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## **STATE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

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**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and  
Transgender (LGBT) Homeless  
Youth in Milwaukee, WI**

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# Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Homeless Youth in Milwaukee, WI

Cream City Foundation would like to thank the Tides Foundation Out-of-Home Youth Fund for its generous support which enabled the printing and distribution of this report.

Cream City Foundation is a 501(c)3 community-based foundation focused on funding lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender programs and organizations working towards social change in southeastern Wisconsin.

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### MISSION:

Cream City Foundation serves as a catalyst for social change on behalf of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) communities in Southeastern Wisconsin. To achieve our mission, Cream City Foundation mobilizes philanthropic resources and funds initiatives that target system-level change, taking into account race, class, gender and age.

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January 25, 2010

Dear Allies for Homeless Youth:

Three years ago we received a report on our desk from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force stating that nationally, 20 - 40% of all homeless youth identify as gay or transgender. Since then, we have found that on any given night nearly 400 homeless youth can be found on Milwaukee's streets. These findings have propelled Cream City Foundation to find better ways to address the needs of an extremely vulnerable population - our youth.

Cream City Foundation and our grantee partners have been working to find innovative and effective ways that leverage our talents, resources, and experience to help understand and address this problem. This included the creation of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth Homelessness Initiative, a collaborative effort that focused on finding ways to ensure that our child welfare system could create safe environments for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

"The State of LGBT Youth Homelessness" report will provide you with a detailed overview of the issue, including national and local data, and recommendations to improve the lives of all youth, and especially LGBT youth in the child welfare system.

We wish to specifically thank and acknowledge the contributions of our grantee partners for their work and commitment on this issue: American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin Foundation, Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at UW-Milwaukee, Fair Wisconsin, Lad Lake, Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, Pathfinders, and St. Aemilian-Lakeside.

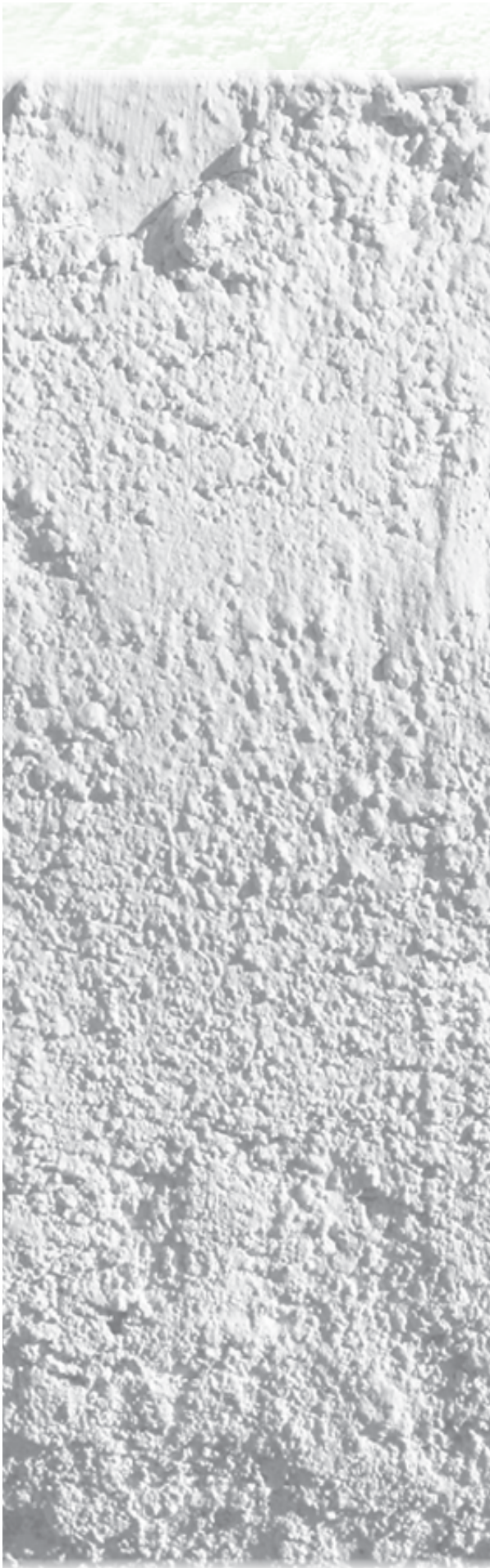
Likewise, we wish to send a very special thank you to the hundreds of individual supporters and partner foundations that make our work possible every day. The support of our current and future donors is critical to our ability to create change in our community.

We hope that you will share this report widely with your constituency, partners, and wider community. Thank you for your interest and review of this report and if you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Maria T. Cadenas / Executive Director / Cream City Foundation



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On any given night there are up to 400 homeless youth on the streets of Milwaukee.<sup>1</sup> There are currently only sixteen emergency youth shelter beds in the Milwaukee area, leaving a number of youth with little options.

National research indicates that a full 20-40% of all homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Many youth report that they face harassment and discrimination in group homes and shelters because of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, research indicates that LGBT youth are more likely to be victims of violence and sexual exploitation while homeless.<sup>2</sup>

An initial pilot study with seven Milwaukee agencies that serve homeless youth is included in this report. Some of the findings mimic those of national studies, including:

- A full 23% of those surveyed identified as LGBT
- In general, LGBT youth in this study tended to be homeless for longer periods of time than non-LGBT youth.
- LGBT youth often reported higher instances of mental illness and substance abuse than non-LGBT youth.

This report also includes information for policy leaders, elected officials, funders, and youth service providers, regarding significant, widespread and discriminatory challenges LGBT youth faces in the child welfare system in Wisconsin.

To that end, the LGBT Youth Homelessness Initiative is working to investigate, document and make

1. Homelessness in Milwaukee: Results of the January 25, 2007 Point in Time Survey of Milwaukee's Homeless Citizens (2007)

2. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth, An Epidemic of Homelessness (2006). National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and National Coalition for the Homeless

recommendations for policy reform in the child welfare system as it pertains to serving all youth. These include:

- **Ensure that organizations who serve homeless youth have non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity and that these policies are enforced.**
- **Mandate LGBT sensitivity and competency training for organizations that serve homeless youth, and ensure state staff responsible for overseeing such programs is equally knowledgeable and competent on LGBT issues.**
- **Increase public and private funding for youth homeless programs.**

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS BACKGROUND

The number of homeless youth in Milwaukee is significant. In 2008, nearly 400 youth were reported homeless on any given night in Milwaukee.<sup>3</sup> Pathfinders, a youth-serving agency in Milwaukee, reported that in 2008 they had to turn away 343 youth, and 22% of those were turned away because of their eight bed capacity. Walker's Point, the only other youth-serving shelter in Milwaukee, also reports demand in excess of their eight-bed overnight shelter.

In an initial study of the Milwaukee area involving seven agencies that serve youth with runaway and homeless programs, a full 23% identified as LGBT.<sup>4</sup> This correlates to national estimates of 20-40% of

homeless youth identifying as LGBT. More details on a recent study of Milwaukee-area LGBT youth homeless is included in this report.

The high number of LGBT youth that are homelessness is sometimes attributed to the fact that youth are coming out at a younger age, creating friction in families and causing - or forcing - LGBT youth to leave home. Still, others are homeless because they ran from foster and group homes because they were mistreated or harassed.<sup>5</sup>

While homeless, transient or "on the streets," LGBT youth often face sexual exploitation and harassment. According to "Best Practices for Serving LGBT Homeless Youth" a report published by National Alliance to End Homelessness, Lambda Legal, the National Network for Youth, and the National Lesbian Rights Center, LGBT homeless youth:

- **Experience an average of 7.4 more acts of sexual violence toward them than their heterosexual peers;**
- **Have twice the rates of sexual victimization on the streets as non-LGBT homeless youth, and LGBT youth report double the rates of sexual abuse before age 12;**
- **Are more likely to report being asked by someone on the streets to exchange sex for money, food, drugs, shelter, and clothing than heterosexual homeless youth;**
- **Transgender youth in particular are often harassed, assaulted, and arrested by police because of their gender presentation.**

3. Homelessness in Milwaukee: Results of the January 25, 2007 Point in Time Survey of Milwaukee's Homeless Citizens (2007).

4. LGBT Homeless Youth: Results of a 2009 Pilot Study of Seven Milwaukee Agencies (2009). Center for Urban Initiatives and Research University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

5. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth, An Epidemic of Homelessness (2006). National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and National Coalition for the Homeless.

## ADDRESSING THE ISSUE: LGBT Youth Homelessness Initiative

Cream City Foundation's mission is to educate, promote, and fund LGBT programs in southeastern Wisconsin. We fund social change programs that aim to create real, long-lasting results, addressing the very systems and root causes to many social issues. To achieve this, Cream City Foundation addresses issues and programs that examine the intersection of sexual orientation, race, gender, and age.

To that end, in 2007, Cream City Foundation convened a group of leaders in the community to look at the root causes of LGBT homelessness. The committee, known as the LGBT Youth Homelessness Initiative, is a partnership of LGBT and youth-serving organizations in Wisconsin. Agencies represented included: ACLU-WI, Adoption Resources of Wisconsin, Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at UW-Milwaukee, Children's Service Society of Wisconsin, Fair Wisconsin, Lad Lake, Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, Pathfinders, and St. Aemilian-Lakeside. The collaborative Initiative

looked at ways of creating real, long-lasting and effective change that addressed youth homelessness through a structural change lens. To that end, the Initiative researched national models and case studies that could be implemented in Milwaukee and throughout Wisconsin. The Initiative established four main goals to address LGBT youth homelessness in the Milwaukee-area:

- **Create independent living housing and support for 25 LGBT homeless youth in Milwaukee annually**
- **Collect data on the scope and dimension of LGBT youth homelessness in the Milwaukee area**
- **Advocate for policies that protect LGBT youth in shelters and group homes throughout Wisconsin**
- **Educate the community, policy makers and funders on the importance of addressing LGBT youth homelessness**

More information about each goal area is included below in this report.

## INITIAL RESEARCH RESULTS

To measure the scope and dimension of LGBT youth homelessness in the Milwaukee area, Cream City Foundation partnered with Center for Urban Initiatives and Research (CUIR) at UW-Milwaukee to study the issue. To do so, CUIR conducted a survey of agencies in the homeless and youth fields to see if they asked about sexual orientation and gender identity on intake forms. Of the seventeen survey respondents, five indicated they routinely ask about sexual orientation on new intake forms. After the initial survey, CUIR worked with seven of the seventeen agencies to collect more in-depth data on a number of variables, including sexual orientation, over a two-month period in the fall of 2009.

In some instances, the results show differences in LGBT and heterosexual homeless youth in terms of reasons for homelessness and length of homelessness, for example. Some of the results of the report from CUIR, "LGBT Homeless Youth: Results of a 2009 Pilot Study of Seven Milwaukee Agencies" are below. (For full results, please contact Cream City Foundation).

It is important to note that this is an initial pilot study and the size of the respondents is relatively small. The results included in this report only represent those that participated in this initial study. Cream City Foundation will be working with CUIR and additional agencies over the next two years to expand the study. That being said, many of the initial results indicate results that are similar to other national studies regarding LGBT homeless youth.

## METHODOLOGY

Researchers developed a form specifically designed for the study that included a targeted set of variables. Eleven questions were included on the data form that included information on gender, sexual orientation, reasons for current homelessness, and needs of client. Prior to data collection, researchers met with agency staff to answer and clarify questions and to be sure data was collected in a uniform manner across all seven pilot agencies.

The data was collected from October 1 to December 1, 2009, at which time all data was forwarded to CUIR. The researchers then compiled and analyzed the data that is included below. It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, youth is defined as 18-24.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A full 23% of those surveyed identified as LGBT. This corresponds to national estimates that indicate nearly 20-40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBT. (Table A)

**Table A: Sexual Orientation**

	Count	Percent
Bisexual	14	9%
Gay	13	8%
Lesbian	4	3%
Straight	121	76%
Questioning / Not Sure	2	1%
Refused	1	1%
Other (Queer)	3	2%
Missing	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100%*</b>

\* Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.

## GENDER

A full 60% of the youth in this initial study were female and 29% male. Additionally, 4% identified as transgender: female to male and 4% male to female.

	Count	Percent
Female	96	60%
Male	46	29%
Transgender: Female to Male	7	4%
Transgender: Male to Female	7	4%
Other (Gender-Queer)	2	1%
Missing	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100%*</b>

\* Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.

## RACE/ETHNICITY

For both LGBT and non-LGBT youth, the survey results indicate that a majority of the youth are youth of color. (Table B)

**Table B: Race/Ethnicity**

	LGBT Youth		Non-LGBT Youth	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
African American (Black)	15	42%	76	63%
Asian	0	0%	2	2%
Hispanic / Latino	3	8%	13	11%
Native American / Alaska Native	2	6%	1	1%
Caucasian (White)	8	22%	17	14%
Other	0	0%	3	3%
Bi-racial / Multi-racial	8	22%	8	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100%*</b>

\* Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Furthermore, call data from IMPACT 2-1-1 indicates that 82% of calls received for information about youth shelters and runaway services came from African Americans. Of these calls, 46% were from individuals age 13-17. And, of all the calls, a majority came from females, 88%. (Table C). Note: 2-1-1 @ Impact data on the callers' sexual orientation/gender identity is not collected.

**Table C: Calls to 2-1-1 for runaway/youth shelters, 2007**

Ethnic /Racial Background	Count	Percent
African American	84	82.4%
Not Appropriate	8	7.8%
White	5	4.9%
Other Ethnic Group	2	2.0%
Asian	1	1.0%
Declined	1	1.0%
Hispanic/Latino	1	1.0%
Native American	0	0.0%
Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	

*\*IMPACT 2-1-1 Call Reports, 2007*

## REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

LGBT youth reported being thrown out or running away as a reason for being homeless at triple the rate of non-LGBT youth (42%, compared to just 14% of non-LGBT youth). LGBT youth also appear to report abuse/violence and being asked to leave at higher rates than non-LGBT youth, perhaps simply because of their sexual orientation. Also of important note is the disparity between mental illness and substance abuse problems among LGBT youth, compared to non-LGBT youth. (Table D).

**Table D**

	LGBT Youth		Non-LGBT Youth	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Abuse / Violence	9	25%	23	19%
Runaway / Thrown out	15	42%	17	14%
Asked to Leave	9	25%	18	15%
Family Break-up	3	8%	19	16%
Lost Job / Cannot Find Work	7	19%	11	9%
Other	3	8%	10	8%
Eviction / Foreclosure	3	8%	5	4%
Foster Care / Group Home Discharge	2	6%	6	5%
High Housing Costs	2	6%	4	3%
Mental Illness	4	11%	1	1%
Medical Problems	3	8%	3	3%
Wages Too Low	1	3%	4	3%
Substance Abuse Problems	3	8%	1	1%
High Utility Costs	0	0%	3	3%
Jail / Prison Discharge	1	3%	1	1%
Lost Benefits	0	0%	1	1%



## LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

LGBT youth were more likely than non-LGBT youth to have had two or more living arrangements in the past six months (58% compared to 22%, respectively).

The most frequently cited response for LGBT youth to living arrangements over the past six months was living with a friend, whereas for non-LGBT youth it is living with a relative/legal guardian. Another difference of note was the more frequent citation of non-residential living arrangements by LGBT youth over non-LGBT youth (i.e., living on the streets, in a car, or a vacant building), as well as LGBT youth being more likely to have lived with someone they did not know well – 21% compared to 3%. (Table E)

**Table E**

	LGBT Youth		Non-LGBT Youth	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
With a Relative / Legal Guardian	13	39%	76	64%
With a Friend	17	51%	37	23%
In Own Apartment / House	13	39%	23	19%
Other	6	18%	18	15%
On the Streets	9	27%	5	4%
In Public Facilities (i.e., bus station, library, etc)	8	24%	2	2%
With Someone Client Does Not Know Well	7	21%	3	3%
In a Car	2	6%	2	2%
In a Vacant Building	4	12%	0	0%

## LENGTH OF CURRENT HOMELESSNESS

In general, LGBT youth in this study tended to be homeless for longer periods of time than non-LGBT youth. A full 45% of LGBT youth had been homeless for a month or longer, compared to only 19% of non-LGBT youth. (Table F)

**Table F**

	LGBT Youth		Non-LGBT Youth	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Never, NOT homeless	16	47%	71	60%
Less than 1 month	2	6%	29	24%
1 to 3 months	3	9%	8	7%
4 to 6 months	4	12%	2	2%
Longer than 6 mos. but less than 1 year	5	15%	3	3%
One to three years	3	9%	5	4%
More than three years	0	0%	1	1%
Not Sure / Don't Know	1	3%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100%*</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>100%*</b>

\* Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.

## ANALYZING POLICIES

According to many youth who have found themselves in shelters and group homes, the spaces, in some cases, are not safe spaces for LGBT people. Other youth, and sometimes even staff, often tease, harass, and physically and emotionally abuse LGBT youth simply because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. This cannot be tolerated and changes are needed.

Currently, there is no mechanism to ensure that youth shelters and group homes that receive state funds adhere to sexual orientation/gender identity non-discrimination policies, or that they even have such written policies. One issue facing many youth-serving organizations is that frequently their staff is not properly trained to serve and work with LGBT youth. Using welcoming language and not assuming heterosexuality, knowing how to recognize issues that LGBT youth face, and simply being open and welcoming, are all qualities and characteristics that staff must have in order to properly serve LGBT youth.

The LGBT Youth Homelessness Initiative has identified several policy changes that benefit the lives of all youth, including LGBT youth. These include:

- Ensure that organizations that receive state funding for youth homelessness programs (shelters and group homes) have non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity and that they are enforced.
- Mandate LGBT sensitivity and competency training for organizations that receive state funding for youth homelessness program and for state staff responsible for overseeing such programs.
- Implement a tracking and referral system for LGBT youth within the child welfare system.

## PROVIDING HOUSING AND MENTORSHIP

In general, shelter and housing for youth in Milwaukee is hard to come by. To complicate the issue, many LGBT youth have reported feeling vulnerable and unsafe at some, but not all, shelters and group homes in the Milwaukee area. As a step in combating this issue, a coalition of agencies including the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, Pathfinders, St. Aemilian-Lakeside and Lad Lake started the Q-Block Young Adults' Housing Initiative. QBlock will provide independent living options to twenty-five youth in scattered sites throughout the Milwaukee area during the first year of operation. Q-Block is also dedicated to supporting youth by offering on-going case management, educational programming, and other resources to ensure the youth in the program because independent and successful young adults.

To compliment the housing option, there will be a mentoring component to QBlock that will match trained adults and families with youth. The mentorship piece is essential, as it will provide additional support to the youth beyond case management and will help youth work toward independence by connecting them to necessary resources. Strengthening the youths' social networks will help them in becoming productive and healthy adults.

With initial seed funding provided by Cream City Foundation, this program was able to expand from serving five youth to serving twenty-five youth after securing federal ARRA-HPRP (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Homelessness and Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program) funds to assist with rent, utilities and case management costs in the amount of \$630,000 over three years.

Youth accepted into Q-Block	14
Youth placed into own apartments	12
Gay	9
Bisexual men	2
Lesbian	2
Transgendered (M/F)	1
Black	9
Native American	4
Mixed race/Latino	1
Disabled	1

*\*Pathfinders/QBLOK  
Report, January 13, 2010*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### ELECTED OFFICIALS

Significant discrimination targeted at LGBT youth has been reported at many youth shelters and group homes. Simply put, too many of these “safe havens” are not safe for LGBT young people. Elected officials and policy makers should be aware that changes are needed. We encourage elected officials and policy makers to engage on this issue and work with Cream City Foundation and our partner agencies in creating safe shelters and group homes for all young people. To that end, there are several recommendations, including:

- Adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classes specific to foster care group homes and shelter care facilities.
- Adding LGBT cultural competency mandatory training to certification program for shelter and group home workers.
- Monitoring and enforcement of cultural competency guidelines
- Ensure agencies receiving state funds for youth services have non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity.

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### NON-PROFITS/SERVICE PROVIDERS

Non-profit organizations and service providers play a crucial role in serving youth. Some agencies are well-equipped to serve the specific needs of LGBT youth, while still others need additional training and education on this issue. To that end, there are several steps organizations can take to be sure they are welcoming to all, especially LGBT youth.

- Ensure staff is trained, comfortable and competent in working with the specific needs of LGBT youth
- Including sexual orientation and gender identity as a voluntary question for youth on intake

forms to better inform service-delivery and case management and to assist in tracking specific needs of LGBT youth

- Ensure organization has a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity for both employment and service access.
- Creating a safe and comfortable environment by using welcoming and affirming language and materials throughout the entire organization
- Make referrals to appropriate LGBT youth-serving agencies when needed

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### FOUNDATIONS/GRANTMAKERS

The collaborative approach of the LGBT Youth Homelessness Initiative has allowed us to leverage support and resources from around the community. More resources are needed to address the systemic changes that must occur within our child welfare system to protect and adequately serve all youth and LGBT youth in particular. To that end, we recommend that foundations:

- Ask and expect that grantee partners to have non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity
- Ensure grantee partners have safe and welcoming environments for LGBT youth through site visits and meetings
- Educate staff and board about LGBT issues and ensure there is a sufficient level of understanding and competency on LGBT issues
- Develop granting partnerships with foundations to further the issue
- Continue to engage and stay aware of LGBT and youth issues

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cream City Foundation is thankful for the support of both regional and national foundations for their commitment to addressing LGBT youth homelessness. Specifically, we would like to acknowledge Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Helen Bader Foundation, Robert H. Andrews Fund of the Tides Foundation, Tides Foundation Out-of-Home Youth Fund, and William Stark Jones Foundation. We would also like to thank the individual donors of Cream City Foundation who have made this work possible.

In addition, we would like to thank all of the agencies who were part of the LGBT Youth Homelessness Initiative who provided insight, expert knowledge, direction and feedback along the way. Specifically, we would like to thank our grantee partners, without whom this important work could not be accomplished: ACLU-WI, Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at UW-Milwaukee, Fair Wisconsin, Lad Lake, Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, Pathfinders, and St. Aemilian-Lakeside.

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