

CREATING AN LGBTQ+ CENTRE

Lessons Learned



PREPARED BY

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INTRODUCTION

This report shares some of the key themes and observations from a Study Visit to LGBTQ+ centres in Florida in Autumn 2022.

For this research fellowship, rather than somewhere big and liberal like New York, or somewhere very conservative like Texas, Florida was chosen. This is because there is a vibrant LGBTQ+ community amidst ongoing issues such as the 'Don't Say Gay' Bill and protests at 'Drag Queen Storytime'. The impact of the Pulse Shooting has led to trauma informed work. Practically there was the opportunity to visit several LGBTQ+ centres in moderate sized cities which offer both similar services to those in Belfast as well as novel ones.


I visited LGBTQ+ centres operated by 3 organisations, as well as meeting the co-chairs of Centre Link, an international member-based association of LGBTQ centres.

I am grateful to the Social Change Initiative for funding this work, to my mentor Rebecca Rittgers who guided the process, and all those who met with me and welcomed me so warmly into their spaces.

Danielle Roberts



CURRENT PROVISION



The LGBTQ+ sector in Belfast has no permanent or purpose built home, using a former co-working building to deliver a multitude of services including group meetings and social events, children's events, health testing and counselling as well as office space.

The shared meeting room could host a toddler group, a meeting with politicians, and a creative writing group all in one day – as well as doubling as the staff room.

As organisations, and work areas, continue to grow the demand for space far outstrips that which is available.

There are discussions at both Belfast City Council and Department of Communities level on the potential of an LGBTQ+ Centre.

While the LGBTQ+ Sector works regionally, and there are other buildings, such as the Foyle LGBT Centre, and the Trans Resource Centre, this report is focusing on the Waring Street premises.

COMMUNITY OPINION

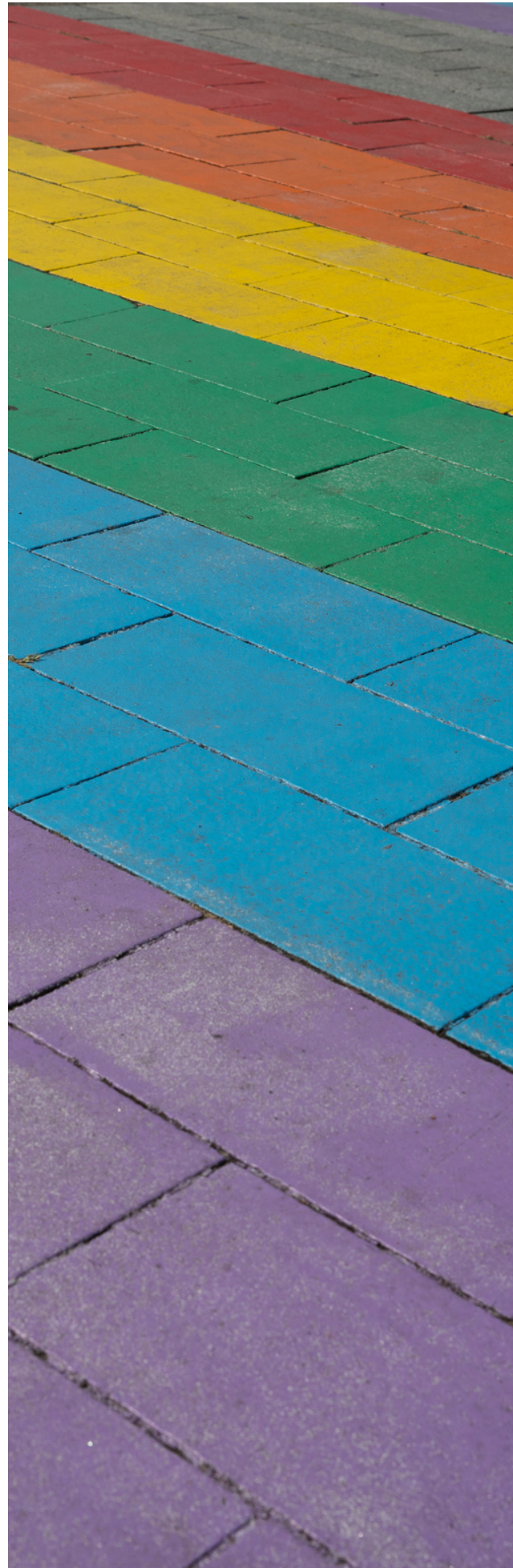
In preparation for the Study Visit opinions of service users were sought.

Common themes arising were:-

- 91% thought it was very or somewhat important that the Centre is family friendly
- 91% thought it was very important that there was space to socialise
- 91% thought it was very or somewhat important that the Centre has health facilities such as STI testing and counselling.

Accessibility was raised by several respondents, in various ways. As well as being accessible for disabled people, ease of access by public transport and parking were raised. Respondents also commented that they would welcome extended opening hours and being able to 'drop in' to the Centre.

This is linked to the repeated suggestions of a cafe as part of the Centre, as well as cultural space, for example performance and gallery space.



CASE STUDIES



'Established in 1993, Metro Inclusive Health is committed to providing quality health and wellness services that are inclusive, relevant, supportive and represent the lifetime continuum of the diverse people in the community.'

metrotampabay.org



'Since 1978, The centre has provided services to the LGBT+ community in Central Florida and is the only community centre offering comprehensive HIV services, mental health counseling, victims service case management, peer-led social and support groups, addiction recovery, food pantry, and housing stability case management.'

thecentreorlando.org

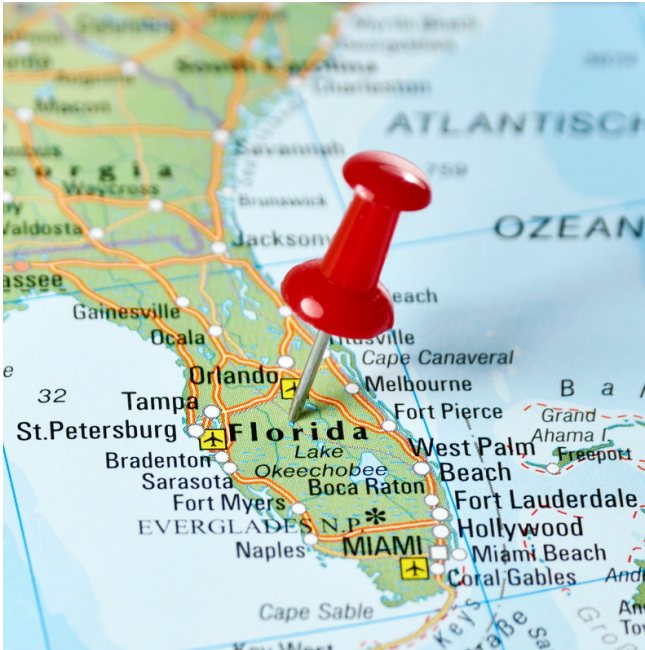


'In 1993, Alan Schubert, philanthropist and gay pioneer, conceived the idea for the then Gay and Lesbian Community centre of South Florida. Schubert determined that a safe community centre in Fort Lauderdale could also assist existing and new groups serving the LGBTQ community. Since then, The centre has met the LGBTQ community's distinct health, social, educational, socio-economic and safety needs.'

pridecentreflorida.org



LOCATION



All of the case study organisations operated out of multiple buildings or sites.

In some instances this was due to reaching different geographic areas, in others it was the different uses of buildings, for example as a healthcare provider, cultural space, or coffee shop.

All three had premises located in, or within walking distance of, the 'LGBTQ+ Quarter' of their City.

IN THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Being situated in the community made the case studies an integrated part of it, welcoming and approachable. This also increased footfall the the centres.

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Having multiple locations, including 'satellite offices' meant that the case studies were able to reach more people.

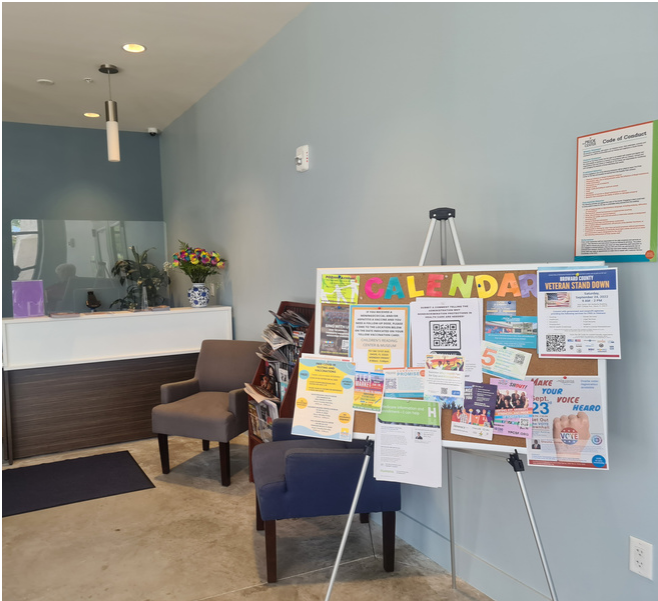
TRANSPORT

Two of the case studies had car parking available, and the third had on street parking. Public transport was less consistent accross the case studies.

ACCESSIBILITY

All the case studies were adapted to be wheelchair accessible, with some using the T-Loop for hearing impaired people.

ENTRANCE



All of the case studies had at least one location where service users could 'drop in' to use facilities like a computer lab, speak to a member of staff, and be directed as required.

In some instances this was a reception desk, in others a more social space like the coffee shop or an information point.

OPEN DOOR

All 3 case studies had an open door, either while open or for set periods of time. People could enter the building with out an appointment.

GREETING

Each of the case study buildings has someone to greet you as you entered. In one this was a concierge style desk, another a coffee shop, and finally a reception desk mainly staffed by volunteers

SAFETY

While there was an open door, this was balanced with locked doors beyond reception and in certain areas.

PRIVACY

All three case studies had private spaces for workers, individual service users, and groups. For example STI testing was in a seperate area and AA meetings were held in a building with it's own entrance.

MANAGEMENT



The case studies all had one person in charge of managing bookings, both internal and external.

This seemed to have great benefit to the organisations, particularly those managing multiple sites. While various staff had access to booking systems, the key was having someone who's job was to look after building management.

ONE POINT OF CONTACT

Having a single point of contact made managing spaces easier both for staff and programming as well as external bookings. It also helped with potential safeguarding issues.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS

There was no set way of managing potential conflicts across the case studies, mostly adopting a 'fair use' policy.

LONGEVITY

Many of the case study sites were owned by the charities, with others being rented. The security of owning the property allowed for extensive purpose built infrastructure such as a playground and housing.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Use of technology to manage spaces, including online portals to book, made management easier.

FLEXIBILITY



All of the case studies demonstrated flexibility in how they used their space. Rooms were used for social meet ups, inclusive religious services, art exhibitions.

Some spaces had a definite purpose, for example the playground, yet they had to be flexible in how it was used due to potential safeguarding issues.

OPENING HOURS

Opening hours varied across the case studies with evening and weekend activities as well as limited service options due to resources, all with the aim of meeting need.

MULTI USE SPACES

The use of moveable and folding furniture and room dividers allowed for rooms to be used for various purposes.

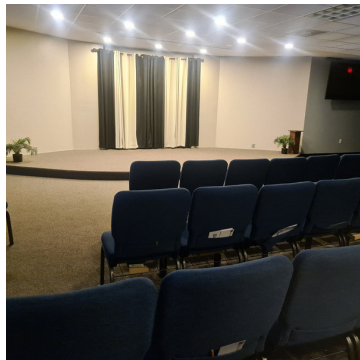
PURPOSE BUILT SPACE

There were specific examples of purpose built space, including housing for seniors, a playground, an auditorium designed to meet the needs of the community.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

The case studies all used their space to generate income, such as a coffee shop and pride store, themed events and pop up markets.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES



The main aim of all three case studies is serving the community. They did this in a range of ways from health and wellbeing services, leisure activities, education and practical support.

There was a great diversity in the facilities provided, all tailored to the needs of the community and in some cases constrained by the resources available.

ADDRESSING MATERIAL NEED

All the case studies addressed material need in different ways these included a 'Pride Pantry' food bank, clothes banks, subsidised healthcare, computer facilities and legal advice clinics.

SOCIAL SPACE

All the case studies hosted social events at specific times, as well as having drop in space for socialising.

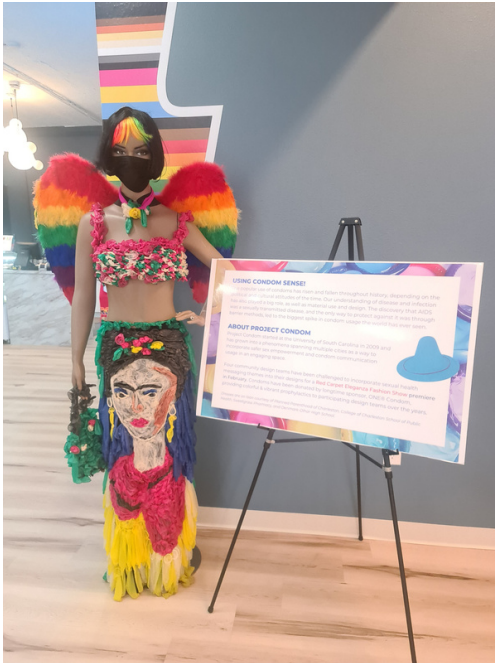
CULTURAL SPACE

Artwork created by and for the community was on display at all the case studies, as well as examples of local LGBTQ+ history and small museum exhibitions. Some case studies had performance space.

CHILDREN'S SPACE

All the case studies had facilities for children and young people, as LGBTQ+ people themselves or with LGBTQ+ family members.

SHARING SPACE



All three case studies shared space with other organisations, some on a full time basis and others more ad hoc.

This included renting office and meeting space, hosting events, or sharing buildings with organisations with similar aims.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most of the case studies had strands of work which had developed into stand alone projects or organisations, which remained in the same location.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships between government services and other non-profits were evident, with one stand out example being a social housing project.

RENTING SPACE

Renting space to organisations provided an income stream for the case studies, as well as expanding the services provided. It also develops relationships with external organisations.

INVITED ORGANISATIONS

All the case studies invited in organisations from time to time, from artists to information stalls.

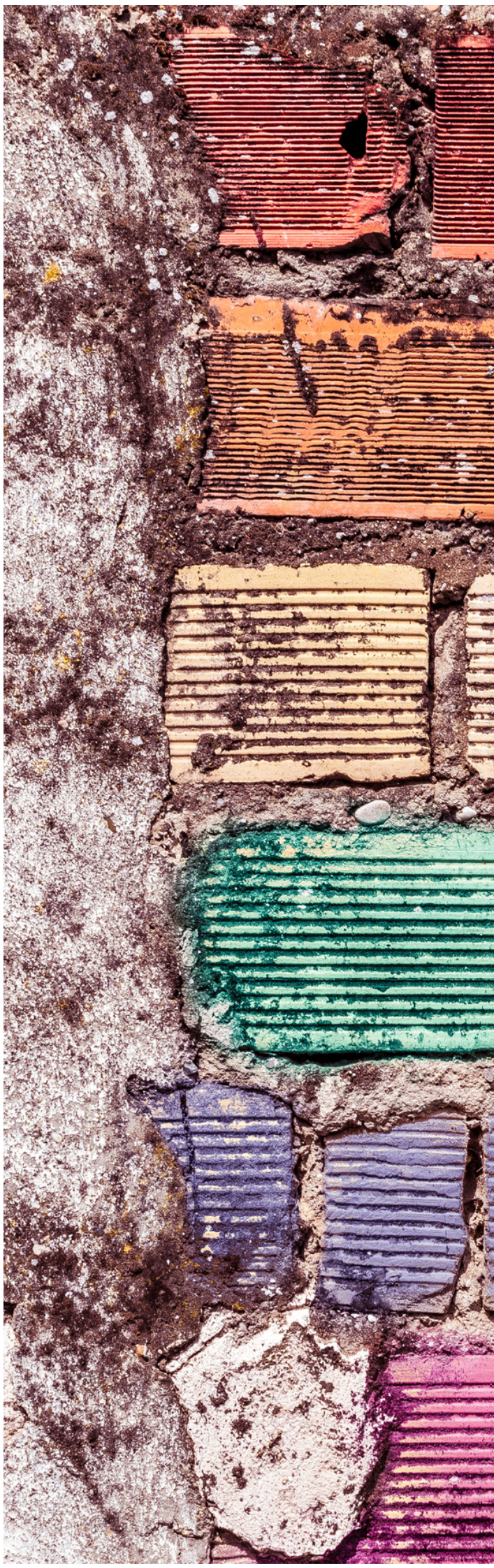
CHALLENGES

One of the ongoing challenges for the case studies, shared by the sector in Belfast, is sustainable funding. Patchwork programme funding and limited government funding is supplemented by philanthropic donations.

While owning buildings provides a level of security, as organisations have grown their space has not been able to keep up. One case study had built a new campus style LGBTQ+ centre, partly funded by partnering with another non-profit and partly by donations. Another is exploring their options, however they are likely to be priced out of the area which they helped to regenerate.

The safety of LGBTQ+ centres is also a concern. One case study had experienced opposition to developing their new building, another had to cancel a children's event because of a right wing protest.

Trying to be 'all things to all people' is not achievable, despite the best efforts of the case studies. For example, a playground in the vicinity of AA meetings can present a safeguarding risk.



POSSIBILITIES

The Belfast LGBTQ+ Sector has no permanent home, however a Centre has been raised at Devolved Government level and Belfast City Council is currently carrying out a scoping exercise.

The case studies show what can be achieved, and delivered.

Were we to have a purpose built, or refitted, centre we could have bespoke facilities to meet community needs including social space, family friendly facilities, and cultural space.

A building with sufficient office space for the whole sector would strengthen partnership working as well as making services more convenient for users.

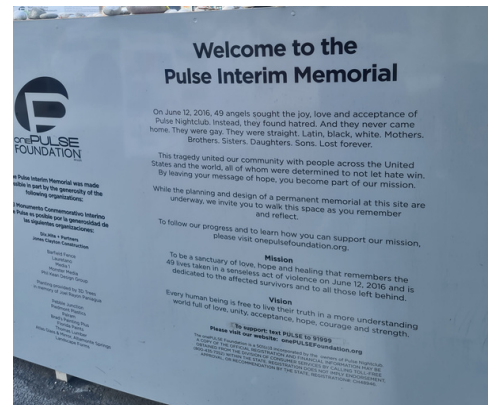
Having the option of a social enterprise cafe and shop, and excess space to rent, would create an income stream for the sector.

With the growing cost of living crisis, continued push back on LGBTQ+ rights, reports of LGBTQ+ hate crime at highest ever levels, and a sector running on a cocktail of precarious funding:

A Belfast LGBTQ+ Centre is greatly needed.



IN MEMORY OF THOSE MURDERED PULSE ORLANDO, JUNE 12 2016



STANLEY ALMODOVAR III
AMANDA LIZZETTE ALVEAR
OSCAR A. ARACENA MONTERO
RODOLFO AYALA AYALA
ANTONIO "TONY" BROWN
DARRYL ROMAN BURT II
ANGEL CANDELARIO-PADRO
JUAN CHAVEZ MARTINEZ
LUIS D. CONDE
CORY JAMES CONNELL
TEVIN EUGENE CROSBY
DEONKA "DEE DEE" DRAYTON
SIMÓN ADRIAN CARRILLO FERNÁNDEZ
LEROY VALENTIN FERNANDEZ
MERCEDEZ MARISOL FLORES
PETER OMMY GONZALEZ CRUZ
JUAN RAMON GUERRERO
PAUL TERRELL HENRY
FRANK HERNANDEZ
MIGUEL ANGEL HONORATO
JAVIER JORGE REYES
JASON BENJAMIN JOSAPHAT
EDDIE JAMAL DROY JUSTICE
ANTHONY LUIS LAUREANO DISLA

CHRISTOPHER ANDREW LEINONEN
ALEJANDRO BARRIOS MARTINEZ
BRENDA MARQUEZ MCCOOL
GILBERTO R. SILVA MENENDEZ
KIMBERLY JEAN MORRIS
AKYRA MONET MURRAY
LUIS OMAR OCASIO CAPO
GERARDO A. ORTIZ JIMENEZ
ERIC IVAN ORTIZ-RIVERA
JOEL RAYON PANIAGUA
JEAN C. MENDEZ PEREZ
ENRIQUE L. RIOS JR.
JEAN CARLOS NIEVES RODRÍGUEZ
XAVIER EMMANUEL SERRANO ROSADO
CHRISTOPHER JOSEPH SANFELIZ
YILMARY RODRÍGUEZ SOLIVAN
EDDIE SOTOMAYOR JR.
SHANE EVAN TOMLINSON
MARTIN BENITEZ TORRES
JONATHAN A. CAMUY VEGA
JUAN PABLO RIVERA VELÁZQUEZ
LUIS SERGIO VIELMA
FRANKY JIMMY DEJESUS VELÁZQUEZ
LUIS DANIEL WILSON-LEON
JERRY WRIGHT

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Lyra McKee memorial mural, Orlando Florida.