

Recommendations to the Community to Address
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness



VISION

All LGBTQ+ youth in West Michigan live in a safe, secure community.

MISSION

Ensure a continuum of inclusive and equitable support and services
for LGBTQ+ homeless youth in an affirming community
by strengthening existing and building new relationships and resources.

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INTRODUCTION

Every day in West Michigan over 3,300 young people experience homelessness. (Source: *Michigan's Center of Educational Performance and Information*) Youth that experience episodes of homelessness touch every zip code, every community, and every school district. Homelessness leaves youth vulnerable and at risk for abuse, trafficking, victims of crime, and more.

Now imagine a young person who identifies as LGBTQ+ and is homeless. Where do you go to feel safe? Who do you tell? Will you be accepted or rejected? These are some of the unique challenges LGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness face.

LGBTQ+ youth are 120% more likely
to experience homelessness
than their straight and cisgender peers.

Source: *Voices of Youth Count*

LGBTQ+ youth who find themselves homeless are incredibly strong and resilient, but they need the community's support.

Of the youth that are homeless in West Michigan, 15-20% identify as LGBTQ+. (Source: *Safe Impact Report*) Although we suspect that number to be higher due to the stigma of identifying as LGBTQ+. How might we, as a community, help LGBTQ+-identified youth who are experiencing homelessness? How might we prevent homelessness for LGBTQ+-identified youth? How might we build on existing service delivery models and systems of care to move this work forward? These are the questions we sought to answer. The answers informed our recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June, 2017 a cross-sector of community leaders, agency providers, and concerned individuals came together to answer this question: *How might we ensure all LGBTQ+ youth in West Michigan live in a safe, secure community?* This became the vision that guided the work of the steering committee and community planning group.

For six months the community planning group came together to examine this question from multiple perspectives. We set out to learn what is and is not working in our community. What do LGBTQ+-identified youth want? What do parents of LGBTQ+-identified youth want and need? How equitable and inclusive is the West Michigan community to LGBTQ+-identified youth? What's the landscape of the housing, faith, and school sectors?

We listened ...

We listened to LGBTQ+-identified youth, parents, faith leaders, law enforcement, school personnel, and program/service providers.

We learned ...

- “Coming out” is a huge process for families. How families navigate this process often determines whether that young person stays within the family unit or becomes homeless
- Youth and families need the community’s support to navigate the process
- Youth of color and their families need the most wrap-around support
- Youth want to stay connected to natural supports while also receiving support from agencies
- Youth want to have self-efficacy and self-determination
- Youth want their LGBTQ+ identity to be celebrated and acknowledged by social service providers
- Youth want safe and affirming spaces
- Services are “siloed” and complex to navigate
- Agencies have minimal collaboration so youth have a difficult time navigating the social services network
- Training and education is needed across our community: schools, churches, agencies, law enforcement, parents, youth

This report is a compilation of recommendations based on what we learned from LGBTQ+-identified youth and parents, service providers, faith leaders, and school representatives. We especially want to thank the LGBTQ+ youth and their parents who came forward and bravely told their stories. This report would not have been possible without their voices.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Process

We used a human-centered design process to research, analyze, synthesize and realize potential solutions. Human-centered design is an approach that looks at problems from a human perspective by listening to stakeholder's lived experiences. It includes methods for generating alternative solutions to increase innovative outcomes.

Methods

We set out to understand the needs in our community by engaging with key stakeholder groups through a variety of methods. When engaging with stakeholder groups, we used availability sampling by reaching out to interested partners and leveraging our networks and connections. We strived to include family members and LGBTQ+-identified youth. (See the appendix for a detailed summary of findings.)

- Conducted listening sessions with **LGBTQ+ youth**
- Conducted listening sessions with **parents** of LGBTQ+ youth
- Administered a survey to LGBTQ+ youth at the Kent County juvenile detention center
- Administered a survey and conducted conversations with members of the **faith community**
- Administered a survey to LGBTQ+ youth at HQ Homeless & Runaway Youth Drop-In Center and Grand Rapids Pride Center
- Administered a survey of local **high schools, colleges and universities**
- Interviewed mental health **service providers**
- Conducted conversations with **law enforcement**
- Reviewed the **Safe Impact Report**, which studied the landscape of support for LGBTQ+-identified youth in greater Grand Rapids
- Reviewed **literature of other communities** including the states of Minnesota and Oregon and the cities of Houston, Cincinnati, Nashville, Hollywood, and New York
- Reviewed **LGBTQ+-affirming resources and web sites**

Themes

As we engaged with key stakeholder groups, these themes emerged:

- LGBTQ+-identified youth and families want **reunification**
- LGBTQ+-identified youth want **safe and affirming housing and spaces**
- We are **program rich but systems poor**: lack of data, lack of effective sharing and coordination among agencies
- **Training and education** is needed in all sectors: schools, churches, agencies, law enforcement, parents, youth

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were developed from the top three needs identified in each subcommittee sector. (See the appendix for needs that were identified in each sector.)

These recommendations are **seeds of ideas** designed to be thought starters for the community. They are intended to **spark conversation**, provide inspiration and the possibility of what could be for our community. Individually, these recommendations will not end LGBTQ+-identified youth homelessness. Taken collectively, however, they provide a pathway on a journey to preventing and ending LGBTQ+-identified youth homelessness.

HOUSING

Recommendation: Engage

Services and resources that help Kent and Ottawa Counties create welcoming, inclusive and safe environments—in both private and public spaces—that seek to prevent homelessness for LGBTQ+ youth. (See Continuum of Services diagram on page 11.)

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Owner: County Specific Housing Continuum of Care
- Family preservation services
- Faith based community
- Schools and community spaces
- Equity, Inclusion and training

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- LGBTQ+ youth
- Families
- Youth service providers
- Youth housing providers

Who will need to receive updates?

- True Colors Task Force
- LGBTQ+ Youth Advisory Board
- County Specific Housing Continuum of Care

Funding Required

Funding targeted to service providers that adhere to, advance and support key principles. (See Continuum of Services Diagram on page 11.)

Timeframe to Implement

12-24 months

Goal Statement

Recommended Action Steps:

- Development of True Colors Task Force
- Development of LGBTQ+ Advisory Board (paid)
- Utilization of True Colors Assessment
- Recommend the LGBTQ+ Advisory Board develop a scale/rating threshold of safe and affirming sites
- Multiple access/entry points for youth to become engaged in services, where there is a common language and practices and standardized assessments that respect the privacy of youth

1. A reduction in the number of LGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness in Kent and Ottawa Counties.

In the desired future state LGBTQ+ youth would say, *“In my time of need, I was able to connect with a safe and affirming provider agency that welcomed and accepted me and helped me connect to needed services.”*

HOUSING

Recommendation: Ensure

If/when the community is not able to effectively engage and prevent homelessness, Kent and Ottawa Counties provides safe, inclusive, and affirming temporary spaces that are targeted to and/or easily accessible to LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness or those at risk for homelessness. These resources are focused on housing, seek to stabilize youth, and provide housing opportunities that fit their needs and allow for choice. (See Continuum of Services Diagram on page 11.)

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Owner: Housing Continuum of Care
- Funders
- Local government
- SOP
- Youth shelter
- Emergency shelters
- Community based transitional housing
- Host homes
- Bridge housing

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- LGBTQ+ youth
- Homeless community
- Continuum of Care
- Youth service providers
- Local government
- Community
- Funders

Who will need to receive updates?

- Funders
- Community
- Continuum of Care
- Providers
- LGBTQ+ Youth Advisory Board

Funding Required

- Funding targeted to Local and Systemic funding
- Funding that requires adherence to the continuum key principles as outlined within Continuum of Services Diagram on page 11.

Timeframe to Implement

18-36 months

Goal Statement

Recommended Action Steps:

- Development of LGBTQ+ youth specific housing emergency accommodations that meet the threshold that has been identified by the LGBTQ+ Advisory Board (seal of approval).
 - Centralized point of access that streamlines the entry of youth into the LGBTQ+ youth specific housing accommodations.
 - Funders mandate that agencies use a standardized data collection system such as HMIS and provide funding opportunities for agencies to utilize the system and to provide the training associated with it.
1. Reduction in unsheltered homelessness for LGBTQ+ Youth

In the desired future state LGBTQ+ youth would say, *“I am treated like an adult—I can come and go when I need to so I can work, continue my education and feel safe and supported. While I would love to be able to go home and be with my family, I am happy with where I am at and making progress to be independent and thrive!”*

Continuum of Services

This effort seeks to create equitable, inclusive, safe, and affirming systems, resources, and supports to prevent and address LGBTQ+ youth homelessness.

Engage

Client-Centered services and resources that help Kent County create welcoming, inclusive, and safe environments—in both private and public spaces—that seek to prevent homelessness for LGBTQ+ youth.

Equity, Inclusion, and Training

Faith

Family Preservation

Schools and Community Spaces

Ensure

If when the community is unable to effectively engage and prevent homelessness, Kent County provides low-barrier emergency accommodations that are targeted to and/or easily accessible for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness. These resources are focused on housing, seek to stabilize youth in crisis, and provide housing opportunities that fit their needs and allow for choice.

Basic Care

Bridge Housing

Community Based Transitional Housing

Emergency Accommodations

Host Homes

Street Outreach

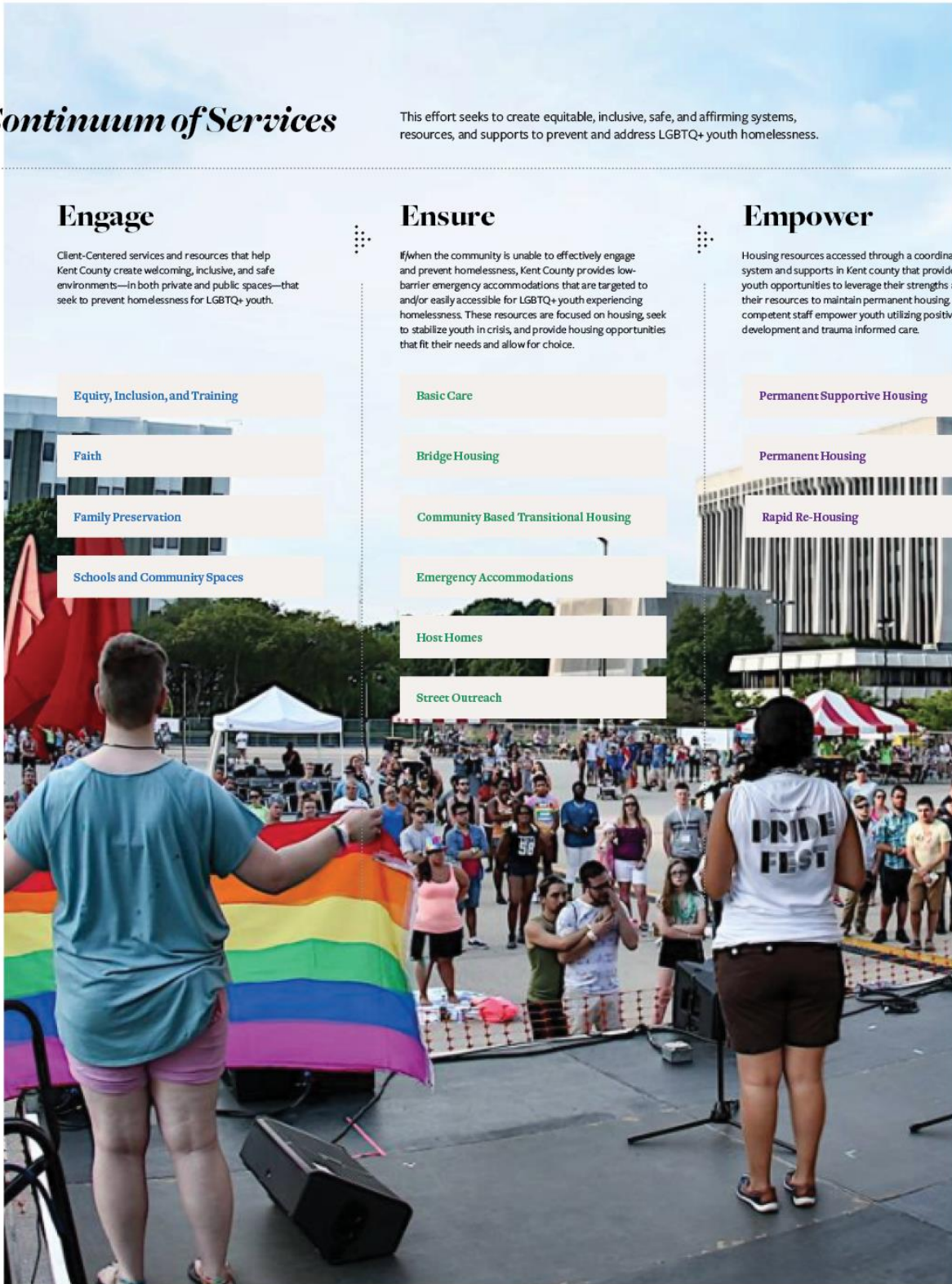
Empower

Housing resources accessed through a coordinated entry system and supports in Kent county that provide LGBTQ+ youth opportunities to leverage their strengths and rally their resources to maintain permanent housing. Culturally competent staff empower youth utilizing positive youth development and trauma informed care.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Housing

Rapid Re-Housing



HOUSING

Recommendation: Empower

Housing resources and support in Kent and Ottawa Counties that give LGBTQ+ youth opportunities to leverage their experience and learning toward greater independence and self-sufficiency. Empowering youth through independent living, membership in community, and stable housing based on youth needs and choice.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Owner: Housing Continuum of Care
- Housing providers
- Programs that provide support services
- Funders
- True Colors Task Force

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- Homeless LGBTQ+ youth
- The community at large

Who will need to receive updates?

- Funders
- True Colors Task Force
- Continuum of Care
- LGBTQ+ Youth Advisory Board

Funding Required

A funding system that is dedicated / targeted to the key principles of safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ youth.

Timeframe to Implement

24-48 months

Goal Statement

Recommended Action Steps:

- Increase housing accommodations that meet the LGBTQ+ threshold
- Increase or improve existing programs and services to meet the previously identified LGBTQ+ threshold

1. A reduction in the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless LGBTQ+ youth

In the desired future state LGBTQ+ youth would say, *“Through this process, I have been continually supported, encouraged, and guided. I was connected with a wonderful host home family and am now living independently while working and supporting myself.”*

SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY SPACES

Recommendation: School Climate Survey

Increase insight about LGBTQ+ youth needs within schools through administration of The Unity Work Foundation School Climate Survey. The survey will seek to collect demographics and factors contributing to current climates within schools.

Utilize survey data to better design and implement solutions and build on successes within the individual school districts.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

6 schools within the Kent Intermediate School District have been selected to implement this tool as a test group.

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- Students
- Faculty/Staff
- Parents/Family

Who will need to receive updates?

- Administration
- Education board/leadership

Funding Required

- Incentives (\$) for programs
- Travel / outreach time

Timeframe to Implement

6 months to 1 year

Goal Statement

At least five schools implement the climate survey annually. Each year, two schools will allocate resources (time, talent, treasure) and strategic priorities to address LGBTQ+ youth homelessness based upon survey results.

SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY SPACES

Recommendation: Education Training

Develop and provide LGBTQ+ homelessness curriculum/resources that can be infused in existing trainings (example: Kent Intermediate School District, Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, Grand Rapids Pride Center, Grand Valley State University Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center, etc.).

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Michigan Department of Education Training
- Grand Rapids Pride Center
- Grand Valley State University LGBT Resource Center
- Grand Rapids Urban League
- Equity PAC

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- Students
- School employees
- Community
- Grand Rapids Urban League
- Equity PAC

Who will need to receive updates?

- Trainers

Funding Required

- Trainer stipend
- Cost to reproduce handouts (worksheets, resources)
- Marketing expenses
- Refreshments

Timeframe to Implement

Curriculum: Six months to one year

Training: Three years

Goal Statement

Within three years, 75% of all districts within Kent and Ottawa Counties have been offered LGBTQ 101 training.

50% of all districts have two or more staff that have received training and have tools/knowledge to provide intervention/support to LGBTQ+ homeless youth within three years.

SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY SPACES

Recommendation: Awareness Campaign

Participate in and promote existing nationwide campaign through True Color’s Forty to None #40ToNoneDay.

Media promotion to include websites, posters, videos and other information regarding LGBTQ+ youth homelessness.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Area schools, service providers, and agencies
- Trainers (offer training to those interested)
- True Colors Fund
- Local Media

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- LGBTQ+ youth
- Community members

Who will need to receive updates?

- Administration
- Education board/leadership

Funding Required

- Leverage internal service provider resources
- Utilize templates and experience through True Colors 40 to None
- Potentially purchase ad space and/or connect with local media.
- Training

Timeframe to Implement

1+ year

Goal Statement

50% of school districts within Kent and Ottawa Counties have engaged with awareness campaign (posted, viewed, accessed) materials within two years.

75% of school districts participate in the #40ToNoneDay or similar campaign within three years.

FAITH

Recommendation: Create an Affirming Faith Coalition

A team of professional LGBTQ+ educators would develop a training / workshop program specifically to consult with and train faith communities that currently self-identify as “affirming” to the LGBTQ+ community. This training would provide a working definition of “affirming faith provider”, would focus on the LGBTQ+ community itself, include up-to-date terminology, best practices on inclusion, etc. The hope is that the faith communities will then have a deeper and shared common understanding and commitment to what it means to be “affirming” to the LGBTQ+ community.

Once the training is complete, these faith communities will work with the LGBTQ+ educators in order to form what we are calling an affirming faith coalition. This coalition will be tasked with staying up-to-date on the LGBTQ+ community and be committed to be “life-time learners”; always looking for ways to educate, inform, and hone their work when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community. This includes periodically updating and crafting new actionable policies and procedures within their own organizations to be more inclusive and welcoming. Additionally, faith leaders within the coalition will now be better equipped to directly support families through research of best practice methods within their own faiths who are struggling with LGBTQ+ youth at home (in the hopes of keeping families together when appropriate and helping to eliminate faith-based LGBTQ+ homelessness).

The coalition will also have an external facing mission: working together as a group with other faith communities who have yet to publicly self-identify as “affirming” to the LGBTQ+ community. The hope would be to increase the overall number of faith communities that self-identify as “affirming”, complete the training, and join the coalition. This would create a circular system of progress flowing into each other, hopefully systemically ending LGBTQ+ homelessness within faith communities.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

A team of professional LGBTQ+ educators in conjunction with current self-identifying “affirming” faith communities.

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- Affirming faith communities
- Non-publicly self-identifying “affirming” faith communities

Who will need to receive updates?

Everyone—be transparent and create positive public support and attention

Funding Required

Funding to gather a team of professional LGBTQ+ educators to develop and execute the affirming faith coalition program/training.

Timeframe to Implement

One year post full funding to develop program and begin early stages of coalition.

Goal Statement

- Successfully gather a team of LGBTQ+ professionals
- Successfully develop the affirming faith coalition program training/workshop program by identifying best practice methods

- Recruit a minimum of 6 self-identifying “affirming” faith communities to complete the training and join the affirming faith coalition program
- Over time, increase the coalition by training more affirming faith communities

FAITH

Recommendation: Increasing the Number of Self-Identifying “Affirming” Faith Communities

The coalition will work with all faith communities, but especially ones that don’t currently publicly self-identify as “affirming.” The hope would be to slowly, with purpose and intent, enter into an initial dialog that over time would ultimately result in more faith communities publicly recognizing and making amends for past views and actions against the LGBTQ+ community.

These faith communities would then publicly confirm their commitment to the LGBTQ+ community and self-identify as “affirming.” Our hope would be for them to complete the training and enter into the formal affirming faith coalition program, ultimately decreasing faith-based LGBTQ+ homelessness.

The intent is not to change the different communities’ faith but shed light on the harm that has been done in its name and move towards a position in which all faith communities not only accept the LGBTQ+ community, but celebrate it, allowing faith to be a positive force of good, and ultimately deepening one’s holistic identity.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

The affirming faith coalition

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

Non-publicly self-identifying “affirming” faith communities

Who will need to receive updates?

Everyone—be transparent and create positive public support and attention

Funding Required

The coalition will require funds and resources to do long-term outreach and to facilitate the training program. Systematic change doesn’t come easy or fast and it especially doesn’t happen without funding.

Timeframe to Implement

Ongoing process once initial coalition is formed.

Goal Statement

- Within two years, there will be a 20% increase in the amount of publicly self-identify “affirming” faith communities
- Over three years, there will be a 40% increase in faith communities participating in the affirming faith coalition program

FAITH

Recommendation: Direct Family Support and Dialog

This three-tiered process has the ultimate goal of systematically ending LGBTQ+ homelessness within faith communities for good. The most direct result of the affirming faith coalition will be that faith leaders within the coalition will now be better equipped to directly help with family dialog and support to those within their own faith communities that are struggling to accept their LGBTQ+ youths at home.

The faith coalition will work to keep the families together when appropriate and guiding families through best practice methods and supporting them with other affirming resources and professionals when needed.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

Individual faith leaders within faith communities who are members of the affirming faith coalition.

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

Families (including LGBTQ+ youth who are at risk of homelessness).

Who will need to receive updates?

This will be kept private and confidential among the faith leaders and the families they serve.

Funding Required

No external funding should be required—faith leaders are typically already paid by their faith communities to do direct outreach to members.

Timeframe to Implement

Ongoing process once the initial coalition is formed.

Goal Statement

- Research and propose an intervention curriculum or framework to utilize within the faith coalition
- Document baseline data on existing LGBTQ+ youth homelessness within faith communities
- Realize a decrease and eventual end to LGBTQ+ youth homelessness within faith communities

EQUITY, INCLUSION & TRAINING

Recommendation: Training Awareness

Youth serving agencies within Kent and Ottawa Counties will have staff who are knowledgeable and informed about the needs and strengths of LGBTQ+ youth so that agencies will have a welcoming and affirming atmosphere for all.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Owner: Grand Rapids Pride Center
- Service providers
- All clients
- Executive director and board (to approve budget and changes)

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- Youth
- Staff
- Clients

Who will need to receive updates?

- Community
- Board
- Staff
- Clients

Funding Required

- Increase training development budgets
- Consult with other agencies
- Pay for trainers and agencies

Timeframe to Implement

LGBTQ+ training plan within 6-12 months

Goal Statement

- Within the first year, an LGBTQ+ 101 training will be developed for youth service providers within the community
- Within two years, 40 youth service providers will have been trained on the LGBTQ+101 training module
- Within three years, youth service providers will have mandated LGBTQ+ classroom and online training for staff and updated orientation plan for new staff within 12 months

EQUITY, INCLUSION & TRAINING

Recommendation: Inclusive Intake Forms

Youth serving agencies within Kent and Ottawa Counties will demonstrate their commitment to inclusion and diversity by having inclusive intake forms.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Owner: Grand Rapids Pride Center
- All service providers/agencies

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

LGBTQ+ youth

Who will need to receive updates?

- LGBTQ+ youth
- Staff
- Board
- Clients
- Community

Funding Required

Grant funding

Timeframe to Implement

12 months

Goal Statement

Within two years, 75% of all youth serving providers and agencies will have intake forms that include pronouns, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

EQUITY, INCLUSION & TRAINING

Recommendation: LGBTQ+ Youth Advisory Board

Agencies and service providers need to receive LGBTQ+ youth feedback and information gathered from human-centered design activities before developing or implementing LGBTQ+ specific services and programs.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Owner: Grand Rapids Pride Center
- All youth service providers

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- LGBTQ+ youth
- Staff
- Community members
- Agency leadership

Who will need to receive updates?

All stakeholders

Funding Required

- Funds to consult with agencies that already have youth boards
- Grants/fundraising
- Travel expenses
- Additional staff responsibilities

Timeframe to Implement

- 12-18 months
- Time for client information sessions
- Appropriate compensation for the youth
- Staff training for youth
- Staff buy-in
- Co-leadership for youth

Goal Statement

Within two years, 75% of all youth service providers will have a diverse youth advisory board comprised of 5–10 youth that will be screening and advising on all LGBTQ+ specific programs and services.

FAMILY PRESERVATION

Recommendation: Diverse Support Groups for Caregivers of LGBTQ+ Youth

Multiple community support groups that are reflective of diverse race, religion, and family composition.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Service providers specific to people of color
- Churches of various faith backgrounds
- Grand Rapids Pride Center
- Out on The Lakeshore
- Child welfare agencies

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- Caregivers
- Youth
- Community

Who will need to receive updates?

- Funders
- Caregivers
- Service providers

Funding Required

Church/agency “buy-in” and willingness to utilize current internal resources.

Timeframe to Implement

6 months to start

Goal Statement

- Caregiver awareness of various opportunities
- Three support groups that reflect the diverse groups outlined above to begin by August 2019

FAMILY PRESERVATION

Recommendation: Broaden and Bring Awareness of Community Resources

Utilize a wide-spread campaign covering Kent and Ottawa counties that gives caregivers a sense of connection and access to resources.

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Funders
- Lead agency
- Public relations firm
- Collaborating agencies

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- Caregivers
- LGBTQ+ youth
- Community

Who will need to receive updates?

- Funders
- Community
- Agencies involved with campaign and resource providers

Funding Required

Significant

Timeframe to Implement

12-18 months

Goal Statement

Develop a community campaign to increase awareness of resources and diminish the stigma associated with LGBTQ+ by mid-2019:

- Billboards
- Radio time
- TV exposure

FAMILY PRESERVATION

Recommendation: Maintain Placements for LGBTQ+ Youth in Foster Care

- Provide training that equips foster parents and staff to be supportive and affirming of LGBTQ+ youth.
- Use already-established human rights campaign project “All Children, All Families.”

Stakeholders

Who should implement this recommendation?

- Child welfare agencies

Who will be impacted by this recommendation?

- Child welfare staff
- Foster parents
- Foster care youth

Who will need to receive updates?

- Child welfare agencies
- Foster parents

Funding Required

- Training materials
- Staff time

Timeframe to Implement

12–18 months

Goal Statement

Three foster care agencies within Kent and Ottawa counties will have adopted a training model for foster parents and child welfare staff by the conclusion of 2019.

CONCLUSION

We began our journey by asking, “*How might we ensure all LGBTQ+ youth in West Michigan live in a safe and secure community?*” We believe that through engaging key stakeholder groups, listening to their needs, and providing these recommendations we’ve been able to answer that question.

It is our goal that these recommendations find funding and a home within our community.

If you’re interested in joining us on the next phase of this journey as either a community partner or funder, please contact Julie Cnossen at Arbor Circle (jcnossen@arborcircle.org).

APPENDIX

Summary of Findings

While there are many things that are positive in our community there are also barriers and opportunities for improvement. These findings highlight what each subcommittee learned as a result of their engagement with key stakeholder groups.

It should be noted that data collection and tracking of LGBTQ+ youth who are experiencing homelessness on a local level is extremely limited. Therefore, when engaging with stakeholder groups, we used availability sampling by reaching out to interested partners and leveraging our networks and connections.

Our research was analyzed and synthesized using two human-centered design frameworks: “Rose, Bud, Thorn” and “Want–Have.”

Family Preservation

Characteristics of families that *stay together* following the child coming out:

- Parents who have a positive support system
- Parental education and exposure to LGBTQ+ individuals / information
- Having friends or family who had previously identified as LGBTQ+
- Ability to accept other minority categories (example given of inter-faith and inter-racial dating)
- Parental access to mental health services / support
- Ability to grapple with family / religion as opposed to only being able to accept conservative faith ideology
- Having an ally in the family
- Having children know prior to coming out that at least one parent is affirming
- Strong parental role of unconditional love

Youth Voice

“I am literally homeless right now because my parent did not approve of “my lifestyle” and couldn't accept it. I'm not sure where I will live. Right now, I'm staying with a friend but I can't do that forever and I don't have keys to her place, which makes it really hard. I'm hiding it from friends at school because I want to look normal.”

Characteristics of families that *separate* either permanently or temporarily:

- Parent not having anyone they feel like they can talk to about it
- Parental belief that “it’s a phase” or that they can do behavior modification
- Rigid religious community expectations
- Fear of social isolation for the parents
- Father may feel his masculinity is in question particularly if it is a son identifying as gay or transgender

Additional Findings

- “Coming out” is a big process for youth and parents
- Diverse racial and religious groups need the most support
- Foster care system is not always LGBTQ+ friendly

Parent Voice

“Sometimes when children come out, it’s the parents who then go into the closet.”

Faith

Positives

- Youth want role models of LGBTQ+ individuals of faith
- Parents are yearning for resources that are pro-religious and pro-LGBTQ+
- Many parents accept their LGBTQ+ youth

Parent Voices

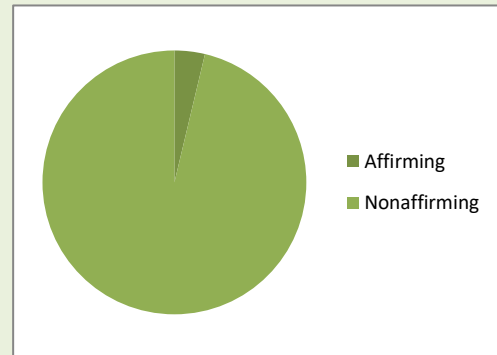
- “Church was the heartbreak, not my son.”
- “I’ve given up on organized religion.”
- “Some faith support groups have actually been more damaging because they aren’t supportive but condemning. They tell the family how they can fix their child.”

Youth Voice

“I was homeless because I told my family I was bisexual and no longer Christian. I had to tell them I was no longer bisexual and go to church with them so that I could go back home and have a place to live.”

Barriers

- Of the 543 registered churches in Kent and Ottawa county, 21 are LGBTQ+ affirming (Sources: Association of Religion Data Archives—Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990 [Counties]; Gays in Faith Together [GIFT])
- Many churches did not respond when contacted to participate in a survey or conversation
- Many parents don’t tell their families or faith communities that their child is LGBTQ+
- Some parents feel they must choose between their faith and their LGBTQ+ child



Equity, Inclusion & Training

Positives

- Many service providers are changing intake forms to include gender / sexual orientation identity and pronoun preferences
- Service providers are interested in making forms / process open for gender expressing
- There are organizations that show physical signs of LGBTQ+ support

Youth Voices

- “I often feel that no one will understand/believe in my gender identity.”
- “Have LGBTQ+ positive signs and brochures around.”
- “Yes, had to explain agender.”
- “Have employees who are part of the LGBTQ community.”

Barriers

- Many services providers would be willing to offer more training but staff don’t have time or agency support
- LGBTQ+ training for law enforcement is limited (i.e., Boys & Girls Club)

Housing

Positives

- Resources are available: easy to find, easy to get connected

Youth Voices

- There were “no resources to reconnect with families. All I wanted to do was go home!”
- “It is easy to contact the service when you start, but when you get going it’s harder to stay connected.”
- “I got harassed because I was gay, a fight ensued, and I got kicked out, not the person who made the slur.”
- “Youth need places that are flexible in terms of time and flexibility to come and go.”

Barriers

- LGBTQ+ youth do not always feel safe while looking for housing
- Difficult for youth to stay connected to services due to staff turnover
- Systems are not integrated; data not shared (youth have to repeatedly share their stories)
- Youth do not always have vital documents (birth certificate, medical records, identification) which makes it difficult to secure stable housing
- No specific LGBTQ+ youth housing
- Most housing resources are located in Grand Rapids; few resources for rural areas
- Interactions with police make youth feel less safe
- Services are time-limited

Schools & Community Spaces

Positives

- There are homeless liaisons assigned to every high school
- Many high schools have GSA clubs
- High school counselors will meet with student and/or family for coming out
- Some higher-education institutions offer training, inclusive policies, LGBT resource centers, and student organizations
- Some higher-education institutions and high schools offer training but it is not required
- Local law enforcement is willing and interested in helping LGBTQ+ homeless youth get access to services

Law Enforcement Voice

- “Happy to know I now have a resource to offer” but “unfortunate that it is not in our community.” (Probation officer from a suburban community that learned of services for a LGBTQ+ youth client who reported as regularly homeless.)

Barriers

- 60% of LGBTQ+ youth surveyed at Kent County Juvenile Detention Center reported not staying at home prior to detention. (Note: All residents were invited to respond. A small sample was identified as LGBTQ+ among all respondents.)
- LGBTQ+ youth report feeling unsafe in law enforcement care
- Law enforcement is not always aware of services for LGBTQ+ youth especially outside of their local community
- LGBTQ+ data is not collected within schools
- There was a low response rate from high schools and colleges when asked to participate in survey
- Colleges: lack of on-campus housing and/or affordable temporary housing

NEEDS

The subcommittees went through an exercise of brainstorming needs. The following needs emerged from the research findings. These needs are presented in order of priority based on subcommittee members voting for their top need in each sector.

Housing

- Housing resources specific to LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness
- Increased prevention resources
- Flexible, barrier free housing
- Relation-driven services for youth

Family Preservation

- Support groups for parents, legal guardians, caregivers and foster care that reflect diversity and culture
- Broader resources for parents, legal guardians, caregivers and foster care to assist in processing through and supporting children that identify as LGBTQ+
- Faith and beliefs reconciliation for parents, legal guardians, caregivers and foster care
- Awareness and training for foster parents and child welfare
- Better understanding of characteristics and families that either accept or reject

Equity, Inclusion & Training

- Agencies to have more training for staff members
- Agencies to ask for gender identities on intake forms. Make intake forms more inclusive for LGBTQ+ community
- Agencies to have more LGBTQ+ services (housing services, support groups, etc.)
- Agencies to have more LGBTQ welcoming materials
- Agencies and staff to ask for pronouns continuously, include them on name badges

Faith

- More faith communities being celebratory of LGBTQ+ community
- Faith to be a positive force for LGBTQ+ individuals and their families
- “Affirming” faith communities to be more visible and action-oriented
- Increased amount of LGBTQ+ faith-based resources and improved connections among those already existing
- More faith-based role models and mentors

Schools & Community Spaces

- Data collection in schools
- Community commitment and buy-in
- Education to support LGBTQ+ youth
- Access to resources/transportation
- Funding in schools

VISION STATEMENTS

As part of the recommendation process each subcommittee created vision statements for their sector. These vision statements are designed to inspire our community and informed our recommendations.

Housing

The housing subcommittee envisions a world where LGBTQ+ youth have access to housing and supports that are equitable and inclusive.

Schools & Community Spaces

The schools and community spaces subcommittee envision a world where schools and community spaces have the resources, commitment, and knowledge to provide safe, affirming and celebratory environments for LGBTQ+ youth.

Faith

The faith subcommittee envisions a world where the faith community not only embraces but celebrates the LGBTQ+ community.

Equity, Inclusion & Training

The equity, inclusion and training subcommittee envision a world where youth are celebrated for all of their identities and are accepted as they are by agencies, organizations, schools and the greater community.

Family Preservation

The family preservation subcommittee envisions a world where all family units remain together and are accepting and affirming of their LGTBQ youth.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Affirming Emergency Shelter

A type of emergency service that provides temporary accommodations to literally homeless LGBTQ+ youth. Voluntary services are housing focused, and a communal living arrangement based on reciprocal rights is observed. Youth are not required to participate in programming in order to access these services and their schedule is managed at their discretion.

Basic Care

An affirming emergency shelter model for runaway and homeless minor youth. Services range from family preservation/reunification to safety planning.

Bridge Housing

A type of housing assistance that focuses on short term stays and quick placement into a permanent housing destination.

Community

Kent and Ottawa Counties and the cities and towns that comprise those counties.

Community Based Transitional Housing

A type of housing program providing time-limited housing and support services, focused on a community-centered approach to quickly transition to permanent and independent living.

Family Unit

Anyone who is a caregiver of youth.

Host Homes

Host home programs are coordinated community initiatives involving local schools, faith communities, civic organizations, and service providers. The mission of these programs is to address the housing needs of homeless youth by connecting them with caring adults from their own communities who are willing to provide temporary safe housing and support.

Housing and Services

Youth can succeed in a variety of housing models, some of which must be low barrier. Key to the success of housing programs is the availability of developmentally appropriate services. The best services are: voluntary, provided in a harm reduction framework, informed by youth, and structured to allow them to make mistakes.

Permanent Supportive Housing

PSH, a type of housing program that is part of the Housing First approach that generally consists of housing payment assistance coordinated with support service delivery, often involving mental health or substance abuse services and target towards chronically homeless individuals.

Rapid Rehousing

A type of housing program that is part of the Housing First method that generally consists of rental assistance targeted towards homeless individuals and families with services provided at needed.

Safe and Affordable Permanent Housing

In general, housing for which the occupant(s) is/are paying no more than 30 percent of their income for gross housing costs, including utilities, and meets basic safety and sanitation standards. Please note that some jurisdictions may define affordable housing based on other, locally determined criteria, and that this definition is intended solely as an approximate guideline or general rule of thumb.

Street Outreach

Youth centered outreach services provided by culturally competent service providers will engage youth in identifying safe and affordable housing options, while working with youth to meet basic needs and safety planning.

Youth

Age groups 13 – 17 and 18 – 24

GLOSSARY OF GENDER-IDENTITY TERMS

Courtesy of the Grand Rapids Pride Center

Agender

A person who does not identify with any gender, or who does not feel that gender is relevant to them personally.

Asexual, Ace

An asexual person experiences little or no sexual attraction. Ace, aro, or aromantic may be used to refer to similar lack of romantic attraction.

Assigned Sex, Gender Assignment

The sex/gender a baby is designated at birth, based on appearance of body parts.

Bisexual, Bi

A bisexual person experiences attraction to people of genders both similar to and different from their own.

Cisgender, Cis

Someone who is comfortable with their gender assignment at birth, and feels it describes them.

Gender

A complex part of a person's identity; an interplay of self-perception, personality, and embodiment. More than just male or female, there are hundreds of possible genders.

Gender Expression, Gender Presentation

Gendered cues such as clothes, hair, and mannerisms that are perceived by others as conveying masculinity, femininity, or androgyny.

Genderfluid

A person whose gender identity changes over time or with circumstances. A bigender person moves between more than one gender and/or experiences more than one gender at the same time. Pangender is another common related term, which describes a dense, multilayered experience of gender.

Gender Identity

A gendered sense of self as a man or woman, another gender entirely, or no gender at all.

Gray Asexual

A spectrum between total absence of attraction and some level of sexual attraction. A demisexual person experiences little to no attraction without first establishing an emotional bond with that person.

Intersex

People with intersex conditions are born with anatomy that is not typically male or female. Chromosomes, hormones, and bodily development may play a part in intersex conditions, such as XXY chromosomes or androgen insensitivity syndrome. Also known as Disorders of Sex Development (medicalized term); use intersex instead of hermaphrodite, which is an offensive term.

LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA+

Abbreviations meant to encompass the entire community, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, non-binary, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual identities.

Non-binary, Genderqueer

Types of gender identities that cannot be adequately described by “male” or “female” and which exist between or outside of those options.

Pansexual

A pansexual person is one who may be attracted to others without regard to gender or has the potential to be attracted to people of any gender.

Pronouns

In this context, pronouns (or preferred pronouns) refers to gendered or gender-neutral third person pronouns such as she/her, they/them, he/him etc., that a person may wish to be called by others as a part of their gender expression. Whatever pronouns a person requests should be used to the best of your ability.

Sexuality or Sexual Orientation

Identity terms—such as lesbian, gay, straight, bi, and asexual—broadly describing who a person is attracted to or desires a relationship with; sometimes divided into sexual and romantic orientations.

Transgender, Trans

A transgender person’s gender identity is something other than the gender assigned to them when they were born. Transsexual is an older, medicalized term referring to someone who intends to transition or has transitioned.

Transition

Steps a transgender or non-binary person may take to feel more comfortable in their body or gender, such as changing their name, requesting different pronouns, dressing differently, (as a youth) hormone inhibitors, or (as an adult) accessing hormones or surgery. Use gender transition instead of sex change.

Two-Spirit

Gender identity unique to indigenous Native American and First Nations people whose gender (or orientation) is outside of binary gender norms. Third gender is a more general term that describes non-cis gender identities from indigenous or non-Western cultures.