

Preventing & Ending Homelessness for LGBTQ+ Youth: How to Create Positive & Sustainable Change

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Why do people experience homelessness?

- lack acceptance from family, friends, community members
- lack a safe space free from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- lack financial support
- lack emotional support
- economic instability
- unable to plan for ongoing crisis
- aged out of foster care without appropriate discharge planning & supports in place
- abusing substances / self-medicating due to underlying issues
- living with severe mental illnesses
- living with disabling physical and/or mental health conditions
- living with HIV/AIDS

Why do LGBTQ+ youth experience homelessness?

According to *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*, a 2012 study by Durso & Gates, these are the top five reasons why LGBTQ+ youth experience homelessness or are at-risk of experiencing homelessness:

- LGBTQ+ youth run away from home because their family rejects their sexual orientation or gender identity (68% of service providers indicated this as a major factor)
- LGBTQ+ youth are forced to leave their home by their family because of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- LGBTQ+ youth experience(d) physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at home (54% of respondents indicated this as an important factor)
- LGBTQ+ youth age out of foster care and have no support system in place
- LGBTQ+ youth experience financial or emotional neglect from their family

Why are LGBTQ+ youth vulnerable?

According to *Supporting LGBTQ Youth and Their Families: The Family Acceptance Project* by Wendy Grace Evans:

- Rejection of LGBTQ+ youth by families leads to high rates of depression, attempted suicide, substance use, and high risk of HIV infection.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless:

- LGBTQ+ youth are twice as likely to experience sexual abuse before the age of 12
- LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness are at higher risk for mental health issues, victimization, and unsafe sexual behaviors
- About 59% of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness have been sexually victimized, compared to about 33% of heterosexual youth experiencing homelessness
- LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness are over 7 times more likely to experience sexual violence than their heterosexual counterparts
- LGBTQ+ homeless youth commit suicide at higher rates (62%) than their heterosexual counterparts (29%)

Why are LGBTQ+ youth vulnerable? (cont'd)

According to the [National Center for Transgender Equality](#):

- 20% of transgender persons in the U.S. have been denied housing because of their gender identity, and more than 10% have been evicted because of their gender identity
- 1 in 5 transgender persons has experienced homelessness at some point in their lives due to discrimination or family rejection

According to the [NCAVP's 2012 Report on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence](#), which compiles data from 15 anti-violence programs in 16 states, including Alabama:

- The report documents 2,016 instances of anti-LGBTQ+ violence in 2012
- LGBTQ+ persons of color are almost twice as likely to experience physical violence than white LGBTQ+ persons
- 73.1% of all anti-LGBTQ+ homicide victims were people of color
- 53.8% of all anti-LGBTQ+ homicide victims were transgender women

How many LGBTQ+ youth experience homelessness?

- According to Durso & Gates's survey of 354 service providers throughout the US, LGBTQ+ youth represent about 40% of the homeless and non-homeless clients these agencies serve:
 - 30% of clients identified as gay or lesbian
 - 9% identified as bisexual
 - 1% identified as "other gender"
 - at least 1% of clients were trans* youth who were identified as male or female on the survey

How many LGBTQ+ Youth Experience Homelessness? (cont'd)

- Durso & Gates's survey also indicates:
 - 43% of youth served by drop-in centers identify as LGBTQ+
 - 30% of youth served by street outreach programs identify as LGBTQ+
 - 30% of youth served in housing programs identify as LGBTQ+ (26% as LGB; 4% as transgender)
- For further statistical information regarding LGBTQ+ youth homelessness, check out [Seeking Shelter: The Experiences and Unmet Needs of LGBT Homeless Youth](#)
- **Keep in mind: Some youth may not self-identify when presenting for services. These statistics may underestimate the number of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness.**

How can you prevent and end LGBTQ+ youth homelessness?

Participate in a coalition or working group and:

- Advocate for services
- Advocate for safe spaces
- Advocate for education
- Advocate for acceptance
- Publicize resources

Advocate for services

Currently, there are no overnight housing options for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in Birmingham. With your help, we can make this better.

- Contact your local homeless coalition, find out about the services in your area, and ask how you can help:
 - Birmingham: [One Roof](#)
 - The Birmingham Shelter Project for Homeless LGBTQ+ Youth is a working group under One Roof. Contact Stanley Rich (johnsrich@bellsouth.net) for more info.
 - Tuscaloosa: West Alabama Coalition for the Homeless (Rebecca Wright, rwright@tuscaloosa.com)
 - Huntsville: [North Alabama Homeless Coalition](#)
 - Montgomery: [Mid-Alabama Homeless Coalition](#)
 - Mobile: [Housing First, Inc](#)
 - Gadsden: Homeless Coalition of Northeast Alabama (Becky Henson, bhenson@cityofgadsden.com)
 - Florence: Northwest Alabama CoC (Nancy Isom, nisom@nwalsafeplace.org)
 - Balance of state: [Alabama Rural Coalition for the Homeless](#)

Advocate for services (cont'd)

- If your local homeless coalition says there's nothing planned or available for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness, contact your local homeless service providers:
 - Contact agencies serving youth
 - Contact agencies serving persons living with HIV/AIDS
 - Contact agencies working to reunite families
 - Understand that more conservative agencies might not be as receptive; don't get discouraged

Advocate for services (cont'd)

- Contact your local government
 - Contact the Community and Economic Development department
 - This department receives funds for community development, and housing youth who are homeless is community development
 - Contact the Mayor's Office
 - You may not be able to talk directly to the mayor, but the mayor will often have a citizens response night
 - Attend city council meetings, public hearings, etc
 - Take the opportunity to advocate during any public hearing or similar opportunity
 - Plans for housing and economic development require a public comment period and, by law, the government has to include **all** public comments when they submit their consolidated plan to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Advocate for services (cont'd)

- Contact state government
 - Rep. Patricia Todd, Birmingham: reptodd@gmail.com; 205-567-9410
 - Rep. Todd will have contact recommendations for other parts of AL
 - Sen. Jeff Sessions
 - Sen. Richard Shelby
 - Contact whoever represents your district
- Contact local churches
 - Talk about issues surrounding LGBTQ+ youth homelessness and discuss educational and outreach opportunities
 - You can find a listing of LGBTQ+ affirming churches in your area at <http://www.glbtnearme.org/>
- Contact organizations like [Equality AL](#) and discuss the potential for statewide efforts to prevent and end LGBTQ+ youth homelessness

Advocate for safe spaces

- What makes a space safe?
 - Inclusive and non-discriminatory policies
 - Zero tolerance harassment policies with constructive repercussions
 - Gender-neutral bathroom options
 - Privacy for dressing and personal hygiene
 - Education
 - Sensitivity training
 - Counseling
 - Continuum of services that addresses all potential needs of clients
 - treatment options, counseling options, options for reintegration into the community (housing, job, building social supports)

Advocate for safe spaces cont'd

- Ask your local homeless coalition how you can make spaces safer and work with your local service providers one-on-one
- Work with existing organizations to make spaces safer
 - In Birmingham: [PFLAG](#), Steel City Spectrum, Magic City Acceptance Project, [Birmingham AIDS Outreach](#), [AIDS Alabama](#), [Youth Towers](#), Birmingham Shelter Project, [Crisis Center](#)
 - Contact your local LGBTQ+ affirming organizations to join their efforts
- Make sure that hateful speech and treatment in your community are responded to with education

Advocate for safe spaces cont'd

- Remember that safe spaces are not the same for all LGBTQ+ youth:
 - A safe space for a white gay cisgender man is not necessarily the same as a safe space for a transgender woman of color.
 - According to the [National Center for Transgender Equality](#): trans* folks experiencing homelessness face discrimination from service providers, “with nearly one in three (29%) reporting being turned away from a shelter due to their transgender status. While leading experts on homelessness recommend providing emergency housing consistent with a person’s gender identity, 42% of trans people facing homelessness have been forced to stay in a shelter living as the wrong gender.”
- Ask yourself and your community: **What can we do to make our spaces safer for *all* persons?**

Advocate for education

- Work with existing LGBTQ+ organizations in your community to increase awareness of and strengthen the response to LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness / at-risk for experiencing homelessness
 - Reduce duplication of efforts
 - Present a unified message
- Increase visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals in your community
 - Seek out and recruit respected community leaders who identify as LGBTQ+
- Recruit and increase visibility of respected community leaders who are LGBTQ+ allies

Advocate for education (cont'd)

- Contact and recruit members of the State Board of Education and your local Board of Education
- Increase culturally competent care and services
 - Contact [Alabama Safe Schools Coalition](#)
 - Identify someone in your community who is equipped to provide culturally competent care and services
 - Start with local schools, ask what they offer and if they've considered education surrounding LGBTQ+ issues

Advocate for education (cont'd)

- Reach out to high schools, colleges, universities
 - Contact local Safe Zones, Spectrums, GSAs, etc
 - Recruit openly LGBTQ+ and allied faculty & staff
- Reach out to local faith communities
 - Start with LGBTQ+ affirming churches, then reach out to all churches
 - Find out where your allies are, make connections, and educate community members

Advocate for acceptance

- Contact local support groups and LGBTQ+ serving and affirming organizations to find out how you can help their efforts:
 - In Birmingham: PFLAG, Steel City Spectrum, Magic City Acceptance Project, Birmingham AIDS Outreach, AIDS Alabama, Youth Towers, Birmingham Shelter Project, Crisis Center
 - Visit sites like <http://www.glbtnearme.org/> to find organizations in your area
- Contact your local faith communities, schools, governments
- Contact organizations working to reunite families, such as PFLAG

Publicize resources

- Post flyers advertising local resources in areas where homeless youth might be (bus stations, major interstates, downtown areas, etc.)
- Publicize resources in local schools, churches, community centers
- Publicize resources and information on social media
- Publicize resources and information on sites like <http://www.glbtnearme.org/>
- Ask allies if they will publicize resources in their newsletters, on their websites, social media, etc.
- Organize a visible fundraiser (if you think this is safe in your community) for LGBTQ+ youth services

Be yourself

- Let your voice reflect who you are as a person and an advocate
- Advocate in a way that feels authentic
- Advocate in a way that feels safe

Don't get discouraged

- Advocacy doesn't create change overnight, but you absolutely can create positive and sustainable change in your community
- People you talk to may disagree with you or even say something offensive or hateful
 - Allow yourself to feel upset or angry
 - You have the power to educate and to model kindness, thoughtfulness, and respect
- You may be the first LGBTQ+ or allied person who's ever taken the time to speak with someone about LGBTQ+ issues

Additional Information & Resources

- [LGBTQ Homeless Youth Fact Sheet \(National Alliance to End Homelessness & Safe Schools Coalition\)](#)
- Videos:
 - [Homeless Youth: Any Given Tuesday \(LA Gay & Lesbian Center\)](#)
 - [Kicked Out: LGBT Youth Experience Homelessness \(In the Life Media\)](#)
 - [A Day in Our Shoes - Homeless LGBT Youth \(In the Life Media\)](#)
- [Family Acceptance Project](#)
- Examples of service providers who serve clients who identify as LGBTQ+:
 - [Avenues for Homeless Youth \(Minneapolis, MN\)](#)
 - [GLBT Advocacy & Youth Services, Inc. \(Huntsville, AL\)](#)
 - [UCAN \(Chicago, IL\)](#)
 - [Lost-n-Found Youth \(Atlanta, GA\)](#)
 - [Larkin Street Youth Services \(San Francisco, CA\)](#)
- [Seeking Shelter: The Experiences and Unmet Needs of LGBT Homeless Youth](#)
- [National Coalition for the Homeless LGBTQ Fact Sheet](#)