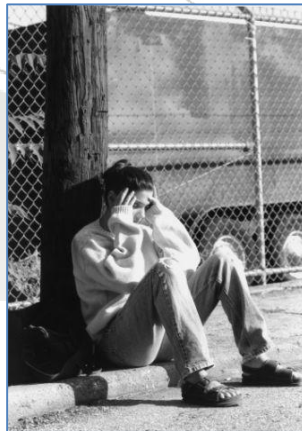


2009 Survey of Springfield's High Risk and Homeless Youth

February 24, 2010



Conducted by:

The Homeless Youth Subcommittee of Community Partnership's
Christian, Greene, and Webster Counties Continuum of Care



Preface

The Homeless Youth Subcommittee (HYS) was established by the Housing Collaborative in March of 1999 to delve into the issue of high risk and homeless youths in Springfield, MO. This grassroots committee was born as a direct response to increasing numbers of runaway, homeless and disconnected youths observed in the downtown area, causing serious concern for business owners, patrons, law enforcement, youth advocates, and the community at large.

During the following months, the HYS identified a frightening gap in services for 17 year old youths. The HYS pursued a progressive strategy to fill the gap and partnered with high risk and homeless youths, as probable service consumers, to inform research and development efforts. The HYS essentially asked youths "What do you need? How would you like it provided? What will make this effort successful?" The HYS then went on to build it with youths under the organizational sponsorship of The Kitchen, Inc. As envisioned by youths, the Rare Breed Youth Outreach Center subsequently opened its doors, in June 2000.

A decade later, the original vision is alive and well. Downtown has experienced resurgence and "missing persons, juvenile" (runaway) police calls are at their lowest level since 1997. Rare Breed Youth Services has attracted nearly 5,500 youths to the outreach center, housed nearly 600 youths in emergency and transitional housing added in 2002 and recently initiated the Safe Place Springfield program providing immediate safety to youths in crisis and enhancing the outreach of local high risk and homeless youth services.

The HYS reconvened in 2006 to develop a needed youth emergency shelter for Springfield, but shortly thereafter, Boys & Girls Town of Missouri received a grant to establish the Empowering Youth emergency shelter for non-system youths. Empowering Youth is a primary service partner in Safe Place Springfield and has sheltered 135 youths ages 10-18 in the last 3 years.

With non-system youth emergency shelter secured, the HYS began gathering formal data about the characteristics and needs of local high risk and homeless youths to inform service development efforts and to provide the foundation for assertive community education and advocacy, resulting in the 2007 High Risk and Homeless Youth Survey and the 2008 Homeless Youth Point in Time Count. Despite the work of the HYS, the breadth and capacity of services for high risk and homeless youths has been shown to be insufficient in the face of record numbers of youth service requests, which spiked in the fall of 2008 and have remained high.

The HYS would like to acknowledge and thank all youth respondents and organizations assisting with the 2009 High Risk and Homeless Youth Survey. This project was completed at virtually no cost and it was conceptualized in the HYS tradition of youth involvement and with the firm belief that youths are uniquely qualified to successfully inform service development efforts, to be effective self advocates and to achieve the unexpected, when provided with sufficient opportunities, vehicles and caring adult partners.

*Todd Duncan
Chairperson, Homeless Youth Subcommittee*

Executive Summary

The Homeless Youth Subcommittee surveyed 456 high risk and homeless youths ages 11 through 22 in Springfield, MO during a 5 week period in 2009. Youths were surveyed at 20 different educational and service sites to elicit information from local HRHY about personal characteristics, past experiences, and current needs.

The results reveal 186 youths have been homeless before. Of these, 134 were experiencing or had experienced homelessness without their family. Between 75%-80% of youths experienced their first episode of homelessness alone at less than 18 years of age. The average age of first homelessness alone was 15 years.

Local youths experiencing homelessness with their families were also likely to experience homelessness alone. Of 86 total youths reporting homelessness with family, 48 also reported being homeless alone, meaning 56% of youth respondents, who experienced homelessness with their families, were also homeless alone.

The following report outlines needs identified by the youth in order to escape a life on the streets. The top needs identified by the youth include:

Education

Transportation

Clothing

How to Get a Job

Food

Health Care

Housing

Dental

Support Keeping a Job

Life Skills

Surveyed youths also overwhelmingly desire a youth oriented multiservice center and a transitional housing program for pregnant and parenting youths

Youth homelessness is a critical issue in need of attention, but it is also more of a symptom of a problem than it is a problem itself. Youth homelessness at its root is primarily a symptom of poverty with exacerbating factors, such as unhealthy or ineffective individual, family and system functioning. The issue of youth homelessness could be addressed much better if more institutions were working in significant collaboration to marshal resources for addressing issues that can only be addressed adequately through such collaboration.

Primary recommendations include: Bolster homeless youth prevention and early intervention while also strengthening existing outreach, emergency shelter and long term housing for youth

For full report visit: <http://www.commpartnership.org/pdfs/2009-homeless-youth.pdf>

High Risk and Homeless Youth Survey

Basic Findings

- School dropout rate is 29%, five times higher than local average
- 58 youths or their significant other were pregnant
- 70 youths were parents of over 100 total children
- 76% were not employed
- 259 youths (57%) were involved with child protection, juvenile authorities, state-run youth corrections or adult probation and parole systems
- 181 had runaway, triple the national average, with 78 running three or more times



- 182 youths had a diagnosed mental illness
- 108 youths self mutilated in three months prior to survey with 56% of them still in school
- More than 1 in 6 (76 total) contemplated suicide in the 3 months preceding survey

High Risk and Homeless Youth Survey

Basic Findings

- Over 450 high risk and homeless youths ages 11-22 were surveyed at 20 locations
- 186 youths have experienced homelessness with family or alone
- 56% of youths homeless with family also reported being homeless alone (48 of 86)



- 134 youths have been homeless alone
- 75%-80% were first homeless alone at age 17 or younger
- Average age of first homelessness alone was 15 years old
- Half were “kicked out” at 15.2 years old
- 44% youths currently seeking housing were ages 12-17 (67 of 154)
- An estimated 950 to 1450 Greene County youths ages 12-17 were homeless at least one night in the past 12 months

Risk Factors for Youth Homelessness

Severe and Persistent Family Conflict	Poverty or Socioeconomic Difficulty
Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Neglect	Separation from Parent or Caregiver
Parental Substance Abuse	Running Away
Aging Out of Systems of Care	Mental Health and Addiction Issues

National Network for Youth Fast Facts

Prevalence

Approximately 1.6 million youths (7 %) ages 12 to 17 had run away from home and slept on the street in the past 12 months. (SAMHSA Office of Applied Studies, 2004)

Demographics

The average age of first homeless episode is 14.7 years. (YouthCare, Inc., 1998)

Available research suggests that between 20% to 40% of all homeless youth identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT). (Ray, 2006)

Abuse

It is reported that 21% to 40% of runaway youth had been sexually abused, compared to between 1% and 3% of the general youth population. (American Civil Liberties Union, 2003)

The most common endangerment component for runaway and throwaway youth was physical or sexual abuse at home in the year prior to the episode or being afraid of abuse upon return. (Hammer, Finklehor, & Sedlak, 2002)

46% of runaway and homeless youth reported being physically abused, 17% reported being sexually exploited and 38% reported being emotionally abused. (Slavin, 2001)

Over 50% of youth in shelters and on the streets report that their parents told them to leave or knew they were leaving and did not care. (Greene J., Ringwalt, Kelly, Iachan, & Cohen, 1995)

Results indicated that 51% left home because of being thrown out, 37% left because of their parents disapproval of their drug use, and 31% left home because of parental abuse. Nearly 47% indicated that they were sexually abused, with females reporting significantly higher rates than males. (Rew, Taylorfer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001)

National Network for Youth Fast Facts (continued)

Mental Health

Mental health problems in the past year were reported by 45% of homeless youth. Between 50% to 56% of youth reported mental health problems over their lifetime. (Burt M. R., 2007, June 19)

A significant portion of homeless and runaway youth participating in programs exhibit characteristics which are predictors of delinquent behavior, adult homelessness, addiction behaviors, and mental illness. In addition, they are subjected to cultures of violence in their families and on the streets. (Simkin, P., 2004)



Sexual Exploitation Experiences

Runaway and homeless youth experience rape and assault rates 2 to 3 times higher than the general population of youth. (Robertson & Toro, 1998)

More than one third of homeless youth engage in survival sex. (Ray, 2006)

162,000 homeless youth are estimated to be victims of commercial sexual exploitation in the United States. (Estes & Weiner, 2001)





Community Partnership's Homeless Youth Subcommittee would like to thank the following agencies and organizations who contributed to the successful completion of this report through creation, coordination, or distribution of the survey.

Adolescent Substance Abuse Program (CSTAR)

Bailey Alternative High School (a Springfield Public School)

Boys & Girls Clubs of Springfield

Boys & Girls Town of Missouri - Empowering Youth

Burrell Behavior Health Homeless Services at Bill's Place

Children's Division - Missouri Department of Social Services

Excel School - Division of Youth Services

GALAGXY Youth Group - Gay and Lesbian Community Center of the Ozarks

Good Samaritan Boys Ranch - Footsteps Transitional Living Program

Greene County Juvenile Office

Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri

Missouri State University Missouri Mentoring Partnership

OACAC Greene County Neighborhood Center

Ozarks Technical Community College - Adult Education & Literacy

Pregnancy Care Center

Salvation Army Springfield, Missouri Corps

Sigma House Recovery Center

Solutions Alternative Program of Springfield Public Schools

The Kitchen's Rare Breed Youth Outreach Center