

Homelessness and Unmet Service Needs of LGBTQ Youth in Central New York

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Study Overview

- ▶ Community collaboration
- ▶ Research questions:
 - ▶ What are the experiences of LGBTQ youth who run away or experience periods of homelessness in the local area?
 - ▶ How do service providers and educators in the area understand the social problem of homelessness among LGBTQ youth and young adults?
 - ▶ What services exist for runaway and homeless LGBTQ youth in the area and what additional services do they need?
- ▶ Mixed-methods, grounded theory approach
- ▶ Findings utilized for development of local services

Youth Demographics

- ▶ Ages 14-21 (average age 17.5)
- ▶ 1 African-American, 1 White, 5 Multiracial
- ▶ 4 cisgender male, 1 cisgender female, 1 transmale, 1 transfemale
- ▶ 3 gay, 1 lesbian, 1 straight, 2 bisexual
- ▶ 5 with experience being in a shelter
- ▶ 2 kicked out because of sexual orientation or gender identity, 3 was a contributing factor, 2 sexual orientation or gender identity was unrelated

Provider Demographics

- ▶ Ages 24-63 (average age 40)
- ▶ 7 White, 1 Southeast Asian, 1 Native American
- ▶ 6 female, 3 male
- ▶ 6 straight, 1 bisexual, 1 lesbian (1 left blank)
- ▶ 6 shelter employees, 2 LGBTQ youth service providers, 1 school counselor
- ▶ 6 working in urban setting (some clients from surrounding areas), 1 working in both rural and semi-urban settings

Descriptive Information on LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Unstable Housing

- ▶ About 15% of youth enrolled in LGBTQ Youth Center had housing needs in the last year
- ▶ Shelter staff reported greatly varying numbers for how many LGBTQ clients they housed
 - ▶ Ranging from 1/5 (40%) to 1/30 (0.03%)
- ▶ Shelters with higher rates of LGBTQ youth had youth reporting positive, safe experiences in their shelters
- ▶ Shelters with lower rates of LGBTQ youth had youth reporting mistreatment and safety issues in their shelters

Overview of Findings

1. General Challenges for LGBTQ Homeless Youth
2. Shelters Experienced as Not LGBTQ-Affirmative
3. Importance of LGBTQ Youth Center
4. Community Needs

Exposure to or Fear of Violence

“Myself being homeless and seeing other people getting their houses broken into and you know, getting their stuff stolen and stuff while they’re asleep. I experienced a lot of shootings in front of my face, while I’m homeless. And it made me not wanna be in my position even more. And it made me worry, or what’s gonna happen to me?”

Decisions About Survival Sex

“One time I was sitting outside of a store, just on the steps, and it was closed. A guy came up to me and asked me if I was alright. And I was like no I’m not all right, I’m homeless. He was like well, oh you’re homeless? Like yes. He’s like stop playin’. I’m like yes I’m homeless, I don’t have nowhere to go. And he was like well, if you perform oral on me then, then you can stay here. I was like no, that’s not happening. Like I’d rather stay in an abandoned house than to perform oral on you and just so I could have a place to stay.”

Mistreatment in Schools

“We see a lot of incidences of you know students who’ve been bullied, more so than their counter parts. So we see a lot of that, we see a lot of apathy actually. We’ve noticed a lot of apathy around here, just kids who have been abused daily be it verbally or mentally or physically they just, they get that thick skin. You know so, we definitely see that when they come in when youth first come into the LGBTQ youth center, they’re not sure about staff or they’re not sure about the place so they have their defenses up. And I think that comes just from the daily onslaught that they take in schools and in their life.”

Safe Spaces Not Safe

“We had some issues with the LGTQ youth center a while ago. There was a big separation and there may still be I don't know, with different ethnicities of kids, and there were kids from rural and suburban areas. And then the urban kids and their cultures were really different. And there was a lot of tension about not understanding each other, and some things that were seen as maybe racist, or whatever, rural-ist. So that's hard because you've got to balance needs of these really different populations of kids. And the music is different, the you know, the look is different, the music is different and the slang is different.”

Strength Through Struggle

“I’m fighting for better. You know, that’s really the only thing I have is that you know one day I’m going to find the love that I’ve always been looking for and I’m going to do everything to make myself stable so that I can learn to love again. You know, be free, and be ok with that.”

“My major is Business Administration and I read when I was 13, a book and it said, anybody that wants to be successful, always falls down. But they get back up and they keep climbing, until they reach their main goal.”

“I’ve always been raised like to, well not by my family but by people who did raise me...to have self-confidence, like self-respect. Not to, not to put myself in a low position. Always to stay strong, and you know to move forward but not in a bad way. Like I was always raised to like hold my own.”

Problems with Gender Segregation

“They put me in my own bedroom. I can’t be in the bedroom with other boys and I can’t, obviously can’t be in the bedroom with other girls. So I just get my own bed. And you know it’s frustrating because I don’t like being singled out. You know and I told them I know my boundaries. And they’re like yeah but, and I’m like there’s no but. It’s, I know my boundaries. You know I’m normal, I’m not diseased. And I kind of feel like I’m being singled out. And I don’t like that. And it’s hard because I can’t eat with the girls but I can’t eat with the boys. I just gotta eat whenever I can either by myself or if there is another staff member in the room.”

Mistreatment By Staff, Often Overtly Based on Religious Beliefs

“It’s a little hard though, because there are a lot of people here that are not supportive. And they make sure I know and it’s a little hard. Like for instance one of the ladies was like so your parents don’t agree with your orientation right? I said right and she’s like ok well I want you to know that I don’t either because, I don’t but it’s your choice and when you die your gonna have stand before your maker and you’re gonna have to take in account for it and you’re gonna have to pay for it and you’re gonna regret it. So I mean, that was one and then, you know a couple of the people were like you know we won’t judge you, but we want you to know we don’t agree and we will not support this.”

Mistreatment By Youth

“I’ve had individuals’ clothes urinated on. Um, belongings urinated on, belongings stolen from them at their shelters, pretty horrific stuff.”

“I have had a young man, who, he liked to wear high heels and his roommate was like what is this about and I was like, we just had a conversation about being tolerant and this was not tolerated by the program that he is who he is and, you know he’s not hurting anybody, so you know, move on.”

Violence in Adult Shelter

“When I stayed there, there was, I guess they have the beds kinda close together and the one guy, when I was asleep, the one guy tried to get on to my bed...I was touched, I was being touched while I was asleep.”

Safe space not Safe for LGBTQ youth

“With what’s going on at home, I don’t want it to be brought into the shelter. I want it to be a place where things can get settled at home, you know my mom, we can just figure things out. But being part of the LGBT community, the shelter wasn’t the best experience at all.”

Shelter Staff Unaware of or Unresponsive to Negative Experiences

“But staff at these shelters have had three or four times we’ve had professional development, cultural competency training with staff so, they’re definitely up to speed. They’re just not heeding the advice.”

LGBTQ Youth Center as a Bridge to Accessing Shelter Services

“The night after I stayed in that abandoned house I had come back to the LGBTQ youth center and the worker there had told me about the shelter, so I had moved into the shelter. I never, I never would’ve known about any of the opportunities until I came to the LGBTQ youth center. So I think it’s a matter of people knowing like what other opportunities are out there.”

LGBTQ Youth Center as Source of Support

“I found support from the building at the LGBTQ youth center. That’s when it really like, that’s when it kinda got my gears grovin’ , like first started to be more open and everything with my mother and my family.”

“We try and link them to the Q Center. That is our main support system, for the LGBTQ youth that come here because they specialize in those needs.”

Community Needs

- ▶ More LGBTQ youth-specific services
 - ▶ LGBTQ mentors/staff
 - ▶ Training for youth workers (especially about trans) and enforcement of LGBTQ-affirmative practices
 - ▶ LGBTQ-specific and/or LGBTQ-affirmative shelter space
- ▶ Increased Access
 - ▶ Transportation
 - ▶ LGBTQ youth centers in non-urban areas
 - ▶ Wider dissemination of information about available resources