American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Pride, Heartbreak and Perseverance

6/19/2018

On the night of June 12, 2016, a gunman entered Pulse, a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and opened fire. Dozens were killed, many were injured, and lives changed citywide. It was the deadliest act of violence against the LGBTQ community in U.S. history.

Shannell Thompson, a Customer Service agent at Orlando International Airport (MCO), was a regular at Pulse; she and her colleagues frequently attended celebrations and community events there, too. But she wasn't there that night. Instead she woke up to her phone ringing.

"Family and friends called from all over," Shannel said. "Everyone was concerned because they knew I attended Pulse frequently." She immediately called her daughter, and when she answered, they both burst into tears. "She didn't know if I was there or not."

Shannell's life changed in that moment. She wanted to know how she could help. She received a call from her station director, John Kashchy, and they began to organize.

American deployed its Customer Assistance Relief Effort (CARE) Team, and Shannell joined fellow CARE Team members Brandon Truesdale, Deanna Cao, Indra Ramsingh and Sue Parente to offer support to the victims' family members. American also donated more than 1 million AAdvantage miles to provide travel assistance to victims and their loved ones and assisted families with transportation of the deceased back to their hometowns. Shannell and Brandon spent six days working with the families.

"In tragedy, people come out and help and show their kindness," she said. "I want people to show kindness every day, not just when something bad happens. No matter who you are."

Two years later, the community remains strong.

“We found other places to celebrate,” she said. “Pulse is always in the back of our minds — you can’t get away from it. But the incident made us more appreciative of each other. Fernando Moran, a coworker, started a prayer group since the incident. It’s easier to talk to people now.”

Customer Service agents Brandon Truesdale and Shannell Thompson worked to help victims and their families following the tragic shooting at Pulse.