

Fact Checker

Youth Homelessness

JUNE 2007

Prevalence of Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness is disturbingly common. Although the prevalence of youth homelessness is difficult to measure, researchers estimate that about 5 to 7.7 percent of youth experience homelessness each year.

Youth Homelessness a Reflection of Family Breakdown

The same factors that contribute to adult homelessness, such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, low education levels, unemployment, mental health, and substance abuse, can lead to homelessness among youth. Beyond these factors, youth homelessness is largely a reflection of family breakdown.² Youth become homeless for varying reasons, including running away from home, being abandoned by their parents or guardians, being emancipated, or discharged from some sort of state care. Homeless youth often flee homes where they experience physical abuse and between 17 and 35 percent experience sexual abuse.³ Although family conflict also plays a role in adult homelessness, the nexus is more critical for youth because they are, by virtue of their developmental state in life, still largely financially, emotionally, and, depending on their age, legally dependent upon their families.

Youth Exiting Foster Care and Juvenile Correction at Risk of Homelessness

Youth transitioning out of foster care are at high risk of becoming homeless. Every year, between 20,000 and 25,000 youth, ages 18 and older, age out of the foster care system.⁴ Without a home, family support, or other resources, homeless youth are often locked up because they are without supervision. Homeless youth are socially marginalized and often arrested for “status” offenses, such as running away or breaking curfew. Twenty-five percent of former foster youth nationwide reported that they had been homeless at least one night *Accurate Statistics on Homelessness* within 2.5 to 4 years after exiting foster care.⁵ For youth who are released from juvenile corrections facilities, reentry is often difficult because they lack support systems and opportunities for work and housing.

Youth Homelessness has Tragic Consequences

Homelessness has serious consequences for young people and is especially dangerous for those between the ages of 16 and 24 who do not have familial support. Living in shelters or on the streets, unaccompanied homeless youth are at a higher risk for physical and sexual assault or abuse and physical illness, including HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, homeless youth are at a higher risk for anxiety disorders, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide because of increased exposure to violence while living on their own.⁶ Overall, homeless youth are also likely to become involved in prostitution, to use and abuse drugs, and to engage in other dangerous and illegal behaviors. Substance abuse, however, is not characteristic of the runaway youth population. Additionally, in the case of homeless youth, various studies have found high rates of parental alcohol or drug abuse (24 to 44 percent).⁷ Despite all of these setbacks, most homeless youth are still in school. In 2005, a survey indicated that prior to shelter 79 percent of homeless youth were attending school on a regular basis and, of homeless youth in transitional housing, 78 percent were still in school.⁸

Current Role of the Federal Government

The federal government has multiple programs designed to prevent and end youth homelessness. Local community programs, funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (Department of Health and Human Services-HHS), served over 500,000 homeless and runaway youth in 2005.⁹ Still, HHS reported that over 2,500 homeless and runaway youth were turned away from shelter and housing in 2005 due to lack of bed spaces.¹⁰ Funding for shelter and housing for youth should be increased to ensure no young people in the US sleep on the streets or in an unsafe environment.

More Should Be Done

The Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program (CHCIP) also provides states with funding to support youth who are expected to emancipate from foster care and former foster care youth ages 18 to 21, which helps prevent homelessness for an at-risk group of youth. However, even if states used all the federal funding for youth housing, each youth would receive only \$800 per year.¹¹ In order to better prevent homelessness, particularly for at-risk groups of youth, an increase in housing funds is necessary. Additionally, housing for youth is cheaper than treatment and jail. While the average cost of foster care, in-patient treatment, or juvenile correction placements average between \$25,000 and \$55,000 per year, the average cost of a transitional living program housing unit for youth is approximately \$11,800.¹²

Note: For article references, go to www.endhomelessness.org.

Classical Fact Checker

In December of 2008, 549 student at Classical Magnet took a youth homelessness and hunger survey. The results of the survey are below:

Students who...	Percentage	Number
Have needed a place to stay	13%	71
Have needed a place to stay in the last 6 months	6%	33
Currently needed a place to stay when they took the survey	3%	17
Think they will need a place to stay in the next year	2.2% yes 18% maybe	12 99
Have missed a meal because their family couldn't afford groceries	12.6%	69
Have missed a meal in the last 6 months because their family couldn't afford groceries	6.6%	36
Currently missed meals at the time of the survey because their family couldn't afford groceries	2.9%	16
Think they will miss a meal in the next year because their family won't be able to afford groceries	2.2% yes 13% maybe	12 72

Students in the Action Against Youth Homelessness and Hunger (AAYHH) at Classical Magnet School are working on developing awareness about and programs for youth homelessness and hunger. In October, 2009, AAYHH will host a Homeless Youth Awareness Conference at Classical Magnet School. Students are working on developing a food pantry in the school for the 2009-2010 school year to provide food for up to 20 students in need a month. The AAYHH group is also researching alternative housing options for Classical students with a long term goal of developing a shelter.

On Thursday, May 28th, the AAYHH group held its **1st Annual Box Out for Youth Homelessness & Hunger** to raise money for the food pantry and to raise awareness within the Classical community about youth homelessness and hunger. From Thursday, May 28th to Saturday, May 30th, eleven students and four adults slept in boxes outside of Classical Magnet School. The goal was to raise \$1,000 to begin the food pantry. The AAYHH enrichment planned the event, and people who participated in the **Box Out** were: Cassidy Capen, Priscilla Quinones, Michael Rush, Courtlandt Roberson, Diamond Dennis, Rahessa Malizia, Sheila Bertrand, Ashley Ramos, Natalie Bacon, Rebecca Webber, Brianna Thomas, Monica Brase, Mark Prelli, Patrick Bracken, and Kenneth Webber. AAYHH would like to thank those who donated food and time, including Mr. Holloway, Ms. Brase, Mr. Bracken, Mr. Prelli, Ms. Kennedy, Ms. Sadlack, Mr. Zea, Ms. Gotez, Ms. DuBow, Mr. Gallagher, Ms. Howard, Mrs. Brown-Follins, Jason Facey, Ms. L, Ms. Fidler, Ms. Avezzie, Ms. McGlamery, and Ms. Bulanda. The group would also like to thank all of the staff, students, and parents that donated money!

Thank you!

If you have any questions or comments about the project, please contact:
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AAYHH would like to give a special thanks to Mr. Sullivan who has supported us in this action to advocate for this important cause. He is truly an administrator with the students' best interests at heart.

