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Many gay youth are homeless Group constitutes big share of young people on streets

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Homelessness is rampant among young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, according to a report released Tuesday by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Coalition for the Homeless.

While gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people constitute between 3 and 5 percent of the general population, they make up 20 to 40 percent of homeless youth in the United States, according to the report.

In San Francisco, between 700 and 1,300 homeless people ages 12 to 24 are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, according to local organizations that work with homeless youth.

"This report documents that there is an epidemic of homelessness of LGBT youth, and at the same time it's a national disgrace that the national government has completely failed to respond," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the task force, which is based in New York.

The report examines the problem and calls for federal spending to help this portion of the homeless youth population.

"There are a multitude of reasons these youth become homeless, but ultimately, family conflict is the major cause," said Nicholas Ray, the author of the report.

Once homeless, the young people face a minefield of substance abuse, depression and risky sexual behavior, including selling sex for money or shelter, according to the report.

Angelika Torres, a 20-year-old transgender woman who grew up in Manhattan, said she left her home after being forced to cut her hair and act more like a boy. She now lives in transitional housing there. "One thing I know from my own experience is that this needs to stop. Kids cannot live like this," Torres said during a press conference on the report Tuesday.

The report, partially released in December, is based on numerous estimates and studies but no scientific counts.

It states that youths often face harassment or discrimination in shelters and that less than \$1 million of the \$105 million the federal government spends to fund the Runaway, **Homeless** and Missing Children Protection Act goes to organizations that work exclusively with them.

Many kids who leave their homes go to New York and San Francisco, which are viewed as bastions of support for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning people in need. But reality in those cities can be harsh, especially with regard to housing, said Jodi Schwartz, executive director of Lavender Youth Recreation & Information Center in San Francisco.

"They've come to the golden city for queer folks and expect to find everything they need here, and they find they're landing in a city like any other and there's no place to go," she said.

Schwartz said most of the young people who come to her organization, known as LYRIC, identify as "gender queer," a label they use to define themselves outside traditional sexual orientation or gender roles.

Even in San Francisco, there are just 25 subsidized housing units designed specifically for formerly homeless gay youth, created two years ago with \$750,000 in city funding. Advocates said the housing, which includes mental health services and other support, is helpful but inadequate to meet the need.

About one-tenth of the funding the city gives Larkin Street Youth Services is for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender services. Executive director Sherilyn Adams estimates that 30 to 35 percent of the city's homeless youth are gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual.

Adams said the city, which contracts with Larkin Street to house homeless youth, should be lobbying the state and federal government for more funding.

"San Francisco should be the leader in the care of youth who are pushed out of their homes or communities because of their sexual orientation," Adams said.