

## "Awareness Will Allow Peace of Mind, Body, and Spirit"

There have been many traumas in the world lately. We have experienced the tsunami, hurricane Katrina, and the war in Iraq. All of these episodes are extremely devastating and thousands of people have been pouring in money and effort to them accordingly. However, there is a huge problem going on within the streets of the cities and towns; the homeless queer teenagers. I myself never really thought about the number of kids on the street due to the rejection of their parents. Many teenagers who are GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transvestite) have finally accepted who they are and have tried to come out to their parents. Many times their parents, the ones who will promise to love them forever regardless, are so disgusted by the fact that they have a queer child that they choose to shun him or her from their life. This is simply unfair and unjust because the rejection that teenagers feel at such an imperative age is devastating. They many times feel that being who they are makes them sinful in society and during the teenage years they are trying to develop their identity. They are then forced to live a life on the streets where many times their only condolence comes from drugs. People wonder why the drug rate is so high in America yet they fail to recognize why people partake in drugs. These GLBT teenagers have no other choice, their family has virtually abandoned them and their fellow peers who are as well homeless disown them. They are forced to spend their nights sleeping on couches or worse on the alley floors. Many teenagers turn to panhandling, stealing, drug-dealing, and worst of all prostitution. The kids can't get a stable job because they don't have a permanent address or phone number. Their only chance to stay alive is to sell their bodies, a task that no one wishes to do. However, many times these GLBT teens choose to do this because the so called "safe homes" for the homeless discriminate them. Not only do the other homeless people constantly ridicule them and try to beat them up but also the staff of the safe homes become a problem because they are misinformed. Many times they think that by helping these kids they are contributing to a cause that is corrupt. I have actually encountered this first hand because I volunteer at the Manna Soup Kitchen. I live in a very small town and the same things happen here as they would in a big city. One day while I was working there, I saw two gay guys come in together and although no violence was done to them, the looks they received were looks that could kill. Everyone stared at them and acted as if they were not even human. People cut them in line saying they weren't worthy of food. When it was their time to come up, I made sure to give them extra food. Going home that night I felt devastated because I realized how cruel our

world really is. It is so upsetting to see God's children being treated in such an inhuman and vulgar manner. Everything that I saw upset me but I later found out something that really hurt my heart. In the big cities, 40% of the homeless population is in fact GLBT and no one tries to help them. Instead of acknowledging the fact that there is a problem, people pretend that the homeless GLBT kids are invisible and will seldom give them a second look. People always assume that these kids are slackers and drug addicts but fail to realize that many are on the streets because they are heroic. They are true to themselves, and they are survivors because they do whatever they can to stay alive and be who they are. Even if people don't agree with the GLBT's sexual preferences, they do need to recognize that they are in fact people and that they need help just as much as the next person. When thinking about what needs to be done to change this problem I have thought of a few ideas. First of all we as a country need to change the Federal Runaway Homeless Youth Act to include the GLBT youth with an equal access to shelters. The youth shelter staff members need to receive training to better understand the emotions and problems of the GLBT population. This would greatly help the teenagers and the leaders to better relate with one another and it would also allow the teenagers to have someone to confide in. However, I think that the best option would be to make the national public aware of the problem. If the statistics became available to everyone, then people would probably start to have more compassion. There could be commercials and billboards stating the facts that GLBT youth are at a higher risk for suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, high school drop out, sexual assault, and severe depression. People would then become more sympathetic and would strive to help the unaided queer youth of America, and for the most part the problem would be solved. Every child is a child of God and each one deserves the same amount of respect and love. Some people in today's world are blind, but with awareness and time, hopefully they will begin to see.