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UNDERSERVED AND UNACCOMPANIED: LGBTQ YOUTH
Meeting the intersecting needs of youth homelessness and LGBTQ identities in
Worcester, MA

MOLLY KELLMAN

MAY 2018

A MASTER'S RESEARCH PAPER

**Submitted to the faculty of Clark University, Worcester,
Massachusetts, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in the department of International Development
Community and Environment (IDCE)**

And accepted on the recommendation of

Laurie Ross, Chief Instructor

ABSTRACT

UNDERSERVED AND UNACCOMPANIED: LGBTQ YOUTH Meeting the intersecting needs of youth homelessness and LGBTQ identities in Worcester, MA

MOLLY KELLMAN

LGBTQ youth are at a much higher risk for experiencing homelessness, victimization, abuse, and disconnection from social and medical services than their non-LGBTQ peers. This research paper uses a mixed-methods approach to identify the specific needs of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in Worcester, Massachusetts, and how the youth service sector can better meet the needs of this population. Analysis of data from unaccompanied LGBTQ youth and the providers who serve them revealed a disconnect between service providers, and a lack of resources that accommodate the intersections of homelessness and LGBTQ identities. LGBTQ youth in Worcester are more at risk of experiencing chronic homelessness, trauma, and having unmet service needs. This study was conducted with the purpose of connecting and coordinating the myriad of youth resources in this city, and improving their accessibility for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in a climate of rising social and political conservatism.

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DEDICATION

My writing process throughout this research is dedicated to my Grandma; whose incredible strength allowed me to actualize my dreams in higher education. She raised a family, got her Ph.D. in her 60's, and spent the rest of her career providing grief counseling through artistic expression. She shattered gendered stereotypes in academia and psychology without compromising her central identity as a poet. Her spirituality, feminist fire, and love for learning through every stage of life inspires me to do work that speaks with my heart; it is one of my biggest blessings to follow the radiant women in my life who marry passion and profession.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Professor Laurie Ross for her continuous support and feedback throughout this research; she weighed guidance with encouragement and helped me to balance my role as researcher with my identity as a queer housing worker in Worcester.

I also want to thank the other service providers who shared their time and perspectives with me. Vulnerability, honesty, curiosity and self-reflection are what I value most in the human services field, and working with other providers in the city who share my passion for equitable housing and LGBTQ rights gives me complete confidence in our capacity to provide more accessible services.

Finally, this research is only possible because of the Worcester youth who disclosed their LGBTQ identities and experiences with homelessness. Giving a voice to frequently silenced issues is not without meaning, and I intend for this research to act as a starting point for regional changes in the way we serve this population.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CoC: Continuum of Care

DCF: Department of Children and Families

ESG: Emergency Services Grant

HMIS: Homeless Information Management System

HUD: Housing and Urban Development

LGBTQ: Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer/Questioning

MHSA: Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance:

PiT: Point in Time (survey)

RHYA: Runaway Homeless Youth Act:

SOGI: Sexual and Gender Identity

TAY: Transitional Aged Youth

I. Introduction

The most recent and comprehensive national study on youth homelessness in the U.S. found that 1 in 10 youth between 18 and 24 years old experience homelessness within a year (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017). Experiencing homelessness before the age of 24 has significant impacts throughout an individual's life; including increased criminal involvement, unstable mental health, substance use disorders, and repeated episodes of homelessness (Mayock, Corr, & O'Sullivan, 2013). This vulnerability is disproportionately experienced by LGBTQ youth, who have a 120% higher chance of reporting homelessness than non-LGBTQ youth (Morton et al., 2017). Unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are also more likely to become disconnected from social services, and experience higher level of trauma and victimization before and after becoming homeless.

LGBTQ youth experience homelessness in their late teens more frequently than non-LGBTQ youth (Kyu Choi Bianca Wilson Jama Shelton Gary Gates, 2015), and are ineligible for most general emergency shelters if they are under 18. However, unaccompanied youth in their late teens may not be put in foster care custody through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) before aging out of the system at 18, (Hunter, 2008) which leaves this age group in a housing service Catch-22. For youth older than 18, emergency adult shelters are often dangerous and inaccessible- particularly for LGBTQ youth who face additional harassment and discrimination (Ray, 2006). Unaccompanied LGBTQ youth often circumvent inaccessible shelter and housing services by staying with friends and couch surfing in their LGBTQ communities (Wenzel et al., 2012). However, it is more difficult to secure permanent housing without the financial support, life skills, and housing placement available through mainstream social services (Morton et al., 2017).

Existing research supports the concept of familial conflict as the largest cause of unaccompanied youth homelessness, both for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth. While familial conflict may be the most cited reason, understanding the situations of individual youth often reveal much more complex histories. I want to consider the experiences of LGBTQ youth who experience homelessness because of other social injustices. In these situations, the trauma and stress of navigating homelessness as a Transitional Aged Youth is compounded by the stigmatization of LGBTQ identities.

The Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth defines unaccompanied youth as someone “24 years of age or younger who is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian and who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (Executive Office of Health and Human Services, 2014). While policy, funding, and service provision view youth homelessness through these parameters, youth who fit this definition often would not associate their situations with homelessness.

Homelessness is widely stigmatized, and is often essentialized as an identity rather than an experience; instead of understanding homelessness as the result of systematic inequality, society and policy view homelessness as a taxpayer burden and cultural inconvenience. For the purpose of this research, it’s also important to conceptualize the meaning of youth homelessness to give a more qualitative understanding of the definition. The different ways youth that experience homelessness, and the processes of becoming separated from their families are not easily quantified. However, maintaining the humanity and range of experiences within statistical data is an essential component of responding to the needs of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth.

The national response to youth homelessness began in 1974, with the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) that directs federal funds through state budgets to meet national goals of serving unaccompanied youth. This model of funding leaves the specific approaches up to the states, which means the allocation of resources to LGBTQ youth varies by states and municipalities. Massachusetts, compared to other states, has a stable history of funding research and services for youth homelessness, as well as specific efforts geared towards unaccompanied LGBTQ youth. However, access to youth and/or LGBTQ housing services is not equally distributed throughout the Commonwealth.

Although Worcester is a regional hub for a variety of public health resources, the city does not have a youth-specific shelter, or any housing services with specialized funding and/or accommodations for LGBTQ youth. According to the 2017 Youth Count data, unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in Worcester report having all of their service needs being met at drastically lower rates than their non-LGBTQ counterparts, as well as the state average for homeless LGBTQ youth. They also report low levels of education and employment, and high levels of abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation. Worcester’s unaccompanied LGBTQ youth experience homelessness at younger ages, and for longer periods of time (Youth Count, 2017); two experiences that indicate greater difficulty securing stable housing and healthy relationships (Morton et al., 2017).

While it is well documented that LGBTQ youth are more vulnerable to homelessness, victimization, and service disconnection, responses at the local level need to be informed by contextually specific evaluation. This study considers the experiences and needs of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth, evaluates if they are more at-risk for experiencing homelessness than their non-LGBTQ peers, and analyzes the unique challenges and barriers they face when accessing housing services in the city.

With the 2016 election, rise in social conservatism, and ongoing funding cuts to welfare programs and public health budgets, the already limited resource pool available to marginalized populations is growing thinner with every fiscal quarter. In addition to engaging in activism and advocating for progressive policy, it is a political necessity to provide and improve social services for populations whose rights are under attack in today's political climate. Worcester's social service sector already struggles to meet the needs of our significant population of unhoused individuals and families; although adjusting existing youth and housing services to fit the needs of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth will take initial cooperation and labor resources, the long-term burden on Worcester's service sector will be alleviated. Accommodating the needs of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth will not only improve the lives of a marginalized population, but reduce the city's resources needed throughout their lives.

By using a mixed-methods and holistic approach to consider the multifaceted identities within this population, this study analyzes points of connection and contention between the needs and experiences expressed by unaccompanied LGBTQ youth, and the providers who aim to serve them. The cross-sections of identity, experience, and positionality are critical analytical frameworks to understanding what services are both available and accessible to unaccompanied LGBTQ youth. I want to make recommendations to Worcester's service sector that draw on its identified strengths, resources and capabilities, as well as those of the populations they serve. Although an individual may be in an unsafe situation or have negative experiences, everyone possesses innate strengths, capabilities, talents, motivations, and values that services should help foster. The experience of LGBTQ and youth housing providers in Worcester is an incredible asset to the city; most of this study's recommendations are centered around restructuring methods of provider collaboration, disseminating sources of expertise improving public and provider understandings of existing services.

II. Background

2.1. National and State Context

Although the structure of the RHYA maintains state decision-making power over the modality and allocation of federal funds for youth homelessness, in 2012 the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness included a specific Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness. This amendment outlined specific steps to coordinate between Federal agencies to meet the goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020 ((Morton et al., 2017). 2012 was also the year that all HUD-funded programs were mandated to provide services to anyone, regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity under the HUD Equal Access to Housing in HUD Programs Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity: Final Access Rule 77 FR.

With the circulation of research showing the inequitable risk to experiencing homelessness LGBTQ youth face, federal attention has included national initiatives to centralize research and program initiatives to meet the needs of this population. At the state level, Governor William Weld created the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth in 1992, which in 2006 grew into a legalized independent state agency called the Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth (Executive Office of Health and Human Services, 2014). The Commission works to implement programming, and advocates for research, policy, and funding for the benefit of LGBTQ youth in the Commonwealth, and collaborates with the Special Commission on Unaccompanied and Homeless Youth to address the needs of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth.

2.2. Worcester's Risk Factors for Homelessness

Worcester is the second largest city in New England, and one of Massachusetts's 26 Gateway Cities, meaning it is both an anchor for the regional economy as well as a city that "struggles to draw economic investment" after the national shift away from domestic industry and manufacturing (MassINC, n.d.). The city's median household income of \$45,599 between 2012 and 2016 is significantly lower than the MA average of \$70,954, and the 22.1% percent of the population living in poverty is more than twice the state average of 10.4%. In addition to economic disparities, Worcester's rates of citizens with a High School

diploma or equivalent is 6 percentage points below the state average, and 4.6% of the Worcester population is without health insurance, compared to the state average of 2.9% (United States Census Bureau, 2017)

Living in poverty, disconnected from healthcare, and with low levels of formal education are some of the most significant risk factors to becoming homeless, which is often linked to Worcester's sizable population of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. To meet the needs of the 1,507 people experiencing homelessness in Worcester, the City provides a wide range of social and medical services. This number was determined through the 2017 annual Point in Time count, which surveys the populations who meet any of the following Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definitions of homelessness:

(1) Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;

(2) Individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence;

(3) Unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition; or

(4) Individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member. (HUD, 2013)

III. Conceptual Framework

Breaking down the significant body of literature on the subject of unaccompanied youth is a key component to understanding the findings of this study in the context of existing research. The first section of this framework explains how the experiences many LGBTQ youth have can act as barriers to accessing mainstream social services. The next section explores ways to mitigate these through an overview of the models of best practice for working with LGBTQ youth to secure stable housing. The final section reviews models of

provider collaboration and information dissemination to implement these best practices throughout localities.

3.1. Barriers to Serving Unaccompanied LGBTQ youth

Although LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience homelessness than non-LGBTQ youth, they are often less connected to youth and housing services. The reasons for this disconnection are usually complicated and non-linear, however literature on the subject can be analyzed at individual, family, community, and policy/funding levels.

At the individual level of accessing service, unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are affected by socioeconomic demographics, their coming out status, experience with trauma, individual protective factors, and awareness of, and willingness to, access supports. A 2012 study on the social networks of street-based youth experiencing homelessness found that unaccompanied LGBTQ youth tend to have stronger and more supportive social networks than non-LGBTQ youth (Wenzel et al., 2012). Having a trustworthy social network may contribute to LGBTQ youth preferring to live someone in that network, rather than navigating frequently inaccessible mainstream housing services (Hicks, 2014).

LGBTQ youth's familial upbringing, environment, and experiences are often a huge factor in the way that unaccompanied LGBTQ youth experience homelessness. Since LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience homelessness because of familial conflict than non-LGBTQ youth (Durso & Gates, 2012), they have to navigate homelessness without the emotional and social support of their families more frequently. In addition to making them more vulnerable to victimization and dangerous situations, this makes unaccompanied LGBTQ youth ineligible for the large proportion of housing resources directed towards families. Throughout the reviewed models of best practice, one of the most common strategies for rehousing unaccompanied youth is through familial reunification (Gaetz, 2014). While this is an important option for all service providers to explore with the youth they serve, this process may be complicated for LGBTQ youth if they are separated from their families because of their SOGI. These situations should be addressed through methods of family mediation that are specifically tailored to LGBTQ identities, if the youth in question have the desire to reconnect with their birth families.

It is also important to note that even if an LGBTQ youth is experiencing homelessness for a reason unrelated to their SOGI, it is not unlikely that they would face anti-LGBTQ violence or discrimination throughout the process of experiencing homelessness

or navigating housing services; cultural and socioeconomic systems of racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, etc. are exponentially magnified for people who also identify as LGBTQ. At the community level, the availability of/access to culturally competent services, programs, shelters, and housing has significant influence on the range of experiences that unaccompanied LGBTQ youth have (Hicks, 2014).

Consistently throughout the literature, a lack of state, local, and federal funding are biggest barriers for providers to serve unaccompanied LGBTQ youth, followed by identifying unaccompanied LGBTQ populations, access to others doing similar work, lack of training, and a lack of foundational/community funding and support (Berberet, 2006, Choi et al., 2015, Durso et al., 2012). Providers also express concern that because of the limited resources available for youth-specific housing programs, creating more of a focus on housing LGBTQ youth would detract from quality and flexibility of services for non-LGBTQ youth (Berberet, 2006).

3.2. Models of Best Practice for Serving and Housing LGBTQ Youth

This section summarizes the best practice models for working with unaccompanied LGBTQ youth and program design. One of the most important and challenging elements to designing these services is balancing data-driven service design with the individual needs of clients. Adaptations of these models need to be situated within local contexts; services should also consider all aspects of LGBTQ youth's identity, experiences, vulnerabilities, and strengths. Unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are more likely to have experienced significant trauma, and to have not been in control of their living situations (Ray, 2006). When providing services to this population, it is especially important to create a space where youth are viewed holistically and are able articulate their own goals and define the steps to reaching them.

3.2.1. *Serving LGBTQ youth*

Within any youth service model, one of the most important aspects to tailoring services to the specific needs of clients is to provide platforms for client engagement with the program. Incorporating a youth advisory board to programs, including youth as advisors for data collection, and hiring youth as peer mentors, specialists, and program staff (HUD, 2016)

can both empower individual youth, and improve the service delivery and design of a program.

Provider-based recommendations include assigning shared accommodations based on self-reported gender identity and providing private accommodations. Keeping small caseloads when possible helps providers devote enough time to forming a relationship with a client to understand their specific needs, and best ways to meet their goals. When helping clients find employment, agency partners in LGBTQ youth housing programs work proactively to identify LGBTQ-friendly work environments and providing education to both employers and youth on how to address workplace conflicts related to SOGI (Choi et al., 2015).

The final, and arguably most important, area of recommendation for working with unaccompanied LGBTQ youth is to cultivate a culture of acceptance and respect among clients and staff. Displaying posters, symbols, and other materials, and making reading materials on LGBTQ subjects available may also help to signify acceptance and reinforce inclusive values among staff and clients (Hicks et al., 2014). Hiring staff with relevant expertise, ideally racially and culturally diverse staff who identify as LGBTQ and/or have experienced homelessness is one of the best methods to connecting with unaccompanied LGBTQ youth. Providing regular, agency-wide trainings on LGBTQ issues, organizing ad hoc discussions in response to specific issues that arise, and partnering with other agencies that serve this population are other key ways to adequately meet the needs of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth (Choi et al., 2015). Creating a culture that encourages open discussion and ongoing community and self-education around racial and cultural competency is another necessity to providing service with minimal risk of re-traumatizing clients (McTeague, 2015).

3.2.2. *Housing service models*

The HUD Ending Youth Homelessness Guidebook Series: Promising Program Models recommends that youth housing services should incorporate primary prevention, identification and early intervention, emergency and crisis response, tailored housing and service solutions. Although this Guidebook was not written specifically for working with LGBTQ youth, its structural components can be used as a baseline model with modifications to best serve the unique needs of unaccompanied LGBTQ populations. Critical primary prevention efforts include family counseling (Gaetz, 2014) and a homelessness liaison in schools (HUD, 2016). Family conflict is the most cited reason for youth homelessness across

the reviewed literature, yet less than half of the 138 agencies surveyed in *Serving Our Youth 2015* provided any form of family services (Choi et al., 2015).

Identification and early intervention, such as street outreach and drop-in centers, may be especially important for reaching LGBTQ youth; Durso and Gates's 2012 study of 381 youth agencies showed 30% of the youth served by street outreach programs, and 43% of the youth served by drop-in centers identified as LGBTQ. The HUD guidebook recommends that street outreach draws on informal community contacts as well as formal partnerships with other organizations, incorporates community education, and focuses on regularity, predictability and follow-through. Another study in 2012 on the social networks of unaccompanied youth found that GLB youth are significantly more likely to have met the people they named in their social networks at drop-in centers or online than heterosexual youth (Wenzel et al., 2012)

Examples of emergency and crisis responses are youth shelters, transitional housing programs, and host homes. Adopting the Housing First method of providing low-barrier housing is critical to make these spaces accessible to couch surfing youth who need to be stably housed before addressing their other needs. HUD recommends that emergency services also provide short-term financial assistance, and offer the option of family connection through phone cards, facilitated visits, etc. (HUD, 2016). The element of direct connection to more permanent services is key for LGBTQ youth, who are at higher risk of experiencing chronic homelessness (Mayock et al., 2013). Emergency service providers across the country report serving increasing numbers of LGBTQ, particularly transgender, youth (Choi et al., 2015). Higher utilization of shelters and emergency services is an indication of cyclical and chronic homelessness (Mayock et al., 2013), and implies that LGBTQ youth are disproportionately disconnected from state services and enter cycles of unstable housing at young ages.

Transitional housing services are time-limited supportive housing programs for youth who are not ready to live independently. Possible housing types include congregate housing, clustered units, or scattered site apartments that focus on developing life skills, education, and/or employment (HUD, 2016). Navigating the period after first becoming homeless, but before the stage of stable and independent living, can be a traumatic and unstable time for youth. Cultivating an intentional and trusting community within the program, as well as facilitating connections with community-based services that will extend past transitional housing is key to help ground youth during this stage of service (HUD, 2016).

One of the most promising models for housing unaccompanied LGBTQ youth is through Host Home programs, which are a form of transitional housing that matches unaccompanied youth with supportive adults in the community (Choi et al., 2015). It is a flexible and cost-effective alternative to a congregate model, which can decrease the likelihood that the individual served will achieve permanency in their living situation (Jacobs and Freundlich, 2006). This non-institutional environment can be effective in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and can act as short-term shelter solutions to keep youth in their community. Host homes are also more easily tailored to the individual needs of youth than most congregate or rooming house styles of transitional housing (McTeague, 2015).

Providing ongoing support, training and using state or institutional funds to compensate a community member for hosting youth brings together youth service agencies and supportive adults who can offer a home-like environment for youth (HUD, 2016). It also bypasses the trauma, stigma, legal bureaucracy and the 18-year-old age limit that comes with DCF involvement. A Host Home can give youth the opportunity to see “how a healthy family lives” for youth who haven’t grown up in accepting and loving home environments (McTeague, 2015).

The Host Home model is voluntary and involves youth in the matching process instead of case managers placing youth in a home. This aspect has the potential to make the program more accessible for LGBTQ youth who may have felt like they did not have control or felt accepted in their previous living situation. Youth are typically accountable to their case managers, not hosts, which relieves the host families of clinical planning and responsibility (HUD, 2016).

In the 2012 survey of youth housing providers, Host Homes were the housing program with the highest percentage of LGBTQ youth (42% of the total population), but were the least offered option. Out of the 381 organizations surveyed, only 8% provided Host Homes (Durso et al., 2012). The lack of widespread implementation of Host Home programs may be because the nature of the model requires significant community commitment. For the approach to give youth the described benefits, host families must be willing to participate in a potentially difficult relationship with unaccompanied youth in their homes.

The final housing service model HUD recommends for unaccompanied youth are tailored housing and service solutions. These programs are long-term housing assistance for youth who are not planning to return to their birth families, and who can live independently. These may include funding earmarked for LGBTQ youth, such as Emergency Service Grants

(ESG) that pay the move-in costs to a new unit, or long-term subsidies that require youth to pay a portion of their monthly income for rent (HUD, 2016).

3.3. Provider Collaboration and Information Management Models of Best Practice

The stakeholders involved in designing services and the providers who work directly with the youth can easily become disconnected, which has detrimental effects on the quality and accessibility of services for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth. Streamlining information management making data collection efforts more accessible for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are essential to developing regional understandings of the population. Throughout the literature, the most effective way to disseminate this information and improve service modality is through close collaboration and communication between providers.

The HUD guidebook on Ending Youth Homelessness: Mainstream System Collaboration recommends building coalition between child welfare (foster care, DCF), education (primary and community colleges), workforce development, justice, housing, healthcare, early childhood education agencies, community organizations and mainstream benefit offices. Streamlining efforts to collect data, conduct outreach and plan programming at the regional level particularly important when unaccompanied LGBTQ youth- a population that often falls through the cracks and is disconnected from services. Formalized community collaboration provides a platform for skills sharing, cross-organization training and education, as well as coordinating services for specific clients who may benefit from the services multiple agencies (Choi et al., 2015).

One of the most valuable benefits of youth service and housing provider coalitions is the strengthened communication and relationships between providers and ensuring that multiple organizations aren't offering the same service instead of coordinating resources. Keeping all stakeholders in the loop about local trends, resources, goals and models of service will leveraging each participant's expertise and resources to streamline efforts to serve all youth in need (HUD, 2016). Community collaborations are also a reliable entry point to advocate for the specific needs of LGBTQ youth entering and aging out/exiting the foster care system (Hicks et al., 2014).

IV. Methods

My motivation for conducting this research is heavily influenced by my identity as an LGBTQ woman, and the work I do within Worcester's housing sector. I am a housing specialist for an Emergency Services Grant program, which gives me a unique perspective into the services available in the city. I manage the intake process for the program, so a significant portion of my job involves outreaching to unaccompanied populations, working with people who need a variety of different resources, referring clients to other services, and collaborating with providers to coordinate services for my clients. Relying on the experiences and knowledge base about what services are available for different sections of the population was the starting point for beginning this research, and informed the process throughout the past four months of collecting and analyzing data.

As both a 22 year old queer woman and a housing social worker in Worcester, my experiences, passions, and biases are not divorced from my research. Studying subjects of passion can never be completely objective, but I also do not believe that objectivity is a precondition for applicable research in the human service field. Love and empathy are what drew me to the line of work I'm in, as well as what draws me to critique it and push it to better fulfil the vision of a city without social inequity.

4.1. *Data sources*

This project uses a qualitative and quantitative mixed methods approach to gather data on the study's unit of analysis: unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in Worcester, MA. The data collection process is focused on representing the perspectives both of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth, and the youth services and housing providers in the city. The experiences of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are relayed through the 2017 Youth Count survey data, which includes quantitative demographic information, housing history, reasons for homelessness, employment and education, risk factors, services accessed and quality of services on youth under 24 years old. A total of 148 surveys were collected throughout a two week period in May 2017. They were distributed through 13 service organizations that have contact with unaccompanied youth. See Appendix A for a more complete description of the Youth Count survey data collection methods.

The qualitative aspect of this research focuses on youth service provider's perspectives on the needs, demographics, barriers to services, and best approaches to

serving unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in Worcester. Five interviewees were service providers to unaccompanied and/or LGBTQ youth in Worcester¹. To give a localized model of best practice for housing LGBTQ youth, I interviewed a service provider for an LGBTQ-specific youth housing program in Western Massachusetts.

4.2. *Research process*

I began this study by analyzing the raw data from the 2017 Youth Count surveys. Although there were 148 surveys collected in Worcester's CoC, I only analyzed the 66 that contained enough self-identified SOGI data to classify respondents as LGBTQ or non-LGBTQ. All calculations and percentages of Worcester's CoC and state averages are made after eliminating responses that do not contain enough self-identified information on gender and sexuality to classify youth as either LGBTQ or non-LGBTQ. This does significantly reduce the size of the analyzed population, but since SOGI is this study's independent variable, including youth who did not report their SOGI would devalue the analysis. I compared the data for Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth to the data on Worcester's non-LGBTQ unaccompanied youth and the state averages for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth to pinpoint demographics, needs and experiences that are unique to the study's unit of analysis.

I then compiled a list of youth housing and LGBTQ-specific services in Worcester, looked into the history of data collection and regional funding for LGBTQ youth housing services, local models of housing LGBTQ youth, and began reaching out to providers for interviews. After conducting and transcribing the open-response interviews, I identified my main findings from the interviews and Youth Count data. I then cross-analyzed the preliminary findings from each source to find contradictions, commonalities, and possible points of connection that could be used to explain questions that arose.

4.3. *Sample population*

42% of the 66 youth who defined their SOGI either met the Commission definition of homelessness when taking the survey, or had left their parent or guardian at some point and later returned; These youth are classified as Worcester's population of unaccompanied

¹ See Appendix C for information on the process of outreach and open-ended response interviews, and Appendix D for a key to the youth services and providers interviewed.

youth. 39.3% of Worcester's unaccompanied youth identify as LGBTQ, and 60.7% identified as non-LGBTQ (See Figure 1). However, it is important to note that it is much more likely for LGBTQ youth to become homeless; 44% of Worcester's LGBTQ youth reported homelessness, compared to 41.5% of the non-LGBTQ population. Worcester's LGBTQ youth are also more likely to report experiencing homelessness than the state average of 36% of LGBTQ youth (See Figure 2).

The average age of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth is 20.1 years old, compared to the average age of 21.4 years old for non-LGBTQ unaccompanied youth (See Figure 3). 18% of the unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in Worcester were born in the city they were surveyed in, and 22 percentage points more unaccompanied LGBTQ youth reported being born out of the state than non-LGBTQ youth (See Figure 4). Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are also much more disconnected from education and employment than both the non-LGBTQ unaccompanied youth in Worcester and the state average for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth (Figure 5).

Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth population is more likely to identify as either transgender or Black/African American than the state average for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth. Close to half of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth identify as transgender, which is 16.4 percentage points higher than the state average (See Figure 6). Around a quarter of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth identify as Black/African American, which is 14 percentage points above the state average (See Figure 7).

V. Limitations

There are significant barriers to gathering complete and accurate data on unaccompanied youth populations, particularly unaccompanied youth who are also LGBTQ. Unaccompanied youth are often very transient, couch surfing, and disconnected from housing services where they would be counted in service-based surveys. Youth may not disclose LGBTQ identity or experiences with homelessness because of stigmatization, not associating experiences with homelessness and/or with an LGBTQ identity, or due to the fear of being forced to return to their legal guardian. LGBTQ youth, and youth who have experienced homelessness for long periods of time are particularly unlikely to be counted without specialized outreach methods. The longer youth are homeless, the more likely they

are to be disconnected from social services (Gaetz, 2014), and many LGBTQ youth may be disconnected from generalized services that are inaccessible or unwelcoming to LGBTQ identities.

5.1. 2017 Youth Count

The data collection methods in Worcester's CoC were also a barrier to complete and accurate data. Worcester organizations did not heavily utilize street outreach methods, youth ambassadors, or outreach to youth under 18. Other CoC's that utilized these approaches had more responses and much higher percentages of unaccompanied and LGBTQ youth in their data sets. Another limit to the Youth Count data is that there is no consistent statewide standard of data collection, which makes it difficult to compare data between regions and aggregate state averages². There are also limited resources that are allocated to identifying and counting this population, and the relatively short window of time to administer the count may be a barrier to gathering data on all youth organizations serve.

The Youth Count relies on participants self-identifying their sexuality and gender identity, but does not ask about sexual experiences. Survey respondents may leave questions about their SOGI blank, rather than self-identify with a specific sexuality or gender. SOGI is experienced and communicated differently across cultures, experiences, and languages, so although the Youth Count allows participants to fill in their own self-definitions, youth may not feel comfortable representing their SOGI in this format.

One of the most notable aspects of Worcester's 2017 Youth Count data is how sparse it is in comparison to other CoC's and Worcester's data from past counts. There was a relatively low response rate in general, and the data that was gathered has a remarkably high percentage of missing data points. Many youth who took the survey did not fill out all questions, so there are significant gaps that make it difficult to make comparisons and find trends within Worcester's data, as well as connect it to other regions and state averages. Additionally, in my interview with Provider 4 I learned that many of Service D's youth who she knows have experienced homelessness were not attending the program the night that the Youth Count survey was distributed. Unless these youth took the survey through another provider, this indicates that the number of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth is underrepresented by the 2017 Youth Count data.

² See Appendix A

Although Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning individuals are typically thought of and treated as a single group, there is a huge range of experiences, identities, struggles and service needs under the LGBTQ umbrella. Race, socioeconomic class, religion, citizenship, ability, coming out status, experience with trauma, individual protective factors, and awareness of/willingness to access supports etc. all contribute to the way that an LGBTQ person experiences the world around them, and how society views and treats them. Oppressions of other aspects of an LGBTQ youth's identity, family structure and cultural norms/upbringing also factor in to the way LGBTQ youth experience homelessness, the risk of losing connection with their families and communities, and experiences with gender and sexual expression. Because of this study's small sample size, the level of meaningful analysis possible is limited to LGBTQ identity. However, the multifaceted identities represented within the umbrella of LGBTQ cannot be lost when adapting services to localized needs.

5.2. Interviews

The nature of interviews with key stakeholders only allows for information to be gathered from one perspective, and it is difficult to generalize an interview with one provider and make a completely accurate assessment of the organizational culture. I also was not able to interview someone from every youth-serving organization, so there are gaps in the programs that are represented in this study. I interviewed providers at various levels within their organizations; some were case managers, and others were program directors who are not involved in direct service to the same degree. The lack of a comprehensive directory of youth housing or residential services in the area was also a significant limitation to identifying potential interview participants, as well as to understanding the service network's current reach and composition. Although I have worked in Worcester's housing service sector for several years in different capacities, I continued to find services that I had never heard throughout this research process.

VI. Findings

6.1. Worcester's Service Network for Unaccompanied and/or LGBTQ Youth

Worcester currently has several specialized out-of-home living programs for youth, including three residential mental health treatment programs, a substance use detox, and a female substance use residential recovery program for ages 13-17. There are two transitional living programs for pregnant and parenting teens/young adults, and two transitional living programs for youth 18-24 years old. There is also a job preparation and employment education residential program that offers 260 gender-segregated dormitories. Grafton Job Corps offers 130 male and 130 female dormitory-style residences, as well as educational and vocational employment services. Worcester has two LGBTQ youth drop-in centers, and one program that offers street outreach and a small drop-in for youth experiencing homelessness in Worcester. For more details on Worcester's youth services, see Appendix E.

This description of Worcester's youth housing service network does not include adult or generalized services that transitional aged youth over 18 would qualify for, only services that are specialized for youth or young adult populations. This also may not be a comprehensive compilation of available services; these programs were compiled through a combination of my personal knowledge from working in the housing sector, data from interviews with youth service providers, and through searching keywords online.

6.2. Unaccompanied LGBTQ Youth Report Higher Levels of Traumatic/Dangerous Experiences Than Non-LGBTQ Unaccompanied Youth

As shown in Figure 8, Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience homelessness because of abuse or neglect, parental alcohol/drug usage, fighting with their parent or guardian, their parent/guardian dying, feeling unsafe or experiencing violence in their homes, their family losing housing, and being told to leave than their non-LGBTQ peers. They also experience homelessness at younger ages (See Figure 3) which not only disrupts the day-to-day life of adolescent youth, but makes it harder to navigate homelessness without the life skills that come with age and experience.

Reasons Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth Report Experiencing Homelessness

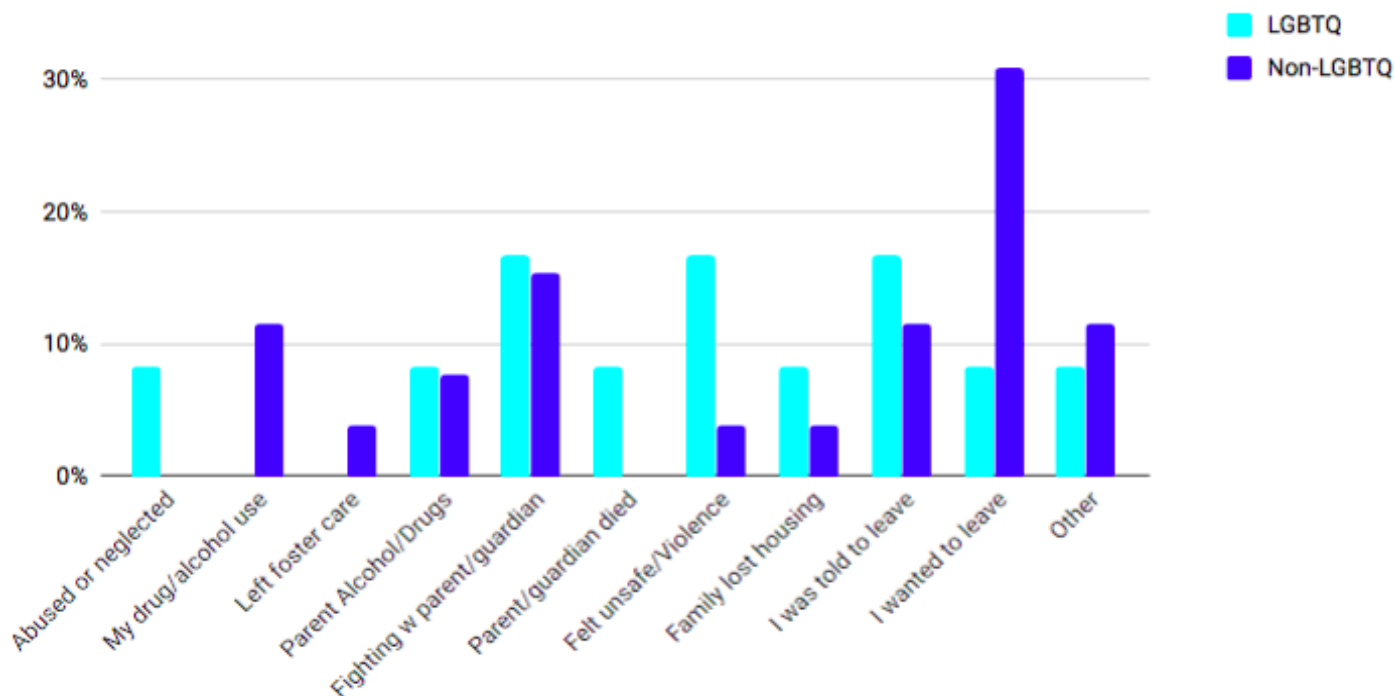


Figure 8: Reasons Worcester Youth Experience Homelessness

Because Worcester does not have a youth-specific emergency shelter, the only referral for immediate and low-barrier housing is the general population SMOC shelter. While a crucial service for the City of Worcester, “it is not comfortable for anyone, especially not youth, even more so for LGBTQ youth” (Provider 5). Transgender youth are particularly subject to discrimination, since the shelter only offers male or female accommodations and transgender individuals usually do not feel safe on either side (Provider 5). All five service providers agreed that the SMOC shelter was the last resort for the youth they work with, and most reported that youth would feel safer and prefer to stay unsheltered and on the streets.

The inaccessibility of emergency services necessitates that unaccompanied LGBTQ youth find shelter through other means and are at higher risk of sexual exploitation. Worcester’s unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are more likely to have exchanged sex for money, food, shelter, or other necessities than both unaccompanied non-LGBTQ Worcester youth, and the state average of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth (Figure 9).

Exchanged Sex for Shelter, Money, Food, etc.

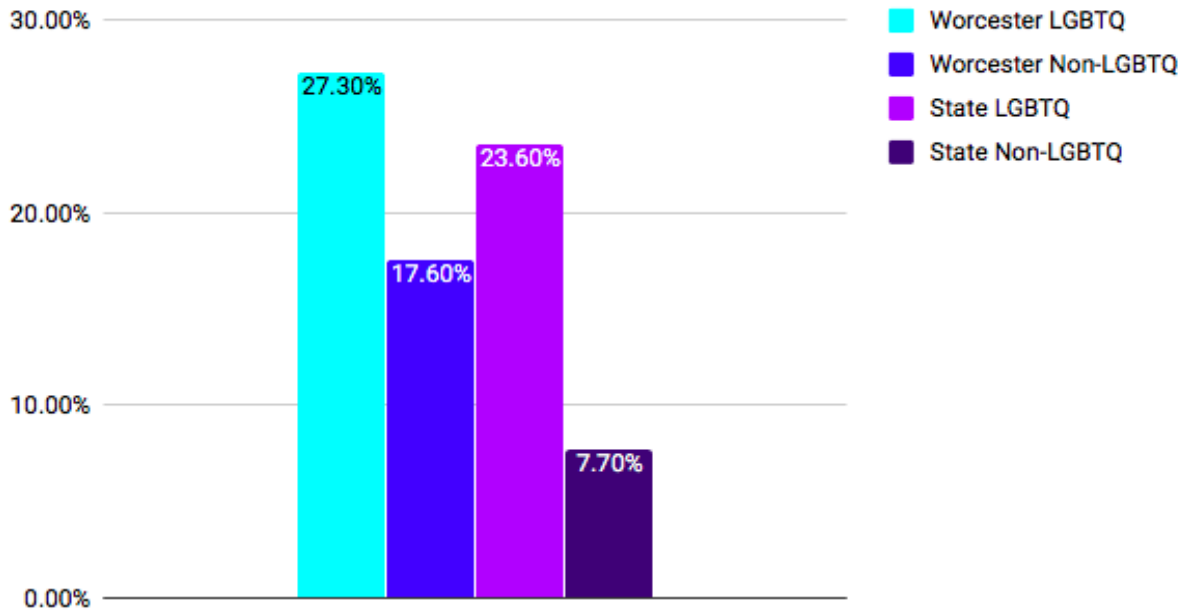


Figure 9: Unaccompanied Youth Who Report Exchanging Sex for Shelter, Food, Money, etc.

6.3. Unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are more at risk of experiencing chronic homelessness and service disconnection

6.3.1. Triage and youth housing services can contribute to chronic youth homelessness

Despite the barriers to accessing Worcester's general shelter for LGBTQ youth, the most common place that unaccompanied LGBTQ youth stayed the night before taking the Youth Count survey was shelter (See Figure 10). However, it is not likely that they will secure stable housing through the shelter. The shelter's approach to housing placement operates based on priority need; "the less issues of addiction or mental health you have, the longer you have to wait for housing" (Provider 3). Many youth that have tried to get housing through the shelter "have sat there for months", and eventually gave up and went back to the streets (Provider 3).

The second most common places for Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth to have stayed the night before taking the survey is a hotel or their parent/guardian's house (See Figure 10), which may indicate that they are not accessing non-emergency housing services at the same rate non-LGBTQ youth are. Although there are two transitional living programs specified for Transitional Aged Youth, data from provider surveys concludes that

they are not fully serving Worcester's population of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth (See Finding 6.6.1). Provider 4 described never being able to find their program's LGBTQ youth a bed at Service A, and was not familiar with Service E.

Compared to adult populations, many youth may have stronger social networks or peers from school that they can stay with, so they may be less likely to pursue emergency services or long-term housing, and alternate between temporary living situations (Provider 5). However, Worcester's LGBTQ youth in particular will often come in for an intake at Service D, then end up not taking service and staying with someone else, and "flip back around" every few months (Provider 5). Provider 2 described Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth population as transient, and likely to "gravitate towards places where it would be less shocking to see someone standing on the side of the street". Unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are more frequently involved in a cycle of transience, and repeatedly staying on the street/ possibly sexually exploitative situations than non-LGBTQ youth, and are then more often connected to street-based and chronically homeless lifestyles.

Provider 4 highlighted the shortcomings of the DCF foster care approach to housing LGBTQ youth; although there are guidelines to train foster parents and DCF staff on working with this population, implementation "often falls short". It is extremely rare for the DCF-involved LGBTQ youth who Provider 4 has worked with to consider continuing the relationship with DCF and receiving the assistance that youth are entitled to after aging out of the system. The traumatic experiences that many LGBTQ youth have within the foster care system, potentially experiencing homelessness as a result of escaping dangerous situations while in foster care, and their consequential need to cut all ties with the system, are putting LGBTQ youth at increased risk of experiencing homelessness after turning 18 (Provider 4).

6.3.2. Worcester's youth housing service network does not have the capacity to serve chronically unaccompanied youth

Service A has historically been unsuccessful with youth who have experienced homelessness for a year or more, possibly developed substance use disorder and who have internalized homelessness as part of their identity (Provider 1). When youth experience unaccompanied homelessness, they are more likely to come into contact and assimilate to the culture of adult homelessness. Once youth have this experience, "the taboo is broken... You may not like it, but at least you know it" (Provider 1). The length of homelessness is the biggest indicator of becoming disconnected from other social services, and beginning to look

to the culture of street homelessness to meet basic needs (Provider 5, Provider 1). Once youth have adapted to a lifestyle without stable housing, “not only is it not scary, but now they’ve found a place they may actually belong”. The role of providers whose programs are created for specific populations becomes hazy in these situations. In reference to working with chronically unaccompanied youth, Provider 1 asked “Now I’m asking people to give up a piece of their identity in order to conform, and is that even okay? Do i get to do that?”.

Although Service E is most likely more appealing to youth than staying at the general shelter, Service E’s eligibility requirements may exclude youth who have been exposed to the risks of extended homelessness. In order to receive transitional housing services through Service E, youth need to have a Social Security card, State ID, and a clean CORI check; youth cannot have any open records, and certain past cases (such as arson), would disqualify them from receiving services (Provider 5). As outlined in the reviewed literature on the subject, many youth who have chronically experienced homelessness have criminal charges, and do not have easy access to state-issued identification documents. Additionally, LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience chronic homelessness than non-LGBTQ youth.

The qualifications for Service E are in place because youth are housed in organization-owned single rooms, and there are necessary safety requirements to protect the other youth and adults living in the building. However, a key element of effective service networks is that each organization serves a specific population; Provider 5 said that the only housing option they are able to refer youth who their program can’t serve is the general shelter. This lack of transitional housing resources for youth who do not qualify for Service E speaks more to the inefficiency of the youth housing network to bring youth experiencing chronic homelessness into stable housing

If an applicant meets the preliminary requirements for Service E, they are given a pre-screening survey that identifies who is most in need of housing. Youth are screened for DCF involvement, hospitalizations for mental or physical health, substance detoxification admission, history with juvenile court, developmental disability, history of familial or childhood homelessness, family estrangement within the last five years, discontinuing education, services through the Children’s Behavioral Health Initiative, and chronic health conditions (Provider 5). The pre-screening process does not ask about youth’s SOGI or racial identity, and does not take into account the risks such as increased harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, familial rejection, disconnection from healthcare, police targeting etc., that LGBTQ and/or youth of color often face while experiencing unaccompanied

homelessness. Without considering these factors, the systematic oppression of both LGBTQ and youth of color are not considered to be potential sources of vulnerability, and may contribute to their chronic homelessness.

6.4. The needs of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are not being met

As shown in Figure 10, Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth have their needs met at lower rates than Worcester's unaccompanied non-LGBTQ youth, as well as the state average for LGBTQ youth. When compared to the state average for LGBTQ youth and Worcester's non-LGBTQ population, Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth also report significantly higher rates of having none of their needs met. Although Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ are not receiving services at disproportionately high rates, Worcester's non-LGBTQ unaccompanied youth report significantly higher rates of having all of their needs met than the state average.

Did You Get the Services You Needed?

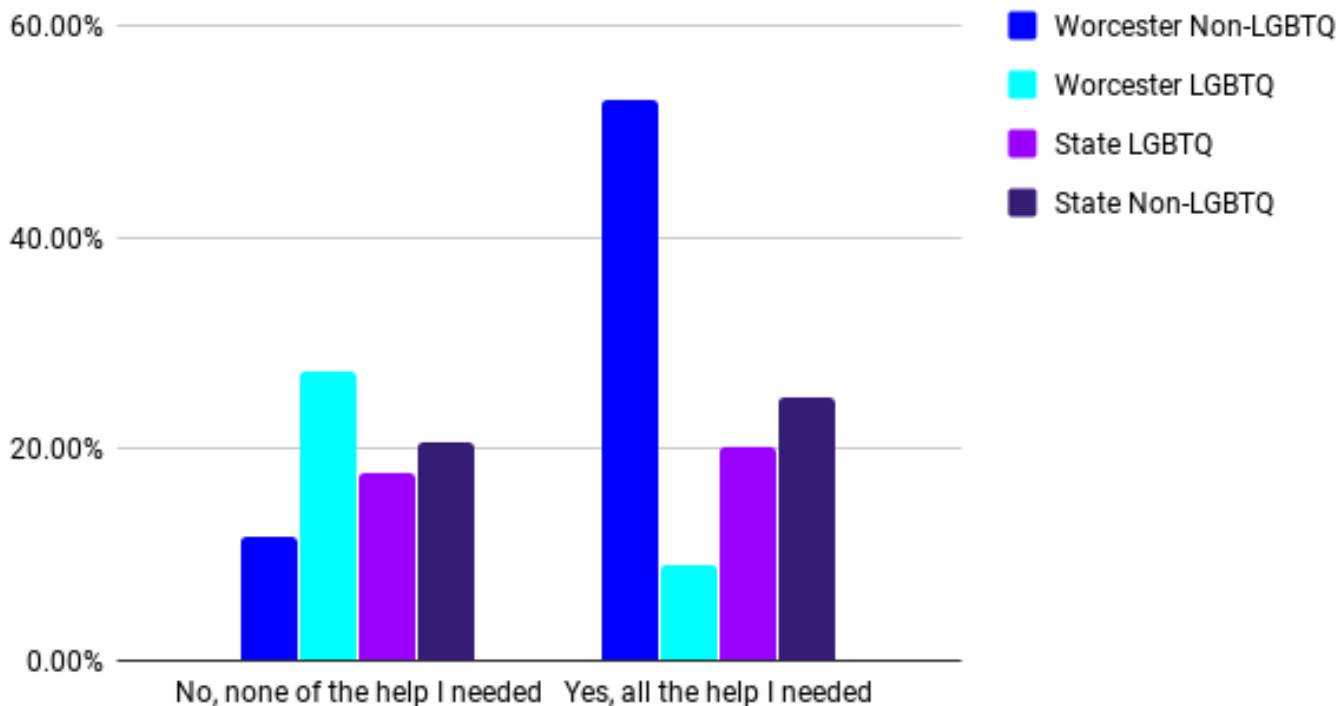


Figure 11: Are the Needs of Unaccompanied Youth Being Met?

Figure 12 shows that not knowing where to go as he most common reason that all unaccompanied youth in Worcester did not receive services. Unaccompanied LGBTQ youth report not accessing services because they didn't have transportation, paperwork, money, were sent somewhere else, put on a waiting list, didn't hear back, or had a language barrier at higher rates than non-LGBTQ youth.

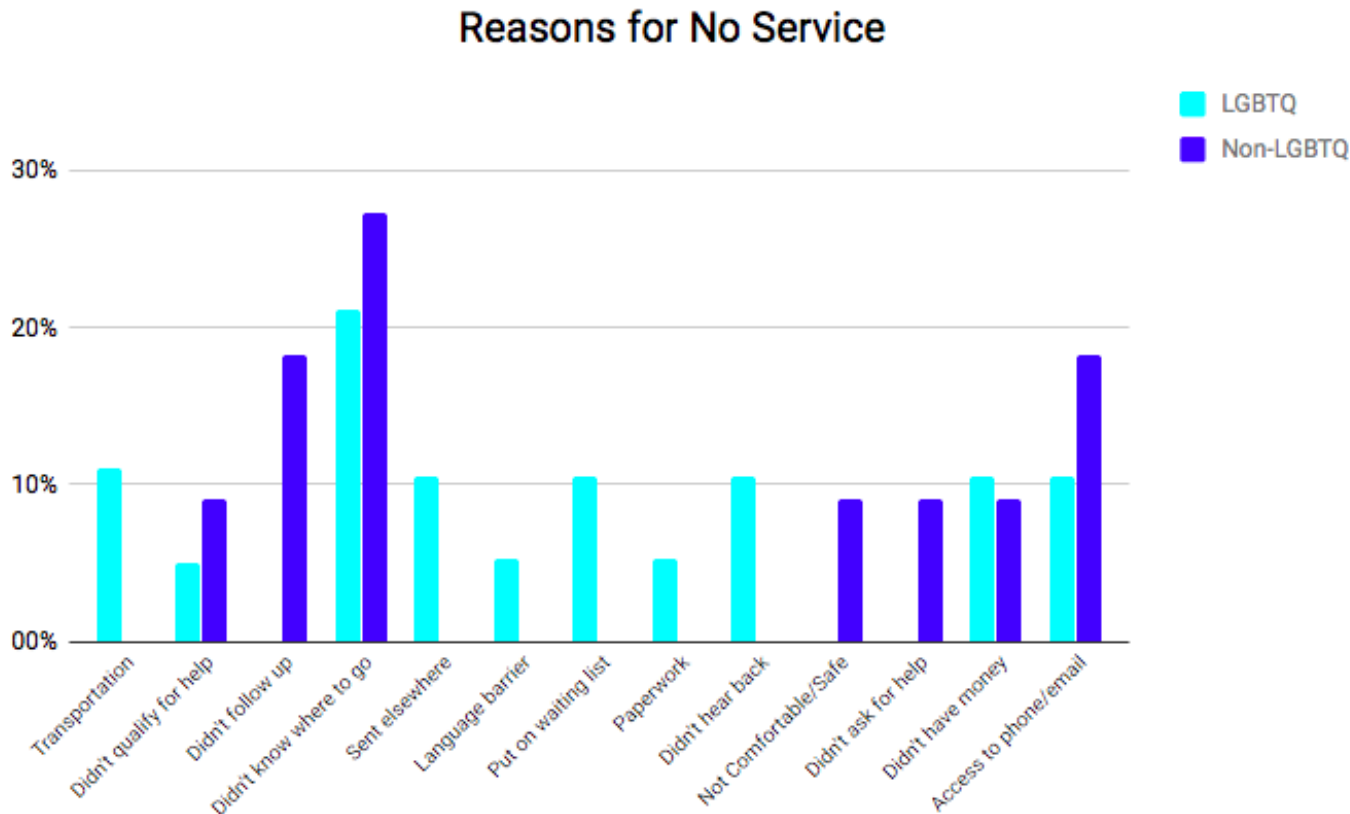


Figure 12: Reasons Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth Did Not Receive Services

One of the most notable differences in service needs between Worcester's LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ unaccompanied youth populations are that it is much more common for LGBTQ youth to have not tried to access services at all, or to have tried to access job training/career support services than for non-LGBTQ youth (see Figure 12). Additionally, only around a quarter of the unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in Worcester report holding a job that they receive a pay stub for; which is significantly lower than both the state average for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth, and Worcester's non-LGBTQ unaccompanied youth (See Figure 5).

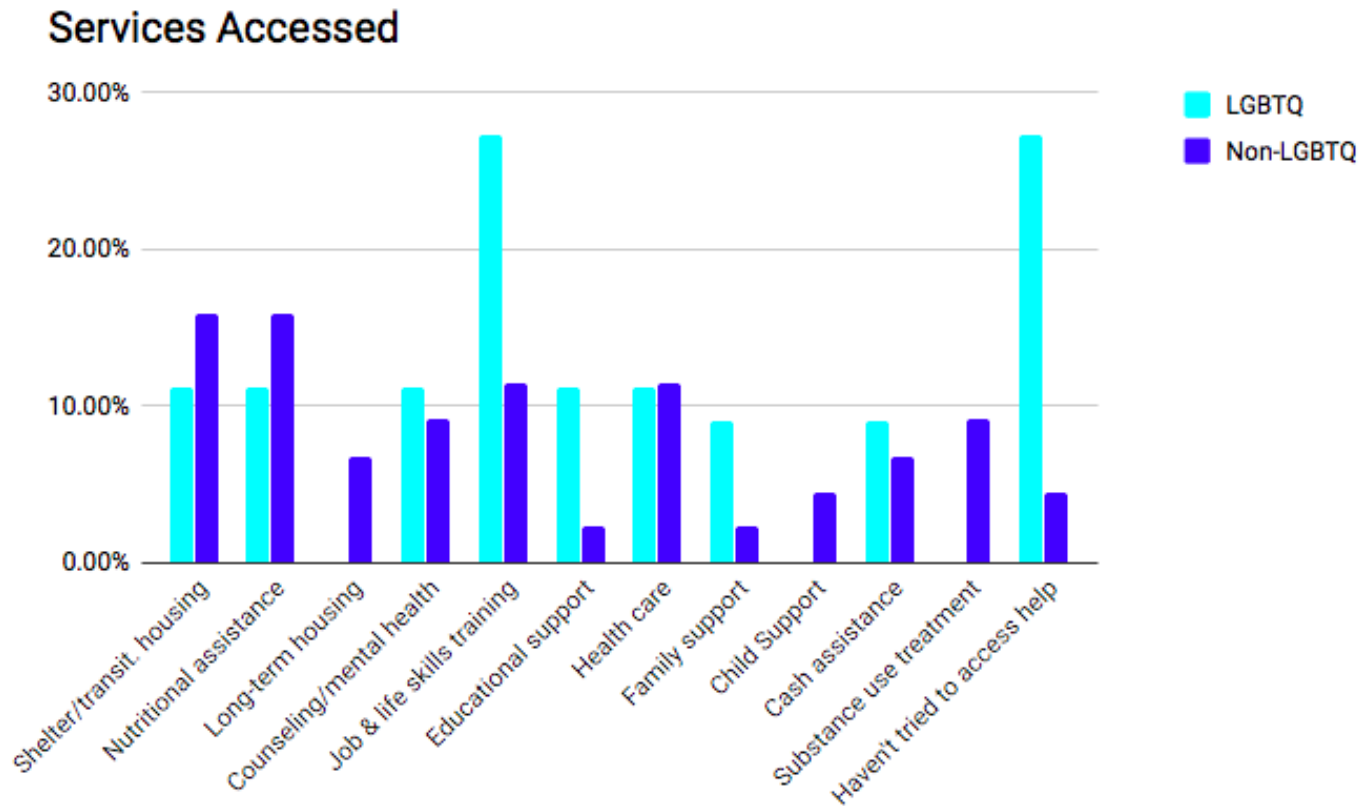


Figure 13: What Services Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth Have Tried to Access

6.4.1. LGBTQ youth are not represented in the population of unaccompanied youth receiving services

Interviews with youth housing providers revealed that there is not a large representation of LGBTQ youth within the unaccompanied youth populations they serve, however this perception may be influenced by program approaches to identifying and working with LGBTQ youth (See Finding 6.1.1.). There are many reasons why LGBTQ youth wouldn't disclose their SOGI, or attempt to access housing services at all, including fear of discrimination, harassment, or the trauma from being shunned for coming out as LGBTQ in the past (particularly in relation to housing). Another reason may be that it is easier for housing providers if a client isn't LGBTQ; they may worry about reactions to LGBTQ clients, the need to adjust service provision, or accommodating transgender clients housing needs (Provider 2). Although existing housing services are generally more accessible to LGBTQ communities than they were a decade ago, they still face significant discrimination within

mainstream housing services (Provider 4). Provider 3 recounted multiple conversations with youth in which they disclosed harassment and discrimination at youth housing services, both by residents and program staff.

6.4.2. The needs of Worcester's unaccompanied transgender youth are not being met

One of Worcester's most important statistics from the 2017 Youth Count data is the significant proportion of unaccompanied transgender youth in the area (See Figure 6), which was not reflected through the interviews with youth housing providers. Provider 5 did not report having served transgender youth in their program, and Provider 1 reported serving around 3 transgender youth in the time that they have worked at the organization.

If youth meet requirements for Service E, the application for housing placement only gives the options of male or female gender, and the program does not have a policy for housing transgender youth or tailor their service approach for LGBTQ youth (Provider 5). Service A is not structured around the specific needs of transgender youth, or equipped to allow transgender youth to change their gendered living assignments in accordance with where they will feel most comfortable expressing and developing their gender identity. Provider 1 recounted a case in which a transgender youth was unable to move apartments to live with other people of the same gender, because they had moved out of another apartment with people of their gender since they did not get along.

6.5. There is a gap in services at the intersections of youth homelessness and LGBTQ identities

One of the biggest issues for unaccompanied youth in Worcester is there is a lack of spaces to "just hang out"; it to be safe at the train station and behind City Hall, but how those areas are so heavily policed that people can't sit around or 'loiter' (Provider 3). All five service providers agreed that there is a need for a youth shelter and/or day program specifically geared towards unaccompanied youth in Worcester. Provider 4 gets 2-3 calls a week from people seeking housing placement, who think that the Service D is a shelter.

Most shelters cannot stay open during the day, so people are unsheltered from 8am-5pm and often have to put themselves in dangerous situations just to stay warm (Provider 5). Having a supportive space for youth to share their experiences with their peers who have also experienced homelessness will also help providers to better understand "the dirty underbelly of homelessness", and adapt services to youth's dynamic needs (Provider 4). It

may also help to address stigma around homelessness, which Provider 3, Provider 2 and Provider 4 cite as barriers to connecting youth with housing services.

6.4.1. LGBTQ spaces are not always accessible to LGBTQ youth who experiencing homelessness

If unaccompanied youth who attend Service D disclose homelessness and the immediate need for housing, staff will do a “callout” to see if there are any older youth who can temporarily house them (Provider 4). However, Provider 4 describes the stigma surrounding self-disclosure of homelessness when staff address potential housing needs after youth ask for emergency bus passes and/or basic needs supplies. Additionally, unaccompanied LGBTQ youth who do not already attend Service D before experiencing homelessness are often uninterested in seeking out that support. Many street-based unaccompanied LGBTQ youth know about Service D but say that the drop-in “isn’t the kind of place I hang out at or people I hang out with” (Provider 3).

Although LGBTQ-specific spaces can help youth learn how to carry themselves in other spaces by finding comfort with LGBTQ peers and projecting that confidence outside (Provider 2), creating services exclusive to youth with an emphasis on inclusivity and respect may be more appropriate for Worcester’s current needs (Provider 4). Youth are generally more accepting of LGBTQ folks (Provider 5), and more open to receiving and absorbing information/education on LGBTQ issues (Provider 4). For any kind of service, trainings and conversations around LGBTQ issues is important both for staff and for clients; youth can’t be assumed to be LGBTQ-savvy, because mutual respect and empathy comes from ongoing conversations (Provider 4).

6.6. The lack of provider collaboration results in uneven understandings of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth and available services

The main hypothesis of the 13 core organizations that began the Compass Network project in 2011 was that the relationship, or lack thereof, between providers was one of the biggest barriers to service access for youth (Provider 1). By meeting regularly and developing similar ideals, there was a 20% decrease in youth saying that they didn’t get their needs met, according to annual surveys before and after implementing the Compass Project, and an exponential increase in youth reporting that they knew where to go to get help

(Provider 1). After the Project lost its funding in 2013, the Network does not meet as regularly, and organizational representation is inconsistent. Through the Health Foundation funding, the Project had a full-time coordinator who developed trainings and coordinated meetings and collaborations (Provider 1).

6.6.1. The Compass Network is not as effective without funding and consistent meetings

Although the Network is still in operation, interviewing five providers who work with Worcester's population of LGBTQ and/or unaccompanied youth revealed the lack of a city-wide understanding of the services available to unaccompanied LGBTQ youth between providers. This knowledge gap is reflected among the unaccompanied LGBTQ youth surveyed by the 2017 Youth Count; the main reason that this population did not receive services is that they did not know where to go (See Figure 11).

The main isolation between providers seems to be between Service D, and transitional housing services. Services D and E were not familiar with each other, and there was a disconnect between program availability and participation in the Network between the Services D and A. Without the structured space for community building, cross-organizational understanding, sharing of experience, and personal connection, there is little consensus between providers on the characteristics of the needs unaccompanied LGBTQ youth have.

Provider 5 has not received any training on models of best practice to serve LGBTQ youth, and Both Providers 1 and 5 reported that they do not structure their services differently or adapt approaches to service based on a client's LGBTQ identity. Both Providers 1 and 5 both report that they serve relatively few LGBTQ clients in relation to the nationally projected statistics on the need of LGBTQ youth for housing services. However, this may be in part due to the SOGI data collection methods used in each program; Service E does not include questions about gender or sexuality when pre-screening potential clients, and does not ask about SOGI unless case managers see it as relevant to providing services. The intake process for Service A includes staff verbally asking the client about their SOGI at the end of the intake interview, and Provider 1 reports that the answers they give at intake may change throughout the course of working with them.

Although most providers reported the need for housing services that are tailored and/or responsive to the needs of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth, Provider 1 doesn't "think there is a need for having housing services with an LGBTQ-specific component, just like I wouldn't have African American-specific housing. I get that informs people's worldview, but I

just don't see what would be different... for me (having LGBTQ-focused spaces) just perpetuates the problem". Provider 1 sees LGBTQ identity as only one part of the whole person; "Isn't this the whole point? Not to separate people out?".

6.6.2. The Network provides the potential to collaborate for system-wide changes, and Worcester's service network has the resources to adapt to LGBTQ youth's needs.

Although Service A lost the funding for their street outreach worker in September 2016, Service E receives transitional aged referrals from the outreach worker through their parent organization. Service C sees around 50 new youth a year, and because they do not accept federal funding, can be more flexible when working with youth under 18 (Provider 3). Additionally, Provider 3 said that the program recently received a small grant for emergency housing that will most likely be used to compensate Host Homes if youth can find somewhere they can stay. Case management services are provided for youth in Services A and E, and Provider 4 said that it would "be a joy of (their) life" to work with youth housing providers on how to most appropriately work with LGBTQ youth.

Although the Compass Network does not run as efficiently as it did when the Project was fully funded, the framework is already established. Provider 2 described the Network meetings as a space to build bridges between agencies, encourage access and staff crossover between programs, and "the only place I saw youth development agencies preparing themselves for the needs of homeless youth". It's incredibly difficult to change the way systems operate; "to do that you really have to advocate and a lot of (individual) agencies aren't funded to advocate" (Provider 2). The funded and fully functioning Compass Network was also a source of identifying youth who may be in need of housing services; Provider 2 recounted the process of providers at Network meetings noticing that multiple youth provided the same address on paperwork, and may be experiencing homelessness.

6.6. Western MA Housing First Program

Service F is a Housing First program specifically geared towards LGBTQ youth experiencing chronic homelessness, and gives housing assistance in the form of placement in an organization-owned scattered site apartment, or ongoing financial support in an independent apartment. Provider 6 reports that most of their clients prefer to have more control over their housing, and find an apartment in the community. The program has a

designated outreach worker who has a regular route, and well-established relationships with providers at the meal programs where youth frequently hang out.

Provider 6 would be surprised not to have a full caseload at any point; there are always eligible youth, and it is more common for LGBTQ youth to experience homelessness “for a significant amount of time” than it is for non-LGBTQ youth. Qualified clients are often referred from other organizations or come to the parent organization for general housing assistance, and learn about the Service F after doing the general intake with optional questions about SOGI at the end of the form. Some of Provider 6’s clients are from out-of-state and are in the area because of the state and region’s reputation as LGBTQ-friendly. Providers in the area have a “good understanding of the services available” at Service F, and refer potential clients directly. The program also connects with clients through the provider networks that Service F participates in.

Service F works to get clients into housing as quickly as possible through individualized case management and close communication with other providers youth may be working with. Provider 6 keeps a small caseload so that they can meet with clients twice a week, develop deeper relationships and nuanced understandings of youth’s experiences, traumas, strengths, and to help the youth outline their own goals and work towards them.

VII. Analysis

7.1 Needs and experiences of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth

Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth population is very transient; only 18% reported that they were born in the city they took the survey in, 10 percentage points less than the state average (See Figure 4). According to the interviews with providers, unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in Worcester frequently move around, and shift between temporary living situations. The most common place for Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth to have stayed the night before taking the Youth Count survey was a shelter; according to the reviewed literature, high utilization of emergency shelter services is an indication of cyclical and chronic homelessness. The concentration of a quarter of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in shelter, but underrepresentation in youth housing services may also indicate that this population is moving around frequently or are not connecting with more permanent housing.

The statistic that 18% of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth stayed at a parent or guardian's house suggests that LGBTQ youth who experience homelessness at younger ages (See Figure 10) do have the potential to return home. Literature on the subject suggests that LGBTQ and younger youth may need more support, and assistance developing life skills than Worcester's current rooming-house style transitional living programs, where it may be "intimidating to walk into a housing situation where there are 15 strangers and you don't know how they'll react to your (SOGI)" (Provider 5). This is also evidenced by Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth reporting that they have a significant need for life skills and job training (See Figure 12).

Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth also report higher levels of potentially traumatic experience than their non-LGBTQ peers; LGBTQ youth are more likely to have exchanged sex for money/ shelter/ food/ necessities, to experience homelessness because they were told to leave their home, felt unsafe, were abused or neglected, or because their family lost their housing (See Figures 9 and 8). According to the literature, one of the most important aspects to helping youth work through trauma where their situations may have felt out of their control is to let youth lead the decision-making process. Youth-lead service provision is the groundwork of how both Services A and E describe their case management methods. It is also the baseline assumption of the Service C Host Home funding; Provider 3 described the approach as compensating households that the youth find themselves, which inherently allows youth to make decisions about where they stay.

1.2. Perceptions of LGBTQ youth homelessness and provider collaboration

Although supporting youth who find their own Host Homes is a promising method for stabilization, it only poses a temporary solution for youth who have been experiencing homelessness long enough to connect with street outreach through Service C. Both the literature and interview findings conclude that prevention and early intervention are key to connecting youth to stable housing and avoiding chronic homelessness, which highlights one of the biggest risk factors that Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth face. Over a quarter hadn't tried to access any services, and a large percentage did not identify themselves as having experienced homelessness (See Figure 12, Figure 13). This may be due either to a lack of education on how homelessness is defined and what services are available for transitional aged youth, or because of the stigma around homelessness.

This disconnect and misconception is also mirrored on the provider side of services. Throughout the interviews with providers for youth housing organizations there were two main approaches to LGBTQ homelessness; Provider 5 did not describe any specified attention to the issues LGBTQ youth face when accessing mainstream housing services, and Provider 1 did not see the need to specialize attention or service delivery methods when serving LGBTQ youth. The discrepancy between this mindset and other provider's perceptions of the regional need for specialized approaches for housing LGBTQ youth is most likely due to the different positionalities each provider holds, which is one of the main separations that the Compass Network aims to bridge.

Although Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth report concerning low rates of having their service needs met, the needs of non-LGBTQ unaccompanied youth in Worcester are met at much higher rates than the state average (See Figure 10). This indicates that while the specific needs of LGBTQ youth are not being met, either due to disconnection from services or the inability of current services to meet their needs, the current system of provider collaboration is effective for straight and cisgender youth. Although, it is important to note that not knowing where to go was the main reason all unaccompanied youth in Worcester didn't have their needs met; suggesting that there needs to be better public education and accessible information about all social services. This may not be possible for all unaccompanied youth services, since Service C does not disclose their location to protect the privacy of their clients and other people who share the space. Service E does not heavily advertise their services because there is an extensive waitlist already.

Both the literature and service providers describe the need for consistent cross-provider communication to stay up-to-date with the changing realities of clients. For instance, although it was unaccompanied LGBTQ youth's most cited service need in the Youth Count data, none of the providers highlighted educational or employment assistance as a service they offer or as an observed need of LGBTQ youth. Provider 4 was also the only provider who stressed the necessity of family counseling as an intervention on behalf of youth, which was a service that Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth sought out at a much higher rate than their non-LGBTQ peers (See Figure 12).

Both the literature and data from service providers also suggest higher rates of unmet substance use and mental health needs for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth. While Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth sought out mental health services at a slightly higher rate than non-LGBTQ youth, none reported seeking out substance use services or

experiencing homelessness because of substance use (See Figure 12 and 8). This may not exclusively indicate that unaccompanied LGBTQ youth have less need for substance use services, but could be because unaccompanied LGBTQ youth struggling with substance use are more disconnected from all services and were not represented in the Youth Count data.

One of the largest differences between Housing First program and the services available for LGBTQ youth in Worcester is that the Housing First program works exclusively with youth who are both LGBTQ and experiencing chronic homelessness; two populations that are seemingly underrepresented in Worcester's service sector, but a large percentage of the Youth Count's data. Individualized services that allow the clients to control the physical placement of their housing may be a more accessible way for Worcester's significant population of unaccompanied transgender youth to find permanent housing, especially when most of the building-based housing service options in the city are divided into male/female arrangements.

VIII. Recommendations

8.1. Improve Relationships and Communication Between Providers

8.1.1. Incentivize collaboration by refunding the Compass Network

Consistent communication and information sharing between the variety of providers who serve unaccompanied and LGBTQ youth is key to coordinating efforts, sharing current understandings of the population's needs, and strengthening the personal relationships between providers. Understanding the exact services and their current availability in different programs will make for more efficient referrals, reduce times on waiting lists, and meet youth's needs faster and more appropriately. Because resources among social services are so scarce, inter-organizational collaboration often needs to be specifically funded. The initial labor and readjustment period that will most likely come with reinvigorating the existing Network structure needs to be framed as a commitment to the lives of marginalized groups of youth, as well as an investment in Worcester's youth housing service network's effectiveness as a whole. If social services are not connecting with youth and providing service as efficiently as they could, it is almost always youth with the least social capital to advocate for themselves that fall through the cracks.

8.1.2. Outreach key stakeholders

One of the biggest strengths of Worcester's service network is the existing groundwork for streamlined provider collaboration. It has proven to be effective for Worcester's youth in the past, and most likely plays an important role in the high number of non-LGBTQ unaccompanied youth who report all of their service needs being met. The first step of adapting it to meet the needs of Worcester's LGBTQ population is ensuring that the key stakeholders who represent population's greatest needs are at the table. Communicating with the LGBTQ youth drop-in centers, and by extension the deep social networks associated with LGBTQ youth, and strengthening a direct connection to housing services is essential.

Coordinating with Job Corps, an organization that provides both housing and employment training/support, is also an important step to meeting the expressed needs of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth. Identifying LGBTQ-friendly family counseling services, mental health, and educational support services are other key stakeholders to collaborate with. Since these services are not directly tied to youth housing, the Network may request these providers to play a more peripheral and referral-based role, or stay in contact with the Network through proxy contacts and/or biannual meeting attendance.

An important point to make about the role of the Network is that the channels of coordination, services, training and education on serving LGBTQ youth needs to be in place before outreaching this population to enroll them in services. Solidifying the capacity of the Network to efficiently serve a population that it's currently missing needs to be a prerequisite to outreaching a larger client base; bringing more youth into a service network without the capacity to meet their needs runs the risk of further isolating a vulnerable population.

8.2. Improve circulation and quality of information

8.2.1. Streamline publication of services

The most common reason that the service needs of all Worcester's unaccompanied youth were not met is that they didn't know where to go, which is a comparatively straightforward barrier to address. Both public knowledge and provider awareness should be targeted when advertising services. Sharing program's exact services offered, qualifications, availability and locations available through different organizations with school guidance

counselors, community centers, religious organizations, outreach workers, and other youth programs/ services are important sites to improve understanding of the available resources. Word of mouth, printed leaflets, and internet postings are critical ways this information can be disseminated.

Evidenced by how many LGBTQ youth connect with Service D through internet searches, and the calls Provider 4 gets asking for shelter, the internet is clearly an important place for service-disconnected unaccompanied LGBTQ youth to begin advocating for their needs. Explicitly outlining organizational emphasis on LGBTQ inclusion and sensitivity in mission and value statements will help ensure that they can be found by people searching those keywords. Ideally, Worcester would benefit from an online repository where providers enter the services they offer and the latest availability/ meeting times. Currently, there are many services that both providers and clients only hear about through word of mouth from providers who have personal knowledge of programs or funding streams. This disadvantages youth who aren't connected with 'in the know' providers, and excludes many people who may need services the most.

8.2.2. *Increase access and quality of population and housing service information*

Service E reported that they don't necessarily advertise their services because they already have a significant wait list and don't have the capacity to serve more clients. However, their program houses youth based on priority, not first come first serve. Making the available services more widely known, and pre-screening more youth to find individuals who are the most vulnerable is a recommended way to direct services to youth who are most in need of housing. These pre-screenings should collect information on gender, race, and sexual identity to more holistically assess the additional risks youth may face.

Additionally, a significant information base on the demographics, service history, experiences and needs of individuals and families accessing housing services in each CoC is stored in the Homelessness Management and Information System (HMIS). Complete access to CoC HMIS files is only available to the administrators of housing programs, which makes it incredibly difficult for service providers, researchers, and program developers to tailor services to the dynamic needs of an area's homeless populations. Although the studies and research efforts outlined in Appendix B have helped improve this understanding, opening up aggregated depersonalized statistics to localized communities of service

providers would allow for more appropriate services and decrease the resources used to gather information that has already been collected.

Administering the Youth Count surveys in schools will also drastically improve accuracy and depth of available data. Most surveys are given through service organizations, which underrepresents youth who are couch surfing and not street-based or disconnected/inconsistently accessing services. As described in Appendix A, the Youth Count survey has a history of utilizing youth ambassador, specialized LGBTQ and street outreach methods, although they are not consistent across CoC's and survey years. These data collection methods are particularly important for reaching populations of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth, who are often not connected with services that would administer the survey.

8.2.3. Utilize training resources

The needs of Worcester's youth who are both LGBTQ and unaccompanied can only be fully understood at the intersection of these identities, as shown in Figure 15.

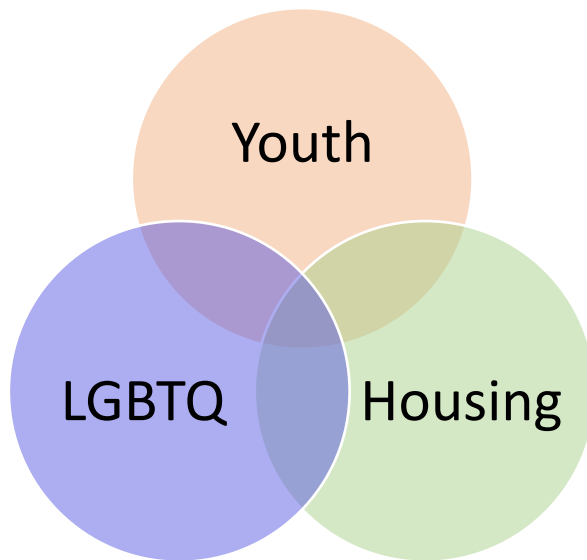


Figure 15: Intersections of Serving Unaccompanied LGBTQ Youth

The structure of the fully-functioning Compass Network provides the platform for information dissemination between youth housing providers and LGBTQ youth providers. These cross-organizational trainings are the most promising starting point to begin building a regional understanding between all providers who work with this population, since there is an

evidenced disconnect between provider understandings of unaccompanied LGBTQ youth in Worcester.

Provider 5 reported never having received training on working with LGBTQ youth, and Provider 1 reported that they did not believe there would be any differences in approaches to serving LGBTQ youth, since there is not a difference in needs from non-LGBTQ youth. One of Worcester's strongest assets is the range of expertise that different youth providers hold; Provider 4 is more than willing to facilitate ongoing trainings for staff at youth housing organizations, which is cited throughout the literature as a key component to educating providers on the specific and contextual needs of an area's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth population.

These trainings could be arranged through the Compass Network meetings and collaborations, which give the platform for long-term and widespread dissemination of information. They should focus specifically on the needs of transgender youth in regards to housing, because although a significant percentage of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth population identifies as transgender, interviews with housing providers did not reflect a large number of transgender being served through youth housing organizations. The reasons why this specific population is either not seeking out formalized housing assistance, not seeking out youth-specified services, or unaware of these services should be addressed and services adjusted to accommodate their needs that are not being met.

8.3. Address Stigma

8.3.1. *Towards organizations as not LGBTQ-friendly*

Throughout the interviews in this study, there were several youth and general housing organizations in Worcester were cited throughout this study's interviews as historically not LGBTQ-friendly (Provider 3). Negative reputations around LGBTQ acceptance and sensitivity carry significant weight within close-knit communities that share their experiences with different programs in the area. The first step to undoing damage to the reputations of organizations, which may be both the cause and consequence of LGBTQ youth avoiding service, is to utilize Worcester's training resources on working with LGBTQ youth and to make the outlined changes to organizational policy.

Several highlighted aspects to inclusive services include gender neutral language on intake forms that does not assume heterosexuality, as well as asking what pronouns they

use, what gendered room they would prefer to stay in (for residential housing services), keeping youth's legal names in confidential files at intake, and not shared with other staff or residents if it is different than the name the client goes by (Provider 4). The physical space should include visual cues to signify acceptance, such as posters, LGBTQ symbols, 'safe space' stickers, visible inclusion and anti-discrimination policies etc. (Provider 4 and Provider 2). When hiring any new staff for a housing program, outreach candidates with experience being homeless, identify as LGBTQ and/or people of color who may be able to better connect with Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth population and give the tools for youth to empower themselves. Throughout the reviewed literature, as well as my own experience as a housing specialist, client connections with providers is often a critical step towards achieving their goals. For many clients, especially those with significant trauma, it's easier to connect with providers who can share or mirror their experiences, and help them work through their barriers on personal and clinical levels.

8.3.2. Towards housing programs as LGBTQ-friendly, and LGBTQ spaces as welcoming to youth experiencing homelessness

In addition to provider training, if organizations have contact and positive relationships with unaccompanied LGBTQ youth they've served in the past, they would have the most valuable insight to evaluate specific organizational policies and practices. Asking these youth if they would be interested in participating in dialogue/ discussion groups, or more low-commitment options of just having a conversation with a trusted provider about their experiences, could be critically important for organizational self-reflection.

Increasing awareness needs to be at the organizational level, among staff and among clients. Social and educational spaces that LGBTQ youth frequent are critical points of entry to circulate education about how youth homelessness is defined and the available resources. It is also necessary to challenge these spaces to break down stigma around homelessness through consciousness-raising dialogues and facilitated self-reflection. As described in the literature, making spaces geared towards unaccompanied youth more accessible to LGBTQ youth, and making LGBTQ spaces welcoming to unaccompanied youth takes intentional training on how to open conversations about the varying experiences of youth within programs.

8.4. Further Research and Next Steps

8.4.1. *Support and track the success of the Host Home model*

Another of Worcester's greatest strengths, and a huge source of my own hope for the city's youth housing service network, is the small-scale implementation of a Host Home initiative through Service C. Because of the organization's capacity and limited funding, the Compass Network should strengthen ties with the program, and offer any supportive services that youth may need to move from a Host Home to more permanent living. This small-scale host home model should also be monitored for its successes, room for improvements, and overall effectiveness in the context of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth.

8.4.2. *Outreach and include LGBTQ and/or unaccompanied youth in program development/ assessment, data collection, and provider collaboration*

The experiences and needs of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth population are articulated in this research through second-hand sources; quantitative survey data and service provider perceptions. To more fully understand how to better provide service to this population, we need to communicate directly with them and incorporate their feedback throughout any steps they are interested in participating in. Following the outlined models of best practice outlined in the reviewed literature is a promising starting point, which can be adapted to Worcester's specific context. Although including youth in the Compass Network meetings would most likely breach confidentiality releases, the Network should be transparent with the content of their meetings in terms of projected next steps and current understandings of the population. If unaccompanied LGBTQ youth have any interest in contributing to the growth and sustainability of the Compass Network, their insights on existing services and the needs for services would be incredibly valuable.

8.4.3. *Conduct further research on the needs and experiences of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth with a larger sample*

As mentioned in the limitations section, the small sample size limits the reach of this study's analysis into the complexities of LGBTQ identities within Worcester's unaccompanied youth population. Although SOGI is a critical aspect to research when examining ways to improve the capacity of a service network to serve LGBTQ youth, the experiences tied to other aspects of LGBTQ youth's identities also influence the ways that they interact with

social services and cannot be discounted. Literature on the subject of complex identities highlight the unique experiences of youth involved with the DCF system, transgender youth, and youth of color, as critical factors to address within program development.

DCF-involved youth

While in the foster care system, LGBTQ youth face more severe abuse, harassment and assault than non-LGBTQ youth. Several studies cited in the 2006 report on LGBTQ Youth in the Foster Care System concluded that the majority of LGBTQ youth in the system spent time on the street because it felt safer than their placement or were removed/ ran away from their foster family due to conflicts over their SOGI (National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2006).

In an approach that parallels the approaches of prison systems, foster care facilities often respond to the reported discrimination or harassment of LGBTQ youth by moving them to another facility. Instead of addressing the homophobia or transphobia that caused the conflict, these new placements are often more restrictive and isolate youth (National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2006). Because many LGBTQ youth do not disclose their SOGI in every situation they are in, particularly if they associate LGBTQ identity with homelessness, many foster parents do not know when they're housing LGBTQ youth (McTeague, 2015). It's critical to prepare all foster parents to address the unique needs of LGBTQ youth to ensure that all "invisible" LGBTQ youth in foster care are safe and have their needs met (Craig-Oldsen, Craig, & Morton, 2006).

Transgender and youth of color

The experiences of gender minority and sexual minority youth are often entirely different; transgender youth experienced more bullying, family rejection and physical and sexual abuse than LGBQ youth, and often have different health-related and support service needs (Choi, Wilson, Shelton, Gates 2015). Additionally, LGBTQ communities do not exist in a vacuum, and are subject to intra-communal exclusion and prejudice along lines of race, gender, and sexuality. The transphobia of some LGBQ individuals towards transgender communities further isolates unaccompanied transgender youth, who then have to navigate homelessness without the support of the wider LGBTQ community (Ray 2006).

Transgender and LGBTQ youth of color at greater risk of experiencing homelessness than white and/or cisgender youth (Burwick, Friend, Gates, & Durso, 2014); a 2011 survey of

transgender men and women found that rates of homelessness were 13% higher than the study's average for those who identified as African-American and 8% higher for Native American (Ventimiglia, 2012). These populations are also more vulnerable to dangerous situations once homeless. A report by Trans People of Color Coalition and the Human Rights campaign found that more transgender people were killed in 2017 than any year before, a statistic that has risen every year in the past decade (Lee, 2017). If this statistic is broken down by race and gender, Black transwomen are killed at the highest rates and make up 44% of the recorded killings of LGBTQ people (Park & Mykhyalyshyn, 2016). When developing services for the LGBTQ youth community, the identity-based levels of vulnerability and kinds of services needed need to be taken into account and incorporated into program planning.

IX. Conclusion

Although the needs of Worcester's unaccompanied LGBTQ youth, and the implications for service providers are specific to this regional context, actualizing this study's findings should also be viewed in a larger social and political context. The current climate of regulation rollbacks, welfare and funding cuts, rising social conservatism, bigotry, violence, and political uncertainty necessitates community action. The unique position that human service agencies have implicates our role as first responders to the fallout from federal changes to social service and public health resources. With the way that Worcester's service network currently runs, unaccompanied LGBTQ youth are falling through the cracks. It is the responsibility of the social service sector to employ existing resources to the fullest capacity; in the context of this study, providers need to look to each other's expertise and coordinate cross-organizational partnerships. Sharing information between youth providers who work specifically with housing, and providers who work specifically with LGBTQ youth is a promising way to begin building an intersectional culture and increasing accessibility for unaccompanied LGBTQ youth. With the existing structure of the Compass Network, and the expansive knowledge base from the multitude of different providers in the city, this goal may only be a matter of organizing collaborative spaces and creating sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships between youth-serving organizations.

X. Figures

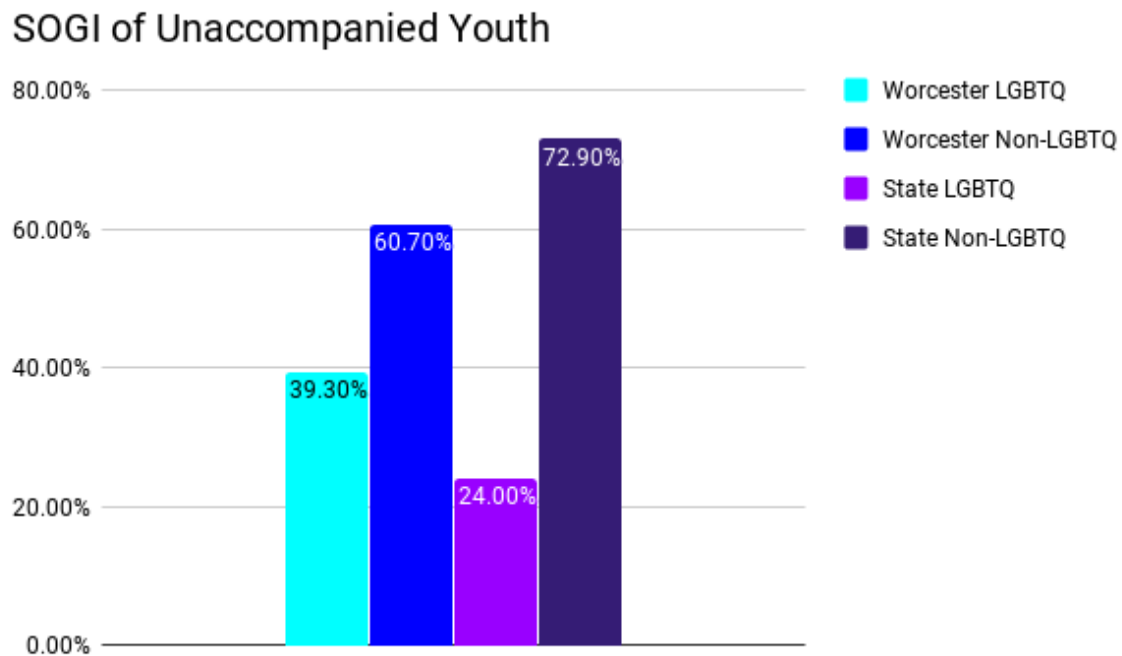


Figure 1: Percentages of Unaccompanied Youth Who Identify as LGBTQ or Non-LGBTQ

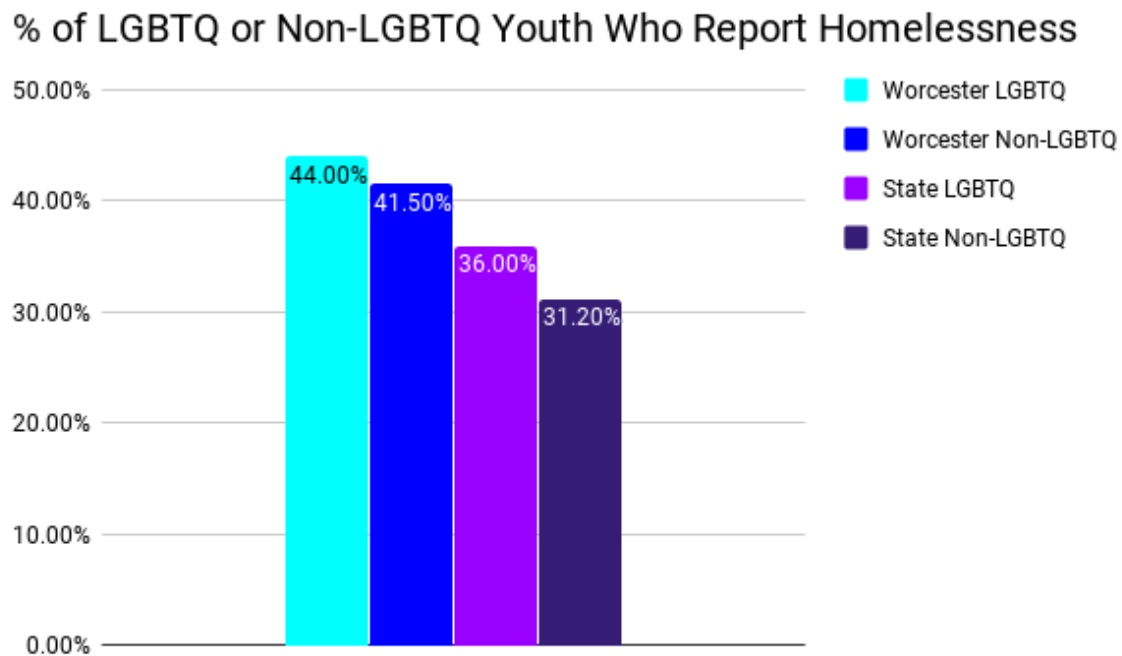


Figure 2: Percentages of LGBTQ or Non-LGBTQ Youth Who Report Homelessness

Age Distributions of Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth

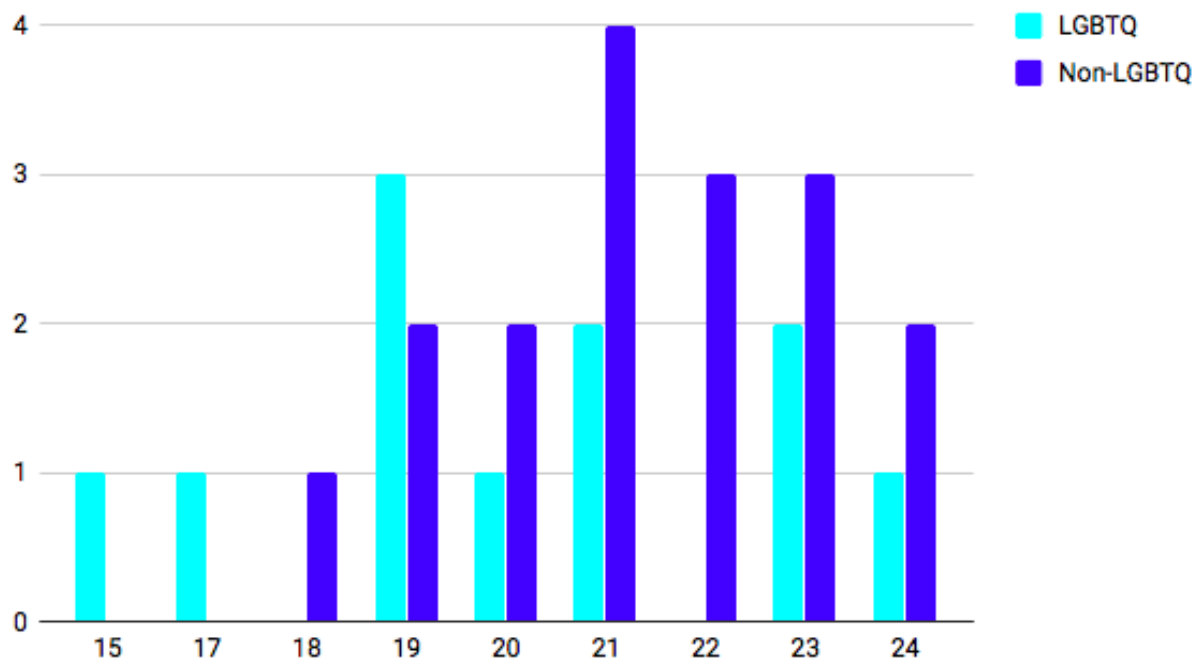


Figure 3: Age Distribution of Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth

Where Were You Born?

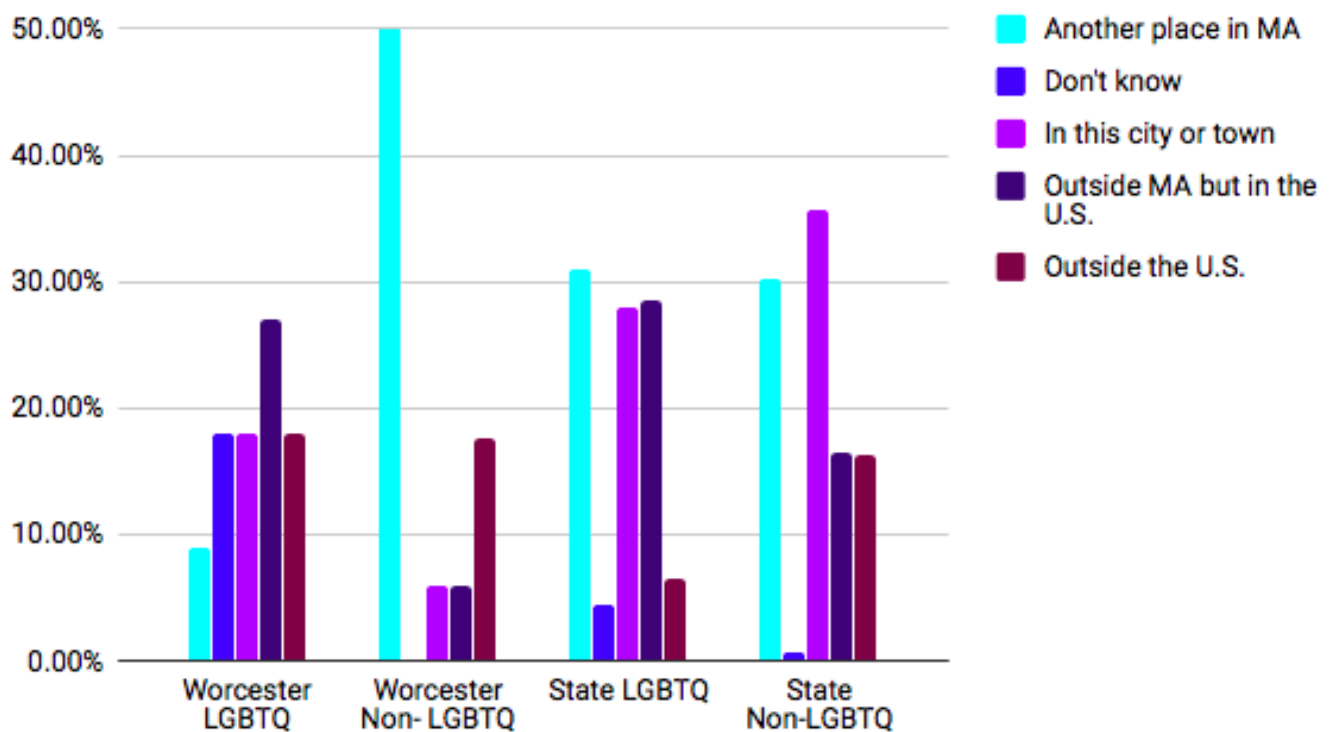


Figure 4: Unaccompanied Youth's Places of Birth

Unaccompanied Youth with High School Diploma/Employment

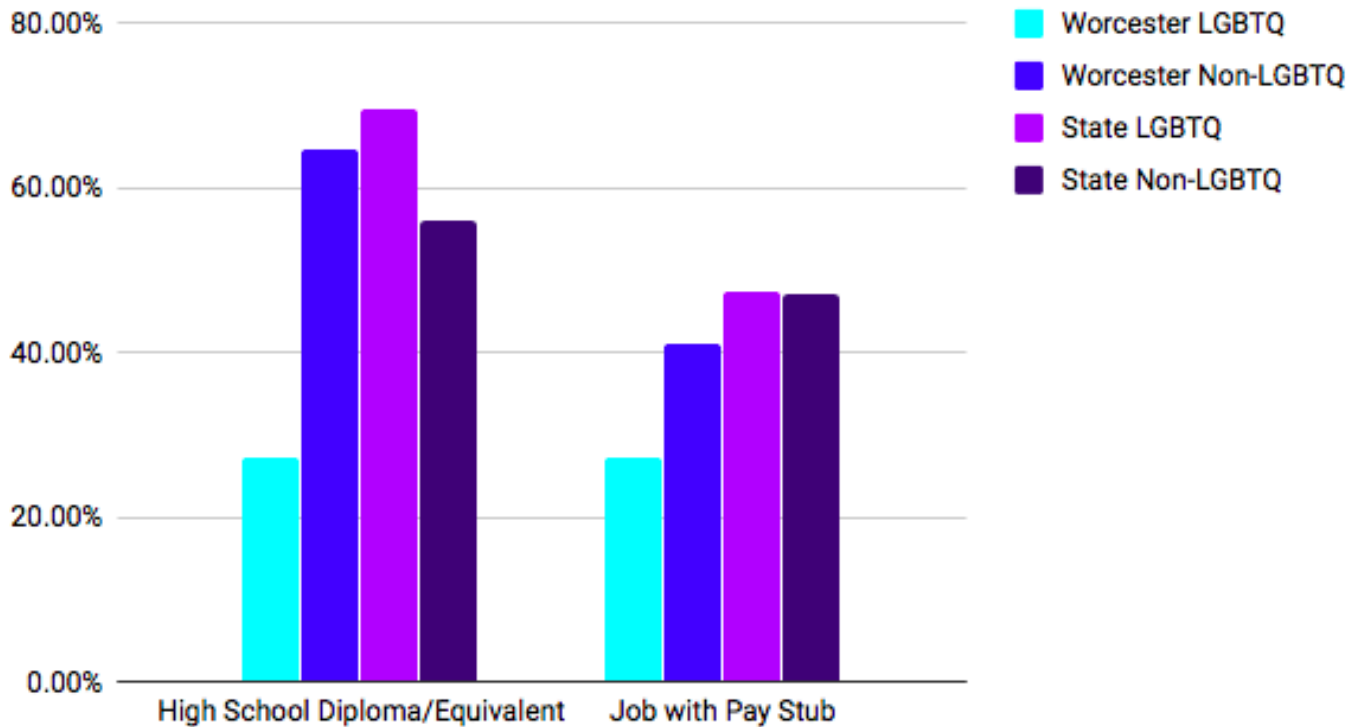


Figure 5: Unaccompanied Youth Who Report Having a High School Diploma/Equivalent, or Holding a Job That They Receive a Paystub From

% of Unaccompanied LGBTQ Youth Who Identify as Transgender

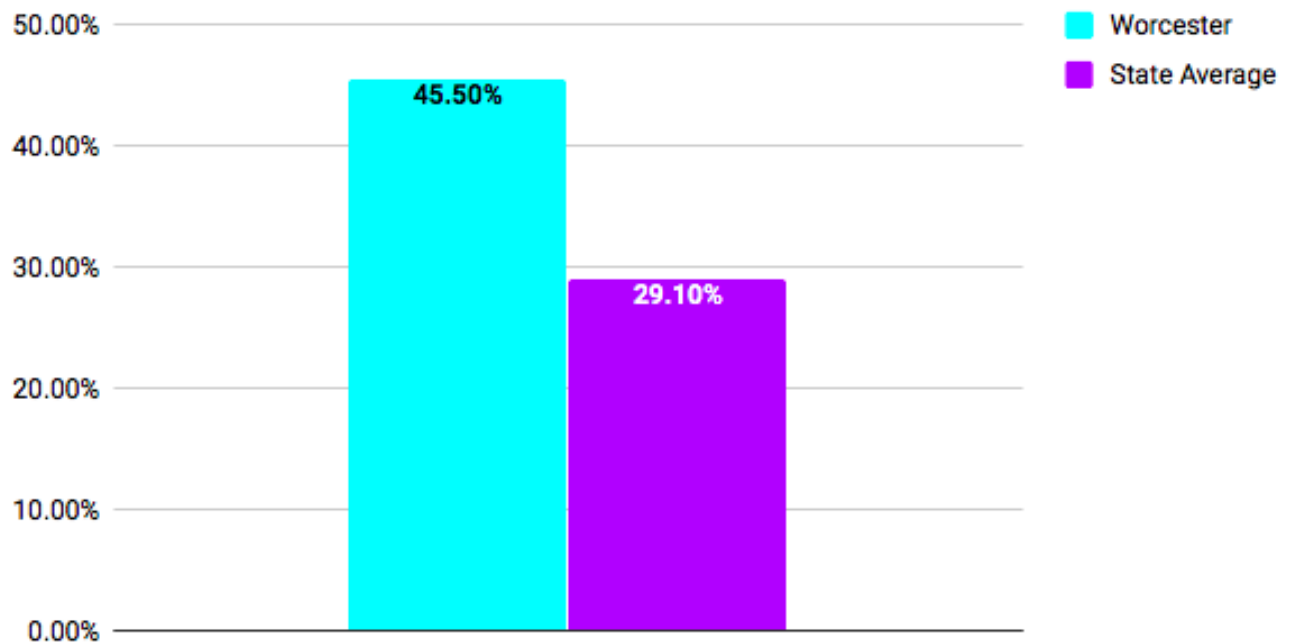


Figure 6: Percentage of Unaccompanied Youth Who Identify as Transgender

% of Unaccompanied LGBTQ Youth Who Identify as Black/African American

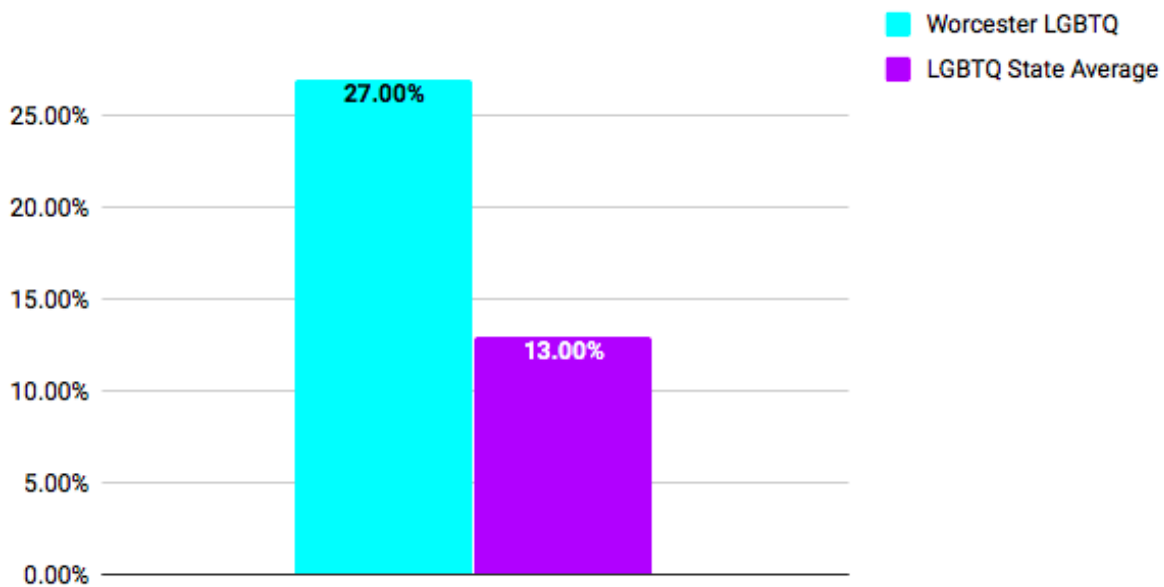


Figure 7: Percentage of LGBTQ Unaccompanied Youth Who Identify as Black/African American

Reasons Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth Report Experiencing Homelessness

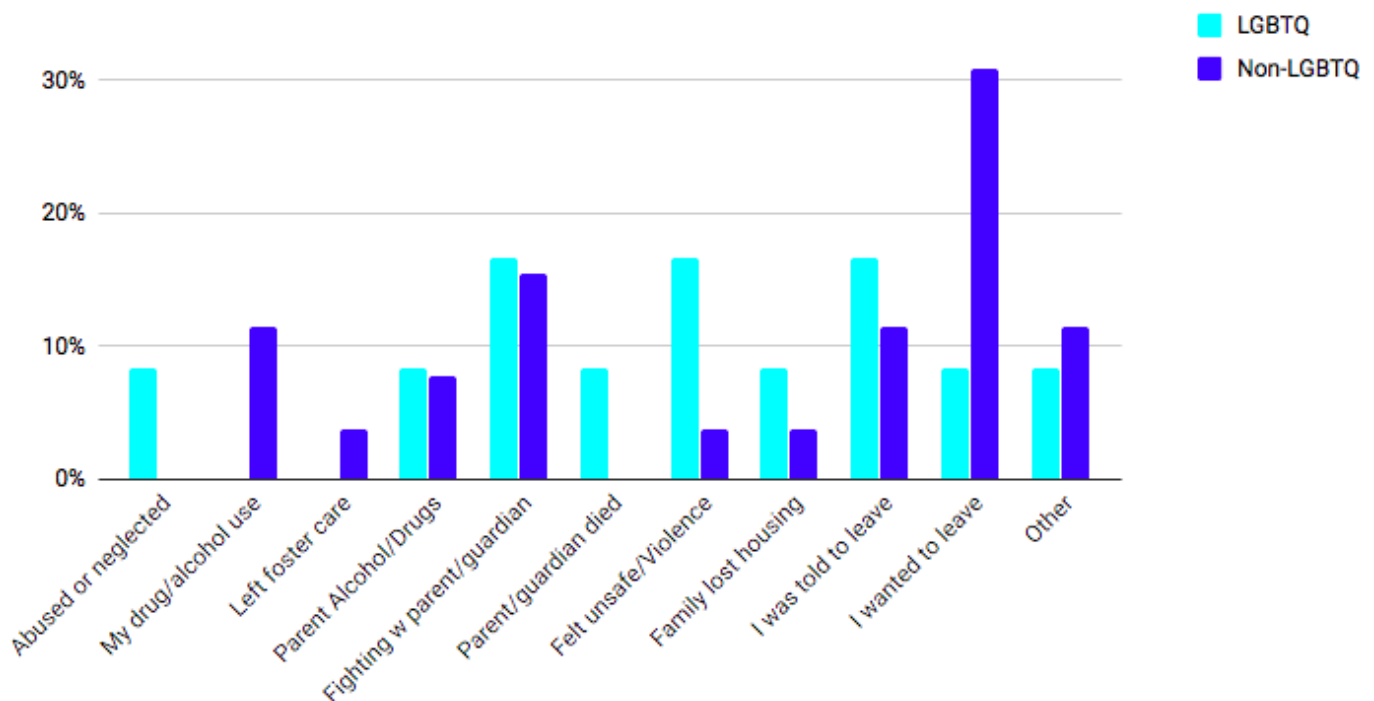


Figure 8: Reasons That Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth Report Experiencing Homelessness

Exchanged Sex for Shelter, Money, Food, etc.

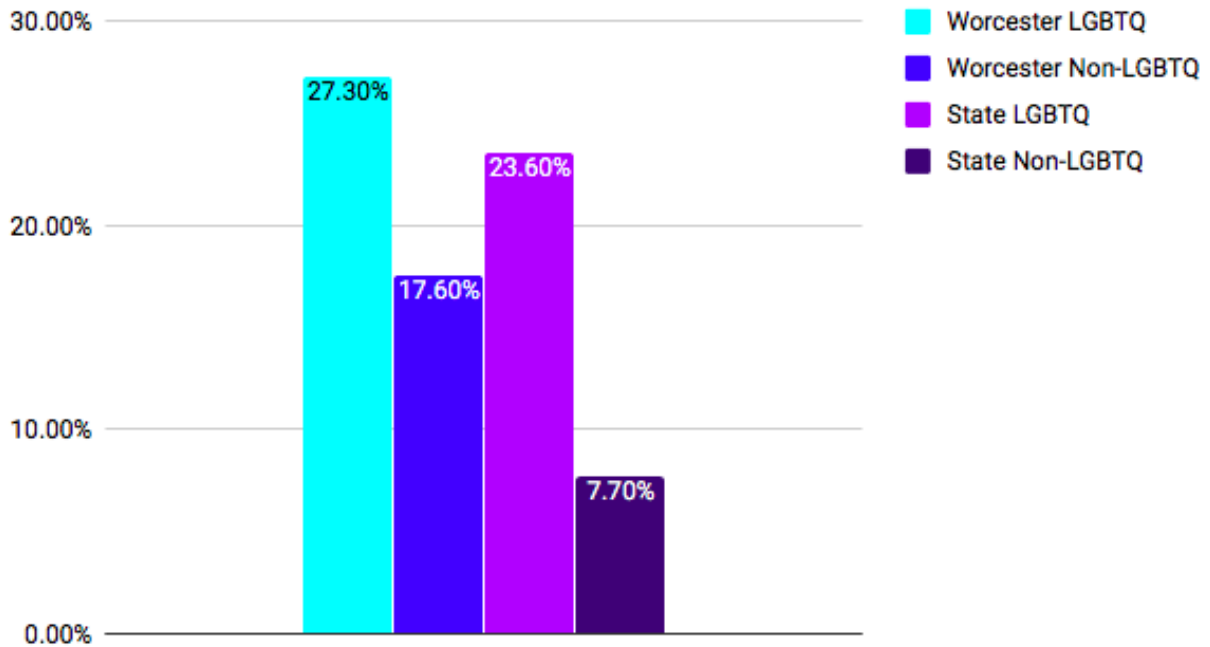


Figure 9: Percentages of Unaccompanied Youth Who Report Having Exchanged Sex for Shelter/ Food/ Money Etc.

Where Youth Stayed Last Night

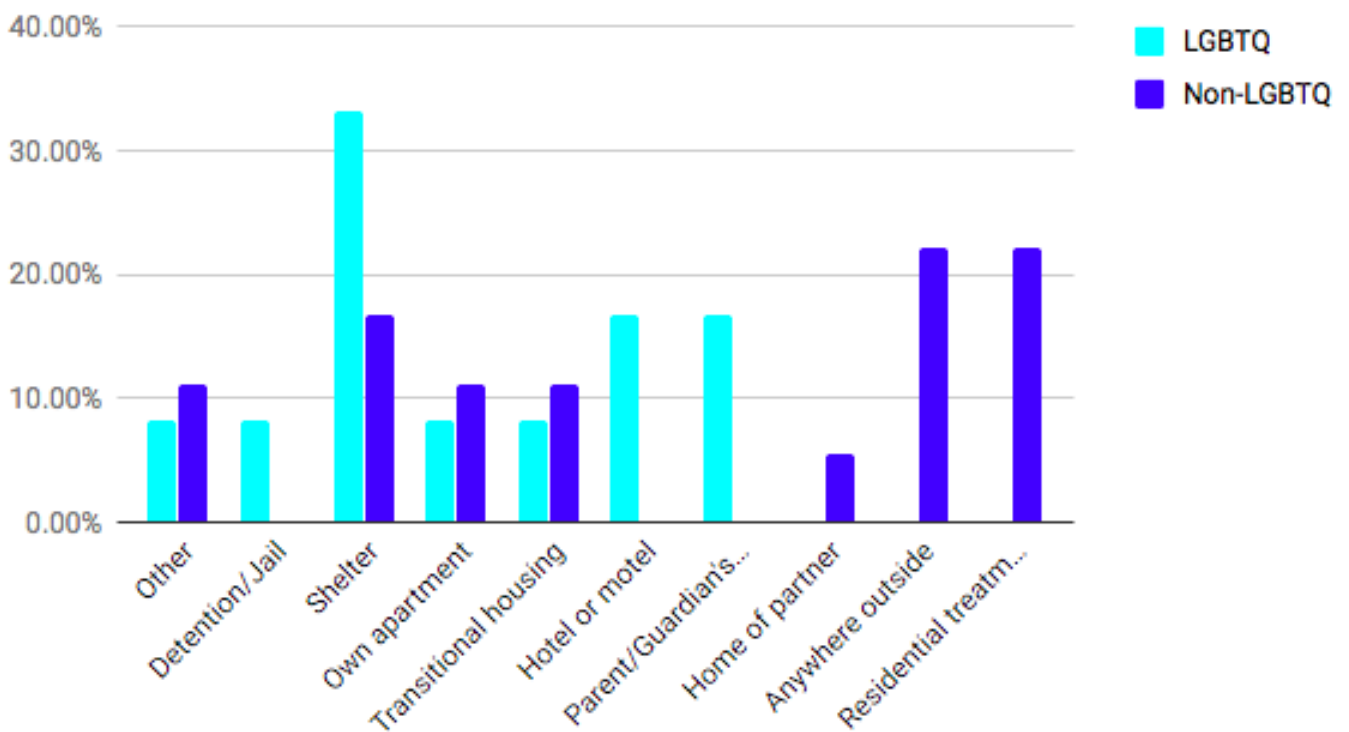


Figure 10: Where Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth Report Staying the Night Before Taking the Youth Count Survey

Did You Get the Services You Needed?

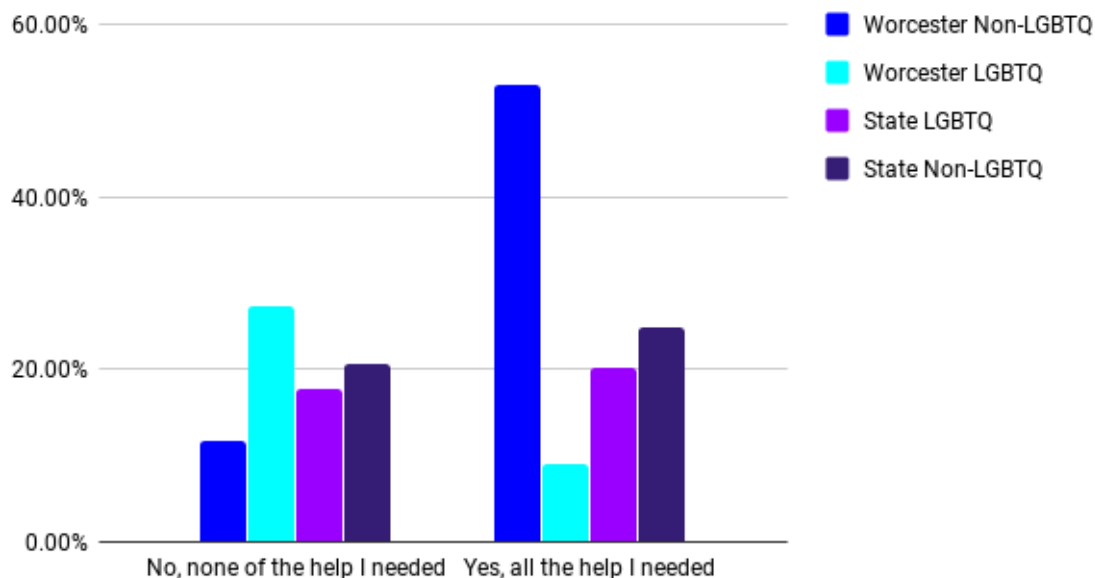


Figure 11: Percentages of Unaccompanied Youth Who Had All or None of Their Service Needs Met

Reasons for No Service

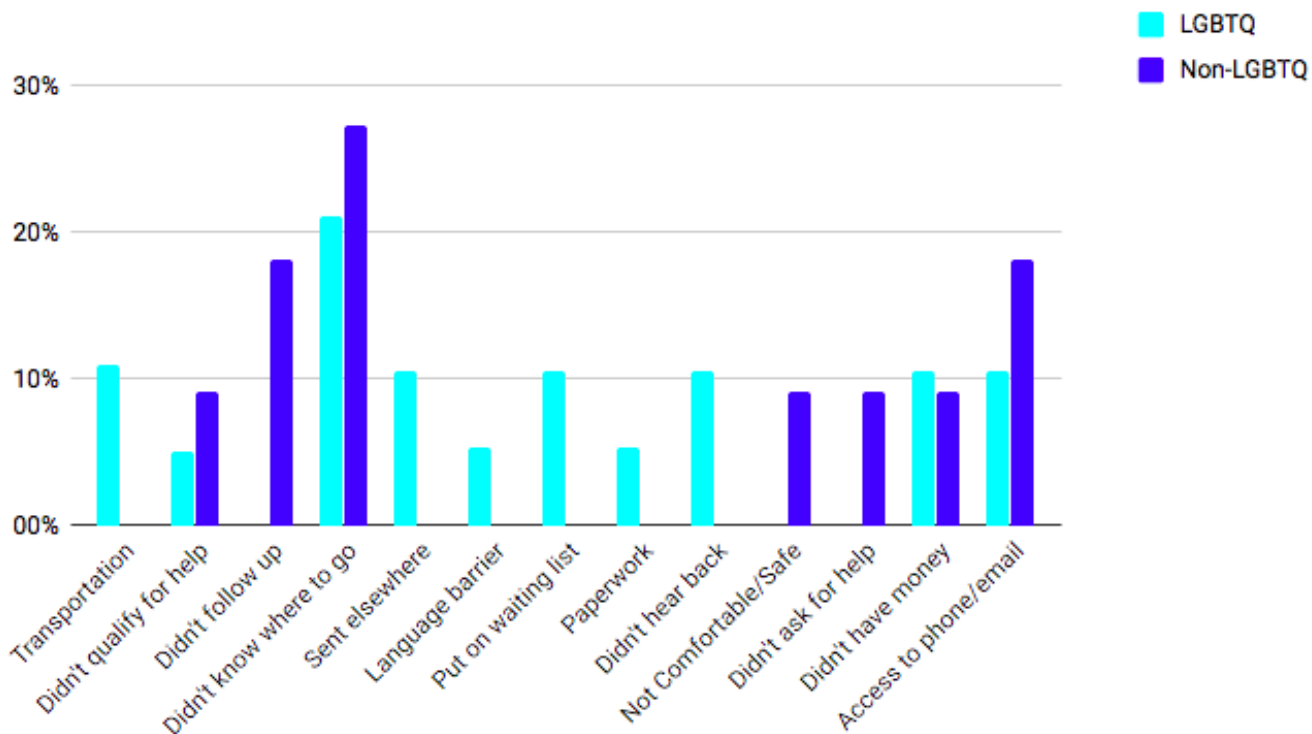


Figure 12: Reasons That Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth Did Not Have Their Service Needs Met

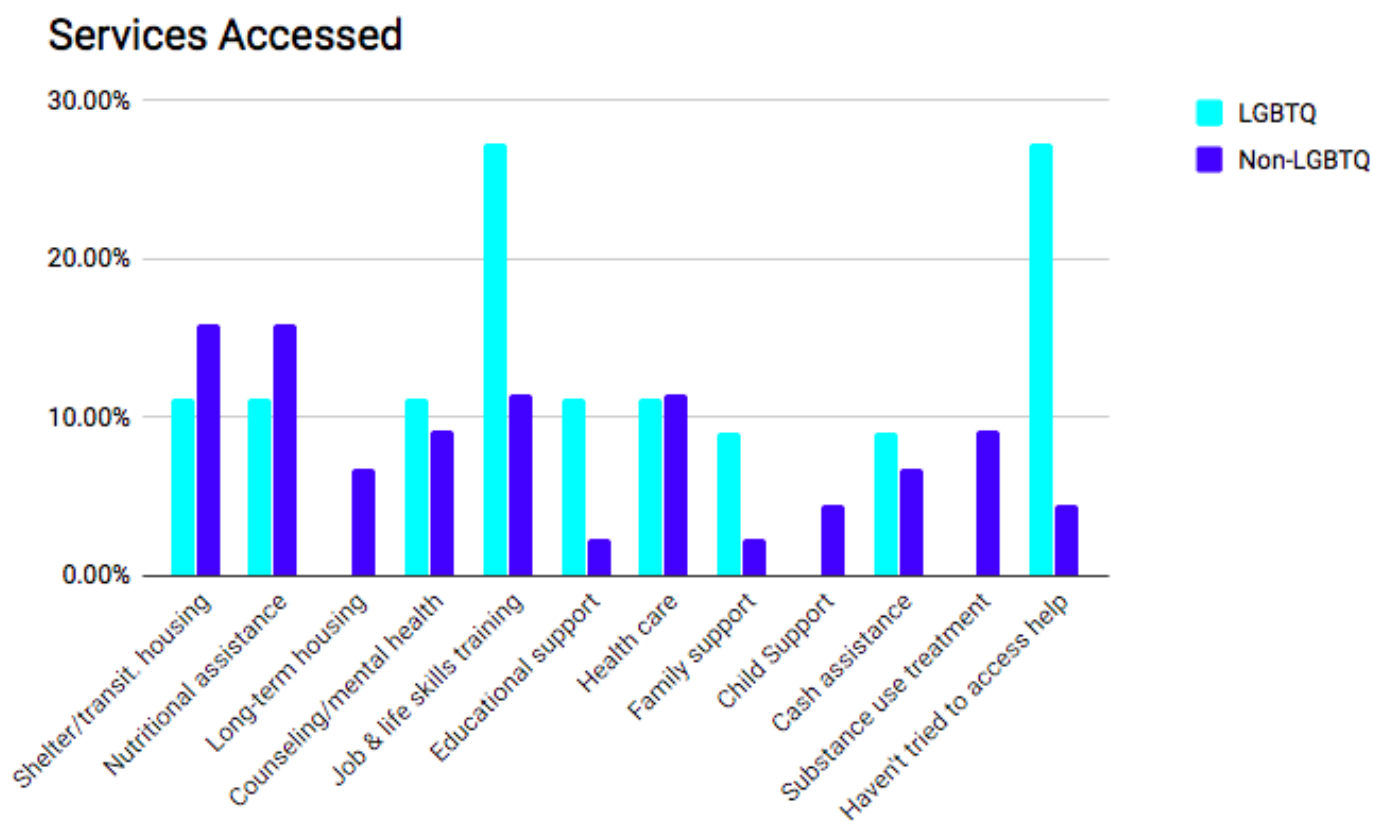


Figure 13: Services that Worcester's Unaccompanied Youth Have Tried to Access

"Never Experienced Homelessness"

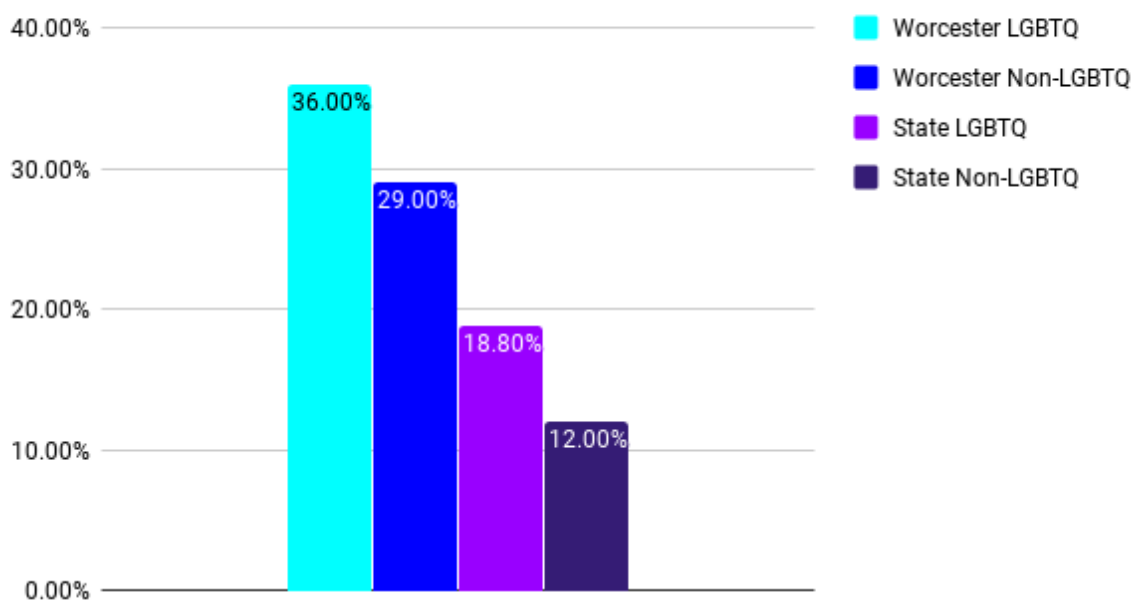


Figure 14: Unaccompanied Youth Who Report that They Have Never Experienced Homelessness

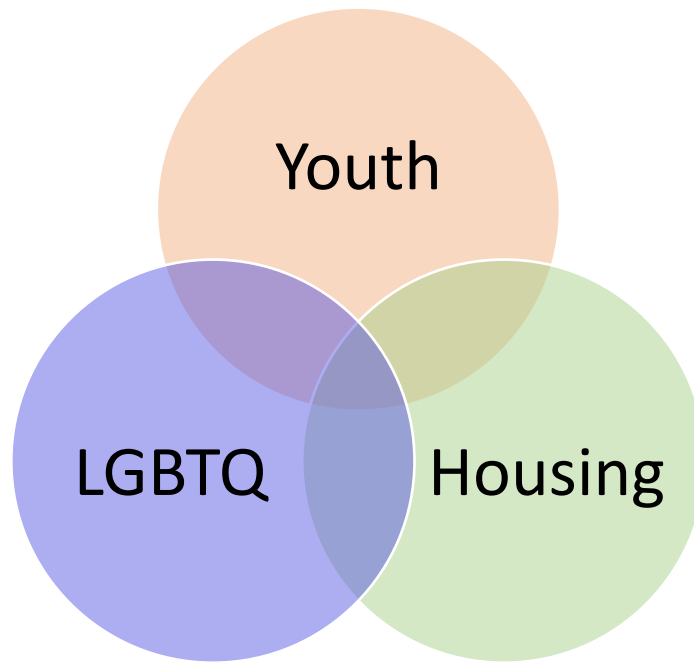


Figure 15: Intersections of Serving Unaccompanied LGBTQ Youth

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Appendix A: 2017 Youth Count Survey Methods

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In May 2017, the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (“the Commission”) conducted the fourth annual Massachusetts Youth Count (Count), a statewide initiative to survey unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. The Commission defines an unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) as a person who:

- 1) **Is 24 years of age or younger; and**
- 2) **Is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian; and**
- 3) **Lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.**

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts understands that to ensure the health and wellbeing of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness—undoubtedly one of society’s most vulnerable populations—it is critically important to determine the scope of the problem. To that end, the 2017 Count builds on momentum from the groundbreaking 2014 Count, which was the first statewide effort of its kind in the United States. The 2014 Count also established baseline against which progress in addressing UHY can be measured. The Executive Office of Health and Human Services allocated \$150,000 from its FY’17 administrative line item (4000-0300) to continue the state’s commitment to better understand the scope of homelessness among unaccompanied youth. This report is being submitted to comply with that requirement. The ultimate goal of the Count is to produce information that will guide the development of policies and programs to reduce homelessness among unaccompanied youth. This report presents the process and outcomes of the 2017 MA Youth Count.

1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT

Three key organizing entities supported the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count: the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (the Commission), the Identification and Connection Working Group (the Working Group) of the Commission, and 15 of the local Continuums of Care (CoCs).¹

The **Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth** provides oversight for the initiative and is responsible for reporting on its progress annually to the Governor’s Office, the Legislature, and the Office of the Child Advocate. The Executive Office of Health and Human Services chair the Commission, and at the time of the 2017 count, included 28 members, representing youth, state government, service providers, and advocates (see Attachment 1 for members of the Special Commission).

The **Identification and Connection Working Group** of the Special Commission organized and facilitated the Massachusetts Youth Count on behalf of the Commission. For the 2017 count, its primary responsibilities were to update the count methodology, edit the uniform survey tool based on feedback from youth, CoCs, providers, and Commission members, coordinate a statewide conference for stakeholders to prepare for the count, and to implement the count in partnership with CoCs.

¹ A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.

The **CoCs** implemented the Youth Count at the local/regional level. Each CoC has a unique geographic area to cover, a mix of resources and providers, and high demand for homeless services.

2.0 YOUTH COUNT METHODOLOGY

The Commission, through the Working Group, provided technical assistance to fifteen of the participating CoCs in Massachusetts that executed the Youth Count survey in 2017. The Count's uniform survey tool was administered during a 2-week period in May 2017. The Working Group developed guidelines for CoCs to work with diverse partners to identify young people who may or may not be connected to schools, employment or social services and to engage youth volunteers, also known as "Youth Ambassadors," to assist with implementation. Please see the Commission's September 2014 report entitled "Massachusetts Youth Count 2014: Overview and Analysis" for more history on the Count's methodology and its development.

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/eohhs/cyf/mayouthcount2014.pdf>

The Working Group formulated a set of guidelines based on best practices to conduct a youth count (See Pergamit et al., 2013). Recommended practices included forming a local planning committee, providing stipends to youth volunteers, conducting focused youth outreach and marketing of the count, training all volunteers, engaging diverse partners, providing day-of coordination and quality control, and seeking creative ways to engage youth under 18.

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/youth-count-process-study>)

2.1 REFINEMENT OF THE UNIFORM SURVEY TOOL

To develop the 2017 uniform survey tool, the Working Group started with the 2016 survey tool and worked to further address limitations, reduce confusion, and encourage completion of each question by survey participants. Very minor modifications were made to the 2017 tool as follows:

- ☐ The question asking, "What is your age?" was moved to directly before Date of Birth (Question 3a and 3b).
- ☐ HiSET degree was added to the question about whether the participant has a high school diploma or GED (Question 14).
- ☐ Questions about being in juvenile detention and adult jail were combined into one question (Question 20).
- ☐ A question asking for all income sources was added back to the tool after being removed for the 2016 count. Respondents could check as many as applied and also could describe any income sources that were not on the list (Question 22).
- ☐ The question about exchanging sex for money or other necessities was moved to after the question about income sources (Question 23).
- ☐ Domestic violence/sexual assault services was added as a service option to the question on help sought over the past year (Question 24).

- ❑ Agender and Two-Spirit were added as options to describe gender identity (Question 28).
- ❑ Asexual was added as an option to describe sexual orientation (Question 29).
- ❑ An official use only question about survey date, site and administering organization was added to the paper survey, but not the Survey Monkey (Question not numbered).

The survey was administered using Survey Monkey as well as through a paper version. The paper survey was available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, Khmer/Cambodian, and Brazilian Portuguese. The electronic form in Survey Monkey was available in English and Spanish. See Attachment Two for the final 2017 Uniform Survey Tool.

2.2 CONTINUUM OF CARE ENGAGEMENT

Once the methodology and updated survey tool were complete, the Working Group worked with the CoCs to develop the outreach strategies. Engagement with the CoCs during this phase included email and telephone conversations providing basic information about what the Working Group was hoping to accomplish, grant information, and an overview PowerPoint presentation that described the Commission and the proposed methodology.

CoCs were invited to attend a half-day MA Youth Count Conference at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, which was held on March 9th 2017. The Commission and Working Group's goal for the conference was to orient everyone to the initiative, provide information about the methodology and survey tool, and facilitate a discussion among CoCs about promising youth count practices, with a particular focus on authentic engagement of youth. Approximately 40 people were in attendance, including at least one representative from each of the CoCs. Following the MA Youth Count Conference, the Working Group co-chairs began providing ongoing technical assistance to each CoC. Additionally, each CoC had the opportunity to apply for a capacity building grant in the amount of \$7,500 by the Commission to help with financial costs of conducting the Youth Count. Not all CoCs accepted the grant and were able to administer the survey with other resources.

2.2.1. KEY PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Debriefing calls were made with 14 out of the 16 CoCs that participated in the 2017 Youth Count. Table One summarizes key components of their Counts and includes the number of surveys collected as well as the percent and number of respondents meeting the Commission's definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth.

Table One: Summary of Key CoC Planning and Implementation Activities

Continuum of Care	Planning Committee	# Days Survey Period	Outreach to LGBTQ Youth	Outreach to Youth Under 18	Youth Ambassadors	Street Count /Out-reach	Magnet events	Used incentives	Total # Surveys Collected	% Commission Definition (#)
Boston	Yes	14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	587	26.4% (155)
Attleboro/Taunton	Yes	7	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	107	4.7% (5)
Balance of State	Yes	14	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	331	9.7% (32)
South Shore	No	14	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	69	43.5% (30)
Cambridge	No	14	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	47	36.2% (17)
Cape	No	14	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	74	6.7% (5)
Fall River	Yes	14	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	193	5.7% (11)
Hampden	Yes	7	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	120	55% (66)
Lowell	Yes	14	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	330	8.2% (27)
Lynn	Yes	17	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	83	36.1% (30)
New Bedford									332	7.2% (24)
Newton									6	0% (0)
North Shore	Yes	14	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	105	32.4% (34)
Somerville	Yes	14	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	76	21.1% (16)
3 County Rural	No	14	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	103	17.5% (18)
Worcester County	Yes	14	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	148	20.9% (31)

Nine out of the 14 CoCs interviewed formed a special planning committee for the Count. The remaining CoCs used an existing committee or subcommittee to plan and conduct the Count. Only five of the CoCs reported using special outreach strategies to LGBTQ populations; yet, a higher percentage of youth meeting the Commission definition reported an LGBTQ identity in 2017 as compared to 2016. Nine of the CoCs reported conducting special outreach to youth under 18; in 2017 a higher percentage of youth meeting the Commission definition were under 18. Eight of the CoCs utilized youth ambassadors; nine conducted street outreach; seven held magnet events; and 13 utilized incentives for youth ambassadors and/or to compensate youth for filling out the survey.

Surveys were collected in 144 out of the 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts (41%). Surveys from respondents who met the Commission definition were collected in 52 of these cities and towns. Table x in Attachment Six is organized by CoC and provides a list of all cities and towns in Massachusetts, the number of surveys collected from each city or town, and the number from each that met the Commission definition.

More details on successes and challenges from the 2017 Count can be found in Attachment Six.

Attachment Six: Attachment Implementation Successes and Challenges

In order to understand how the CoCs planned, implemented, and organized this work, debriefing calls were conducted with CoC representatives. Findings about implementation successes and challenges are summarized below.

Successes

- CoCs brought new and long-time partners to the table and developed relationships with providers who would support future counts. Youth Harbors was noted several times as a partner that is able to access youth in schools. Hampden County highlighted their partners who are specialized in reaching homeless and runaway youth as a reason they were able to engage a high percentage of young people who met the Commission definition.
- The Count raised awareness about the issue of youth homelessness in communities and more specifically young people learned about service availability as evidenced by an increase in calls for help in some CoCs.
- CoCs that utilized youth ambassadors expressed a higher degree of satisfaction with the model than last year—both in terms of the number of young people who want to help work on the issue of homelessness and the knowledge the young people brought to the Youth Count process. For example, Lynn’s Youth Ambassadors were very helpful in connecting young people who were couch-surfing to the Youth Count process. It appears that rather than have Youth Ambassadors be responsible for administering and returning surveys themselves, the model works better when the Ambassadors are integrated into teams with staff such as youth workers or outreach workers.
- Boston developed a systematic approach to utilize Youth Ambassadors and street outreach workers in conjunction with hotspot research to collect a large number of surveys from unaccompanied homeless youth staying in a wide array of living arrangements.
- South Shore utilized HMIS reports to identify who to survey in shelters, providing a more systematic approach to ensure the entire population of unaccompanied youth who were homeless and in shelter were surveyed.
- North Shore reported success utilizing handheld devices for youth to take the survey, increasing young people’s access to the Youth Count process.
- Several CoCs used social media to advertise the count and to direct young people to the survey. CoCs mentioned wanting more training on how to best utilize social media, learn about formats other than Facebook, and how to use social media analytics to understand who is being reached and who is not.
- From a State perspective, it was noted that the Youth Count is becoming a more regular feature of the calendar which helps the CoCs plan. CoC’s were also positive about state funding for stipends and incentives.

Challenges

Many of the challenges that CoCs face negatively impact their ability to reach doubled-up and couch-surfing youth, youth under 18 who meet the Commission definition, and LGBTQ youth. Some of these challenges include not being able to administer the survey in the schools, the size/geographic diversity

of regional CoCs make it challenging to do street counts and coordinate the count more generally, and several CoCs that had partners who connect with the LGBTQ community had a more difficult time engaging them in 2017 than last year. That young people tend not to identify themselves as homeless can exacerbate these challenges.

Three challenges that were identified through the debriefing calls are already being addressed for the 2018 Count.

- ☐ Some CoCs reported a sense of Youth Count fatigue. To combat this, they reported needing earlier and more definitive communication from the State about the timing of the count, to receive the final version of the Uniform Survey Tool earlier, and to have earlier access to the state grants to support the count. COMMISSION RESPONSE: In November, the Commission announced the dates for the 2018 Count, released the NOFA for Youth Count grants, and publicized the date for the Youth Count Conference at Holy Cross. Starting these processes months earlier should allow the CoCs to get prepared and energized for the 2018 Youth Count.
- ☐ In general, CoCs are supportive of a spring count. Several CoCs suggested starting the Count earlier so that college students and youth residents at seasonal shelters can be more easily reached. COMMISSION RESPONSE: The 2018 Count will run from April 23 through May 13 so that these populations can be more easily included.
- ☐ CoCs reported that the lag time between the Count and receiving results was problematic because it reduced the buy-in of partners who did not see the results of their efforts. CoCs also expressed the need for more individualized findings so they could demonstrate the extent of the problem locally. COMMISSION RESPONSE: The final set of raw data was shared with the research partner in September 2017. Initial findings were shared September through November 2017 in Commission meetings and subcommittee meetings. The final report was completed in January 2018. Additionally, CoC specific reports were developed and distributed in January 2018.

A final challenge that will be addressed in the months leading up to the 2018 MA Youth Count is for the state to develop marketing materials and mechanisms to encourage youth across the state to take the survey independent of CoC efforts. The analysis of cities and towns where no surveys were administered can help guide the implementation of statewide efforts to increase the coverage of MA Youth Count outreach efforts. Adding a Survey Site question to the Uniform Survey Tool that gets entered into the database, will greatly facilitate our understanding of where young people take the survey and whether it was completed via a Youth Ambassador, Street Outreach, Agency-based, or via the Web/Social Media.

Appendix B: Regional History of Data Collection and Funding/Policy on LGBTQ Youth Homelessness

Date	Policy and Funding	Data Collection
October 2011		Worcester's Point in Time youth homelessness survey through Clark University and the Compass Network- no mention of LGBTQ youth in the report
September 2011		Study on the High Burden of Homelessness Among Sexual-Minority Adolescents: Findings from a Representative High School Sample- showed 25% of lesbian/gay, 15% of bisexual, and 3% of heterosexual youth from the 2005 and 2007 YRBS were homeless
Fall 2011		MHASA's statewide shelter survey of homeless youth
December 2012	Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth established based on the demonstrated need from the MHASA survey	
November 2013	MHASA launches "housing program for LGBTQ unaccompanied homeless young adults", providing 32 units of permanent supportive housing in Greenfield, Boston and Cambridge	
December 2013- January 2014		First MA Youth Count Survey
January 2015	signing of the unaccompanied youth homelessness bill into law and the Legislature's	

	inclusion of \$2 million in the final FY'16 and FY'17 budgets for youth housing demonstration projects	
January/February 2015		Youth Count Survey
May 2016		Youth Count Survey
May 2017		Youth Count Survey
July 2017	State budget cut the \$2 million for youth homelessness demonstration projects	
September 2017	Governor Baker reinstated \$600,000 of the original \$2,000,000 for demonstration projects	

Appendix C: Interview Process with LGBTQ and Youth Housing Service Providers

Personal/Project Information

Researcher's Name:	Molly Kellman
Advisor:	Dr. Laurie Ross
Dept./Box Address:	International Development Community and Environment
Title of Research Project:	LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in Worcester, MA
Grant Agency:	N/A

Survey Information

1. The Nature of Your Subjects:

The potential subjects are identified through their organizational ties to youth/LGBTQ/housing service organizations throughout the cities of Worcester, Greenfield, Boston and Cambridge. I will be gathering data on Worcester's the service network capacity, barriers to providing service, and the understanding of social service and housing needs of homeless LGBTQ youth from the perspective of the City's service providers. I will use data from Greenfield, Boston, and/or Cambridge as localized models of best practice for serving unaccompanied LGBTQ youth.

The purpose of this study is to make recommendations for improving Worcester's capacity to serve this population, which I will substantiate with findings from the cities of Greenfield, Boston and Cambridge. In 2013, these three cities received funding earmarked for LGBTQ youth housing services through the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance. Service providers in these organizations have an organizational focus on serving homeless LGBTQ youth, and have valuable insight into the effectiveness of different ways to work with this population. I will compare city-specific findings from the state-wide 2017 Youth Count! Homelessness Survey to the findings from my interviews with service providers in these four cities to identify themes of need, barriers to service, and effective strategies for serving this population.

2. Identification of Subjects:

Subjects will be identified through a preliminary internet search, and through the 2013 Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance LGBTQ youth housing funding recipients. I work at a housing specialist in Worcester, MA, and I will also use my experiential knowledge of service providers in the city. Subjects will be approached through email, and participation will be entirely voluntary. The subjects of this study will be adult service providers who work with LGBTQ or homeless youth. Instead of interviewing youth, I will interview service providers about their experiences and insights working with this population.

Recruiting Text:

My name is Molly Kellman and I am a student conducting a study in the Community Development and Planning program in the International Development Community and Environment Department at Clark University on LGBTQ youth homelessness. The goal of this study is to review findings from the 2017 Youth Count! Homelessness Survey and interviews with service providers to recommend possible improvements in accessibility and implementation of social services for LGBTQ homeless youth in Worcester, MA.

I am reaching out to you to request your voluntary participation in this study as a service provider to homeless and/or LGBTQ youth. I am interested in the experiences, observations, needs and recommendations of professionals who have a nuanced understanding of the realities unaccompanied LGBTQ youth face. It will take approximately 45 minutes of your time. Participation is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question [or do any task] that you do not wish to answer [or do], and if you wish to drop out of the study at any time, you are free to do so. Your answers will be kept fully confidential, and all participants will be referred to by code only.

If you wish to participate or have any questions, please call me at 443-510-3080 or email me at mckellman@clarku.edu. My research supervisor's contact information is: Dr. Laurie Ross, Associate Director of Community Development and Planning program and faculty member in the International Development Community and Environment Department at Clark University, lross@clarku.edu, (508) 793-7642

3. Testing Procedure:

Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes, and will not require any degree of deception. The interviews will take place in the participant's office, or in another private meeting place. I will ensure privacy by clarifying with the participant the length of the interview so that they can plan for any potential interruptions and prevent any non-emergencies. I will also silence my cell phone and make sure that there is no one else in the room before beginning the interview. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews is to obtain practice-based knowledge of the experiences of LGBTQ homeless youth, which relies on transparency between the interviewer and participant. The study is not expected to subject the interview participant to physical or psychological discomfort. The nature of the interview questions is not personal, and does not require the participant to disclose sensitive information about themselves, their organization, or the populations they serve. At the beginning of the recording, I will state that the participant should not mention anything that would violate HIPPA.

See Appendix A for a copy of interview questions.

4. Subjects Rights:

- a) Security of person is not a likely risk. There is minimal risk of legal, social or professional damage to the participant if they disclose sensitive information during the interview. If the participant reveals information protected by HIPPA, or would potentially damage the reputation or relationships of their personal career or agency, I will erase that information from my data records and will not include it in my final report. A copy of my final report will be given to all participants before submission.
- b) Participation is confidential, and participants will be cited as 'Participant #'. No personal questions, or questions that would put the reputation or credibility of the individual or their organization will be asked. All data will be kept in a password-protected computer, but will not be coded due to its qualitative nature. Only the primary researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the data.
- c) There is no expectation that the interview process will change the participation in any way, since they are primarily describing their own experiences and understandings.

5. Consent Form:



Interview Consent Form

Title of Research Study: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in Worcester, MA

Person in charge of study: Molly Kellman, graduate student in the Community Development and Planning program
443 510 3080
mkellman@clarku.edu

Researcher supervisor: Dr. Laurie Ross, Associate Director of the International Development Community and Environment Department
Associate Professor of Community Development and Planning
(508) 793-7642
lross@clarku.edu

The signing of this form constitutes consent to participate in a 45-minute interview being conducted by Molly Kellman, graduate student in the Community Development and Planning program under the International Development Community and Environment department at Clark University. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences and service needs of LGBTQ homeless youth throughout Massachusetts to improve the social service network in Worcester, MA. Your participation may contribute to expanding the knowledge of LGBTQ youth-specific housing models, as well as the improvement of the youth housing service network in Worcester. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to terminate your participation in this research at any time, or to refuse to answer any questions to which you don't want to respond without penalty. Your participation in this study is confidential, and you will be identified as 'Participant #'. Participants are not expected to experience any discomfort or increased risks

Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked storage area in The International Development Community and Environment House at Clark University accessible only to Molly Kellman and Laurie Ross separate from audio recordings and transcripts. Transcripts will be stored in electronic form only, in password protected files on Molly Kellman's computer. Recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the one year research project. Password protected transcript files will be retained indefinitely after project completion. If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Molly Kellman (mkellman@clarku.edu, 443-510-3080) or Dr. Laurie Ross (lross@clarku.edu, 508-793-7642)

By signing below, you verify that you have read this consent form, agree to participate in this interview, and have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____ (Signature) _____ (Date)

_____ (Printed Name)

Consent to be audio recorded (circle one): YES NO

_____ (Signature) _____ (Date)

This study has been approved by the Clark Committee for the Rights of Human Participants in Research and Training Programs (IRB). Any questions about human rights issues should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. James P. Elliott (508) 793-7152.

6. Program Necessity:

Deceit will not be involved at any point during this survey process, and written consent for all interviews will be obtained from the interview participants.

7. Risks

In my estimation, there is little to no risk involved for the subject. Participants will be answering questions about their understanding of available services, evaluations of best models of practice, their experiences with barriers to providing service etc. They will not be providing personally sensitive information in any way.

Interview Questions

1. Does your organization serve or encounter LGBTQ homeless youth?
2. What other agencies do you collaborate to serve this population? What other services that you know of are frequented or available to LGBTQ homeless youth?
3. What do you see as the major barriers to providing service to this population?
4. What approaches to serving this population do you see as effective?
5. What services in addition to housing do you see as the greatest needs for LGBTQ homeless youth?
6. What changes to your organization's existing service network would make the needs of this population more attainable?
7. What kinds of support, and from whom, do you need to enact these changes?

Appendix D: Key to the Study's Service Providers and Youth Services

<u>Provider</u>	<u>Service</u>
Provider 1	Service A
Provider 2	Service B
Provider 3	Service C
Provider 4	Service D
Provider 5	Service E
Provider 6	Service F

Appendix E: Worcester's LGBTQ and Youth Housing Service Network

Specialized out-of-home living programs

- Mental health
 - Burncoat Family Center
 - Department of Mental Health- Intensive Residential Treatment Programs
 - Adolescent STARR (Short Term Assessment and Rapid Reintegration)
- Substance use treatment
 - Motivating Youth Recovery: 14-day detoxification program
 - Grace House: 3-month residential recovery home for girls
- Pregnant/parenting
 - LUK INC. Maternity Group home for youth age 16-21
 - You Inc. Pregnant and Parenting Teens Transitional Living
- Job Corps

Transitional living

- LUK- Transitional to Independent Living (TIL) Program
- SMOC- Transitional Aged Youth Single Room Occupancy (SRO's)
- You Inc.- Transitional Living Program

Independent living

- ESG programs- The Bridge of Central MA
 - LUK
 - SMOC

Emergency shelter: minimum age 18

- SMOC- Queens St.
- Overflow/seasonal- Temple St.
- Abby's House

Street outreach

- Stand Up for Kids
- CHL HOAP- not specified for youth
- Quality of Life- not specified for youth

LGBTQ drop-in centers

- Safe Homes
- APW- SWAGLY

