



**IDENTIFYING,
SUPPORTING, AND
MEETING
THE NEEDS OF
LGBTQ YOUTH**

**Why are we here?
Why should we care?**



N C C W E

National Center for Child Welfare Excellence

at the Silberman School of Social Work

Building and translating practice knowledge and evidence into child welfare excellence

Why LGBTQ Youth?

Why are we here?

Why should we care?

One Gay Young Person's Experience

I couldn't live at home with my family once they found out that I was gay so I was sent to live in a group home.

One Gay Young Person's Experience

That was worse than living at home. I didn't fit in at home and then I didn't fit in at the group home either. I was living in my fourth group home in like six months and it was horrible. The teasing, the tormenting, the harassment really got to me and one day I just decided that I couldn't take it any more and I left. I had no place to stay, but I didn't even care.

One Gay Young Person's Experience

I knew that I just couldn't stay
one more minute in that group
home ...

One Gay Young Person's Experience

I lived with friends, I stayed on people's sofas, I prostituted - I'm not proud of that, but I did what I had to do - to get money to rent a place. I even lived in an abandoned trailer truck with ten other people, slept in railroad tunnels, and anywhere that was warm.

One Gay Young Person's Experience

As bad as things got on the streets - it was better than the group homes that I had lived in - at least people on the streets cared about me.

Recent Research on Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care in Los Angeles

Williams Institute and Holarchy Consulting
conducted the study, with funds from
Children's Bureau, a telephone interview
study with 786 randomly sampled youth
ages 12-21 living in foster care in LA
County

19% of Study Sample Identified as LGBTQ

Around 7,400 youth, ages 12-21, are in out-of-home care in Los Angeles County in any given month (LA-DCFS, 2014)

19% or about 1,400 of these youth identify as LGBTQ.

Sample is Reflective of Overall Foster Care Population

The majority of LGBTQ youth in the sample were youth of color. Further, about 10% of LGBTQ youth reported being born outside of the U.S. and nearly one third had a biological mother or father that had been born outside of the U.S.

Disproportionality of LGBTQ Youth

- 13.6% of foster youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning;
- 13.2 % reported some level of same sex attraction;
- 5.6% identify as transgender.

Disproportionality of LGBTQ Youth

This means that there are between 1.5 to 2 times as many LGBTQ youth living in foster care as LGBTQ youth estimated to be living outside of foster care.

Homelessness, Mental Health, Multiple Placements

LGBTQ youth have a higher average number of foster care placements and are more likely to be living in a group home.

They also reported being treated less well by the child welfare system, were more likely to have been hospitalized for emotional reasons.

Homelessness, Mental Health, Multiple Placements

They have had:

Multiple placements;

Mental health concerns;

Homelessness,

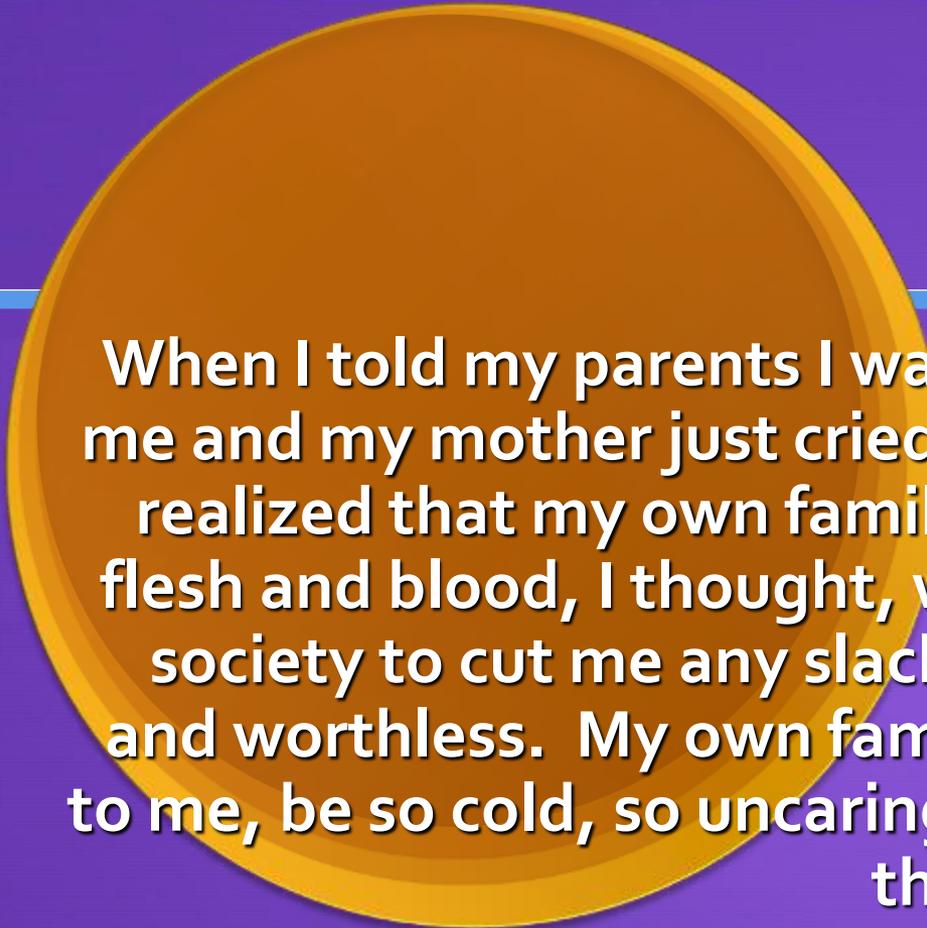
Placements in group homes are barriers to permanency faced by all youth, and LGBTQ youth in particular.

What do we still need to know?

We need to know more about the ways that LGBTQ youth in foster care have different experiences than non-LGBTQ youth.

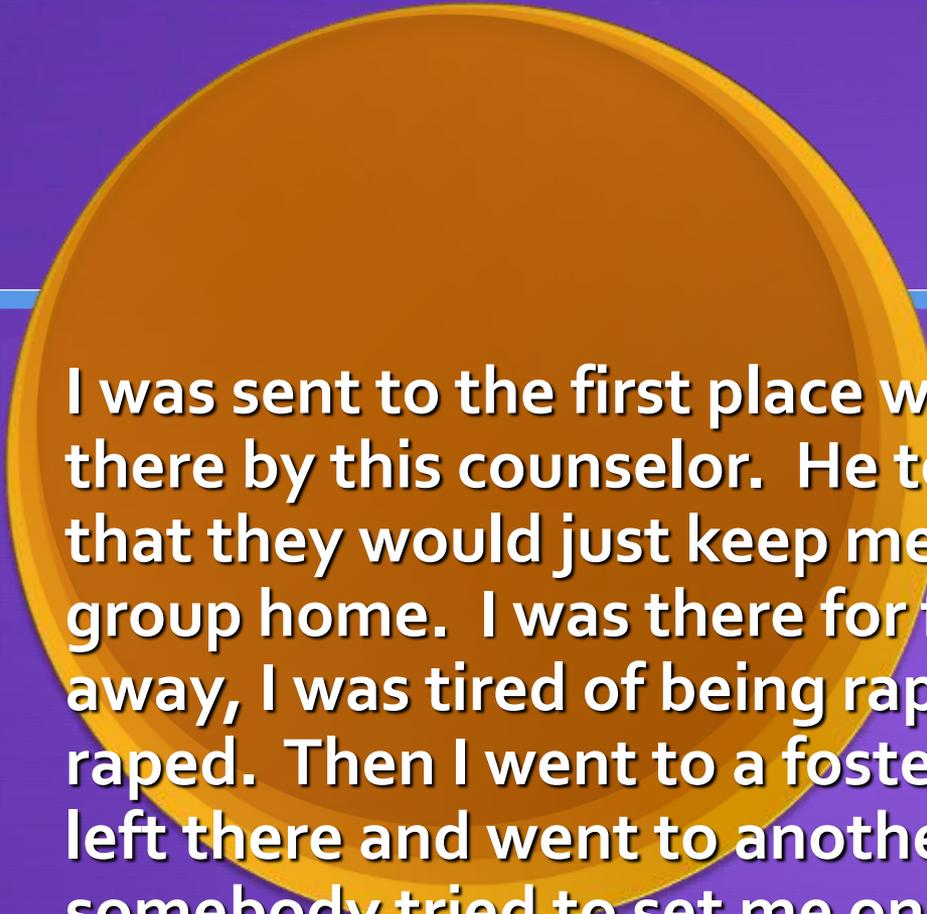
Future studies should examine other areas:

1. Conditions surrounding entry into care
2. Permanency rates and differences in experience by placement setting to LGBTQ or gender non-conforming youth
3. How do race, culture, sex, and gender interact to affect other relevant factors
4. Identifying resiliency factors that allow some LGBTQ youth to thrive and transition out of foster care into permanency



When I told my parents I was gay, my father just stared at me and my mother just cried. It was really painful. When I realized that my own family couldn't accept me, my own flesh and blood, I thought, why should I expect the rest of society to cut me any slack. I felt hopeless, disillusioned and worthless. My own family . . . how could they do that to me, be so cold, so uncaring, it was as if they were saying they didn't care if I lived or died.

I don't think I'll ever get over that. . .



I was sent to the first place when I was eight. I was raped there by this counselor. He told me that if I told anybody that they would just keep me there or put me in another group home. I was there for five months and then I ran away, I was tired of being raped, and I was repeatedly raped. Then I went to a foster home and it was real strict, I left there and went to another group home and there somebody tried to set me on fire. I was sleeping and they put lighter fluid on my bed and threw a match on me, I got burned on the leg [he points to an eight inch burn mark] The staff didn't do nothing, they knew about it, they just moved my bed. I didn't feel safe there, you kinda had to sleep with one eye open. I finally left. I was tired of that shit.

What Makes Child Welfare Services for LGBTQ Young People in Foster Care Positive?

At Green Chimneys they told me it was OK to be gay. I didn't believe them at first, but after being there a few days I felt safe, I didn't always have to watch my back - the other kids there were just like me and the staff had rules and they enforced them, but they really cared for the kids that lived there. I learned to trust again at Green Chimneys and I build some great friendships there.

Recommendations for Competent Practice with LGBTQ Youth

1. Realize, if you see youth in your court room, you see LGBTQ youth, they may not be out to you, but they are there!
2. Create environments which are LGBTQ affirming and safe for all youth.
3. Realize that some LGBTQ youth are open and out; some are not open or out; and some are not sure yet if it is safe to be open and out.
4. Don't be afraid to say the words, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning – it is powerful when you do.

Recommendations for Competent Practice with LGBTQ Youth

5. Do not tolerate or excuse anti- LGBTQ practices, policies, or staff in your programs;
6. Clinically, not all LGBTQ youth need to process their sexual orientation or gender expression, they may be are clear about it even if you are not.
7. Train yourself and your staff about trauma informed and competent practice with LGBTQ youth: be aware of “your stuff” about LGBTQ people.
8. Research or create LGBTQ youth resources and supports in your court room.



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