



# GROWING UP LGBT IN AMERICA



Growing up in America these days can be a very challenging experience. We live in a rapidly evolving and internet frenzied world that brings children along for the ride often without regard to accommodating for their innocence, naivety and/or modesty. But the internet also has its benefits such as youth being able to research information and connect with other young people with similar interests and challenges.

However, growing up can be an even greater challenge when you're gay or lesbian. Often ridiculed and bullied in school, gay/lesbian youth sometimes come home to an even more hostile environment.

Sadly there is a growing number of gay youth who are being told by their parents to leave home because of their sexuality. Homelessness among gay teens is an absolute travesty that is further worsened by additional abuse as many are forced to work as sex workers in order to support themselves.

This spiral continues downward as gay teens are often exposed to HIV/AIDS and with no health insurance or community support to assist them in gaining medical attention.

## The Scope of the Problem

The National Black Justice Coalition's (NBJC) expanding programmatic initiatives provide visibility and outreach, advocacy, and public education on the socio-economic issues impacting today's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. In fact NBJC has identified three major areas where LGBT youth are most vulnerable along with solutions that we ask that you join us in advocating for:

1. School Harassment/Bullying and Attacks
2. Homelessness
3. HIV/AIDS

The following are disturbing statistics collected by our peer organizations which validate why NBJC and your efforts are needed to help protect today's youth!

## School Harassment/Bullying and Attacks

- 75% of school aged students hear derogatory remarks such as "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often at school, and nearly nine out of ten (89.2%) reported hearing "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" - meaning stupid or worthless- either frequently or often.
- Over a third (37.8%) of students experience physical harassment at school on the basis of sexual orientation and more than a quarter (26.1%) on the basis of their gender expression.
- Nearly one-fifth (17.6%) of students have been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and over a tenth (11.8%) because of their gender expression.
- A survey of school principles revealed that while nearly all (96%) of their schools have anti-bullying policies, less than half specifically mention sexual orientation (46%) or gender identity or expression (39%).

Source: *Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment (2007)*  
*National School Climate Survey (2005)*

## NBJC Solutions:

Join NBJC in advocating for the following:

1. Support Safe Schools legislation that would provide comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination legislation at the local, state and federal levels.
2. Support your child's school and school district in adopting anti-bullying policies which clearly identify harassment based upon gender identity or expression.
3. Create and support Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs). This will help to bring children, parents, and teachers together in understanding each other and the unique challenges that LGBT youth sometimes face.
4. Increasing visibility and education concerning LGBT history. Learning more about the dynamic and vibrant lives of gay/lesbian achievers helps to instill a sense of pride in gay youth. From their perspective it helps to know that they truly can do anything and that their sexual orientation does not have to be a hindrance in their life.

## Homelessness

- Approximately 26% of gay teens who came out to their parents/guardians were told they must leave home. LGBT youth also leave home due to physical, sexual and emotional abuse.
- More than 33% of youth who are homeless or in the care of social services experienced a violent physical assault when they came out as gay or lesbian. This can also lead to youth leaving a shelter or foster home because they actually feel safer on the streets.
- Homeless LGBT youth are more likely to: use drugs, participate in sex work that puts them at higher risk for HIV and other STDs, and attempt suicide.
- Of the estimated 1.6 million homeless American youth, between 20-40% identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).
- Family conflict is the primary cause of homelessness for all youth, LGBT or straight.
- Specifically, family conflict over a youth's sexual orientation or gender identity is a significant factor that leads to homelessness or the need for out-of-home care.

Source: *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: An epidemic of homelessness (2007)*

## NBJC Solutions:

Join NBJC in advocating for the following:

1. Increased funding for shelter space and housing dedicated for LGBT youth. Once they're kicked out of the house for being gay, the streets often become the home of gay youth.
2. Expanded LGBT training for state agency staff who work in child welfare or juvenile justice divisions. Should they find refuge in a youth home, gay youth are still abused by other youth and sometimes by group home workers for being gay

3. Repealing any existing laws and policies that prevent single and partnered LGBT individuals from serving as adoptive and foster parents. Loving families is the key to instilling confidence and success in today's youth.

### HIV/AIDS

- Today approximately 13% of all HIV/AIDS diagnoses are attributed to young people (13-24).
- Since the beginning of the epidemic, more than 52,000 estimated young people in the United States have received a diagnosis of AIDS, and an estimated 10,129 young people with AIDS have died.
- Among American high school students 48% have had sexual intercourse.
- 7% have had sexual intercourse for the first time before the age of 13.
- 35% were currently sexually active.
- 38% did not use a condom during last sexual intercourse.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2004)

### NBJC Solutions:

Join NBJC in advocating for the following:

1. Increased funding for HIV/AIDS testing campaigns geared towards youth. Getting tested is key in help to curb the growth of HIV. Early detection also helps to keep the disease manageable and even undetectable.
2. Support HIV/AIDS training that includes safer-sex practices (i.e. condom use) and is not "abstinence only" as a solution for prevention. Regardless of what you may want to think, youth are having sex. You must speak to your children about using protection should they decide to have sex. However this is not a parental green light to allow them to have sex but instead a plea for them to use precaution should they decide to have sex.
3. Health care reform that makes it easier for LGBT youth to receive treatment without parental approval. This will allow youth to secure badly needed treatment without fear of retaliation from their parents.

Together we can help protect America's LGBT youth by providing them with brilliant path to follow as productive citizens and human beings.



### Parental Resources:

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG)  
<http://www.pflag.org>

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)  
<http://www.glsen.org/>

National Youth Advocacy Coalition  
<http://www.nyacyouth.org/>

The Trevor Project  
<http://thetrevorproject.org/home2.aspx>

Gender PAC <http://www.gpac.org/>

National Center for Transgender Equality  
<http://www.nctequality.org/>

### LGBT Religion Resources:

Soulforce Bible Responses  
<http://www.soulforce.org/whatthebiblesays.pdf>

Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture by Bishop John Shelby Spong  
<http://www.bishopspong.com>

Living in Sin?: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality by Bishop John Shelby Spong  
<http://www.bishopspong.com>

Operation REBIRTH  
<http://www.operationrebirth.com/>

"Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe " by John Boswell

Whosoever  
<http://www.whosoever.org/index.shtml>

Soulforce  
<http://www.soulforce.org>

Reconciling Ministries Network  
<http://www.rmnetwork.org/>

Gay Christians Online  
<http://www.gaychristianonline.org>

"The Good Book" by Peter J.Gomes

Unclutter: Cleanse Your Spirit and Claim Your Stuff by Pastor Kevin E. Taylor  
<http://www.unclutter.org>

Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry  
<http://www.clgs.org/>

Gay Christian Outreach  
<http://groups.msn.com/GayChristianOutreach/>

Absolutely Gay Christian Men  
<http://groups.msn.com/AbsolutelyGayChristianMen>

Grace Online  
<http://www.msusers.com/GraceOnline>

Unity Fellowship Church Movement  
<http://www.unityfellowshipchurch.org/wp2008/>

Integrity USA  
<http://www.integrityusa.org/>

Rainbow Baptists  
<http://www.rainbowbaptists.org/>

Affirmation  
<http://www.umaffirm.org/>

ECWR  
<http://www.ecwr.org/>

