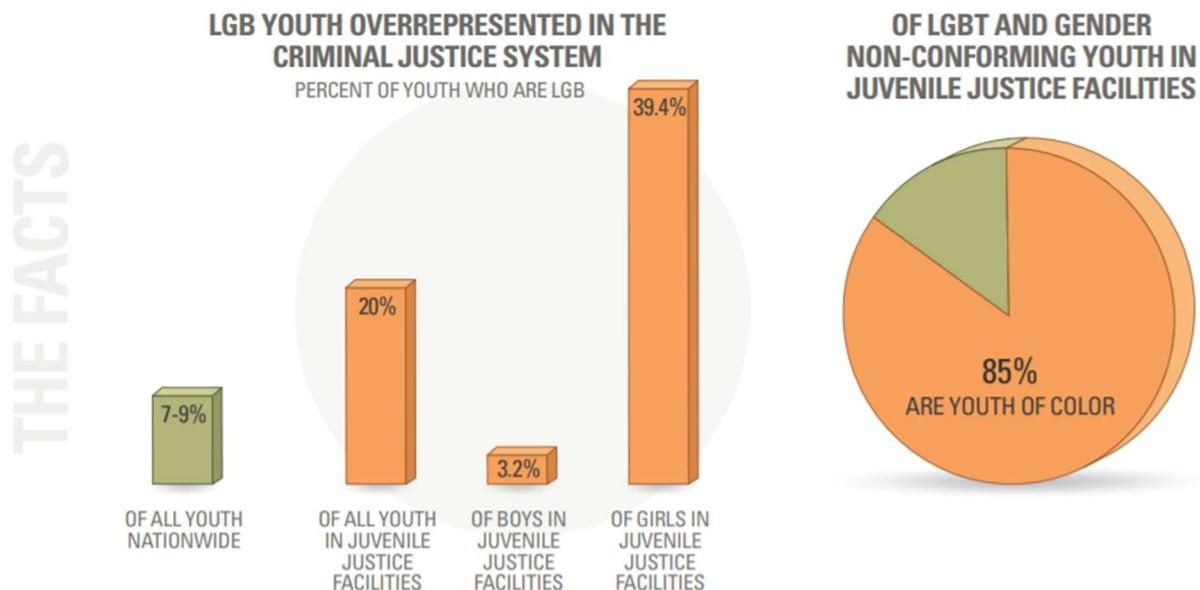


## Supporting Youth Identifying as LGBTQI+

The Department of Children and Families has an obligation to ensure fair, equal, and non-discriminatory treatment of all individuals who identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and Ally (LGBTQQIAA), in accordance with state laws governing non-discrimination. The DCF Working with Transgender Youth and Caregivers Practice Guide provides a comprehensive list of definitions that apply to transgender and gender non-conforming young adults. In general, LGBTQI+ is an umbrella term for people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Intersex. Gender identity or expression is a protected class included within Connecticut civil rights statutes - Public Act No 11-55. Even given this protected class designation, many transgender and gender non-conforming young adults face widespread misunderstanding and discrimination.

LGBTQI+ youth are at a higher risk for depression, suicide, substance abuse and violence. Violence can take the forms of bullying, teasing, harassment and physical assault. Further risks include victimization, rejection, health disorders, trauma and homelessness. Due to homelessness, these young adults are more likely to be arrested and detained. Research has estimated that LGBT youths represent 5 percent to 7 percent of the nation's overall youth population, but they compose 13 percent to 15 percent of those currently in the juvenile justice system ([www.ojjdp.gov/mpg](http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg))



This DCF practice guide also includes a Q&A section regarding protocols. Some important information from this section:

- Disclosure of information about a youth's LGBTQI+ status or gender non-conformity without the youth's consent occurs only when disclosure is necessary to comply with state or federal laws or required by the court.
- Husky and other insurance providers in Connecticut are required to provide coverage for medically necessary treatments for transgender youth and adults.
- All in - and out-of-state placements should be consistent with and supportive of a transgender or gender non-conforming youth's gender identity and expression.
- If a youth uses a different name than is reflected in his or her legal documents, DCF staff and providers should address the youth by his or her chosen name and use the correlative gender pronouns.
- Youth should have access to groups and programming that are consistent with their gender identity.

**Information:** There are various resources and supports for LGBTQI+ young adults. A resources section can be found on the V.I.T.A.L. resources website. For assistance finding resources, please feel free to connect with the Transitional Supports and Success Division.

Resources to support youth include the New Haven Pride Center, Q-Plus, Triangle Community Center in Norwalk, Quest in Waterbury, OUTCT in New London. Another resource is the Walk with Me support service through the Wheeler Clinic.

**Training:** DCF policy requires that LGBTQI+ sensitivity training shall be made available through the DCF Academy of Workforce Development on a regular basis, or by special request to

- All DCF employees
- Foster or adoptive parent(s)
- Mentor(s)

In addition, offices, congregate care facilities, schools and other agencies may access on-site training.

The Working with Transgender Youth and Caregivers Practice Guide includes helpful information for DCF staff to ensure safe, fair and equal treatment of transgender and gender non-conforming youth.

*Legal reference: Non-Discrimination of LGBTQQIAA Individuals 21-16*

Cross reference: "Working with Transgender Youth and Caregivers DCF Practice Guide"

## Tip Sheet

### *V.I.T.A.L. Steps Applied to Case Practice*

#### **Focus: Supporting youth identifying as LGBTQI+**

**Best Practice Summary:** It is widely known that youth identifying as LGBTQI+ report significantly increased rates of depression, suicidality and victimization compared to their cisgender peers, and are at higher risk for homelessness or housing insecurity. LGBTQI+ youth and young adults often must navigate the often stressful young adult world with additional challenge of being misunderstood, possibly outcast and discriminated against. For these young people in DCF care that we are responsible for, we need to have additional case management expertise in engaging, supporting and planning for these youth.

The DCF Working with Transgender Youth and Caregivers Practice Guide is a valuable resource for this. It provides terminology and definitions, protocols, helpful tips in ensuring safe, fair and equal treatment of transgender and gender non-conforming youth; resources and programs and groups for youth. The DCF Academy of Workforce Development has a several training opportunities specific to LGBTQI+. There are also champions within DCF who have expertise in the area of LGBTQI+ that can be consulted to assist in case planning. LGBTQI+ young adults that we work with require a specialized understanding if team members are to be successful in working with, for and representing them.

Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of oneself, which can differ from a person's assigned sex at birth and which also develops over time. A person's sexual orientation cannot and should not be assumed based on their gender. A **child's gender identity** may also change as they progress through adolescent development, with influence and enlightenment from their social, cultural and ethnic influences and through their own self-reflection.

It is also important to understand that gender can be expressed in many ways – from the types of clothing worn, to hairstyles, to different behaviors and mannerisms expressed, this exists along a spectrum. This concept is called a person's **gender expression**. A person's expression of their gender may not be what we typically expect based on societal or cultural norms, but this is perfectly normal.

**Goals for activity:** Case planning and resources

#### **V.I.T.A.L. Values and/or Essential Practice principles in action**

- **Voice and choice** for LGBTQI+ youth to feel that they are understood and accepted and have **input** into their plan
- **Authentic youth engagement** by listening and learning from them, from their perspective and then developing a plan together.

- V.I.T.A.L. principles of **relationships** that recognizes and supports their choices and support networks which may be different than ours.
- Strengthening the young adult's **self-confidence** and **resiliency** to be successful by assisting them with the appropriate supports and resources

**For coaching and support of skill development in supervision-**

Are there any pre judgements that team members share that need to be worked through? Are there any further training needs?

Has the team met with their friends and/or support group(s) to get a better understanding of this young person and what they are facing and what they need?

Has the team accessed DCF staff who have expertise in the LGBTQI+ area that could assist in identifying specialized services for this young person?

Is there anything that missing in case planning?

**Suggested CQI Checklist**

**Supporting Youth Identifying as LGBTQI+**

[ ] Did the case plan incorporate specific referrals and/or engagement of service providers that have an expertise in LGBTQI+ youth and young adults?

[ ] Did we ensure that the placement(s) for this person had the necessary supports and training for LGBTQI+ youth and that your placement visits include discussions about this?

[ ] Have we secured appropriate consults?

[ ] Has the team considered referral to peer supports? (If needed, resources can be located on the V.I.T.A.L. Resources website).

**Level of Mastery Demonstrated:** Consider the level of skill demonstrated across the core practices (Engage & Exchange, Assess & Understand Strengths, Fortify and Support, Reflect and Adjust) by staff on this task.

**Foundational:** The team member is at an early stage of core practice and skill acquisition. The team member is supported in learning the skills. The team member has an opportunity to develop skills further. The skills are demonstrated and coached by team leaders.

**Rising:** The team member occasionally applies the practices and skills independently. The team member is given the opportunity to develop skills. The team member demonstrates

increasing understanding of the practices. Skills are demonstrated and coached by team leaders.

**Secure:** The team member consistently applies skills independently and aspires to apply knowledge and understanding. There is a range of evidence that shows a deeper understanding of concepts.