
Homeless and Runaway Youth in the Juvenile Justice System

Introduction

Over 40 years ago, during the passage of the first Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA), Congress recognized the need for communities to provide alternatives to detention for out of home youth and included the Runaway Youth Act as title III of the 1974 JJDPA. Since that time, Title III has been reauthorized as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) and expanded to provide three types of program grants to communities – street outreach, short-term crisis housing and services, and longer-term transitional housing – as well as funding for a national communications center to coordinate and connect youth to services, and a national training and technical assistance center.

Unfortunately, too many young people who run away from home or another placement still interact with the juvenile justice system. In fall 2017, Voices of Youth Count, an initiative of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, released a first-of-its kind study on unaccompanied youth and young homelessness in America: *Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America*. As part of *Missed Opportunities*, more than 4,000 in-person brief youth surveys across 22 counties showed that nearly half of youth experiencing homelessness had been in juvenile detention, jail, or prison. And according to a study of runaway and homeless youth who interacted with RHYA funded Street Outreach Programs in 11 U.S. cities, nearly 44% have stayed in a jail, prison, or juvenile detention center and nearly 78% have had at least one interaction with law enforcement. Nearly 62% of the young people who were interviewed reported that they had been arrested at some point in their lives.

Fortunately, programs funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act have developed tools and resources, and working relationships to help serve youth at-risk of becoming and youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system. These include providing diversion services and housing, services and housing for youth on probation, and transition services for youth exiting juvenile detention.

As part of the *Collaborating for Change: Addressing Youth Homelessness and Juvenile Justice* project, the National Network for Youth has written this brief to document how runaway and homeless youth programs and juvenile justice systems are collaborating to jointly serve youth. The information presented here was collected in a survey of 38 Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers from across the nation and from targeted follow-up interviews and discussions.



Juvenile Justice-Related Factors Contributing to Homelessness

According to RHY providers, the youth they served identified a number of factors stemming from their juvenile justice involvement that contributed to their homelessness.



More than 80% of providers reported that family issues related to the juvenile justice involvement of the youth they serve were a key contributor to their homelessness – either because it was not safe for the youth to return to family, or because the family refused to allow youth to return home because of their juvenile justice involvement. The fact that youth had been involved with the juvenile justice system meant that nearly two thirds (63.2%) were homeless due to legal restrictions on living with family, such as lease terms or the fact that residing with family would restrict the leaseholder's (typically a parent, guardian or family member) access to public benefits (e.g.: housing, food assistance, or other social supports).

For a majority of youth exiting juvenile justice systems, the lack of legal identification, such as a state-issued photo identification card, contributed to their homelessness. In addition, up to a third of youth experienced homelessness because of fines and fees as a result of either their involvement in the juvenile justice system (36.8%) or their homelessness (26.3%).

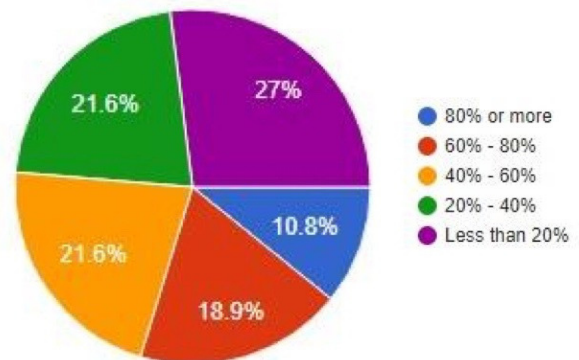
Being homeless before entering the juvenile justice system was a key factor in youth returning to

homelessness after exiting the juvenile justice system. More than two thirds of providers (68.4%) reported that youth identified the fact that 'they were homeless before becoming involved with the juvenile justice system' as contributing to subsequent homelessness.

Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth Served by Runaway and Homeless Youth Providers

RHY providers serve youth ages 12 to 24, with federal funding supporting housing and services for those aged 13-22. Current or previous juvenile justice involved youth served by RHY providers were predominantly under the age of 21, with the largest concentration of those being between 15 and 18 years of age.

Of the youth with juvenile justice involvement that you serve, what percent have current or prior experiences with the child welfare/foster care system?



Similar to the juvenile justice system as a whole, certain populations are overrepresented with juvenile justice involved youth receiving services from RHY providers. Nearly two thirds of providers report that African American youth and males were overrepresented among the juvenile justice-involved youth that they serve. A majority of programs reported that 40% or more of the juvenile justice-involved youth that they serve have also been involved with the child welfare system.

According to a 2016 report from the Congressional Research Service during the 2014 fiscal year, 9.8% of

youth reported having spent some time in foster care and 6.4% of youth had been in the juvenile justice system at some point in their lives. While RHY providers offer programs supporting diversion from trial or detention for juvenile justice-involved youth, two thirds of providers have less than 40% of their justice-involved youth with active cases. The same number reported a less than 40% recidivism rate for those youth who participated in RHY programs.

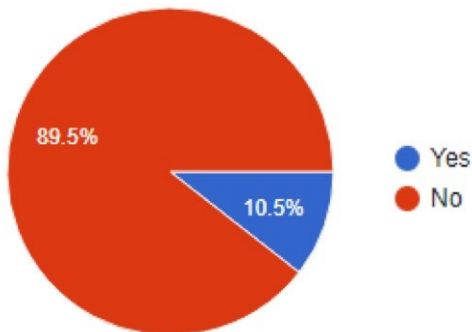
Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs Serving Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth

All of the RHY providers surveyed indicated they provide services to youth and young adults who have been involved in the juvenile justice system within the last 12 months. While all of these youth received services within regular RHY programs, a majority of programs (55%) serve juvenile justice -involved youth in both RHY and juvenile justice -specific programs. Providers served youth across three key RHYA programs:

- 56.8% through Street Outreach Programs
- 81.8% through Basic Center Programs
- 67.6% through Transitional Living Programs (only 10.8% specifically identified Maternity Group Homes, a TLP specialized for pregnant and parenting youth).

Nearly nine in ten providers (89.5%) said that their communities did not have enough services and

Does your community have a sufficient amount of housing for youth with juvenile involvement?



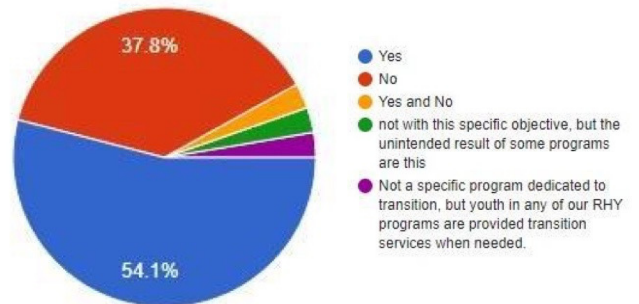
housing options for youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system, and only one fifth of providers reserve beds specifically for juvenile justice-involved youth.

Those with dedicated beds largely reported that funding came from the local juvenile justice system. An alternative funding source used by the Ruth Ellis Center in Highland Park, MI is reimbursement from the state child welfare system for placement as a diversion to incarceration.

Incorporating Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth in to Programs

RHY providers see their services for all youth as services that help to prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system, regardless of whether or not those youth had already encountered or previously been involved in the juvenile justice system. In addition, RHY providers provide specialized services for juvenile justice involved young people.

Do you provide transition services for youth entering or exiting the juvenile justice system?



These specialized services are offered at various points throughout a young person's involvement with the juvenile justice system. The majority of providers (54%) provide specific transition services for youth entering or exiting the juvenile justice system. The vast majority of providers surveyed indicated that they provide services to youth while cases are pending (69.2%), after adjudication (69.2%), before exiting custody (65.4%), and after existing custody (76.9%). The key services that providers identified providing

for youth throughout their juvenile justice involvement include housing, case management, employment, job readiness and placement, and educational completion and life skills development.

Providers also identified the following four core areas of support they provide for youth during early points of juvenile justice system involvement (e.g. arrest, diversion, intake, pre-adjudication court hearings):

- family mediation (77.1%),
- educational supports (including coordination with schools) (85.7%),
- housing (82.9%), and
- connection to employment services (68.6%).

Two providers in Hawaii County, Ha. - the Salvation Army Family Intervention Services and Family Support Hawaii - highlighted partnerships with law enforcement and juvenile court personnel as being key to facilitating early intervention and diversion strategies. In addition, Janus Youth Programs in Portland, Or. operates a 24-hour crisis triage center where police divert youth from juvenile justice system involvement. As a part of Janus's Basic Center Program, this triage allows youth to access to shelter and family reunification services as well as links to aftercare assistance in the community.

For those exiting custody, providers reported that they are able to assist youth with:

- housing,
- case management,
- independent living skills development,
- employment connections,
- educational advocacy, and
- referrals for medical care.

All providers noted that the services they provide are youth-specific, but that how services were delivered was dependent on the specific program in which the youth was engaged. For instance: juvenile justice-specific programs and services were delivered exclusively to juvenile justice-involved youth. But if services were provided as part of living in a Basic Center Program, those services were delivered along with services for other youth in the BCP.

Providers identified both short-term emergency and longer-term transitional housing as the key interventions to divert youth from further involvement with juvenile justice systems and to support those transitioning out of custody.

Additionally, the type and level of partnership with outside agencies/organizations influenced how RHY providers offered services to juvenile justice-involved youth. One example for exit planning was provided by the Center for Youth Services in Rochester, NY. They described their transition services:

“Jail in-reach by the RHYA Street Outreach Program offers planning before a youth who does not have a safe place to go exits to homelessness. Upon exit, youth can access shelter and/or employment services. We also provide a specific school for young men with juvenile justice experience as well as longer term housing options, including Transitional Living Program and Rapid Rehousing services.”

Partners and Funders

Collaborations are key to successfully supporting youth. Providers who engaged in diversion services, for example, did so in partnership with key community agencies and organizations. More than 85% of providers partnered with the local juvenile justice system, individual schools or the local school systems, and the child welfare system. Other key partners included law enforcement (78.9%) and youth employment services (65.8%). No more than half of providers reported partnerships with prosecutors (47.4%), public defenders (44.7%), and legal aid services (50%).

In our discussions, providers highlighted the benefits of collaboration with all ‘system’ stakeholders who are connected to youth.

Specifically, providers described partnerships with public agencies as being key to connecting youth and families with specific services. This included referrals from school personnel, child welfare case managers, law enforcement, prosecutors and courts.

Collaboration with juvenile justice system partners is particularly critical to ensure that youth and families are connected to the diversion related services that RHY providers offer. The Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services noted the value that AmeriCorps members in supporting cross-system connections: “AmeriCorps members expand the staff time available, which strengthens our street outreach presence and the ability to increase service availability to youth in collaboration with law enforcement and juvenile justice.” Strengthening these relationships was identified as a priority by all RHY providers who participated in post-survey discussions.

RHY providers use multiple funding sources to provide housing and services to youth with juvenile justice involvement. Most receive a combination of federal, state and county funding. In particular, Runway and Homeless Youth grant funding provided resources for RHY programs (an average of \$2.1 million per state in federal fiscal year 2017) that house and provide services for juvenile justice-involved youth, whether as a part of regular RHY programs or in a targeted manner. Other federal funding included:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (other than RHYA, such as child welfare or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- U.S. Department of Labor (through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs).

State and county funding also plays an important role. These funds came from a wide range of specific sources including:

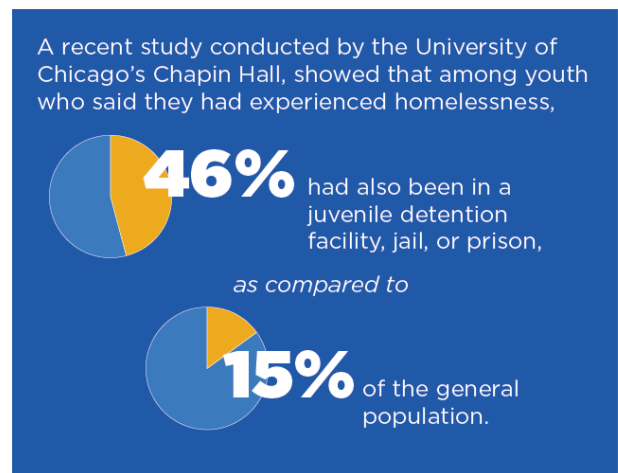
- Health departments,
- Mental health agencies,
- Child welfare agencies,

- State Medicaid reimbursement, and
- Juvenile justice systems.

As highlighted above, just over 20% of providers identified that their partnership and funding arrangements include reserving specific beds for system-involved youth. Most of these were set aside in an agreement between RHY providers and state/local juvenile justice agencies. One exception was the Ruth Ellis Center, which receives reimbursement from the state child welfare system for placement as a diversion to youth incarceration.

Youth service providers who receive state or local funding for services provided to juvenile justice involved youth may likely be the beneficiary of federal grants made to the state or local entity.

Regardless of the source of funding, all providers surveyed and interviewed noted that their community lacks adequate funding for juvenile justice-involved youth.



Recommendations

RHY providers across the country clearly identified that they serve youth experiencing homelessness who are, or have been, involved with the juvenile justice system. They see all the services and housing that they provide as being critical to preventing youth engagement with the juvenile justice system, and in ensuring that youth who are system involved do not exit to homelessness.

While providers regularly collaborate with the juvenile justice system, and other systems, they

recognize that there are opportunities to improve partnerships between RHY providers, law enforcement and other juvenile justice stakeholders.

Key elements of the *Collaborating for Change: Addressing Youth Homelessness and Juvenile Justice* project's Principles for Change are particularly relevant to how RHY providers and juvenile justice systems collaborate to serve youth that experience both the juvenile justice system and homelessness. In particular, these include:

Principle 2: Ensure that young people are diverted from juvenile justice system involvement whenever possible, and that any diversion programs or services are appropriately tailored to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

Principle 3: When juvenile justice system involvement cannot be avoided, ensure that comprehensive transition planning begins immediately after—and continues throughout—a youth's confinement or probation supervision.

Principle 4: Ensure your community has both long- and short-term safe housing options available for youth who are, or have been, involved with the juvenile justice system.

Principle 5: Ensure your community provides youth and their families with related services and supports that can help them obtain and keep safe and stable housing.

Principle 6: Ensure that youth, and their families, are not kicked out of their homes or denied housing because the youth have been arrested or adjudicated for a delinquency offense.

Other specific recommendations that emerged from our survey and discussions with RHY providers included:

- Strengthen collaboration between juvenile justice system and RHY providers to provide transition support for youth before they exit custody.
- Increase participation of youth in developing programs to support juvenile justice involved youth.
- Foster increased collaboration between RHY providers and law enforcement, prosecutors, public defenders and legal aid services.
- Provide the resources – both financial and physical – that RHY providers, child welfare agencies, and schools need to provide coordinated housing and services to youth and their families before entry in, and after exit from, the juvenile justice system.
- Identify funding sources at the federal, state and local level that can be braided and blended to support juvenile justice involved youth, whether by RHY providers and other community based organizations or state and local government.
- Remove or mitigate legal prohibitions on juvenile justice involved youth living with families (e.g.: restrictions on receipt of public benefit or lease terms).
- Enhance exit planning from custody to ensure that youth have legal identification, and that there are reasonable plans in place to remove, reduce or mitigate any fines and fees (such as through payment plans).
- Previous experiences of homelessness should not result in youth returning to homelessness after leaving the juvenile justice system. Juvenile justice systems need to ensure that youth have clear exit plans that not only ensure that they don't exit to homelessness, but that take in to account the factors that may have led to any previous experience of homelessness (either with family or alone).



This project was made possible through the generous support of the Raikes Foundation, the Tow Foundation, and the Melville Charitable Trust.

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