



REACH OUT

Enhancing Services to Out-of-Home
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning Youth

Evaluation 2004-2006

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ABOUT NEW ENGLAND NETWORK FOR CHILD, YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services (NEN) is a private, not-for-profit organization that works to support and advance child and youth services throughout New England. Through linked professional development and practical research divisions, NEN works collaboratively to strengthen social services, promote best practices and respond to emerging policy and practice issues.

This document is a prime example of a formative, participatory evaluation. In addition to documenting specific outcomes, this evaluation explores the skills, knowledge and perspectives acquired by the individuals involved with the project. Our vision for this evaluation is rooted in the conviction that project evaluation and project management are inextricably linked. This evaluation will inform future programming, our understanding of best practices in the field, and factors that lead to improved services for all youth.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
BACKGROUND	5
GLBTQ YOUTH IN RURAL SETTINGS	6
GOAL AND OBJECTIVES	8
OUTCOMES	9
REACH OUT ACTIVITIES	10
EVALUATION	10
IMPACT OF REACH OUT ON PARTICIPATING AGENCIES	11
THE YOUTH VOICE	12
THE PROVIDER VOICE	15
SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS	17
LESSONS LEARNED	18
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?	19
RESOURCES	21

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At its best, evaluation is an empowering experience, enabling participants to analyze their world, and leading to planning and action. Although an outside evaluator may facilitate the process, the goal is not to transfer and impose the outsider's perspective, but to express, share, and strengthen the ideas and intentions of participants. This implicit understanding has informed every step in the evaluation process described in this report.

This report represents the coordinated efforts of many individuals, including the agencies that participated in Reach Out, our three Outright partners in Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire, Reach Out staff, youth workers, administrators, community leaders, and other agencies with whom we have collaborated over the years. We also wish to acknowledge the private foundations that have supported this project, including the Tides Foundation's B'charta B'chaim Fund; NH Endowment for Health; Gamma Mu Foundation; Samara Foundation; and the Gill Foundation.

We are especially grateful to the many young people who participated directly and indirectly in the project by providing training to our agency partners, sharing their personal experiences with youth workers, and helping us understand their needs. Throughout this project, young people's willingness to share their experiences was moving and powerful, and we wish to honor both the struggles and achievements of young LGBTQ leaders despite sometimes overwhelming odds.

Over the past three years, Reach Out has learned a great deal about the impact of the program design we have set in motion. Ultimately, we hope that these findings prove inspirational, enhancing our ability to help young people embrace opportunity and possibility.

Melanie Goodman
Executive Director

BACKGROUND

In our years of experience serving at-risk youth in New England, one population has continually emerged as being particularly vulnerable: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth.¹ Confronted by a pattern of discrimination directed in a sweeping fashion against LGBTQ individuals of all ages, LGBTQ youth (and straight youth perceived as being LGBTQ) are especially susceptible because of their youth and isolation. LGBTQ youth often find themselves outsiders at an early age, with prejudice and discrimination arrayed against them from vantage points that question their morality, emotional health, and even their acceptance in the “eyes of God.”

In 1995, NEN began addressing the needs of LGBTQ youth by:

- Developing and piloting an organizational assessment tool focused on the effectiveness of service delivery for LGBTQ youth; and
- Developing and piloting a training and technical assistance program focused on improving service delivery for LGBTQ youth.

Informal evaluation with participating organizations showed that these strategies, implemented together, dramatically altered individual perceptions about LGBTQ youth and the need to provide services designed specifically to reach and serve LGBTQ youth. This early work also led NEN to reaffirm its commitment not just to support the development and expansion of direct-service programs for LGBTQ youth, but to foster fundamental and sustainable institutional changes to improve accessibility and provide a safer environment for LGBTQ young people.

In 2000, at the National Network for Youth’s advisory committee meeting in Washington DC, NEN’s Task Force for LGBTQ Youth presented findings from the pilot study, and in FY 2004 (after several years of development), NEN launched the three-year Reach Out Initiative in northern New England. Over this period, from FY 2004-2006, Reach Out’s goal has been to foster positive institutional change in the systems that serve LGBTQ youth, particularly those who are homeless, runaway, and/or in foster care or the juvenile justice system.

¹ “‘Transgender’ is an umbrella term for all who challenge the boundaries of biological sex and culturally determined gender expression; those who choose not to conform to their culture’s gender norms, including transsexuals, cross-dressers, Two-Spirit people, drag performers, and people who do not identify with their biological sex.” (Definition from *Advocates for Youth Fact Sheet*.)

REACH OUT YOUTH-SERVICE AGENCY PARTICIPANTS

MAINE

Breakwater Teen Center
Rockland

Greenleaf/SILP
(Rumford Group Home)
Rumford

Preble Street Teen Center
Portland

Sweetser
Saco

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Child & Family Services
Manchester

Dept. of Juvenile Justice Services
Manchester

New Hampshire Division for Children,
Youth & Families
Concord

North American Family Institute, Inc./
Northeastern Family Institute, Inc.
Bethlehem
(Participated in Year 1 only)

VERMONT

Lund Family Center
Burlington

North East Kingdom Community
Action (NEKCA)
Newport

Youth Services Inc. of
Windham County
Brattleboro

GLBTQ YOUTH IN RURAL SETTINGS

KEY FINDINGS OF NATIONAL STUDY ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG GLBTQ YOUTH

- Family conflict, including conflict over a youth's sexual orientation or gender identity, is the primary cause for young people becoming homeless. In one study, 50% of gay male teens who came out to their parents experienced a negative reaction and 26% of them were told they must leave home.
- GLBTQ youth report experiencing discrimination, harassment and violence at shelters and service providers. For example, one facility in Michigan forced youth who identified as or were perceived as being GLBTQ to wear orange jumpsuits.
- GLBTQ homeless youth are more likely to suffer from mental health issues and substance abuse than are their heterosexual peers, and are more likely to be victimized by sexual predators.

Growing up 'different' in a society that assumes and demands heterosexuality can be devastating for young people. It is important to understand that it is not their sexual orientation creating the problem, it is society's response to this sexuality. Active discrimination causes many LGBT youth to be profoundly isolated from their peers, schools and families.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual &
Transgender Youth:
Pressing Needs
& Promising Practice

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
& Transgender Youth:
An Epidemic of Homelessness,
December
2006

In rural areas such as northern New England, the needs of GLBTQ youth are made more acute by the level of geographic and social isolation. Already lacking comprehensive health and human services, many communities outside of major metropolitan areas of New England lack GLBTQ organizations and provide little in the way of services or advocacy that are specific to the GLBTQ community. Moreover, GLBTQ youth in northern New England often report extreme reluctance to seek health care and other services, due to bias, prejudice, and a lack of understanding displayed by health and human service providers.

Despite the fact that GLBTQ youth have been identified as a group at disproportionately high risk for experiencing verbal insults, threats, assaults, depression, substance use, and suicidality, very little research has been conducted to explore this reality in any real depth. Although public health officials in Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire all conduct regular youth risk behavior surveys, only the Vermont Department of Health asks multiple questions about sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.¹ The Maine Youth Risk Behavior Study asks one indirect question, and New Hampshire doesn't ask any questions related to sexual orientation.²

Analysis of data from the 1997-2003 *Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey* confirms that, compared to their peers, GLBTQ youth experience the highest levels of at-school victimization, including verbal insults, bullying and assaults. In addition, GLBTQ youth who experience high levels of at-school victimization also report significantly higher levels of substance use, depression, suicidality, and high risk sexual behaviors. GLBTQ youth are three to six times more likely to be threatened or injured with a weapon at school or make a suicide attempt requiring medical attention.³

At the time Reach Out was being launched, NEN's Vermont partners also reported a severe backlash to Vermont's ground-breaking passage of civil unions legislation. Organized opposition from groups such as "Take Back Vermont" and "Who Would Have Thought" launched widespread attacks on the GLBTQ community. NEN members reported that GLBTQ youth suffered acutely.

Despite the scarcity of data from New Hampshire and Maine, we know through NEN's Reach Out partners that GLBTQ teens in these states have been extremely isolated, struggling with circumstances that are at least as difficult as those found in Vermont.

GLBTQ youth, high percentages of whom face some level of homophobia and violence at school, in their communities, and/or at home, are at risk of adopting unsafe and potentially lethal behaviors as a way to manage their feelings of shame, isolation, fear, or anger. According to GLSEN's 2001 *National School Climate Survey*, 83% of GLBTQ students

reported experiencing verbal harassment, 65% reported sexual harassment, 42% reported physical harassment, and 14% reported physical assault. For LGBTQ youth, this reality can be devastating: 42% of lesbian adolescents and 34% of adolescent gay males who have suffered physical attack also attempt suicide.⁴ In fact, gay and lesbian youth are almost four times more likely to have attempted suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.⁵

LGBTQ teens also may find that their families are far from being a safe haven from societal homophobia. As LGBTQ teens come out of the closet, an estimated 26% are rejected by their families and told they must leave home, and 12% are physically attacked by family members. LGBTQ youth also leave home due to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. In fact, recent data suggest that LGBTQ youth make up a disproportionately high percentage of out-of-home youth, with an estimated 40% of out-of-home New England youth identifying as LGBTQ.⁶ The implications of such large numbers are profound, particularly in rural communities, where isolation is a key factor in rural youth suicides.

The rural character of northern New England – with minimal transportation, isolation, and scarcity of services and resources – presents a tremendous challenge for region-wide programming, particularly for marginalized communities such as LGBTQ youth.

¹ Since 1995, the Vermont Dept. of Health/Education *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* has derived information about LGB youth by asking respondents to answer questions about whether they engage in sexual contact with same sex and/or opposite sex partners. In 2005, however, the survey added a more direct question, asking youth if they identify as heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual, or not sure.

² 2005 *Maine Youth Risk Behavior Study*; 2005 *New Hampshire Youth Risk Behavior Survey*.

³ Analyses compiled by Randall L. Sell, Sc.D., Drexel University, School of Public Health, Philadelphia, PA, and reported on <http://gaydata.org>.

⁴ Victim Services/Traveler's Aid, "Streetwork Project Study," 1991.

⁵ *Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, 2001.

⁶ *Ibid.*

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Over the past three years, Reach Out has sought to drive sustainable, institutional changes in the capacity of youth-serving agencies to effectively serve LGBTQ youth. Specifically, Reach Out activities were designed to enable agencies to embrace the following “open, affirming, and inclusive” practices:

Organizational Environment

- Organizational environment is characterized by respectful and inclusive language, absence of slurs or jokes based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, and visual displays (posters, agency policy, etc.) affirming the agency’s non-discriminatory practices and LGBTQ-friendly environment.
- Staff and public relations materials use respectful and inclusive language that does not assume youth have a specific sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Staff and/or supervisors intervene immediately when other staff or program participants behave in a homophobic manner.
- Grievance procedures for staff and program participants outline steps for resolving complaints pertaining to homophobic behaviors.
- Youth workers respect a youth’s gender identity and expression, including calling transgender and gender-nonconforming youth by the name and pronoun that they go by as well as allowing them to dress in accordance with their gender.
- Program development and fundraising activities include a focus on supporting activities that promote an open, affirming and inclusive agency and community culture towards LGBTQ individuals.

Staff Development

- Through orientation and ongoing mandatory training, all staff are informed about the needs of LGBTQ youth and are able to provide appropriate resources, affirm youth regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, and appreciate and meet the unique needs of LGBTQ youth.
- Clinical and general supervision includes a focus on the competency of youth workers and other staff to address the needs of LGBTQ youth.
- Written personnel policies for staff at all levels, including contracted providers, prohibit harassment and discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Staffing practices pertaining to recruitment, outreach, hiring and staff retention are explicit in embracing the agency’s open and affirming policies towards LGBTQ participants.

Program

- Youth programming includes dialogue and focus on all forms of diversity, including sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Written policies for youth are explicit in prohibiting anti-LGBTQ harassment and discrimination. Staff members are encouraged and supported in responding to homophobic behavior.
- Youth development policies and program practices support and encourage LGBTQ

healthy, safe, age-appropriate exploration and expression for all youth, including LGBTQ youth.

- Rules regarding sexual or gender-related behavior and expression are applied equally to all youth.
- All youth have opportunities to appropriately express their sexual orientation or gender identity through conversations, social activities and non-sexual expression such as clothing, jewelry, books and posters.
- Youth workers are able to provide LGBTQ youth with information and access to social and recreational services and events consistent with their interests and geared toward the community with which they identify. In addition, youth are not required to participate in activities that discriminate against LGBTQ individuals or render them invisible.
- LGBTQ youth are actively involved in selecting “open and affirming” placements when they cannot live with their families. Placement options include LGBTQ-supportive foster families, shelters, group homes, etc.
- Youth-serving programs do not isolate or segregate LGBTQ youth to keep them safe.
- Staff are sensitive to the safety and challenges confronting transgender youth placed in group care, and housing placements for transgender youth take into account the young person’s emotional and physical well-being. In general, accommodations are made (extra privacy for showers, for example, or a private room) to house a transgender youth according to his or her gender identity.
- LGBTQ youth are provided with information and access to supportive, inclusive and non-judgmental health care and mental health services.

OUTCOMES

Reach Out was designed to bring about the following long-term changes among the population of out-of-home LGBTQ youth in northern New England:¹

- LGBTQ youth feel more comfortable approaching providers; they receive appropriate health care and other support services; and they know that a support network is available to help them navigate challenging homophobic and other prejudicial systems.
- Over time, the health and well-being of LGBTQ out-of-home youth improves through increased access to support services and sensitive health care and human service providers.
- LGBTQ youth know about LGBTQ-friendly providers in the community and know how to access safe services.
- Over time, homophobic attitudes diminish and community groups and individuals grow increasingly more tolerant and accepting of LGBTQ individuals. This, in turn, leads to increased feelings of safety, self-worth, community, and a sense of belonging for LGBTQ youth.

¹ Although these outcomes are long term in nature and difficult to measure (because regional data relative to LGBTQ youth is still virtually nonexistent), Reach Out focused on fostering changes within agencies that would be likely to lead to these outcomes.

- Gains made by LGBTQ youth, including increased access to health, increased support network, feelings of self worth and belonging are nurtured over time through programs that are effectively run, well-planned, -executed and evaluated. Strong agencies have the capacity to sustain positive institutional change and this, in turn, ensures that youth benefit from dependable providers with an ongoing focus on LGBTQ youth development.

REACH OUT ACTIVITIES

NEN delivered the Reach Out Initiative for three years, from FY 2004-2006. The program consisted of providing organizational assessment, training, technical assistance and capacity building assistance and support to ten participating agencies in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.¹ The five integrated Reach Out activities included:

1. Highly detailed on-site organizational assessment, focused on effectiveness in reaching, serving, and developing the leadership potential of LGBTQ youth.
2. Specialized one-day trainings developed from the assessment findings for each organization, offering an interactive format for providers to gather information, ask questions, and enhance their appreciation for the interrelatedness of issues.
3. On-site, phone, and electronic technical assistance, including assistance in developing an action plan to address weaknesses identified in the organizational assessment; revising organizational policies and program materials; providing networking, resource, and referral information; and evaluation.
4. Annual follow-up assessment and technical assistance related to implementing action plan and/or revising action plan to enhance services for LGBTQ youth.
5. Program-specific technical assistance, training, and funding to build organizational capacity and disseminate and promote best practices related to LGBTQ programs and policies; enable the development of meaningful evaluation systems; and enable Reach Out organizations to leverage new income through fund development assessment, planning, and implementation of new fundraising strategies.

In actuality, only a few of the agencies participated in the organizational capacity-building activities, with most agencies focusing instead on introductory training and technical assistance.

EVALUATION

How has Reach Out impacted youth-service organizations? To what degree has organizational capacity increased with respect to responding to out-of-home LGBTQ youth? What role does Reach Out play in mobilizing and building a sustained and effective regional system for supporting LGBTQ youth? The Reach Out participatory evaluation was designed to answer questions like these and provide information to facilitate ongoing dialogue about services for LGBTQ youth among youth-service providers, policy makers, and planners.

In the first two years of this project, data collection included preliminary and follow-up agency assessments, written evaluations completed after trainings, and phone interviews with program directors. In the final year, additional data collection included:

1. Community impact survey administered to Reach Out agency staff and management participants.
2. Youth survey, with a focus on access to services for out-of-home youth, provider sensitivity to needs of LGBTQ youth, and the needs of the LGBTQ population.
3. Stakeholder interviews with a diverse sample of individuals, including those from Reach Out agencies, youth-serving agencies not participating in Reach Out, and other individuals with an interest in Reach Out or serving GLBTQ youth.

IMPACT OF REACH OUT ON PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

One of the basic truths that challenged Reach Out in all three years can best be expressed by the adage, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” Or, put another way, despite ample evidence that out-of-home LGBTQ youth are in critical need of open, affirming, and inclusive services, participating agencies were not entirely willing to embrace each facet of the Reach Out model. For example, shortly after its organizational assessment and initial training, one New Hampshire organization dropped out of the program entirely, citing fears that Reach Out would drive away funders and incite hostility from the surrounding community. Moreover, this agency felt the program was unnecessary in light of their belief that their service population did not include LGBTQ youth.

Although other agencies were much more open to engaging in the program, the need to effectively serve LGBTQ youth was seen by many as a secondary priority. Early on, Reach Out staff became aware that the program’s success relied on their ability to educate administrators about the need for Reach Out.

The extent of Reach Out’s influence was explored in training evaluations and through detailed individual interviews with the six Reach Out partners listed on the right.

Raising Awareness

One of the most significant ways that Reach Out changed agencies was by raising their awareness of LGBTQ issues. In particular, many trainees said in evaluations that they had little or no previous knowledge about transgender youth. As one trainer explained, “The training opened up the [transgender] issue, introduced people to a whole new realism that they had never thought about.”

Many agency participants felt that the training worked because people were *required* to attend. Staff with NH DCYF, who institutionalized the training as part of their required curriculum, were most likely to indicate a significant increase in the competence of youth workers to work with LGBTQ youth. One interviewee cited the ongoing impact of staff discussing these issues “in their offices,” after

REACH OUT PARTNERS INTERVIEWED

United Way of Windham County (VT)
Julia Hampton

Baird Center/Howard Center (VT)
Tracy Carlson

Preble Street Resource Center (ME)
Jon Bradley

NH Child & Family Services
Gail Starr

NH Division for Children, Youth & Families
Brigitte Bowmar

NH Division for Children, Youth & Families
Rob Rodler

NH Seacoast Outright
Tawnee Walling

In general, the best thing about Reach Out is getting information about the particular needs of GLBTQ youth into the greater community. One of the benefits for us is that it furthers our mission, which is to continue to change the climate for GLBTQ youth in a positive way. It also gave us an opportunity to create some training materials and the ability to get into agencies that we wouldn’t have been able to reach without the project.

*Tawnee Walling
Seacoast Outright*

The Reach Out training was really helpful because it came to us! All of the evaluations came back very high and people got a lot of important information. People are scared because they don’t want to say the wrong thing, but having information is power, so I think people felt more empowered.

NH DCYF Training Participant

the training, and another felt that simply raising awareness was a huge benefit.

Updated Resources, Referrals & Materials

Many participants cited the value of obtaining updated resources, referrals and other related materials. “For the first time,” said one youth worker, “I was able to include LGBTQ information in our independent living packets for youth.” Many staff, both in the organizational assessments and interviews, talked about having adapted policies and procedures and adding movies, books, posters and other items to make youth feel safer in their environments.

Increasing Sensitivity and Understanding

People who attended trainings clearly came away with a much deeper understanding and sensitivity about the needs of LGBTQ youth. One interviewee put it succinctly, saying, “I think the Reach Out Initiative has improved the ability of the youth workers to provide more specific and client-centered care.” Reach Out was seen as providing youth workers with needed tools, enhancing everyone’s knowledge about the issues, and providing a foundation for planning future programs. One NH DCYF training participant affirmed the value of devoting time to this issue:

It’s a topic that doesn’t get a lot of attention, so to spend a whole day was special, and thorough, and successfully brought attention to an area that is really key when dealing with youth in child welfare. We’re going to encounter diversity and we have the potential to interact with all kinds of youth, so it’s incumbent on us to be familiar and comfortable with all kinds of youth.

Increasing Community Support and Awareness

Agency participants and trainees also spoke enthusiastically about the impact of Reach Out on the broader community. As one agency participant explained, “What Reach Out did here was create some additional dialogue about our LGBTQ youth in the community and some additional understanding of that population for our staff.”

THE YOUTH VOICE

Sixty-two (62) young people, all associated with youth-service agencies in northern New England, completed the Reach Out Youth Survey.¹ Approximately half of the surveys were obtained through Reach Out partner agencies, and the other half from non-Reach Out agencies. Unlike the interviews, which were designed to elicit information about the direct impact of Reach Out on agencies and youth workers, the Youth Survey was designed to explore the extent to which young people – both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ – currently feel supported by youth-serving agencies in general.

Slightly over half of the respondents self-identified as “heterosexual/straight,” with the remainder identifying as LGBTQ. Because youth were chosen at random to complete the survey, this finding – that 44% of youth are LGBTQ – corroborates other studies, which indicate that LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented among homeless and at-risk youth. Half of the respondents live in Maine, with the remainder divided evenly between NH and Vermont. Half of respondents were between the ages of 18-20, and the other half were under 18.

¹The youth respondents were drawn from agencies that focus largely on serving at-risk and out-of-home youth.

Services Used By Respondents in Past Year	% of Respondents
Shelter/Temporary Housing	37%
Individual or group counseling	32%
Other health care provider/health clinic	23%
Crisis hotline for teens/teen hotline	19%
Peer leadership program	19%
Drug or alcohol treatment services	16%
Family planning services/birth control	16%
Group Home	16%
Services for rape victims	13%
Legal services	11%
Domestic violence services/battered women's programs	6%

Respondents self-selected as 58% female; 40% male; and 2% did not respond. None of those surveyed self-selected as transgender.

The three northern New England states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont are less diverse than other New England states, with white/Caucasians comprising 96% of the population. Nearly 7% of individuals in these three states are non-native English speakers, with their primary language being French. Nevertheless, youth respondents were somewhat more diverse than the overall region, with 72% self-identifying as white/Caucasian; 12% as American Indian; 4% as black/African American; 4% as Hispanic/Latino, and 4% as other/multiracial.

Almost three-quarters (74%) of all respondents said they were “very comfortable” with their sexual orientation; 18% said they were “comfortable,” and 6% said they were “neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.” No one described himself/herself as “uncomfortable.”

While 15% of respondents said they usually seek services provided specifically to the LGBTQ population, the vast majority of respondents usually seek services that are designed for the general population (40%) or the general youth population (26%). When asked to select the type of services they used in the past year, respondents were most likely to indicate shelter/temporary housing (37%) and individual or group counseling (32%). The above chart indicates services used most frequently by respondents.¹

Other services/supports listed by at least one participant included: foster care, AIDS project, LGBTQ support services, and friends.

Over two-thirds of respondents (68%) indicated that they received the assistance they needed; 18% said they “sometimes” received assistance; and 13% did not respond. No one indicated that they did not receive needed assistance. Similarly, 60% indicated that they had a “good experience,” 23% said they “sometimes” had a good experience; and 16% did not respond. No one said they did not have a good experience. For the most part, respondents also felt that youth workers were supportive and helpful. Only 13% said that youth workers were only “sometimes” helpful and 2% said they were not helpful. Thirteen percent (13%) did not respond.

¹ Percentage of respondents totals more than 100% because most respondents used more than one service.

On other questions, youth were somewhat less positive. For example, only 55% felt they could speak honestly with youth workers, and only 48% shared their sexual identity with youth workers. Nearly one-quarter (24%) said they did not reveal their sexual identity, and 15% said they sometimes do.

Over two-thirds (66%) said they would recommend the services to heterosexual/straight individuals, and nearly the same percentage (69%) said they would recommend the services to LGBTQ individuals.

In general, youth indicated that agencies were less effective at demonstrating inclusive practices, such as showing LGBTQ people in publicity material and including LGBTQ-appropriate options on forms. More than one-third of respondents (34%) indicated that agencies did not have posters on the walls, or books or magazines that showed gay as well as straight people. Twenty-three percent (23%) felt that materials “sometimes” depicted LGBTQ people; and 31% felt that materials depict LGBTQ people. A similar percentage (35%) indicated that agency forms do not provide options for a variety of sexual identities, while 24% felt this standard was being met “sometimes.”

Of the group that used services designed for the general population or general youth population only, the vast majority (73%) felt that agencies need to work on improving services for LGBTQ individuals.

Youth respondents added a variety of comments to their surveys, most often suggesting ways that services could be improved. Comments have been grouped below, according to general topic.

Need for Welcoming, Supportive Approach

- *It's important to just stay open to young people of every sexuality, race, gender, etc. And workers should keep the speech open and friendly.*
- *The way you talk to people can make them feel more like friends than like cases.*
- *Be very friendly, welcoming and accepting. Be nice, no cops.*
- *Hire staff that can relate to the things that the clients may be experiencing.*
- *Make it fun and have food.*
- *Be a little more supportive of people's needs and feelings.*

Services/Service Needs for LGBTQ youth

- *There should be more services for gay kids.*
- *There needs to be more services that can deal with gay and lesbian kids. We [LGBTQ youth] need to be more aware of what different agencies are for and who they are open to.*
- *There should be more informational talks at high schools and places where youth hang out about queer issues and problems and discrimination – the queer youth experience.*
- *Treat them [LGBTQ youth] like you would a friend or any other person, not like they are delinquents that need to be jailed or sheltered from the real world.*
- *Have more posters that show different kinds of people, including gay and lesbian teens.*

General Services/Service Needs for General Youth Population

- *I wish there was a way I could see a therapist.*
- *We need more information and support around transportation.*
- *Keep drugs out of the Teen Center.*
- *There should be more information and discussion about sexual assault and rape.*
- *Have more individual counseling available.*
- *Shelter programs and other services should have longer curfews.*

- Services would be better, and we'd be more likely to use them, if we didn't have to give the number of our guardian/parent.
- Provide more food for kids.

Other

- Agencies should be more open to hiring young people.
- I guess I feel that not only gay people are being harassed. Straight people are too, and it isn't always recognized.

THE PROVIDER VOICE

As part of this evaluation, NEN was interested in learning what some other youth providers – those not directly involved with Reach Out – believe about the needs of LGBTQ youth and their ability to serve this population. Essentially, we wanted to get a sense of how other providers were approaching the issue of working with LGBTQ youth and what they felt was needed, if anything, to build agency capacity to effectively serve this community. Information for this section was drawn from interviews with five well-established, non-Reach Out youth service agencies (all member agencies with NEN), two in Vermont, one in New Hampshire, and two in Maine. Information from these interviews is reported anonymously here, as a condition of the interviews.

Extent of Work with LGBTQ Youth

All of the groups except one work with LGBTQ youth as part of their larger youth population. As one interviewee stated, "They're among the other at-risk homeless and runaway youth we serve, so as a subpopulation, they're right in there. It's not our target group, but we serve them." One program director spoke about extensive work that her agency has done on this issue and said that although her agency was very interested in joining Reach Out, it was "possibly needed more in some other places." And another interviewee said regretfully, "We've never specifically done work on lesbian and gay issues due to the rural nature of our area. No one thinks we have gay and lesbian youth in the community."

Knowledge About LGBTQ Youth in the Local Community

All five interviewees were aware of the need to better serve LGBTQ youth in their communities. One of the interviewees, who described working on LGBTQ issues "for a long time," noted that other local programs for LGBTQ youth had lost funding in recent years, leaving their agency as a sole support in a conservative, rural region. She added, "We did what we could to make sure that our services were open and supportive of all kids, including gay kids, because there wasn't anywhere else in the community for them to go for support." An anti-gay referendum divided the entire community, including its young people, and generated negative public discourse. Still, "things have gotten better generally in recent years." She noted that it is becoming more acceptable for youth to identify as LGBTQ. As evidence, she cited findings from an HIV-risk survey that her program has administered over the years. In particular, in the most recent 2006 survey, 25% of youth described

QUOTES FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS

Preparing staff to work with these [LGBTQ] kids needs to be addressed by agencies and start at the top, or staff aren't going to feel the support that they need, and the kids will know – they can tell when something is real versus pretend.

Reach Out Provider Interview, 2006

It's a very complex issue, so people who maybe in their heads believe, oh yeah, I think that's okay and everybody is equal, etcetera, may still react to seeing a boy in a dress. Of course we still hear homophobic remarks from kids – saying "gay and faggot" in a derogatory way. We can't change society, so even though we're on the right road, our kids are no more open and tolerant than society at large. We just have to keep working on it.

Reach Out Provider Interview, 2006

When my staff put their hands on the doorknob of our building, I pay them to work with the youth in the way I think they should. We have a very low tolerance with anyone being negative with any of our youth for any reason. I send staff to as many sexuality trainings as I can.

Reach Out Provider Interview, 2006

This is a generation where twenty years from now we won't even be having this conversation. Vermont is very progressive and has done unique things to push this particular issue, and things are changing so quickly. But still young people are tentative and should be, because they still experience a fair amount of abuse because of their sexual identify. Fortunately, once they walk in the door they quickly realize there are opportunities here.

Reach Out Provider Interview, 2006

themselves as something other than heterosexual, compared to 13% in 1999, and 0% in 1989. She added, “It certainly is becoming more acceptable for kids to identify as LGBTQ, at least in an anonymous survey, though it is still far from easy to be out.”

Other interviewees described LGBTQ youth as still very closeted, particularly those in rural areas. As one interviewee in northern Maine explained,

It's still something that is quite hidden. We have a very high rate of suicide among our youth population, one that is among the highest rates in the nation. Since it [being visible as a LGBTQ person] is not socially accepted, we don't know if that suicide rate applies primarily or largely to LGBTQ youth, but I suspect and have always suspected that it's true. In the mid-section and southern parts of Maine, it's socially okay to be different, but we're in a very different kind of culture. Sometimes we get young people from the southern part of the state, and they come with different attitudes that they don't have to hide their sexuality. It's weird because in our area there are NO groups or clubs or other people who are open to admitting their preferences. That's where you end up seeing things like cutting – it's just not healthy.

All of those interviewed shared similar thoughts about the challenges facing LGBTQ youth in their communities, citing homophobia, hate speech, threats, and isolation as the most challenging.

Agency Response to LGBTQ Youth

Two of the interviewees come from agencies where numerous steps have been taken to improve services to LGBTQ youth. One of the groups has made institutional changes, including developing a new operating philosophy, eliminating discrimination and discriminatory language, and generally striving to “make our support visible and support our gay and lesbian staff by creating an accepting atmosphere where we value them as role models for kids.” The second agency has also worked hard to remove barriers to access, including re-writing their diversity statement, rethinking how they categorize and separate youth by gender, and updating forms to be more inclusive of all youth, including LGBTQ youth.

The other three interviewees all felt that, although some attempts had been made, more could be done by their agencies to better sensitize staff, particularly in light of constant staff turnover. One person explained, “We can't make assumptions that the training that has been done in the past is enough.” Another acknowledged that some staff still hold on to “unfortunate values and beliefs.”

Need for Tools and Support to Meet Needs of LGBTQ Youth

All five of the interviewees agreed that staff training is critical to improving services for LGBTQ youth, and several expressed the need for ongoing training due to high staff turnover. One person explained that agencies need to be prepared to make this a priority and deal directly with any controversy that might arise. Suggestions for improving services and/or meeting the needs of local LGBTQ youth included:

- Training: Provide on-site staff training and certification related to working with LGBTQ youth and doing educational presentations in the schools.
- Community Outreach: Increase amount and variety of outreach into the community.
- Community Networking: Develop a vibrant community support network committed to this issue. This will provide “safety in numbers” when controversy arises, and it

will encourage agency leaders to take a stand.

- Collaboration: Foster cross-discipline collaborations to build on work already being done in the field, pool training resources, and reach a greater proportion of the LGBTQ youth population.
- Education: Educate community groups about why it is important to serve LGBTQ youth. This is critical in reducing denial about the issue and mitigating the potential for a negative public response.
- Increased Visibility: Find ways to safely increase the visibility of the adult LGBTQ community, to serve as role models for youth.
- Evaluation/Follow Up: Many of the people interviewed made a strong case for the need to move beyond piece-meal trainings and incorporate a system of follow up to ensure that plans are being kept and progress made.

Obstacles

When asked to describe the obstacles preventing agencies from effectively serving LGBTQ youth, two related, central themes emerged from all the people interviewed: a) lack of funding; and b) homophobia/ignorance. Lack of funding was seen as impacting programs in a variety of ways, including inadequate staff training; lost funding for other key community supports for LGBTQ youth; staff shortages and rapid staff turnover due to inadequate salary levels (leading to new staff being inadequately trained to work with LGBTQ youth); inability to commit resources to developing inclusive programming; inability to conduct adequate outreach; and a myriad of other consequences.

Homophobia, including ignorance about the out-of-home youth population, also creates obstacles (including scarce funding), as in the case of one program's licensing agency:

We have residential programs and there is absolutely no consciousness among the licensing program that there is anything besides straight boys and girls. We sometimes have dilemmas about where to have kids sleep.

Homophobia also creates barriers for youth who may not realize that there are "respectful adults on the other side of the door for young people."

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

1. Reach Out was most successful in these specific areas:
 - a) Raising awareness among participating providers in northern New England about the existence and needs of LGBTQ youth, particularly transgender youth.
 - b) Providing updated resources and referrals and linking youth-service agencies to local LGBTQ agencies and programs.
 - c) Increasing staff sensitivity and understanding about the needs of LGBTQ youth and increasing the competence of youth workers to interact with and meet the needs of LGBTQ youth.
 - d) Driving institutional changes, including the development of LGBTQ-friendly personnel policies, program procedures, and public relations materials.
 - e) Promoting broader community dialogue in support of LGBTQ youth in the community.
2. Nearly half (44%) of the 62 surveyed youth, all of whom were chosen randomly from youth participants at youth-service agencies, identified as LGBTQ.
3. Only 15% of surveyed youth sought LGBTQ-designated services in the past year.

- Most sought services designed for the general population (40%) or the general youth population (26%). Surveyed youth were most likely to have used shelter/temporary housing (37%) or individual/group counseling services (32%).
4. Over two-thirds (68%) of surveyed youth received the assistance they needed, while 18% said they “sometimes” received the assistance they needed.
 5. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of surveyed youth had a “good experience,” and 71% felt that youth workers were helpful and supportive.
 6. Slightly less than half (48%) of surveyed youth shared their sexual identity with youth workers.
 7. Thirty-one percent (31%) of surveyed youth felt that agencies consistently displayed posters, books or magazines that showed gay as well as straight people. Twenty-four percent indicated that agency forms provided options for a variety of gender identities.
 8. Of the group of surveyed youth that only used services designed for the general population or general youth population, the vast majority (73%) felt that agencies need to work on improving services for LGBTQ individuals.
 9. Youth suggestions for improving youth services included:
 - a) Being friendly, warm, and welcoming.
 - b) Being open to LGBTQ youth and providing services that include and meet the need of LGBTQ youth.
 - c) Improving services for the general youth population, including access to therapy/counseling, transportation, and improved confidentiality.

LESSONS LEARNED

Over the course of delivering Reach Out, we have had our own assumptions challenged, we have had moments of incredible frustration, and we have experienced unexpected successes. We also have been profoundly moved by the level of caring and commitment demonstrated by so many of our partners, youth leaders, youth workers, and community members. We hope the lessons we have learned in the course of implementing this project will help other groups develop similar programs and/or replicate the Reach Out model in other communities.

- Homophobia will impact the work. From the beginning, Reach Out staff were confronted with this very real fact of life. A number of participants shied away from fully embracing the program because of fear of community suspicion, ignorance about their own local community of LGBTQ youth (and even whether LGBTQ youth existed in their community), and general discomfort with the subject matter.
- Enthusiastic commitment from the highest organizational levels is critical. While middle managers often have the authority to engage trainers, without the support of the Executive Director and Board, the program will only go so far in influencing agency-wide change. In situations where middle managers are driving the partnership, it is important to develop a strategy to engage upper management and board members.
- Remote rural areas tend to have the greatest need. Remote, isolated regions generally have fewer supports for the LGBTQ community, homophobia is often intense, LGBTQ youth are likely to be extremely isolated, and LGBTQ individuals are generally less visible than in more urban areas. Although these factors

may also present more obstacles to delivering LGBTQ-related programming in these areas, that's all the more reason to actively reach out. In many cases, providers operating in these communities are eager for resources that will enable them to address the needs of LGBTQ youth.

- Large, statewide organizations can make excellent allies and partners. Do not assume that large, state funded institutions will be hostile to LGBTQ-related programming. Our experience partnering with NH DCYF enabled Reach Out to significantly influence training for youth workers throughout New Hampshire, a state where we had experienced limited success prior to DCYF's involvement.
- Collaborate with and build the capacity of local LGBTQ Partners. Not only did Reach Out collaborate with Outrights in each state to deliver T&TA to youth-serving agencies, but Reach Out also provided T&TA to help build the organizational capacity of several of our Outright partners. This reciprocal relationship was essential to the success of the program. Outrights continue to provide local contacts, resources, youth leaders, and expertise to many of the Reach Out agencies.
- Lay the groundwork for the program through pre-education and outreach. Do not assume that youth-service agencies understand why it is important to increase capacity to serve LGBTQ youth. Many well-intentioned and supportive providers may believe they are performing well in this regard when, in fact, they are failing to address key access and support issues. It is important to provide workshops and trainings on what the training and technical assistance is about and why it is needed *before* starting to invite agency participation.
- Staff training on LGBTQ-related issues must be mandatory and part of a regular agency-wide orientation and training program. The most successful training programs were those that mandated staff attendance. In our experience, where trainings were voluntary they tended to attract those staff who were most open to the information, with others opting not to attend for various reasons, including discomfort or disagreement with the topic. Consequently, in voluntary trainings, the staff most in need of training were the least likely to attend. Sustainable change requires that all incoming staff receive this information, as well as more in-depth opportunities to explore issues over time.
- Engage LGBTQ youth leaders as well as adults in training and program delivery. The most well-attended, well-received, and informative trainings given by Reach Out were those that included LGBTQ youth as panelists and speakers. Repeatedly, training participants described the experience of hearing first-hand from LGBTQ youth as profound, positive, and mind-altering. Reach Out recruited youth leaders through the Outright organizations. In addition to participating in the training programs, LGBTQ youth also served on the initial agency assessment teams.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Across New England, there are several realities that continue to have important consequences for out-of-home LGBTQ youth, including:

1. Continued lack of awareness, especially in rural communities, of the extent to which LGBTQ youth exist in the out-of-home and at-risk youth population;
2. Lack of LGBTQ-friendly and inclusive services for out-of-home youth;

3. General tendency of communities/society to demonize all youth and see them as contributing to lawlessness, drug use, etc.; and
4. Under-resourced services, including lack of money for:
 - Research about LGBTQ youth and research pertaining to effective interventions with LGBTQ youth;
 - Programs that reach out to LGBTQ youth; and
 - Capacity-building for agencies and programs that serve LGBTQ youth.

In our experience, although programs are working hard to find effective ways to serve out-of-home youth, many still fail to address the explicit needs of LGBTQ youth within the out-of-home youth population. Our own challenges in helping agencies understand the need to more effectively serve LGBTQ youth illustrates the problem. For example, in one remote rural area, Reach Out staff were repeatedly told that the community would not tolerate these services and, moreover, that there were no LGBTQ youth in the community anyway. In other words, the lack of visibility of LGBTQ youth in smaller, rural communities is cited as evidence that no such population exists.

Widespread change will require major shifts in policy, including:

1. Across-the-board buy-in for the need to build the capacity of youth-service agencies to serve LGBTQ youth;
2. Acceptance that LGBTQ youth are represented disproportionately among out-of-home youth;
3. Promotion of compassionate, accepting, and effective services to meet the needs of LGBTQ out-of-home youth; and
4. Fundamental shift in resource allocation (including private, public, and government grants) to include LGBTQ youth in target populations. Groups applying for funds to serve the out-of-home, at-risk, and general youth population should be required to demonstrate their understanding of the needs of LGBTQ youth; statistics about this population; and service design to meet the needs of LGBTQ youth.

Ultimately, collaborations are key to this work. Out-of-home LGBTQ youth are served by a variety of providers, including youth-service agencies, statewide agencies, LGBTQ agencies and schools. All of these groups need to be working in tandem to meet the needs of this population. State agencies, which are often the agencies charged with establishing service protocols and training criteria, are key to ensuring an effective broad-based response. The out-of-home youth services field intersects with other youth-services fields/activities, including youth development, youth leadership, juvenile justice, services for at-risk youth, mentoring programs and service learning programs. The strategies employed by agencies working with out-of-home LGBTQ youth are likely to be highly applicable to providers working with youth in other areas.

RESOURCES

There is a growing wealth of online resources for LGBTQ individuals, families and allies on the internet. Below is a good cross-section of publications, local groups, and national organizations.

Outright

Reach Out training and technical assistance was provided through Outright organizations in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. Outright's mission is to create safe, positive, and affirming environments for young gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and questioning people ages 22 and under. Outright aspires to a youth-driven philosophy in which youth needs and beliefs form decisions, and a collaboration of youth and adults provides support, education, advocacy, and social activities. Our Outright partners included:

Portland Outright
Portland, Maine
www.outright.org

Seacoast Outright
Portsmouth, NH
www.seacoastoutright.org

Outright Vermont
Burlington, Vermont
www.outrightvt.org

Written Materials

Bisexuality Resource Packet, a fact sheet, resource lists and articles from PFLAG, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (\$1.50). 1726 M Street, NW Suite 400 Washington, DC 20036; Phone: (202) 467-8180.

Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: A Toolkit. This 79-page manual from Advocates for Youth can be downloaded free. It includes excellent sections specifically on supporting youth of color and trans youth and 12 lesson plans for any youth program or 8-12 classroom. Go to: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/safespace/index.htm> or <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/safespace/safespace.pdf> (pdf format).

Eighty-Three Thousand Youth, A report of selected findings of eight population-based studies as they pertain to anti-gay harassment and the safety and well-being of sexual minority students, from the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington State (in pdf format): <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/83000youth.pdf> or see this page for ordering information: http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/ssc_order.htm.

Experiences, Vulnerabilities and Risks of Lesbian and Gay Students, by Caitlin Ryan & Donna Futterman (2001) in *The Prevention Researcher*: <http://www.tpronline.org/articles.cfm?articleID=123>.

Gender Variance: A Primer: A thumbnail on the transgender community, explaining what it is and who it covers. <http://www.gender.org/resources/dge/gea01004.pdf> (pdf format).

GLBTQ Youth, fact sheet available on line and in print, from Advocates for Youth: Suite 200, 1025 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005; Phone: (202) 347-5700; website: www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/factsheet/fsglbt.htm and <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/factsheet/fsglbt.pdf> (pdf format).

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Issues, a fact sheet from the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States: <http://www.siecus.org/pubs/fact/fact0013.html> and http://www.siecus.org/pubs/fact/FS_lgbt_youth_issues.pdf (pdf format).

Perguntas e Respostas sobre: Orientação Sexual e Identidade de Género/Questions and Answers About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, in Portuguese: <http://www.ex-aequo.web.pt/arquivo/perguntas.pdf> (pdf format).

Respecting the Rights of GLBTQ Youth, A Responsibility of Youth-Serving Professionals, Advocates for Youth's journal *Transitions* (Vol. 14 June 2002). The contents include: *3Rs & GLBTQ Youth*; *Latino YMSM*; *Stressors for GLBTQ Youth*; *Transgender Youth*; *Harassment in School*; *Serving HIV-Positive Youth*, *Youth Activism*; *Coming Out?*; *Creating Inclusive Programs*; *Emergency Contraception*; *Abstinence-Only Education*; *Bill of Rights*; and *GLBTQ Youth of Color*. For the pdf version, go to: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/transitions/transitions1404.pdf> (pdf format).

Supportive Organizations/Groups in Maine, New Hampshire & Vermont

Equality Maine Foundation: www.equalitymaine.org
Equality Vermont: www.equalityvt.org
G/LEARN: www.glearn.org
Maine SpeakOut Project: www.mainespeakout.org
Mountain Pride Media: www.mountainpridemedia.org
New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services, including the Reach Out Initiative: www.nenetwork.org
NH Freedom to Marry Coalition: www.nhftm.org
Outright (site includes web links for Outrights in Maine, New Hampshire & Vermont): www.outright.org
RUI2? Community Center: www.ru12.org
Samara Foundation of Vermont: www.samarafoundation.org

National and Regional Organizations

Children of Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (support network for children, youth and adults with LGBT parents): <http://www.colage.org>
Family Pride Coalition (national organization working with LGBT families): www.familypride.org
Freedom to Marry Coalition: www.freedomtomarry.org
Funders for Lesbian & Gay Issues: www.lgbtfunders.org/lgbtfunders
Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD): www.glad.org
GLSEN (addressing homophobia in schools): www.glsen.org
Lambda (litigation, education and public policy group): www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/index.html
National Network for Youth: www.nn4youth.org
NGLTF (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force): www.nglhf.org
Outproud, The National Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Youth: www.outproud.org
PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays: www.pflag.org
Transproud, OutProud's website for transgender youth: www.transproud.com/index.htm

New England Network
156 College Street
Suite 301
Burlington, VT 05401
Tel (802) 658-9182
Fax (802) 951-4201
E-mail: information@nenetwork.org

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