**YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN HAMPDEN COUNTY: Youth Aged 18-24**

**Measuring Youth Homelessness**

It is difficult to know the full extent of youth homelessness, because many homeless young adults do not seek out services and some do not want to be found. The tables below provide the available data about youth who are literally homeless and those who are housing insecure. There is little distinction between these two categories. Many cycle through these states, and the night of the count determines which category they are counted in.

**Literal Homelessness:** in shelter or in a place not fit for human habitation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Individuals | Parenting | Total |
| At a point in time: |  |  |  |
| In shelter on a single night in January 2017 | 25 | 106 | 131 |
| Unsheltered on a single night in January 2017 | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Youth Count May 2017 | Data not yet available | | |
| Over the course of a year: |  |  |  |
| In shelter sometime during fiscal year 2015-2016 | 174 | 431 | 605 |

**Housing Insecure:** couch-surfing, doubled up, in substandard housing, at campgrounds, etc.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| At a point in time: |  |  |  |
| Youth Count May 2017 | Data not yet available | | |
| In school system during school year: |  |  |  |
| Unaccompanied youth 2016-17 |  |  | 62 |

**Causes of Youth Homelessness[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1. **Family instability**, including child abuse and/or neglect, domestic violence, parental substance abuse, and family conflict – including conflict over sexual orientation or gender identity.
2. **System involvement**, including with the child welfare system, where a high percentage of youth age out of foster care without a strong support network in place and end up homeless, and with the juvenile justice system, where a high percentage of youth are released from incarceration only to become homeless.
3. **Residential instability**, usually due to economic issues. Youth may become homeless with their families but may be forced to separate because of shelter, transitional housing, or child welfare policies. In other cases, households may ask youth to leave at age 18 because of a lack of financial resources to support them or a cultural expectation that children will leave the family home at age 18.
4. **Extreme disconnection from education, employment, and support networks**, often resulting from one or more of the situations mentioned above.

**Populations in Focus**

**LGBTQ Youth**

Nationally, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth account for 30% to 40% of all youth experiencing homelessness but only 7% of the national youth population.[[2]](#footnote-2) LGBTQ youth are most likely to become homeless because of family conflict and rejection. While experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ youth are at greater risk of victimization for sexual exploitation and trafficking, sexually transmitted diseases, and developing mental health problems, including suicidal ideation and attempts.

**Justice System Involved Youth**

Youth who have run away or been homeless are involved in juvenile justice systems at high rates. Nationally, 6% of youth in Basic Center Programs (aged 18 and under) and 9% of youth in Transitional Living Programs (ages 16 through 22) were involved in juvenile justice systems.[[3]](#footnote-3) Youth experiencing homelessness report engaging in a variety of high-risk and illegal behaviors to survive, such as theft, property offenses, drug possession/ use/distribution, and prostitution, which can ultimately lead to arrest and justice system involvement. While homelessness is a risk factor for justice system involvement, being involved in the justice system is also a risk factor for homelessness. Justice-involved youth may be returning to communities and home settings that are unstable, and youth may lack the education or job skills to maintain employment necessary to achieve stability. In addition, youth may face barriers to housing because of their conviction or adjudication.

**Child Welfare System Involved Youth**

Youth aging out of foster care have high rates of homelessness and housing instability. In some jurisdictions, up to 36% of youth who transitioned out of foster care reported at least one episode of homelessness.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Sex Trafficked Youth**

Young people often flee abuse and violence at home, but are exposed to further sexual victimization and human trafficking once on the street. Research has shown that 34% of youth reported sexual abuse before they left their homes, while 80% of runaway and homeless girls reported having ever been sexually or physically abused.[[5]](#footnote-5) One quarter of youth living on the street and 10% of those in shelters have report being forced to have “survival sex” in exchange for shelter, food, or money.[[6]](#footnote-6) If the youth has already been the victim of sexual abuse, it increases the odds of the youth engaging in survival sex.

**Immigrant and Refugee Youth**

Being undocumented and/or non-English speaking increases the risk of homelessness. As individuals flee their home countries to escape widespread poverty, violence, and persecution, families are often separated. Once arriving in America, exploitation of workers and unequal pay is commonplace. Further, immigrants often have limited or no access to services and benefits – either because they are not eligible, because they are unable to access culturally appropriate services, or because they are reluctant to seek assistance for fear of deportation. Lack of a social network only exacerbates these problems.

1. Based on a summary of research conducted by the National Network for Youth. What Works to End Youth Homelessness? March 2015. Accessed at: https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015-What-Worksto-End-Youth-Homlessness.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Williams Institute, Serving Our Youth: Findings from a National Survey of Service Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Who Are Homeless or At Risk of Becoming Homeless (July 2012). Accessed at: https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-HomelessYouth-Survey-July-2012.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fernandes-Alcantara, Adrienne L., Runaway and Homeless Youth: Demographics and Programs, Congressional Research Office (2016). Available at https://fas. org/sgp/crs/misc/RL33785.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Chapin Hall, Predictors of Homelessness during the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood (2016). Accessed at: http://www.chapinhall.org/research/inside/ predictors-homelessness-during-transition-foster-care-adulthood [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Molnar, B., Shade, S., Kral, A., Booth, R., & Watters, J. (1998). Suicidal Behavior and Sexual/Physical Abuse Among Street Youth. Child Abuse & Neglect. Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 213-222. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jody M. Greene, Susan T. Ennett, & Christopher L. Ringwalt, Prevalence and Correlates of Survival Sex Among Runaway and Homeless Youth, 89 Am. J. Pub. Health 1406, 1408 (1999). Accessed at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1508758/pdf/amjph00009-0102.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)