

For Parents & Family: Ways Trans Youth are Overrepresented in the Foster Care System

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Research from government agencies, academic journals, and non-profits serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning communities, have identified that transgender youth are disproportionality represented in the U.S. foster care system compared to their cisgender counterparts. About five percent of youth in the foster care system identify as transgender compared to 1.17% of youth not in the foster care system according to a 2019 study issued by the Children's Rights organization.

Generally, transgender and cisgender youth enter the foster care system for similar reason (e.g., family neglect, abusive parents, unstable home environment). However, transgender youth may also experience family rejection due to their gender identity. This family rejection may lead to a hostile home environment, parents giving up custody, or youth experiencing homelessness. Homelessness may occur due to transgender youth running away from their hostile environment or being told to leave their home by a parent. Transgender youth who already living in a home environment that is abuse, may experience additional traumatic event after coming out to their families. This type of rejection and treatment can have long lasting negative mental (e.g., depression, anxiety) and physical (e.g., self-harm) outcomes. The separation from their home often results in transgender youth entering the foster care

system according to the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

For many transgender youth, becoming connect to the foster care system may act as a buffer against housing instability in their future. A study conducted by the federal Administration for Children and Families found that about seven percent of unhoused individuals identified as transgender and half reported having been in the foster care system. However, many transgender youth continue to face discrimination while in the foster care system, such as verbal harassment, misgendering, refusal to use desired pronouns, frequent replacement, and physical violence due to others rejecting their gender identity. These negative experiences may lead some transgender youth to run away from their placements, resulting in homelessness.

Overall, the strongest available evidence shows that transgender youth are disproportionately represented in foster care and related systems of housing instability. The disparity is not explained by transgender identity itself. Rather, research and government agencies point to social conditions—including rejection, maltreatment, homelessness, discrimination, and placement instability—that can increase transgender youths' likelihood of encountering the child-welfare system. Addressing those conditions through family support, affirming foster placements, and

staff training, could help reduce unnecessary system involvement and improve outcomes for transgender young people.