

You Are Not Alone

A Handbook for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth In New York City's Foster Care System

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Lawyers For Children is a nonprofit organization providing critically-needed, top-quality legal representation and social work services to over 4,000 children and young people in foster care in New York City every year. We advocate on behalf of our clients in foster care, abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights and custody proceedings. In addition, Lawyers For Children engages in policy and reform efforts to benefit all children in foster care throughout New York State. To learn more about LFC, visit our website at www.lawyersforchildren.org, call us at 212-966-6420, or write to Lawyers For Children at 110 Lafayette Street, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10013.

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INTRODUCTION

Being a teenager can be complicated. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) teens, life may be even more complex.

This book was written for LGBTQ young people in foster care. We hope that it will help you find places that will make you feel safe, people who will support you in your sexual identity, and programs that will improve your stay in foster care and help you with the transition to independent living. Many of the organizations in this book provide services such as medical care, counseling, or emergency housing, and also provide places for young people to meet each other, be creative, and learn new things.

WHAT IS LGBTQ?

LGBTQ stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning.”

People who are lesbian or gay are people who have sexual and romantic feelings primarily for people of the same sex. Although the term “gay” is generally used to describe men who are romantically and sexually attracted to other men, it is sometimes used as a general term and applied to both gay men and lesbians. People who are bisexual are people who have sexual and romantic feelings for people of both sexes. People who are transgender are people who feel as though they do not fit the “traditional” gender roles of how males and females are expected to look and act in society and may seek to live and appear as members of the opposite sex. People who are questioning are people who are still learning about and identifying their sexual orientation or identity.



Lesbian **G**ay **B**isexual
Transgender **Q**uestioning

AM I LGBTQ?

Only YOU can decide whether you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. No one else can tell you how you feel or how to identify. Do not worry if you are not sure of your sexual orientation right now. Many people ask themselves these questions.

And, remember: YOU ARE NOT ALONE. It is estimated that one out of every ten people is LGBTQ. LGBTQ people exist in ALL cultures, races, countries, and communities. There is nothing wrong with you because you are LGBTQ.

Some famous people who are LGBT are:

Pedro Almodóvar (film director)
James Baldwin (writer)
Chaz Bono (activist)
Glenn Burke (pro baseball player)
Margerethe Cammermeyer (army colonel)
John Amaechi (basketball player)
Ellen DeGeneres (actor/comedian)
Melissa Etheridge (musician)
Barney Frank (U.S. congressman)
Rudy Galindo (skating champion)
Elton John (musician)
k.d. lang (musician)
Frederico Garcia Lorca (poet)
Audre Lorde (activist/writer)
Greg Louganis (olympic diver)
Sir Ian McKellan (actor)
Martina Navratilova (pro tennis player)
Rosie O'Donnell (actor/comedian/talk show host)
Renee Richards (pro tennis player)
Oscar Wilde (playwright)
B.D. Wong (actor)
Ricky Martin (singer)
Adam Lambert (singer)





COMING OUT

“Coming out” is the process of accepting your sexual orientation as an LGBTQ young person and deciding how you want to share this information with others. You should only come out when YOU are ready. If you want to discuss your sexual orientation with others, it is up to you to decide how much you want to share and how and when you want to do it. If you do come out to friends, family members, and people at your foster care agency, different people may react very differently. It may take time for your friends and family to understand that being LGBTQ is normal and that you are the same person that they have always known and loved. If they want to talk to other parents, family members, and friends of LGBTQ people, you can suggest that they contact P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) at 212-463-0629 or online at <http://www.pflag.org>.

COMING OUT

WHEN YOU ARE READY

FOSTER CARE

YOUR LAWYER

All young people who are in foster care have a lawyer. Your lawyer works for YOU, not for your foster care agency or your family. Your lawyer should protect your rights, help you find appropriate services, and make sure the judge knows what you want. You should contact your lawyer if you have any problems or need any services while you are in foster care.

All conversations that you have with your lawyer are confidential, which means that nothing that you tell your lawyer can be repeated to anyone else without your permission.

If you do not know the name of your lawyer, you can contact Lawyers for Children or the Legal Aid Society, the two organizations that provide attorneys for most of the young people in foster care in New York City.

Lawyers for Children 212-966-6420 or 1-800-244-2540 (free call)
or online at <http://www.lawyersforchildren.org>

Legal Aid Society 212-577-3300 or online at <http://www.legal-aid.org>

You have the right to be who you are.

YOUR RIGHTS

Remember that you have a right to safe housing, adequate food and clothing, medical care, mental health services and counseling, a free public school education until you receive your high school diploma or until you turn 21, career counseling and independent living skills classes, visits with your parents at least every other week (unless the judge says otherwise), and visits with your brothers and sisters (unless the judge says otherwise).

RIGHT TO SAFE PLACEMENT

Regardless of your sexual orientation, you have a legal right to be emotionally and physically safe in your foster care placement. Foster parents and/or agency staff may not harm you physically or use harmful language towards you. Your foster care agency must protect you from harm from staff and other young people.

Discrimination and abuse may occur in many ways, such as name-calling, threatening, hitting, kicking, or sexual assault. If you feel unsafe, speak to a staff member, a caseworker at your foster care agency or your lawyer.

To Report Abuse You Can Do Any Of The Following:

- call the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-342-3720
- speak to the Youth Officer at your local police precinct
- call your lawyer
- call the LGBTQ Youth Project at Lawyers for Children at 212-966-6420 or 1-800-244-2540 (free call)
- talk to someone who will report the abuse to the Child Abuse Hotline, such as a doctor, nurse, guidance counselor, social worker, or teacher.

Doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers and counselors are “mandated reporters,” which means that they are required by law to call the Child Abuse Hotline if they suspect that a young person is being abused or neglected. Remember that these people **MUST** report abuse and cannot legally keep your information confidential once you report it. If you are not sure yet about whether or not you want the abuse reported to the Child Abuse Hotline, you can discuss it with your lawyer, who does not have to report the abuse and can legally keep your information confidential.



911

**IF YOU ARE IN
IMMEDIATE
DANGER, CALL 911.**

REMEMBER:

If you do not feel safe where you live or if you are experiencing verbal or physical harassment, you can ask for a change in placement. If you do not want a new placement, your agency may have to make changes so that you can stay in your current placement and feel safe. If you need a safety transfer or would like to discuss your options, call your lawyer or the LGBTQ Youth Project at Lawyers For Children at 212-966-6420 or 1-800-244-2540.

20.3% of homeless youth entering crisis shelters identify as LGBTQ.

—“All Our Children: Strategies to Prevent Homelessness, Strengthen Services and Build Support for LGBTQ Youth,” report by the NYC Commission on LGBTQ Runaway and Homeless Youth, June 2010.



RIGHT TO APPROPRIATE SERVICES

Your agency must help you obtain appropriate services based on your particular needs. These services could include a foster home that is safe for LGBTQ youth, residential programs for LGBTQ young people, placement in a school for LGBTQ young people, and/or individual or family counseling with a therapist trained to work with LGBTQ young people.

For information about these services, you can speak to your caseworker, your lawyer, or the LGBTQ Project at Lawyers For Children at 212-966-6420 or 1-800-244-2540.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your foster care records should be kept confidential. Information about you, your family history, your medical care and your foster care placement can only be shared with someone who is directly involved with your care (such as your biological parent or guardian, your social worker, your caseworker or your foster parent). This information can only be shared with others with your permission or if a judge orders that the information be shared in order to help improve the services you receive in foster care.

Sexual Orientation

Telling someone about your sexual orientation or gender identity should be your choice. When you meet privately with your caseworker or counselor, what you choose to tell him or her about your sexual orientation or gender identity should not be shared with anyone else without your permission. If you want to be sure that information about your sexual orientation or gender identity is kept private, before talking about it, let your caseworker, social worker, therapist or counselor know that you are not ready to share this information with others, and have them explain their policy on confidentiality to you.

TELLING

SOMEONE

ABOUT YOUR

SEXUALITY IS

YOUR CHOICE .

Medical Care

A doctor working with a foster care agency is allowed to share information about your medical care with your caseworker, foster parent, and staff at your group home or residential program to make sure that you are getting the services you need.

If you would feel more comfortable receiving medical care outside of your agency, you can contact the following places for free and confidential health care.

HEAT (Health and Education Alternatives for Teens)

c/o Kings County Medical Center
Free health testing, counseling, support groups, and workshops for young people
718-467-4446

HOTT (Health Outreach to Teens)

c/o Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
Free or low-cost complete medical and counseling services for LGBTQ, straight, and homeless young people, available at the clinic or the mobile health van
212-271-7212 (you may call collect)

SHOUT Van

Free mobile health van for young people ages 13 to 24, offering physical examinations, testing, and treatment
212-749-1820

The Door

Adolescent Health Center

Physical examinations, general health care and education, dermatology, nutritional counseling, sexual and reproductive health care, and routine dental services to all young people ages 12-21, as well as counseling services geared toward LGBTQ youth.
212-941-9090 ext. 3221 or 3222

For further referrals, contact the LGBT Community Center at 212-620-7310.

HIV Status

If you are HIV positive, there are very specific rules about who can be told about your HIV status. Your HIV status CAN be shared with your parents, guardian, caseworker, health care staff, foster parent, and potential adoptive parent. The purpose of sharing this information is for these people to help you to obtain appropriate medical care. They should NOT share this information with anyone else without your consent.



PERMANENCY HEARINGS

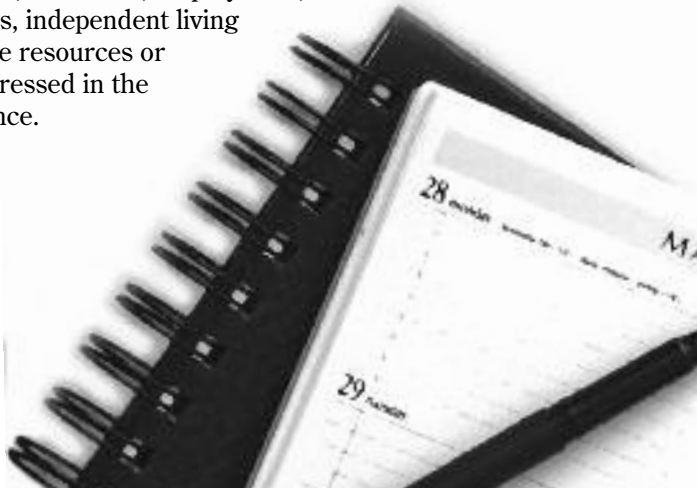
This is a hearing held about every six months, where the Family Court reviews the agency's progress in planning for you. You should talk with your lawyer in advance about coming to court for these hearings, so that you can have the most input possible into the plan that will be presented to the judge regarding your future. Remember that when your plan is presented in court, you and your lawyer can agree with the plan or present a different plan to the judge.

AGENCY CASE CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

Your agency should be scheduling meetings at least every six months to discuss your permanency plan and what services are available to you. These meetings may be called Case Conferences, Family Treatment Conferences, Service Plan Reviews or Permanency Reviews. It is important to know that you have a right to attend these meetings about the plan for your future.

Your caseworker should invite you and any "significant adult" (parent, relative, foster parent, teacher) in your life to attend these conferences. You also have a right to have your attorney present.

Any concerns or issues you may have, such as questions about your immigration status, education, employment, housing, medical needs, independent living services, and discharge resources or support should be addressed in the meeting/case conference.



If your goal is APPLA (independent living), the agency should help you to identify your “significant adult.” Tell them about anyone whom you would feel comfortable calling on for help after you’re out of foster care. If you can’t think of anyone, your agency should help you find someone whom you can turn to when you leave care.

PROGRAMS FOR LGBTQ YOUNG PEOPLE

Some young people in foster care want to live in group homes especially for LGBTQ young people. Others want to stay at their agencies. Listed below are agencies that provide specific services for LGBTQ young people in foster care, including legal assistance and referrals for LGBTQ services.

St. Christopher-Ottile

St. Christopher-Ottile is a foster care agency that offers group home placements for males, females, and transgender young people. For more information, call St. Christopher-Ottile at 718-895-8670 or 718-935-9466 or talk to your law guardian.

“When I finally had the nerve to go to an LGBT youth group, I don’t think I said ten words for about a month. I was just in awe that there were people who felt just like me. It was a wonderful thing.”

—Kristine, age 16.

Lawyers For Children

The LGBTQ Youth Project at Lawyers for Children specializes in referrals and legal representation for LGBTQ young people in foster care. For more information, call Lawyers for Children at 212-966-6420 or 1-800-244-2540.

The Door

The Door offers a wide variety of educational, recreational, counseling, and social services for young people ages 12 to 21. Their services include assistance for young people in foster care whose goal is independent living and a support group for LGBTQ young people, called BGLAD. For more information, call The Door at 212-941-9090.

Urban Justice Center

There are two projects at the Urban Justice Center to assist young people. The Foster Care Independence Project offers a support group, job assistance, independent living planning, and assistance with Service Plan Review meetings for LGBTQ young people. The Peter Cicchino Youth Project offers free legal help and referrals for homeless and runaway LGBTQ young people, and can also help you with immigration, emancipation, public assistance, and fair hearings. For more information, call the Urban Justice Center at 646-602-5600.

“I had to reject a lot of negative heterosexual and religious programming that made me feel lousy about myself as a gay person. I began to like myself by meeting other gay people and going to a gay support group. After that I was content with myself.”

—Bill, age 18.

INDEPENDENT LIVING (APPLA)

Many young people in foster care have a goal of “independent living” or APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement). If this is your goal, your foster care agency must help prepare you for life after foster care so that you are emotionally and financially ready to be on your own.



As you prepare to leave foster care, you will be making many decisions about your future. You may question where you will live, how you will support yourself, and how your relationships with friends and family may change. You may worry about what you will do if you experience problems after you leave foster care. Know your options, and remember that finding the answers to these questions may take time.

During a period of transition, such as when leaving foster care, it is not unusual to feel uncertain, worried, or confused. You may be trying to understand your past, or you may be questioning your future. Some young people describe this as a time when they are “waiting for their lives to begin.” You may feel as though no one is listening to you or helping you. You may wonder whether you are prepared to be on your own. You may also be trying to understand your sexual orientation and gender identity and the effect it may have on other parts of your life. So ask for help, use this book, and know that YOU ARE NOT ALONE.



DISCHARGE PLANNING

Before you leave foster care, your agency **MUST**:

- give you written notice 90 days before your last day in foster care
- help you find a place to live where you can stay for at least a year (your agency **CANNOT** discharge you to a shelter)
- help you identify people (including family members) and services that can help you when you are on your own
- give you a discharge grant (up to \$750) or take you shopping for the things that you will need to live on your own, such as furniture, cleaning supplies, pots and pans, etc.
- keep you on a “trial discharge” for six months or more, until your 21st birthday, so that if you have any serious problems, you can get help from the agency or return to foster care
- help support you while you are in college

For more information about discharge planning, you can request a copy of the Independent Resource Manual from the Legal Aid Society at 212-577-3030.



SIGNED CONSENT TO REMAIN IN FOSTER CARE

When you are 18 years old, you may leave the foster care system OR sign a letter of consent saying that you agree to remain in foster care past your 18th birthday. Signing this letter means that you can stay in foster care until you are 21 years old if you want to do so. Even if you sign a letter of consent, you can still leave foster care when you are ready.

If you have questions or concerns, you should discuss this decision with your lawyer. If you are being pressured to leave foster care before you are ready, or if the agency says they do not have an LGBTQ-safe placement for you, call your lawyer for help.

MENTORING

Mentoring programs pair you with a responsible adult volunteer. Usually, a mentor is chosen based on your interests. Some mentoring programs offer mentors specifically for LGBTQ young people. Your mentor should provide you with information and emotional support.

To find an adult mentor, you can call

Green Chimneys NYC
212-677-7288 or 718-732-1500

Hetrick-Martin Institute
212-674-2400

RETURNING TO CARE AFTER YOU TURN 18

If you have signed yourself out of foster care and are between 18 and 21 years old, you may be able to return to care if things are not going as planned.

If you do not have a safe and stable place to live or if you are unable to obtain adequate food or if there are any other reasons why your plan to live on your own is not working out, you should call your lawyer right away. Your lawyer will help you understand whether you qualify to return to foster care.

MENTOR
GET

HOUSING

Your agency is responsible for helping you find safe, permanent and affordable housing before you leave foster care. Finding safe and affordable housing is a challenge for everyone living in New York City, and as a young person leaving foster care, it is one of the most difficult tasks that you will face. Although there are no guarantees or easy solutions, there are many programs specifically designed to help young people aging out of foster care find permanent housing.

Many housing programs for youth aging out of foster care require that you apply before you leave foster care. At the end of this section you will also find information about housing programs for youth who are still in foster care and are participating in independent living programs. Talk to your caseworker, his/her supervisor, the housing coordinator at your foster care agency, or the Administration for Children's Services Housing Support and Services Unit (212-341-8979) for help locating and applying for housing. If you cannot get the information or assistance you need, **CONTACT YOUR LAWYER!**





There are three main housing programs for youth aging out of foster care:

- The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA),
- NY/NY III Supportive Housing,
- The ACS Housing Subsidy.

It is extremely important to understand that you can receive benefits from only one of these programs. However, you should apply for all of them, see which ones are approved, and then decide which program best meets your needs. For further information about housing resources, contact your caseworker, your lawyer, or the Administration for Children’s Services Housing Support and Services Unit at 212-341-8979.

To apply for any of these programs, you should speak to your caseworker or go to the Housing Support and Services Unit in Manhattan at 150 Williams Street (between Fulton and Ann Streets), on the 8th Floor.

Because locating housing can be a long and complicated process, you should begin as soon as possible after you turn 18. It is important to know that most, but not all, of these programs require that you have some form of income, and they look for four to eight pay stubs as part of the application process. More detailed information is provided in the insert in the back cover of this handbook, but the following pages provide brief descriptions of the programs.

HOUSING PROGRAMS

YOUR CASEWORKER SHOULD BE WILLING AND ABLE TO HELP YOU APPLY FOR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING HOUSING PROGRAMS:



New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

The New York City Housing Authority gives priority to applications from young people aging out of foster care and locates apartments for them in public housing complexes. To qualify, you must meet certain income requirements and pass a criminal background check.



NY/NY III Supportive Housing

NY/NY III supportive housing is a special subsidized, semi-permanent housing program. Tenants reside in their own apartments that are either scattered-site (apartments spread across different buildings) or congregate (all apartments are housed in one building). Tenants also have access to supportive services, which may include case management, mental health services, vocational programs, and public benefits advocacy.

There are several eligibility categories under NY/NY III Supportive Housing. For some categories, you must have HIV/AIDS, a serious mental illness or physical disability, or a substance abuse problem. There is also a category specifically for youth who are aging out of foster care (or who have a history of at least one year of foster care following their 16th birthday). For this category, you do not need to have any additional mental health, physical, or substance abuse issue.



You cannot apply for NY/NY III supportive housing on your own. The application must be completed by either the ACS Housing Support and Services Unit at 150 William Street on the 8th Floor, or by your agency caseworker or housing specialist. Your application must also include:

- An up-to-date psychosocial evaluation
- Proof of current PPD test (a skin test for tuberculosis)
- An up-to-date psychiatric evaluation (for some applicants)

Once the application is submitted, you will receive an eligibility letter explaining which categories of NY/NY III supportive housing you are eligible for. Once you are approved, you can expect to be placed on a wait list for interviews with individual NY/NY III providers.

You must have a source of income to reside in NY/NY III supportive housing. This source may be a full- or part-time job, public assistance, or Social Security Income (SSI). You can expect to pay 30% of your income towards rent.

Note: Most NY/NY III supportive housing is for single adults only. However, there are limited spaces available for families whose head of household meets additional eligibility criteria.

ACS Housing Subsidy

The ACS Housing Subsidy program pays up to \$300 per month towards your rent, directly to your landlord, for up to three years or until your 21st birthday.



In order to qualify for the ACS Housing Subsidy, you must be on trial discharge to independent living (APPLA), with a documented source of income, and you must be able to pay 30 percent of your income towards your housing costs. The subsidy is paid directly to the landlord, and the landlord must agree to accept payment from ACS. ACS must also inspect the apartment and determine if it qualifies for the housing subsidy.

Generally, the caseworker looks at the size and the condition of the apartment to decide whether it is eligible for the subsidy. You can only receive the subsidy if your name is the only name on the lease, even if you have roommates who are also former foster youth.

ONE-SHOT GRANT

The ACS Housing Subsidy program may also pay part of your real estate broker's fee, security deposit, moving expenses, or other one-time expenses, up to a total of \$1,800. These funds are available to you even if you have not located an apartment that has been approved for an ACS subsidy. The \$1,800 in funding is often referred to as a "one-shot grant." If you leave foster care without a rent subsidy and get behind in your rent payments, the ACS subsidy program may also provide cash assistance to prevent you from being evicted.

Your agency caseworker should help you fill out the housing subsidy application. You can also call ACS's Housing Subsidy Office for help at 212-442-2140. The ACS subsidy application can take months to approve, and you have to locate an apartment where the landlord will accept the subsidy, so the sooner you apply, the better your chances.

Note: Under the current ACS guidelines, after you turn 21, you can no longer receive the ACS subsidy. This means that you will get the most out of the ACS Housing Subsidy the younger you are when you apply for and begin to use the subsidy.



HOUSING LOTTERIES

New York City receives money from New York State and other sources to develop apartments and homes for lower income individuals and families. Tenants are chosen by a lottery system once the developments are completed. These houses and apartments are listed in the classified section of newspapers and online at:

www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/html/apartment/lotteries.shtml.

Each residence has different qualifications and deadlines to enter its lottery. You should know that these apartments and houses are not public housing. Your landlord will be the real estate developer, and you will be a regular tenant.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Supportive housing could be available to you if you have mental or physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS and/or addiction issues. Supportive housing offers services on site. You must qualify for it through the Human Resources Administration (HRA). There are different levels of supportive housing, ranging from individual apartments scattered around the five boroughs to apartments in special adult residential facilities. To apply, you or anyone who works with you can submit the New York City Supportive Housing application available from HRA. The application is available at:

www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/nyc_supportive_housing.pdf.

The application must include an updated psycho-social summary, a psychiatric evaluation, a release of HIV-related information, and a PPD test (a skin test for tuberculosis). After all of these are submitted, HRA and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) determine what level of supportive housing you qualify for. There are often waiting lists for openings. As with the ACS Housing Subsidy and NYCHA, you should expect to pay 30 percent of your income towards your rent.

OTHER EMERGENCY HOUSING PROGRAMS

If you need emergency cash assistance to keep your housing after leaving foster care, you may be eligible for assistance from programs such as Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS) or Rent Arrears Grants.

FEPS (Family Eviction Prevention Supplement) (formerly known as Jiggetts)

FEPS assistance may be available if you:

- have an active public assistance case;
- have at least one child living with you that is under 18 (or under 19 if the child is still attending high school full time);
- are named as the tenant of record on the lease;
- are NOT living in a Section 8 or NYCHA apartment;
- are facing a housing court proceeding for eviction or nonpayment of rent ONLY;
- have no other way to pay the rent.



FEPS assistance pays a monthly rent subsidy on a sliding scale, and arrears up to \$7,000. Any household members who are not receiving public assistance are required to contribute 30% of their income toward the rent.

You cannot complete the FEPS application on your own. Instead, you must apply with the help of a qualified legal services provider or community-based organization, such as The Legal Aid Society (212-312-2260), Legal Services of New York (<http://www.legalservicesnyc.org/>), or CAMBA (718-287-2600). FEPS assistance can last for up to 5 years, but it is only temporary rental assistance. While applying for or receiving FEPS, you should also be exploring other low-cost housing or housing assistance programs.

Rent Arrears Grants

Rental arrears grants may be available through the NYC Human Resources Administration if you live in an apartment but are about to be evicted for not paying the rent, or if you have been evicted but your landlord is willing to re-let the apartment to you. Grants are available for both families and single adults, regardless of whether or not they receive public assistance. You must apply in person at your local HRA center, which you can locate by calling 311.

HomeBase

If you are at risk of becoming homeless, you may be eligible to receive assistance through HomeBase. You will be assigned a case manager that coordinates services for you, including:

- Family or tenant/landlord mediation
- Household budgeting
- Job training and placement
- Benefits advocacy (child care, food stamps, tax credits, Medicaid)

HomeBase assistance is temporary. You must be re-approved every 3 months. You must apply in person at your local HomeBase office, which you can locate by calling 311.

**CALL
311**



Transitional Living Programs (TLPS)

TLPS are 12–18 month residential programs for homeless youth. You can only be referred to these programs if you are homeless after discharge. Educational services, vocational training, job placement assistance, counseling and training in basic life skills such as cooking, home maintenance and money management are available on site. There are a total of 5 of these programs in the 5 boroughs, and some are single sex only. To enter a TLP, you must enter a crisis shelter and request a referral to a transitional living program. You can find a crisis shelter by contacting Covenant House at 212-613-0300, Safe Horizon at 212-695-2220, or your lawyer.

HOUSING PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH STILL IN FOSTER CARE

Chelsea Foyer

The Chelsea Foyer offers housing and job training for 40 young adults in their late teens and early twenties. It is a group home setting, and you stay between 18 and 24 months while receiving services and job training on site. Along with a case manager, you'll develop a personalized program that aims to smooth the transition to life out of foster care by providing job training and placement and other supports. The program is run by Good Shepherd Services. You can contact the Foyer at 646-485-3946 or Good Shepherd Services at 212-243-7070, or you can contact your lawyer to find out more about the program.

RENTAL AGREEMENT

This Rental Agreement and/or Lease shall evidence the complete terms and conditions under which the parties whose signatures appear below have agreed. Landlord/Lessor/Agent _____, shall be referred to as "OWNER" and Tenant(s)/Lessee, _____, shall be referred to as "RESIDENT." As consideration for this agreement, OWNER agrees to rent/lease to RESIDENT and RESIDENT agrees to rent/lease from OWNER for use solely as a private residence, the premises located at _____ in the city of _____.

1. TERMS: RESIDENT agrees to pay in advance \$ _____ per month on the _____ day of each month. This agreement shall commence on _____ and continue (check one)
A. _____ as a leasehold. Thereafter it shall become a month-to-month tenancy. If RESIDENT should move from the premises prior to the expiration of this time period, he shall be liable for all rent due until such time that the Residence is occupied by an OWNER approved paying RESIDENT and/or expiration of said time period, whichever is shorter.
B. _____ on a month-to-month tenancy until either party shall terminate this agreement by giving a written notice of intention to terminate at least 30 days prior to the date of termination.

2. PAYMENTS: Rent and/or other charges are to be paid at such place or method designated by the owner as follows _____ All payments are to be made by check or money order and cash shall be acceptable. _____ and additional _____ for a total payment of \$ _____. All payments are to be made payable to _____ who acknowledges receipt of the First Month's rent of \$ _____. _____ and a Security Deposit of \$ _____. _____ days after the premises have been completely vacated less any amount necessary to replace replacement costs, d) cost for repair of damages to premises and/or _____ amount legally allowable under the terms of this agreement. A written _____ days of move-out. If deposits do not cover such costs and _____ and due for any payment of rent _____ subject to an additional fee of _____.

Schafer Young Adult Initiative

This program is similar to the Chelsea Foyer program in that it provides housing and services on site for young people on trial or final discharge from foster care. To apply, you must be 18-23 years old and on trial or final discharge with an APPLA goal. In terms of income, you must either qualify for the ACS Housing Subsidy or have enough income without it to pay the rent. They accept Section 8 vouchers as well. For more information, call 212-828-3007.

FURNITURE AND OTHER HOUSING-RELATED ASSISTANCE

Furniture

In addition to your discharge grant, you can get money for furniture through ACS's Day Program Services or through the "one-shot grant" from the ACS Housing Subsidy program described earlier. Make sure you speak to your caseworker to clarify whether you qualify and how the funds will be given to you. Some agencies will have a caseworker shop for furniture with you and others will reimburse you after you provide receipts for furniture you have purchased on your own. Public assistance may also help with furniture costs.

The \$1,800 "one-shot grant" available through the ACS Housing Subsidy program can be used to help pay your security deposit, your first month's rent or any broker's fees. Public assistance may also help with these initial rental costs. Be sure to ask your public assistance case manager about these programs.



You have the right to a safe education

EDUCATION

If you are between the ages of 5 and 21, you have the right to a free public school education in the school district where you live until you have received a high school diploma or a GED.

When you enter foster care or change placements you have the right to continue your education in your school of origin (the school you attended before coming into foster care or before changing placements). You also have the right to go to a school that is closer to your foster care placement.

If you are not attending school or if you would like to be placed in a different school, call your lawyer. You can also call The Door at 212-941-9090 or Advocates for Children at 212-947-9779.

You are entitled to a safe and civil school environment. If you do not feel safe or comfortable in your current school because of your sexual orientation or gender identity, you may request placement in an educational program created especially for LGBTQ young people. You can contact the Harvey Milk High School for LGBTQ young people at 212-674-2600. You can also contact the Audre Lorde GED Program for LGBTQ young people at 212-463-0342.

In 2010, Governor Patterson signed into law the Dignity For All Students Act (DASA). DASA targets bullying and harassment in school settings. DASA explicitly prohibits harassment and discrimination based on a student's actual or perceived "race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or sex." For the first time, New York State law explicitly protects transgender youth in their school environment from harassment and discrimination.

Call your lawyer if you are experiencing harassment or discrimination in your school environment.



COLLEGE

Grants and scholarships are provided to students based on financial need and do not need to be repaid. You should be eligible for some cash assistance for your college tuition in the form of Pell grants and Tuition Assistance Programs. Other types of financial aid include student loans and work study programs. Talk to the college advisor at your school or the independent living coordinator at your foster care agency to learn about what financial aid is available to you. Also ask about fee waivers for applications and testing costs.

If you go away to college, your agency must pay for your room and board expenses (equal to the amount they would pay a foster parent to care for you each month) until you are 21. The agency must also provide a place for you to live during school vacations.

To find a list of LGBTQ-friendly colleges on the web, check out
<http://gayteenmeeting.tripod.com/colleges.html>



New York City law prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.

EMPLOYMENT AND JOB TRAINING

If your goal is independent living, your agency must provide you with vocational (job) training and/or job placement assistance before you leave the foster care system. For information about training, education, and employment resources, contact the independent living coordinator at your foster care agency or one of the resources listed below.

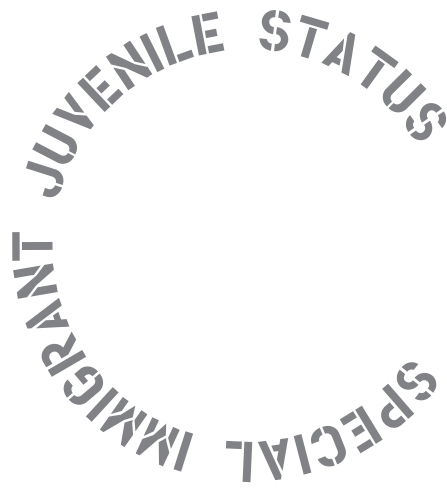
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center
212-620-7310

The Door 212-941-9090

FEGS 212-366-8400

Also remember that New York City law prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.





IMMIGRATION STATUS

Lawful permanent residency is an immigration status that allows you to live and work in the United States permanently. Establishing this status is necessary in order to get a job, financial aid for college, and many public benefits. It is also necessary to prevent deportation. If you are an undocumented immigrant and are in foster care, you may qualify for Special



Immigrant Juvenile Status to receive permanent legal residency. You are eligible for this status if you are in long-term foster care and you are under 21 years old when your application is reviewed.

Talk to a lawyer at one of the agencies listed below to discuss your status and other options for achieving legal residency.

Lawyers for Children, Immigration Project

212-966-6420 or 1-800-244-2540

The Door 212-941-9090

Legal Aid Society, Immigration Unit 212-577-3974

Urban Justice Center 646-602-5600

HOMELESS AND RUNAWAY YOUNG PEOPLE

MISSING PERSONS REPORTS AND WARRANTS

If you run away from home, your parent or guardian may file a missing persons report with the police. If you are found, the police can hold you until your parent or guardian is notified. Your parent or guardian can also go to family court and file a PINS petition (Person In Need of Supervision) against you, asking for court supervision over you.

If you run away from your foster care placement, you are considered AWOL (Absent Without Leave). Your foster care agency can file a missing persons report with the police and/or go to family court and ask for a warrant for you to be returned to foster care. If you are found by the police, you will be taken to family court, where the judge will determine your foster care placement.



If you feel as though you have no choice but to go AWOL from foster care, consider talking with your lawyer about the problems you are having in your current placement. There may be a way to solve these problems so that you can stay in your current placement, or you may be able to move to another foster care

placement. If you are already AWOL and you want to return to foster care, call your lawyer.

If you are homeless there are places to go for help.

PERSONS IN NEED OF SUPERVISION (PINS) PETITIONS



If you are violent to a family member, run away from home, skip school, or break your curfew repeatedly, your parent or guardian can go to family court and file a PINS petition. A PINS petition asks the judge to decide whether you are a “Person In Need of Supervision.” It can be filed against you until you are 18 years old. However, a PINS petition can NOT be filed against you because of a decision that you have made about your sexual orientation or gender identity.

When a PINS petition is filed, you will meet with a probation officer. Sometimes, instead of going to court, you and your parent or guardian may be offered services in your neighborhood, such as counseling, that might help you and your family.

If you or your parent or guardian refuse to participate in these services, or if the problems continue, you will either go to court to have a PINS hearing or the probation officer may suggest voluntary foster care placement. Voluntary foster care placement means that your parent or guardian can choose to put you into the foster care system. If you go to court, you will have a lawyer to represent you. The judge may place you in foster care or on probation for up to 12 months. If you are placed on probation, it means that you are under court-ordered supervision. Violating a probation order can lead to placement in a residential program outside of your home.

VOLUNTARY FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT

If your parent or guardian files a PINS petition, they may be asked to consider placing you in the foster care system voluntarily instead. If you are voluntarily placed into foster care, you will be assigned a lawyer to represent you.

If you are placed voluntarily, your parent or guardian may still make a written demand for you to be returned home at any time. Unless ACS can prove in court that your parent or guardian would be unable to care for you, ACS must let you return home within 10 days of receiving your parent or guardian's written request. If you do not want to return home, contact your lawyer immediately. If you do want to return home but your parent or guardian has not requested your return, your lawyer will help you understand all of your options and legal rights.

“Nationally 320,000 to 400,000 gay and transgender youth experience homelessness at some point each year.”

—“On The Streets: The Federal Response to Gay and Transgender Homeless Youth,” Nico Sifra Quintana, Josh Rosenthal and Jeff Krehely, Center for America Progress, June 2010.



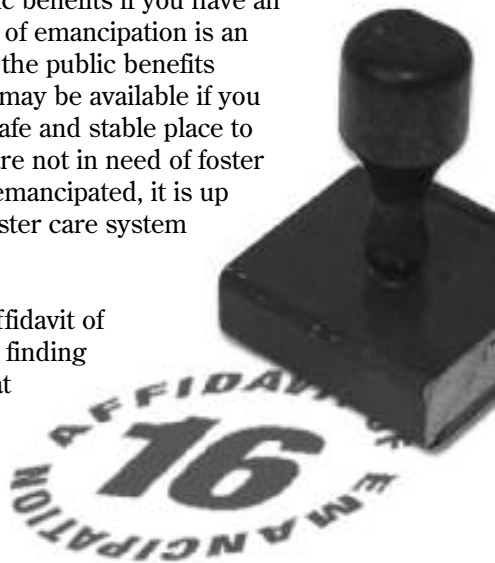
EMANCIPATION

A minor is emancipated if they are legally released from the control of their parents and granted some or all of the legal rights of an adult. In New York State, people under the age of 18 are NOT considered emancipated when they are in foster care or if they have run away from home. It is important to remember that New York State does not offer full legal emancipation for minors. This means that, for example, a landlord can refuse to sign a lease with you if you are a minor, even if you have an affidavit of emancipation.

Affidavit of Emancipation

You may be eligible for some public benefits if you have an affidavit of emancipation. An affidavit of emancipation is an official paper that says that you meet the public benefits requirements for emancipation. This may be available if you are at least 16 years old, you have a safe and stable place to live apart from your family, and you are not in need of foster care services. Remember, if you are emancipated, it is up to you to support yourself, and the foster care system will not provide you with assistance.

For assistance in applying for an affidavit of emancipation or public benefits, or in finding housing, call your lawyer, The Door at 212-941-9090, or the Urban Justice Center at 646-602-5600.



PROGRAMS FOR HOMELESS LGBTQ YOUTH

Although it is difficult to approximate the number of homeless LGBTQ youth, various studies report that around 30-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBT.

Many of these young people left their families or foster care placements because they felt unsafe as a result of conflicts over their sexual identities. If you are a homeless LGBTQ young person, there are programs that can help you.

Drop-in centers for homeless young people offer food, showers, medical care, referrals to shelters, counseling, and a safe place to hang out. You can find out about drop-in centers that are safe for LGBTQ young people by calling any of the following resources:

Streetworks 212-695-2220

Hetrick Martin 212-674-2600

The Door 212-941-9090

For emergency shelter, you can contact:

Sylvia's Place <http://mccny.org/wordpress/>
466 West 36th Street (between 9th and 10th Avenue), New York, NY

Covenant House (Manhattan) 212-613-0300

Trinity Place Shelter 212-222-7045
164 West 100th Street (off Amsterdam Ave), New York, NY

There are also transitional housing programs especially for homeless LGBTQ young people. These programs provide living space, referrals, and other support services. For more information, contact Green Chimneys at 845-279-2995.



YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

RIGHT TO MEDICAL CARE

In some cases, your parents, guardians, or foster care agency must give their consent for you to obtain medical care. However, there are certain kinds of health care that you can obtain on your own. Many places offer these services for free and will not share your information with others. These services include birth control, prenatal care, abortions, drug and alcohol counseling, other counseling services, and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, and HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus, which causes AIDS).

Many young people want medical and counseling services that will not share information about them with their parents, guardians, or foster care agencies. In addition, many young people find that establishing a confidential relationship with a counselor can provide stability and emotional support as they move through the foster care system to independent living and adulthood. Your lawyer can help you identify confidential medical and/or counseling services.



The following are some of the programs that may provide you with these services.

HEAT (Health and Education Alternatives for Teens)

c/o Kings County Medical Center
Free health testing, counseling, support groups,
and workshops for young people
718-467-4446



HOTT (Health Outreach to Teens)

c/o Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
Free or low-cost complete medical and counseling services for
LGBTQ people, free or low-cost for LGBTQ, straight, and homeless
young people, available at the clinic or the mobile health van
212-271-7212 (you may call collect)

SHOUT Van

Free mobile health van for young people ages 13 to 24, offering
physical examinations, testing, and treatment
212-749-1820

**The Door
Adolescent Health Center**

Physical examinations, general health care and education,
dermatology, nutritional counseling, sexual and reproductive health
care, and routine dental services to all young people ages 12-21, as
well as counseling services geared toward LGBTQ youth.
212-941-9090 ext. 3221 or 3222

**For further referrals, contact the LGBT Community Center at
212-620-7310.**



TRANSGENDER SERVICES

Some transgender young people say that they feel “trapped” in the wrong body. Some seek to live and appear as a member of the opposite sex. Some use hormones to develop a body more like someone of the opposite sex. Some want sex reassignment surgery to change their bodies from male to female (MTF) or female to male (FTM).

Some transgender young people obtain and use hormones illegally, and some share needles or trade sex for money to obtain hormones. **REMEMBER** that sharing needles and trading unprotected sex for money is dangerous and puts you at risk for contracting HIV and other serious sexually transmitted diseases. If you are interested in obtaining hormones or hormone blockers legally or if you want any other trans-related health care, speak with your caseworker or lawyer.

Sex reassignment surgery is only available after a long, medically-supervised process. If you are in foster care and you are interested in sex reassignment surgery, you must wait until you are at least 16 and have the approval of ACS.

For more information about specific services for transgender young people, call:

Michael Callen-Audre Lorde Health Center 212-271-7200

Green Chimneys NYC 212-677-7288 or 718-732-1500

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

Statistically, drug and alcohol abuse among LGBTQ young people is higher than it is among non-LGBTQ young people. If you seek treatment, it is important to find a treatment program where you can feel safe discussing your sexual orientation or gender identity, conflicts with your family and any questions you have. Some of these programs are free. They will not share information about you without your permission. For information, contact Health Outreach to Teens (HOTT) at 212-271-7212.

“When I first met another gay person, I felt excited, anxious, nervous, happy. There was an indescribable relief to know that I was not alone, that there was someone else like me. It was also intimidating, not knowing what to expect, but I quickly loosened up and felt relaxed.”

—Nathan, age 17

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Life in the foster care system is, by definition, life in transition. Any period of transition can be a time filled with unanswered questions.

Your questions may revolve around understanding your past. Your questions may also relate to making choices for the future. You may be asking yourself, “Where will I live? How will I support myself? Who can I turn to if I have a problem?” You may also be trying to understand your sexual orientation or gender identity and how it affects other parts of your life.

For some LGBTQ young people, issues of sexual orientation and gender identity can be very difficult. You may feel alone. You may blame yourself, feel guilty or depressed, use drugs or alcohol, or engage in risky sexual behavior. Counseling can be a very helpful and productive way to deal with some of these issues.

NO ONE SHOULD
TRY TO CONVINC
YOU THAT
YOU ARE STRAIGHT

TYPES OF COUNSELING

Individual counseling or **therapy** involves regular one-on-one meetings between you and your counselor to discuss issues of your past, your present and/or your future.

Support groups or **group therapy** involve regular meetings with other young people to share your experiences and give each other support, information, and advice. The group may be led by an adult or by another young person.

Family therapy involves regular meetings with you, your counselor, and members of your family with whom you may be having conflicts. The counselor should help you talk about your feelings with your family members in a way that feels safe.

FINDING THE RIGHT COUNSELOR

A good counselor will:

- listen to you
- help you deal with your feelings
- help you make good decisions
- have experience or training with young people with your specific needs
- respect your privacy
- be supportive of you and your sexual orientation and gender identity

A good counselor will NOT:

- lecture you
- judge you
- make negative comments about you or LGBTQ people
- try to convince you that you are straight
- share details about your counseling sessions with others

Before you start counseling with a specific person, you can ask the counselor:

- Are you trained to work with LGBTQ young people?
- Do you have other LGBTQ clients? If so, how many?
- Are you aware of what resources are available for LGBTQ young people in the community?

You may contact the following places to find a counselor who is trained in the specific needs of LGBTQ young people:

Hetrick Martin Institute

212-674-2600

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center

212-620-7310

The Door

212-941-9090

HOTT (Health Outreach to Teens)

212-271-7212

Green Chimneys NYC

212-677-7288 or 718-732-1500

GLOSSARY

Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) is the child protective agency of New York City that oversees the foster care system and other services for youth.

Bisexual describes people who have sexual and romantic feelings for both men and women.

Coming out is the process of understanding and accepting your identity as an LGBTQ person and sharing that information with others.

Cross-dresser describes a person that wears clothing traditionally associated with the opposite sex, such as males who wear dresses and makeup.

LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning.

Gay describes people who have sexual and romantic feelings primarily for people of the same sex.

Gender is the socially and culturally defined idea of what is masculine or feminine based on identity, appearance and behavior.

Heterosexual is the scientific term to describe someone who has sexual and romantic feelings for people of the opposite sex.

Homophobia is the irrational fear, dislike, or hatred of LGBTQ people. It often leads to prejudice, discrimination, and abuse towards people believed to be LGBTQ.

Homosexual is the scientific term to describe someone who has sexual and romantic feelings for people of the same sex.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes AIDS.

In the closet is a phrase used to describe someone who is not open or “out” about their sexual orientation and who hides it from themselves and/or others.

Lesbian describes women who have sexual and romantic feelings primarily for other women.

Person In Need of Supervision (PINS) is a young person who a judge has decided requires court supervision because they are beyond the control of their parent or guardian.

Pink Triangle In Nazi Germany gay men were forced to wear a pink triangle. Today this is a symbol used to represent the struggle for LGBTQ civil rights.

Questioning describes people who are still learning about and defining their sexual orientation or identity.

Rainbow Flag is the official six-colored flag of the LGBTQ community.

Service Plan Review (SPR) is a regularly scheduled meeting in which a foster care agency, family members, and the young person in foster care identify the plan for the young person and their family and outline what services will be provided.

Sex is whether someone is a male or a female, as defined by their sexual organs at birth.

Sexual orientation describes the direction of a person’s sexual and romantic attractions, such as “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “straight.”

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are diseases that can be passed from one person to another through skin-to-skin contact and/or the exchange of bodily fluids during sex. Sexually transmitted diseases include syphilis, gonorrhea, HIV, genital warts, herpes, and many others.

Straight refers to people who have sexual and romantic feelings primarily for members of the opposite sex.

Transgender is a term that describes people who challenge traditional “male” and “female” gender roles. It refers to a variety of gender expressions, identities, and behaviors, including cross-dressers and transsexuals.

Transsexual describes someone whose personal gender identity (whether they see themselves as “male” or “female”) does not match his or her biological sex (whether they were born with male or female sex organs).