Honoring Pride Month: Focus on LGBTQIA+ Youth

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On June 28, 1970, thousands of people gathered in the streets of New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. Since then, the marches have evolved into what is now known as Pride Month—a time to celebrate the achievements of the LGBTQIA+ (meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more, and used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity) community and to help raise awareness of their continued fight for equity. Pride Month continues to evolve as needs shift, communities mobilize, and political structures change. One such change includes ensuring that Pride Month includes the voices and plight of LGBTQIA+ youth, a population that is faced with substantial health disparities.

Despite the political and social advances, the LGBTQIA+ community has experienced thus far, its youth have not experienced the same overarching positive outcomes. In fact, in a 2021 report by the Trevor Project, 28% of LGBTQIA+ youth surveyed reported having experienced homelessness or housing instability. Other reports have found that around 40% of homeless youth identified as LGBTQIA+ and that 44% of LGBTQIA+ youth in state custody reported they were removed, ran away, or kicked out of their home for reasons directly related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition to housing insecurity, LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to use illicit drugs, feel sad or hopeless, or seriously consider suicide.

LGBTQIA+ youth fare no better in the education system. The National School Climate Surveys, conducted by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) in 2021, found that 76.1% of LGBTQIA+ youth experienced verbal harassment, 32.2% were physically assaulted (e.g., pushed or shoved), and 53.7% were sexually harassed (e.g., unwanted touching or sexual remarks) in the 2021 to 2022 academic year.

Despite the disparaging statistics, research findings have concluded that inclusive school curricula have resulted in positive outcomes for LGBTQIA+ youth. For example, students are less likely to hear homophobic remarks at school, less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe, and more likely to have higher GPAs when they have the support of adults and inclusive school curriculum.

Organizations like The Trevor Project are endeavoring to improve health and wellness outcomes for LGBTQIA+ youth at the national level by providing a 24/7 suicide hotline, advocating for welcoming schools, educating allies and teachers, and conducting research studies to provide to policymakers and other LGBTQ+ youth-facing professionals. At a local level, other organizations like the Los Angeles LGBT Center provide frontline critical services such as employment assistance, housing, mentorship, and mental health support.

While Pride Month is often synonymous with rainbow flags, parades with colorful floats and glitter, and corporate sponsorship, it cannot lose sight of its origin. That is, six decades ago the Stonewall Uprisings represented a turning point in the gay civil rights movement. Today, for Pride Month to continue being a symbol that honors the past and rallies for future change, it is essential that LGBTQIA+ youth are not forgotten. Addressing the challenges LGBTQIA+ youth face is a critical step in ensuring better health outcomes for youth from other populations.