Youth Homelessness in Texas

A report to fulfill the requirements of House Bill 679
(84th Texas Legislature, regular session)

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Submitted by:

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Executive Summary

The 84th Texas Legislative Session's House Bill 679 (Appendix A) requires the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA), in conjunction with other members of the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless (TICH), to conduct a study of homeless youth and submit a report to the Texas Legislature no later than December 1, 2016. In the study, TDHCA is directed to 1) collect data on the number of homeless youth in the state; 2) examine the needs of homeless youth and the degree to which current programs are meeting those needs; 3) identify any sources of funding that might be available to provide services to homeless youth; and 4) develop a strategic plan establishing steps to be taken and timelines for reducing youth homelessness in this state. The current report was prepared to address the requirements of the legislation through a contract by TDHCA with the University of Houston, Graduate College of Social Work.

Definition

The definition of "homeless youth" as defined in Sec.2306.1101. is a person who is younger than 19 years of age, including a migratory child, who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including a person who is living in an emergency shelter, abandoned in a hospital, or awaiting foster care placement[1]; has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for humans; or is living in a car, park, other public space, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train station, or similar setting.

Number of Homeless Youth in Texas

Three sources of data were used that provide different insight into the number of homeless youth in Texas. These sources draw on data that uses different criteria for determining homelessness across different time frames so each provides information that contributes to a broader understanding of youth homelessness as it is encountered in different settings.

1) Administrative data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) provided information on the number of Texas students, ages 3-20, that were identified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education definition of homelessness at any time during the school year. During the 2014-2015 school year, 111,881 students were identified by

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[1]As of December 10, 2016 the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act removes the 'awaiting foster care placement' from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education definition.

schools across Texas as homeless with 15,608 of these identified as unaccompanied youth who are not living with parents or legal guardians[2].

2) Data from the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) was also used to identify the number of young people in foster care that are on runaway status, under DFPS supervision (i.e. temporarily without placement), were placed in emergency shelters, had been given up due to a parental refusal to accept responsibility, or had been abandoned at a hospital over the course of a fiscal year. For FY 2015, 5,506 youth met these criteria.

3) Original data was also collected in conjunction with community Point-in-Time (PIT) counts and a youth count across 16 communities in Texas through a study called *Youth Count Texas!* (*YCT!*). This number is a snapshot of a single point in time of homelessness for youth (up through age 24) identified as living on the streets, in shelters or in unstable housing situations. Across Texas, 758 youth and young adults were counted and surveyed through this effort.

Needs of Homeless Youth in Texas

Needs of homeless youth were examined using data from a literature search, primary data from the *YCT!* survey, and feedback from stakeholders obtained through feedback sessions and individual interviews. Primary need areas reviewed included housing, education, employment, health & mental health, foster care, juvenile/criminal justice, victimization, and social support. Primary reasons for homelessness in *YCT!* were financial and family-related, highlighting the need for solutions focused on affordable housing and employment as well as preventive interventions to support families.

Educational needs identified included better education about services available through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education program and better connections with community resources and post-secondary education. Needs related to employment included better training programs matched to labor market needs and removing barriers to getting documentation. Mental health problems were prevalent with nearly 40% of youth in the *YCT!* survey identifying as having a mental disorder, and stakeholders identifying barriers to accessing mental health services.

Consistent with prior studies, 37% of those in the *YCT!* survey reported a history of foster care, highlighting the ongoing need to intervene with youth served in the foster care system. The

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[2]. Information submitted by TEA to U.S. Department of Education (USDE) through the Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR) has slightly higher totals. For the purposes of this report, it can be assumed that the information provided for this study is accurate; while also recognizing that different studies and reports citing TEA homeless education data may have slightly varying results.

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intersection between juvenile justice involvement and homelessness highlighted the need to support youth exiting these systems to acquire stable housing and to provide housing interventions quickly when youth experience homelessness to prevent subsequent criminal justice involvement. Trauma and victimization are prevalent in youth that experience unstable housing situations, highlighting the need for trauma informed interventions. Social supports are also an integral part of providing interventions to homeless youth, particularly providing connections with positive peers and supportive adults. Perceived needs among respondents in *YCT!* included transportation, documentation, dental care, stable housing, and mental health supports.

Services Available

Youth experiencing homelessness in Texas are eligible for additional services and supports through the school system, DFPS, and through services specifically designed to prevent and address homelessness. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act requires that all schools identify homeless students and ensure that barriers to education are removed for students experiencing homelessness. Each district has a designated homeless liaison to support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with identifying homeless students and fulfilling the requirements of the law. Federal funds through Title I and competitive McKinney-Vento subgrant awards, known as the TEXSHEP (Texas Support for Homeless Education Program) provide some districts with additional resources to remove barriers and promote academic success for students experiencing homelessness. DFPS provides a variety of supports to prevent homelessness among older youth in their care. Supports include transitional living, preparation for independent living classes, assistance in getting identification, and extended care. Housing specific supports include supported independent living programs for those in extended care and an allowance for housing given at the time of transition out of care.

Housing-related services available across Texas include preventive counseling, the Texas runaway & homeless hotline, street outreach, drop-in centers, emergency shelters, host homes, transitional housing and supported housing. Services are most available in urban areas such as Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, & Austin; however, providers in urban areas were also the most likely to report capacity problems and unmet need for services.

Funding Sources

There is not a single funding stream in the Texas state budget dedicated to providing services to children, youth, and/or young adults experiencing homelessness. There are a small number of state programs that may prevent homelessness among certain youth populations, as well as a number of funding streams that serve broader homeless populations.

State-administered programs include the following programs through DFPS – Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR), Texas Youth and Runaway Hotline, Supervised Independent Living,

Transitional Living & Aftercare Services. TDHCA administers the following programs that are used by some youth: the Section 811 Project Rental Assistance Program, Emergency Solutions Grants, and the Homeless Housing and Services Program.

Federal funding comes from the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) program through the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB); the Continuum of Care (CoC), Emergency Solutions Grants directly to cities or counties, and Family Unification Vouchers through Housing and Urban Development (HUD); and the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act.

Recommendations

Recommendations are presented to address identified gaps across five areas identified below:

1. Improve Data Sources for Counting Homeless Youth
2. Provide a Full Continuum of Housing-Related Supports
3. Increase Service Delivery and Supports to Youth Identified Through Schools
4. Prevent Homelessness by Addressing Needs of Youth in Foster Care & Juvenile Justice
5. Remove Barriers to Exiting Homelessness

Conclusions

Large numbers of youth are identified by school systems across Texas as living in an unstable housing situation each year. These are youth with a wide range of needs that require different levels of service intensity depending on their situations. Many systems, including foster care, juvenile justice, and housing-related service systems, provide services to youth who are at risk of or are currently experiencing homelessness. This report highlights the need to use consistent terminology and assessment measures across schools and other systems and for all of these providers to coordinate together to address the range of needs homeless youth present. Schools identify large numbers of youth and they could serve as a point for screening and connecting them with more intensive services when needed. Policies that support smooth transitions to stable housing for youth served in foster care and juvenile justice would also assist in reducing homelessness since young people disproportionately experience homelessness when they exit these systems. Finally, gaps in the service system that can address housing-related needs highlight the need to fund communities to develop a full continuum of services from prevention to supported housing to ensure all identified needs are met.

Introduction

The 84th Texas Legislative Session's House Bill 679 (Appendix A) requires the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA), in conjunction with other members of the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless (TICH) to conduct a study of homeless youth and submit a report to the Texas Legislature no later than December 1, 2016. In the study, TDHCA is directed to 1) collect data on the number of homeless youth in the state; 2) examine the needs of homeless youth and the degree to which current programs are meeting those needs; 3) identify any sources of funding that might be available to provide service to homeless youth; and 4) develop a strategic plan establishing steps to be taken and timelines for reducing youth homelessness in this state.

The TICH is a council created by the 74th Texas Legislature to coordinate Texas' resources for the homeless. Per legislation, the TICH serves as an advisory committee to TDHCA, and TDHCA also provides clerical support to the TICH. The TICH is composed of eleven state agencies and representatives appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House of Representatives. TDHCA has two representatives on the TICH. The TICH has a working group on youth homelessness that provided input specific to this report.

The activities and data collection described in this report were completed through contracts with Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) and the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work (UH GCSW). The study was conducted in 3 phases. Phases 1 and 2 were completed by TNOYS and focused on primary data collection using a survey administered in communities across the state, primarily in conjunction with area PIT counts. Information and reporting specific to these phases are attached as Appendices to this report (see Appendices B&C). Phase 3 involved data analysis of the survey data (see Appendix D&E) as well as of administrative data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Stakeholders provided feedback on priority needs of homeless youth in 3 separate feedback sessions and in individual interviews (see Appendix F). Surveys of providers working with homeless youth (See Appendix G) and homeless liaisons who work with homeless students in public schools (see Appendix H) were also conducted and analyzed to provide additional data to inform recommendations. A review of the literature was also conducted to further identify needs of homeless youth (see Appendix I). Recommendations in this report are informed by data across these data sources.

Reading this Report

This report is organized as outlined below in line with the above listed statute:

   I.   Data on the Number of Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Texas

  II.   Needs of Youth Experiencing Homelessness

III.   Homeless-Related Services and Perceived Service Gaps in Texas

IV.   Funding Sources Available to Address Youth Homelessness

V.   Recommendations

I. Data on Number of Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Texas

Overview

Producing a reliable estimate of the number of youth experiencing homelessness at any given time is a challenge for researchers across the country. Definitional issues regarding which youth should be counted as homeless and over what period of time the count occurs result in widely varying estimates across data sources. In addition, characteristics of homeless youth such as a tendency to remain hidden and not identify as homeless (Santa Maria et al, 2015), make them particularly difficult to capture as a population (see Appendix J for additional discussion).

The definition of homeless youth in HB 679 restricts the age to those under age 19. This age group is largely found through schools and the child welfare system hence this report reviews administrative data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Youth are also counted by local Continuum of Care (CoC) organizations through community Point-in-Time (PIT) counts that are held in January each year to provide data to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

A special effort named *Youth Count Texas! (YCT!)* was developed in response to HB 679 to mobilize communities across Texas to count and survey young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability either in conjunction with their PIT counts or through specific data collection efforts targeted toward youth. These efforts were directed at all youth under age 25, since many federal programs define homeless youth as up to age 24. Data from *YCT!* are presented to provide additional information about the numbers of youth counted in communities across the state at a given point in time.

Administrative Data from the Texas Education Agency

Administrative data provided by TEA provides information about the number of homeless youth identified through schools in Texas. Schools determine that a student is homeless based on the definition of homelessness provided through the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento, 2013), Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program. The act defines the term "homeless children and youth" as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence which specifically includes children and youth who are…

- sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations;
- living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- abandoned in hospitals;
- awaiting foster care placement[3];

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[3] As of December 10, 2016 the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act removes the 'awaiting foster care placement' from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education definition.

- have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; or
- migratory children who qualify as homeless based on the criteria above.

This includes both accompanied and unaccompanied youth and represent students from ages 3-20 that are served through elementary and secondary schools. The McKinney-Vento Act defines unaccompanied as, "a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian" (42 USC §11434a(6), 2001). This includes youth who are living on their own and those that are staying with someone who does not have legal guardianship.

Homeless identification is conducted for all students at the time of enrollment into school. Schools are directed to determine the current living situations of families who meet McKinney-Vento criteria and these situations are grouped into four categories for reporting – unsheltered, living in a hotel or motel, living in a shelter, or doubled up. Homeless students are also designated as unaccompanied if they are not staying with a legal guardian. Additional homeless students are identified throughout the school year as homeless liaisons become aware of situations where a student has become homeless or as new students enroll in the school district. Once students are identified as homeless and McKinney-Vento eligible this determination remains throughout the school year. The number reported for a school year is a total based on the number of homeless students uniquely reported to TEA by local education agencies (LEAs), including both school districts and open enrollment charter schools. Therefore if a student moves and is counted in more than one LEA, they are only identified once for the purposes of this study. Despite school districts' best effort to identify and report all students in homeless situations, under reporting occurs. New federal legislation, December 10, 2015 the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), formerly known as No Child Left Behind, places a strong emphasis on the Homeless Liaison's responsibilities to identify students in homeless situations. Research from the Urban Institute suggests that up to 10% of people living in poverty will experience homelessness at any time during the given year.[4] Based on this estimate, Texas likely has many more students who are homeless in Texas schools than are being identified.

The education systems reporting on the number of homeless students have become increasingly standardized since 2012 when homeless indicators were added to TEA's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Prior to this school year this information was collected and reported in eGrants, which was a less accurate reporting system for McKinney-Vento Homeless data. Federal law provides specific definition of who is defined as homeless and meets eligibility requirements. These definitions are included in TEA's PEIMS Data Standards. Although LEAs use the same definitions and reporting metrics, there is currently no

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[4] http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/310305-What-Will-It-Take-To-End-Homelessness-.PDF

standardization across districts of specifically how the questions to determine living situation or unaccompanied status are asked. A majority of LEAs include this information on a student residency questionnaire or assessment. Additional sample tools and resources to support LEAs with identification are provided through the Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO). For the 2016-2017 school year, the Every Student Succeeds Act will require reporting on specific outcomes for homeless students separate from other at risk students. Specifically, ESSA requires that state report cards must include disaggregated information on the graduation rates and academic achievement of homeless children and youth. These data will become available in future years which should enable a more complete understanding about the impacts of homelessness on school outcomes.

For the 2014-2015 school year, a total of 111,881 students were identified by schools as homeless, with 15,608 of these identified as unaccompanied and homeless. Approximately 79% of those identified as homeless were living in doubled up situations, 11% were living in shelters, 7% were living in hotel or motels, and 3% were in unsheltered situations (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Living Situations of Homeless Students in Schools, 2014-2015
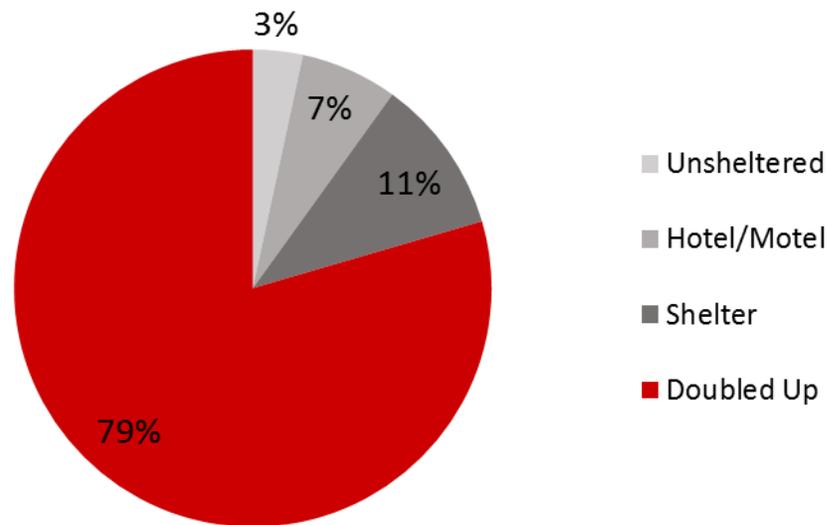
Trends across three school years are presented in Table 1. The overall number of students identified as homeless by school districts has increased each year. This may reflect true changes in the size of the population but could also be the result of improved methods for identifying homeless students or increased focus on reporting these numbers in standardized fashion.

Table 1: Homeless Students Across Living Situations, 3 school years

	Unsheltered	Hotel/Motel	Sheltered	Doubled Up	Total	Unaccompanied
2012-2013	2,685	5,344	11,204	80,752	99,985	11,751
2013-2014	3,177	5,925	15,175	86,292	110,569	16,681
2014-2015	3,772	7,341	11,798	88,970	111,881	15,608

For the purpose of this study, school district and open enrollment charter school data was analyzed and listed by county. Figure 2 displays counties in which the largest numbers of homeless students were identified across the state. A listing of those counties with more than 1,500 students identified is presented in Table 2 as well as the number of those students that were identified as unaccompanied[5]. There is wide variation in the overall percentage of those reported as homeless that were designated as unaccompanied across counties which may be related to true underlying differences or to differences in how consistent and vigilant different school districts are about identifying unaccompanied homeless youth. Reporting on these categories is relatively new and will likely increase in precision over time.

Figure 2: Total Number of Homeless Students by County 2015

Number of Homeless Students
- 1500 or less
- 1501 - 3000
- 3001 - 4500
- 4501 - 6000
- More than 6000
- No data

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2015.

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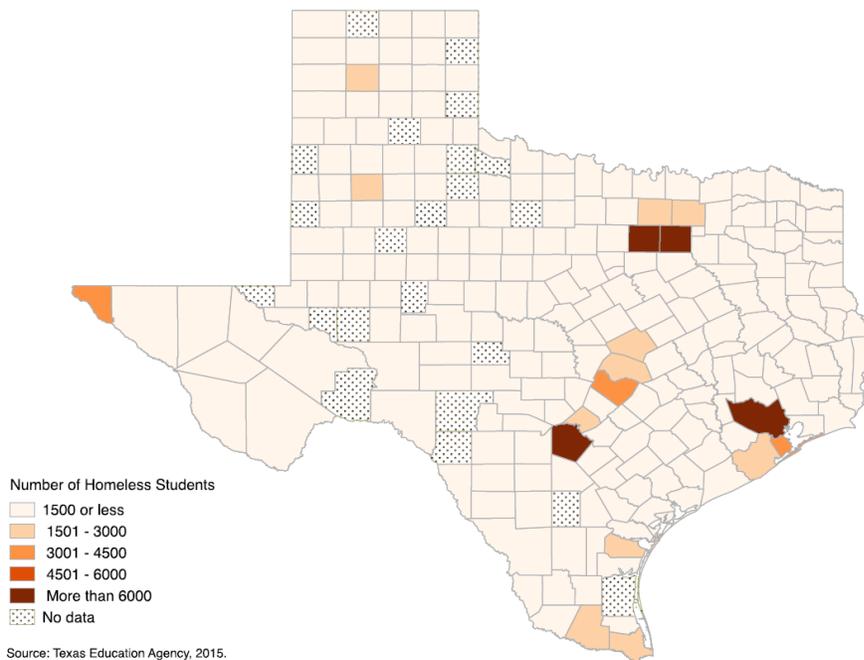
[5]TEA identifies an unaccompanied student as someone who is not yet 21st on September 1 at the start of the school year and not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian.

Table 2: Counties with More Than 1500 Total Homeless Youth Identified by Schools

County	Total # Homeless Youth	Unaccompanied HY
Harris County	18,422	2,275
Dallas County	8,920	994
Bexar County	8,802	1,126
Tarrant County	7,514	956
Travis County	3,780	465
Galveston County	3,712	547
El Paso County	3,168	551
Collin County	2,891	315
Potter County	2,454	180
Nueces County	2,414	502
Bell County	2,215	475
Denton County	2,072	197
Cameron County	1,980	461
Brazoria County	1,974	407
Hidalgo County	1,763	279
Comal County	1,751	1,120
Williamson County	1,658	251
Lubbock County	1,513	74

Another way of looking at the number of homeless students across the state is as the percentage of overall students experiencing homelessness in each county. Figure 3 depicts the data in this way as another description of homeless students in Texas. Counties with the highest percentages of homeless students are listed in Table 3.

Figure 3: Percentage of Homeless Students by County

Percent of Student Population
2.5% or less
2.6 to 5.0%
5.1 to 7.5%
7.6 to 10.0%
More than 10%
No data

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2015.
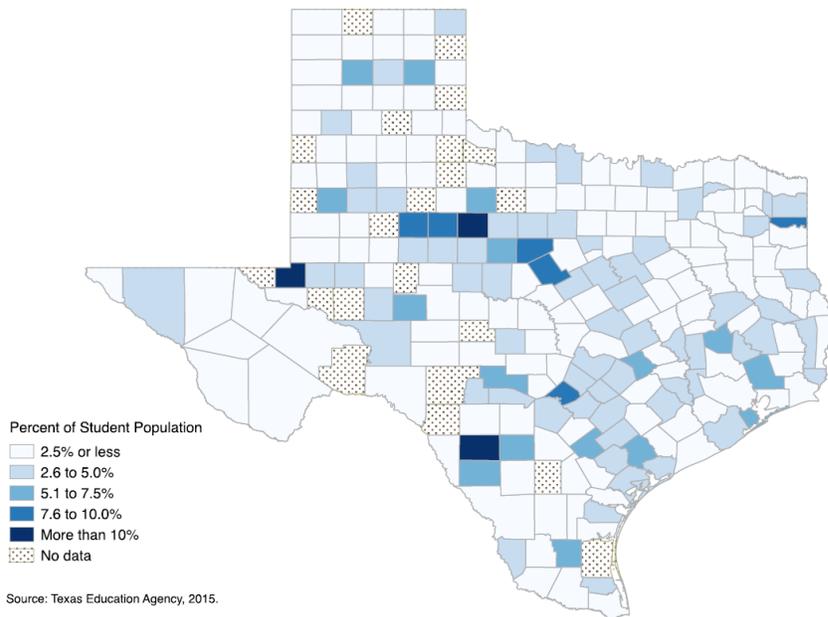
Table 3: Counties with Over 7.5% of Students Identified as Homeless

	% of students identified as homeless	Total number of homeless students
Jones County	11.4	292
Winkler County	10.4	174
Zavala County	10.2	260
Comal County	9.8	1,751
Fisher County	8.6	46
Eastland County	8.5	205
Comanche County	8.3	154
Marion County	7.7	89
Scurry County	7.6	245
Kerr County	7.4	481
Potter County	7.1	2,454

Across the sample of homeless students identified in the 2014-2015 school year, approximately one-third were adolescents ages 13-20 (n=35,316, 31.6%). The overall break down by race/ethnicity was 50.6% Hispanic, 23.1% African American, and 21.7% White.

Administrative Data from the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)

The definition of homeless youth as detailed in HB 679 identifies a group of young people who are most likely to be found through DFPS including "a person who is living in an emergency shelter, abandoned in a hospital, or awaiting foster care placement." Texas DFPS identified four distinct groups that might meet the definitions of homelessness based on the language in HB 679. These groups are not mutually exclusive so youth often fell into more than one classification. The first group was defined as "any child who was ever placed in an Emergency Shelter, DFPS supervision, or runaway" during the fiscal year. DFPS supervision includes those who are temporarily without a placement such as those who are sleeping in an office or hotel. The second group was any child considered a Baby Moses child during the fiscal year. These are infants that were abandoned at a designated safe place by their parents. The third group was any child removed from custody solely to receive mental health services during the fiscal year. The fourth group was any child removed from custody with a removal reason of "Refusal to Accept Parental Responsibility" (RAPR) during the fiscal year. Duplicates across categories were removed in the total number presented for each year. In fiscal year 2015, 5,506 youth were included in one of these groups, with 5,005 of these classified as Emergency Shelter, DFPS supervision or Runaway. Table 4 displays the data in each category across the last three complete fiscal years.

Table 4: Populations in DFPS Data Who Meet Homeless Definitions of HB 679

	Unduplicated Total	Emergency Shelter/Runaway	Baby Moses	Mental Health	Refusal to Accept Parental Responsibility
FY 2013	5,346	4,795	28	0	940
FY 2014	5,417	4,893	16	16	893
FY 2015	5,506	5,005	18	30	874

Figure 5 displays the total number of homeless youth across categories in each county of the state. Similar to data from schools, the largest numbers of youth identified as homeless were in the population centers. Table 5 presents the list of all counties with more than 100 children across all categories and details the numbers in the highest frequency subgroups. It is impossible to tell whether these same students would have been counted by their schools as homeless at some point, though it is certainly possible that while awaiting DFPS involvement, these same young people were noted to be homeless through the McKinney-Vento determination process. These data cannot be combined with the TEA data and should be viewed as an alternative source of information to add to the overall picture of youth homelessness in the state.

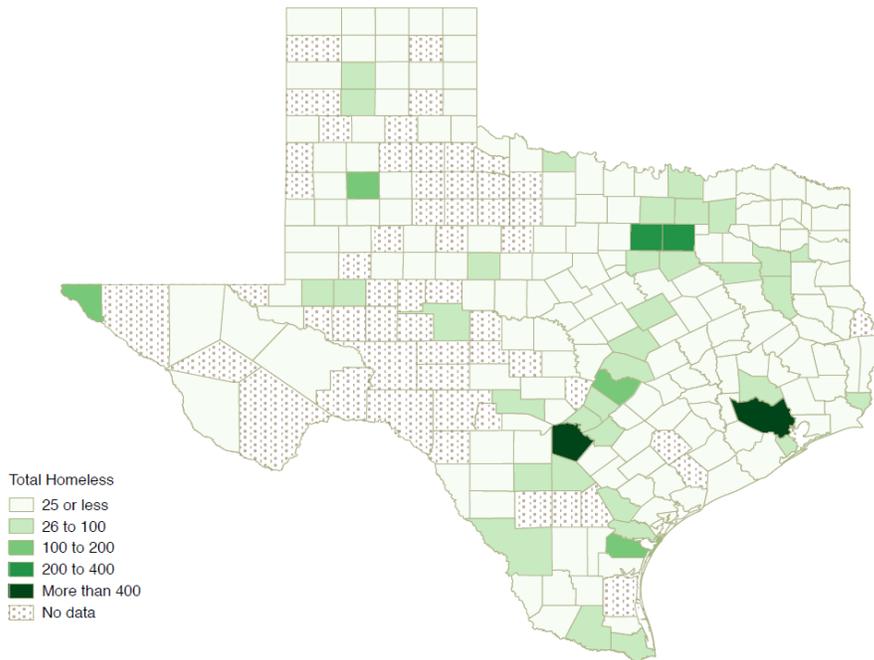**Figure 4: DFPS Homeless Population by County, FY 2015**

Table 5: Counties with Over 100 Youth in a Homeless Category

	Total	Emergency Shelter/Runaway	RAPR
Bexar	893	850	70
Harris	454	404	93
Dallas	345	289	78
Tarrant	276	232	79
Travis	188	174	39
Nueces	185	172	27
Lubbock	155	144	22
El Paso	117	108	17

Nearly half of the young people identified in the Emergency Shelters or Runaways group were ages 13 and over: 33.9% were under age 9 (n=1,672), 16.2% were ages 10-13 (n=800), 40.3% ages 13-17 (n=1,988), and 9.4% were ages 18 or over (n=468).

Data from *Youth Count Texas!*
YCT! was designed to count and survey young people in homeless situations across the state of Texas. TNOYS led the development of a survey instrument in collaboration with the TICH Youth Workgroup and the Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) at the University of Texas at Austin. This survey instrument was provided to communities across the state. Communities were trained on the instrument and although TNOYS could not ensure that communities would utilize it, the instrument was recommended for use in *Youth Count Texas!* Communities could choose to use a short two-page version of the survey or conduct a more extensive six-page version that included the items from the two-page version but then asked additional, more in-depth questions (see Appendix B for survey instruments).

TNOYS provided technical assistance and training for communities across the state in conducting these counts in Fall 2015 and early 2016. Data collection efforts were held October 2015-March 2016. Young people under age 25 were included in these youth counts, consistent with HUD's definition of homeless youth. Young people were considered to be homeless if they had spent the last night in a shelter, transitional housing, on the streets or other place not meant for human habitation, or in an unstable housing situation such as staying temporarily with a friend. A total of 1,007 surveys were collected by TNOYS and compiled by the CFRP. UH GCSW removed duplicates and those that did not meet eligibility criteria for age or living situation. A final total of 758 surveys were included for analysis.

Unfortunately, communities across the state used different versions of the survey with somewhat different response options resulting in wide variation in the amount of data available for different items based on which communities asked those questions. More information on the data collection process and lessons learned is available in Appendix C. Further details of the survey

responses are provided in Chapter II on the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and in Appendices D & E.

Figure 5 displays the communities that participated in *Youth Count Texas!* and Table 6 lists these communities and details the number of youth and young adults who were surveyed in each. The number counted in each community was largely related to the methods and approach used in that particular community. Communities that were able to successfully partner with schools for data collection, for example, reported larger numbers of young people under 19. Although *YCT!* provided training and technical assistance for counting youth and young adults, and it appears that the initiative resulted in increased youth representation within the PIT counts in some communities, it is unlikely that *YCT!* data accurately captures the scope of youth homelessness in participating communities. The data do offer insight, however, into the number of homeless young adults beyond school age who may be unsheltered in a community on a given night.

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Figure 5: *Youth Count Texas!* Participating Communities
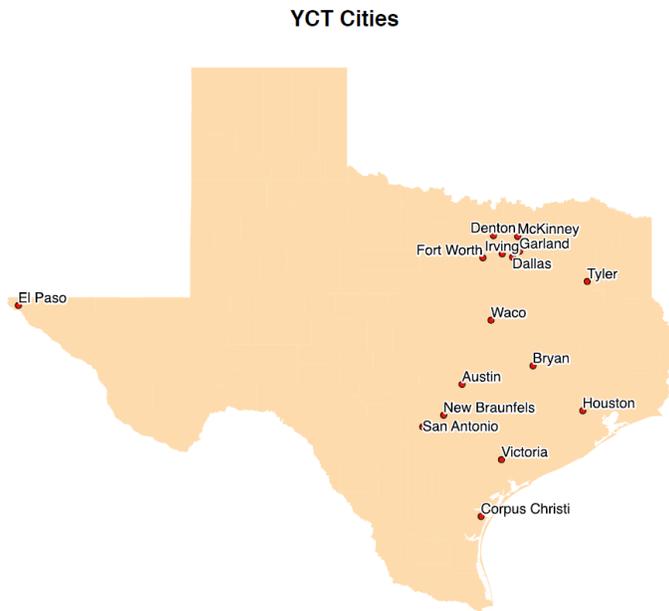
Table 6: Surveys Conducted in Each Location, Overall and by Age (n=758)

	Total	Under 19	19-24
Austin	61	7	54
Bryan	40	34	6
Corpus Christi	203	164	39
Dallas	64	15	49
Denton	16	8	8
El Paso	61	10	51
Ft. Worth	11	3	8
Garland	1	0	1
Houston	89	14	75
Irving	1	0	1
McKinney	1	0	1
New Braunfels/Comal &Guadalupe Counties	49	37	12
San Antonio	96	81	15
Tyler	19	2	17
Victoria	11	1	10
Waco	35	23	12
	758	**399**	**359**

Age was measured differently across sites with some cities asking for specific birth date or age and others using broad categories. Figure 6 shows the age distribution of the *YCT!* sample overall (n=758) with as much specificity as possible. Three quarters of the sample is confirmed to be over age 13 (76.0%) and the 17.4% that are broadly classified as under 18 are likely largely over age 13. Hence, the sample described in the *YCT!* data is primarily adolescents and young adults. This may be due to an emphasis that was placed on counting unaccompanied homeless youth, rather than youth who were homeless with their families, during *Youth Count Texas!*

Figure 6: Age Responses in *YCT!* Data
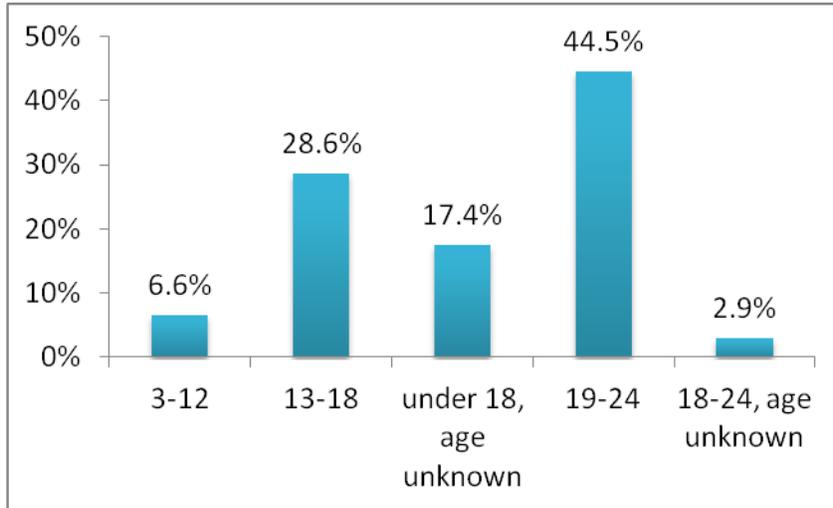
The sample was racially diverse with 32.9% identifying as African American non-Hispanic, 4.2% identifying as African-American Hispanic, 35.2% identifying as White Hispanic, 20.6% identifying as White Non-Hispanic, and 7.2% identifying as Other. Just over half of respondents identified as female (50.6%), 48.2% identified as male and 1.2% identified as transgender. As noted earlier, not all communities collected information on these demographics so the overall sample size was 514 for gender and 505 for race/ethnicity. Of those asked (n=381), 16.3% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning. Only four respondents reported that they had served in the military (4/333).

Summary of Chapter I

It is currently not possible to say with certainty how many young people in Texas experience homelessness on any given night or across any given year without first clearly defining how homelessness is measured. Data from schools measured across a school year supports the assertion that there are more than 111,881 school age young people who are enrolled in public school that are experiencing homelessness and housing instability, primarily in doubled up situations with families, at some point each school year. Data from schools also indicate that there is a much smaller, though quite sizeable group, who were designated as unaccompanied within this larger group of homeless students (n=15,608). These unaccompanied young people likely warrant different approaches than those who may be younger in age and who are homeless with a parent or guardian. Data from DFPS provides additional data about young people that meet homeless definitions within that system and the YCT! data provides some information about youth and young adults that may beyond school age who may be unsheltered in a community on a given night.

School district data does not capture homelessness of those who are not enrolled in school. Young people who are homeless may hesitate to enroll because they did not have a parent or guardian (even though they legally can), they may have dropped out, or they may have completed high school already. The *YCT!* effort provides data about the challenges of capturing youth homelessness in PIT counts which aim to find these youth. Further information about the specific challenges and lessons learned is available in Appendix C.

Future efforts to better capture data on youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in Texas and examine subgroups are warranted. Any efforts that standardize and connect all the data sources presented in this chapter will assist in moving toward being able to estimate how many young people experience homelessness in Texas, on any given night (*e.g.,* PIT) and across any given year (*e.g.,*TEA, DFPS) according to which specific definition of homelessness is used.

II. Needs of Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Texas

Overview of Data Sources

Multiple sources of data were used to examine the needs of homeless youth across the primary domains of housing, education, employment, health & mental health, foster care, criminal/juvenile justice, violence & victimization, and social support. A literature review was conducted for each domain, focused specifically on peer-reviewed journal articles published in the last five years. Data collected through *Youth Count Texas!* (*YCT!)* surveys was also analyzed. Finally, feedback was obtained from stakeholders through four different avenues. First, three stakeholder feedback sessions were held in August and September 2016 where initial findings from the *YCT!* data were presented. Across the three sessions, 128 stakeholders participated. Second, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders including agency leaders and administrators at child protection and juvenile justice, schools, and local Continuum of Care (CoC) agencies (see Appendix F). Third, a provider survey (Provider Survey) was conducted through the TNOYS listserv to gain perspectives from direct service providers, with 55 providers responding (see Appendix G). Fourth, a web-based survey was distributed to all homeless liaisons across Texas (HLS Survey) with 392 liaisons responding (see Appendix H). More details on the Provider Survey and HLS Survey are provided in Chapter 3. Young people who have had experience with homelessness were included as part of the team that assembled the report, as well as through responses on the *YCT!* surveys.

Primary data on the needs of youth experiencing homelessness came from the *YCT!* survey data. While this data provides important information about the needs of youth experiencing homelessness across the state of Texas, it should be considered with some limitations in mind. There is substantial systematic variation within the data that introduces bias. The fact that not all communities asked all the recommended questions or asked them in the same way means that each question item has a different number of respondents who could have potentially answered it. The overall number of respondents that were asked the question is presented along with the results. The communities also varied substantially in terms of the age and gender of young people who were surveyed. Rather than being representative of true differences in the underlying populations in each area, these differences can more likely be attributed to differences in recruitment and data collection at different sites. Therefore, *YCT!* data contribute to the overall conversation but should be considered in conjunction with other data sources.

Demographics of the overall survey were reported in Chapter I and are further detailed in Appendix D. The six-page extended survey version was used in four communities – Austin, Bryan, Dallas, and New Braunfels for a total of 151 responses. Overall, this sample was slightly older than the overall survey sample (55.6% were ages 19-24 compared to 47.4% overall), more

female (56.7% compared to 50.6%), and more African American, non-Hispanic (41.2% compared to 32.9% overall). Further details of the extended survey sample and results are provided in Appendix E.

Housing

The unifying feature across all young people identified in this report is that they lack a stable place to stay. Samples in prior studies vary in the distribution of the types of living situations depending on where the data was gathered. As mentioned previously in Chapter I, the majority of youth identified through schools are living in unstable housing situations (79%), with smaller numbers living in shelters (11%), hotel/motels (7%), or on the streets (3%).

For *YCT!*, the sample included young people who were on the streets, in shelters, and those in unstable housing situations such as temporarily staying with families. The overall distribution (n=638) was relatively evenly split between homeless situations: 29.5% had spent the prior night in an unstable housing situation, 28.2% on the streets, 19.7% at a shelter, and 19.9% in transitional housing. Comparisons of *YCT!* with other counts or similar studies across the country is presented in Appendix K.

Figure 7 depicts the reasons young people reported for becoming homeless. Young people could select multiple reasons for homelessness among a long list that was aggregated for reporting. Financial reasons, the dominant category selected, included responses such as eviction, unemployment, and being unable to pay rent/mortgage. Financial reasons were the most often reported reason for both those under 19 (20.7%) and those ages 19-24 (56.9%) with 39.0% across the entire sample noting a financial reason as a contributor to their current homeless situation. Multiple categories that indicated family problems were also frequently endorsed including nineteen percent of youth respondents that identified family related reasons such as family illness or divorce and 15% that endorsed having been being kicked out by family. Additional reasons included having left or currently being in custody of child protective services (10.5%), running away from home (7.7%), and abandonment by parent/guardian (8.0%).

Figure 7: Top Reasons for Homelessness (n=489)
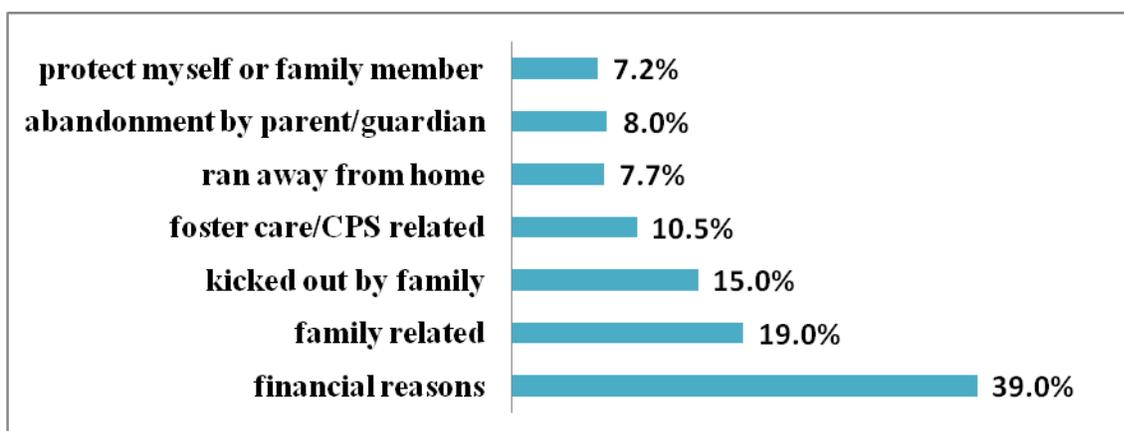
At the time of the survey, youth reported their household composition as 48.7% single adults (18 or over), 17.2% unaccompanied minors, 15.3% minors living with parents, 7.6% single parents, 4.9% part of a couple with no children, and 2.5% parents in a two parent family. In addition to current living situation, 15.0% reported being currently pregnant (n=59/396) and 31.8% had ever had a child (n=124/396). Of those, almost half (45.2%) reported that the child is living with them. Hence, there is a need for housing to accommodate both young people and their young children.

One factor that is often assessed due to its association with negative outcomes is the length of time youth have spent as homeless (Rice, 2013). Over half of the sample had been homeless for six months or less with 20.7% having been homeless for less than one month (Figure 8). This highlights opportunities to intervene early to keep the length of homelessness episodes brief. About a quarter of youth, however, (28.5%) reported being homeless for more than a year.

Figure 8: Time Currently Homeless (n=368)
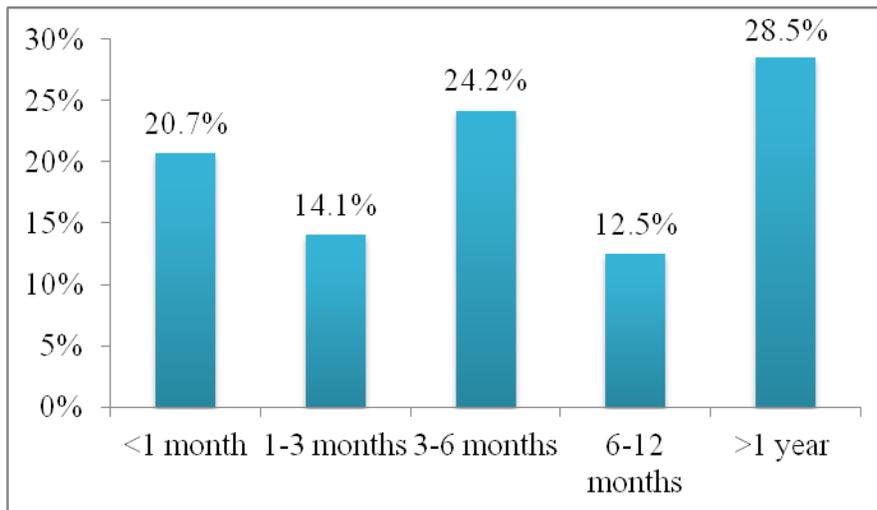
There is no consensus in the literature about the best approach to addressing the housing needs of homeless youth, though a variety of findings support the need for an array of service types to meet diverse needs. Emergency shelter services have some clear benefits but are not attractive to all youth for a variety of reasons (Ha et al, 2015). Youth-specific shelters that utilize positive development approaches are recommended to ensure that these spaces are attractive to youth (FYSB, 2015). Adult shelters are perceived as less desirable and less safe than youth specific services (Ha et al, 2015). In addition, providing a range of interventions to engage youth experiencing homelessness, including street outreach, case management, and drop-in centers may provide a route to get youth connected with longer term housing solutions, even if they do not access shelter services (Slesnick et al, 2008; Slesnick et al, 2016). In *YCT!*, past use of housing services was asked only in the extended survey. Across the sites (n=153), 29.8% of youth reported that they had ever used an adult emergency shelter, fewer (22.5%) reported they had used a youth-specific emergency shelter, 27.8% reported they had used a drop-in center,

23.8% reported they had used transitional housing, and 21.9% reported they had used none of the listed services

Feedback from stakeholders across the state highlighted the need for a range of different types of housing services and housing alternatives across communities. The specific needs varied by resources available in each community. Stakeholders spoke about the need for emergency shelters and other safe places that provide emergency housing, such as host homes, and the need for longer term housing alternatives for both youth under age 18 and young adults. One particular gap in the service continuum noted by some was the lack of transitional programs that could provide supports for young people at age 18. It was noted that many young people that become homeless have a wide variety of needs and require supportive environments to learn independent living skills where there is guidance and support in addition to some independence. Another gap specifically noted by stakeholders was a lack of youth-specific shelters, particularly for young people ages 18-24 since these were not funded through federal Runaway and Homeless Youth funds (funding will be discussed in Chapter IV). Lack of affordable housing and inability to sign a lease were also noted to be barriers for young people trying to gain independent housing.

Education
Educational supports are a critical need for all youth experiencing homelessness – whether currently in or out of school. Most young people under 19 in *YCT!* (n=307) were connected with schools: 89.1% were still in school and 7.2% were out of school because they had a diploma or GED. Of those ages 19-24, (n=308), 65.6% had a diploma or GED, and 19.5% were still in school. Across all ages, 90% of those who were out of school (n=113/126) reported that they planned to return to school.

Administrative data from TEA highlights a few specific need areas where homeless students likely require (and receive) additional supports. Overall, 15.3% of those identified in data from 2014-2015 school year were identified as limited English proficiency (n=17,140) and 12.0% were in special education (n=13,386). In *YCT!*, 26.0% (n=63/242) reported receiving special education services while in school.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Act identifies specific provisions that must be addressed to ensure that homelessness is not a barrier to receiving an education (see Chapter III for more detail). Literature on the educational needs for homeless students connected with schools centered on ensuring that these provisions were followed by schools. The literature, as well as stakeholders that participated in this study, identified inconsistencies in how individual schools implemented McKinney-Vento regulations as well as a lack of knowledge among youth about what the term homeless means and their rights as homeless students (Ausikaitis et al, 2015; Rahman, 2015). Ongoing efforts to ensure that schools consistently follow McKinney-Vento and that young people understand their rights appear to be needed.

Stakeholders also mentioned needs of youth who have experienced homelessness in relation to higher education. It was noted that youth need supports in learning more about careers and education after high school and accessing higher education if they desire it. Others noted the need for connection with a variety of post-secondary education programs, not just colleges, including programs that match young people with employment areas that are in demand. Stakeholders also recommended trying to get institutions of higher education more involved in reaching out to youth who have experienced homelessness and suggested having designated homeless liaisons at colleges to assist young people that have struggled with housing instability to be successful in a college setting.

Employment

Employment readiness becomes increasingly important for all youth as they move toward high school exit. And, employment is a critical element of moving youth out of homelessness and into stable independent housing. Overall, 82.7% of youth in *YCT!* reported being able to work (n=345/417). Of those under 19 (n=116), 44.0% stated they were unemployed and looking for work, 8.6% had a full-time job and 22.4% had a part-time job. For ages 19-24 (n=217), 54.4% were unemployed and looking for work, 15.3% had a full-time job, and 8.4% had a part-time job. Literature reviewed supports the need for early intervention in connecting youth with employment since youth are less likely to search for or successfully find employment once they have experienced homelessness for an extended period of time (Curry et al, 2016).

Stakeholders who worked with young people that had left high school described multiple barriers youth face when they seek employment. One barrier was not having proper documentation such as a drivers license, birth certificate and social security card. Getting these documents required trips to multiple places and sometimes associated fees. As one stakeholder commented:

> "It is very difficult to get a state I.D. in Texas, if you have parents, transportation, and money. I have teens and made 2-3 trips to DPS for each kid. How much more difficult must it be for homeless youth who have none of these? That affects employment, medical, housing, benefits, and transportation."

In addition, criminal background checks were noted as a barrier for many in securing employment. Young people with criminal backgrounds were less successful in securing job interviews as well as passing background checks during the employment screening process. Stakeholders also spoke of the need for vocational training programs and short term certification programs that could provide youth with skills matched to job opportunities so they wouldn't be limited to minimum wage jobs. Internships that could assist in building skills in young people who had limited employment experience were also identified as a potential avenue for improving services.

Health & Mental Health

Literature consistently supports the fact that youth who experience homelessness are a population at risk for a variety of adverse health effects. Studies have found that rates of sexually transmitted infections, mental health problems, and substance use disorders are all elevated for homeless youth compared to peers in the general population (Childress et al, 2015; Edidin et al, 2012). The *YCT!* survey did not assess for symptoms of health or mental health problems; however, it did ask youth to self-report health problems they experienced from a check list. Across sites, the options presented were somewhat different so the number that responded is slightly different for each identified problem. Figure 9 presents the results.

Mental health problems were identified most commonly including a general category for mental illness which was endorsed by 39.9% of respondents and a specific category for post-traumatic stress disorder that was endorsed by 15.6%. Physical disabilities (8.0%), developmental disabilities (5.8%) and substance use (8.0% alcohol abuse; 6.2% other substances) were less frequently identified as problems and only one youth identified as HIV positive. Approximately one fifth of those who endorsed a health or mental health problem (20.1%) reported that it keeps them from holding a job.

Figure 9: Self-Reported Health Conditions
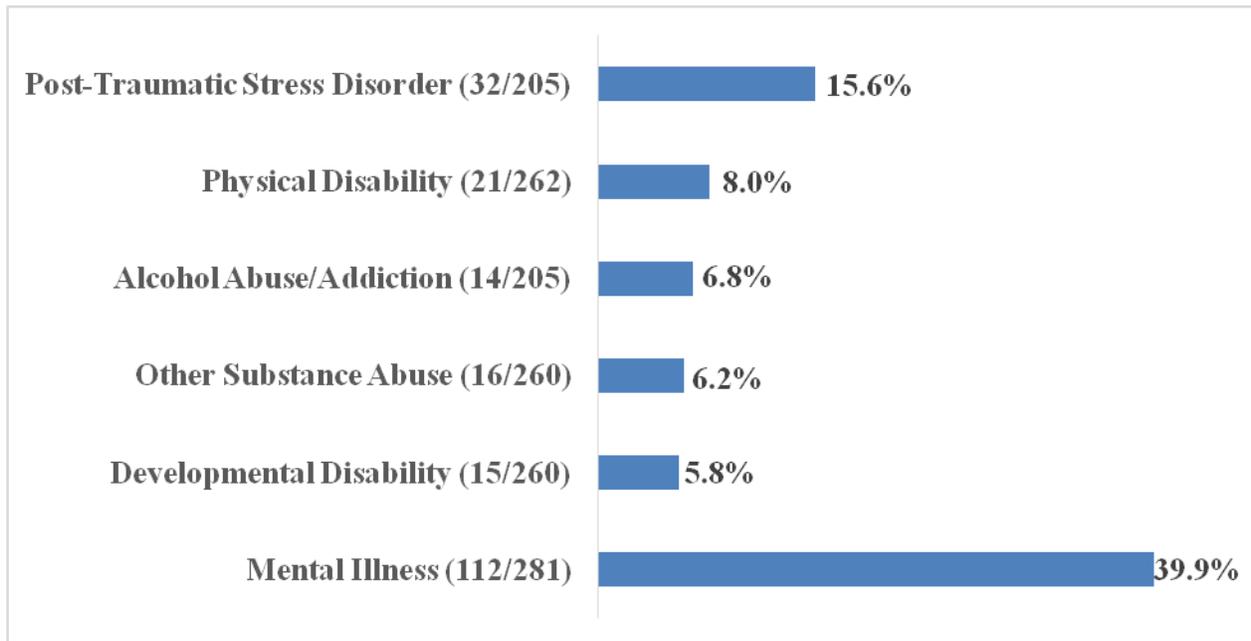
Stakeholders noted that mental health is a significant concern for many of the young people they work with and identified challenges in getting treatment. They noted that some young people resist seeking treatment due to stigma but even those who are committed to getting help have to fight hard and be persistent to access the service system and simply get an assessment. Improved connections to mental health and health services were reported as desirable but stakeholders did

not provide a lot of specificity about how to facilitate better connections. This may be an area for further exploration to determine specific interventions.

Foster Care

Research in communities across the U.S. has found that homeless young people disproportionately come from the foster care system. For example, a study of youth in three cities (Denver, Lost Angeles, & Austin) found that 36.7% of the sample reported being in foster care at some point (Bender et al, 2015a). Data from *YCT!* were similar with 37.9% of youth reporting that they experienced foster care (n=99/261). Studies that have specifically looked at aging out of foster care, have found that approximately half of those with foster care involvement have actually aged out of care, meaning they were in foster care when they turned 18 (Narendorf et al, 2015). In *YCT!*, both surveys asked about foster care history but only the extended survey asked young people if they had aged out of foster care. Sample sizes are relatively small, hence, the data should be considered with that in mind. For the extended survey, 35.1% reported foster care experience, and 56.4% of those youth with foster care experience reported aging out. Further details of the findings from the extended survey related to foster youth are presented in Appendix E.

The transition out of foster care does provide a clear point of intervention to prevent homelessness. For young people aging out of care, a variety of supports are available that are aimed at promoting a successful transition including stable housing (see Chapter III for further details). In spite of these efforts, stakeholders noted a number of areas where these efforts are not fully realizing their intended benefit. Stakeholders talked a lot about the lack of housing options available to older foster youth and noted that youth are still exiting care without stable housing situations. The lack of available housing options contributed to discharge plans where youth reunited with family or relatives in situations that seemed unlikely to succeed. The challenge was particularly acute for young people with histories of challenging behaviors who were extremely difficult to place. A number of specific recommendations were made by stakeholders about targets to improve the transition out of foster care which are summarized in the recommendations section (Chapter V, Recommendation 4).

Within the foster care system, young people with challenging behaviors and intensive mental health needs were noted to be particularly at risk for both running away and needing emergency shelter placement due to disruption of other placements. Informants noted that the placement capacity in Texas for residential and group homes has been reduced which has led placements to become more selective. Young people with histories of running away, assaulting staff, or self-injury were mentioned as extremely difficult to place. Licensing regulations for facilities were also perceived to contribute to placements being unwilling to take on high needs or high-risk youth. In addition, licensing requirements were mentioned as a deterrent for foster parents being willing to accept some youth or keep them after they turned 18.

Overall, in the DFPS data from FY 2015 that were described in Chapter 1, 16.6% aged out (n=820) and 17.7% completed Preparation for Adult Living Classes (874) during that fiscal year. Of those ages 14-17, 36.8% aged out and for those ages 18-21, 91.8% aged out. These would appear to be youth that are at particularly high risk for adverse outcomes after transition given that they were either on runaway status, DFPS supervision (i.e. without a placement) or had spent time during the year in an emergency shelter. Identifying and providing targeted supports to these young people may be particularly beneficial in preventing homelessness.

One protective factor that was discussed by stakeholders was getting a drivers license. Foster youth face many barriers to getting a drivers license due to the need for an adult to provide drivers education, complete required driving hours, and provide a vehicle for them to learn in. Texas Child Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) has made some specific recommendations related to easing barriers for foster youth to get drivers licenses which are included in Appendix L. Texas CASA is an organization that supports committed volunteers who are appointed through the courts to advocate on behalf of young people involved in the child welfare system.[6] These recommendations also have implications for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness that are not in the formal foster care system.

Criminal/Juvenile Justice

Involvement with the criminal justice system is a significant problem for youth experiencing homelessness, one that intersects with other factors such as mental health problems, substance use, and victimization (Ferguson et al, 2011). There are multiple dynamics that influence this relationship in both directions. First, the situation of being homeless contributes to criminal behavior because young people are sometimes driven to engage in illegal behaviors for survival including trading sex, selling drugs, or stealing (Ferguson et al, 2012). In addition, some behaviors that are essentially related to homelessness, such as sleeping in a public place or loitering, are criminalized and can lead to legal involvement. In the other direction, there is also an association between leaving juvenile and criminal justice settings such as detention, jail or prison and becoming homeless (Metreaux & Culhane, 2004; Narendorf et al, 2015). In the *YCT!* data, 19.5% (n=39/200) overall and 27.9% of those age 19-24 (n=24/86) reported that they had legal problems or a prior conviction. In the extended survey, 32.5% of respondents overall (n=37/114) and 48.5% of those ages 19-24 (n=33/68) reported involvement with the adult criminal justice system and 33.3% with the juvenile justice system (n=41/123).

In stakeholder feedback sessions, involvement with the criminal justice system was noted to be prevalent among youth served in programs such as emergency shelters and drop in centers. Stakeholders noted that criminal records create a barrier not just to employment but also to housing, since criminal background checks are part of the screening process for leasing apartments. Even juvenile records, which many youth assumed were sealed, contributed to young people being turned away from jobs and housing. Recommendations for changes to

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[6] For more information, see http://texascasa.org/

juvenile record sealing were mentioned by several stakeholders and are further discussed in the recommendations section of this report (Chapter V, Recommendation 4.3).

Stakeholders associated with the juvenile justice system identified several specific barriers which speak to the need for long term transition planning for youth leaving juvenile justice facilities. First, youth who complete their time in a detention setting are sometimes stuck when parents refuse to pick them up. These are situations that could likely be anticipated with earlier discharge/transition planning. For youth that are leaving secure facilities or halfway houses through the Texas Juvenile Justice Department without family to take them back, finding placement is challenging. Some stakeholders suggested that finding similar placements for youth leaving county facilities is also challenging. Sex offenders are particularly difficult to successfully transition. Funds to assist youth who are ready for independent living were noted to be very limited and these funds are time limited and available only to the youth while they were on parole. These young people were noted to need a wide range of independent living supports which are not readily available through current services.

Experiences of Victimization

A consistent theme across many of the need areas was the relationship to trauma and victimization. Homeless youth are more likely to have experienced trauma prior to becoming homeless than youth in the general population and they are more likely to experience trauma while they are in an unstable housing situation (Bender et al, 2015b). Intersections between victimization and each of the need areas of foster care, criminal justice, mental health, health, and substance use were noted (Bender et al, 2014; Bender et al, 2015b; Yoder et al, 2014). Trauma screening and trauma-informed services were suggested across many different need areas (Bender et al, 2015b; Thompson et al, 2015).

Some evidence of trauma is present in the DFPS data reviewed for this report as well as the *YCT!* data. In the 2015 DFPS data, referral criteria gave an indicator of potential exposure to trauma. Over three quarters (75.4%) had indication of neglectful supervision[7], 22.5% of physical abuse, 20.3% of neglect, and 11.9% of sexual abuse. Two-thirds had indications of family violence in the risk assessment conducted by caseworkers (67.3%). In the *YCT!* data, 34% of youth indicated they had experiences of child abuse or neglect (n=53/156), 23.0% of sexual assault (n=46/200), and 16.8% of physical or sexual violence on the streets (n=32/191).

Social Supports and Social Networks

An important consideration in intervention with youth experiencing homelessness is the influence of peers and adult mentors in their lives. Literature has documented the impact of peers on increasing risk behaviors (Barman-Adhikari et al, 2016a) which supports the importance of developing relationships with positive peers (Barman-Adhikari et al, 2016b) and

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[7] Neglectful supervision is defined as placing a child in or failing to remove a child from a situation that a reasonable person would realize requires judgment or actions beyond the child's level of maturity, physical condition, or mental abilities

having mentors and caring adults to rely on for support (Dang & Miller, 2013). Stakeholders talked about the importance of connecting young people to positive adult supports and to positive communities where they feel accepted. They explicitly identified the need for mentors to assist young people in gaining independent living skills and "finding housing, healthcare, mental healthcare, and planning a future path to success."

Perceived Service Needs

Responses from *YCT!* provide further information about what youth themselves perceive to be areas of need. Questions on the *YCT!* survey asked youth to check from lists of potential needs with the questions "Are there any important things that you need help getting?" and "Which services do you need that you are not getting?" Results are presented in Figures 10 and 11.

The most commonly identified needs were a bus pass (28.2%), clothing (25.1%), birth certificate (22.9%), and state identification (ID, 21.7%), followed by emergency food (18.7%), social security card (17.7%), hygiene supplies (17.1%) and laundry facilities (12.2%) (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Important Things Youth Need Help Getting (n=327)
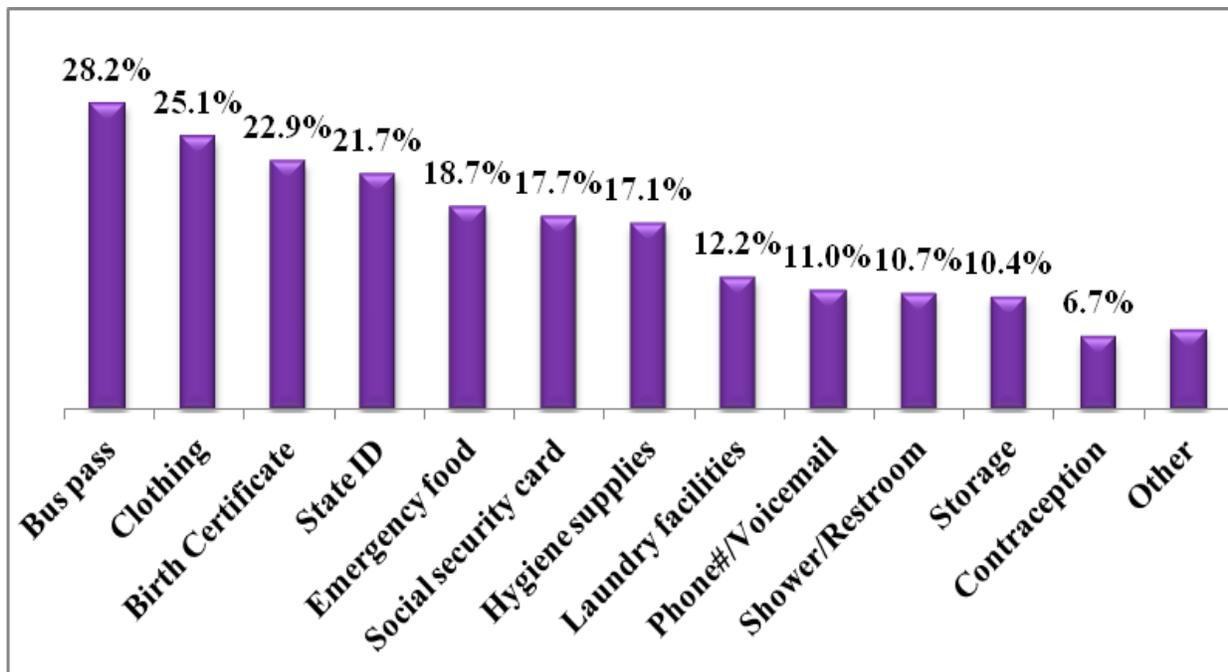
The most commonly identified services needed but not received were dental care (20.6%), followed by government benefits (18.7%), transportation (17.1%), employment services (14.8%), case management (14.6%) and permanent housing (12.3%) (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Services Needed that Youth are Not Getting (n=437)

Service	Percentage
Dental Care	20.6%
Govt. Benefits	18.7%
Transportation	17.1%
Employment Svcs	14.8%
Case management	14.6%
Permanent Housing	12.3%
Routine Medical Care	10.8%
Enroll in School/GED	10.4%
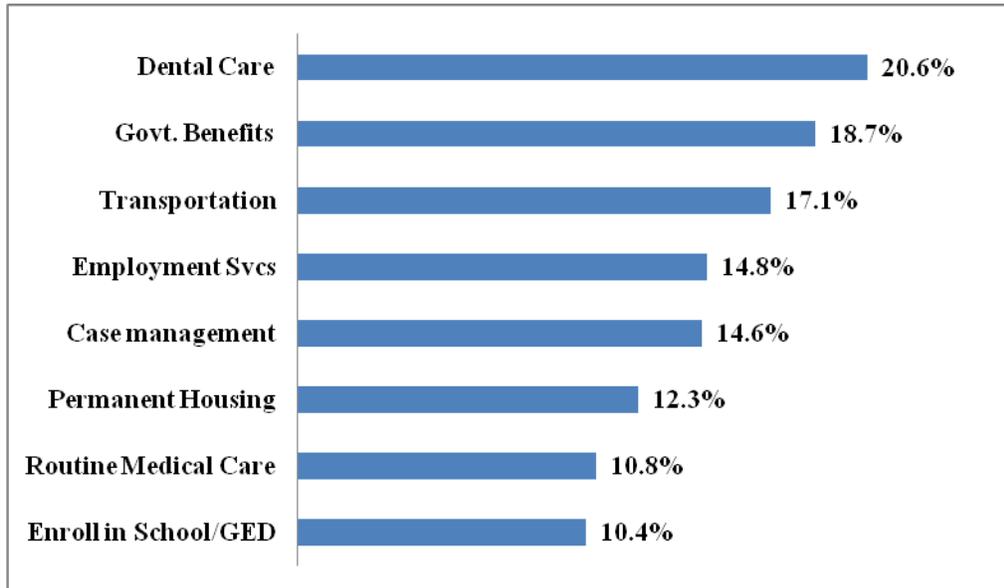
In the extended survey, youth also rated each of a list of problems from 1 to 10 on how challenging that issue is for them right now (n=102). The item rated as most challenging overall was finding housing (mean=5.2), followed by items related to mental health problems including depression (mean=4.8), trouble sleeping (mean=4.5), anger (mean=4.4), anxiety (mean=4.4) and disturbing thoughts (mean=3.5). Responses across all items are displayed in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Most Challenging Problems (n=102)
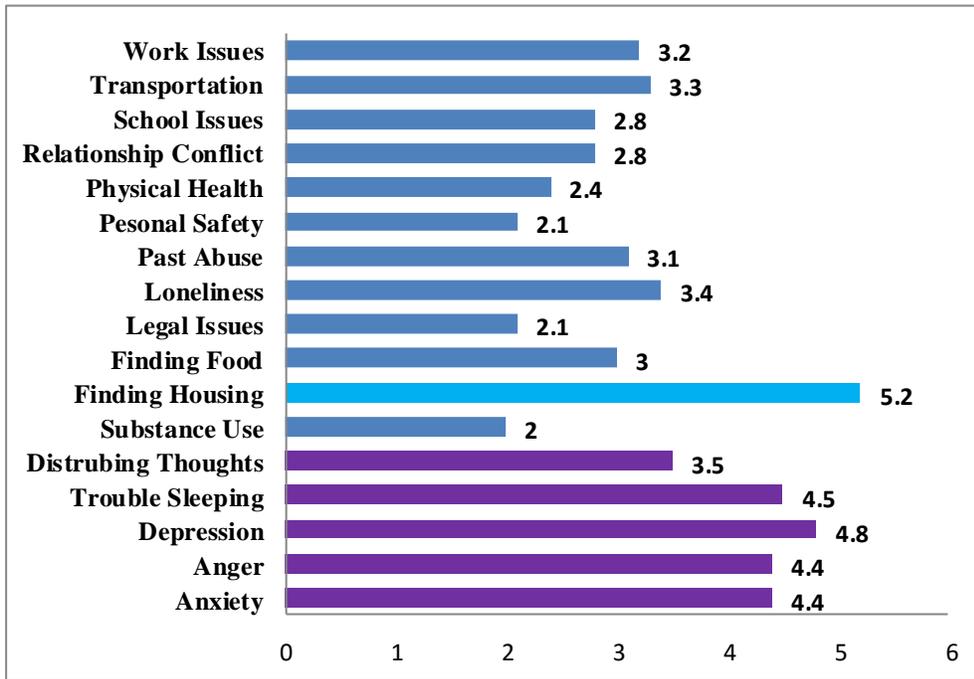
III. Homeless-Related Services for Youth in Texas

Overview

Homelessness is a phenomenon that cuts across service delivery systems so young people who are experiencing homelessness may receive a variety of interventions from a variety of service systems, depending on their situation. The focus of this report is services with an explicit focus on preventing homelessness or improving outcomes for those that are currently homeless. This review covers services provided across educational, child welfare, and homeless service systems to provide an overview of the current service landscape in Texas designated specifically to serve this population. An inventory of programs to address homelessness and where they are provided across the state is attached in Appendix M.

Services Provided through Schools

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

The federal McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, reauthorized by the Every Student Succeed Act, 2015 (ESSA)(McKinney-Vento, 2013) mandates that schools identify homeless students and have policies in place to remove barriers to their education[8]. Every state agency must have an Office of the State Coordinator to oversee implementation of the Act, and every local education agency (LEA) must designate a local liaison to ensure that homeless students are identified and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in school. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) works with Education Service Center (ESC) Region 10 and the Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO) to implement the McKinney-Vento program in Texas.

The McKinney-Vento Act also requires that
- homeless students who move have the right to remain in their schools of origin (i.e., the school the student attended when permanently housed or in which the student was last enrolled, which includes preschools and feeder schools) if that is in the student's best interest;
- if it is in the student's best interest to change schools, homeless students must be immediately enrolled in a new school, even if they do not have the records normally required for enrollment, including proof of residency;
- transportation must be provided to or from a student's school of origin, at the request of a parent, guardian, or, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the local liaison;
- homeless students must have access to all programs and services for which they are eligible, including special education services, preschool, school nutrition programs,

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[8] For more information about the Every Student Succeeds Act and how it impacts McKinney-Vento visit: http://nche.ed.gov/legis/essa.php

language assistance for English learners, career and technical education, gifted and talented programs, magnet schools, charter schools, summer learning, online learning, and before- and after-school care;

- unaccompanied youths must be accorded specific protections, including immediate enrollment in school without proof of residency or parent or guardian;

Texas Support for Homeless Education Program (TEXSHEP) Grants

Additional funding is available to LEAs, education service centers, and open enrollment charter schools to provide supplemental services to homeless students through a competitive grant program called TEXSHEP. The purpose of this program is for the recipients to provide supplemental academic and related assistance, beyond that provided in the general education program, to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and academic success of homeless students. TEXSHEP funds are distributed through a competitive grant application process that takes place every three years. Currently, 66 sub-grants have been awarded which impact 131 different LEAs across the state. While this is just over 10% of the over 1,200 LEAs in Texas, nearly 60% of currently identified homeless students throughout Texas are enrolled in these 131 districts. A listing of grantees is provided in Appendix N.

Title I Funds

TEXSHEP grants are intended to be used in combination with federal funds from the Title I program. Title I, Part A, of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and reauthorized by ESSA provides financial assistance through State Educational Agencies (SEAs) to LEAs or school districts and public schools with high numbers or percentages of disadvantaged children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic achievement standards. Homeless students are automatically considered disadvantaged students and serving homeless children is an integral part of Title I. There are specific Title I requirements that pertain to Title I services to homeless children and youth. TEXSHEP grants are used in combination with Title I funds to maximize the activities across both sources.

Homeless Liaisons

Homeless liaisons play a key role in ensuring that school districts follow the McKinney-Vento regulations. The following activities are specifically designated for local liaisons (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, F-2):

- Outreach to locate homeless students and notify them of their rights;
- Assisting homeless children and youth with identification for eligibility, enrolling in school and accessing school services;
- Helping homeless children and youth obtain immunization or medical records
- Informing parents, school personnel, and others of the rights of homeless children and youth;
- Working with school staff to make sure that school staff are trained on McKinney-Vento requirements and that homeless children and youth are immediately enrolled in

school pending resolution of disputes that might arise over school enrollment or placement;

- Helping to coordinate transportation services for homeless children and youth; and
- Collaborating and coordinating with the State Coordinator and community and school personnel responsible for providing education and related support services to homeless children and youth.
- Refer homeless families, children and youths to health care services, dental services, mental health and substance abuse services, housing service and other appropriate services.[9]
- Authorized to affirm whether children and youth meet the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness, to qualify them for HUD homeless assistance program.[10]

Additionally, there are numerous state laws that have also been passed to align with McKinney-Vento and strengthen state laws concerning students experiencing homelessness.

- TEC § 25.007 Requiring special support and assistance with school transitions.

- TEC § 25.001 Admission/Enrollment homeless provisions

- TEC § 33.906   Requiring campus websites to list services for homeless students and families

- TEC § 25.915   Requiring districts to have truancy prevention measures

- TEC § 25.086   Compulsory attendance exemptions for absences caused by homelessness

- TEC § 28.025   Graduation from previous district

- TEC § 29.153   Pre-K homeless provisions

Although, liaisons are now required to coordinate and make referrals to local services, their capacity to do so may be limited. Various job responsibilities, as well as the availability of services within their community can hinder coordination with local service providers in some instances.

Services Provided through the Foster Care System

A variety of services are provided to youth through the foster care system that are aimed at preparing youth for independence when they exit the system. Transitional living services, programs, and benefits are aimed at helping foster care youth and young adults make the

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[9] Homeless families and referrals to substance abuse and housing services were added under ESSA, October 1, 2016.
[10] Recently enacted as a part of ESSA, October 1, 2016.

transition to adulthood more smoothly. Transitional Living Services begin at age 14 and may continue until age 23.

Transitional Living Services[11]

Transitional living services are a combination of programs that assist young people to prepare for independent living. Services include specific family and support team meetings to plan for transition which are called Circles of Support meetings. Youth are also encouraged to participate in Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) classes that provide instruction on skills for independent living. Participants that successfully complete PAL receive a $1,000 stipend. Youth also have access to Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) and college tuition and fee waivers. All foster youth are also supposed to be given copies of their birth certificates and social security cards prior to system exit. Fees for state identification and drivers licenses are also waived for youth ages 15-17 in Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS) managing conservatorship and former foster youth age 18-21 who are residing in a paid DFPS placement.

Extended Foster Care Option

Extended Foster Care is a voluntary program that offers young adults turning 18 in DFPS care opportunities to continue foster care placement and facilitate the transition to independence with DFPS supervision, if there is an available placement. Stakeholders reported that a lack of available placements sometimes prevents some youth from taking advantage of this option.

In addition, some restrictions are in place for youth to be able to take advantage of the extended care option. They have to be one of the following:

- Attending high school or a program leading to a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate (GED);
- Attending college or other institutions of higher learning;
- Participating in a program or activity that promotes or removes barriers to employment;
- Employed for at least 80 hours a month; or
- Or incapable of doing any of the allowed activities described in Texas Family Code Sec. 264.101 (a-1) due to a documented medical condition.

Stakeholders noted the challenge of supporting youth who struggled to successfully participate in school or work. These youth were regarded as at high risk for becoming homeless but not able to meet requirements for extended care.

Trial Independence Period

A young adult in DFPS conservatorship who turns 18 as well as a young adult enrolled in the Extended Foster Care Program may leave foster care for a "trial independence" period of 6 months (or up to 12 months with a court order). During the trial independence period, the young

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[11] https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Transitional_Living/

adult may continue to receive other transitional living benefits such as PAL, ETV, and Transitional Medicaid, and may be living with relatives or independently.

Transitional Living Programs

A transitional living program is an environment set aside for transitional living and programmatic services that are generally designed for a group of older youth, rather than individually designed services for youth. A transitional living program allows opportunities for youth to start early to build a strong foundation of life skills and community connections.

Supervised Independent Living (SIL)

Supervised Independent Living (SIL) is a type of voluntary Extended Foster Care placement where young adults can live on their own, while still getting casework and support services to help them become independent and self-sufficient.   It is available in a variety of settings for young adults in Extended Foster Care who are ages 18 to 22. SIL settings include apartments, college dorms, shared housing, and host homes with minimal supervision and case management, allowing youth to practice living independently and achieve self-sufficiency in a supportive environment. In 2015, DFPS contracted with nine providers across the state to offer this service (see Appendix M). Although the program's effectiveness at preventing homelessness among participating youth has yet to be determined, eligibility is based on foster care history, as well as opting to remain in extended foster care, rather than on homelessness. Young people who are homeless but who are not in the foster care system at age 18 or those who do not opt to remain in extended foster care are not currently eligible for SIL services

Transition Centers

Transition Centers provide a central clearinghouse of one-stop services to serve the diverse needs of current and former foster youth, homeless youth, or other at-risk youth. Services may include employment assistance, training, educational support, access and referrals to community partners and resources and various transitional living services, such as PAL classes, job search and job readiness classes, food and housing assistance, and substance abuse / mental health counseling. These Transition Centers which are independently funded, operated and supported by partnerships between DFPS and their Providers and the Texas Workforce Commission (see Appendix M for specific sites).

Homelessness Prevention & Intervention Services

There are a number of different points of intervention to address housing problems and promote stable housing situations. The current continuum of services includes prevention services to address problems that may result in homelessness, outreach and drop-in services to connect youth with supportive services, emergency housing programs such as shelters and host homes, and longer term housing programs such as transitional and supportive housing.

Homeless Prevention Services

One approach to preventing homelessness is to provide counseling and therapeutic support services to families where youth are at-risk of running away or being kicked out. The Services to At-Risk Youth ("STAR") program at DFPS is the only statewide state-funded program designed to prevent youth homelessness by resolving family conflict and keeping youth at home safely with their families. Through STAR, DFPS contracts with community-based organizations to provide family counseling and other crisis intervention services to children and youth up to age 17 and their families in all 254 Texas counties. Although the program does work to reunite runaways safely with their families, it focuses primarily on working with youth dealing with family conflict, truancy, and misdemeanor offenses.

Supports such as a crisis hotline can assist families and youth to get connected with a full range of homeless-related services, including prevention if they need it. DFPS also operates the Texas Youth and Runaway Hotline, a 24-hour toll-free hotline staffed by volunteers that offers crisis intervention services, telephone counseling, and referrals to youth and families who are struggling. The hotline made 7,542 contacts (by phone, text or online chat) in fiscal year 2015. Roughly 60% of these calls were with adults, 27% were specifically with youth, and the rest were unknown.

Street Outreach and Drop-In Services

Street Outreach Programs are generally connected to agencies that provide other services and they are specifically focused on helping young people get off the streets. Programs generally employ outreach workers to build relationships with runaway, homeless and street youth. FYSB specifically funds street outreach programs with the ultimate goal of preventing sexual abuse or exploitation of young people living on the streets or in unstable housing. Across the state, 13 programs were identified that provide street outreach services to youth. Many of these street outreach programs also provide prevention services.

Another piece of the continuum of services for youth experiencing homelessness are drop-in or resource centers. These are places where runaway and homeless youth can come without an appointment to get advice or information, receive services or service referrals, or to meet other runaway or homeless youth. These centers are another point of connection for young people who may not want to go to shelters and are a way to engage them in relationships and provide basic services.

Emergency Housing

Once youth become homeless, there is an immediate need to find temporary, emergency housing.

Emergency shelters are designed to respond to this immediate need for shelter. Youth shelters are licensed by DFPS as General Residential Operations and are often contracted as residential child care providers to serve children and youth in foster care. Many shelters serve a combination of young people placed through DFPS and those funded by other sources such as Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) basic center grants or private funding.

Other alternatives such as host homes are also a key part of meeting need for emergency housing. Host homes are emergency placements provided by either trained hosts who provide temporary shelter in their homes or made through agreements with young people in the youth's natural support network such as teachers or parents of friends.

Housing Supports

Transitional Living Programs
Transitional Living Programs are an example of a service model that provides longer-term housing for youth. A transitional living program is typically a residential program designed to help young adults gradually transition into self-sufficiency. These programs allow opportunities to build life skills and community connections while in a supportive environment. There are a number of transitional living programs that serve youth and young adults who are homeless in Texas. Many of these programs are funded by FYSB. FYSB funds transitional living programs that serve youth and young adults ages 16 to 22. FYSB-funded TLP services are usually limited to 540 days and provided with the goal of helping youth who experience homelessness to transition to self-sufficient living. The FYSB TLP program includes funding for group homes, host homes, and supervised apartments.

Several programs in Texas are specifically designated as Maternity Group Homes (MGH). The MGH Program, which is funded through FYSB, supports homeless pregnant and/or parenting young people between the ages of 16 and 22, as well as their dependent children. Services are provided for up to 21 months, or until a young person turns 18 years old if they enter a program at age 16. MGH grantees are required to teach young people parenting skills as well as child development, family budgeting, health and nutrition, and other skills.

Supportive Housing
A few programs across the state provide supportive housing in apartment-based locations with case management services. Some of these locations, including in Houston and Dallas, were reported by agencies as providing permanent supportive housing (PSH). PSH vouchers are generally available only to those who have been determined to be chronically homeless and to have a disabling condition.

Perceived Service Gaps

Across data sources, there were indications of gaps in the service system. Four data sources contributed information about perceived service gaps. 1)Homeless Liaisons in Schools (HLS survey) 2)Survey of providers in homeless serving organizations (Provider Survey) 3)Stakeholder feedback sessions 4)*YCT!* survey findings.

HLS Survey

The HLS survey conducted for this report was designed to better understand the role of homeless liaisons across Texas. A web-based survey was distributed to all homeless liaisons in Texas in August/September 2016 (see Appendix J for more details). Responses were received from 392 liaisons (response rate=42%). About 63% of respondents identified their county as being rural, 12.7% as suburban, 13.5% as small-medium metro, and 10.2% large metro. The vast majority of those that responded (83.2%) served as the liaison for the entire district, followed by 12.2% who worked at a single school 2.6% at multiple schools and 1.5% that identified as other.

Findings indicate that while liaisons often had multiple roles in addition to their liaison duties, they felt prepared and supported in doing their jobs. Over two-thirds (67.8%) felt they had enough time for their liaison duties and 93.3% indicated they could adjust their workload to meet the needs of the homeless youth they served. The overall level of support from their school or district was high with a median score of 9 out of 10. They also reported a high level of support from peers (median 8/10), supervisors (median 9/10), teachers (median 8/10), the administration (median 8/10) and the community (median 8/10). Overall, 75% of respondents indicated that they received training specific to being a homeless youth liaison and reported feeling adequately trained (median 7-8/10).

The HLS Survey also asked liaisons to rank the top needs of their homeless students. The most highly ranked needs were based on a score summing the rank of 1, 2, or 3 as most needed. The top five needs are presented in the table below – some were education related but supportive services outside of school was identified as the top need.

Table 7: Top five homeless student needs (n=392)

	Score
Supportive services outside school	213
Free lunch program	197
Connection to housing supports	186
School supplies	170
Transportation	148

HLS survey respondents were also asked to report the availability of different types of services in their community. Housing and shelter were the number one issues identified as unavailable,

with respondents indicating that there were no youth shelters (74%), transitional living programs (72.9%), homeless shelters (70.8%), or other housing programs (65.1%) in their area. Multi-agency referrals system (43.5%), ID document services (43.5%), and dental services were also identified as needs. The services most commonly reported to be available included hygiene supplies (82.4%), emergency food assistance (74.1%), medical services (59%), food stamps (58.9%), and community clinic services (55.9%).

Provider Survey

The Provider Survey conducted with those in homeless serving agencies also identified service gaps and problems with capacity. Over half of provider respondents (58%, n=35) reported that the referrals they made were unable to meet youth's needs. When asked to identify specific barriers, almost half of responses related to housing needs (45%) such as immediate shelter and long term housing. Only 13% of respondents to the survey answered "yes" to a question about whether they are able to serve all youth that are eligible for their services, another 39% answered "sometimes", and 48% selected "no." Overall, 48% stated that they often or sometimes turned down prospective clients due to capacity. Percentages in suburban and urban areas were higher indicating potentially more problems in meeting demand in higher population areas where there are higher numbers of youth experiencing homelessness.

Stakeholder feedback sessions/interviews

Similar issues came out in the stakeholder focus groups and interviews. Participants talked about inadequate staffing as barriers they faced in meeting the needs of homeless youth but also noted the importance of having staff that are adequately trained. Stakeholders noted the importance of youth-focused services based on principles of positive youth development and trauma informed care. As one provider stated

> "In my community, case workers are not necessarily aware that they're working with youth and instead approach youth as they would adults. Youth probably have never had an apartment before and might need more hand holding and more leniency. They might be afraid."

In line with a focus on youth development, some stakeholders suggested approaches prioritize youth preferences and goals but provide adult guidance so youth can "be a voice and fix their own needs."

YCT! Survey

The extended *YCT!* survey data provided some additional insight into youths' unmet needs. More than one-quarter, or 26.2% (n=33/126), of youth reported they had been to a shelter and not felt comfortable and 31.9% (n=38/119) reported they had attempted to use a shelter but not stayed the night. The most common reasons youth reported for not staying the night at a shelter were that they felt uncomfortable or unsafe (31.0%, n=13/42) and the shelter was full (31.0%, n=13/42). Youth were also asked to respond to an open ended question that asked them

"Imagine you are in charge. If you could change one thing (like a rule or law) to help youth who are homeless, what would it be?" The most common responses related to shelter and housing such as "More shelter, cheaper rents, cheaper taxes." These responses indicate that youth may not feel they are equipped to meet financial obligations associated with being an adult.

IV. Funding Sources

There is not a single source of funding in the Texas state budget dedicated to providing services to youth and/or young adults experiencing homelessness. There are a small number of state programs that may prevent homelessness among certain youth populations, as well as a number of state and federal funding streams that support services for broader homeless populations. Specific funding information, such as funding amounts, was not available for every funding source or program. Additionally, it is not always clear whether funding for homeless services is used to support services for youth specifically. The funding sources available to support community-based services are summarized briefly below, and more detail is included in Appendix O.

State-Administered Funds

Although there is a not a single source of state funding dedicated to the purpose of serving youth and young adults who are homeless in Texas, there are a number of state-administered programs through which providers may be able to access funds to serve certain population of youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Some of these state-administered programs are funded through state dollars, others are funded through federal dollars that the federal government awards or passes through the state.

- As discussed previously in this report, the Services to At-Risk Youth ("STAR") program at DFPS provides family counseling and other crisis intervention services to children and youth up to age 17 and their families in all 254 Texas counties. DFPS contracts with community-based organizations to provide STAR services through a competitive procurement process.

- The Texas Youth and Runaway Hotline is a 24-hour toll-free hotline that offers crisis intervention services, telephone counseling, and referrals to youth and families who are struggling. The hotline is operated by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. The hotline made 7,542 contacts (by phone, text or online chat) in fiscal year 2015.

- The State of Texas also funds a number of services for youth and young adults exiting foster care as described in Chapter 3, including services provided through the Supervised Independent Living (SIL) program which provides housing for youth in Extended Care.

- Transition centers in communities across Texas support youth who age out of foster care with navigating challenges related to the transition to adulthood, including unstable housing and homelessness. Although there is not funding dedicated to supporting

transition centers in Texas, some providers have been able to leverage funding provided through DFPS Preparation for Adult Living contracts, Aftercare contracts with DFPS as well as funding from the Texas Workforce Commission.

- Youth with disabilities have an additional option when they exit foster care through the Section 811 Project Rental Assistance program. This program provides project-based rental assistance for extremely low-income persons with disabilities linked with long-term services by coordinating voluntary services and providing a choice of subsidized, integrated rental housing options.

- The Homeless Housing and Services Program (HHSP) was established during the 81st Texas Legislature through an appropriations rider and codified during the 82nd Texas Legislature. The program is funded by $5 million General Revenue per year and administered through TDHCA. Through HHSP, the state provides funding to the eight largest Texas cities to support the provision of services to homeless individuals and families, though no funds are specifically allocated for youth or young adults.

Federal Programs

- The Family and Youth Services Bureau's Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) program is the primary federal program that provides services specifically for runaway and homeless youth. Through the RHY program, FYSB supports street outreach services, emergency shelter services, and longer-term transitional living program services, including maternity group homes, in Texas and across the country.

- Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) are funded by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and a portion of these funds (around 45%) are administered in Texas by TDHCA. TDHCA may award ESG to nonprofits, units of local governments (e.g., cities and counties) to provide services that are necessary to assist persons who are at risk of homelessness or who are homeless to quickly regain stability in permanent housing. Additional points in the ESG competitive application cycle may be available if serving youth aging out of foster care. Although some youth services organizations receive and utilize ESG funds, the ESG program is not targeted to homeless youth and young adults.

- Youth-service agencies are increasingly engaging with their local Continuum of Care (CoC) organizations to access funding from the HUD. The federal CoC program is designed to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. CoC member organizations access HUD funds by applying through their local CoC program.

- HUD recently released a Notice of Funding Availability for a Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) in August 2016 that will fund up to ten communities

nationally to participate in the YHDP to develop and execute a coordinated community approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness. Applications are due on November 30, 2016, and there are multiple Texas communities applying for the funding.

- The Family Unification Program is a HUD program that can provide housing choice vouchers to youth between ages 18-24 who have left foster care at age 16 or older and who lack adequate housing for up to 18 months. Public housing agencies administer FUP in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies.

- Through the Every Student Succeeds Act and Title I, homeless students may receive additional supports and assistance. Title I, Part A set-aside funds and McKinney-Vento TEXSHEP grant funds are used to remove barriers and provide support that assist homeless students to attend and succeed in school.

Summary

The current funding landscape provides little specific funding for youth experiencing homelessness. One concern of stakeholders was the intermittent nature of federal funds which could not be relied on from year to year. State funding could assist in strengthening and sustaining the infrastructure of services available to youth and young adults experiencing homelessness so that organizations can continue to operate when federal funding does not come through and ensure that programs do not have to close and turn away clients who are in need. State funding could also strengthen existing programs, by growing capacity and/or enhancing programming to serve special populations.

V. Recommendations

Based on the review of data across sources for this report, five broad recommendations were generated which were shared with stakeholders. The following recommendations were the result of discussions and additional feedback from stakeholders on potential targets for addressing the broad areas of need identified. Overall recommendations are presented with specific action steps. It is assumed that each of these recommendations would only be carried out should the Texas Legislature deem them worthy of implementation via policy directive and appropriate funding as necessary. A timeline for each recommendation would be highly dependent upon the number of local units of government, nonprofit organizations, state agencies, and for-profit entities involved. Considering that many of these entities may collaborate on multiple recommendations, timelines may need to be extended due to limited resources.

1. Improve Data Sources for Counting Homeless Youth

The data collection in phases 1 and 2 of the *Youth Count Texas!* project provided many lessons learned to inform data collection directly with homeless young people experiencing homelessness. This data adds to the conversation about how to count and identify homeless youth rather than providing a definitive answer to the question of how many youth are homeless in Texas. There appear to be several points of intervention to ensure stronger data collection across the state to facilitate tracking homelessness among young people across the state and across systems.

1.1 Standardize data collection tools to accompany point in time (PIT) counts

While a standardized instrument to be used across the state was created in Phase 1 of this project, there were numerous barriers to getting communities to use the same instrument. This resulted in wide variation in numbers of youth counted across communities and wide variations in the populations sampled. Ideally, all communities would use the same instrument and collect data in the same way. Utilizing a single standardized survey would promote uniformity and eliminate the confusion that comes from use of slightly varying instruments. Increasing consistency of data collected across the state in community PIT counts could improve the ability to make comparisons of homeless populations across different communities. Providing communities with a pre-programmed computerized survey that would be used to collect the data with tablets or computers could be one way to facilitate this standardization. Additionally, it is recommended that the standard survey instrument include core data elements relevant to youth homelessness.

1.2 Align school eligibility determinations with PIT count criteria

The widespread identification of homeless status by schools is currently the most comprehensive method for collecting data on homeless youth under age 19. Federal law guides how schools determine a student's homeless status. There are four categories that are submitted and reported to PEIMS. Additionally, students must be surveyed for their unaccompanied status if they are homeless. LEAs, most often collect this information on the Student Residency Questionnaire (SRQ)
It is unclear how these might align with similar questions asked on PIT counts. Aligning these questions would facilitate comparisons of the number of homeless youth across these different data sources. Tools used across schools and across PIT counts should use identical questions to assess for homelessness, even if they interpret the answers to these questions differently when determining who to count as homeless. The federal government is increasingly requiring that communities standardize data collection through the homeless management information system (HMIS) so this might be a vehicle for ensuring consistency if HMIS could be utilized by schools as well.

1.3 Change PIT count timing to better match school data collection

Currently, the PIT count is conducted over several days in January. It is difficult to ask schools to reassess all of their students for homelessness at this time of the year. Since housing status often changes between the start of the school year and January, reassessment is then needed for an accurate count of those in school. While it may be difficult to accomplish since federal guidelines determine count timing, moving the month of the PIT collection to match the time frame where schools are already collecting this data would greatly improve the ability of schools to provide accurate counts that match the PIT requirements. School sources suggest that October is the ideal time for schools, since they are finalizing their eligibility determinations based on federal reporting requirements.

1.4 Collect data on homelessness across administrative sources

Standardized questions to assess the elements of homelessness determination could be used beyond the schools and housing systems. All state agencies that routinely assess youth such as the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, should also assess for housing instability using the same questions that schools use to determine homeless status. A field for homelessness in routine data entry would then allow these agencies to capture the number of youth experiencing homelessness in their systems.

2. Provide a Full Continuum of Supports to Promote Housing Stability

In conversations with stakeholders across systems, gaps in the types of housing and supportive services available were consistently noted. These problems were attributed to a lack of capacity of currently available placements and to gaps in the types of housing supports available. A continuum of housing supports ideally includes preventive services such as counseling to high risk families, short term crisis stabilization services including emergency shelters and short term respite placements, foster or host homes, transitional housing programs, and housing vouchers for independent living. Across all levels, these need to accommodate young people that are also parents. In areas with larger populations of youth experiencing homelessness, street outreach and drop in centers are also part of this continuum.

2.1 Increase funds for communities to fill gaps in their continuums according to community needs.

Ideally, young people across the state would have access to the full range of housing-related services and supports. Different communities have different constellations of providers and services so each community will need some flexibility in determining where the gaps in the continuum are. Funds may need to be funneled specifically to population centers for efficiency in creating a full continuum in locations across the state.

It is worth noting that one specific need identified by many stakeholders was transitional housing. Transitional housing services that provided more structure than a completely independent apartment situation were noted by many stakeholders as currently inadequate. HUD has de-emphasized this type of housing as a priority, yet stakeholders talked about the need for an interim step between institutions or family based care and fully independent situations in apartments. This type of housing was envisioned as providing more extensive supports but having low barriers to entry to provide a safe space for youth who are not prepared for fully independent living.

2.2 Offer mental health services in conjunction with each level of housing supports

Across data sources, mental health needs were prominently identified including both serious mental illnesses and post-traumatic stress disorder. Exposure to trauma is highly related to homelessness and housing instability and evidence reviewed across need areas emphasized the importance of incorporating trauma treatment and trauma informed approaches across all levels of programs. Employing personnel such as case managers who are trained to assess and manage mental health problems is desirable for all types of housing related services. All funded programs would ideally identify a formal mechanism for assessment and treatment of mental health problems as well as response to mental health-related crises to formally connect mental health and housing service systems.

2.3 Offer comprehensive preventative healthcare services in conjunction with each level of housing supports

Young people experiencing homelessness suffer health related morbidities and higher mortality rates than their housed peers. They are at higher risk for HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, and multiple other preventable conditions. Employing healthcare professionals to identify health needs, provide prevention services, and facilitate healthcare system navigation is desirable for all types of housing related services. All funded programs would ideally identify a formal mechanism for delivery of healthcare services to meet the basic needs of this high risk population to prevent and respond to health-related crises and formally connect healthcare and housing service systems.

2.4 Comprehensively review child care licensing requirements for where these requirements introduce unintended barriers to housing older or more challenging youth and ensure that licensing representatives consistently understand and enforce requirements.

In conversations with stakeholders, barriers to placing or housing youth were often tied to child care licensing requirements. Licensing requirements were perceived to prevent agencies from working with young people under age 18 or to housing those over 18 along with younger youth. For example, foster care licensing was noted as creating disincentives for foster parents to accept or keep older youth since they had to have a separate room for these youth once they turned 18. In some cases, the perception of these regulations was not in line with the actual regulations. Stakeholders noted that licensure representatives across the state may present different information and enforce regulations differently, presenting confusion about what is and is not possible in housing unaccompanied youth. An example of this conflict is the perception that a youth under 18 and one above 18 cannot live in the same facility. What licensing specifically states is that two youth cannot share a bedroom with over a two year difference in age unless a professional level service provider has designated that there is no risk involved for the minor. There is an additional section of licensing which specifically states that an adult in care (i.e. a young adult in extended foster care) can share a bedroom with a minor under certain circumstances. A full review of licensing requirements considering how they may influence providers' ability and willingness to provide housing is recommended. In addition, a review of how information about licensing is disseminated and enforced appears to be indicated.

3. Increase Service Delivery and Supports to Youth Identified Through Schools

Schools present a point of entry to identify, assess and connect homeless young people with resources to meet their needs. Our literature review identified that some youth are not being identified due to lack of information so it is important to support ongoing efforts to educate

schools and youth about the specific definition of homelessness and services provided to homeless students. These recommendations focus more specifically, however, on how to enhance services once youth have been identified. Currently, schools identify a wide range of young people who are homeless, both unaccompanied and with families. This appears to be a natural point of intervention for connecting youth with outside services which is currently underutilized.

3.1 Offer Needs Screening for All Young People Identified as Homeless to Facilitate Referrals to Appropriate Services

Schools across the state provide a wide range of services to young people they identify as homeless. All schools are required to identify homeless students, remove barriers to educational access and facilitate continuity by providing transportation and other supports but there are no specific requirements for identification of needs more broadly. There is wide variation in how schools assess and connect students with services beyond education-specific needs depending on the resources and personnel available. It is recommended that some standardized screening across the different domains of needs exhibited by youth experiencing homelessness be offered to all homeless students in order to better connect them with outside resources that could meet these needs.

3.2 Develop Closer Partnerships between Schools and Community Agencies

Identification of needs as proposed in 3.1 is only one step in actually meeting these needs. Schools have limited ability to directly provide services for the range of needs homeless students present with, however, community agencies that provide homeless services are well positioned to partner with schools to meet these needs. Initiatives that directly connect the designated lead homeless agency in the community (when there is one) with its school districts through their homeless liaisons would assist in translating identification of homeless students into connection with resources and improved outcomes across life domains.

3.3 Provide Transition Planning for Unaccompanied Young People

The period from the end of high school into independent adulthood is a critical transition where young people need adult support in planning for their futures. The importance of planning for transition has been recognized by the foster care and special education systems but there are currently no specific provisions for young people who are homeless. Specific attention on planning for education, vocation, housing and health & mental health needs after graduation is particularly critical for unaccompanied youth who often lack parental support in managing the transition out of high school. Closer partnerships with housing agencies as described in 3.2 and with

post-secondary education and workforce training opportunities would be helpful in this process as well as supports from counselors or homeless liaisons to specifically support these young people. Ideally these efforts would begin by at least age 16.

4. <u>Prevent Homelessness by Addressing Needs of Youth in Foster Care and Juvenile Justice</u>

Youth who are involved in the juvenile justice and foster care systems are easily identified and are involved with service delivery systems charged with ensuring their success, yet these youth disproportionately experience homelessness after they exit these systems. While recommendations across juvenile justice and foster care systems are similar, the challenges and solutions are somewhat different across systems so within each area, they are divided by system.

4.1 Increase housing options available at time of transition

Foster Care

Young people in Texas who are in the custody of the child welfare system at age 18 have the option to extend their time in foster care until age 21. They then have access to case management supports and the state will continue to financially support placement in a foster home, independent living situation or dorm. Unfortunately, not all young people choose to extend their time in care, even though staying in care can reduce homelessness. Stakeholders were asked specifically in stakeholder sessions and individual interviews about why more young people do not take the extended care option. One problem identified by many is the lack of available placement options. While the extended care option would theoretically provide placements, youth who have struggled in the past have few options and hence exit the system since they perceive that there is little benefit for them to stay. At the time of system exit, if youth meet certain criteria, they can potentially qualify for support from an aftercare room and board allowance of up to $3,000 before they turn 21. These funds are generally accessible in conjunction with case management services through transition centers and are intended to provide supports to help youth transition to full independence. The funds enable payment to relatives or other housing settings to assist in housing during the transition and with rent and utility deposits. Stakeholders noted, however, that there are currently limited housing options available to youth at age 18 through the foster care system, creating an incentive for youth to choose to exit the system and use the aftercare room and board funds to support staying with relatives or for independent housing. This money tends to run out quickly, however, leaving youth in homeless situations.

Some potential remedies to address the limitations in both type and capacity of housing for older foster youth include increasing the room and board allowance and increasing incentives for foster parents to take or keep youth older than age 18. This may involve changing licensure requirements for foster homes, which is addressed in

recommendation 2.3. In addition, it is recommended that steps be taken to increase the accessibility and supply of Supported Independent Living (SIL) Facilities. Currently, there are approximately 9 of these programs across the state with far fewer beds than the current demand. In Harris County, for example, the SIL facility has 20 beds available, far fewer than the approximately 200 young people who age out of care each year. One barrier to increasing capacity for SIL facilities is the low reimbursement rate provided for operating these types of facilities. Organizations reported that they have to raise additional revenues from other sources in order to afford to provide SIL services. SIL programs were also noted to have fairly rigorous admission requirements so that youth needed to demonstrate a high level of functioning and autonomy in order to be accepted or successfully remain in a SIL. A gap in the system was noted for youth that required higher levels of structure and support. While these youth may have been the least prepared for successful independent living and hence the most likely to become homeless, they were less likely to be able to access housing through the extended care option.

Juvenile Justice

Stakeholders from the juvenile justice system also noted the lack of available options for young people leaving their systems. For young people exiting from secure facilities to parole, there are very limited funds available for assistance with housing or any sort of preparation for independent living and these funds provide very time limited assistance. This was particularly problematic since having a criminal background (even a juvenile record) and a lack of rental history made it difficult for them to secure housing in addition to the financial barriers of coming up with deposits. Additional funding specifically for youth exiting juvenile justice systems for housing would assist in addressing these challenges, particularly if these could be provided through housing programs to leverage other supports for housing that may also be available through those systems.

4.2 Improve transition planning

Foster Care

While specific legislation supports transition planning for young people that age out of foster care, this planning continues to insufficiently prepare them to secure and maintain stable housing. Overall, stakeholders identified the need to put mechanisms in place that could ensure that foster youth knew about the resources available to them, that they took advantage of them, and comprehensively planned for system exit with a full understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of different choices. One potential point of intervention was the court system. A few specific steps could foster

greater involvement by courts across the state

- Increase the frequency of court hearings at age 17 to occur every 4 months and mandate a specific hearing in the week before their 18th birthday. During these hearings, reporting on documentation such as birth certificates, social security cards, and state ids or licenses would be a required element.

- Create specific dockets for older foster youth (i.e. those eligible to participate in preparation for adult living programs) when feasible and provide education and training for judges specific to successful transitions. Resources such as a bench card specific to transitions out of care could assist in standardizing planning.

- Change incentives for extending care so that youth request exit rather than requesting to stay

Juvenile Justice

One driver of homelessness among youth served in the juvenile justice system was a lack of family or other supports that are willing to take them when they have completed their requirements. Stakeholders reported that youth end up staying in detention centers or other restrictive settings solely because there is no alternative placement for them. They suggested that planning for housing when a youth exits a placement should begin earlier, at the time of initial placement. In addition, this planning should include interaction and preparation to ensure that the identified transition plan is secure. For older youth who are exiting to more independent situations, more extensive transition planning was indicated to ensure that they had the skills and supports needed to successfully maintain independent housing. Currently in foster care, youth are required to work on transition planning and have a specific plan for housing 90 days prior to system exit. It is recommended that similar requirements be applied to those exiting the juvenile justice system.

4.3 Increase placement options for youth with high levels of need

Young people who present challenging behaviors often end up being removed from placements and end up having few stable housing options, even when involved with public systems such as child welfare or juvenile justice. Stakeholders noted that youth with histories of suicide attempts, high medical or mental health needs, histories of running away, sex offenses and histories of assault become very difficult to place.

Foster Care

Stakeholders noted that a lack of placement capacity in the foster care system has

resulted in youth being placed in temporary housing situations not designed to address their needs. In addition, stakeholders talked about young people in both the foster care and juvenile justice system staying in placements that were more secure than they needed due to lack of available space in less restrictive alternatives. The challenges in placement capacity for foster youth go beyond the scope of this report, however, it is worth noting the relationship to homelessness. Without available capacity and a full continuum of housing supports to provide placement, stakeholders noted that some youth are ending up on the streets. Additionally, because many shelters are currently at their capacity due to CPS placements, there is less room for youth who are not in foster care but are experiencing homelessness.

Juvenile Justice

Another barrier to finding appropriate placements for youth that was noted by stakeholders was their prior offenses. Stakeholders described barriers encountered across placement types including residential treatment placements, foster homes, and private landlords, when they learned that youth had a prior criminal history. While juvenile records were supposed to be closed, without record sealing, stakeholders noted that this information was available and could disqualify youth from placement settings. While juvenile records for deferred adjudication and misdemeanors are supposed to be automatically sealed two years after a youth's case closed, this process is complicated and does not always happen. And the two year waiting period created a long and important period of time where these offenses could be used as ground for rejection from placements. Re-visiting this process for potential avenues to seal records more quickly may identify ways to remove these barriers through a potentially simplified process that would automatically and easily occur without need for additional resources. In addition, licensing requirements were mentioned as a rationale for placements refusing to serve some high needs youth (in line with recommendation 2.4).

5. Remove Barriers to Exiting Homelessness

Studies of homeless young adults have identified age 18 as a peak age where young people experience homelessness for the first time (i.e. Narendorf et al, 2015). While these young people are technically adults, they experience a number of challenges that increase their chances of remaining homeless for longer periods of time. Many are still trying to complete high school as they struggle with housing instability. The following recommendations are aimed at ensuring that these young people have access to the supports they need to successfully achieve the normal markers of a transition to adulthood, rapidly move out of homelessness and achieve long term housing stability.

5.1 Facilitate access to documentation such as birth certificates, social security

cards, and state identification.

One barrier to applying for jobs, housing, and getting needed benefits is lack of official documentation. One barrier to successfully acquiring this documentation is fees. A policy that allows young people who are designated as homeless through homeless liaisons or homeless service providers to have fees waived when acquiring their state identification or drivers license would remove one of the barriers that stands in the way.

5.2 Facilitate access to transportation

Another common barrier identified by young people was transportation. Policies that can facilitate access to public transportation for young people who utilize homeless service agencies would assist in removing one of these barriers. In addition, programs that can assist young people in learning to drive and getting their drivers licenses would remove another barrier to acquiring reliable transportation. Recommendations for assisting foster youth to learn to drive and obtain a drivers license prior to aging out of care have been proposed by Texas CASA (see Appendix L).

5.3 Increase access to employment, job training, and post-secondary education

Many young people who end up in homeless situations lack job readiness skills. This limited readiness is compounded by barriers such as criminal records. Criminal background checks were described as a barrier for both employment and housing across stakeholder groups. Policies that incentivize employers to consider criminal background checks later in the hiring process may remove one barrier to employment for young people experiencing homelessness. In addition, there a number of barriers to youth successfully accessing advanced training or higher education. Lack of information about the process for applying for higher education and financing it were noted by stakeholders. Specific funding to support homeless service providers in providing targeted employment and education supports or partnering with others such as workforce specialists who provide these services in their communities may assist young people to overcome some of these barriers.

5.4 Support programs that connect young people with positive adults and build their support systems

One reason that young people become homeless and remain homeless is a lack of social supports, particularly positive adults in their lives who can assist them in navigating the wide range of challenges that come during the transition to adulthood. Literature supports that increasing the presence of positive adults available to young

people can improve outcomes across the domains of education, employment, and housing. It is recommended that mentoring supports be included as a service in conjunction with housing interventions for young adults.

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