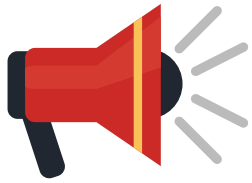


Practice Brief

# SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY HOMELESS YOUTH

# Background



Sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth are adolescents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) or who express their sexuality or gender in ways that differ from established social norms. This group represents one of the most vulnerable populations of youth.

## WHAT TO KNOW...

- SGM youths experience higher prevalence of victimization than non-SGM peers. Victimization is sometimes related to their SGM identities but other times is not.
- Victimization of SGM youths occurs in a variety of contexts, yet may have the most severe consequences in family settings. In particular, unsupportive home environments increase the likelihood that SGM youths will experience psychosocial problems, including homelessness.
- When SGM youth become homeless they may be more likely to engage in transactional sex.
- SGM homeless youth often experience discrimination and stigma when trying to find a place to work, leaving them with little choice but to engage in sex work.
- Against all odds, SGM homeless youth are incredibly resilient and maintain many strengths that can be leveraged to help them achieve stability without relying on survival sex.

# The Details

## PURPOSE AND FACTS



### PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEF

1. Educate stakeholders who interact with SGM homeless youth who engage in survival sex about the persistent challenges faced by this population.
2. Provide recommendations for best practices with the SGM homeless youth population.

### KEY CHALLENGES FOR SGM HOMELESS YOUTH ENGAGING IN SURVIVAL SEX:

1. Unsupportive family and/or home environments
2. Barriers to leaving the street
  - a. Lack of stable and affordable housing
  - b. Lack of employment opportunities
3. Ongoing victimization and lack of protection

### STRENGTHS OF SGM HOMELESS YOUTH

- Authentic expression of SGM identity
- Ability to meet basic needs despite adversity
- Social networks and chosen family





# BEST PRACTICES

# 1 YOUTH NEED VIABLE AND RELIABLE ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF STABILITY, SUCH AS HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT.

## GOALS

Ensure SGM homeless youth are not discriminated against in shelters and permanent housing

Implement fair hiring practices that inhibit discrimination against SGM youth

Create employment opportunities that do not exclude SGM youth that may have criminal records

Find supportive substitute caregivers (e.g. foster families) for youth under the age of 18

## STRATEGIES

- Advocate for policy changes with temporary housing service providers to accept all SGM youth, especially trans and bisexual youth.
- Develop relationships with landlords that are willing to accept trans youth into housing
- Give financial support to youth working to obtain permanent housing

- Advocate for equal opportunity employment practices
- Develop relationships with employers willing to hire SGM youth (particularly trans youth)

- Develop relationships with employers willing to hire youth with criminal records
- Advocate for expungement of youth criminal records

- Recruit LGBTQ+ and Ally foster parents willing to care for displaced youth
- Train current foster parents about the specific experiences and needs of this population
- Educate homeless youth about the opportunities available to them if they engage in foster care services

## 2 POLICE NEED TO BE EDUCATED ABOUT THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES OF SGM YOUTH AND HOW TO APPROPRIATELY INTERACT WITH THEM.

Many SGM homeless youth have histories of multiple victimization, sometimes at the hands of police. It is important for members of the police to understand the influence of these specific experiences on their interactions with SGM youth.

Arrest policies and practices that criminalize homeless youth place them at a disadvantage for being accepted into permanent housing and securing gainful employment. Although safe harbor laws protect youth who engage in survival sex from being prosecuted, these laws only go into effect if youth are actually arrested for engaging in survival sex. For example, SGM homeless youth may end up being stopped by the police, but instead of being arrested for engaging in survival sex, they are arrested for other offenses, such as loitering or carrying drugs. Therefore, alternative strategies and diversion programs should be recommended for use by police. Goals and strategies for improving police interactions with SGM youth are provided below.

### GOALS

Educate police about culturally competent responses to SGM youth

Improve collaboration between service providers and police

Improve collaboration between service providers and police

### STRATEGIES

- Conduct city wide police training, collaborating with current officers that are SGM or have a better understanding of culturally sensitive practices
- Include basic training on sexual and gender identity

- Invite police to participate in strategic events with service providers and advocacy groups to encourage more positive engagement and collaboration
- Resolve incongruent views about youths' social networks

- Educate police about the short- and long-term impacts of misdemeanor charges and barriers to employment and housing
- Inquire about the limited use of prostitution charges and inability of youth to utilize safe harbor laws
- Brainstorm about appropriate diversion programs for youth

# Resources

## AND FURTHER READING



### LINKS

- <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/surviving-streets-new-york-experiences-lgbtq-youth-ymsm-and-ywsw-engaged-survival-sex>
- <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/access-safety-health-outcomes-substance-use-and-abuse-and-service-provision-lgbtq-youth-ymsm-and-ywsw-who-engage-survival-sex>
- <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/locked-interactions-criminal-justice-and-child-welfare-systems-lgbtq-youth-ymsm-and-ywsw-who-engage-survival-sex>

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