

The Homelessness Crisis Of LGBTQ Youth

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Here are some disturbing facts. LGBTQ youth have a 120% higher risk of being homeless than their non-LGBTQ peers; though they make up only 7% of the youth population, youth who identify as LGBTQ make up 40% of the youth homeless population. About one in four teens are forced to leave their homes after coming out to their parents; young black men are particularly likely to become homeless after coming out. Family rejection can lead to severe psychological damage, such as depression and PTSD; once homeless, LGBTQ youth face harassment, trauma and abuse at a higher rate than straight homeless youth.

Despite these deeply troubling statistics – some of which have been documented for many years – there is still no federal program designed to specifically meet the needs of LGBTQ youth homeless. For, in addition to the usual burdens of homelessness, they are met with stigma and discrimination from other homeless, shelters, their family and their peers. Several state programs do, however, seek to respond to this problem and some shelters are also specifically designed for LGBTQ youth (information on programs and shelters by state can be found at The Ali Forney Center website).

Why are LGBTQ youth much more likely than their straight peers to be homeless? The biggest factor is family rejection: as stated above, one in four teens are kicked out by their parents after coming out to them, and over half of LGBTQ teens face a negative reaction from their family when coming out. A true solution to the crisis would, then, require an end to the discrimination LGBTQ individuals are met with by their families and communities – but until then, there are other measures that can be taken. For instance, shelters and other resources can end their own discriminatory practices towards LGBTQ youth and provide specialized counseling.

Because of their high rates of family rejection, LGBTQ homeless youth are also exposed to particularly high levels of mental health issues, drug abuse and victimization, including prostitution. These are problems for all youth homeless, as the instability and stresses of homelessness can lead to many mental health and behavioral issues; but they are particularly so for LGBTQ youth homeless, due to the added stigma of their identity. According to Lesley University, homeless LGBTQ youth are almost twice as likely to abuse alcohol than homeless heterosexual youth, and they are significantly more likely to abuse intravenous drugs. 58% of LGBTQ homeless youth have reported being sexually abused as well.

These issues can lead to cycles of crime, victimization and incarceration, which can cause a lifetime of struggling in the system. This so-called “homeless to prison pipeline” is a problem for all homeless populations; a solution to LGBTQ youth homelessness cannot be done in isolation from the wider homeless population, therefore. We cannot ignore the fact that the particular challenges for LGBTQ youth homeless spiral into the wider challenges of homelessness for everyone.

References:

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