

There are tens of thousands of queer homeless teens. The exact number is not known due to the ever-changing situations of these adolescents and the fact that they often do not even know. Many are kicked out after coming out to their parents or drop out of school or run away because of assault by their peers and depression. The needs of queer teens are too often not met. They have looked prejudice in the face many times already. Even while they're homeless, discrimination of them is all too common by shelters, foster parents, and charities. When added to the taboos about general homelessness in American society, a situation is created that many adolescents are locked into just to survive from day to day.

The causes of distress that could lead to homelessness in queers seem to usually be from harassment, force, and confusion. Problems in queers, both with and without homes start in middle school, when the hormones begin to rush. Boys begin to like girls, girls begin to like boys, and queers don't know where they fit in the game. These queer youth begin to question not only their sexuality but also themselves, wondering if something is "wrong" with them for not liking a pretty girl. The hypersexuality of American culture increases taboos against queers early on, and middle school students begin using insults like "fag" and "dyke." An atmosphere of homophobia is created which can obviously lead to verbal harassment, physical and even sexual assault. As one middle school queer, comfortable with herself puts it, "I am proud of who I am, but no one else is." ("School Life").

Queer homeless leave for many of the same reasons that straight teens do. Many of them did not react well hi structured environments at school or home and left. If they are under the age of 18, they may avoid places required to report them to the Department of Child and Family Services which would put them with an authority figure again, and to them, being homeless is a better option. Many homeless teens also have parents with alcohol or other drug-use problems who may become abusive while on drugs or use most of their money for the drugs. They also may have mental health problems with abusive impacts on the children, or the youths themselves may have mental health problems. The older teens may be homeless because their parents forced them out. If they are over 18 and have a job, their parents' subsidized housing rates will increase and some parents cannot afford to pay any extra, so they force their children out (Livingston).

Queer homeless also have their own set of problems that cause them to choose homelessness as a means of survival. Many queer youth are forced out of their homes by their

parents in reaction to their coming out. While many queer youth without problems in a structured environment could find shelters, many shelters' staff members discriminate against queer youth. The YMCA's Y-Haven refuses to train staff members how to handle a queer occupant (Seper). In one incidence, a queer female in a group home was not allowed to show affection or even speak to her girlfriend while heterosexual females could be alone with their boyfriends. The rumors about her and any other queer female were also distressing to her because they simply were not true and based on stereotypes. People in group homes have felt the need and been encouraged by staff not to come out to other members because of the fear of violence. So instead of accessing such services, they may live in tents or in the woods. After living on the streets for a while and finding street friends, they may be reluctant to be in transitional housing out of the fear of retaliation from their street friends (Schwartz). Those without street friends "flop" or "couch-surf" from house to house, usually a friend's, often exchanging sex for a roof over their heads. This is a main reason for the unknown numbers of queer youth. By living this way, many queer youth stay invisible from the outside world and authorities. Unlike other homeless people, they usually do not live outside so they are inconspicuous to many others in society (Livingston).

There are many negative correlations with queer homelessness. The study compared the rates of certain incidents and experiences within the lifetimes of queer homeless men, queer homeless women, straight homeless men, and straight homeless women. While queer homeless have the same alcoholism rate as straight homeless, 15% more of queer homeless women have been in drug rehabilitation clinics. There is more LSD and cocaine use in queer homeless women than in straight homeless women and more marijuana usage in queer homeless than in straight homeless men. 16% more queer homeless men have been physically abused than straight homeless men. Queer homeless women seem to generally be more unstable, as compared to straight homeless women, 8% more have been in a youth detention facility, 4% more incarcerated, and 6% in a mental health facility. There are also more contemplations and attempts of suicide in queer homeless compared to straight homeless. (Noell et al.). Results of another study have been interpreted as queer homeless are more likely to be victimized, used highly addictive substances, have a higher psychopathology, and have more sex partners (Cochran et al.). Many of these teens seem to do these things just to survive on the streets and try to alleviate their depression. (Schwartz).

These studies are bringing to light many of the problems that queer homeless youth face and in turn, new ways to help are being created. One such way is a task force of New York City churches to shelter homeless youth overnight for emergency shelter. Other churches have been enlisted to volunteer and donate resources for this project. The five churches providing the shelter are from Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, and gay Catholic denominations which will alternate caring for six queer homeless adolescents, who can stay for a week. Donations are also coming from SoulForce, which promotes spiritual freedom in queers, and from The River Fund, a food donation program for the homeless and HIV/AIDS populations (Kling). The stories of unfair treatment in transitional housing are helping create The Rainbow Lodge, which will exist in San Diego (CA). There will be about a dozen beds for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, and HIV positive youth who are homeless or at an extreme risk. They also hope to include education, employment, life skills, and medical care services onsite. (Schwartz). As for permanent housing, in Minnesota queer youth can choose their "foster parents," who, through the GLBT Host Home Program sponsored by the Foster Care Youth United, are screened, unpaid, and the youth can choose to leave whenever they wish to. Foster parents are trained by FCYU about coming out, queer homelessness and their experiences. Youths who wish to be in the program apply to be in it, interview the parents based on their applications, make home visits, and choose a home. Both they and their hosts have monthly meetings with the organization to make sure that their welfare is at their best. Even though there are some natural struggles between the adolescent and the parents, the adolescents are always cared for by the host parents. After about a year, these youth are usually ready to leave, however there are often family bonds that stay between the foster parents and the youths and they may keep in touch. Through this program, they finally have a healthy relationship with a caring adult. ("Safe Homes").

Although the needs of queer homeless youths are often unmet, the studies are bringing change to this. New programs such as the Rainbow Lodge, task force of churches, and GLBT Host Home Program are helping pave the way for many homeless youths. However, these programs seem to exist primarily in large cities. There are many queer homeless youth in rural areas who also need help. Even though the population of queer homeless youth is not known anywhere and allocating just enough resources for an unknown population is a tough job, helping these teens can only help society. These teens will continue to grow with the experiences of

homelessness in their minds and some will never even leave the streets. Every adolescent needs stability in their lives and there are few things less stable than homelessness.

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