

Homeless GLBT Youth Research for the

Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCRHYP)

VCRHYP policies and procedures manual requires all TLP staff participate in ongoing training that ensures each site conducts outreach and delivers services in a manner that is culturally sensitive to RHY, LGBTQI, and other diverse groups; and incorporates language that is appropriate to the complex identities of male, female and transgender youth. Further, VCRHYP ensures that training opportunities are not only available to VCRHYP staff but to the larger youth serving community by, for example, offering at the 2012 annual Working with Youth Conference a 3.5-hour Cultural and Linguistic Competence Training focusing on systems of oppression and health disparities and providing participants with strategies to address and eliminate disparities in our society. Additionally, more than 500 service providers in Vermont have received a 100-resource CD¹ around cultural competency issues.

Beyond ongoing training, VCRHYP adheres to the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services² (CLAS) standards by ensuring youth receive effective, understandable and respectful care, sites conduct ongoing organizational self-assessments, and data on individual consumers' race, ethnicity and spoken and written language are collected in records.

The 2011 VT Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) findings for queer youth in Vermont revealed that:

- The rate of attempted suicide continues to decline for GLBQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning youth). In 2009, 20% of GLBQ youth reported attempting suicide in the last 30 days – in 2011, that number dropped to 15%. While these numbers are showing it is getting better, GLBQ youth in Vermont are still five times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.

¹The list of resources is also available online at http://youth-in-transition-grant.com/uploads/CLC_Resources_CD_Index.pdf

²CLAS standards available at: <https://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/Content/clas.asp>

- GLBQ youth are four and five times more likely than heterosexual youth to use harder illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin.
- 4 in 10 GLBQ youth, or 35% of all GLBQ Vermont youth, report being bullied or harassed in the last 30 days.
- GLBQ youth are three times more likely than heterosexual youth to skip school due to feeling unsafe.

In order to address the findings described above, VCRHYP will continue partnering and consulting with Outright Vermont, the state's LGBTQ youth advocacy organization to ensure that policies and procedures reflect sensitivity to current LGBTQ culture, and staff increase awareness of risk factors associated with these groups. VCRHYP also consults with the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP), the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), and Diversity Rocks (refugee youth led group) to ensure services are provided in ways that are culturally sensitive to refugee youth and young adults.

Vermont has a long history of commitment to GLBQ issues and this is also reflected in the YRBS results that show GLBQ youth are engaging in positive behaviors that include, among others:

- Half of all GLBQ youth in Vermont volunteer in their community every week.
- Nearly 60% of GLBQ youth agree that their teachers really care and encourage their development as young people.
- 6 out of every 10 GLBQ youth talk to their parents about school.

VCRHYP is aware that in addition to the public health risks young people face merely by being homeless, the risks are exacerbated for those who self-identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Van Leeuwen et al, 2005). Further, the National Recommended Best Practices for Serving LGBT Homeless Youth³ report urges organizations to improve practices, improve organizational culture, and improve residential services for LGBT homeless youth. Consequently, annual TLP site visits will include a review of the sites' cultural and LGBT competency action plans, organizational self-assessments, and evaluate how well sites are meeting the needs of diverse homeless youth. Recommendations will be made for enhancing the level of sensitivity in all aspects of TLP services, ensuring sites demonstrate effective

cross-cultural work, and service delivery models are driven by client-preferred choices⁴.

Recommendations will additionally be used as a broader action plan for creating new initiatives; including revision of the annual training plan to ensure training specifically relates to RHY, LGBTQ, and other diverse groups in the state.

³ National Recommended Best Practices for Serving LGBT Homeless Youth available at:

http://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/bkl_national-recommended-best-practices-for-lgbt-homeless-youth_0.pdf

⁴ National Center for Cultural Competency <http://nccc.georgetown.edu/>

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