



# Barriers in Access for Youth Experiencing Homelessness who Identify as LGBTQ+

## Homelessness Amongst LGBTQ+ Youth

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) youth are dramatically over-represented in the homeless youth population. In Minnesota, 23% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+, compared to 4% of all Minnesota youth<sup>iii</sup>. For a range of reasons: family rejection resulting from sexual orientation or gender identity; physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; aging out of the foster care system; and financial and emotional neglect<sup>i</sup>. Family conflict is the most common cause of all youth homelessness. Amongst LGBTQ+ youth in particular, the conflict tends to be over their sexual orientation or gender identity. Annually over 20% of youth at The Bridge identify as LGBTQ+, and over 80% cite family conflict/household dynamics as a critical issue.

## Experiences of LGBTQ+ Youth Who Experience Homelessness

Not only are LGBTQ+ youth at higher risk of homelessness, amongst all youth experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+ youth are at greater risks of assault, trauma, exchanging sex for basic needs, and early death. Black youth who identify as LGBTQ+, particularly young men, experience the highest rates of homelessness. LGBTQ+ youth endure traumatic experiences - harassment, abuse, and stigmatization from people and systems that are not trauma-informed and sensitive to their vulnerable situation that results in many more choosing to live on the streets than their heterosexual homeless peers which increases the likelihood of engaging in “survival sex cycle” and putting them at further risk of violence and exploitation. This results in LGBTQ+ youth experiencing higher rates of post-traumatic stress, and suicidal behavior<sup>iv</sup>.



## Welcoming, Affirming, Safe.

LGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness need access to safe, supportive housing, free of bias and harassment and access to culturally competent services that affirm their identity and welcome them, and the space to develop peer-to-peer relationships and coping strategies and build community. Despite significant gains made in responding to the needs of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness, these youth continue to face barriers to access basic needs such as obtaining vital documents (Social Security card, state ID, or driver's license), housing, education, healthcare, employment and more. This situation requires immediate, collective attention and resources to address the contributing factors and make permanent change for youth in crisis who identify as LGBTQ+.

## Trauma-informed, Resilience-focused Approach to LGBTQ+ Homelessness

LGBTQ+ youth who turn to The Bridge for Youth (The Bridge) for immediate safety and support, do so bearing complex histories of trauma, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and violence at home or on the streets. Often, they are further traumatized by the rejection they have experienced in their families, schools, and communities due to their gender identity or expression or sexual orientation. Since 1970, The Bridge has been a safe place for ALL youth – welcoming youth, with absolute respect and relentless support further supported with intentionality within policies, practices, physical spaces, and programs that ensure a welcoming, affirming, and safe environment for youth who identify as LGBTQ+.

In 1993, The Bridge launched the first and today the longest running support group *So What if I Am* a support group for youth ages 12-21 to find community and be their authentic self, that provides emotional support and leadership development for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing family rejection/conflict, bullying and/or emotional distress. For LGBTQ+ youth in need of emergency shelter, comprehensive and individualized case management specifically addresses the unique strengths and barriers that LGBTQ+ youth face in obtaining and maintaining safe, stable, and affordable housing; reconnecting youth with their families when it is safe and possible, and providing resources and referrals for additional supports that are affirming and safe for LGBTQ+ youth.

Most recently, in Fall 2021, The Bridge launched The Mobile Youth Outreach Center prioritizing meeting the immediate needs of BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and sexually exploited youth ages 10-21 in the Twin Cities. Vibrantly designed by youth, The Mobile Youth Outreach Center meets youth in spaces and places they feel safe and are reflective of their community, and provides immediate basic needs - healthy food, gender affirming clothing, connection, and more.

## The Bridge for Youth

The Bridge for Youth (The Bridge) centers youth voice, justice, and equity in all we do, and empowers youth experiencing homelessness through safe shelter, basic needs, and healthy relationships. Our vision is a community where all youth feel safe, accepted, and supported. Since 1970, The Bridge has provided over 50,000 youth safety and stability through emergency shelter, as well as transitional housing for youth—including parenting youth and their young children; individual, family and group counseling; specialized case management for crime victims and youth who identify as LGBTQ+; phone/text crisis intervention; as well as street, site, and mobile outreach. The Bridge is at the forefront of addressing youth homelessness in Minnesota, positively impacting the lives of the most vulnerable youth in our community, through youth-centered programs that offer a pathway out of poverty and chronic homelessness.



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- i. [https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/homelessness#:~:text=A%20study%20of%20more%20than,care%20system%3B%20and%20\(4\)](https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/homelessness#:~:text=A%20study%20of%20more%20than,care%20system%3B%20and%20(4))
- ii. Voices of Youth Count, an Initiative of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. <https://voicesofyouthcount.org/>
- iii. Wilder Research. Homelessness in Minnesota 2018 Study. <https://www.wilder.org/wilder-research/research-library/homelessness-minnesota-2018-study>
- iv. Lambda Legal, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Network for Youth, & National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2009