

Homelessness Among LGBT+ Youth

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According to the *True Colors Fund*—an organization devoted to ending homelessness among youth in the LGBT community—young people who do not identify as cisgender and/or heterosexual are 120% more likely to experience homelessness than those who do. Additionally, while LGBT individuals make up only approximately 7% of the general youth population, they make up an estimated 40% of the homeless youth. As a queer student myself, this is an issue that I am personally very passionate about. As times change and our society becomes more accepting than ever, it is important that we do not overlook the tragedies and discrimination still present in our world.

A close friend of mine was thrown out of her home by her homophobic father a few years ago when he caught her kissing her girlfriend. For years after this incident, she had gone from random couch to random couch, desperately trying to find a place to belong. She has attempted to seek shelter with family in California, Nebraska, and various locations throughout Florida, but has found that her entire family shares similar biases and is not comfortable in any of these places. Now, she is struggling to work, take college classes, and support herself at twenty years old with no help from those who are supposed to be her greatest support system. Her story breaks my heart, in part because I care about her life as my friend but also because I know that these kinds of stories are not unusual throughout the LGBT community.

Often times, LGBT youth end up homeless due to rejection of their sexual or gender identities, harassment by family members, or a combination of both. Some people are forced to leave their homes, and others are made to feel so unwelcome that they choose to

leave on their own. Lesbian, bisexual, and gay youth may be told that they are not allowed to be with their partners of the same gender; parents may attempt to change their child's identity and control their expression. Transgender and gender-nonconforming youth are often dead-named and forced to present themselves in a particular way, likely causing excess body dysmorphia and self-hatred.

Additionally, discriminatory practices can be seen occurring within youth shelters and in the foster care system, coming from those people who are supposed to be there to help youth in unfortunate circumstances. Transgender youth may be not allowed to room with others of their true gender identity while their caregivers may insist that they are something they are not, as well as restraining access to specific health care that they may need.

I was lucky to have such a loving, supportive family when I came out. However, I know that not many people in similar situations to myself are as fortunate. Therefore, I would like to do what I can to help support those in need. I know what it is like to feel out of place and unwanted due to some aspect of yourself that you cannot control, so I hope to be a part of the change in the world that will encourage others to be more open-minded and accepting of people with those differences. I hope that in my lifetime, I will see great changes in the way that society as a whole treats the LGBT community. I long for a time when all people will be accepted and loved for who they are, without any outside pressure to change or conform to social standards and gender roles.

References

"About Us." True Colors Fund, truecolorsfund.org/about/.

"LGBT Homelessness." National Homeless, National Coalition for the Homeless, nationalhomeless.org/issues/lgbt/.