

## **Literature Review:** Addendum to Youth Transitional Living Services

**Authors:** Anne Minssen, B.A., Craig Pacheco, B.A.  
Institute for Social Research

**Date:** August 23, 2016

This document is an addendum to the Youth Transitional Living Services literature review summary that was completed August 4, 2016. The addendum more specifically discusses what the literature states in regards to defining homeless youth populations (i.e. who they are, and what are the pathways to youth homelessness), and provides information on what the literature states in regards to LGBT homeless youths. The services described in this addendum are the same as the services described in the literature review summary that was previously submitted, with the exception of the target population.

### **Defining Homeless Youth Populations**

Homeless youth are defined as adolescents and young adults (i.e. up to ages 18 or 24) who live independently (Russell, 1998). This population excludes youth, who are homeless and living with their parents, living in foster homes, or youth that are incarcerated for violations of the law (Kidd and Scrimenti, 2004). According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, title VII, subtitle B, section 725, homeless youth include youth who are living in shelters for runaways, on the streets, in abandoned buildings, facilities unfit for habitation, youth who do not have adequate living environments (i.e. basic shelter and amenities), transitional emergency shelters, state institutions, and youth living in group arrangements with friends or relatives (Kidd and Scrimenti, 2004 & McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, title VII, subtitle B, sec. 725). According to the literature, some youth populations are more at risk of becoming homeless than others. For instance, youths from blended or single parent families are more at risk of becoming homeless than youths from conventional nuclear families (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2006). The literature also states that indigenous youths, and youths in state care/protection are over-represented in youth homeless populations (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2006).

According to the literature, there are five pathways to youth homelessness: drug and alcohol with or without additional psychological problems, trauma and psychological problems (absence of drug and alcohol), drug and alcohol and family problems, family problems (absence of drug and alcohol), and trauma (Martijn and Sharpe, 2006). Recent studies provided more specific examples that explained youth homelessness such as internal family conflicts, eviction by sibling/parent, death of parents, partner violence, or home repossession (Robinson, 2008). The literature states that family difficulties are one of the leading factors that play into an individual's decision to leave home. The role of family in youth homelessness is often characterized by instability, drug use, violence, or neglect. In a sample collected by Robinson, numerous homeless youth reported leaving home, because of a family dispute, and/or violence in the home (Robinson, 2008). Robinson also states that one challenge that researchers face when collecting data from homeless youth, is that they often underreport, and often decline to give details of problems within their families (Robinson, 2008). Robinson explains that these patterns can be explained by individual's loyalty to their family, embarrassment, and/or lack of comparative perspectives (Robinson, 2008). Lack of comparative perspectives explains homeless youth's skewed perceptions of healthy home environments and healthy relationships. The literature also states that histories of childhood trauma increase risks of homelessness and/or future victimization (Martijn and Sharpe, 2006). For instance, one study evaluated responses from adult homeless populations to determine the prevalence of childhood trauma. Outcomes showed that 67% of the participants reported a history of childhood trauma, which included physical, and/or sexual abuse or both (Martijn and Sharpe, 2006).

### **LGBT Homeless Youth**

According to a Williams Institute report (Gates, 2011), an estimated 3.5% of adults in the United States identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and an estimated 0.3% of adults are transgender. This implies that there are approximately 9 million LGBT Americans. According to Across the United States, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth are grossly overrepresented in the homeless youth population. These youths are at an increased risk of being victims of violence in homeless youth housing facilities (Hunter, 2008). A report by Choi, et al. (2015) summarizes findings from the 2014 LGBT Homeless Youth Provider Survey, a survey of 138 youth homelessness human service agency providers conducted from

March 2014 through June 2014 designed to better understand homelessness among LGBTQ youth. This survey was designed to obtain greater detail on the similar and distinct experiences of sexual minority (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning) and gender minority (transgender) youth experiencing homelessness. Estimates of the percent of LGBTQ youth accessing their services indicate overrepresentation of sexual and gender minority youth among those experiencing homelessness. Of youth accessing their services, providers reported a median of 20% identify as gay or lesbian, 7% identify as bisexual, and 2% identify as questioning their sexuality; In terms of gender identity, 2% identify as transgender female, 1% identify as transgender male (Choi, 2015). The survey also showed that the LGBT homeless youth population is growing, as agency staff reported average increases in the proportion of LGBT youth they served over the past 10 years, and this change is higher for transgender youth (Choi, 2015). LGBT youth accessing these homelessness services were reported to have been homeless longer and have more mental and physical health problems than non- LGBT youth (Choi, 2015). Another study conducted interview and focus groups with homeless youth, and found that 32.9% of their sample reported self-identifying as LGBT (Whitbeck, 2016).

In the most recent LGBT Homeless Youth Provider Survey (Choi, 2015), the most commonly cited reason for homelessness among LGBT clients was due to being forced out by parents or running away because of their sexual orientation or gender identity/ expression This is followed by family issues, such as substance abuse, mental illness or violence in the household, and youth being aged out of foster care systems with nowhere stable to live for both LGBQ and transgender youth. Research has continued to demonstrate that family rejection has a serious impact on LGBT young people's physical health and behavioral health, including substance use (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009), and is often the cause of LGBT youth becoming homeless. LGBT youth rejected by their families were more than 8 times as likely to have attempted suicide, nearly 6 times as likely to report high levels of depression, more than 3 times as likely to use illegal drugs, and more than 3 times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and STDs, compared with LGBT youth who were not rejected by their families (Ryan et al., 2009). In a 2012 study, 46 percent of runaway and homeless youth who identified as LGBT reported that they ran away, and 43 percent reported being forced out of their homes by parents due to disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity (Durso & Gates, 2012). Coming out at a young age is associated with increased risk for longer time spent homeless (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2012). LGBT young people often encounter intolerance, stigma, bullying, and humiliation at school, which results in skipping school and being almost twice as likely to not finish high school or pursue college, compared with the national average (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). The emotional and physical trauma LGBT youth experience appears to make them more vulnerable when they leave home. Once on the street, LGBT youth are more likely to engage in survival sex and other risky behaviors like substance abuse (Greene, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1997), to be victimized, and to meet criteria for mental disorders than their homeless heterosexual peers (Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, Tyler, & Johnson, 2004). When LGBT youth become homeless, they also face higher rates of violence, discrimination, and poor health (Quintana, Rosenthal, & Krehely, 2010). Gay and transgender youth who seek help in homeless youth shelters can face just as much abuse and mistreatment in those settings as they do on the streets. They report being discriminated against, sexually and physically assaulted by staff, and physically harassed by peers at higher rates than heterosexual youth and youth who are not transgender in the same shelters (Dunn & Krehely, 2012). These conditions lead many LGBT youth to turn to the streets instead of seeking the services they need.

From the results of the most recent LGBT Homeless Youth Provider Survey (Choi, 2015), after housing needs, acceptance of sexual identity and emotional support was the second most cited need for LGBQ youth experiencing homelessness. Whereas, transition services (access to healthcare specific to transgender youth, access to hormones, emotional support during transition, and legal support) was the second most cited need for transgender youth experiencing homelessness (Choi, 2015).

The literature suggests that LGBT specific training would help to better serve the overrepresented LGBT youth homeless population. Training youth shelter staff on their obligation to provide protection and other services on a non-discriminatory basis could do more to reduce violence against LGBT youth if accompanied by sensitivity training. Sensitivity training could decrease violence against LGBT youth in two ways: first, by making it easier for staff to identify and intervene in anti-LGBT harassment before it becomes violent; and second, by creating an environment in which LGBT youth feel that they are respected by the staff, making it more likely that they will report violence against themselves (Hunter, 2008). Training shelter

staff on how to act respectfully towards LGBT youth clients and gain their trust will make shelters safer for these clients (Mottet, 2003). One of the most effective ways administrative agencies can increase the safety of LGBT youth in homeless youth housing programs is by promoting the creation of programs specifically for LGBT youth (Woronoff, 2006). In homeless youth housing facilities, LGBT youth can be made to feel unsafe through negative language or silent complicity with abuse from others. Physical abuse, even at the hands of staff members themselves, is a common experience for LGBTQ youth in many congregate care settings (Woronoff, 2006). This information indicates that perhaps the most effective way to curb violence against homeless LGBT youth is to provide them with separate housing facilities so that they are not targeted for violence because of their sexual orientation or gender expression (Woronoff, 2006). Although when couched in terms of “segregation” placing LGBT youth in separate facilities may seem controversial, this approach to creating welcoming living arrangements for homeless LGBT youth is already being used effectively by multiple housing programs. Examples include the Larkin Street Youth Project in San Francisco, which operates emergency and transitional housing programs for LGBT youth, Sylvia's Place and Green Chimneys, which operate such programs in Manhattan, and CASA-Q, which operates here in Albuquerque. These types of programs do an excellent job of providing safe and secure living environments where LGBTQ young people can be open about who they are and find affirming support from adults (Woronoff, 2006).

---

## References:

- Chamberlain, Chris and MacKenzie, David. (2006) Youth Homelessness in Australia. Australia: Counting the Homeless 2006 Project.
- Choi, Soon, et al. (2015). *Serbing Our Youth 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness*. The Williams Institute. True Colors Fund.
- Dunn, M., & Krehely, J. (2012). Supporting gay and transgender youth most in need: White House conference turns spotlight on housing and homelessness issues impacting gay and transgender population. Center for American Progress.
- Durso, L. E., & Gates, G. J. (2012). *Serving our youth: Findings from a national survey of service providers working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless*. The Williams Institute.
- Gates, Gary. (2014). *LGBT Demographics: Comparisons among population-based surveys*. The Williams Institute.
- Greene, J. M., & Ringwalt, C. L. (1998). Pregnancy among three national samples of runaway and homeless youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 23*(6), 370–377.
- Hunter, Ernst. (2008). *What's Good For The Gays is Good For the Gander: Making Homeless Youth Housing Safer for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth*. Family Court Review.
- Kidd, Sean A. and Scrimenti, Kathryn. (2004). *Evaluating Child and Youth Homelessness*. Sage Publications Vol. 28 No. 4, 325-341.
- Kosciw, J. G., Diaz, E. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2008). *The 2007 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network.
- Mallett, Shelley, Rosenthal, Doreen, and Keys, Deborah. (2005). *Young People, Drug Use and Family Conflict: Pathways into Homelessness*. Australia: *Journal of Adolescence 28*, 185-199.
- Martijn, Claudine and Sharpe, Louise. (2006). *Pathways to Youth Homelessness*. Australia: *Social Science & Medicine 62*, 1-12.
- Mottet, Lisa & Ohle, John. (2003). *Nat'l Gay & Lesbian Task Force Pol'y Inst. & Nat'l Coalition for the Homeless, Transitioning Our Shelters: A Guide to Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People*. <http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/TransitioningOurShelters.pdf>.
- Quintana, N. S., Rosenthal, J., & Krehely, J. (2010). *On the streets: The federal response to gay and transgender youth*. Center for American Progress.
- Robinson, Phil. (2008). *Working with Young Homeless People*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications.
- Rosario, R., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2012). Risk factors for homelessness among lesbian, gay and bisexual youths: A developmental milestone approach. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 186–193.
- Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R. M., & Sanchez, J. (2009). Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in White and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics, 123*(1), 123–346

Whitbeck, L. B., Chen, X., Hoyt, D. R., Tyler, K. A., & Johnson, K. D. (2004). Mental disorder, subsistence strategies, and victimization among gay, lesbian, and bisexual homeless and runaway adolescents. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 41, 329–342.

Whitbeck, Les et al. (2016). Data Collection Study Final Report. Administration for Children and Families Family and Youth Services Bureau Street Outreach Program.

Woronoff, Rob et al. (2006). Out of the Margins: A Report on Regional Listening Forums Highlighting the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Care. Child Welfare League of Am. & Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.