



National Alliance to END HOMELESSNESS

Family Acceptance as one Solution to LGBT Youth Homelessness

Introduction

Many youth report their family's rejection of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as a factor leading to homelessness. While the scope of this issue is unknown, helping families accept their youth can strengthen families while decreasing the risk of negative outcomes. The Family Acceptance Project (FAP) is a community research, intervention, education and policy initiative designed to help diverse families decrease rejection and increase support for their LGBT children.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals are believed to make up 5-7 percent of the total American population, but studies show that LGBT youth make up anywhere from 20 to 40 percent of all youth experiencing homelessness. The studies tend to use different methods and recruit varying populations, so it is impossible to pinpoint more precise numbers. At a minimum, this population is overrepresented amongst youth experiencing homelessness, but we are unable to develop extensive strategies without consistent, reliable data identifying the full scope of the problem.

The Impact of Rejection on Risky Behaviors

A study completed by FAP was the first to identify how family relationships can impact an LGBT child's risk and resiliency. Children coming out at younger ages are at increased risk for victimization, including within their own homes. According to FAP, this victimization has long-term consequences for their health and development, and rejection by family can increase major health and related risks for LGBT youth.

The study found that increased levels of family rejection correlate to an increased risk of depression, suicidal behavior, substance abuse and HIV/STD risk in LGBT youth. In particular, LGBT young adults with low levels of family acceptance during adolescence were over three times more likely to report suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts – compared to peers with high levels of family acceptance. On the other end of the spectrum, those with high levels of family acceptance reported higher levels of self-esteem, social support, general health and life satisfaction when compared to their peers with low levels of family acceptance.

FAP for Providers

Some providers might be reluctant or uncertain about engaging the families of LGBT youth. In many instances, however, helping youth remain connected to family, or restore connections can prevent more serious problems and consequences. FAP providers have an array of resources that can be useful for direct practitioners. The FAPrisk Screener is one of several evidence-based resources available specifically for providers. This assessment tool is designed to identify LGBT youth at risk for serious health problems related to family rejection. FAP provides training and guidance for using the screener.

Once at-risk LGBT youth have been identified, follow up is necessary to help families appropriately respond to the coming-out process. FAP developed family acceptance workbooks, which are available in English, Spanish and Chinese, in addition to a Mormon-specific version. Use of these resources can increase family acceptance, which can lead to positive development and healthy futures for LGBT youth. For youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness, reconnecting to family in a positive way can facilitate reunification, reduces long-term negative consequences, and allows providers to shift housing, shelter and related resources to other youth in need.

For More Information

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