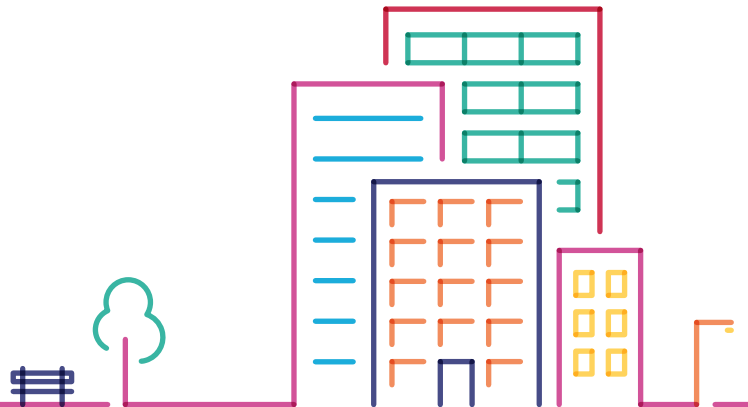


OUT ON THE STREETS

LGBTQ+ Youth
Homelessness in Wales:
REPORT SUMMARY AUGUST 2019



Summary Report

“LGBTQ+ youth homelessness is a major public health concern that has significant consequences for a young person’s physical and psychosocial well-being.”¹

LGBTQ+ young people who become homeless in Wales in 2019 face stigma, abuse, misgendering and a range of harms and threats beyond even those that non-LGBTQ+ people face when made homeless. From survival sex to rough sleeping, this report summarises a major review of the experiences some LGBTQ+ young people have had in Wales. Young people from across Wales were interviewed by their peers, where possible, or by trained researchers, to gain a powerful insight into their experiences and demands for change. Alongside young people’s experiences, this report also sets out the views of those working with homeless young people, in Wales and beyond, and what research from elsewhere tells us. Ultimately, this report recommends a series of actions for Welsh Government, local authorities and service providers which can help us to end homelessness for LGBTQ+ young people in Wales.

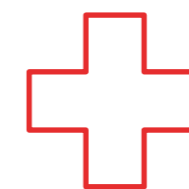
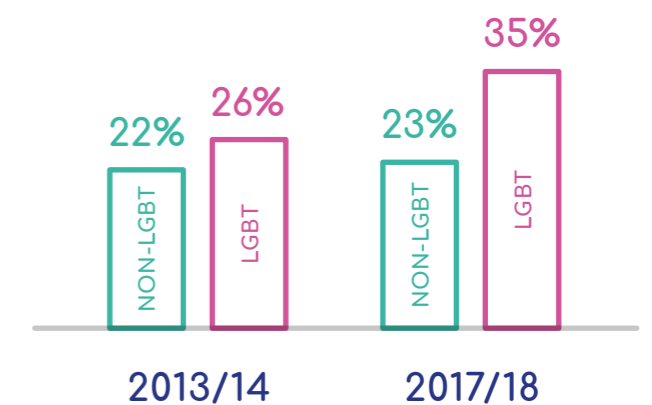
LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately affected by youth homelessness.



of the youth homelessness population across the UK IDENTIFIED AS LGBT²

FAMILY BREAKDOWN

as a reason given for LGBT homelessness is increasing:³



72% of young homeless LGBT people accessing supported housing experience mental ill health³



16-24 year olds who identified as LGBT in the general population⁴

young people accessing Llamau services identified as LGBT³

¹ McCann, E. & Brown, M. (2019). Homelessness among youth who identify as LGBTQ+: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 2019: 1-12.

² https://www.theproudtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/AlbertKennedy_ResearchReport_Youth-Homelessness.pdf

³ Llamau inhouse data

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2016>

Key Findings

Prevalence of LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness

LGBTQ+ young people are disproportionately overrepresented in the wider homelessness population, more likely to leave stable accommodation to escape emotional, mental or sexual abuse and at greater risk of harm when homeless than non-LGBTQ+ young people.⁵ Despite this, they are underserved by support services designed to respond to their specific needs.

The Albert Kennedy Trust found that 24% of the youth homelessness population across the UK identified as LGBT.⁶ By contrast, ONS statistics suggest that just 4.1% of the population are LGBT.

In Wales, statistics for 2017/18 demonstrate that 9% of the young people accessing Llamau's supported housing services classify themselves as LGBT (likely an undercount).

"I was trying to make myself straight again... I've only recently opened back up to the fact that I can't change who I am."

Increased Risk of Harm

Homelessness is challenging for anyone, but LGBTQ+ young people often have to cope with homophobic and transphobic violence and discrimination as well as everything else.⁷ As a result, they experience greater risk of psychological harm than non-LGBTQ+ people, are more likely to develop substance misuse problems, be exposed to sexual exploitation⁸ and experience greater difficulty obtaining safe shelter, staying in school, earning money and accessing social support and health services.

The young people we spoke to talked about exposure to considerable risk of harm when homeless, turning to survival sex in some cases.⁹

"I have used Grindr lots. I used to start going on it when I was 14, I would go out to meet someone anyway but if they offered the opportunity to stay over I would definitely. If it was a night away from my parents then I would.... Since I've been 14 I've used it to stay over guys houses or since I've been homeless I've used it to get a meal"

"I have used Grindr to hook up... Every time I've gone to meet a randomer I've had a knife in my boot."

Others described rough sleeping, sharing accommodation with drug users or staying in abusive relationships to maintain shelter.

"I was staying at my mate's and my mate's boyfriend is a drug addict and it was either go there or sleep on the streets. I would rather go there and just keep out of the way than stay on the street."

"I've been in homes where I've felt and known that I'm not wanted there, which has put me out of my comfort zone."

Pathways to Homelessness

The predominant cause of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness is family breakdown, with abuse at home a greater risk for LGBTQ+ young people. Many of the young people interviewed for this study experienced rejection from families unprepared to accept them for who they are.

"My Dad used to beat me because I was bi-sexual. I have had a lot more female partners than male partners and my Dad didn't accept that"

"My family treated it like it was a mental illness: 'You can get help for this', 'You can be cured'. It was definitely one of the main reasons why I did become homeless."

"They just refused to call me by my name, kept calling me she. Well I'm not she. Kept calling me by my deadname. Well that's not who I am. Truth be told, I've never been her. It's not like this should have been a surprise. I'd been telling them for years. So that's when I left. Packed all my stuff and left. Just like that. I had to get away. But I had nowhere to go."

For many young trans people, domestic abuse played a key role in their homelessness, compounded by economic precarity and underscored by families turning their backs.

"My girlfriend at the time was abusive, yeah. You know, 20/20 hindsight – great, isn't it? But I was only 15, I didn't have anywhere else to go. My step-dad- well he's not a very nice person, shall we say? I just got on with it. No one was interested anyway."

⁵ <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/sites/default/files/DANGER-ZONES-REPORT-FINAL-EMBARGOED-TILL-00.01AM-THURSDAY-22-MARCH-2018.pdf>

⁶ https://www.theproudsttrust.org/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/AlbertKennedy_ResearchReport_Youth-Homelessness.pdf

⁷ Abramovich, A. (2015). A Focused Response to Prevent and End LGBTQ2S Youth Homelessness. Prepared for Government of Alberta.

⁸ Bateman, W. (2015). LGBT Youth Homelessness: UK National Scoping Exercise. Albert Kennedy Trust.

⁹ McCann, E. & Brown, M. (2019). Homelessness among youth who identify as LGBTQ+: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 2019: 1-12.

Access to Support

The young people we spoke to typically highlighted a lack of early intervention, particularly from social services and CAMHS. Mental ill health was a recurrent theme across the board and those we spoke to had almost all struggled to access help. A more proactive offer to engage young people in mental health support before their situations deteriorated may have prevented much of the trauma they experienced.

“Well my experiences have been pretty rubbish. I’ve been pushed around from pillar to post and they finally gave me a diagnosis about two weeks ago, after fighting for nine years.”

“Social services were involved from when I was 4 up until I left and they didn’t do anything. They knew we were being beaten, they knew everything that was going down. They knew that they were trying to turn me straight but nothing was being done. Social services need to pull their finger out.”

Young people told us they wanted more specific emphasis placed on LGBTQ+ people in the design of both housing and mental health services.

“You’ve got the mental health (support) for all the different disorders but then they should have one for the LGBTQ people so that they could all get together and understand that they are not on their own.”

Experiences of homelessness services differed across the participants. Although it was not specifically asked, some participants noted that gaining access to statutory support was difficult.

“At 16 I was sofa surfing for nine months before I got accommodation... A social worker who does conference meetings flipped her lid with my social worker and then contacted (third-sector homelessness provider).”

There were a number of positive experiences of joined-up working going well or young people feeling well supported by a range of organisations, particularly third-sector homelessness organisations.

“I had (third-sector homelessness provider), I had my social worker, a YOS worker, I had counselling and CAMHS and stuff, so it was really good. I found them helpful.”

“I think that (third-sector homelessness provider) have supported me in the best way that they can because I’ve got the best result. I have achieved the goals that they have set for me. I’m just going to try and work hard in college and better myself and see what the future holds.”

However, some trans participants, in particular, noted very poor experiences of homelessness services. A large minority were put off approaching services because they believed that they would be unhelpful or even judgemental. One young person described an experience of mediation in which he felt he was expected to see his gender as negotiable:

“So we were sent to mediation- that’s where the homeless people sent me. Me and my mum and dad in a room eyeballing each other...the trouble is, they don’t want to accept I’m trans. I tried to explain to them [the mediators], they [parents] don’t want to talk to me. Whatever you say, they won’t accept me. It’s their daughter they want. And I’m not their daughter. The mediators were like, oh, you just need to talk to each other. You need to understand where your parents are coming from. Uh no. Waste of time.”

Other comments reflected how the perception of the being the lone LGBTQ+ person in a supported housing project can make young people feel singled out and unnerved, leading to calls for LGBTQ+-specific supported accommodation from some.

“When you go for support in homeless places there are lots of dodgy characters around the house... it can be very intimidating being amongst loads of homeless people. The majority, when I was being supported, all of them were straight so it was very daunting because they were naturally intimidating people and being gay can feel like you are a target almost. I had just turned 16 and was the youngest there.”

Solutions to LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness

Young people told us about a number of changes they want to see as a result of their experiences. They want to see major societal shifts in attitudes, with more focus on LGBTQ+ rights at schools, more focus on addressing breaches of their rights and more early intervention for those at risk.

“I would ask the First Minister to change education about sexual minorities in schools. I think the education about LGBT is important because it sets the idea of it into people’s heads to normalise it... It is something that would be accurate and does represent the community well and is informative and when those students become parents their children won’t need to come out as LGBT it will just be normal. There wouldn’t be a reason why they would become homeless.”

The young people also told us about changes to homelessness services they wanted to see. **LGBTQ+ specific homelessness services** were called for by a number of those we spoke to, both young people and practitioners, and there is strong evidence for their effectiveness in the literature.

“Sometimes I thought I don’t want to go into a hostel, cos I’m different and people will pick on me and that, so putting more protective housing in for (young LGBTQ+ people) maybe that would work. I don’t know, just to stop people from picking on what you are”



“We have supported a number of young homeless young people who have identified as LGBTQ. I feel a service should be developed for LGBTQ young people that allows them to express and explore their sexuality and identity.”

A Welsh Government funded partnership project between Llamau, Denbighshire Council, Viva LGBT and a mental health specialist in Rhyl, which will offer homeless LGBTQ+ young people accommodation and support is set to open in Autumn 2019. Beyond this project, **strategic direction on the issue is needed, at both national and local scale.**

Practitioners working across local authorities and third sector providers generally highlighted a desire to improve what they currently offer for LGBTQ+ youth. **A repeated theme was a strong demand for training and information sharing.**

“We need more in depth training for staff to enable them to provide a stronger support network for LGBTQ+ service users”



“We should receive LGBTQ+ training so people understand the different definitions... I think it should be something that as a service we are much more comfortable talking about with clients, understanding how their sexuality or gender could affect their life experiences and how in turn that affects their housing needs.” Research with practitioners working with young people suggests that without well trained staff who understand LGBTQ+ issues, young LGBTQ+ people will receive inadequate care or avoid the services they need all together.¹⁰

One response from a practitioner called for “Service user involvement and LGBTQ+ staff involvement to plan and drive change. Outreach to groups / services to support us with that.” During the course of the research it became clear that LGBTQ+ community groups, such as Impact in Cardiff, Viva LGBT in Rhyl or those run by SYSHP, GISDA, or Swansea YMCA are extremely important for young people. They are also very useful for service providers, who can direct young people to them for informal, community support. Improved awareness of the availability of such services and financial support for those that need it would mean **enhanced community support for LGBTQ+ young people.**

A lack of trust in services and experience of hostility and homophobia mean that many LGBTQ+ young people are not comfortable revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity, so services underestimate the scale of both the issue and the required response.

“When a worker meets a young person and that person is likely in the LGBT community, do not try and rush that young person into saying what they are. It’s nothing to do with you and as a worker you need to respect the fact that someone wants to keep it a secret. I’ve met lots of workers and they say “I don’t mean to be rude but are you gay?” and it’s like “I don’t mean to be rude but its none of your fucking business”. There is no need for it.”

This mistrust can be overcome by **improving training of staff** and making improvements to the environments in which services are provided. Simple changes such as **gender-neutral toilets, pro-actively offering private spaces to talk or visible displays of support for LGBTQ+ rights** should help. The Rock Trust in Edinburgh offered a creative example by working with a group of LGBTQ+ young people to make artwork showing support for LGBTQ+ rights to hang in their public reception areas. As a result of this, and a range of other activities with partners LGBT Youth Scotland, they have seen a significant increase in the numbers of homeless young people they work with describing themselves as LGBTQ+.

“I think I did disclose my sexuality straight away but I can see why someone would be phased by that. Especially if you’ve been kicked out for being LGBT and then you are asked and then could think is this going to be a barrier in terms of me getting help or a place. Is this person going to judge me from my response? Do they want to know so they don’t have to have me in their service? I have since found out that is not the case.”

As with all aspects of homelessness, **early prevention of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness** is crucial. Methods identified in the research include Albert Kennedy Trust’s online service Your Toolkit, offering resources written by young people for others in need of information or support, which includes advice on coming out to family.¹¹ Schools have a role to play too and Stonewall Cymru have developed resources for schools to use, including Creating a Trans Inclusive School, a bilingual publication partly funded by Welsh Government.¹² Support for young people, or a lack thereof, at

school, through referral to LGBTQ+ or homelessness services, for instance, was noted as a significant factor in young people’s experiences in the research.

Ultimately, societal change in attitudes is needed to condemn LGBTQ+ youth homelessness to history altogether, so progressive approaches such as the plan to ensure that relationship and sex education lessons are LGBTQ+ inclusive in Wales are most welcome. To reflect this change sex education and relationship lessons in schools in Wales will now be called Relationship and Sexuality Education. In the meantime, there is much that those working with young people, whether providing homelessness services or otherwise, can do to improve the support available to this highly vulnerable and disproportionately impacted group. By listening to the voices of young people and making the changes they have asked for, we can make LGBTQ+ youth homelessness rare, brief and non-recurrent.

“There should be more groups and youth clubs for people to be able to get together and understand each other and make sure that they know they are not on their own. I have had a lot of people come into my hostel and think they are on their own.”

¹⁰ Maccio, E. M. & Ferguson, K. M. (2015). Service to LGBTQ runaway and homeless youth: Gaps and recommendations. Children and Youth Services Review. 63, 47-57.

¹¹ <https://www.akt.org.uk/Blogs/toolkit>

¹² <https://www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/creating-trans-inclusive-school-cymru>

Recommendations:

1. Welsh Government's **10 year strategy** to tackle homelessness comes to an end this year. **Any future Welsh Government strategy should address LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness specifically, drawing upon the findings of this report, plus consultation with young people, LGBTQ+ groups and service providers to make LGBTQ+ youth homelessness rare, brief and non-recurrent.**

2. **We recommend that Welsh Government support the trial of an Upstream-style service, whereby schools work with youth homelessness specialists to identify young people at risk of homelessness.** Schools offer an excellent opportunity to prevent youth homelessness or intervene early to help young people access appropriate support and this approach would directly address the concerns of many young people who feel earlier intervention would have helped them. This would not need to directly address the gender identity or sexual orientation of those completing the survey, but would enable schools to pick up on tensions at home and introduce appropriate support to prevent homelessness.

3. **Welsh Government should request data from Local Authorities on the numbers of LGBTQ+ people accessing homelessness services.** This data should be presented in a fashion which allows for cross referencing by age, so that the scale of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness can begin to be understood and the effectiveness of efforts to reduce it demonstrated. It is crucial that this is done in a sensitive fashion, so monitoring questions should be co-designed with the LGBTQ+ community and data should only be used for specific, stated purposes.

4. **Local Authorities should revisit their Statutory Homelessness Reviews and 5 Year Homelessness Strategies in light of these findings.** They should consult with local LGBTQ+ groups, and ensure that there is a strategic commitment and agreed approach to reducing LGBTQ+ youth homelessness in their areas.

5. **LGBTQ+ –specific supported housing services, where young LGBTQ+ people who have been made homeless can feel comfortable and safe should be developed.** It is recommended that Local Authority commissioners learn from and replicate the progress of the LGBTQ+-specific supported accommodation project in Rhyl, funded by Welsh Government's Innovation Fund and delivered in partnership by Viva, Llamau and Denbighshire Council.

6. **Local authorities should ensure that they are aware of and linked in with the youth groups in their areas and that financial support is available to them, as necessary.** Existing youth services, which cater for LGBTQ+ young peoples' needs to socialise, learn and form communities within safe spaces are precious and should be protected, funded appropriately and encouraged to develop, ensuring that, should they experience homelessness, young LGBTQ+ people have a trusted agency to turn to.

7. **Local authorities, third sector providers and health practitioners working with young people should commission training from LGBTQ+ organisations to ensure that their staff feel fully confident when working with young LGBTQ+ people and know where to refer for specialist interventions.** Improved understanding across Wales would reduce intolerance and ensure problems were picked up earlier, reducing the numbers of young people entering crisis.

8. **Local authorities and third-sector agencies should consider ways to make homelessness services more welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ+ people.** Visible commitments to equality (including trans equality), employing staff with lived experience and early intervention, for instance with homelessness services having a presence at Pride events or visiting LGBTQ+ youth groups, would all promote engagement. It is important to remember that trans youth are a distinct group from LGBTQ+ youth as a whole, and do not necessarily "read" LGBTQ+ materials as inclusive of them, so this should be taken into account (by displaying the trans flag alongside LGBTQ+ flags, for example).

9. **Organisations working with young people should provide gender-neutral toilets.** This is a simple way to ensure that no LGBTQ+ young person feels uncomfortable accessing any element of the service provided.

10. **Young people presenting to homelessness services should be proactively offered a private space in which to talk to staff members about their reasons for presenting.** This is a straightforward way to help young people to feel more comfortable discussing their experiences.

11. **More research on this subject is required to help us to better understand young LGBTQ+ people's needs in Wales.** In particular, this could focus on improving understanding of survival sex (among LGBTQ+ young people and others), as well as intersectionality with other issues, e.g. economic disadvantage, race, disability.

Acknowledgement

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About This Report

This report summarises a full study, undertaken by End Youth Homelessness Cymru, which can be found on Llamau's website. End Youth Homelessness Cymru is a coalition of organisations who have come together to end youth homelessness in Wales. We are grateful for support to produce this report from the following local authorities: Rhondda Cynon Taf, Newport, Cardiff and Swansea. We also thank all the members of EYHC who contributed their time to this report and, particularly to the young people who acted as peer researchers or opened up to us about their experiences.

A Note on Terminology and Definitions

For the purposes of this report, we have chosen to use the term LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans and Queer, with the + representing inclusion of other identities to represent other non-cisgender and non-heterosexual groups). This decision was made in consultation with the young people who worked on the project as peer researchers, as they felt it was the term most likely to resonate with their peers. This definition is deviated from only when making reference to data collected by others. Where the term 'trans' is used, it is included as an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Some trans people are also LGBTQ+.

