



Slain NYC Gay Man Is Remembered

By MARCUS FRANKLIN – Dec 7, 2007

NEW YORK (AP) — Ten years ago this month, Ali Forney — a gay man who for years had struggled with homelessness and drug use — was fatally shot in the head.

His death highlighted the issue of homelessness among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youths and young adults, and it led to the opening of an organization that provides housing and other help for them.

Dozens of people gathered in a Manhattan church Thursday evening for a service commemorating Forney's death and the work done in its wake. It marked the first memorial service for Forney since his 1997 death.

"I miss you, Ali, and I love you, and I hope you're proud of what we've done in your name," Ali Forney Center founder and executive director Carl Siciliano said.

Forney, 22, was homeless at a time when there were no homeless shelters for gay youths, Siciliano recalled before the service.

"Gay youth were getting gay-bashed" in the city's traditional youth shelters, Siciliano said, "so Ali was afraid to go there. A lot of them decided to stay on the street."

Siciliano met Forney while working at a defunct Times Square center for homeless youths. Fed up with the absence of housing and services for gay youths and what he saw as the lack of a sense of urgency to provide them, he was inspired to create the Forney center in 2002. It started in a church basement with a \$37,000 grant from an anonymous donor.

Today, the center has an annual budget of more than \$3 million and houses 43 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, or LGBT, people between the ages of 16 and 24. It also provides HIV testing, health care, meals and employment assistance, said Siciliano.

In a December 2006 report, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Coalition for the Homeless called homelessness among LGBT youths an "epidemic," estimating that they account for up to 42 percent of the estimated 575,000 to 1.6 million homeless or runaway youths nationwide.

During the memorial service, many spoke of Forney's humor, quick wit, tart tongue, bright eyes, gangly physical presence and warmth and love for others despite his hardships. His murderer has never been identified.

Even some who had never met Forney, but have benefited from services at the center named for him, spoke.

"If it wasn't for him," 21-year-old Ari Yanopulo told the crowd, "we wouldn't have a place to go."

