



The Greenhouse drop-in center is the first stop for homeless youth

He adds that sexual minority youth are also more accepted on the streets. "There is a larger percentage of gay youth on the streets than in the school system because it is harder to come out in school, especially in rural areas. So, they leave and come to the streets."

Kerr attributes the culture of acceptance to the survival needs of the street. "They need one another."

Chantel adds, "It's acceptance— whoever you are." She says a lot of queer youth are on the streets. "All the boys are bi or gay!" she laughs.

Chantel says her mother didn't care that she was bisexual. "My problems with acceptance were at school," she says. "I was fat and white trash. Now, everybody loves me. You know why? Because those people went through what I did!"

One of their survival techniques is to blend in with larger society. Chantel and Stephanie dress neatly. Consequently, people treat them with respect.

Unlike the more visible homeless adults everyone sees on the street, Duke explains, homeless youth don't look or dress like they are homeless. "They don't want to be homeless. They hate the idea of becoming a homeless adult." The flip side is that the public doesn't perceive that there is a huge homeless youth population.

The future of these kids is unclear. Both Chantel and Stephanie have friends who have gotten off the streets. "I have seen people sleeping on the street and going from



Street kids allege that incidents similar to this occur all too frequently

there to having their own apartment."

Stephanie is awaiting Section 8 housing. Chantel is attending school at New Avenues and hopes to get her GED.

They have been unsuccessful at finding a job. Chantel attributes part of the problem to lacking an address. "I tried to get a job—I gave my address as Greenhouse—then the lady said the job was not available," she says.

"I want to make one point," Chantel says quietly, poking at her coffee drink. "Being on the street—it's nothing to glamorize at all. To be honest, we don't really like it down here."

Stephanie shakes her head as she contemplates life on the streets. "To stay on the same street corner every day for five years...the only thing that gets me up is the people."

Chantel looks thoughtful. "When it rains, it gets cold. A lot of kids go home. I wish I could

do that. I wish I could go home and it would be normal like it once was." □

NATALIE SHAPIRO is a Portland free-lance writer.

## RESOURCES

- **Outside In:** 1236 S.W. Salmon St.; 503-223-4121.
- **Greenhouse:** 820 S.W. Oak St.; 503-239-1245.
- **New Avenues for Youth:** 812 S.W. 10th Ave.; 503-224-4339.
- **Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center:** 2100 S.E. Belmont St.; 503-872-9664.
- **Bad Date Line** (alerts sex workers about dangerous clients): 503-813-0966.

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