

Donor Spotlight: DARNELL SMITH

"I am so thankful that LGBTQ youth in Jacksonville have a place like JASMYN to lean on. It is hard enough to be a young person, and everyone needs a group where they can be themselves, receive emotional support and experience acceptance." Darnell Smith, Florida Blue Market President, North Region, feels strongly about the need for JASMYN in our community. His support of LGBTQ young people at JASMYN is a testament to his passion.

As a philanthropist, Darnell says JASMYN is laser-focused on using its dollars and networks to improve the lives of its youth for the betterment of the whole Jacksonville community. This makes it a good investment, but he is quick to point out that "we are put on this earth to take care of one another. There are many people who helped me when I was younger, and my job now is to pass that on."

Maybe you've seen the piece he wrote on Florida Blue's blog about being a St. Augustine student athlete in 10th grade but not "getting" math. A teacher made math not only doable, but understandable and even more, fun for him and his whole class. Since Darnell went on to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering from FSU, we can only assume it was a life lesson in 10th grade. He says everyone needs a group where they can be themselves, receive emotional support and experience acceptance. And that is what LGBTQ youth get at JASMYN.

Darnell marvels at the immense growth of support for JASMYN over the past 4 years. "I remember participating in the JASMYN [Coming Out Day] breakfasts at UNF. A small group of loving, caring business leaders, led by Hugh Greene and Audrey Moran, invited me to join them in recruiting companies to attend the breakfast and provide financial support for JASMYN." In a decade it became an 800 person event at the Hyatt. He says "It was and continues to be a beautiful sight to see so many people in our community step forward to show support for LGBTQ youth."

Darnell also credits JASMYN with being able to bring his executive assistant Rupal Wells into the Florida Blue family. It was during a JASMYN tour he had arranged with a City Councilman, helping to educate that person on the benefits of the HRO which passed that year, for whom Rupal worked at the time. When he saw her interest in the information provided at that tour he knew she would be "an extraordinary addition to our team. I am so thankful for her!"

Darnell Smith's community service includes Board membership at First Coast YMCA, Sulzbacher, Feeding Northeast Florida and United Way of NE Florida. He has held appointed positions with the Boards of the Jacksonville Chamber, Chairing that panel in 2017, the Economic Development Council of Tallahassee and JAXUSA Policy Council. He is a former Host Committee Chair for JASMYN's Coming Out Day Breakfast and our Diamond Award winner at the 2019 Coming Out Day Breakfast.



**To discuss your philanthropic goals with JASMYN,
contact Loretta Prescott, Director of Development:
lprescott@jasmyrn.org.**