

**STRENGTHENING FEDERAL SUPPORT
TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND HUMAN
SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND LABOR

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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STRENGTHENING FEDERAL SUPPORT TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

**Tuesday, July 16, 2019
House of Representatives,
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services,
Committee on Education and Labor,
Washington, D.C.**

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:19 p.m., in Room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Suzanne Bonamici [chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Bonamici, Schrier, Hayes, Comer, Thompson, Stefanik, Johnson, and Foxx.

Also Present: Representatives Scott, and Yarmuth.

Staff Present: Tylease Alli, Chief Clerk; David Dailey, Senior Counsel; Paula Daneri, Education Policy Fellow; Emma Eatman, Press Assistant; Christian Haines, General Counsel; Stephanie Lalle, Deputy Communications Director; Andre Lindsay, Staff Assistant; Jaria Martin, Clerk/Assistant to the Staff Director; Richard Miller, Director of Labor Policy; Max Moore, Office Aide; Jacque Mosely, Director of Education Policy; Banyon Vassar, Deputy Director of Information Technology; Courtney Butcher, Minority Director of Coalitions and Member Services; Bridget Handy, Minority Communications Assistant; Dean Johnson, Minority Staff Assistant; Amy Raaf Jones, Minority Director of Education and Human Resources Policy; Hannah Matesic, Minority Director of Operations; Jake Middlebrooks, Minority Professional Staff Member; Carlton Norwood, Minority Press Secretary; Chance Russell, Minority Legislative Assistant; and Mandy Schaumburg, Minority Chief Counsel and Deputy Director of Education Policy.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. The Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services will come to order.

Welcome everyone. Our apologies for the delay. We did have votes on the floor.

I note that a quorum is present, and I note for the Subcommittee that Mr. Yarmuth of Kentucky is permitted to participate in today's hearing with the understanding that his questions will come only after all members of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services on both sides of the aisle who are present have had an opportunity to question the witnesses.

The Committee is meeting today in a legislative hearing to hear testimony on strengthening Federal support to end youth homeless-

ness. Pursuant to Committee Rule 7(c), opening statements are limited to the Chair and the Ranking Member. This allows us to hear from our witnesses sooner and provides all members with adequate time to ask questions.

I recognize myself now for the purpose of making an opening statement.

We are here today to discuss our responsibility to provide every child and youth with a safe and stable environment to learn and grow. Today, millions of youth across the country do not have access to a stable home. For many of them, the effects of homelessness are not isolated to days or weeks or months. Youth homelessness has long-term consequences that undermine their education, their safety, and their future.

As our witnesses will establish, youth who do not have access to the support and resources that come with stable housing are far more likely to drop out of school, fall prey to exploitation and human trafficking, and remain homeless as adults.

In 1974, Congress recognized its responsibility to support youth who lack a safe and stable home by passing the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. Over the last four decades Congress has repeatedly recommitted on a largely bipartisan basis to fund the law's programs to make sure that runaway and homeless youth receive the services they need to transition out of homelessness and thrive as self-sufficient individuals. Unfortunately, it has been more than a decade since Congress updated the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. Since then, new research shows that youth homelessness is a public health crisis that demands a significant and thorough response.

Researchers have found that over a 12-month period more than 1 in 30 youth between the ages of 13 and 17 and one in 10 youth between 18 and 25 will experience homelessness. One of the counties I represent in northwest Oregon, Washington County, has reported cases of youth homelessness in the thousands.

We also know that factors associated with the significantly higher risk of youth homelessness reflect the systemic challenges facing underserved communities including family conflict, child abuse, and experience with the juvenile justice and foster care systems. It is no surprise then that some youth experience homelessness at disproportionately higher rates. LGBTQ youth, for example, are at a 120 percent greater risk of entering homelessness compared to heterosexual or cisgender peers. Racial discrimination also contributes to disproportionate homelessness among Black and Latino youth. Black youth have an 83 percent higher risk of experiencing homelessness than their White peers, and Latino youth have a 33 percent higher risk.

Homelessness can also put youth at high risk for devastating experiences that can have long-lasting consequences on their development. Homeless youth are vulnerable to exploitation and coercion. The data show that one in five homeless youth are victims of human trafficking. I am going to say that sentence again. The data show that one in five homeless youth are victims of human trafficking. One in six are sexually assaulted or raped.

Homeless youth who experience these unspeakable acts need comprehensive supports to process their trauma and rebuild their

lives. Our deeper understanding of the causes and factors surrounding youth homelessness demand an updated approach to addressing this public health issue.

As this Committee considers a bipartisan reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, we must make sure that Federal programs engage and unite family members; approve an approach to transitioning youth into a safe and stable housing when it is in the best interest of the child; adopt trauma-informed practices that support youth whose experiences have had long-lasting effects on their mental health and well-being; and, finally, importantly, that they do not discriminate against youth based on age, race, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Including these provisions in Federal programs will help prevent children from having to experience the uncertainty and the trauma of homelessness. Today's hearing takes an important step toward achieving our shared goal of making sure that all children have access to safe and stable housing that empowers them to reach their full potential.

And I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member for the purpose of making an opening statement.

[The statement of Chairwoman Bonamici follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Suzanne Bonamici, Chairwoman,
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services**

We are here today to discuss our responsibility to provide every child and youth with a safe and stable environment to learn and grow.

Today, millions of youth across the country do not have access to a stable home. For many of them, the effects of homelessness are not isolated to days or weeks or months. Youth homelessness has long-term consequences that undermine their education, their safety, and their future.

As our witnesses will establish, youth who do not have access to the support and resources that come with stable housing are far more likely to drop out of school, fall prey to exploitation and human trafficking, and remain homeless as adults.

In 1974, Congress recognized its responsibility to support youth who lack a safe and stable home by passing the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. Over the last four decades, Congress has repeatedly recommitted—on a largely bipartisan basis—to fund the law's programs to make sure that runaway and homeless youth receive the services they need to transition out of homelessness and thrive as self-sufficient individuals.

Unfortunately, it has been more than a decade since Congress updated the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. Since then, new research shows that youth homelessness is a public health crisis that demands a significant and thorough response.

Researchers have found that, over a 12-month period, more than one in 30 youth between the ages of 13 and 17 and one in ten youth between 18 and 25 will experience homelessness. One of the counties I represent in NW Oregon, Washington County, has reported cases of youth homelessness in the thousands.

We also know that factors associated with significantly higher risk of youth homelessness reflect the systemic challenges facing underserved communities, including family conflict, child abuse, and experience with the juvenile justice and foster care systems.

It is no surprise, then, that some youth experience homelessness at disproportionately higher rates. LGBTQ youth, for example, are at a 120 percent greater risk of entering homelessness compared to heterosexual or cisgender peers. Racial discrimination also contributes to disproportionate homelessness among Black and Latino youth. Black youth have an 83 percent higher risk of experiencing homelessness than their white peers, and Latino youth have a 33 percent higher risk.

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less youth who experience these unspeakable acts need comprehensive supports to process their trauma and re-build their lives.

Our deeper understanding of the causes and factors surrounding youth homelessness demand an updated approach to addressing this public health issue. As this Committee considers a bipartisan reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, we must make sure that federal programs:

- (1) Engage and unite family members—a proven approach to transitioning youth into safe and stable housing—when it is in the best interest of the child;
- (2) Adopt trauma-informed practices that support youth whose experiences have had long-lasting effects on their mental health and well-being; and
- (3) Importantly, that they do not discriminate against youth based on age, race, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Including these provisions in federal programs will help to prevent children from having to experience the uncertainty and trauma of homelessness. Today's hearing takes an important step toward achieving our shared goal of making sure that all children have access to safe and stable housing that empowers them to reach their full potential.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Madame Chairwoman, for yielding.

There are few aspects of a child's development as influential as the home they grow up in. For homeless and runaway youth, there are devastating dangers and risks that can compromise their safety and health. Sadly, reports indicate that in the United States, around 700,000 youth are without homes. Congress reauthorized the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in 2018 which helps continue efforts to prevent childhood homelessness and rescue youth runaways.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act's three main programs offer crisis intervention, such as temporary shelter, counseling, and family unification for runaway and homeless youth. Additionally, the programs support community-based organizations that provide homeless youth with stable and safe longer-term housing. The RHYA also funds outreach and education programs for runaway and homeless youth who have been subjected to serious trauma, like sexual abuse and human trafficking. This work is lifesaving for young Americans facing homelessness.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, which we will hear from today, also helps save and protect missing youth including runaway youth. The center's work is just one example of the multifaceted effort to protect youth. By engaging with corporations, law enforcement, nonprofit organizations and families, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children also helps bring kids back home. Increasingly, children cared for by the state are running away, ending up homeless.

While we will hear today that there is a better coordination to help locate these kids and get them back home, there is more work that can be done. There isn't a simple solution for youth homelessness. Children leave home for a lot of reasons. Some run from abuse, but others are lured by predators looking to harm children. That is why we need to help the folks on the ground, the people we will hear from today, to do their jobs.

Our children are this country's most valuable asset. They are also the most vulnerable in our society. As lawmakers, we must help protect American youth from homelessness and the dangers it presents. Today's hearing will give us an opportunity to learn more about the programs serving our runaway and homeless youth. I look forward to the testimony from all of our witnesses.

And I yield back.
[The statement of Mr. Comer follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services**

Thank you for yielding.

There are few aspects of a child's development as influential as the home they grow up in. For homeless and runaway youth there are devastating dangers and risks that can compromise their safety and health. Sadly, reports indicate that in the United States around 700,000 youth are without homes. Congress reauthorized the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) in 2018, which helps continue efforts to prevent childhood homelessness and rescue youth runaways.

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There isn't a simple solution for youth homelessness. Children leave home for a lot of reasons some run from abuse but others are lured by 1predators looking to harm children. That is why we need to help the folks on the ground - the people we will hear from today to do their jobs.

Our children are this country's most valuable asset. They are also the most vulnerable in our society. As lawmakers, we must help protect American youth from homelessness and the dangers it presents. Today's hearing will give us an opportunity to learn more about the programs serving our runaway and homeless youth. I look forward to the testimony from all our witnesses.

Thank you, I yield back.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. Thank you very much for your statement, Ranking Member.

Without objection, all other members who wish to insert written statements into the record may do so by submitting them to the Committee Clerk electronically in Microsoft Word format by 5 p.m. on July 29.

I will now introduce our witnesses. We are fortunate to have a distinguished panel.

Dr. Matthew Morton is a research fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago with expertise in youth homelessness, youth development, and evidence-based practice. He is the principal investigator of Voices of Youth Count, the most comprehensive national research initiative to date focused on youth homelessness in America. Dr. Morton held previous positions at the World Bank, the U.S. Government, in philanthropy, and with youth-serving non-profits. While working in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, he was a key contributor in the development of the U.S. Government's National Strategy and Framework to End Youth Homelessness.

Dr. Melinda Giovengo -- was I close? Giovengo?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Close.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. Giovengo -- I am Italian. I should know that, right? -- is Executive Director of YouthCare in Seattle, Washington. She has 30 years of experience in developing and implementing reengagement programs for out-of-school and homeless youth. Melinda holds an M.A. in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in educational psychology and is published on issues regarding youth homelessness and the impact of learning disabilities in hard-to-serve populations. She is the board chair of the National Network for Youth and a board member of the National Youth Employment Coalition.

Mr. Robert G. Lowery, Jr., is the Vice President of the Missing Children Division at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, where he supervises the organization's response to reports of missing children. Previously, Mr. Lowery spent more than 30 years in public services as a law enforcement officer, as the Assistant Chief of Police for the Florissant, Missouri, police department and as commander of the Greater St. Louis Major Case Squad, the oldest and largest multi-jurisdictional homicide task force in the United States.

Mr. Lowery has authored several publications, including an investigation and program management guide for law enforcement agencies responding to cases of missing and abducted children, as well as detailed guides promoting strategies for finding long-term missing children and appropriate response protocols for children with special needs who go missing.

Finally, Mr. David Baker is a resident of San Diego, California, where he is a support specialist for the YMCA Youth & Family Services Program. As a formerly homeless youth, Mr. Baker advocates for public policy across the Nation and represents the boundless potential of underserved youth. He uses his life experience to guide the creation and implementation of realistic solutions to social issues like youth homelessness. His mission is to promote agency, access, and hope for the most vulnerable populations in society.

Welcome again to our witnesses. We appreciate all of you for being here today, and we look forward to your testimony. Let me remind the witnesses that we have read your written statements. They will appear in full in the hearing record. Pursuant to Committee Rule 7(d) and Committee practice, each of you is asked to limit your oral presentation to a 5-minute summary of your written statement. Let me remind the witnesses that, pursuant to title 18 of the U.S. Code, section 1001, it is illegal to knowingly and willfully falsify any statement, representation, writing, document, or material fact presented to Congress or otherwise conceal or cover up a material fact.

Before you begin your testimony, please remember to press the button on the microphone in front of you, so it will turn it on, and the Members can hear you. And as you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After 4 minutes, the light will turn yellow to signal that you have 1 minute remaining. When the light turns red, your 5 minutes have expired, and we ask you to please wrap up.

And we will let the entire panel make their presentations before we move to member questions. When asking -- excuse me -- when

answering a question, please remember to once again turn on your microphone, and I first recognize Dr. Morton.

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW MORTON, PH.D., M.SC., RESEARCH FELLOW, CHAPIN HALL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, CHICAGO, IL

Mr. MORTON. Thank you, Chairwoman Bonamici, Ranking Member Comer, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to join this important hearing.

My name is Dr. Matthew Morton. And I am a researcher with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. I lead Voices of Youth Count, the most comprehensive research initiative to date focused on youth homelessness in America. This research was designed in response to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act through which Congress called for replicable, national prevalence and incidence estimates of youth homelessness and data concerning the population's needs and characteristics.

I also have a family background of lived experience. I lost my parents at a young age and grew up with a great deal of turbulence at home. I had brief runaway experiences, but I was lucky. Teachers, coaches, and others saw potential in me. And they helped me to realize that potential in spite of my adversities. Others, like my little sister, are not so lucky. Their adversities escalate to enduring crisis and homelessness, and many of them remain invisible.

Good data can help make the invisible visible. Evidence can help us know where and how to make things better for all our Nation's youth. As long as millions of youth do not live up to their potential as individuals, we don't live up to our potential as a Nation.

Chapin Hall's first nationally representative survey of youth homelessness surfaced alarming conclusions. We found that 1 in 30 adolescents ages 13 to 17 endure some form of homelessness within a 12-month period. With young adults ages 18 to 25, the prevalence climbs even higher. One in 10 young adults reported some form of homelessness within a year. Moreover, the prevalence rates were statistically equal between rural and nonrural communities. As a share of the population, youth homelessness is just as much of a problem in rural America as it is elsewhere.

Our research also shows that not all youth share the same likelihood of facing homelessness. Youth of color have significantly higher homelessness prevalence as compared to their White, non-Hispanic peers. Rates are especially high among American Indian, Alaska Native youth, and among African American youth. Our data also show that young people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, LGBTQ, face 120 percent increased risk of homelessness.

In addition to demographic disproportionalities, certain experiences indicate increased risk for homelessness. The single factor that we found most strongly correlated with higher risk for homelessness among young adults was the lack of a high school diploma. These young people had more than four and a half times the risk of homelessness as young adults who attained at least a high school level of education. Further, youth experiencing homelessness had disproportionately been in foster care and had spent time in juvenile detention, jail, or prison.

Our research also sheds lights on connections between youth and family homelessness. For one thing, a large share of youth experiencing homelessness are parents themselves, struggling with housing instability while caring for young children. Moreover, nearly all young people link the beginning of their homelessness to earlier disruptions of family and home, including family homelessness and entry into foster care.

For youth, homelessness is about more than the loss of housing. It is about the lack or loss of relationships and connections that others can rely on more consistently for support, safety, and stability. In fact, a startling 35 percent of youth reported the death of at least one parent or primary caregiver. Housing instability is but one factor that characterizes their journeys, which are typically shaped by significant trauma. We can do better. We can take steps to better respond to youth homelessness and to prevent it. The Federal Government plays a critical role in supporting data to inform policy in a broad range of areas.

Likewise, we encourage Congress to consider its role in enabling the replication of national data on youth homelessness so that we can track our progress toward the goal of ending youth homelessness and tailor strategies accordingly.

We cannot end youth homelessness in the dark. Adolescence and young adulthood are key developmental periods in our lives. Every day of housing instability represents missed opportunities to support young people's healthy development so that they can contribute to flourishing communities. We all lose out in these missed opportunities.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Morton follows:]

Extended Testimony

Testimony before the Committee on Education & Labor of the U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services
Chairwoman Suzanne Bonamici
Ranking Member James Comer

Hearing Title: Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness
Tuesday, July 16, 2019 at 2:00 p.m.

Witness: Mr. Matthew Morton, Ph.D., M.Sc.
Research Fellow, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

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Thank you, Chairwoman Bonamici, Ranking Member Comer, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to join this important hearing.

My name is Dr. Matthew Morton, and I am a researcher associated with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. I lead the institute's research agenda on youth homelessness, which includes Voices of Youth Count, a public-private partnership and the most comprehensive national research initiative to-date focused on youth homelessness in America. This research was designed in response to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA; Public Law [P.L.] 110-378), through which Congress called for replicable national prevalence and incidence estimates of youth homelessness and data concerning the population's needs and characteristics. In addition to having worked previously on this issue in the U.S. government, in philanthropy, and with youth-serving non-profits, I come from a family background of lived experience.

I lost my parents at a young age and grew up with a great deal of turbulence at home. I had brief runaway experiences, but I was lucky. Teachers, coaches, and community leaders saw potential in me before I even saw it in myself, and they helped me to realize that potential in spite of my adversities. Others, like my little sister, are not so lucky. Their adversity escalates to enduring crisis and homelessness, and many of them remain invisible. I got into research because I believe good data can help make the invisible, visible.

Evidence can help us know where and how to make things better for all our nation's youth. The success of our young people has a direct impact on the success of our country. As long as millions of youth do not live up to their potential as individuals, we don't live up to our potential as a nation.

### Prevalence & Incidence

In the first ever nationally-representative survey of homelessness among youth and young adults, Chapin Hall's Voices of Youth Count came to alarming conclusions. Our estimates indicate that at least 1 in 30 adolescents, ages 13-17, endures some form of homelessness within a 12-month period. As expected, with young adults, ages 18-25, the prevalence climbs even higher. 1 in 10 young adults reported some form of homelessness within a year. About half of these were young people reporting couch surfing without a safe and stable living arrangement.<sup>1 2</sup>

Moreover, the prevalence rates of youth homelessness were statistically equal between rural and non-rural communities. There are still more youth experiencing homelessness in urban communities because there are more people living in urban places. Yet, as a share of the population, youth homelessness is just as much of a problem in rural America as it is elsewhere.

At the same time, homelessness can look different in rural communities. Our brief youth surveys show that youth in smaller, rural counties are about half as likely to be staying in shelters—often because those shelters don’t exist or aren’t youth-friendly—and twice as likely to be staying with others while homeless as compared to their peers in larger, more urban counties.<sup>3</sup> This reality further complicates conventional approaches for identifying and counting youth experiencing homelessness in rural communities because these have depended largely on shelter- and street-based counting methods. Our study underscores that, just because youth homelessness might be less visible in rural communities and small towns, doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.

Understanding the scale of our prevalence estimates may be assisted by understanding the broader socio-economic context from which these estimates emerge. A Harvard study found that high housing costs disproportionately affect young households, especially in the 100 largest metro areas.<sup>4</sup> In more rural areas where housing costs may escalate less rapidly, poverty rates also tend to be higher and economic opportunities fewer for young people, which could contribute to comparable youth homelessness rates in these communities.<sup>5</sup> Equally concerning is the fact that young adult householders have among the highest poverty rates in the country—especially unmarried young householders. Unmarried male household heads under age 25 have a poverty rate of 36 percent, and unmarried female household heads under age 25 have a staggering poverty rate of 49 percent. These are well above the national poverty rate of 13.5 percent.<sup>6</sup> About 4 in 10 adults, ages 18 to 29, have student loan debt,<sup>7</sup> and student loan balances have more than tripled since 2004, with an average balance per borrower of nearly \$30,000.<sup>8</sup>

Taking these factors into account, it is perhaps not surprising that, according to the American Community Survey and the Current Population Survey, the share of young adults continuing to live with their parents has risen sharply over the last decade, with one-half of 20- to 24-year-olds living with their parents in 2015.<sup>9</sup> Cost burden is a commonly cited reason for young adults continuing to live with their parents. On top of this, many youth cannot rely consistently on parents for safe and stable housing when their other options are exhausted. Take, for instance, many of the nearly 1 million youth, ages 14–26, who have spent time in foster care since their 14th birthday.<sup>10</sup>

All the aforementioned trends disproportionately affect youth of color whom are also at higher risk for experiencing homelessness. Due to data limitations, it is difficult to empirically assess the extent to which each of these factors contributes to the prevalence of youth homelessness, but they illustrate an important backdrop against which high annual estimates of homelessness experiences can be better understood.

### **Disproportionalities**

Our research shows that not all youth experience homelessness at equal rates. Some subpopulations are at greater risk than others.<sup>11</sup>

Race and ethnicity: Youth of color—especially American Indian and Alaska Native, Black, multiracial, and Hispanic youth—have significantly higher homelessness prevalence as compared to their White non-Hispanic peers. Rates are especially high among American Indian and Alaska Native youth and Black youth, who face about twice the risk of experiencing homelessness as other youth. With respect to American Indian and Alaska Native youth experiencing homelessness, it is important to point out that, contrary to popular perception, like the Native population overall, the vast majority of these young people do not reside in rural communities or tribal lands. As such, policies focused spatially on reservations alone to address the specific needs of this population would be insufficient. Tailored strategies to address the disproportionate risk for homelessness among American Indian and Alaska Native youth living in urban and suburban communities are also critically needed.

We also find disproportionately high rates of homelessness among Hispanic youth, which is different than what we typically see with administrative shelter data across the country. Other representative surveys, however, have come to similar conclusions. This suggests that these young people are experiencing homelessness at concerning levels, but their experiences may be more hidden—for example, in the forms of couch surfing, doubling up, and avoidance of shelters.

Sexual orientation and gender identity: In addition, our data show that young people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) face a 120 percent increased risk for homelessness compared to young people identifying as heterosexual and cisgender.<sup>12</sup> Across the 22 counties in which we conducted youth homelessness counts with brief surveys, the share of homeless youth identifying as LGBTQ generally ranged from 15 to 40 percent, which is much higher than the share of youth identifying as LGBTQ in the general population. Our research finds that, not only do LGBTQ youth experience homelessness at higher rates, but, among youth experiencing homelessness, they also face even greater degrees of adversity—ranging from exposure to violence and sexual abuse, to discrimination, to early death—compared to their non-LGBTQ peers.

Our analysis also underscores the importance of an *intersectional* understanding of different identities and risks. Youth belonging to multiple at-risk subpopulations—such as a Black youth who also lacks a high school diploma, or is parenting, or identifies as LGBTQ—face compound risk for homelessness. And different identities can shape young people’s trajectories into homelessness and experience with systems and services in different ways along their journeys.

### **Risk Factors**

In addition to demographic disproportionalities, certain experiences also put young people at increased risk for homelessness.

Low education: First, the single factor that we measured and found most strongly correlated with higher risk for homelessness among young adults was low educational attainment, and in particular the lack of a high school diploma. These young people had over 4.5 times the risk of homelessness as young adults who had attained at least a high school level of education. Although we cannot make causal inferences, this finding reinforces the extent to which education, and underlying factors that support educational attainment, might protect youth from becoming homeless. There

is likely a bidirectional link between school dropout and housing instability, and multi-sectoral policies and programs are needed to address these interconnected outcomes.

Systems involvement: Second, we have strong evidence that youth exposed to certain systems face much greater risk for homelessness. Among the youth experiencing homelessness who we surveyed across our 22 diverse partner counties, 29 percent had ever been in foster care, and 46 percent had ever spent time in juvenile detention, jail, or prison.<sup>13</sup> To appreciate how high these percentages are, consider that two percent of the 18- to 28-year-olds in a nationally representative survey sample—the third wave of the Add Health Study—had ever lived in a foster home, and that 15 percent of the 24- to 34-year-olds who participated in the fourth wave of the Add Health Study had ever spent time in a jail, prison, juvenile detention center, or other correctional facility.<sup>14</sup>

Our research doesn't necessarily show that involvement in these systems *causes* youth homelessness, and, in many cases, youth do not necessarily exit directly from these systems into homelessness. For instance, some young people could have been in foster care earlier in their childhood, subsequently adopted or placed into kinship care, and then experienced homelessness as older adolescents or young adults. But the data nonetheless show the significant overlap between these systems involvement and youth homelessness, and they underscore that youth involved in these systems should be viewed as at higher risk for homelessness and in need of increased early identification efforts and developmentally-appropriate support to mitigate that risk.

From other research, we also beginning to learn about the poor transitions of many youth from behavioral health systems. For example, a recent Washington state study found that 17 percent of young people exiting inpatient mental health services, and 28 percent of those exiting substance use disorder facilities, were homeless within a year of discharge.<sup>15</sup>

Taken together, these findings suggest that we need to work across public systems in partnership with runaway and homeless youth service providers to facilitate more supported transitions into and out of different systems. We also need to recognize that youth with histories of involvement with child welfare, criminal justice, and behavioral health systems are broadly populations at higher risk for homelessness and needing our help.

Parenting and family instability: Third, our improved understanding of risk factors reveals a blurry line between youth and family homelessness. For one thing, a large share of youth experiencing homelessness are themselves parenting. In fact, we found that about 44 percent of young adult women, and 18 percent of young men, experiencing homelessness were pregnant or a parent.<sup>16</sup> These young people need coordinated services that respond to the developmental needs of a youth parent, of their young children, and the holistic needs of a family. Systems could also recognize pregnancy as a potential early warning indicator for risk of homelessness among vulnerable youth.

Moreover, the intersection between youth and family homelessness also comes into play with respect to youths' trajectories into homelessness. Indeed, through our in-depth interviews with youth in five communities, we found that 3 out of 4 young adults experiencing homelessness had first experience homelessness as minors, and 1 in 4 experienced family homelessness before they experienced unaccompanied homelessness.<sup>17</sup> In both respects, these data clearly underscore the

need for more coordinated, seamless systems of care that address both youth and family homelessness.

### **Pathways**

Beyond the scale, scope, and characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness, it is important to understand this issue in a broader context of trauma, loss, and fluidity. For youth, homelessness is about more than the loss of housing; it is about the lack or loss of relationships and connections that most people had to rely on more consistently for love, support, safety, and stability. Housing instability is but one factor that characterizes their journeys. Every young person's journey into and through homelessness is unique. Each tells its own story of adversity and resilience.

Take the example of Baylee, a 17-year-old multiracial female living in San Diego and one of 215 young people who participated in Voices of Youth Count in-depth interviews. Baylee's homelessness started at age two when her mom and two older sisters became homeless. Baylee described these childhood years as "mov[ing] around a lot" between hotels, shelters, apartments of friends, and family. Instability marked many areas of Baylee's early childhood. She recalled attending "at least 15 elementary schools" and having "missed the fourth grade entirely." She attributed this instability to her mother's poor health and, as a result, her mom's inability to hold a steady job.

When Baylee was 11, her mom committed suicide, and Baylee entered foster care. She lived in a group home and two foster homes, which she described as abusive. Throughout, she contemplated suicide. It took two years for the court to approve an out-of-state placement with her dad, stepmother, and stepsiblings. Once there, she became the target of ongoing conflict and arguments. Often kicked out, she would temporarily stay with other family members. Baylee increasingly struggled with her mental health and was hospitalized multiple times for attempting suicide. Upon discharge, her required "safety plan" included talking with her dad. Baylee explained, "Because of my mental health issues, like I told my dad that I needed to talk to him, and he was like, 'No!'" Feeling rejected, she left home. Her dad told her to never return. She never did.

Baylee first stayed in a hotel with a friend whose family was also homeless, but then she moved to an emergency shelter for minors. However, she was turned away after her dad refused to sign the required paperwork. Baylee then began to exchange sex and "do stuff" to pay for a hotel room. Not wanting this to continue and afraid of sleeping outside on the streets, she returned to the emergency shelter at 2:30 a.m. They let her in for the night, and the following morning, the shelter convinced Baylee's father to sign for her to stay. When we met Baylee, her 21-day time limit at the shelter (a federally mandated time limit) was approaching. She was eagerly awaiting acceptance into Job Corps. But as a minor, she needed a 2-week extension in order to remain at the shelter and avoid placement into foster care for 6 months until she turned 18. Baylee felt optimistic that through Job Corps a brighter future was on her horizon.

Baylee's story reflects the unique and complex pathways that lead young people into homelessness. At the same time, our in-depth interviews also reveal some commonalities in youths' pathways into and through homelessness, several of which we see reflected in Baylee's experience.<sup>18</sup>

Family disruption, loss, and adversity: First, nearly all young people link the beginning of their homelessness to earlier disruptions of family and home. For many, these disruptions included family homelessness and entrance into foster care. Relatedly, youth pathways through homelessness are also characterized by significant personal losses. In fact, a startling 35 percent of youth experienced the death of at least one parent or primary caregiver.<sup>19</sup> When we take other forms of loss into account—loss of family, loss of home, loss of trust, loss of safety, loss of childhood, and loss of routine, friends, school, or community due to instability—loss emerges as an incredibly poignant and prominent shared experience among runaway and homeless youth. Baylee experienced so many of these forms of loss over the course of her young life.

Our in-depth interviews further revealed that youth experiencing homelessness, like Baylee, face astounding levels of adversity, including exposure to violence, maltreatment, exploitation, and discrimination, among others. In response to histories of loss and adversity—both while housed and unhoused—many youth learn over time to seek to emotionally and physically protect themselves against the risk of future losses. Systems and services need to understand these natural coping mechanisms that young people justifiably acquire and respond by providing trauma-informed environments for young people to gradually recover a sense of safety and stability in their lives.

Fluidity: Second, as with Baylee’s situation of moving in and out of homelessness and between a range of different sleeping arrangements over time, we found fluidity to be a common trait of young people’s experiences of housing instability. This is an important difference in how youth tend to experience homelessness and housing instability compared to chronically homeless older adults who the general public often imagines when thinking of “homelessness.” Nearly all (93 percent) of the youth in our in-depth interviews who experienced what some call “literal homelessness”—i.e., sleeping on the streets or in shelters—also experienced couch surfing at some point, or at multiple points, across their pathways. Few young people reported using only one type of sleeping arrangement across their pathways. Instead, the majority (91%) experienced two to three different types. While in a single day youth may use one type of sleeping arrangement (for example, staying on the streets), over the course of a week, youth often cycled between many types.<sup>20</sup> This fluidity of young people’s homelessness experiences reinforces why it is so important to capture young people’s housing situations over a period of time, and not just on a single night, and to capture the full spectrum of sleeping situations a young person has to engage in while unstably housed.

Overall, young people’s pathways demonstrate that homelessness is not an event. Our in-depth interviews revealed that young people rarely shifted abruptly from a positive and stable situation one day to entrenched homelessness the next. Rather, young people’s pathways reflect complex journeys into and out of different forms of housing and homelessness, positive and negative experiences and relationships, and different systems and services. The research on these pathways underscores why preventing and ending youth homelessness takes all of us—multiple systems, programs, and institutions—working together, sharing data and information wherever appropriate, to avoid the many missed opportunities illuminated by young people’s trajectories into homelessness.

## Conclusion

The breadth and depth of insights produced by the Voices of Youth Count initiative illuminate the benefits of a comprehensive, mixed-methods approach to studying youth homelessness at the national level. We have invested in developing methods to studying the prevalence, incidence, characteristics, and experiences of youth homelessness that are both robust and replicable. None of it would have been possible without the impetus from Congress to fund better evidence to help address the problem. On behalf of my colleagues and partners across the country, I want to thank this body for its critical investment in establishing a better foundation of data.

We encourage Congress to now consider its role in supporting the replication of national prevalence, incidence, and experiences data on youth homelessness going forward so that we can track our progress as a nation toward the goal of ending youth homelessness and tailor strategies as needed. Trend data based on repeated nationally representative studies are commonly gathered and used to inform policy in a range of other areas, such as child welfare, substance use, domestic violence, sexual risk behaviors, and employment, among others. We need this sort of federal commitment in the case of youth homelessness, too. We simply cannot end youth homelessness in the dark.

Our findings reveal youth homelessness as a broad and hidden challenge as well as a complex problem with deep roots in family adversities and structural inequalities. Youth homelessness will not be fixed by short-term or simple fixes. At the same time, youth homelessness is a solvable problem. While there is much greater need for investment in evaluation of programs and practices in this space, our evidence review revealed interventions that demonstrated measureable reductions of youth homelessness, and several of our research components shed light on key entry points in the lives of youth and across public systems where better policies can make a difference.

It may help in mobilizing the resolve and resources to end youth homelessness if we consider what is at stake. Research shows that the single most common pathway into adult homelessness is not eviction, not substance use or mental health problems, not adult domestic issues, but youth homelessness.<sup>21</sup> In other words, if we care about ending homelessness overall, we need to invest in preventing and ending youth homelessness. Further, our analysis, along with colleagues at the University of Southern California, of homelessness systems administrative data across 16 communities has shown that the longer we wait, the harder and more expensive the job of ending youth homelessness becomes. Of the few youth who come into homelessness systems and are offered a HUD-funded housing resource, most wait about 4.5 months or longer to get housing placements. And these bottlenecks in resources and service delivery have consequences. Every additional day of waiting was associated with a 2 percent decrease in a youth's likelihood of staying stably housed even after getting into a housing program.<sup>22</sup> We have to act more effectively and more efficiently to help young people achieve housing stability and get on a path to thriving.

A lack of safe and stable housing is a lack of freedom to act fully on one's unique assets and realize one's potential. This is particularly concerning during adolescence and young adulthood. Ample research documents adolescence and young adulthood key developmental windows that significantly shape our life trajectories. Every day of housing instability represents accumulated

trauma and missed opportunities to support young people's healthy development, transitions to productive adulthood, and capacity to contribute to vibrant and economically competitive communities. We all lose out in these missed opportunities.

### **Summary of Findings that Directly Impact RHYA**

The purpose of Chapin Hall's "Missed Opportunities" reports has been to connect the dots between Voices of Youth Count research findings and implications for meaningful policy change. We realize that the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is of interest to this Subcommittee and can be directly informed by the findings of our research.

In summary, one could take away five themes from our findings: (1) address interpersonal trauma; (2) apply a developmental lens to program practices and rules of participation; (3) match policy to the fluidity of the homeless experience; (4) coordinate with the child welfare systems to enhance our family-based prevention efforts; and (5) improve engagement and share data across service systems and geographic locations. Each theme allows a window into the multiple areas within RHYA that could be strengthened. We encourage Congress and other stakeholders to consider the implications of our findings to align federal policy with the real challenges that confront young people experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

- (1) *Address Family Disruption and Interpersonal Trauma:* The significant effects of interpersonal trauma and loss are a thread woven throughout many of the stories of youth who experience homelessness. A consistent source of trauma among young people we interviewed was borne from the conflict and struggles youth experienced earlier, within their families. This finding invites us to reorient policies that inform our work by centering family conflict and family disruption as core to the problem of youth homelessness.

This includes the experiences of stigma and discrimination that youth faced, particularly LGBTQ youth, in their own family systems. To bolster the trauma specific nature of services, there is opportunity within RHYA to acknowledge the universality of family disruption and interpersonal trauma among youth experiencing homelessness and recommend specific evidence-supported practices to address the interpersonal trauma in the lives of these young people. Core to this trauma-informed approach is valuing youth perspectives and insights regarding unique needs for support in achieving their life goals.

- (2) *Apply a Developmental Lens:* Adolescence and emerging adulthood usher in a time in a young person's life where healthy relationships are critical to fostering growth and healing, especially from relationship-based traumas and losses that have occurred in their families. Our findings also support attention to identity development for youth who experience stigma and discrimination. RHYA would benefit from a focus on the unique and diverse developmental needs within this population. Our findings would promote healthy development through healing from the interpersonal trauma, family conflict, and disruption that young people reported impacts their relationships, and shapes how/if they engage with people who may be available as resources and supports (family, friends, peers). Providing young people with second chances is critical. Developmentally speaking, all young people need opportunities to make mistakes and to recover and learn from them. Our service systems must provide those second chances and critically important developmental supports. This means flexibility in

programs and services is needed. Consider that for every participant in our study, peers were a critical factor in their decision making; young people regularly prioritized retaining friends over finding or maintaining housing stability. Youth we interviewed shared that if the rules and requirements of a program placed important relationships at risk, youth prioritized maintaining those relationships. Said differently, if asked to choose, youth would prematurely exit, or altogether avoid, a program instead of abandoning relationships with peers/family/pets that mattered to them. Youth also require extended supports during moments of transition. Finally, young people whose identities are developing in the context of stigma and discrimination will also avoid service providers and family members who are not sensitive to their developmental needs for identity safety, nurturance, and belonging.

- (3) *Youth Homelessness Policy Should Match the Fluidity and Mobility of the Homelessness Experience:* Even within a single week, many of the young people in our study cycled among couch surfing, shelters, abandoned buildings, cars, family homes, and the street. Yet most youth remained within their home states. The RHYA has the opportunity to reflect the nature of these patterns in mobility, and this attunement to fluidity should exist across all three program types authorized under RHYA, including Basic Center, Transitional Living, and Street Outreach.
- (4) *Coordinate with Child Welfare Systems to Enhance Family-based Prevention Efforts in Families:* The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 provides the opportunity for RHYA-authorized service providers to coordinate with child welfare systems when the families of young people require more supports beyond what is allowable under the RHYA. Child welfare systems can now provide prevention services for families and youth who are at risk of foster care placement. This new legislation allows for a level of coordination among child welfare and RHYA-authorized services that has not been possible before.

<sup>1</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., Matjasko, J.L., Curry, S.R., Schlueter, D., Chavez, R., Farrell, A.F. (2017). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National Estimates*. Chicago, IL, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

<sup>2</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., Matjasko, J.L., Curry, S.R., Schlueter, D., Chávez, R., & Farrell, A.F. (2018). "Prevalence and Correlates of Youth Homelessness in the United States." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 62(1):14-21.

<sup>3</sup> Morton, M. H., Dworsky, A., Samuels, G. M., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in rural America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

<sup>4</sup> Joint Center for Housing Studies (JCHS) of Harvard University. (2016). *The State of the Nation's Housing: 2016*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Chapin Hall analysis of U.S. Census data.

<sup>7</sup> Cilluffo, A. (2017). "5 facts about student loans," FactTank. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. <http://pewrsr.ch/2vau4Bw>

<sup>8</sup> Brown, M., Haughwout, A., Lee, D., Scally, J., & van der Klaauw, W. (2015). "The student loan landscape," Liberty Street Economics. New York, NY: Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). (2017). *The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practice with Adolescent Brain Development*. Baltimore, MD: Author.

<sup>11</sup> Morton, M. H., Dworsky, A., Matjasko, J.L., Curry, S.R., Schlueter, D., Chávez, R., & Farrell, A.F. (2018). "Prevalence and Correlates of Youth Homelessness in the United States." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 62(1):14-21.

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- <sup>12</sup> Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>13</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., Matjasko, J.L., Curry, S.R., Schlueter, D., Chavez, R., Farrell, A.F. (2017). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National Estimates*. Chicago, IL, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>14</sup> Harris, K. M. (2009). The national longitudinal study of adolescent to adult health (Add Health), Wave IV, 2007–2009. Chapel Hill, NC: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- <sup>15</sup> McCanne, E.S. (2018). *From Inpatient Treatment to Homelessness: Envisioning a Path Toward Healing and Safe Housing for Young People in Washington State*. Seattle: A Way Home Washington.
- <sup>16</sup> Dworsky, A., Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M. (2018). *Missed opportunities: Pregnant and parenting youth experiencing homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>17</sup> Samuels, G. M., Cerven, C., Curry, S., Robinson, S. R., & Patel, S. (2019). *Missed opportunities in youth pathways through homelessness*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Chamberlain, C., & Johnson, G. (2013). "Pathways into adult homelessness," *Journal of Sociology* 49 (1): 60–77.
- <sup>22</sup> Morton, M.H., Rice, E., Blondin, M., Hsu, H., & Kull, M. (2018). *Toward a system response to ending youth homelessness: New evidence to help communities strengthen coordinated entry, assessment, and support for youth*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. Thank you for your testimony.  
Dr. Giovengo, you have 5 minutes for your testimony. Thank you so much.

**STATEMENT OF MELINDA GIOVENGO, PH.D., CEO,  
YOUTHCARE, SEATTLE, WA**

Ms. GIOVENGO. Thank you.

Good afternoon, Subcommittee Chair Bonamici and Ranking Member Comer and Members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Dr. Melinda Giovengo. And for over 12 years, I have had the privilege of serving as the CEO of YouthCare, one of the largest providers of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness services in Washington State. I also serve as the Board Chair for the National Network for Youth. I am honored to share testimony today about YouthCare's work and our support for the reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

Founded in 1974, YouthCare was one of the first RHYA shelters to serve runaway and homeless youth on the West Coast. We currently serve about 1,500 young people each year and operate a budget of around \$17 million. I want to tell you a little bit about YouthCare's services and why the reauthorization of the RHY Act is so critical to our mission.

First is our focus on minors experiencing homelessness. Across the country, States are grappling with a major system gap: How to support teens who may not meet the threshold of child welfare and dependency but also cannot return home safely. YouthCare's RHY shelters and transitional living program fill that gap in our community. Our first priority is always family reconciliation. Yet reconciliation takes time. For this reason, we support extending the length of stay at the Basic Center from 21 to 30 days or longer if it is permitted by licensing in the State.

But for a quarter of the youth in our shelters, returning home will not be an option because of issues like abuse, family homelessness, or rejection. This is why YouthCare opened a transitional living program for minors in 1999. We strongly advocate for expanding these programs so that youth are not re-traumatized by having to move from shelter to shelter in order to stay safe.

Second, our focus on trafficked youth. Young people living on the streets are extremely -- at extreme risk for exploitation and trafficking. YouthCare requires all of our staff and all of our employees to attend a 2-day training on the unique needs of sexually exploited youth and has specialized case managers that support young people with histories of trafficking and sexual exploitation.

This is also where outreach comes into effect, where we go out on the streets and find these young people before others do.

Third, our focus on LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ youth face a higher risk of homelessness. In 1998, YouthCare opened a groundbreaking program for LGBTQ-identified young adults, which was and remains the only transitional living program for LGBTQ young adults in Washington State, focused on affirming young people's gender identity and their sexual orientation.

Last, our focus on at-risk or overrepresented populations. The YouthCare staff are trained in harm-reduction, trauma-informed care to provide services for populations most at risk of homeless-

ness, including young people of color, young people exiting systems of care, pregnant and parenting youth, and refugee and immigrant young people.

Neuroscience has shown that young people's brains do not reach maturation until the age of 25. They are cognitively and emotionally still in formation. Many youth also lack basic employment and life skills. For this reason, strategies, interventions, and outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness must be different than for adults. RHY is the only Federal funding source tailored to the unique educational, socio-emotional, and housing needs of young people experiencing homelessness. Specifically, RHY's flexible three-pillar model of outreach, shelter, and transitional housing, maternal group homes, allows us to progressively move young people across housing continuums without barriers, such as narrow definitions of homelessness and permanent housing used by HUD, which is why, I will just add, it is so important that you also pass the Homeless Children and Youth Act. Instead, RHY's definition of homelessness and performance outcomes of safe and stable housing, permanent connections, education, and employment, and socio-emotional and well-being enable us to design services and capture progress through a lens that is age-appropriate and reflective of generational needs, which brings me to the reauthorization of RHY.

4.2 million young people in our country are experiencing homelessness. That number is staggering and unacceptable. Without targeting intervention, it also represents a pipeline to chronic adult homelessness, yet lifesaving services are woefully underfunded. RHY's recent funding was \$127 million, a mere \$30 per young person experiencing homelessness. We can end youth homelessness, but this investment is far from what we need to do so.

RHY needs a comprehensive reauthorization, which occurred more than a decade ago, and this must include the nondiscrimination and gender-affirming language and support for human trafficking and prevention. YouthCare also supports changing all RHY grant cycles from 3 to 5 years to ensure program stability.

Every young person has potential. Unleashing that potential will start with passing of the reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. I have done this work for more than 35 years. It can be hard, gritty, and yet inspiring every day. What keeps me going without a doubt is that we change lives and we save lives.

Thank you for letting me share my thoughts, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The statement of Ms. Giovengo follows:]

**Testimony of  
Dr. Melinda Giovengo, PhD, CEO & President of YouthCare  
Hearing on “Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness”**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services  
July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Introduction**

Good afternoon Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee Chair Bonamici, Ranking Member Comer, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

My name is Dr. Melinda Giovengo. For over thirteen years, I have had the privilege of serving as the CEO of YouthCare, one of the largest providers for youth and young adults, ages 12-24, experiencing homelessness in Washington State. I also serve as the Board Chair for the National Network for Youth.

I am honored to share testimony about YouthCare’s work and our support for the reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

**About YouthCare**

YouthCare works to end youth homelessness and to ensure that young people are valued for who they are and empowered to achieve their potential. Founded in 1974, YouthCare was one of the first shelters to serve runaway and homeless youth on the West Coast. Dovetailing with the initial passage of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), YouthCare was also among the first agencies in the nation to receive federal funds for the Basic Center Program authorized through RHYA. Over the past four decades, YouthCare has defined best practices and developed programs that set a national standard for excellence.

YouthCare currently operates fourteen physical sites, which includes our founding Basic Center Program, the Adolescent Shelter. YouthCare serves over 1,500 youth and young adults each year and operates a \$16.7M annual budget. Public dollars comprise approximately 66% of YouthCare’s funding, with almost 20% coming from federal funds.

Through a combination of individualized services tailored to young people’s needs and a trusting relationship with a caring adult, YouthCare ensures that young people experiencing homelessness achieve long-term stability. YouthCare’s comprehensive range of services includes shelter and transitional housing, education and employment training, street outreach and engagement services, and prevention services.

### YouthCare's Unique History & Services

From its inception, YouthCare was dedicated to serving populations that were disproportionately at-risk of homelessness, with an emphasis on helping minors, young people who identified as LGBTQ, and young people who were being trafficked and/or sexually exploited. The goal was always to help young people stabilize, build skills, and reconcile with family if safe and possible.

- **Focus on minors experiencing homelessness**

YouthCare's founding Basic Center Program, the Adolescent Shelter, helps minors experiencing homelessness access shelter and reunite with family whenever safe. In 1999, YouthCare bolstered its services for minors by opening a RHYA-funded transitional living program for under-18 adolescents called Pathways.

RHYA Basic Center Programs, like the Adolescent Shelter, and RHYA Transitional Living Programs for minors, like Pathways, fill a unique need—not just in King County, but also in the state and the nation. Across the U.S., states are grappling with a pervasive system gap: how to support teens who may not meet the threshold for state dependency—or may meet the threshold but cannot access foster care due to lack of capacity or will—but cannot go home for myriad reasons (e.g., safety, rejection, poverty, family homelessness, chemical dependency or mental health issues in the home, caregiver death, or incarceration).

YouthCare's Adolescent Shelter immediately helps young people who may be experiencing trauma, sexual exploitation, abuse, or neglect. The 24/7 Shelter increases young people's personal safety and socio-emotional well-being while working to ease underlying family conflict. Yet family reconciliation, particularly in the face of trauma, is hardly a linear process, and cannot always be achieved within a short period of time. For this reason, YouthCare supports extending the length of stay at Basic Center Programs from 21 days to 30 days, and longer if permitted by state licensing.

For some youth, however, family reconciliation may simply be unfeasible or unsafe. These youth, who account for a quarter of youth staying in YouthCare's under-18 shelters, often find themselves "shelter hopping"—bouncing from shelter to shelter every month, staying the maximum amount of time allowed, until, if they are lucky, securing a solution that is more permanent. In King County, that alternative is YouthCare's Pathways Transitional Living Program. Unfortunately, there are just nine longer-term beds for all minors experiencing homelessness in the County. There is a dire need for increased RHYA investments in longer-term transitional living programs for minors in both the County and the nation.

- **Focus on LGBTQ youth**

LGBTQ youth are disproportionately at risk of homelessness. Approximately one third of unaccompanied young people in King County identify as LGBTQ; across the nation, estimates of LGBTQ homeless youth reach as high as 40%.<sup>i</sup> Research conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago revealed that LGBTQ homeless youth face higher levels of adversity: 38% reported being forced to have sex (compared to 15% for non-LGBTQ youth), and 64% reported being exposed to stigma or discrimination within their family (compared to 37%).<sup>ii</sup> These risks underscore the need to include gender-affirming and non-discrimination language in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

In 1998, YouthCare opened Ravenna House, a groundbreaking program for LGBTQ-identified young adults. Ravenna House was, and remains, the only RHYA-supported transitional living program specifically developed for LGBTQ young adults in Washington State. The program focuses on gender-responsive services that acknowledge, affirm, and celebrate young people's gender identity and sexual orientation. Both the RHYA Street Outreach Program grant and the RHYA Transitional Living Program grant support YouthCare's Street Outreach Program and Ravenna House to this day.

- **Focus on trafficked youth**

Young people living on the streets are at extreme risk of exploitation and trafficking. About one fifth of homeless youth report being trafficked and over one third report experiencing violence or sexual assault while homeless.<sup>iii iv</sup>

In 1988, YouthCare was one of the five organizations in the nation to secure a demonstration grant through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) focused on helping street youth who were being trafficked or victimized through sexual exploitation. The grant enabled YouthCare to launch its Threshold Program, which served commercial sexually exploited children (CSEC) through a continuum of care including shelter, housing, case management, education and employment training. YouthCare operates similar services today through the Bridge Continuum.

Under the Bridge Continuum, every YouthCare employee attends a two-day training on identifying and serving the unique needs of CSEC. YouthCare holds dedicated beds for CSEC and has specialized case managers that work with CSEC to heal and move forward. Additionally, YouthCare manages the Bridge Collaborative, a multi-agency partnership across King County that provides case management, support, and resources to youth and young adults experiencing sexual exploitation and human trafficking, including sex and labor trafficking. YouthCare is very supportive of the recommendations to add provisions to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act around

identification, data collection, and service provision for young people experiencing trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation.

- **Focus on at-risk and overrepresented populations**

All YouthCare staff are trained in the evidence-based frameworks of harm reduction and trauma-informed care, as well as strengths-based practices. In addition to LGBTQ and trafficked young people, YouthCare tailors its services to populations that are disproportionately at risk of homelessness, including youth of color, youth exiting systems of care in the justice system, child welfare, or behavioral health facilities, youth with undiagnosed and untreated mental health and/or chemical dependency issues, youth who are pregnant and parenting, and immigrant and refugee youth.

### **Why is the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act so critical?**

Just as young people's risks while couch-surfing or living on the streets are unique, so too, are their needs. Neuroscience has shown that young people's brains are still rapidly developing and do not reach maturation until 25.<sup>v</sup> Moreover, young people are at the onset of adulthood: not only do they lack credit, rental, and employment histories, but many also lack the basic life-skills to successfully thrive on their own. For these reasons, the strategies, interventions, and outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness must vary from those for adults experiencing homelessness.

- **Definitions of homelessness**

Young people are the most vulnerable during their first night on the street—and, in many cases, their first hour. If we can prevent youth from experiencing homelessness, or get them off the streets as soon as possible, we curb the risk of traumatization and long-term homelessness. Early intervention and prevention must be a core strategy to ending youth and young adult homelessness.

Unfortunately, the definitions of homelessness used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) make prevention services challenging and do not reflect young people's unique needs. HUD directs communities to prioritize homelessness services for those who fall within Category 1 of homelessness, or "literal homelessness." Both the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED), however, use a more inclusive definition of homelessness that recognizes temporarily staying with others and other forms of homelessness as homeless episodes that are eligible for services. This inclusivity is critical: homelessness is a fluid experience for youth and families, and the definition of homelessness determines which services and systems communities can—or cannot—access or design.

HHS and ED's definition of homelessness more accurately represents both the need and nature of homelessness—and affords broader access to a continuum of shelter and housing services. For example, under RHYA a young person exiting a YouthCare shelter can move into a YouthCare RHYA-funded transitional living program. Under HUD's definition of homelessness, that same young person would need to exit the shelter into homelessness to meet the definition of "literal homelessness" and become eligible for housing. In other words, the HHS definition of homelessness prevents homelessness; HUD's definition promotes the creation of homelessness and penalizes young people's access to emergency services.

- **Performance outcomes**

The performance outcomes used by HUD are similarly problematic for young people. HUD measures success through the narrow lens of permanent housing. RHYA, however, uses "safe and stable housing," which is more reflective of developmental trends. Indeed, the majority of young adults 18-24 in the U.S. do not live in housing considered permanent. Nearly a quarter of the population has the ability to live with their parents long-term; many others are living in transitional or stable housing (e.g. college dormitories).<sup>vi</sup> Moreover, according to the U.S. Census, young adults move more than any other generation (accounting for over 43% of movers), and migration patterns increase with economic instability.<sup>vii</sup> Stable housing is thus a more appropriate outcome measure for this population.

Moreover, "success" is multi-faceted and looks different based on age, cognitive levels, and socio-emotional needs. RHYA's program outcomes and three-pillar approach of outreach, shelter, and transition living programs are customized to young people's developmental needs. RHYA broadens its scope of success, measuring progress through the four categories of safe and stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and social and emotional well-being.

For all these reasons, I ask Congress to bolster and elevate the value of an investment in these vital Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs, as the HHS approach to serving youth is what our young people need.

### **Funding for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act**

National research authorized by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago found a staggeringly high prevalence of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in America: at least 700,000 minors and 3.5 million 18 to 25 year-olds experienced some form of homelessness in America per year. That amounts to 1 in 10 young adults ages 18-25 and 1 in 30 youth ages 13-17.<sup>viii</sup>

RHYA is the only federal funding source geared toward the housing, socio-emotional, and educational needs of this population; however, RHYA's vital community-based services are woefully underfunded. The most recent appropriation for RHYA was \$127 million, which equals a mere \$30 per young person investment in the life of a young person experiencing homelessness. This level of funding is far from the investment truly needed to transform young people's lives—and stem the cycle of chronic homelessness, intergenerational poverty, and toxic trauma.

### **Conclusion**

I've done this work now for more than 35 years. What keeps me going is knowing that, every day, we change lives. Allow me to end with the words of one of our young people, Triston Spears:

*Before I came to YouthCare, I was homeless. I was relying on anything to survive. Anything you could imagine in order to find a meal to eat—a snack—or a few bucks to get to where I needed to go.*

*It was ugly. I was depressed. Sad. Desperate. I felt abandoned and lacked support. I was eager to make something better of myself, but I didn't know how to do it.*

*Fortunately, I had a friend that was a part of YouthCare, and she referred me to a woman working at YouthCare.*

*If I needed food, clothing—anything—I always knew I could reach out to YouthCare. If I needed help, most of the time, my case manager, Joe, had it or he could put me in the direction of where to find it.*

*If it weren't for YouthCare, I'd probably be another statistic. The people I grew up with are dealing drugs. They're killing themselves to support their addictions. They're the people that you see outside.*

*Where would I be without YouthCare? Probably with them.*

*The first time I was put in detention I was in fourth grade. I was raised in the criminal justice system. Then I was in the foster care system. The people I know that were part of the criminal justice system and the foster care system are dead.*

*I have a credit score.*

*I have three daughters that are my everything.*

*I have an apartment downtown.*

*I have a good paying job.*

*That's what three years of consistent support can do.*

Every young person has potential; everyone grows up with curiosity and dreams for their future. We must leverage this opportunity. Almost 50% of homeless adults in King County experienced homelessness for the first time before the age of 25.<sup>ix</sup> Helping young people move ahead is our most effective—and humane—strategy to preventing and ending adult homelessness. Federal investments in homeless services should reflect that strategy.

RHYA needs a full and comprehensive reauthorization, which last occurred more than a decade ago. This includes critical non-discrimination and gender-affirming language and increased supports for human trafficking services and prevention. Additionally, YouthCare supports changing the Basic Center Program stay from 21 to 30 days to give youth more time to reconcile with family and changing all RHYA grant cycles from 3 to 5 years to ensure for increased program sustainability.

Congress has the power to invest in these programs so they can be scaled to meet the need and, one day, end youth homelessness in this nation. This starts with passing a full reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I appreciate your time and attention and I look forward to addressing any questions you may have.

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<sup>i</sup> Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Greeson, J. K.P., Schilling, D. S., Treglia, D., Wasch, S., &. (2018). *Human trafficking prevalence and child welfare risk factors among homeless youth*. Philadelphia, PA: The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research at the University of Pennsylvania

<sup>iv</sup> Crawford, D., Huatala, D., Lazoritz, M.W., & Whitbeck, L. (2016). *Administration for children and family youth services bureau street outreach program*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln

<sup>v</sup> Arain, M., Haque, M., Johal, L. Mather, P., Nel, W., Rais, A., Sandhu, R., & Sharma, S. (2013). Maturation of the adolescent brain. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*; 9: 449–461.

<sup>vi</sup> Nova, A. 2018. "A growing share of millennials are living with mom." Englewood Cliffs, NJ: CNBC. N.J. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/10/nearly-25-percent-of-millennials-live-with-their-mom-.html>

<sup>vii</sup> Benetsky, M., J., Burd, C.A., & Rapino, M. A. 2015. "Young adult migration: 2007–2009 to 2010–2012." Suitland, MD: United States Census Bureau

<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/acs/acs-31.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

<sup>ix</sup> All Home King County (2019). *Seattle/King County Point-in-time count of persons experiencing homelessness*. Seattle, WA: All Home King County.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. Thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Lowery, I recognize you for 5 minutes for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT LOWERY, JR., M.S, VICE PRESIDENT,  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN,  
ALEXANDRIA, VA**

Ms. LOWERY. Good afternoon, Chairwoman Bonamici and Ranking Member Comer and Members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Bob Lowery. I am the vice president of the Missing Children Division for the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, or NCMEC. It is an honor to be here today with you to provide NCMEC's perspective on the growing problem of runaway children and discuss our role in helping to quickly resolve cases of runaway children and how we bring them home safely.

As a background, NCMEC was created in 1984 by child advocates as a private nonprofit organization to help find missing children and to reduce child sexual exploitation and to prevent child victimization. Since NCMEC opened its doors, it has been apparent that the most common reason children go missing today is because they run away. NCMEC knows that the runaway crisis is a very real problem, and it creates extremely dangerous situations for our children.

Over the past 4 years, 91 to 92 percent of all missing child reports made today received by NCMEC are runaways. The average age of a runaway reported in NCMEC is 15 years of age, and more than half of these runaways reported to NCMEC over the past several years have run three to four times, many of the children dozens of times.

NCMEC uses modern tools and technology, as well as personalized case manager attention, to help find each runaway child reported to us. When we receive a call about a runaway child, we work directly on an individual basis to provide a coordinated response tailored to the particular child. We are child-centric when the reports are made. This approach will include specialized analytical expertise, technical assistance, ongoing support to the parent, guardian who are in crisis, the law enforcement agency responsible for the search and investigation of what happened to that child, the social service agencies working to find the child as well.

NCMEC operates a 24-hour-a-day hotline that receives calls each and every day of the year relating to runaway children. Our call center is bilingual, and we have access to third-party interpretation services in nearly 200 languages. We also operate streamlined electronic reporting for social service agencies to enable them to quickly report critical information to NCMEC when a child in foster care runs away.

As part of NCMEC's unique intake process for runaways, we gather specific information and conduct a risk assessment for that individual child. This helps us evaluate if the child has things like social media accounts, which are very prevalent today, or if they have been communicating with anyone online who wish to do them harm or suffers from other endangerment, such as alcohol or drug use; victimization by child sex trafficking; gang recruitment or enticement; pregnancy or other medical conditions that raise their risk; and, of course, self-harm and suicidal tendencies. Over the

past 4 years, 72 percent of the reported runaways suffered from one or more of these serious endangerments.

While NCMEC treats all reports of runaway on an individual basis, we have seen significant increases in the numbers of children who are running from foster care or another form of State care managed by a social service agency.

The increase came as a result of Congress' enactment of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014. The new law required for the first time that children missing from State care be reported immediately to law enforcement and to NCMEC. We were strong supporters of that law because it enables NCMEC to provide consistent services to previously underserved populations of runaway children. Since the passage of the law, NCMEC reports of children running from State care have nearly tripled. NCMEC has worked tirelessly with State and local social service agencies, as well as Health and Human Services, and our partner nonprofits to create streamlined reporting systems and educational programs to share NCMEC's unique expertise and knowledge regarding runaways so we can best protect them.

As detailed in my written testimony, NCMEC knows our mission is amplified when we work with public and private partners to help identify and locate runaway children and bring them home safely. NCMEC partners with dozens of technology and social media, retail, and print media companies who help us distribute current images of the child where we geolocate to specific targeted areas where the child may be, which increases our chance of someone in the public recognizing that missing child and reporting it.

We analyze data on online data so we help determine where a child may be while, as I say, most of our children now have social media presence. We glean lots of information about where they may have gone or who they may be in contact with. We alert the entire community to ensure that the runaway receives the same public attention and concern as any other type of missing child.

As NCMEC enters into our fourth decade of working with finding missing children, we know there is a lot more that can be done to help locate and recover runaways and find stable placements to ensure that they do not fall into the cycle of repeated runs that have longstanding detrimental impacts on their health and safety.

NCMEC is fortunate to be joined in this mission by the Subcommittee and our public and private partners, and we look forward to continuing in our work with all of you.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee to discuss this very important topic.

[The statement of Mr. Lowery follows:]



Statement by

**Robert G. Lowery, Jr.**  
Vice President, Missing Children Division  
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

for the

**United States House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Education and Labor**  
**Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee**

**Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness**

**July 16, 2019**

Chairwoman Bonamici, Ranking Member Comer, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here on behalf of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC).

NCMEC is a private, nonprofit organization that serves as a national resource center and information clearinghouse to provide a coordinated response to the problem of missing and exploited children. For more than 35 years, NCMEC has partnered with the U.S. Department of Justice and an array of corporate, private, and public partners to provide resources and services to families, law enforcement, victims, child-serving professionals, and communities to assist in preventing child abductions, recovering missing children, and providing services to deter and combat child sexual exploitation.

Like other nonprofit organizations, NCMEC was created in response to an unthinkable tragedy. In 1981, 6-year-old Adam Walsh was shopping with his mother at a Florida shopping mall when he disappeared. His devastated parents, John and Revé Walsh, had nowhere to turn for help. At that time, there was no 24-hour missing child hotline, no AMBER Alert program, no national, coordinated response to search for missing children, no uniform mechanism to enter missing child reports into the FBI's national database, and little support for impacted families like the Walshes. Despite their own best efforts, ten days after Adam was abducted, he was found murdered more than 100 miles away.

John and Revé channeled their grief and the painful experience of losing Adam and joined forces with other child advocates to create NCMEC in 1984. Since that time, NCMEC has expanded to over 340 employees and hundreds of volunteers, and we have forged strong public-private partnerships with other nonprofits, members of the public, federal and local government agencies, corporate entities, and families and private individuals who help support our mission and honor our commitment to help recover and protect missing and exploited children. NCMEC provides services and programs in five major areas: (1) missing children; (2) child sexual exploitation; (3) professional development and best practices; (4) child safety and prevention; and (5) victim and family support.

NCMEC's unique role addressing missing children cases enables us to witness firsthand the impact when children run away and the lasting impact this experience often has on their lives. We know that children who run away are at risk for serious endangerments, tend to run more than once—often dozens of times—and can suffer lingering, often devastating impact as a result of their runaway experiences.

NCMEC knows that one organization acting alone cannot resolve the issue of runaway children. As a result, we devote enormous resources to working with our public and private partners to find ways to help runaway children and their families disengage from the cycle that drives them to run and help them break free from the long-lasting impacts they so often suffer. After we intake a case, NCMEC never forgets about a runaway child no matter how much time has passed, and we continue searching as long as it takes to help bring the runaway child home.

This written testimony provides the Subcommittee with information pertaining to NCMEC's experience over the past thirty-five years working on runaway cases, including NCMEC's unique role in helping to recover children who run from their home or state social services placement; essential trends derived by NCMEC from the volume of reports we receive; and the public-private partnerships NCMEC leverages to better assist the recovery of these children. Finally, we offer recommendations on what more can be done to address and provide services to runaway children.

### **I. A Child in Crisis: NCMEC's Experience with Runaway Children**

Since NCMEC opened its doors in 1984, and began receiving phone calls to our hotline from across the country, it quickly became apparent that the most common reason children go missing is because they leave home under their own power. National incidence studies sponsored by the Department of Justice<sup>1</sup> have consistently provided research-based confirmation of what we see every day—runaways are by far the largest category of children who go missing. Children who run away from their place of residence<sup>2</sup> are consistently the largest category of missing child reported to NCMEC each year. In 2015, runaway cases reported to NCMEC accounted for 86% of our entire caseload, and since then this trend has increased. Over the past four years, runaway cases have accounted for 91-92% of all missing child reports received by NCMEC.<sup>3</sup> Throughout NCMEC's 35-year history, we have provided resources and assistance to help locate more than 250,000 runaway children.

Far too often, when a child leaves home of his or her own volition, the general public does not view them as a missing child at all, let alone a child in need of significant attention. Although these cases do not always capture the public's attention in the way that high-profile abduction cases may dominate a news cycle, at NCMEC, we realize that the vulnerability of a teenage runaway and the life-threatening endangerments they face require an urgent response regardless of whether a child has run from a generally safe environment or are because the child (or someone they live with) suffers from substance abuse issues, has engaged in self-harm or expressed thoughts of suicide, suffers from a medical condition, or has been neglected or sexually victimized.

Children who run away from home tend to be in their mid- to late-teens, with the average runaway reported to NCMEC being 15-years-old. In NCMEC's experience, it is all too common for a child to run multiple times. Between January 1, 2015 and June 30, 2019, 28% of runaways reported to NCMEC had run at least twice, and on average, these children had run 3 to 4 times. In 2018, the rate of repeat runs increased, with just over half of runaways reported to NCMEC running more than once.

It is very common for a child in foster care or otherwise under the guardianship of a social service agency to run away. In 2018, 94% of runaway children reported to NCMEC were missing from care. The unique issues pertaining to children missing from care will be discussed in greater detail in Section II C.

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<sup>1</sup> See National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART) 1, 2, 3, available at <https://www.ojjdp.gov/research/NISMART1-3.html>. In NISMART-1 (1988), NISMART-2 (1999), and NISMART-3 (2011), runaway/thrownaway child reports were the largest category of missing children. The related, and disheartening, term "thrownaway" describes a child who is told to leave, or prevented from returning home overnight, by an adult household member who does not arrange alternate care for the child. See NISMART-3, at 3.

<sup>2</sup> Because NCMEC sees large volumes of cases involving children who run from their parental/guardian home as well as children who run from social services placements, we will refer to these children collectively as running from their places of residence.

<sup>3</sup> In 2015, NCMEC received 11,817 cases of runaway children, accounting for 86% of our total missing child caseload. In 2016, we received 18,556 runaway child cases (91%); in 2017, we received 24,914 runaway child cases (91%); in 2018, we received 23,676 runaway child cases (92%); and as of June 30, 2019, we have received 13,000 runaway child cases (91%).

In NCMEC's experience, while we see many tragic outcomes when a child runs away, the majority of runaway children are located relatively quickly and safely. More than half of the runaway children recovered last year were located within the first 9 days after they went missing.

In an effort to combat public desensitization and misconceptions relating to runaways, NCMEC is mindful of the language it uses in connection with these vulnerable children. Internally, NCMEC refers to every runaway child case we work on as an "Endangered Runaway."<sup>4</sup> We avoid referring to children under the age of 12 as runaways, even if they have left of their own volition, because we recognize the limited social and mental development of a child this young. When publicizing and distributing missing child posters, we avoid describing a child as a "runaway" and purposefully never publicly disclose that a child has run from the foster care system, to ensure that there are no pre-conceived ideas or bias about the child as we encourage the public to help us locate that runaway child just as they would work to locate any other missing child.

## **II. NCMEC's Operational Protocols in Assisting Runaway Children**

### **A. NCMEC's Intake Procedures**

Although the tools and technology NCMEC uses to help find missing children have modernized significantly since NCMEC opened its doors, we still take a personalized approach to each report we receive relating to a runaway child. Each case is worked on an individual basis to provide coordinated resources, specialized analytical expertise, technical assistance, and support for law enforcement and the family of the missing child or the social services agency.

NCMEC receives reports regarding runaway children in a number of ways, including from:

- (1) a child's parent or legal guardian;
- (2) a state social service agency;
- (3) law enforcement; and/or
- (4) issuance of an Endangered Missing Child Advisory.<sup>5</sup>

NCMEC encourages parents and legal guardians to call our 24hour, 365 day/year hotline—1-800-THE-LOST—as soon as they have alerted police that their child has run away or left home. Bilingual call center staff are available at all times, and NCMEC has access to nearly 200 languages through a third-party interpretation service. For institutional guardians, such as a state foster care agency, we have a simplified process to enable these agencies to immediately report a

<sup>4</sup> NCMEC categorizes missing children reports in five case types: (1) **endangered runaways** (children who have run from a parent, legal guardian, or state care facility); (2) **family abduction** (children who have been taken, wrongfully detained, or concealed by a parent or other family member); (3) **lost, injured, or otherwise missing** (children who disappear under unknown circumstances or who are too young to be considered endangered runaways); (4) **nonfamily abduction** (children taken by someone they know but are not related to or taken by someone unknown to them); and (5) **critically missing young adults** (individuals who are 18, 19, or 20 years old and referred by law enforcement to NCMEC).

<sup>5</sup> An Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA) is similar to an AMBER Alert, however, while an AMBER Alert typically does not include provisions covering runaway cases, an EMA has criteria that can include cases of runaway children. See Guide for Implementing or Enhancing an Endangered Missing Advisory (U.S. DOJ 2011), available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/232001.pdf>.

missing child to NCMEC through a digital reporting platform that collects critical information quickly and efficiently, without even requiring a phone call to NCMEC.<sup>6</sup>

NCMEC recognizes that children often go missing in the middle of the night or under circumstances that are so urgent or critical that it may be impossible for a parent or legal guardian to contact NCMEC immediately. In those situations, NCMEC receives electronic notification of runaway children when one of the following occurs:

- (1) a law enforcement agency enters a missing person report for a runaway child into the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database;<sup>7</sup>
- (2) an official Endangered Missing Child Advisory is issued in a critical case; or
- (3) a public missing child notification is broadcast by law enforcement or the news media.

When NCMEC receives such a notification, we proactively contact the investigating law enforcement agency to offer our assistance and ensure that the affected family is provided a coordinated, comprehensive response like that originally envisioned by John and Revé Walsh when they founded NCMEC over thirty-five years ago.

Regardless of how NCMEC is notified about a runaway child, NCMEC's call center specialists perform a comprehensive intake procedure with the parent, guardian, social service worker, or law enforcement agent who is calling so they can collect descriptive information about the child and learn about the circumstances of the child's disappearance. This intake process initiates a specialized internal risk assessment that NCMEC undertakes for each child reported as a runaway to assess potential endangerments that a child may face.

As part of NCMEC's intake process, we seek relevant information to help us evaluate whether the child has:

- (1) Special needs, medical, or mental health conditions;
- (2) Expressed self-harm or suicidal tendencies;
- (3) Active social media accounts;
- (4) Communicated with any children or adults online prior to leaving home;
- (5) Past or current substance abuse; or
- (6) Indicators of possible exploitation or child sex trafficking.<sup>8</sup>

NCMEC's intake process and risk assessment help guide NCMEC's initial response on how best to help locate the runaway child. Technology or social media resources can be rapidly implemented depending on the facts of the child's disappearance, and, in urgent, high-risk situations, NCMEC can deploy representatives to where the child went missing to offer unique on-

<sup>6</sup> NCMEC has developed a dedicated microsite with information, resources, and secure electronic reporting capability for social services agencies to report children missing from care (available at <https://cmfc.missingkids.org/>).

<sup>7</sup> Specific flags can be entered by the investigating agency to trigger NCMEC notification. *See, e.g.,* Effective Use of the National Crime Information Center Database with Missing-Child Incidents: A Reference Guide for Public-Safety Telecommunications Personnel (NCMEC 2012).

<sup>8</sup> While no single indicator confirms child sex trafficking is occurring, there are research-based physical and behavioral red flags to help screen for this possibility. Additional information, including NCMEC-produced guides for parents and child welfare agencies can be found on NCMEC's website at [www.missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking](http://www.missingkids.org/theissues/trafficking).

site resources.<sup>9</sup> When the intake indicates a critical response is needed, NCMEC's specialized staff are on-call around the clock to respond and apply their particular skills (e.g., photo imaging, media response, research and analysis) to develop further information about the child's circumstances.

After NCMEC's initial intake and risk assessment is complete, a child's case is assigned to an internal case manager who will remain assigned to that child the entire time that they are missing. This is a unique aspect of NCMEC's case management services for runaway cases and ensures that we can maintain a personal connection with that child while they are missing and if they are recovered and run again at a later date. The case manager's first step is to contact the parent, legal guardian, social service worker, or investigating law enforcement agent who reported the runaway child as missing. Particularly for runaway children, NCMEC is often the only consistent source of background information and details about a child and their unique circumstances.

No matter how short or long the duration that a runaway child is missing, NCMEC will continue to apply carefully coordinated support and analytical and technological resources to each case, in addition to the constant personal touch we maintain with the concerned adult who is searching for the child. NCMEC never stops searching for a runaway child until he or she is located, even if a child "ages out," becomes emancipated, or otherwise is dropped from the caseload of involved agencies or fades from the public's attention.

#### **B. Assessing a Runaway Child's Potential Endangerments**

As a result of NCMEC's case work with both missing and exploited children, and through our operation of the CyberTipline,<sup>10</sup> NCMEC has become increasingly aware of the increased risks faced by children who run away, especially children who run away from state care, and who are particularly vulnerable to dangers such as sex trafficking. Last year, one in seven runaway children reported to NCMEC were likely sex trafficking victims.

A child's home environment, including abuse, neglect, or abandonment that can lead to a child's involvement with the foster care system, also can have a significant impact on a child's experience when they run away. NCMEC has long recognized that it is vital to assess and identify each child's individual endangerments to hopefully prevent specific harms to which they are vulnerable.

Over the past several years, NCMEC has noted an increase in runaway cases where a parent, guardian, or investigator reports the child was sexually exploited, has a diagnosed mental health condition or other special needs, or has expressed a desire to harm or kill themselves. NCMEC has tracked other common endangerments for runaways as shown below:

<sup>9</sup> NCMEC's Team Adam program provides rapid, onsite assistance to law enforcement agencies and families during critical cases involving missing children, including runaways. Consultants are deployed to the scene to provide technical assistance and connect families and law enforcement to NCMEC's vast network of resources.

<sup>10</sup> NCMEC's CyberTipline is the nation's core program to help facilitate the reporting of online child sexual abuse content and prevent future victimization.

| <b>Reported Endangerment<br/>(NCMEC Runaway Cases 1/1/15 – 6/30/19)</b> | <b>Percentage<br/>of Children</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Notable Alcohol/Drug Use</b>                                         | <b>51%</b>                        |
| <b>Relevant Mental Health Diagnosis</b>                                 | <b>39%</b>                        |
| <b>Suicidal Expressions</b>                                             | <b>19%</b>                        |
| <b>Likely Victim of Child Sex Trafficking</b>                           | <b>15%</b>                        |
| <b>Self-harm Tendencies</b>                                             | <b>15%</b>                        |
| <b>Significant Medical Condition</b>                                    | <b>12%</b>                        |
| <b>Gang Involvement</b>                                                 | <b>11%</b>                        |
| <b>Carrying a Weapon</b>                                                | <b>5%</b>                         |
| <b>Pregnant</b>                                                         | <b>4%</b>                         |
| <b>Other Special Needs</b>                                              | <b>3%</b>                         |

Between 2015 and 2019, 72% of the runaways reported to NCMEC had a least one of these endangerments, and most runaways averaged two endangerments. As might be expected, when a child ran away more than once, they suffered these endangerments at a greater rate.

It is commonly believed that a child is pushed to run away by something negative in the home or a negative personal experience. At NCMEC, we see a troubling trend in the number of runaways who leave their residence because they have been manipulated to believe they are running toward a better situation<sup>11</sup>—usually fueled by online communications with an adult who is enticing them to leave home. This trend is fueled by modern technology, which allows an adult to cast a wide net across public areas of the internet to identify and entice vulnerable children, and then shift to private or encrypted forms of online communications, where they can solidify a connection with the child. In recent years, NCMEC has seen a large increase in runaway cases where a child has been enticed to run to an adult who seeks to sexually, and otherwise, exploit the child.<sup>12</sup> It is also common for children to travel significant distances when they run away, especially in situations where they have been enticed. More than a third (39%) of all runaway children reported to NCMEC were recovered in a different city from where they went missing.

The risks to a runaway are significant in these cases, and the outcomes are often deeply troubling. The following is an example of one runaway case in which NCMEC assisted.

In January 2018, a 16-year-old girl ran away from her home in South Carolina and left a note for her family indicating she was not happy at home and was going

<sup>11</sup> A “better situation” in a child’s view may be a place where the child has less parental restrictions or rules; a love interest is available; or the child has more material benefits (e.g., money, ability to travel, extravagant gifts).

<sup>12</sup> NCMEC analyzed more than 5,800 CyberTipline reports relating to online enticement submitted between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2015 to identify specific trends and characteristics of this new crime. The Online Enticement of Children: An In-Depth Analysis of CyberTipline Reports (NCMEC 2017), *available at* <http://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/nmcac-analysis/Online%20Enticement%20Pre-Travel1.pdf>.

“somewhere better.” Law enforcement tracked her movements to a city in the Midwest and later confirmed she had traveled to Georgia on the date she went missing and then bought a plane ticket to travel across the country where she was picked up by a 30-year-old man. The child had a number of unique endangerments due to a history of past victimization and abuse. NCMEC geo-targeted missing child posters to ask the community for tips and leads and staff ran analytical searches to help determine where specifically the child may have traveled with the adult man. Within days, police located, and were able to recover, the child at the man’s residence in another state, and he was arrested for crimes related to sexual assault and luring a minor. According to investigators, the man had communicated with the child through messaging features on social media apps as well as direct text messages for several months before she ran away.

### **C. Unique Runaways: Children Missing From Care**

Children who are in foster care or are guardians of a state social service agency are more likely to run away from home and/or face other negative outcomes later in life, such as incarceration and homelessness, when they run away. NCMEC refers to children who run from any form of foster care or the care of a state social service agency as children missing from care.

For nearly twenty years, NCMEC has worked with a variety of partners to draw attention to this unique category of runaway children and to ensure that these children do not slip through the cracks. In earlier years, we had crucial partnerships with organizations such as the Child Welfare League of America to help craft and provide guidance and best practices when responding to children who have run away from foster care.<sup>13</sup>

More recently, a tremendous sea change in resources for children missing from care occurred when Congress recognized the need for a uniform prompt response to missing and runaway children from state care and enacted the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014. This legislation addressed a wide variety of issues relating to the proper care and resources for children in the welfare system, but NCMEC lobbied specifically for inclusion of a provision requiring state social services agencies to report missing, abducted, or runaway children immediately to law enforcement and then to NCMEC.<sup>14</sup> Recognizing the unique vulnerabilities of children missing from care and being painfully aware of the gaps in reporting such runaway children to NCMEC, we welcomed the law’s enactment. The impact of the new law has been significant because, for the first time, it enables NCMEC to provide coordinated and uniform resources to every child who has run away or gone missing, regardless of what sort of residence they were missing from, which state they ran from, or the circumstances under which they went missing.

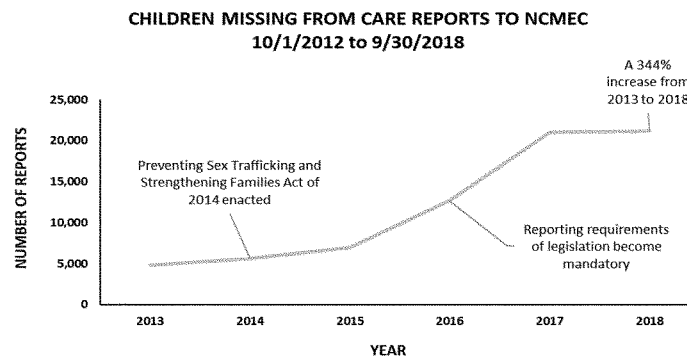
When the legislation was enacted in 2014, it provided states with a two-year implementation period. However, NCMEC immediately realized that coordination with state and county social service agencies would be key to successfully and smoothly implementing this new reporting

<sup>13</sup> See companion publications CWLA Best Practice Guidelines: Children Missing From Care (CWLA 2005) and Children Missing From Care: The Law-Enforcement Response (NCMEC 2005).

<sup>14</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 671.

paradigm. NCMEC developed new policies, draft agreements, and streamlined enactment of the response to children missing from care.

NCMEC has experienced tremendous growth in its caseload of children missing from care since passage of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act. Since 2012, the number of missing children, most of whom are runaways, reported to NCMEC by state agencies has nearly tripled. This has necessitated dedication of new case management and analytical resources to support these cases and, even more importantly, to provide educational resources and technical assistance to social services as they work to develop new reporting protocols to NCMEC. Today, NCMEC has formal reporting agreements with 9 states and counties<sup>15</sup> and receives electronic reports or hotline calls for missing and runaway foster children from every U.S. state and most territories each year.



Due to the increased vulnerabilities of children who run away from state care, NCMEC continues to devote increased resources to these cases and expands its work on helping to prevent and provide recovery services for these children. For example, NCMEC is identifying possible future partnerships and expanded programs with other organizations that can assist with recovery planning for runaway children, direct services to victimized children, and better, more organized victim and family support.

### **III. NCMEC's Unique Tools and Partnerships**

#### **A. Technology—A Potential Risk but also a Powerful Tool for Recovery**

NCMEC uses technology to play an important role in facilitating the recovery of runaway children. It is a critical tool to develop leads about a missing child's location, including information about companions who may recently have interacted with the child. Unfortunately, technology also has enhanced the ability of offenders to target young teens and rapidly exploit their vulnerabilities and

<sup>15</sup> NCMEC has formal agreements with Arkansas, Florida, Hawaii, Los Angeles County, Louisiana, Maine, Texas, and multiple agencies in Wisconsin.

manipulate them with false promises of love and affection to entice them to run away from home. The widespread use of internet-enabled devices among young children and the increasing amount of time they spend online creates both opportunities and risks.

When NCMEC receives a report of a runaway child, we routinely ask whether the child has active social media profiles and in almost half of reports (46%), we are immediately able to gather information about the child's known social media activity. Recognizing that parents and guardians often do not know the full details of their child's online presence, we actively seek this information from a child's friends or siblings. In NCMEC's experience, the same public platforms that help NCMEC locate missing children also may provide an opportunity for adults who wish to harm, exploit, or traffic children, to contact vulnerable potential victims.

## **B. Public-Private Partnerships to Enhance NCMEC Resources**

### **1. Analytical Resources**

NCMEC's mission is amplified when we partner with public and private stakeholders who share our dedication to helping to locate and identify runaway children and help create public awareness to find and reunite missing children with their families. These relationships enable NCMEC to stretch our resources and expand our mission through public-private partnerships that provide vital in-kind, programmatic, and financial support. We use many cutting edge analytical tools in our efforts to quickly locate runaway children. As examples, generous corporate partners such as LexisNexis, Thomson Reuters, Appriss, Neustar, and Palantir contribute resources and expertise that NCMEC uses to review open-source databases and public social media profiles to obtain information that may help identify the possible locations of missing children. These technologies also enable NCMEC to leverage vast data within our past missing and exploited child cases to develop crucial information relating to prior related missing incidents; law enforcement agencies that have had contact with the missing child; individuals the child and their potential companion(s) are known to associate with; and information relating to potential endangerments.

The following is just one example in which NCMEC successfully leveraged its public-private partnerships to help locate a missing child.

In October 2018, a mother reported to NCMEC that her 16-year-old daughter had run away with a friend, also a minor. Her daughter had run away once before, and the mother believed the children left to meet a man they met on social media who claimed he wanted to take modeling pictures of them. The mother was worried that the children were being recruited for sex trafficking and sent NCMEC an image posted on social media showing her child boarding a bus headed for a state that was thousands of miles away. Five days later, law enforcement where the children had traveled responded to a call of gun shots fired at an apartment complex. Two girls and multiple men were at the location, including a man believed to be the one who had enticed the children to travel. He was arrested, but the two girls were frightened and provided fake names to law enforcement and were released. NCMEC provided social media analysis to link a second adult—a woman—to the man who had been arrested. Law enforcement worked with this information to arrange a meeting with the children through social media and ultimately recovered the children and opened a human trafficking investigation against the suspect.

## 2. Technology and Geo-Targeting

Over the past three decades, NCMEC has seen runaway case trends evolve, and we have evolved our programs and best practices in response. It has become increasingly essential for the public to receive rapid notice when a child goes missing in their geographical area. While NCMEC continues to develop modern solutions to locate runaways more quickly, one of the most effective methods to find a missing child—soliciting the community’s help to circulate photos of missing children—has remained consistent since NCMEC was created in 1984. As a result, NCMEC continues to proactively expand use of unique targeted social media messaging for runaways. Our efforts in this area, bolstered by our partnerships with leading technology companies, have led to many recoveries of runaway children, including the following:

In January 2019, a 12-year-old girl was reported to NCMEC after running away from her home in Georgia. Six days later, at a location over 300 miles away, a woman encountered the child walking in her neighborhood at night. The woman was concerned because the child was confused and claimed to be much older. The woman stayed with the child, but her suspicions led her to look on her Facebook feed, where she quickly found a missing child alert for the child. The woman contacted police who recovered the child.

In a second case, in February 2017, a 15-year-old girl ran away from her home in Colorado. After the child was reported to NCMEC, NCMEC produced a missing child alert video for the child, which was distributed widely on Facebook and geotargeted to areas where the child was believed to be traveling with an adult male. The video received over 300,000 views before one viewer contacted NCMEC’s hotline with information about the child’s possible location, enabling police to recover the child that day.

While families and volunteers continue to post physical flyers in their community when a child runs away, NCMEC’s partnerships with social media companies significantly promote the visibility of runaway child images to geographically targeted digital audiences who are most likely to have information about a particular child. NCMEC helps ensure that critical, time-sensitive information relating to a runaway child is broadcast far and wide.

## 3. Runaway Train

Twenty-five years ago, NCMEC contributed to a music video project for the song “Runaway Train” produced by the band Soul Asylum, which featured images of actual missing children, and ultimately helped to recover more than twenty missing children. This year, NCMEC is proud to renew this successful campaign with the release of a remixed version of the song. The project<sup>16</sup> features a new music video that dynamically geolocates images of missing children to the specific, local geographic area where the viewer is watching the video.

Just weeks ago, NCMEC celebrated its first success in recovering a runaway child as a result of this new video. In late May 2019, a 15-year old girl from the Midwest who had run away from her residence a month earlier, contacted her guardian and was recovered safely. NCMEC had encouraged media outlets to create and broadcast geographically-specific versions of the

<sup>16</sup> See [www.runawaytrain25.com](http://www.runawaytrain25.com).

“Runaway Train” video. One Midwest news station responded and generated and televised a version of the video that featured the 15-year-old runaway’s image. As the broadcast circulated widely in the targeted area, a friend of the missing child saw the video and convinced her to reach out to her guardian.

#### **4. Poster Delivery Partnerships**

Unfortunately, sometimes the search for a runaway child extends into a longer period of time. Six percent of runaways reported to NCMEC remain missing for 6 months or longer. When this happens, NCMEC continues to work actively to maintain public attention and utilizes different technology to assist with efforts in locating the child. Media and retail partnerships, such as Valassis’ “Have You Seen Me?” program; LexisNexis’ ADAM (Automated Delivery of Alerts on Missing Children) Program; OAAA’s digital billboards; and Walmart’s Missing Children’s Network poster distribution, help us to regionally-target information about runaways.<sup>17</sup> NCMEC tries to ensure no runaway is ever forgotten by the public by proactively highlighting cases of longer-term missing children and publicizing anniversary dates of each runaway’s disappearance. We also have staff with special expertise in using forensic technology to: produce digital age-progression images; populate interactive mapping software to search and identify children; and assist in biometrics collection and analysis as need to help identify a child, or tragically, the remains of a child.

NCMEC understands that there are limits to our reach, so we have always partnered with other non-profits and federal and state public agencies that share our mission to help recover runaway children. As a national clearinghouse, it is extremely important for NCMEC to utilize specific skills and complementary services of like-minded organizations to collaboratively help deliver better outcomes for the runaway children and families we serve.

#### **5. Non-Profit Collaborations**

NCMEC has had a long-standing relationship with the National Runaway Safeline, a nonprofit whose mission is to keep America’s runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. For decades, our respective 24-hour hotlines have coordinated to make prompt referrals to each other to ensure that appropriate services are offered to runaway children and their families. To help identify runaway children who may particularly be at risk for sex trafficking, NCMEC has collaborative partnerships with organizations like THORN, Marinus Analytics, and the Exchange Initiative, which develop unique technology and software to help locate victims more quickly.

NCMEC also has strengthened its partnerships with non-profit organizations across the country that provide direct services to runaway and homeless youth, including family and youth homeless shelters, group homes, substance treatment facilities, and drop-in youth programs. Our collaborations with these groups include information sharing relating to this unique population of missing children and coordination on trying to locate specific runaway children who might be seeking services with one of these providers.

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<sup>17</sup> Cumulatively, these media and retail partners, plus hundreds of smaller such partners, have distributed and displayed over 700,000 posters of NCMEC’s missing children, including runaways.

## **6. Enhanced Child and Family Services**

In addition to NCMEC's case management, analytical support, outreach, and prevention education, we also offer support to families whose children have run away. These services are facilitated by NCMEC's master-level mental health and child welfare professionals, who also manage voluntary initiatives to expand resources available to help families, including NCMEC's Family Advocacy Outreach Network (FAON) and Team HOPE. NCMEC's FAON is a referral system of treatment professionals experienced in treating children who have run away. NCMEC works to recruit and support these professionals who work closely with NCMEC to provide ongoing crisis management and therapy, including in-person intervention, to families and recovered victims on a reduced fee or pro-bono basis. NCMEC also supports families through Team HOPE, a facilitated volunteer group of parents and family members who have experienced a missing or sexually exploited child and can provide peer counseling and support to other families.

## **IV. Goals and Outlook**

Much more can be done within our existing resources to partner and expand our collective efforts to help locate runaway children and to ensure that they can find secure, stable placements once they are covered. NCMEC looks forward to increasing its partnerships with other child-serving non-profits and direct service providers that interact with homeless youth. We continue to explore opportunities where we can capitalize on technology advances to better identify child victimization and to more efficiently locate children who have run away from home—and wherever possible, to bring in new technology partners willing to contribute their expertise and ideas to our mission.

NCMEC is grateful for the chance to share our perspective and discuss with the Subcommittee our programs to help find and assist runaway children. We look forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee, the Committee on Education and Labor, and other Members of Congress to support the children and families impacted by this issue and to help reduce the incidence of runaway children, hasten their safe and quick return, and prevent all forms of child victimization.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. Thank you for your testimony.  
Mr. Baker, I recognize you for 5 minutes for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID BAKER, SUPPORT SPECIALIST, YMCA  
YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES, SAN DIEGO, CA**

Mr. BAKER. Thank you. Good afternoon, Subcommittee Chair Bonamici, Ranking Member Comer, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me here today to testify before you.

My name is David Baker. I am a proud Youth Advocacy Council member with the National Network for Youth and a support specialist with the YMCA Youth and Family Services Department in San Diego, California.

I came here from San Diego to demonstrate the potential of opportunity youth when given the tools and resources and to express the value and absolute necessity of Federal programs like the Run-away and Homeless Youth Act. I come from a background of inter-generational homelessness, which means my mother was born into homelessness and her mother was also born into homelessness. So access to stable housing was something that my family has never known.

The trauma that my mother incurred from her childhood led her to cope with alcohol and drug use. Unfortunately, it seemed there was no place for my mother to address her trauma. The shelter would kick us out for bed rotation at 7 a.m., and it seemed the liquor stores were open by 9. So I would go into school knowing that, by the time I got out, my support system would be broken.

Due to a lack of resources in our area, housing, financial, and food insecurity, plagued my family until at about 16 years old I understood that there just weren't enough to meet my basic needs. And I ran away. Instead of being a burden to my struggling mother -- and this is an extremely common occurrence amongst youth where their living conditions are so bad that they see the streets as a place of opportunity, but what I found in the street was the opposite of opportunity. I found the threat of imprisonment, the threat of trafficking, and the threat of death.

Years went by with no diversion opportunities or support offered to me, and I found myself couch surfing as a freshman in college. After hurdling the barriers to receive financial aid as a homeless student, I bought an old car. And that became my home. The back-seat was my bedroom. The front seat was my kitchen. And the San Diego County Sheriff was my alarm clock, waking me up every morning to remind me that my safe place was temporary.

I completed multiple homeless vulnerability assessments but came to accept that there just weren't enough housing opportunities for nonfoster homeless youth. Also, I didn't want to enter traditional homeless HUD shelters or programs because of the trauma of my childhood. I knew what to expect there. And like many homeless youth, I found my car as a safer alternative.

This living situation continued until I received a call just a few days before my 22nd birthday from a TLP through the YMCA. You know, it is amazing to think that if I had just been a few days older, I would have been led to continue sleeping in a place that isn't suitable for human habitation. This opportunity completely

changed the trajectory of my life. In this TLP, I found myself surrounded by trauma-informed professionals who genuinely wanted the best for me. For the first time ever, I had a support system that wasn't broken or toxic or damaging to my life in any way, and I was empowered to use my experience as a homeless youth to help my peers, which led to a position within the Y, and today, I facilitate workshops across San Diego County that teach youth in our Basic Center, Transitional Living Programs to effectively address their trauma. These workshops include skills like emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and thoughtful decisionmaking, all extremely essential for navigating a life of trauma and keeping those kids in their homes.

I have also created entrepreneurial workshops for our youth that feature a comprehensive look at financial literacy and work readiness. This information was transformative for me, and I am grateful to be sharing these tools, and it is amazing to see the resiliency and growth of youth in our programs, but I know we are just scratching the surface. There are so many of us who need these programs but just don't have the access because of the Federal investment being so small compared to what is needed.

Please know that every dollar that you invest tells a young person like me that their dreams and their goals matter, and they are valuable, and they should have the opportunity to flourish. When you invest in us, our entire society benefits. And you can see me as a living example of that.

Through programs funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, I was given a foundation to build a life of prosperity. I was given a chance to change my family history forever. Today, I ask you to please make that a possibility for every youth because they deserve it. Before, I was a youth in the street with no resolution in sight. But, today, I am so much more than that. I am a taxpayer. I am an exceptional entrepreneur. And last, but certainly not least, I am an advocate.

Thank you all again for allowing me to speak.

[The statement of Mr. Baker follows:]

**Testimony of  
David Baker, Youth Advocate, National Network for Youth  
Hearing on “Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness.”**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services  
July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

Good afternoon Subcommittee Chair Bonamici, Ranking Member Comer, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.

My name is David Baker and I am a proud Youth Advisory Council Member with National Network for Youth and a Support Specialist with the YMCA Youth & Family Services department in San Diego, California. I am eager to advocate for young people experiencing homelessness in America and to share with you the impact that two Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs had on my life.

I came here from San Diego to demonstrate the potential of opportunity youth, when given the tools and resources, and am eager to express the value and absolute necessity of federal programs like the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. I have not only reaped the benefits as a youth in need, but I am now a provider who uses my lived experience to develop my organization’s basic center, transitional living, and street outreach programs.

I come from a background of extreme-poverty and intergenerational homelessness. This means that my mother was born into homelessness and her mother was also born into homelessness. The trauma that my mother incurred from her childhood led her to cope with alcohol and drug use. This toxic mix of covering trauma with substance use kept us living in shelters or out of a suitcase in some stranger’s home.

Unfortunately, there was no place to help my mother address her trauma. The shelter would kick us out for bed rotation at 7 in the morning and the liquor store was open by 9. I would go to school knowing that my only support system would be broken by the time I got out. All I wanted was peace for her because I knew it would mean stability for me.

I recognized the vulnerability of our situation and I became my mother’s protector. I knew that all she had to combat traffickers, drug dealers and abusive boyfriends was little 9 year old me. Nobody would recognize the abuse that I endured because the bruises were inside, on my mind and soul. I would do absolutely anything to avoid indicating to anyone that I was in such a predicament because I didn’t want to be taken away from my mother, so I internalized this trauma like my mother did when she was a child and the cycle of unhealed trauma continued.

Food, housing and financial insecurity continued to plague my household and by 16 years old I understood that we just didn't have enough resources to meet my basic needs. So instead of being a burden on my already struggling mother, I chose to run away. I didn't know where I was headed, but I knew that I would have to break the cycle if things were ever going to be different. I know now, that this is an extremely common occurrence where a youth's living conditions are so bad that they see the streets as a place of opportunity.

However, what I found on the street was the opposite of opportunity. I found the threat of imprisonment, trafficking and even death. My stark reality created a hopelessness that led me down a path of destruction that intersected with the juvenile and adult justice system on multiple occasions.

Years went by with no diversion opportunities or support offered to me and I found myself couch surfing as a freshman in college. After hurdling the barriers to be able to receive financial aid as a homeless youth, I got my first check and bought an old car that I could sleep in. This became my home; the backseat was my bedroom; the passenger seat was my kitchen and the San Diego County Sheriff was my alarm clock waking me up every morning to remind me that my safe place was temporary.

After completing multiple homeless vulnerability assessments, I still found myself sleeping in the backseat of my car. I came to realize that there just weren't enough housing opportunities for non-foster homeless youth. Also, as a young person, I didn't want to enter a traditional adult HUD shelter or program because I didn't identify with the population there and I did not feel safe. This living situation continued until I received a call from a YMCA Youth & Family service transitional living program that could house me for a year and a half. This opportunity completely changed the trajectory of my life.

My apartment was state of the art with stainless steel appliances and hardwood floors, which displayed a level of care that I was unfamiliar to. This space was designed with dignity. I found myself surrounded by trauma-informed professionals who genuinely wanted the best for me. For the first time ever, I had a support system that was not broken or damaged.

During my time in the transitional living program I became very intentional about my personal development. I earned an associate's degree in business management and another in sociology. I also used my experience as a homeless youth to help my peers. YMCA Youth & Family Services recognized my goodwill and hired me on as a peer-support specialist. I flourished in that role and was soon promoted to a position that allowed me to have more of an impact on the services we provided.

Today, I facilitate workshops across San Diego County that teach essential tools to youth in our basic center and transitional living programs to address their trauma. My wellness workshops include skills like emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and thoughtful decision-making. I also hold an entrepreneur workshop that features a comprehensive crash course on financial literacy. This information was transformative for me as a youth and I am grateful to be a service

provider teaching these tools and skills and being a real-life example of what youth can overcome and achieve with access to these services and housing.

I am here today to ask you to help other young people like me who are all across America. There are so many of us who need these programs, but don't have access to one because the federal investment is so small compared to the need. Please know that every dollar you invest, tells a young person like me, that they are not defined by their family or life circumstances. You tell a young person that their potential and dreams matter and should be given a chance to flourish. When you invest in us, our entire society benefits.

Through programs funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act I was given a foundation to build a life of prosperity. I was given a chance to change my family history forever. Before, I was a hopeless youth with no hope in sight, but today I am so much more than a statistic. I am a taxpayer, an exceptional entrepreneur, and last but certainly not least, I am an advocate.

Sincerely,

David Baker

Chairwoman BONAMICI. Thank you so much, all of you, for your very powerful testimony.

We under Committee Rule 8(a) we will now question the witnesses under the 5-minute rule and, as Chair, I will start and be followed by the Ranking Member, and then we will alternate between the parties.

And I am going to start with Dr. Giovengo. Homeless youth are at an increased risk for trafficking and sexual exploitation. A study by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and Loyola University found that one in five homeless youth were victims of human trafficking and girls as young as 10 years old had been forced into sex trade. Many children have no way out because their traffickers use physical force and intimidation to keep them from seeking help.

So how does your organization use staff training -- you mentioned in your written testimony -- and leverage the partnerships with local organizations to help identify and serve victims of trafficking? And how can Congress support these efforts to protect children and youth from trafficking and exploitation?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Thank you.

I want to say that YouthCare was actually started to really address the issue of sexual exploitation in Seattle, and so we have always been very aware of the issue in our community.

Currently, we run a program called the Bridge Continuum, which is exactly what you described as a multidisciplinary, multi-agency intervention strategy to help young people who have been trafficked. Through street outreach, through specially trained advocates, and through partnerships with trauma informed-care therapists, substance-abuse specialists, workforce development specialists, we have been able to create a wraparound service model for these young people. It is not just a stand-alone model. It is a model that has lived inside of our runaway and homeless youth programs for 40 years, and we have actually expanded that in our community and around the state of Washington in replicating that model in other communities.

So, I think that it is important for folks to understand that the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program's Basic Centers, Outreach, and Transitional Living Programs are our first line of prevention for these young people who are being trafficked, and they can be -- and like at YouthCare, all of our staff, everyone, including my accounting staff, are trained in the recognition and the services needed for helping these young people exit the streets and getting into a safe and stable environment.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. Terrific. Thank you so much.

Dr. Morton, currently the two Federal agencies collecting data on the problems of child or youth homelessness are the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Education but counts of homeless youth vary widely across these two agencies. For example, HUD's Point-in-Time count identified 168,267 homeless youth in 2017. Yet your study identified 4.2 million homeless youth.

So how do each of these agencies collect data on youth homelessness and what definition does each agency use to decide whom to include in their counts and why is it so important that the counts

of homeless youth include those who are doubled up? What can Congress do to make sure we are getting the highest quality data on the prevalence of runaway and homeless youth?

Mr. MORTON. Thank you, Chairwoman.

These different counts and estimates serve different purposes. HUD's counts aren't meant to capture primarily shelter and street-based homelessness on a specific night. Education captures reported homelessness over the course of the year. Both are different forms of capturing homelessness as they are presented to a system, largely, whereas a nationally representative survey, like the one we did, does not depend on the young people that emerge to a system or that are formally reported or identified visibly in the streets.

This is important because much of youth homelessness is hidden. We find that young people experience many different forms of homelessness and housing instability over a period of time. They can come in and out of homelessness, and this is different than what we see with older adult chronic homelessness, for example. To be able to capture that hiddenness, it is important to capture the full spectrum of young people's experiences and not just at one point in time, but over a period of time. And this is why we have taken this particular approach to complement the data that we get about young people coming into systems and services through education and HUD.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. Thank you for your work.

I am going to yield back the balance of my time. I recognize Ranking Member Comer for his questions and --

Mr. CASTRO. Stefanik.

Chairwoman BONAMICI. I recognize Representative Stefanik from New York for 5 minutes for her questions.

And Representative Hayes is going to take over for me.

I yield back.

Representative Stefanik.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I represent one of the most rural districts on the East Coast. I represent 194 towns and villages. It takes about 5 hours from one side to the other of my district. Homelessness in rural communities is different, and the resources are different than homelessness in urban and suburban communities. So my questions are going to focus on how we can address this challenge in rural communities and what specific solutions we have for rural America.

So, first, Dr. Morton, the Voices of Youth Count indicates that homelessness is almost as common in rural areas as it is in urban areas, at least for youth and young adults. Can you tell us if these percentages hold true for other age groups, and what are some of the unique aspects of helping to provide services for the homeless and prevention services in rural communities?

Mr. MORTON. Thank you, Congresswoman.

It is a very good question and a very important issue to highlight. We do find with our data that youth homelessness is just as prevalent as a share of the population in rural communities as it is in nonrural communities. Now there are more youth experiencing homelessness in urban communities because there are more people living in urban communities. But as a share of the population, it is just as much of a challenge in rural communities.

At the same time, it doesn't necessarily look the same in rural communities as you alluded to. Young people are about twice as likely to be couch surfing, staying with others in rural communities, or even more likely to be literally homeless on the streets or in places not meant for human habitation in rural communities. They are about half as likely to be staying in shelters, often because the shelters don't exist. In rural communities, they are inaccessible, or they are not youth-specific.

So this underscores the need for much more creative and resource outreach efforts and working across public systems and services and community-based organizations that could be coming into contact with young people.

Ms. STEFANIK. Do you or does anyone on the panel have examples of particularly effective outreach efforts in rural communities? Because the access is an issue. Transportation is an issue. You know, hunger in rural areas is an issue, too. And that is very much tied to the challenge of homelessness.

Does anyone have best practices you would like to highlight?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Well, this is Dr. Giovengo speaking.

And I think that one of the things we have seen in Washington State and some of our rural communities are really the gathering of local resource providers to kind of create what I would call a virtual one-stop for young people and reaching into the schools early and often to make sure that we are identifying those young people who are experiencing homelessness.

Obviously, faith-based organizations have stepped up in many communities. In one community in Washington State, Whidbey Island, we have a very extensive model of host homes where the community has gone out and found community providers to help, community people to actually help house young people in emergency situations.

So I think that there are unique challenges, but most of it is getting the information consistently out in places where we know young people are and even in rural areas, schools probably are the best way we can reach them early and we need to start before the crisis hits so that they -- before they drop out, they know how to get homelessness resources when the crisis hits.

Ms. STEFANIK. And, Mr. Lowery, I wanted to ask specifically about different protocols or actions taken to help find someone who goes missing in a rural community rather than if they go missing in an urban or suburban community.

Ms. LOWERY. Well, yes, there are differences in our approach to that, but, of course, all missing children are pretty much treated the same. What we look for is we do a risk assessment anytime a child goes missing and pretty much can give us an idea of where that child may have gone and oftentimes, especially with our runaway children, there is a specific place that they might go or specific individuals they may be with. Oftentimes, though we find that some of our children are despondent or may be suffering from some mental illnesses and things, which does make that challenge much more challenging for us when it goes to that search.

So, at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, we have protocols for searching rural areas, which is a different protocol than you would say searching suburban or densely populated

urban areas. So we will send those representatives on site to work with the sheriff's office or the local agencies to aid them in the rescue of that child. We will have them there usually within just a few hours. But for us, you know, a missing child is a missing child. And they go missing for a variety of reasons.

The only difference that we do see in rural areas is that we -- I think every area struggles with resources for these children, especially after they have been found, and rural areas, I think, certainly suffer from that phenomena.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you.

Yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. [Presiding.] Thank you.

I now recognize the Committee Chairman, Mr. Scott, from Virginia.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And I want to thank all of our witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Baker, you indicated that we need to make investments in young people to make sure they are not homeless. Exactly what do you mean? What should we be investing in?

Mr. BAKER. I believe just ensuring that these funds are available for these innovative programs so that the TLPs, the Basic Centers, and especially those outreach teams, to ensure that they have everything that they need to get the job done.

Youth homelessness and youth struggle as a whole comes in many different unique forms, and every single individual's need is as unique as their character is, so ensuring that the money, you know, the blood of it is all is available so that these folks can access these services and overcome their barriers, whatever they may be.

Mr. SCOTT. Well, if you find the homeless and provide emergency services, you still need to do something to deal with the underlying problem.

What should we be doing, Dr. Giovengo? Do you want to answer what we should be doing to deal with the underlying problem?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Thank you for the question.

I would say that youth homelessness is way more than just a house and a roof over a young person's head, and we must address the issue from a 360 perspective. Young people, we will not end youth homelessness unless we are partnering with the education and employment systems to get these young people back on kind of traditional pathways so they can become self-sufficient. It is very different than an adult who has had life experiences with housing and jobs.

You know, giving a young person just a place to live is not enough. We have to be able to provide them with the education, employment, mental health, healthcare, and really support to become a full individual and understand what their needs are and how they can build their own talents and scope moving forward.

Mr. SCOTT. You mentioned education. Is on-campus educational experience one of the solutions?

Ms. GIOVENGO. I think for some young people it is. I mean, we run drop-in schools. We also have -- we run a YouthBuild program is that an employment and training program for homeless young people. We run prevention services inside of on-campus educational

facilities to help young people stay in school and help their families from going homeless so they don't lose schools.

So I think being at all points where a young person can begin to drop away from mainstream systems is critical in order to prevent them from ending up in a chronic state of homelessness.

Mr. SCOTT. Now, on-campus educational experience would probably be after high school. What could we do before high school graduation?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Well, I think being in those post-secondary -- being in high schools is critical. Running programs like National Safe Place in communities, which gives young people resources when they first think about running away and to access.

On campus, I do think that we need to address the post-secondary access to housing. One of the things we see -- and I have dropped many a young person off at college -- and the first question they ask me when I start to leave is, where do I go at Thanksgiving? And you will find young people end up in a crisis situation at those natural juncture points where they don't have any place to live and the campus is shut down.

So we have to think about how we are going to support young people who do not have traditional families and/or friends to be able to go home to during those break periods and give them the pocket money and things that we would give our own children to be able to fit in and be normalized in that situation.

Mr. SCOTT. When they shut down the campus over Thanksgiving, that sounds like something we can do, work with the college to make sure that shouldn't be a problem.

Ms. GIOVENGO. Absolutely.

Mr. SCOTT. Are there peculiar challenges when you talk about parenting, either the child or the homeless older child who has a child herself? Is that a unique challenge?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Absolutely.

I mean, to be honest with you, we need more maternal care group homes for young people, especially for minors who have children. Right now, there are very, very few places for a 17-year-old to go with an infant child.

And, just recently, we had a young person that was living in her car on Monday and, on Tuesday, stayed with a friend and, on Thursday, was back in her car and had a housing assessment through the HUD definition and wasn't eligible because she had stayed with her mom one night and the night before she had been safe.

So we have to think about how we are preventing young people from accessing the services, especially these young families and especially these young women, and I would say that putting those young parents into adult systems is not helpful, because you are talking about a child parenting a child, and we actually have to help the young person who is the parent learn the skills to be self-sufficient on their own, as well as help coach them through parenting a very young infant.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you.

I now recognize the Ranking Member of the Committee, Ms. Foxx, from North Carolina.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Lowery -- and thanks to all the witnesses for being here. Mr. Lowery, this hearing is about the Federal Runaway and Homeless Youth programs. However, in addition to learning about the work done under these programs, we thought it was important to highlight the work done to help a child when they are missing because they ran away.

Can you discuss why it is important to focus on what we do to help bring the child home as much as on providing services if they are experiencing homelessness or preventing them from leaving home in the first place?

Ms. LOWERY. Thank you, Ms. Foxx.

And, yeah, I think you are absolutely correct and we agree that all children, either homeless or runaway, are in crisis, and we know that it is very important that we intervene as quickly as we can when that child is reported missing.

We do work with homeless shelters all over the U.S. when a child goes missing from those shelters, but, in general, we also work with all runaway children, and every one of those children are in crisis, and we have to get them back as quickly as we can. But hence this is where it becomes the issue is that, while finding the children is something that we do each and every day, but that is only half the battle. It is keeping them in those safe places so they are encouraged not to leave there and they stay in a safe environment, and this is the challenge that we face each day. And we depend on our partners, our other NGOs and nonprofits out there that provide services for these families and these children so that they are encouraged not to run away and find themselves in harm. As I testified earlier, many of our children don't run just once. They run multiple times, and each and every time, we can tell that with increasing severity of the risks that these children face.

So we know that we need early interventions, and sometimes we find that those sources are not always available as we need them.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Lowery, I want to follow up. You mentioned the need to evolve in your work to continue helping to find missing children. Can you explain this in more detail and share some examples of what this has looked like over time? And, finally, what harm can occur if you are not constantly evaluating and improving your methods?

Ms. LOWERY. Yes, thank you, Ms. Foxx. That is an excellent question.

You know, in our 35 years of existence, you know, we find that essentially we are constantly evaluating the work that we are doing. We are evaluating trends because a lot has changed in those 35 years since we first opened our doors. You know, the behaviors of children have changed. The behavior of offenders has changed. We are seeing social media now as ingrained in our culture as one good example is nearly all of our children have some social media presence. And while we find social media to be a wonderful tool and a wonderful part of our daily lives and it has helped us when it comes to finding, locating, and recovering children, it also has those that use that platform for nefarious purposes by luring our children, engaging them in conversations that are inappropriate, and eventually convincing those children to go along with them.

We have entered into an age now that we have to be very, very on guard. We have to learn from those experiences, and we know as a center that constant evaluation on how we can get better. So we work with our technology partners that we have at the national center. We have availabilities of some of the best in the world that help us with those very issues on how we can identify those kids.

So, to your point, ma'am, is that, yes, the world has changed. And we have to stay at our best when it comes to protecting our children.

Ms. FOXX. And one more question, Mr. Lowery.

Your testimony talked about work being done to prevent a child from running away again. What are some of the things the center does to help families keep those children home? Are there workshops the center puts together for local organizations and families to help know what to watch for, be concerned about what may lead to a child running away again?

Ms. LOWERY. Yes, ma'am.

Matter of fact, I am very glad you asked that question because this is something that we pride ourselves in it, because we know that finding these children is as important as the prevention work that we must do to keep them safe. Because if we can keep a child and discourage them from running, we know that child is going to live a long, prosperous life.

We have discussion guides that have been developed at the National Center that we share with parents and guardians on recognizing early warning signs of when a child may be susceptible to wanting to run away or escape an environment that may be detrimental to them and what they might do, how it would intervene with that child. With third parties, they could engage to help them before that child goes.

As importantly is we have guides that also guides parents that if the worst should happen, that child goes missing, what they need to do, and what they really need to do is they need to report immediately because time is the enemy when children are missing. And we need to act as quickly as we can and mobilize to get those children back. Every missing child is important to us, but keeping them safe is the challenge that we face each day. There are no waiting periods when it comes to missing children. We remind parents of that each and every day: report immediately.

The other thing I want to point out is we have a lot of online safety guides that protect children when they are using these electronic platforms, and it is age-appropriate material that can be found at the web site at the National Center that can be shared with children, and we share that information also in schools, with educators, so that children are taught that, while we have some wonderful things available to us today, there are some inherent dangers that our children just need to be aware of and how to avoid them.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you.

I now recognize Ms. Schrier from Washington.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. I was so impressed by all of your testimonials, and I have a couple of questions.

First, Dr. Morton, thank you for laying out all the different ways that these kids and young adults are counted because there are vast differences.

And, Dr. Giovengo, I wanted to let you know that I was in Auburn at a temporary living shelter for homeless youth. I believe it is up to age 18. On the same day that King County released their remarkable homeless count, which showed a dramatic decrease from the year prior, all the people sitting around the table said that is complete baloney. We all know that because we know where these kids are on the streets. We drove the neighborhoods the night before. And the night of the count, they weren't there. They theorized that perhaps they were handed bus tickets out of town, that perhaps they were caught up in the criminal justice system.

And I wondered if either one of you could maybe speak to the intersection between homeless youth and the criminal justice system. And then I will get to another question.

Mr. MORTON. Sure. Thank you very much, Congresswoman.

So we do know that there is a significant overlap between juvenile criminal justice involvement and the experience of youth homelessness. In fact, 46 percent of young people experiencing homelessness on a specific night that we surveyed across 22 counties had been in juvenile detention, prison, or jail, and that is not even counting other forms of contact with the criminal justice system.

It doesn't mean that all young people exit these systems directly into homelessness, but it does mean that, like youth in child welfare, like youth in behavioral health systems, this is a population that is at significant risk and in need of additional screening to look for risk factors or situations of housing instability and to align appropriate supports and services and to collaborate with these young people themselves so that they can teach us what types of solutions make the most sense for them.

Ms. GIOVENGO. I would agree with Dr. Morton. In King County in particular, YouthCare does exceptional work inside of juvenile detention to prevent young people from exiting on the streets. As far as the count goes, the one night count in January at 2 in the morning, you are probably not going to see a lot of young people anyway. But on the positive side, Washington State has done some remarkable investment, through their Office of Homeless Youth, in terms of addressing the issue of minors experiencing homelessness, which is where we saw the biggest drop. And that included expanding beds, i.e., more Basic Center beds, more Basic Center opportunities, more outreach opportunities, to find those young people and get them reattached, and to actually, you know, begin early with family intervention, family supports, family reconciliation, which is the primary really target of all of the RHY services. As soon as we see a young person, it is about getting them back to family, a family that is safe and stable. And so we try to do that immediately. But targeted resources help, and I think we have seen some of that in Washington State.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you. I had a question about resources. Because that same temporary shelter said that for a year -- and this

is just my memory here -- it was in the tens of thousands of dollars for each young person they had there.

And I am looking at what Federal funding is, and I am hearing the number \$30 per homeless youth per year. And I am embarrassed that I am even sitting here having this discussion, because it is nothing, what the Federal Government is providing.

I am wondering what your other funding sources are and what more we can do or whether there are other Federal programs that overlap that help these kids.

Ms. GIOVENGO. Sure. I think that is really important, because the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is kind of the anchor point in communities, and that is why every community should have a Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. When we have an RHY program, we can then leverage that \$3 and \$4 to \$1 through our State dollars, sometimes, not so much anymore, but occasionally through HUD, through our Workforce Investment Act dollars, through our local homelessness dollars, through private philanthropy, and really create comprehensive services.

At YouthCare, each bed for an under 18 young person costs -- bed, not per child, but each bed that we keep open on each night is about \$55,000 a year, because of licensing and license requirement, which are critical, and in order to provide a high quality of care, making sure that young person is getting to school, getting to workforce development, doing family reconciliation, having access to mental health and substance disorder treatment. All of that, you know, comes into a basic center in order to meet the developmental needs of young people, and it is really critical.

The Federal investment needs to be much higher. I am not going to, you know, let everyone off the hook there, but it is only part of the solution, but it does provide the anchor in a community and the philosophy of how we should be addressing these needs in communities.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you. Thank you to all of you. And then I have run out of time, but I will submit questions for you, Mr. Baker, in terms of what services were most helpful to you and what would you like to see more investments in. Thank you to all of you.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member.

Thank you for this hearing on an incredibly important topic. It is rather sad what happens to kids, to our children. You know, we see that manifest itself in so many ways, whatever the issues are. A lot today obviously with escalation with substance abuse, opioid abuse, but a breakdown of the family. Sometimes, you know, just, you know, the impact of poverty that occurs for whatever reason.

And so I really appreciated hearing all of your testimony. I apologize I had to step out. I am actually hosting a hearing on Tuesday's Children, and they are having it kicked off. But I was here for your testimony, and I appreciate the experience and the compassion that each of you bring to this hearing.

Mr. Lowery, I want to thank you for being here, taking time out of your busy schedule. As you know, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act aims to end childhood homelessness and rescue youth runaways. During the 2017-2018 school year in my home State, Pennsylvania public schools totaled 4,101 unaccompanied homeless youth. That is not acceptable. Our children are this country's most valuable asset, and, unfortunately, they are also the most vulnerable in our society.

So, Mr. Lowery, given your work with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, how does the Center interact with homeless shelters and organizations that work to provide safety services to homeless and runaway youth, and are there improvements to those interactions you would like to make?

Mr. LOWERY. Thank you, Mr. Thompson. And thank you for that question. Exactly what we do at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, we do interact with those homeless shelters, whether it is family youth shelters, whether they are group homes or they are just drop-in facilities.

We take reports now, because of our work with the Children Missing from Care initiative, which under the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act requires that they be reported. So we are interacting with agencies in all 50 States now and all regions of the United States when it comes to missing children.

And, of course, when you are talking about homeless children, it exacerbates the problem when they run away from that environment because, oftentimes, as you say, they are the most vulnerable children that we have in our society today. There are those that are waiting for them, luring them from that environment, luring them into things such as horrendously into child sex trafficking. Gangs target these children for recruitment or affiliations so that they can carry out some of the things for the gangs.

So we are seeing all sorts of victimization with these children as well. Sexual exploitation. But sexual and violent victimization is also something else that we don't find to be uncommon with all of our runaway children.

But I think you bring up another point is what we would like to see in a perfect world would be when we find these children, we can return them to a safe place. Oftentimes, we are going to find that those children are going to simply walk away and continue their cycle of running away. And it is a very frustrating issue for us.

As I said, finding the children is only half of the work that we have to do. It is how do we keep them there. And oftentimes we are lacking services and those important interdictions to show these children that there is a better life for them out there than what they are seeking or what they are being encouraged to do by those who are taking advantage of their situation. And I think this is where, if we had anything, I would believe that would be what we would really wish for.

Mr. THOMPSON. So what type of services? You mentioned in general you would like to see the services that would be instrumental in facilitating that. What type of services in particular, you know, would it be good to be able to expand or to improve upon?

Mr. LOWERY. Well, you know -- and that is an excellent question. I think what we would like to see is more services directly to that child and their family so that we can keep them together and strengthen that position so that the child isn't in a position where they find circumstances undesirable, or maybe there are circumstances within the home that need to be improved.

I think Mr. Baker made some very excellent points about his own situation that really exemplifies the points that I am making. Because oftentimes our children are running because they are seeking a better life for themselves. They have a lack of self-worth sometimes, and they are running from a situation.

So the more that we can get interventions for those children and help them improve their lives, the better I think we will serve that population of kids. But, as I said, sometimes, you know, we do find that some places have adequate services, and many others do not.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you.

I now recognize Mr. Johnson from South Dakota.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Lowery, we will keep on with you. I thought you did a good job in your testimony talking about the role of technology and how it can be used by predators to make children more susceptible to running away.

So are there data or statistics that can help us get a better sense of how acute or pervasive this problem is?

Mr. LOWERY. Well, yes, we can provide you some more additional information. I don't have that with me here today. But I can tell you that our experience at the National Center is most children today have some sort of online presence. You know, the social media and the availability of smartphone technology and computers for children now has made our world, frankly, a better place, but it is also an area where predators are seeking our children for victimization.

We are seeing cases now where they are making contact with our children in online chat rooms or on social media apps. And these conversations might take place but over periods of days, weeks, months until they have gained the confidence of that child.

Mr. JOHNSON. Almost a grooming process.

Mr. LOWERY. Absolutely, it is a grooming process. And this is something that we are extremely concerned with because then our children are being coerced into doing something they would not normally do, and that is go with those offenders. Too often, when these reports are made, because it doesn't present itself to law enforcement, the officer taking the report sees that child as a runaway. And we think it is something more than that, so we dig deeper into that.

Mr. JOHNSON. So is there something that NCMEC is using? Is there something families can be doing to help, you know, push back against this negative influence of technology?

Mr. LOWERY. Absolutely. In fact, we specifically target our families with information about how social media and how the interaction with our children, both good and bad. There is safety material on there as well. But at the same time is that we remind parents that they are the first line of defense when it comes to their

children. You know, oftentimes we find that children are reluctant to share information with their parents because of the inappropriateness of the conversations of which they have been engaged. So we remind parents: Do not be judgmental when it comes to your child. There is one villain in this story, and it is not the youth.

Mr. JOHNSON. And at least for me, as the father of, you know, three young sons, if I only bring up these topics once a year as sort of the big scary conversation, then people have a tendency to clam up. The more regularly that I can integrate some of these conversations about how do you make good decisions, how do you take care of yourself, how do you make sure your friends are making good decisions, then it seems more like just a part of a good conversation between a parent and a child. Does that sound about right?

Mr. LOWERY. You know, and I think you bring up a point too. It is not necessarily bad parenting. It is just the fact that we are living in a social media world that has a culture this way. And that, while we are parenting in a world that is dominated by social media, we are, frankly, policing in an area that is dominated by social media. So it is gaining that understanding.

Frankly, you know, someone my age didn't have the understanding until, of course, I have been in this job that, say, my grandson would have. They are far more keen to how this technology evolves and how they can utilize this technology to communicate with their friends, communicate with their siblings. So, oftentimes, we find that the parents are not always the best source of information when it comes to this. When we know that a child has run away and we can't explain why, we are going to be speaking with the siblings. We are going to be seeking their friends. What is their online presence? And it is not always apparent with those initial reports. That is why we dig in and do a very comprehensive risk assessment.

Mr. JOHNSON. So my district, the entire State of South Dakota has, you know, nine reservations as well as, you know, tens of thousands of Native peoples living on and off reservation. You know, does NCMEC have particular resources that they are deploying to Indian Country that can help with this issue?

Mr. LOWERY. Absolutely. We are in Indian Country quite frequently. We have programs, not only with AMBER Alert -- frankly, I was in Arizona and New Mexico recently helping the Navaho Nation establish their AMBER Alert program. But we are very, very active in our interventions with Indian and Tribal communities, which are oftentimes considered to be underserved.

You know, the reports of missing children sometimes are sparse, and we encourage the reporting. So we are sharing with their law enforcement agencies and the families not to be hesitant to report their children missing. We are there to help them and provide those services. But we have been very, very active in that regard, especially up in the north.

Mr. JOHNSON. Well said. Thank you, Mr. Lowery.  
Thank you, Madam Chair, and I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes.  
So welcome to the witnesses. I have heard a lot of things today that really has got me thinking about some things back at home. One of the things in my hometown in Waterbury, Connecticut, we

have the largest homeless youth population in my community. And as an educator, I always saw kids who were transitioning out of high school faced with these challenges.

And I reached out this week in preparation for this hearing to our shelter, to some of our community foundations. And one of the things I found out was that we have the largest -- let me be more specific -- the largest homeless LGBTQ youth population, and part and parcel due to the fact that Waterbury has the largest capacity of homeless shelters.

But our homeless shelter assigns anyone who comes according to their identity, their sexual orientation at birth. And many of these young people end up on the street as a result of that. So our community has really just become the place where all of this happens.

I guess, Mr. Lowery, is there anything as we are thinking about that specifically, young people being assigned to dorm-style shelter units by their gender identity at birth, is there any way that we can assure that youth are getting the services that they need and not going to the streets instead of going to a shelter, because of issues like that?

Mr. LOWERY. Well, you bring up an excellent point, ma'am. The LGBTQ community is obviously a very vulnerable population of children. But when those reports are made -- and we get those reports quite frequently of children who run away -- the sexual orientation is not really relevant to the work we are doing. We are assessing the risk that child faces instead.

So we don't keep this particular data on that population of kids nor any other population, because race, sex, and sexual orientation is only part of the work that we do. And it is using that information that we have about the individual child to assess the risk that they face. Oftentimes, we know that those children face higher rates of victimization, so that raises that risk level.

Mrs. HAYES. But specifically about this -- I don't mean to cut you off. I just don't want all my time to run out.

Dr. Giovengo, do you have any information in that specific area?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Yes. At least YouthCare's practices and I think the practices of most of the RHY programs around the country is to be gender-affirming and supportive of young people. So, as they come in, they basically identify the gender that they identify as, and we then assign them beds or units based on their choice and their selection. Their self-identity is gender-affirming, --

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you.

Ms. GIOVENGO. -- which I think is really critical for their safety.

Mrs. HAYES. Two other things that I want to elevate right now, and I will ask both my questions at once so that if we get to the end of the time, at least I will have asked the questions.

The first one is we are talking a lot about youth who are of the age to make the choice. I know there are also lots of minors who are homeless youth. And, again, in this city, where we have the largest homeless shelters, we have a lot of families who are housed there.

And what I saw was in the summer, you know, you had a mom who lived in the shelter but had full-time employment and was on the pathway to stable and secure housing, but because there was no school, they often were forced to quit their jobs, because they

now had to leave the shelter at 9 a.m. and be out all day and had nowhere to put their children.

So I am going to come back to you, Dr. Morton, on this. Does your research address any of the wraparound services that we can provide for people as they are on the pathway to stable and secure housing, even while they are homeless?

And then my next question is something that we touched upon earlier. I have worked so hard as an educator so many times to get kids through our high school system, get them enrolled in college, get them on a campus. And, just like you said, when the campuses go on break, these kids are back in a situation and often can't recover. You know, are on the Dean's list, have been doing amazing work; go through the summer and can't return.

So, again, what are the wraparound services we can provide? So, with the remainder of my time, I would like Dr. Morton and Mr. -- or even Mr. Baker, because you have had some experience here.

Mr. MORTON. Thank you very much, Congresswoman.

I would say that, you know, the research certainly reinforces that young people need housing stability, and permanent housing is a basis for success in areas elsewhere, but also underscores the fact that youth homelessness is a product of more than housing instability. It is also about ruptured relationships, a lack of education, an ability to connect to a long-term career path with stable income in the context of rapidly increasing housing prices.

So all of these connected supports and services are really essential to young people and that they are offered in a trauma-informed way and that they establish meaningful long-term connections in the community for young people that they can utilize and engage beyond the life of the specific housing program.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. Unfortunately, my time has expired, but I just want us all to think about and be reminded that these are -- like you said, it is not just the housing. It is all of those connected services and the extension of what happens to these children in our communities. I guess I am yielding back to myself.

I now recognize the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, Mr. Comer from Kentucky.

Mr. COMER. Before I begin my questions, Mr. Baker, I just have to say that I was very impressed with your story. You certainly are an inspiration. I am glad that you serve now as an advocate because you should be a role model to the youth that we are talking about today.

And I just wanted to publicly say that, Mr. Lowery, you took a lot of time to discuss why it is important to consider these kids as missing rather than as runaways or something else. How successful has the Center been in getting communities to see that, and what kind of education do you do to help spread that message?

Mr. LOWERY. Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member. Yes, what we find is very frustrating, is that we face a desensitized and an apathetic public when we advertise the fact that this child was a runaway, in fact, so much so that, several years ago, we made a conscious decision to remove that designation from our posters when we are facing to the public. Unfortunately, the public doesn't understand the endangerments these children face. So, instead, now we embarked on an education program and sharing of information

program so that we raise public awareness of the endangerments. And we are seeing progress, although it is coming in increments.

We know also that the public is now starting to recognize that they play a role when it comes to finding our children in our communities. And we also know that media -- frankly, it was very difficult for us to get media attention for a child if they knew that child was a runaway. So we are starting to get better media attention to our children, especially when we start talking to them about that risk that child faces.

So, if they are in danger, we are getting much better -- and law enforcement is doing a much better job. We have been sharing best practices, recommendations with law enforcement. We encourage rapid response, rapid search that is being adopted. And, frankly, I am working right now with our partners at the International Association of Chiefs of Police to develop model policies for response to missing children that we hope will be soon adopted by most agencies across the country.

Mr. COMER. A child that is missing is a crisis, no matter where they come from or who they are. However, sometimes it helps to have better information about the child to try to locate them faster. What kind of information is important, and how does the Center spread that information out in a useful manner to help local organizations find and bring the child home?

Mr. LOWERY. Excellent question. Yes, sir. When we get a report of a missing child, immediately at the time that report is being made, we are taking information from the caller. As I say, we are a child-centric organization, meaning that we don't treat that child as a number, that we treat that child as a person.

And each child that goes missing we know is a unique event. So, therefore, we are looking for information on who that child may be with, where they may be heading, why they left the environment that they left, if they had a social media presence with someone who may have been in contact with them that encouraged them to leave that safe environment.

We are also watching very intently on whether or not these gangs are in contact with our kids, encouraging them to come there. And, again, these children are especially vulnerable to that kind of contact because they lack that sense of belonging oftentimes and maybe that sense of self-worth. So they are looking for someone who would look after them or possibly even protect them. Obviously, we know that is probably not the best choice to be made. But, again, we are not in the circumstances of those children. So we have learned from all that through that risk-assessment program.

Also, each and every child is assigned to one singular case management team at the National Center. So they know that child better than anyone else and the behaviors. So when that child, as I say, goes reported missing more than once, that case manager is going to know where they have been found in the past, who they have been in the company with. So they are sharing that information with law enforcement and the social service agencies to expediently return that child to a safe place.

Mr. COMER. My last question I am going to ask Mr. Baker: Is there anything in particular that we in Congress should be aware

of as we look at programs to help vulnerable children or anything you would like to mention that would be helpful for us to know?

Mr. BAKER. Thank you for the question, Ranking Member Comer. I think one thing that Congress should be aware of is the Homeless and Foster Youth Act of 2019. This act would streamline the process for applying for financial aid, receiving financial aid. It would help students access housing, and it would designate a higher education liaison to, you know, hold a place for these students to access services.

In San Diego, the community college that I went to had an equity office, and that was a place where students could go to get a little sticker on their ID so that they didn't have to self-identify that they were homeless. It also gave us access to showers in the morning, which is essential for somebody who is trying to get themselves together, especially while trying to avoid self-identifying, which is one of the main things that keeps a young person from accessing services.

Mr. COMER. Well, thank you very much.

My time has expired, and I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I now recognize the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Yarmuth.

Mr. YARMUTH. I thank Chairwoman Hayes and Ranking Member Comer and also for the witnesses for being here. I am very grateful to the Committee to allow me to participate in today's hearing. I would also like to thank again the witnesses.

And I am here because I am the lead Democrat on the reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act, which I am working to finalize now with Representative Bacon here in the House and with Senators Leahy and Collins in the Senate.

This hearing presents a great opportunity to discuss how we can strengthen our RHY programs and work toward ending youth homelessness altogether. Youth homelessness is an issue that I have focused on throughout my time in Congress, and the testimony presented today demonstrates the need for increased support from the Federal Government in these critical programs.

Investing in children is the most important investment we can make in our Nation's future, and homeless youth are among the most vulnerable people in our communities. We know that homeless youth are at high risk for developing physical, behavioral, and emotional problems and potentially becoming victims of sex and labor trafficking.

Given the right support, we can help these young people effectively transition into adulthood, become competitive in the workforce, and positively contribute to society. Yet, 1 in 10 young adults and 1 in 30 adolescents are homeless and in need of services, which clearly exceeds the resources of RHY programs.

For the young people who do receive RHY services, the current funding level limits that assistance to \$30 per day per young person, on average. So we have two gaps to fill between those who need services and those who are getting it and the level of services provided to each young person and what is needed, to make sure each individual is safe and set up to succeed, which brings me to my questions.

Dr. Giovengo, your testimony talks about the importance of extending the grant length from 3 to 5 years. Could you tell us how that change would improve service delivery to young people?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Absolutely. This is something that we are very passionate about in the field, because the 3-year grant cycle really keeps our staff on kind of pins and needles about if they are going to have a job. And that constant reauthorization really doesn't allow us to develop especially young staff into excellent staff and maintain them over time.

People change people. That is what makes a difference in the lives of our young people that we serve. And the better we are able to maintain both the programming, the consistency of the people, and the quality of the people that we have in programs makes a huge difference. A commitment of 3 to 5 years allows us to focus our resources on, you know, developing a workforce that are the experts and that can stay committed to the young person.

I mean, I submitted a story in my written testimony about a young man, a young person that said, you know, 3 years, worked with the same person over 3 years. That is how he got out of homelessness. And so I think that one of the things it allows us to do is stabilize these programs and help build the kind of community sustainability that we need to keep them going in whatever economic times.

Mr. YARMUTH. Just following up, what would you like to see Congress do other than extend the duration from 3 to 5 years, for Congress to do to strengthen these programs?

Ms. GIOVENGO. Well, I think we have talked about the idea of going from 21 to 30 days, and where licensing allows it even longer for young people, so that we can actually work on long-term placement for young people, either getting them back home or building more transitional living programs for those minors 16 to 18 years old so that they are not just discharged to another shelter.

I think those are two critical pieces, extending the timeline, working on the length of the grant. And, of course, the level of funding would be critical. We need, you know, way more than \$127 million to have an RHY program in every community. And I think Congress needs to recognize the cost of dealing with minors and licensing and having quality services.

Helping young people regain their lives, ending homelessness is an expensive undertaking. And I would say that we turn away young people, you know, every day all across this country. And, you know, just as a saying, you know, traffickers don't have wait lists. So, when they can't be served by us and when we don't have a resource in a community, someone is right there waiting for them, and we need to be there to ensure that these young people's lives are not destroyed and trauma loaded over time.

Mr. YARMUTH. Thank you.

And, Mr. Baker, I really don't have time to ask a question, but I want to, once again, congratulate you and thank you for your testimony. I remember the first time we had a hearing on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. And we had a young man named Robbie who had come through our Safe Place program in Louisville, Kentucky, and he had everybody in the room in tears because his story was so inspirational, and yours is as well.

So, once again, let me thank the Subcommittee for allowing me to participate. And as someone that serves the district where Safe Place was started and is now the home for National Safe Place headquarters, I am very, very proud to be a part of this effort.

So thanks again, and I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. That is the end of our questioning. Thank you all for your time.

I remind my colleagues that, pursuant to the Committee practice, materials for submission for the hearing record must be submitted to the Committee Clerk within 14 days following the last day of the hearing, preferably in Microsoft Word format. The material submitted must address the subject matter of the hearing. Only a Member of the Committee or an invited witness may submit materials for inclusion in the hearing record. Documents are limited to 50 pages each. Documents longer than 50 pages will be incorporated into the record via an internet link that you must provide to the Committee Clerk within the required timeframe, but please recognize that, years from now, that link may no longer work.

And now, without objection, I would like to enter into the record a research brief from Chapin Hall detailing that a comprehensive study of the national prevalence of youth homelessness showed that 4.2 million youth experience homelessness each year; a report from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness summarizing what the Federal Government knows about the scale of youth homelessness and identifying the gaps in robust data on youth homelessness; a guide from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness summarizing strategies and promising practices for ending youth homelessness; and a report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office on child well-being showing that homelessness has increased among students and families in recent years.

Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

# Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America

## *National Estimates*

The first in a series of Research-to-Impact briefs by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago on understanding and addressing youth homelessness.

*Missed Opportunities: National Estimates* highlights results from a national survey of unaccompanied youth homelessness in America. The study captures youth homelessness broadly, including sleeping on the streets, in shelters, running away, being kicked out, and couch surfing. Overall, findings show one in 10 young adults ages 18-25, and at least one in 30 adolescents ages 13-17, experience some form of homelessness unaccompanied by a parent or guardian over the course of a year. As a nation, we are missing opportunities to ensure that all young people can reach their full potential and contribute to stronger communities and economies across the country.

voicesofyouthcount.org

**ChapinHall**  
at the University of Chicago

**VOICES OF  
YOUTH COUNT**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Voices of Youth: Natalie's Story

At age 14 in a small town in Washington State, Natalie's experience with homelessness began. Natalie's dad left her family, and her mom fell into depression and started using methamphetamines. "[I]f she wasn't drunk or high, she was gone," Natalie noted in one part of Voices of Youth Counts research efforts. For the next six months, Natalie cared for her four younger siblings. She started to miss school and ultimately dropped out. The stress of her circumstance mounted. Through friends, she encountered meth, a drug that had become tragically common in her community. She started using. This only added to conflict with her mom, and, after a fight with her mom's new boyfriend, Natalie was kicked out.

Natalie then cycled between couch surfing and trap houses, where illegal drugs are sold. She exchanged sex with an older man so that she could "have a roof over [her] head." Natalie traveled to other cities for housing and informal support. By 17, when chemical dependency had taken a strong hold, she stayed for extended periods in the shed of someone she knew. Natalie found herself regularly returning to juvenile detention—where she says she was grateful for a bed to sleep in and respites of safety. When Natalie was interviewed, she was about to embark on a residential treatment program. Asked about her future, she said, "I want to be home with my mom, and I want to stop using, and I want to be clean with my mom. I want to be able to see my siblings."

Adolescence and young adulthood represent a key developmental window. Every day of housing instability and the associated stress in the lives of young people like Natalie represents missed opportunities to support healthy development and transitions to productive adulthood. Voices of Youth Counts gives voice to young people like Natalie across our nation who do not have the necessary supports to achieve independence and make their unique contributions to our society.

### Voices of Youth Count

Through multiple methods and research angles, Voices of Youth Counts sought to capture and understand the voices and experiences of thousands of young people like Natalie. While the deprivation of housing stability was the common thread in Voices of Youth Counts research, the stories of youth homelessness—and the opportunities for intervention—rarely centered on housing alone. Every experience every youth has is unique. Yet, with the data gained through Voices of Youth Counts, we can begin to better understand the scale and scope of the challenge and the patterns that can guide smarter policy and practice.

Since 1974, when Congress first passed what is now known as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), the nation has recognized its shared responsibility to care for young people who live on the streets or apart from a safe and stable home. This landmark legislation, subsequent changes within statutes across multiple federal agencies, and ongoing national initiatives support a basic set of services for youth who experience homelessness and are at risk of homelessness. In 2012, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) amended the national plan to end homelessness to include a specific Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness, outlining steps that need to be coordinated across Federal agencies to advance the goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020. However, despite important national actions—and many efforts at the state and community levels—a sizable percentage of American youth continues to experience homelessness. The problem is solvable, but much remains to be done.

*Missed Opportunities: National Estimates* summarizes the results of the Voices of Youth Counts national survey that estimates the percentage of United States youth, ages 13 to 25, who have experienced unaccompanied homelessness at least once during a recent 12-month period. Results show that approximately one in 10 American young adults ages 18 to 25, and at least one in 30 adolescent minors ages 13 to 17, endures some form of homelessness.

Key to understanding these estimates is the fact that young people—like Nadale—often shift among temporary circumstances such as living on the streets and couch surfing in unstable locations.

The Voices of Youth Count national survey also reveals that urban and rural youth experience homelessness at similar rates and that particular subpopulations are at higher risk for homelessness, including black and Hispanic youth; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth (LGBT); youth who do not complete high school; and youth who are parents.

Previous research shows that the longer youth experience homelessness, the harder it is to escape homelessness and contribute to stronger families, communities, and economies. To exit homelessness permanently, youth require housing and support services tailored to their *unique developmental needs*. Although many factors drive youth from their homes, including economic hardship, conflict, abuse, and neglect, the young people thrust into this situation share difficulty and uncertainty.

### Moving Toward Solutions

Until now, one major challenge to putting solutions in place has been the lack of credible data on the size and characteristics of the youth population who experience homelessness and a way to track how this population changes over time. Without credible numbers and deeper understanding, it has been difficult for

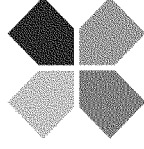
the nation to develop a well-resourced and tailored response to address this problem in our communities. It has also been impossible to reliably track the nation's progress toward its goal of ending youth homelessness.

*Missed Opportunities: National Estimates* provides Congress with new foundational evidence for understanding the scale, scope, and urgency of youth homelessness in America.

Voices of Youth Count will bring forward more evidence in the months to come. Look for Research-to-Impact briefs related to trajectories into homelessness; the dynamics between interactions with systems like child welfare and youth homelessness; syntheses of the evidence regarding interventions to address youth homelessness; and deep explorations of the experiences faced by specific subgroups of young people.

Beyond the findings, Voices of Youth Count will offer implications and recommendations intended to focus the attention of Congress on existing policy opportunities—like the RHYA and others—that might be leveraged to make change. Recommendations are intended to be the beginning of a dialogue about tangible changes to the nation's laws, regulations, and programs, not an end point. In each brief, Voices of Youth Count will speak to the evidence while seeking solutions.

No more missed opportunities.



Adolescence and young adulthood represent a key developmental window. Every day of housing instability represents missed opportunities to support healthy development and transitions to productive adulthood.

No more missed opportunities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 
 Conduct national estimates of youth homelessness biennially to track our progress in ending youth homelessness. See Finding 1.
- 
 Fund housing interventions, services, outreach, and prevention efforts in accordance with the scale of youth homelessness, accounting for different needs. See Finding 1.
- 
 Encourage assessment and service delivery decisions that are responsive to the diversity and fluidity of circumstances among youth experiencing homelessness. See Finding 2.
- 
 Build prevention efforts in systems where youth likely to experience homelessness are in our care: child welfare, juvenile justice, and education. See Finding 3.
- 
 Acknowledge unique developmental and housing needs for a young population, and adapt services to meet those needs. See Finding 3.
- 
 Tailor supports for rural youth experiencing homelessness to account for more limited service infrastructure over a larger terrain. See Finding 4.
- 
 Develop strategies to address the disproportionate risk for homelessness among specific subpopulations, including pregnant and parenting, LGBT, African American and Hispanic youth, and young people without high school diplomas. See Finding 5.

## A NATIONAL SURVEY APPROACH

Quantifying the number of youth struggling with homelessness presents a challenge due to the transitory and hidden nature of youth experiences. For example, after Natalie was kicked out of her home at 14, she found shelter in varied locations such as on other people's couches, in a trap house, or in a shed. Because she didn't stay on the street or in a shelter, she might not have been included in a community effort to capture the extent of youth homelessness.

To gain a fuller picture, Voices of Youth Count primarily draws on a nationally representative phone survey for national estimates in this brief, but we also include some insights from other research components—like in-depth interviews and brief youth surveys that took place during local Youth Counts across the country.

The national survey interviewed 26,161 people, who were broadly representative of the population of the nation, during 2016 and 2017. The study interviewed adults whose households had youth and young adults ages 13-25 over the year *and* respondents who were ages 18-25. The respondents then answered questions about occurrences of different types of youth homelessness experienced by the respondents themselves (if ages 18-25) or by young people (ages 13-25) who were in the household. Page 15 includes key terms for this study.

The survey sought to identify how common, or prevalent, youth homelessness is in America. The study also aimed to collect information on the characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness and identify subpopulations at higher risk of homelessness. Voices of Youth Count chose this approach to national estimation of youth homelessness not only because of its technical strengths, but also because of its cost efficiency and replicability.

The Voices of Youth Count national survey was reinforced through follow-up interviews. A random sample of 150 people who reported on any youth homelessness were called in an effort to learn more. Details on the methodology of the national survey, along with its strengths and limitations, are reported in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* article titled "Prevalence and Correlates of Youth Homelessness in the United States." This brief also draws on more than 4,000 in-person brief youth surveys in 22 counties and 215 in-depth interviews with youth in five counties who had experiences of homelessness.



# Five Major Findings

Finding 1: Youth homelessness is a broad and hidden challenge

Finding 2: Youth homelessness involves diverse experiences and circumstances

Finding 3: Prevention and early intervention are essential

Finding 4: Youth homelessness affects rural youth at similar levels

Finding 5: Some youth are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness

## Finding 1: Youth homelessness is a broad and hidden challenge

The survey results revealed that the nation has a serious and substantial challenge with youth homelessness. As shown in Figure 1,

over a 12-month period, 3.0% of households with 13- to 17-year-olds reported explicit youth homelessness (including running away or being kicked out) and 1.3% reported experiences that solely involved couch surfing, resulting in an overall 4.3% household prevalence of any homelessness. We estimate that this translates to a minimum of 700,000 adolescent minors, or 1 in 30 of the total population of 13- to 17-year-olds.

The prevalence climbs even higher when looking at homelessness among young adults (ages 18-25). Twelve-month population prevalence rates for young adults were 5.2% for explicit homelessness, 4.5% for couch surfing only, and 9.7% overall. The estimated count reveals more than 3.5 million, or 1 in 10, young adults experienced homelessness in a year. It could be that the size of the difference in rates between the younger and older youth was due partly to underestimation of the minors because they were not contacted directly. However, this upward trend is consistent with broader public health research that shows increased levels of vulnerability during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

In addition to showing a broad national challenge, these estimates reveal a largely hidden problem of youth homelessness. A large share of youth

included were couch surfing or otherwise staying with others while lacking a home of their own. These experiences are the most invisible. Previous research shows that couch surfing generally takes place early in people's struggles with homelessness, with sleeping more on the streets happening at later stages of homelessness. Our estimates also capture large numbers of young people that are hidden to other counts and data. For example, our estimates for adolescent minors are larger than those produced by data collected by school officials because our survey included out-of-school youth, and it does not depend on the strengths or limitations of school identification systems of student homelessness. Our estimates are bigger than those from point-in-time counts largely because we capture experiences over a year, rather than on one night. Our survey approach also includes more hidden homelessness of youth who are not in the streets or shelters at the time of a point-in-time count.

## Implications & Recommendations

These national estimates reveal that key systems and federal programs need to be significantly better resourced to address the scale of youth homelessness. For example, according to 2014 data collected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 50,000 youth were served by the two major runaway and homeless youth programs involving short- or longer-term housing in 2014. Per the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) 2016 Annual

Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, there were 21,000 beds or housing spaces under different HUD-funded programs targeted to unaccompanied and parenting youth in 2016. Even if we conservatively assume that only a small share of youth experiencing any homelessness in a year needs short- or long-term housing interventions, these numbers fall well short.

Now, with the first national estimate of youth homelessness complete, Congress has a solid foundation for conducting future estimates. The national survey has significantly advanced understanding of the scale and characteristics of this previously hidden challenge. It also achieved these insights through an underlying approach that is replicable and cost-efficient. At the same time, it was a first effort that can be fine-tuned through more detailed measures and additional approaches to collect information directly from adolescent minors in the future.

Voices of Youth Count encourages Congress to act quickly to refine RHYA language and appropriate necessary funds, to allow for subsequent national prevalence and incidence estimates every two years, in alignment with the frequency of HUD biennial point-in-time counts, to ensure Congress has up-to-date evidence for tracking and decision making. The language and appropriations should reinforce the importance of collecting information on both adolescent minors—an especially key stage for prevention—and young adults. In this way, the nation can track progress toward preventing and ending youth homelessness.

### Finding 2. Youth homelessness involves diverse experiences and circumstances

While the concept of “homelessness” might seem straightforward, in reality it takes many forms in terms of situations, acuity, safety, needs, and duration of events. The survey confirms a scenario of American youth homelessness in which a shifting population of young people uses temporary

situations to get by when they cannot stay in a home of their own.

One 19-year-old interviewed, for instance, shared the following experience of staying at a friend's before returning to sleeping in a car: *“My friend had a small bed, so I just crashed on the floor. She had a boyfriend...and he would stay over a lot of the time, so it was just, I felt as an inconvenience to them. So I—although they didn't force me out of their house—kind of fished and said that I was planning on getting an apartment so that they weren't worried about me, and I moved back into my car for a bit.”*

According to analysis of the national survey follow-up interviews, the vast majority—72%—who experienced “literal homelessness” (generally, sleeping on the streets, in a car, or in a shelter) also said they had stayed with others while unstably housed.

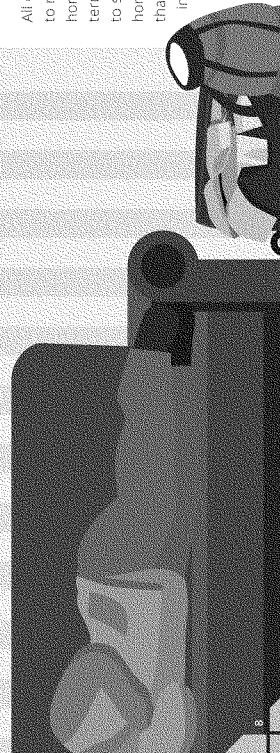
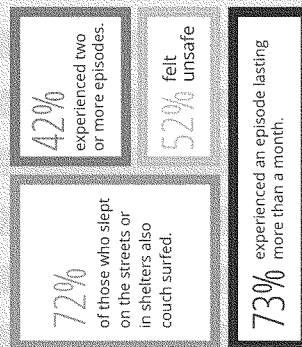
In looking at safety, about half of the follow-up interview respondents believed that the youth was unsafe during their experiences of explicit homelessness or couch surfing. These youth need access to rapid family reconnection supports when appropriate, safe brief respites (such as trauma-informed youth shelters or host homes), or long-term safe and stable housing options, depending on their needs and preferences. Yet many youth self-organize temporary housing through informal networks—such as couch surfing with a friend or relative—that is safe, if unstable. In these cases, youth may need supports to get on a path to housing stability while not necessarily needing formal short-term shelter or respite housing.

Among other youth surveyed, supports beyond housing are warranted to ensure sustainable exits from homelessness. For instance, 29% of youth were reported as having substance use problems, and 69% were indicated as having mental health difficulties, while experiencing homelessness. Just as Natalie's story highlighted, having safe and stable housing is the critical

**Figure 2. Range of Homeless Experiences**

While the concept of "homelessness" might seem straightforward, in reality, it takes many forms in terms of situations, ability, safety, needs, and duration of experience. The survey confirms a scenario of American youth homelessness in which a shifting population of young people uses temporary situations to get by when they cannot stay in a home of their own.

Data depict the experiences of youth (13-25) over a 12-month period, as described during the survey follow-up interviews with a smaller sample of respondents.



starting point for youth to benefit from other services. Often, arranging safe and stable housing involves working with the family. In other cases, it involves ensuring that young people have access to other long-term, low-barrier housing options. In addition to stable housing, integrating meaningful services tailored to individual youth needs is essential to help them exit homelessness for good.

For still others, situations are temporary and nonrecurring during the year, and these experiences and circumstances likewise require different responses. For example, according to analysis of the follow-up interviews, at least one in four young people who experienced some form of homelessness had experiences of housing instability lasting less than one month. During a one-year period, over half of the youth with any experiences of homelessness only had one episode. Older research has shown that most runaway/kicked out experiences among minors tend to last for less than a week.

All of these experiences can expose youth to risks and can be warning signs of future homelessness. But many may not need long-term housing interventions so much as access to supports to stay safely housed during homelessness spells and services to ensure that they never have to relive homelessness in the future.

### **Implications & Recommendations**

Given the differences among youth homelessness situations in acuity, needs, and duration, we recommend Congress encourage well-rounded assessments of young people's overall circumstances to inform access to housing and support services and to develop better service delivery models.

To deliver well-tailored support and services, these assessments should take into account young people's sleeping arrangements over time, the conditions of these arrangements, age-appropriate risk and protective factors, relationships and family history (when appropriate), and individual preferences. Federal policy should also encourage authentic youth collaboration in any funding or program addressing youth homelessness, to ensure that young people's lived experience contributes to smarter strategies to address their needs and aspirations.

### **Finding 3. Prevention and early intervention are essential**

The national survey revealed that a large number of youth come into homelessness for the first time throughout the course of a single year. In fact, about half of the young people in the study, ages 13 to 25, who were homeless during the 12-month period studied experienced homelessness for the first time in their lives. This dynamic cannot be fully addressed with reactive policies and programs alone.

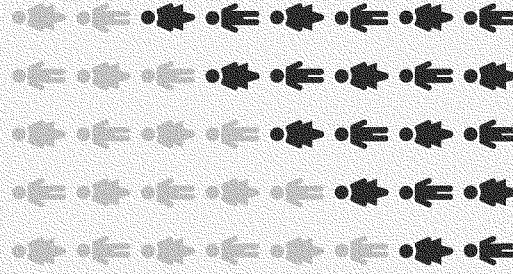
Prevention and early intervention solutions are needed to stop the flow of youth into homelessness experiences; this point was reinforced by the Voices of Youth Count's in-depth interviews in five communities.

The majority of young adults (ages 18-25) interviewed had experiences of homelessness or housing instability that started in childhood or adolescence. For many young people interviewed (ages 13-25)—nearly a quarter—unaccompanied experiences had precursors in the context of family homelessness. Over one-third of youth experienced the death of a parent or caregiver, underscoring early trauma and disruptions that can contribute to paths of instability and, ultimately, homelessness. These insights from in-depth interviews reinforce the extent to which early actions to address risks and boost youth resilience can help curb the trajectories of young people into homelessness.

**Figure 3. Incidence of First Time Homelessness**

About half of the youth who experienced homelessness over a year faced homelessness...

*...for the first time.*



Further, key systems present untapped opportunities for actions to prevent youth homelessness. Across 22 counties, more than 4,000 in-person brief youth surveys showed that nearly one-third of youth experiencing homelessness had experiences with foster care and nearly half had been in juvenile detention, jail, or prison. While these statistics do not reveal the nature of relationships between systems and homelessness, they do suggest that these systems offer important entry points for preventing large numbers of youth from becoming homeless.

#### **Implications and Recommendations**

**The findings suggest that local, state, and national prevention strategies and resources are essential.** No one system alone can address the multiple needs of these vulnerable young people. Policies that cut across federal programs are necessary to build a strong prevention safety net to avoid homelessness before it begins, and to ensure that any experiences that do take place are brief and nonrecurrent. With close engagement of multiple federal agencies, the USICH could facilitate development of a specific cross-sectoral strategy on prevention of youth homelessness, and Congress should consider appropriating necessary resources for its implementation.

Congress has an essential role to play in shaping federal programs for youth at high risk of homelessness. They can act to emphasize the importance of prevention and early intervention in legislation. They can also encourage that programs that serve youth experiencing homelessness use an age-appropriate developmental lens in creating services and support systems.

Furthermore, Congress should consider expanding stronger homelessness prevention and early intervention capacities to other public systems like child welfare, schools, and justice that

already play a role in ensuring health and well-being, especially for adolescent minors. Voices of Youth Count brief youth surveys further documented that young people who have been in child welfare or justice systems, or lack a high school diploma, are at especially high risk of homelessness. Public systems can and do have an impact.

In particular, Congress should encourage these systems to develop and implement plans that identify youth at risk of homelessness or housing instability and initiate service referrals. The most obvious mechanisms for Congress to leverage include the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JDPA) and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act (for child welfare), expanding resources for outreach and drop-in centers in RHYA, and adequately supporting identification and assistance measures for youth homelessness present in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, for education).

#### **Finding 4. Youth homelessness affects rural youth at similar levels**

**Before Voices of Youth Count, little was known about the degree of youth homelessness in rural areas compared to urban areas.** The results indicate that, despite more visible signs of homelessness such as youth asking for help on city corners, youth in rural, suburban, and urban counties experience very similar prevalence rates of homelessness. In predominantly rural counties, 9.2% of young adults reported any homelessness while, in predominantly urban counties, the prevalence rate was 9.6%. Household prevalence of any homelessness among adolescents ages 13-17 was 4.4% in predominantly rural counties and 4.2% in mainly urban counties.

Said differently, this means that as a share of the population size, youth homelessness is just as much of a challenge in rural communities as it is in more urban communities. Of course, the number of youth experiencing homelessness in urban and

suburban areas is much larger than the number in rural areas because a larger share of the US population lives in urban and suburban areas. As a country, we need tailored strategies to reach all of these young people.

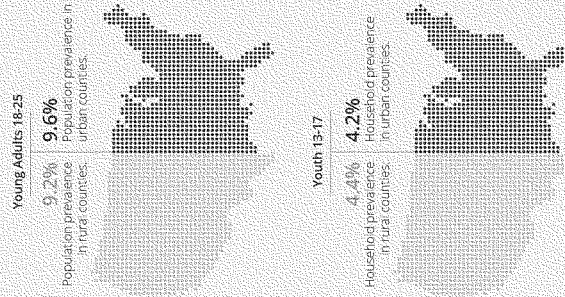
One interesting distinction is that youth in rural communities seem to rely more on couch surfing, probably due to a lack of shelter and housing services in their communities. The national survey suggests modestly higher rates of couch surfing in the least densely populated counties when compared to those with the highest density. But the national survey did not show where there might have been heavier reliance on some sleeping arrangements over others because its aim was to assess whether a youth couch surfed at all. The 4,000 in-person Youth Count surveys across 22 counties, on the other hand, show sleeping arrangements on a given night. This component of the research found that youth experiencing homelessness in rural counties were twice as likely as youth in medium and large population counties to be staying with others, rather than in shelters or on the streets, on the night of the count. These cross-component findings underscore how hidden many young people are who experience homelessness in rural settings and the need for more creative identification and outreach approaches to support them.

**Implications and Recommendations**  
**The findings highlight that youth in rural jurisdictions require a strong set of tailored supports.** Rural areas face unique challenges given that youth homelessness is spread across a larger space with greater hiddenness and more limited services infrastructure. Federal programs addressing youth homelessness should encourage and support coordination and peer learning across communities with rural geographies to enhance the supports provided to youth.

Through legislation like RHYA and the HEARTH Act, policymakers could also consider appropriating resources to allow for tailored outreach strategies and provision of services in rural communities, building on lessons from pilots funded by HHS and HUD. Congress should also consider supporting the evaluation of services delivered in rural communities to ensure interventions are meeting the needs of this group of young people.

**Figure 4: Youth Homelessness Affects Rural and Urban Areas Alike**

Rates of youth experiencing homelessness were similar in rural and non-rural areas.





### Finding 5. Some youth are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness

Understanding that certain groups of young people are more likely to experience homelessness can prompt targeted

strategies to speed progress toward ending youth homelessness (see Figure 5). Voices of Youth Court analysis offered additional information about comparative risks of different subpopulations of young adults ages 18-25 of experiencing "explicit homelessness."

Among racial and ethnic groups, African American youth were especially overrepresented, with an 83% increased risk of having experienced homelessness over youth of other races. Higher risk of African American youth compared to other races remains even when we control for other factors like income and education. Disproportionality of homelessness experiences among black youth mirrors racial disparities documented elsewhere, for example in school suspensions, incarceration, and foster care placement. It is likely that disproportionalities in other systems, along with a weaker schooling and service infrastructure in predominantly black communities, help explain elevated risk of homelessness, but more targeted research can help pinpoint causes.

Hispanic youth were also found at higher risk of experiencing homelessness than non-Hispanic youth. Further, while Hispanic youth comprised 33% of 18- to 25-year-olds reporting explicit homelessness (compared to 25% of young adults not reporting

homelessness), only 19% of youth served by federally funded runaway and homeless youth programs in 2014 were Hispanic. Point-in-time counts have also shown lower percentages of Hispanic youth overall among those identified as homeless, especially those in shelters. As such, our national survey results suggest that Hispanic youth are especially hidden among those experiencing homelessness.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth had a 120% increased risk of experiencing homelessness compared to youth who identified as heterosexual and cisgender. These findings reinforce growing evidence on the heightened risk of experiencing homelessness among LGBT youth. This often stems from a lack of acceptance that young people experience both in and outside of the home.

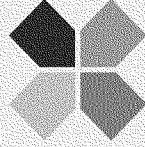
Young parents—especially those unmarried—had three times the risk of experiencing homelessness compared to non-parenting peers. This finding is alarming, not only because of the risks posed to young people themselves, but also to their children. Housing instability in early childhood can have lifelong consequences. For these young people, approaches to prevention and services need to reflect the developmental needs of the young people, their children, and the holistic needs of their families.

Above and beyond these demographics, education was strongly related to risk of homelessness. In fact, of all of the indicators

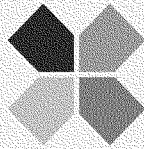
assessed, the lack of a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) was the most strongly correlated with higher risk. These young adults had 4.5 times the risk of experiencing homelessness compared to peers who completed high school. Although we cannot say whether lower education causes youth homelessness, this finding reinforces the extent to which education, and underlying factors that support educational attainment, could protect youth from becoming homeless.

At the same time, the data also show that many youth experience homelessness while enrolled in school. According to national survey follow-up interviews, 29% of young adults who experienced homelessness were enrolled in college or another educational program at the time that they experienced homelessness. These struggles often go unknown to faculty, administrators, and others who could be in a position to help.

Young people with lower household income were more likely to experience homelessness. However, and perhaps less obviously, when Voices of Youth Count controlled for income, unemployment was not strongly correlated with homelessness. Taken with findings from Voices of Youth Count in-depth interviews and brief youth surveys, which show significant levels of work experience among youth experiencing homelessness, we can see the difficulties underpinning homelessness. Put simply, the problem is not that these young people are



**Disproportionality of homelessness experiences among black youth mirrors racial disparities documented elsewhere, for example in school suspensions, incarceration, and foster care placement.**



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full potential.

not working. Many are. It may be, however, that quality of work and the income associated with gainful employment (and perhaps education and other supports) may be more important for lifting youth out of homelessness than simply having a job.

#### **Implications and Recommendations**

**The findings reinforce the need for targeted strategies to address the disproportionate risks for homelessness among certain**

**subpopulations.** This starts with ensuring that systems and programs collect and use data to track whether some high risk subpopulations are served less frequently, or less effectively, than other young people. Informed by continuous monitoring, systems and programs can better tailor outreach, staff recruitment or development, and service delivery models to prevent higher risk of homelessness among some groups and to provide safer, more inclusive services that meet their needs for exiting homelessness.

These findings suggest an opportunity to strengthen an array of statutory areas—such as RHYA and HEARTH Act—by incorporating in each the importance of using data and tailoring outreach, staff recruitment or development, and service models mindful of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and pregnancy or parenting status. Homelessness spans and services supported by federal funding need to be safe and specific to adolescents and young adults and appropriate for the youth subpopulations who need to

access them.

Going forward, Voices of Youth Count will explore each of the overrepresented groups—black, Hispanic, LGBT, youth who do not complete high school (as well homelessness among in-school youth), and youth who are parents—in further detail in upcoming Research-to-Impact briefs. Implications and recommendations for policy, programs, and practice will be drawn out for dialogue and action.

## CONCLUSION

*Mixed Opportunities: National Estimates* offers unprecedented national insights into the scale, scope, and characteristics of youth homelessness in America. Although every experience is unique, Voices of Youth Count finds that 17-year-old Natalie is far from alone in her struggle with homelessness. The challenge involves a scale that requires greater coordination and resourcing of multiple systems and programs—behavioral and physical health, child welfare, education, employment, housing, justice, and outreach—at local, state, and federal levels to drive these numbers toward zero.

There are no silver bullets, but the efforts and investments to end youth homelessness are worth it—for Natalie, for the millions of youth who share her struggle, and for our country, which stands to gain from helping all of our young people achieve their full potential.

## TERMS

**Couch surfing.** Moving from one temporary living arrangement to another without a secure place to be. While some definitions consider staying with others homeless, others place this under a broader concept of “housing instability.” We include couch surfing in overall estimates of homelessness but also provide estimates that separate out couch surfing-only experiences in which people did not also report “homelessness.”

**Explicit homelessness.** This refers to survey respondents who used the term “homelessness” to describe youth experiences. For 13- to 17-year-olds, it also includes reports of “having run away from home, or having been kicked out, and staying somewhere else for at least one night.”

**Homelessness.** Generally, experiences of sleeping in places not meant for living, staying in shelters, or temporarily staying with others (“couch surfing”) while lacking a safe and stable alternative living arrangement. Voices of Youth Count took an unaccompanied homelessness, meaning that the youth is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian while homeless.

**Household prevalence.** The percentage of households with youth members in the specified age groups in which any of those members had experienced homelessness in a year. Because this survey was administered to adults (ages 18 and over), we could directly estimate only household prevalence for the 13-17 age group. We use household prevalence to calculate a minimum number of adolescent minors 13-17 who experienced homelessness in the U.S. These numbers are probably low, since some households could have multiple youth experiencing homelessness, and adults might not report as accurately on youth experiences as youth would themselves.

**Incidence.** The percentage of youth who experienced homelessness in the last year for the first time in their lives.

**Population prevalence.** The percentage of the youth population of the specified age group that experienced homelessness in a year. For young adults ages 18-25, we could calculate both household and population prevalence.

**Youth.** Varying age ranges are used for youth. The most common international is 15-24. We use the age range of 13-25 to align with the RHYA age range for national estimates, but we refer to two specific subgroups: adolescent minors (ages 13-17) and young adults (18-25).

## REFERENCES

Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., Majasko, J.L., Curry, S.R., Schueter, D., Chávez, R., & Farrell, A.F. (in press). Prevalence and correlates of youth homelessness in the United States. *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

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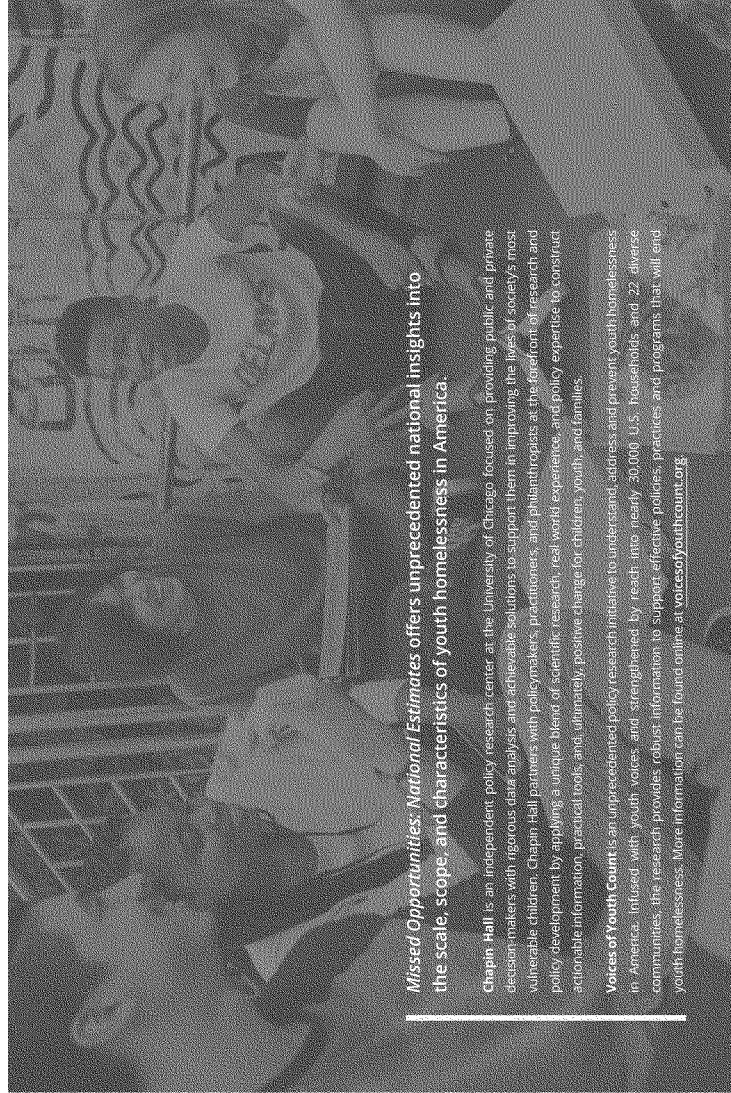
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***Missed Opportunities: National Estimates*** offers unprecedented national insights into the scale, scope, and characteristics of youth homelessness in America.

**Chapin Hall** is an independent policy research center at the University of Chicago focused on providing public and private decision makers with rigorous data analysis and achievable solutions to support them in improving the lives of society's most vulnerable children. Chapin Hall partners with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children, youth, and families.

**Voices of Youth Count** is an unprecedented policy research initiative to understand, address and prevent youth homelessness in America. Infused with youth voices and strengthened by reach into nearly 30,000 U.S. households and 22 diverse communities, the research provides robust information to support effective policies, practices and programs that will end youth homelessness. More information can be found online at [voicesofyouthcount.org](http://voicesofyouthcount.org)



# HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA: FOCUS ON YOUTH

UNITED STATES INTERAGENCY  
COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS



## Introduction

To prevent and end homelessness in America, we need to have a clear understanding of who is at risk of homelessness and who experiences homelessness. We also need to be attentive to differences within and between subpopulations of people who are at risk or are experiencing homelessness. In our *Homelessness in America* series, we are summarizing the most relevant data and research regarding different subpopulations to help inform the work we must do, together, across the federal government, states, and local communities, to end homelessness once and for all.

In this *Focus on Unaccompanied Youth* brief, we review data and information that help us answer the following questions:

- What is the scale of youth homelessness?
- What do we know about unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness?
- What do we know about patterns of homelessness among unaccompanied youth?
- What do we know about youths' risks for experiencing homelessness?
- What are the most significant gaps in available data and our current understanding of unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness?

Other briefs in this series focus on Veterans, individual adults, people experiencing chronic homelessness, and families with children.

## What is the scale of youth homelessness?

Approximately 11% of all people experiencing homelessness as individuals on a given night are “unaccompanied” youth. We use the term unaccompanied youth to describe people who are under the age of 25 and are not part of a family with children or accompanied by their parent or guardian during their episode of homelessness.

On a given night, almost 41,000 unaccompanied youth were identified as experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness in America, according to Point-in-Time (PIT) counts conducted in January 2017 by communities across the country.<sup>1</sup> Most of these unaccompanied youth (88% or 36,010 people) were between ages 18 and 25, and 12% (4,789 people) were under age 18. More than half of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness were unsheltered (55%), meaning that they were sleeping outdoors, in cars, or in other places not meant for human

Of the almost 41,000 unaccompanied youth identified as experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness in the January 2017 Point-in-Time count, 88% were between ages 18 and 25 and 12% were under age 18.

<sup>1</sup> The January 2017 PIT count of unaccompanied youth provides a baseline measure that will be used to address future point-in-time trends and to measure progress within the PIT counts toward the goal of ending homelessness for unaccompanied youth.

habitation. PIT count data shows that a larger proportion of unaccompanied youth are unsheltered compared to other individuals experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, approximately 9,400 parenting youth (under age 25) and their approximately 12,150 children were identified as experiencing homelessness during the January 2017 PIT count. Most (95%) parenting youth and their children identified as experiencing homelessness were in shelters or transitional housing programs, and only about 5% of these young families were experiencing unsheltered homelessness.<sup>3</sup> During 2016, nearly 45,000 people between the age of 18 and 24 were in families with children who stayed in shelters or transitional housing programs at some time over the course of the year.<sup>4</sup> (Families in which the parent is a youth are not included in this brief, but they are described in the *Focus on Families with Children* brief.)

Data reported by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), which is collected by local education agencies (LEAs) about children ages 3 through grade 12 who are enrolled in public schools, including public pre-school programs, showed a 25% increase in the number of unaccompanied homeless youth between the 2015-16 and 2013-14 school years. This data, based on the ED definition which includes students who are sharing housing with other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (commonly referred to as “doubled-up”),<sup>5</sup> shows that over the course of the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 111,700 students (8.6% of the total homeless student population) were identified as unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.

For unaccompanied youth who experience sheltered or unsheltered homelessness, this experience is often part of a larger pattern of housing instability that may also include short stays with friends and family members, often referred to as “couch surfing.” Based on national survey data assessing the prevalence of youth homelessness broadly, researchers at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago estimate that about one in ten young adults ages 18 to 25, and about one in 30 adolescents ages 13 to 17, experience some form of homelessness unaccompanied by a parent or guardian over the course of a year. Most (72%) of the youth who experienced literal homelessness (sleeping in emergency shelters or in unsheltered locations) also spent some time “couch surfing” (staying with friends or family) during the year.<sup>6</sup>

About one in ten young adults ages 18 to 25, and about one in 30 adolescents ages 13 to 17, experience some form of unaccompanied homelessness over the course of a year.

#### What do we know about unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness?

Studies of unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness provide important insights into the characteristics, needs, risks, and strengths or protective factors among these diverse youth, but it can be

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (December 2017). *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR) Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness*

<sup>3</sup> 2017 AHAR Part 1

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (December 2017). *The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR) Part 2: Estimates of Homelessness in the United States*

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Homeless Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. *Federal Data Summary: School Years 2013-14 to 2015-16* accessed at <https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/data-comp-1314-1516.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017). *Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America. National Estimates*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

challenging to interpret or compare findings from multiple sources because of differences in methodology. Because many youth experience relatively short episodes of homelessness at different times during the year, youth who experience longer episodes of homelessness are more likely to be included in data that is collected at a point in time. Studies that focus on youth who are unsheltered, including youth who have experienced longer periods of unsheltered homelessness (who are sometimes referred to by researchers and service providers as “street youth”), may find higher rates of substance use, risky sexual behavior, and mental health disorders, compared to other studies that may include more youth who are newly experiencing homelessness or those who are staying in shelters or transitional programs. In addition, studies of youth who experience homelessness do not always distinguish between youth who are unaccompanied and youth who are experiencing homelessness with other family members.

Information regarding the demographic characteristics of unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness comes primarily from data obtained from PIT counts, HMIS data, and from performance data regarding students enrolled in public school districts and identified as experiencing homelessness at some point during the school year, as reported in ED’s annual federal data summary of its Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. Voices of Youth Count, an effort led by researchers at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, is designed to generate a more complete understanding of youth homelessness by integrating findings from multiple research activities, including collaboration with 22 partner communities to improve youth count methodology and survey providers who serve youth, in depth interviews with youth in five communities, a national survey of households, and reviews of additional research and evidence.<sup>7</sup> Other research and reports referenced here help provide a deeper understanding of the characteristics and challenges of youth experiencing homelessness.

**Gender and sexual identity:** According to the January 2017 PIT count, the majority of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are young men or boys. More than two-thirds of unsheltered unaccompanied youth, and 55% of sheltered unaccompanied youth, are male. Young women or girls represent more than one-third (37%) of unaccompanied youth and about 2% of unaccompanied youth are transgender. People who did not

identify as male, female, or transgender make up a higher share among unaccompanied youth who are unsheltered (0.5%) compared to those who are sheltered (0.2%).<sup>8</sup>

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender youth are 120% more likely to report homelessness at some time during the year than their peers who identify as heterosexual and cisgender.

Youth who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT) are over-represented among unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness. National survey data indicate that LGBT youth make up about 20% of all youth experiencing homelessness, and a higher proportion of the youth experiencing homelessness in large, urban communities.<sup>9</sup> The risk of youth reporting homelessness at some time during the year is 120% higher for LGBT youth compared to their peers who identify as heterosexual and cisgender.<sup>10</sup> National survey

<sup>7</sup> For more information about this approach see <https://voicesofyouthcount.org/approach/>

<sup>8</sup> 2017 AHAR Part 1

<sup>9</sup> Morton, M.H., Samuels, G.M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018) *Missed Opportunities: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

<sup>10</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017).

data show that youth who are Black and LGBT, particularly young men, report the highest rates of homelessness.<sup>11</sup>

**Racial and ethnic demographics:** One third (34%) of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness at a point in time are African American, compared to fewer than one in six (15%) of all U.S. residents who are 18 to 24 years old. Nearly half (49%) of unaccompanied youth are white, compared to 54% of U.S. residents in the same age group.<sup>12</sup> One in 25 (4.2%) of unaccompanied youth identify as Native American, compared to about 1% of all U.S. residents ages 18 to 24. And 10% of unaccompanied youth identify as multiple races, compared to about 3% of U.S. resident youth.<sup>13</sup>

For African American youth, the relative risk of experiencing homelessness in the last 12 months is 83% higher compared to youth of other races.

One in four (25%) unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, and nearly one in three (31%) unaccompanied youth experiencing unsheltered homelessness are Hispanic or Latino.<sup>14</sup> In comparison, Hispanic youth are about one in five (21%) of the U.S. population ages 15 to 24.<sup>15</sup>

The relative risk of experiencing homelessness in the last 12 months is 83% higher for African American youth, compared to other races, and 33% higher for Hispanic youth, compared to non-Hispanic youth.<sup>16</sup>

**Geographic distribution of youth who experience homelessness:** National survey data shows that homelessness affects youth living in rural, suburban, and urban communities at similar rates.<sup>17</sup> More than half (55%) of the unaccompanied youth who were counted on a single night in January 2017, and nearly two-thirds (64%) of the unsheltered youth, were in major cities. About one-third of all unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness were counted in smaller cities, counties, and regional CoCs. California accounted for 38% of all unaccompanied youth, and 58% of unsheltered unaccompanied youth, counted in the nation in 2017.<sup>18</sup>

Youth who experience homelessness come from diverse communities nationwide. Some grew up in or near the cities in which they are now experiencing homelessness, while others left their communities when they separated from their families or lost their housing. Youth who experience homelessness in rural communities are more likely to be couch-surfing, compared to youth experiencing homelessness in urban and suburban communities, who are

<sup>11</sup> Morton, M.H., Samuels, G.M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018)

<sup>12</sup> Comparison data are retrieved from U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistic. (2017) "Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups" [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator\\_raa.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_raa.asp)

<sup>13</sup> 2017 AHAR Part 1

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2014) "The Hispanic Population in the United States: 2014"

Table 2. Population by Sex, Age, and Hispanic Origin. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2014/demo/hispanic-origin/2014-cps.html>

<sup>16</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> 2017 AHAR Part 1

more likely to be in shelters.<sup>19</sup> This is most likely because there are fewer shelters or programs to serve youth experiencing homelessness in rural communities, although there may be other contributing factors.

**Students who experience homelessness:** As described above, ED collects data about unaccompanied students who are enrolled in public schools through grade 12 identified as experiencing homelessness at some point during the school year, including those who are staying with family or friends.<sup>20</sup> While school can be a buffer for some children who face hardship, conflict, and instability at home, youth who experience homelessness often report that they have had negative experiences with school, and they are less likely to have completed high school. Low school performance increases the risk of homelessness among youth, and is likely to limit access to employment opportunities, increasing financial hardship and barriers to housing stability.<sup>21</sup>

Other youth who are experiencing homelessness are attending college or participating in other post-secondary education and training programs. In Federal Student Aid applications (FAFSA) submitted in 2016-17, more than 32,000 youth under age 24 were identified as experiencing homelessness. This is probably an undercount of the number of unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness and seeking financial aid because of the way this data is collected.<sup>22</sup>

Many college students struggle to meet basic needs, including food and housing. A national survey of more than 43,000 college students at 66 institutions in 20 states and the District of Columbia found that 9% of university students and 12% of community college students experienced homelessness, broadly defined.<sup>23</sup> Many more students, including 36% of university students and 51% of community college students, were identified as housing insecure during the past year. The most common challenges were difficulty in paying rent or under-paying the amount of rent owed in the last 30 days.<sup>24</sup>

Some students were at greater risk of experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, or food insecurity than others. The students who were at greatest risk were former foster youth. LGBTQ youth were at much higher risk of basic needs insecurity compared to other students. Black, multi-ethnic, and Native American students were significantly more likely to experience homelessness compared to other students.<sup>25</sup>

**Disabilities, health, and behavioral health conditions:** While national data is not available to describe the rates of disabilities or health conditions among unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness, there is some

<sup>19</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017).

<sup>20</sup> Reports of data collected by the U.S. Department of Education do not provide details regarding the characteristics of unaccompanied youth. Unaccompanied youth were 8.6 percent of enrolled homeless students during 2015-16, and they are included in the data summary report that describes the characteristics of all students who are identified as experiencing homelessness.

<sup>21</sup> Sznajder-Murray, B., Jang, B., Slesnick, N. & Snyder, A. (2015) "Longitudinal Predictors of Homelessness: Findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-97" *Journal of Youth Studies*. 18(8): 1015–1034

<sup>22</sup> For more information see <https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/he/fafsa-homeless-2016-2017.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> For this survey, students were considered homeless if they answered affirmatively to any of five questions focusing on lack of housing, including whether students stayed in a shelter, slept in a place not meant for housing, were evicted or thrown out of their home, or did not know where they would sleep. Students were identified as experiencing housing insecurity if they indicated they had difficulties paying housing costs or maintaining stable housing.

<sup>24</sup> Goldrick-Rab, S. et al. (2018) "Still Hungry and Homeless in College" Wisconsin Hope Lab

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

evidence that these youth experience significant challenges that impact their health, well-being, and academic success. For example, data collected by ED shows that nearly one in five (18%) students identified as experiencing homelessness has a disability.<sup>26</sup> The data does not indicate how many of these students with disabilities are unaccompanied.<sup>27</sup> Students with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness may encounter educational barriers including lack of timely assessment and access to services and lack of continuity of services when they move between schools. For unaccompanied students with learning disabilities, an additional challenge is the lack of support from a parent or other caring adult to advocate for the student to receive appropriate services and reasonable accommodations.<sup>28</sup>

Among youth who experience homelessness, rates of mental health and substance use disorders are significantly higher than among young people in the general population. While studies have not always been limited to youth who are unaccompanied, and they have used varying methodologies, including different definitions of homelessness and different settings for selecting study participants, the findings consistently show high rates of depression, PTSD, suicidal thoughts, substance use disorders, and other mental health conditions among youth who experience homelessness.<sup>29</sup> Many of these youth have co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, which often intersect with issues such as trauma and risk behaviors.

Among youth who participated in interviews and focus groups for the Street Outreach Program Data Collection Study, almost two-thirds (62%) of participants reported symptoms associated with depression and nearly three-fourths (72%) reported that they had experienced major trauma, such as experiencing or being a witness to physical or sexual abuse. Four in five (80%) reported that they had experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress for more than a month. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of participants reported using alcohol, almost two-thirds (65%) reported using marijuana, and more than one-third (38%) reported they had used hard drugs (intravenous drugs, inhalants, cocaine, or methamphetamine) in the previous 12 months.<sup>30</sup>

Surveys of nationally representative samples of youth produced similar findings. For almost every substance, substance use prevalence rates were substantially higher among unsheltered youth who were living on the streets, compared to youth experiencing sheltered homelessness, and both groups used alcohol or drugs at higher rates compared to youth living in family households, after researchers controlled for demographic differences among these groups. Over half of unsheltered “street youth” reported using illicit drugs other than marijuana, while about one-third of sheltered youth and one-quarter of youth who had recent runaway or homeless experience reported other illicit drug use. High rates of substance use among youth experiencing homelessness

<sup>26</sup> National Center for Homeless Education. *Federal Data Summary: School Years 2013-14 to 2015-16*

<sup>27</sup> Researchers in Canada are examining the connections between homelessness and intellectual, developmental and/or learning disabilities among youth who experience homelessness. For more information see <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10530789.2018.1480892> and [http://conference.caeh.ca/wp-content/uploads/COH10\\_The-invisibility-of-disability-for-homeless-youth\\_Steph-Baker-Collins.pdf](http://conference.caeh.ca/wp-content/uploads/COH10_The-invisibility-of-disability-for-homeless-youth_Steph-Baker-Collins.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> For more information see [https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/nav\\_idea\\_mv.pdf](https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/nav_idea_mv.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Hodgson, K.J., Shelton, K.H., van den Bree, M.B. & Los, F.J. (2013) Psychopathology in Young People Experiencing Homelessness: A Systematic Review. *American Journal of Public Health* 103(6)

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau (2016). “Final Report - Street Outreach Program Data Collection Study” retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/resource/street-outreach-program-data-collection-study>

may put these youth at greater risk for HIV infection and for other risks, including survival sex, suicide, and physical victimization, that often co-occur with alcohol and drug use.<sup>31</sup>

Another study of more than 600 unsheltered “street youth” in three cities examined connections between victimization and mental health disorders. Researchers found that youth who experienced victimization on multiple occasions were significantly more likely to meet diagnostic criteria for major depression or PTSD, compared to youth who experienced little or no victimization. Youth who were exposed to “indirect victimization” because they experienced threats and witnessed violence had similarly high rates of risk for depression or PTSD.<sup>32</sup>

**Vulnerability to victimization, exploitation, and trafficking:** Many youth who experience homelessness feel unsafe, and even short episodes of homelessness increase the vulnerability of young people to traumatic events that can have lifetime consequences. Youth who experience homelessness often report that they have been raped or sexually assaulted or that they fear being sexually victimized, and some report that they engage in sex work or “survival sex”, exchanging sex for food or a place to stay.<sup>33</sup>

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services administers the Street Outreach Program (SOP), serving runaway youth, youth experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and youth with increased risk of abuse and sexual exploitation. As part of the SOP Data Research Project, researchers from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln conducted surveys and focus group interviews with of 873 “homeless street youth” ages 14 to 21 in 11 cities. Among youth who participated in the study, victimization was common. More than 60% of these youth reported that they had been raped, beaten up, robbed, or otherwise assaulted. LGBT youth and youth who had formerly been in foster care reported higher levels of victimization, compared to other youth in the study.<sup>34</sup>

Youth who experience homelessness also experience higher risks of mortality, compared to other youth. One study examined rates of mortality among a sample of homeless street youth in San Francisco and found that they experienced a mortality rate more than ten times higher than the state’s general youth population. Most deaths were due to suicide or substance use.<sup>35</sup>

A ten-city study of more than 600 youth experiencing homelessness found that nearly one in five (19%) were identified as victims of some form of human trafficking. More than 14% were victims of sex trafficking, while 8% were trafficked for other forced labor, including forced drug dealing.<sup>36</sup> Some (3%) of the youth were trafficked for both sex and labor. More than half (58%) of youth who were sex-trafficking victims were in situations of force,

<sup>31</sup> Greene, J.M., Ennett, S.T., Ringwalt, C.L. (1997) Substance Use Among Runaway and Homeless Youth in Three National Samples. *American Journal of Public Health* 87(2): 229-235

<sup>32</sup> Bender, K., Ferguson, K., Thompson, S. & Langenderfer, L. (2014) Mental Health Correlates of Victimization Classes Among Homeless Youth. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 38 (2014): 1628-1635

<sup>33</sup> Heerde JA, Scholes-Balog KE & Hemphill SA. “Associations Between Youth Homelessness, Sexual Offenses, Sexual Victimization, and Sexual Risk Behaviors: A Systematic Literature Review.” (2015) *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44(1):181-212

<sup>34</sup> HHS (2016). “Final Report - Street Outreach Program Data Collection Study”

<sup>35</sup> Auerswald, C.L., Lin, J.S. & Parriott, A. (2016) Six-Year Mortality in a Street-Recruited Cohort of Homeless Youth in San Francisco, California. *PeerJ* accessed at <https://peerj.com/articles/1909/>

<sup>36</sup> Sex trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or any commercial sex act involving a minor who is under the age of 18 years. For more information see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/archive/otip/resource/fact-sheet-sex-trafficking-english>

fraud, or coercion, while other youth (42%) were minors involved in commercial sex and survival sex. One in five young women and more than one in ten young men who participated in the study were victims of sex trafficking. Youth who identified as LGBTQ were twice as likely as non-LGBTQ youth to be trafficked for sex. Young people experiencing homelessness were often desperate for work and reported that other people took advantage of their need. More than nine in ten (91%) of youth who participated in the study reported that they were approached by people who offered work opportunities that were “too good to be true” and turned out to be fraudulent work situations, scams, or trafficking for sex or other labor. Youth who aged out of foster care were particularly vulnerable to traffickers and to engagement in the sex trade, particularly if they experienced homelessness after exiting foster care.<sup>37</sup>

A three-city study of 270 youth experiencing homelessness found that two-thirds (67%) of females and 90% of transgender youth reported being solicited for paid sex. Among youth who reported that they were victims of trafficking, 95% had a history of child maltreatment and nearly half had experienced sexual abuse. Youth who lacked a caring adult in their lives were more likely to be victims of sex trafficking, and most of the youth who were sex trafficked reported some involvement in the child welfare system. More than four in ten (41%) of sex-trafficking victims had at least one out-of-home placement in their lives, and many had experienced frequent moves.<sup>38</sup>

**Normal adolescent development can make unaccompanied youth particularly vulnerable to unsafe situations and risk-taking behaviors when they experience homelessness:** Compared to adults, young people are naturally more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors, such as unprotected sexual activity and substance use. The brains of teenagers and young adults are still developing until they are in their early twenties, and this has implications for their skill development and executive functioning, including decision-making, inhibition, planning, and reasoning. Until young people mature, they are more likely to engage in impulsive actions, risk taking, and sensation seeking. These risks and behaviors are not unique to youth who experience homelessness, but young people who are on their own without caring adults are more likely to be exposed to unsafe or risky situations.

Among young people who experience homelessness, exposure to trauma and adversity in childhood may have impacts on brain development that contribute to impairments in executive functioning and impulse control and increase risk-taking behaviors.<sup>39</sup> Homelessness is also associated with several HIV risk behaviors, such as having sex without a condom or having multiple sex partners. Compared to adults who experience homelessness, unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness are more likely to engage in HIV risk behaviors.<sup>40</sup> Youth who

<sup>37</sup> Murphy, L. (2016) Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth: A Ten-City Study Full Report. Modern Slavery Research Project, Loyola University New Orleans

<sup>38</sup> Wolfe, D.S., Greeson, J.K., Wasch, S. & Treglia, D. (2018) Human Trafficking Prevalence and Child Welfare Risk Factors Among Homeless Youth: A Multi-City Study. The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research, University of Pennsylvania

<sup>39</sup> Piche, J., Kaylegian, J., Smith, D. & Scott J. Hunter, S.J. (2018) “The Relationship between Self-Reported Executive Functioning and Risk-Taking Behavior in Urban Homeless Youth” *Behavioral Sciences* 8(6)

<sup>40</sup> Santa Maria, D., Hernandez, D. et. Al. (2018) “Current Age, Age at First Sex, Age at First Homelessness, and HIV Risk Perceptions Predict Sexual Risk Behaviors among Sexually Active Homeless Adults” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15(2): 218. and Santa Maria, D., Narendorf, S.C., Ha, Y. & Bezette-Flores, N. (2015) “Exploring Contextual Factors of Youth Homelessness and Sexual Risk Behaviors: A Qualitative Study” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 47(4): 195-201

experience homelessness are also sometimes forced to engage in unsafe sexual practices when they are being exploited and trafficked.

#### What do we know about patterns of homelessness among unaccompanied youth?

Most youth who experience homelessness return home or to other stable housing quickly, often within a few days or weeks, and they often stay housed for long periods. One study of youth experiencing homelessness in a large Midwest metropolitan area found that two-thirds of youth returned to housing, usually their parents' homes, within one month of baseline interviews.<sup>41</sup> Another study of youth experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles found that 30% returned home within six months.<sup>42</sup> Older youth (ages 18 to 20) were significantly less likely to return home, compared to youth under age 18.<sup>43</sup>

Most youth who experience homelessness return home or to other stable housing quickly, often within a few days or weeks, and stay housed for long periods.

#### What do we know about youths' risks for experiencing homelessness?

In recent years, researchers, federal agencies, and community partners have worked to expand our understanding of homelessness among unaccompanied youth, and strengthened data helps us better understand who is experiencing or more likely to experience homelessness. Youth who experience homelessness reflect the diversity of young people living in the United States, but some youth are at significantly greater risk of homelessness. There are both risk and protective factors that increase or reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness.

Pathways or risk factors that contribute to homelessness for youth include unstable family life, including experiencing housing instability or homelessness as a child, severe family conflict, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect or abandonment by parents and caregivers, as well as caregiver and youth substance use and mental health disorders. Youth often report severe family conflict as the primary reason for their homelessness. Some youth may be rejected or abused by their families because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>44</sup>

Children and youth may enter the child welfare system as a result of family conflict, abuse, or a parent or caregiver's behavioral health condition, and out-of-home placement may be part of the pathway that leads to youth homelessness. A longitudinal study of youth who aged out of foster care in three Midwest states found that by age 23 or 24, almost 30% of the youth had been homeless for at least one night since exiting foster care.

<sup>41</sup> Braciszewski, J.M., Toro, P.A., Stout, R.L. (April 2016) Understanding the Attainment of Stable Housing: A Seven-Year Longitudinal Analysis of Homeless Adolescents. *Journal of Community Psychology* 44(3): 358-366.

<sup>42</sup> Tucker JS, Edelen MO, Ellickson PL, Klein DJ. (2011) Running Away from Home: A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Risk Factors and Young Adult Outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*; 40(5): 507-518.

<sup>43</sup> Milburn, N.G. Rosenthal, D., et.al (June 2007) Newly Homeless Youth Typically Return Home. *Journal of Adolescent Health*; 40(6): 574-576

<sup>44</sup> Hooks Wayman, R. A. (2008) "Homeless Queer Youth: National Perspectives on Research, Best Practices, and Evidence Based Interventions" *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 7 (2: 13). Available at: <http://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sjsj/vol7/iss2/13>

Nearly as many reported that they had couch-surfed. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of study participants who experienced homelessness did so within the first year after leaving foster care.<sup>45</sup>

ACYF is funding a multi-phase grant program to build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the child welfare system. While the Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH) program is not focused on young people who are currently experiencing homelessness as unaccompanied youth, it will help to inform efforts to reduce the risks or likelihood of homelessness among sub-groups of youth.

States and communities in the YARH program have been engaged in cross-sector data analysis to better understand the connections between child welfare involvement and risk of homelessness, and to identify both risk factors (e.g., number of foster care placements, history of running away from placements, juvenile justice involvement, etc.) and protective factors (e.g., placement with relatives, enrollment in post-secondary education, etc.) that increase or reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness.<sup>46</sup> Using data from a nationally representative sample of youth, researchers found that multiple runaway episodes prior to age 18 predicted homelessness among youth in early adulthood (by age 25). A single runaway episode, however, was not associated with increased risk of homelessness.<sup>47</sup> Youth who have multiple runaway episodes are likely to face greater individual and family challenges compared to youth who run away once and return to their families.

Young people who age out of foster care face significant risks of experiencing homelessness. For example, in the state of Washington, approximately one in four youth who aged out of care during 2011 or 2012 experienced homelessness over the next 12 months. “Crossover youth,” who had been involved in both the foster care and juvenile justice systems, were more likely to experience homelessness. Youth who had experienced multiple

placements in congregate care, African American youth, and those who had changed schools frequently, also faced significantly higher risks of experiencing homelessness after aging out of foster care.<sup>48</sup>

In one study, more than half of street youth reported that they became homeless for the first time because they were asked to leave home by a parent or caregiver.

Among youth who participated in the interviews and focus groups for the ACYF Street Outreach Program Data Collection Study, more than half reported that they became homeless for the first time because they were asked to leave home by a parent or caregiver. About one in four (25%) reported that they first became homeless because they were unable to find

<sup>45</sup> Dworsky, A. & Courtney, M. (March 2010) Assessing the Impact of Extending Care Beyond 18 on Homelessness: Emerging Findings from the Midwest Study. Chapin Hall, University of Chicago

<sup>46</sup> Christine Ross, C and Selekman, R. (2017) Analysis of Data on Youth With Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness. OPRE Report #2017-54 retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/varh\\_analysis\\_of\\_data\\_2017\\_54\\_508\\_compliant.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/varh_analysis_of_data_2017_54_508_compliant.pdf)  
For more information see : <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/building-capacity-to-evaluate-interventions-for-youth-with-child-welfare-involvement-at-risk-of-homelessness>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ford Shah, M., Qinghua Liu, Q., Mancuso, D. et. Al. (2015) Youth at Risk of Homelessness: *Identifying Key Predictive Factors among Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in Washington State*. Department of Social and Health Services | Research and Data Analysis Division. Olympia Washington

a job, and nearly one in four reported that they became homeless because they were being physically abused or beaten (24%) or experiencing problems in the home due to a parent or caretaker's drug or alcohol abuse (23%). On average, youth had been experiencing homelessness for a total of nearly two years (23 months) and reported first becoming homeless at age 15. Fewer than one in three (30%) reported that they had the option of returning home. About half of these youth had been in foster care, and youth who had experienced foster care had been homeless for much longer, compared to youth who had never been in foster care.<sup>49</sup>

Factors associated with multiple or lengthy episodes of homelessness among youth include a history of involvement in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems and a history of exposure to abuse and violence at home.<sup>50</sup> Youth who experience prolonged homelessness are at greater risk for substance use, including use of intravenous drugs, methamphetamine, and other hard drugs.<sup>51</sup>

Other factors associated with prolonged homelessness among youth include being a high school dropout, being unemployed or working "under the table," being unsheltered or moving between cities, having been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant, and having run away from a family home, group home, or foster care.<sup>52</sup> Youth who experience prolonged homelessness also have higher rates of mental health disorders, including depression PTSD, and higher rates of traumatic experiences including physical abuse, sexual molestation, and sexual assault. Mental health disorders, such as psychosis that first becomes symptomatic during adolescence and early adulthood, can increase risk for homelessness.<sup>53</sup> One study of youth experiencing homelessness in Australia found that 44% of youth reported substance use disorders and 42% reported mental health disorders when they first became homeless, and these rates later increased to 66% for substance use disorders and 70% for mental health disorders.<sup>54</sup>

#### **What are the most significant gaps in available data and our current understanding of unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness?**

There continues to be a concerted effort to more closely align existing data on youth to better understand the scope, scale, and characteristics of youth homelessness. Federal agencies, states, and communities continue to use the data they have to better understand and respond to local needs. There remains a need, however, for more detailed understanding of the pathways in and out of youth homelessness and precipitating causes. There is also a need for expanded evidence regarding the impact of housing and services interventions on a range of youth-level outcomes and on achieving sustained and stable exits from homelessness.

<sup>49</sup> HHS, ACF Family and Youth Services Bureau (2016). "Final Report - Street Outreach Program Data Collection Study" (op. cit.)

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/resource/street-outreach-program-data-collection-study>

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation (2017).

"Factors Associated with Prolonged Youth Homelessness". Accessed at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdf-report/factors-associated-prolonged-youth-homelessness>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation (2017).

"Serious Mental Illness and Prolonged Youth Homelessness". Accessed at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/257811/SMIProlongedYouthHomelessness.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Martijn, C., & Sharpe, L. (2006). Pathways to youth homelessness. *Social Science and Medicine*, 62(1), 1-12.

Areas where further data and research are needed include:

**Data collection and analysis**

- Better nationally representative data, including:
  - A better understanding of geographic mobility among unaccompanied youth and the characteristics of youth who may leave their home communities when they experience homelessness.
  - More information about the prevalence of disabilities among youth who experience homelessness, including developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, and behavioral health conditions.
- Analysis of the thoroughness of PIT, HMIS, and school district data sources in identifying youth experiencing homelessness and the degree to which unaccompanied youth are being appropriately identified and included across multiple data sets, including data from other sources that may include housing status information.

**Factors contributing to entries into and exits from homelessness**

- Deeper understanding of the impact of race, gender, sexual identity, and other demographic factors on entries into and exits from homelessness.
- Improved documentation of the patterns and trajectories of homelessness among unaccompanied youth living in rural areas.
- More research about housing instability and homelessness among youth who have been involved in child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and about the impact of multi-sector efforts to support system-involved youth as they transition out of public systems and into adulthood.
- Greater understanding of which youth are most at risk of experiencing homelessness to tailor prevention and diversion strategies that include supports from mainstream systems.
- Better understanding of the patterns of homelessness among unaccompanied youth, including:
  - Differentiating among different experiences and risks associated with short-term and long-term homelessness among youth who stay in different types of settings.
  - Understanding which youth who do experience homelessness are at greatest risk for experiencing chronic homelessness.

**Short- and long-term impacts of homelessness on core outcomes**

- Better understanding of the long-term consequences of youth homelessness, including long-term impacts on adult homelessness, health, and economic opportunity.
- Expanded understanding of the impact on long-term educational outcomes of maintaining student enrollment in schools of origin among children and youth exiting homelessness.
- Expanded understanding of the needs of students who are enrolled in post-secondary education or job training programs and the impact of housing stability on successful completion of these education and training programs.

**Tailored services and housing solutions**

- Stronger assessment and understanding of family interventions that positively impact family functioning, reduce conflicts, and support safe and stable reunification for young people exiting homelessness, particularly among youth most at risk of repeated or prolonged episodes of homelessness.<sup>55</sup>
- Better understanding of the types of housing assistance and program models (e.g., time-limited rental assistance, host homes, transitional housing, non-time-limited supportive housing, etc.) that have the greatest impact on youth-level outcomes associated with stable housing, permanent connections, education, employment, and well-being, and community-level outcomes, including reducing the number of youth experiencing homelessness.
- Longitudinal studies of unaccompanied youth to identify patterns of housing instability and homelessness, characteristics of the most vulnerable youth, and patterns of service utilization and outcomes, to inform the design of interventions that might identify and more effectively serve those at greatest risk for homelessness and housing instability.

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Pergamit, M. Gelatt, J. & Martin, M.C. (2016) Family Interventions for Youth Experiencing Homelessness. Urban Institute. Washington, DC retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/205401/FamilyInterventions.pdf>

# Ending Youth Homelessness

## Guidebook Series: *Promising Program Models*



### *Ending Youth Homelessness: Overview of this Guidebook Series*

This series of three guidebooks is designed for Continuum of Care (CoC) leadership and stakeholders to use as a direct, hands-on action plan in efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness, as they have been directed to ensure there is an effective and efficient system of care for all persons and households experiencing homelessness. The Guidebooks include suggested strategies, identification of promising practices, and considerations for CoCs and their partners that can be implemented immediately.

The guidebook topics include:

- **System Planning** - strategies for developing a youth homelessness system and leadership.
- **Mainstream System Collaboration** - strategies for engaging mainstream sectors such as child welfare, education, workforce, justice, housing, health, early childhood education, community organizations and mainstream benefits.
- **Promising Program Models** - promising strategies for youth-specific program models.



## OVERVIEW OF THIS GUIDEBOOK

Nationwide, there is a growing network of housing and service programs that are employing promising strategies to reach, engage, support, and house unaccompanied youth.

This Guidebook provides information on the following emerging program models:

- **Primary Prevention**
- **Identification and Engagement:** Mobile “Street” Outreach, Drop-In Centers, Family Engagement
- **Emergency and Crisis Response:** Youth Shelters and Emergency Services, Host Homes, Transitional Housing and Transitional Living
- **Tailored Housing and Services:** Rapid Re-Housing, Non-time-limited Supportive Housing

This Guidebook describes key features of these emerging program models, highlighting promising practices and possible funding sources in order to help communities plan, develop, and improve their own youth-appropriate services. These models are organized within the framework outlined in the Federal Partner’s Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness:

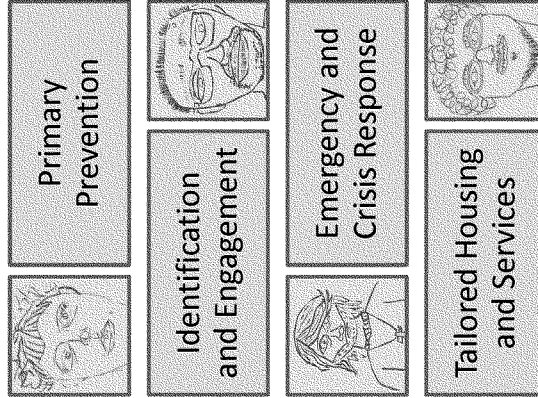
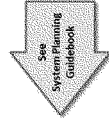
### A Coordinated Community Response.

A Federal Interagency Working Group developed a shared vision and the necessary program models that it will take to prevent and end youth homelessness. This requires a homeless youth system that provides stable housing,

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permanent connections, education and employment, and well-being. The unified, collaborative response must include the following services and housing options.

With a well-coordinated and proportionate housing and service delivery system, communities can prevent and end youth homelessness.



## OVERVIEW OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

With the launch of Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, the Federal Administration established goals to prevent and end homelessness, including ending youth homelessness by 2020. Communities across the country have made incredible progress toward reaching this goal and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and Federal Partners have increased efforts to focus and align available federal resources to help prevent and end youth homelessness.

### What does 'youth' mean?

While revolving around a flexible subpopulation, by using the word "youth" these Guidebooks address youth experiencing homelessness up to age 24 who are unaccompanied by a parent, guardian, or spouse, or who are with their own children.

Youth homelessness is unique because young people are still developing. They are experiencing homelessness or are precariously housed for any number of reasons — abuse, family conflict, sexual identity, pregnancy or family poverty. They may be aging out of foster care. They may have become disconnected from family, school or work. They may be struggling with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

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Youth who experience homelessness are especially vulnerable to criminal victimization, sexual exploitation, labor and sex trafficking or traumatic stress. As communities are creating systems of support for precariously housed youth and those experiencing homelessness they must take all of these different life experiences into account.

When creating a network of services and housing for youth there are guiding principles that should be incorporated. You may recognize some of these key guiding principles from the work that is being done in the adult and family systems. Interventions that support youth should adopt the following principles:

- Immediate accessibility
- Individualized, flexible, and choice-based
- Developmentally appropriate for youth
- Culturally competent
- Trauma-informed
- Based on the Housing First approach
- Employ Positive Youth Development (PYD) principles
- Emphasize family reunification and resiliency strategies



## PRIMARY PREVENTION

The best outcomes for youth happen when they remain connected and housed with family whenever appropriate (or with other natural supports as defined by the youth), and if this is not possible, then when they are supported in a planned transition to stable housing. Coordination with mainstream partners and early intervention can help prevent homelessness. Key features and promising practices of primary prevention include:

- **Encourage Family Resiliency:** Targeted counseling, caregiver support, conflict resolution, respite, and behavioral health services can resolve family conflict and build family resiliency so that youth can safely remain or return home. Securing income and health benefits can alleviate financial pressures on the family. Key centers of conflict include: teen pregnancy, behavioral issues, sexual orientation, gender identity, or stresses of poverty and income insecurity.
- **Support Foster Care Transitions:** Young adults aging out of foster care, or with histories of involvement with foster care, have high risk of homelessness. Support to progress successfully into a new community should be provided to transition-age youth (TAY) as far in advance of that move as possible. Completing an assessment for factors known to put youth at higher risk of homelessness — and then coordinating developmentally appropriate services, such as money management, parenting skills, and job placement — can help youth transition successfully to stable housing.

- **School-Based Prevention:** Local homeless liaisons in school districts — or Single Points of Contacts at colleges — can identify youth who may be at risk and help keep them in school while coordinating community supports and stable housing. Schools are an important place where youth can engage with positive adult role models who can offer support that the family may not.
- **Leaving Juvenile Justice or Adult Correctional Systems:** A significant number of at-risk youth are involved with the juvenile justice or adult correctional systems. Formal collaboration with law enforcement, diversion programs, probation officers, and after care programs can help identify at-risk youth early and support better outcomes.

### Making It Work: Primary Prevention

- Assess for protective and risk factors early using developmentally appropriate tools
- Use Positive Youth Development to build strengths and resiliency
- Formally coordinate with mainstream partners to support at-risk youth
- Help at-risk youth build and maintain healthy adult relationships
- Prioritize high-risk populations, like LGBTQ youth and pregnant or parenting teens
- Offer TAY services before and after aging out of foster care

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

## IDENTIFICATION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

### A. Mobile (“Street”) Outreach

Outreach programs are often a first point of contact with unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and are especially effective at engaging youth who are hiding. Key features and promising practices of mobile “street” outreach include:

- **Assertive Outreach:** Assertive outreach teams go to the places where youth keep themselves hidden, such as parks, cars, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, parking lots, and public storage lockers. To find youth, outreach teams draw on informal community contacts such as baristas, public librarians, and sanitation workers.
- **Build Trust:** Regularity, predictability, and follow-through are critical to program success.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Workers are trained to provide trauma-informed care with an emphasis on meeting youth where they are.
- **Experience with LGBTQ Youth:** Given the prevalence of homelessness among LGBTQ youth, culturally competent staff and coordination with organizations serving the LGBTQ community is important.
- **Meet Basic Needs:** Teams carry supplies to meet basic needs — clothing, food, water, hygiene items — and offer a hotline for youth to call for help or emergencies.

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

#### Making It Work: Mobile “Street” Outreach

- Educate the community to be part of the solution
- Establish safety protocols for staff and collaborate with law enforcement
- Build trust through reliability and follow-through
- Meet basic needs first then move on to critical service connections
- Include youth in program planning and implementation



- **Employ Formal Partnerships:** Outreach programs field mobile medical vans or partner with health centers to provide basic primary health and dental care, including testing for HIV, STDs, and TB. Counseling and advice regarding substance abuse and other health risk behaviors are delivered using a harm reduction model. Outreach programs may work closely with law enforcement through Police Homeless Outreach Teams, especially for youth who have experienced criminal victimization, sexual or labor exploitation.

## B. Drop-In Centers

Drop-in centers are a first point of contact and provide an informal atmosphere to attract and engage youth who are homeless; thus an effective alternative to the adult shelter system for older unaccompanied youth. Key features and promising practices of drop-in centers include:

- **Low- or No-Barrier:** Foster a welcoming, safe, non-judgmental environment, with limited rules or requirements, conveniently located near public transportation whenever possible.
- **Meet Basic Needs:** Provide easy access to food, laundry, shower, and clothes. Provide access to internet and phones, and lockers for storage of belongings. Regularly visiting medical staff can provide optional basic healthcare and first aid.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Despite the informal atmosphere, staff is trained and ready to provide crisis intervention, conflict resolution, and counseling services. It is especially important that staff be trained or have access to services specifically for LGBTQ youth, who are disproportionately represented among youth who are experiencing homelessness.
- **Positive Youth Development:** Staff is trained to develop the youth's competence, confidence, character, caring, connection, and contribution ("6 Cs").
- **Youth Focused:** Create a positive and healthy peer network for youth, access to caring adults, and engage in youth-centered programming.

- **Service Coordination:** Operate as a central hub for services, such as medical, dental, behavioral health care, substance abuse treatment, housing search support, and advocacy. Staff can help with documentation and facilitates school re-engagement or connection to adult basic education or workforce development programs. Drop-in centers operate in tandem with mobile "street" outreach programs, family engagement services, emergency shelters, and transitional housing.

### Making it Work: Drop-In Centers

- Choose easy and low-key access locations
- Place high importance on feeling safe and welcome
- Provide easy access to education, work, and mental health/substance abuse recovery programs when ready
- Peer support and activities offer meaningful structure
- Include youth voices in programming
- Continually assess opportunity for family engagement



Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

### C. Family Engagement

Family engagement services help youth develop, maintain, or strengthen connections whenever safe and appropriate so that they can remain or return home. Even for those who cannot return home, transitions between communities work best if supported by family relationships and repairing the relationship has indirect positive outcomes. Family engagement services can be a component of a housing-focused project or can be a stand-alone service.



Key features and promising practices of family engagement include:

- **Comprehensive Intervention:** Services typically include assessment; individual, family, and group counseling; caregiver support; conflict mediation and resolution; respite care; coordination with behavioral, mental health, and substance abuse services; and connection to community supports and activities. Additionally, securing income and health benefits should be secured.

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

- **Build Strength:** Casework practices approach youth and families with genuineness, empathy, and respect. Staff actively listens, includes the voices of youth and their families, and uses a strength-based approach to partner with them. Cultural competency and the ability to pace expectations are also important.
- **Aftercare:** Successful programs provide support to stay connected with the youth and family following a housing choice and offer respite or caregiver support as needed to build resiliency and reconnection. Aftercare may be offered even in cases where the youth is staying in transitional, supportive housing or with extended family or friends.
- **Stability:** Remaining consistently connected to natural supports like friends, family, and teachers results in positive outcomes such as stability in life and improved capacity to develop healthy relationships, thus preventing the recurrence of homelessness. Services that create an individualized housing stability strategy help youth move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way.

#### Making It Work: Family Engagement

- Prefer family reunification when safe and appropriate
- Use strength-based approaches
- Be culturally competent
- Know family systems and homelessness
- Provide aftercare
- Connect youth and family to community supports and services

## EMERGENCY & CRISIS RESPONSE

### A. Youth Shelters and Emergency Services

Youth shelters are a first point of contact with unaccompanied youth, and provide an immediate and short-term alternative to the dangers of the streets. Hours of operations can vary (24 hours/day or evening to morning) and crisis shelters may focus on younger youth under 18 or young adults ages 18-24 depending on funding and licensing.



Key features and promising practices of youth shelters and emergency services include:

- **Youth Focus:** To attract youth who would otherwise choose to couch-surf or sleep on the streets, youth shelters are low- or no-barrier programs with easy access. Youth shelters provide a connection to a community of peers, which can encourage awareness and acknowledgement of needing help.
- **Safety and Harm Reduction:** Focus on youth feeling and being safe and use a harm reduction model with screening for safe behaviors rather than substance use rules.

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

Making It Work: Youth Shelters

- Centralize the mission on Youth
- Make safety paramount
- Utilize low- or no-barriers and a harm reduction model
- Integrate family engagement services
- Provide peer support and community connections
- Include youth in programming design

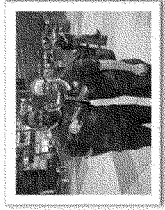
- **Support Family Connection:** Offer opportunities for youth to connect to families, e.g., providing phone cards, postcards or postage, overnight visits, etc. This helps staff see if and when youth are interested in engaging with their families so that reunification conversations may begin.
- **Individual Case Management:** In addition to meeting immediate basic needs, on-site staff provides crisis intervention, assessment, and individual case management. This may include connections to schools, caring and trusted adults, health care providers, and youth development organizations.
- **Focus on Transition to Stable Housing:** The goal is quick exit planning by engaging and stabilizing youth through case management and counseling services; family reunification, or transition to other stable and safe environments. This may also include transitional supports for shelter graduates.
- **Short-Term Financial Intervention:** In a few cases, youth may only need short-term or one-time financial assistance in order to secure stable and independent housing. This can be combined with a mentoring adult to co-sign a lease and encourage soft skills support as needed.

## B. Host Homes

Host homes are a flexible and cost-effective model for providing stable housing and supports. Host homes offer a home-like, non-institutional environment rooted in the community. Key features and promising practices of host homes include:

- **Host Recruitment:** Host homes are an arrangement between community members who act as volunteer hosts and a youth service provider. Hosts provide safe shelter and food. The service provider offers program coordination, host support, and case management services. Informal community networks (such as faith-based and LGBTQ networks) or a community advisory council can support host recruitment. Hosts may receive financial assistance to defray the costs of hosting the youth or to compensate for loss of rental income.
- **Supporting Hosts:** Hosts are screened (background check, 2-3 interviews and references) and receive training and ongoing support, especially with boundary-setting, managing expectations, conflict mediation, and cultural competency. Youth are typically accountable to case managers, not hosts. Programs may create support groups among hosts.
- **Positive Youth Development:** Case management and services are individualized and focus on problem-solving, skill-building, communication, and goal-setting. Setbacks and mistakes are tolerated. Youth participate voluntarily and are never “placed” in a home. The matching process should be driven by the youth with support from the case manager.

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models



- **Flexible Model:** Host homes are effective in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Host homes may be used as short-term emergency shelter allowing youth to remain in their community, as respite care combined with family engagement services or as transitional housing. This model may work especially for unaccompanied youth who can build long-term and authentic relationships with caring adults.
- **Formal Partnerships:** Successful programs involve formal partnerships with schools, child welfare, justice, and behavioral and mental health service providers in order to collaboratively support youth.

### Making It Work: Host Homes

- Ensure the host home is a youth-driven choice, not a placement
- Continue long-term efforts and education for host recruitment
- Provide hosts with training and ongoing support
- Use intensive and flexible case management
- Explore questions of host liability and licensure
- Integrate social activities and community

### C. Transitional Housing and Transitional Living

Transitional Housing and Transitional Living is time-limited (up to 21-24 months) supportive housing for youth who are not ready to live independently. This model has a focus on developing life skills and staying in school or securing work. Key features and promising practices of transitional housing and transitional living programs include:

- **Variety of Housing Configurations:** Possible housing types include: congregate housing with overnight staff (especially for youth under 18 or those who find structure helpful), clustered units with or without a supervisor on-site, or scattered site apartments or shared units in which a youth may hold the lease.
- **Individualized and Flexible Service Delivery:** Intensity, duration, and array of services are customized and unique to each transitional housing program and youth population. Many programs are finding great success in implementing a housing first approach offering low barriers and voluntary services. Programs use positive youth development focusing on skills-building, leadership and community involvement. Programs tend to have low- or no-barriers to entry and to stay in the program.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** Provide specialized services and community supports for vulnerable sub-groups, such as pregnant and parenting teens, youth with mental and behavioral health difficulties, youth fleeing domestic violence or trafficking situations, transition-aged youth, those leaving juvenile justice, or LGBTQ youth.

Making It Work: Transitional Housing & Transitional Living

- Codify flexible time limits
- Support choice and diversity through congregate and scattered site models
- Use PYD and developmentally appropriate services
- Focus on education, employment opportunities and income supports
- Encourage peer support and building trusted community
- Case manage toward transition to permanent housing
- Involve youth in creating house rules, program design, and planning activities
- Support transition to independence with adult mentors

- **Forge Community Connections:** While in the program, youth are provided with services such as health and mental health services, support groups, life skills training, substance abuse treatment, employment, vocational, and educational services. Programs facilitate intentional and trusted community but also connect youth with community-based services that they can remain connected to once they leave the program.
- **Exit Planning:** Requires formal partnerships with housing search staff and permanent housing providers and begins early to support a transition to independent living as soon as a youth can make an informed choice and feels ready. Many programs also provide aftercare case management for up to six months upon exit from the program.

## TAILORED HOUSING AND SERVICE SOLUTIONS

### A. Rapid Re-Housing (RRH)

Rapid re-housing is a promising strategy for older youth with greater independent living skills who cannot reconnect to family or who need time to do so. RRH can be offered as part of a suite of possible housing and service options that includes host homes and family engagement services. Key features and promising practices of rapid re-housing programs include:

- **Housing First Approach:** Projects utilize a Housing First approach that provides immediate access to stable housing, low-barriers to entry and to keep assistance, and voluntary but persistent services, with high expectations and high levels of engagement.
- **Age Appropriate and Individualized Case Management:** Services are intensive (daily or 2-3 times per week) and may continue even after youth appear to have stabilized. Case managers (with a ratio of 8 or 10:1) foster independent living skills (budgeting, cooking, basic maintenance, setting boundaries, etc.), support youth with lease obligations, and coordinate clinical supports as needed. Case managers help mediate problems, and allow mistakes and learning in a supported environment.
- **Cultivate Landlord Base:** Requires a trained and dedicated staff or partnership with a housing organization to cultivate

and maintain relationships with property owners, (co)sign and oversee leases, oversee tenant move-ins, and handle the rent payment process.

- **Long-Term Housing Stability:** RRH time frame is up to 24 months with the goal of achieving long-term housing stability. Rental assistance is structured with youth paying 30 percent of their income or less, building savings as income increases. Apartments should be appropriate for independent life beyond rental assistance. This can include a roommate in high rent areas or use of tenant-based rental assistance, if secured. Alternatively, youth can be supported to find other independent affordable housing, to reunify with family or to secure non-time-limited supportive housing, if needed.

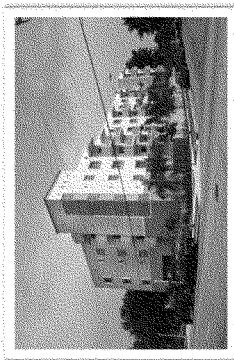
#### Making It Work: Rapid Re-Housing

- Continually recruit and support property owners
- Use a Housing First approach
- Case manage intensely, especially at start
- Prepare for setbacks
- Offer voluntary but persistent developmentally appropriate services
- Integrate education, job training, and access to community services
- Build social and community connections
- Ensure services are relevant to needs and goals
- Support transition to independence with adult mentors

## B. Non-time-limited Supportive Housing

Non-time-limited youth supportive housing is a specialized age- and service-appropriate version of permanent supportive housing for youth with complex needs. Key features and promising practices of non-time-limited supportive housing include:

- **Highest Needs:** Target youth experiencing homelessness likely to have the highest service needs — mental health, substance abuse disorders, trauma — such as LGBTQ youth, who experience trauma and mental health disorders at higher rates than their heterosexual peers. Age range is typically 18 to 24 years old.



- **Housing First:** Use a harm reduction and trauma-informed care approach, with voluntary comprehensive support services. On-site staff engages youth at their own pace and tailors services to their individualized needs. Services address the physical, socio-emotional, intellectual, and life skills development of youth on a pathway to independence.

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

- **Non-Time-Limited:** There are no time limits. This model includes a “moving on” culture that encourages youth, when and if they can, to move to independent or adult permanent supportive housing. Youth pay 30 percent of their income in rent and holds the lease. Access to tenant-based rental assistance and adult permanent supportive housing is critical to supporting transitions as youth become ready.

- **Housing and Service Operating Agreements:** Youth Supportive housing requires strong formal operating partnerships among youth-serving organizations, affordable housing providers (such as public housing agencies, property owners, and housing developers), and coordinated community supports. Models may be scattered site — using tenant-based or project-based rental assistance, project-based units, or a sponsor-based set-aside within a mixed-population building — or may be developed as a single site rental building.

### Making It Work: Non-Time-Limited Supportive Housing

- Utilize for youth with the highest needs
- Train staff in trauma-informed care and harm reduction
- Individualize and pace services to meet youth where they are
- Foster a “moving on” culture for youth who are ready
- Establish formal operating agreements between service providers and property managers/owners
- Work with a youth advisory council to foster peer community and inform programming and activities

## ENGAGING YOUTH

Youth engagement is the practice of meaningfully involving youth in decisions that affect them, their peers, and their communities. Young people are an integral part of organizations' and communities' work and their voices help shape the future. Youth can bring energy and new ideas to challenges, and their involvement creates a sense of ownership, accountability, and greater acceptance of services and decisions. For youth, engagement increases self-esteem, builds connections, develops skills, and fosters philanthropy.

See  
System Planning  
Guidebook

- There are many different ways of engaging youth, including:
- Speaker Panels to planners and practitioners — cultural competence training
  - Youth Advisory Boards for specific programs and the system

- Advisors or committee members for CoC and/or Point-In-Time count planning
- Participation in CoC Point-In-Time counts
- Participation in staff interviews
- Youth employed as peer mentors, peer specialists or program staff
- Staffing of information tables at conferences and meetings
- Youth-to-youth panels of speakers
- Leaders in community and cultural activities
- Youth-to-youth outreach approaches

Youth engagement requires planning. It is important to explore the full spectrum of possibilities and find the best fit for the system, organization, program, and youth being served. Youth engagement works best when it is fully understood and embraced by the adult and youth communities involved.



Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

## PROGRAM FEATURE HIGHLIGHTS

This information is not intended to represent a complete service description, but rather to highlight what is working for some programs and further an important dialogue on ending youth homelessness.

| Program Type             | Sponsor and Project                                                                          | Project Highlight                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary Prevention       | <u>Lighthouse Youth Services, Safe and Supported</u> , Cincinnati, OH                        | County-wide initiative to prevent homelessness for LGBTQ youth through formal collaboration among youth-serving organizations, improving the quality of interventions and connecting youth to resources. |
|                          | <u>The Montrose Center, NEST</u> , Houston, TX                                               | City-wide collaborative led by a steering committee and involving over 60 organizations to prevent homelessness among LGBTQ youth.                                                                       |
|                          | <u>Youth Villages, YVLifeSet</u> , national model currently in use in TN, FL, GA, MA, MS, NC | A comprehensive service model for helping youth in foster care successfully transition to the responsibilities of adulthood through services, family engagement and building support systems.            |
| Mobile "Street" Outreach | <u>Larkin Street Youth Services, Street Outreach Program</u> , San Francisco, CA             | Focus on hidden and LGBTQ youth. A <u>Youth Advisory Board</u> advises the programming.                                                                                                                  |
|                          | <u>Sojourners Care Network, Solo Street Outreach Program</u> , Appalachian, OH               | Focus on rural area outreach. Utilize Safe Space program to educate and involve community.                                                                                                               |
|                          | <u>Lutheran Social Services, StreetWorks Collaborative</u> , Twin Cities, MN                 | Collaboration among twelve youth-serving organizations, sharing best practices to most effectively reach and engage youth who are homeless.                                                              |
| Drop-in Centers          | <u>Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development</u> , Phoenix, AZ                                 | Youth resource centers operate in conjunction with a youth-run T-shirt printing company providing youth work experience and screen printing skills.                                                      |
|                          | <u>Bridge Over Troubled Waters</u> , Boston, MA                                              | Interface with job training and paid internships via community action program agency. Street outreach program uses a mobile medical van.                                                                 |
|                          | <u>YouthCare's Street Outreach &amp; Drop-in Centers</u> , Seattle, WA                       | Drop-in centers assist youth with access to education, housing services and employment training programs.                                                                                                |

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

| Program Type                         | Sponsor and Project                                                         | Project Highlight                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Family Engagement                    | <u>Huckleberry House Family Support Program</u> , Columbus, OH              | Therapists are masters' level clinicians and offer flexible hours. Operates in conjunction with Huck House and a 24-hour crisis hot-line for youth 12-17 who have run away or are in crisis.                            |
|                                      | <u>Families First</u> , Atlanta, GA                                         | Targets children and youth in families facing chronic economic, social or health challenges so that they will succeed in stable homes. Also offers a Family Violence Intervention Program.                              |
|                                      | <u>Ozone House Safe Stay Program</u> , Ann Arbor, MI                        | Two- to three-week residential counseling program for youth feeling unsafe or fleeing family conflict; combined with individual and family therapy and life skills training.                                            |
| Youth Shelters and Emergency Centers | <u>Ali Forney Center</u> , New York, New York                               | Serves LGBTQ youth 16-24 years. Emergency housing program is hosted in small homelike environments supervised by staff during operating hours.                                                                          |
|                                      | <u>YZY Harvard Square</u> , Cambridge, MA                                   | This shelter is staffed by a student workforce via community service and is a program of a university affiliated nonprofit. Only operates through winter months.                                                        |
|                                      | <u>Covenant House</u> , Safe Haven, Washington, DC                          | Emergency housing for homeless single and parenting young people, ages 18 to 24.                                                                                                                                        |
| Host Homes                           | <u>Avenues for Homeless Youth</u> , GLBT Host Home Program, Twin Cities, MN | Provides LGBTQ youth who are experiencing homelessness with homes and support. Advisory Council includes youth and former hosts.                                                                                        |
|                                      | <u>Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska</u> , Western Nebraska  | Host homes program in rural Nebraska; stipends provided.                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                      | <u>Alternative House</u> , Homeless Youth Initiative, Fairfax, VA           | HYI is a coordinated program with the Local Homeless Liaison to help unaccompanied youth complete high school. HYI offers host homes and, for some youth, rental assistance funded with TLP, to provide stable housing. |
| Transitional Housing                 | <u>Bill Wilson Center</u> , Transitional Living Program, Santa Clara, CA    | Emphasis on self-direction and self-determination. Serves young parents with children in shared housing program; also operate TAY Inn for at-risk transition-aged youth experiencing mental health challenges.          |

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

| Program Type                        | Sponsor and Project                                                                                 | Project Highlight                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Transitional Housing                | <b>Lighthouse Youth Services, Life Skills and Housing Options for Young Adults</b> , Cincinnati, OH | Services focus on developing life skills. Offered with alternative rapid re-housing scattered site option for more independent youth.                                                                                                                         |
|                                     | <b>Valley Youth House</b> , Maternity Group Home program, Philadelphia, PA                          | Housing, life skills, parenting, on-site health clinic and case management for 16 to 22 year old homeless and parenting or pregnant teens and their children.                                                                                                 |
|                                     | <b>The Link</b> , Rapid Re-Housing Program, Minneapolis, MN                                         | Units for young adults 18-24 years old and their children; uses CoC program so youth must meet HUD definition of homelessness                                                                                                                                 |
| Rapid Re-Housing                    | <b>Valley Youth House</b> , PRIDE, Philadelphia, PA                                                 | Case planning, life skills counseling, rental assistance, and support services for LGBTQ youth ages 18 to 21.                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                     | <b>First Place</b> , My First Place Program, Oakland, CA                                            | Provides current and former foster youth an opportunity to develop a sense of permanency. Emphasis on authentic adult relationships; independent living skills; positive youth development.                                                                   |
|                                     | <b>Edwin Gould Academy</b> , Edwin Gould Residence, East Harlem, NY                                 | Targets youth aging out of foster care 18-25; includes 15 units for parenting young adults.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Non-time-limited Supportive Housing | <b>Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative</b> , Niccollet Square, Minneapolis, MN                  | 42 studio apartments for homeless youth 16-21; partnership between on-site service provider and a nonprofit affordable housing provider.                                                                                                                      |
|                                     | <b>West End Residences HDFC</b> , True Colors Residence, New York, NY                               | 2 projects of 30 units each w/ PBV harm reduction and trauma informed care for formerly homeless LGBT youth (18-24). Harm reduction model for youth with active substance abuse disorder; fosters a “moving on” culture rather than time limits to residency. |

## POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCES

The table below outlines possible funding sources for each of the different program models mentioned in this Guidebook.

### Eligible Uses Key

- S = Services
- O = Operations (leasing, facility, supplies, etc.)
- RA = Rental Assistance (short, medium, TBRA, PBRA)
- C = Capital (acquisition, rehabilitation, construction)
- RP = Real Property

| Possible Funding Source                                             | Program Model      |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|---|
|                                                                     | Primary Prevention | Mobile Outreach | Drop-In Centers | Family Engagement | Youth Shelter and Emergency Services | Host Homes | Transitional Housing | Rapid Rehousing | Non-Time Limited Supportive Housing |   |
| <b>Administration for Children and Families (ACF)</b>               |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |   |
| <b>FYSB - Runaway and Homeless Youth</b>                            |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |   |
| <u>Street Outreach Program</u>                                      |                    | S, O            | S, O            |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |   |
| <u>Basic Center Program (BCP)</u>                                   |                    |                 | S, O            | S                 | S, O                                 | S          |                      | S               |                                     |   |
| <u>Transitional Living Program (TLP)</u>                            |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      | S, O       | S, O, RA             | S, O, RA        |                                     |   |
| <u>Maternity Group Homes for Pregnant and Parenting Youth (MGH)</u> |                    |                 |                 | S                 |                                      |            | S, O                 |                 |                                     |   |
| <b>Children's Bureau</b>                                            |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |   |
| <u>Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program</u>                   | S                  |                 |                 | S                 |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |   |
| <u>John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program</u>              | S                  |                 |                 | S                 |                                      | S          | S                    | S               | S                                   | S |

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

| Possible Funding Source                                                                    | Program Model      |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                                                                            | Primary Prevention | Mobile Outreach | Drop-In Centers | Family Engagement | Youth Shelter and Emergency Services | Host Homes | Transitional Housing | Rapid Rehousing | Non-Time Limited Supportive Housing |
| Office of Community Services                                                               |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| Community Services Block Grant                                                             |                    |                 | S, O            |                   | S, O                                 | S          | S, O                 | S, RA           | S, O                                |
| Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)                             |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| Project for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)                              |                    | S               | S               |                   | S                                    |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| Cooperative Agreement for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals (CABHI)                      |                    | S               | S               |                   | S                                    |            | S                    | S, O, RA        | S, O                                |
| Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals - Services in Supportive Housing (GBHI-SSH) |                    | S               | S               |                   | S                                    |            |                      | S               | S                                   |
| Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA)                                            |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) CARE                                                   |                    | S               | S               |                   | S                                    |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| Federal Home Visiting Program                                                              | S                  |                 |                 |                   |                                      | S          | S                    | S               | S                                   |
| Housing and Urban Development (HUD)                                                        |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| Emergency Solutions Grant                                                                  |                    | S               | S, O            |                   | S, O, RA, C                          |            | S                    | S, RA           |                                     |
| Title V                                                                                    |                    |                 |                 |                   | RP                                   |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| BRAC Property Disposition                                                                  |                    |                 |                 |                   | RP                                   |            | RP                   |                 | RP                                  |
| Continuum of Care (CoC) Program                                                            |                    | S               |                 |                   |                                      |            | S, O, RA, C          | RA, O, S        | S, O, RA, C                         |
| Tenant-based vouchers (TBV)                                                                |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      | RA              | RA                                  |
| Project-based vouchers (PBV)                                                               |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      | RA              | RA                                  |
| Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)                                        |                    | S               | S, O            |                   | S, O, RA, C                          |            | S, O, RA, C          | RA              | S, O, RA, C                         |

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

| Possible Funding Source                                               | Program Model      |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                                                       | Primary Prevention | Mobile Outreach | Drop-In Centers | Family Engagement | Youth Shelter and Emergency Services | Host Homes | Transitional Housing | Rapid Rehousing | Non-Time Limited Supportive Housing |
| Family Unification Program (FUP)                                      |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      | RA              | RA                                  |
| HOME                                                                  |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      | RA              | RA, C                               |
| Community Development Block Grant Program                             |                    |                 | C, O            |                   | C, O                                 |            | C, O                 |                 | C                                   |
| Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program (RHSP)                     |                    |                 |                 |                   | O, RA, C                             |            | O, RA, C             | RA              | O, RA, C                            |
| Other Housing and Services Funding                                    |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| Title I, Part A Education funding                                     |                    |                 |                 |                   | S                                    | S          | S                    | S               | S                                   |
| Low Income Housing Tax Credits                                        |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 | C                                   |
| Federal Home Loan Banks                                               |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 | C                                   |
| National Housing Trust Fund                                           |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 | C                                   |
| Medicaid                                                              |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      |                 |                                     |
| Home and Community-Based State Plan Option (1915(l))                  |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      | S               | S                                   |
| Health Homes State Plan Option                                        |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            |                      | S               | S                                   |
| Rehabilitation and Targeted Case Management Services (state-by-state) |                    |                 |                 |                   |                                      |            | S                    | S               | S                                   |
| Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT)        | S                  |                 | S               |                   | S                                    | S          | S                    | S               | S                                   |

*Note: Private funders such as United Way, Urban League, community foundations, state and local philanthropy can provide significant support to programs especially services and operations.*

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

## RESOURCES

### Program Development and Design Resources:

- [Youth Report to Congress Federal Program Serving Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#): Document providing a comprehensive overview of key federal program areas and analyzes the opportunities for them to better coordinate to serve youth experiencing homelessness.
- [A Way Home Canada Website](#): Website that is an exhaustive resource with multiple tools and references that can be instructive for planners of new programs.
- [Who is Doing Well? A Typology of Newly Homeless Adolescents](#): A journal article advises planners of new programs on how to effectively match resources to adolescent groups.
- [A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth](#): Guidance from the Canadian Youth Network assists planners of new programs to adopt a housing first approach.
- [Youth Transitional Housing Toolkit](#): Toolkit from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness outlining recommended practices for the design of transitional housing for youth.
- [At the Intersections: A collaborative report on LGBTQ youth homelessness](#): Report from the True Colors Fund and the National LGBTQ Task Force helps planners of new programs ensure cultural competence and relevance for LGBTQ youth.
- [Youth Status Report Series](#): The Covenant House Institute produced reports to inform service delivery and advocacy efforts, specifically with regard to program development; fundraising initiatives; legislative recommendations; and raising awareness among local, state, and federal officials. The findings can play a pivotal role in determining priorities and developing strategies. They provide a comparative analysis of 24 indicators of well-being.
- [No Strings Attached: Helping Vulnerable Youth with Non-Time-Limited Supportive Housing](#): March 2016 brief from the Corporation

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

for Supportive Housing discusses non-time-limited supportive housing with a focus on the outcomes of True Colors Residence, a New York City program.

- [Catalog of Permanent Supportive Housing Programs for Transition Age Youth](#): Catalog of programs provides a profile and descriptive details about specific permanent supportive housing programs for youth, and the programs' sponsors.
- [Serving Homeless Families and Youth](#): An overview of HUD's family and youth programs.
- [Family and Youth Services Bureau Website, Assessment Tools for Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs](#): A list presenting various screening and assessment tools to help determine the best interventions and services for different youth in care.
- [Becoming Adults: One-Year Impact Findings from the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation](#): An MDRC publication from May 2015 discussing the results of the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation.
- [Resource Guide for the Youth Engagement Toolkit](#): Provides in-depth information about youth engagement, as well as practical strategies for engaging youth. 2013. Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia.
- [Housing and Outreach Strategies for Rural Youth](#): A document with best practices from the Rural Youth Survey (National Alliance to End Homelessness)
- [A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth](#): An article from the "Homeless Hub: Research Matters, Finding Solutions to Homelessness".
- [Community-Wide Prevention of LGBTQ Youth Homelessness](#): HUD report summarizing lessons and recommendations of the LGBTQ Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiative.
- [What is a Host Home?](#): A blog on National Alliance to End Homelessness, which features a slide show by Avenues for Homeless Youth in Minneapolis.

- [Webinar: Host Homes for Homeless Youth](#): National Alliance to End Homelessness webinar features two programs in Minnesota and Nebraska.
  - [Voices of Youth Count: An effort to link evidence and action by capturing the experiences of runaway and homeless youth.](#)
  - [The Intersection of Youth Homelessness and Pregnancy and Parenting](#): A brief from the National Network for Youth on pregnant and parenting unaccompanied youth.
  - [Practice, Policy, and Research Recommendations on Transition to Adulthood](#): A brief from the National Network on Youth Transition discussing the Transition to Independence (TIP) model for young adults experiencing emotional and/or behavioral difficulties.
  - [9 Evidence-based Guiding Principles to Help Youth Overcome Homelessness](#): Developed by the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation.
  - [Housing for Homeless Youth](#). National Alliance to End Homelessness. Youth Homelessness Series. Brief No. 3: This brief outlines a spectrum of youth housing models that connect affordable housing, self-sufficiency services, and positive youth development approaches.
  - [The Practice Knowledge Project: An Initiative of the National Alliance to End Homelessness](#), the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and Funders Together to End Homelessness, to capture information from diverse homeless youth practitioners about effective strategies.
  - [Bricks, Mortar, and Community: The Foundations of Supportive Housing](#): A paper identifying a set of core components for supportive housing programs serving pregnant and parenting teens, and case studies of programs meeting these standards.
  - [Connections Between Trafficking and Homeless Youth: A Blog Post and Information article by Katherine Chon](#), Director, Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) on the ACF's Family Room Blog.
  - [HHS ASPE Report on Family Intervention Strategies for Youth Experiencing or at Risk of Homelessness summarizing existing Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models](#)
- evidence and common elements from 49 different interventions (prevention, reunification, reconnection) and what is most effective.
- Family Engagement Resources**
- [Youth Villages' YVLifeSet](#): A program that works not only with former foster youth and other vulnerable young people but also with their support systems to help ensure a more successful transition.
  - [Family Intervention for Unaccompanied Youth](#): A paper focusing on lessons providers have learned as they have undertaken family intervention with youth and their families.
  - [Casey Life Skills](#): A free tool that assesses the behaviors and competencies youth need to achieve their long term goals.
  - [Creating and Sustaining Effective Respite Services](#): A guide funded through the Children's Bureau discussing the need and best practices of respite services.
  - [Family Finding model](#): Includes methods that can be used to locate and engage relatives of children currently living in out-of-home care.
- Resources on Working with Property Owners**
- [Establishing and maintaining landlord partners](#): A resource from USICH that includes a short two-page guide for landlords on the SSVF and HUD-VASH programs.
  - [Landlord Liaison Project](#): The Landlord Liaison Project of King County, Washington, creates incentives for landlords to relax screening criteria for people experiencing homelessness who have barriers to accessing permanent housing.
  - [Landlord benefits of working with homeless providers](#): A checklist on how to advertise your program to potential landlords.
  - [Landlord outreach plan resources](#): The second of five short modules the NAEH Center for Capacity Building has developed on rapid re-housing. This module discusses how to locate housing by developing and maintaining landlord relationships.

#### Additional Community Examples by Program Models

*Programs listed here are not mentioned in the guidebook but may serve as helpful examples.*

##### Prevention

- [LGBTQ Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiative](#)
- [National Runaway Safeline](#)

##### Mobile "Street" Outreach

- [Bellefaire JCB](#), Cleveland, OH
- [National Safe Space](#)

##### Drop-In Centers

- [Tile Project](#), Seattle, WA
- [Barista](#), Seattle, WA
- [Zine employment training program](#), Seattle, WA
- [YouthLink's Opportunity Center](#), Minneapolis, MN

##### Host Homes

- [NAEHCV Host Home Start-up Checklist](#)

##### Rapid Rehousing

- [Report on Formative Evaluation Findings, June 2010 to March 2012](#)
- [Northwest Youth Services](#), Bellingham, WA

Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guidance material was prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Community Planning and Development by Abt Associates, CSH and Technical Assistance Collaborative. Special thanks to the following federal partners: the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, and U.S. Department of Justice. Contributions were also made by A Way Home America, National Center for Homeless Education, National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Rapid Results Institute, MANY, and the numerous agencies whose projects were highlighted in the Guidebooks. Thank you!

A special acknowledgement is made to youth whose pictures were used in the Guidebooks, especially the transition age youth from Bridge Over Troubled Waters Drop-In Center in Boston, MA who created Inoleum block self-portraits that are used in the Guidebooks.

All materials in this work are in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Citation of the source is appreciated. This publication may not be reproduced or distributed for a fee without the specific written authorization of the Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, Office of Community Planning and Development, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Mrs. HAYES. Again, I want to thank the witnesses for their participation today. What we have heard is very valuable. Members of the Committee may have some additional questions for you, and we ask the witnesses to please respond to those questions in writing. The hearing record will be held open for 14 days in order to receive those responses. I remind my colleagues that pursuant to committee practice, witness questioning for the hearing records must be submitted to the majority committee staff or Committee Clerk within 7 days. The questions submitted must address the subject matter of this hearing.

I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member for his closing statement.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. And thank you all for coming here today and sharing your stories and thoughts on runaway and homeless youth. You all confirmed the sad reality that homeless youth face grave dangers. I am happy to hear about your efforts to help keep these children safe. What we know is that this work continues and that it is critical to engage many partners in the work to bring these children home and help keep them home.

I particularly appreciated hearing about various facets of work to help save these children, including the efforts undertaken by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. The work they do when a child goes missing is critical and is a vital part of the system to provide help to protect runaways and homeless children. The service with our other witnesses are equally important to saving these children. And, finally, without good data, we can't properly assess our work and know what works. All these parts combine to help protect children, and I want to thank you again for all the work that you do.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I now recognize myself for the purposes of making a closing statement.

Today's hearing made clear to the Members of this Subcommittee that youth homelessness is a pervasive issue that demands our attention. Congress has a responsibility to ensure all children and youth have access to stable housing. As our witnesses shared, youth homelessness is not only an urgent public health crisis facing millions of youth across the country, it is a threat to the safety and development of our country's future.

Without stable housing, far too many young Americans cannot access the resources and support that are so crucial to excelling in school, staying safe from horrific abuse and sexual exploitation, and learning to live self-sufficient and independent lives.

Importantly, today's hearing also confirmed that youth homelessness is not experienced equally across all communities. Systemic discrimination throughout our society subjects children in underserved communities to a significantly higher risk of suffering the long-lasting consequences of youth homelessness.

As our witnesses shared, family disputes, abuse, and experience with the juvenile justice and foster systems push LGBTQ youth and Black and Latino youth into homelessness at disproportionately higher rates. Young parents are also more likely to face

homelessness, putting not only themselves at risk but also their young infants and toddlers, whose lives are just starting.

After hearing what our witnesses had to say, I do not think anyone disagrees that Congress must update and improve Federal policy to help eliminate youth homelessness. Drawing from our discussions today, I look forward to working with each of my colleagues to pass the bipartisan reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act we so urgently need.

We need a reauthorization that meets the needs of young adults by extending the length of time youth can stay in Basic Center programs and prioritize family engagement when it is in the best interests of the youth. We need a reauthorization that centers trauma-informed practices to effectively serve and support youth who have been victims of abuse, trafficking, or sexual exploitation. And we need a reauthorization that ensures that young people, no matter where they find shelter, do not face discrimination or abuse, based on their age, race, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

I hope that all of us here can work together to realize these priorities and take long overdue steps to ensure that no child in this country endures the trauma and uncertainty of youth homelessness. Our Nation's children deserve no less.

Thank you all for your time here today. If there is no further business, without objection, the Committee stands adjourned.

[Questions submitted for the record and their responses follow:]



**COMMITTEE ON  
EDUCATION AND LABOR**  
U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
2176 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6100

July 23, 2019

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FRED KELLER, PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. David Baker  
Support Specialist  
YMCA Youth & Family Services  
4262 Swift Avenue #1  
San Diego, CA 92116

Dear Mr. Baker,

I would like to thank you for testifying at the July 16, 2019, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services hearing entitled *"Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness."*

Please find enclosed additional questions submitted by Committee members following the hearing. Please provide a written response no later than Tuesday, July 30, 2019, for inclusion in the official hearing record. Your responses should be sent to Paula Daneri of the Committee staff. She can be contacted at 202-225-3725 should you have any questions.

I appreciate your time and continued contribution to the work of the Committee.

Sincerely,

**ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT**  
Chairman

Enclosure

Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee Hearing  
*“Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness”*  
Tuesday, July 16, 2019  
2:00 p.m.

**Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA)**

- Mr. Baker, in your testimony you mentioned that you were able to enroll in college and earn a degree in business management and another in sociology.
  - Can you tell us what supports allowed you to enroll in college and, more importantly, complete reach graduation?
  - Based on your experience, how prevalent was homelessness in your community college campus? Were you one of few homeless students or were there many others in situations just like yours?

**Representative Kim Schrier (D-WA)**

- Mr. Baker, in your testimony you mentioned your experience with the juvenile justice system following years of child homelessness. I was hoping you could tell us more about your own experience following your involvement with the juvenile justice system. I'm sure you had to work through some traumatic experiences. From your perspective, what services do you think would be most helpful in ensuring that youth who have had experience with the juvenile justice system avoid homelessness, complete their education, and access a career once they exit the system?



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Mr. Matthew Morton, Ph.D., M.Sc.  
Research Fellow  
Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago  
108 E 30th Street, Apt. 1  
New York, NY 10016

Dear Dr. Morton,

I would like to thank you for testifying at the July 16, 2019, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services hearing entitled "*Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness.*"

Please find enclosed additional questions submitted by Committee members following the hearing. Please provide a written response no later than Tuesday, July 30, 2019, for inclusion in the official hearing record. Your responses should be sent to Paula Daneri of the Committee staff. She can be contacted at 202-225-3725 should you have any questions.

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Sincerely,

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Enclosure

Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee Hearing  
*“Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness”*  
 Tuesday, July 16, 2019  
 2:00 p.m.

**Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA)**

- Dr. Morton, youth who experience homelessness are also likely to experience trauma. In your testimony, you mentioned that many youth enter homelessness after experiencing maltreatment in the home or family conflict. Moreover, you mentioned that being homeless itself exposes many youth to further trauma, which can include anything from being witnesses to violence to becoming victims of trafficking.
  - What effect can trauma have on youth, particularly those who are in their teenage years?
  - What role can Runaway and Homeless Youth providers play in helping youth process and heal from trauma?
- Dr. Morton, your research shows that parenting youth are among the groups at highest risk for experiencing homelessness. According to a report you wrote titled “Missed Opportunities: Youth Homeless in America: National Estimates,” parenting youth are 200% more likely to experience homelessness than non-parenting youth.
  - Can you tell us more about what the research shows drives parenting youth into homelessness?
  - What effect does homelessness have on parenting youth and their children?
  - What supports can best help parenting youth transition into stable housing?
- Dr. Morton, in your testimony you mentioned that low education is the factor most strongly correlated to youth homelessness. According to your prevalence estimates, youth who lack a high school degree are 346% more likely to experience homelessness than those with a high school degree. I have also seen other research showing that experiencing homelessness puts youth at risk for dropping out of school before graduating.
  - Can you tell us more about the relation between homelessness and schooling?
  - What supports can Congress provide through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to ensure young people are able to finish high school and have the opportunity to pursue higher education, if they so desire?

Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee Hearing  
*“Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness”*  
 Tuesday, July 16, 2019  
 2:00 p.m.

Responses by Mr. David Baker

**Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA)**

**Mr. Baker, in your testimony you mentioned that you were able to enroll in college and earn a degree in business management and another in sociology.**

- **Can you tell us what supports allowed you to enroll in college and, more importantly, complete reach graduation?**
- **Based on your experience, how prevalent was homelessness in your community college campus? Were you one of few homeless students or were there many others in situations just like yours?**

The Equity and Student Success office at my college was the center of my academic support while pursuing my degree. This office provided assistance with books, food, and resources. The equity team would also open the showers before classes started so students did not have to implicate themselves as homeless. This is where I witnessed how prevalent homelessness was amongst students. The shower lines in the morning would stretch out of the locker rooms and into the gym, full of students who just wanted to clean themselves before class. Seeing scores of my peers struggling for the basic human right of housing fueled my desire for change and ultimately pushed me to graduate.

**Representative Kim Schrier (D-WA)**

**Mr. Baker, in your testimony you mentioned your experience with the juvenile justice system following years of child homelessness. I was hoping you could tell us more about your own experience following your involvement with the juvenile justice system. I’m sure you had to work through some traumatic experiences. From your perspective, what services do you think would be most helpful in ensuring that youth who have had experience with the juvenile justice system avoid homelessness, complete their education, and access a career once they exit the system?**

I have had multiple interactions with juvenile detention facilities across the nation. Most of these arrests came from simply being a youth in the street with no parental advisory. The last instance was at 16 years old when an off-duty officer approached a group I was standing with on a corner and told us that we looked like drug dealers. I personally took offense to the remark because I spent my childhood preventing drug dealers from exploiting my mother. My anger got the best of me and I impulsively told him that I would do something to him if he didn't stop harassing us. This resulted in a 21-day sentence for terroristic threats that was extended because I had no guardian to come and claim me when exiting the juvenile detention center. I remained in juvenile hall until a power of attorney was given to an uncle who lived locally.

My story is an example of just how vulnerable unaccompanied youth who fall into the juvenile justice system become. These youth are targeted by the justice system and lack the support to address the trauma that they endure while suffering through it. This experience taught me that my voice did not matter in the court of law and that police would take any opportunity to arrest me. I felt that I had been caught in a trap that was meant to lead me right into prison. I believe the solution is to make basic centers and legal aid programs as accessible as the juvenile justice system is. With these resources youth will be able to establish a support network that can be called into action when crisis occurs. Building a network of positive connections contributes to increased resiliency; and resiliency is the key to navigating life after any traumatic experience.

**Responses to written questions following the hearing, “Strengthening Federal Support to End Youth Homelessness”**

Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee

Tuesday, July 16, 2019, 2:00 p.m.

Responses by Dr. Matthew Morton and Dr. Amy Dworsky at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago  
Submitted on July 30, 2019

Note: Questions are bolded; responses are not.

**Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA)**

**Dr. Morton, youth who experience homelessness are also likely to experience trauma. In your testimony, you mentioned that many youth enter homelessness after experiencing maltreatment in the home or family conflict. Moreover, you mentioned that being homeless itself exposes many youth to further trauma, which can include anything from being witnesses to violence to becoming victims of trafficking.**

- **What effect can trauma have on youth, particularly those who are in their teenage years?**

As documented by a vast body of scientific literature, the effects of trauma on young people are multifarious. They include difficulties with forming and maintaining positive attachments and relationships; short- and long-term health consequences; tendencies to dissociate from experiences, making it difficult to be present and purposeful in day-to-day activities; challenges with self-regulation and behavior; difficulties with forming self-concept and a future orientation; difficulties with thinking and learning; and adverse economic impacts associated with all of the above.<sup>1 2 3 4</sup> With respect to engaging services, experiences of loss, adversity, and trauma can also hinder young people’s trust of, and ability to engage positively with, adults and institutions.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, young people’s concerns are reinforced by negative experiences with services and systems that are not trauma-informed, making it even harder for them to engage positively with resources in the future.

It is important to reinforce that adolescence is a critical developmental period in which young people experience a fundamental reorganization of the brain and typically develop a greater sense of identity and connections to people and institutions outside of the family.<sup>6 7</sup> When a child or teenager endures environments or situations of fear or constant or extreme stress, these vital developmental processes are disrupted with potentially long-term implications. Situations of homelessness and housing instability, and the adverse conditions that often lead to homelessness, create these sorts of traumatic experiences.

For all of these reasons, it is critical that programs and systems serving this population are grounded in a deep understanding of the nature, expressions, and consequences of complex trauma in the lives of youth, and that they offer trauma-informed care for all young people at every level of service delivery.

- **What role can Runaway and Homeless Youth providers play in helping youth process and heal from trauma?**

Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers can take steps to help youth process and heal from trauma while getting on a path to stability and thriving. In many cases, these actions can build on, or

extend the reach of, existing efforts that many RHY providers are already taking to offer trauma-informed care. Consistent with the research findings, actions RHY providers can take in response to pervasive trauma among the youth they serve include the following:

*First, RHY providers could ensure that all staff are thoroughly trained, supported, and supervised in delivering trauma-informed care.* Given high turnover of personnel and continual advances in evidence and learning, providing many opportunities to receive such training and support, including refreshers, is important. Further, personnel trained and supported in trauma-informed care should include staff who might not necessarily be directly responsible for programming but could still interface in service settings with youth (e.g., administrative and support staff). Authentically collaborating with, and learning from, youth with lived experience of homelessness (who are compensated for their time and expertise) could be part of RHY providers' professional and organizational development to strengthen trauma-informed care.

*Second, RHY providers could incorporate evidence-based trauma and social-emotional well-being screening and assessment tools routinely in their intake processes and outcomes monitoring practices.* Such screening and assessment should be aligned with organizational strategies to deliver or connect young people with evidence-based or evidence-informed programs and practices to mitigate the effects of trauma and strengthen young people's well-being as part of their work to support young people's long-term housing stability and successful transitions to adulthood. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) website includes screening and assessment tools for trauma. Further, a recent report published by Chapin Hall and Youth Collaboratory (with Federal agencies' guidance and input), *Measuring Up: Youth-level Outcomes and Measures for System Responses to Youth Homelessness*, recommends outcome measures for social-emotional well-being (along with stable housing, permanent connections, and education and employment) that RHY providers could incorporate into routine intake and outcomes monitoring processes to track and strengthen the results of service delivery around the consequences of trauma.<sup>8</sup>

*Third, RHY providers can coordinate and streamline intake processes, supports, and services between themselves and other services and systems in the community—while being mindful of young people's privacy and protections—to reduce the occurrences of youth having to retell their traumatic stories and experiences repeatedly to obtain services.* Congress and Federal agencies, such as HHS and HUD, in consultation with youth with lived experience, could explore opportunities to support greater coordination along these lines through federal policy and guidance. Constantly requiring youth to retell their stories to obtain services in fragmented program environments—often reinforced by federal funding structures—can result in re-traumatization.

*Fourth, we encourage RHY providers to create time and space for reviewing and discussing the findings and implications of key literature and resources that can foster professional and organizational development with respect to trauma-informed care.* For example, Chapin Hall's Voices of Youth Count Research-to-Impact brief, *Missed Opportunities in Youth Pathways through Homelessness*, includes the voices and stories of 215 youth with lived experience of homelessness captured in in-depth interviews.<sup>9</sup> This brief illustrates the complex and consequential roles that histories of trauma play in young people's pathways into homelessness and informing their decisions about whether, when, and how to engage services. Providers could also review and discuss online resources available on trauma-informed care, treatments, and practices through NCTSN and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center (RHYTTAC).

Finally, while there is much RHY providers can do to further strengthen trauma-informed care for the youth they serve, they need support and resources. Providing high-quality, trauma-informed services requires resources to do well—from staffing, to training, to facilities, to treatment and programming. With RHYA program grant amounts having remained virtually stagnant for decades despite inflation and growing understanding of what it takes to deliver quality programming, many RHY providers are finding themselves increasingly constrained to deliver the level and reach of quality programming needed. Congress could carefully review opportunities to better resource RHY providers' capacity to deliver more trauma-informed care and effective programming for all youth who need their help.

**Dr. Morton, your research shows that parenting youth are among the groups at highest risk for experiencing homelessness. According to a report you wrote titled “Missed Opportunities: Youth Homeless in America: National Estimates,” parenting youth are 200% more likely to experience homelessness than non-parenting youth.**

- **Can you tell us more about what the research shows drives parenting youth into homelessness?**

The results of the Voices of Youth Count national survey of 18- to 25-year-olds found that young parents were three times more likely to report that they had experienced homelessness during the past year than their non-parenting peers.<sup>10</sup> Data from Chapin Hall's Voices of Youth Count in-depth interviews, which were conducted in five diverse counties across the U.S., shed some light on why young parents are at risk for homelessness. Several young women who participated in those interviews reported becoming homeless after becoming pregnant. These young women described their pregnancy as yet another source of conflict or cause for parental rejection in an already dysfunctional or abusive family. Although they eventually left or were kicked out of their homes, becoming pregnant was not the only reason these young women became homeless. Additionally, young parents may be particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness due, in part, to the increased stressors and challenges associated with caring for young children.

It is also possible that some young people become parents after they become homeless. As we note in Chapin Hall's research brief, *Missed Opportunities: Pregnant and Parenting Youth Experiencing Homelessness in America*, few, if any, of the evidence-based pregnancy prevention programs have been tested with youth experiencing homelessness. This is important because existing programs may be difficult to implement in the types of settings where those youth can often be found (e.g., shelters, drop-in centers, street outreach locations). Additionally, the programs may not be trauma informed, and may not seem relevant to youth who are sometimes forced to engage in sexual behaviors in exchange for food, shelter, or other basic needs as part of their survival strategy. Youth experiencing homelessness may also lack access to free or low-cost sexual and reproductive health care services, including contraception.

- **What effect does homelessness have on parenting youth and their children?**

In an article published in a special issue of the journal *Zero to Three* focused on young children and families experiencing homelessness, Kull, Dworsky, Horwitz, and Farrell describe the effects that homelessness can have on parenting youth and their children.<sup>11</sup> As described in that article, homelessness during early childhood may lead to changes in brain architecture that can have long lasting developmental effects. Homelessness during infancy and toddlerhood is associated with delays in social and emotional skill development, cognitive functioning, and the acquisition of language and literacy skills. It has also been linked to lower levels of academic achievement and school engagement and higher rates of behavioral problems. Homelessness interferes with children's access to early childhood education programs such as Head Start so homeless children are not exposed to critical learning opportunities. Children who are homeless during their early years are more likely to experience food insecurity and have reduced access to healthcare. For young parents who are homeless, the demands of caring for a newborn are compounded by the stress of not having a safe and stable place to live or the financial resources to meet their children's basic needs. Heightened levels of parental stress can lead to diminished parental responsiveness and lower quality parent-child relationships. This can impair the development of early social-emotional and self-regulatory skills.

- **What supports can best help parenting youth transition into stable housing?**

Young parents experiencing homelessness need developmentally appropriate services and supports for both themselves and their young children. They also need resources to help them become economically self-sufficient. Both *Missed Opportunities: Pregnant and Parenting Youth Experiencing Homelessness in America* and the Kull et al. article in *Zero to Three* offer suggestions for what these supports might include.

First, young parents and children experiencing homelessness need access to high-quality early childhood programs including Head Start, Early Head Start and home visiting; community-based parenting programs; and early intervention services. Second, young parents experiencing homelessness need help enrolling in education or employment programs, connecting with mental health or substance use treatment, and finding childcare and applying for childcare assistance. Third, data from the Voices of Youth Count in-depth interviews indicate that they also need assistance to ensure that they are receiving benefits, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), for which they are eligible.

Two-generation programs can address the individual needs of young parents and their children as well as the collective needs of young families by integrating parent-focused and child-focused service provision. Program approaches typically involve engaging young parents in education, career training, and employment opportunities; promoting parent-child bonding; improving parent and child health and well-being; and linking families with economic, social, and other supports.

Young parents and children experiencing homelessness also need more options for shelter and housing. The Voices of Youth Count survey of service providers found significant gaps in the availability of shelters and housing programs for young parents who are homeless, particularly if those parents are minors or live in rural areas. More homeless youth and family service providers should consider serving minor parents and more homeless youth service providers should consider serving youth who are parenting.

Communities can begin to fill these gaps by using the Pregnancy Assistance Fund (PAF) and Second Chance Homes (SCH) to support young parents experiencing homelessness. PAF grantees provide supportive services (e.g., case management, referrals, parenting skills training) to pregnant and parenting teens and young adults in a variety of settings, including schools and community centers. SCH provide adult-supervised housing and supportive services (e.g., childcare; transportation assistance; education, job training, and employment services; counseling; and parenting and life skills training) to pregnant teens, teen mothers, and their children. PAF grantees and SCH could prioritize pregnant and parenting youth experiencing homelessness.

**Dr. Morton, in your testimony you mentioned that low education is the factor most strongly correlated to youth homelessness. According to your prevalence estimates, youth who lack a high school degree are 346% more likely to experience homelessness than those with a high school degree. I have also seen other research showing that experiencing homelessness puts youth at risk for dropping out of school before graduating.**

- **Can you tell us more about the relation between homelessness and schooling?**

The research demonstrates strong relationships between homelessness and low educational attainment. Most of the evidence is not designed to establish causality, which future investments in longitudinal research could help with. It is likely that the relationship between the two outcomes is to some degree bi-directional. That is, homelessness and housing instability impose additional challenges on young people's ability to remain and succeed in school, and lower educational attainment in a modern knowledge economy leaves youth without the skills and qualifications they often need to advance prosperous careers with incomes that support sustained housing stability in the context of high housing and living costs across the country.

Further, the evidence shows a significant overlap of risk factors for both homelessness and school dropout. These tend to include exposure to trauma, family conflict and instability, poverty, discrimination, mental health difficulties, involvement in systems such as child welfare and juvenile justice, and a lack of positive supports and connections. If school systems and community-based organizations work together to identify these risk factors and conditions among children and youth and provide appropriate supports and services as early as possible, it is likely that communities could reduce the incidence of both youth homelessness and early school leaving.

Lastly, while youth experiencing homelessness are less likely than their stably housed peers to enroll in post-secondary education (underscoring the importance of youth shelter and housing programs that work to strengthen young people's educational opportunities), we still find significant rates of youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability while enrolled in post-secondary education. Surveys by researchers at the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice find especially high homelessness and housing insecurity prevalence among community college students.<sup>12</sup> Yet post-secondary institutions often lack systems and resources needed to identify and address student homelessness and the challenges it imposes on students' ability to remain and succeed in school.

- **What supports can Congress provide through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to ensure young people are able to finish high school and have the opportunity to pursue higher education, if they so desire?**

First, Congress could encourage and resource RHY providers, especially those implementing Basic Center Programs, to have the flexibility and capacity to provide more upstream family strengthening interventions, including for youth who are at-risk for homelessness but have not yet experienced homelessness or running away. These services should be coordinated with schools so that students identified as at-risk for homelessness, usually among other adverse outcomes, have the community-based resources they and their families need to avoid risk conditions from escalating to crisis, and to avoid crisis situations from escalating to homelessness.

Second, Congress could support the development and evaluation of youth-centered housing and support programs that integrate robust educational and career partnerships, such as with community colleges. Chapin Hall's systematic evidence review of programs and practices found little evaluation of such multi-disciplinary program models. The research suggests they are likely important for young people's long-term housing stability and pathways to thriving, but we need more investment in developing and evaluating models so that we understand what approaches work best and for whom. Such evidence could inform improved service delivery models through Transitional Living Programs among other federally-funded community services.

<sup>1</sup> Herringa, R. J. (2017). Trauma, PTSD, and the Developing Brain. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 19(10), 69-69. doi:10.1007/s11920-017-0825-3

<sup>2</sup> Cook, A., Spinazzola, J., Ford, J. Lanktree, C., et al. (2005). Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescents. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35(5), 390-398

<sup>3</sup> Trickett, P. K., Negri, S., Ji, J., & Peckins, M. (2011). Child Maltreatment and Adolescent Development. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 3-20.

<sup>4</sup> The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). "Complex Trauma: Effects." Available at: <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/complex-trauma/effects>. Accessed on July 29, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Samuels, G. M., Cervin, C., Curry, S. R., & Robinson, S. R. (2018). "Nothing is for free..." Youth Attitudes about Engaging Resources While Unstably Housed. *Cityscape*, 20(3), 35-68.

<sup>6</sup> Konrad, K., Firk, C., & Uhlhaas, P. J. (2013). Brain development during adolescence: neuroscientific insights into this developmental period. *Deutsches Ärzteblatt international*, 110(25), 425-431.

<sup>7</sup> Blakemore S. J. (2012). Development of the social brain in adolescence. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 105(3), 111-116.

<sup>8</sup> Morton, M. H., Blondin, M., Chrisler, A., Puffaff, J., Kull, M. A., Kugley, S., & Elliott, K. (2019). *Measuring Up: Youth-level Outcomes and Measures for System Responses to Youth Homelessness*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at <https://youthcollaboratory.org/youth-outcomes-project-release>, accessed on July 29, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Samuels, G. M., Cervin, C., Curry, S., Robinson, S. R., & Patel, S. (2019). *Missed opportunities in youth pathways through homelessness*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

<sup>10</sup> Dworsky, A., Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M. (2018). *Missed opportunities: Pregnant and parenting youth experiencing homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

<sup>11</sup> Kull, M. A., Dworsky, A., Horvitz, B., & Farrell, A. F. (2019). Developmental consequences of homelessness for young parents and children. *Zero to Three Journal*, 39(4).

<sup>12</sup> Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., & Williams, T. (2019). *College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National RealCollege Survey Report*. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. Available at: <https://hope4college.com/college-and-university-basic-needs-insecurity-a-national-realcollege-survey-report/>, accessed on July 29, 2019.

[Whereupon, at 3:55 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.

