

Book Review: Drifting Toward Love

Contributed by Trevor Gates, LMSW, ACSW

Review of *Drifting Toward Love: Black, Brown, Gay, and Coming of Age on the Streets of New York*. Written by Kai Wright. Published by Beacon Press, Boston, 2008. 224 pages, \$24.95.

Finding safe places where we can feel free to experience our lives, to be all of who we are, and to find others who cherish us for our unique nature is a common human concern. For those who cannot find that safe place within their families or communities of origin, the obstacles can be great. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are often faced with the considerable task of finding safe places, to wholly experience their lives and to feel respected for who they are, while in some cases, meeting the very basic human needs of shelter, food, and clothing. Social workers are frequently in a position to serve LGBTQ youth. Journalist Kai Wright's *Drifting Toward Love: Black, Brown, Gay, and Coming of Age on the Streets of New York*, is a superb introduction to the many challenges and great strengths of LGBTQ youth of color.

A work of non-fiction that reads like a novel, Wright's *Drifting* portrays the lives of LGBTQ youth who are at-risk for a variety of reasons. Youth portrayed in this true story are faced with navigating the challenges of families that disown them because of who they are. Youth, such as Jason and Manny, would be of special concern to many social workers, faced with extraordinary life circumstances such as unsupportive home environments, sex work, experimentation with drugs, and suicide. Julius is a young man of color who was lost by the foster care system, spending many of his adolescent years negotiating the streets of New York City, housing himself in temporary shelters, and supporting himself at any cost possible. At risk for homelessness, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, exploitation, and a myriad of other social problems, LGBTQ youth like Manny, Jason, Julius, and others depicted in Wright's story find themselves *Drifting Toward Love*, grasping to the love, safety, and security that several of the characters find through trusted adults and a safe haven for LGBTQ people of color.

Social work students, practitioners, and educators have much to learn about the strength of LGBTQ youth. Social workers will not have to look very far in Wright's *Drifting* to see the many ways that LGBTQ youth are at risk and in need of our social work expertise in helping youth like these navigate their complex realities. Wright's book represents multiple instances in which LGBTQ youth have fallen through the cracks of our system and remain invisible to our communities. However, social workers must also look to the ways that Wright's LGBTQ youth of color have been resilient, successfully navigating the harsh truths of New York City street life, albeit in ways that are arguably misguided and self-destructive. Wright's book superbly teaches social workers the importance of building on the strengths of LGBTQ youth and of recognizing the capacity of LGBTQ youth in finding safer places to experience their lives. Perhaps most significantly, *Drifting Toward Love* emphasizes the importance of human relationships and communities in navigating the seemingly impossible task for LGBTQ youth of experiencing living life with dignity, compassion, and respect.

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