



# Minnesota HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE

## Human Trafficking & The LGBTQ Community

ISSUE • RESPONSE • SOLUTION

### UNDERSTANDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a public health, public safety and human rights violation that occurs around the world and in communities throughout Minnesota. Human trafficking includes both labor and sex trafficking, and international and domestic victims. The Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force (MNHTTF) is working to address and prevent human trafficking in Minnesota through a coordinated, multidisciplinary, statewide response.

### THE ISSUE: THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) people have historically faced discrimination and oppression. Stigmatization and rejection continue today, putting this population at an increased risk for depression, suicide, substance abuse, homelessness, being victims of bullying and other forms of violence, including sexual exploitation.

Studies supporting these findings, while troubling, should provide insight and inform service delivery for this particularly vulnerable group:

- One study found that 73 percent of LGBTQ youth had thoughts of suicide and 50% had attempted suicide at least once. <sup>(1)</sup>
- A recent study found that 9 percent of LGBTQ youth met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, and 15% met the criteria for major depression. <sup>(2)</sup>
- Alcohol use of LGBTQ youth is reported at 60%, compared to a reported 45% of their heterosexual peers, with binge drinking at reported at 44% for LGBTQ youth, compared with 26% of heterosexual youth. <sup>(3)</sup>
- 33% of LGBTQ youth have missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe, compared to less than 5% of all students. <sup>(4)</sup>
- LGBTQ youth are almost twice as likely to not finish high school or pursue college compared to heterosexual youth. <sup>(5)</sup>

LGBTQ youth are an over-represented sub-population within victims of sexual exploitation. (6) Various studies have found that between 20-40% of unaccompanied homeless youth identify as LGBTQ v. 3-5% of general youth population (7), while one local Minneapolis study found that nearly one third of sexually exploited youth self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual. (8)

Research from the Family Acceptance Project has shown that the average age that an individual “comes out” as LGBTQ has lowered over time. In the 1970’s people were coming out in their early 20’s and today the average age that a youth comes out is 13.5. (9) This younger age means that the youth is most likely still living with their parents or other caregivers who may or may not be accepting of the youth’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The Family Acceptance Project’s research also shows that 1 out of every 4 youth that come out may be forced out or kicked out of their home by their parents or caregivers.(10) Homelessness increases the youth’s risk for being sexually exploited. Additionally, transgender individuals experience greater difficulty in finding employment due to transphobia, which can also contribute to an increased risk of sexual exploitation. (11)

A recent study of transgender youth found that 67% had engaged in sex work. (12)

## **THE RESPONSE: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES**

In order to meet the unique needs of LGBTQ youth, programs and initiatives that provide specialized services are essential. The following community-based organizations provide such services:

**Avenues for Youth-GLBT Host Home Program** - is a community based program that connects homeless LGBTQ youth with host families (that have had background checks and training) in order to provide them with a safe place to live and support. [www.avenuesforyouth.org](http://www.avenuesforyouth.org)

**Reclaim** - is a mental health provider specific for LGBTQ youth [www.reclaim-lgbtyouth.org](http://www.reclaim-lgbtyouth.org)

**Transgender Youth Support Network (TYSN)** - is a nonprofit that provides education, technical assistance and training, advocacy and organizing and support for transgender youth. [transyouthsupportnetwork.org](http://transyouthsupportnetwork.org)

**Minnesotans United for All Families, Out Front and the Human Rights Campaign** - is a coalition of organizations working to change policy and law to reflect inclusive laws for LGBTQ people. [mnunited.org](http://mnunited.org) [outfront.org](http://outfront.org) [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

**Parents & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG)** – is an organization that provides support to families and parents/caregivers of LGBTQ children. [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

**United Way’s ARISE Project** – is an initiative aimed at raise awareness and funding for LGBTQ youth homelessness programming that is led by the United Way but includes collaborations with other corporate businesses such as Target, Land O Lakes and Supervalu. <https://www.unitedwaytwincities.org/>

## THE SOLUTION: EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

As Minnesota works to prevent the sexual exploitation of all youth, the state must commit to increased education and awareness about meeting the needs of the LGBTQ youth population, as well as to fostering an environment of respect for all gender identities and sexual orientations.

School districts should adopt and implement policies that address bullying of all types, including the targeting of LGBTQ students. Comprehensive sex education that facilitates open discussion about healthy sexuality as well as LGBTQ-specific issues should also be incorporated into school health curriculum.

State and county agencies serving youth should undergo training that will enhance service providers' ability to support LGBTQ youth. For example, the Department of Human Services recently published a best practice guide and increased trainings for county social workers.

Other recommendations include specialized trainings for foster parents, culturally specific mental health and chemical dependency treatment programs for the LGBTQ population, and additional supports for parents and families of LGBTQ youth.

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3. Goodenow, C. (2004) *Youth risk behavior survey results*. Massachusetts Department of Education.
4. Kim, R. (2009) *A report on the status of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in education: Stepping out of the closet, into the light*. Washington, D.C. National Education Association.
5. Quintana, N.S., Rosenthal, J. and Krehely, J. (2010) *On the streets: The federal response to gay and transgender homeless youth*. Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress.
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7. Sifra Quintana, N., Rosenthal, J. & Krehely, J. (2010) *On the Streets: the Federal Response to Gay and Transgender Homeless Youth*. Center for American Progress
8. Holger-Ambrose, B., Langmade, C., Edinburgh, L. & Saewyc, E. (2013): *The Illusions and Juxtapositions of Commercial Sexual Exploitation among Youth: Identifying Effective Street Outreach Strategies*. Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 22:3, 326-340.
9. Ryan C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R. M. and Sanches, J. (2009) *Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and latino lesbian, gay and bisexual young adults*. Pediatrics, Vol. 123.
10. Ibid
11. For more information on the sexual exploitation of homeless and runaway youth, please see *the Fact Sheet on Sexual Exploitation of Homeless and Runaway Youth*.
12. Wilson, E.C., Garofalo, R., Harris, R.D., Herrick, A., Martinez, M., Martinez, J. & Belzer, M. (2009) *Transgender female youth and sex work: HIV risk and a comparison of life factors related to engagement in sex work*. AIDS and Behavior, 13(5), 902-913.