



Youth credits shelter for saving her life

By Staff

PHOENIX — Valley lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning homeless youth now have a safe place to live thanks to the Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development, Phoenix Vice Mayor Tom Simplot's office, 1n10, 'N Touch News and community volunteers.

Megan Schmitz, facilities chair for the GreenHouse Project, told 'N Touch News that the transitional housing program has begun to take LGBT homeless youth off the streets.

"It took us a while to fund the program, but we are now able to house LGBT youth between 18-24 years old, give them a safe environment to live, and provide them with case managers so that they can get their lives back in order," Schmitz said.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 575,000 to 1.6 million youth runaway or become homeless each year — and between 20 and 40 percent of them identify as LGBT.

Morticia Lovejoy, 21, credits the GreenHouse Project for saving her life. Lovejoy was the first youth admitted into the program.

"I come from the Navajo Nation, but some Native Americans are not too keen with the LGBT community," Lovejoy said. "I came out as gay then trans and before you know it I was out on the streets."



Case Manager Colleen Kinney (l) and Morticia Lovejoy (r)

Lovejoy was made aware of the homeless youth program while attending 1n10's weekly youth group meeting at the Community Church of Hope in Phoenix. "I had never been on the streets before so I talked to Beck who was the program coordinator at 1n10 and she got me in contact with Tumbleweed."

Ten months have passed since Lovejoy first began the GreenHouse Project program and now she has become a model participant and a true role model for other homeless youth, according to case manager Colleen Kinney.

"She has been so willing to make changes and learn about how to be independent and live successfully," Kinney said. "She is the ideal participant. I can't even express how proud we are of her. Her transformation is like a butterfly. When she first came to us she

kept to herself and now she has a ridiculous amount of confidence. She has grown into a great young lady."

Once Lovejoy graduates the program she plans to give back by volunteering at the GreenHouse Project. "The program introduced me to so many resources and people in the community that it totally changed me," Lovejoy said. "I can't wait to come back and volunteer to help other homeless youth."

Homelessness has serious consequences for young people and is especially dangerous for those between the ages of 16 and 24 who do not have familial support.

According to the Healthcare for the Homeless Clinician's Network, the nation's leading organization connecting hands-on providers from many disciplines who are committed to improving the health and quality of life of homeless individuals, unaccompanied homeless youth are at a higher risk for physical and sexual assault or abuse and physical illness, including HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, homeless youth are at a higher risk for anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide because of increased exposure to violence while living on their own.

The GreenHouse Project is one of 12 direct service programs offered at Tumbleweed for homeless youth. The name of the GreenHouse Project was chosen to honor Maurice "Melissa" Green, a former participant of 1n10 who was murdered on the corner of 35th and Glenrosa avenues on March, 21 2006. A vigil (see page ?) has been held every year on the anniversary of his death by Simplot's office to help find the murderer.

Upcoming Events

Pathways to Hope, the annual fundraising dinner for Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development will be held at 6 p.m. on April 30 at Scottsdale Hilton Resort & Villa, 6333 N. Scottsdale Rd. in Scottsdale. Individual tickets are \$150. For more information contact Tumbleweed at 602-271-9908 or visit tumbleweed.org

GreenHouse Project Facts and Frequently Asked Questions

Where is the GreenHouse located?

The GreenHouse is not a single residence. It is a Valleywide program at Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development. The Tumbleweed's office is located at 1413 N. 3rd St. Suite 102 in Phoenix.

Who does the GreenHouse Project help?

Homeless youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning between 18-24 years of age.

Is the shelter a temporary step?

Yes. This shelter is a short-term solution to house LGBT youth.

What happens to GLBT youth under 18 who contact the GreenHouse Project?

The project works with a network of foster care resources willing to house this underserved population.

How is the GreenHouse Project funded?

Tumbleweed funds some of the program, but the majority of the funding is from community donations.

How do I contact the GreenHouse Proj.?

Phone: 602-271-9904
24-hour crisis hotline: 602-841-5799
Toll free number: 1-866-SAFE (7233)703