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Time Out Youth Center releases LGBTQ Homeless Youth of the Carolinas Needs Assessment

CHARLOTTE – During the past year, Time Out Youth Center’s Board and staff identified the documentation of LGBTQ homeless youth in the Carolinas as a crucial need, and conducted a study to research and quantify the needs and interests of this vulnerable population. They conducted formal surveys with homeless youth, homeless service providers and held focus groups with stakeholders mid-2015.

The Center is proud to share this important report with our community. The **LGBTQ Homeless Youth of the Carolinas Needs Assessment** is now posted on The Center’s website. Until now, documentation of LGBTQ homeless youth in the Carolinas has been limited to anecdotal evidence of what is generally known to be a growing problem. And only a few other formal surveys have been done on homeless LGBTQ youth (links to various studies and LGBTQ homeless youth shelters are posted at www.timeoutyouth.org).

“As we celebrate a quarter century of supporting LGBTQ youth, we feel the call to move forward with a plan to meaningfully address one of the most basic of our LGBTQ youth’s needs — a safe and stable place to live,” stated Rodney Tucker, Time Out Youth Center’s Executive Director. “With so many LGBTQ youth facing homelessness in the Carolinas, The Center is virtually the only safe resource for housing and support. We seek to change the future landscape of housing opportunities and services available to LGBTQ homeless youth in the South, while making an important contribution to the body of knowledge on LGBTQ homeless youth. The publication of this report serves as a call to members of our community — policy makers, service providers, funding agencies and many others — to act on recommendations from this project.”

The Center’s mission is to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth ages 11-20 by offering vital programs, fostering unconditional acceptance, and creating safe spaces for self-expression through leadership, community support and advocacy. In 2015, Time Out Youth Center had over 2,300 sign-ins for use of the after school drop in space, where the Center provides safe space for activities and workshops, and professional counseling services. The Center works closely with area Gay Straight Alliances (GSA’s), student clubs that work to improve school climate for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, and connected with 611 GSA members last year. The Center also provides school and agency trainings; highlights of 2015 included trainings with all Charlotte Mecklenburg school resource officers and school social workers; led a Welcoming Schools training for faculty and undergraduate students at UNC-Charlotte’s Department of Education; created a partnership with Providence Day School to provide LGBT 101 workshops to every 9th grade student as part of their health education curriculum; and developed the first two satellite groups – Cab Co TOY in Concord and Gaston TOY. In all, Time Out Youth reached more than 5,000 individuals throughout the year.

Due to increased calls requesting housing and access to emergency financial assistance, the Center’s Host Home Program has worked to meet the increased demands of youth by doubling the numbers of Host Homes in an effort to fill the gap in present resources.

Despite this progress and increasingly positive portrayals of LGBTQ people, a significant population of LGBTQ youth continues to struggle with discrimination, transphobia, homophobia, violence and suicide. The rates of homelessness among LGBTQ youth, particularly LGBTQ youth of color, continue to rise. In 2013, Time Out Youth

Center received 40 inquiries for housing; that number increased to 57 in 2014, **and to 111 in 2015**. In 2015, eight LGBTQ-identified youth were housed through our Home Host Program for a total of 643 nights. The study points to a need for a permanent shelter.

The Center undertook an LGBTQ homeless needs assessment in order to better understand the complexities of seemingly divergent realities, as well as to study the urgent and long-term needs and experiences of LGBTQ youth. The assessment included a survey of local LGBTQ homeless youth and housing organizations, as well as information gleaned from focus groups of LGBTQ youth who have experienced homelessness and professionals from housing organizations in the Charlotte area. Reviewed independently, the available research and information gathered in the surveys and focus groups followed common threads of discrimination based on gender and sexual identity. The report highlights the gaps, barriers and the need for services as seen from the viewpoint of LGBTQ homeless youth and housing organizations that serve those youth in the Charlotte area; their experiences are described and solutions are provided to meet their specific needs.

Report author Kimberly Gray is a program evaluation consultant to nonprofits, government and community groups. She graduated from Augusta University with her Master's degree in public administration (MPA), and earned her doctorate in public administration (DPA) from Valdosta State University with her culminating project entitled: The Greater Augusta Healthcare Network (GAHN): An Impact Evaluation.

Highlights of the **LGBTQ Homeless Youth of the Carolinas Needs Assessment** include:

- An overview of youth homelessness (some studies have found that LGBTQ youth account for between 20 percent and 40 percent of the homeless youth population; that number is thought to be conservative based on some of the other estimates which reveal the percentage to be closer to and perhaps higher than 40 percent in large urban areas [Van Leeuwen et al, 2006]).
- Research methods and survey findings (service providers identified several gaps in services directly affecting LGBTQ homeless youth, including a lack of resources or availability in case management services, early intervention, education/life skills programs, mentorship program, mental health services, drop-in services and specialized services for those affected by domestic violence, drug addiction, sex work and criminal records).
- Reasons for homelessness (survey respondents who said they had stayed in a shelter were asked what caused them to become homeless. LGBTQ youth largely are not leaving their homes by choice. In 70 percent of cases, youth were evicted. Of those youth evicted, all were racial minorities and two were transgender females. Other reasons included feeling unsafe at home because of sexual orientation or abuse in the home).

The report makes the following recommendations based on the needs expressed in the study.

Recommendations outline ways in which housing organizations, advocates and government officials must work together to address the challenges facing LGBTQ homeless youth in the Charlotte area and ensure that these youth have access to the services they need and overcome homelessness.

1. LGBTQ Homeless Youth Shelter (establish and open a dedicated shelter)
2. Access to Basic Necessities (provide access to meals, clothing, storage space, and toiletries)
3. Housing Case Management Services (service providers and organizations must offer culturally competent housing services)
4. Training & Professional Development (service providers must have access to training and professional development on LGBTQ issues in order to offer the best culturally competent services and care)
5. Mental Health Services (LGBTQ youth must have access to free individual therapeutic services)
6. Employment Assistance (LGBTQ youth must have access to case management and support services for job training and employment)

7. Policy Reform (Government officials must undertake policy efforts to eliminate discriminatory housing policies and practices at the local, state and federal level)
8. Certified Housing & Safe Zones (Housing organizations must create certified welcoming, safe and affirming housing for LGBTQ youth)
9. Section 8 Housing Vouchers (LGBTQ youth must have increased access to housing vouchers offered by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development)
10. Resource Guide (A resource guide to safe housing and other services for LGBTQ youth must be offered online via a geographic information system)

In order to be successful, however, an LGBTQ homeless youth shelter must meet not only the needs, but also the expectations, of the population it seeks to serve. These expectations range from simple atmosphere to the more robust and complex services this study demonstrates are needed to address LGBTQ youth homelessness in Charlotte. Youth and service provider survey participants were asked to describe important elements of a successful LGBTQ youth shelter:

- A well-trained affirming staff.
- Friendly volunteers who are trained and understand LGBTQ issues.
- Personal accommodations: private showers, computer room, comfortable beds and a place to store personal belongings.
- Good food.
- Flexible curfew to accommodate real-life schedules of residents.
- Practical services that will prepare clients for a healthier adult life: job skills, job placement, career counseling, life skills, GED and vocational training, budgeting and after-program accountability.

Tucker concluded, “LGBTQ youth homelessness is a rising concern, with increased needs seen year after year. To ignore or delay now will only make addressing these unique needs more difficult in the future. Charlotte area service providers, non-profit organizations, advocates and government officials must do better and will do better working together to be more welcoming and supportive of all LGBTQ youth. All youth deserve a happy, safe, welcoming and nurturing environment in which to grow into a healthy adulthood. Right now, LGBTQ youth turn to survival sex, are living on the streets and are taking drugs to cope with their current life experiences. No child should be forced to turn to these dangerous coping methods in order to find basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. Quite simply, these scenarios are unacceptable, especially in a cosmopolitan city like Charlotte.”

The publication of the report was funded in part by the Charlotte Lesbian and Gay Fund. Additional support for the study came from: Alexander Youth Network, Caldwell Presbyterian Church, Florence Crittenton Services, Mecklenburg County Community Support Services, Men’s Shelter of Charlotte, RAIN Inc., Safe Harbor Community Health Center, South Charlotte Counseling Center, UNC-Charlotte Urban Institute, and Urban Ministry Center.

The Center will issue periodic reports in the coming year about its work and progress on this topic. To learn more about Time Out Youth Center, view the full report or donate, please visit www.timeoutyouth.org.

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ABOUT TIME OUT YOUTH

Time Out Youth Center provides support, advocacy, and education for LGBTQ youth ages 11-20 in Charlotte and the surrounding communities. For more information about Time Out Youth Center's Host Home program or Emergency Financial Assistance, please call 704.344.8335 or visit www.timeoutyouth.org.

Our Vision: To inspire inclusive communities where all youth are equally empowered to reach their true potential.

Our Mission: To support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth by offering vital programs, fostering unconditional acceptance, and creating safe spaces for self-expression through leadership, community support and advocacy.

Core Values: Youth Voice | Respect | Acceptance | Honesty | Confidentially | Individuality

Core Beliefs: Leadership by Youth | Social Change | Unconditional Acceptance | Inclusiveness | Self-Expression | Empowerment

LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH RESOURCES AND STUDIES

National Coalition for the Homeless, Washington, DC

<http://nationalhomeless.org/references/publications/>

<http://nationalhomeless.org/campaigns/national-campaign-youth-shelter/>

Ali Forney Center, NYC

<http://www.aliforneycenter.org/about-us/lgbtq-youth-crisis/>

The Wanda Alston House, Washington, DC

<http://www.wandaalstonhouse.org/>

The Wanda Alston Foundation, Washington, DC

<http://wandaalstonfoundation.org/>

Los Angeles LGBT Center

<https://lalgbtcenter.org/social-service-and-housing/youth/homelessness>

Larkin Street Youth Services, San Francisco

<http://larkinstreetyouth.org/resource-library/download-info/youth-homelessness-in-san-francisco-2014-report-on-incidence-and-needs/>

Project Homeless Connect, San Francisco

<https://www.projecthomelessconnect.org/2015/06/jazzies-place-americas-first-lgbt-shelter/>

Project Fierce Chicago

<http://projectfiercechicago.org/press-release-local-collective-buys-property/>

ARTICLES

Metro Weekly, Washington, DC | May 23, 2016

DC shelters frustrated by lack of funding for LGBT homeless youth

<http://www.metroweekly.com/2016/05/advocates-perplexed-by-lack-of-funding-designated-to-districts-lgbt-homeless-youth-problem/>

San Francisco Chronicle | June 16, 2015

Groundbreaking shelter for LGBT homeless opening in the Mission

<http://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Groundbreaking-shelter-for-LGBT-homeless-opening-6331449.php>

