

Are the kids alright? Transyouth in bathrooms and on the streets

Won't someone think of the children? There is big money in advocating for queer youth. But who is being served? GJ's discussion on strategies for radical support for queer youth and their consequences centered on two current trends. The first is accommodations of gender non-conforming youth in public schools and the wave of anti-trans legislation in response to this. The other is the continuing problem of queer youth homelessness and whether queer-specific responses are necessary.

In the past year, trans youth have regularly appeared in the media as the focus of legal battles over their access to bathrooms and locker rooms in public schools. Our discussion focused on the Chicago-area example, in which a Schaumburg trans youth secured access to locker room use after a legal battle that ended in the Department of Education ruling in support of the youth. Some significant points of discussion

- Noting that this student enjoyed not just the support of her family, but also of her peers and their families, we discussed the extent to which legal support is accessible to GNC youth who do not have access to such social resources. Furthermore, the financial consequences of being stripped of Title IX funding would be very different in a wealthy suburb than for a Chicago Public School with a more modest tax base.
- The driving advocates for these youth are their families and communities - no major Chicago-area trans-focused non-profit or activist group devotes significant resources specifically to GNC youth in schools; they primarily focus on adult needs such as housing and employment.

Of course, some GNC youth are in need of housing because their families are not supportive. Our focus on queer youth homelessness looked at the extent to which organizations that specifically serve these youth are organized to address other ways in they are marginalized or if they center the queerness of the youth in their vision. Some significant points of discussion:

- Local organizations dedicated to serving homeless queer youth traditionally derive their funding directly or indirectly from resources intended to prevent HIV and/or support HIV+ individuals. Some, like Howard Brown's Broadway Youth Center, primarily envision these youth as queer and are not foundationally structured to consider other factors that create homelessness. Others, like the Puerto Rican Cultural Center's El Rescate, target queer youth from a specific neighborhood, enabling a more synthetic response to the range of factors that might bring an individual into their program.
- While new organizations like Project Fierce envision alternatives to traditional services, the necessity of financial sustainability opens up questions about what other resources they envision to be available to staff, volunteers, and the youth they serve. For example, will youth enrolled in high school be expected to work as part of their contribution to the support of the house? Would this be determined based on the conventions of the communities to which these youth belong or would the program be an opportunity to focus more exclusively on education than a youth might otherwise be able to?

The major conclusions from our discussion all centered around the difficulty of providing radical support for queer and/or gender non-conforming youth because of the different needs of youth versus those of queer and/or GNC adults. Trans organizations have primarily organized around the needs of adults rather than youth - in no small part because trans people continue to be marginalized socially and economically; as a result, the organizations taking the lead in reaching out to and/or organizing families who are supportive of trans youth are not community based, but rather are professional (social workers, doctors, or lawyers). Conversely, organizations seeking to support homeless queer youth are often an extension of LGBT organizations originally founded to serve adults and the centering of queer identity may be of variable value for supporting youth in negotiating homelessness.

Interested in hearing more? Get in touch we'd love for you to join us or collaborate with us on continuing this and other conversations! Check out our events page for upcoming meetings.