

Twice Spurned, Homeless LGBTQ Lodge at 100th

Interfaith Task Force Helps Provide Living Space for 10 Homeless People at Trinity Lutheran Church

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The Interfaith Task Force, founder of a homeless shelter in Trinity Lutheran Church on 100th Street, works for the needs of a large, underprivileged, and often invisible population-homeless LGBTQ youth.

There are no official statistics about the population, but the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force estimates 20 to 40 percent of New York City's homeless youth identify as LGBTQ, as opposed to five to 10 percent of the population at large. Cast out from their families, and often dropping out of school to flee prejudice, LGBTQ youth converge on New York City with few friends, few prospects, and little protection.

"People here in this city don't realize this grim dynamic-this invisible population-7,000 kids and 60 beds, and nobody seems to care," Kathy Green, vice president of the Interfaith Task Force, said.

There are currently four shelters that separate LGBTQ people from the general homeless population in New York City. Peggy Borgstede, president of the Interfaith Task Force, said she has heard what she described as "horrific" stories from LGBTQ youth who have lived in shelters with the general homeless population and have been beaten or raped. This violence especially targets transgender people, who form a disproportionate amount of the homeless LGBTQ population.

Trinity Lutheran Church, working with the Interfaith Task Force, provides shelter for 10 homeless LGBTQ youth for up to one year, during which time a case manager from St. John the Divine's Cathedral Community Cares program helps them find work or continue their education.

"There are a lot of gay teenagers that need support, and a lot of agencies that won't give it because of religious reasons," Victor Carrera, case manager with Cathedral Community Cares, said. Borgstede and Green began the Interfaith Task Force in Westchester County, asking churches to provide safe spaces for LGBTQ people to hold community meetings. They moved to New York City to respond to the urgent needs of the homeless population, who they feel remain invisible partly because of religiously-influenced social prejudice.

"As we say to the churches, you helped create this homophobia, now you have to help undo it," Borgstede said.

On Wednesday nights, Borgstede and Green take a moment from the fundraising and support they do as volunteers to cook and share a meal with the residents of the shelter-Borgstede says they hope to provide the "feeling of community and family" that these youth have been denied.

One resident, who wished to remain anonymous, just received her first letters of acceptance into college two weeks ago. "They've been very supportive," she said of the Interfaith Task Force. "That has been invaluable."