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Homeless and Runaway Youth

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LearningWork Connection

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Who are Homeless and Runaway Youth?

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) uses the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act definition for a **homeless individual** (42 U.S.C. 11302).

- (1) An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; or
- (2) An individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:
 - (A) A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
 - (B) An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - (C) A public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Runaway youth. A person under 18 years of age who absents himself/herself from home or place of legal residence without the permission of parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

Note: Local areas are cautioned that although the WIA allows for service to runaway youth, it does not address legal implications that could arise from service to this group.

Throwaway youth. Minors who are forced by their parents or legal guardians to leave home.

Individuals imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to an Act of the Congress or a State law are not considered homeless individuals.

Statistics

- The national homeless youth population is estimated to be between 500,000 and 2.8 million.
- Youth account for 5 percent of urban homeless.
- The U.S. Department of Justice estimated that in 1999, nearly 1.7 million youth had a runaway or throwaway episode.
- A 1991 national study revealed that 25 percent of former foster youth were homeless at least one night.
- A survey of 209 unaccompanied youth who were homeless in Minnesota reported that 46 percent had been in a correctional facility and, of those, 44 percent exited into an unstable housing situation.
- One out of every seven youth will run away some time between the ages of 10 and 18.
- Every year approximately 5,000 runaways and homeless youth die from assault, illness, and suicide.

Causes

What leads to homelessness? Why do youth run away?

Conditions Resulting in Homelessness and Runaway Youth

Homelessness is usually caused by economic problems.

- Lack of family's affordable housing
- Limited employment opportunities
- Insufficient wages
- No medical insurance
- Inadequate welfare benefits

Youth may also be homeless when they transition out of programs.

- Transitioning out of foster care
- Release from juvenile justice system

Runaway youth are often fleeing from a painful situation.

- Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse
- Strained relationships
- Substance abuse
- Parental neglect, disapproval
- Divorce
- Remarriage
- Problems with siblings
- Pregnancy
- Poor grades
- Suspension or expulsion from school
- Sexual orientation
- Poor self-esteem

Characteristics of Homeless and Runaway Youth

In many respects, homeless and runaway youth are similar to other at-risk youth. In addition, they tend to have some unique characteristics.

Characteristics of Homeless and Runaway Youth

- Conduct disorder
 - Oppositional defiant disorder
 - Post traumatic stress disorder
 - Uncontrollable behavior
- History of abuse
- Unstable, violent home life
- Health problems
- Unwillingness to engage in treatment
- Self-destructive behavior
- More frequent prostitution and criminal activity
- Association with those involved in criminal activity
- Mental instability

Challenges

Like other at-risk youth, homeless and runaway face poverty, lack of positive role models, unstable family life, and lack of motivation to finish school. However, homeless and runaway youth are confronted with their own set of challenges.

Challenges for Homeless and Runaway Youth

- Inability to earn sufficient money to meet needs – too young, no skills, no credentials
- Lack of awareness of available services
- Distrust of authority
- High risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- Anxiety, depression, low self-esteem
- Poor health and nutrition habits
- Limited self-sufficiency skills
- Lack of shelters that can accommodate youth
- Difficulties attending school
 - Guardianship requirements
 - Residency requirements
 - Lack of records
 - Lack of transportation

Who Is Responsible for Serving Homeless and Runaway Youth?

The juvenile justice system and child welfare agencies have the primary responsibility for providing housing, food, and other services such as reunification with families to homeless and runaway youth.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974) includes three basic programs. Local juvenile justice agencies can provide additional information.

- The **Basic Center** program provides grants to support emergency shelter for youth under age 18 and provide counseling for youth and families to assist in reuniting them.
- The **Transitional Living** program provides grants to support long-term residential supports and life skill supports to youth ages 16-21.
- The **Street Outreach** program provides grants to support street-based outreach and education to those who have been sexually abused or at risk of being sexually abused.

Homeless and runaway youth may also be eligible for WIA youth services. WIA youth staff would provide services to eligible homeless and runaway youth just like any other WIA-eligible youth.

Networking

WIA youth staff should network with appropriate agencies to meet the immediate, basic needs of homeless and runaway youth.

Lighthouse Youth Services, located in Cincinnati, Ohio, prevents youth in child welfare from becoming homeless and prevents young adults in the adult shelter system from remaining homeless through their Independent Living and Transitional Living Programs. In 1981, Lighthouse developed a semi-supervised scattered-site apartment model based on the philosophy that young people learn best by doing and that youth should have opportunities to live on their own and develop self-sufficiency skills prior to discharge from care. The agency has served over 1,000 youth in its model and averages around 80 youth a day living in their own apartments. (http://www.lys.org/Programs/Runaway_and_Homeless_Youth_Division.html)

Networking Possibilities

- Long-Term Responsibility
 - Children's services
 - Foster care agencies
 - Juvenile justice system
 - Family and social services
- Short-Term Assistance
 - Faith-based agencies
 - Homeless shelters
 - Food pantries
- Schools

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