

J A S M Y N

When Ernie Selorio moved to Jacksonville in the early 1990s, he was a lonely, closeted gay teenager desperate to find a support network in his new home. His journey led him to a small group of adults willing to help and in 1992 Selorio led the first support group of gay and lesbian youth, meeting at the Willow Branch Library.

Fast forward 25 years and the seeds that Selorio planted have grown into JASMYN, a robust nonprofit that supports and empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth ages 13-23 in greater Jacksonville.

With a current budget of \$2 million¹, JASMYN has served more than 25,000 young people since its formal organization in 1994. From a three-building campus in Jacksonville's Riverside neighborhood, it provides an array of services for young people: a drop-in center, youth development programs, HIV testing, an onsite STD clinic and case management. It also works in the community, nurturing gay-straight alliances in schools, supporting corporate and community diversity and inclusion, providing



¹ Fiscal 2016

LGBT diversity training and advocating for a safe community that promotes equality and human rights.

“It’s wildly different now,” said Bruce Musser, past board chair and long-time friend of JASMYN. “It’s so fully realized and expanded. A gay teen created JASMYN so that gay teens would have a safe place but now we have a full-service health clinic and a youth center. And we reach out to vulnerable and homeless youth. We have expanded who we serve as well as what we do.”

JASMYN’s story, like that of all good organizations, is grounded in the people whose vision, tenacity, determination and ideas created and sustain the organization. It begins with Ernie Selorio.

Selorio was part of a Filipino-American Navy family that lived in Washington, D.C. prior to moving to Jacksonville. In Washington, Selorio had connected with SMYAL – Supporting and Mentoring Youth Activities and Leaders – and it was that organization that sparked his vision for a group in Jacksonville. Through the Jacksonville chapter of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), he met Ted Howard and several other adults who helped him organize the initial support group for LGBT youth. Inspired by SMYAL, he named his new, unofficial group JASMYN – Jacksonville Area Sexual Minority Youth Network.

Selorio was intentional about making youth aware of JASMYN. “He was small and he could pass for a high school student,” said current JASMYN CEO Cindy Watson. “He would sneak into high schools and leave cards.” The phone line for JASMYN was Selorio’s personal phone in those early days. Though he enjoyed the support of a handful of adults, Selorio was the driving force behind the birth of JASMYN.

At that time – the early 1990s – the AIDS epidemic was raging in Jacksonville and across the country. In 1994, AIDS was the No. 1 cause of death among all Americans aged 25-44.² It had affected the lives of such notables as international tennis star Arthur Ashe, international ballet great Rudolf Nureyev, NBA basketball star Earvin “Magic” Johnson and Olympic gold medal diver Greg Louganis.

It also had led to the death of an Indiana teenager named Ryan White, and prompted Congress to pass the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act, which funded community-based care and treatment for AIDS patients.

Cindy Watson was working at Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, one of two staff members who were involved in HIV planning and Ryan White CARE Act funding. Though not a lawyer, Watson often worked with AIDS patients, helping them prepare the advance directives that specified what actions should be taken if illness prevented them from making decisions for themselves. It was personal and often painful work that put her in contact with many in the gay and lesbian community.

In 1994, Watson received a phone call in her office at Legal Aid. The caller, Watson recalls, said she was trying to establish an organization to help LGBT youth and she “heard there was a lesbian at Legal Aid who might help them.”

It was Watson’s introduction to JASMYN.

² It would be 1995 before antiretroviral drugs were introduced; in 1996, the number of new AIDS cases in the U.S. declined for the first time since the start of the epidemic.

Cindy Watson grew up in rural South Carolina but she took the long route to Jacksonville. In retrospect, each step of that journey prepared her for the role she would assume with JASMYN.

Her childhood home near Six Mile, South Carolina, was a typical southern small town; life revolved around family and church – Prater’s Creek Baptist Church – where her family still worships. “I was one of the smart kids,” she said. She attended Furman University in nearby Greenville, S.C., graduating in 1979 with a degree in psychology.



“I knew I wanted to be in the helping business,” she said. Though it would be years before she self-identified as lesbian, she also knew she found the environment in South Carolina stifling. She wanted to go someplace completely different.

She attended a Sierra Club meeting where she saw a film about Alaska and focused her sights on going to The Last Frontier. Without money or an abundance of family support for her idea, she had to be creative. She joined VISTA (Volunteers In Service to America) and accepted a job in Alaska. She was assigned to a small Arctic town where she worked in a newly-established shelter for battered Eskimo women.

At age 23, it was a powerful experience.

She discovered that the very presence of the shelter made a huge difference – where once there was no refuge, a safe place now existed. Women who had been battered for years arrived seeking help. The “shelter” was a two-bedroom apartment that also served as Watson’s home, but for the clients it was precious space.

She learned from the clients how to live in the Arctic – what to eat, what to wear, what to do to survive, how to adapt to the culture and the darkness and the light.

And she learned how important a board of directors is. After her first year, the shelter was absorbed into a larger organization and Watson was named director of the shelter. The shelter board, Watson said, was made up largely of white women who had paternalistic attitudes toward the Eskimo clients. She succeeded at bringing to the board more native individuals who were connected to the community.

“Who you have driving the organization is really important,” Watson said, “and how you relate to the community – in healthy and respectful ways – is really important.”

After two years, Watson was exhausted. “I felt like I was constantly on – all of my neurons were working all of the time to deal with the job, the culture and the environment.” She left Alaska and moved to Vermont, becoming director of a rural women’s center.

“In that era, rural Vermont was populated with a lot of well-educated, high-energy, progressive-minded people who made things happen,” Watson recalled. Though the center’s staff was very small, its board was robust, supportive and highly engaged. She appreciated her board even more when she talked with the directors of other women’s centers who were part of a statewide network. “You know how it is

when EDs get together – they talk. I heard all of these stories and realized what a healthy board I had. I learned two important things: the qualities of a good board, and once you have a bad board culture it's really hard to change it."

In her nine years with the center, she grew the staff from two part-timers to 12 staff. (The organization is still in operation with 26 staff and a \$1.3 million budget.)

She also grew in her personal life. Watson met Garnett Harrison, divorced her husband and came out. The couple wanted to return to the South; Harrison was licensed to practice law in Georgia. They settled temporarily in St. Augustine. While there, Watson was hired at Jacksonville Area Legal Aid.

While her work at Legal Aid was often difficult, the office was "an oasis for progressive thought," Watson said. She recalls reading a comment from Gloria Steinem about pulling women out of the river and the importance of going upstream to keep the women from jumping in in the first place. That idea of "working upstream" was in her mind when the call came seeking help for JASMYN.

JASMYN, she thought, might be a way to work upstream and prevent young people from contracting AIDS.

In her initial meeting with the JASMYN representatives, Watson explained that she was not a lawyer and could not provide any legal help. But she did know about organizations – "I knew about boards and bylaws and 501(c)(3)s and I could help them with that." Immediately she zeroed in on the question of mission: "One of the first questions that I asked them was 'Do you want to be focused on the community or do you want to be youth-centric?' They looked surprised and said, 'Youth-Centric! THAT's what we are!'"

In 1995 Watson became the board chair. There were no employees; the board was a working board. In small steps they began to build the organization.

They installed a JASMYN phone line (this was the era of land lines) and listed it in the white pages of the telephone directory under Gay Youth Information Line. JASMYN youth roller skated through the local AIDS walk, attracting attention and sharing word of JASMYN. Out & About, a local newspaper for the LGBT adult community, began reporting on JASMYN.

Participation in the support groups grew – and JASMYN collected data: how many were present at each meeting and their ages.

Evelyn Nehl, a prominent ally of the gay community, introduced JASMYN to a number of influential individuals, several of whom offered to serve on the board. Watson drew on the lessons of the past: "When someone volunteered to serve on the board I always did an interview with them. We were looking for people with skills. And I was looking for people I wanted to work with – people who were nice and kind and committed, not on a power trip or exploitive... I knew that one person like that in a group can be very destructive. I was a hawk about it."

In 1995, JASMYN received its first grant -- \$1,000 from what was then the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services to support HIV education.

By 1998, JASMYN had moved into a small office in a house on Osceola Street in Riverside that was shared by People With AIDS, Lutheran Social Services' AIDS Care and Education program and other related organizations. JASMYN had begun building a curriculum around HIV and applied for a three-year grant from the Florida Department of Health for HIV prevention. Impressed by their focus on youth, the Health Department awarded the \$88,000 grant to JASMYN, bypassing more established and larger organizations.

The grant funding enabled JASMYN to hire an executive director. The board advertised the position, had a great pool of candidates, carefully vetted and interviewed the candidates and selected one for the job. When Watson met with him to offer him the job, he declined because of the level of compensation. Disheartened, Watson headed back to JASMYN's office. "I was driving across the Fuller Warren Bridge," she said, "and I had this sense of one door closing and another door opening and I decided I needed to be the ED."

The other board members agreed, and for the next decade, Watson led an organization that steadily grew and enhanced its programs but generally remained under the radar.

"It wasn't very safe to be visible for our young people," she recalled.

JASMYN moved from the shared space on Osceola Street to a house on Roselle Street in 1999 and, in 2002, to a larger house on Peninsular Place. In both instances, staff asked the youth if they wanted to put up a sign or fly a flag at the location. The answer was No! No signs, no flags. They wanted anonymity, a safe space.

While Watson was more than willing to share information about JASMYN, she generally waited until she was asked. "We were very reactive."

But the work grew and the organization grew. And it attracted notice. In 2000, JASMYN became the first LGBT youth organization to receive support from an NFL franchise, when Delores Barr Weaver, one of the owners of the Jacksonville Jaguars, directed the Jaguars Foundation to make a grant to JASMYN. The move, when publicized, created controversy; some Jaguars ticket-holders returned their tickets in protest. But Weaver held firm.



That same year, JASMYN hosted the southern regional conference of the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC) as well as Jacksonville's first gay and lesbian film festival.

In addition to providing a youth drop-in center, HIV and safe sex education programs and a youth hotline, JASMYN began working to encourage a better environment in the community for LGBT youth. In 2001, JASMYN joined with PFLAG and others to found the Northeast Florida Safe Schools Coalition in an effort to stem bullying of students based on real or perceived sexual orientation. The next year, the Duval County School Board voted 5-2 to prohibit harassment and acts of hate against students based on sexual orientation.

JASMYN expanded its focus to include homeless and vulnerable youth, including those in the child welfare system and, in 2003, received its first funding from the City of Jacksonville, to support that work.

The City funding came as something of a surprise. Watson had applied for the grant partly as a marketing ploy. Watson had become aware of some back-channel criticism among city officials about JASMYN and was irritated that no one from the city had bothered to call her or seek any clarifications from the organization. “I decided to apply for the grant because it gave me a chance to explain JASMYN [in the grant application] and the grant panel would have to read it and maybe next time they would bother to call us.” The City awarded the grant to support a safety net project for homeless and vulnerable LGBT youth.

While there were numerous awards and recognitions for JASMYN, and youth participation continued to grow (the organization was serving more than 400 unduplicated youth annually by 2003), Watson still struggled with communications and marketing. As a community, Jacksonville was not particularly open to LGBT individuals. “How could we talk about JASMYN without opening up the whole expansive conversation about LGBT issues?” Watson asked.

In 2006, they received help from a member of the Community Coaches program – trained experts who volunteered their time and skills to support local nonprofits. The coach helped Watson and her staff understand they did not need to market to the entire community; they could focus on targeted audiences, specifically young people, parents, the organizations that work with young people and the funders who support work with young people.

“We weren’t going to get into the [public] schools,” Watson said. “That was totally closed to us. But we decided we could work with the organizations that went into the schools. We could build their awareness and train them and through them reach the youth in the schools.”

Jeff Chartrand knew nothing about JASMYN when he returned to Jacksonville in 2006, but during the next decade he would become one of the organization’s most important friends and, arguably, its greatest change agent.

The gay son of one of Jacksonville’s prominent businessmen, Chartrand had been away from home for several years. Upon his return, he helped his parents and sister establish The Chartrand Foundation, which focused on education. He admits he struggled a bit to find his footing and was uncertain how he would be received in conservative Jacksonville.

In 2007, Cindy Watson approached Chartrand at a community event and suggested that his foundation support JASMYN. Jeff demurred, saying, “We only work in education,” he recalls. “Cindy smiled and said, ‘That’s ok, our kids go to public schools, too.’” Chartrand, however, did not follow up.



A year later, Chartrand was more settled and asked a friend, Bruce Musser, to arrange a tour of JASMYN and an introduction to the CEO. Impressed, Chartrand invited JASMYN to apply for funding and The Chartrand Foundation awarded a \$65,000 grant to help JASMYN support students who wanted to start Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs; now known as Gender & Sexualities Alliance Network) in Duval County schools and develop Teaching Respect for All, which teaches educators, counselors, social workers, youth workers and others how to create an environment where all people, including LGBT people, are respected.

At the time, it was the Chartrand Foundation’s practice to fully fund programs for four years and then require the grantee to seek partial funding from other sources. For four years, JASMYN was told of this policy, but in year five, the organization again asked for full funding of the program.

Chartrand was very frustrated. “I had offered to introduce her [Watson] to a lot of other funders in the community but she never took me up on my invitation.”

In retrospect, he realizes JASMYN shared the challenge facing so many other LGBT organizations across the country. They were birthed and grew up on government funding – HIV AIDS funding – and had never done the capacity building work to become mature organizations, diversify their funding streams and become sustainable entities. “They [JASMYN] didn’t have a development director,” Chartrand said. “They didn’t have a development-oriented board. At that time, it was like bean bag chairs and pizza on the floor.”

Not only was JASMYN facing funding challenges, it was facing programmatic challenges, noted Nina Waters, president of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, which was an early supporter of JASMYN. Increasingly, community organizations were recognizing the need to develop more cultural competencies to effectively interact with gay and lesbian employees, clients and customers. JASMYN was the only organization in greater Jacksonville that offered education and training in this field and it found itself besieged with requests. It was harder and harder for staff to stay on mission, manage time and resources effectively and avoid burnout.

Though it pained him, Chartrand declined the fifth-year-funding request.

“I didn’t want to see the only LGBT nonprofit leave our grantmaking portfolio and yet at the same time I knew that it needed capacity building work,” he said. “It was kind of a tough love situation.”

Watson, in her usual fashion, was open and candid. “I told him, ‘I don’t know what to do.’”

Her response turned Chartrand around.

“She said, ‘I know we need it but I don’t know what to do. How do you get private funding?’ I really appreciated that. When a person’s first response is asking for help, it made me really want to lean in.”

Instead of extending funding for the GSA work, Chartrand offered JASMYN \$25,000-\$30,000 to support capacity building work. He contacted Richard Burns who had served as executive director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center in New York City for 22 years and had recently begun consulting with LGBT organizations. He engaged Burns to serve as a JASMYN consultant and Watson's coach.

For the next four years, with annual support from the Chartrand Foundation, Burns worked with JASMYN staff and helped establish systems and taught staff and board how to nurture donors.

As important as Burns' involvement was, Chartrand gives enormous credit to Watson and her willing and open attitude.

"The humility there," Chartrand said. "She is well established but she was open and so willing to do this part of the work and learn a skill set that she had not learned."

But The Community Foundation's Waters also credits Chartrand's intervention for revitalizing the organization: "I do see Jeff as the biggest instigator in helping them build their capacity."

Bruce Musser had come to Jacksonville at the end of the 1980s as a young twenty-something, before JASMYN existed. As Musser grew up, established himself and made his way as a small business owner, he was aware of JASMYN and thought well of the organization -- but it was for teens and he was an adult. In the 2000s, Watson approached him about joining the board but Musser dropped the ball. He and Watson remained casual friends, he said, and he would call her with congratulations over news of a major gift.

When Chartrand arrived in Jacksonville, Musser helped him learn about the community, meet people and make connections – including introducing him to JASMYN. After that introduction resulted in the Chartrand's generous grant to JASMYN, Watson called Musser and said, "NOW will you join the board?" In 2009, Musser said yes.

It was a small board and not an engaged board. Musser, an energetic and engaged individual, says his experience was disappointing: "I told Cindy at one point that I would describe my board experience by saying, 'I feel lonely.'

"I recognized that the board was a mess," Musser said. "There was no leadership, and the board wasn't contributing leadership. Cindy's side – the staff side – was in great shape but the board... not so much. The board members had skills, they were committed, they had good networks, but they had no one to harness that."

In 2011, Musser was named vice chair of the board. The chair was most often absent and Watson advised Musser to "just start acting like the chair."

"I decided I was going to focus on rallying troops," Musser said, "and give them some work to do."

During the next few years, consultant Burns helped Musser shift the board culture. They replaced committees ("where people go to die," Musser said) with task forces, which were time-limited and

focused on specific challenges. That energized board members and gave them a sense of accomplishment.

“Burns helped the board migrate from a grassroots board to a development-oriented board,” Watson said. “Musser was the perfect person to manage that culture change.”

“They had board members who had been there the whole 16 years,” Chartrand said. “They had to get folks to self-identify that maybe it’s time to roll off. [Remaining board members had to decide] what’s the ideal board member, how do you on-board them?”

Musser said they developed a very specific and consistent way of vetting board candidates, employing a governance committee and multiple interviews and introductions. Board members were asked to “make a gift that is a stretch,” he said, rather than being asked to “give or get” a certain amount.

Musser was elected chair in 2012 and held the post until summer of 2016. He credits Watson for most of his success.

“In Cindy Watson I had the most phenomenal partner,” he said. “We met almost every week in the early years. Not many executive directors will give that much time to their board chair.... It was really Cindy’s grace that slowly took the board through the transition and that built a lot of trust.”

December 2013 was a major turning point. In anticipation of JASMYN’s 20th anniversary, the organization had decided to celebrate the anniversary with a “coming out” party of sorts, focusing on raising JASMYN’s community profile.

JASMYN owned a single, aging building on Peninsular Place that was totally inadequate for the volume of services it was providing. The board and staff were eager to either expand or relocate, and knew a capital campaign was needed to finance the move. They engaged local consultants to conduct a campaign feasibility study. In December 2013, the consultants reported back to the board with disappointing news: JASMYN was not ready for a capital campaign; it was not widely known in the community and would be unsuccessful at attracting the level of gifts needed. To improve the chances of success in the future, the consultants suggested six things that JASMYN should accomplish, among them raising more money from the LGBT community, raising more private dollars and hiring a development director.

“They gave us a wake-up call and a road map,” Musser said. “I thought, I really have to walk this group through the disappointment and get them focused on doing the six things the consultant recommended.”

Musser’s journey with the board proved to be a personal journey as well.

“JASMYN helped me grow up,” he said. “I got the benefit of JASMYN’s programming but as a board member.”

His experience reinforces his belief that board service often benefits the board member as much as the organization.

“When we talk with prospective board members, we listen for the connection: ‘I have a gay brother,’ ‘My uncle died of AIDS.’ ‘My niece is a lesbian,’ whatever. We don’t ask about it but we listen and are

attentive to it. It is the reason many of our board members connect strongly with the organization. And, I believe, our board members need us to help with whatever type of healing they may need to do. We may never know or understand what is happening, but I think we need each other.”

JASMYN’s building on Peninsular Place in 2013 was a two-story, roughly 3,000-square foot house built in 1912 that needed a host of upgrades. The organization also desperately needed more room to accommodate its programs, the scores of teens who showed up nightly, as well as its staff and directors. As staff and board worked to accomplish the fundraising consultant’s to-do list, they were surprised by two events.

At a gathering at the University of North Florida, Watson happened to meet Paul Schilling and James Dutton, two doctors from nearby Vilano Beach, Florida who were interested in supporting worthy organizations. They expressed interest in JASMYN and Watson scheduled a time for them to visit. But due to a mix-up, the doctors arrived when Watson was not present. Unfazed, staff showed the doctors around and answered their questions. The doctors left.

On their visit, Schilling and Dutton noticed that the property immediately northwest of JASMYN – a 1914 house with about 2,700 square feet – was for sale. They reached out to Watson, explained how impressed they were with the atmosphere and services at JASMYN, and offered to buy the property and gift it to JASMYN along with about \$40,000 to support repairs and renovations.

After careful consideration and a meeting between the doctors and the board, JASMYN accepted the gift.

“From December 2013 to summer 2014 we went from not-ready-for-a-capital-campaign to having a new building,” said Musser. “The miracles started happening.”

The board, meanwhile, had raised \$40,000 to contribute to building acquisition. With the doctors’ gift, the board redirected its funds to supporting the position of development director.

In 2015, the second surprise arrived from Jaguars owner Delores Barr Weaver, who had continued to support JASMYN through the years, providing a gift of \$200,000 to the organization in 2007. In early 2015, Mrs. Weaver announced that she was paying off JASMYN’s mortgage on the Peninsular Place property and providing additional funds to improve the property.

As JASMYN was expanding, support for the LGBT community also was growing. In 2014, The Community Foundation launched the LGBT Community Fund for Northeast Florida, a giving circle whose philanthropy works to enhance the area’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.³

“That took some pressure off JASMYN,” the Foundation’s Waters said, “because there was another place folks could go for support on LGBT related matters.”

One of the fund’s first grants was to support the development director position for JASMYN.

³ Cindy Watson served on the advisory committee that recommended establishment of the fund.

With the grant and the board's contribution, "Cindy had [the resources to hire] a thought partner and someone who could carry some of the development burden," Waters said.

But the LGBT Fund did more.

"The investment strategy of the LGBT Fund is to strengthen existing organizations," said Michael Meyers, who serves on the LGBT Fund's steering committee. "JASMYN was doing great work, and one of their crying needs was for a development director.... But we also funded an update to JASMYN's strategic plan, which had not been done for a few years. That work helped them focus on their core mission. Organizations need to pick what they are going to do, and what they are not going to do, for if they are not clear about the difference it can lead to wasted efforts."

(The significance of the LGBT Fund cannot be overstated – in 2015, the LGBT Fund's second year, The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida was named the No. 1 community foundation in the nation in funding for LGBTQ issues, outpacing community foundations in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Miami. And JASMYN was the nation's No. 1 community foundation LGBTQ grantee.)

About the time JASMYN celebrated the opening of its newly renovated property and its two-house operation, another opportunity presented itself.

In 2015, a 1919-era two-story quadruplex immediately behind the JASMYN buildings came on the market. Again, the doctors stepped in and in December 2015, JASMYN acquired the 3,000-square-foot building for \$168,000. JASMYN hopes to transition the space into a safety net resource center for at-risk and homeless LGBT youth in a collaboration that links youth to the Youth Crisis Center for emergency housing.

"One of our advantages now is that we have a youth center and an HIV clinic and they are in the same space," said Musser. "That's important. Many other organizations are in different spaces – a youth center here and an HIV clinic around the corner. We are youth-centric so our clinic intake is welcoming. I've been to the Health Department – it's pretty intimidating, even for a grown man."

This dual focus creates multiple entry points for young people – they may come to JASMYN for the youth programs and learn about the clinic; or come for the clinic and learn about the youth programs. In either case, JASMYN's case management is there to provide support. "Our case management takes a more parental style," Musser said. "These are teens, after all. Our case managers physically take teens to their appointments, buy bus tickets for them, help them get where they need to be safely."

Creating a safe environment for LGBT youth goes beyond keeping them physically safe. For JASMYN, the commitment extends to encouraging a more welcoming and supportive community for all people, including LGBT youth. In that respect, JASMYN has been a leader in transforming Jacksonville attitudes, laws and policies with respect to LGBT individuals.

"JASMYN is clearly the leading LGBT services organization in Jacksonville, with a reach much beyond its core constituency of youth," said Meyers of the LGBT Community Fund. "But its impact on the community is much broader."

“JASMYN has helped people be less threatened by the LGBT world,” Waters of The Community Foundation said. “Cindy has led the organization with grit and grace. She has helped people understand the real issues these kids were facing. She has humanized the issues and once people get to know someone, their perceptions often change.”

Watson was appointed to the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission in 2006. The city’s Human Rights Ordinance – or HRO – failed to offer any protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Watson began what would be a 10-year campaign to amend the HRO to provide equal protections to LGBT individuals.

JASMYN was an active participant in that campaign. Musser recalls the HRO being a topic of discussion at every board meeting – something he found a bit surprising at first. “Cindy explained how important this was for our kids and the community they would grow up in.”

Over time, JASMYN rewrote its mission to include the phrase “bringing people and resources together to promote equality and human rights,” ensuring alignment with its public policy and advocacy work.

But it was a difficult campaign, with two failed votes before the Jacksonville City Council approved the amendment. In the course of the campaign, the LGBT and the straight community experienced change.

“It [the HRO campaign] woke up our LGBT community,” Musser said. “We were fragmented. Gays and lesbians didn’t get along. There were bars that you went to if you were gay and bars that you went to if you were lesbian and you weren’t welcome at the other one. Now, we have a flag and a name that we live under [LGBT community]. JASMYN was important in making that happen because it had events that were open and welcoming to everyone. And now everybody’s all mixed up and having fun together.”

By 2016, when the measure came before Council for the third, and ultimately successful vote, JASMYN was joined by the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, the Jacksonville Civic Council, the president of the University of North Florida and a battalion of business and civic leaders.

“The challenge for our community,” Meyers said, “is to build more organizations that promote LGBT inclusiveness in our community, and happily we have a number that are primarily LGBT and others that are mainstream working to promote LGBT inclusion. What JASMYN has led, and what these other organizations contribute to, is increasing the number of touches between Jacksonville residents and the LGBT community – that is how understanding is built.”

There have been many critical turning points for JASMYN in its journey from the Willow Branch Library to the Peninsular Place campus. Observers often point to that first major Health Department grant that provided legitimacy and staffing, or to Jeff Chartrand’s strategic funder intervention. But more than anything, they point to Cindy Watson, and the style of her leadership.

Watson is a strong executive director but she is a wise executive director, said The Community Foundation’s Waters. “She understands her responsibility is to lead the organization. The Executive Director’s role is not be totally focused on program. Cindy has been able to deal with the ‘forest’ issues and she has brought on staff who can deal with the trees.”

She is extremely knowledgeable, said the LGBT Fund's Meyers: "When anyone has an LGBT question in Jacksonville, the immediate thought is to call Cindy, and if she does not know the answer she has three leads to get to the answer."

"She is like eternal sunshine and that to me is amazing," said Chartrand. "She has this well of optimism, that makes her unique."

Watson will tell you that her demeanor comes from her upbringing.

When she worked for Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, she recalled, her office was directly across the street from First Baptist Church in downtown Jacksonville – not always a friend of the LGBT community. That proximity, she said, helped her firm up her sense of self.

"I have been able to work in Jacksonville with detractors because I know where I came from," Watson said. "I can't ever look at folks without thinking that they might be my cousins or my family members and I can never be disrespectful. I have to meet their humanity and I can't just rule them out. But I have to hold myself where I belong."

Maintaining that equilibrium in a world that too easily gets mean has not only enhanced JASMYN's image, but also smoothed the way for change in Jacksonville, Waters said.

"Cindy has been amazing at partnerships," Chartrand said. "She is just so pleasant to be around. There's a lot of negativity out there but there is something about her spirit, her resiliency."

Watson anticipates that she will retire in the next five years or so and the board has formed a succession task force to plan for that change. For Watson, the board is the key to the organization's future.

"We belong to the community," Watson said. "The community trusts us to do this work and to care for our LGBT youth and the board stands in for the community."

And the board is in a good place now, Chartrand said.

"It is a highly functioning, roll-up-your-sleeves and supportive board. All of their events are strong, well-oiled machines with lots of partners. When I go to that campus and think if she wasn't here..." he pauses. "It's a healthy organization. It doesn't depend on her now. But it wouldn't have happened without her."

Waters agrees, and easily articulates the qualities that have led to Watson's – and JASMYN's – success.

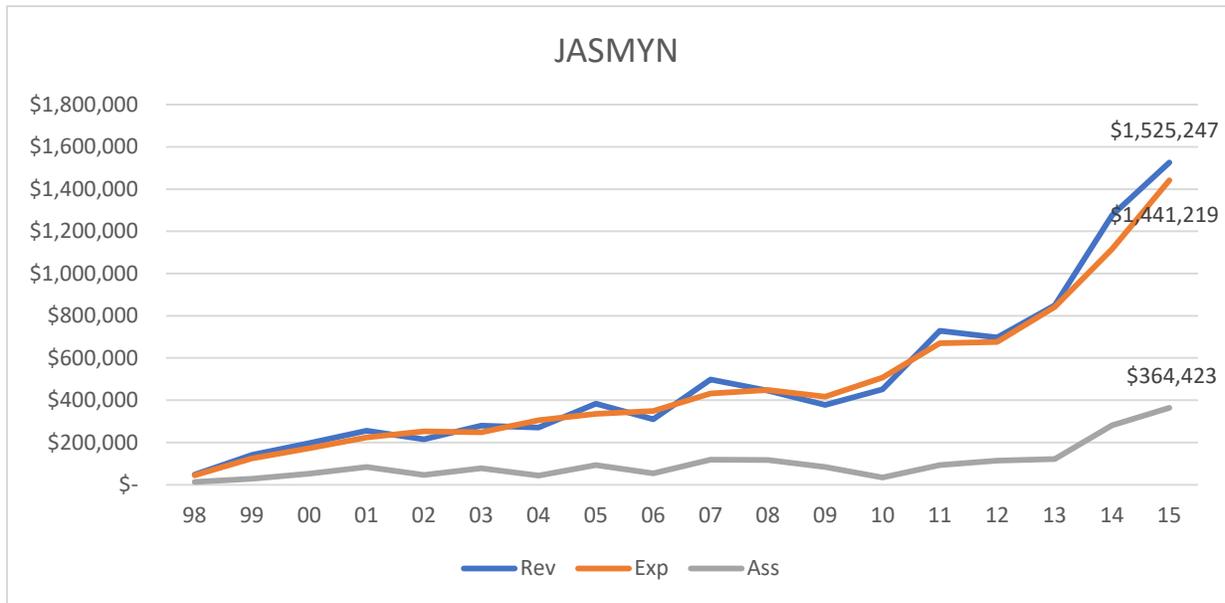
"She is a really good listener. She is really good at reading other people and meeting people where they are. She is extremely empathetic and can talk about the work. She is not a harsh activist who is in your face. She is like that slow soaking rain."





JASMYN TIMELINE

1992	First JASMYN group meeting
1994	JASMYN formally established
1995	Florida Health & Rehabilitative Services awards JASMYN grant to support HIV education & outreach
1996	JASMYN opens gay youth information line; opens office in in community house
1997	2 part-time staff hired;
1998	JASMYN receives three-year, \$88,000, Department of Health grant for comprehensive HIV education and outreach; Cindy Watson becomes executive director
1999	JASMYN Youth House opens on Rosselle Street
2000	Jaguars become NFL team to support LGBT youth organization
2001	JASMYN is founding member and fiscal sponsor for Northeast Florida Safe Schools Coalition; hosts first Alternative Prom
2002	JASMYN moves to Peninsular Place building
2003	JASMYN receives first-time funding from City of Jacksonville for supporting homeless/vulnerable youth; launches program for foster kids
2004	JASMYN Youth Drop in Center enrolled 426 youth during the 12 months prior, a 38% increase over the previous year. Over half of all youth served are under 18, and 45% are youth of color.
2005	
2006	JASMYN launches LGBT Youth in Foster Care Task Force
2007	JASMYN opens on-site STD health clinic; first Coming Out day breakfast; Jaguars Foundation awards \$200,000 grant
2008	Chartrand Foundation supports JASMYN's work with Gay-Straight Alliances; Teaching Respect for All conference begins
2009	
2010	JASMYN receives 5-year \$1.25 million grant from CDC for HIV prevention
2011	
2012	Chartrand Foundation supports capacity building work with consultant Richard Burns; Bruce Musser named board chair
2013	Feasibility study reports JASMYN not ready for capital campaign
2014	Donors give second building to JASMYN; funding secured to support development director
2015	Donors give third building to JASMYN
2016	Jacksonville Human Rights Ordinance amended to provide protections for LGBT individuals



Year	Revenues	Expenses	Assets
98	\$47,361	\$45,085	\$12,913
99	\$140,456	\$123,936	\$28,710
00	\$196,164	\$173,314	\$51,560
01	\$256,163	\$224,308	\$83,415
02	\$214,341	\$252,386	\$45,370
03	\$279,717	\$247,717	\$77,370
04	\$270,426	\$304,735	\$43,061
05	\$384,004	\$334,909	\$92,156
06	\$310,235	\$349,468	\$52,923
07	\$498,018	\$431,968	\$118,973
08	\$445,072	\$447,754	\$116,290
09	\$378,297	\$416,008	\$83,615
10	\$451,377	\$506,659	\$33,333
11	\$729,283	\$670,067	\$92,549
12	\$697,075	\$676,272	\$113,352
13	\$849,640	\$842,347	\$120,645
14	\$1,275,674	\$1,115,924	\$280,395
15	\$1,525,247	\$1,441,219	\$364,423

