AIDS Stigma Taunts Homeless LGBT Youth

March 8, 2012 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

The White House will be convening in Detroit an LGBT conference on housing and homelessness, which as far as I know is the first time such a thing has happened.

No conversation about homelessness among LGBT people can be credible without focusing on the disproportionate impact it has on LGBT youth.

An article at HuffPost Gay Voices does a great job of describing how bad the situation is for LGBT youth on the street.

From the article:

LGBT young people represent a dramatically high proportion of an estimated 600,000 or more homeless youths across the country - between 20 percent and 40 percent, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. But only about 5 percent of youths identify themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Also in the article, Carl Siciliano, executive director of the Ali Forney Center, which helps homeless LGBT youth in New York City, offers his insights:

Siciliano believes there's a new reason for the rising number of LGBT youths seeking shelter. As some states legalize gay marriage and the military welcomes openly gay soldiers, "Many kids think, `Oh, I'm ready to come out,'" he says.

As a result, the average age of young people declaring their sexuality - or at least sharing their doubts about it - has dropped dramatically in recent years to as young as the early teens, according to the Family Acceptance Project.

Some families are not ready for them, nor are segments of society, he says. Each rejection turns into a homeless youth looking for a bed. And there aren't enough.

"These kids are the collateral damage of our cultural wars," Siciliano says.

To think that our progress as a people has also increased the suffering of our youth is beyond words. But I do believe he is correct.

What struck me most in the article as a gay man with HIV who tested positive for the virus at the age of 22 was the slideshow of personal stories from homeless LGBT youth.

From a transgender youth named Paris:

I grew up with my mom in Brooklyn. I came out to her when I was 15. She wasn't happy with it ... She attached

all the negative stigmas to being gay. Doing sex work, having AIDS. She was always saying I was going to get AIDS. I wasn't even sexually active … One day she said she was going to leave me. I thought she was joking, but three days later she packed up and moved.

And from a gay youth named Terrence:

I grew up in Foster Care in Greensboro, N.C. It got bad when people realized I was gay. The staff treated me horribly after that. They would make gay jokes about me and tell me I was going to die of AIDS. You don't treat a 13-year-old kid like that.

AIDS stigma taunts homeless LGBT youth. AIDS stigma taunts all LGBT youth. AIDS stigma taunts all LGBT people. When will LGBT people turn the tables on AIDS stigma?

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