

Serving LGBTQ/GNCT Youth of Color Who Are Unhoused in Texas

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Texas is home to more than seven million people younger than 18 (approximately 70 percent of whom are youth of color)¹ and has the second-largest population of lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning/queer, gender nonconforming, and transgender (LGBTQ/GNCT)² youth in the country (Conron 2020).³ Like many states, Texas is striving to end youth housing instability and homelessness.⁴ Solutions must be tailored to LGBTQ/GNCT youth because they are more likely to be unhoused than the general youth population (Choi et al. 2015; Morton et al. 2018). Moreover, LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color may be particularly vulnerable to housing instability and youth homelessness because of structural and systemic barriers and injustices that disproportionately deprive them of resources, care, and services needed to promote their well-being. Importantly, LGBTQ/GNCT youth, particularly those of color, in southern states face heightened vulnerabilities and discrimination in service delivery (MAP and CSE 2020). Youth experiencing homelessness are also at heightened risk of being policed and experiencing continued justice involvement (Narendorf 2016).⁵

We sought to better understand the scope of youth homelessness among LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color in Texas by proposing a project that would examine data from multiple sources including public education data, service provider insights, juvenile justice data, and a statewide count of youth who are

¹ US Census Bureau 2019 American Community Survey, table: S0101 (Age and Sex) and table: B01001H Sex by Age (White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino).

² In this case study, "LGBTQ/GNCT" is used to encompass the difference between sexual orientation (LGBTQ) and gender identity (GNCT). The term "queer" is used interchangeably with LGBTQ/GNCT as an all-encompassing term to represent any identity that is not cisgender and heterosexual. We use the language from original data sources when they specify subpopulations within the queer population. For instance, we use LGBT when the source does not include queer and gender-nonconforming identities in their data collection.

³ This source does not present breakdowns for gender nonconforming youth.

⁴ "Homeless" and "unhoused" denote situations in which someone lacks secure housing. This includes transitional and chronic situations, including living in a shelter, living with relatives, or living outside with or without temporary shelter. We use "housing instability" and "unstable housing" to denote a broader variety of situations, such as being at risk of losing housing, moving frequently, and lacking utilities or necessary services. Though government agencies refer to a lack of housing as "homelessness," we use "homelessness" and "unhoused" to refer to the situation experienced by people without housing. Because "homelessness" implies lack of a "home," some researchers and people with lived experience prefer "homelessness," which denotes a lack of housing but not necessarily the lack of a home. Housing is also a community responsibility, and "unhoused" helps communicate when housing is not made accessible to people who need it. For more information on these terms, we recommend reading articles by [Kidd and Evans](#) and [Natalie Orenstein](#).

⁵ Narendorf (2016) defines LGBTQ as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning.

unhoused. In our preliminary review we learned that each organization and system has its own definition of houselessness and there is a disjointed policy and funding approach when it comes to identifying and serving youth who are unhoused (Texas Appleseed and TNOYS 2017a). Because they are situated at the intersection of multiple stigmatized identities and dimensions of societal oppression, a careful and systematic approach is needed to promote the well-being of LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color by addressing gaps in service provision. Philanthropic actors can help researchers and service organizations better understand the scope of the problem by aiding them and investing in actionable solutions.

Youth houselessness is a pervasive and understudied topic. Moreover, the unique needs of LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color with unstable housing are not well researched or well documented. With the recent passing of three Texas laws (House Bill 811, House Bill 692, and House Bill 123) focused on the needs of unhoused youth (Texas Appleseed 2019), better understanding the needs of LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color who are unhoused is critical to promoting well-being for the next generation of youth and young adults of color. Future research is needed to illuminate where and how to build capacity among service providers, advance policy changes, and support youth-led activism. Philanthropy must develop a pointed understanding of the gaps in resource provision for LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color in Texas through qualitative and quantitative data collection on unhoused youth and their experiences; accordingly, it must support partnerships between necessary services such as temporary housing and queer-affirming mental health services and amplify the voices of marginalized youth.

We know the following things about unhoused youth in Texas:

- During the 2019–20 school year, the Texas Education Agency reported that there were 78,296 houseless or unstably housed students statewide, and some counties reported that as many as 26 percent of students were houseless or unstably housed.⁶ This is likely an undercount of the overall population of unhoused youth because many young people who are unhoused are not enrolled in school (Narendorf 2016).
- Throughout the US, youth who are unhoused are more likely to be LGBTQ/GNCT than the general population of youth. National studies have found that as many as 40 percent of youth who are unhoused identify as LGBTQ/GNCT (Choi et al. 2015; Morton et al. 2018). In Texas, approximately 16 percent of surveyed youth experiencing houselessness identified as LGBTQ (Narendorf 2016).
 - » Texas is home to approximately 195,000 LGBT youth between the ages of 13 and 17, representing 10 percent of all Texas youth in that age range (Conron 2020).⁷
- One in three surveyed youths experiencing houselessness in Texas reported prior involvement with the juvenile justice system (Narendorf 2016). Justice involvement and houselessness are

⁶ Texas Education Agency, “2019-2020 Student Program and Special Populations Reports,” accessed January 11, 2021, <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/adhocrpt/adspr.html>.

⁷ This rate was calculated using Annie E. Casey Foundation’s “KIDS COUNT Indicators for State in Texas.” Conron (2020) uses the phrase LGBT, defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender.

intertwined: people who are unhoused often rely on survival mechanisms that are criminalized (NLCHP 2019), and people exiting the justice system lose social support systems, education, and potential employment because of incarceration and stigmatization, which leads to greater risk of housing instability (CAP and MAP 2016). Youth who are LGBTQ/GNCT often face discrimination and stigmatization and loss of familial support, leading to higher likelihood of being unhoused. Overall, queer people, especially transgender people, are at greater risk of disproportionate policing, placing queer youth of color—especially trans youth—at particularly high risk of being pushed into the cycle of justice involvement and houselessness (CAP and MAP 2016; Greene 2019).

- Youth who are unhoused are more likely to be youth of color, to experience a disability, and to have a history of mental health issues, both in Texas and the US more broadly (Texas Appleseed and TNOYS 2017a).⁸
- Young people experiencing houselessness in Texas and throughout the US are not well documented because they are inclined to hide their status as unhoused because of stigmatization and/or out of fear of being returned home or arrested.⁹

Need for Further Analysis

Policymakers can use counties and cities as measurable units by which to address service gaps. The proposed analysis aims to capture four complex intersections: race, housing status, age, and justice involvement. It is crucial to understand these intersections to identify overlapping vulnerabilities that put LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color at high risk of being unhoused. Although some counties' data on juvenile justice overlap with separately collected data on youth houselessness, consistent county-level data disaggregated by sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and race are difficult to find, and gaps in these data are particularly pronounced in less populous counties. Queer people of color in rural counties are more likely to experience discrimination and higher rates of poverty (MAP 2019), and queer youth of color in rural areas are more likely to experience a lack of safety in schools and to have fewer social supports than youth in more populous areas (Palmer, Kosciw, and Bartkiewicz 2012). Service provision in these areas is often overlooked because of a lack of overarching data.

Moreover, the lack of interconnecting data means that even in larger counties with more robust services and data collection, the needs of youth at the intersection of housing instability or houselessness, discrimination based on LGBTQ/GNCT identity, and racial discrimination are not holistically understood.

⁸ "Current Statistics on the Prevalence and Characteristics of People Experiencing Homelessness in the United States," Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, last updated July 2011, https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/homelessness_programs_resources/hrc-factsheet-current-statistics-prevalence-characteristics-homelessness.pdf.

⁹ "How Many Homeless Youth Are in America?" National Network for Youth, accessed January 11, 2021, <https://nn4youth.org/learn/how-many-homeless/>.

Philanthropists seeking to better understand the factors driving homelessness among LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color, and subsequently to address these drivers, can invest in local organizations collecting crucial data and build capacity to bring disparate data sources together.

These quantitative data must be paired with a qualitative approach to understanding youth and how they become unhoused. Numerical data can provide a wealth of information, but they cannot speak to the stories of people at the margins of society. Data collection and advocacy in this area must not only include, but center LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color who are unhoused, both in methodology and in data collection. Any analysis intended to promote the well-being of youth of color must include them as experts, building their capacity and allowing their needs to drive data collection. Philanthropists can add needed depth to quantitative data by supporting organizations already collecting relevant qualitative data, and they could fund partnerships with organizations like the Urban Institute to leverage their strengths in quantitative data collection and analysis. By supporting such partnerships, philanthropists can help community organizations better understand where to focus supports and build service capacity as well as which existing services most improve outcomes for youth of color who are at risk of being unhoused.

Maximizing Impact

The dearth of comprehensive data on LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color and the lack of infrastructure needed to link data across agencies (e.g., education, the juvenile justice system, shelters, service agencies) present major challenges for service providers, policymakers, and advocacy organizations working to address the heightened risks and overlooked needs experienced by this group. It is crucial not only to address these needs directly, but to move beyond mitigating the problem and to uplift an equitable social framework. This means developing infrastructure and databases that will allow us to identify the scope of needs among youth of color who are LGBTQ/GNCT and account for the factors that disproportionately disadvantage them.

If given the funding and resources to collect more data and create actionable solutions in this area, we can improve outcomes for youth in this generation and those that follow. As Urban expands its research priorities to work on [promoting equity and dismantling structural and systemic racism](#), philanthropy can help us improve supports for youth in Texas who are most likely to be unhoused. Texas is an ideal place to begin this work because it already has numerous organizations actively dedicated to serving LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color and LGBTQ/GNCT youth who are unhoused,¹⁰ and because it is home to a significant share of this unique population. In addition, LGBTQ/GNCT people in southern states often face heightened risk of negative life outcomes and obstacles owing to anti-LGBTQ

¹⁰ Examples include Allgo, Covenant House, Montrose Center, Outlast Youth, Texas Appleseed, and Tony's Place.

legislation and homophobia (CAP and MAP 2016), so an integral part of the proposed project would be to better understand anti-LGBTQ stigmas and barriers.

We propose that Urban partner with one or several youth-serving organizations in Texas to provide research support and/or training and technical assistance to advance and support the much-needed data collection described above. Layering resources will allow people working at the center of the problem to be heard and financially supported while getting them the assistance and backing they may need from an established social-science research organization. A comprehensive data collection effort requires qualitative and quantitative data, which Urban's experts are well equipped to collect. As partnerships are built and needs are better understood, Texas can serve as a model for other states (particularly southern states) to reproduce successful efforts.

Although data collection is imperative for better understanding the needs of LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color who are unhoused, we acknowledge that it is only part of the equation. In box 1, we offer a list of funding priorities and directions for philanthropists interested in addressing the root causes of this issue and in assisting people it impacts.

BOX 1

Funding Priorities for Philanthropy

- Invest in robust, systematic qualitative and quantitative data collection.
- Invest in grant-funded positions to perform data entry and processing to link data across agencies.
- Input small seed funding into local jurisdictions or counties to implement noncarceral service programs that support LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color and community growth.
- Support organizations that are “close to the problem” (e.g., Texas Appleseed, Texas Network of Youth Services, Montrose Center), and enable people with lived experience to speak with local legislators and policymakers by forging connections and providing professional development funding, focusing on youth-led activism and advocacy to allow youth to tell their own stories.
- Support decarceration models and divert funding from strategies that bolster harmful systems, such as police, detention centers, jails, and prisons. Though commonly accepted, these systems penalize people who lack housing and criminalize survival strategies through surveillance and encampment sweeps. They also separate youth from support systems and immerse them in environments (e.g., prisons, detention centers) that are neither prosocial nor inclined toward growth, and they generally fund punitive measures that do not help reduce or mitigate houselessness or help people acquire skills to ensure their long-term success (NLCHP 2019). Harmful strategies also include funding models that suggest police reform as a terminal destination for racial equity, because these models often seek to further legitimize and fund police actions toward unhoused youth while neglecting to recognize the inherently harmful nature of the policing system (NLCHP 2019).

In addition to funding further research and support for LGBTQ/GNCT youth who are unhoused, philanthropists and agents of change can also address specific structures causing inequality by engaging in critical thought on policing and further encouraging city budgeting that serves people who are unhoused, instead of exacerbating adverse experiences that LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color face. Philanthropy can invest in, learn from, and uplift youth in the short and long terms by funding and resourcing efforts that best serve LGBTQ/GNCT youth of color who are unhoused.

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