



## Large percentage of homeless youth among LGBT community

February 1, 2007

By Tony Lee/Metro Boston

As many as 40 percent of homeless Boston youths identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), according to a national report released Tuesday.

Facing harassment at their childhood or foster homes, 150 to 300 homeless Boston youths are LGBT, based on estimates by the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**.

"We know that LGBT youth are disproportionately affected by homelessness," said Colby Berger, director of LGBTQ Services at The Home for Little Wanderers. "Many feel safer on the streets than somewhere they have to deal with homophobia."

Among the most distressing results of this movement to the streets is that many youths have intentionally tried to contract the HIV virus knowing there are several services for victims of the disease and a better chance to find a bed, Berger said.

Another concern for The Home for Little Wanderers — which once struggled to fill 12 beds set aside for homeless LGBT youth — is the lack of training on the topic for social workers.

"Social workers didn't have the language to talk to these kids about sexual orientation and gender identity," said Berger, who helped create a program that trained roughly 2,000 state employees in LGBT issues in 2003-04.

Of the estimated 1.6 million homeless American youth, between 20 and 40 percent are LGBT, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.