

Slipping Through the Cracks

In today's world there isn't a day that goes by that we don't hear of another family that is forced out of their home for financial reasons. We drive down streets and see people standing with signs asking for help for food, a bus ticket, or change to help them financially. Often times we live in our own world that seems to be safe and sound because we have a roof over our heads and food to eat and a few dollars in our pocket to go get a cup of coffee on our own and forget about these people that live without that same freedom everyday. The problem with poverty in America today is an ever present problem. It seems that there is some new piece of legislation everyday that is attempting to rectify the problem and provide assistance where assistance is needed. While we hear of these problems and do our best to help when we are able there is still a huge number of people that live below the poverty line and in many cases live in something far more terrifying. They live their life homeless.

One of these groups that fall into this category that often go unnoticed is the plight of groups of homeless LGBTQ youth. Children that face the problem of homelessness at younger and younger ages. In many cases this is due to being forced from their homes due to families not accepting their choice to live their lives as openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer. They also run away from their current homes because of their fear of going to school each day because of problems they face with bullying or because they can no longer live in places they are not accepted as who they truly are. The numbers of these youth continue to rise and the percentages of these youth living homeless are staggering (Jenson, Rendon, Snuggs).

In the United States the national percentage of youth that are homeless sit at 10% according to an article written in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution whereas the number of youth that identify as LGBTQ that number jumps to between 20% and 40% of the homeless youth population (Snuggs). This number doesn't change the number of those living homeless but it does show that these youth are at a much higher risk for becoming homeless due to various reasons. Most of these youth find their lives on the street where the use of drugs, prostitution, and criminal activity becomes much more of a reality just to survive the new lives that they are living (Snuggs). While there is no exact percentage that has been released as to the exact number of youth living on the streets these percentages give us an idea of just how much more at risk the LGBTQ population is to being homeless (Shelton). This is not something that can be covered up anymore and be justified as just another statistic. These children are living lives that are far more dangerous and deadly than any child should have to live (Snuggs).

While the exact cause of this problem is not entirely known much research points to the problems these youth face in their family lives, religious communities, and schools which they are learning in. The problems continue to rise because these youth feel so un-accepted in their home lives that they are either kicked out of their homes or they feel that their lives are in danger because of the persecution they are faced with on a day to day basis that it is much easier to find a new home even if it is more dangerous than their previous places of residence. According to a survey done by the Human Rights campaign these homeless youth reported that 53% of them were verbally harassed, 17% said they were physically assaulted, 65% said they didn't feel that their government wasn't accepting of the LGBT community, and 74% said that their church or

religious affiliations weren't accepting of them either (Human Rights Campaign qtd. in Rendon). This gives us a better idea of why these youth have ended up where they are now.

These statistics are a sign of just how much more at risk these children are to being homeless and if nothing is done to change this then these numbers seem like they will only continue to rise. While there are options such as youth shelters that do offer support to these youth by giving them a place to sleep and food to eat (Snuggs). While there are these places that do offer support more needs to be done to assist these youth in finding a new way to live their lives in a way that they no longer have to live under the title of homeless.

The United States has started to work on this problem by creating the National LGBTQ Task Force to report on the problem itself and continues to do work to find protection these same youth are not protected from discrimination under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (Shelton). The importance of this issue and the ability to find a resolution to solve this problem lies within the hands of the people of this country. According to Shelton, it is imperative that people become educated on the problem itself and are able to see how large of a scale this problem extends on. The need to become a people that both understands the issue as well as takes action in resolving it and standing up for the cause and take actions within their own cities so that this problem can become something that, as a people, we're able to overcome. According to Shelton, we can no longer see these youth as just another statistic but as the children that they are and protect them and give them the life that we experience everyday by simply having the ability to go and buy a cup of coffee and are able to go to sleep at night with a roof over our head and a place to call home. In Shelton's article she points out that we must realize that the scale of this problem needs to be something that we see as something that we can conquer and give the

children of this nation a life and the opportunities that they deserve (Shelton). All Under One Roof offers support. This is one of the best places that we can all locally volunteer, donate or even become a safe zone member and offer support to LGBTQ youth of Pocatello. You can do this at allunderoneroof.org

Works Cited

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