

Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Work Group



From Out of the Shadows

*Shedding Light on Oregon's
Homeless and Runaway Youth*

**Report to the Interim Committee on
Health and Human Services
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Acknowledgements

Oregon Runaway and Homeless Work Group

Galen Phipps, Looking Glass Youth and Family Services, Inc., Eugene, Work Group Chair

Karen Andall, Oregon Youth Authority

Janet Arenz, Oregon Alliance of Children's Programs

Dona Bolt, Oregon Department of Education

Greg Bowles, University of Oregon Intern

Connie Carley, OCCF Positive Youth Development Demonstration Project

Kevin Donegan, Janus Youth Programs, Portland

Pat Farr, State Representative District 14

Ramona Foley, DHS Children, Adults and Families

Rainy Gauvain, Oregon Housing and Community Services

Beth Goodman, University of Oregon Research Assistant

Joe Hayes, J Bar J Youth Programs, Bend

Marcine Hays, Parent, Salem

Rosemary Iavenditti, DHS Independent Living Program

Elizabeth Johnson, University of Oregon Research Assistant

Jodie Jones, Oregon Housing and Community Services

Erinn Kelley-Siel, Governor's Office

Mickey Lansing, Oregon Commission on Children and Families

Jean Lasater, Northwest Human Services, Salem

Donna Middleton, DHS Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Celia Nunez, Oregon Democratic Caucus

Pam Patton, Coalition for Equal Access for Girls

Kitty Piercy, Planned Parenthood of Southern Oregon

Lawrence Piper, DHS Office of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Daniel Pitasky, New Avenues for Youth, Portland

Michael Serice, DHS Children, Adults and Families

Pearl Wolfe, Looking Glass Youth and Family Services, Inc., Eugene

Roxanne Young, University of Oregon Intern

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“What happens to children has a lifelong impact on them. When you see a homeless adult, it is quite possible that they are homeless because of people and systems that failed them as children.”

– National Alliance to End Homelessness

Overview

Homeless youth struggle with issues of housing, school attendance, health and emotional problems

On any given day thousands of young Oregonians are homeless – living in the shadows, forgotten or unnoticed, without the guidance of caring adults and connections to the support systems of families, schools and community. These youth lead unstable and hazardous lives. Many have been abused, neglected or abandoned by their families. Homeless youth not only struggle with housing issues, but also with school attendance, health problems and emotional development issues, which often lead to participation in dangerous and illegal activities like substance abuse and unsafe sex. Running away is not a crime, but runaways who remain homeless for extended periods of time usually end up living on the streets, creating a law enforcement problem for communities.

Parents of runaway and homeless youth often have problems of their own such as family violence, substance abuse, mental illness, disabilities, limited parenting skills, unemployment, incarceration, or homelessness. While some families are unwilling to seek help, those who do may find that services are too expensive or not readily accessible. In addition, communities have few methods to encourage parents to hold their children accountable.

No branch of state government has responsibility for this at-risk population

No branch of state government has specific responsibility for providing services or guiding decision-making for this at-risk population. Generally, runaways are viewed as inappropriate for child protective services, and lack of funding as well as rules of access leave the majority outside of the mental health and child welfare systems. Most homeless programs serve either adults or families with children; homeless adolescents fit neither category. Juvenile justice systems concentrate on law violators, and it is not against the law for a teenager to be without a home. Except for falling under truancy laws or invocation of a little-used parental responsibility law requiring supervision of a minor, runaway and homeless youth don't fit neatly within any specific jurisdiction. As a result, most “official” doors are closed.

All adolescents need support and guidance as they navigate towards adulthood, one of the most difficult transitions in life. They need the guidance, time and help of a stable, secure family. They need connections to communities that

provide access to other caring adults and real-life options. And, they need access to education and experiences that provide them with a foundation of learning, life skills and credentials to help them gain the knowledge and confidence they need to succeed.

These are the young people who we believe need our urgent attention

Unfortunately, most youth who are runaways or homeless have not had the opportunity to engage in interactions and activities that foster a sense of accomplishment or competency. Many have had a history of school failure long before they left home. Even more troubling, the home environments of these youth also do not appear to provide many opportunities for developing a sense of accomplishment or competence either. These are the young people who we believe need our most urgent attention.

Therefore, as organizations committed to ending and preventing youth homelessness, the Homeless and Runaway Youth Work Group makes the following recommendations:

- Designate the Oregon Commission on Children and Families (OCCF) as responsible for statewide planning of services to homeless youth, runaways and their families.
- Provide greater support to at-risk youth and families in order to increase family stability and accountability.
- Identify and replicate models of culturally competent, gender-specific, evidence-based service delivery for runaways, their families and homeless youth in urban and rural areas.
- Dedicate and allocate funding to adequately and appropriately serve runaways, their families and homeless youth.

As a state, we cannot afford to turn our back on homeless youth. For instance, incarceration of just one juvenile costs taxpayers \$48,500 a year. By comparison, adolescent drug treatment programs cost only \$3,000 to \$12,500 a year, and the costs of sheltering and other basic services for a homeless youth are \$1,100 to \$1,800 per year.

Studies show that an effective system of care (including preventive and aftercare services, emergency shelter services, extended residential shelter, and street outreach services) is a proven way for youth to re-connect and transition successfully to adulthood. Runaway youth, homeless youth and other street youth need opportunities to complete high school or earn a general equivalency degree, learn job skills and obtain employment.

There should be a coordinated system of care for runaway and homeless youth in our state

Of course, communities must hold young people accountable for their actions – and families accountable to supervise their children. It’s clear that most of these families need the help and support of programs to promote parental responsibility and address substance abuse and other problems so they can help themselves and their children. Yet, this currently isn’t taking place.

Oregon must develop a comprehensive state policy, dedicate resources and improve collaboration and coordination among programs that serve runaway and homeless youth as a long-term strategy for responding to the needs of this population. At the very least, there needs to be a coordinated system of care for runaway and homeless youth with the capacity to provide basic services of food, clothing and shelter in all Oregon counties that demonstrate the need. It should provide a transitional living component and access to education, health care, job training, aftercare, and case management for homeless youth in areas where needed. Moreover, the system must have a strong prevention component to address the root causes of youth homelessness.

Background

To address the issues of runaway and homeless youth in our state, in 2003 the House Committee on Health and Human Services recommended the formation of the Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Work Group. Made up of stakeholders from several agencies, the work group is led by the Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Coalition (OHRYC), Oregon Commission on Children and Families (OCCF) and Department of Human Services Children, Adults and Families (DHS/CAF). The charge of the work group is to study the issues affecting Oregon's homeless youth and to report on the following:

- A clear picture of the nature and scope of the problem including the interface with other systems of care and the current status of programming available for homeless and runaway youth
- Analysis of the cost of potential service delivery systems and the cost of not doing them
- Identification of a service delivery system model that has demonstrable efficacy, is integrated, and is sustainable by the state and community partners
- A thorough, insightful recommendation for long and short-term changes to existing policy and service delivery with attention to phased strategic planning and implementation
- Recommendations for a predictable income flow while identifying current and potential revenue sources

Definitions of Homeless Youth

This report focuses on youth who are age 21 or younger and meet one of the following definitions:

- "Runaway youth" have left their homes or alternative care placements or remained away without permission for a long period of time and have little or no connection with their families or caretakers.

- “Throwaway youth” have been pushed out of their homes, abandoned by their parents, or have left home for the streets with their parents’ knowledge and consent.

For simplicity and readability, the term “homeless youth” is used throughout this report as an inclusive term that also means runaway and throwaway youth unless specifically noted.

- “Homeless youth” lack a stable place of residence, having been away from home for six months or more; lack adult supervision, guidance, and care; or have little likelihood of reunification with parents.

Sources for this Report

The research and data that serve as the basis of this report include:

- Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS) from Oregon’s federally funded programs
- Night Count surveys from 2001-2003 conducted by Oregon Housing and Community Services twice yearly at homeless shelters
- 2003-04 report from of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (McKinney-Vento) including responses from 85% of Oregon school districts
- Survey of 23 local commissions on children and families and their partners conducted by the OCCF
- Information from Department of Human Services Office of Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Review of existing related studies, research and practices in other states (For a discussion of other states’ practices, please see Appendix B.)

Findings

The Work Group’s findings are summarized within four key areas of study and analysis: history and policy, the homeless youth population, family accountability and support, and services for homeless youth.

I. History and Policy

At various times throughout our nation’s history – early settlement and expansion westward, industrialization in the 1800s, and during the Great Depression in the 1900s – homeless youth were a part of U.S. society. Even so, homeless youth were generally ignored until the 1960s when “runaways” – youth who left middle- and upper-class homes – began to be perceived as a social problem. In response, Congress enacted the Runaway Youth Act of 1974, which provided funds for establishing a network of shelters to temporarily house the youth and reunite them with their parents.

Many key federal and state policies and legislation affecting runaway and homeless youth are presented in Appendix A.

Three years later, the Runaway Youth Act was revised and renamed the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to acknowledge a new group of “throwaway” youth (those who were pushed out of their homes, abandoned by parents, or left home for life on the street with their parents’ knowledge and consent). Although the 1977 act continued to stress family reunification, it acknowledged that both youth and their families needed extensive services for reunification to be successfully accomplished.

Throughout the 1980s, the number of throwaway youth seen by the shelter system continued to increase. Shelters reported that these youth exhibited multiple psychological and behavioral problems and came from families characterized by parental substance abuse, family violence, child maltreatment, long-term family conflict, and dysfunctional parents (many of whom had severe psychological and behavioral problems of their own). In 1986, Congress passed the Independent Living Initiatives Program Legislation to provide programs in out-of-home care to youth through age 21.

In the 1990s, family dysfunction continued to be cited as a primary source of youth homelessness, although poverty was also considered a significant factor.

There were also increases in the number of youth who became homeless as a result of their families' homelessness. During this decade, Congress enacted legislation that included the Missing, Exploited and Runaway Children Act of 1999, which allowed for emergency shelter, food and clothing, medical assistance, counseling, and referrals to health care and educational systems.

Runaway behavior is classified as a dependency status offense in our state (i.e. an offense that if committed by an adult would not be a crime). Until a Supreme Court decision banning the practice in 1983, runaways could be detained and placed in custody with adult criminals. Following this decision, states were required to revise detention criteria for juveniles and fund alternatives. In 1987, the Oregon Legislature appropriated \$500,000 to the (former) State Children and Youth Services Commission, primarily to comply with the court decision for the de-institutionalization of status offenders. Counties were mandated to serve runaway and homeless youth to receive the funds. In practice, most funds were applied to alternatives to detention for criminal youth offenders, the majority of whom were males.

Finding: Oregon lacks a comprehensive policy for systemically addressing the issues and needs of runaway and homeless youth.

During the rest of the 1980s and into the 1990s, Oregon's policies towards runaway and homeless youth were shaped in part, to comply with federal mandates, and additionally, by two major state efforts designed to reform services to children, youth and families. In 1993, House Bill 2004 created a comprehensive planning process to address the needs of all children, and to provide supports for children as

early as possible to prevent them from entering the child welfare system. In 1995, Senate Bill 1 reformed the system created to deal with Oregon's most violent juvenile offenders by separating juvenile delinquency from dependency services. In addition, Senate Bill 1 set a new direction for dealing with juveniles who commit crimes by calling for personal accountability and immediate and appropriate sanctions for criminal behavior.

"Level 7 youth" was a definition established for administering a specific level of service. It refers to youth ages 13 to 17 who are deemed out of parental control and/or at-risk for child abuse or neglect, alcohol and drug use/abuse.

Despite these reforms, the issue of runaway and homeless youth was largely absent from the debate. As a result, counties were no longer required to provide shelter care and services to divert dependency status offenders (including runaways) from the juvenile justice system. Children's Services Division drew the line at "Level 7" youth, transferring responsibility for children at lesser risk to county

government. Based on the belief that many of these youth could be better served at a lesser cost in the community, less than half of the funds previously

spent on the population was transferred to the newly created Oregon Commission on Children and Families for allocation to the counties.

In 1995, the target population that Oregon called “Level 7” youth was no longer relevant when a new definition of “youth investment” was established by the federal Social Services Block Grant (Title XX). As a result, youth investment funds now apply to children and youth from birth to age 17 and their families for supports and skills in lieu of more intensive state services. The Youth Investment Intergovernmental Agreement was established between State Office of Services to Children and Families and the Oregon Commission on Children and Families for the transfer of youth investment funds to the commission for programs serving at risk youth.

Today, many programs and agencies at the federal, state and local levels provide services to children. Local communities can address homeless youth in community planning for services to children and families. However, available resources for helping runaway and homeless youth have declined over the years. Less attention is given to the needs of teenagers and young adults, particularly runaway and homeless youth.

CASE STUDY: Luke, Age 14

Luke lives with his mother, step-father and two step-sisters. His mother has a job but no benefits. His step-father works off and on in construction, traveling up and down I-5. When he isn't working, he drinks and spends a lot of time at the casino. Luke has problems with drinking himself, having been arrested three times for Minor in Possession. He was sent to a diversion program with mandatory attendance, but during the program, the funding was cut and now, there is no one to oversee his sentence of community service. He has only been in school three days this year. His mother is too tired from working and taking care of the other children that she doesn't find much time to talk to Luke. He hates his stepfather, who is constantly berating him and calling him a loser. Luke wishes he could find someone to talk to about this, but isn't sure what good it's going to do.

II. The Homeless Youth Population

Determining the number of youth who are runaway, throwaway, or homeless is difficult, given the temporary and often hidden nature of their living arrangements and the absence of reliable methods for counting people experiencing runaway episodes. That being said, efforts have been made to estimate the size of the runaway and throwaway youth population in the United States:

Finding: There is no coordinated effort to document the actual number of runaway and homeless youth so that their needs can be fully assessed.

- The U.S. Department of Justice estimated that in 1999, nearly 1.7 million youth had a runaway or throwaway episode.ⁱ

- A 1995 study conducted for the federal government by the Research Triangle Institute reported a far higher figure – an estimated 2.8 million youth.ⁱⁱ
- The most current research estimates that between 1.3 million and 2.8 million youth live on the streets of the United States each year.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In 2000, the National Runaway Switchboard estimated that 75% of runaways are females (www.nrscrisisline.org).
- Females are less likely to come the attention of the juvenile authorities during their runaway episodes, are more likely to be victimized, and are more likely to seek shelter.^{iv}
- Homeless youth are the *fastest growing segment* of the homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2001).

Oregon Estimates

Estimating the size of the Oregon’s runaway and homeless youth population is difficult because there is no coordinated data collection to document the actual number of runaway, throwaway and homeless youth or where they are located. Further, accurate knowledge about Oregon’s homeless youth is limited by the fact that most studies involve young people seen by the shelter system, who make up only a small percentage of the total number of homeless youth. A report by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General estimated that only one in twelve homeless youth ever comes into contact with the shelter system.

Estimates of Oregon's homeless youth population range from 23,000 to 25,000.

While no single data source in Oregon provides a comprehensive estimate of the number of runaway or homeless youth, we note the following:

- Based on an informal 2002 survey of its membership, the Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Coalition reported an estimated 25,000 Oregon youth are runaway or homeless in one year's time.
- During a 12-month period in 2002-2003, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS) reported that federally funded shelters served 1,992 of Oregon's unaccompanied homeless youth. (RHYMIS is an automated management information tool designed to capture data on the number of runaways and homeless youth being served by the Family and Youth Services Bureau grantee programs, Basic Center Program and Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth.) Applying the Inspector General assumption that only one in 12 homeless youth are seen by the shelter system, Oregon's homeless youth population numbers at least 23,904.

In addition, two Oregon databases collect information on runaway youth, the Law Enforcement Data System (LEDS) and the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS). In 2002, LEDS logged 10,499 reports of runaways who are picked up at the request from parents or legal guardians. (This figure represents the number of runaway incidents, which may involve some of the same youth more than once.) In 2003, the JJIS reported that 2,359 youth were referred to county juvenile departments for a total of 6,817 referrals of runaways statewide.^v

Characteristics of Oregon's Homeless Youth

As previously noted, rigorous research on this population is sparse, making it difficult to capture an accurate and complete picture of homeless youth. Much of what we know about Oregon's homeless and runaway population comes from the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS). This data is collected from federally funded programs offering shelter and other services.^{vi}

▪ Age/Gender

According to RHYMIS data, slightly more females (52%) than males (48%) accessed Oregon's Basic Center Programs (emergency shelter, food and clothing, medical assistance, counseling, and referrals to health care and educational systems) during the fiscal year 2002-03. RHYMIS data indicates

that the majority of homeless youth served that year were age 13 and older, although a few were as young as 11. Most were ages 15 and 16.

Predictably, RHYMIS data indicates that Oregon's Transitional Living Programs (case management, housing support, and comprehensive social services designed to increase independent living skills) are serving older youth. Of the entire group of clients served during fiscal year 2002-03, nearly one-third were females 17-18 years of age (30%), followed by females over 18 (24%). Males over 18 made up the next largest subgroup (21%), followed by males ages 17-18 (13 %).

▪ **Ethnicity/Race**

Some 73% of Oregon homeless and runaway youth are white; 9% are Native American or Alaska Native; 8% are Hispanic or Latino; and 4% are African American; 4% are of mixed races; and 2% are of other races.

▪ **Health and Behavior**

A wide range of health and behavior problems have been documented by shelter staff working with homeless youth, including substance abuse, emotional and mental problems, and medical problems. According to the 2002 Mental Health Consumers Summary, one-third of the youth receiving detoxification services report being homeless or living in a shelter. Agency staff point to an increase in the use of methamphetamine.

Finding: Shelters report that many homeless youth and runaways often have multiple health and behavior problems.

While some of these problems appear to be long-standing, others are probably exacerbated by the stressful experiences of homelessness. Shelter staffs also indicate that homeless youth, especially those on the streets, sometimes resort to illegal activities, such as prostitution or drug dealing, in order to survive. Many youth are victimized while homeless.

▪ **Education**

RHYMIS data shows that of the homeless youth served by Oregon's federally funded programs during fiscal year 2002-03, 59% were enrolled in high school and 29% were in middle school. Some 45% of youth reported they attended school regularly while 26% said they had dropped out. Another 19% reported attending school sporadically.

Causes of Youth Homelessness

The reality of life on the streets is not a pleasant one. Homeless youth lead hazardous and unstable lives. They rarely reside in one location for long, and many have been found to live in four or more places in just a six-month period.

Finding: Family instability is a major factor in youth homelessness.

The risks runaways and homeless youth face are serious. Research conducted among these young people in areas throughout the country have found a

number of problems existing in high proportions: malnutrition, psychological disorders, HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, drug and alcohol abuse, robbery, and sexual and physical assault.

Homelessness interferes with typical youth development and makes attending school much more difficult. Without connections to family, school and community, there are few opportunities for positive interactions. And, the constant preoccupation with basic needs creates greater insecurity which can lead to or exacerbate mental problems.

Why would anyone choose a life on the streets? In most cases, homelessness among youth is a means of escaping numerous problems that exist in the home environment: violence, abuse and neglect, substance abuse, mental illness, disabilities, limited parenting skills, unemployment, incarceration of one or both parents, or the family's homelessness. Further, researchers say that the runaway label is misapplied to many adolescents who have left home. A great many are actually throwaways, young people who are forced to leave their homes or prevented from returning after leaving.

In general, causes of youth homelessness fall into three inter-related categories: family problems, economic problems and residential instability following a history of foster care:

- **Family Problems**

Youth consistently report family conflict as the primary reason for running away. These family problems have been found to be longstanding, rather than single episodes occurring shortly before youth leave home. Many youth leave home after years of physical or sexual abuse, strained relationships, addiction of a family member, and parental neglect. Across studies of homeless youth conducted throughout the country, rates of reported sexual abuse range from 17 to 53 percent, and physical abuse ranges from 40 to 60 percent.^{vii} According to the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect, girls are twice as likely as boys to be sexually abused.

Most Commonly Cited Issues by Oregon Homeless Youth

More than one-third (38%) of males and approximately half (51%) of females reported family dynamic/conflict as the most important issue they were facing.

The second highest issue for both males (25%) and females (27%) was school/education, followed by housing (16% among males and 24% among females).

Abuse/neglect was cited by 16% of males and 22% of females. Another 16% of males cited alcohol/drug abuse as an issue. Some 17% female youth also cited mental health as an issue.

Source: Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS), fiscal year 2002-03

Others are forced out of the home due to parental disapproval of pregnancy, parenting status, sexual orientation, school problems, drug or alcohol use, or other circumstances. In a 1995 study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than half of the youth interviewed during shelter stays reported that *their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving and did not care.*

Runaway youth initially flee to the homes of friends. If reconciliation with their families does not occur, these youth may end up leaving their friends' houses for unsafe situations. Homeless youth frequently share money to rent hotel rooms, live with adults who exploit them, commit minor crimes, or live with community members who take them into their homes temporarily. As resources diminish or violence erupts, youth are forced to move on to other housing options, often times, with the same results.

▪ **Economic Problems**

Some youth become homeless when their families become homeless. Their families may suffer financial crises resulting from the lack of affordable housing, loss of a job or limited employment opportunities, insufficient wages, no medical insurance, or inadequate welfare benefits.

These youth become homeless with their families, but are later separated by shelter, transitional housing, or child welfare policies.^{viii} Even as housing problems occur, the family may attempt to stay together. Eventually, the family is forced to split apart when housing a group is not feasible. In such situations, youth can lose track of their families or decide that going it on their own is better for their survival. Once homeless, youth are susceptible to exploitation, seduced by other homeless youth or adults who discourage them to not return to their families.

▪ **History of Foster Care**

A history of foster care has been found to be correlated with becoming homeless at an earlier age and remaining homeless for a longer period of time.^{ix} One national study reported that more than one in five youth who arrived at shelters came directly from foster care, and that more than one in four had

been in foster care in the previous year (National Association of Social Workers, 1992).

There are several reasons offered for this. Most children are placed in foster care due to abuse or neglect in their home environments. Yet, the foster care system does not necessarily address the problems which cause them to be removed from their homes. And, for those who receive treatment for abuse or neglect, that treatment is not always effective. Consequently, many children who have been in foster care continue to carry the effects of early abuse into adolescence and adulthood. They have difficulty adjusting upon discharge or when they voluntarily leave placements.

Some young people who “age-out” of foster care become homeless because they lack the support networks that other people depend upon in times of transition or crisis. These youth may have been moved from home to home over an extended period of time (foster care and/or unofficial placements) and have learned to deal with problems by leaving them behind. In addition, they lack the independent living skills to establish a household. Further, they may not have opted to enroll in voluntary services, or services may not be available.

CASE STUDY: Angelina, Age 17

Angelina has drifted in and out of shelter care since she was 13. Her earliest years were spent with her mother, who had a history of child neglect and drug abuse. At the age of eight, Angelina was sexually abused by one of her mother’s boyfriends. After that, she was removed from her mother’s home and placed into foster care. Throughout the rest of her childhood, Angelina moved in and out of various foster homes. She began running away and using drugs. At age 13, during one of her many admissions to treatment centers, Angelina was diagnosed with bi-polar, social anxiety and oppositional defiant disorders. Her runaway episodes continued. By age 16, Angelina was homeless and living on the streets with a succession of adult men whom she called her “boyfriends”. Eventually, caseworkers lost contact with her, finally dropping her from their caseloads. In her last shelter visit she stayed three nights, then left, and has not been seen since.

III. Family Accountability and Support

Homeless youth are not isolated to one geographic area, or to a certain social class, race, or ethnicity. The great majority of homeless youth come from

Finding: Preventing youth homelessness must include efforts to increase family stability.

families suffering from problems that lead to instability. Consequently, efforts to address youth homelessness must also address and seek to improve family stability.

By family stability, we mean that a family is capable of developing the emotional competence of its

children so they can focus on doing well in school, getting along with peers and adults, delaying gratification, and bouncing back quickly after stressful experiences. Parents who grew up in stable families themselves are more likely to be able to care for their children in such a way as to develop their children's emotional competence. The evidence is strong that economic and community-level factors – including a social network, involvement with civic or faith organizations, having parental skills, and adequate financial means – help increase the ability of a family to provide a nurturing environment for their children.

Homeless youth are not isolated to one geographic area, or to a certain social class, race, or ethnicity.

By contrast, runaway and homeless youth have experienced a number of problems prior to becoming homeless. These include long-term family economic problems, involvement in the foster care system, the absence of one parent (single parenthood), abuse

(physical, emotional and/or sexual) and parental substance abuse. From research and anecdotal information, we know that youth who experience these conditions within their homes are at greater risk of running away and becoming homeless. The following data provide a picture of the numbers of families in Oregon who live in situations where such factors are present:

- Of the 849,000 children in Oregon, 159,000, or 19% are living in poverty. Oregon ranks 38th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia at combating child poverty.*
- Of Oregon families in poverty, 52% (74,383) are headed by a single parent, most of whom are single females.
- A total of 11, 086 children were served in family foster care in 2003. Youths between 13 and 18 years of age comprise 30% of the state's population in foster care,^{xi} despite the fact that they currently comprise only about 10% of state's population. (This is attributed in part to the

aging of children who enter foster care when younger and remain until they are older youth.)

- In 2003, there were 42,455 reports of suspected child abuse and neglect, an increase of 5.5% over the previous year. Of the founded reports, 4,500 victims of child abuse were identified.^{xii}

“The roles that families and communities play in young people’s lives actually don’t diminish with age – they increase. And, the information, skills, resources and supports that families and communities need to successfully help young people make it through this transition also don’t diminish – they increase.”

Karen Pittman, Roundtable Discussions December 2001, “Strengthening Families to Promote Youth Development,” Annie E. Casey Foundation

Families vary in their ability to deal with problems and their access to resources to create a nurturing home environment. Not all families have the resources they need, and some families have more serious problems to overcome. They may not possess the skills or the willingness to make good decisions for themselves or their children. Communities that seek to prevent youth homelessness must identify ways to strengthen and support vulnerable youth and families.

In some cases, legal actions may be necessary to persuade them to take responsibility for their children and youth. Yet, services and other supports

for parents are more useful and cost-effective than sanctions, particularly when some parents’ behaviors do not meet the legal definition of abuse.

Consequently, it is more important that communities create a supportive, non-stigmatizing environment where families can ask for and receive help.

Parenting education and community resources such as mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, case management, and other related services should be readily available.

Finding: Communities need more options to hold families of runaway youth accountable and to deal with parents who do not supervise or provide care for their children.

Evaluations of efforts in other states have shown that accountability laws can be effective as deterrents, inducing parents to take responsibility for their children’s care, supervision and nurturing. However, it has also been shown that once legal consequences are levied on a parent, the parent’s

motivation to follow through decreases. Additional sanctions are needed for compliance, and judicial costs increase.

Moreover, families must be willing to help themselves. For those involved with illegal drug use, criminal behavior, violence, and undetected abuse or neglect, or in families where there is mental illness, legal sanctions are not likely to be

effective. Further, parents in these situations may bring reprisals against their children for drawing the attention of law enforcement or other authorities. Other viable means must be found for safeguarding the welfare of children and youth in these families.

Additional research is needed to identify the respective roles of communities and families in preventing youth homelessness. Vulnerable families need greater access to education and services so that they are better able to help themselves and provide a stable environment for their children. And, communities need the technical assistance and funding to establish or enhance effective family support programs.

CASE STUDY: John, Age 15

John began running away from home during the past year. His parents are divorced and have problems with addiction. Recently, John began to have problems with substance abuse too and was cited for misdemeanor charges. John said he wanted to live with relatives, but his mother who has custody wouldn't allow it. When John ran away from home, his mother reported him to authorities. He was picked up and taken to juvenile detention, but she refused to take him home. John was released to a local shelter. Staff says that John's mother doesn't want to look for solutions – only to control his life from a distance without taking responsibility. John has run away from the shelter and has not surfaced since.

IV. Services for Runaway and Homeless Youth

Current Services

Research confirms that an effective system of care that includes an array of services – from prevention, early intervention, street outreach, and emergency shelter to extended residential care and aftercare – is a proven way for youth to re-connect and transition successfully to adulthood. At the very minimum,

Finding: Oregon’s only dedicated funding to address runaway and homeless youth is the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

such a system should include the capacity to provide basic services (food, clothing and shelter) in all communities that demonstrate the need. Equally critical are the provision of a transitional living component and access to education, health care, job training, mental health and substance abuse treatment, case management, and aftercare. Yet, no such system of care currently exists throughout our state for

runaway and homeless youth.

The following programs currently serve runaway and homeless youth:

- **Federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) Programs**

Oregon’s only dedicated source of funding for this population comes from

RHYA Programs

Street Outreach Program: resources that are brought to street youth for basic needs, sexual exploitation prevention, case management, and support for healthy life choices and exiting street life

Basic Center Program: 24-hour crisis response to runaway youth with emergency shelter, family re-unification and case management/aftercare services

Transitional Living Program: self-sufficiency training, transitional housing/shelter, independent living skills, and case management/aftercare services

federal grants of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA). The following allocations fund three types of programs that serve youth in seven Oregon counties: Street Outreach \$500,000; Basic Center \$650,000; and Transitional Living Program \$1,335,436. The remainder of the state has very limited or no such services available. Yet, according to a recent survey of 23 local commissions on children and families, nearly all report that homeless youth in their communities need food, shelter, safety, and stability. (Survey results are included in the Appendix C.)

Consequently, Oregon’s shelter system is able to provide only basic services for a fraction of the runaway and homeless youth who need help.

These limited resources are most often applied to short-term emergency services – temporary housing, food and medical care –

while longer-term services to break the cycles of family distress and homelessness remain largely under-funded (including screening and treatment for health, mental health, and substance use problems, reconciling family conflict, and educational or vocational training).

Oregon Agencies with RHYA Funds	Service Area	Programs
Looking Glass Youth and Family Services, Inc.	Lane Co.	All Three Programs
J Bar J Youth Programs	Deschutes Co.	All Three Programs
Northwest Human Services HOST	Marion - Polk Co.	Basic Ctr; TLP
Boys and Girls Aid Society	Portland	TLP
Community Action Agency Yamhill Co.	Yamhill County	Street Outreach
Community Works	Jackson Co.	TLP
Integral Youth Services	Klamath -Lake Co.	Street Outreach; Basic Ctr
Janus Youth Services	Portland area	All Three Programs
Outside In (pregnant, parenting teens)	Portland area	TLP

Figure 1: Oregon agencies serving runaway and homeless youth with federal grant funds from the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

■ **Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program**

The Oregon Department of Education reported that 825 unaccompanied minors were being served by school district programs for homeless and highly-mobile students during school year 2002-2003 – just over three percent of the estimated number of homeless youth in our state.

In response to the growing problems associated with homelessness, Congress passed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, a portion of which established the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. The McKinney Act (recently renamed McKinney-Vento Act) affirmed that homeless children and youth have the same right to a free, appropriate public education as other students, but recognized that due to a variety of obstacles, they were often unable to access and succeed in school. The law required states to remove barriers so that homeless children and youth could successfully participate in school. It also established formula grants to the states to fund programming for homeless students in particularly needy districts.

The law’s definition of homeless includes runaway, “thrown away” and abandoned children and youth, as well as those living in any shelter or transitional setting. Youth in foster care are excluded unless they are in temporary emergency placements due to lack of foster homes. However, the trend in federal policy is now shifting to include foster care youth. This is based on the McKinney principle that youth should be served continuously in the same schools and neighborhoods since moving children from one school to

another without regard to consequences weakens the essential bond to learning.

The McKinney EHCY programs are generally considered a success. Almost all states have revised school policies regarding homeless children and youth, and attendance rates rose from 50% in 1987 to 86% in 1995. Despite the progress, there are only limited funds appropriated for state programs. In addition, homeless students still face serious obstacles to completing school. Those most frequently cited are transportation problems and a lack of awareness about homeless youths' right to school access. Poor health and an inability to obtain adequate food, clothing and school supplies are also of concern, as are the difficulties surrounding transfer and recovery of credits and the lack of alternative education options or general equivalency degree programs.

■ **Independent Living Program**

Oregon's Independent Living Program (ILP) is funded through federal funds from Title IV-E and Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and administered by DHS Children Adults and Families. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act funds states for foster care maintenance and adoption assistance payments made on behalf of certain eligible children. The primary issuances of Title IV-E funding are to support the welfare of children and teens in foster care and adoptive placements. Title IV-E requires states to submit plans to implement the federal regulations. Oregon has defined the use of this program in administrative rules OAR 413-100-0000 to 413-100-0360. These rules outline the basic qualifying eligibility, age, placement options, and judicial determination and oversight.

Chafee ILP funds are used to prepare youth for the transition from foster care to independent living in the community. To be eligible for ILP services, youth must be currently in foster care and 14 or older, or as a former foster youth, must have at least 180 days of DHS or Tribal foster care after the age of 14. The ILP provides skill-building services through contracted providers in local community, housing assistance, and postsecondary education or training scholarships. For a former foster youth to be eligible for housing assistance, he or she must have been discharged from DHS or Tribal care and custody on or after his or her 18th birthday.

■ **Other Programs Serving Children and Youth**

In addition, homeless youth are served by other programs which are administered or funded by state agencies. Most are not designed specifically for runaway and homeless youth. These include DHS programs serving youth

who are abused or neglected, and youth who are pregnant or parenting in need of financial assistance. In addition, the Oregon Commission on Children and Families administers Youth Investment (block grant) funds for programs that serve adolescents, a portion of which are used by some counties to serve runaway and homeless youth.

Gaps in Current Services

Despite the benefits of these services, significant gaps remain in the following areas.

■ Prevention/Early Intervention

Currently, youth who are at-risk of running away are most often identified in public schools. Yet, communities lack prevention or early intervention services to assist youth – especially girls – before they leave homes. (Girls at risk are not as readily identified as boys since girls are less likely to act out and when they do, are generally less aggressive than boys.)

Finding: There are significant gaps in the areas of prevention, availability and coordination of services for runaway and homeless youth.

■ Coordination of Services

Youth and their families are often involved with multiple services provided by alcohol and drug treatment programs, juvenile departments, schools, health departments, and housing programs. Coordination among state and local agencies is essential for efficient delivery of services accessible to youth and their families – including those who are at-risk of running away – and to prevent

further penetration into state services and long-term homelessness.

■ Service Availability

Low- or no-cost services are not available to all families and youth so they can address their problems without state intervention. A range of services on a sliding fee scale would allow youth and families better access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, crisis services, case management, and residential services.

Out of fear or frustration, parents often file minor criminal charges against their children, hoping to access services through the juvenile justice system that are not otherwise available. However, this rarely results in youth or parents accessing services since juvenile departments focus on higher-risk crimes. There are few methods to hold youth accountable; these include

enforcing truancy laws or juvenile court sanctions for minor offenses and addressing disruptive behavior at school through suspension or expulsion.

The Need for a Continuum of Services

Perhaps the greatest challenge in dealing with youth homelessness is recognizing and accepting the scope of the work that must be done. In our efforts to secure funding and come to terms with the complexity of the issues, we must first acknowledge our own perceptions and assumptions. For example, if we see the problem is that they are homeless, then the solution must be to find them a home. If we see them as at-risk, then we may try to alter their environment to remove or minimize the risk.

Yet, those who work closely with runaway and homeless youth understand that the most important factors in helping homeless youth are not limited to meeting basic physical needs (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) or removing the risks. Communities need the capacity to offer a continuum of services. These should include prevention services, emergency stabilization (such as food, housing, health care), transitional services (planning for housing options, education, job training) and longer-term, aftercare assistance. The following are examples each type of service.

Preventive services (while young people are still in the home):

- Family preservation and support services, such as mediation and family counseling, to assist vulnerable families
- Identification and assistance of at-risk youth through different community settings including schools, recreation programs, drop-in centers, and faith-based organizations
- Twenty-four hour crisis counseling for information and referrals to community resources
- Education and outreach through schools and other community locations to provide instruction on safety from sexual predators and prevention of HIV/AIDS, and teen pregnancy.

For those who have just left their homes:

- Temporary shelter as emergency housing for crisis stabilization so that planning can take place while in a safe, supportive environment

- Assessment, planning and case management for reconciliation to their families or to locate alternative housing, resume education, and gain access to health care, mental health services and substance abuse treatment
- Outreach and early intervention services to bring youth who have just left home into safe environments before they fall victim to the high-risk circumstances on the street
- Programs to assist teen parents and their children

Longer-term services for youth who are/have been homeless:

- Drop-in programs and street outreach teams to allow young people who have been on the street for some time to access shelter care, substance abuse and mental health services
- High school completion and job training including career planning and placement to help establish independence and avoid criminal activity
- Transitional housing for opportunities to gain experience and skills in living independently
- Social and life skills training to build positive social support networks through mentoring programs, peer counseling, and enrichment activities
- Aftercare with regular contact in declining frequency and in some cases, long-term stabilization for youth with persisting mental health, social development, substance abuse and childhood trauma to overcome

Key Principles of Effective Services

A system of services and supports should involve the principles of positive youth development, evidence-based practices and culturally-competent, gender-specific programming.

Successful interventions must be based on an understanding of the developmental needs of runaway or throwaway and homeless youth, and accordingly, provide the guidance, training and support that these youth have not received in the traditional ways.

Consequently, a system of services and supports for runaway and homeless youth should be based on key principles of positive youth development and involve evidence-based practices. In addition, services

to youth and their families should be culturally competent and gender specific. By culturally competent, we mean the willingness and ability of a system to value the importance of culture in the delivery of services to all segments of the population. Gender-specific services seek to comprehensively address the needs of a gender group and positive gender identity development.

■ **Positive Youth Development**

Adolescents need support and guidance as they navigate towards adulthood, one of the most difficult transitions in life. All youth, no matter what their background or financial status, need a set of basic connections, or assets, to help them navigate these challenges. These include developing a sense of

connection and commitment to others, a sense of belonging, and a perception that one has some control over life.

Research into human resiliency has found that overcoming challenges and difficult circumstances is an inherent human quality that can be nurtured through methods of specific interactions identified as “protective factors” or “assets.”

Youth who have the benefit of a healthy childhood and the support of a stable and loving family are able to meet their developmental needs through involvement in productive activities at home, in school and in the community. The recognition that

comes from these activities helps youth develop a sense of accomplishment and competence. This in turn, fosters the development of a stable identity during adolescence and the perception of oneself as a potentially productive member of society.

By contrast, most runaway and homeless youth have not had the benefits and opportunities associated with a stable family. Consequently, these youth need all the emotional support a family would ordinarily provide. Besides safe places to live with access to education and job training, and physical and mental health services, homeless youth need environments for positive interactions with peers and adults. Although the youth shelter system offers these kinds of environmental opportunities, the efforts of this system are often diminished by the short time period in which youth can remain in the shelter and by the scarcity of transition services and longer-term care options available to them.

It is also important to understand that the developmental needs of runaway and homeless youth are not necessarily the same. Runaway youth who can be reconciled with their families need nurturing, structure, and guidance to reconnect with peers, school and other members of the community. Their families need support so they can provide an environment for re-engagement to occur. For many others, however, family reunification will not be beneficial since they lack stable families to which they can return. These individuals

need transition-planning and aftercare services that prepare them for independent living.

■ **Evidence-Based Practices**

An effective, statewide system to serve runaways, their families and homeless youth should be based on research-based practices and proven models of service planning and delivery. Services should be planned and designed collaboratively by agencies, providers, families, and community stakeholders to maximize resources and effectively meet the diverse needs of youth and families.

Special considerations must be given to meet the varied needs of those in rural communities and in urban areas. For example, most rural communities face

An examination of promising practices and initiatives from other states appears in Appendix B.

challenges such as lack of public transportation to span longer distances to access services. In general, rural areas have fewer resources and limited access to specialty services. Although the size and population of most urban areas offer more resources such as specialized hospital care, residential treatment and

mental health and substance abuse treatment, urban areas can benefit from improved communications to inform youth and families about such services. And, the prevalence of homeless youth in urban population centers perpetuates the need for services in urban areas. In all areas, and especially in rural areas, access to services can be improved by offering transportation assistance to youth and their families.

■ **Culturally Competent, Gender-Specific Services**

In 1993 the Coalition of Advocates for Equal Access for Girls helped pass a bill that resulted in Oregon becoming the only state in the nation with a law (ORS 417.270) that requires state agencies serving children under 18 to ensure that girls and boys have equal access to appropriate services, treatment and facilities.

Cultural competence is an approach which values differences and is responsive to diversity at all levels of an organization (i.e., policy, governance, administrative, workforce, provider, and consumer/client). Cultural competence is developmental, community focused and family oriented. Culturally competent service delivery promotes quality services to underserved racial/ethnic groups, values ethnic and cultural differences, and integrates cultural attitudes, beliefs and practices throughout the system. A culturally competent system

of care is based on collaboration with diverse populations and organizations to acknowledge and incorporate at all levels the importance of culture, cross-cultural relations, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally-unique needs.

Gender-specific services comprehensively address the needs of a gender group to foster positive gender identity development. Gender-responsive programming for girls intentionally allows gender to affect and guide services, creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of girls' lives, and is responsive to the issues and needs of the girls and young women being served. A program or service is gender specific to females when it is relational and creates an environment where women are safe. Gender-specific services can be offered in a mixed gender program if the service (such as a gender-specific group therapy in a mixed residential program) or can be a whole program (such as residential treatment for women only).

As a result of Oregon's ground-breaking equal access law, state agencies are required to implement plans to ensure girls are receiving equal access to social, juvenile justice, and community services statewide; that barriers to these services are removed; and that the services provided are gender specific. Ensuring that services are gender specific is also a requirement of Oregon counties' Juvenile Crime Prevention Plans.

Cost-Effectiveness of Services

A coordinated system of care for runaway and homeless youth is more than services; it is a prevention program. The ultimate aim is to prevent the multiple costs associated with crime and victimization and wasted human potential. In justifying the funding for a system of care in our state, consider that incarceration for just one juvenile costs taxpayers \$48,500 a year. By comparison, adolescent drug treatment programs cost only \$3,000 to \$12,500 a year, and the costs of sheltering and other basic services for a homeless youth are \$1,100 to \$1,800 a year.

Further, given the likelihood that runaway and homeless youth will become involved in crime, either as a means of survival or as its victims or both, any analysis of cost must consider the savings associated with diversion of youth from both crime and victimization. For instance, if current programs serving the runaway and homeless population divert as few as 100 youth annually from one year of incarceration (and the research data suggest that many more than that are so diverted), they return to the taxpayers nearly a half-million dollars in cost avoidance for every dollar they consume.

Recommendations

The Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Coalition and its partners cite the seriousness of the issues facing homeless and runaway youth in our state. Thoughtful, deliberate planning is required to successfully address policy issues, systems coordination and service delivery across a continuum of needs. To facilitate this planning, working relationships have been forged with DHS Children, Adults and Families, the Oregon Commission on Children and Families, the Department of Education, and Housing and Community Services through the Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Work Group. Toward this end, homeless and runaway youth are included in the 10-year plan to prevent homelessness created by Housing and Community Services and recently signed by Governor Kulongoski. To continue this work, the Work Group submits the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Designate the Oregon Commission on Children and Families (OCCF) as responsible for statewide planning of services to homeless youth, runaways and their families.

OCCF is the appropriate state entity to recommend policy and to coordinate statewide planning for service delivery to homeless youth due to the commission's charge to convene state and local partners in comprehensive planning of services to children and families. Further, the Work Group recommends the establishment of a runaway and homeless youth coordinator housed at OCCF and a subcommittee on runaway and homeless youth through Partners for Children and Families, the commission's collaborative planning body. The coordinator's duties would include data collection to count and profile the number of runaway and homeless youth; technical assistance to local communities for assessing the needs of homeless and runaway youth; identification and promotion of best practices for coordinated, efficient service delivery; and the recommendation of long-term goals to address and prevent the underlying causes of homelessness among Oregon youth.

Recommendation 2: Families of runaway and homeless youth need support to be held accountable to address critical problems.

This support should strike a balance between efforts to correct family problems and efforts design to motivate them to seek help, without discouraging families to the point of abandoning their children. Additional research is needed to determine the policies and services that will most effectively meet the needs of these families including:

- Determining which resources, information and services families need to promote youth safety, prevent runaway behavior, and return youth home;
- Identifying existing state laws that if enforced would provide accountability to parents and ensure the welfare of youth; and
- Examining additional strategies that would encourage parents to be accountable in providing for the positive development of youth.

Recommendation 3: Identify models of culturally competent, gender-specific, evidence-based service delivery for runaways, their families and homeless youth in urban and rural demonstration sites.

It is important to select both urban and rural demonstration sites because effective service delivery models differ greatly between rural and urban settings.

Recommendation 4: A dedicated funding stream should be allocated to adequately and appropriately serve runaways, their families and homeless youth. (Addendum: Research will be conducted to formulate specific recommendations regarding funding mechanisms, financial resources and fiscal policy changes to support a service continuum across state agencies that provide services for runaway and homeless youth and their families.)

In Conclusion

Adolescents need support and guidance as they navigate towards adulthood, one of the most difficult transitions in life. All teens need our help – even those who are homeless and disconnected – to become the productive parents, citizens and leaders of tomorrow. As a state, we cannot afford to turn our back on homeless youth. Of course, communities must hold young people accountable for their actions – and families accountable to supervise their children. It’s clear that most of these families need the help and support of programs to promote parental responsibility and address substance abuse and other problems so families can help themselves. A comprehensive state policy, dedicated resources, improved collaboration and coordination among programs that serve runaway and homeless youth are necessary for a long-term strategy for responding to the needs of this population.

Appendices

A: History of Funding and Policy Issues

B: Service Delivery Systems of Other States

C: Survey of Local Commissions on Children and Families

Appendix A: History of Funding and Policy Issues

National

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) - Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP)

Responding to public concern about increasing numbers of youth who, after running away from home, were at risk of physical and sexual exploitation, Congress passed this legislation in 1974. RHYA established a system of care for runaway and homeless youth outside the traditional child protection, law enforcement, or juvenile justice agencies and services. Programs currently funded under RHYA include Basic Centers, Transitional Living and Street Outreach:

- Basic Centers, the core of RHYA (as amended by the Missing, Exploited and Runaway Children Act of 1999), are designed to accomplish three goals: immediate, safe shelter and services for runaway youth; reunification of families whenever possible; and alternative placements of the youth when reunification is not appropriate. To achieve these goals, Basic Centers provide a wide range of services to runaway and homeless youth, including 24-hour access to all program services, emergency shelter, food and clothing, medical assistance, counseling, and referrals to health care and educational systems.
- Transitional Living Programs (authorized by the RHYA, as amended by the Missing, Exploited and Runaway Children Act of 1999) provides shelter and an array of comprehensive social services for older homeless youth. In TLPs, youth live in a supported, structured environment in which the overall goal is to increase their independent living skills and ability to be self-sufficient. Housing and a range of life skills services are provided for up to 18 months to youth ages 16-21 who are unable to return to their homes.
- Street Outreach programs provide street-based education and outreach to youth who have been, or who are at risk of being, sexually abused or exploited. The ultimate goal of the program is to move these young people off the streets and into shelters where they can access other needed services. The Street Outreach programs provide access to medical and mental health treatment, counseling, and information and referral services.

1977 Juvenile Justice Amendments to the Runaway and Homeless Act of 1974

Through this legislation, Congress established FYSB’s Regional Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) as coordinated networks. Today, FYSB has cooperative agreements with regional organizations in the ten regions of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to provide T/TA to FYSB grantees. The T/TA providers assist FYSB grantee agencies by helping them develop new approaches for responding to challenges in serving young people, accessing new resources, and establishing linkages with other grantees. Through this system, FYSB tracks regional trends in youth and family issues, identifies and shares best practices, sponsors conferences and workshops, and provides direct T/TA.

Independent Living Initiatives Program Legislation of 1986

This law amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to provide funds for programs for youths in out-of-home care who would neither return to their families nor be adopted-youth for whom out-of-home care is a permanent situation until they become too old for care. Services may be made available to youth beginning at age 16 and continue through age 18, or at state option, through age 21. Independent living services included that can be funded under the federal program include:

- Teaching the basics of daily living such as housekeeping, money management, and nutrition
- Assistance in finishing high school
- Preparation for college
- Employment preparation
- Job training and placement
- Individual and group training

The Children’s Bureau, DHHS, administers the Independent Living Program (ILP) to provide funding to States to assist young people making the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency.

Violence against Women Act of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

Congress established the Education and Prevention Services to Reduce Sexual Abuse of Runaway, Homeless and Street Youth Program, through the Violence against Women Act of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Grants were created for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (also known as the Street Outreach Program).

Congress also authorized Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), which is an agency of Administration of Family and Youth Services Bureau (ACYF), Administration of Children (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to implement a national reporting system. FYSB provides youth service grants to local communities.

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999

This act provided states with more funding and greater flexibility in implementing programs designed to assist young people leaving foster care and doubled federal funding for the Independent Living Program to \$140 million per year. It further required states to use some portion of their funds for assistance and services for older youths who have left foster care but have not reached age 21. The act allowed states to use up to 30% of Independent Living Program funds for room and board for youths ages 18 to 21 who have left foster care.

- Allowed states to extend Medicaid to 18, 19 and 20-year-olds that have been emancipated from foster care
- Established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, in honor of the late Senator John H. Chafee of Rhode Island
- Replaced the Independent Living Initiative of 1986 with the Chafee Independence Program
- Allowed states to use the funding to provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, and educational support to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age.

Oregon

Oregon, like other states, was faced with responding to the changes in policy dictated by the JJDP A. The following are the funding and policy changes that have accompanied efforts at providing care to this population.

1983 Court Decision

A 1983 U.S. Supreme Court decision issued by Judge Helen Frye ruled that adult jails could not be used to house juveniles. In the same year, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 2963, severely restricting pretrial placement of juveniles.

Senate Bill 300 1985

Detention criteria for juveniles were revised by SB 300, and \$750,000 was appropriated for the biennium to fund alternatives to detention. However, much of these funds were used to fund alternatives to detention for criminal offenders leaving the detention system due to downsizing in training schools.

Appropriation to Children and Youth Services Commission 1987-1989

During 1987-89, legislation to support community-based care for status offenders failed, and \$500,000 was appropriated to the Children and Youth Services Commission to support communities in caring for an estimated 22,000-25,000 runaway youth. Less than 10% were served, and the designation for the funds was removed, enabling counties to use the funds at their discretion.

**1993 House Bill
2004**

HB 2004 created the Oregon Commission on Children and Families (OCCF). Local comprehensive planning and decision-making replaced state-mandated services, and counties were no longer required to provide shelter care. During the same year, care for youth designated as Level 7 was transferred from DHS Services to Children and Families (SCF) to the OCCF with less than half of the funds previously designated for these youth.

**1996 Youth
Investment
Intergovernmental
Agreement**

In 1995, the Social Service Block Grant redefined the target population that Oregon called Level 7 as “youth investment” – children 0-17 and their families that demonstrated a need for support and skills to reduce the need for more intensive state services. In 1996, the Youth Investment Intergovernmental Agreement was established between SCF and OCCF to reimburse OCCF programs serving chronically acting-out youth ages 13-18.

**Ad Hoc Committee
on Juvenile
Runaways and
Homeless Youth**

The Youth Investment Analysis confirmed that youth investment funds were being used as intended. In addition, the Ad Hoc Committee on Juvenile Runaways and Homeless Youth, chaired by Attorney General Ted Kulongoski, reported that existing social service and juvenile justice systems were not designed to respond to runaways. Two legislative proposals were developed, but not enacted. The OCCF Comprehensive Planning update for the 1997-1999 biennium asked counties to provide a summary of how they would address the issue.

**1995- 99
Examination of
Shelter Care**

During this period, the issues of pre-adjudicated and adjudicated youth and the system of shelter care were examined. A short-term shelter model was endorsed, evincing the need for community-based, multi-systemic shelter care using blended funding from SCF, OYA, OCCF, A & D, mental health, education and county general funds. The Shelter Services Partnership Work Group was established to highlight the need in Oregon counties for shelter care for pre-adjudicated youth.

House Bill 3859

In 2001, HB 3859 established the Oregon’s Children’s Plan and designated additional resources to serve children birth to age six and their families. Youth investment funds continued to be available to counties for services provided to “acting out” youth ages 13 to 17.

Most Recent

In recent years, budget reductions have limited the availability and intensity of all CAF, OCCF, and OMHAS services. As a result, runaways, their families, and homeless youth continue to lack access to needed services to ameliorate their situations.

Appendix B: Service Delivery Systems of Other States

The following information was obtained by the Work Group through interviews conducted with individuals representing four states: Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, and New York.

Arizona

The Homeless Youth Intervention Project provide funding to three existing nonprofit organizations

Arizona has few laws specifically addressing the problems of runaway and homeless youth. The most important created the Homeless Youth Intervention Project five years ago, providing funding to three existing nonprofit organizations that also receive federal funds. The funding is limited to approximately \$3,600 for each youth, although the costs to provide services are at least \$7,000 (for youth not receiving assistance from state programs such as child welfare or juvenile justice). The project serves 60 youth annually, providing case management, crisis intervention, shelter, treatment, and other services. A recent evaluation by the Arizona Auditor General's office deemed this program successful.

Additional services for Arizona's runaway and homeless youth are provided by nonprofit organizations funded with federal dollars and some state funding through the Homeless Youth Intervention Project. Funded services include short-term crisis assistance with a focus on either family reunification or transitional help for independent living. There are only six short-term crisis beds available in Tucson and 12 to 15 in Phoenix. Eight agencies provide longer-term transition living programs but their capacity is low, with the need exceeding the available resources. There is a growing, unmet need for more services especially in rural areas and a need for standardized evaluation of current services. The Arizona Evaluation Project is working to establish evaluation of service outcomes and to identify best practices of homeless programs serving adult and youth.

Colorado

Four nonprofit agencies are funded by federal and community dollars to provide services to runaway and homeless youth. (These agencies do not receive state funding.) Services include temporary and long-term shelter, crisis service, meals, shower, case management, job training and support, health care, mental health, substance abuse, and transitional living. There are currently 120 units of housing available, 50 of which are available for extended stays beyond 18 months. Through a partnership with the school system, current efforts are underway to open a public school for runaway and homeless youth.

Current efforts are underway to open a public school for runaway and homeless youth

The nonprofit agencies track the number of RHY that they have contact with and the state can request these numbers from the nonprofits, but there is no state supported data collection. Service providers report an increase in the population, and at the same time, decreases in available resources to address the problem.

Colorado does not have specific parental accountability laws. Parents are held responsible for their youth's actions – especially if those actions involve causing property damage or committing a crime.

Illinois

The Illinois Juvenile Court Act addressed the problem of minors who are absent from home, beyond the control of their parents and puts these youth into the category of Minors Requiring Authoritative Intervention (MRAI). Despite the existence of the law, in practice it is difficult to refer a young status offender to the court as an MRAI. There are less than 100 MRAI petitions, filed statewide in any given year. Most of these juveniles are handled by Illinois's RHY service system and most cases are handled in a matter of days (if not hours), with the youth being effectively reunified with their family.

As for homelessness, the Illinois Child Care Act specifies that any young person under the age of 18 who is homeless is, at a minimum, a dependent minor. The Illinois Collaboration on Youth (ICOY) is an advocacy group for RHY and is consistently in pursuit of maintaining policies and procedures that hold state agencies accountable to the law to take responsibility for these youth. This has presented challenges over time.

Legally, parents are responsible for their children. If they do not take responsibility they can be held as neglectful, although the law is not often enforced. ICOY and their provider agencies are currently involved in some cooperative agreements with local child protective services to exercise joint leverage on reluctant parents to minimize the chances that this will occur. It is still a challenge and a problem.

Illinois has two main services, one addressing youth running away, and the other, for permanently homeless youth

Illinois RHY service system has two parts, one that addresses problems of youth running away (CCBYS) and the Homeless Youth program for permanently homeless youth. These programs are funded through the Department of Human Services (IDHS) and are designed to prevent youth from entering the child welfare system and to divert them from further involvement with the juvenile justice system. There are other programs in the system of care that fall

under the aegis of the IDHS Bureau of Youth Services and Delinquency Prevention which are not discussed here.

Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services (CCBYS) most closely corresponds to the Federal RHY Basic Center Program (BCP). It is appropriated at just under \$13 million and has statewide presence. Most often, the police, who have been trained to immediately contact the CCBYS agency, pick up these young people. The CCBYS provider also accepts referrals from schools, other community agencies and walk-ins. Parental reunification is the goal of the CCBYS. Most of these cases are local and the process of addressing the problem begins with establishing parental contact. Approximately 95% of the cases are handled without the need for alternative residential care. In cases where residential care (e.g., host home, group home) is provided, the average length of stay is approximately three days. Ultimately, approximately 98% of these cases result in reunification. The CCBYS system responds to approximately 16,000 crisis calls statewide each year.

The Homeless Youth program is designed to serve older homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 21, who will not be returning home, or who may need temporary support to transition to a healthy and productive adulthood. This program corresponds to the RHY-funded Transitional Living Program (TLP). It is funded by IDHS at approximately \$4.7 million annually. This program is located in specific parts of the state, where homeless youth are most likely to be. The predominant recipients of the Homeless Youth program services are 18- to 21-year-old youth.

Illinois is in the process of identifying and standardizing outcomes. Of the programs mentioned, CCBYS has the most consistent and identifiable outcomes. Of the 16,000 calls annually, 98% are ultimately reunified with their families (with follow-up and aftercare). With its low rate of alternative residential placement and high rates of family reunification over time, CCBYS is considered an effective program. Its approach emphasizes immediate response toward a resolution of the presenting crisis-at-hand, involving the young person and the responsible adult, coupled with a commitment to avoid placing a youth in a congregate care setting, produces the desired outcome of family reunification.

Over the past couple of years, Illinois has been systemically implementing the Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI). YASI is an evidence-based tool that identifies risk factors and protective factors in relation to several areas of a youth's life, e.g. school, social relationships, health and mental health, substance abuse, and family. It was developed by a Canadian group, Orbis Partners, and is used in a few states, including Washington. Illinois uses YASI

to identify young people who are moderate- to high-risk, in order to direct limited resources where they are most needed. ICOY's provider agencies are also interested in implementing those evidence-based, cognitive-behavioral "best and promising practices" that have been generally recognized in the field. These include Reasoning and Reacting (R & R), Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT), Functional Family Therapy (FFT), and Aggression Replacement Training (ART). While no single approach has been mandated by the state, many individual agencies have implemented one or more of these approaches within their organizations. This has created a kind of patchwork of approaches in the field.

New York

New York passed the New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in 1978. This law is designed to increase the flexibility of services available to runaway and homeless youth. The law created two types of services, crisis services and transitional independent living.

Crisis services are split into two age categories: young people up to 17-years-old and young people age 16 to 21. Crisis services allow for a 30-day length of stay and offer services including shelters or host homes programs, assessment, case management, family work, after care, and referrals. New York's crisis services are similar to the federal BCP program except that youth are allowed to stay up to 30 days in the state crisis services and only 15 days in the federal program.

New York's Transitional Independent Living program offers youth ages 16 to 21 residential and nonresidential services for up to one year. Residential services provide a place to live, either in a shelter or an independent apartment. Nonresidential services include independent living skills, employment skills and education. The Transitional Independent Living program is similar to the Federal Transitional Living Program (TLP) except for the length of stay, which is up to 18 months in the federal program. As a result, most programs in New York have state and local funding or federal funding for these services.

The state funds to 60% of the cost of the services and requires a 40% match from localities

The state funds up to 60% of the cost of the services and requires a 40% match from localities. The state provides \$5.3 million with localities providing at least \$2.12 million for a total of at least \$7.42 million. Localities often provide more than the 40%. The funding from the state has remained the same for several years. These services are provided by approximately 50 to 60 nonprofit organizations in 35 of the state's 62 counties. In a few cases, the county directly delivers services to RHY. However, all residential services are delivered by nonprofit organizations. The Office of Family and Children's Services oversees

the RHY program. Counties distribute funds through their own mechanism. In some counties that means a formal, competitive RFP process. In others, they work with the known RHY provider.

New York does not have a central method for counting or tracking RHY. They use missing person reports and determine that approximately 20,000 per year. The RHY programs serve about 16,000 youth per year. The street outreach programs serve tens of thousands of youth per year. They do not know what level of duplication there is between these counts of RHY. New York does not have parental accountability laws.

New York does not specify the type of programs that should be used with RHY. They have looked at evidence-based programs but found that they are not the best match for the RHY programs because each youth has very different problems. The nonprofit programs that are successful are flexible and tailored to meet each youth's needs. These practices are too flexible and change too quickly to be considered best practices or evidence-based programs.

They define RHY as a young person without safe, stable, appropriate housing. They can be living in abandoned building, living with inappropriate people, or couch surfing. The state does not make much distinction between runaways and homeless, focusing instead on the length of time youth have been out of the home and the likelihood of returning.

New York law does not specify outcomes. Most outcomes are centered on reducing recidivism in jails or juvenile justice programs, although these outcomes do not really focus on the problems of RHY. The nonprofit programs work with their own outcomes.

Appendix C: Survey of Local Commissions on Children and Families

In the spring of 2004, local children and families commissions conducted an informal survey about homeless and runaways. The survey sought input on three categories of information: estimates of Oregon's runaway and homeless populations, community perceptions of runaway and homeless youth, and recommended actions regarding the runaway and homeless population.

Overall, a broad range of partners provided input. Major participants included: DHS Self-Sufficiency, Juvenile Departments, both public and alternative school staff, youth shelter staff, law enforcement, Child Welfare, public and private mental health and behavioral health providers, public health, residents including youth, and the business community. The following is a summary of the major themes in their responses.

1. What is an informal estimate of the runaway and homeless population in your county (community)?

Based on responses from 23 counties, at least 10,000 of 405,000 school age children (5- to 18-years-old) are homeless or runaway each year. This estimate should be considered an under representation of the actual total as some counties only reported the number of runaways and others only reported the rate of homelessness for youth (11- to 18-years-old).

The average rate of homeless and runaway children was 2.4%. The rates of homelessness varied from practically none in rural counties such as Morrow and Sherman to as much as 5% in Jackson, Josephine, Marion and Tillamook counties.

2. What are some perceptions of the runaway and homeless youth in your community?

The perceptions of runaway youth are different from the perceptions of children from homeless families; attitudes about runaways are more negative than attitudes toward children of homeless families. In terms of runaway/homeless adolescents, surveys indicate that the public sees these youth as troublemakers; they aren't in school, aren't employed, and have probably been kicked out of home because of being out of control. For example, in Polk county law enforcement reports that most of the runaways they see are kids acting out and not wanting to follow the rules at home. They say it is rare for them to see abusive cases, but officers acknowledge that youth

do not willingly share that type of information with them. A number of surveys show negative perceptions reflected in community members' comments about kids hanging out in parks and causing problems, from crime to creating uncomfortable environments. These behaviors are not associated with homelessness – just runaways.

Many counties report a general lack of awareness of the problem of homelessness. There is limited awareness of the number of homeless families and a general perception that homeless families have no jobs, are poorly educated, poorly equipped to raise children, and the parents most likely have drug or alcohol abuse problems. Washington County reports that 30% of the families housed in shelters have at least one adult with a full-time job and are homeless as a result of an unexpected crisis or emergency.

The surveys consistently report that the community does not understand the depth of the underlying problems of runaway/homeless youth and their need for support services. It is true that youth may run away to have access to people that parents do not approve of (i.e. peers with whom they may be romantic or who engage in risky or illegal behaviors) and some are kicked out of their home due to behavioral concerns, but nearly every survey reports that more youth leave for personal safety reasons (i.e. family violence, substance abusing parents) or because parents are not able to adequately care for them.

The most common perception about runaway/homeless youth is that the majority end up going from house to house, couch-surfing with friends or relatives. When couch-surfing is the case, it is uncommon for these adults or friends to help the youth become involved in social service programs or attempt to reunite them with their family. The Polk County survey reports that people willingly take in homeless kids under informal agreements. However, if one of these youth runs away from that home, it most likely goes unreported. In general, respondents indicate that many parents are reluctant to file runaway reports because they fear that their child will be locked up in detention even though running away is not a crime in Oregon.

2a. What are their needs?

Nearly all counties report that runaway and homeless youth need food, shelter, safety, and stability. In addition, for many there is a need to reconnect with their families. Placing youth in safe and stable living arrangements that provide a home address and phone is essential.

In addition to the needs already cited, the following items were reported regularly across the state, but with less frequency than those noted above.

(This is not a ranked list as each was reported about the same number of times.)

- Temporary youth shelter, drop-in centers, transitional housing
- Showers and laundry facilities
- Outreach, social service information, case managers
- Mentors and positive, caring adults
- Life skills training
- Employment
- Family intervention/mediation, group and family counseling
- Substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment
- Medical and dental health care. Birth control, STD education, safe sex practices
- Clothing
- Transportation

Another consideration that was discussed by Gilliam, Tillamook Counties and others are the barriers homeless minors experience in attaining assistance on their own. There is agreement that homeless/runaway youth have a great need for health services (medical, dental, mental health, and reproductive) which are structured to meet their needs and living situations in a non-threatening, comfortable place with those they trust. However, it is difficult to serve youth without a consenting guardian. Minors cannot sign for their medical treatment and have no authority to sign medical releases or school information. Consequently, they cannot get Food Stamps, may not qualify for the school's free lunch program, or be able to access other income from the state. In addition, they need help with obtaining social security cards and drivers licenses if they want to gain employment.

2b. What are the causes?

The top five causes cited are serious family conflicts including physical, emotional or sexual abuse; significant alcohol or substance abuse issues; financial crisis or inadequate income; and child or adult mental health issues. These were cited in nearly every county's responses. Many counties noted that parental or youth alcohol and/or substance abuse issues had a significant impact on these and other causative factors. Linn County and at least half-a-dozen other counties singled out methamphetamine use as the number one drug issue in dealing with homelessness.

The following causes were reported in about half of the survey responses:

- Abandonment, families kick out youth, or move and leave youth behind

- Divorce, or single parent who bring a “significant other” into the home that the youth is unwilling to live with, or makes him or her no longer feel welcome in the home
- Mobility/transience of parent(s), immigration status
- Parents lose control of child’s behavior
- Incarcerated parent(s)

2c. What is the impact to our county (community)?

Counties generally report the impacts in term of the services needed to address:

- Crime
- School truancy and dropout
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Mental health issues
- Youth who are unemployable and not self-sufficient

According to the surveys, homeless and runaway youth are more likely to commit crimes and be victims of crime. Klamath County reported that the longer a youth is homeless and unsupervised, the greater the temptation or necessity to become involved in sex or illegal activities. Lane County reported that youth on the streets are also at risk of assault and robbery. Homelessness contributes to the number and seriousness of crimes committed in communities. Some of the crime-related issues that law enforcement are faced with include youth substance abuse, gang involvement, youth prostitution and other victimization by adult predators, vandalism, theft, assaults and other crimes youth commit against persons.

Some 75% of the counties identified school truancy and dropouts as significant issues that can best be addressed through local public or alternative schools. Schools are a natural source of support. Homeless and runaway youth are generally unaware of the services available to them through the Department of Human Services’ Self-Sufficiency program, so they rely heavily on community services they hear about from other youth and emergency services for health care. A liaison for homeless could facilitate assistance for homeless families and youth and work closely with the schools on issues of attendance and academic performance. Yet, few counties report the kind of collaboration needed for these high-risk children. In Jackson County, Vento has funds that help get kids what they need to finish school, but this appears to be an exception rather than the rule, based on survey responses.

Crucial to teens staying in school is stable, safe shelter and food. Umatilla County reports that when kids have food and housing, they are in school and relatively at peace; when they don't know where they'll be the next night they display erratic behavior and can get the rest of the class in upheaval. Schools can play a critical role in identifying and serving runaway/homeless youth. Often, school resource officers are aware of youth runaways before they are reported by parents. Grant County points out that the schools are uniquely positioned to identify dropouts and kids with poor attendance to ensure they are not falling through the cracks because they're homeless or runaways. Despite their homelessness, many youth continue their education. School may be the only place they can count on for safe shelter, food, peer support systems, and adults to listen.

3. From your perspective, what do you recommend for your county (community) and Oregon regarding the runaway and homeless population?

There were three themes contained in survey responses:

- 1) Increase the availability and range of prevention and early intervention services for at-risk and runaway youth and families directed toward stability and reunification. This means funding sources for programs and services.
- 2) Establish consistent policies that encourage service providers, schools and law enforcement to communicate, collaborate and share resources that support the needs of youth and their families and increase involvement and support from the business community.
- 3) Research programs in place in other jurisdictions to see what has succeeded and what hasn't. Fund programs to address at least two levels of response, temporary relief and long-term preparation and training for independent living.

3a. Services needed?

It is difficult to rank this list of services. However, the order does reflect a rough indication of how often the counties reported these items in their responses.

- Provide funding for shelter care organizations and transitional housing to improve the level of services available to runaway and homeless youth. These services should include showers, laundry facilities and clothing.
- Counseling and education about youth rights

- Outreach, social service information and case managers to improve access to food stamps, medical care (health insurance), mental health and A&D treatment for runaway and homeless youth and their families
- Mentoring programs for youth and their parents
- Independent life skills training
- Alternative educational opportunities
- Family intervention/mediation, group and family counseling, family therapy, parenting information and education
- Low-income housing
- Employment services for youth and underemployed or unemployed parents
- 24-hour crisis intervention and respite for families

3b. Policies?

Responses to this question were brief and varied. The list below captures the essence of what the counties suggested.

- Oregon needs to establish policies regarding runaway and homeless youth that:
 - Allow time to arrive at solutions that get youth in a safe place without fear of becoming involved in the legal system (which has at times forced youth to return to unsafe situations);
 - Ensure assessment by qualified personnel of the youth's situation and development of a plan for safety;
 - Protect those who are acting on behalf of the youth's best interests to alleviate the fear of being prosecuted for parental interference; and
 - Establish a process to identify a caretaker who will have educational and medical authority or a means to resolve service access issues for homeless youth.
- Policies that ensure:
 - Family wage jobs and workplaces that allow flexibility to parents,
 - Health insurance for medical needs,
 - Affordable housing for families, and
 - Family reconciliation whenever possible.
- Define regulations to make youth and parents more accountable. Clarify law enforcement's role and parental responsibility; court sanctions for parents who continue to refuse parental responsibility.

END NOTES

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For more information, contact:

Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Coalition

541-607-0627