

# "Aging out" shouldn't make youth homeless



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# Workshop Agenda

- Overview of Youth Homelessness
- Data and Research on Homeless Youth
- Federal Policies that Address Youth Homelessness
- State Policies and Practices to Prevent Youth Homelessness
- Developing Housing for Youth
- Questions and Answers

# Categorizations of unaccompanied youth

- ◆ **Runaway:** stay away from home at least overnight without permission/knowledge of parent(s)
- ◆ **Throwaway:** leave home due to parent(s) abandonment, or forced / encouraged to leave
- ◆ **Homeless:** youth with no home to return to because of irreconcilable conflicts with family, lost contact with family, or the family is homeless.
- ◆ **Street youth:** youth with no stable residence who often reside in unsafe public places and have little contact with family.

# National rates

- ◆ Approximately 1,692,900 youth run away or are forced to leave their homes each year
  - only 21% are reported missing to police/missing children's agency (U.S. Dept of Justice, 2002).
- ◆ 7.6% of adolescents 12-17 years of age have spent at least one night in an emergency shelter, public place, abandoned building, or with a stranger during the previous year
- ◆ Nearly half (53%) return to parental homes following a runaway episode

# Why do youth run?

- ◆ Interfamily conflict, poor communication, dysfunction, abuse and/or neglect
- ◆ High degree of family discord and lack of emotional cohesion and warmth .
- ◆ For some, leaving is not a choice - youth forced out of their homes by parents either encouraging them to leave, abandoning them, or subjecting them to intolerable levels of maltreatment
- ◆ Dangers of the streets are more attractive than remaining in an environment characterized by parental dysfunction and maltreatment

# Youth Characteristics

- ◆ often engage in high-risk behaviors
  - school truancy
  - substance abuse
  - criminal activity
  - unprotected sexual activity
- ◆ increased risk for various difficulties
  - sexually transmitted diseases
  - mental health problems
  - poor family relationships

# Youth exposed to highly stressful situations often:

- develop a heightened sense of vulnerability, anxiety, anger, and fear
- experience elevated rates of distress, delinquency, substance use, anxiety reactions, aggression, withdrawal, dissociative reactions, and depression; similar to those of children with histories of maltreatment and physical/sexual abuse
- Exposure to traumatic events or victimization may produce symptoms of acute stress or post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

# National findings of RHYMIS

- ❖ Data for all runaway youth shelter users (1997) - approximately 17,000 cases
- ❖ National rates:
  - ❖ 62% female
  - ❖ 60% Caucasian, 22% African American, 13% Hispanic, 6% other ethnic groups
  - ❖ 87% between 15 to 18 years of age
  - ❖ 48% lived with parent at time of admission
  - ❖ 58% reunified to parental home following shelter stay
  - ❖ 31% have contemplated suicide

# Region 6

(Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas)  
**vs. other states**

- ❖ **More Region 6 youth living “on the street” at admission to emergency shelter (19.1% vs 14.7%).**
- ❖ **More Region 6 youth discharged to institutions following shelter stay than national rates (27.2% vs 18.3%)**
- ❖ **Fewer Region 6 youth use drugs (54.1% vs 59.2%), but more sell drugs (18.5% vs 16.1%)**
- ❖ **Higher rates of physical abuse (31.9% vs 30.5) and sexual abuse (9.8% vs 7.6%) in Region 6 than national rates.**

# Texas Runaway Youth Study

- ❖ **195 completed surveys of runaway youth utilizing services at Emergency Youth Shelter in Fort Worth**
- ❖ **Female: 56%      Male: 44%**
- ❖ **White: 44%      African American: 29%      Hispanic: 11%**
- ❖ **Average age: 14.8 years, range 11-17**
- ❖ **Number of Prior Runaway Episodes: 6.1**
- ❖ **Lived with parent(s) prior to service entry: 42.3%**
- ❖ **Lived with other relative prior to service entry: 39.2%**
- ❖ **School Status**
  - ❖ **Poor grades      49%**
  - ❖ **Expelled/truant: 33%**

# Runaway Study Results

- ◆ **Factors leading to multiple runaway episodes**
  - ❖ Being a member of ethnic minority group
  - ❖ Living with someone other than a parent at time runaway episode
  - ❖ Identified as substance user
  - ❖ Youth who reported being neglected by family
  - ❖ Youth who did not trust their parents
- ◆ **Youth were 65% more likely to run multiple times if they felt neglected by their parents and distrustful of them**

# Homeless, Street-involved Youth


- Exploratory studies of homeless youth 16-23 using drop-in services in Austin
  - **Focus groups – 60 youth**
    - 52% male
    - Average age 20
    - 65% Caucasian
  
  - **Individual Interviews – 50 youth**
    - 72% male
    - Average age 20
    - 65% White/not Latino
    - 35% dropped out of school (43% in 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade)
    - 37% were in foster care

# Homeless Study Results

- Youth highly transient – average 33 months since first runaway episode
- Extensive substance use – initial use at 13-14 years of age:
  - 88 % used alcohol
  - 88 % used marijuana
  - 57% used cocaine
- Services most useful if show respect for their independence, not paternalistic/rigid, pet-friendly
- Many appreciate formal services (food, clothing, showers, laundry – shelters); however, transitioning off the street not a immediate objective or even desire.

# Service Implications

- Recognize heterogeneity of these youth
- Type of services used by runaway/homeless youth
  - Youth emergency shelters
  - Youth detention centers
  - School-based services
  - Homeless drop-in centers, street outreach
  - Foster care agencies
  - Child protective services
- **Runaways:** reunification & family-based interventions
- **Homeless:** supportive - recognize 'street culture and perspective' divergent from 'norm'.



# Federal Policies that Address Youth Homelessness



# Policies and Practices to Prevent Youth Homelessness



# Developing Housing for Youth



# Questions & Answers

# Contact Information for Panelists

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