

TIP Sheet: Working with Homeless LGBTQ+ Youth

If you are working with homeless youth, you are almost guaranteed to encounter a client that identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ). These youth face unique challenges that led them to homelessness in the first place and prevent them from escaping it. It is crucial to understand these challenges and ensure that your organization isn't creating even more barriers for LGBTQ youth to overcome.

Statistics and Facts about Homeless LGBTQ+ Youth:

- **Half of all teens get a negative reaction from their parents when they come out as LGBTQ. More than 1 in 4 are thrown out of their homes** (True Colors Fund).
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer Youth make up **7% of the general youth population but 40% of the homeless youth population**. This adds up to approximately 680,000 homeless LGBTQ youth in the United States (True Colors Fund).
- LGBTQ homeless youth are **disproportionately African American, Hispanic, or Native American**. They often come from low-income communities and poor or working class families (National Alliance to End Homelessness, Williams Institute).
- LGBTQ homeless youth are **physically or sexually victimized on average by 7 more people** than non-LGBTQ homeless youth (Lambda Legal, Washington University).
- **65% of 400 homeless LGBTQ youth reported having been in a child welfare placement in the past**. Many LGBTQ youth feel compelled to run away from child welfare placements after their physical and emotional safety is jeopardized (Lambda Legal).
- **Harassment, assault, and even rape are common experiences** for LGBT youth living in temporary shelters. Half of lesbian and gay youth surveyed reported that they had spent time living on the streets in preference to the hostile environments they had found in shelters (Lambda Legal).
- When shelter policies cause a transgender youth who identifies as female to be placed in a male facility, she is at **greatly increased risk of harassment and rape** (Lambda Legal).
- **LGBTQ youth are *not* more likely to engage in sexual behaviors or commit sexual offenses than their heterosexual peers**. Preventing them from having roommates will only deprive them of opportunities to interact with peers and compound their feelings of isolation (Lambda Legal).
- On the streets, transgender youth frequently find a thriving **underground market for hormones and other medical procedures** as they seek to align their physical bodies with their gender identities. Denying youth proper healthcare encourages them to seek out these dangerous markets (Lambda Legal).

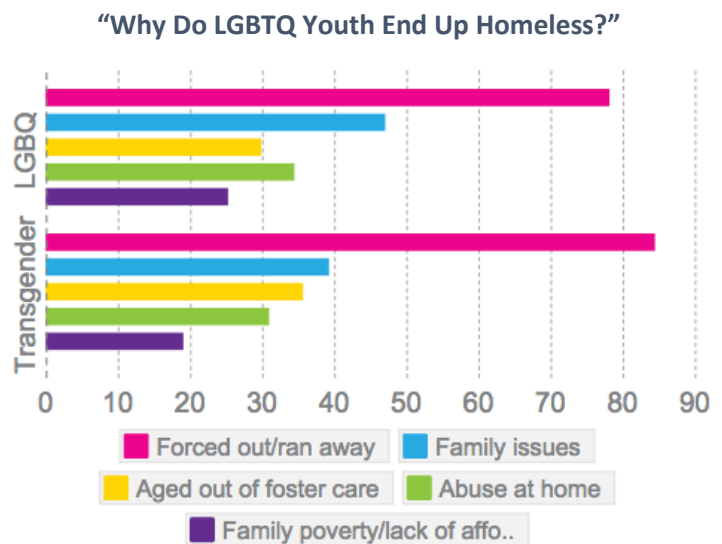


Chart via True Colors Fund

Tips for Working with Homeless LGBTQ+ Youth:

- **Never assume anything. Create a safe space that allows youth to disclose information about their gender identity, name and pronouns, and sexual orientation at their own pace.** Remember to ask youth if they are out (and who they are out to) before sharing this information with others.
- **Adopt and enforce written LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination policies, and provide training on LGBTQ issues for all staff.** Include a copy of the policy with orientation materials and discuss it with all youth entering the program.
- **Allow transgender youth to access gender-segregated facilities and programming consistent with their gender identity.** Providing an option for transgender youth to shower before or after others can minimize risks of harassment and abuse.
- **Promptly and consistently intervene when youth or adults behave disrespectfully toward someone based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.** It is crucial to send a clear message throughout each facility that anti-LGBTQ harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated.
- **Display LGBTQ-supportive images such as pink triangles, rainbows, or safe zone stickers in shelter facilities.** This sends a clear message to all youth and staff that LGBTQ youth are welcomed and affirmed. Include LGBTQ-affirming books, magazines, and videos in facility libraries. Youth are quick to pick up on these cues; it often makes an enormous difference just seeing them displayed.
- **Connect youth with LGBTQ-affirming physical and mental healthcare providers.** All Allegheny County affiliated providers are screened for affirming and nondiscriminatory policies.
- **Develop an up-to-date list of LGBTQ resources in the community and distribute it to everyone in the agency,** including to youth who may wish to contact community resources privately. Local examples are listed below.

Pittsburgh Community Resources:

- Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Pittsburgh – community events and resources
 - www.glccpgh.org
- The PERSAD Center – outreach, prevention, counseling, advocacy, and training services
 - www.persadcenter.org
- The Garden of Peace Project – community programs specifically for LGBTQ+ people of color
 - www.gardenofpeaceproject.org

Online Resources:

- Child Welfare League of America, “Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care: Best Practices.”
 - <https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/sites/default/files/bestpracticeslgbtyouth.pdf>
- The Williams Institute of UCLA, “Serving Our Youth 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness”
 - <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Serving-Our-Youth-June-2015.pdf>
- True Colors Fund, “Our Issue.”
 - www.truecolorsfund.org/our-issue/
- Lambda Legal, “Working with Homeless LGBTQ Youth.”
 - www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-homeless
- National Alliance to End Homelessness, “Homeless LGBT Youth Fact Sheet.”
 - www.safeschoolscoalition.org/LGBTQhomelessFactSheetbyNAEH.pdf