



JAMES ROBINSON

Activist For LGBTQ+ Youth

James Robinson moved to Sarasota from Fort Myers to become executive director of ALSO Youth (the ALSO stands for advocacy, leadership, support and outreach) this past April – right at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown.

Originally from south of Boston, Robinson's dedication to LGBTQ+ activism began when he was living in New York City in the 1980s. "Most gay men my age became accidental activists when our friends all started dying of AIDS," he explained.

From that epidemic to this pandemic he earned a graduate degree in urban affairs and subsequently worked in a variety of positions and places including as development director at a private school and for a wildlife preservation organization.

Robinson is gratified to be working at a nonprofit with a strong activist mission: To promote the health, safety, and

personal growth of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, and allied youth.

ALSO Youth takes a three-pronged approach to cover all the bases. It supports local GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance) clubs in Sarasota and Manatee counties; provides trainings on LGBTQ+ issues to the GSA groups and to for-profit and nonprofit businesses and community groups; and it operates the ALSO Youth Drop-In Center.

When the pandemic shut down in-person meetings ALSO Youth moved its peer-run support groups online. At press time, the schedule included check-ins, open groups and transgender support via Zoom Chats for teens (ages 13-17) and young adults (ages 18-24).

Even when virtual, Robinson knows that these groups may save lives. "There is any number of statistics showing that LGBTQ+ youth think about suicide more than their peers."

BY EMILY LEINFUSS | PHOTO BY BARBARA BANKS