YOUTH PRIDE NETWORK

STATE OF PLAY REPORT

LGBTIQA+ YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF THE YOUTH ACCOMMODATION SYSTEM

YPN

Acknowledgement of Country

The Youth Pride Network would like to acknowledge the custodians of the land we work on, the Whadjuk Noongar people and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Thank you

YPN would like to thank every young person and worker who shared their story as part of this report. The YPN will strive to do justice to your experiences. YPN would also like to thank the LGBTIQA+ community, particularly those who have come before us for their support of our work and in providing space for us to do what we do.

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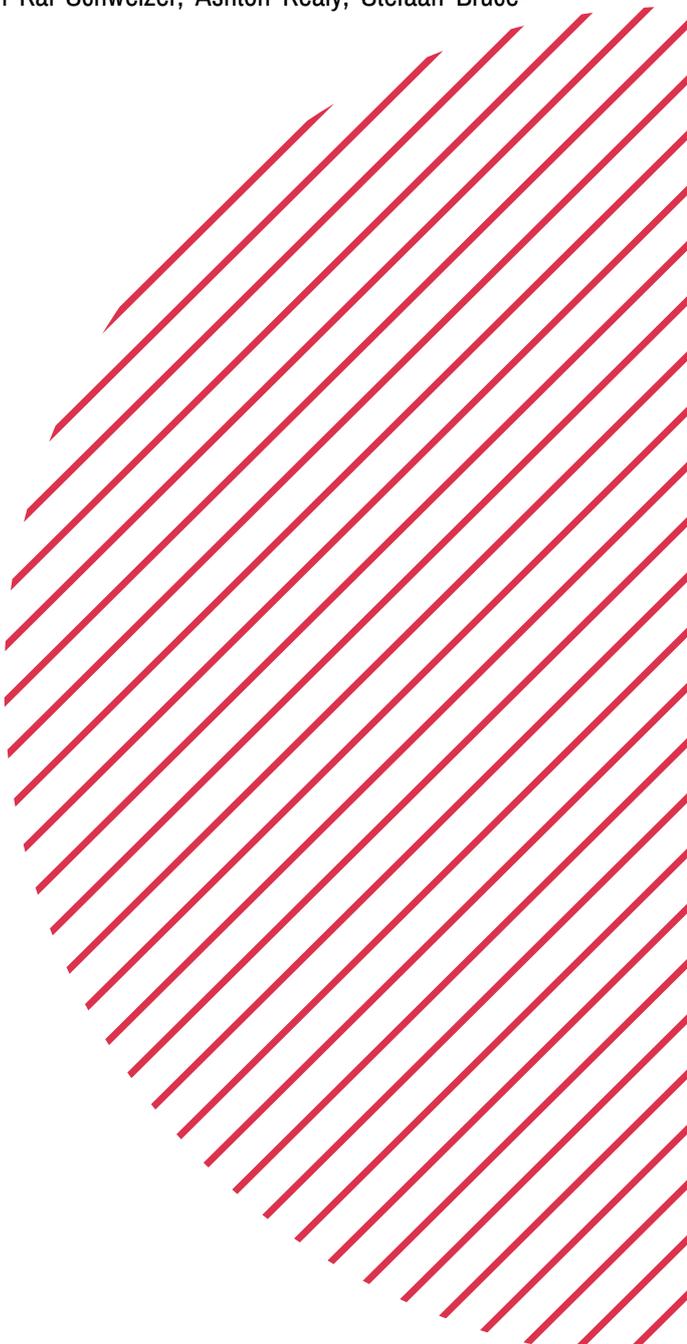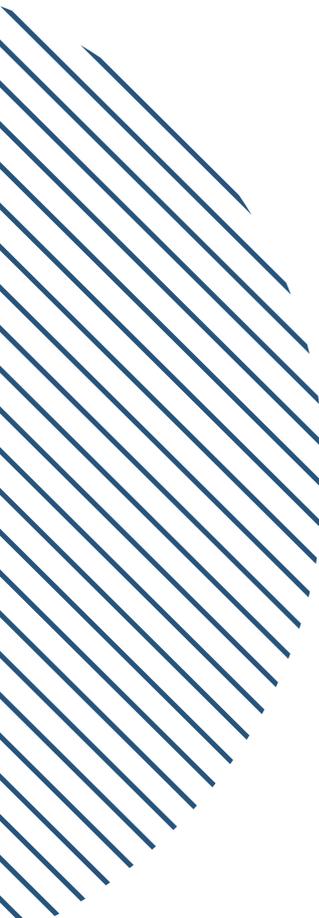
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Executive Summary

LGBTIQA+ young people are overrepresented in the homelessness system, however little is known about their experiences within that system in Western Australia. This report aimed to document the experiences of LGBTIQA+ young people within the homelessness system, including barriers they face to entry, discrimination they experience within the service, structural issues that make services inaccessible and characteristics of LGBTIQA+ affirming service practice.

Through interviews and online surveys with workers and LGBTIQA+ young people this report found that while there were examples of excellent practice, there were also examples of significant discrimination, that exacerbated the trauma that LGBTIQA+ young people faced. Underlying this was a theme of inconsistency across the sector.

Key findings were:

- A significant proportion of LGBTIQA+ young people who have experienced homelessness have never accessed an accommodation service.
- LGBTIQA+ young people accessing accommodation services are regularly experiencing discrimination, violence and rejection.
- Many systemic barriers exist in the youth homelessness system that prevent LGBTIQA+ young people from accessing accommodation and other services.
- In some cases, services are conducting abusive practices such as conversion practices within their services on LGBTIQA+ young people.
- The impacts of these experiences of discrimination include a worsening of trauma and mental ill health, as well as a longer time spent homeless.
  When in affirming services, LGBTIQA+ young people are able to thrive and affirm their identity and these services were a protective factor from other experiences of discrimination.

Recommendations for services:

- Hire LGBTIQA+ affirming staff and create a safe work environment for LGBTIQA+ employees
- Integrate LGBTIQA+ inclusion into core business and ensure service delivery is LGBTIQA+ affirming
- Develop and implement safe methods of data collection on LGBTIQA+ young people
- Ensure service structures and processes are appropriate for LGBTIQA+ young people

Recommendations for government:

- Develop safe methods of data collection on LGBTIQA+ young people
- Integrate LGBTIQA+ inclusion into tendering processes and reporting
- Ensure staff across government are trained in LGBTIQA+ inclusion
- Integrate LGBTIQA+ inclusion into government strategy

Terminology used in this report

Affirmed gender - the gender a person identifies with. It may or may not be aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Assigned sex at birth - the sex a person is assigned by medical staff when they are born.

Deadnaming - the act of using a trans or gender diverse person's birth name or a name that they no longer use. It is a deeply disrespectful act and is usually done to show the person doesn't acknowledge their autonomy and gender identity.

Coming out - the act of a person disclosing their LGBTIQA+ identity to others.

LGBTIQA+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual and other diverse sexuality and gender identities.

Misgendering - referring to someone as the incorrect gender. This often happens to trans and gender diverse people either by accident or because the person does not respect their identity.

Passing - a problematic term used to refer to whether a transgender person meets cisgender standards of gender presentation.

Outing/outed- when someone's LGBTIQA+ identity is disclosed to others without their consent.

Transition - the process a transgender person undertakes when changing their gender. This is multifaceted and can include medical transition (e.g. taking hormones or getting surgery) social transition (e.g. asking people to use a new name or pronouns) and legal transition (e.g. legally changing your name).

Note on pronoun usage in this report - Please note that all young people and workers in this report are referred to with they/them pronouns in order to preserve anonymity. This is not a reflection of their gender and assumptions about their gender should not be made from this.

Previous Research

LGBTIQA+ young people and homelessness

A growing body of evidence has suggested that LGBTIQA+ young people experience higher rates of homelessness than the general population (3, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15). In an Australian study combining the data from two large surveys (N=19,060), lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) participants were significantly more likely to have reported leaving home in their early adolescence compared to their heterosexual peers (13). It has also been suggested that sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts, more commonly known as conversion practices, are associated with higher rates of homelessness amongst LGBTIQA+ young people (10).

44.4%
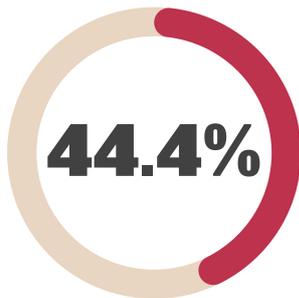
In their 2021 study, Jones and colleagues (2021) reported that 44.4% of young LGBTIQA+ participants who had experienced conversion practices had also experienced homelessness (10).

Another Australian study, focused on trans and gender diverse people aged 18 and older, reported that 23.8% of participants had experienced homelessness in spite of being highly educated (1). In the Breaking the Silence Report, 12.7% of Aboriginal LGBTIQA+ participants had experienced homelessness relating to their sexual orientation or gender identity (7). Research on intersex people in Australia found that around 6% of the respondents were currently experiencing homelessness (9).

Similarly, a 2017 study of Australian trans and gender diverse young people reported 22% of participants had experienced homelessness (16). Of these, only 38.9% had accessed crisis accommodation (16). Of those who have accessed crisis accommodation, 43.2% felt their gender identity was not respected (16). Many participants attributed their issues with accommodation or homelessness to their gender identity or gender expression (16). Some participants reported that potential housemates had rejected them based on their gender identity and/or expression (16). In the most recent Writing Themselves In, 23.6% of participants had experienced homelessness (6). Of these participants, 26% reported that their homelessness was related to their LGBTIQA+ identity (6). Trans and gender diverse people were more likely to experience homelessness, with 41.3% of trans women, 39.3% of trans men, and 31.8% of non-binary people reporting an experience of homelessness (6).

Contributing factors to homelessness

Data have suggested that a young person's disclosure of their LGBTIQA+ identity to their family is often a significant contributor to their unique experiences of homelessness (2, 11, 12, 14). It has been reported that families often do not understand diverse sex, sexuality, and gender identities. This causes open hostility towards the young person, leading to family conflict and then homelessness (14). Negative family responses are associated with a lack of emotional support and material resources (8).

Some researchers also attribute increased rates of homelessness in this cohort to greater self-awareness of LGBTIQA+ identities via social media and thus earlier instances of 'coming out' (8, 14).

Furthermore, Dempsey and colleagues (2020) have suggested that family perception of a young person as LGBTIQA+, even if they have not disclosed such an identity, can also be a catalyst for homelessness. Other contributing factors reported in the literature include mental health challenges, disability, domestic and family violence, unemployment, and financial hardship (2, 4, 8). Furthermore, one study noted the association between LGBTIQA+ homelessness and societal stigma, including family conflict and discrimination at schools and workplaces (5).

Limited data regarding conversion practices are available. However, in their study of young LGBTIQA+ people experiencing religious conversion practices, 44.4% had experienced homelessness (10). This elevated risk of homelessness was attributed in part to the trauma caused by conversion practices and associated mental health challenges (10).

According to McNair and colleagues (2021), the absence of reference to LGBTIQA+ people in housing and homelessness policies contributes to homelessness in this population (13). Similarly, Oakley and Bletsas (2017) reported a lack of data collection regarding sex, sexuality, and gender within services (14). These policy gaps result in a lack of targeted prevention efforts, effective intervention, and allows services to discriminate (13). Furthermore, the lack of appropriate services is reported to long term homelessness and street presence (14).

According to McNair and colleagues (2021), the absence of reference to LGBTIQA+ people in housing and homelessness policies contributes to homelessness in this population (13). Similarly, Oakley and Bletsas (2017) reported a lack of data collection regarding sex, sexuality, and gender within services (14). These policy gaps result in a lack of targeted prevention efforts, effective intervention, and allows services to discriminate (13). Furthermore, the lack of appropriate services is reported to long term homelessness and street presence (14).

Experiences with homelessness services
Only one study was identified collecting data on the experiences of LGBTIQA+ young people experiencing homelessness in Australia (14). A total of 23 LGBTIQA+ young people experiencing homelessness and 29 service workers in metropolitan Adelaide and Sydney were interviewed (14). This study reported significant negative service experiences amongst LGBTIQA+ young people (14). Participants were harassed by other young people within services without appropriate intervention from staff (14).
One participant described being called slurs and physically threatened within their accommodation service, saying:

> *"I just wanted – I was constantly like, no, I want to [expletive] leave, I don't want to be here anymore" (14).*

Young participants also reported mistreatment by service staff members (14). They described being humiliated in relation to their sexual orientation or gender identity through inappropriate comments (14). Several reported feeling that they were being treated poorly compared to their peers due to their LGBTIQA+ status (14). One service worker admitted that "sometimes it's probably safer for them to be transient and couch surfing" (14).

This inadequate support from staff was attributed to a lack of training and awareness (14). Service worker participants stated that staff in some services were not formally qualified to work in community services as they have no training (14). Furthermore, they reported that many have also not undertaken any kind of professional development on LGBTIQA+ identities and issues (14). They alleged that mainstream services often turned LGBTIQA+ young people away, with the justification that they did not feel equipped to support them (14).
One worker, who worked in an affirming service said:

> *"It is common to have a mainstream service provider ring up and explain that it is apparent that they have been working with a person who is gay, queer or gender questioning … so we thought we would refer them on to you" (14).*

Methodology

The aim of this report was to collect the experiences of LGBTIQA+ young people in the youth homelessness system.

This project used a mixed-methods approach which consisted of online surveys and in-person interviews. In total, this project received input from 166 individuals. This was across 4 methods of data collection:

- An online survey for LGBTIQA+ young people (120 responses)
- An online survey for individuals who worked with LGBTIQA+ young people experiencing homelessness (19 responses)
- In person interviews with LGBTIQA+ young people with lived experience of homelessness (10 individuals)
- In person interviews with individuals who work with LGBTIQA+ young people experiencing homelessness (19 individuals)

Data collection involving those who have experience working with LGBTIQA+ young people experiencing homelessness there was no restriction on discipline. This cohort included youth workers, psychologists, peer-support workers, social workers and those in other systems. For ease, this group will be referred to as 'workers' for the remainder of the report.

In the online survey of LGBTIQA+ young people, the survey purposely advertised to all LGBTIQA+ young people and not just those who had experienced homelessness. This was to ensure that LGBTIQA+ young people who may not recognise their experience as an experience of homelessness (e.g. couch surfing, staying in a hostel) were captured. Individuals were asked whether they had experienced particular situations (e.g. having to run away from home) rather than being asked whether they had experienced homelessness. Additionally, this was done to provide comparative demographic information between LGBTIQA+ young people who had and had not experienced homelessness.

Age ranges for this survey were 15-30 years. This was modified from the normal youth definition of 12-25 years, to capture those who may have experienced homelessness as young people but were now aged over 25 years. (e.g. were experiencing homelessness when they were 24 and are now 26). The average age of participants was 21.

Respondents were limited to current residents of Western Australia which excluded 18% of respondents. One respondent was excluded because they were over 30 years old.

Results from online survey - LGBTIQA+ young people

Qualitative and quantitative data from the online survey is included throughout the report, however key findings are noted here.

Experiences of homelessness
Of the respondents to the online survey for LGBTIQA+ young people who were WA residents (n = 120), more than half (56%) had ever experienced homelessness. Of those respondents with experiences of homelessness, 58% had experienced more than one form of homelessness (e.g. sleeping on the street, staying with a friend, being kicked out of home).

Demographic information

- Trans and gender diverse people made up 52% of total respondents and 64% of respondents that had experienced homelessness.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQA+ young people made up 4% of total respondents and 5% of respondents who had experienced homelessness.
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse LGBTIQA+ young people made up 11% of total respondents and 11% of respondents who had experienced homelessness.
- LGBTIQA+ people with disability made up 42% of respondents and 60% of respondents who had experienced homelessness.
- Carers (those looking after a family member, child or person with disability) made up 14% of total respondents, and 24% of respondents who had experienced homelessness.

Barriers to access
Of the respondents who had experienced homelessness, only 46% had ever accessed a homelessness service. In total, of all respondents who had experienced homelessness, 70% had an experience of not being able to access a service.

The most common barriers faced to service access were:
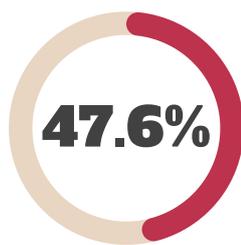
47.6%
- Not know what services were available,
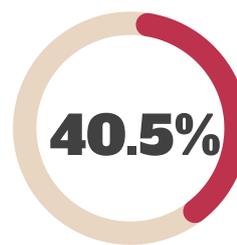
40.5%
- Discomfort with the service's religious affiliation,

40.5%
- Not meeting the service criteria, and

35.7%
- Concern that staff would not take their issues seriously.

Negative experiences

Amongst respondents who had accessed services (46% of those with an experience of homelessness), 92% of respondents had one or more negative experience(s). The most common negative experiences were:

- Having to hide their LGBTIQA+ identity: **60%**

- Homophobia, transphobia, or queer phobia: **52%**

- Hurtful comments about LGBTIQA+ people: **52%**

- Misgendering: **48%**

- Invasive questions about their sex, sexuality, or gender: **44%**

- Staff not taking their issues seriously: **44%**

- Being told by staff they would 'make others uncomfortable' because of their identity: **40%**

- Feeling unsafe in a service: **40%**

- Being housed in a 'male' or 'female' service that didn't align with their gender identity: **32%**

- Staff ignoring other young people discriminating against them: **32%**

- Being told they were 'too difficult' because they were LGBTIQA+: **28%**

- Staff discriminating against them because they were LGBTIQA+: **24%**

- Being refused housing because of their LGBTIQA+ identity: **20%**

- Being forced to do a prayer or faith practice: **20%**

- Experiencing violence because of their LGBTIQA+ identity: **20%**

Trans and Gender Diverse Young People (TGDNB)

- TGDNB young people were more than twice (2.23 times) as likely to report living with a disability compared to cisgender LGBQA+ young people.
- TGDNB young people were 1.6 times more likely to have experienced homelessness compared to cisgender LGBQA+ young people.
- TGDNB young people were 3.5 times more likely to have experienced more than one kind of homelessness than their cisgender LGBQA+ peers.
- Two thirds of TGDNB young people had experienced homelessness. Of these, only 47.2% had ever accessed a service.
- 70.5% of TGDNB young people who'd accessed a service reported experiencing misgendering and 88.2% reported a negative experience related to their gender identity.

Cisgender LGBQA+ Young People

- 41.6% of cisgender LGBQA+ young people had experienced some form of homelessness. Of these, only 40% had ever accessed a service.

41.6%

- All cisgender LGBQA+ young people who had accessed a service reported negative experiences related to their sexuality.

100%
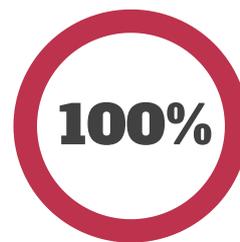
Experiences of Intersex Young People

In the online survey no respondents identified that they were born with a variation of sex characteristics (sometimes called intersex). 3% of respondents identified that they would prefer not to say and 9% were not sure. YPN acknowledges this is a gap in this report and recommends investment in future research in this area.

Analysis of Consultation

Reasons for Entering Homelessness

While this was not the focus of this report, some themes were identified in in-person interviews with workers. Workers reported that for the majority of LGBTIQA+ young people they worked with, discrimination and violence based on their identity played a significant role in their entry into homeless. For some, it was the only reason the young person left home - because they had been kicked out or they left to escape discrimination and violence relating to their identity. One worker reported multiple young people they encountered who left home in order to escape conversion practices their family was subjecting them to. Other workers described young people who had experienced significant violence and harassment because of their LGBTIQA+ identity. There were also instances where schools had 'outed' a young person and revealed their LGBTIQA+ identity to their family when calling home to report instances of bullying relating to their gender or sexuality.

However, for some young people, there were multiple reasons that led to them leaving home and rejection of their LGBTIQA+ identity was an additional contributing factor. In these situations, young people had other experiences of abuse, family discord, and neglect that contributed to their experience of homelessness.

For other LGBTIQA+ young people, they discovered their identity during their time in the accommodation system, usually after meeting other LGBTIQA+ young people.

Barriers to Entering the Accommodation System

Assumption of hostility

In the online survey, 31% of respondents didn't access a service because they were worried they would experience violence because of their LGBTIQA+ identity and 33.3% were worried that their identity wouldn't be respected. A worker reported that, particularly for trans and gender diverse young people there was an assumption that there were no safe services. In the online survey, one worker recounted "there is often a lot of fear surrounding entering a homelessness service due to concerns around abuse and discrimination from staff and other residents". It can be presumed from this that unless an LGBTQA+ young person sees signs to the contrary they will assume that a service is non inclusive.

26.2% of young people chose not to access a service at some point because they didn't want to hide their identity or pretend to be a gender they weren't. This was supported by worker reports that LGBTIQA+ young people would sometimes choose to remain street-present or in unstable accommodation rather than stay in a bed that didn't align with their gender identity. This was exacerbated if the LGBTIQA+ young person had previous negative experiences. For example, one worker noted that:

> *"Most LGBTIQA young people I have supported feel highly anxious entering accommodation services as a result of previous experiences, or avoid entering them at all."*

Workers reported this was exacerbated if young people had become homeless due to rejection of their LGBTIQA+ identity.

Reputation

Many workers and young people reported LGBTIQA+ young people discussing experiences of different services with each other. This meant that if one LGBTIQA+ young person had a negative experience, then other young people would also avoid that service. Workers in some services would provide young people with information about experiences that other young people had had in a service in order to prepare them for possible discrimination they may experience. In some cases, as mentioned above, young people would choose to remain unhoused rather than risk experiencing further discrimination.

In some circumstances, LGBTIQA+ young people who had a negative experience with one particular service would avoid all other services run by that organisation because they assumed they would also be negative.

Religious affiliation

41%

Over 41% of respondents to the online survey said that they chose not to access a service because it was religiously affiliated. Workers reported that LGBTIQA+ young people who had experienced religious trauma, and in particular conversion practices, would avoid services that were religiously affiliated. For others, they would simply assume that a religious service was not LGBTIQA+ affirming.

Lack of knowledge

55% of LGBTIQA+ young people who had experienced homelessness had not accessed a service. Of the LGBTIQA+ young people who had at some point been unable to access a service, 48% attributed this to being unaware of available services. This was the most common reason given. One young person stated that they were "geographically isolated and unaware of any appropriate services in the area.".

Male/female bed separation on Entrypoint

Workers reported that for some young people, calling Entrypoint and being asked if they would like information for male or female beds was enough to make them disengage from their attempt to find shelter.

Being too young

26% of respondents who had faced a barrier to accessing a service reported this was because they were too young. From the data it's unclear whether this was too young for youth services or too young for adult services. However, one youth worker reported working with several young people who stayed in violent or abusive households until they were old enough to be eligible for accommodation services. Another worker reported a young person who had become homeless at the age of 11.

Lack of availability

In the online survey, 33% of respondents who had experienced barriers to accommodation services reported that the service didn't have beds available.

In interviews with workers it was clear that this was also exacerbated by a heavy reliance on the few services that were well known for being inclusive of LGBTIQA+ young people.

Additionally, workers noted some young people were unable to access available beds if they were located across the Perth metropolitan area and accessing those services would mean leaving school, friends and support services.

Cost

In the survey around 25% of respondents were unable to access services because they couldn't access Centrelink. 33% of respondents were unable to access services because they couldn't afford them. This is explored further in the report section on surrounding services.

Separation from partner or pets

In the survey, 7% of respondents did not access a service because they did not want to be separated from their partner and 17% did not access a service because they could not keep their pets in the service.

Rejection of LGBTIQA+ Young People from Accommodation Services

In the online survey, 20% of young people had been rejected by a service because of their LGBTIQA+ identity. This theme was also explored in in-person interviews with workers and young people.

Viewing LGBTIQA+ identity as an additional complexity - "They're too complex"
Workers reported instances where they were unable to refer LGBTIQA+ young people, particularly trans and gender diverse young people, to services because the service deemed the young person 'too complex'.

In some instances this was because the young person's LGBTIQA+ identity was seen as an additional complexity that the service felt they were unable to support. Some workers believed they received this response because the service had assumed that the young person's LGBTIQA+ identity was the driver of their general issues. Other workers believed that this was an excuse given when a service did not want to house an LGBTIQA+ young person. In the online survey 28% of respondents who had accessed a service had been told they were 'too difficult' because they were LGBTIQA+.

Viewing LGBTIQA+ young people as out of scope - "We don't have the expertise to support this young person"/"We're not funded for..."
Workers reported experiences where a service would not accept a young person because they claimed they 'did not have the expertise to support this young person'. Workers reported that this was likely due to services seeing supporting LGBTIQA+ young people as a specialist skill set rather than integral to all service provision. Some workers believed services saw this as a 'nice' way to reject the young person from the service because they did not want to admit them. Particularly, some workers believed this was said when a worker knew there were other staff members at the service who were openly discriminatory towards LGBTIQA+ young people.

In other instances, workers reported having services tell them they couldn't take in a young person because they were not funded to support LGBTIQA+ young people. Workers believed this further demonstrated that services viewed supporting LGBTIQA+ young people as a specialty rather than a core part of service provision, further increasing the burden on the small number LGBTIQA+ specialist youth homelessness services that currently exist.

Not feeling confident to address discriminatory views of other users - "The other young people will mistreat them/they'll make other uncomfortable"
Workers also reported LGBTIQA+ young people being rejected from services because the service believed other users would discriminate against them. Workers pointed out that in doing this, the service was showing they didn't understand that managing discrimination was their responsibility or that they didn't know how to manage discrimination. Workers noted that the effect of this was that the service ended up 'victim blaming' the young person for their own potential mistreatment.

In other instances, some workers reported that services would state that they couldn't accept an LGBTIQA+ young person because they would 'make the other service users uncomfortable'. In the online survey 40% of young people who had accessed a service had been told that they would make other service users uncomfortable because of their LGBTIQA+ identity. One young person recounted that they were "removed from many services because they didn't want me to corrupt other young people and they wanted me to be away from females to prevent me trying to get involved with them."

Rejection of trans and gender diverse young people - "Do they pass?"
Workers reported in some instances, particularly when contacting services with gendered beds, services would be unsure as to how to support or house a trans or gender diverse person. In some instances the worker received questions such as 'where should we put them?' or 'what is their legal name?'. The workers believed that these questions were aimed at determining the young person's assigned sex at birth and therefore ignoring the young person's affirmed gender. Workers noted that this was particularly difficult for trans and gender diverse young people because they often did not have access to legal and medical transition due to financial or legal barriers.

In the online survey, of trans and gender diverse young people who had accessed a service, 47% had a negative experience because their identification documents did not match their gender identity.

Negative Experiences with Accommodation Staff & Other Service Users

Young people and workers detailed negative experiences concerning the behaviour and attitudes of workers and other service users. In the online survey 60% of young people felt like they had to hide their LGBTIQA+ identity in a service, 52% had someone say something hurtful about LGBTIQA+ people and 52% had experienced homophobia, transphobia or queerphobia. Some young people and workers also detailed positive experiences which outlined how LGBTIQA+ affirming services prevented these negative experiences from occurring.

Discriminatory attitudes

Workers and young people identified that some workers had negative attitudes towards LGBTIQA+ people which was expressed to young people accessing the service. One worker identified a young person who had a staff member question how they could understand their LGBTIQA+ identity if they had a mental health issue. Other workers identified that an "ignorance from staff and a lack of wanting to upskill" and "Lack of training across the service, lack of knowledge" as barriers to LGBTIQA+ inclusion.

24% — *In the online survey 24% of respondents had experienced a staff member discriminating against them because they were LGBTIQA+.*

Conversely in LGBTIQA+ affirming services workers identified that staff "(had) high levels of education and consultation", "understanding and educated staff", "staff are trained and willing to advocate on the behalf of the young people", and "staff with education and awareness of LGBTIQA+ culture".

Intrusive questions

Young people and workers both discussed instances where a young person had disclosed their LGBTIQA+ identity and then subsequently received many intrusive questions about this from staff. Young people reported that this made them feel unsafe in the service. One young person described an experience where they had disclosed their identity to one staff member at a service and then had several workers 'swarm' them to ask them questions about it. One worker in the online survey specifically identified this as a factor preventing LGBTIQA+ young people from accessing services - stating that young people wanted to avoid "explaining themselves constantly to questions about their gender".

Additionally, workers noted that there were many young people who were not settled or certain in their identity and found questions about this topic difficult or uncomfortable to answer. In the online survey, 44% of young people reported being asked invasive questions about their gender or sexuality.

By contrast, in services that were LGBTIQA+ affirming, workers noted that there was no demand on young people to declare or explain their identity. While young people were asked to disclose their identity and sexuality on forms, they were also able to not answer the question if they were uncertain. Additionally, young people were able to change the name or pronouns they had given to a service freely without having to give explanations.

Service fixation on identity

Workers and young people described instances whereby service staff would assume that the young person's LGBTIQA+ identity was a greater area of focus for the young person that it may have actually been. Workers noted that in many instances LGBTIQA+ young people were very confident in their identity and needed support in other areas of their life. One young person described an instance where they had disclosed that they were transgender to a service and the staff member wrote in their notes that medical transition was a goal for the young person. The young person had not told the worker that this was the case and at that time did not want to medically transition. This experience was very invalidating for this young person.
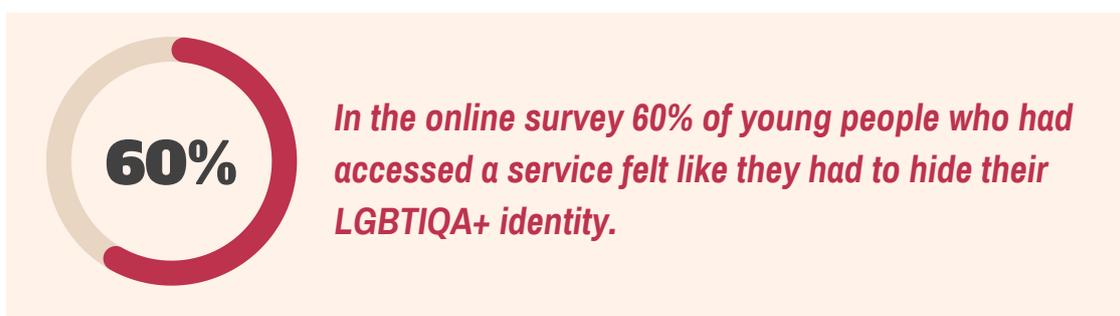
By contrast, in LGBTIQA+ affirming services, young people clearly knew that their gender identity and sexuality was accepted and were able to raise goals when they wanted to and were ready. When they did so, the young people were supported to meet goals as they defined them.

Erasure of identity/hiding identity

Workers and young people noted that for LGBTIQA+ young people who did not disclose their identity many services assumed that they were not LGBTIQA+ by default. One young person was told by staff and young people when they disclosed their identity that they didn't 'look queer'.

By contrast, workers in LGBTIQA+ affirming services noted they did not make assumptions that anyone in the service was or wasn't queer until they were told by the young person. This meant they didn't invalidate the young person's identity accidentally.

Additionally, when young people didn't feel safe in a service they reported hiding their LGBTIQA+ identity from other young people. This had the reported effect of making young people feel that they were not accepted and they would subsequently withdraw and isolate themselves from others. Young people described that they felt that if other young people did not accept them then there was no point in trying to connect. This was exacerbated if the young person had already experienced significant rejection previously.

60% *In the online survey 60% of young people who had accessed a service felt like they had to hide their LGBTIQA+ identity.*

26.6% of young people did not access a service because they didn't want to hide their LGBTIQA+ identity or pretend to be a gender they were not.

Deadnaming & misgendering

Many young people spoke about staff consistently misgendering or deadnaming them. In the online survey, 70.5% of trans and gender diverse young people who had accessed a service had been misgendered. Young people reported that this made them feel invalidated, rejected and often re-traumatised the young person, particularly if rejection of their identity was part of the reason they were experiencing homelessness. One worker described an instance where a staff member had written a young person's dead name in a shared space, which then disclosed this name to other service users and led to harassment of the young person. In the online survey a worker described witnessing "Trans folk being told they're being demanding for asserting their pronouns with staff who persistently misgender them" and "Trans folk having their gender denied and dismissed."

Workers and young people also reported that in some services the majority of staff would respect the young person's identity however one or two staff members would consistently misgender the young person and importantly, other staff members would not step in to correct the worker or support the young person.
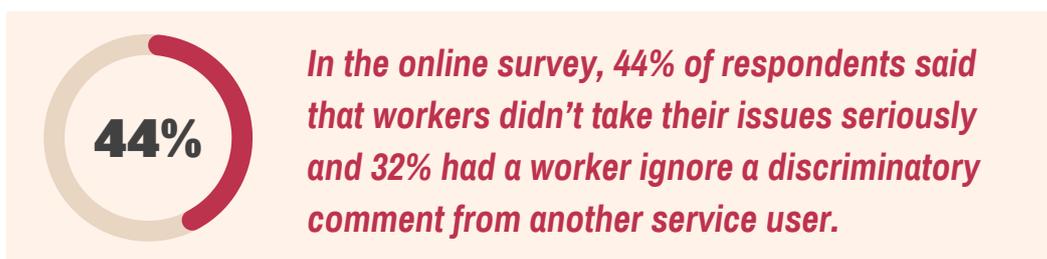
Additionally, some workers pointed out that in many services staff don't ever ask the young person how they would like to be referred to.

By contrast, in LGBTIQA+ affirming services young people were not asked for their dead name and it was made clear to them that they could use their chosen name on forms. Additionally, if young people changed their name while using the service this was communicated between workers so that they were all across how to refer to each young person, both when the young person was and wasn't present. Workers and service users also gently corrected each other if they used the wrong name or pronouns. In these services, pronoun use was upfront and regular.

Workers not standing up for young people

LGBTIQA+ young people reported many instances in which they faced violence or discrimination from other service users and staff did not support them or correct the other service user. This was a particular issue when young people were in off-site shared housing and found it difficult to contact staff to get support. One young person described having multiple other service users say discriminatory things to them and the staff member tried to 'shush' the other service users rather than address or correct the discrimination.

Another young person said that when they had tried to get support from staff around discriminatory and threatening language the staff member did not understand the impact the language was having on that young person. The staff member treated the situation as they would between young people who simply did not like each other and did not recognise that for that LGBTIQA+ young person this language was an invalidation of their identity and an indication that they were at risk of violence.

44%

In the online survey, 44% of respondents said that workers didn't take their issues seriously and 32% had a worker ignore a discriminatory comment from another service user.

By contrast, young people described services that were LGBTIQA+ affirming as ones which took a zero-tolerance approach to discriminatory language. Young people reported feeling safe when they knew they could rely on staff members to address this language and where LGBTIQA+ young people were actively affirmed by the service. Workers described these services as ones that did not necessarily take a punitive approach; it was often a culture of correcting others when they made a mistake or explaining why some things weren't ok to say.

Violence from other service users

Many young people reported experiencing verbal and physical abuse from other service users. This occurred most often when young people were sharing a room or house with other service users who were 'worried' that they would 'hit on them' or who were queerphobic. For example, one young person recounted "I was often verbally and physically abused by other girls in the house because they didn't want me to make a move on them."

In many of these instances, young people reported that staff were unhelpful or blamed the young person for their experience. This included instances where the young person was told if they were less 'damaged' they would not experience this violence or that the violence was their fault for being LGBTIQA+.

In one particular instance, staff not only failed to stand up for a LGBTIQA+ young person, they also victim-blamed the young person - using their identity to justify the violence. One young person explained "Being in a refuge for teens I was attacked and the staff said well don't be a lesbian. I left n[sic] stayed on the street." Another young person stated "I was also told that it was my fault that other girls were harming me, and if I was less damaged and straight it would not happen"

In the online survey 40% of young people that had accessed services said they felt unsafe. 20% had experienced violence due to their identity. 40% of young people had had their property stolen, damaged or confiscated.

Emphasis on family connection

Workers reported that some services, particularly those with strong religious influence, put a heavy emphasis on family relationships and pushing young people to reconnect with family. For LGBTIQA+ young people, this was often inappropriate, particularly if their families were actively hostile towards their identity. One worker noted that this also did not represent trauma informed practice.

In the online survey 33% of young people did not engage with a service because they were worried that their parents would be contacted.

Service Structures and Operation

Young people and workers described the instances where the structure of services placed a barrier in their access or a point of re-traumatisation. Conversely, many young people outlined how these barriers were overcome by LGBTIQA+ affirming services they had engaged with.

Service criteria

Workers and young people both reported difficulties that LGBTIQA+ young people faced when accessing services that did not support young people with mental health issues or alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues. Workers noted that because LGBTIQA+ young people had very high rates of self-harm and suicide attempts, as well as higher rates of AOD use this meant that these thresholds disproportionately impacted LGBTIQA+ youth. Research into trans and gender diverse young people showed that 50% have attempted suicide at some point in their life.[16] LGBTIQA+ young people without supportive parents are over-represented in this statistic.[17] Additionally, LGBTIQA+ young people are reported to have higher rates of AOD use, which is theorised to be a strategy used to cope with minority stress.[18] Additionally one worker reported that some young people felt they had to hide a diagnosis of autism from a service because they felt it may get them rejected from the service.

One young person reported in the in-person consultations, that a service had told them they were 'a really complex case'. In the online survey a worker reported "Comorbidity and high levels of complexity can be an additional barrier to accessing accommodation services and other homelessness services."

Young people responding to the survey reported "My mental health issues meant services didn't want to deal with my high risk and kicked me out…It was really hard to know where to look for beds and I was stuck in hospital on the mental health unit for months partly because there wasn't anywhere that would accept me because of my high risk."
Another young person explained:

> *"Many places refused me because of my complex mental health issues."*

Additionally, it was reported that LGBTIQA+ young people sometimes struggled to find employment or maintain education because of discrimination due to their identity. One worker discussed an LGBTIQA+ young person who was asked to leave a service because they could not find a job, despite the fact the young person believed they were experiencing discrimination from employers. Having to leave this service and enter a service for young people experiencing greater difficulties resulted in the young person losing their 'positive trajectory'.

In the online survey 40.5% of respondents said they couldn't access a service because they didn't meet the criteria.

Services with only 'male' and 'female' beds.

Workers and young people both noted that accommodation, particularly crisis accommodation, where beds were split into 'male' and 'female' sections were often inaccessible for LGBTIQA+ young people.

For non-binary, gender diverse or gender fluid young people they were often faced with the decision between staying street present, in an unsafe accommodation or in a service that invalidated their identity. Workers described many instances where these young people chose to remain street present rather than enter an invalidating accommodation service. Workers reported practices whereby services tried to accommodate non-binary people into women's beds by default, however the worker noted that this practice was just as problematic. One young person in the online survey explained that:

> *"The only options for me were female-only housing services but I identify as Non-binary…so found it uncomfortable accessing those services".*

Workers also noted that for young people who were visibly gender non-conforming, regardless of their gender identity, these gendered wings could result in that young person experiencing discrimination, bullying and abuse from other service users. As has been mentioned above, for same-gender attracted young people, many had experienced violence from other service users who held discriminatory beliefs about them. This was the case when staff weren't actively aware or addressing this safety issue.

In the online survey 47% of trans and gender diverse young people who had accessed a service had been housed in a bed that did not match their gender identity. 19% of respondents who had not accessed a service had done so because the service only had gendered beds.

Similar issues arose in other gendered services. For example, in the online survey one worker stated "Female only DV refuge not accepting transgender young people. Could not explain why in any way that made sense."

One worker reported having services tell them that they couldn't change their service design because they were on an old contract that tied them to this model. The worker believed that the lack of data around LGBTIQA+ homelessness contributed to an apathy to change service models.

Some services had moved towards having non-gendered beds or at the very least allowing young people to choose which gendered wing they stayed in.

Gender neutral toilets
Workers and young people both reported issues with services that did not provide gender-neutral toilets. One young person reported a service not having a gender-neutral toilet which resulted in them not feeling safe to access the toilet when they were at the service. Staff had offered work arounds however many of these made the young person feel more ostracized from other service users. A young person had advocated for the conversion of these toilets to be gender-neutral, a process that they believed would be quite straightforward, and was told that the organisation bureaucracy had to process this before it could be allowed.

A worker described an instance where they had made signs to convert single stall toilets to be gender neutral, however other workers had covertly and repeatedly taken down the signs afterwards without explanation. This worker expressed frustration that the service had undergone training and accreditation for LGBTIQA+ inclusion but did not provide gender-neutral toilets for their service users.

Conservative influence on the service
Some workers reported facing resistance when implementing LGBTIQA+ affirming policies, particularly if senior levels of the organisation had conservative beliefs. This included difficulties in being publicly LGBTIQA+ affirming or attending LGBTIQA+ community events. One young person reported continually receiving pushback when they suggested the service they attended promoted themselves at an LGBTIQA+ event.

There was a perception by workers that some religious services attracted workers who held conservative views even if they were attempting to be more inclusive. For example, one worker in the online survey explained "One organisational barrier was association with the church as some have particular views or agendas...Another is just old school culture and systems that take time and effort to shift, there is progress but there is a ways to go."

Lack of inclusion in administrative processes
Young people expressed frustration when they encountered services that had non-inclusive administrative processes. For example, one young person reported having to undertake an enormous amount of self-advocacy in order to have the service stop using their deadname on written communication and records. They reported being repeatedly told this was not something the system was able to do.

This theme was echoed by workers who discussed how inaccessible forms, websites and language could present an immediate barrier for LGBTIQA+ young people before they had even entered the service. Workers acknowledged that in some services staff worked incredibly hard to try and shield young people from the back-end processes that were not set up to be affirming of LGBTIQA+ people, particularly trans and gender diverse young people.

In LGBTIQA+ affirming services, the service did not require the young person to provide their deadname, even if this was their legal name. They were also able to change their name and pronouns frequently within the service.

Lack of consistent LGBTIQA+ acceptance across staff
Workers discussed that in some instances they worked with other staff who were openly or covertly bigoted towards LGBTIQA+ young people, including those within management. For example, one worker reported that they worked with other staff members who would take down posters or signs that affirmed the LGBTIQA+ community. In some instances these staff were members of management and organisations did not take disciplinary action when these actions were reported.

Workers reported that in many instances services would tolerate having 1 or 2 members of staff who were discriminatory, particularly if the rest of the service was 'generally ok'. Workers described how these few members of staff could invalidate any other good work that the organisation was doing if they came into contact with LGBTIQA+ young people. Particularly, workers emphasised that a negative experience with a single worker was enough to re-traumatise the young person and make them reluctant to re-engage with services and other staff. Workers also described the frustration of having to refer young people to a service where it was a 'luck of the draw' whether they would have an affirming experience or not - depending on which staff were working.

For young people, it did not matter whether it was a few members of staff or all members, the experiences of discrimination were just as harmful.

Staff not feeling safe to be out
Some workers described working in services or knowing LGBTIQA+ staff who didn't feel safe to be out in their service. It was noted that if the service did not create an environment where staff felt safe to be out then it was unlikely that young people accessing the service would feel safe.

Lack of intersectionality
Workers noted that even for services that were LGBTIQA+ affirming, they weren't always accessible for young people with intersecting identities, for example young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Workers reported that for these young people it could be difficult to find a service where they felt their LGBTIQA+ and other identities would be respected, and some felt like they had nowhere to go.

Some young people reported not feeling like they were able to disclose that they were neurodivergent and some felt they had to mask, or hide their neurodivergent behaviours, within services. One respondent had the additional barrier of finding a service that was both LGBTIQA+ affirming and wheelchair accessible. In the online survey, 23.8% of respondents said they didn't engage with a service because it wasn't accessible for their disability.

One worker noted that young people could also face barriers if they were as a sex-worker, particularly if the service had stigmatising attitudes towards sex work.

Abusive and Negligent Practices

In particular services, young people reported very concerning instances of abusive practices. There were predominantly services that did not receive State Government funding, however services that were still supporting young people and integrated into the accommodation system.

Conversion practices

Young people and workers reported that some services were forcing young people to undertake conversion practices as a condition of accessing accommodation.

> One young person described that when they disclosed their LGBTIQA+ identity they were told that if they had mentioned this earlier they would have been rejected from the service. They were then subject to extensive abusive conversion practices including exorcisms, prayer and being encouraged to 'change' their identity. Additionally, they were told they were just 'confused' and that their feelings would pass.
>
> The service forced them to do workbooks to help them become a 'good wife' and the service restricted the types of clothes they were allowed to wear to make sure they did not wear any 'revealing' clothes in case there were 'predatory lesbians' at the service. That young person described that after they left the service, they attempted suicide multiple times and believed they deserved to die because of their LGBTIQA+ identity. They also discussed trying to save money to seek out further conversion practices as a result of being conditioned under duress to believe that their identity was unnatural by the service.
>
> The young person is now affirmed in their identity and while they still experience significant distress from their experience they are now proud of their identity.

In the online survey other young people reported "I was forced to go to church and remove the lesbian from me". A worker reported services where "conversion therapy being perpetrated as part of the conditions of [young people] staying in accommodation services." In the online survey 20% of young people reported being forced to do a prayer or faith practice at a service they accessed.

Inadequate service support

Young people and workers also described instances where services, that were not state government funded, were not safe for young people. This included staff who were unqualified and acted inappropriately. One young person described having a staff member yell and try to physically intimidate them.

Concerns for child-safety

For the services referred to above it was reported that while it was well known to youth workers that these were not safe services, in some instances workers were concerned that Child Protection, the Department of Justice and the Court system may refer young people into these services.

Adult Service System

While the focus of this report was on the youth accommodation system, workers noted that adult services were very inaccessible for LGBTIQA+ young people. Workers noted this was an issue as young people aged over 18 could and often had to access adult services.

For young people this was particularly difficult when they reached 25 and had to transition into adult services. This was not only difficult because of the loss of their previous support but also because it meant moving into a more inaccessible system. One young person described feeling like they were being abandoned by their previous support workers.

Surrounding Systems

LGBTIQA+ young people expressed that discrimination they faced in surrounding systems created difficulties in accessing and continuing engagement with accommodation services.

Centrelink

Workers and young people reported issues with Centrelink being a significant barrier to service access. One young person discussed that in order to prove that they couldn't live at home Centrelink called their violent and abusive family which put them in further danger. Workers also discussed that some young people who may have a different name on their university or TAFE records compared to their legal records run the risk of getting cut off by Centrelink. Workers and young people noted that many of these problems could be worked around if the young person was supported to navigate the Centrelink system. Some services had very positive experiences when they had a representative come out from Centrelink to assist young people. However, one worker noted that this required the young person to be engaged with that service in order to access this support. This created a barrier whereby young people who were already having difficulty accessing Centrelink found it tough to access some accommodation services that required them to already be receiving a welfare payment to be able to afford to pay for the accommodation.

In the online survey around 25% of respondents were unable to access a service because they couldn't access Centrelink. This was exemplified by one young person who said "I didn't have the documents and Centrelink didn't listen to my situation and so I couldn't access housing services".

33% of respondents were unable to access services because they couldn't afford them. For some young people, being able to access Centrelink was correlated with being able to afford other services like mental health support; one young person noted they were delayed in accessing mental health support because: "The process took a while as I needed to obtain a license before then and set up Centrelink so I could afford it."

Department of Housing

Deadnaming and misgendering young people was a significant issue for young people engaged with the Department of Housing.

Child protection

Some workers reported discriminatory experiences that young people had in the child protection system. This included young people being housed with other young people who were discriminatory towards their identity and the service not being able to respond adequately to support their needs.

Schools

Workers reported that young people who were experiencing violence, abuse and rejection at home often had a similar experience at school. Many young people were regularly deadnamed, invalidated or bullied at school by both students and teachers. Additionally, as school is often a key system for identifying young people who are at risk, if the young person was forced to stay 'closeted' at school they were unlikely to disclose their situation to staff and be identified as requiring support.

Workers and young people both reported situations where a young person in a non-affirming religious family was also attending a non-affirming church, school and mental health services so had very little affirming support. As one young person noted when responding to the online survey "I currently go to a... church, and I am...not out to most there. My psychologist is Christian. These, other than friends, are my main source of support but I can't trust them because of my sexuality."

Job providers & workplaces

Workers noted that LGBTIQA+ young people had experienced discrimination in workplaces as well as with job providers. Particularly, that young people struggled to obtain or maintain employment if they were experiencing discrimination.

This was particularly difficult if the young person needed income or to be employed to meet the criteria for service access.

Emergency, hospital-based, mental health services

Many young people and workers reported significant and persistent discrimination when presenting to hospital for emergency mental health concerns, or a step-up, step-down service. There was a clear consensus that these services were not safe for LGBTIQA+ young people, particularly trans and gender diverse young people.

For trans and gender diverse young people who presented with suicidality many reported that they have been consistently misgendered, had their identity invalidated or told they would 'get over' their LGBTIQA+ identity. One worker described a young person who had to go to extreme, overt lengths to try and get workers to stop misgendering them.

Because of these experiences, many trans or gender diverse young people would not present at a hospital even when they were experiencing severe mental health issues and suicidality. Workers described that for many LGBTIQA+ young people this simply was not an option.

One worker reported a death of a young person who had experienced significant discrimination in a step-up, step-down facility and who believed this discrimination was a contributor to their death.

Data Collection

Many workers were concerned about the lack of data collected on the number of young people experiencing homelessness who were LGBTIQA+ in either community or government run services.

One worker noted that stronger data collection would highlight if there were disparities in LGBTIQA+ attendance in different services. Workers also noted that the lack of data made it difficult to justify stronger policy measures or increased funding for LGBTIQA+ inclusion.

The online survey also noted that around 50% of respondents who experienced homelessness had never accessed a service and additional data measures were needed to capture this population.

In LGBTIQA+ affirming services, data was collected on levels of service usage by LGBTIQA+ individuals through providing open box questions for young people to describe their gender and sexuality. This was mandated by the service's governance which required reports of what proportion of service usage was by LGBTIQA+ young people. When asked if non-LGBTIQA+ young people had difficulties with these forms, workers reported that it was often used as a teachable moment to improve the young person's awareness of LGBTIQA+ identities and that it often provided the young person greater insight into their own identity.

Impact of Negative Experiences

Invalidation

Workers noted that these negative experiences led to young people developing a negative self-belief that they were worthless and broken.

For those who had experienced trauma relating to discrimination against their identity, particularly if this discrimination was one of the reasons they became homeless, these experiences compounded this trauma and made it more difficult to heal. Workers reported that for some young people it created a self-belief that their identity was an issue.

Difficulty re-engaging

Workers reported that young people who had negative experiences in a service developed mistrust of services which made re-engaging with other services significantly more difficult, even if they were an affirming service. Workers described having an immense amount of difficulty rebuilding trust with a young person after a negative experience at a referred service and difficulty in convincing the young person to try a different service. This resulted in the young people delaying or not accessing the support they needed.

Workers reported that these experiences could reduce a young person's willingness to engage with entire systems of services, for example health care or education.

Longer time spent homeless

Workers reported that they believed because LGBTIQA+ young people had a more difficult time accessing services they spent a longer time homeless. Particularly if young people felt they had to remain street present in order to avoid invalidating or discriminatory experiences. In other instances, young people spent longer in unsafe or abusive environments because they didn't want to experience discrimination from services.

Examples of LGBTIQA+ Affirming Practices

Throughout interviews, young people and workers also described positive experiences they had with LGBTIQA+ affirming services as well as what made those services particularly inclusive. Themes that aren't included in other areas of the report are listed here.

Overt inclusion

Workers noted that LGBTIQA+ affirming services had deliberate visual symbols of inclusion such as pride flags, LGBTIQA+ posters, rainbows and a lack of 'visual heteronormativity'. In these services, workers gave their pronouns and asked for young people's pronouns in a relaxed way. Staff in these services also supported young people to advocate for their identity, including correcting forms and documentation that had incorrect names and pronouns on it. This also included participating in LGBTIQA+ community events such as the Pride Parade.

Workers also pointed to services that had a high number of LGBTIQA+ staff. Young people reported positive experiences with staff members who were able to support them with medical and legal transition or with exploring different aspects of their identity.

Workers noted that services that were overtly inclusive took the burden off young people to have to figure out if the service was safe for them. As one worker said in the online survey:

> *"Places that clearly demonstrate that they are LGBTQIA+ affirming through the environment, policies, and staff lead to a greater sense of safety and willingness for these young people to access these services."*

Protective effect of LGBTIQA+ inclusion

Young people who had an LGBTIQA+ inclusive support system including case managers, psychologists, and doctors described how this helped them to cope with discrimination in other areas of their life. One young person who experienced discrimination at school described that having this support meant they didn't interpret that discrimination as an indicator that they were deficient or broken but rather these supports helped them understand this was a deficiency of that institution. This was a protective factor in this young person's wellbeing. Young people also described how services that were affirming allowed them to build a positive self-concept of their LGBTIQA+ identity.

Space to discover and explore their LGBTIQA+ identity

Young people reported that in LGBTIQA+ affirming services they were able to easily connect with other LGBTIQA+ young people, which helped them to better understand their own identity. Particularly, young people valued being in a space that supported them to try different names, labels and pronouns to explore what felt right for them. For some young people, being in this environment allowed them to discover that they were LGBTIQA+. Additionally, young people described how having a trans or gender diverse case worker supported them to understand different trans and gender diverse identities and supported them to navigate feelings of gender dysphoria.

Working with supportive affiliates

Services were able to support LGBTIQA+ young people by providing affirming legal, Centrelink and health services. This allowed young people to do things like change their legal name, access affirming medical treatments and navigate the Centrelink system. This assisted the young people to minimise barriers they faced as LGBTIQA+ people. One service was able to provide wrap-around support that assisted a young person with a large part of their transition.

Clear referrals

Workers in LGBTIQA+ affirming services had strong preferred referral pathways and were able to have frank conversations about possible experiences of discrimination a young person may have in a service, based on the experiences of other young people. This meant that the young person could make an informed decision as to which services they chose to access.

Recommendations - Services

Hire LGBTIQA+ affirming staff and create a safe work environment for LGBTIQA+ employees

Across interviews it was clear that LGBTIQA+ affirming services had a practice of hiring diverse, LGBTIQA+ staff. Additionally, those services had specific questions in interviewing processes designed to ascertain the candidate's understanding of how to support LGBTIQA+ young people, e.g. 'how would you work with a non-binary young person?'. The purpose of these questions was to discover, beyond general support for inclusion, the skills and knowledge of the staff member to support LGBTIQA+ young people.

Interviewees also identified that if LGBTIQA+ staff members did not feel safe and supported in their identities in the workplace then they would not be able to model LGBTIQA+ inclusion in the service. LGBTIQA+ staff were also more likely to identify gaps and issues with LGBTIQA+ inclusion within the service and workplaces where they were empowered to raise these issues were able to work towards continuous improvement.

Integrate LGBTIQA+ inclusion into core business and ensure service delivery is LGBTIQA+ affirming

Interviews identified that a key barrier to LGBTIQA+ inclusion was the perception that being LGBTIQA+ affirming was a specialist skill set and not the responsibility of mainstream services. To achieve equitable outcomes for LGBTIQA+ young people every service needs to see LGBTIQA+ inclusion as their responsibility. Suggestions from interviewees included governance structures requiring reports on LGBTIQA+ inclusion measures, and co-design with LGBTIQA+ young people.

Interviews with workers and young people also stressed that services need to actively address discrimination within their services. This included being responsive to reports of discriminatory staff and training staff to intervene to stop discrimination from other service users. All staff members must receive comprehensive training on LGBTIQA+ inclusive practices and must regularly demonstrate this in ongoing practice in order to be fully equipped to support LGBTIQA+ young people and ensure that no client experiences discrimination from any staff member. As one worker put it:

> *"We need to go beyond LGBTIQA+ 101 training".*

Additionally, workers noted that the training should be prioritised by organisations and not delegated to LGBTIQA+ staff members to do for free, with a particular emphasis on supporting LGBTIQA+ organisations who deliver this training.

Develop and implement safe methods of data collection on LGBTIQA+ young people

Another key theme from interviews was the detrimental effect that a lack of data collection had on perpetuating the cycles of exclusion and disadvantage for LGBTIQA+ young people. It is critical that services develop safe ways of collecting data about a young person's LGBTIQA+ identity. This will not only support broader advocacy through providing clearer data on rates of LGBTIQA+ homelessness but will also allow services to identify if LGBTIQA+ young people are receiving the same support and service outcomes as other service users.

Ensure service structures and processes are appropriate for LGBTIQA+ young people

In interviews, several internal processes were identified as barriers to access for LGBTIQA+ young people. For example, forms that were non-inclusive and record systems that didn't allow for changes of name. Additionally, it was identified that there was a need to educate staff on keeping LGBTIQA+ young people safe, for example allowing a young person to have a contact who is not a parent. To become LGBTIQA+ affirming, services need to identify their own processes and ensure they are appropriate for LGBTIQA+ young people.

Additionally, elements of service structure were found to be barriers for LGBTIQA+ young people including gendered wings in services and services without gender neutral toilets. It is worthwhile for services to evaluate whether LGBTIQA+ young people have a safe place to sleep and go to the bathroom in their service. Service risk thresholds and requirements were also barriers for LGBTIQA+ young people, these thresholds and services should understand what additional support LGBTIQA+ young people may need in order to meet them.

Recommendations - Government

Develop safe methods of data collection on LGBTIQA+ young people

A key theme from interviews with workers was the difficulties that arise from a lack of data around the prevalence of LGBTIQA+ young people experiencing homelessness. It is important to note that it may not be appropriate to have this information linked to a young person's file or documents as this may make them vulnerable to discrimination from different workers they encounter. However, collecting this data at an aggregate level and allowing young people to have this data recorded if they choose to is important to understanding the prevalence and resource allocation needed for LGBTIQA+ young people.

Integrate LGBTIQA+ inclusion into tendering processes and reporting

Another key theme of interviews was the desire for more accountability for services to work towards being LGBTIQA+ affirming. A suggestion to address this included asking questions about LGBTIQA+ inclusion practices in reporting and tendering processes.

Additionally, workers suggested that the Government works with services to support re-designing services to remove gendered wings of services, or present alternative and inclusive structures.

Ensure staff across government are trained in LGBTIQA+ inclusion

Key themes from reports indicated that many Government departments needed comprehensive training on LGBTIQA+ inclusion. This included the Department of Communities, housing & homelessness service policy and contract managers, Child Protection and Family Services, Department of Justice, and Department of Education. This training should be focused on increasing the safety of LGBTQIA+ young people in those systems.

Additionally, this should empower workers and Government to better understand how LGBTIQA+ young people are treated in the various services to help inform referral pathways and ensure due diligence and duty of care is upheld in referrals.

> **Discrimination in health and education systems contributed to the disadvantage faced by LGBTIQA+ young people. Working towards affirming schools and health systems is vital for increasing the wellbeing and outcomes of at-risk LGBTIQA+ young people.**

Integrate LGBTIQA+ inclusion into government strategy

A key theme from consultations was that LGBTIQA+ young people were a significant proportion of young people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, from this report it is clear that young people who aren't affirmed in services will have worse outcomes, increased trauma and longer time in the homelessness system. From this, it can be suggested that LGBTIQA+ people need to be deliberately included in systemic strategies to reduce homelessness.

Additionally, workers suggested interventions that supported families to understand and affirm their LGBTIQA+ children would work to reduce family rejection. General strategies to address discrimination in the community would also support the wellbeing of LGBTIQA+ young people.

Finally, in addressing service availability and mix, strategies should take into account the real availability of services for LGBTIQA+ young people, taking into account services that are non-affirming and those with criteria that may disproportionately exclude LGBTIQA+ young people.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are many areas this report did not adequately address. This includes the experiences of intersex young people, LGBTIQA+ young people in regional and remote areas and the experiences of LGBTIQA+ young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. YPN strongly recommends additional work that explores these experiences in more detail and the deliberate inclusion of representatives from these groups in any work resulting from this report. Additionally, it is worthwhile exploring the experiences of discrimination LGBTIQA+ young people face in other systems such as health, education, youth justice, sport & recreation and child protection and family services.

Conclusion

This report highlighted the stories and experiences of LGBTIQA+ young people in the Western Australian youth homelessness system. It identified the persistent systemic and attitudinal barriers that LGBTIQA+ young people face to accessing the support they need. Exclusion of LGBTIQA+ people occurs at all levels, from policy and contracting to day to day service delivery. Additionally, tackling discriminatory attitudes in the community is a key way that we can reduce the trauma of LGBTIQA+ young people and prevent homelessness.

However, there is also evidence from these findings that LGBTIQA+ inclusion is achievable and has been demonstrated by a number of services. At its core, it requires setting LGBTIQA+ young people as a priority and being accountable to continual improvement in inclusion.

As one young person remarked in the online survey:

> *"It has to be better.*
> *Please."*

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YOUTH PRIDE
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