

LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH OF THE CAROLINAS NEEDS ASSESSMENT



presented by
TIME OUT YOUTH CENTER

O'Neale Atkinson, MSW
DIRECTOR OF YOUTH PROGRAMS

Shakira Clarke, BSW
DIRECTOR OF YOUTH SERVICES

Gwen Pearson, BS
OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

James Rice III, BA
PROGRAM ASSISTANT

Todd Rosendahl, Ph.D.
DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL OUTREACH

Parker Smith, BA
YOUTH OUTREACH WORKER

Rodney Tucker, MA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Definitions of selected terms which appear frequently throughout this report:

YOUTH: Ages 13-24.

CISGENDER: To self-identity with the gender assigned at birth.

TRANSGENDER: A term used to describe an individual who experience a disconnect between their biological sex and their gender identity.

SERVICE PROVIDERS: An umbrella term representing survey responses from those working in organizations serving homeless and at-risk youth.

SURVIVAL SEX: A term used to describe an individual who traded sex acts (including prostitution, stripping, pornography, etc.) to meet the basic needs of survival (i.e., food, shelter, etc.).

HOMELESS: Living on the streets in places not meant for human habitation (including abandoned building and cars), in institutional housing (including shelter and transitional living programs), and/or couch surfing (temporarily staying from place to place with friends, relatives, or strangers for a short amount of time).

LGBTQ: An acronym used to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (questioning) community, or someone who identifies as a member of that community.



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR.....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
RECOMMENDATIONS: OVERVIEW	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7
<i>Overview of Youth Homelessness.....</i>	7
<i>Time Out Youth Center Overview</i>	8
<i>Time Out Youth Center Core Service Offerings</i>	9
<i>Surge in Demand for Emergency Housing</i>	10
<i>Surge in Demand for Emergency Financial Assistance.....</i>	10
<i>In Conclusion.....</i>	11
RESEARCH.....	12
<i>Background.....</i>	12
<i>Service Provider Survey</i>	12
<i>LGBTQ Homeless Youth Survey</i>	13
<i>Focus Groups.....</i>	13
SURVEY FINDINGS: SERVICE PROVIDERS	14
<i>Issues Identified by Housing Service Providers</i>	15
<i>The Current Situation.....</i>	16
<i>Recognizing the Gaps.....</i>	17
<i>Recognizing the Challenges.....</i>	18
SURVEY FINDINGS: LGBTQ YOUTH	20
<i>Who They Are.....</i>	20
<i>Homelessness and Unstable Housing.....</i>	21
<i>Reasons for Homelessness</i>	22
<i>Barriers to Housing</i>	22
<i>Youth Experience with Shelters.....</i>	23
ANALYSIS OF STUDY FINDINGS	23
<i>Where LGBTQ Youth Are Staying</i>	23
<i>Barriers to LGBTQ Homeless Youth Housing.....</i>	24
<i>Shelter Safety.....</i>	25
<i>Resource and Gap Analysis for LGBTQ Population</i>	26
RECOMMENDATIONS: IN-DEPTH.....	27
<i>LGBTQ Homeless Youth Shelter.....</i>	29
CONCLUSION	30

We feel the call to move the charge 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.

For more than 25 years, Time Out Youth Center has provided services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth in the Charlotte region. LGBTQ homeless youth began arriving at the Center at our very first meeting. It was on that night we recognized the profound need to provide safe housing and support for youth, particularly black LGBTQ youth diagnosed with HIV. As we celebrate a quarter century of supporting LGBTQ youth, we feel the call to move the charge 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. With so many LGBTQ youth facing homelessness in the Carolinas, Time Out Youth Center is virtually the only safe resource for housing and support.

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. The Board of Directors and staff have identified this as a crucial time to research and quantify the needs and interests of this vulnerable population. Time Out Youth Center seeks 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. While this report is a call to action, it also stands as a reminder that much more needs to be done to protect and serve LGBTQ homeless youth and end youth homelessness.

It is with this in mind that Time Out Youth Center renews our pledge to continue the fight to end LGBTQ youth homelessness and our commitment to a safe tomorrow for all youth.

Sincerely,



Rodney Tucker
Executive Director
Time Out Youth Center



Time Out Youth Center has served local LGBTQ youth for 25 years. In that time, our organization has seen this local youth population change and grow alongside the City of Charlotte. The landscape for LGBTQ rights has changed drastically over the past quarter century. Several states protect LGBTQ people from employment and housing discrimination. Nationally, same-gender couples have full access to legal marriage recognition. LGBTQ youth are also feeling empowered to come out at earlier ages than seen among previous generations of LGBTQ people. Schools have become more welcoming and affirming spaces with the creation of Safe Zones, LGBTQ affirming policies and Gay-Straight Alliance clubs.

Despite this progress and increasingly positive portrayals of LGBTQ people, a significant population of LGBTQ youth continue to struggle with discrimination, transphobia, homophobia, violence and suicide. The rates of homelessness among LGBTQ youth particularly LGBTQ youth of color, continue to rise. The impact can be felt in the lives of LGBTQ youth growing up in the Charlotte area today, affecting the services and supports those youth need to grow into happy, healthy and independent adults.

The Center undertook an LGBTQ homeless needs assessment in 2015 in order to better understand the complexities of these seemingly divergent realities, as well as to study the urgent and long-term needs and experiences of LGBTQ youth. This 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 lack of research on LGBTQ homeless youth provides little research for comparison, but this model study provides a strong foundation for future studies on LGBTQ homeless youth.

This 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.

Despite progress and increasingly positive portrayals of LGBTQ people, a significant population of LGBTQ youth continue to struggle with discrimination, transphobia, homophobia, violence and suicide.



The recommendations shown here are based on the needs expressed in this research. They 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 for LGBTQ youth.
2. **ACCESS TO BASIC NECESSITIES**
Provide access to meals, clothing, storage space, and toiletries for LGBTQ homeless youth.
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 (HUD).
10. **RESOURCE GUIDE**
A resource guide to safe housing and other services for LGBTQ youth must be offered online via a geographic information system.

OVERVIEW OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Despite documented increasing numbers of homeless youth and their growing proportion among the overall homeless population, LGBTQ homeless youth are among the most understudied and have been virtually invisible in existing research. LGBTQ youth face larger barriers to housing and the types of services where they might be counted, and reporting data for homelessness generally does not include options for tracking clients' sexual orientation, gender expression, and/or gender identity during the intake process.

In 2014, The National Alliance to End Homelessness' Annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count Survey reported that there were more than 45,000 homeless youth in the U.S. According to the Survey, approximately 754 homeless unaccompanied children and youth are in North Carolina, representing 6.6 percent of all U.S. homeless youth. (Meghan Henry, October 2014)

These numbers are estimated to be much higher for LGBTQ homeless youth, who typically don't show up in PIT counts; LGBTQ youth are less likely to access traditional shelters and homeless youth often do not congregate in the same areas where homeless adults are counted. Additionally, homeless youth are not often asked about their sexual and/or gender identities when being counted. The growing problem of homelessness in this particular population

requires innovative programmatic and policy solutions beyond those employed for homeless youth and adults in general. Empirical studies on LGBTQ youth homelessness have been limited, but show that a striking number of LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented among homeless youth populations. Some studies have found that LGBTQ youth account for between 20 percent and 40 percent of the homeless youth population; their proportion is slightly smaller in suburban locations. 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).

Before taking on the larger mission of better serving LGBTQ homeless youth, the community must first understand the needs of this population, including what barriers they face and some recommendations for addressing the needs of this underserved population. With this in mind, targeted outreach is necessary to study LGBTQ homeless youth with any precision. Furthermore, while this study focused on LGBTQ homeless youth in the Charlotte region, the study will have a far-reaching impact for lending greater insight into the needs of this population in cities large and small throughout the country.

*Studies show that 20 to 40 percent of urban homeless youth identify as LGBTQ. In larger urban areas, that proportion can increase to **more than 40 percent.***

(Van Leeuwen et al, 2006)

TIME OUT YOUTH CENTER OVERVIEW

Time Out Youth Center is a non-profit youth center that offers support, advocacy and opportunities for personal development, and social growth to LGBTQ youth ages 11-20. Founded on April 1991, Time Out Youth Center hosted six gay and lesbian youth at its first weekly discussion group and has grown exponentially since then.

MISSION

The mission of Time Out Youth Center is 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.

VISION

Time Out Youth Center's vision is to inspire inclusive communities where youth are equally empowered to reach their true potential, through consistently expanding programs to reach more LGBTQ youth every day.



TIME OUT YOUTH CENTER PROMISES TO:

- Provide a safe environment for LGBTQ youth and their allies by fostering interaction, learning and affirmation.
- Build a young person's self-concept to its full potential through uniquely targeted programming.
- Offer diverse opportunities for group activities that are open to all and closed to none.
- Promote awareness, understanding, acceptance, and inclusion for LGBTQ youth.

The number of LGBTQ youth served by Time Out Youth Center has steadily increased each year since the group's founding. From 2013 to 2014, the Center saw a dramatic influx of new youth clients who accessed Center services or attended Center events or activities.

CORE SERVICE OFFERINGS

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Drop-In Space, Discussion Groups, David Bohnett Cyber Center, LGBTQ Library, and social events.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ADVOCACY

Advocacy, activist and leadership training for youth, school focused advocacy and awareness days and community education on LGBTQ issues.

SCHOOL OUTREACH

Supporting gay-straight alliances, consultations and professional development training for teachers, counselors and school administrators and policy development.

TEMPORARY HOUSING

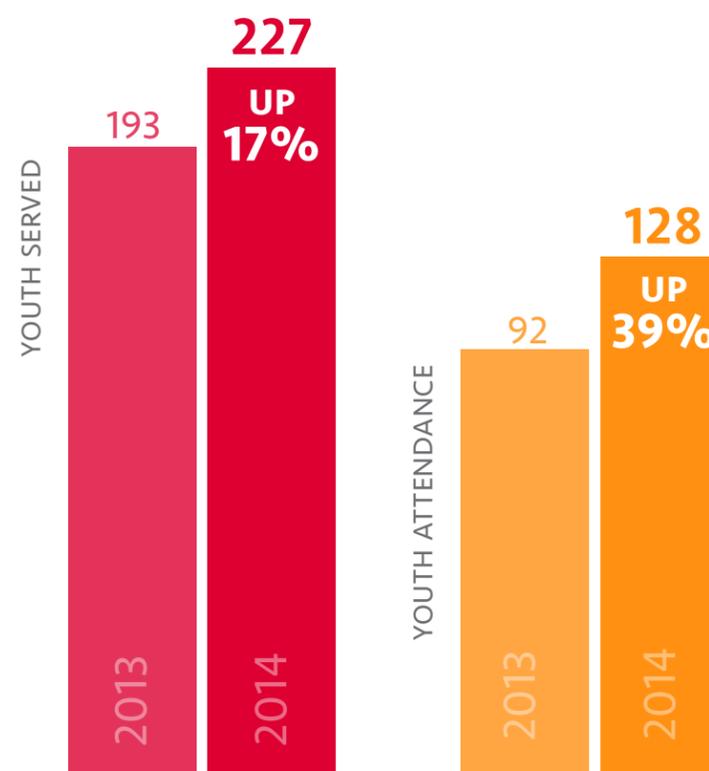
A ninety day housing program, with intensive case management for LGBTQ homeless youth.

EMERGENCY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Financial assistance for transportation, food, clothing, personal items, and down payment assistance.

When you're in a positive and safe environment you feel like you can accomplish anything.

-Youth



SURGE IN DEMAND OF TEMPORARY HOUSING

Of the core services Time Out Youth Center provides, the Temporary Housing (Host Home) and Emergency Financial Assistance programs that have seen the greatest increase in demand in recent years. This increased need, in particular, spurred the Center to move forward with a focused LGBTQ homeless youth needs assessment.

In 2013, Time Out Youth Center received 40 inquiries for housing; that number increased to 57 in 2014, and again to 111 in 2015 — a staggering increase of 95 percent over 2014.

Thirteen LGBTQ youth completed the intake process for housing services in 2013. In 2014, that number rose 84 percent to 24 and rose again to 34 in 2015.

Many of the youth who completed the intake process self-identified as transgender females (42%), whereas the majority were cisgender males (57%). Housing intake is limited to those LGBTQ youth who have no criminal record and have no history of mental health issues. Since Host Homes are provided strictly by community volunteers, Time Out Youth Center must be selective on youth admitted to the program.

SURGE IN DEMAND FOR EMERGENCY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

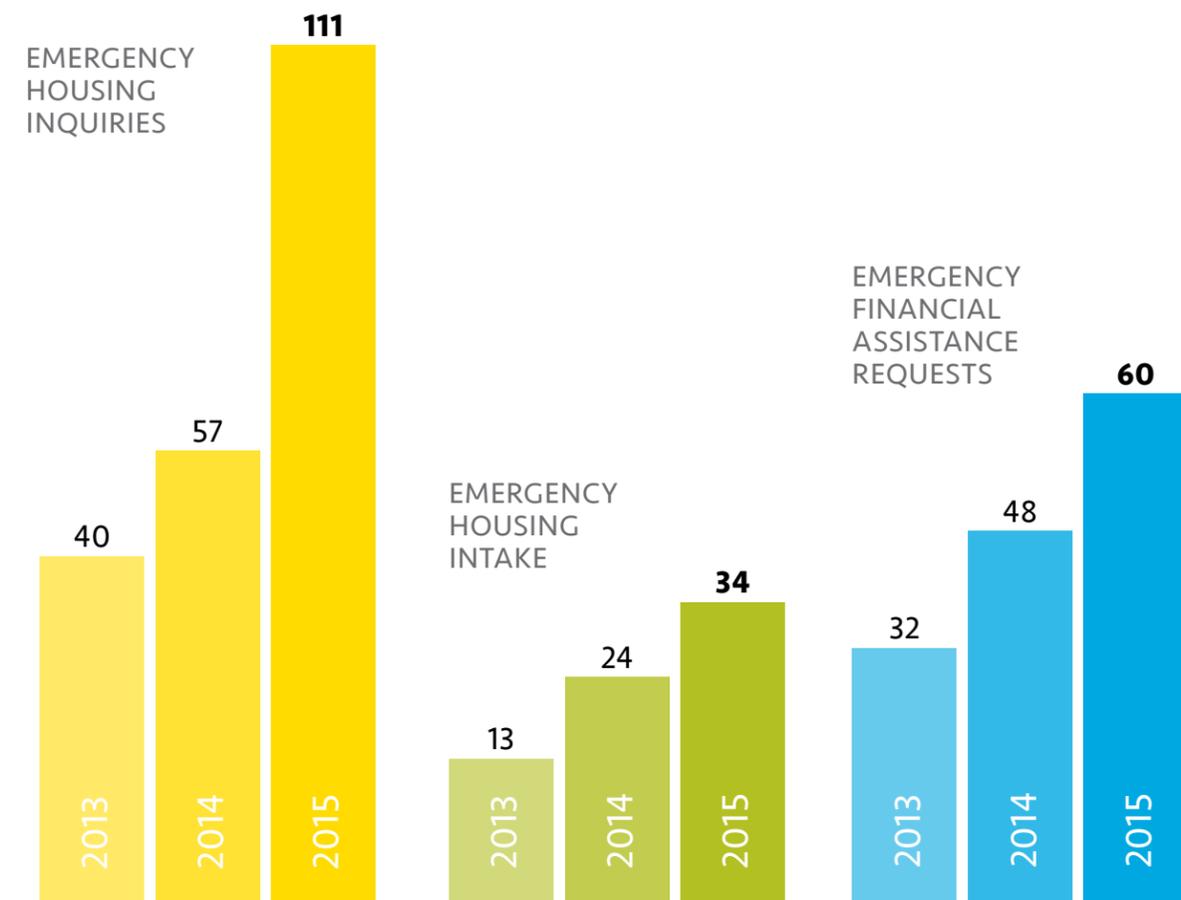
The Emergency Financial Assistance (EFA) program also realized a significant increase in demand. Demand has risen twofold, from 32 youth requests in 2013, to 48 in 2014 and hitting 60 by October 2015. The rising requests represent a 67 percent increase from 2013 to 2014 and escalating 100 percent in less than two years.

In 2013, the program provided a modest \$1,421 in assistance, which increased to \$2,632 in 2014 and to \$2,638 in 2015. Youth who have accessed the EFA program have also required pantry items in like numbers.

In 2013, Time Out Youth Center received 40 inquiries for housing; that number increased to 57 in 2014, and again to 111 in 2015 — a staggering increase of 95% over 2014.

IN CONCLUSION

Time Out Youth Center recognizes the rising trend of increasing disruption of housing stability and financial distress among LGBTQ homeless youth. In response, the Center embarked upon surveying LGBTQ homeless youth in the community to find out what resources youth need, gaps in services and the efficiency of services. The goal is that this report will bring change in the community giving a voice to LGBTQ homeless youth and increase their chances of happiness and success.



BACKGROUND

The Time Out Youth Center Board of Directors and staff initiated efforts to understand the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth 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. With the increase in calls, the Center is determined to identify a solution which could ultimately answer the need for an LGBTQ homeless youth shelter and provide programming to meet the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth.

In summer 2015, the Center conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of LGBTQ homeless youth in the Charlotte region. The first step was to identify several groups from which to gather information. LGBTQ homeless youth would have the strongest voice, but researchers also needed information from housing organizations. With these key target groups identified, the Center moved forward with conducting the surveys and focus groups, hosting informational meetings and administering surveys to service providers and LGBTQ homeless youth. Each meeting and survey garnered more and more information, which developed themes for use in the final analysis.

SERVICE PROVIDER SURVEY

The Service Provider Survey was administered over a period of five weeks during summer 2015. The Center's Director of Youth Services sent an online survey to participating service providers for completion. Recipients included members of the Homeless Services Network (HSN), the Coordination of Services and Housing (COSH) and the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (RAIN), who were asked to complete the survey as well as participate in focus

groups and some of the informational meetings. In all, there were 57 service provider respondents representing various positions within their respective organizations. Most of the respondents were case managers (21), with executive director, housing supervisors, outreach personnel, educators and intake specialists completing the survey.



LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH SURVEY

Each of the youth participating in the Host Home Program during summer 2015 completed the LGBTQ Homeless Youth Survey. Additionally, the Center distributed surveys to all of the youth in its email database and posted a link to the survey on its Facebook page. RAIN case managers also recruited

youth known to have experienced homelessness and distributed the survey to clients on their email list. Community service providers were also asked to administer the survey to clients who identified as LGBTQ between the ages of 13 and 24 years.

FOCUS GROUPS

Four focus groups were held, two with LGBTQ homeless youth and two with housing services providers. LGBTQ youth participated in one of two focus groups held at either Time Out Youth Center or RAIN. The LGBTQ youth focus groups included five and seven participants respectively. Youth who participated in focus groups were recruited from the Host Home Program or recommended by program staff who knew they had experienced housing issues. Each focus group participant received a free dinner and a gift card in appreciation for their participation.

Various personnel from Charlotte-area housing organizations or service providers participated in one of two focus groups held at an HSN or COSH meeting. The focus groups included 25 participants and 15 participants respectively.

In this report, information from the LGBTQ youth and service provider focus groups has been included in the discussion section to support or further explain trends, issues and overall findings of the surveys.

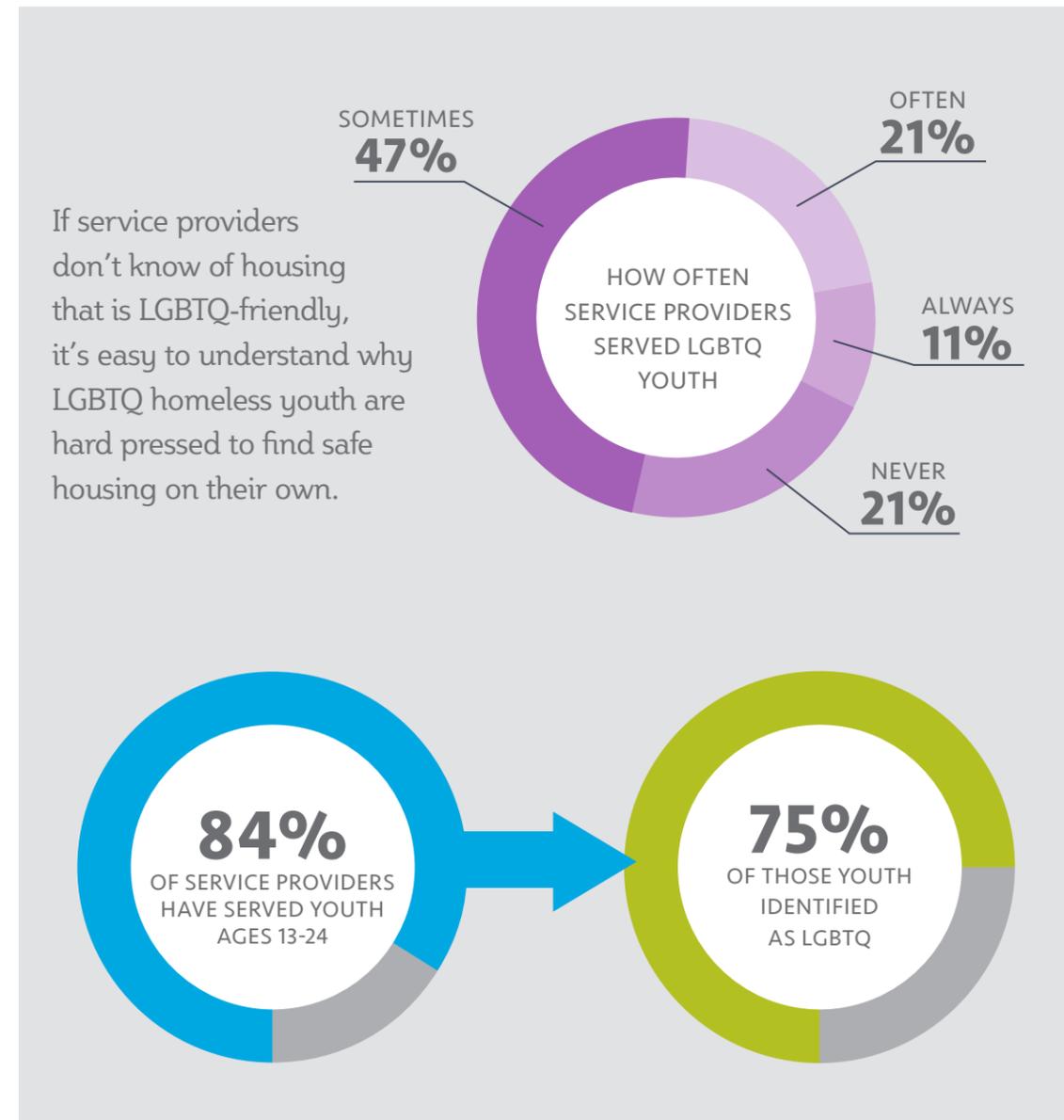
When you're able to be yourself is when you feel like you're living, and when you're in a setting where you don't feel accepted or wanted you just feel like you're not living, you're surviving. -Youth

SERVICE PROVIDERS

One of the early benefits of the Service Provider Survey was a look at who was actually being served by the housing organizations. Respondents were asked to provide data describing LGBTQ youth clients, barriers to services, resources available and recommendations. Of the community housing respondents surveyed, 84 percent said they had served homeless youth

between the ages of 13 and 24 years — 75 percent of whom identified as LGBTQ.

Not all organizations carried the same burden in serving this population of LGBTQ youth. In 2014, some housing organizations did not serve any LGBTQ homeless youth, while others served up to twenty.



ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY HOUSING SERVICE PROVIDERS

TRAINING

Most of the housing organizations surveyed stated that they have had some training on LGBTQ issues, but still felt that more training is needed. Several service providers stated that they were still “somewhat uncomfortable” or entirely “not comfortable” deal-

ing with LGBTQ homeless youth. Service providers seemed to widely share these feelings of discomfort, though a small percentage of those surveyed candidly stated that they felt particularly uncomfortable dealing with transgender or gender non-conforming youth.

POLICIES

The policies of housing organizations directly correlates with the experiences of LGBTQ youth. Twenty-two percent of agencies reported not having LGBTQ-inclusive language in their non-discrimination policies. Two agencies specifically stated that their policies did not protect LGBTQ individuals, with 18 percent stating they were unaware of any such policies. The nature of the organizations themselves may influence their policy decisions. More than 75 percent of housing organizations are non-profits or faith-based; another 20 percent are governmental agencies.

ations in which LGBTQ youth are living — whether couch surfing, living with friends or living in hotel rooms, none of which currently align with the accepted definition of homelessness used by government agencies. The definition should encompass a better understanding of how youth experience homelessness.

Several responses led to the theme of prioritizing LGBTQ youth-specific housing, whether that be by providing a LGBTQ homeless youth shelter, prioritizing LGBTQ youth-specific spaces or housing within existing shelters, or requiring emergency shelter display LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination policies or safe and affirming signage.

The service providers identified various housing/ Housing and Urban Development (HUD) policies they would change or develop to help LGBTQ homeless youth. Recommendations are to remove discriminatory policies and increase inclusive policies for sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.

Providing a housing program specifically designed for LGBTQ youth to transition into independent living was noted as a need for the community. Similarly, increasing transitional housing options can also help LGBTQ youth transition to independence.

Service providers would like to see a change in the age at which youth are able to qualify for housing assistance and a change in the definition of homelessness. The definition should be more inclusive of the situ-

*In larger cities the medical community has the idea that **housing is a form of medicine**, Charlotte hasn't done that yet. -Service Provider*

BARRIERS TO HOUSING

Homeless youth — especially those who identify as LGBTQ — face many barriers when it comes to finding housing. Safe and welcoming options after being evicted or forced to leave home because of abuse or violence are not available in most communities.

Service providers were asked about their perspectives on existing barriers for LGBTQ homeless youth in Charlotte.

Roughly 81 percent of service providers agreed that the primary barrier to procuring stable housing for LGBTQ homeless youth was employment, or the lack of employment. Youth who are unemployed or underemployed and who do not have the basic skills to find a job, get a job or keep a job, simply cannot earn enough money to pay for housing.

The second largest barrier, according to 70 percent of respondents, was the lack of funding to specifically address youth access to housing.

Another significant barrier for LGBTQ youth was “unsafe housing” itself. Housing can be a barrier when there is no safe LGBTQ youth-specific housing. Currently, there is only one option for safe and affirming LGBTQ housing in the Carolinas. Seventy-nine percent of service providers said restrictive housing policies are a leading issue keeping LGBTQ homeless youth on the streets.

Other barriers highlighted by service providers are the lack of LGBTQ friendly and affirming agencies, community support, understanding and the prevalence of mental illness among homeless youth. The next most common barriers identified are access to transportation, lack of supportive staff and a youth’s criminal record.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

LACK OF SAFETY

Service providers stated that the primary housing currently available to LGBTQ youth was an emergency shelter. However, 65 percent of those providers expressed the belief that shelter services are not safe for LGBTQ homeless youth. Service providers across the board did not believe that other housing options available to LGBTQ homeless youth were safe and none of the options received a vote of confidence higher than 20 percent.

Additionally, 45 percent of service providers were unaware of whether existing housing services in the Charlotte region were supportive and welcoming of LGBTQ homeless youth.

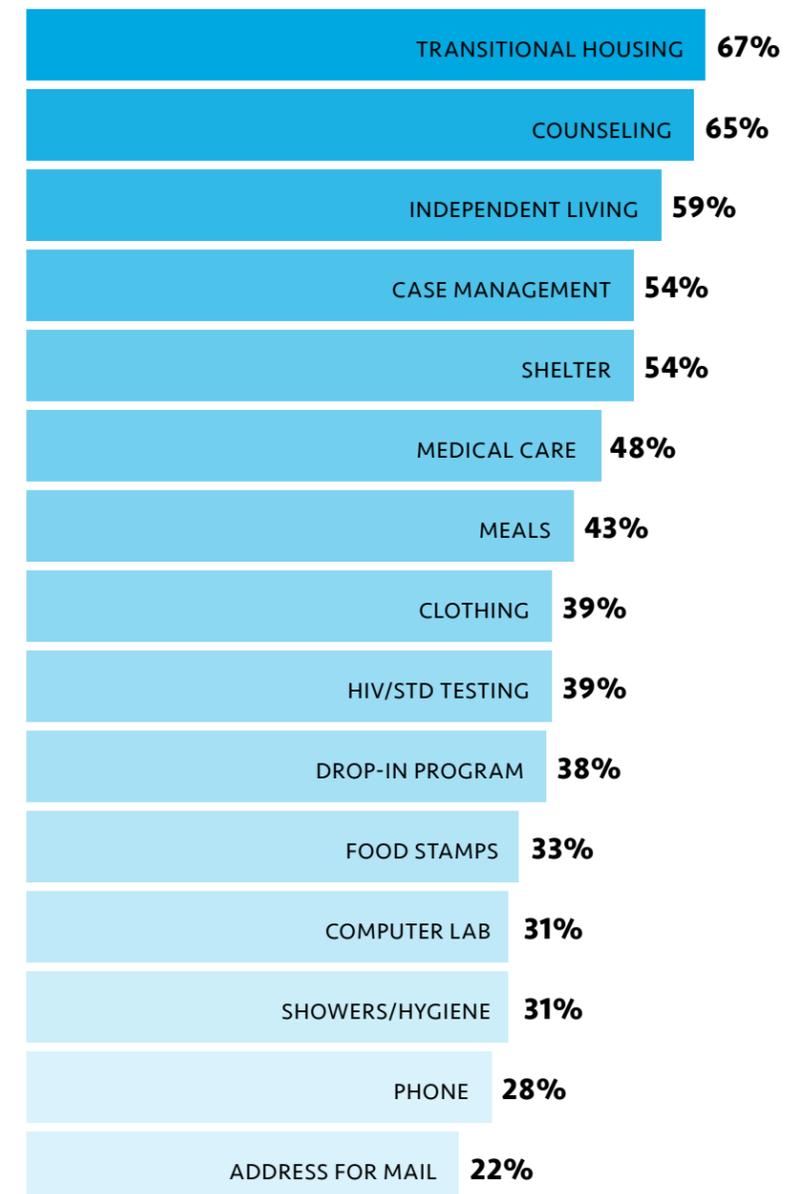
Similarly, service providers were asked what types of housing services are supportive and welcoming for LGBTQ homeless youth. Only 21 percent of respondents said emergency shelters were “supportive and welcoming,” while “transitional housing,” “temporary housing,” and “no services for LGBTQ youth” were thought to be even less “supportive and welcoming.”

More than 60 percent of service provider respondents believed there are no viable safe, supportive and friendly housing options for LGBTQ homeless youth in Charlotte today.

RESOURCES

Unique barriers and the lack of training and other resources prevent service providers from adequately serving LGBTQ homeless youth, according to respondents. Service providers specifically identified “lack of staff with experience working with LGBTQ youth” as a barrier to providing appropriate housing services. They stated that a lack of training on LGBTQ youth issues and difficulty identifying LGBTQ homeless youth deterred them from providing appropriate resources and safe housing.

Service providers identified the following necessary resources for helping LGBTQ homeless youth:



More than 60 percent of service provider respondents believed there are no viable safe, supportive and friendly housing options for LGBTQ homeless youth in Charlotte today.

RECOGNIZING THE GAPS

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.

Other specific gaps or challenges were addressed by those providers working specifically with LGBTQ

homeless youth. Among those challenges, respondents said they experienced difficulty in outreach to youth about available services, youth access to safe spaces in shelters, refusal by service provider staff to use preferred names or gender pronouns for transgender clients, agency staff willingness to work directly with LGBTQ homeless youth and a lack of education or understanding among staff of the unique needs of LGBTQ homeless youth.

Determining a Need: LGBTQ Youth Shelter

All service providers surveyed agreed that there is a need for an LGBTQ homeless shelter in Charlotte. Seventy percent of housing organization respondents said such a shelter is an “extreme need.” Twenty-five percent described the need as “moderate,” with five percent saying there was “some” need.

EXTREME
NEED
70%



MODERATE
NEED
20%



SOME
NEED
5%



Nobody wants to be homeless. I’ve been doing this work for a really long time and I have never met an LGBTQ identified youth that said, “I want to be homeless”.

-LGBTQ advocate

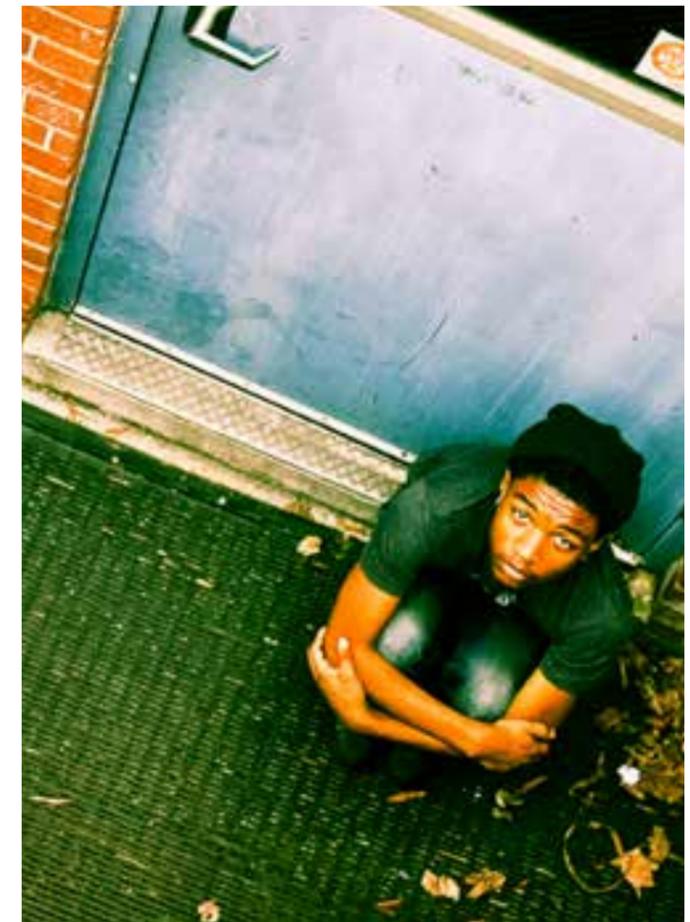
RECOGNIZING THE CHALLENGES

LGBTQ youth identified several challenges when seeking out services from housing organizations. Many of these challenges are mirrored in the responses from the service providers themselves, though some service providers identified specific challenges and barriers more than the LGBTQ youth they serve.

Service providers said access to money, clothing and safety are the top three challenges for LGBTQ homeless youth.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES NOTED ARE:

- Inability to identify welcoming and inclusive housing services
- Finding affordable housing
- Finding employment
- Access to mental health services
- Lack of family and community support
- Encountering uneducated and/or judgmental staff
- Eliminating transphobia and transmisogyny in agencies/shelters
- Discrimination based on sexual orientation, and/or gender identity/expression
- Finding that available services were primarily created for middle-aged individuals
- Limitations of being a minor
- Lack of official documents or identification
- Lack of access to transportation



LGBTQ YOUTH

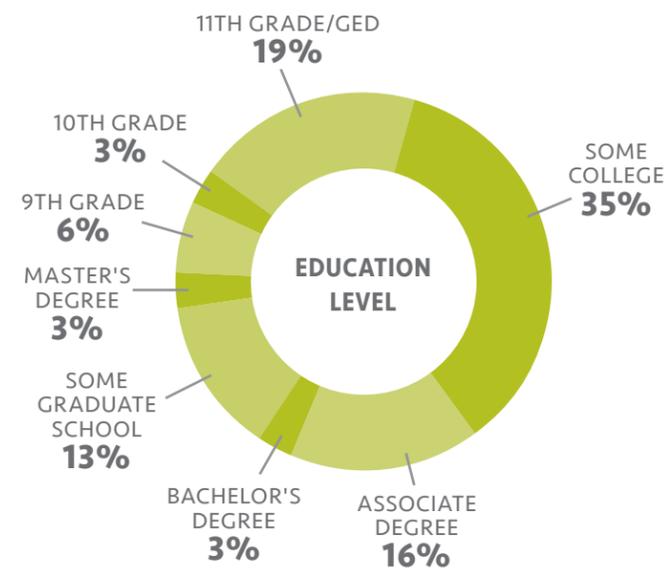
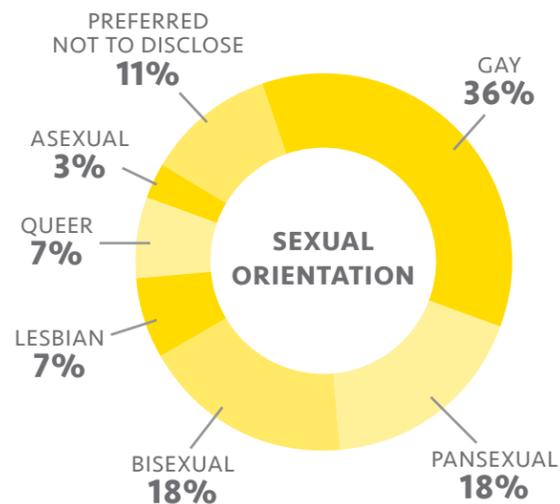
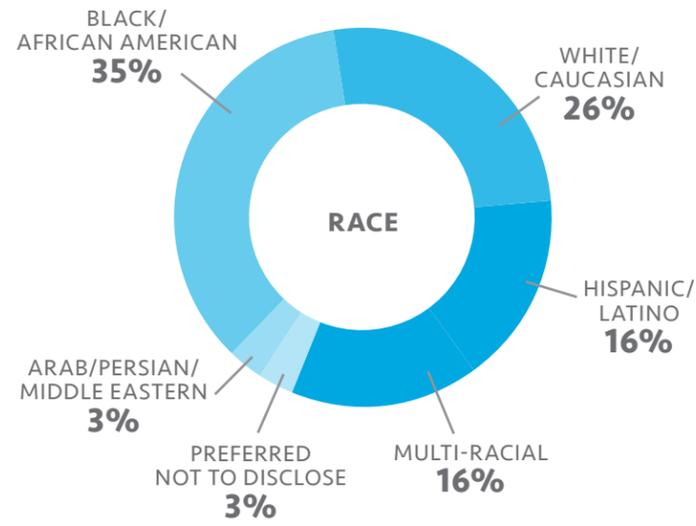
Housing organizations that were included in the Service Provider Survey assisted in recruiting participants in the Youth Survey. These organizations, along with Time Out Youth Center, sought out as many LGBTQ homeless youth as they could so that all possible research could be documented.

The LGBTQ homeless Youth Survey was administered from July 6, 2015, through August 31, 2015. Participants were provided with computer access to complete the survey online. At the end of the two-month period, 31 respondents between the ages of 13 and 24 years who identified as LGBTQ and homeless took part in the survey.

WHO THEY ARE

The survey collected several key demographic figures, including race, sexual orientation, gender identity, work status and education level

50%
of LGBTQ homeless youth have been without stable housing at least four or more times in the last three years.

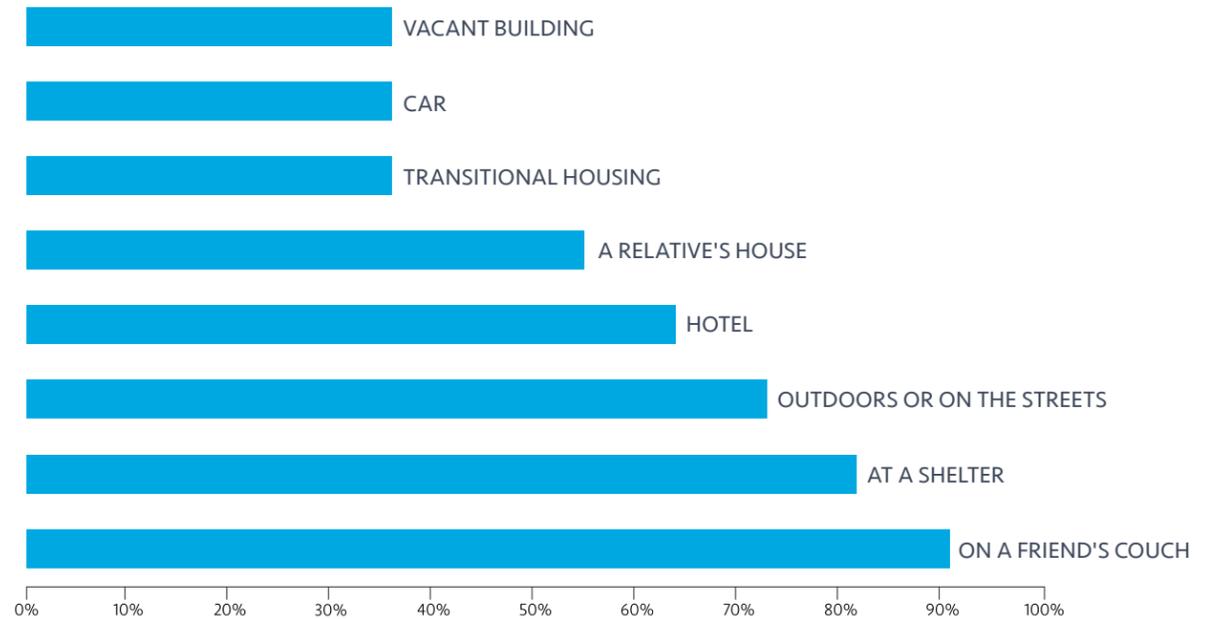


HOMELESSNESS AND UNSTABLE HOUSING

Seventy-one percent of youth survey respondents said they had experienced homelessness or an unstable housing situation. Of those, only 85 percent had stayed in a shelter in the Charlotte region. The youth survey data shows that homeless shelters are not often the first place LGBTQ homeless youth choose to stay.

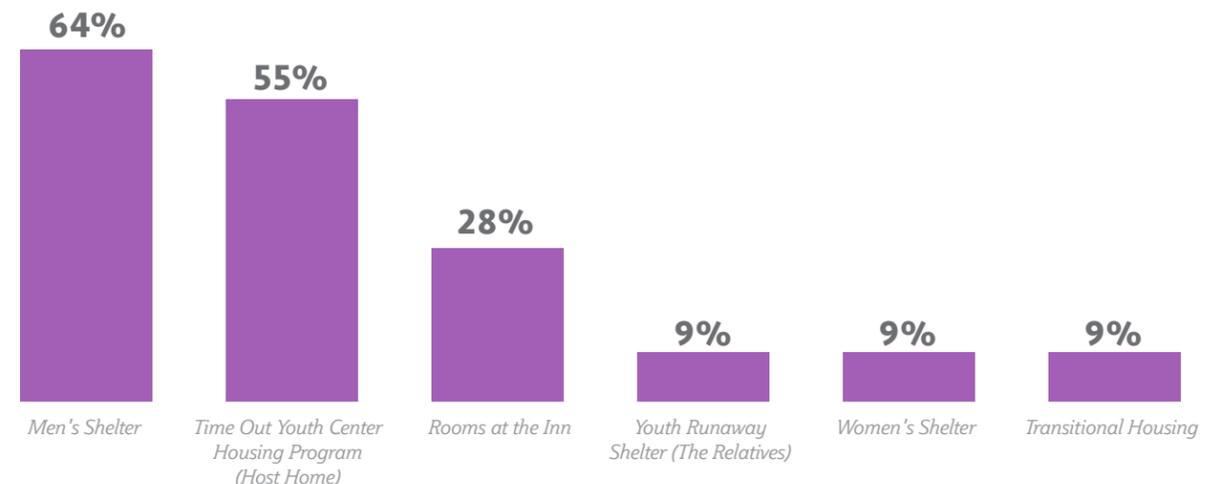
Each of the youth surveyed has slept at two or more of the places described below. Several respondents had stayed in at least four places, with six respondents noting that they had stayed in at least six places.

WHERE YOUTH SLEEP



* Eleven respondents chose at least one of the options.

HOUSING SERVICES ACCESSED BY LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH

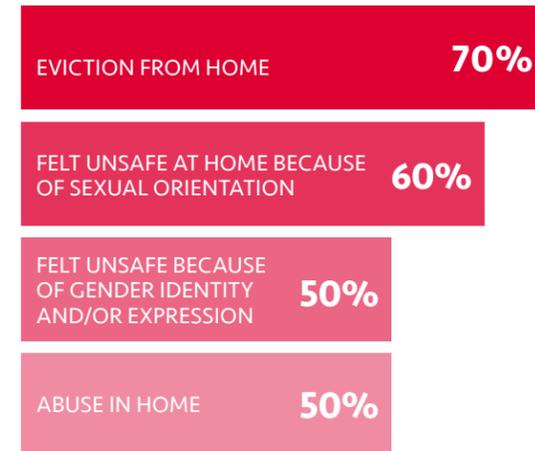


REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

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. Of these, five respondents said they did not feel safe at home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Many dealt with abuse in the home.

Respondents were also specifically asked where they stayed “last night.” Only two respondents said they had stayed at home. Three stayed in a shelter, two in transitional housing, two outdoors or on the street and two stayed on a friend’s couch.

REASON FOR LEAVING HOME



BARRIERS TO HOUSING

LGBTQ homeless youth were asked to tell us what challenges stood in the way to getting stable housing and then rank them 1-5, with 1 being the most challenging and 5 being the least challenging.

Youth’s top three barriers to housing included:

- 1 Unfair treatment due to gender identity and/or expression**
- 2 Lack of money**
- 3 Lack of family support**

LGBTQ homeless youth identified several reasons which complicated their accessibility to stable housing, including:

- Not knowing what to do on their own
- Not knowing where to go
- Feeling overwhelmed with “too much to do on my own”
- Not able to find cheap housing
- Lack of transportation

Despite the stigma and violence that many LGBTQ homeless youth experience, these youth often demonstrate incredible courage and resilience.

When LGBTQ homeless youth were asked to list their top needs, their responses were consistent and clear: meals, clothing and toiletries. Other top responses included condoms, shower facilities, money, laundry facilities and groceries.

YOUTH EXPERIENCE WITH SHELTERS

Fifty percent of youth respondents stated they “did not feel safe” and 20 percent felt “very unsafe” when in a homeless shelter. Youth were asked about shelter staff and their perceived understanding of LGBTQ homeless youth issues. Sixty percent of youth felt that shelter staff did not understand LGBTQ issues.

Youth respondents identified several areas where shelter staff could improve safety and make them feel safer, including caring staff, understanding volunteers, a compassionate intake process and safe places to store their personal items and food.

Conversely, respondents were asked to identify the top five things that made them feel unsafe at a shelter; overwhelmingly, the number one and most common response and the most common response was “the residents” — other clients at the shelter. Youth also said lack of inclusive signage or posted policies, such

as a “Safe Zone” sticker, made them feel less safe. A significant portion of youth also said that “no private showers” and “dirty sleeping areas” affected their safety. Other responses included youth feeling “unable to express my sexual orientation” and equally “unable to express my gender identity and / or expression.”

Those who work at a shelter, both paid and volunteer staffers, have a direct impact on whether LGBTQ homeless youth feel safe or unsafe at a shelter. Youth respondents who stayed at a shelter were asked if they would feel safer in a homeless shelter specifically designed for LGBTQ youth. All youth respondents said they would feel safer at an LGBTQ youth-specific shelter. Additionally, each of the respondents said that an LGBTQ youth-specific shelter was a need in the Charlotte area.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY FINDINGS

The previous sections reviewed the findings of the Service Provider and LGBTQ Homeless Youth Surveys. This section will analyze these findings, along with the focus group findings, in order to better understand the data and what it means for LGBTQ homeless youth.

A rudimentary analysis reveals that many of the foundational needs of LGBTQ homeless youth are not

being met. This discussion will focus on the importance of meeting the need of LGBTQ homeless youth with physiological provisions, physical safety and love and belonging in their community — all required for youth to progress toward realizing self-esteem and self-actualization, reaching maturity and happiness and growing into a fulfilled adulthood.

WHERE LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH ARE STAYING

LGBTQ youth who have experienced homelessness report that they typically stay wherever they can find a place — whether that is a shelter, a host home, or a friend’s couch. When they do access one of these options, the assumption is that they are safe because they are “off the streets,” but this research tells a decidedly different story.

There exists a very real expectation of “quid pro quo” when LGBTQ homeless youth impose on friends or acquaintances for a place to sleep. Because these youth usually don’t have money (or the ability to get a job in many cases), they can only stay a short time without hosts expecting something in return for stay. Transgender women reported that sexual favors are

nearly always expected from them. These scenarios push many youth to prefer the privacy of sleeping on the street to staying on a couch and having to “pay up” at some point. This dynamic is typically referred to as survival sex, defined as prostitution engaged in by a person because of their extreme need. Survival sex describes the practice of people who are homeless or otherwise disadvantaged in society trading sex for food, a place to sleep, other basic needs, or for drugs.

Existing research shows a dramatic variation in the rates of LGBTQ youth survival sex. Some 16 to 46 percent of youth on the street resort to survival sex in order to have their basic needs met, though actual numbers may be much higher. (Van Leeuwen et al, 2006).

The local research in this study revealed that while 40 percent of Charlotte-area service providers “didn’t

know” how many of their LGBTQ youth participated in survival sex, they believed that at least half of LGBTQ youth participated in survival sex. Some service providers put this number as high as 75 percent.

Beyond staying with friends, youth are also accessing temporary stays at shelters, transitional housing, and hotels, in cars, in tent cities, parks, under bridges and in vacant buildings. Nearly all of these options present significant safety risks, leading some LGBTQ homeless youth to feel the need to take drugs to stay awake through the night.

The youth who participated in the survey reported that when they stayed at a shelter, they stayed most often at the Men’s Shelter. The Men’s Shelter was also rated by the same youth as the most unsafe option.

BARRIERS TO LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH HOUSING

LGBTQ youth repeatedly find themselves in the position of being treated unfairly due to their gender identity and or expression. Essentially, age is the greatest obstacle beyond sexual and gender identities faced by LGBTQ homeless youth. They have no money, they don’t know where to go and they have

too much to figure out on their own. They don’t have the life skills or the foundation needed to survive as adults. Instead of being nurtured and guided into adulthood, these youth are thrust into providing for themselves before they are ready.

*One the most jarring parts of this work is that **most of our LGBTQ homeless youth say that survival sex is often the safest option.***

– Time Out Youth Center staff member

*Staying at the shelter was a very **dehumanizing experience.** -Youth*

SHELTER SAFETY

One of the primary locations where LGBTQ homeless youth told us they stay is at shelters. We received much feedback from the LGBTQ youth and the service providers regarding the safety of these facilities.

Neither the youth nor the housing organizations we surveyed believe the shelters are safe for LGBTQ homeless youth.

RESIDENTS

As expected, LGBTQ homeless youth are staying at Charlotte-area homeless shelters. Neither the youth nor the housing organizations we surveyed believe the shelters are safe for LGBTQ homeless youth. The primary reported safety concern was “other residents,” a problem that is altogether easy to identify yet difficult to address. Service providers aren’t sure how to handle the other residents in relation to the LGBTQ youth. Adding LGBTQ residents to the mix of overall shelter residents increases the complexity of shelter cohabitation especially without proper education or awareness among both clients and staff. Many times, a shelter employee’s first response is to separate the LGBTQ youth from the general population to keep them safe and protected from issues other residents; respondents reported, however, that separation from the general population made them feel isolated and “imprisoned.”

General knowledge about and respect for LGBTQ youth is a major issue affecting their safety in a shelter. For example, transgender women would feel safer in a women’s shelter, but the cisgender wom-

en that also occupy these shelters often pose a risk to transgender women. There is a notable issue of transmisogyny in shelters; cisgender women using these spaces usually don’t consider transgender women “real” women. This often results in verbal and physical harassment, which drives transgender women away from women’s shelters. On the face of it, these are valid feelings of residents of varying backgrounds – and shelter employees should be trained to deal with these situations through understanding and education. This research shows that shelters remain widely unprepared to support and welcome LGBTQ homeless youth.

NO ‘SAFE ZONE’ STICKER

Youth survey respondents said a shelter’s lack of a “Safe Zone” sticker made them feel less safe. The Safe Zone sticker represents an affirming and supportive organization which has gone through the process of identifying inclusive practices and policies and training or educating employees and other organization members about the needs of LGBTQ youth.

The LGBTQ youth surveyed said that the sticker represents to them a place where they can immediately feel safe and understood and that the lack of it makes them feel the opposite.

NO PRIVATE SHOWERS AND DIRTY SLEEPING AREA

LGBTQ youth said shelters without private showers make them feel unsafe and vulnerable. This issue is not a matter of semantics, but rather one of protecting the privacy and health of youth.

SHELTER EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

Many LGBTQ homeless youth expressed that the shelter employees and volunteers are a major factor in making them feel unsafe. Youth experienced discrimination, unfriendly staff and poor customer service, leaving them feeling degraded and stigmatized. One youth stated that “the experience was dehumanizing” and others shared that they felt like they were in prison.

One provider said, “I think that providing an LGBTQ shelter will provide an option until the heterosexual community feels comfortable.”

RESOURCE AND GAP ANALYSIS FOR LGBTQ POPULATION

Many housing organizations surveyed for this research said they had been trained on LGBTQ issues. Astonishingly, however, one of the primary barriers to LGBTQ-affirming services was directly related to a lack of training or education on LGBTQ issues and needs. Clearly, service providers and the youth they serve recognize the need for more education and training to develop stronger cultural competence. Without training, they won’t know how to work with LGBTQ youth or assist with residents’ interactions.

Needs described as “important” by service providers and by youth seem to range from immediate and tangible needs to larger intangible issues, revealing a continuum of need.

Youth focused on basic physical needs: food, clothing and toiletries. Service providers were concerned with access to resources and cultural competence, as well as other needs such as counseling, case management, job/life skills, health care and housing.

Service providers have essentially identified key areas which address the basic needs being sought by LGBTQ youth, many of whom reported that they “weren’t sure where to turn.” The relevance of these findings is unequivocal and the directive is clear: case management, counseling and early intervention services are invaluable to helping LGBTQ youth.

Service providers have also identified gaps in services for youth that have suffered from domestic violence, drug addiction and for those youth who engage in survival sex. Although LGBTQ homeless youth didn’t verbalize a direct need for these services, their stories do show that these issues have a serious impact on their lives. Domestic violence and abuse at home, drug use while on the streets and doing sex work for shelter or money were common themes in the stories of youth respondents. Other challenges relate directly to their feeling of belonging. Service providers believe that youth encounter a general lack of community support, unwelcoming shelter staff and discrimination because of their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Additionally, service providers believe that most local housing services are geared toward middle-aged individuals and are not tailored to meet the needs of homeless LGBTQ youth.

Service providers confirm these problems are encountered by clients of their organizations every day. Counseling, case management and other crucial services are needed for youth’s ability to be safe, secure and to grow in the future. Service providers must first address physical needs of safety, food, shelter and clothing with organizations like Time Out Youth Center able to confront larger intangible issues — like mental health care, addiction and sex work — that are often more difficult to address, but with significant, lasting effects on LGBTQ youth well-being.

Community organizations, advocates and government officials have the responsibility to act now and meet the immediate and long-term needs of LGBTQ homeless youth. This research has collected information key to addressing these needs, but knowledge in and of itself will not save LGBTQ homeless youth.

The findings presented here must result in concrete action and must be applied in a two-pronged approach, first through a “centering the margin” approach, which will render issues of sexual identity, gender identity and gender expression as obsolete through education and additional programming directed at governmental and community organizations. The second approach is to actively implement and deliver direct services through an LGBTQ youth-specific shelter, thus reducing social exclusion and adjacent disadvantages of being homeless. By reducing the issues LGBTQ youth face in their identities alone, these youth can start the work of improving their mental health, life skills and education in order to improve their lives. The following recommendations are driven by these approaches and the underlying understanding that everyone must apply the knowledge gained through this report for it to be worthwhile.

1. LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH SHELTER

The evidence suggests that LGBTQ homeless youth and housing organizations strongly agree that a dedicated LGBTQ shelter is needed in the Charlotte region. LGBTQ youth are clearly not safe on the streets nor in shelters due to marginalization, stigmatization and the lack of a supportive environment. These youth have been rejected by their families or often evicted or forced to leave home to escape abuse and violence because of their identity. Unfortunately, today there are no

safe options for LGBTQ youth, especially transgender women, who are dealing with harassment, fear of abuse and an expectation of sex in exchange for safety.

2. ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS FOR LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH

Throughout the survey, youth were clear on lack of access to basic needs like food, clothing and toiletry items. We believe that if the community can satisfy these basic physiological needs it will open the door for service providers to help youth seek out long-term safety, security and wellbeing in their lives.

3. LGBTQ HOUSING CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Secondary to meeting their immediate physiological needs and necessary for long-term wellbeing, LGBTQ homeless youth need guidance. Youth are not adults and they lack the experience and maturity to adequately address their own needs. Providing a case manager for LGBTQ homeless youth who “don’t know what to do” or “don’t know where to go” — a common theme among homeless youth surveyed — will ensure that youth can quickly access lifesaving services needed for a transition to stable housing.

Case management should be provided from a single location that is known in the community to be safe, accepting and welcoming to LGBTQ youth. Dedicated case managers can help map out a personalized plan of action for each LGBTQ youth and help them manage obstacles and celebrate their successes as they work toward permanent housing.

4. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR HOUSING SERVICE PROVIDERS

Professionals serving the homeless population need a better understanding of the unique set of challenges faced by LGBTQ homeless youth. Cultural competency trainings and appropriately tailored services as a result will assist housing providers in addressing youth needs. Service providers have already requested additional training and are aware of its importance. Resources and funding should be directed toward professional development and organizations should develop and implement LGBTQ-inclusive best practices and policies in their services.

5. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

LGBTQ youth are, by definition, at a critical period in their lives for developing relationships, accessing education and preparing for the workforce to support their goals in life. Failure to establish themselves during adolescence and early adulthood has long-term repercussions that are all too common to LGBTQ youth. Fractured support systems limit their ability to make quality friends, develop social relationships and healthy support systems, garner job skills and find employment. Counseling and other therapeutic care is a critical need for youth to develop and prepare for a healthier life.

6. EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

LGBTQ homeless youth face difficulties in finding and keeping employment, due to a lack of preparedness and other factors, including instability

in their housing environment and discrimination. Youth are ill-equipped to find quality employment on their own. Job training and assistance with job placement will help youth stay on a more stable path and reduce housing instability, thereby making room for service providers to address more intangible needs like physical and mental health.

7. POLICY REFORM AT THE LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL

All housing policies need to be reviewed and revised as necessary for inclusive language for sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Most existing policies exclude these classes, which only furthers discrimination. Considering the growing number of LGBTQ homeless youth that we've been able to reach (and understanding that scores more probably exist who have not been counted), the definition of "homelessness" needs to be adjusted to include all of the situations LGBTQ homeless youth are facing, including violence, couch surfing, and survival sex.

8. CERTIFIED HOUSING AND SAFE ZONES

This study proves that LGBTQ homeless youth respect the Safe Zone sticker or symbols of LGBTQ inclusion and affirmation. We believe that all personnel and volunteers working at a potential service site for LGBTQ youth should be required to participate in training sessions to earn a Safe Zone status, identifying that location as a safe and welcoming place. Furthermore, shelters and service agencies should advertise that they are LGBTQ youth-friendly to encourage

youth to seek out services with these designated "safe" providers.

9. SECTION 8 HOUSING VOUCHERS

Section 8 Housing Voucher preference is given to families who are homeless, living in sub-standard housing, or have been involuntarily displaced. LGBTQ youth normally fit these criteria and would be excellent candidates for the program, if they could gain access.

We believe that discrimination and/or discriminatory housing policies may be keeping these youth from obtaining these vouchers today. HUD prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, color, national origin, religion, or sex; sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are not explicitly protected classes in the existing HUD definition in CFR 24 Part 982. Case managers can champion eligible LGBTQ homeless youth with housing organizations to advocate for Section 8 Housing Vouchers. Furthermore, HUD discrimination policies need to be reviewed and revised to include language for sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

10. RESOURCE GUIDE TO SAFE HOUSING FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

Currently, information about youth services are commonly offered online. Youth need a far more accessible, user-friendly technological access point for these services. Such access is imperative. Geographic Information System (GIS) resources will provide instant information if they find themselves in trouble and can't get to their case manager right away, or have not been assigned one yet. GIS resources will also assist LGBTQ youth by showing a visual of the Charlotte region with various resources superimposed on the map.

LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH SHELTER

Both LGBTQ youth and service providers were unanimous in their agreement on the need for one recommendation — the creation of an LGBTQ homeless youth shelter in the Charlotte region. Such a shelter would provide the kind of safe and affirming centralized location in which to meet immediate basic needs, case management and referral systems for long-term care and support.

WHAT WOULD THE LGBTQ HOMELESS YOUTH SHELTER LOOK LIKE?

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.

We see all types of people, but we wouldn't address issues that we know nothing about.

-Service Provider



This study has provided a glimpse into the lives of LGBTQ homeless youth in the Charlotte area. These reflections illustrate a small part of the reality that exists among and around us every day. LGBTQ homeless youth face barriers trying to find shelter or housing. If they arrive at a shelter, they face safety and discriminatory barriers based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression. These same barriers come into play in transitional or permanent housing.

Furthermore, housing organizations need training to assist LGBTQ homeless youth providing safe and supportive services. There also are gaps in services between what this unique group of LGBTQ youth need and what the community is providing. Education, public awareness and community support are needed for LGBTQ homeless youth to survive and thrive. As a community, Charlotte must provide a more welcoming place for LGBTQ homeless youth.

Time and again, youth and service provider respondents returned to the need for a specific shelter for LGBTQ homeless youth. This population faces exceptionally unique and critical barriers best served by agencies and facilities which can offer the necessary, culturally-competent education and support needed for LGBTQ youth to address both immediate basic needs and long-term care.

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.

This study has provided us with the information on the circumstances, the gaps in services, the needed resources and concrete recommendations to better serve LGBTQ homeless youth in the Charlotte area now and in the years to come. Solutions to the challenges facing LGBTQ homeless youth and the housing organizations that serve them have been provided. It is imperative that our community acts now, with housing organizations, advocates, allies and LGBTQ youth and government officials coming together to find the resources to put these recommendations into action. There is no time like the present.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kimberly Gray is an experienced grant writer, grant administrator and program evaluation consultant to nonprofits, government and community groups. After serving in the U.S. Air Force, Kimberly graduated from Augusta University with her Master's degree in public administration (MPA). Kimberly 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*. The success of this project opened doors to additional consulting work with healthcare and non-profit organizations throughout the Augusta, Georgia area.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Akeliah Stewart, Alexander Youth Network

Ashley Clark, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

Courtney Morton, Mecklenburg County Community Support Services

Emma Foster, Florence Crittenton Services

Heath Wiggins, Caldwell Presbyterian

Jermaine Lee, Safe Harbor Community Health Center

Liz Clasen-Kelly, Urban Ministry Center

Matt Comer, Editor

Roberto Olmo, RAIN, INC.

Sarah Yum, South Charlotte Counseling Center

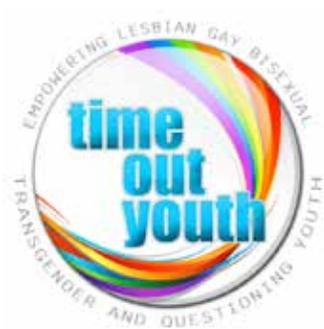
Donovan Andrews Design

WORKS CITED

Van Leeuwen, James M, Boyle, Susan, Salomonsen-Sautel, Stacy, D Nico Baker, et al. (Mar/Apr 2006) *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Homeless Youth: An Eight-City Public Health Perspective*. *Child Welfare*, 85 (3), 151-170.

Portillo, Ely. (Sept. 15, 2015) *Average monthly apartment rent in Charlotte reaches \$1,000*. *Charlotte Observer*. <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/biz-columns-blogs/development/article35271921.html>

Meghan Henry, D. A. (October 2014). *The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress: Part 1*.



TIME OUT YOUTH CENTER

2320 NORTH DAVIDSON STREET
CHARLOTTE NC 28205

PHONE: 704-344-8335

FAX: 704-344-8186

WWW.TIMEOUTYOUTH.ORG

INFO@TIMEOUTYOUTH.ORG

THIS REPORT WAS MADE POSSIBLE
WITH SUPPORT FROM

Charlotte Lesbian and Gay
Fund