

## Without Shelter: Homeless GLBT Youth

It has been approximated that in the United States alone there are about 2 million homeless adolescents. A large percent of these homeless teens are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT). Most of them leave their homes to avoid they face from their parents and family because of their sexual orientation. They leave this harassment for extremely dangerous conditions found on the streets. The homeless GLBT individuals face a more risk living style than their heterosexual counterparts in this environment.

It has been reported that 20-40% of the homeless youth in this nation are GLBT. It has been reported that 60-75% homeless individuals experience serious physical abuse. Research shows that GLBT teens face higher levels of violence and mental health problems than the homeless heterosexual individuals. They also have higher rates of HIV infection and substance abuse. It is calculated that 56,250 homeless GLBT individuals are abused on the streets across the United States.

The GLBT community has to face discrimination everyday, but for homeless individuals it can make their lives even harder. In the homeless shelters set up across the nation, GLBT youth faces harassment from other youth in the shelter and sometimes the staff working there. Within the last few years gangs have become a major problem in homeless shelters. Most of these gangs are dangerously homophobic, making GLBT youth unsafe in many shelters. So, many of these youth choose to live on the streets rather than face the violence and abuse found in the shelters. In some cities, there are shelters dedicated to or have a specific number of beds for GLBT youth. Unfortunately these shelters and beds are very few.

Homeless transgender youth are faced with more struggles than the gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. Transgender youth have to deal with trans-phobia, which in many cases can be harsher than homophobia. In today's society, individuals are getting more comfortable with homosexuals, but there is still a huge problem with dangerous and many times violent trans-phobia. On top of this situation, it is harder for transgender individuals to find a job, which does not allow them to escape from their situation. In order to get a job one has to produce sufficient identification. For the transgender youth this is difficult because their appearance is a contradiction to the identification they have. Many transgender youth turn to prostitution as a way to support them, and to some it is used to confirm their gender identification. This leads to

higher rates of STD and HIV in these individuals. The difficulties that the transgender individuals face on the street often do not allow them to become self-sufficient and healthy adults.

There is a problem on streets across the United States. Homeless GLBT youth face discrimination, homophobia, and trans-phobia daily. They face constant struggle and danger in their lives. In order to provide help for these individuals, more safe shelters need to be built across the nation. Each of which need to provide physical and mental health care for the youth that resides there. Homeless GLBT youth need a step up in order to get on their feet and out of the dangers of living on the street.