

METROWEEKLY

Friendship Place's annual Walk fundraiser seeks to provide a safety net for homeless LGBTQ youth

The fourth annual Friendship Walks helps fund the organization's work to combat homelessness

By John Riley



Friendship Place: Friendship Walks

“Ending homelessness means building systems strong enough to catch people in time,” says Jean-Michel Giraud, president and CEO of Friendship Place.

“Understanding that is key, because in any economic system, some people are going to fall through the cracks, and they’re going to end up homeless or on the

brink. But it's how quickly and effectively you respond, and how person-centric and empowering you are, that makes the difference."

Friendship Place looks at a myriad of issues that contribute to homelessness and tries to resolve them — not merely providing temporary shelter to homeless individuals.

Their "Employment First" model — one that treats the whole person — helps them serve close to 3,700 people a year.

To raise money for its numerous programs, several of which are tailored to specific populations such as veterans, the chronically ill, and youth, the organization will hold a 1.5-mile-long walk along the National Mall.

The fourth annual Friendship Walks will feature brief remarks from past clients and Councilmember Mary Cheh (D-Ward 3), who represents the ward where Friendship Place is located. Registration fees are \$10 for persons under the age of 5, \$25 for ages 6 to 22, and \$35 for adults 23 and over.

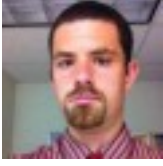
Saturday's walk will focus on the issue of youth homelessness. "Unaccompanied young people living on the street are at greater risk of drug addiction, trauma, suicide, sex-trafficking and other forms of exploitation," Giraud says. "We are doing a lot of work on the ground, in all eight wards of the city, to reach out to youth, in places where those who are homeless tend to gather."

Giraud notes that about 40 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ.

"These are people who are being forced out of their homes after coming out to family," he says. "We cannot allow them to be shut out from society for claiming who they are."

"With Friendship Walks, we're saying: 'We're here for you and all people experiencing homelessness, and so is the community,'" he continues. "It's a chance to showcase our mission, bring volunteers out, and bring attention to the fight against homelessness in the D.C. Metro area."

Friendship Walks kicks off at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 3 at the Lincoln Memorial. Check-in begins at 9:30 a.m. To register, or for more information, visit friendshipwalks.org.



John Riley is the local news reporter for Metro Weekly. He can be reached at jriley@metroweekly.com