



Saving our Homeless LGBT Youth

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Homelessness is an issue that's often swept under the rug. These days, even those with homes struggle to maintain shelter. Daily hustles leave little time to break and care for those whose fortune has already run dry.

Some of us hand out dollars in passing; others sigh with frustration at the homeless who crowd our streets. Eventually, the images of the many homeless people meld into one common description: Middle-aged, soiled rags, unpleasant hygiene, and an air of hopelessness. However, few can process the thought of a homeless teen; teens that at first glance look like every other young person. They may be well groomed, well mannered and energetic. They appear to have a destination--which they often do--but it's not to a home. And surprisingly enough, many of these homeless teens are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. According to **The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, in collaboration with the National Coalition for the Homeless, 42 percent of the estimated 1.6 million homeless American youth are glbt, with a disproportionate number identifying as bisexual or transgender.

These homeless teens didn't lose their homes due to cutbacks or lay-offs or an unfortunate turn in the market; they are homeless because of their sexuality. Their parents turn violent or become terribly distant at the news of their child's sexuality, forcing many of these kids (some as young as 11) to live on the streets and care for themselves. They live in shelters or transitional housing. Too many of them turn to drugs and prostitution as a means to make a living.

Thinking back to your teen years... What was your biggest concern? For many of the glbt homeless, like the late Ali Forney, it was survival. Forney lived on the streets of New York City from the age of 13 until he was murdered at 22. It was in honor of him Carl Siciliano named The Ali Forney Center for glbt homeless youth in 2002. Since then, Siciliano and his staff have created one of the most comprehensive centers for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender homeless kids. Siciliano invited me inside The Ali Forney Center to experience the world of glbt homelessness and to see what pioneers like himself are doing about it.