

# LGBTQ Homeless Youth Survivors of Sex Trafficking

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**Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault**

# Learning Objectives

- To determine the barriers and obstacles faced by LGBTQ homeless youth.
- To understand how these vulnerabilities increase the risk of sex trafficking.
- To outline and discuss action steps to improve awareness, prevention, and service provision.



# Human Trafficking

**Sex  
Trafficking**

**Labor  
Trafficking**

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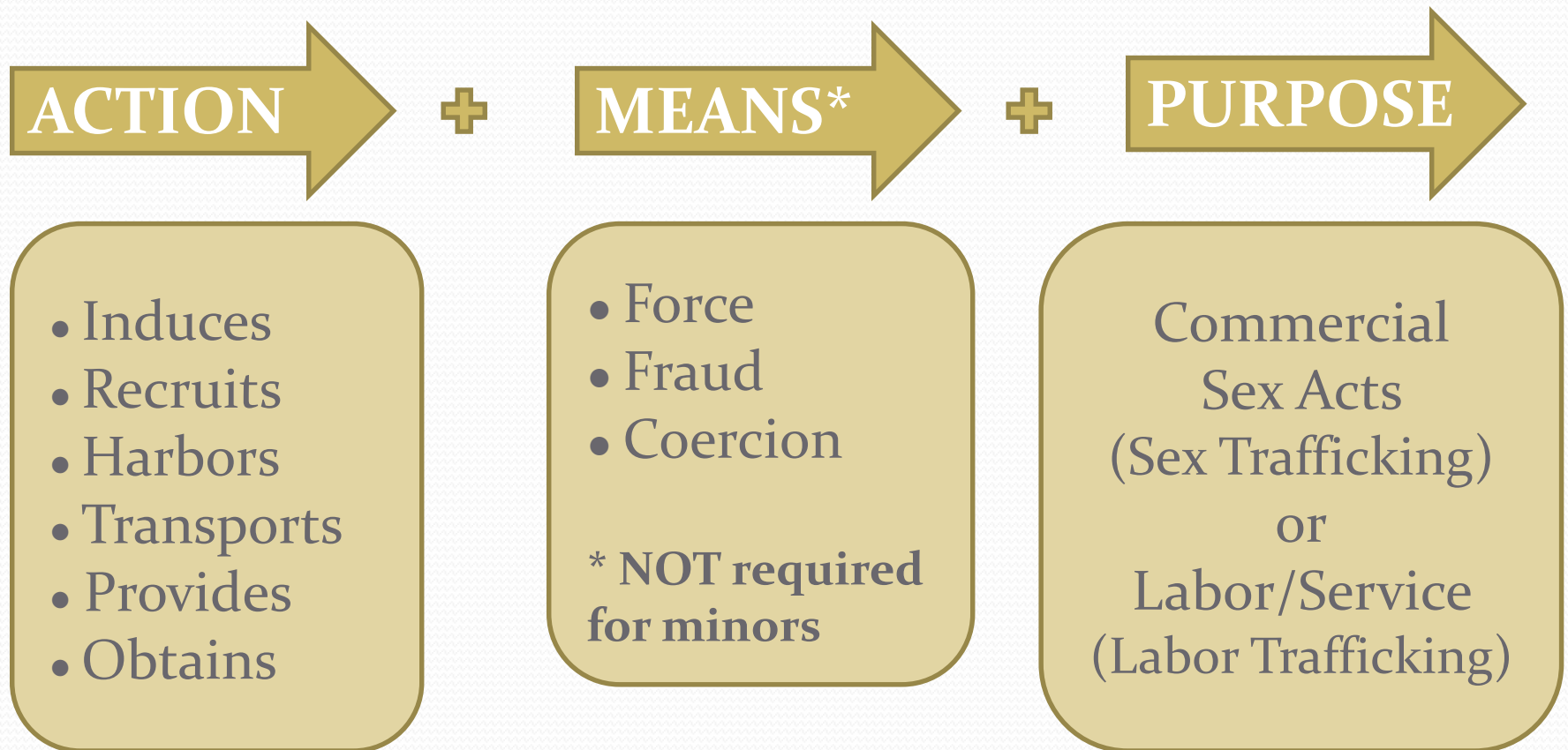
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info@mcasa.org | 301.328.7023 | P.O. Box 8782 Silver Spring, MD 20907

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# Human Trafficking



**Movement is NOT required**

# Means

## COERCION

### FORCE

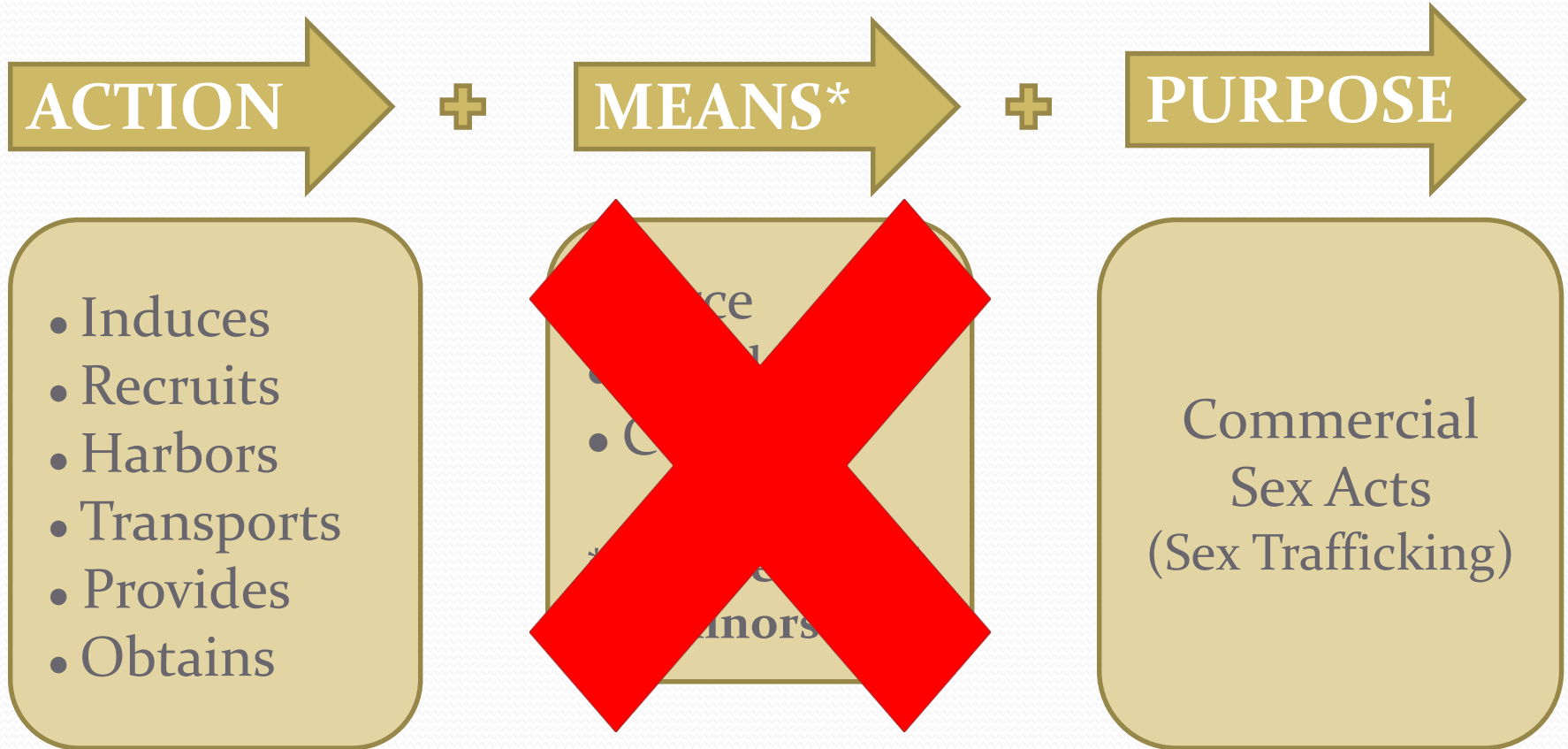
- Beating
- Burning
- Rape
- Sodomy
- Confinement
- Isolation
- Starvation

### FRAUD

- False promises
- Debt bondage
- Withholding wages
- Lie about working conditions
- Blackmail

- Psychological abuse
- Threats of serious harm
- Abuse of the legal process
- Confiscate ID documents
- Create/exploit alcohol or drug dependency
- Climate of fear

# Human Trafficking



**Movement is NOT required**

# Minors and Means

## Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act...

- Force, fraud, or coercion are not necessary when the victim is under the age of 18

*Anyone under the age of 18 involved in a commercial sex act is deemed a victim of human trafficking and is eligible for services.*

# Sex Trafficking

Escort Services  
Massage Parlors  
Brothels  
Street Solicitation  
Strip Clubs  
Exotic Dancing  
Online  
Pornography  
Survival Sex



# Defining Commercial Sex

When **anything of value** is exchanged for sex or a sexual act including:

- Money
- Food, shelter, clothing
- Drugs
- Transportation
- Job/Opportunity

When does commercial sex become human trafficking?

**18 and older**

Must prove force, fraud, or coercion

**Under age 18**

Automatically a victim of sex trafficking

# Who is Highly Vulnerable?

- **Runaway and homeless youth**
- Youth with chronic truancy history
- Victims of sexual and physical abuse and domestic violence
- Youth involved in child welfare and juvenile justice systems
- **LGBTQ youth**
- Undocumented immigrants
- Friends or family involved in the commercial sex industry
- Underserved and impoverished youth
- Substance abuse (individual or within family)
- Developmentally or intellectually delayed individuals

# Faces of Human Trafficking



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# Discussion



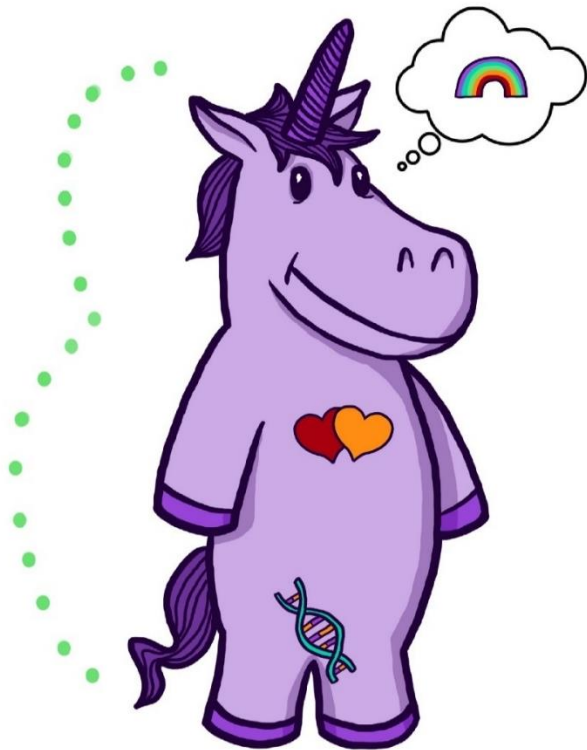
# Vulnerability

Individuals are at an increased risk for trafficking if they...

- Have experienced some form of violence in the past
- Have fewer economic opportunities
- Lack a stable support system

# Homelessness

LGBTQ youth are at a heightened risk for homelessness due to familial responses to their *sexual orientation, gender expression, and/or gender identity*.

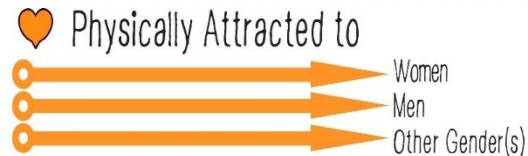


To learn more, go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

# The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



# Homelessness

LGBTQ youth experience higher rates of homelessness than heterosexual youth as they are **less likely to have a stable support system and home life.**



# LGBTQ youth represent 40% of the youth homeless population\*



*\*compared to 5-7% of the general youth population*



# 26%

of homeless LGBTQ youth  
report being forced out of their  
homes **solely because of their  
sexual orientation or gender  
identity.**

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***LGBTQ youth, on average, experience a longer duration of homelessness than heterosexual youth.***

Transgender youth spend an average of 52 months

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual youth spend an average of 29 months

Heterosexual youth spend an average of 26 months



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*LGBTQ youth are*

**7.4x**

*more likely to experience acts of sexual violence\**

*\*compared to heterosexual youth*

*Nearly **60%** of homeless LGBTQ youth...*

**report being sexually victimized**

*compared to 33% of heterosexual homeless youth*

# LGBTQ Youth and Sex Trafficking

- **Survival Sex**
- **Online**
- Street Solicitation
- Pornography
- Brothels
- Exotic Dancing
- Strip Clubs
- Escort Services
- Massage Parlors

# Survival Sex

The trading of sexual acts to meet **basic survival needs** such as food, shelter, clothing, etc.



# Survival Sex

- Individuals feel as though they have little or no other options
- Often no third party controlling sexual exploitation
- Mandatory to report any instance of commercial sexual exploitation of a minor **including** survival sex

*LGBTQ homeless youth are*

**3-7x**

*more likely to engage in survival sex\**

*\*compared to heterosexual homeless youth*

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# Coercion

Traffickers often coerce LGBTQ homeless youth by:

- Exploiting their housing insecurities
- Capitalizing on their lack of familial support
- Building a false sense of protection
- Threatening to “out” them
- Manipulating their self-worth due to their sexuality
- Withholding hormone therapy
- Instilling a mistrust of others as means of control
- Traumatic bonding



# Barriers to Justice

Although LGBTQ youth are at a high risk for sex trafficking, they are less likely to seek support services.

## WHY?

# Barriers to Justice

- Fear of being outed
- Fear of not being believed
- Fear of being placed in foster care system
- Fear of prosecution
- Misconduct and abuse from law enforcement
- Do not consider their experience as victimhood
- Unaware of or lack of community resources

# Barriers to Justice

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# System Involvement

Approximately **30%** of LGBTQ  
homeless youth have been involved in  
**the child welfare system**



# System Involvement

Approximately **30%** of LGBTQ  
homeless youth have had a history with  
**the juvenile justice system**

# System Involvement

42%

of LGBTQ youth **in the child welfare system** were forced out of their homes or were removed for safety concerns

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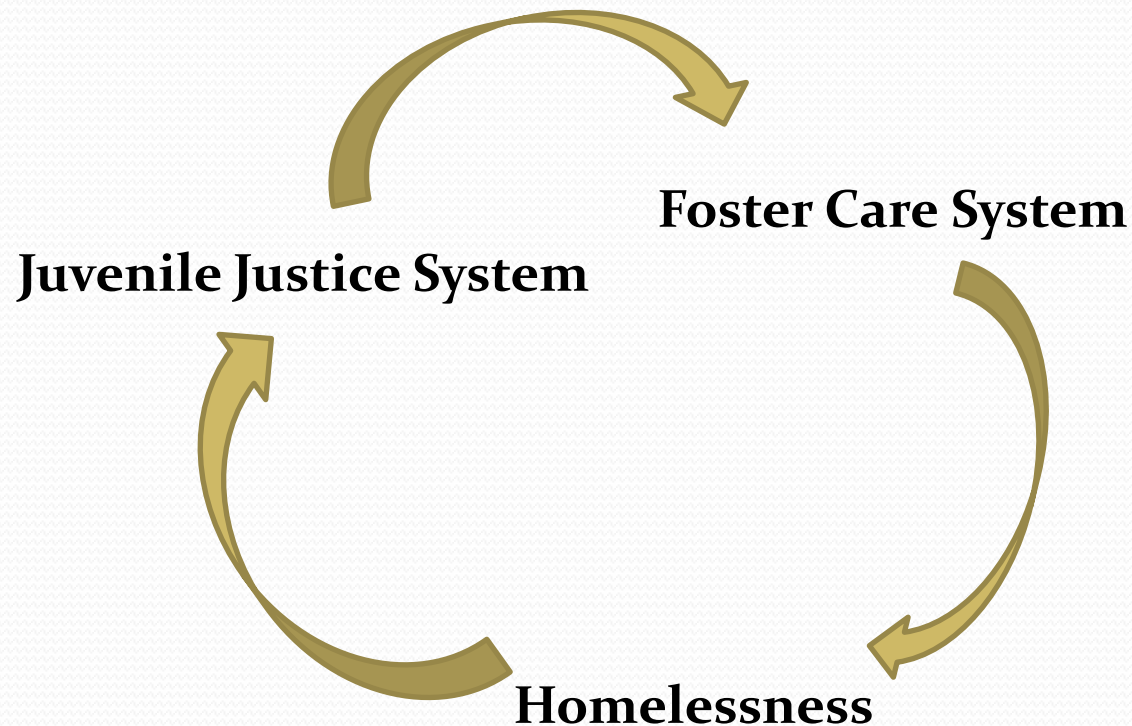
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# System Involvement



# Mental Health and Trauma

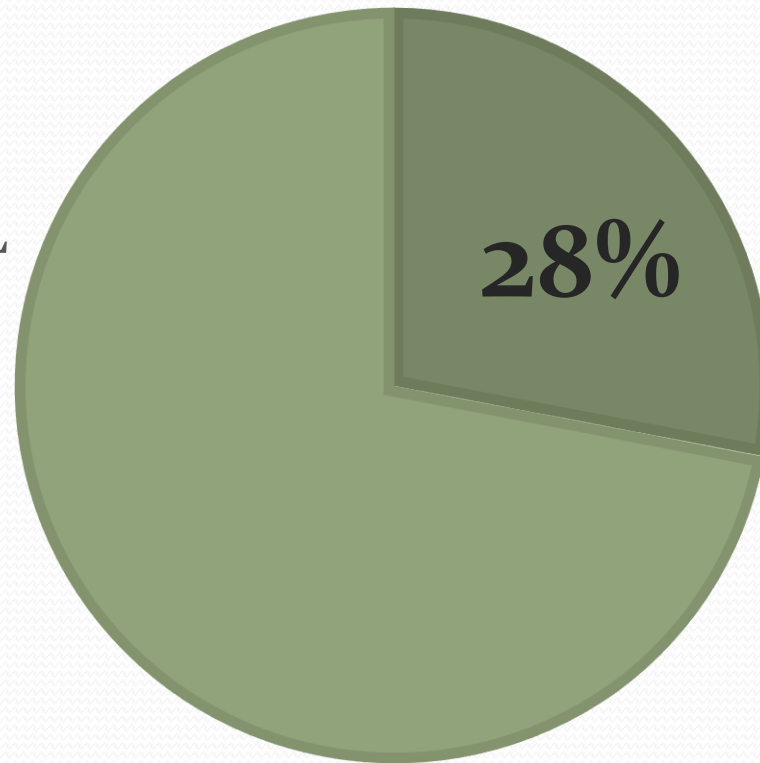


# Homophobia

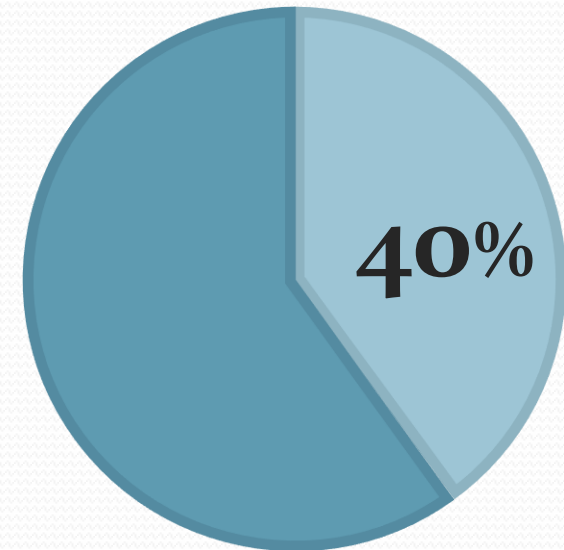
Because of stigma and discrimination, LGBTQ youth are more likely than non-LGBTQ youth **to struggle with their mental health.**

# Homophobia and Depression

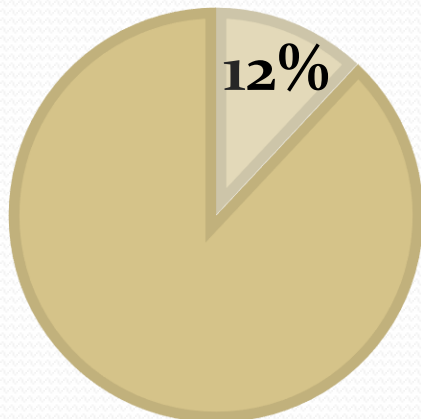
## LGB YOUTH



## TRANS YOUTH



## HETEROSEXUAL YOUTH



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*LGBTQ youth with less  
familial support are*

8.4x

*more likely to attempt suicide*

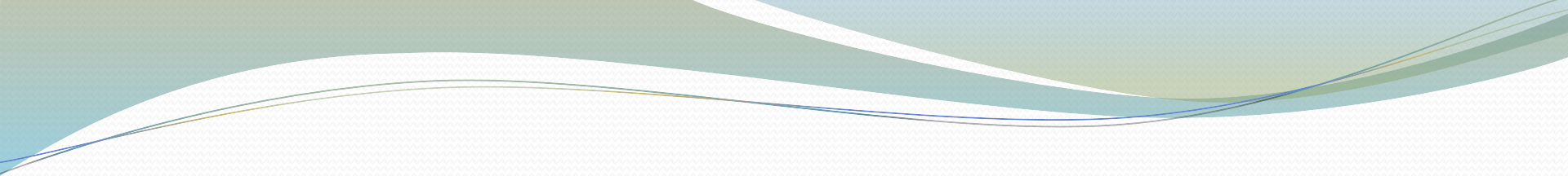
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20%

*of Trans youth have  
attempted suicide*

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# Youth Homelessness

Homeless youth are more likely than youth who are not homeless **to experience psychiatric disorders.**

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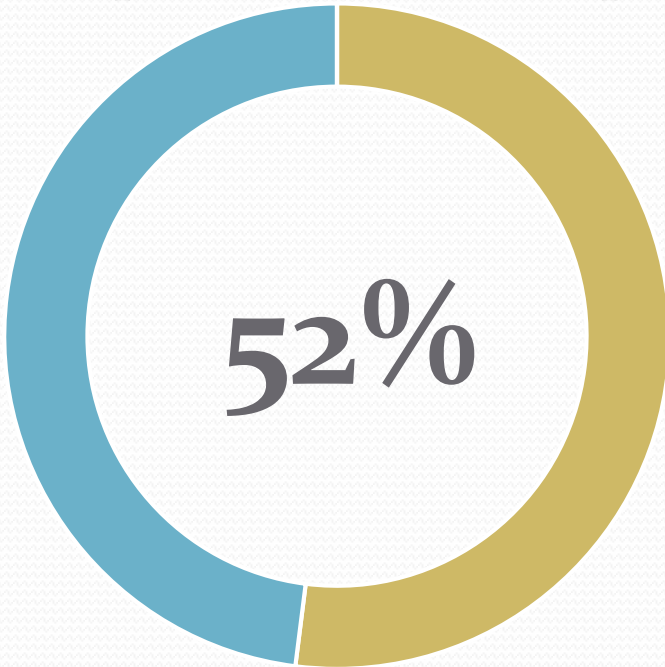
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# Youth Homelessness

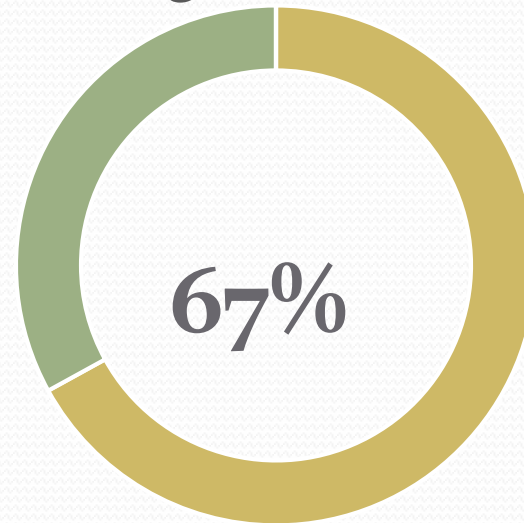
Homeless youth are **FOUR** times more likely to experience depression than youth who are not homeless.

# Youth Homelessness

Multiple Suicide Attempts



Thoughts of Death



*\*findings based on a 2008 study of 444 homeless youth ages 16-19 conducted by K. A. Yoder, et al. and published by Social Indicators Research Journal*

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# Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking victimization is associated with mental health disorders such as:

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Depression
- Suicidal ideation
- Self-harm
- Anxiety

# Sex Trafficking

57%

of child trafficking survivors reported  
having probable depression

*Findings based on a 2015 study of 1102 trafficking survivors in Cambodia,  
Thailand and Vietnam; published by the Lancet Global Health Journal*

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# Sex Trafficking

27%

of child trafficking survivors  
reported having probable PTSD

*Findings based on a 2015 study of 1102 trafficking survivors in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam; published by the Lancet Global Health Journal*

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# Multiple Layers of Trauma

When an individual is impacted by multiple co-occurring issues that negatively affect their safety, health, or overall well-being.

# Multiple Layers of Trauma

Examples include:

- Child abuse (physical, emotional, and/or sexual)
- Substance abuse, or witness to substance abuse
- Witness to domestic violence
- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Incarceration
- Sex or labor trafficking
- Being outed and/or familial rejection for LGBTQ identity



# Addressing the Fears & Barriers



# Addressing the Fears & Barriers

Awareness

Prevention

Service  
Provision

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# Awareness & Prevention

- Build community partnerships that include:
  - Specialized LGBTQ service providers
  - Local Gay-Straight Alliances
  - Universities and Hospitals
  - Survivor-led organizations
  - Local branches of National LGBTQ organizations
  - Runaway and Homeless Youth organizations

# Awareness & Prevention

- Encourage cultural competency training for staff members on:
  - Understanding LGBTQ homeless youth experiences and survivor perspectives
  - Recognizing internal biases
  - Strengthening empathetic responses
  - Creating an equitable and supportive environment for LGBTQ survivors
- Hire staff and volunteers who identify as LGBTQ

# Awareness & Prevention

- Host LGBTQ inclusive events
  - Supports regular partnerships with broader LGBTQ community
  - Builds awareness and trust of your services
  - Engages youth allies and parents of LGBTQ youth
  - Allows for LGBTQ youth to network and expand sense of community

# Service Provision

- Develop a more inclusive intake process with questions that may include:
  - Fill in the blank response fields
  - Preferred name and pronouns
  - Description of gender identity
  - Description of sexual orientation
  - “Other”
- Make survivor aware of how to report any instance of discrimination within your organization

# Service Provision

- Revisit your organizations confidentiality standards
- Be transparent about what is confidential and what is not
- Adjust safety planning practices
  - External – traffickers, family members, partners, etc.
  - Internal – other residents, staff members, etc.

# How to Respond

- Address emergency and basic needs first
- Build trust and rapport
- Respect boundaries
- Recognize personal biases
- Understand and acknowledge LGBTQ-specific fears
- Give choices
- Realize that they may not be ready to accept help
- Provide LGBTQ-specific counseling and assistance resources



# How to Respond

**If you are working with a minor who is involved in commercial sex AND you are a mandatory reporter, you must call your local CPS.**

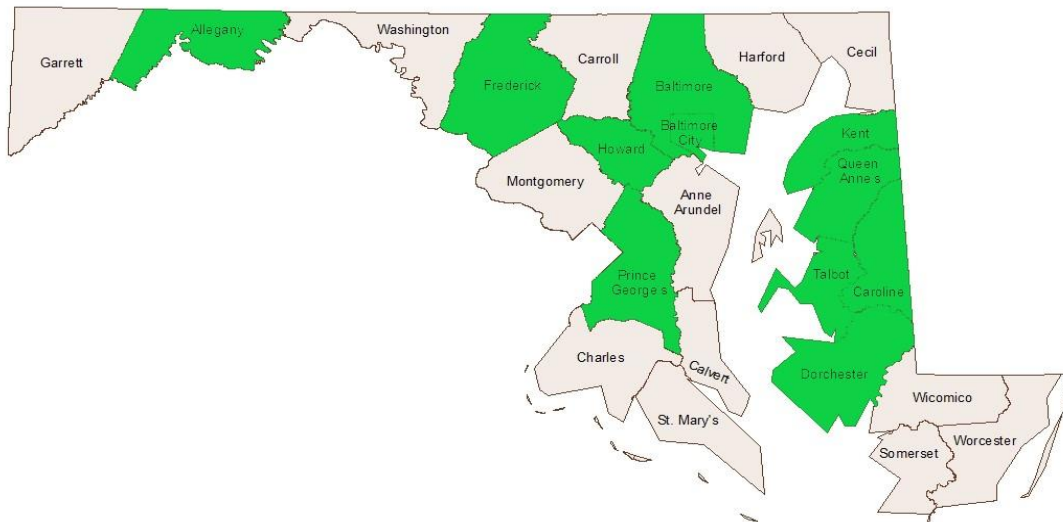
24/7 National Human Trafficking Hotline

**1-888-373-7888**

# Additional Resources

## Coordinated Action Against Sex Trafficking (CAAST) Initiative

MCASA coordinates a statewide initiative with rape crisis centers, to build statewide capacity to provide services to sex trafficking survivors across Maryland.



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# National Human Trafficking Resource Center

Provides human trafficking victims and survivors with critical support through the National Human Trafficking Hotline, BeFree Textline, local resource directories and information.

24/7 Hotline: **1 (888) 373-7888**

(in more than 200 languages)

Or text: BeFree (233733)

[www.humantraffickinghotline.org/](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org/)  
[www.polarisproject.org/](http://www.polarisproject.org/)

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# Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force

A multidisciplinary team of organizations and agencies committed to a victim-centered approach to combatting human trafficking in Maryland. See website for list of service providers.

[www.mdhumantrafficking.org/](http://www.mdhumantrafficking.org/)

# True Colors Fund

National organization working to end homelessness among LGBTQ youth through training and education programming, federal and state advocacy, and leadership development for LGBTQ youth who have experienced, or are experiencing, homelessness.

[www.truecolorsfund.org](http://www.truecolorsfund.org)

# Safe Place

National youth outreach and prevention program for young people in need of immediate help and safety.

[www.nationalsafeplace.org](http://www.nationalsafeplace.org)



# The Trevor Project

The leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ youth and young adults.

24/7 Hotline: **1 (866) 488-7386**

Or text: TREVOR to 1 (202) 304-1200

[www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)

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# My Life My Choice

National organization focused on ending commercial exploitation of children through survivor-led advocacy, professional training, and survivor empowerment programming.

[www.fightingexploitation.org](http://www.fightingexploitation.org)

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# Questions?

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