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My name is Tanya Gulliver-Garcia and I am the Research Coordinator at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, also known as the [Homeless Hub](#). I am a member of the City's LGBTQ2S Stakeholder Working Group, as well as a member of the LGBTQ2S Shelter Standards Sub-group.

Based at York University, the Observatory is Canada's leading research institute focusing on homelessness that works collaboratively with national, regional and local organizations, institutions and communities to ensure that research and evidence have a greater influence on policy and practice.

Our mandate is to conduct research and mobilize knowledge so that it has a greater impact on solutions to homelessness. We draw from the expertise of leading homelessness researchers in Canada, as well as the knowledge developed in the community and in government.

The [Homeless Hub](#) is a web-based research library operated by the Observatory, and has become a key knowledge mobilization tool. Over the years, we have developed effective strategies to mobilize research knowledge; this includes the development of a broad range of plain language research outputs, infographics and videos, which are disseminated through the website, as well as conventional and social media.

We endorse the recommendations presented in today's staff report and want to share some key research findings about LGBTQ2S youth. However, we also want to encourage City Council to move forward with recommendations it could implement now and to be even more aggressive in its fight to combat queer youth homelessness.



The youth shelter sector in Toronto has 517 beds, and as of June 20th was operating at 92% capacity. [Lots of studies show that LGBTQ2S youth](#) are generally considered to make up about [25-40% of the homeless youth](#) population. While the City's 2013 Street Needs Assessment put the rate at 21% it is also noted in the staff report that this may be an underestimation of actual numbers.

Even using numbers on the conservative side 21% (per the [Street Needs Assessment](#)) or 25% (per most research on queer youth homelessness), this means the City should be looking at how to better provide services for 100-200 youth.

The City has had a directive for many years, [reaffirmed last year](#), to maintain a 90% or less shelter occupancy rate. The youth shelter sector certainly meets this level. City shelter [daily census statistics](#) show that occupancy rates were 92% on June 20th and 21st and 90% on June 22nd. As a result of the 90% load capacity, **we certainly do encourage the city to move forward with Recommendation #1 “to explore community interest in operating an emergency shelter or transitional housing for LGBTQ2S youth.”** New beds are needed in the system. We know, and the staff report echoes, that often LGBTQ2S youth face barriers accessing the emergency shelter system and may choose to sleep rough rather than coming in to a shelter which they deem as unsafe, due to (and I'm quoting the staff report here) “homophobic and [transphobic](#) attitudes of staff and other services users, as well as inappropriate personal space, and/or washroom and shower facilities which do not respect the dignity and gender identity of LGBTQ2S youth.”

However, we also encourage you direct staff to release a second REOI to develop a [safe shelter for LGBTQ2S youth from within the existing youth shelter beds](#). Given that at least a fifth to a quarter of the youth currently residing in Toronto youth shelters already identify as LGBTQ2S (as well as some older youth residing in adult shelters) it makes sense to move [quickly to address their needs](#). The proposed REOI in the recommendations is not guaranteed to be fast and, if a transitional housing option is chosen, may not actually result in any new shelter beds.

New beds are needed to address the 90% capacity issue, but at minimum safe spaces are needed and sooner rather than later. Toronto could easily designate at least 25% of youth shelter beds as LGBTQ2S youth safe spaces without impinging on the rights and freedoms of heterosexual youth.

Ideally, all shelters for youth, and indeed all shelter beds period, in the City of Toronto would be considered to be safe spaces. But research has shown that this isn't currently the case and hasn't been for a number of years. Toronto needs to be proactive in its shelter response in order to help address this issue. It will take time to make the necessary physical space adjustments, management and staff training, adjustments to the shelter standards etc. to create universally safe spaces. A second REOI allows the City to move quickly to address the needs of LGBTQ2S youth. Additionally, if the planned REOI in the staff report comes back with a proposal for

transitional housing, it also ensures that safe spaces are opened within the existing shelter system. The way the recommendation stands now it is possible that no new shelter beds will be opened and no beds within the existing shelter system will be designated for queer youth.

We encourage you to make training on issues of homophobia, transphobia and issues facing queer youth mandatory for all staff immediately. While this will likely occur as part of the Shelter standards review, there is no reason that this can't be implemented sooner. Why delay something that is an easy way to contribute to safety for LGBTQ2S youth?

We also hope that you will consider expanding the scope of this work beyond LGBTQ2S youth and look at issues of access, discrimination and service delivery in the adult, family and co-ed sectors as well. Research shows that homeless youth often grow up to be homeless adults. Additionally, some older youth are served by the adult shelters in Toronto.

In 2008, a research project by the Wellesley Institute called [“Invisible Men: FTMs and Homelessness in Toronto”](#) found that was a lack of trans-appropriate resources and challenges existed both in the shelter and broader housing sectors. They put forth 8 recommendations for the City of Toronto including specialized shelter services for trans men (female to male), an anti-violence campaign, mandatory trans access training and policy development for all shelters, and ensuring shelters are held accountable for trans-inclusive policies through access and equity reviews. With the overall goal of ending discrimination and fostering trans-positive shelters clearly provided well-developed research and recommendations, yet very little has changed in the past 6 years. **We urge the city to direct staff to look at the recommendations of this report and to report on the possibility and timelines for implementing the recommendations.**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.



Tanya Gulliver-Garcia

HOMELESS LGBTQ2 YOUTH IN TORONTO

How many are there?



1 in 5
homeless youth in the shelter system identifies as LGBTQ2

2x
that's more than twice as many identified LGBTQ2 as the general population

"A high percentage of people who are homeless happen to be LGBTQ2 because they got kicked out of their house, or maybe they lost their job, or they live in a small town, then they can't pay their rent and where else can they come, but Toronto."

- Anonymous homeless youth

Is there a safe place to go?

LGBTQ2 YOUTH ARE AT HIGHER RISK DUE TO HOMO/TRANSPHOBIA IN THE HOME OR AT SCHOOL & THEN GO ON TO FACE DISCRIMINATION IN THE SHELTER SYSTEM.

TORONTO IS ADVERTISED AS A SAFE PLACE FOR LGBTQ2, BUT **THERE ARE NO DEDICATED SHELTERS FOR LGBTQ2 YOUTH.**

Health implications



LGBTQ2 YOUTH ARE AT DRAMATICALLY HIGHER RISK FOR SUICIDE & MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES THAN HETEROSEXUAL AND CISGENDER YOUTH

THEY ARE ALSO AT HIGHER RISK FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE, RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR & HOMO/TRANSPHOBIC VIOLENCE



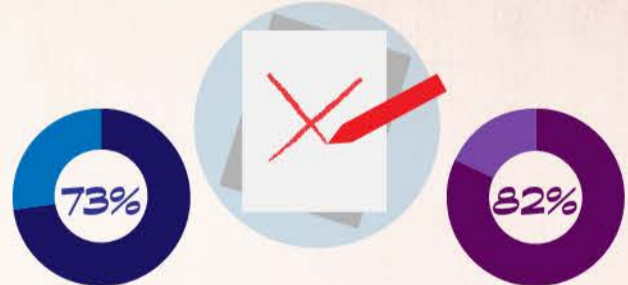
LGBTQ2 youth in shelters:



Shelter workers need training.

Frontline shelter workers have expressed a need for formal anti-homophobia training, as well as training regarding LGBTQ2 culture and terminology.

Reporting incidents



73% OF YOUTH INTERVIEWED WERE NOT AWARE THAT ANY COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES EXIST

82% OF YOUTH INTERVIEWED STATED THEY WOULD NOT FILE A COMPLAINT ANYWAYS.

Violence against LGBTQ2 youth is left unrecorded.

Many LGBTQ youth choose to sleep on the streets instead of in shelters where their needs are not met & they are likely to be the victim of discrimination and/or violence.

THERE ARE NO SPECIALIZED HOUSING INITIATIVES THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF LGBTQ2 YOUTH IN CANADA.

THE CITY OF TORONTO NEEDS TO IMMEDIATELY DEVELOP & FUND A SPECIALIZED SHELTER FOR LGBTQ2 YOUTH.



INFOGRAPHIC BASED ON:
Abramovich, Alex (Ilona). No Fixed Address: Young, Queer, and Restless. In Gaetz, Stephen; et al. Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.