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## **Harris County Launches NEST: A One-of-a-Kind Plan to Prevent LGBTQ Youth Homelessness *An Unprecedented Collaboration***

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Today, The Montrose Center and partnering organizations in Harris County announce [NEST](#), a collaborative to prevent homelessness among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, & questioning (LGBTQ) youth. This announcement follows **eight months** of strategic planning, during which **93 stakeholders** across multiple sectors contributed to the development of the comprehensive plan. The collaboration's vision is to **end homelessness among Harris County LGBTQ youth by 2020** and to **give these youth a future** to be positive contributors to society.

### **It's not us. It's them.**

Homelessness is affecting all youth in unprecedented numbers, **from all backgrounds and from every walk of life**, with *LGBTQ youth dramatically overrepresented* in the homeless youth population. An estimated 1.6 million youth are experiencing homelessness in the United States each year. LGBTQ youth make up only 5-7% of the general youth population, yet up to 40% of the population of youth experiencing homelessness nationally. **Family conflict** is the most frequently reported reason that young people experience homelessness, and for LGBTQ youth that conflict is often related to their **sexual orientation or gender identity**. Resolving family conflict, if safe and appropriate, is a key element in holistically addressing and helping to bring an end to youth homelessness in our country, especially for LGBTQ youth.

"One objective of NEST is to identify successful strategies for intervening early to address conflict in the home," said Deb Murphy, Youth Specialist at the Montrose Center. "In the event that it's not safe and appropriate for the youth to remain in the home, then we also want to ensure that **all service providers** are able to work with the youth in an inclusive and affirming manner."

### **Why here? Why now?**

Harris County is one of just two communities in the country participating in the LGBTQ youth homelessness prevention initiative; Hamilton County, Ohio is also participating. The Montrose Center is the lead agency for NEST, and they are joined by countless other organizations who have participated in the planning. As the lead agency, the Montrose Center will help facilitate the implementation of the plan and ensure its alignment with local efforts to address homelessness that are already underway.

Eva Thibaudeau, Director of Programs for the Coalition for the Homelessness of Houston/Harris County, called the work an, “Unprecedented collaboration in Houston.” According to the coalition, it “has resulted in incredible progress in addressing chronic and veteran homelessness; nearly 2,000 chronically homeless individuals, and more than 2,800 veterans have been housed in our community since January 2012.”

Speaking to the crisis of LGBTQ youth who are homeless, Thibaudeau said, “We are very excited for the NEST initiative and anticipate that this collaborative effort will lead the way as we work to end family and youth homelessness by 2020.

NEST activities are structured around **four core outcomes** outlined in the federal *Framework to End Youth Homelessness* by the year 2020. The framework calls on federal agencies and systems at all levels to work together to achieve better youth outcomes in the following areas: stable housing, permanent connections, education/employment, and well-being. The framework includes a preliminary intervention model that provides a local system and service outline as well as key system and service values necessary for achieving these goals.

At the national level, the initiative was developed by and is supported by five (5) Federal Government partners - the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Education (DOE), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Justice (DOJ) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) - and the private nonprofit True Colors Fund. The support provided by all six (6) partners includes intensive on-the-ground technical assistance (TA).

The local Steering Committee of NEST has created 10 subcommittees: advocacy, child welfare, criminal justice, education & training, employment, funding, primary & behavioral health care, research & data, schools, and shelter & housing. Each subcommittee developed its own objectives, action steps, and outcome measures.

“The energy that the community in Harris County has put into this project is admirable and contagious,” said former Houstonian Jama Shelton. She now serves as the Forty to None Project Director at the True Colors Fund, a national organization working to end LGBTQ youth homelessness. “I’m excited to do everything I can do help make the plan succeed, so that LGBTQ young people in Harris County have access to everything they need to reach their full potential.”

NEST is bringing together stakeholders and organizations from various systems (including child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and the homelessness systems) at both the local and national level to break down silos and to collaborate towards ending LGBTQ youth homelessness. Preliminary recommended strategies include: cultural competency trainings, ensuring LGBTQ youth can access existing housing options, coordination with the child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems, as well as improved data collection.

**The Montrose Center empowers our community, primarily gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals and their families, to enjoy healthier and more fulfilling lives.**

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