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Issues Brief



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UNCOUNTED AND DISCOUNTED

HOMELESS YOUTH: PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING THIS HIDDEN PROBLEM IN BALTIMORE

The common thread is disconnection among homeless and unstably housed youth. These youth have fallen off the normal path to adulthood, some further than others.

Their needs vary—some may require a doctor's care, a hot shower, a warm coat; others may want help finding a job, staying in school, or simply to talk to an understanding adult. They all share a desperate need for refuge, a safe place away from danger.

The reasons why they are homeless are as diverse as their complex needs. Youth become homeless because of family breakdowns, because they are abandoned by parents or guardians, because they must flee from abusive situations at home, and because of poverty, unemployment, mental health issues, and substance abuse.

Solutions that may work for younger children and adults who are homeless do

not work for this age group. Most homeless youth want help, but they just do not know how to take steps toward a normal life with the limited resources available to them.

Many services are difficult or impossible to access without a parent's signature, proper identification, or a medical insurance card. Other programs have long waiting lists, which pose challenges for youths moving around each night or every couple days.

Homeless youth are distrustful of adults, social service agencies, and the foster care and juvenile justice systems.

They have been let down—a lot.

Policymakers, service providers, and all people who care about youth need to learn more about the risks to which this vulnerable population is exposed, and the barriers they face getting help.

This issues brief will examine the characteristics of Baltimore's homeless youth, describe the unique risks they face, specify services currently available to them, present effective local and national models, and review the policies and systems already in place that can shepherd these youth into productive adulthood.

THE MANY FACES OF HOMELESS YOUTH

RUNAWAYS: Left their homes voluntarily

THROWAWAYS: Thrown out of their homes

STREET YOUTH: Live on the streets or in shelters for short periods of time

DISPLACED YOUTH (sometimes called "**COUCH SURFERS**" or "**DOUBLED UP**"): Staying temporarily with friends, lovers, or other family members

SYSTEMS YOUTH: Removed from their homes and are in juvenile justice or foster care

DOUBLY HOMELESS YOUTH: Run away from foster care or other placement

THE UNLINED FACE OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Adolescence is typically a time of budding independence. For Baltimore's homeless and displaced youth, this independence is chronic and involuntary. It is a hidden problem, with most youth dwelling under the radar. As a result, we do not even know how many there are.

As many as 1.7 million American youth run away from home or are homeless every year, which translates into 5 to 7.7 percent of young people experiencing

homelessness annually.¹ Youth ages 18-24 make up 12 percent of the homeless population and are its fastest growing segment. They may also be more at risk than other homeless people.²

Some of these youth fall under the classic definition of "homeless," living in shelters and on the streets. Some are what we call "unstably-housed youth," which could involve temporarily staying with a friend or extended family member. Bouncing from one address to another means these unstably housed or displaced youth are less likely to use services traditionally

available to the transient population—services such as soup kitchens and food banks, short and long-term shelter, legal advice, health care, job training, and classes in life skills to get them off the streets and back into society.

Current estimates of the number of homeless and displaced youth locally are varied. According to the 2005 Baltimore City Homeless Census, 2,943 individuals are homeless in Baltimore City, and 294 (10%) are under the age of 18. Some of these minors are homeless with their families, while others—current estimates

are unclear on the numbers—are on the streets alone. Another 382 (13%) are between the ages of 18 and 30.³ According to the Baltimore City public school system, roughly 2,289 students are homeless or displaced.⁴

Estimates from schools only capture those youth who are in school or have recently passed through the school district and reported their residential status. Given the high school dropout rates for youth in Baltimore City (up to 72% for African American young men), this count underestimates the magnitude of residential instability and homelessness facing the youth of Baltimore City.

The Homeless Census is a count and survey taken every other year at places where homeless people congregate on a single day. The census captures only those young people who appear at the shelters or access other services (such as soup kitchens) where they conduct their surveys and counts. The fact that displaced youth do not necessarily fall within the strict definition of homelessness makes it even more likely they will not be included in counts.



WHY CAN'T WE GET AN ACCURATE COUNT?

It is relatively easy to count homeless youth who frequent shelters and soup kitchens or systems youth who are counted by the child welfare or juvenile justice systems; but it is more difficult to pinpoint numbers for displaced youth, since they move from one locale to another and prefer to remain an invisible population.

The scarce information is in itself an indicator of the challenges we face to address the mental and physical problems dogging homeless and displaced youth. The less we know about any population, the more likely it is that they are difficult to reach and are often not accessing existing services.

THE TOP CAUSES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

There are many reasons why a youth may become homeless. Often, it is a combination of factors, such as severe family conflict, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, a mental illness, learning disability, or emotional issues;^{11, 12} the actions or residential status of parents and other adults responsible for caring for the child; and larger social issues, such as a lack of affordable housing, inadequate capacity in the child welfare system, racism, and poverty.

Rarely does a singular factor lead to youth homelessness.

Youth homelessness is usually not caused by personal economic crisis as it is for many homeless adults. However, with the rising cost of housing, many young adults face insufficient income to maintain housing, especially those who have been in foster care or otherwise have little financial support from adults.

An inadequate child welfare system is another factor. Studies of homeless youth reveal that rates of sexual abuse ranged from 17-35 percent and physical abuse from 40-60 percent.^{13, 14} Rates of foster care placements ranged from 21 percent to 53 percent.¹⁵

A series of transitions between foster homes may add to the trauma of being abused and of being separated from parents. When the child becomes an adolescent, this trauma is often acted out by running away and defiance or aggressiveness toward foster parents and other adults in authority. It becomes more difficult to find a placement for the youth and he or she eventually becomes homeless. Children involved in the juvenile justice system face even greater challenges in finding placement.

MOST RECENT EVIDENCE ABOUT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS NATIONWIDE

- ❖ In 1999, an estimated 1,682,900 children ran away from home.⁵
- ❖ In 1999, 150,700 youth were arrested for running away from home. The majority of young people arrested for running away are females (59%).⁶
- ❖ In 2003, Runaway & Homeless Youth Act programs served over 619,000 youth through Street Outreach, 77,882 youth through the Basic Center Program, and 4,312 youth through the Transitional Living Program.⁷
- ❖ In one study, 38% of runaway and homeless youth reported emotional abuse by a parent figure.⁸
- ❖ In another study, 46% had been physically abused and 17% had been forced into unwanted sexual activity by a family or household member.⁹
- ❖ Yet another study found 25% of youth exiting foster care were homeless one or more nights during the first year after leaving care.¹⁰

BY THE NUMBERS

- ❖ 5,000 die each year as a result of assault, illness, or suicide^a
- ❖ 40 to 60% experience physical abuse^b
- ❖ 17% forced into unwanted sexual activity by someone in their household^c
- ❖ Chronic health problems—asthma, lung conditions, high blood pressure, tuberculosis, diabetes, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS—are prevalent among homeless youth enter prostitution^d

(SOURCE: WWW.WINDYOUTH.ORG)
^A NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY. (2004). *LEGAL TOOLS TO END HOMELESSNESS* (P. 3). WASHINGTON, DC: NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY.
^B HEALTHCARE FOR THE HOMELESS CLINICIAN'S NETWORK. (2000, FEBRUARY). *PROTECTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH. HEALING HANDS*, 4(1).
^C WESTAT, INC. (1997). *NATIONAL EVALUATION OF RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH*. WASHINGTON, DC: U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, ADMINISTRATION ON CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES.
^D WILDER RESEARCH CENTER. (2005, FEBRUARY). *HOMELESS YOUTH IN MINNESOTA 2003. STATEWIDE SURVEY OF PEOPLE WITHOUT PERMANENT SHELTER* (P. 27). ST. PAUL, MN: WILDER RESEARCH CENTER.

WHY DON'T THEY JUST GO TO A SHELTER?

Baltimore has few services exclusively targeting homeless youth. There are no services explicitly geared toward displaced youth. Although systems and services are available for at-risk youth in Baltimore City, anecdotal evidence suggests homeless and displaced youth are not accessing them—and little is known as to why these youth are so reluctant to get help. It is possible youth are fearful of being trapped in systems that threaten their autonomy and sense of freedom.

A range of services are available to homeless individuals in Baltimore City. These include health services (substance abuse counseling, mental health counseling, meals, reproductive health education and testing, HIV and STD counseling and treatment, dental services), legal services (assistance for homeless and prevention of homelessness, eviction prevention, CINA—Child In Need of Assistance—legal advocacy), emergency shelter services (overnight and emergency shelter), and transitional housing (ranging from one month to 24 months).

Only one organization, Fellowship of Lights, offers homeless services designed especially for youth ages 12-18. Some youth have said they do not feel safe at an adult shelter and would often choose to spend the night on the street or “doubled up” instead. Although many youth view shelters as safe and adequate living situations, they may also leave these facilities based on distaste for shelter rules.

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT SYSTEMS AND PROGRAMS

Some existing programs and services may not adequately suit the needs of homeless and displaced youth.

The child welfare system

The first line of defense against youth homelessness is the child welfare system, or foster care. This system is a safety net

designed to buffer and protect children. Children who experience challenges within their family, including homelessness, are often placed in foster care.

Homeless children are at particularly high risk for being placed in foster care, 12 percent compared to just over 1 percent of other children. The National Center on Family Homelessness has identified placement in foster care as one of only two childhood risk factors that predicts family homelessness during adulthood.¹⁶

Approximately 11,000 children in Maryland are in out-of-home placements due to abuse, neglect, or because their parents are unable to take care of them. The majority of these children live in Baltimore City. Once placed in foster care, many youth in Baltimore do not remain in placement, but rather run away from foster homes they find intolerable, because of abuse, neglect or other conditions. On any given day, more than 100 youth are missing from the foster care system.

Discharge planning

While Maryland has a mandate to provide services to youth transitioning out of the foster care or juvenile justice systems, programs vary greatly from county to county, leaving many teens to fend for themselves.

Young people exiting jail, foster care, or a psychiatric facility often lack follow-up on their discharge plan that includes independent housing, medical care, employment, and learning independent living skills. During the time of institutionalization, prior housing arrangements and support networks might have been lost or put at risk. One prevention approach is to enhance discharge planning from institutions that serve teens at high-risk of homelessness.

For many foster teens, services such as housing, education, and health care are cut off the day they turn 18—when they emancipate, or “age out” of foster care. With few exceptions, most youth will age out or exit from foster care no later than

HEAR THEIR STORIES: MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF HOMELESS YOUTH

- ❖ Roderick Wolfe, a football star at Morgan State University, found himself homeless and living out of his car in Baltimore City after the death of his parents from AIDS complications. You can read his story of homelessness, survival and success against all odds in the *Baltimore Sun* article “Homeless No More”— www.baltimoresun.com/sports/bal-te.sp.wolfe14sep14,0,7420496.story
- ❖ Read about Iven and Gary, two real-life homeless youth living in Baltimore City, in the four-part *Baltimore Sun* series “On Their Own”— www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/bal-te.own09oct09,1,2049989.story?coll=bal-home-headlines
- ❖ Baltimore author Laura Lippman's ninth novel, “No Good Deeds” (Harper, 2007, 383 pp., \$7.95) is a murder mystery centering on Lloyd, a homeless teenager and witness to a crime. The book gives a compelling glimpse into the day-to-day lives of Lloyd and other homeless children surviving in East Baltimore, the soup kitchens and food banks they frequent, and a harrowing view of the underside of society where life is sometimes cheap.
- ❖ Liz Murray became homeless in New York City at age 15, when her mother died and her father moved to a homeless shelter. Her life turned around when she began attending the Humanities Preparatory School in Greenwich Village. Although without a stable home, Murray graduated in only two years and was awarded a *New York Times* scholarship for needy students and accepted into Harvard in 2000. Her story became a 2003 Emmy-nominated movie for the Lifetime cable network, “Homeless to Harvard” (<http://www.lifetime.com/on-tv/movies/homeless-harvard-liz-murray-story>).
- ❖ Two young adult novels offer vivid portrayals of teen homelessness. In “Tyrell” by Coe Booth, (Push, 2007, 320 pp., \$7.99), 15-year-old Tyrell has been forced into homelessness, living in a roach-infested shelter with his numbed out mother and needy young brother. Despite myriad pressures, Tyrell is determined to stay clean as he agonizes over creating a new life for his family. Todd Strasser's “Can't Get There from Here” (Simon Pulse, 2005, 198 pp., \$5.99) depicts a surrogate family of homeless teens living on the streets of New York City and lets young readers know exactly what it is like to live without shelter, huddling in nests of rags, newspapers, and plastic bags.
- ❖ Jim Goldberg's “Raised by Wolves” (Scalo, 1995, 315 pp., \$45) is a large-format photography book depicting homeless and throwaway youth in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Goldberg spent months on the street photographing and interviewing his adolescent subjects, as well as social workers and police, painting a stark picture of American street life and the adversarial institutional culture surrounding it.

their 21st birthday. Many youth exiting foster care spend at least some period of time living in perilous circumstances. Large numbers of former foster youth are poorly educated, unemployed, and/or homeless.^{17, 18, 19}

Although systems are in place for transitioning out of juvenile justice, recent evidence regarding prisoner re-entry suggests that youth exiting jail facilities are at risk for homelessness.²⁰

Senate Bill 767, enacted in 2004, requires that all youth, upon discharge from a Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) residential program, have a step-down aftercare plan. Aftercare services are designed to provide a range of support to ease the youth's re-entry into his or her community and decrease the number of repeat juvenile offenders. An Individualized Service Plan is developed for youth assessed as high risk/needs. Under this plan, DJS assigns a juvenile counselor and teams of social workers, family intervention specialists, and mental health professionals to counsel youth, provide interventions, address family functioning, and serve as referral sources for family members.²¹

However, what youth experience within these institutions impacts how they will—or even if they will—tap into services upon discharge. A U.S. Department of Justice investigation found the constitutional rights of institutionalized juveniles in Maryland facilities were being systematically violated with practices such as staff-on-youth violence, abusive restraint, excessive use of disciplinary procedures, denial to bathrooms, inadequate assessment of suicide risk, and lack of access to needed health, mental health, and educational services.²²

Transitional Living Programs

Long-term housing with independent-living services is needed for at-risk youth's successful transition into productive adulthood. Most services for youth and young adults are crisis-oriented, providing emergency or short-term shelter relief. Intensive support to develop independent

living skills education, vocational training, and financial management is necessary.

A national evaluation of the Transitional Living Program (TLP) for homeless youth (based on a quasi-experimental design implemented in 10 sites with 175 homeless youth, most ages 18 to 21) found some positive program effects over a 6-month follow-up period, including better education outcomes like high school graduation and job placement and retention.²³

Integrated systems and centralized resources

Many databases are unable to “speak” to one another, which makes communication and information exchange between agencies and service providers difficult. Integrated systems and centralized resources allow service providers to document many outcomes and risk factors for homelessness.

One example of successful integration of both preventive services and homeless services is the Montgomery County Department of Health and Homeless Services (Montgomery County, MD).²⁴

The Montgomery County system collects data on recipients of emergency assistance and services using three different automated systems. These databases can be merged to document several outcomes and identify youth who are at-risk for homelessness to provide resources that may prevent homelessness, such as referrals to shelter care or independent living programs.

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Programs and services catering to homeless and unstably housed youth can be found all across the country. They are distinctive for their holistic and comprehensive approaches, for including youth in planning and development, for their goal of integrating systems, for the systematic collection of data, and for diversified funding streams.

Local policies in the city of Baltimore have been responsive to the needs of the homeless population as a whole, but have yet to craft a large-scale plan for homeless or unstably housed youth.

Without these opportunities, the youth become disenfranchised and disengaged. Innovative strategies in research, service delivery, and policy are necessary to reach this population.

Targeting systems youth. The First Place Fund for Youth (Oakland, CA)²⁵ targets 16-23 year olds preparing to age out of foster care or recently aged out of care. First Place serves more than 500 youth with programs such as therapeutic case management, emancipation planning, housing search assistance, emergency food vouchers, emergency utility assistance, computers, recreational activities, and educational resources. A supported housing program provides safe, affordable housing to 86 youth and 32 children annually.

When comparing First Place youth with the general population of former foster youth 12 to 18 months after discharge from foster care, First Place youth are four times less likely to be homeless.

Emphasizing youth involvement. Founded by 10 dedicated emancipating/emancipated foster youth ranging in age from 15-21, the Napa Valley, California-based VOICES (Voice Our Independent Choices for Emancipation Support) is the first known youth-led center.²⁶ Projects include an art program, Community Service Project, Law Center, Life Planning and Coaching, Smoking Cessation, Supportive Housing, Youth Employment, and Youth-led Trainings for system professionals.

Another example of youth involvement is at Denver, Colorado's Urban Peak.²⁷ Urban Peak found they were only reaching a certain subset of homeless youth, so they partnered with The Spot, an evening drop-in center created in 1994 by gang members, homeless youth, and graffiti artists. Merging with this longstanding drop-in center allowed Urban Peak to expand services and begin to reach out to a more diverse street culture.

Offering transitional housing programs.

Schafer Young Adult Initiative in East Harlem, New York offers permanent supportive housing for young adults (18-23 years old) who have aged out of foster care. Youth residents are provided with case management, education, employment assistance, mental health, and substance abuse counseling and referrals. Through a federal program, residents also receive tenant-based Section 8 vouchers enabling them to pay only 30 percent of their income towards rent. The program has no time-limits.²⁸

Covenant House International²⁹ is the largest privately-funded agency in the Americas providing shelter and other services to homeless, runaway, and throw-away youth. With facilities in 21 cities, Covenant House provided residential and non-residential services to more than 60,000 youth in 2006. Covenant House's transitional living programs also offer case management, education, and vocational services.

A special component to Covenant's transitional model is the Mother/Child program designed to assist young mothers and their children. The program offers long-term housing, health services, counseling, parenting classes, and employment skills training.

Ensuring comprehensive service-delivery.

The Larkin Street Drop-In Center, established in 1984, has grown into Larkin Street Youth Services (LSYS),³⁰ expanding from a drop-in center to a peer-based substance abuse treatment program, opening a 16-bed Diamond Youth Shelter, spreading out to other neighborhoods, offering employment and workforce development, and starting the Avenues to Independence transitional living program. In 1997, LSYS opened the nation's first comprehensive housing program for HIV+ youth.

THREE PROMISING DEVELOPMENTS IN BALTIMORE CITY

1) Counting Homeless Youth 2007:

Working with the Baltimore Homeless

Youth Initiative (BHYI) and the Johns Hopkins Center for Adolescent Health, Baltimore Homeless Services included questions on the 2007 census to obtain an estimate of the number of unaccompanied minors who are homeless. Baltimore Homeless Services (BHS) included questions on unaccompanied minors to the current surveys used by the Census to count homeless populations and agreed to share information regarding the numbers of youth found in the Census to compare with the BHYI count.

Simultaneously, BHYI conducted a parallel survey of the City's youth-serving agencies on the same day as the BHS biannual homeless census. This was a pilot for a more comprehensive count that will take place in the winter of 2008. The January 2007 survey focused on homeless young people who are unaccompanied minors (under 18) and young adults ages 18-24.

This differed from the BHS census in that the youth definition of homelessness is broader than the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) mandated definition, and they sought out places where homeless young people seek companionship, receive services, or "reside."

2) Developing Transitional Housing Services for Baltimore Youth: BHYI, a collaboration of government and community agencies, 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.

BHYI's current focus is on the development of a permanent, supportive housing project for homeless youth. The building will be called Restoration Gardens, and will be located in the city's Southern Park Heights neighborhood. BHYI is also the recipient of a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Compassion Capital Grant to increase the sustainability and capacity of BHYI and its members to serve homeless youth.

The grant allows BHYI to provide technical assistance and training in the areas

of leadership development, organizational development, program development, and community engagement.

3) Integration of Services within the Department of Social Services: The Baltimore City Department of Social Services (BCDSS) is working toward integration and seamless service delivery, which offers an opportunity to reduce some of the barriers that youth might experience while navigating the social services system.

The BCDSS has identified three strategic goals: a) protection of vulnerable children and adults from maltreatment, b) strengthening of families, and c) provision of safe and stable homes for children who cannot be reunified.

HOMELESS YOUTH FACE UNIQUE—AND DAUNTING—RISKS

Homeless youth are exposed to many risks that lead to poor health, such as sexually transmitted diseases including HIV,³¹ high rates of current substance use,^{32,33,34} survival sex,^{35,36} pregnancy,³⁷ depression,³⁸ suicidal ideation,³⁹ and sexual abuse.⁴⁰

- ❖ HIV prevalence for homeless youth may be as much as 2 to 10 times higher than the rates reported for other samples of adolescents in the United States.⁴¹
 - * One barrier to effective HIV education among street youth is that the long-term threat of HIV infection is irrelevant in comparison to immediate survival.
- ❖ Homeless youth often resort to criminal behavior to meet basic needs, including exchanging sex for food, clothing, and shelter.
- ❖ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified (LGBT) youth are at high risk for depression and suicide.⁴² One study of young gay men found that 26 percent were forced to leave home because of conflict with family over their sexual orientation.⁴³ LGBT youth may be more likely to be "throwaways."
- ❖ Throwaways have approximately double the risk of attempting suicide, ingesting drugs, using needles to inject drugs, and participating in criminal activities as compared to other homeless youth.⁴⁴
- ❖ Girls face special challenges after business hours to find a place where they feel safe. Several Baltimore girls identified unsafe places where groups of men hang out and "pick on you and ask you for sex."⁴⁵
 - * Several female youth in a Baltimore-based study identified sex as "necessary for survival on the street, being a requirement for maintaining boyfriends and, through them, temporary housing and safety."⁴⁶

WHAT IS THE FUNDING PICTURE FOR YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

Resources and the delivery of services for youth who are homeless or in need of related assistance are regulated by federal, state, and local government. Private dollars also address the needs of these youth.

Although funding exists across the continuum of needed comprehensive services from prevention to permanent housing, the funding is siloed and even funding sources specifically targeting youth may have restrictions on access. For example, Chafee Independence Program is only for youth exiting foster care and Baltimore Homeless Services does not have resources allocated specifically tailored to meet the needs of homeless youth.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE NOW

Youth homelessness is caused by deep-seated societal problems and severe family conflicts. The causes are complex, and what works for other segments of the homeless population might not apply to unstably housed youth.

However, there are things you can do now to reach out to this underserved and under-the-radar population.

1. Recognize the signs of youth homelessness. Some of the ways you might detect homeless youth in your community or school include: lying about where the parents are or where they are living, protective of parents and/or covering for parents, poor health/hygiene, hoards food at snack time or meal time, inconsistent grooming (well groomed one day, poorly groomed the next), does not participate in field trips or after-school activities, transportation/attendance problems, hunger, refusing invitations from classmates and friends, inability to pay fees, unwillingness to risk forming relations with classmates and teachers.

2. Learn where to send homeless youth to get help. Fellowship of Lights (410-522-9605) is the only shelter for unaccompanied youth under 18. Local shelters for adults may not be the most attrac-

Services	Components
Prevention & Advocacy	<p>Abell Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Funding for issues relevant to homeless and displaced youth, including workforce development and criminal justice. ❖ Annual competition to address urban policy issues in Baltimore. <p>Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Funding for issues relevant to homeless and displaced youth, including workforce development and education services targeting youth. ❖ Support for direct services strategies to address homelessness including communications, advocacy, and basic needs. <p>Open Society Institute—Baltimore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Policy advocacy initiatives geared to address workforce development, education, incarceration, and substance abuse. <p>Annie E. Casey Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Initiatives focused on juvenile detention, family economic success, and improving child welfare systems.
Street Outreach	<p>Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Street outreach
Shelter Care	<p>McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Assistance Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Shelter Plus Care is available for youth with serious mental illness, chronic substance abuse problems, other disabilities, and/or AIDS.⁴⁷ <p>Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Basic center program provides funds for temporary shelter to serve children and youth under age 18 and family reunification services and counseling.
Transitional Housing and Independent Living Programs	<p>Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Transitional living program provides transitional housing and independent living services to older homeless youth (up to age 21) for up to 18 months. <p>John H. Chafee Independence Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Provides funding for independent living activities. ❖ Offers increased assistance, including room and board, for youth ages 18-21 exiting foster care. ❖ Emphasizes the importance of securing permanent families for young people in foster care. ❖ Expands capacity for states to offer Medicaid for young people aging out of foster care.
Housing	<p>Baltimore Homeless Services, Inc. (BHS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Provides housing and support services to more than 13,000 individuals and families yearly. <p>Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Subsidy used to finance the development of affordable rental housing for low-income households. ❖ Creates an incentive for private investment in low-income housing development by giving federal tax credits to investors. It is the largest source of capital financing for affordable rental housing.⁴⁸ <p>McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Assistance Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rental assistance payments through the Supportive Housing Program or Section 8 rental assistance payments for Single Room Occupancy Dwellings.

tive choices for youth, but they do exist. For a comprehensive list of shelters visit Baltimore Homeless Services at <http://www.baltimorehealth.org/homeless.html>. Stand Up for Kids (www.standupforkids.org) is a volunteer group that conducts outreach programs for homeless youth and the Baltimore chapter may be reached at Baltimore@standupforkids.org.

3. Be a supportive adult. Homeless youth are disconnected from their families and often do not trust people associated

with systems designed to protect them. Prove there are caring and nurturing adults who can help them. Listen and value our youth. Empower them by asking them what they need to succeed, and trying to locate resources to meet those needs.

4. Contribute to homeless shelters housing youth and advocacy groups working with homeless youth. Some local entities include Fellowship of Lights, AIDS Interfaith Residential Services, and

the Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth and Families.

5. Learn more about existing prospects. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) is the only federal program targeted exclusively to accompany youth. Funding for RHYA remained stagnant from 2002-2006,⁴⁹ but a \$10 million increase has been approved for 2008. This increase provides an opportunity for Maryland to develop or expand programs for homeless youth.

6. Spread the word. Raise awareness about this issue. If policymakers know the extent of the problem, they can ensure that city and county “Plans to End Homelessness” include homeless youth.

RECOMMENDATION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Opportunities abound to develop new—and enhance existing—ways to both prevent homelessness and to provide programs that target homeless and displaced youth.

We need to develop concrete efforts to eliminate youth homelessness in Baltimore, including:

- Enhance discharge planning from juvenile justice and individualized

emancipation plans out of foster care.

- Expand homeless services to better serve youth. Existing services for homeless people through Baltimore Homeless Services can be improved to specifically address the concerns of homeless youth, including a desire for greater autonomy and the need for comprehensive psychosocial support services. Comprehensive and tailored services are necessary to meet the needs of this population.

- Promote public and private partnerships to foster homeless youth initiatives. Diversified funding streams and sustained public/private partnerships are needed to develop programs that will serve homeless and displaced youth.

- Learn more about this population through a formal research agenda. The knowledge base on this vulnerable population is weak. Although evidence shows increased health-risk behaviors with homeless and displaced youth, more research needs to be conducted. Research data can then be used to develop comprehensive programs and policies.

- Demand accountability from federal and state agencies responsible

for resource allocation. There are resources allocated to serving this population, but they can be difficult to access and the application process is often cumbersome and opaque. Holding these agencies accountable for fulfilling their mandate, and for simplifying access to resources, is essential.

CONCLUSION

The nearly 2,300 homeless and displaced youth in Baltimore require the willingness of public and private institutions to respond to their individual needs.

The current evidence shows homeless and displaced youth have many poor health outcomes. Without the opportunities (both real and perceived) to lead healthy and productive lives, they become increasingly more disenfranchised and disconnected.

All youth need opportunities and support systems to make a successful transition to adulthood. Many vulnerable youth are not given the chance to do so. Homeless and displaced youth in Baltimore face overwhelmingly tough situations, and it is our challenge to respond.

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