

Volunteer for program providing host housing for LGBTQ+ youth pays it forward for those who once helped her

Description

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Growing up in what she describes as â??a not very supportive family,â?• Lynne Painter, now 59, turned to her friendsâ?? parents for support. â??Older people mentored me throughout my life,â?• she said. â??I tend to hang out with them.â?•

When she moved to San Francisco in her mid-20s, it was a friend of a friend, 17 years her senior, who showed her around and introduced her to the cityâ??s many neighborhoods.

In the last year, sheâ??s been paying it forward through Host Homes, a year-old San Francisco program serving LGBTQ youth who are homeless or unstably housed. Painter is sharing her two-bedroom condo with a 24-year-old in the Queer Studies department at City College.

Before moving in, Hold, who asked not to share a last name, had been living in a converted, windowless garage shared with a rotating group of roommates. â??The living conditions were unsafe for me as a Queer/Trans survivor,â?• Hold said.

Nearly half of the 1,145 San Francisco youth under age 25 identified in the January 2019 federal homeless count were LGBTQ+. Not all slept on the streets; 201 had some sort of shelter, whether couch surfing, living in their cars or, like Hold, jammed into cramped quarters with others.

Host Homes was launched about a year ago by the San Francisco LGBT Center. Painter was one of its first volunteers. Hold was referred by LYRIC, a program for LGBTQQ youth.

Supported by federal funds, the program aims to house 10-15 youth for three months to a year while providing case management that leads to stable, long-term housing. â??We arrange home stays for homeless youth who are either attending school or working, said Karessa Irvin, program manager.

Intergenerational mutual support

Both Painter and Hold have become advocates for the program. â??Living with Lynne and the support Iâ??ve received from the program helped me learn how to speak up for myself, even on small things,â?• said Hold. â??Itâ??s definitely raised the bar on the behavior I expect from others.â?•



Hold and Painter just hanging out with friends. (Photos courtesy of Lynn Painter.)

Painter has gotten an education in the younger generationâ??s views on racial justice as well as on nonbinary individuals, those whose gender identity isnâ??t exclusively male or female and often refer to themselves as â??theyâ?• rather than he or she. Itâ??s also been a chance for some day-to-day companionship after eight years living on her own.



They often cook together and share meals.

She and Hold sometimes cook together and share an occasional meal. They watched the annual LGBT film festival and celebrated birthdays. Theyâ??re both Taurusâ??s so they started out with a lot in common, Hold said. Painterâ??s friends, initially apprehensive about her decision to open her house to a stranger, gathered in the backyard with Hold to celebrate Painterâ??s birthday. Then Painter joined in celebrations for Holdâ??s birthday and attended Holdâ??s presentation in poetry class.

There have been difficult times, both admitted. â??Iâ??m an accountant and I can get tense at times,â? • Painter said. The pandemic didnâ??t make it easier. When City College classes went online, suddenly Hold was home 24/7. â??Luckily, weâ??re both private people and I have a small office down the

street.â?•

Setting boundaries

â??We let each other know when weâ??re having a bad week,â?• said Hold, â??and we practice maintaining our boundaries.â?•

Painter has a two-inch medallion with a design on one side and the word â??completionâ?• on the other that she wears when overwhelmed with work or on a tight deadline. â??I gave it to Hold the first time they had an exam. We took to passing it back and forth, whoever needed it got it. We didnâ??t have to say anything. We knew to be extra-considerate during those times.â?•

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Hold relaxing in Painterâ??s back yard.

The first host-home program for LGBT youth opened in 1997 in Minneapolis, a small program by design, said Ryan Berg, one of two ConneQT staff members. â??We donâ??t want to scale up. We have a pool of 20 hosts and find homes for 10 youth a year. Itâ??s the relationship the youth build with the case manager and the host family thatâ??s most important.â?•

The San Francisco program is among a growing number pairing homeless LGBTQ youth with older couples or single people, said Orlando Roybal, director of Point Source Youth, a national organization that has provided advocacy, technical assistance and evaluation services for San Franciscoâ??s Host Homes and other such programs. â??We work with about 30 of these programs throughout the United

States,â?• he said. â??Each program is unique to its community and resources.â?•

For example, hosts in California get a stipend because of the high cost of living. And pro-tenant housing laws make it important to develop clear, legally-binding waivers to protect hosts from unwanted claims on their residence. There are also programs in San Jose, Santa Cruz, Los Angeles and Venice Beach. Roybal says most of its programs have been successful, which they measure as 80 percent of graduates finding stable housing.

In San Francisco, which is still building infrastructure and recruiting, Irvin said, a case manager helps the prospective guest and host complete a detailed questionnaire identifying their values, interests and lifestyles. â??Itâ??s important that the host and guest are compatible,â?• Irvin said. â??We want the relationship to work.â?• Hosts and guests are provided a number of supports including training, and regular check-ins.

Homeless youth in S.F. in 2019

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Itâ??s all about the relationship

Hold will be moving out of Painterâ??s house in March, and the case manager has been helping them discuss their relationship when they no longer live together. Painter would like to introduce Hold to live theater and perhaps a trip to the snow in Yosemite, activities they could not enjoy during the pandemic.

And Hold is looking forward to mentoring the second guest moving into Painterâ??s extra bedroom.

â??Iâ??m ready to do it again,â?• said Painter, now also a volunteer recruiter. â??Itâ??s so much more meaningful that just writing a check, itâ??s establishing a relationship. I think we all volunteer to help and to learn.â?•

For more information or to participate in a Feb. 28 conversation about the program, RSVP at https://www.sfcenter.org/event/host-homes-information-session-feb-28/. Or contact Karessa Irvin at 415-865-5541 or HostHomes@sfcenter.org. The online conversation will be held from 12 to 1 p.m. and include representatives from the San Francisco LGBT Center, Our Family Coalition and LYRIC as well as District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman.

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Date Created
20/02/2021
Author
jgoddess