

AMERICA'S HOMELESS YOUTH

Recommendations to Congress on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

Summary Recommendation:

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs are essential to prevent exploitation of youth on the streets and to support reconnection to their families, schools, employment, and housing options.

America's homeless youth are denied shelter, housing, and support because communities lack the spectrum of programs needed for complete support. Prevent denied access to crisis services for homeless youth by appropriating \$140 million in FY2008 for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) programs.

Total Program Funding Remains Stagnant in Face of Need

YEAR	FY2002	FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006
Transitional Living	39,700	40,500	36,600	36,200	39,500
Basic Centers	48,200	49,400	44,400	43,800	48,300
Street Outreach	15,000	15,400	13,700	14,200	15,000
Total (in thousands)	\$103,023	\$104,202	\$104,733*	\$103,902*	\$102,864*

* Represents 1% across-the-board spending cuts.

Homelessness among American Youth is Widespread

The best studies available indicate that over 1 million youth are homeless each year in America. One national study in 1998 reviewed the 1992 National Health Interview Survey and determined that 5 percent of the youth population (more than a million) experienced homelessness each year. The most recent federal study supported by the U.S. Department of Justice (NISMART-2) estimates that 1.7 million youth under age 18 were homeless in 1999. Additionally, the Research Triangle Institute reported a significantly higher estimate of 2.8 million in 1995. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs serve approximately 523,300 youth in 2005. A 2006 report on homeless youth by the Congressional Research Service noted "grantees serve only a fraction of the more than one million youth who run away or are homeless."

Causes of Youth Homelessness

Youth report severe family conflict as a primary reason for becoming homeless. Volatile conditions within a family create an environment where the youth may experience physical violence, sexual abuse, chronic neglect, abandonment, chemical dependency, or mental health issues by their parents. Across studies of homeless youth, sexual abuse experiences range from 17 to 53 percent and physical abuse ranges from 40 to 60 percent. Youth may also become homeless when their families throw them out due to pregnancy, drug or alcohol use, sexual orientation, or school problems.

Youth homelessness also reflects the deficits in public systems of care such as child welfare, juvenile corrections, and child mental health systems. Many teenagers are turned away from child protection services with responses that their complaints of abuse or neglect do not warrant intervention or foster care services. At the end of 2005, over 11,000 children had fled a foster care placement and were not recovered. Each year, approximately 24,000 youth age out of foster care with little or no financial and housing resources. As a result, many experience episodic homelessness. Additionally, there is little attention paid to the housing needs of youth leaving juvenile correction placements.

Homeless Youth Are Turned Away

Of the over 1 million homeless youth in America, the Runaway and Homeless Youth programs served just over 600,000 in 2004. Over 6,800 youth were turned away and denied shelter and housing, and only one-third of homeless and runaway youth contacted through street outreach in 2004 had their needs met. Communities have the desire to serve homeless youth but often lack the necessary options of outreach, drop-in centers, shelters, and housing to intervene. Once homeless, many youth face survival on the streets, recruitment by gangs, exposure to drugs, and sexual exploitation by adults.

Homeless Youth Programs Cost Less

Homeless youth programs are cost effective alternatives to more expensive out-of-home placements like treatment facilities, group homes, foster care, juvenile corrections, custodial care, treatment, and/or arrests. The average cost of serving a youth in a transitional living project is \$8,810—less than half the minimum cost of serving youth through the child welfare or juvenile justice systems with average annual costs ranging from \$25,000 - \$55,000 per youth.

Congressional Action Request

The National Partnership to End Youth Homelessness encourages members of Congress to appropriate \$140 million to this vital program to meet the crisis needs of America's homeless youth. This recommendation would serve more homeless youth (over 7,000 with shelter and housing and nearly 200,000 with outreach and crisis intervention) and potentially alleviate future public expenditures for this population of vulnerable youth.

The National Partnership to End Youth Homelessness is a consortium of national organizations dedicated to the prevention, intervention, and elimination of youth homelessness.

Members include:

Child Welfare League of America, National League of Cities, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Foster Care Coalition, National Network for Youth, and Volunteers of America.

For more information on Appropriations for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Programs, please contact Richard Hooks Wayman at (202) 942-8257 or rhookswayman@naeh.org, or Bob Reeg at (202) 265-7271 or bob.reeg@verizon.net.