

## DIVERSITY & SUBPOPULATIONS

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### No Fixed Address: Young, Queer, and Restless

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#### Introduction

*My dad found out about it, and was like: “Come out to the garage, I heard Vicky is gay. You can’t be friends with her anymore. You’re not gay are you?” And I was like: “No, fuck no, of course not”, and he was like: “Okay good, cause if you were I would have to kill you.” He really meant that, it wasn’t an empty threat. So, if my father knew that I was queer and trans he really would do something to eliminate me from the world. I fully believe in his ability and his desire to do this. That was when I was fourteen. (Homeless youth, 26 years old)*

It is accepted wisdom in our culture that home is where the heart is and that our primary caregivers are supposed to love us unconditionally. Our childhood storybooks teach us that home is a place of shelter and safety, a place of refuge from the rest of the world. However, this is not the case for young people coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) to an unsupportive family. Approximately 25-40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ, while only approximately 5-10% of the general population identifies as LGBTQ (Josephson & Wright, 2000). The large number of LGBTQ youth (defined as 16 to 26 years old) who are homeless tells us that a *house* is not always a loving *home* (Abramovich, 2012; Cull et al., 2006; Josephson & Wright, 2000; Ray, 2006). There are many reasons that lead or force youth out of the home;

however, family conflict is the number one cause of youth homelessness (Cull et al., 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). In particular, family conflict resulting from a youth coming out as LGBTQ is a major contributing factor to youth homelessness (Abramovich, 2008; Ray, 2006). In recent years, there has been extensive research in the area of youth homelessness both in Canada and internationally; however, little is known about LGBTQ youth homelessness.

The incidence of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto is on the rise, and agencies serving homeless youth have reported challenges in providing support to this population (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). We also know that many LGBTQ homeless youth feel safer on the streets than in shelters due

**I WOULD LIKE TO OPEN THIS CHAPTER  
WITH A FEW WORDS ABOUT LOVE.**

The notion of love is critical to discussions of homophobia and transphobia, because these are ultimately about hate and about efforts to confine the powers of the human spirit. A deep understanding of love and of our culture's mistrust of the capacity of the human heart is fundamental to this research. Our culture does not nurture love enough and it rarely teaches us how to love. The family is still thought of as the primary place where we should learn about and how to love. However, this belief can hurt young people who are kicked out of their homes for coming out, who learn that there are 'right' and 'wrong' people to love and that loving the 'wrong' people means losing their families' love. Sadly, we live in a culture where some people are more comfortable with hate and violence than with love and acceptance. Only profound changes in the ways that people think and act can create a culture of love and acceptance.

This lack of love and acceptance is what lies behind LGBTQ youth homelessness. The experiences of LGBTQ homeless youth are a critical piece often missing from discussions on youth homelessness. This area does not receive nearly enough attention or discussion. It is time that we begin to raise awareness by naming the problem of homophobia and transphobia and by listening to the voices of those with lived experiences of discrimination. It is my hope that this chapter inspires discussion and strategies that can lead to solutions and support for LGBTQ youth who are homeless, and that we may shift towards a more loving culture, where all youth are accepted regardless of their sexual and gender identities.

to homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system (Denomme-Welch et al., 2008; Ray, 2006). Despite these findings, there are few specialized support services and no specialized shelters for LGBTQ street-involved youth in Canada. Additionally, there are gaps in knowledge indicating a need for research. For example, we do not know enough about how the lack of specialized services impacts this population's health, wellbeing, and length of time on the street; or how experiencing intersecting or multiple oppressions (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia), both on the streets and in the shelter system, impacts LGBTQ street-involved youth.

Society's acceptance of sexual diversity is growing, and consequently, youth are coming out at younger ages (Lepischak, 2004). Nonetheless, homophobic and transphobic bullying remains a significant problem in Canadian schools. A recent study that investigated homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools reported that a high proportion of LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school and are exposed to daily verbal harassment (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Due to gaps in knowledge and support, our society does not truly understand the social and emotional complexities of coming out and how often it leads to homelessness. Our society also does not have a thorough understanding of the connection between homophobia and homelessness, and of the challenges of coming out, trying to form one's gender and sexual identities<sup>1</sup>, and bearing the burden of social stigma and discrimination in addition to the everyday stresses of street life. These factors have a major impact on the wellbeing of LGBTQ homeless youth. For example, it has been found that LGBTQ youth are at a dramatically higher risk for suicide and mental health difficulties than heterosexual and cisgender<sup>2</sup> youth (Cull & Platzer, 2006; Frederick et al., 2011; Gattis, 2011).

This chapter begins to address the complex issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness and provides initial findings from an ongoing qualitative (narrative-based) study exploring the specific changes needed for Toronto's shelter system to become safer, more accessible, and more supportive of LGBTQ youth who are homeless<sup>3</sup>. Core findings discussed in this chapter include: shelter staff's perceptions of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, and their thoughts on the training needed for shelter staff to be well equipped to deal with situa-

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1. Numerous studies have lumped transgender people under the label *sexual minority*. While, gender identity and sexuality overlap, they are not the same. Gender identity refers to how one identifies one's gender (male, female, genderqueer, transgender, etc.) and sexual identity refers to how one identifies whom they are sexually attracted to (lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, etc.).
  2. The term 'cisgender' refers to people whose lived gender identity matches with the sex (female or male) they were assigned at birth.
  3. The study's methods include critical ethnography, participatory research, and arts-informed research.

tions of homophobia and transphobia and to serve all youth properly; the need to revise the City of Toronto's shelter complaints procedure; and the need to create specialized services for LGBTQ homeless youth. The aims of this chapter are to inform policy and practice, to raise awareness of the ongoing crisis of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada, and to share the voices and experiences of LGBTQ street-involved and homeless youth. The voices of LGBTQ homeless and street-involved youth are shared throughout this chapter to raise awareness of the ongoing barriers and challenges faced by this group of youth in the shelter system, as well as to recognize their voices and lived experiences as knowledge. It was particularly important to present the voices of these youth, as it is precisely their voices and experiences that are so often marginalized in society.

(Please note that a glossary of important terms used throughout this document can be found in Appendix A.)

## Background

*I used to be homeless 3 years ago, just because I slept over at my friend's house and I came home late and my father said, "Where are you coming from? You're sleeping over at a man's house now" and he started calling me names and all this stuff. He asked me if I'm gay, "Batty boy get out me house" and then the man almost cut me up to pieces, so I took my stuff and I left. I disappeared for one year. For one year everybody thought I was dead. [...] He wanted to shoot me. He told me that he wanted to kill me. My father is a bad man. (Homeless youth, 22 years old)*

When youth are kicked out or forced to leave home for reasons beyond their control, they are suddenly faced with the stress of street life: finding safety, shelter, and food, often while coping with intense feelings of rejection, trauma, and fear. Although services for homeless youth seek to offer support, a number of LGBTQ youth report conflicting experiences, such as homophobic and transphobic violence within services. Homeless youth experience significantly higher rates of criminal victimization than housed youth (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004). These rates are higher again for LGBTQ homeless youth, who experience daily incidents of homophobia and transphobia (Dunne et al., 2002; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). LGBTQ homeless youth are also at greater risk for substance use, risky sexual behaviour, and mental health difficulties, and these risk factors are amplified by the lack of support available (Ray, 2006; Sheriff et al., 2011). Not only do LGBTQ youth face different risks and barriers; their needs also differ from those of their heterosexual and cisgender peers. There is a greater need for acceptance, in the form of safe spaces where youth are able to identify themselves freely (e.g. name, gender, sexuality), as well as specialized programs that address

and acknowledge the impacts that homophobia and transphobia have on this population's wellbeing and mental health (Abramovich, 2012; Ray, 2006).

Toronto is advertised as a safe city for LGBTQ people, a place where same-sex marriage is not only acknowledged and accepted, but even becoming somewhat normalized. This reputation for acceptance attracts thousands of LGBTQ people to Toronto (Carlson, 2012). Nevertheless, homophobic and transphobic violence remains a problem in the City. Additionally, the high prevalence of homelessness in Toronto has made the city known as the homeless capital of Canada (Laird, 2007; Novac et al., 2009). It is estimated that there are approximately 1,500-2,000 homeless youth in Toronto on any given night (Canadian Foundation for Children Youth and the Law, 2011; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2002). The City of Toronto provides funding to 13 youth shelters with a capacity of 529 shelter beds (City of Toronto, 2012). Although there are no shelters for LGBTQ youth in Toronto, there are several specialized evening/drop-in programs offered through the Sherbourne Health Centre: Supporting Our Youth, and the 519 Church Street Community Centre. These programs offer food, subway tokens, activities, and a place to feel safe and accepted; unfortunately, they do not offer a place to sleep. Due to Toronto's queer friendly reputation, LGBTQ youth frequently migrate to Toronto expecting to find support and safety, which unfortunately is not always the case.

*A high percentage of people who are homeless happen to be LGBT because they got kicked out of their house, or maybe they lost their job, or they lived in a small town, then they can't pay their rent and where else can they come, but Toronto. (Homeless youth, 27 years old)*

While the City of Toronto does not have any shelters for LGBTQ youth, other cities have invested in these resources. For example, there are a number of emergency shelters and transitional living programs for LGBTQ homeless youth in the United States (e.g. Detroit, New York City, Massachusetts). Most notable is the Ali Forney Center in New York City, which has become the nation's largest and most comprehensive organization serving LGBTQ homeless youth (Siciliano, 2012). The Ali Forney Center was named after a homeless transgender youth who was murdered in New York City. The center offers emergency housing, transitional housing, as well as day programs such as street outreach, medical care, HIV testing, mental health assessment and treatment, and workshops on LGBTQ issues for service providers. The Ali Forney Center is recognized for the specialized care and support they have been providing to LGBTQ homeless youth since 2002 (Siciliano, 2012). Moving forward, the City of Toronto could use the Ali Forney Center as a blueprint for creating a broader action plan to develop services and meet the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto.

## Results

*[Homophobia and transphobia] is the number one reason why we have so many homeless people. [...] I had a few friends who killed themselves because they couldn't deal with it; what other people said about them, their parents kicked them out and didn't listen to them. [...] A lot of these guys they do not want to go to the shelter. That is most of them, being stubborn and staying on the street, because they are afraid to be in the shelter. Do you know what they do you to you in the shelter? They tie you to the bed and they beat the shit out of you. (Homeless youth, 22 years old)*

During the first stage of data collection, a number of focus groups and one-on-one interviews were conducted with adults who work in the shelter system, including frontline shelter workers, shelter executive directors and management from the City of Toronto's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration. I also observed three mandatory training workshops for shelter staff, and interviewed the facilitators of each workshop. All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, were recorded and transcribed verbatim (word for word), and took place in a private office at the interviewees' places of work. There were three aims to interviewing professionals in the shelter system: first, to learn what the adults who work in the shelter system have to say about the issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness; second, to explore their level of preparedness in dealing with situations of homophobia and transphobia; and third, to learn more about the anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia training that shelter staff receive.

During the second stage of data collection, eleven LGBTQ youth who are either homeless or street-involved in Toronto were interviewed about their experiences with the shelter system and the problems and barriers they deal with on a daily basis. These interviews were also semi-structured and were conducted in private offices at the Sherbourne Health Centre and the Queen West Community Health Centre in Toronto. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The purpose of this stage was to identify the local problems faced by LGBTQ youth who are homeless in the city of Toronto and to learn more about their experiences with the shelter system and where they found support.

Several of the core findings were selected for the purpose of this chapter and are presented as follows:

### Perceptions of Homophobia and Transphobia

Shelter staff were asked about their understanding and perceptions of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. Major differences were revealed

in the ways that they perceived these issues. Some staff acknowledged that homophobia and transphobia are problems in the shelter they work in, as well as in the shelter system more broadly, while others did not think it was a problem at all, but rather believed that some youth use the term ‘homophobia’ as a way to protect themselves. For example, one staff member stated:

*I've seen something here where they started an altercation but it wasn't about because he's a gay or he's a something different orientation where they are fighting with each other that was about something else. But this is a way to protect themselves, "Oh because I'm gay he's attacking me". It's not true, no. It's not true in any cases, no.* (Staff member, Blue Door Shelter)

In contrast, there were staff who recognized homophobia and transphobia as daily occurrences in the shelter system, which sometimes are ignored by overworked staff who are too exhausted to intervene when such incidents occur. One staff member stated:

*I do know that there are many instances in the shelters and in a lot of the places that I've worked, that what happens a lot of the times is that staff will turn a blind eye to it or not address it or just not put their foot down about it and I think that that's where a lot of the gaps in the systems lie. Or just burned out staff who may not necessarily be doing rounds. Like there was an incident at one of the youth shelter's with one of our clients who was beaten up [because he was gay] in the shower there and it was a pretty brutal beating and staff didn't know about it.* (Staff member, Turning Point Youth Shelter)

## Training

Frontline shelter workers were asked to describe the level of anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia training they had received to date, either inside or outside of their current workplace. Participants reported that they had not received any formal anti-homophobia training – all focus groups expressed the need for this, as well as for training regarding LGBTQ culture and terminology. The Toronto Hostels Training Centre (THTC), run by the City of Toronto, provides all mandatory training workshops, as well as additional training, to shelter staff. THTC offered anti-homophobia training in 2001-2002; however, the training was never made mandatory and the workshop was discontinued due to low registration. In recent years, shelter workers have made ongoing requests both verbally and on workshop evaluation forms for anti-homophobia training, however, THTC still does not

offer this type of training<sup>4</sup>.

A number of participants had taken anti-oppression and/or transgender 101 workshops at THTC. However, many of them had received the training years ago. For example, one staff member reported that he had been working in the shelter system for 10 years and had only taken one anti-oppression workshop during his first year of work and had never had any follow-up training. The focus group data suggested that staff want and see the importance of ongoing anti-oppression, transgender 101, and anti-homophobia training.

### Complaints Procedure

The City of Toronto – Hostel Services, has a complaints procedure in place for shelter residents and staff, which allows them to file complaints by telephone, fax, letter, email, or in person. The Hostels Complaints and General Inquiry number is supposed to be posted in a visible area in all shelters. The phone line accepts calls between the hours of 8:30am-4:30pm from Monday to Friday. All complaints are input into an electronic complaints tracker and the tracker captures who is calling, when, why, etc. Calls are tracked by demographic (single women, single men, youth, etc.) and are separated by the nature of the complaint. This procedure allows the City of Toronto to keep track of the types of complaints that are lodged, which provides them with information on the problems that are occurring in the shelter system. Hostel Services receives approximately 300 complaints per year and not surprisingly, the majority of complaints are lodged by the adult sector, as adults make up the majority of the shelter system. It was found that youth file the fewest complaints and there have been no known complaints from the youth sector in relation to transphobia or homophobia dating back to 2009. However, there is only one complaint per year filed in relation to transphobia or homophobia amongst the entire population of single adult users of the shelter system, with access to shelter being the nature of the complaints (e.g. being denied service at a particular shelter, shelter being full, etc.)

Although there are violent occurrences as a result of homophobia and transphobia in the youth sector of the shelter system, as described in the staff quotation above, the City of Toronto has no record of such occurrences. This suggests that incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system are not being reported. Among the youth interviewed, 73% did not know that the complaints procedure existed. When asked if they would ever file a complaint, 82% of youth stated that they would not, because it is an inaccessible

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4. Since collecting data for this study, THTC reintroduced an introductory level homophobia and heterosexism workshop in March 2012, however, it is not considered mandatory training for shelter workers.

and unrealistic system from their point of view. For example, one youth stated:

*I did not know about this, this is the first that I've heard of this, which is interesting, having been involved in the shelter system. You said there is a number that people can call? Yeah, all these street-involved youth have these magical cell phones with unlimited minutes to just call in this number that we are going to retain in our magic brains because we are not focused on other things. Sorry that was completely sarcastic, just to be clear. That doesn't really sound accessible to me. Like, you know what I mean? Oh I have to take time out of my day, quarters out of my pocket to call you from a payphone, to tell you how I just got the shit beat out of me? No, that's not happening. [...] That just seems completely unrealistic, like many things that the city does. It's a government, it's a system and it's not always in the best interest of the people, especially those who need it most. (Homeless youth, 26 years old)*

Other youth reported that the complaints procedure was of little use to them after a threatening or violent occurrence and believed that filing a complaint would not solve or change anything:

*That's literally of no value to anyone because you are in the situation which you are trying to get out of, unless there is someone right there in order to help you, sorry not to be rude but what am I going to say, oh yeah, this happened, now what? It's like, not worth the time. (Homeless youth, 27 years old)*

Youth stated that the complaints procedure is not always made accessible to them in shelters for various reasons. Several youth stated that they believed that staff do not want residents complaining for fear of receiving less funding from the City of Toronto.

*The number is not made accessible and I think that sometimes the shelters don't want you to know about that, cause staff want a pay cheque and a lot of times staff are just there for a pay cheque. It's sad to say. Some staffs really do care, but some are just there for a pay cheque. (Homeless youth, 24 years old)*

Additional reasons for not reporting incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence given by youth included their own sense of pride, wanting to appear tough, social pressure to fit in, and internalized homophobia and transphobia. For example, one youth stated:

*I don't know if a lot of it is really reported, honestly, I don't know how much is, honestly, a lot of gay kids take it, really, a lot of them do, they take it and they don't say anything. [...] It is a big thing in this town. It's huge, with the shelter boys and the street boys. They have internal homophobia. And it's very dangerous.* (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

## Specialized Services

Another key theme that arose was the need for a specialized LGBTQ youth shelter in Toronto. All participants were asked a number of questions regarding the idea of a specialized LGBTQ youth shelter. There was consensus amongst the youth participants that a LGBTQ youth shelter is necessary and urgently needed in Toronto. All youth participants stated that such a service would have been helpful to them at different points while they were homeless, especially during crisis situations. One youth participant spoke about living in a park for four months because he did not feel safe in the shelter system due to the homophobia and transphobia he had experienced:

*I was taking so many sleeping pills, so I would sleep through the night. Often if it went below 30 degrees or something, I was just like fuck this. Safer for me to be popping pills and sleeping outside in minus zero degree weather than being in the shelter system, [because of] transphobia and homophobia.* (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

A number of shelter workers, executive directors, and workshop facilitators were shocked to find out that there are no LGBTQ youth shelters in Canada. However, they held varying views on the need for such a shelter. Some believed that it would be an essential service to help youth feel comfortable and safe, while others were uncertain because they worried about the implications of a segregated shelter and whether other shelters in the broader system would stop working on creating an inclusive environment for LGBTQ youth. Most agreed that it would be important to first get insight from LGBTQ homeless youth on whether they would access such a shelter.

Support services play a crucial role in fulfilling homeless youths' daily needs, such as shelter, food, healthcare, and presumably safety. However, it is essential that services be equipped to deal with the wide-ranging needs of youth, which have undoubtedly become more complex and diverse since the first shelters were established in the city of Toronto approximately thirty years ago (Youth Shelter Interagency Network, 2007). Today's homeless youth are faced with problems such as homophobia, transphobia, immigration, legal issues, HIV/AIDS, etc. Support services must be revised and adapted to reflect the changing needs of youth. Both

the adult and youth participants felt strongly that even with a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth, it would still be crucial for other shelters to work on inclusion and safety, so that there is not just one designated space for LGBTQ homeless youth. This was mainly because LGBTQ youth would continue to access other shelters for various reasons (e.g. if they were discharged or restricted from the specialized shelter, not all LGBTQ youth could access a specialized shelter, etc.).

Specialized services for certain populations are crucial in meeting the needs of homeless youth and decreasing the threat of violence and discrimination (Cull 2006; Ray 2006). However, in the City of Toronto there is reluctance to create a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth, due to a variety of opinions and beliefs. For example, some people believe that segregating LGBTQ youth in a specialized shelter will lead to further marginalization, but that allotting a number of beds to LGBTQ youth within a shelter would not cause the same problems.

This reluctance does not reflect the experience of many LGBTQ youth, who when interviewed talked about the value of such a resource. While a specialized shelter is not a solution to homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, it is a way of responding to a situation that youth have described as unsafe. For example, one youth stated:

*They need to have more LGBT housing workers to go around and deal with the queer youth to get them off the street. There should be someone going around and doing more outreach for the people who are in Cawthra Park [Toronto's gay village] at 2 o'clock in the morning, cause they have nowhere else to sleep. (Homeless youth, 27 years old)*

Discrimination against transgender youth on the streets and in the shelter system is rampant: transgender youth face more discrimination than any other youth group (Quintana et al., 2010). Enforcing gender-related shelter rules, such as segregating sleeping spaces by birth sex, which is often done, increases the risk of transphobic violence in the shelter system. Currently, there are several youth shelters in Toronto that allocate 1-2 beds to transgender youth, which is problematic because it segregates youth in a way that forces them to out themselves as transgender to everyone else in the shelter. For this reason many transgender youth avoid the shelter system altogether, even at the cost of putting their safety at additional risk. For example, one youth stated:

*I just think it's easier and safer to not be in a homeless shelter, even if it means being with somebody who might not be safe or being in a situation that might not be safe. It [LGBTQ shelter] would just be like more inclusive and instead of having one bed and having to out*

*yourself as trans to some random worker I think everyone else in the shelter would know and then people wouldn't be like, "why do you get your room all to yourself?"* (Homeless youth, 27 years old)

When asked about the key elements that youth participants thought would be necessary for a successful specialized shelter, a number of youth stated that it would be essential to have LGBTQ staff and volunteers working at the organization, which would help them feel safer and more understood. Numerous youth also discussed feeling disappointed that there is never any mention of gender or sexual identity upon arrival at shelters and that offering information or resources related to gender and sexual identity would be helpful and put a lot of youth at ease. For example, one youth stated:

*The intake was so shitty in terms of trans stuff, there's just no room for trans or even LGBTQ stuff on their intake. I tried to incorporate it in, cause they are like, 'do you need tokens to go to your appointments?' And I'm like 'yes! I'm going to this trans program Monday, this trans program Tuesday, this one at Sherbourne, this one at 519', and they just kind of ignored that. I just found it really shitty and I was in crisis. I hadn't slept for four days and it was January, so it was peak of the winter and I was just so cold.* (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

The preliminary findings presented in this chapter indicate that people who work within the shelter system have conflicting perceptions of homophobic and transphobic violence that occurs in the shelter system. This may be due to a combination of youth not reporting occurrences of homophobia and transphobia, overworked staff ignoring or not noticing such situations, and an inaccessible complaints procedure. We have also discovered that shelter staff have limited knowledge of LGBTQ culture and terminology and receive no formal anti-homophobia training. Nonetheless, there certainly are individuals working in the shelter system who not only understand the marginalization of LGBTQ homeless youth, but also have a desire to make the shelter system a safer place for these youth.

## Informing Policy and Practice

*Systemically there aren't policies that necessarily protect people and talk about inclusion from a useful perspective, address the kinds of barriers that exist for trans people for example. They need policies about access and intake. There need to be policies that say if a trans person comes into the shelter, they will be served in the gender in which they've identified as the safest and most comfortable for them. [...] The onus is on the agency to make the space safer. That needs to be there. And that hasn't happened yet.* (Staff member, 519 Church Street Community Centre)

The epidemic of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada has yet to be fully investigated or understood. LGBTQ youth are not only at a higher risk of homelessness, but also commonly experience homophobia and transphobia within the shelter system. Due to gaps in knowledge and a lack of reported incidents, discrimination against these youth remains largely invisible to policy makers and shelter management at a time when LGBTQ youth homelessness is on the rise (Abramovich, 2012; Denomme-Welch et al., 2008; Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Service providers are not fully equipped or prepared to deal with issues of homophobia and transphobia in the youth shelter system. Currently there are few specialized support services and no specialized shelters in Canada that meet the needs of LGBTQ youth. The impact this lack of support has on this population's health and wellbeing has yet to be revealed.

The present research informs social service and shelter providers and policy makers about the issues of LGBTQ youth homelessness and the need to fund a specialized LGBTQ shelter, anti-homophobia/anti-transphobia training for shelter staff, and further research in this area. This research not only contributes to education and awareness around youth homelessness, but it also provides new and surprising findings on current issues faced by LGBTQ youth who are homeless in Toronto.

The lack of awareness of LGBTQ youth homelessness and the daily occurrences of homophobia and transphobia experienced by youth keep major decision makers from implementing necessary changes in the shelter system and to support services so that LGBTQ youth receive the supports they need. Further research in the area of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada will undoubtedly expand our understanding in this area and will help us create policy recommendations and best practice guidelines. The present research asks policy makers to develop supportive policies for LGBTQ youth and to modify existing policies to ensure that the shelter system provides high-quality support to all youth, regardless of their sexual and gender identities. Currently, there are a number of successful LGBTQ youth shelters in the United States, which the City of Toronto can look to for best practice guidelines (Ray, 2006; Wilber et al., 2006).

Policy and practice recommendations include:

- Immediately provide mandatory anti-homophobia training at the Toronto Hostels Training Centre for shelter staff. The City of Toronto needs to revise the shelter standards to include stronger guidelines for ongoing mandatory anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia training.
- Revise the City of Toronto's shelter system complaint procedure to have stricter guidelines for shelters so that each youth is informed

upon arrival, both verbally as well as on paper, of all the details regarding the complaint procedure and the importance of reporting incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence. In order to find out how to make the complaint procedure more accessible and useful, and how to get youth to use it and report incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence, youth should be involved in the revision process.

- Reduce and eliminate the barriers to services experienced by LGBTQ youth by creating shelter policies that allow youth to identify their sexuality, gender, preferred names, and pronouns, rather than having staff make assumptions about sexual and/or gender identity. All shelters must be equipped with appropriate resources for youth (e.g. information about coming out, sexual identity, and gender identity, as well as information on any local services that address gender identity and sexual orientation) and knowledge to refer transgender youth to transition-related treatment (e.g. hormone therapy, name change, counseling).
- Shelters should have strict anti-homophobic and transphobic language policies and have residents sign written agreement forms when checking in to the shelter to comply with the language policy.
- Shelters that have implemented all of the above changes should openly identify as LGBTQ positive by posting a rainbow flag or positive space sticker on their front door.
- The City of Toronto should immediately develop and fund a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth. The shelter should provide a positive, safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ youth, as well as short-term assistance, emergency shelter, food, clothing, treatment and counseling, health care, separate washrooms and showers, private rooms, information and referrals. The City of Toronto should look to the specialized LGBTQ shelters and supportive housing facilities in the United States (e.g. The Ali Forney Center and the True Colors Residence) as models.
- Funding/resources are needed for further research on LGBTQ youth homelessness and a needs assessment of LGBTQ homeless youth in Canada.

## Concluding Comments

*Everybody seems to be down and when we have these pressures, homophobia, well guess what, now people have to guard themselves all the time. That guy's crying, this girl's crying, that kid looks so sad, this kid just wants to talk to somebody, that kid's dying on the inside. It's a big*

*problem. There's a big social thing going on here with all the kids and they're all dying to just talk to somebody. [...] A community would look like people looking out for the best interests of kids. That's a community. There's no other such thing as a community. I'm Native, we know that. It's about the kids. It's not about nobody else. You're supposed to be watching out for them, no matter what.* (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

This study begins to demonstrate the dire need for specialized services that create safe spaces for LGBTQ homeless youth, for stricter policies in the shelter system against homophobia and transphobia, and for more discussions of inclusion and acceptance among shelter providers and workers. Professionals working with homeless youth, as well as the general public, need a solid understanding of the impacts of homophobia and transphobia on the lives of people who identify as LGBTQ, and of the ways in which the LGBTQ community has been and still is marginalized and oppressed. May we start this important work by raising awareness of the growing problem of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada and by naming the hate that leads so many youth to homelessness.

Moving forward, I hope these findings will help fill some of the gaps in knowledge around LGBTQ youth homelessness and that this study can serve as an important call to action for all levels of government, policy makers, shelter directors, shelter staff, youth, and the general public to become more inclusive, accepting, and supportive of all youth regardless of what they look like or who they love.

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## Appendix A: Glossary of Important Terms

<b>Cisgender</b>	When a person's gender identity matches with their body and sex assigned at birth.
<b>Coming-out</b>	The process of coming to terms with one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity and disclosing it to others. Heterosexuality and fixed gender states that fit into the binary of "female" and "male" are typically assumed by others, therefore, coming-out is an ongoing process.
<b>FTM</b>	A person, who was assigned the female sex at birth, but identifies as male. Also, trans man or transman. FTM is the acronym for Female-to-Male.
<b>Gender identity</b>	A person's deep internal feeling of whether they identify as being female, male, something in between, genderqueer, or something other.
<b>Heteronormativity</b>	The belief that heterosexuality is the 'normal' sexual orientation. Also refers to the belief that female and male gender roles are fixed.
<b>Homeless</b>	People who lack a stable living situation, such as those who are living on the streets, in the shelter system, couch surfing, or in temporary or marginal shelter.
<b>Homophobia</b>	Feelings of rage, hate, and disapproval of homosexuality. Homophobia can be manifested in numerous ways, such as verbally, emotionally, and through physical attacks.
<b>LGBTQ</b>	Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer, questioning.
<b>LGB</b>	Acronym for lesbian, gay, and bisexual.
<b>MTF</b>	A person, who was assigned the male sex at birth, but identifies as female. Also, trans woman or transwoman. MTF is the acronym for Male-to-Female.
<b>Queer</b>	An umbrella term for LGBTQ. Also a term of self-identification for people who do not identify with binary terms that describe sexual and gender identities.
<b>Sexual identity</b>	How a person identifies whom they are sexually and romantically attracted to (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, etc.)
<b>Transgender</b>	An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity does not match with the sex they were assigned at birth. This term can encompass those who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, cross-dresser, and others whose gender identities challenge gender norms.
<b>Transphobia</b>	Feelings of rage, hate, and disapproval towards transgender people or people who are gender-nonconforming. Transphobia can be manifested in numerous ways, such as verbally, emotionally, and through physical attacks.
<b>Youth</b>	People between adolescence and young adulthood. Youth programs typically categorize youth between the ages of 16 and 26 years old.

