

National LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness Research Agenda



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2018, with generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Drs. Jama Shelton and SJ Dodd convened a town hall meeting at the True Colors United Impact Summit. The goal of the town hall was to gather information from young people with lived experience, service providers, policy makers, and advocates regarding the challenges they face and the questions needed answering in order to adequately and comprehensively address LGBTQ youth homelessness, with the goal of creating a national LGBTQ youth homelessness research agenda. **The intention of the research agenda is to center the voices and experiences of those most impacted by LGBTQ youth homelessness and to provide a guide for researchers investigating solutions to address the disparities faced by LGBTQ youth, particularly LGBTQ youth of color.**

We believe that LGBTQ+ youth with lived expertise related to homelessness are the experts and should be at the forefront of the movement to address LGBTQ+ youth homelessness. As such, a team of 12 young people led the development of the research agenda. The research team analyzed data gathered at the town hall, supplemented the data with their own knowledge, and developed research topics, sample research questions, values to guide researchers, and tips for engaging young people both as research participants and also as researchers. The research topics and questions are organized using the four core outcomes outlined by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (stable housing, social and emotional well-being, permanent connections, education/employment), with additional categories of importance added by the research team.

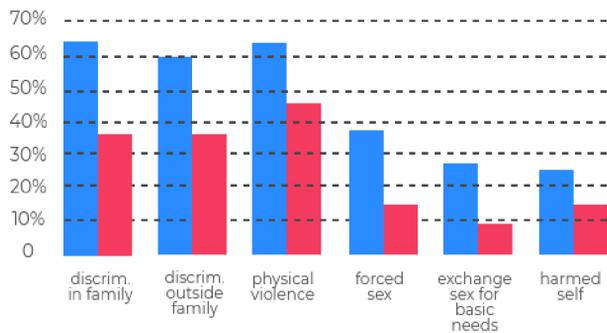
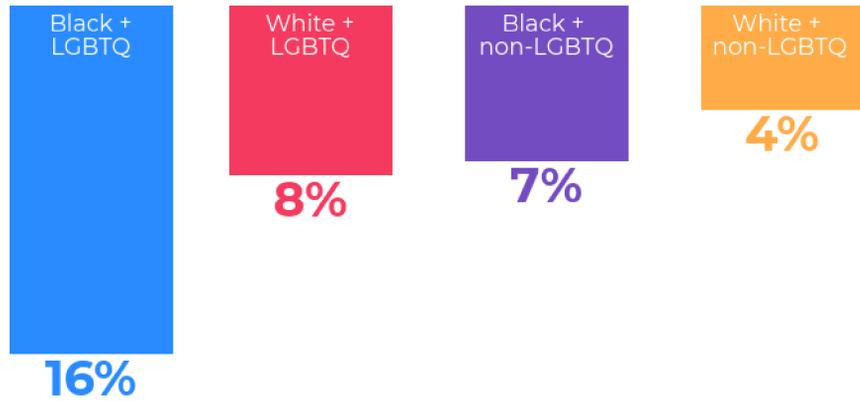
The purpose of this national research agenda on LGBTQ+ youth homelessness - the first of its kind - is to ensure our movement is backed by the data we need in order to create real and lasting change. It is our hope that this document will enable researchers across sectors to investigate the topics and questions within, in collaboration with one another and alongside LGBTQ+ young people.

If you have any questions about this work, please contact Jama Shelton at jshelton@hunter.cuny.edu.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON LGBTQ+ YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

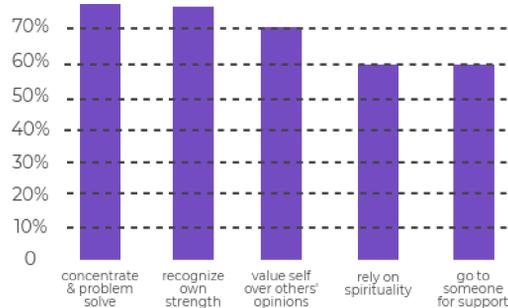


YOUTH WHO ARE BLACK & LGBTQ = HIGHER RATES OF HOMELESSNESS

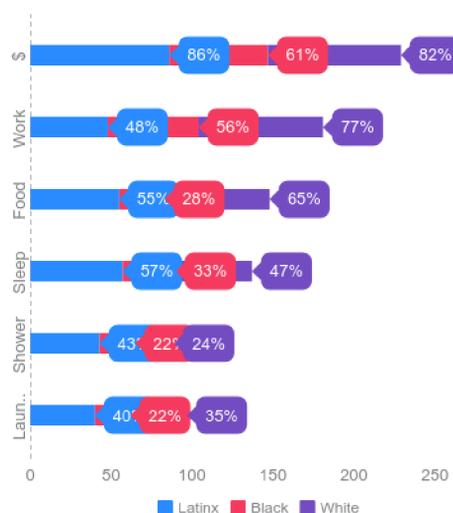
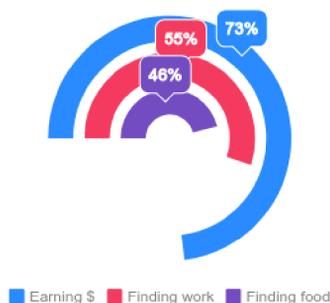


LGBTQ youth experience higher levels of adversity than **non-LGBTQ** youth experiencing homelessness

COPING STRATEGIES utilized by LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness n=442



TRANSGENDER YOUTH Experiences of Stress



RESEARCH VALUES

HOW we conduct research activities is as important as what we are researching. We provide the following values as a framework for researchers studying LGBTQ+ youth homelessness. We believe these values are essential to the ethical and equitable conduct of research, and strongly encourage you to embrace each and every one!

1. Center those most marginalized by systems, particularly transgender youth and youth of color.

- Include focus on race, poverty, gender ID, citizenship, undocumented experience, LGBTQ+ young adults who are parents.
- Always disaggregate the data to highlight experiences of race/gender/sexuality.
- Utilize research methods that enable multiple ways for people to express themselves (not only those rooted in white supremacy/academia).
- Emphasize the strengths of young people, rather than solely focusing on risk and deficits.

2. Remember that youth are the experts.

- Utilize qualitative research methods to provide depth and context that #'s alone can't provide.
- Use story-telling as a bridge, while respecting young people's ownership of their own stories.
- Reduce the time between the story and the story being told/consumed by using instantaneous access to stories that social media provides (going live etc.).
 - How do we provide youth with ways of documenting and sharing their story as it is unfolding? Who is the audience for this?
- Include LGBTQ+ young people as researchers on research studies/teams and/or have a youth advisory group to inform your research design & implementation.

3. Keep a system level perspective.

- Explicitly name structural issues (i.e., racism, transbias, hetero/cisgenderism) and connect individual/family struggles to structural issues and solutions.
- Don't just focus on the individual youth or individual families; the problems & the solutions are bigger than individuals.
- Focus on both legislative change AND culture change (because one doesn't always lead to the other).

4. Make data more accessible to drive change.

- Use social media, infographics and other visuals, as well as other creative ways to present data to the public.
 - Bring practical information back to community, with suggestions for using data to make change.
 - Educate service providers - Make our research available to people who can use it when serving LGBTQ+ youth. Do this with intention.
-

5. Build infrastructure for youth-led research and advocacy.

- Train LGBTQ+ youth on advocacy, policy, and research basics. When possible, make these peer to peer trainings.
- Aim to involve and engage young people to identify and invite in those young people who do not yet believe in or know the power of their voice. Extend engagement beyond those youth who are already involved.

KEY TERMS

Cisnormativity

The assumption that a person's gender identity is the same as the gender typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth, otherwise known as being “cisgender” or “cissexual.” Examples of cisnormativity are closely linked to gender essentialism. Although rarely deliberate, its impact is almost always hurtful and oppressive to the transgender community. Cisnormativity contributes to the erasure of transgender and non-binary experiences. At worst, it is part of a deliberate and calculated system of oppression that includes institutionalized cisgenderism and trans bias.

Equity

The state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair. The concept of equity is synonymous with fairness and justice. Equity is not simply a desired state of affairs or a lofty value. To be achieved and sustained, equity needs to be thought of as a **structural and systemic concept**. (Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation)

LGBTQ+

We are using this acronym as an umbrella to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and additional terms individuals use to describe their sexual and/or gender identity. Not everyone uses the terms included in this definition. Additional terms people may use for sexual identity are pansexual, demisexual; people may use terms such as nonbinary or bigender to describe their gender identity.

Implicit Bias

Unconsciously-held associations about a social group that can result in the attribution of particular qualities to all individuals from that group, also known as stereotyping. They are the product of learned associations and social conditioning.

Racial Equity

Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them. (Source: Center for Assessment and Policy Development)

Structural Racism

The racial bias that exists across institutions and society. It describes the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of factors that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. (Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation)

TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE AS RESEARCHERS

As we consider engaging youth as **co-researchers**, we recommend that researchers use the age range set by HUD (14 to 24) for “youth” **and** that they consider being flexible with the age range on the older end. We believe that investment in young people is a process that happens over time, and that youth with lived expertise who are ages 25 - 30 also have important contributions to make to this research agenda as co-researchers.

Based on our experiences, we believe there are 10 key considerations when engaging youth as researchers.

- **Take time to self-reflect.** Ensure that you are prepared and educated to engage in an LGBTQ+ affirming & anti-racist practice before engaging youth as researchers.
- **Create meaningful opportunities.** Tap into why youth get engaged in research and identify opportunities for them to fulfill those expectations. Instead of assuming that youth are getting engaged for the same reasons, ask them what has drawn them to this kind of involvement. Consider shifting how the research will be used after receiving input from youth researchers.
- **Make the opportunity accessible.** This can begin in the planning phases by asking youth what, if anything, they anticipate getting in their way while participating in the research process. Listen to what the youth say and identify resources and supports to minimize barriers to participation. Don't take anything for granted. Is your meeting space on a public transportation route? Does participation require access to technology? If so, how will that be provided? Accessibility also means going to where youth are instead of assuming that your regular place of work is the best place to locate the project.
- **Create an opportunity pipeline.** Identify ways to connect youth involved as co-researchers to resources beyond the research project.
- **Develop permanent connections.** Engagement in research can result in connections and networks for youth and adult researchers that did not previously exist. Where appropriate, build intentional connection-making and bridge-building among co-researchers as well as between researchers and other community stakeholders into the process. For example, are there legal experts in the community who can assist with research dissemination who can also be resources for youth later when they have a question about housing law?
- **Ensure that youth receive tangible benefits from participation.** Youth should be paid a living wage as equal partners in the work. What other tangible resources do the adult researchers receive that would be appropriate to provide to youth, such as invitations to events, publications to include on a resume, something else?

TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE AS RESEARCHERS (cont.)

- **Support a culture shift.** Many job opportunities that exist in communities require formalized education or other forms of formalized experience. Consider the ways that engaging youth as co-researchers can help create a culture shift that values lived experience as a form of expertise and support shifts in systemic cultures related to hiring, etc.
- **Ensure that youth researchers have the skills and knowledge to fill the role that you have put them in.** For instance, provide support for youth to show up in an anti-racist way. If youth are not prepared to meet expectations, then they are essentially being tokenized. Similarly, ensure that the research environment is prepared with the knowledge and skills to engage with youth.
- **Encourage different types of leadership and involvement in all aspects of the research and dissemination of findings.** Resist assumptions that youth can't contribute in meaningful ways to certain aspects of the research process. Many youth have lived expertise as research participants and are keenly aware of what works and what doesn't work in terms of study design, outreach and recruitment. Youth provide meaningful contributions to data analysis, interpretation and dissemination.
- **Invest in youth engagement that is sustained over a period of time.** As previously described, developing leadership among youth requires an ongoing investment and commitment. Be transparent and realistic about what you can commit to, and advocate for long term engagement when possible.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

As we consider engaging youth as **research participants**, we recommend that researchers use the age range set by HUD (14 to 24) for defining “youth” **and** that they consider being flexible with the age range on the older end. We believe that for many youth who have experienced homelessness, there is value in forms of retrospective research that allow young people to identify what worked for them as they gained and maintained stable housing.

Based on our experiences, we believe there are 5 key considerations when engaging youth as research participants. These are just a place to begin. We strongly encourage researchers to develop a youth advisory board, engage youth as co-researchers (see tips for engaging youth as researchers), or identify some other form of engagement that allows for input from LGBTQ+ youth with lived expertise.

- **Be creative about where you conduct outreach.** Identify generationally-specific marketing and outreach techniques, including the use of social media.
- **Engage youth where they are.** Get into the community, including parks and other gathering places. Community-based organizations are one venue for doing outreach, but recognize that many youth do not utilize these organizations.
- **Make sure youth get something out of their participation.** LGBTQ+ communities have a long history with researchers that has involved taking. Recognize the responsibility of researchers in this field and identify ways to provide youth with tangible benefits. Include money to pay youth participants in your research budgets. Just as you are getting paid for your time to do your work, young people should be paid for their time and effort!
- **Make the research process accessible to youth.** We recommend that researchers think broadly about accessibility. For example, youth need to be able to get to the research site (if a physical location) or have mobile access (if an online study), but they also need research to be presented in an accessible way. Be transparent about why the research is being conducted. How will it help them or youth who might experience homelessness in the future? Consider having a video consent rather than the traditional text-based consent form. Use arts based methods for outreach, engagement, data collection and dissemination. Recognize that sharing information about one’s experiences can feel stigmatizing and re-traumatizing. Create a supportive, safe environment for research participation.
- **Help youth find a voice through the research.** In our experience, young people want their experiences to help others. But many young people are looking for additional opportunities to use their voices for change. Keep this in mind as you solicit participation in your research study. Find ways to share the research findings with the youth. Create dissemination tools that youth can use to share the research findings with others. What other opportunities exist that youth might be interested in? How might you share these?

THE RESEARCH AGENDA

TOPICS	SPECIFIC ISSUES/GAPS	SAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Preventing Housing Instability and Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What works for LGBTQ+ youth? • Lack of proactive education and outreach to families and conflict resolution resources • The role of family in causing housing instability - not just kicking youth out, but other factors/experiences, like the family being housing unstable, etc. • Fixing the child welfare and juvenile justice to homelessness path • Understanding and supporting naturally occurring prevention strategies (outside of the system). Support could range from funding other strategies, to a cultural shift in understanding the types of things that can be supportive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do LGBTQ+ youth say would have helped them not have an experience of homelessness? • What are programs/systems of care currently doing re: prevention? • What non-formal support systems are keeping LGBTQ+ youth from experiencing homelessness and/or accessing the homeless response system? What are the benefits and challenges of these non-formal networks/systems? What type of support do these systems need in order to successfully and sustainably support LGBTQ+ youth?
Stable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding how to best facilitate the achievement of stable housing among LGBTQ+ youth, especially LGBTQ+ youth of color and trans youth • Understanding barriers to stable housing and exploring policy solutions to barriers (i.e., low wage jobs, discriminatory/racist landlords, poverty) • Lack of permanent housing supports for LGBTQ+ youth with chronic mental health needs • Nonprofit industrial complex silencing LGBTQ+ youth who are seeking to change the way things work (perpetuating continued housing instability) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What works? What has helped LGBTQ+ youth maintain housing stability following an experience of homelessness? • What does after-care or follow up look like? How can programs support LGBTQ+ youth in maintaining their housing? • How does the criminalization of homelessness and poverty disrupt housing stability, particularly for LGBTQ+ youth of color? • How does the power dynamic, inherent in the service provider/youth relationship support or hinder the ability of LGBTQ+ youth to maintain housing?

THE RESEARCH AGENDA (cont.)

TOPICS	SPECIFIC ISSUES/GAPS	SAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Permanent Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about the role/potential of chosen family in the lives of LGBTQ+ youth How to build upon naturally occurring relationships while experiencing homelessness for ongoing connection (i.e., with chosen family, case workers, social workers, teachers, etc.) while recognizing the structural conditions that may limit the types of relationships available to LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness and the systemic issues that alienate LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness from connections/relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are programs facilitating/supporting connections between LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness and community?
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of school to prison pipeline on homelessness How to facilitate higher education for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness Anti-immigration policies and immigrant accessibility Supports for LGBTQ+ youth interested in pursuing an education but not knowing how or not being able to afford it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness supporting themselves while they pursue their education, and how can those strategies be supported systematically? How do we get LGBTQ+ youth interested in pursuing an education if they are experiencing homelessness?

THE RESEARCH AGENDA (cont.)

TOPICS	SPECIFIC ISSUES/GAPS	SAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness having to choose between available bed and a job/career • Prioritizing a career track over low wage jobs and poverty for LGBTQ+ youth, particularly LGBTQ+ youth of color • Barriers to employment for trans youth - (cost of identity documents, transbias) • Innovative employment options (i.e., starting own business) • Anti-immigration policies and immigrant accessibility • Getting everyone on board with having LGBTQ+ youth at the table in a meaningful, authentic way and compensating them appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What supports around employment do LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness want? • What worked for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness who have been successful in the employment sector? • What are the characteristics of a successful career pipeline for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness? • How do authentic youth leadership/collaboration opportunities contribute to career development for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness?
Social & Emotional Well-Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of LGBTQ+ youth having access to artistic/creative skills outlets • Fear of identity-based rejection when accessing services • The role of religion/spirituality in relation to social and emotional well-being for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness • The role of self-advocacy in relation to social and emotional well-being for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness • The impact of internalized feelings about sexual and gender identity/dysphoria on social & emotional well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the relationship between religion/spirituality and social & emotional well-being among LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness? • How do discriminatory experiences encountered by LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color experiencing homelessness impact their social & emotional well-being and service engagement? • How can LGBTQ+ youth create change in service provider relationships? Does an inability to effect change in such circumstances affect the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth and as a result, are they less able to maintain housing and interact with health systems?

THE RESEARCH AGENDA (cont.)

TOPICS	SPECIFIC ISSUES/GAPS	SAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Service Access & Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of professional development for program staff about working with LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness • How implicit bias among program staff impacts service access and engagement for LGBTQ+ youth of color experiencing homelessness • Anti-immigration policies and immigrant accessibility • The qualifications that are required to access a program or service and the barriers they create for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the barriers for staff regarding inclusive and affirming care for specific subpopulations of young people (i.e., youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, trans youth, immigrant youth, youth with disabilities) • How do we get more people to care about LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness, particularly LGBTQ+ youth of color? Solving poverty? (Investigate successful change models)
Program Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time limited housing • Abstinence only programming/lack of comprehensive sexual health programming • The ways programs and systems may re-traumatize LGBTQ+ youth • What do 24/7 services look like? • Absence of long term goals/goal setting • Creating safe access points for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness • Serving young LGBTQ+ families • Impact of scarcity politics -- everyone's competing for a piece of the pie • Not enough transparency with youth • One size does not fit all-different youth need different supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the experiences of young LGBTQ+ parents in the youth homelessness system? • What are the costs/benefits of youth led "case planning" for organizations? Compare outcomes of youth who led their own plans vs. those who did not.

THE RESEARCH AGENDA (cont.)

TOPICS	SPECIFIC ISSUES/GAPS	SAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Social Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The current political environment has emboldened hate -- “religious freedom” laws and efforts to erase/exclude LGBTQ+ people at the federal level gives permission for individuals and programs to discriminate• Criminalization of sex work• Criminalization of homelessness and the homelessness to prison pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do campaign finance laws and conservative ideology at the government level perpetuate homelessness, imprisonment, and poverty among LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color?

CONCLUSION

This research agenda serves as a call to action for researchers, policymakers, funders, elected officials, homeless systems administrators and service providers. We thank you for the work you have done, and ask you to continue by listening to the ideas of youth with lived expertise - contained within this document - using them as guideposts for preventing and ending homelessness among LGBTQ+ youth.

Housing is a human right.

In solidarity,

The National LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness Research Agenda Team

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