

# Federal Policy Solutions to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

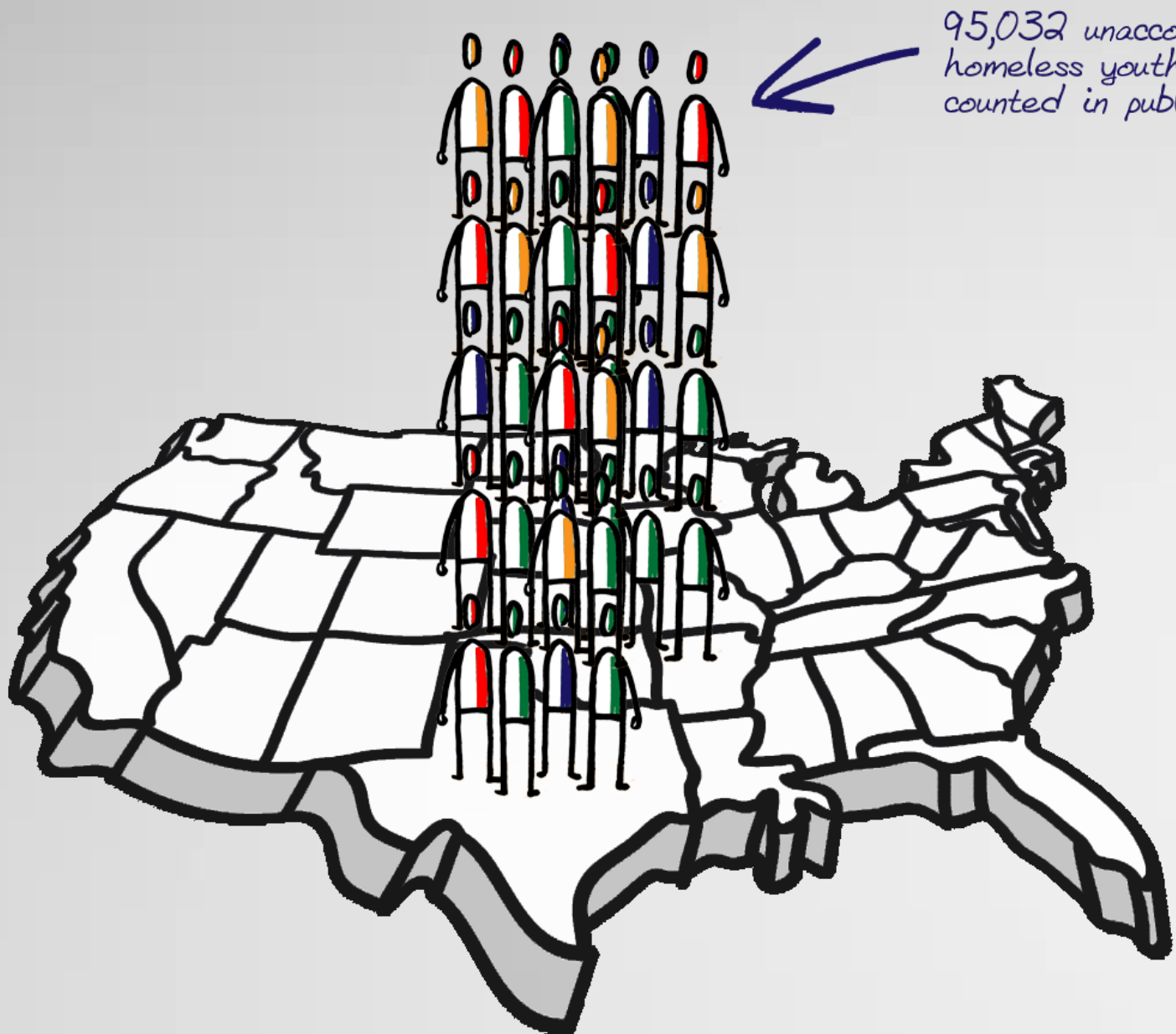


# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>The Problem</b>	5
<b>Call To Action</b>	5
<b>About This Brief</b>	6
<b>Youth And Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness: Who We Are Serving &amp; How We Are Failing Them</b>	6
<b>The Roadmap: Recommendations On How Build An Accessible, Coordinated, Youth-Centric Federal System To Prevent And End Youth And Young Adult Homelessness</b>	10
STEP 1: Develop a shared understanding of YYA homelessness	11
STEP 2: Increase investment in YYA-appropriate housing and services	12
STEP 3: Examine and fix the child welfare and juvenile justice systems	13
STEP 4: Strengthen and support the work of federal agencies	15
STEP 5: Create mechanisms for flexibility in federal programs	18
STEP 6: Adopt a shared vision for core outcomes	19
<b>Appendix 1</b>	
Federal Programs That Support Runaway And Homeless Youth	21
<b>Appendix 2</b>	
Principles Of Services For Youth Experiencing Homelessness	24
<b>Appendix 3</b>	
Federal Definitions Of Homelessness	25

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACF	Administration for Children & Families
AHAR	Annual Homeless Assessment Report
BCP	Basic Center Program
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CSEC	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
CoC	Continuum of Care
DOJ	U.S. Department of Justice
DOL	U.S. Department of Labor
ED	U.S. Department of Education
EHCY	Education for Homeless Children and Youth
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FYSB	Family and Youth Services Bureau
FUP	Family Unification Program
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
HEARTH	Homeless Emergency and Rapid Transition to Housing
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning
LEA	Local Education Agency
NISMART	National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children
NOFA	Notice of Funding Availability
PIT	Point-in-Time
RHYA	Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
RHY	Runaway and Homeless Youth
RHYMIS	The Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse Mental and Health Services Administration
SEA	State Education Agency
SOP	Street Outreach Program
TAY	Transition-Aged Youth
TLP	Transitional Living Program
USICH	United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
WIB	Workforce Investment Board
WIOA	Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act
YHDP	Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program
YRBS	Youth Risk Behavior Survey
YYA	Youth and Youth Adults



95,032 unaccompanied  
homeless youth were  
counted in public schools

## THE PROBLEM

The severity of our nation's youth and young adult (YYA)<sup>1</sup> homelessness epidemic is staggering. Tens, and possibly hundreds of thousands of youth (minors) and young adults (18 to 24 year olds) face homelessness each year. Accurate numbers are hard to come by, but the most recent HUD Point-in-Time count found nearly 37,000 YYA and about 9,900 parenting YYA homeless on a single night in January 2015. Additionally, 95,032 unaccompanied homeless youth were counted in public schools in the 2014-2015 school year – a 21 percent increase from the 2012-2013 school year.

Communities across America – rural, urban and suburban alike – are struggling to address youth and young adult homelessness, often with no established developmentally appropriate infrastructure in place. Youth experiencing homelessness – who are not children and are not adults – remain unserved by many state and federal programs. The child welfare system – foster care – focuses on children and youth ages 18 and under and for many teens in crisis, the foster care system just doesn't prioritize them, or work to provide them with the skills to successfully transition to adulthood.

HUD provides housing for those facing homelessness – but not always the kind that young adults need. Adult homeless shelters typically lack developmentally appropriate solutions for young people. Additionally, HUD-funded programs frequently lack the capacity to serve the homeless population within their communities, and new coordinated entry systems often fail to provide access or appropriate solutions for young people experiencing homelessness.

Programs funded through, or operating under, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act provide a range of housing and services to help YYA experiencing homelessness: street outreach, short term early intervention and crisis housing for minors and transitional living programs for youth between the ages of 16 and 22. However, there is no comprehensive, coordinated federal system that is funded to meet the magnitude of need among youth and young adults at-risk of and experiencing homelessness. In fact, multiple federal agencies have multiple programs that are designed to serve YYA and these programs have differing eligibility requirements. This makes a coordinated and effective response challenging. Despite a previous U.S. government commitment to end youth homelessness by 2020, serious work remains to be done.

## CALL TO ACTION

We are calling on federal policymakers and agency staff to support the creation of a comprehensive, collaborative, system-based approach to addressing youth and young adult homelessness that is youth-centric and flexible. This support is needed in the form of updated laws, policies and priorities. YYA

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<sup>1</sup> 'Youth' include minors under the age of 18, 'young adults' include 18 to 24 year olds, and 'young people' includes both youth and young adults.



must have the widest possible door to entry of this system so that whenever and wherever they find themselves, young people can access a safe and secure place to stay and services to help them undergo a safe and healthy transition to adulthood. Our recommendations target the critical need for the federal government to:

1. **Adopt a shared understanding of YYA homelessness** so that: data collected by different sources will paint a consistent and accurate picture of the need in our communities and ensure that all young people are able to access the services and housing they need;
2. **Increase investment in YYA-appropriate housing and services** so that the gap between need and vital services is closed;
3. **Examine and improve the child welfare and juvenile justice systems** so they stop failing to help exiting youth transition with appropriate services and supports, especially stable housing;
4. **Strengthen and support the work of federal agencies** to facilitate the effective sharing of resources and remove needless bureaucratic barriers that prevent YYA from receiving the help they need;
5. **Create mechanisms for flexibility in federal programs** so that communities can develop YYA accessible and appropriate housing and services that meet the needs in their community; and
6. **Adopt a shared vision of core outcomes to measure success** across federal programs that are developmentally appropriate.

## ABOUT THIS BRIEF

The National Network for Youth (NN4Y) has developed a **Proposed System to End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness** that encompasses all of the essential elements and principles of a coordinated national, state and local response to youth homelessness. This system is meant to be implemented flexibly, meaning that every community doesn't need to have every single element, but that there should be **Prevention**, **Early & Crisis Intervention** and **Long-Term** housing and services and **Aftercare** services to the extent needed by YYA in community. Policies should support and allow for this flexibility. This brief is one in a six-part series that is intended to guide practitioners and policymakers in achieving the vision of this system. Here, we identify important gaps and barriers in federal policies that are impeding a successful system approach to ending homelessness among America's young people, and offers recommendations to overcome them. It also provides guidance for community-based organizations to better understand and leverage available federal programs and resources.

## YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS: WHO WE ARE SERVING & HOW WE ARE FAILING THEM

At the most basic level, it is imperative that service providers, advocates, philanthropists and government officials at all levels have a shared understanding of the youth and young adults in need of housing and

services. Only then, can their homelessness be prevented, and if not prevented, appropriately and effectively served so that they exit homelessness. We also need to understand and appreciate how our current amalgamations of uncoordinated federal programs are failing young people in need.

**America's YYA at-risk of and experiencing homelessness face very different issues and have different needs than homeless adults.**

Most often, young people lose their homes through no fault of their own. Many are fleeing abuse, neglect, poverty, rejection and/or family conflict. Others age out of the child welfare system or are exiting

juvenile and criminal justice systems with nowhere to go. These young people usually have no way to financially support themselves. They are often forced to leave school because of homelessness. Entering homelessness, young people are at high risk to become victims of human trafficking, both sex and labor trafficking. They have little or no job skills, have a difficult time finding employment and also lack basic life skills, like cooking or money management.

Far too many cannot find the help they need.

They are still, by and large, kids, developing physically, emotionally, psychologically and socially without the basic supports that every developing adolescent and young adult needs to grow into productive, healthy adults. This is especially true of young adults, one of the fastest growing homeless populations in the U.S. No longer children, but still developing into adulthood, like many young people in intact families, they continue to need adult support to truly move to self-sufficiency and ultimately achieve upward mobility. Sadly, they often fall through the cracks of federal, state and community systems, which makes it difficult for them to access their basic life needs, let alone achieve their fullest potential.

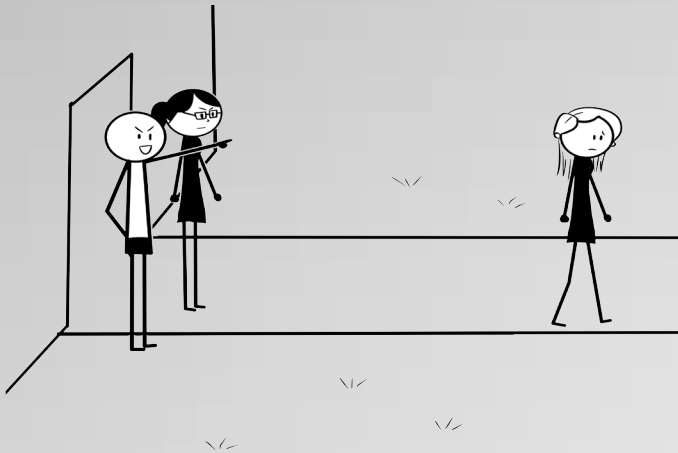
Finally, they often distrust adults and societal systems due to the high prevalence of adults who have harmed them and let them down throughout their lives - often in the form of sexual and physical abuse, neglect, rejection or violence.

## WHO SERVES YYA AT-RISK OF, OR EXPERIENCING, HOMELESSNESS

Many diverse providers and systems serve YYA through a wide range of programs operating under different federal, state and local requirements and funding streams. At its core, these housing programs include Runaway and Homeless Youth service providers, the child welfare system, Housing and Urban Development programs and other housing and service programs. For a full list of federal programs that support these young people, refer to Appendix I on page 21.



*Most often, young people lose their homes through no fault of their own. Many have suffered abuse, neglect or other violence, either at home or on the streets, and far too many cannot find the help they need. An April 2016 study by the U.S. Administration for Children and Families and Youth Services Bureau Street Outreach Program<sup>2</sup> found the following sobering statistics:*

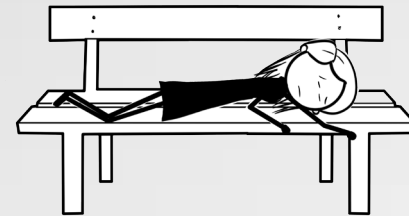


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More than half of youth experiencing homelessness become homeless for the first time because they were asked to leave home by a parent or caregiver.

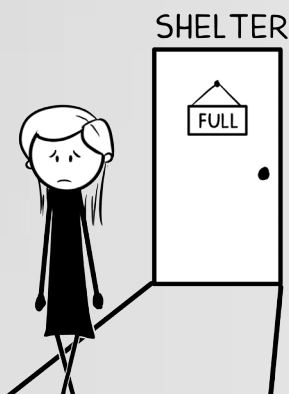
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The average young person spent nearly two years living on the streets.



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More than half say they have tried to stay at a shelter but it was full.



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More than 60 percent were raped, beaten up, robbed or otherwise assaulted.

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Nearly 30 percent of participants identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual, and nearly 7 percent identified as transgender.

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About half of youth had been in foster care and former foster youth were homeless for longer (27.5 months, on average), compared to youth who had never been in foster care (19.3 months, on average).

The study was based on interviews with more than 656 young people, ages 14 to 21, in 11 U.S. cities.



*The unique needs of youth and young adults at-risk of and experiencing homelessness call for creating a system that has the broadest possible front door and the greatest possible flexibility, so that young people access housing and services from many different places, in different ways, as often as necessary and with the lowest possible barrier to entry.*

Nothing illustrates the disconnection between systems quite like a common case of a young person without a home who, in order to survive, may break the law. They may be forced to sleep in public spaces or shoplift food because they are hungry and have no money. Rather than fining or locking young people up for these minor ‘survival crimes’, law enforcement’s response should be to work with youth-serving systems to intervene and provide appropriate services. Unfortunately, this rarely occurs. It should be no surprise that fear of being reported to police or child welfare is the number one reason why young people do not seek help when they become homeless.

### **Disconnected systems and a lack of understanding leads to missing opportunities for prevention and exacerbates YYA homelessness.**

Youth and young adults at-risk of and experiencing homelessness often fall through the cracks of federal systems that were designed to provide housing and services to adults or children. At the same time, the RHY programs designed to serve this population are chronically unable to meet the needs of all young people and families in need due to a lack of adequate funding.

Unfortunately, the systems that are supposed to support YYA at-risk of and experiencing homelessness often

operate in silos which prevents the effective sharing of resources and erect needless bureaucratic barriers that keep YYA from receiving the help they need. From child welfare to juvenile justice, this lack of coordination fails to protect the long-term interests of young people and instead sets them on a path of instability, poverty and homelessness.

In addition, systems that serve young people, such as schools and law enforcement, often have the opportunity to identify those who are heading for a crisis and intervene early on. Unfortunately, these systems often fail to do so, and are also frequently disconnected from the other systems that can help these young people and their families with housing, therapeutic interventions and other services.

Schools can play a key role by being alert to clues that a youth and their family may be in trouble. Tardiness or absenteeism, for example, are often early red flags of difficulties, but many times schools fail to take proactive steps when these issues first begin to emerge.

These silos and barriers are not insurmountable. What’s required is a commitment of proper resources, updated laws and policies, training and technical assistance and education so that systems YYA encounter

can better understand, identify and support YYA in vulnerable situations through collaboration as part of coordinated community-wide systems.

### **Child welfare and juvenile justice systems create an unintended pipeline to youth and young adult homelessness.**

The high rate of homelessness among young people who have been involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems amplifies the failure of these systems to help exiting youth transition with appropriate services and supports, especially stable housing. For example, in the juvenile justice system, although some state and local jurisdictions provide transition services, they are not currently required by federal law to do so.

As a result of their homelessness, young people face devastating harms and barriers in life, all of which hinder their ability to re-assimilate into society, depress their motivation and inhibit their ability to become independent, successful and contributing members of their families and communities. The consequences of homelessness bring despair to young people in the form of mental health problems, substance abuse, victimization, criminalized survival acts and unsafe sexual practices. Young people experiencing homelessness also encounter barriers to education, employment, safe housing, food and medical care. If these young people are not helped they will likely further burden society and add to the population of chronically homeless adults.

However, we know that the trajectory of young people can be disrupted. We know that stable housing, caring adults, supportive services, education and access to employment enable young people to heal from trauma and enter adulthood with the support and skills necessary to be successful.

Together, systems at every level of government and within communities must urgently work together to create a sustained, comprehensive and effective approach to preventing YYA homelessness and responding quickly and appropriately when it does occur.

### **THE ROADMAP: RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW BUILD AN ACCESSIBLE, COORDINATED, YOUTH-CENTRIC FEDERAL SYSTEM TO PREVENT AND END YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS**

The following recommendations provide a roadmap for Congress and federal agencies, and reflect the vision and principles of our Proposed System to End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness.

The comprehensive system we envision includes services and housing that meet youth and young adults wherever and whenever they need help, spanning four stages of need: **Prevention, Early & Crisis Intervention, Long-Term** and **Aftercare**. The recommendations, if implemented, would strengthen the federal government response throughout all of these stages thus enabling communities to meet the needs of young people more effectively, efficiently and expansively.

Together, these recommendations, if adopted, will improve immediate access to food, safe housing, health care, education, and opportunities for economic independence and a more positive future for youth and young adults in America. Importantly, these recommendations were developed in collaboration with NN4Y's National Youth Advisory Council, young leaders who have experienced homelessness, and Policy Advisory Committee, experts from the field of RHY service providers.

## STEP 1

Develop a shared understanding of YYA homelessness so that data collected by different sources will paint a consistent and accurate picture of the need in our communities and ensure that all young people are able to access the services and housing they need,

### **Obstacle 1:** *Getting an Accurate Count of Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness*

National data on YYA homelessness is woefully incomplete, which means allocated resources are not based on actual need. This has resulted in a significant deficit in the funding necessary to truly prevent and respond to YYA homelessness in America despite policymakers' stated goal of ending youth homelessness in America by 2020.

**Solution:** Periodic national estimates of youth and young adult homelessness are needed to more fully understand the scope of need and track progress over time. Additionally, existing data points from ED McKinney-Vento data and HUD's Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress provide information that can be useful in targeting resources now. Importantly, community counts to collect this data should utilize multiple methodologies to capture both couch-surfing and street homeless.

**Expected Result:** Policymakers, advocates and community leaders will more fully understand, and be able to address, the gaps in housing and services for YYA experiencing homelessness, from **Prevention** and **Early & Crisis Intervention** through **Longer-Term** and **Aftercare**.

### **Obstacle 2:** *Broadening HUD's Definition of "Homeless" to Align with Other Federal Programs*

HUD has a narrower definition of homelessness than other federal programs targeted to homeless YYA. As this definition is applied through CoCs, only some YYA who experience homelessness are eligible for HUD-funded homeless assistance. For example, if a young person pays for a hotel room with their own income, they do not meet the HUD definition of "homeless" and are not eligible for HUD homeless assistance until they only have enough money for 14 days or less, no subsequent place to go and no resources to obtain permanent housing. Many young people bounce from place to place not knowing how long they can stay at any one location. These housing situations are not safe, stable or permanent—the very outcomes that HUD-funded housing models seek to achieve.

**Solution:** In order to increase access to HUD-funded housing for YYA who are at-risk of and experiencing homelessness, policymakers, CoCs and service providers need to: 1) Adopt and implement laws and policies that expands who is eligible to include all forms of homelessness for YYA; 2) Remove existing barriers so that YYA can access what they need when they need it (i.e. screening and assessments that determines YYA are not “vulnerable enough” even when they meet the definition); and 3) Allow communities to serve all persons experiencing homelessness in a community.

**Expected Result:** Many more youth and young adults will be able to access **Early & Crisis Intervention** and **Longer-Term** housing, leading to shorter periods of homelessness.

## STEP 2

Increasing investment in YYA-appropriate housing and services so that the gap between need and vital services is closed.

### **Obstacle 1:** *Increase Community System Resources to Prevent and Respond Quickly to Short and Long Term Episodes of Homelessness Experienced by Youth and Young Adults*

The woeful gap in funding for systems and programs that serve YYA at-risk of and experiencing homelessness is creating a pipeline to chronic, long-term homelessness that is depriving young people of the safe shelter, therapeutic services, education and bright future they could otherwise have. With an opportunity, young people are able to overcome trauma, achieve their full potential and become contributing members of their families and communities.

**Solution:** Across federal agencies, appropriations for programs serving youth and young adults at-risk of or experiencing homelessness must increase. Specifically: 1) HHS – Provide prevention services, safe housing and family support for youth and young adults by funding the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHY) at \$625 million; 2) HUD -- Provide safe housing for young adults by increasing funding for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Programs by \$642 million to serve this specific population; 3) ED – Identify and support youth who experience homelessness while in school by funding the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act at \$250 million; and 4) DOJ – Care for youth with juvenile justice involvement by funding the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act at \$145 million.

**Expected Result:** Increased funding will support a functioning system approach that prevents at-risk YYA from experiencing homelessness and provide critical housing and services to many more YYA experiencing homelessness, from **Prevention** and **Early & Crisis Intervention** through **Long-Term** and **Aftercare** periods.

**Obstacle 2:** *Addressing the Nation's Opioid Overdose Public Health Crisis*

Housing is a social determinant of health, and YYA experiencing homelessness face amplified risk for chemical dependency and alcoholism if unable to access housing and supportive services. Additionally, many youth fall through the cracks when leaving a hospital for treatment of addictions and have no safe, stable housing with services to help them heal and move forward. With few residential programs specializing in these services, youth battling addiction are left experiencing homelessness at an age which is likely to propel them into the next generation of chronically homeless adults.

**Solution:** Addressing this crisis will require a number of steps, including: 1) Substance Abuse Mental and Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) should focus on young people experiencing homelessness within the required 5% State Community Mental Health Services Block Grant set-aside. These funds support individuals as they are experiencing their first signs of serious mental illness, which often occurs at the same age when YYA might find themselves homeless; 2) SAMHSA should promote the development of a comprehensive and cross-systems approach to address the behavioral health needs of young people who are involved in the juvenile justice system and/or the criminal justice system; and 3) Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services should issue guidance encouraging states to use Medicaid to cover care coordination, case management services, and system navigation to improve health outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness.

**Expected Outcome:** More youth and young adults will receive vital services to support their recovery from substance abuse and mental health disorders, which will prevent, shorten and decrease the number of homelessness episodes through **Prevention, Early & Crisis Intervention** and **Long-Term** housing and services.

**STEP 3**

Examine and fix the child welfare and juvenile justice systems so they stop failing to help exiting youth transition with appropriate services and supports, especially stable housing.

**Obstacle 1:** *Preventing Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System from Entering or Experiencing Unnecessarily Long Periods of Homelessness*

Oftentimes, youth in the juvenile justice system have lower academic and vocational achievement, as well as serious health consequences (physical and mental) — all of which can put them at greater risk for experiencing homelessness. Further, youth may be excluded from housing and employment programs because of their juvenile records.



**Solution:** DOJ and HHS should jointly release guidance about using appropriate adolescent developmental approaches in partnership with RHY programs to assess whether an RHY Transitional Living Program and/or a family reunification approach is the best approach for the youth exiting JJ. Also, DOJ, DOL and HUD should work together to ensure that young people who have had juvenile justice involvement are not excluded from participation in housing and employment programs on account of their records.

**Expected Result:** Collaboration between the JJ system, RHY providers, HUD housing and employment programs will ensure that no youth exiting custody experiences homelessness through **Prevention, Early & Crisis Intervention** and **Long-Term** services and/or housing.

**Obstacle 2:** *Ensuring Youth Who Are Exiting Foster Care or Have Had Child Welfare Involvement Are Not at Risk of Homelessness*

Studies show that youth who have experienced the child welfare system at some point throughout their life are more likely to experience homelessness than young people who have never encountered the child welfare system. This includes young people who age out of foster care and those who were only in the child welfare system for a period of time and then were either reunified, adopted or placed in kinship care.

**Solution:** The Administration on Children and Families (ACF) within HHS should develop recommendations in coordination with other federal agencies to further a collaborative public system response to prevent or shorten experiences of homelessness among young people with child welfare involvement, whether aging out or exiting to another setting (adoption, reunification, kinship care, etc.). These recommendations should include highlighting promising practices across state child welfare agencies, emphasize the value of partnerships with community-based organizations and explore new investments and resources.

**Expected Result:** Collaboration between the child welfare agencies and RHY providers will ensure that no youth who encounters the child welfare system experiences homelessness through collaborative strategies to target **Prevention** , **Long-Term** and **Aftercare** to these young people.

**Obstacle 3:** *Cultivating a Larger Pool of Foster Care Families Capable of Providing Developmentally Appropriate Placements for Adolescents*

There is a shortage of foster care families in general and a particular shortage of foster families who have both the desire and expertise to provide developmentally appropriate care for adolescents. Also, the child

welfare system often does not serve youth experiencing homelessness who have serious needs and could benefit from the foster care system.

**Solution:** HHS should set aside technical assistance and supportive services funding within the foster care budget for families to care for youth experiencing homelessness who desire a foster care placement. Also, training is needed to ensure that all youth child welfare placements are developmentally appropriate and responsive to the unique needs of adolescents.

**Expected Result:** Young people in the child welfare system will receive developmentally appropriate care by families with expertise who want to care for them and these **Prevention** and **Early & Crisis Intervention** efforts will allow the individual youth to be safe and prevent homelessness experiences.

#### STEP 4

Strengthen and support the work of federal agencies to facilitate the effective sharing of resources and remove needless bureaucratic barriers that prevent YYA from receiving the help they need.

**Obstacle 1:** *Addressing the Gap in Housing and Services for YYA Experiencing Homelessness Due to a Lack of Coordination and Understanding Between HUD CoCs and RHY Service Providers*

Even though HUD systems have become more available to serve young adults, there is often a lack of understanding between CoCs and RHY providers about how best to serve all young people experiencing homelessness. For example, RHY providers aren't always included in their local CoC and may not understand how CoC's function. Likewise, many CoCs don't have specialized services for young adults experiencing homelessness and serving this population may not be a priority. Most CoCs do not provide any developmentally appropriate resources for young people experiencing homelessness, and without RHY service providers and CoCs learning how to work together efficiently, young people in these communities will be left without appropriate or available housing and service options.

**Solution:** HUD should strengthen policies that encourage CoCs to: 1) Incorporate RHY service providers' involvement in the CoC; 2) Ensure that programs for young people receive HUD funding through the NOFA process; and 3) Require that any coordinated assessment system's measure of needs are developmentally appropriate for young adults and specifically assess the unique vulnerabilities of YYA experiencing homelessness.

**Expected Result:** YYA will have more options for developmentally appropriate housing throughout the system – from **Prevention** and **Early & Crisis Intervention** to **Long-Term** and **Aftercare**.

**Obstacle 2:** *Ensuring Youth and Young Adult Housing Programs Do Not Suffer from the Movement to Eliminate Congregate Care*

There is currently a movement among many states to completely eliminate congregate care in the child welfare context, but because of local definitions of congregate care and how funding is allocated, YYA homelessness programs are being swept up in this movement. Unlike youth in child welfare systems, young people enter RHY specific programs voluntarily and often because their home is not safe. RHY programs in particular are quite different from typical child welfare congregate care in that the number of young people per program is small. Also, RHY providers are experts in assessing and facilitating family reunification when safe and appropriate. RHY programs offer youth a safe, stable placement and services to address the issues driving them to experience homelessness. Moreover, youth frequently run from child welfare funded congregate care and/or foster care placements and voluntarily seek housing and services in RHY programs.

**Solution:** HHS must issue guidance to states that RHY programs should not be included in state and community policy changes which seek to significantly decrease congregate care in the child welfare context because RHY programs are distinct from child welfare congregate care in that: 1) While there may be some overlaps in the populations served, engagement with RHY programs is voluntary and markedly different than involuntary placement in a typical child welfare congregate care setting; and 2) There is a difference in the size, scope and structure of these programs as well as variance in the length of time young people stay.

**Expected Result:** More youth and young adults will find safe housing with supportive services in RHY programs that meet critical **Prevention, Early & Crisis Intervention** and **Long-Term** housing and service needs.

**Obstacle 3:** *Overcoming Barriers to Accessing and Completing Secondary and Post-Secondary Education*

Youth and young adults experiencing homelessness face many obstacles to completing higher education: 1) Despite requirements in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that States establish procedures so youth experiencing homelessness can receive course credit during unstable times, many homeless students changing schools wind up repeating courses or entire grades which, in turn, leads to high high-school drop-out rates; 2) Despite their legal right to education related support services, youth experiencing homelessness often fall through the cracks or do not enroll in school at all because they and/or their families are not aware of their rights; and 3) Though all homeless college-age young people are considered independent students eligible for financial aid, many still experience homelessness and its associated turmoil during school breaks, making it difficult to return and complete their education.

**Solution:** ED should: 1) Issue information to SEAs and LEAs on how to establish

procedures that ensure YYA experiencing homelessness get credit for their work and that these credits move with them to different schools; 2) Establish mechanisms for assistance and monitoring to ensure that dedicated McKinney-Vento educational coordinators and liaisons are appropriately resourced with time and training to fulfill their duties to assist unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness; and 3) Release guidance on best practices to help YYA experiencing homelessness enroll in and complete post-secondary education, including how to designate single points of contact on college campuses, ensure access to existing campus housing, develop housing options during academic breaks and improve access to work study programs.

**Expected Result:** YYA experiencing homelessness will be able to complete their secondary education and have access to the post-secondary education opportunities that all American youth deserve, through **Prevention, Early & Crisis Intervention, Long-Term** and **Aftercare** supports.

**Obstacle 4:** *Improving Schools' Ability to Prevent and Quickly End Episodes of Homelessness*

Schools are an integral place where youth heading for a crisis can be identified early on. Schools can then intervene to either prevent or quickly respond to episodes of homelessness through the provision of services and connecting them and their families to additional resources as needed. However, most school personnel are not provided with the training to identify these young people and few schools have the resources and expertise these young people and their families need.

**Solution:** In implementing ESSA, ED should utilize the experience of local McKinney-Vento homelessness liaisons to identify and promote promising school-based approaches to identify at-risk youth and prevent episodes of homelessness. These approaches should include increased coordination with RHY providers and other systems and community based services.

**Expected Result:** Many youth and young adults will receive the housing and services they need to prevent them from experiencing homelessness through **Prevention, Early & Crisis Intervention**.

**Obstacle 5:** *Ensuring That RHY Providers are Equipped to Protect Youth from Human Trafficking*

Increased housing and services for YYA experiencing homelessness helps to prevent them from becoming a victim of human trafficking. Further, training for YYA homelessness providers can aid in identifying and providing appropriate services for survivors of human trafficking (both sex and labor trafficking). In the current funding landscape, however, most RHY providers lack the funding to serve all YYA experiencing homelessness and lack the training to identify those who have survived a trafficking situation.

**Solution:** HHS should increase collaboration and training to both OTIP and FYSB grantees to enhance prevention and response services to trafficking victims and YYA experiencing homelessness. Additionally, RHY providers should be provided with more funding to increase the number of YYA they can serve.

**Expected Result:** Increased capacity of RHY programs to prevent human trafficking and appropriately serve survivors through **Early & Crisis Intervention** and **Long-Term** housing and services.

## STEP 5

Create mechanisms for flexibility in federal programs so that communities can develop YYA accessible and appropriate housing and services that meet the needs in their community.

### **Obstacle 1:** *Blending Federal Funding Streams to Provide a Continuum of Service*

YYA experiencing homelessness frequently interact with multiple federal programs, all of which have limited resources and many of which provide only part of what a young person needs. Blending those programs' funding streams, without imposing new restrictions or requirements, would ensure a continuum of services for youth transitioning into adulthood.

**Solution:** The Performance Partnership Pilots (P3) is a very successful initiative that allows communities to blend funding to test innovative, cost-effective and outcome-focuses strategies for improving results for young people experiencing homelessness, in foster care, juvenile justice system involved, not working, not in school or at-risk of leaving school. The lessons learned through these pilots regarding collaboration and flexibility should be scaled up and implemented throughout the services offered by ED, HHS, HUD, DOJ and other participating agencies.

**Expected Result:** More YYA will have access to youth-appropriate **Early & Crisis Intervention**, **Long-Term** housing and services as well as **Aftercare** services.

### **Obstacle 2:** *Breaking Through HUD Bureaucracy*

While HUD Continuums of Care have become more inclusive of young adults, their models are largely not developmentally appropriate for YYA. Further, HUD's requirements for national population priorities get in the way of local communities guiding their response to homelessness based on local needs assessments.

**Solution:** HUD should utilize lessons that will be learned from the ten Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) communities and require all CoCs to: 1) Implement developmentally appropriate entry processes that do not screen out young people; 2) Provide housing models that are developmentally appropriate to young adults; 3)



Provide young adults access to services as needed in addition to housing; and 4) Utilize assessments with outcome standards that recognize the experiences of young adults exiting homelessness are different than that of older adults.

**Expected Result:** More YYA will access developmentally appropriate **Early & Crisis Intervention** and **Long-Term** housing and services.

**Obstacle 3:** *Making it Easier for YYA Experiencing Homelessness to Secure Jobs and Achieve Financial Independence*

Youth and young adults experiencing homelessness often face unique barriers to entering the workforce, including: lack of access to legal identification, limited resources for transportation and a criminal history and/or court-based fines and fees as a result of minor crimes committed in order to secure food or housing. Additionally, many young people have never held a job and lack the workforce knowledge, skills and experience needed to obtain and maintain the type of employment that leads to financial independence.

**Solution:** The Department of Labor should issue a Training and Employment Notice to develop year-round subsidized employment programs specifically targeted to young people experiencing homelessness. In addition, DOL should outline strategies for supporting basic literacy and adult education concurrently with earned income strategies such as subsidized employment to support those with literacy, education and employment needs. Finally, DOL should issue guidance about strategies to incorporate legal services into WIOA funded youth programs, focusing especially on acquiring documentation young people need for employment.

**Expected Result:** Ensuring improved access to employment and training resources will allow youth experiencing homelessness to develop skills and experience in the workforce while in **Long-Term** housing, which will enable them to exit homelessness for good.

**STEP 6**

Adopt a shared vision for core outcomes to measure success across federal programs that are developmentally appropriate.

**Obstacle:** *Establishing Consistent Outcome Measures Across Federal Programs Serving YYA Experiencing Homelessness*

Communities struggle with duplicative data collection requirements and outcome measures that vary between the patchwork quilt of funding streams that they need to access in order to provide the housing and services that young people need. Some of the funding streams have outcomes that are not even

developmentally appropriate for young people, because the program was designed for older adults. These inconsistencies can become unduly burdensome on communities and create competing priorities for programs.

**Solution:** The multiple federal programs who target resources to prevent or address youth and youth adult homelessness should use both USICH's *Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness* and NN4Y's *Criteria for Ending Youth and Young Adult Homelessness* to craft outcomes that are appropriate for both their funding streams and the YYA populations.

**Expected Result:** Community responses will become more coordinated because all funding streams will be driving the work in a consistent direction as they seek to achieve common results in addressing the unique needs of young people through **Prevention, Early & Crisis Intervention** and **Long-Term** housing and services.

These recommendations, if implemented, would strengthen the federal government response and encourage and enable communities to develop the comprehensive systems we envision. These system would provide services and housing to youth and young adults wherever and whenever they need help, spanning from Prevention to Aftercare. Together, these recommendations will ensure that all young people have access to what they deserve- food, safe housing, health care, education and opportunities to achieve economic independence and a more positive future.

State and local communities can also take action to support YYA through policy decisions and legislation. At least nine states have specific legislation addressing YYA homelessness, including providing dedicated funding for programs serving young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. Review NN4Y's Model Legislation to Provide Housing and Services to Runaway and Homeless Youth to learn more about how states can support YYA through their own laws and state funded housing and supportive services.



## APPENDIX 1

### FEDERAL PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH

#### U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)

##### **The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) (P.L. 110-378)**

Provides foundational support to address youth and young adult homelessness across the country. RHYA funds three key pillars of intervention to help YYA experiencing homelessness: street outreach, emergency shelters for minors and transitional living programs for youth between the ages of 16 and 22. Additionally, a national communications system (National Runaway Safeline) and national training and technical assistance center (Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center) are created by this act.

##### **Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) (P.L. 113-65)**

Provides states with funding to provide services to youth who are expected to age out of foster care as well as former foster care youth ages 18 to 21. Funds from the program can be used for helping with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support and assured connections to caring adults for older youth in foster care. Activities and programs include, but are not limited to, help with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support and assured connections to caring adults for older youth in foster care.

##### **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351)**

Increased federal funds available to states who choose to extend assistance to foster youth up until age 21, when those youth meet certain education, training or work requirements or has a medical condition that prevents them from participating in those activities. Services can include housing assistance, vocational and college help, and counseling.

##### **Title IV-E Federal Foster Care Program**

Administered by state and local public child welfare agencies to help provide safe and stable out-of-home care for children until the children are safely returned home, placed permanently with adoptive families or placed in other planned arrangements for permanency. Funds are available for monthly maintenance payments for the daily care and supervision of eligible children; administrative costs to manage the program;

training of staff and foster care providers; recruitment of foster parents and costs related to the design, implementation and operation of statewide data collection systems.

The Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Projects allow states to offer greater flexibility in program design and service delivery. Some states with Title IV-E waivers have used their flexibility fund prevention, independent living arrangements, and systems-level interventions.

### **Affordable Care Act (ACA) (P.L. 111-148)**

The Affordable Care Act has created a stronger safety net for unaccompanied homeless youth by expanding access to health care insurance and ensuring parity for behavioral health treatment.<sup>1</sup> Service providers can assist homeless youth in signing up for health insurance by merely offering documentation that the youth is living in poverty. The ACA requires issuers that offer dependent coverage to make the coverage available until youth reach the age of 26.

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (ED)**

#### **McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) (CFDA No. 84.196)**

Created to remove barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth in school. It establishes a requirement for all state educational agencies to designate an Office of State Coordinator to develop and implement a state plan, including data collection, and for all local educational agencies to designate a local liaison to identify and support homeless children and youth and ensure their ability to enroll in school. Dedicated exclusively to homeless children and youth, formula grants are made to the 50 states, tribes and territories based on each state's share of Title I, Part A, funds.

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD)**

#### **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77)**

Funds local, regional, and state homeless assistance programs through the Continuum of Care (CoC) process. A CoC is a geographical administrative unit through which federal homeless assistance funds are distributed and through which homeless assistance providers in a specific geographic area work together to apply for federal funding. HUD ranks the applications and provides funding based on the quality of the application, the

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<sup>1</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. (2011). The Affordable Care Act: Implications for Older Adolescents and Young Adults. Retrieved from: [ncsl.org/portals/1/documents/health/HRAdolescents.pdf](http://ncsl.org/portals/1/documents/health/HRAdolescents.pdf).

performance of the local homeless assistance system, the need for homeless assistance, and the local rankings of individual programs. Funding can be used for permanent and supportive housing, transitional housing, and services. Some funding is also distributed to communities through the Emergency Solutions Grants program.

### **Family Unification Program (FUP), Housing Choice Voucher Program**

Awarded through a competitive process, FUP provides a formula for local level partnerships between public agencies and social service providers. HUD and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are encouraged to use FUP as a model for the creation of Memoranda of Understanding that facilitate resource sharing and relationship development between agencies at the local level. Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) are provided to two different populations under the FUP.<sup>2</sup>

## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL)**

### **The Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (P.L. 113-128)**

Employment training and academic support services for both youth in school and school dropouts ages 14 to 21. Eligible youth must be low-income and either deficient in basic literacy skills, a school dropout, homeless, a runaway, foster child, a parent, an offender, or an individual who needs additional assistance to complete an educational program or secure employment. Youth councils of local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) advise the boards about youth activities. WIBs are certified by the state to coordinate the workforce development activities of a particular area through a local workforce investment system.

### **YouthBuild (P.L. 109-281)**

YouthBuild was authorized as a federal program in 1992 under Subtitle D of Title IV of the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act. First authorized under the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, the federal YouthBuild program was transferred to the US Department of Labor in 2006 and is administered by the Employment and Training Administration. Since 1992, DOL and HUD have awarded YouthBuild grants and contracts totaling over \$1.2 billion to local community- and faith-based nonprofit organizations, and local government entities.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Family Unification Program. Retrieved from: [portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/hcv/family](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/family).

<sup>3</sup> YouthBuild U.S.A. The Federal YouthBuild Program. Retrieved from: [youthbuild.org/federal-youthbuild-program](http://youthbuild.org/federal-youthbuild-program).



## APPENDIX 2

### PRINCIPLES OF SERVICES FOR YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

In an effective, youth-appropriate system to prevent and end YYA homelessness, all support services and housing models should be designed and implemented according to the following principles:

**Positive Youth Development (PYD):** focuses on meeting youth at their own developmental stage and supporting positive growth, to ensure that young people have opportunities to contribute within the community and develop transferable skills and competencies through healthy interactions with adults and other youth.<sup>1</sup>

**Trauma-Informed Care (TIC):** provides services appropriate for youth who have experienced abuse and/or trauma. Moreover, it places an emphasis on the creation of appropriate settings and relationships within which a young person can heal.<sup>2</sup>

**Cultural Competence:** refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly in the context of human resources, non-profit organizations and government agencies.<sup>3</sup>

**Client-Centered Care:** is an approach to service provision rooted in an understanding of each client's needs and perspectives. Customized individual treatment "starts where the youth is at," allowing the client to identify strengths, clarify goals and set a path toward achievement.<sup>4</sup>

**Strengths-Based Services:** describes an assessment and treatment model that identifies individual core strengths across life domains. Additionally, it builds upon those strengths to overcome issues that youth believe are necessary to require positive change.<sup>5</sup>

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1 National Resource Center for Youth Development. The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH. Retrieved from <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/youth-engagement/positive-youth-development>.

2 United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2010). *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*.

3 Martin, M. & Vaughn, B. (2007). Cultural competence: the nuts & bolts of diversity & inclusion. *Strategic Diversity & Inclusion Management* magazine, pp. 31-36. San Francisco, CA: DTUI Publications Division.

4 Center for Health Training. (2003). *Fundamental skills for case managers, a self-study guide*. Oakland, CA: Center for Health Training.

5 MacArthur, J., Rawana, E. P., & Brownlee, K. (2011). Implementation of a strengths-based approach in the practice of child and youth care. *Relational Child and Youth Practice*, 24(3), 6-16.; Durrant, M. (1993). *Residential treatment: A cooperative competency-based approach to therapy and program design*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

## APPENDIX 3

### FEDERAL DEFINITIONS OF HOMELESSNESS

#### U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**The Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Act (42 USC 5701 § 387)** defines “homeless youth” as individuals who are not more than 18 years of age if seeking shelter in a Basic Center Program, or not more than 21 years of age or less than 16 years of age if seeking services in a Transitional Living Program, and for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement.

#### U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth (42 USC 11434(a))** defines children and youth as homeless if they “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence,” including sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons; living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to lack of alternative accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; and living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar places.

#### U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

**The Homeless Emergency and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009** amends and reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act with substantial changes, including an expansion of HUD’s definition of homeless:


1. An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; is living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or is exiting an institution where they temporarily resided;
2. An individual or family who is losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or a doubled-up situation, in 14 days (previously seven days) and lacks resources or support networks to remain in housing;
3. Unaccompanied youth and families who are homeless under other federal statutes (such as the education definition or the RHY Act definition) who have experienced a long-term period without living independently in permanent housing, have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves, and can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of childhood abuse, the presence of a disability, multiple barriers

to employment, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against an individual or a family member;

4. Individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member.

Unfortunately, as written and implemented in law and regulations, HUD's definitions impose confusion and undue burdens on YYA at risk of or experiencing homelessness. For instance, YYA who are temporarily staying with others usually lack clarity as to the length of time and they can remain in that setting, and their arrangements are subject to change with little to no notice. For these reasons, NN4Y strongly recommends that law and policies across HUD programs adopt and implement the broadest understanding of homelessness as possible to ensure that YYA have access to the services and housing solutions that they need regardless of how they are experiencing homelessness.





This publication and more information about the Proposed System is available at  
[www.nn4youth.org/learn/what-works](http://www.nn4youth.org/learn/what-works)