker with the Orlando United Assistance Center, kept calling Mina, knowing she desperately needed help. Mina refused to answer. Finally, Cuello showed up unannounced at Mina's door.

"She would cry and I would just listen to her, listen to her," Cuello said.

Through the Orlando United Assistance Center, thanks to support from the Better Together Fund at Central Florida Foundation, Cuello arranged mental health counseling for Mina and paid her back rent and late bills, then spent more to keep her current. Slowly, she helped resuscitate Mina, who now has a full-time job, a new house in Davenport and a dog named E.J. after her slain son.

Mina, 57, has re-entered the world of the living, even though she still profoundly hurts. "For the rest of my life," she said, "a part of me is empty... I want my son back."

A NEW **REALITY**

As the reality of what occurred sadly settled upon all of us and the candlelight vigils and funerals began in earnest, the OneOrlando Fund was created by Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer to handle the donations pouring in from around the world. In all, almost $31 million was collected and, by April 2017, distributed to 299 people—either family members of the deceased, those injured in the shooting or people who were there and fortunately escaped physical injury.

But there were demands that the OneOrlando Fund could not meet. Survivors and mourning family members were in dire need of assistance. Without help in the near term they might not recover...ever.

*"It was just a **regular night.** Dancing, hanging out with friends."*

IVORY McNEAL A 31-year-old supervisor at a clothing store, Ivory McNeal lost six friends at Pulse. He remembers greeting and hugging them as they mingled at the club that night. At one point, McNeal unknowingly was moving away from where Mateen was about to open fire, while several of his colleagues were innocently walking toward the killer.

"It was just a regular night," McNeal said. "Dancing, hanging out with friends." Then McNeal heard the pop, pop, pop of a semi-automatic weapon. "We just started running," he said.

McNeal ducked into a hallway by the bathrooms, undoubtedly little more than a few feet from Eddie Justice, who was behind a closed stall door. McNeal was close enough to Mateen to see the muzzle flash each time he fired his rifle. At one point, the gun jammed, giving McNeal time to sprint for an exit that led to a walled-in patio. He dived behind a palm tree and waited, listening to the cries of the wounded and dying and the seemingly unending gunfire.

He texted friends and family: "Someone is killing people, shooting up the club."

Eventually, Orlando police broke through the bathroom wall, first using a bomb, then piling through with an armored vehicle, freeing McNeal and others who had taken cover near him. "Everybody started running like crazy," McNeal said.

Police told him to throw his hands in the air. He did and they rushed him to a safe place near a donut shop. After talking with authorities and fellow survivors for hours, he made his way home at 1 p.m. Sunday.

McNeal unlocked the door, looked around his apartment, and his first thought was that he should have cleaned it better before leaving. Why? He would have been mortified that his mother would have been forced to tend to his mess if he had died.

To this day, he tidies his place before closing the door behind him.

Before Pulse, he had two part-time jobs at retail shops, though he lost one after he called in sick the first few days following the shooting. He just couldn't work; the thought of dealing with customers almost sickening to him. His boss said he needed reliable workers and fired him. His other employer was more understanding and gave him time off with pay.

> *"He smiles now. He has such a nice smile."*

But the loss of half his income quickly put him in a financial hole. McNeal fell behind on his rent, phone bill and utilities. He also dug an emotional hole and filled it with denial. He refused to go to any funerals or talk about what he experienced. He pretended his slain friends were still alive.

"They just kind of moved away," he decided, "and we don't talk anymore."

He lost all sense of security: "You're never safe, whether you're in your house or wherever."

Sullen and withdrawn, he realized he needed help. He heard about the Orlando United Assistance Center, which had received more than $322,000 in Foundation funds through Heart of Florida United Way.

He went to the Michigan Street office and met Cuello, the caseworker. She got him back on his feet financially and set up therapy sessions where he could talk about the trauma he had suffered and the carnage he had witnessed.

McNeal gradually re-emerged from his isolation. He now has a full-time job, is current on his bills and re-engaging with friends and family. "It would have been a lot harder," he said, without the aid of Cuello and the Assistance Center.

Cuello said McNeal is returning to his former self. "He smiles now," she said. "He has such a nice smile."

CENTRAL FLORIDA FOUNDATION
TAKES ACTION

Recognizing that the OneOrlando Fund could not address all of our community's needs, Central Florida Foundation decided to get involved.

"We had supported other foundations around the county whose communities were struck by disaster," said President/CEO Mark Brewer. "This time it was in our own city. We knew philanthropy would play a unique role in supporting the survivors, families and community at large in the road ahead."

Through the generosity of donors, locally and across the country, the Foundation established the Better Together Fund, which has granted nearly $1 million to support Pulse victims, family, survivors and first responders, and promote long-term rebuilding.

*"There's an **absence** in my heart."*

EMILY ADDISON A 39-year-old mother of three, Emily Addison rarely leaves her Kissimmee apartment without a large blue binder stuffed with documents, bills, apartment leases and photos, lots of photos. The folder represents a mishmash of memories of the life Addison shared with Deonka Drayton, who perished at Pulse.

Addison and Drayton had lived together off and on for seven years, moving to Orlando in 2012 a couple years after meeting in Columbia, S.C. Drayton, Addison said, filled the role of a stepfather to her children, especially the youngest, a 4-year-old boy named Diyari.

Even though they were not living together when Drayton was killed in one of the Pulse bathrooms, Addison said the woman known as Daddy D still provided financial and emotional support to the family.

"She was a great co-parent. She was amazing," Addison said.

Addison cooked Drayton dinner on the night she went to Pulse. Drayton, she said, intended to drop a friend off at the club, then go to another lounge, but decided at the last minute to go into Pulse for a drink or two.

Addison went to bed early that night, silencing her phone so she could sleep uninterrupted. When she woke, she discovered a series of increasingly panicked texts from Drayton, including ones that said, "I'm scared" and "Please call da police."

She turned on the news and could not comprehend what she heard. Then she learned Drayton was one of the 49 who died. She turned numb.

"People try to say things to make you feel better. But it doesn't help. It hurts still," she said.

Without Drayton's money and friendship, Addison said, the entire family floundered. They lost their apartment and were reduced to living in a series of motel rooms in Kissimmee, forced to move every month because of state lodging rules.

A part-time driver at a theme park, Addison did not make enough money to keep going. "It took my whole paycheck [just to pay for the room]," she said. They subsisted on crockpot meals and cold sandwiches.

Using their car as shelter loomed on the horizon as her cash dwindled and the bills multiplied.

Finally, she heard about the Orlando United Assistance Center and she walked in, blue binder firmly in hand. Caseworker Gabriella Rodriguez arranged for rent and utility money and helped her get into a four-bedroom apartment in Kissimmee that the family could afford.

"I see nothing but good coming from this place," she said. "I wouldn't have been able to do it without them."

Addison said life is tolerable again, but will never be the same without Drayton.

"I had to fight very hard to get anger and hate out of my heart," she said. "I've been faking it. I smile. But there's an absence in my heart, a void. Not a single day goes by without me thinking about it [Pulse]."

"Coming here was keeping me sane."

NEAL WHITTLETON Visitors to the shrine that surrounds the shuttered Pulse nightclub on South Orange Avenue often meet Neal Whittleton. He is there nearly seven days a week, tending to the grounds and building, answering questions, selling commemorative T-shirts, handing out bottled water on hot days.

"I point things out," he said of all the portraits of the slain that grace the property. "You ask, I'll tell you. I keep it short."

Whittleton was in charge of security at the nightclub the night of the shooting and is lucky to be alive. He estimates Mateen fired at him a half dozen times and missed. Given the American Red Cross National Hero Award in 2016 along with two other Pulse employees, Whittleton hurried dozens of patrons to safety through a back door of the club during the pandemonium.

"Get out," shouted Whittleton, who was not armed. "Follow me."

He only stopped when police arrived and refused to allow him back into the chaos.

A former law enforcement officer, Whittleton had worked at Pulse for two years and was perhaps the only survivor to have spoken to Mateen. In a sworn court statement, Whittleton said Mateen asked him, "Where are the girls at?" That was just a few minutes before Mateen left the club, went to his van, came back with a rifle and handgun and started shooting.

Whittleton was acquainted with most of the victims, though not necessarily by name. He knew their faces, what they liked to drink, who might cause mischief, who was dating whom. In short, he tracked the kind of stuff a man who keeps the peace in a drinking establishment knows.

After the shooting, he began to fade. First off, he lost his job. "I had no money. Landlord wanted money. I couldn't support myself," he said.

A single father raising a teenage daughter at the time, Whittleton looked vainly for work. He fell one month behind on rent, then two. Same with the utility bills. He feared he and his daughter, Nealeaha, would soon be homeless.

He checked in with the Orlando United Assistance Center as a last resort. They paid his bills, offered him a computer to look for work, got him some counseling. He often would drop by just to talk with his caseworker, Jessie Arias.

"Coming here was keeping me sane," said Whittleton, who was becoming increasingly despondent because he could not provide for Nealeaha.

Thanks to the Center's support, he hung on until taking over as the caretaker of the Pulse memorial. He also is working in security at another nightclub, trying, he said, "to catch back up [financially]."

He has come to terms with the fact that he "can't bring any of those [Pulse victims] people back." But he does his best to keep their memories alive.

"Life is back the way it was before," Whittleton said. "Normalcy is back."

ALIGNING
FOR IMPACT

From the outset, the Better Together Fund has been invested in nonprofit organizations such as the Heart of Florida United Way, the Barry University Center for Human Rights and Social Justice, the Peace and Justice Institute at Valencia College, the Trauma Resource Institute and others. These organizations, along with several other partners, were identified to help carry out the priorities of the fund.

DR. ASHLEY AUSTIN A licensed clinical social worker and associate professor of social work at Barry University in Miami, Dr. Austin also has a private practice where she counsels LGBTQ+ youth, in particular those who are transgender.

Austin conducted four day-long training workshops during the winter and summer of 2017 in Winter Park for nearly 130 clinical practitioners, human resource experts, attorneys, government officials and educators. She taught them how to deal positively and competently with the unique needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

> *"We don't know the amount of PTSD, but we know the experience is vast."*

The Foundation invested $14,000 for the classes.

LGBTQ+ people, she said, deal every day with discrimination ranging from rejection to violence to passing looks of disdain because they are different from the straight majority. That, in Austin's estimation, amounts to structural oppression because society is built around the assumption that everyone is straight, or heterosexual.

Many LGBTQ+ members suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder—sometimes unknowingly—because their day-to-day lives often involve encounters where they are treated disrespectfully or worse by everyone from family to strangers. The message they often receive, she said, is they do not have a right to live.

"We don't know the amount [of PTSD], but we know the experience is vast," she said. What happened at Pulse, she said, is "an extreme example in terms of scale."

Her first two-day training course had 80 attendees. They studied a number of issues, ranging from the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity, the impact of homo/transphobic attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to policies on the lives of LGBTQ+ people and how to take an affirmative stance toward diversity.

When prompted to share one new thing they learned that day, attendee responses included "my own need for growth" and "becoming aware of any bias I may have as a clinician."

The second round of two sessions offered a deeper look at LGBTQ+ issues and attracted 48 people. Topics covered: affirmative practice framework and assessment practices; early anti-LGBTQ+ messages and affirmative response to discrimination; integrating trauma-informed care into affirmative practice; building self-awareness, self-compassion and self-connection; therapeutic mask-making.

Austin said the masks provide a way for participants to vent their feelings and has been used by veterans recovering from PTSD.

Written responses to the second round of classes showed Austin's message was getting through. "How vast the spectrum is! How much the statistical data supports mental health risks. HOW WE NEED TO HELP!"

photo courtesy of Willie J. Allen Jr.

RACHEL ALLEN Creating a safe space for LGBTQ+ people and minorities is at the core of what Rachel Allen is promoting. A long-time professor of humanities and now the director of the Peace and Justice Institute at Valencia College, Allen led a week-long seminar on campus during July 2017 for 23 students and teachers. The Foundation invested $25,150 to make the class possible.

> *"Am I representing all of my students and all of their aspects?"*

Her goal was to "raise empathy and compassion" for those who are different. "It's largely about the insides of the teacher, shifting the inside of the teacher," Allen said.

Teachers must acknowledge and make room in their approach for all types of students, not just the straight white majority, she said. The creeds, colors, orientation and genders of Central Florida and the nation are becoming increasingly diverse. And they all have different points of view, desires and needs. The days of one size fits all have passed.

"Am I representing all of my students and all of their aspects?" she asked.

Allen likes to allude to using windows and mirrors as a way for teachers and their charges to open themselves up to the notion that the differences among us are to be celebrated, not just tolerated or, even worse, disregarded or belittled.

Minorities and LGBTQ+ people, she said, must have the personal assurance and security to be able to tell their stories and experiences without fear of reprisal or ridicule. "I want to know it rather than inadvertently negate it," she said.

The class, held at the Peace and Justice Institute, raised the "empathy and compassion" of those who attended, Allen said. "It was powerful beyond our wildest dream," she said.

The institute was a natural place for such discussions because its purpose is "to nurture an inclusive, caring and respectful environment on campus and within the community." Along with a peace and justice studies curriculum, the institute also promotes similar studies for nursing and criminal justice students.

Allen, who spoke about peace and justice before the United Nations last summer, hopes to hold another seminar this year involving teachers, librarians and support staff not just from Orange, but from Seminole and Osceola counties, too.

INVESTING IN **OUR PRIORITIES**

The Better Together Fund also identified four focus areas that will be critical to healing and restoring hope across our community, and has invested in major initiatives in these areas:

1. Gaps in the support nonprofits are providing for families and survivors.
2. Supporting the LGBTQ+, Latino, faith and other affected communities.
3. Treating the underlying causes of the tragic event, though not through legislation or political lobbying. The aim is to break down stereotypes and prevent or root out the hate and ignorance that drive people to do horrible things.
4. Unanticipated needs, such as devising a forward-thinking coordinated philanthropic plan to react to disasters, manmade or natural. Among the objectives would be creating a path for connecting volunteers to needs and building a shared website.

IAN SILJESTROM A former fifth-grade school teacher in Duval County, Ian Siljestrom now works with the public school systems in Orange, Seminole and Osceola counties on LGBTQ+ education issues. He meets with coordinators, counselors and assistant principals most school days on devising ways to teach tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ+ students.

"Safety is the baseline," he said. "Then we need to get to joy and empowerment and happiness."

Siljestrom, 26, was hired by Equity Florida through a $65,000 grant from Central Florida Foundation over two years after the Pulse tragedy. The basic idea is to prevent what happened at Pulse by prying out hate and prejudice at an early age and replacing it with an open-minded attitude to diversity.

> *"Reaching the student is what's important at the end of the day."*

"How can we really shape and shift the culture in our school districts to be more accepting of the LGBTQ+ culture?" Siljestrom asked.

During his first year, he contacted nearly 110 administrators in Orange and Seminole counties, introducing himself and his mission. He met with 400 officials during the past school year as he expanded his efforts into Osceola County. One of his goals is to establish a Gay/Straight Alliance in each middle and high school in all three counties.

The needs of the LGBTQ+ are great, he said. He points to research that indicates lesbian, gay and bisexual youth suffer a much wider range of health problems, substance abuse and intimidation than their straight counterparts. Some LGBTQ+ students are homeless because their parents have rejected them.

Among the issues facing LGBTQ+ youth, one national report said, are "depression, suicidal behavior, bullying and harassment, abuse, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and teenage pregnancy. These increased risks are often the result of, and a complicated reaction to, negative environmental stressors LGBTQ+ face in their schools, homes and communities. Recent research also shows that youth suffering from such health risks are at greater academic risk than are other youth."

A survey during the spring of 2017 of almost 1,400 students in 19 Orange County public high schools found that 12.2% of them self-identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Siljestrom believes the percentage of LGBTQ+ high schoolers may be higher because many teens are unsure of their sexuality or afraid to admit their true orientation because of bullying.

Siljestrom, who is gay, said he has faced no backlash from school officials, possibly because he speaks from the heart on the LGBTQ+ front. "I completely bring my experiences from the classroom. I know what is happening. I know the reality," he said.

Getting students to accept each other regardless of their sexual identity, he said, is the bottom line. "Reaching the student is what's important at the end of the day," he said.

"'Speaking in ways that are affirming' is vitally important to LGBTQ+ people."

YASMIN FLASTERSTEIN As the director of the Orlando United Counseling program at the Mental Health Association of Central Florida, Flasterstein has arranged for mental health guidance for 145 people affected directly or indirectly by Pulse. Part of her job is matching up the needs of the client with the particular skills of the 20 counselors she has on call. Is the client gay or Spanish speaking? Who can speak best to those characteristics?

It is vital, she said, that everyone, not just counselors, talk with Pulse victims and LGBTQ+ people in ways that are positive, in part because they must overcome obstacles and attitudes that the straight community rarely, if ever, faces.

Pulse, she said, sadly introduced an entirely new and abhorrent level of trauma to people who are LGBTQ+. Even those who were not at Pulse or knew anyone at the club that night can feel some traces of post-traumatic stress disorder because the bullets were fired at people of their community, she said. People, in other words, just like them.

Flasterstein and her associates offer everything from medications to talk therapy to help their clients recover from Pulse. "Everyone deals with trauma in a different way," she said.

"Microaggression" is how she describes much of society's typical response to LGBTQ+ people, particularly when it comes to the bullying that often occurs among youngsters and teens. Flasterstein said she came to a deeper understanding of microaggression by attending Rachel Allen's course.

Seemingly innocent questions posed by straight people, she said, can be hurtful. For example, asking a gay or lesbian couple "So what are you?" in relation to who acts more manly in a same-sex relationship.

"People think it's OK, but it's offensive," said Flasterstein, who added the training she received from Allen helped her to openly come to grips with the fact that she is a lesbian.

Many straight people, she said, do not realize that sexual attraction and gender identity can be fluid in the LGBTQ+ world, moving well beyond the traditional limits of male and female. Some embrace both male and female identities, or fall somewhere in the middle, she said.

Such nuances, she said, can be difficult for the rest of society to understand, much less accommodate. That's why, Flasterstein said, "speaking in ways that are affirming" is vitally important to LGBTQ+ people.

Of course, no amount of money or therapy will ever truly salve the bodily and spiritual wounds inflicted at Pulse. But Central Florida Foundation and its partners have been committed to stitching our community back together no matter how long it takes, with the goal of making it more resilient and inclusive than before.

JENNIFER FOSTER Long a leader in Orlando's LGBTQ+ community, Jennifer Foster realized in the days following the Pulse shooting that everyone needed to pull together if any healing could occur after the tragedy.

That included conceiving a consensus among the numerous LGBTQ+ organizations already in place and, before long, the 18 new groups that sprung up to raise funds and offer free or discounted services, such as mental health counseling and legal aid.

"Our community wasn't ready for this. What community would be?" said Foster, who owned a creative content and digital media production company in Orlando.

> *"We needed to get together, to work together."*

She quickly became the board chair of the One Orlando Alliance, established to streamline all the nonprofits, reduce redundancy and create a network. Central Florida Foundation invested $120,000 in total to provide technical assistance to start the Alliance and to find an executive director.

That search ended in October, when Foster accepted the position after essentially handling the job on a volunteer basis for more than 18 months.

The first year after Pulse, she said, was about meeting the pressing needs of a reeling, mournful people, from managing blood donations to food and shelter to rent money and counseling. There were plenty of volunteers, as well as good intentions, but chaos reigned.

Organization became a top priority, too. "Everybody was in their own silo. We needed to get together, to work together," Foster said.

The Alliance spent the past year bringing order to the post-Pulse world and now works with more than 30 LGBTQ+ and allied organizations. The bottom line for the Alliance is building a "safe, welcoming and inclusive community for all LGBTQ+ people."

The organization also has published a 12-page report on the 10 most critical needs of the LGBTQ+ community, along with proposed solutions. It will be updated annually.

The issues, according to the Alliance, are: produce a safer place for LGBTQ+ youth; ensure workplace equality; reduce homelessness; increase health care; eliminate barriers for people coming out; protect vulnerable populations; provide more economic opportunity for transgender/gender nonconforming; pass comprehensive hate crime laws that include gender identity and gender expression provisions; reduce racial inequality; offer more services for immigrants.

SAMYRA BONEY, ELLIE HAUSER, MEGHAN GUCK The trio of counselors were among those who attended the LGBTQ+ cultural competency workshops with Ashley Austin of Barry University, and they use much of what they learned from the workshop with all their clients, including the nearly 100 people they have worked with who were affected by the Pulse tragedy.

Shortly after the shooting, the three became part of a mobile crisis team that met for a year with Pulse survivors. Boney, Hauser and Guck are employed by Aspire Health Partners Inc., a non-profit behavioral health care organization with campuses in Brevard, Lake, Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties.

> *"We were guiding people through this."*

They also were at the Camping World football stadium just west of downtown Orlando where a host of city and health counseling services were set up for victims and family during the days following Pulse. "We were guiding people through this," Samyra Boney said.

The experience, they said, was little short of a triage, just trying to offer patches to keep people functioning and moving in the right direction until deeper healing could take place. Often, they dispensed medications for anxiety, sometimes for free, depending on the finances of those being treated.

More than 200 people sought help during the first few days. "We kind of came together as a community by checking on one another," Meghan Guck said.

One of the counseling techniques the three used during the year following Pulse was a calming procedure called CRM, or Community Resiliency Model. They learned it during a session with the Trauma Resource Institute. Central Florida Foundation invested $31,470 to bring the CRM model to Orlando to help stabilize the community and train those individuals working to assist others.

The three say they employ CRM to help reprogram the brain after a tragedy to understand that people should embrace a soothing experience when bad feelings are imminent. For example, they might teach someone to think of relaxing in a hot tub or playing with a child when a sensation of fight or flight takes over.

They call CRM the chill app. Their hope is that the method is continually passed on, from counselor to counselor, client to client, friend to friend. "It's a ripple in the water. It expands," Ellie Hauser said.

Ivory McNeal, who escaped from the Pulse shooting, has become a proponent of CRM. "It helps me focus on the moment," he said.

CRM, he said, was especially helpful during the first two anniversaries of the Pulse tragedy. "It's always a sad time for me," McNeal said. "That easily could have been my last day on earth."

From left to right: Ellie Hauser, Meghan Guck and Samyra Boney

BETTER TOGETHER: BY THE NUMBERS

This report details how, where and why the Foundation invested the Better Together Fund post-Pulse, primarily by making grants to 15 nonprofits for a variety of purposes ranging from support for survivors and mental health to teaching survivors, family members and first responders techniques to soothe anxiety attacks.

But even more important than the expenditures of dollars and cents are the men, women and children who were helped and those who are working to improve the lives of those around them. We value their successes the most. We strive to create, share and celebrate even more of their stories in the years to come.

TOTAL FINANCIAL IMPACT

$989,976.45

$10,000
granted to
A Gift For Teaching Inc.
to work on a coordinated disaster response plan and the disaster summit.

$7,000
granted to
Barry University—Center for Human Rights and Social Justice
for cultural competency training for LGBTQ+ Affirmative Care to mental health and community providers in three full day sessions.

I

$7,000
granted to
Barry University—Center for Human Rights and Social Justice
for LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency Training.

$50,000
granted to
Building US Inc.
for a series of convenings, radio shows and StoryCorps type podcasts to begin the healing process for the community after the Pulse tragedy.

$30,000
granted to
Equality Florida Institute Inc.
for Central Florida Safe and Healthy Schools Program.

$35,000
granted to
Equality Florida Institute Inc.
to expand Central Florida Safe and Healthy Schools Program.

$122,000
granted to
Heart of Florida United Way
to support up to 150 families identified through Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, Heart of Florida United Way and Orange County Emergency Services for immediate needs like rent, utilities, etc.

$50,000
granted to
Heart of Florida United Way
for rent, utilities, and/or mental health care for Pulse survivors and their families administered through the United Orlando Assistance Center.

M

$50,000
granted to
Heart of Florida United Way
to provide gap mental health care to primary survivors of the Pulse tragedy and their family members in collaboration with Two Spirit Health Services and Hispanic Family Counseling.

$50,000
granted to
Heart of Florida United Way
to provide gap funds for emergency needs to primary and secondary Pulse survivors.

$120,000
granted to
Heart of Florida United Way
to continue funding for emergency needs of Pulse survivors and family members through February of 2018.

$60,000
granted to
Heart of Florida United Way
for a Mental Health Coordinator and Flexible Funding for clients of the Orlando United Assistance Center.

P

$20,000
granted to
Heart of Florida United Way
to support the Orlando United Assistance Center until December 2019.

$5,000
granted to
Heart of Florida United Way
to support the Orlando United Assistance Center until December 2019.

$5,000
granted to
The 49 Fund at Central Florida Foundation
to provide educational scholarships.

$50,000
granted to
Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association
to cover the cost of lawyers professional liability insurance for attorneys and staff and pro bono/volunteer services for ongoing free legal services related to the Pulse tragedy.

$15,000
granted to
Maven Leadership Collective
for operation and capabilty building for the Orlando Maven Cohort.

$1,500
granted to
Mental Health Association of Central Florida Inc.
to provide mental health care for primary, secondary and community survivors of the Pulse tragedy through weekly support groups.

$100,000
granted to
One Orlando Alliance
to hire an Executive Director.

A

$5,000
granted to
Orlando Youth Alliance
to provide educational scholarships.

$832.45
granted to
OUR FUND Inc.
for the Pulse Anniversary Funders' Symposium.

$10,000
granted to
Pulse of Orlando
for the development of a plan and strategy to formalize the One Orlando Alliance.

$10,000
granted to
Pulse of Orlando
for ongoing technical assistance to implement the strategy for the One Orlando Alliance.

C

$6,000
granted to
Trauma Resource Institute Inc.
to offer a one-day training for 24 people on the biological response of trauma using the Community Resiliency Model.

$31,140
granted to
Trauma Resource Institute Inc.
to offer a four-day certification training for trainers on the Community Resiliency Model.

$91,854
granted to
Two Spirit Health Services
to provide gap funding for the mental health services infrastructure that will be funded by the Department of Justice.

$5,000
granted to
University of Central Florida Foundation Inc.
to provide educational scholarships through the Dively-Dupuis LGBTQ Leadership Award.

$5,000
granted to
Valencia College Foundation Inc.
to provide educational scholarships through the onePULSE Foundation.

$25,150
granted to
Valencia College Foundation Inc.
for the Peace and Justice Institute Academy.

$7,500
granted to
Valencia College Foundation Inc.
for support of ACES Trauma Informed Community Summit with the Peace and Justice Institute.

$5,000
granted to
Zebra Coalition
to provide educational scholarships through the Jefferson R. Voss Education Fund.

T

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-MAYOR BUDDY DYER

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