

Supporting young transgender people experiencing domestic abuse

Briefing for homelessness services

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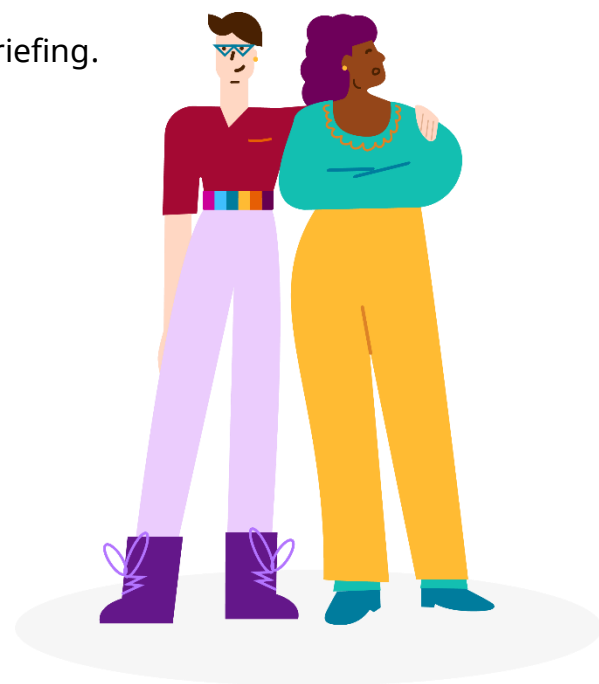
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Overview

Young transgender (trans) people are a vulnerable demographic and the impact of issues like domestic abuse is heightened by the intersectionality of oppression in their lives. It is important for homelessness services to be accountable for the gaps in their knowledge and awareness of the issues, both as a service, and as practitioners. Being accountable goes a long way to addressing the oppression faced by the trans community.¹

This briefing will highlight the experiences of abuse faced by young trans people, the possible barriers to services, and highlight the key things homelessness services and practitioners can do to promote inclusion. Quotes have been included from people who have accessed Loving Me² services, who attended Homeless Link's workshop on supporting young trans people in homelessness services.

Within this briefing, there is some information about supporting trans people generally, and some which is more focussed on young people.

Experiences of domestic abuse

Family-based abuse

Family-based abuse may come in the form of:

- Denying gender/pronouns/chosen name of the young person
- Use of transphobic slurs
- Use of political talking points against young trans person
- Threats of homelessness/violence if young person starts gender care³ or wears preferred clothes around them
- Monitoring of the person's body e.g., checking for facial hair or breast growth
- Disposing of clothes or medication that the young trans person acquires
- Dictating which family members/friends they are 'allowed' to be around or talk to
- Tracking online activity and location.

The above factors lead to emotional abuse that makes the young trans person involved have little space to explore their gender; eroding self-esteem and mental health. These tactics of emotional abuse may be employed in conjunction with physical and sexual abuse.

¹ Read our guidance on supporting young trans people in homelessness services: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/how-homeless-services-can-be-more-inclusive-and-support-young-trans-people/>

² For information about Loving Me, visit their website: <https://www.lovingme.uk/>

³ Gender care consists of an array of services that may include medical, surgical, mental health, and non-medical services for transgender and nonbinary people.

Multiple perpetrators

A common scenario that plays out in experiences of domestic abuse for young trans people is finding themselves facing abuse within their family home, with parents who are hostile and unsupportive of how they identify. As a result of this, young trans people may enter into an intimate relationship, and often move in, with someone who may display abusive behaviour, but may be broadly more accepting of their trans identity than the original perpetrator (family). This provides the trans person with a chance to be outwardly themselves, but often puts them in a position of harm.

“Sometimes you’re kicked out. Sometimes you fall into an abusive relationship whilst seeking safety.”

Isolation

“When you’re growing up, you’re shown so many signs that who you are is wrong. It’s social isolation: never fitting in at school, verbal and physical abuse, social media messages and transphobic rhetoric at every turn.”

Trans people often find themselves isolated due to their identity, for example, losing friends and family members who don’t support them, and struggling to find a community local to them. Trans people may struggle to find someone to talk to about their experiences of domestic abuse, and in emergency circumstances, may find it difficult to find a safe place to stay. This isolation can also make young trans people vulnerable to further domestic abuse and deteriorating mental wellbeing.

“It’s so much easier to be targeted because when you’ve experienced this abuse, your standards for care are already so far below where they should be.”

The above factors, coupled with how trans people are received publicly (in the media, in the streets etc.) in having their identity questioned, has a negative impact on the individual’s self-worth. Ultimately, this can lead to the trans person minimising their own abuse, believing they shouldn’t expect more, and isolating themselves from getting support.

Barriers to services

Exclusion and mistrust

Trans people have often had negative experiences with institutions that are supposed to protect them (e.g., police, GPs, the council), so will have a level of distrust in services who have their best interests in mind. Therefore, it may take longer for individuals to open up about their experiences or even seek support in the first place. In addition, trans people will often have experienced exclusion from services, for example, women’s services/refuges that may not accept trans women, and male services/refuges that don’t accept trans men.

Understanding and awareness of familial domestic abuse

There is also a gap in understanding from services about what abuse looks like in the lives of trans people, for example high levels of familial and coercive control. What might appear to be 'strict' parents, could in fact be a situation where a young person is living at their family home under conditions that are restrictive and hostile to them being trans.

Things services can do

Provide training for staff: to understand trans people and their socio-political experiences of domestic abuse, homelessness & access to healthcare.

Promote active inclusion: stating you're a trans positive/aware service – use of pronouns in correspondence and asking for them can help.

“Pronouns in emails and bio go a long way to help normalise trans friendly attitudes. It builds the idea in your organisation that you can't base a person's pronouns of their looks.”

Challenge transphobia: creating a safe space for respectful discussions within a service around transgender identity and holding staff accountable for transphobic jokes and attitudes.

Things practitioners can do

Provide person-centred care: not everyone's experience of being trans is the same, and not everyone will be ready to share information about their identity. If you are asking questions about a young person's identity (e.g., previous names, decisions about their body), ask yourself whether this is crucial to understanding their situation.

“Don't ask invasive questions. Let us have our privacy and body autonomy.”

Be transparent when you don't know something: it shows greater respect to a trans person reaching out to your service to admit the gaps in your knowledge. However, the individual involved doesn't have to inform you; not every trans person is happy to educate others. Collaborate with LGBTQ+ services if there are topics you would like to discuss and carry out your own learning and understanding outside of a surface awareness.

“Don't believe everything you see on the news because a lot of it doesn't come from actual trans people. Listen to our stories and understand our experiences.”

Be aware of the network of LGBTQ+ services that exist: and how you can signpost and refer trans service users to these services. Understand the specific types of support they might like help with and how they can access this help.

Further resources & information

Practitioners working in the homelessness sector should be aware of the following additional needs a trans person may have and be able to refer them to appropriate services:

- How to change a name through [deed poll](#).
- Refer to gender care support (Gender Identity Clinic, GIC) via their GP
- [GenderGP](#): online transgender clinic which provides advocacy, support, advice, healthcare and access to a range of services (private, paid service)
- [Interactive map of trans-friendly GPs](#) in the UK.
- [Gender Construction Kit](#): website which contains helpful information and advice for trans people on a variety of topics.

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Homeless Link

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**Let's End Homelessness
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