

Transgender: Homelessness & HIV

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https://www.transadvocate.com/transgender-homelessness-hiv_n_4962.htm

Abstract

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Article

I know someone who was kicked out of her family's home because she was trans. When she was on the streets, she went to the only place she knew would be welcoming to someone like herself: a gay bar. When she got there, a man let her know that she could stay the night at his place... if she agreed to have sex with him. Until that night, she had never had any sexual relationships... exchanging sex for housing would become her first experience.

Unfortunately for her, he didn't tell her that he was HIV+. Today, she is housed, has a high T-Cell count and an undetectable viral load. She's housed through a program that is funded to house transgender people - the first one of its kind funded by the federal government.

NOTE: HIV infection rate among the homeless was 22.11%. Became Homeless: n=6,450 transgender people, IAET, 2011

So, if you didn't catch that number for the chart above, the HIV infection rate among the homeless transgender population is more than TWENTY-TWO percent... 22.11%! That's huge. The HIV infection rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is just 5%, and worldwide, it's .8%. However, for homeless transgender people, it's OVER TWENTY-TWO PERCENT!

When I was advocating for this program that this trans woman is now housed in a few years ago, I remember telling the person writing the grant proposal that they need not fear not having enough people to fill the housing program's slots. When I wrote the project narrative and stood before the approval body presenting our vision for this housing program, I - unfortunately - had a number of stories to tell them about the horrors of being transgender and homeless. (Since this post is about HIV, I'll save the stories of transgender homeless people who suffered bashing, mutilation, rape and murder for another time.)

Currently, this program is full (over capacity, actually) and has a waiting list of close to 100 homeless trans people.

I'm also very happy with the progress we've made with Covenant House (a teen homeless provider). For years, Covenant House refused to house transgender people.

After some serious targeted and coordinated advocacy, Covenant House is now openly supportive and welcoming of trans kids. Moreover, the Houston GLBT-positive model is being adopted by other Covenant Houses throughout the US, Mexico, and Canada!

While we're making hard-fought progress, many homeless service providers still refuse to house transgender people.

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is taking final steps before publishing a new rule that would prohibit trans discrimination at any shelter or provider of housing that received HUD funding. Under current HUD rules, discrimination is permissible.

On November 15, 2011 U.S. Secretary of HUD Shaun Donovan said an estimated one in five transgender Americans have been refused a home or apartment, and more than one in ten have been evicted because of their gender identity or expression. He went on to say that for the Obama Administration, addressing the trans homelessness issue is "not as an issue--but as a priority."

Living on the street puts transgender folk at greater risk of becoming HIV positive. Being excluded from the social safety net that's available to everyone else, the beatings, the rape, the survival sex - all these risk factors are focused upon the homeless trans population, and the result is an out-of-control epidemic tearing through an incredibly vulnerable population.

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