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# Homeless Young People in Baltimore:

A Parallel Count Accompanying  
the 2009 Homeless Census

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On January 22, 2009, the Center for Adolescent Health (CAH) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Baltimore Homeless Youth Initiative (BHYI) undertook a parallel count of homeless youth to the Baltimore Homeless Census conducted jointly by Baltimore Homeless Services and Morgan State University. Seven community agencies and organizations provided data on the homeless youth they served on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. From these sources we identified **781** young people (ages 10-24) in Baltimore City who were homeless or unstably housed. Of these, **426** were unaccompanied by parents or guardians. In 2007, a similar parallel count was carried out and CAH counted **272** homeless and unstably housed young people.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

In February of 2008, the Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute (UHI) made a grant to the Baltimore Homeless Youth Initiative (BHYI) and the Johns Hopkins Center for Adolescent Health (CAH) to complete a service-based, point-in-time count of homeless youth in conjunction with the 2009 Census of Homeless conducted by Baltimore Homeless Services (BHS).

The UHI is "...a collaboration and a vital connection with East Baltimore. The Institute is the starting point for forging true university and community partnerships in health care, education and community planning, with all partners working to change the trajectory for the children, youth and families of East Baltimore. As it seeks to build a "learning community," the Institute draws on the expertise of neighborhood residents, educators, philanthropic organizations, elected representatives and community leaders, in addition to the wealth of intellectual resources that Hopkins can offer."<sup>1</sup>

The BHYI ".....was created in response to a need for a comprehensive continuum of housing, resources, services and care for Baltimore's homeless and unstably housed youth and young adults between the ages of 14-24. While Baltimore has many valuable

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jhsph.edu/urbanhealth/>



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resources for the homeless, there are significant gaps, especially for older youth. Very few services are available for youth under 18 and most facilities and programs are not designed to be developmentally appropriate for youth ages 16-24. They do not have the capacity to provide significant supplementary service and there are few coordinated linkages among the services to this population.....The goal....is to increase the sustainability and capacity of.... the community to serve homeless youth.”<sup>2</sup>

The CAH is “....one of 33 Prevention Research Centers supported by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. We are committed to assisting urban youth in becoming healthy and productive adults. Together with community partners, the Center conducts research that identifies the needs and strengths of young people and tests programs designed to promote the health and well-being of young people.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***Definition of Homelessness***

Our definition of homelessness was broad and included:

- young people who were in state foster care or juvenile justice custody, but have left the system without placement
- young people who are living on the street, in shelters and in transitional housing
- "unstably-housed youth" who are couch-surfing—staying temporarily with friends, extended kin networks, or lovers

We were particularly interested in acquiring data on *unaccompanied* young people, that is, young people who were not with an adult parent or guardian who is responsible for their well-being. Unfortunately, it is difficult for service providers to know whether or not a young person is unaccompanied. Those agencies and reporters who could make this determination were instructed to exclude young people who were homeless as part of a family group. The numbers seen in the Results section of this report are organized to reflect knowledge of whether or not we know the young person is accompanied.

We included unstably housed young people in the parallel count because they are likely to be in housing situations that are either exploitative (such as the exchange of sex or illegal activities for shelter) or tenuous and unsustainable (adult lacks the resources to make a long-term commitment). These young people lack the skills to legitimately support themselves and are not connected with an adult willing and/or able to make a long-term commitment to supporting and encouraging them to make a successful transition to adulthood.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.manynet.org/strategicinitiatives/baltimorehomelessyouthinitiative.aspx](http://www.manynet.org/strategicinitiatives/baltimorehomelessyouthinitiative.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.jhsph.edu/adolescenthealth/>



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## PREPARATORY WORK

### *Meetings with BHS*

Nan Astone from the CAH attended five meetings with BHS staff, most of which were also attended by people from Morgan State University with whom BHS contracted to conduct the BHS 2009 Census of Homeless People. These meetings included planning for the Census.

Two decisions were taken over the course of these meetings that are relevant:

- The full group decided on the use of the same unique, but non-identifying number for each person counted to help identify people who are double counted within either of the two counts (i.e., the BHS Census of Homeless or the Parallel Count).
- January 22, 2009 was determined as the date of the count.

### *Institutional Review Board Approval*

Astone applied for and received approval from the Johns Hopkins Institutional Review Board to conduct the Parallel Count.

### *Recruitment of Participants in the Parallel Count*

During August, September and October of 2008, Aleya Lyn from the CAH identified a list of potential social service agencies that might serve young people and participate in the Parallel Count.

Astone attended a meeting of the BHYI Steering Committee on September 25, 2008 to inform BHYI about progress (setting of the date and other info from coordination with BHS). In November, Lyn attended a regular meeting of BHYI to inform and recruit participants.

In early January, Ross Pologe from the BHYI, as well as Lyn and Astone, went through the list of service providers, as well as the sign-up sheet from the BHYI meeting. They identified the agencies in **Table 1** as potential candidates to record the homeless youth they served on the day of the count. **Table 1** is organized into categories depending on the disposition of their final participation.

In addition to asking youth-serving organizations to keep track of the young people they served on January 22, 2009, we asked the Baltimore City Public Schools to provide data on young people between the ages of 10 and 24 who they knew to be homeless on January 22, 2009.



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Forms were distributed the week of January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 to all agencies agreeing to participate in the Parallel Count. An email went out the day before to remind everyone who agreed to participate to keep track of the young people they served. In addition, Astone made an appeal at the BHYI meeting two days before the count took place.

The CAH worked with BHS to develop publicity about the count and Center staff, as well as Astone, was on hand at BHS's command center to speak to the press.

## METHODS

### *Provision of Data*

In the two or three days following the day of the census, the participating agencies returned the forms to Astone or Lyn. In almost every case, the forms that were filled out by hand were scanned and returned by email.

In one particularly noteworthy circumstance, the Rose Street Community Center that works with homeless and unstably housed youth and young adults in an East Baltimore community had attracted approximately 45 young men to the center on the day of the count. Allegedly, four Eastern Police District cars rolled up to the center to serve warrants, ostensibly in response to the spike in violence in the district and to enforce tougher enforcement strategies. Subsequently, it seems some of the warrants were for daytime curfew violations, not violent activities. As a result of the police presence, all of the young men left the scene and no counting was conducted. The incident highlights the need to coordinate such efforts with law enforcement agencies.

In early February, the Baltimore City Public Schools provided an Excel file, extracted from their own database, which gave most of the required information on homeless young people identified by the school system.



**Table 1. Agencies invited to participate**

***Agencies that participated***

Health Care for the Homeless

Rose Street

St. Ambrose Family Outreach Center

Learning Inc

DSS

Manna House

AIRS

YO Center (East)

***Agencies that stated they did not serve people of this age***

Helping-Up Mission

House of Ruth

My Sister's Place

Paul's Place, Inc.

Project P.L.A.S.E

Mercy Children's Health Outreach Project

***Agencies that did not have staff to do the count***

Legal Aid Bureau, Inc

***Agencies that did not return phone calls***

You are Never Alone (YANA) Inc.

Center for Urban Families STRIVE

I Can Inc.



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In late February, Jean Lewis of the Mayor's Office provided an Excel file with most of the required information on those systems young people for whom there was an outstanding warrant—either for criminal behavior or missing children.

### ***Data Processing***

Two interns identified by BHYI and supervised by Lyn entered the data into two laptop computers dedicated to that purpose. The data was entered into Excel. The interns worked to transform the data appropriately. For example, originally the initials and month/year of birth were entered as separate fields (since the form collected it as such). The interns created a new field that was a continuous unique identifier.

One of the first actions of the interns was to check for duplicates within our count. Some were discovered, and the tabulations in the Results section have eliminated all duplicates.

The plan was to cross-check the unique identifiers with the BHS Census of Homeless Housing, but this proved to be impossible because Morgan State University, who tabulated the data for BHS, did not acquire the unique identifier for the sheltered population. A representative of Morgan State asserted that no one in the unsheltered count was under 24, although this assertion is questionable since the final BHS report states that 20 people between the ages of 19 and 25 were included in the unsheltered count.

Therefore, we cannot determine how many of the young people in our count were also counted in the regular Census of Homeless. This is unfortunate, because we based our count on the premise that the regular homeless Census does not adequately count youth, and we cannot prove this without question.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Summary***

- ✓ From these sources we identified **781** young people (ages 10-24) in Baltimore City who were homeless or unstably housed;
- ✓ Of these, **426** were definitely unaccompanied by parents or guardians;
- ✓ The majority of youth in the parallel survey were **15-18 years old** (55%);
- ✓ Just over **60%** of the young people were male;



- ✓ The overwhelming majority were unstably housed (including systems youth); and
- ✓ Half of the young people were identified as systems youth, either so defined by the reporting agency, or the focus of an outstanding warrant.

**Detailed Tables**

<b>Table 2. Gender Distribution</b>			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Unaccompanied</b>	<b>Over 13</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Male</b>	61.8	70.4	66.8
<b>n</b>	<b>781</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>578</b>

<b>Table 3. Age Distribution</b>			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Unaccompanied</b>	<b>Over 13</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>10</b>	6.0		
<b>11</b>	9.7		
<b>12</b>	4.5		
<b>13</b>	5.6	0.7	
<b>14</b>	6.9	1.9	9.3
<b>15</b>	9.5	8.5	12.8
<b>16</b>	12.8	4.8	17.3
<b>17</b>	17.8	27.5	24.0
<b>18</b>	14.5	24.2	19.5
<b>19</b>	6.5	11.5	8.8
<b>20</b>	2.7	4.7	3.6
<b>21</b>	1.8	3.3	2.4
<b>22</b>	0.9	1.6	1.2
<b>23</b>	0.5	0.9	0.7
<b>24</b>	0.1	0.2	0.2
<b>26</b>	0.1	0.2	0.2
<b>n</b>	<b>781</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>578</b>



<b>Table 4. Source of Data Distribution</b>			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Unaccompanied</b>	<b>Over 13</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Baltimore City Public Schools</b>	45.5		26.9
<b>Outstanding Warrants</b>	49.4	90.6	66.2
<b>Learning Inc.</b>	0.5	0.9	0.7
<b>AIRS</b>	3.3	6.1	4.5
<b>Health Care for the Homeless</b>	0.4	0.7	0.5
<b>Manna House</b>	0.3	0.5	0.4
<b>DSS</b>	0.6	1.2	0.9
<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>781</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>578</b>

### LIMITATIONS

Two limitations stem from the methodology used, a point-in-time, service-based enumeration. This does not capture all of the young people who did not access services and only counts the people who met our definition on the day of the count. This methodology does not, for example, include a street count.

Many of the groups affiliated with BHYI did not join in the Parallel Count. Agencies that could have participated include Connect to Protect, the Baltimore Gay and Lesbian Community Center, the Harriet Lane Clinic, Jewish Community Services Teen Drop-in Center, King Edwards Independent Living Program, Martin Pollack Project, Northwest Baltimore Youth Services, Power Inside, Second Home, Service Coordination, Sisters Together and Rising, Turnaround, The Baltimore Urban League, the YOUR Store, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and People Encouraging People.

Also, other agencies that could have taken part did not return phone calls or have the staff to do this.

Another limitation is that without BHS getting unique identifiers, it is impossible to determine the overlap between the Census of Homeless and the Parallel Count.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The BHYI, in collaboration with the CAH, should repeat the youth count in January, 2010.
- The BHYI should consider alternative methodologies; in particular, a more accurate count may be attained by doing a service-based, point-in-time estimation several times over the course of a month and estimate the homeless youth population by applying the capture-recapture methodology to this series of count.
- CAH would encourage using the capture-recapture method, but this would require significant funding and close coordination with participating agencies.
- The BHYI should consider expanding beyond a service-based enumeration to a method that includes a street count.
- All organizations of the BHYI should be recruited to participate.