

# NO FIXED ADDRESS: YOUNG, QUEER, AND RESTLESS

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## What do you need to know?

LGBTQ youth disproportionately experience homelessness in Canada. Living with an unsupportive family can directly lead to homelessness, and without many services or any shelters specifically equipped to meet the needs of LGBTQ youth, many turn to the streets due to fear of homophobic or transphobic violence. There is a need for more research to document the complexities of coming out, forming one's sexual and gender identities, as well as the additional stigma, discrimination and burdens LGBTQ youth face while on the street.

## What did the researcher do?

A critical ethnography research methodology was used for this study, which included gathering data from participatory observation, arts-informed research, focus groups and interviews. The researcher interviewed 11 LGBTQ street-involved youth about the ongoing challenges and barriers they face in Toronto's shelter system.

Mandatory training workshops for shelter staff were also observed, and

the researcher conducted individual interviews with trainers to learn about any training staff received regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness. Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with service providers and government officials in Toronto's Shelter, Support and Administration to learn more about their perceptions and understanding of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system.

### WHAT IS THIS CHAPTER ABOUT?



This chapter outlines the complex needs of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. It discusses preliminary findings from ongoing research regarding changes to Toronto's shelter system that are necessary if we are to provide a safe, accessible and supportive environment for LGBTQ youth who are homeless. Its emphasis is on giving voice to LGBTQ youth in Toronto, and using their lived experience as knowledge.

#### ARTICLE SOURCE

Abramovich, A. (2013). No Fixed Address: Young, Queer, and Restless. In Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Buccieri, K., Karabanow, J., & Marsolais, A. (Eds.), *Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice* (387-403). Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

# What did the researcher find?

Staff varied in their acknowledgement of homophobia and transphobia as major problems in their shelters, with some acknowledging the problem and others feeling that it was not a major concern. A number of staff felt that some of their colleagues ignored the problem. There is currently no formal, mandatory anti-homophobia training for shelter staff, and youth who are subject to acts of hate/violence do not have a reliable, accessible channel in which to lodge formal complaints. This research demonstrates an urgent need for more LGBTQ-specific services and specialized housing in Toronto. This does not eliminate the need to also make all shelters safer.

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## What can we do with this research?

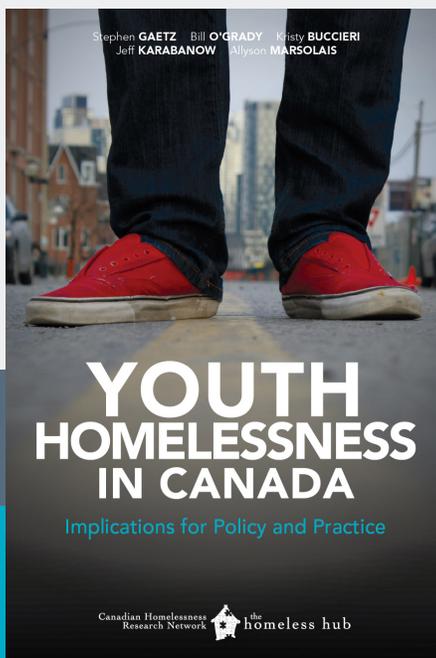
This research can be used to inform social service workers, shelter providers and policy makers about the issues of LGBTQ youth homelessness and the need to fund a specialized LGBTQ shelter, mandatory anti-homophobia/anti-transphobia training for shelter staff, and further research in this area. This

research can also be used to mobilize knowledge amongst professionals working with homeless youth, as well as the general public, who need a solid understanding of the impacts of homophobia and transphobia and the ways in which the LGBTQ community has been and still is marginalized and oppressed.

### About the researcher



ALEX (ILONA) ABRAMOVICH is a Doctoral Candidate in the Adult Education and Community Development program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education-University of Toronto. Alex is currently investigating the changes that need to be implemented in Toronto’s shelter system in order for it to become safer, more accessible, and more supportive for LGBTQ homeless youth.



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