

# INVISIBLE no more

Creating opportunities for youth who are homeless



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## Executive Summary

This report used a convenient and snowball sample of young people experiencing housing insecurity. A total of **98** young people were interviewed in Bridgeport, lower Fairfield County, Hartford, New Haven, and New London. These young people completed structured and open-ended interviews about their experiences across several domains, including basic demographic information, education, housing, financial, family, peer, criminal justice, mental health, physical health, substance use, trauma, and personal functioning. In addition to structured interviews, a select group of young people completed semi-structured interviews that sought to identify the lived experiences of these young people over the past six months.

Key informant and focus group interviews were also completed with service providers, Connecticut state agency representatives, and advocates who work with housing insecure young people. These structured interviews sought to identify and document the perspectives of providers who have experience addressing young people's individual and structural needs.

### Key observations from the completed structured interviews include:

- 52 (54.6%) females, 41 (42.3%) males, and 3 (3.1%) transgender respondents completed the interviews;
- 43 (49%) African American, 22 (25%) Mixed race, 21 (24%) Caucasian, 1 (1%), and 1 (1%) American Indian/Native American;
- 33 (35%) were of Hispanic/Latino descent;
- Respondents were 18.95 (SD = 2.47) years (14-24 years);
- 75 (77%) identified as heterosexual and 22 (23%) identified as either bisexual, gay, lesbian, or not sure;
- 82 (86%) were born in the United States;
- 32 (35%) completed the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 24 (26%) completed the 11<sup>th</sup> grade;
- 25 (27%) received special education services at school;
- 29 (32%) dropped out of school;
- 10 (12%) reported that their school told them they could no longer attend;
- 63 (66%) were unemployed and 28 (26%) were employed part-time;
- Over 60% of the young people reported that their average income was between \$0 and \$4,499 or less than \$100 per week;

- About ½ of the young people were raised by their mother and ¼ were raised by both their mother and father;
- About ½ of the young people reported family contact with the Department of Children and Families (DCF);
- 40 (41%) reported being in their current living situation for less than 3 months;
- 66 (70%) reported moving two times or more in the past year;
- Most of the young people reported having tried cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana;
- ¼ of the young people reported considering suicide over the last year;
- The modal number of traumatic experiences endorsed was 5;
- Several youth reported that they had traded sex for money (N = 7; 7.1%), a place to stay (N = 8; 8.2%); and drugs or alcohol (N = 4; 4.1%);
- 83 (89%) of the young people were sexually active with an average of 5.6 sexual partners;
- 23 (23.5%) of the youth first experienced sexual intercourse at age 12 or under;
- 16 (17%) reported having a FWSN (Family with Service Needs) petition filed against them;
- 47 (50%) were arrested at least once in their lifetime;
- 36 (39%) reported having been incarcerated in jail, prison, juvenile detention or residential facility;
- 56 (57%) received food stamps.

#### **Key informants and focus group participants reported that:**

- Working with housing insecure youth is challenging.
- Multiple factors were associated with housing insecurity, including generational dysfunction, substance use, involvement with the judicial and/or child welfare system, mental health challenges, and a family history of housing insecurity.
- Populations seen as especially vulnerable to housing insecurity include youth who are LGBT, trafficked, juvenile justice involved, child welfare involved, and young men and boys of color.
- There is a lack of available safe housing options for young people in crisis.
- They called for:
  - Increased affordable housing stock;
  - Increased alignment in supports across systems;
  - Changes in policies that impact access to services for young people;

- Increased need for “best practice” models;
- More training and coordination at Connecticut state agency, service provider, and advocate levels; and
- Crisis housing options for young people across the state.

■ They recommended:

- Additional evaluation and research to better understand the wants and experiences of housing insecure young people;
- A formal planning process to address the unique needs of housing insecure young people;
- Creating services and systems for youth that are separate from the adult system;
- More prevention services and supports located in the communities that these young people represent; and
- Increasing Connecticut's awareness of housing insecurity among young people.

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## Background

Homeless youth and children are comprised of two groups, 1) children and youth in families who are experiencing homelessness, and 2) unaccompanied children or youth.

Unaccompanied children and youth have been estimated to account for approximately one to three million youth or children, or 1% of the urban homeless population<sup>1</sup>. This includes children and youth up to age 17 who are not residing with their legal guardians, and are effectively homeless, and young adults ages 18 through 24 who are not residing with families and who are experiencing homelessness.

In June, the federal Department of Education announced that the number of homeless students in the U.S. exceeded 1 million for the first time during the 2010-2011 school year. Runaway, “thrown away” (children and youth kicked out of their homes) and children and youth living alone on the streets are examples of unaccompanied youth populations.

Obtaining accurate data on the prevalence and service needs of unaccompanied, homeless youth has been described as difficult due to issues such as failure of families to report youth who are no longer living with them, variable definitions for what accounts for “runaway” behavior, and unaccompanied youths’ lack of participation in social service programs<sup>2,4</sup>. Additionally, unaccompanied youth may live with other friends, family or extended family members, posing further difficulties in capturing this population. National surveys and research studies may fail to provide a clear definition of the homeless children, and they may fail to account for and/or include them in their assessment of youth populations. For example, major surveys and reports on homeless children and youth often adopt the definition of homeless children and youth provided by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act<sup>5</sup>, which defines homeless *students* in public schools as, “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” This definition fails to capture those unaccompanied homeless children and youth who have dropped out of school.

When unaccompanied youth are described in surveys, the question of whether or not this is an accurate picture of this population comes to bear. For example, during the last Point in Time Count, a statewide census of Connecticut’s homeless shelters, an estimated 3,587 individuals were living in homeless shelters across the state of Connecticut on the night of January 29, 2013, with half of this population found in Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, of the 3,587 individuals in shelters, approximately 746 were children and 111 were youth in families. Across the state shelters, 172 were homeless youth. Only 12 individuals were identified as unaccompanied children.

The impacts of homelessness on children and youth in general have been described extensively within the academic literature<sup>1, 7, 8-11</sup>. Children and youth who experience homelessness are at risk for suffering from hunger and poor physical health<sup>1</sup>. In studies comparing homeless and non-homeless youth populations, unaccompanied homeless youth

were found to be more likely to suffer from depression and other mental health or substance abuse concerns as opposed to youth with stable housing<sup>7</sup>.

Unaccompanied homeless youth may have few employment opportunities due to their age. They may engage in activities, including sex trade or gang violence, that place them at greater risk for sexually transmitted diseases and being victims of violence<sup>8,9,10</sup>. Lack of a stable residence may also place unaccompanied youth at risk for school absenteeism and school dropout, resulting in failed educational goals<sup>8</sup>. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) unaccompanied youth may experience additional traumas from being kicked out of their homes due to their sexual orientation, in addition to experiences of homophobia in their communities<sup>3,11</sup>.

Homelessness in youth has profound consequences. It is an ongoing problem that has garnered increased attention over the last five years. For example, the most comprehensive study of homeless youth to date was conducted in New York City by the Empire State Coalition in 2007. The Coalition surveyed over 1,000 youth who were either homeless or at-risk for homelessness. These young people ranged in age from 14 to 24. The surveys were done at youth programs, at runaway shelters and transitional living programs, at adult homeless programs, on the street, and at other miscellaneous sites. The survey consisted of 55 questions including questions about age, reasons for homelessness, sexual orientation, history of foster care, educational attainment, current living situation and age when they first began living away from their parent/guardian.

The results of the Coalition study indicated that there are some populations of youth who are grossly overrepresented in the homeless youth populations, including gay, lesbian and bisexual youth; youth who are transgender; minority youth; youth with some history of foster care; and youth who have been through either the juvenile justice or adult criminal justice systems. The vast majority of the youth in the study were undereducated and unprepared for self sufficiency. A full 50% did not have a high school diploma or an equivalency, and while an additional 23% stated they were in high school or enrolled in a GED program, it is unknown how many of those were able to complete these programs. Importantly, less than 25% of youth utilized a program specifically designed for homeless youth, but those who did were much better able to access needed supports.

Displaced youth are an invisible population and a difficult sample to obtain and study. However, they are also particularly vulnerable to the deprivations and consequences associated with homelessness. It is imperative that these youth are identified and cared for prior to falling into serious and lasting life consequences, including poverty, crime, addiction, inadequate education, consistent unemployment or underemployment, chronic health

issues and other maladies affecting their future. The current study seeks to build on previous research while overcoming some traditional limitations

## Method

This study adopted a mixed methods approach by integrating qualitative and quantitative data obtained from interviews with **homeless, unaccompanied** youth. A mixed data collection method was used. We combined both convenient and snowball sampling strategies. Convenient interviewees were identified at community programs serving young people experiencing housing insecurity. Some of these young people recommended friends and acquaintances who were experiencing similar housing challenges. The strategy of identifying individuals with similar housing challenges and referring them to be interviewed is called snowball sampling, a type of purposive sampling. A *purposive sample* is a non-representative subset of a larger population that is constructed to serve a very specific purpose. Research may have a specific group in mind—in this case, housing insecure youth—and will target that group by interviewing anyone from the target population who is available. A subset of a purposive sample is a *snowball sample*, so named because one picks up the sample along the way, similar to the way in which snow is picked up as the snowball is rolled. A snowball sample is achieved by asking participants to suggest someone else who might be appropriate for the study.

Snowball sampling is particularly useful for research in elusive or hidden populations, such as homeless youth. Obtaining accurate data on the prevalence and service needs of unaccompanied homeless youth have been noted as difficult due to issues such as failure of families to report youth that are no longer living with them, variable definitions for what accounts for “runaway” behavior, and unaccompanied youths’ lack of participation in social service programs. Additionally, unaccompanied youth may live with other friends, family or extended family members, posing further difficulties in capturing this population. Snowball sampling was used to mitigate these difficulties with a focus on populations in four areas/towns/surrounding counties in Connecticut: Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford, and New London. Using this strategy, this study recruited **98** participants. All participants signed consent, and were then interviewed using a semi-structured measure and then completed several self-report questionnaires. The entire procedure lasted approximately 75-90 minutes and culminated in debriefing and a \$20 compensation for participation.

Key informant interviews (n= 16) and a focus group (n=11) were also conducted with local service providers, advocates, Connecticut state agencies, and other interested parties. The information collected from these key constituent groups is summarized later in this document.

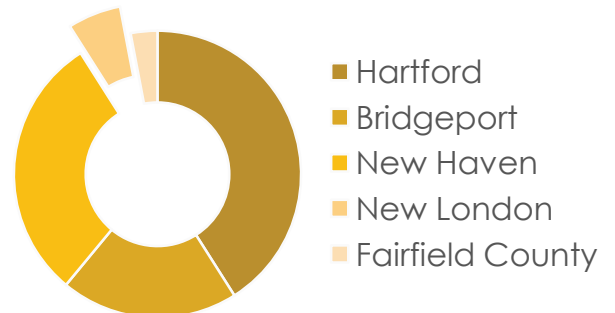
## Measures

Measures included a semi-structured interview and several self-report questionnaires. These measures were used to collect a wide range of data relevant to the experiences of homeless youth and their interaction with social services. The information gathered focused on participant demographics (age, sex, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status) and history (family, moving, cities and schools, academics, mental health, substance use, abuse, and trauma), as well as a range of key social systems (e.g., criminal justice, social welfare, extracurricular programs, employment) and are presented in the following pages.

We also collected qualitative data from the young people where they were asked to indicate where they had lived and who they had lived with over the last six months. In these interviews, they were prompted to respond to social markers (holidays and dates) to facilitate understanding of young people's housing stability prior to their participation in this study.

In this study we recruited 98 individuals. Most of the young people interviewed came from the greater Hartford area (40%), followed by New Haven (29%), Bridgeport (20%), New London (6%) and Fairfield County (3%).

Region	N
Hartford	40
Bridgeport	20
New Haven	29
Lower Fairfield County	3
New London	6



## Demographics

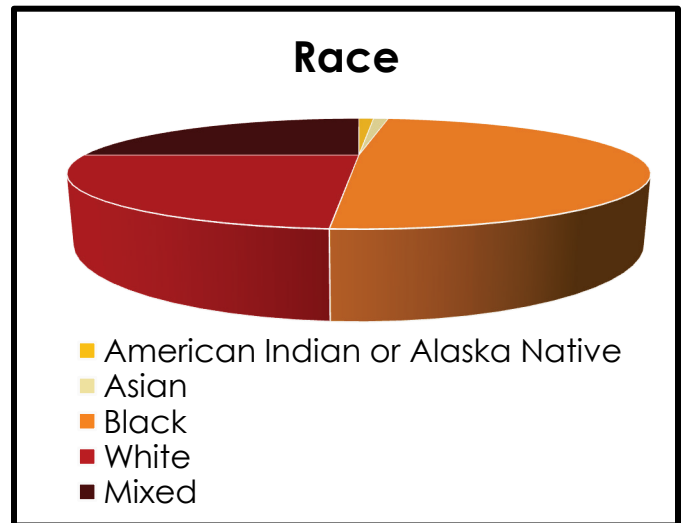
The following data describes the demographic characteristics of the young people recruited into the study. In this summary, data is presented on sex, race, ethnicity, relationship status, and age.

There were 98 youth, of which they were categorized as follows:

- 53 Females (54.1%)
- 41 Males (41.8%)
- 3 Transgender (3.1%)\*

When we examined the racial breakdown of the young people interviewed, the following data were observed:

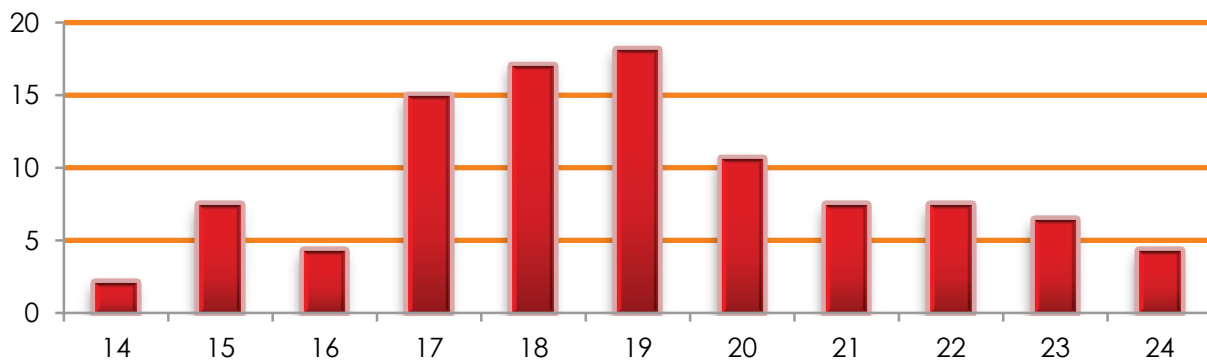
- 43 African American (43.9%)
- 22 Mixed Race (22.4%)
- 21 Caucasian (21.4%)
- 1 Asian (1.0%)
- 1 American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.0%)\*



Ethnically, one-third of the young people interviewed described themselves as Hispanic/Latino.

- 33 Hispanic/Latino (33.7%)

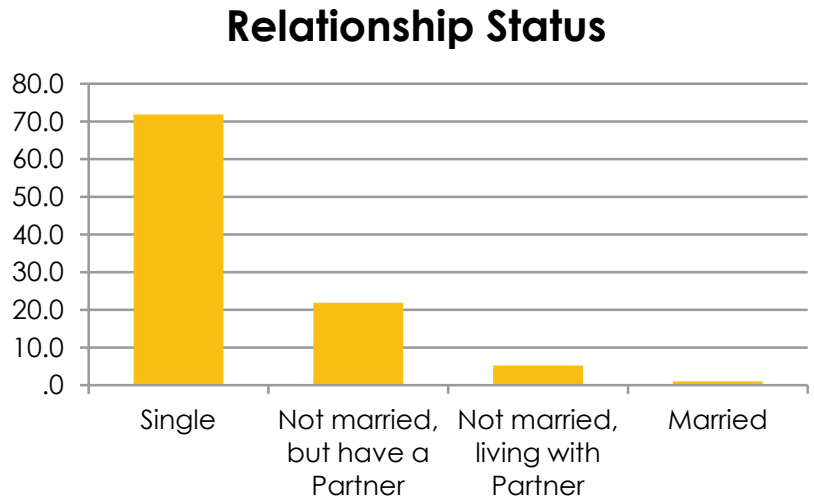
The age range of participants interviewed was between 14 and 24 years of age, with an average of 18.95 years ( $SD = 2.47$ ).



\*Not all participants responded to every question.

Almost three-quarters of the young people described themselves as single. The others were either involved in a relationship, living with a partner, or married.

- 69 Single (70.4%)
- 21 Partnered (21.4%)
- 5 Living with partner (5.1%)
- 1 Married (1.0%)\*



Slightly more than three-quarters of the young people described their sexual orientation as heterosexual and slightly less than one-quarter described their sexual orientation as either bisexual, gay, or not sure.

- 75 Straight (76.5%)
- 14 Bisexual (14.3%)
- 6 Gay/Lesbian (6.1%)
- 2 Not sure (2.0%)\*

Of the respondents who answered the survey, the majority were born in the United States.

- 82 were born in the United States (83.7%)

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

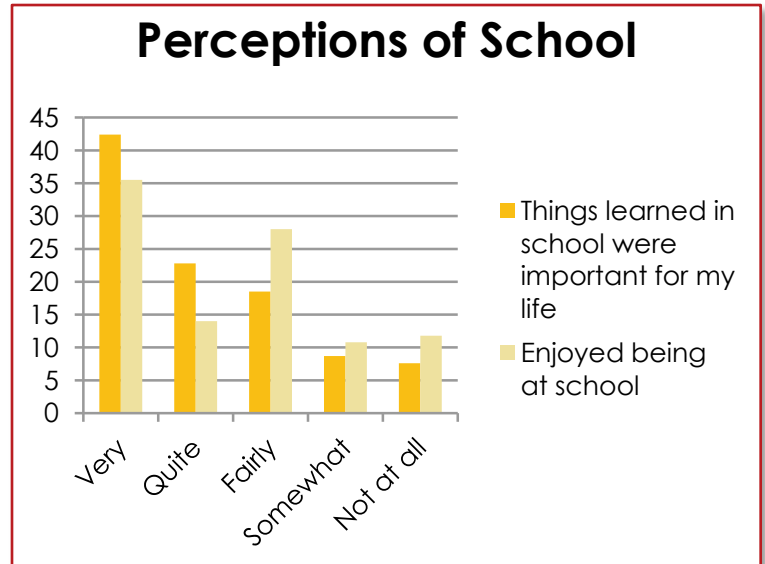
## Education

When asked about their educational experiences, the young people reported that their educational experiences were varied and underscored the challenges faced by them as they managed their housing challenges.

- 32.7% (N = 32) of youth surveyed had completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade.\*
- 24.5% (N = 24) completed 11<sup>th</sup> grade.\*
- 40.8% (N = 40) of the youth reported that 12<sup>th</sup> grade was the last grade they had attended.\*
- Percentages of youth who reported that their grades were:
  - Mostly A's (11.2%; N = 11)
  - Mostly B's (30.6%; N = 30)
  - Mostly C's (35.7%; N = 35)
  - Mostly D's (10.2%; N = 10)
  - Mostly F's (5.1%; N = 5)\*
- Almost one-third of the youth took PSAT classes 27.6% (N = 27) and 35.7% (N = 35) took the PSAT.\*
- 25.5% (N = 25) of the youth indicated that they had received special education services.\*
- 29.6% (N = 29) of youth surveyed had dropped out of school.\*
- 10.2% (N = 10) of the youth reported that the school told them they could no longer attend after they stopped living with their family.\*

In open-ended responses, a subset of youth (N = 40) reported barriers related to school. These included challenges with English and academics. Several youth reported that these struggles led them to stop going to school. Additional school-related challenges included feeling socially awkward and having social issues with classmates.

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

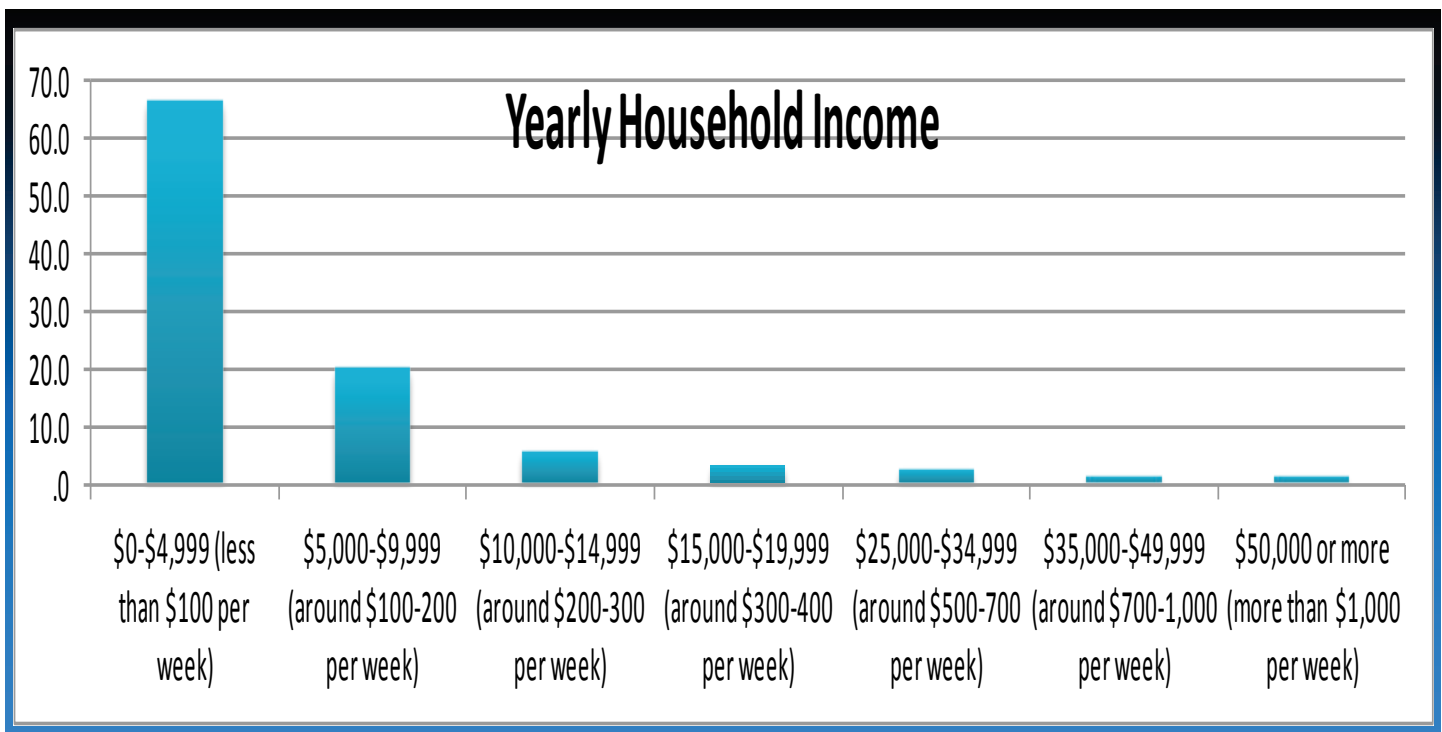


In contrast, several youth reported that school was a source of support and a significant strength was that they were able to graduate from high school. Close relationships with principals, social workers, teachers, guidance counselors, and other school staff often provided emotional support. One youth also reported that teachers provided money and transportation for work and/or appointments when needed.

## Finances and Employment

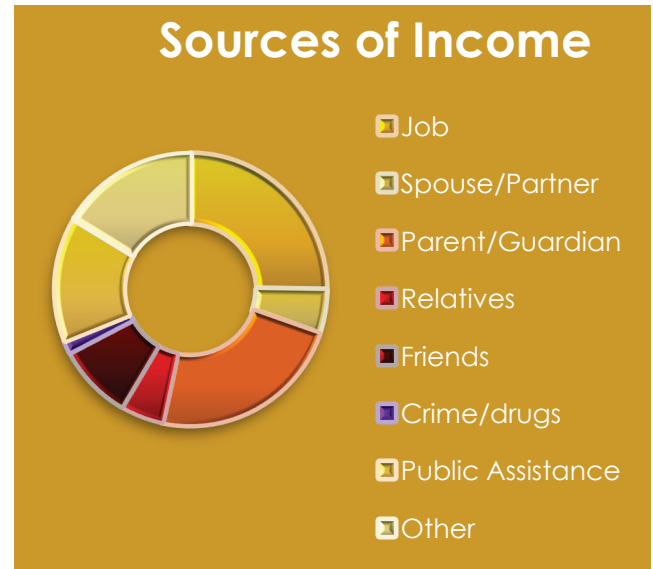
Homelessness exacts significant financial challenges for adults, thus, we attempted to better understand this issue for young people with unstable housing.

- Most youth were not working (N = 63, 64.3%); for those who were employed (N = 34, 34.7%), the majority were employed part time (N = 28, 82.4%).\*
- Most of the respondents had significant financial limitations:
  - The most frequent income range that the young people reported earning was between \$0 and \$9,999 per year, or between \$0 and \$200 per week.



\*Not all participants responded to every question.

- Sources of income included:
  - Employment (N = 34, 34.7%)
  - Spouse/partner (N = 7, 7.1%)
  - Parent/ guardian (N = 31, 31.6%)
  - Relatives (N = 7, 7.1%)
  - Friends (N = 12, 12.2%)
  - Public assistance (N = 20, 20.4%)
  - Other (N= 22; 22.4%)
  - Crime and drugs (N = 2, 2.2%)

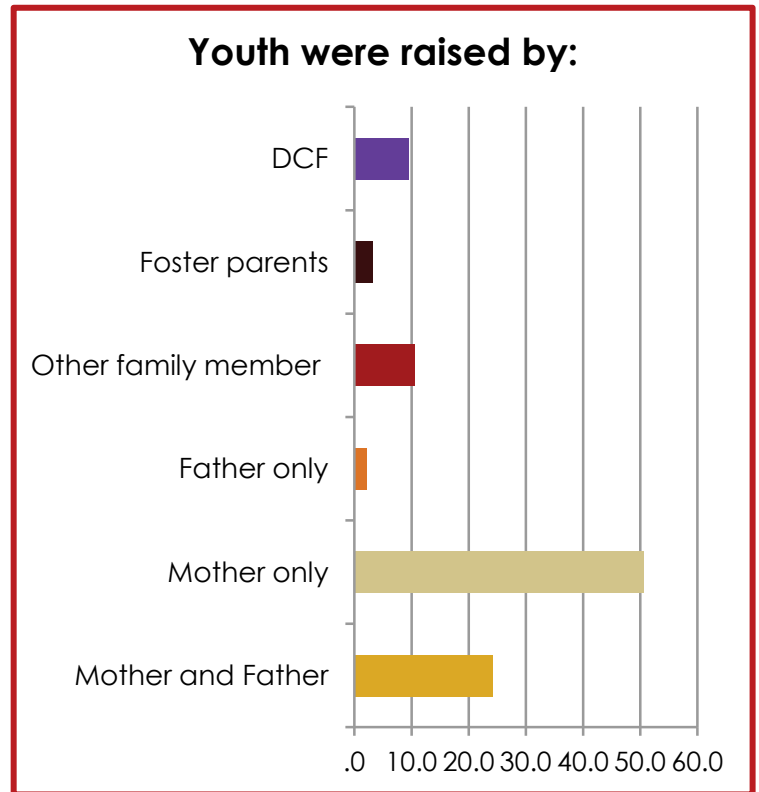


- In the past year, most youth borrowed money from family and friends (N = 65; 66.3%); went hungry (N = 46; 46.9%); and wanted to see a doctor or go to the hospital but couldn't afford it (N = 25; 25.5%).\*
- A subset of the overall sample (N = 40) answered opened ended questions about barriers and strengths related to money.
- Barriers identified included lack of employment contributing to their money problems and limited transportation options. Lack of support from parents/guardians and stress related to income at home were also challenges described. It is important to note that one youth reported selling drugs as a means to ensure financial security. The youth also reported that even part-time employment was not sufficient to pay rent and purchase food.
- Despite substantial financial and employment barriers, many youth identified sources of financial support. These included financial supports received from friends, romantic partners, family members, including grandparents, and employment. Several youth reported that they completed paid internships that helped them financially support themselves.
- When asked how they were able to get money to survive, the youth reiterated the previous sentiments and shared that they received financial support through work, friends, romantic partners, family, and internships. Several youth reported that the shelters provided them with money, and one youth reported that a mentor had provided financial support to help her survive. Some youth also indicated that they worked odd jobs to make money, such as doing hair and babysitting. Youth also reported that they would, at times, go hungry due to lack of money.

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

## Family of Origin

- The majority of the youth had been raised only by their mother (N = 48; 49.0%) and about ¼ was raised by their mother and father (N = 23; 23.5%).\*
- Most youth reported that their mothers' (N = 65; 66.3%) and fathers' (N = 65; 66.3%) highest level of education was the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Of the 28 youth who indicated they were raised by someone other than their parents, 75% (N = 21) of these guardians had completed 12 grade.
- Half of the youth reported that the Department of Children and Family Services (DCF) had been called on their parents or guardians (N = 52; 53.1%) and of those, 36 youth (69.2%) had been removed from their homes by DCF.
- Notably, youth often indicated that they left home due to problems with their family of origin. For example, several youth reported problems with mom, especially when mom was either in an abusive relationship or had financial challenges. Sometimes, youth were the primary caretakers of younger siblings with little parental support.
- The most frequently used term throughout these responses was that the youth had 'bounced around.'



	Female		Male		Transgender			
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Has DCF ever been called on your parents/guardians?	27	27.6	21	21.4	1	1.0		
Were you ever removed from your home by DCF?	17	17.3	17	17.3	2	2.0		
	Black		White		Mixed		Hispanic	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Has DCF ever been called on your parents/guardians?	18	18.4	12	12.2	20	20.4	20	20.4
Were you ever removed from your home by DCF?	14	14.3	7	7.1	15	15.3	15	15.3

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

## Personal Family Planning

- 24 females (24.5%) and one male (1.0%) reported that they had been pregnant. The male youth reported that he kept his one child.\*
- Of the 24 females who had been pregnant, 17 (70.8%) kept the child; 5 (20.8%) had an abortion, one (4.2%) gave the child up for adoption, and one (4.2%) had the child taken from her by DCF.
- Of the 19 female respondents, 10 had one child (52.6%), five had two children (26.3%), and four had three or more children (21.1%).
- Of 17 female respondents who were currently living with their children, 14 had one child living with them (82.4%), two had two children living with them (11.8%), and one had three or more children living with them (5.9%).
- Four female respondents received child support from the other parent and five received childcare assistance from the government.
- Of eight female respondents who no longer had custody of their children, two reported that they had given a child up to DCF, five had given a child up to a family members and one had given her child up for adoption.

## Housing

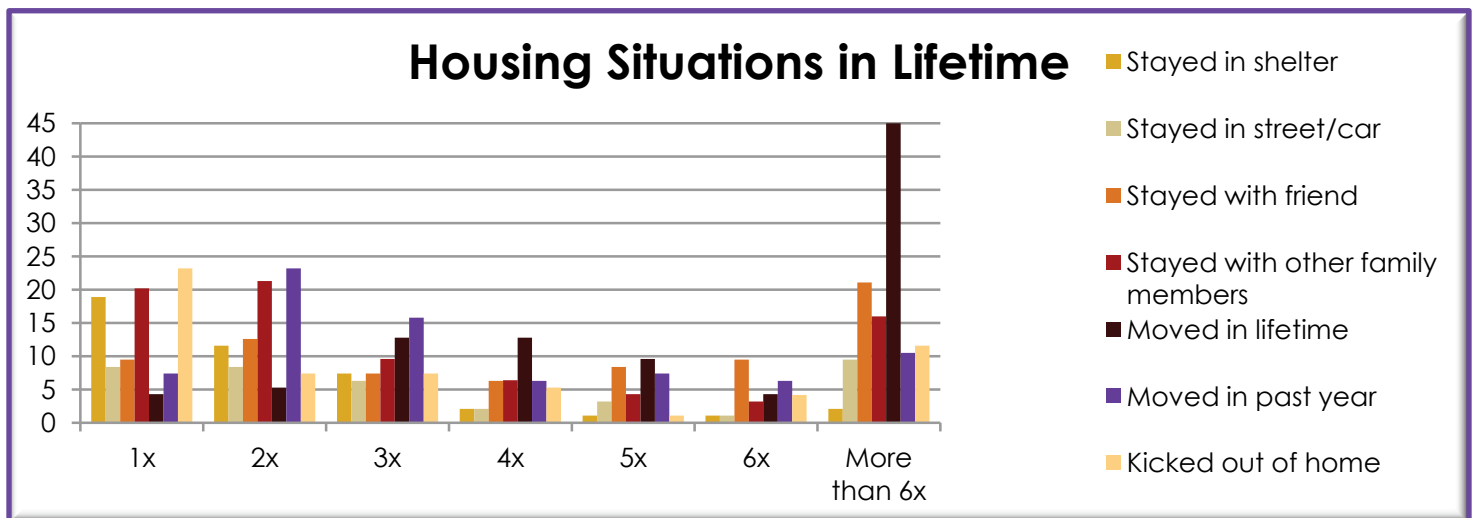
Understanding the housing experiences of these youth is a complex issue. While a large number of these young people reported significant housing instability, few considered themselves homeless or housing insecure.

- When asked how long have they been living/staying in their current contexts:
  - Living/staying in their current contexts for less than 3 months (N = 40; 40.8%).\*
  - 3-6 months (N = 11; 11.2%)
  - 6-12 months (N = 16; 16.3%)
  - 1-2 years (N = 10; 10.2%)
  - More than 2 years (N = 20; 20.4%)\*

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

As shown in the figure below, 49.0% (N = 48) youth had moved more than six times in their lifetime. Similarly, almost 3/4 of the youth (N = 66; 67.3%) had moved two times or more in the past year.\*

- More than half of the youth had been kicked out of their homes by their family at least one time (N = 57; 58.2%).\*
- Most youth reported that they had stayed with friends (N = 71; 72.4%); other relatives (N = 76; 77.6%); shelter (N = 42; 42.9%); and on the street/in a car/outdoors (N = 37; 37.8%) at least one time in their lifetime.\*



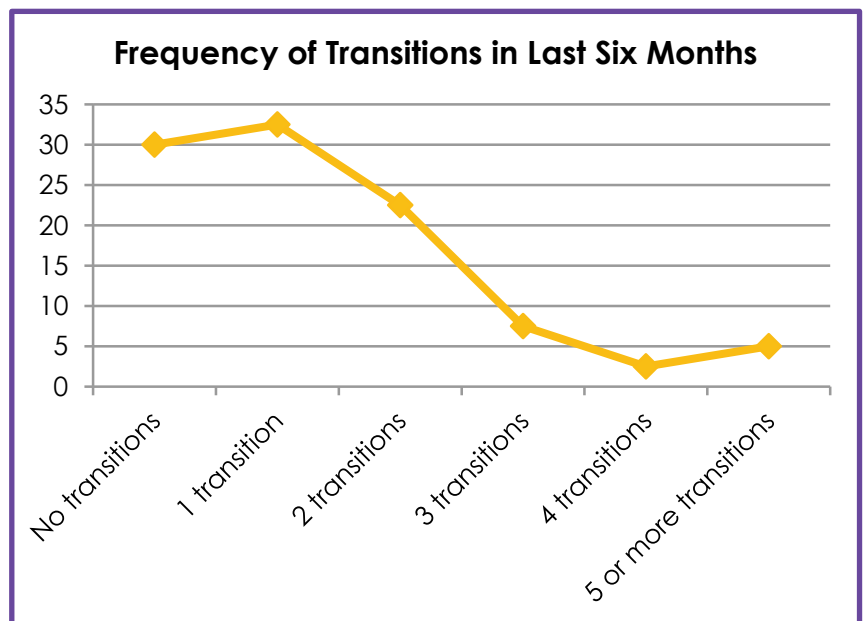
- Youth reported that they had been homeless one time (N = 18; 18.4%); two times (N = 8; 8.2%); three times (N = 7; 7.1%); and four or more times (N = 23; 23.5%).\*
- Notably, five youth reported that they had been homeless more than 20 times (5.1%).\*
- 39.8% (N = 39) of the youth reported that they had never been homeless.\*

A subset (N = 40) of the total sample of 98 youth completed additional paper and pencil questions administered during their completion of the online survey. These questions asked them to think back over the past year regarding their housing experiences. This recall attempt was grounded by significant dates (e.g., holidays, birthdays). Questions specifically asked about housing transitions in the past six months, including *whom* the youth lived with and *where* they lived. The frequencies of transitions were calculated as a proxy for housing (in)stability.

At the time of participation, two youth were living with their sexual partners (5.0%); two were living with their children (5.0%); 14 were living with their parents (35.0%); eight were living with family (20.0%); five were living with friends (12.5%); and nine were living alone (22.5%).

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

- Most (N = 17; 42.5%) youth were living in a house/apartment; 12 were living in a shared housing environment (30.0%); seven were living in a residential program with staff (17.5%); two were living in shared housing (5.0%); and two were temporarily housed (5.0%).
- On average, youth had lived in their current residence for 3.29 months (SD = 2.32).
- 27 youth reported a second residence in the past six months, which included with family (N = 8; 28.6%); alone (N = 7; 25.0%); friends (N = 6; 21.4%); a sexual partner (N = 3; 10.7%); children (N = 1; 3.6%) and other (N = 1; 3.6%).
- Of the 27 youth, most reported their second residence in a mutual living environment (N = 12; 44.4%); a house/apartment (N = 7; 25.9%); temporary housing (N = 3; 11.1%); homeless shelter (3; 11.1%); residential program with staff (N = 2; 7.4%); and controlled environment (1; 3.7%).
- On average, youth had lived in their second setting for 2.37 months (SD = 1.66).
- Fifteen youth reported a third residence in the past six months, and six reported four residences in the past six months.
- Three youth (7.5%) had lived in more than five places in the past six months.
- Importantly, the majority (70.0%, N = 28) of the 40 youth had transitioned at least once in the past six months.
- Youth identified barriers to housing that included challenges with a parent and/or guardian which prohibited a return home.
- Strengths at home included the support of peripheral family members, including siblings and aunts.
- Several youth reported that since they had left their family/guardians, they had 'bounced around.'



\*Not all participants responded to every question.

## Substance Use

### Cigarettes

- Most youth had tried cigarettes or cigars (N = 59; 60.2%) and the average age of first use was 14.42 years (SD = 3.27).
- In the past 30 days, 39 youth smoked 1-2 days or more (40.0%) and the majority (N = 31; 79.5%) smoked between 2 and 20 cigarettes.

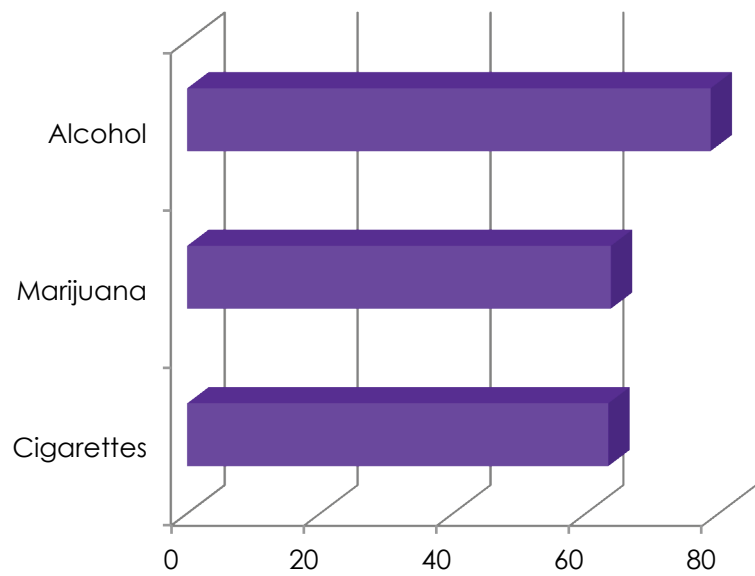
### Alcohol

- Most youth tried alcohol (N = 75; 76.5%) and the average age of first drink was 14.72 years (SD = 3.38).
- In the past 30 days, 35 youth had at least one drink (35.7%); and of these, 21 youth had 5 or more drinks within a few hours (60.0%).

### Marijuana

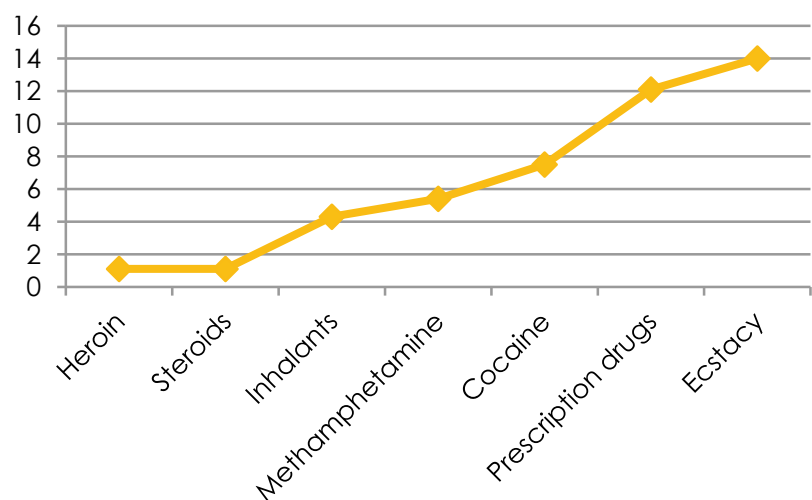
- The majority of youth had used marijuana (N = 60; 61.2%) and the average age of first use was 14.10 years (SD = 2.63).
- In the past 30 days, twenty-nine youth (48.3%) smoked marijuana.

### Most Commonly Used Substances



Although alcohol, cigarettes/cigars, and marijuana were the most commonly used substances, youth also endorsed use of ecstasy, non-prescribed prescription drugs, cocaine, methamphetamine, inhalants, steroids, and heroin.

### % of Youth Who Used



## Mental Health

Youth were asked several questions about their mental health status, including questions about suicide attempts and exposure to traumatic events.

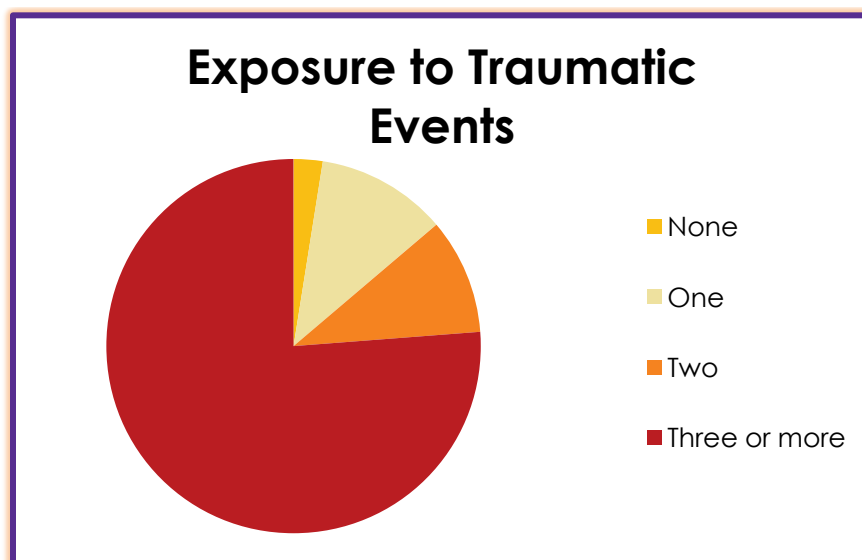
### Suicide

In the past twelve months, one quarter of youth surveyed (23.5%) had considered a suicide attempt.

14 of those youth (60.8%) made a plan for how to commit suicide	14 youth tried to commit suicide. • 64.2% (N = 9) tried one time • 35.7% (N = 5) tried two or three times	6 of the 14 (42.9%) who attempted suicide reported that the attempt resulted in an injury or poisoning.
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### Trauma

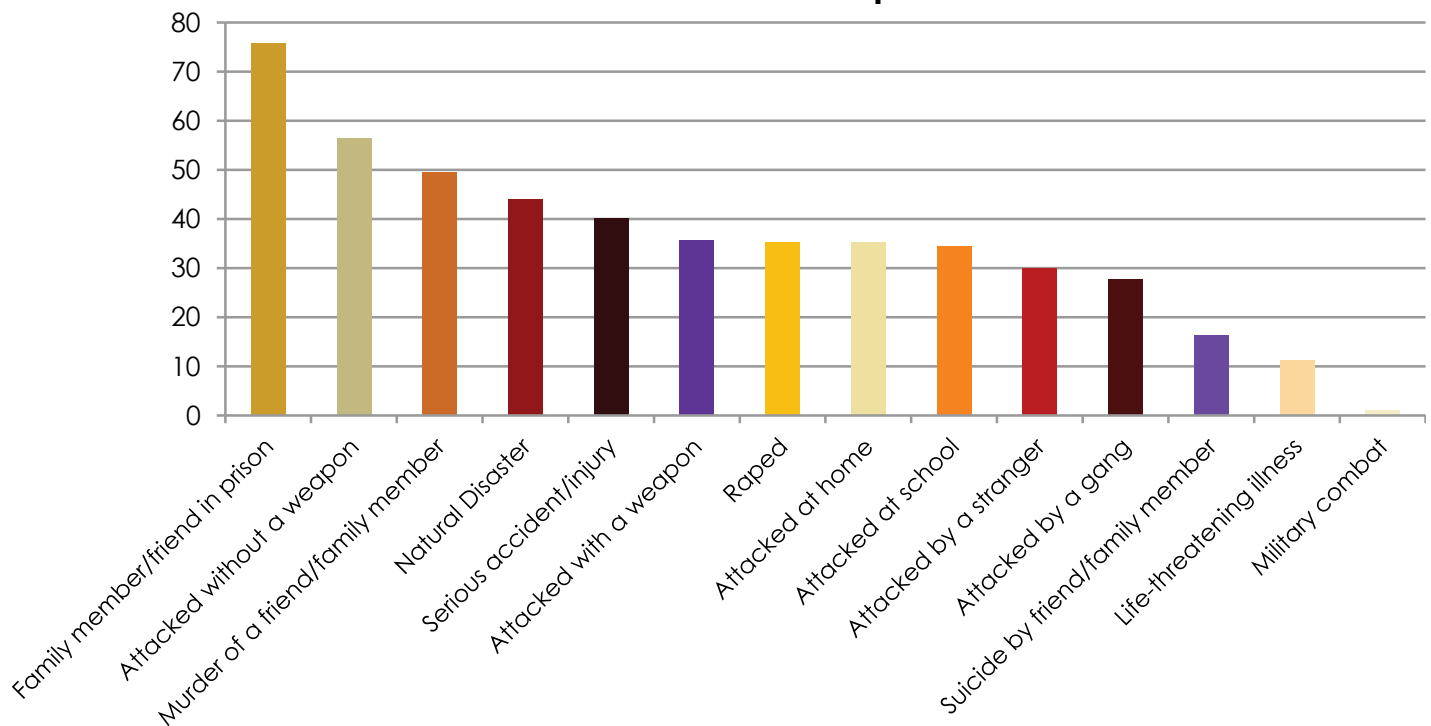
Youth endorsed multiple traumatic experiences throughout their lives. In fact, the average total number of trauma experiences endorsed was 5.05 (SD = 3.04). As shown in the figure, the majority of youth reported exposure to three or more traumatic events (N = 61; 62.2%); while eight youth reported exposure to two traumatic events (N = 8; 8.2%); nine youth reported exposure to one traumatic event (N = 9; 9.2%); and two youth reported exposure to no traumatic events (N = 2; 2.0%).\*



\*Not all participants responded to every question.

The most frequently endorsed traumatic event was the incarceration of a friend/family member (N = 69; 70.4%), followed by being attacked without a weapon (N = 52; 53.1%); the murder of a close friend/family member (N = 45; 45.9%); a natural disaster (N = 40; 40.8%); a serious accident/injury (N = 37; 37.6%); being attacked with a weapon (N = 35; 35.7%); raped (N = 32; 32.7%); attacked at home (N = 32; 32.7%), attacked at school (N = 31; 31.6%); attacked by stranger (N = 33; 33.7%); attacked by gang (N = 25; 25.5%); had a close friend/family member commit suicide (N = 15; 15.3%); experienced a life threatening illness (N = 10; 10.2%) and was involved in military combat (N = 1; 1.0%).\*

### Traumatic Events Exposure



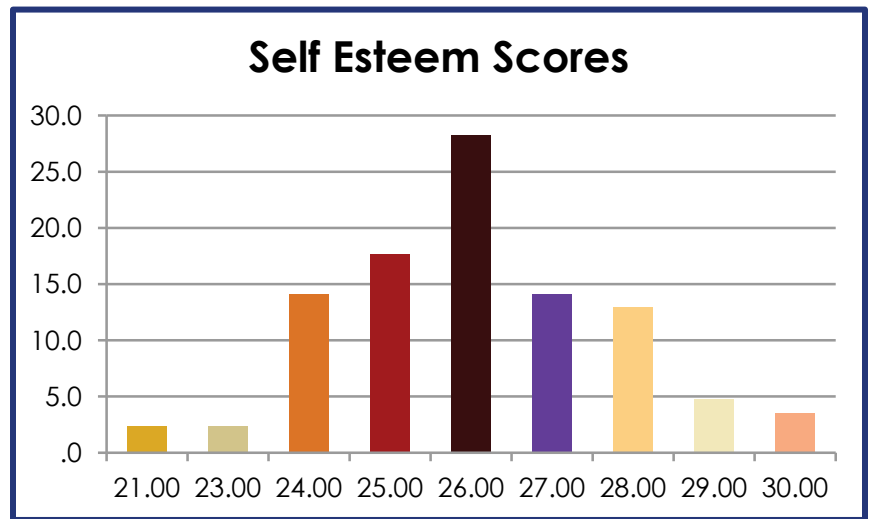
### Perceived Stress

Youth also indicated high levels of perceived stress as measured by the Perceived Stress Scale<sup>12</sup>. This scale measures psychological stress on a scale from zero (never) to four (very often) within the past month. On average, the perceived stress score was 21.13 (SD = 7.44) and ranged from 0-38 points. The most commonly endorsed items are presented in the table below.

Item	Average
How often have you felt nervous and stressed?	2.71
How often have you been angered because of things outside of your control?	2.43

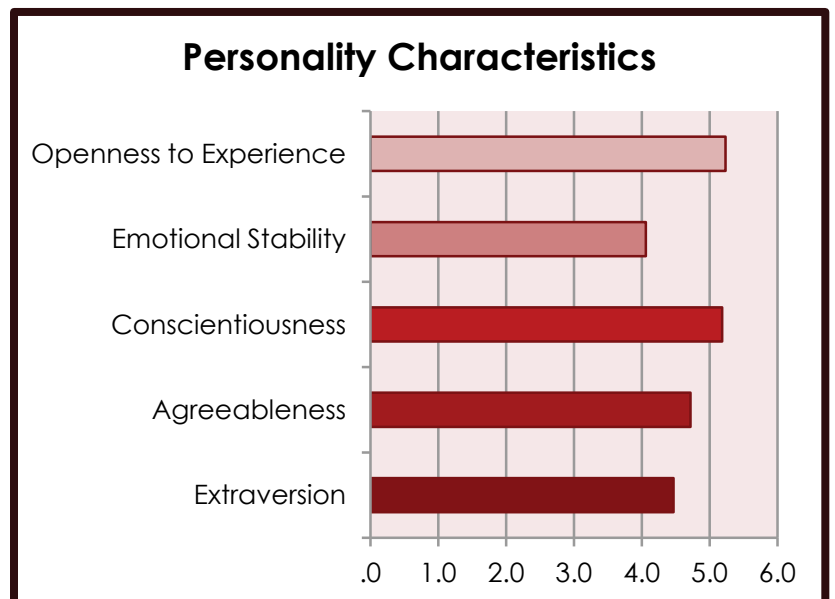
### Self Esteem

- As shown in the chart to the right, youth's self-reported self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale averaged 26.05 points (SD = 1.80) and ranged from 21-30 points, suggesting good self esteem. National averages range from 15 to 30 points.
- The items on this scale ranged from 1 (disagree) to 4 (agree strongly).



### Personality

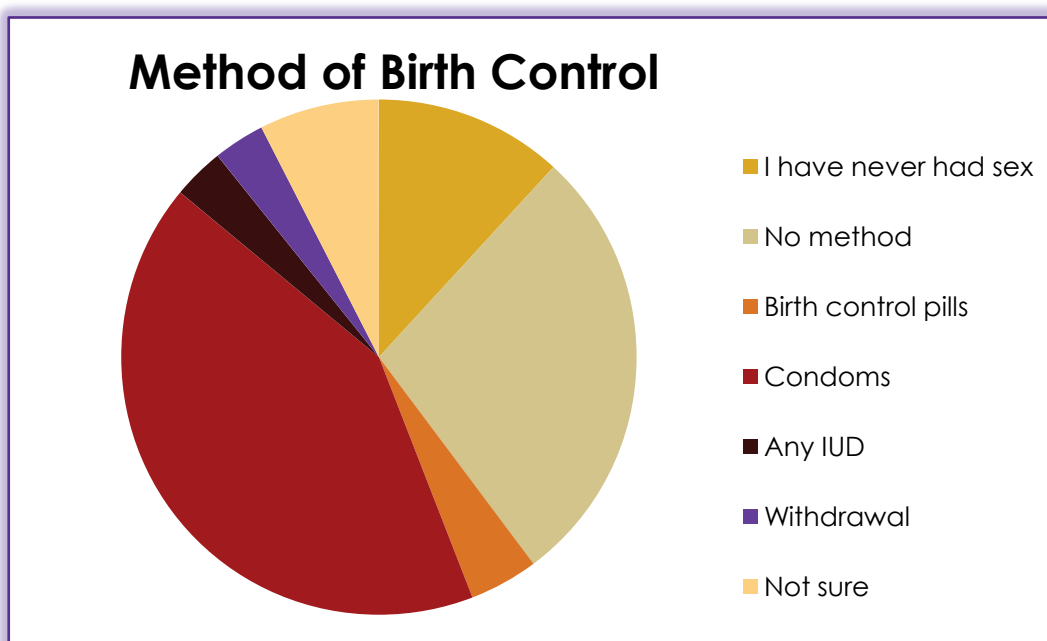
- Youth completed a 10-item measure to assess personality characteristics. Specifically, this measure assessed the Big 5 Personality Factors:
  - Openness to experience: this measures insight, imagination, and range of interests.
  - Conscientiousness: this measures thoughtfulness, good impulse control, goal-directed behaviors, organization, and mindfulness of details.
  - Extraversion: this measures excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness, and emotional expressiveness.
  - Agreeableness: this measures traits such as trust, altruism, kindness, affection, and other pro-social behaviors.
  - Emotional Stability: this measures level of emotional stability, anxiety, moodiness, irritability, and sadness.
- Openness to Experience average scores were 5.23 (SD = 1.16) which was average when compared to population norms.
- Emotional Stability average scores were 4.06 (SD = 1.38) which was slightly lower than population norms.
- Conscientiousness average scores were 5.18 (SD = 1.26) which was slightly lower than population norms.



- Agreeableness average scores were 4.72 (SD = 1.09) which was moderately lower than population norms.
- Extraversion average scores were 4.47 (SD = 1.44) which was similar to population norms.
- Taken together, youth who participated in the study scored highest on open to new experiences, conscientiousness, and agreeableness.

## Sexual Health

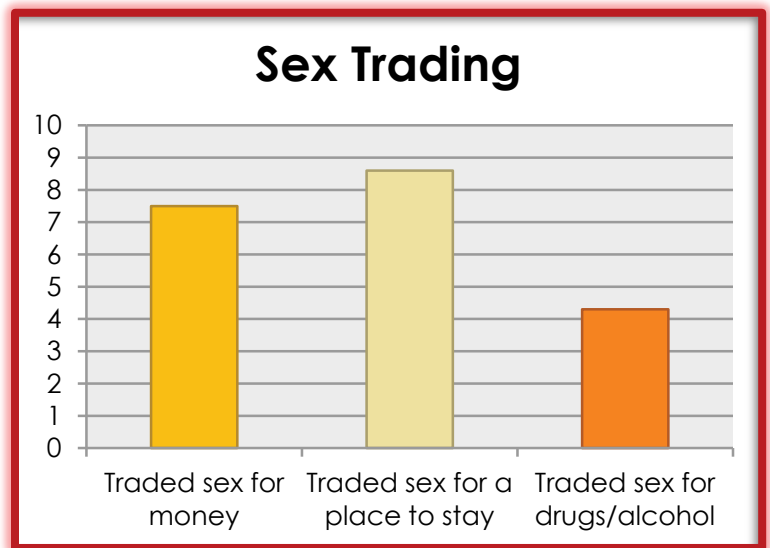
- Most youth reported that they had engaged in sexual intercourse (N = 83; 84.7%). On average, youth were 14.23 years old (SD = 2.97) at their first sexual intercourse encounter (range 8 – 23 years).\*
  - 23.5% (N = 23) of the youth first experienced sexual intercourse at age 12 or under.\*
  - 54.1% (N = 53) of the youth first experienced sexual intercourse at age 15 or under.\*
- On average, respondents had 5.67 sexual partners in their lifetime (SD = 3.23) and 1.73 partners in the last three months (SD = 1.32).
- Almost one-fifth of the youth drank alcohol or used drugs prior to their most recent sexual encounter (N = 18; 18.4%).\*
- Most youth reported that they had used condoms (N = 39; 39.8%); birth control pills (N = 4; 4.1%); an IUD (N = 3; 3.1%); withdrawal (N = 3; 3.1%) to prevent pregnancy. More than one quarter (N = 26; 26.5%) used no method and seven (7.1%) were not sure.\*



\*Not all participants responded to every question.

As shown to the right, several youth reported that they had traded sex for money (N = 7; 7.1%), a place to stay (N = 8; 8.2%); and drugs or alcohol (N = 4; 4.1%).\*

- The majority of youth respondents had been taught about AIDS or HIV infection in school (N = 76; 77.6%).
- Most youth reported that they knew their HIV status and that it was negative (N = 73; 74.5%); however, one-fifth of respondents did not know their HIV status (N = 19; 19.4%).



- As shown below in Table 2, sexual health varied by age at first sexual intercourse.

**Table 2: Age and sexual health**

	12 or under (23)	15 or under (53)	Total Sample (98)
Drank alcohol or used drugs prior to sex	30.4% (7)	26.4% (14)	18.4% (18)
Birth Control			
Condoms	52.2% (12)	45.3% (24)	39.8% (39)
Birth Control Pills	0	7.5% (4)	4.1% (4)
IUD	8.7% (2)	5.7% (3)	3.1% (3)
Withdrawal	4.3% (1)	1.9% (1)	3.1% (3)
No protection	13.0% (3)	28.3% (15)	26.5% (26)
Not sure	21.7% (5)	9.4% (5)	7.1% (7)
Traded sex for money	8.7% (2)	9.4% (5)	7.1% (7)
Traded sex for drugs	8.7% (2)	3.8% (2)	4.1% (4)
Traded sex for a place to stay	21.7% (5)	13.2% (7)	8.2% (8)

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

## Court and Criminal Justice History

### Families with Service Needs (FWSN)

- 16.3% (N = 16) of the youth surveyed reported that they had been referred to probation or court for a Family with Service Needs (FWSN) case.
- Of these 16 youth, six (37%) reported that their case had been dismissed; three (19%) reported that their case had been referred to a family support center; and seven (44%) reported that their case had been referred for services.

**Half of the youth surveyed had been arrested at least one time.**

### Criminal Justice/Delinquency

- Approximately half (N = 47; 48.0%) of the youth had been arrested at least one time.\*
- Of those arrested, 15 had been arrested for activities related to drugs, with six youth reporting the arrest as a juvenile; seven as an adult; and two as both a juvenile and adult.
- Of the 47 youth who had been arrested, 20 (42.6%) had been convicted of a crime.

#### Types of Conviction



- As shown in the figure to the left, four youth (20.0%) were convicted of misdemeanor property crimes; three (15.0%) of misdemeanor violent crimes; two (10.0%) of felony property crimes; five (25.0%) of felony violent crimes; and five (25.0%) of other crimes.
- Sixteen youth reported that they had been in jail, prison, or a juvenile detention facility one time (N = 5; 31.3%); two times (N = 8; 50.0%); and three times (N = 3; 18.7%).
- Most of the youth who had been incarcerated had been detained for less than one month to six months (N = 10; 62.5%).

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

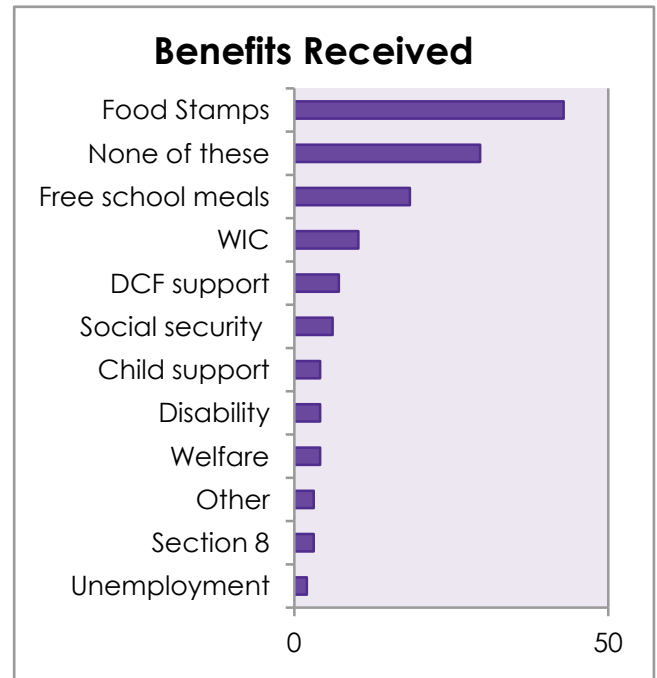
- 39% (N=36) of the young people reported having been incarcerated in jail, prison, juvenile detention or residential facility.
- Of those who had been incarcerated, three reported that they tried to stay in a correctional facility longer because their family couldn't or wouldn't take them in; two tried to stay because they were waiting for a foster home; and two tried to stay because they were waiting for a group home.
- Of these detained young people, while incarcerated/residential:
  - Two youth reported using drugs (12.5%);
  - Nine youth had witnessed physical violence (56.3%);
  - Five had been victims of physical violence (31.25%);
  - One had been a victim of sexual violence (6.3%); and
  - Four witnessed sexual violence (25.0%) while in a correctional facility.
- Twelve youth reported that they had violated probation in the past (12.2%).

As shown below in Table 3, a larger percentage of females were referred to probation or court for a Family with Service Needs case. In contrast, a larger percentage of males had been incarcerated. In terms of race, a larger percentage of Black youth had been arrested, convicted of a crime, and incarcerated than their White and Mixed counterparts.

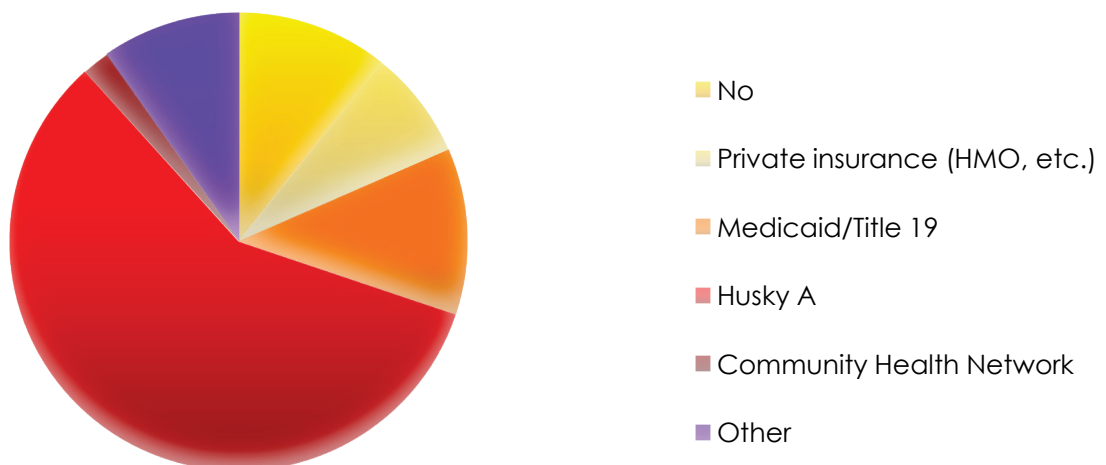
Table 3: Criminal Justice, Sex and Race	Female		Male		Transgender			
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Referred to probation or court for FWSN case	13	13.3	3	3.1	0	0.0		
Ever arrested	24	24.5	21	21.4	2	2.0		
Convicted of a crime	9	9.2	11	11.2	0	0.0		
Incarcerated	6	6.1	10	10.2	0	0.0		
	Black		White		Mixed		Hispanic	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Referred to probation or court for FWSN case	6	6.1	5	5.1	4	4.1	7	7.1
Ever arrested	22	22.4	6	6.1	13	13.3	14	14.3
Convicted of a crime	9	9.2	5	5.1	5	5.1	4	4.1
Incarcerated	8	8.2	4	4.1	3	3.1	1	1.0

## Social Service Benefits

- When asked about social services, more than half of the youth reported that they received food stamps (N = 56; 57.1%).
- The next most frequently endorsed service item was no benefits (N = 29; 29.6%).
- Four youth reported that they received welfare benefits (4.1%); ten received WIC (Food and Nutrition services for Women, Infants, and Children) (10.2%); three had Section 8 housing (3.1%); four received disability (4.1%); two received unemployment (2.0%); four received child support (4.1%); seven received DCF support (7.1%); 18 received free meals at school (18.4%); six received Social Security or survivor's benefits (6.1%); and three received other benefits (3.1%).
- As shown in the figure below, a small proportion of youth did not have health insurance (N = 11; 11.2%).
- Most youth had Husky A, or state, insurance (N = 62; 63.3%).\*
- A small number of youth had private insurance (N = 8; 8.2%); or used a community health network (N = 2; 2.0%).\*



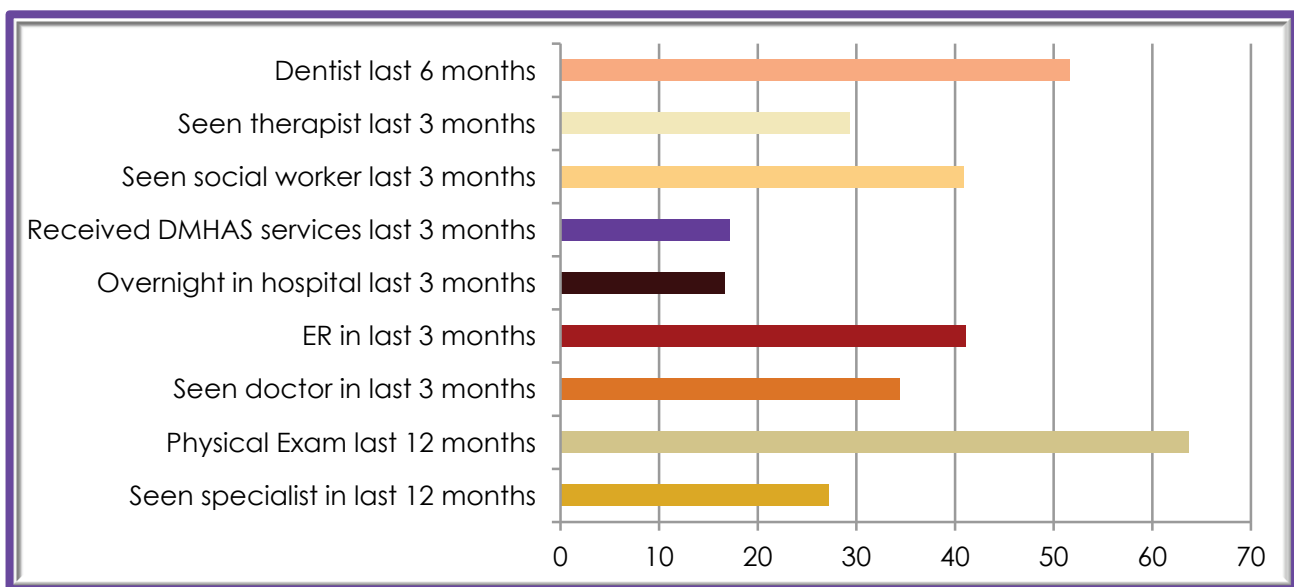
## Health Insurance Status



\*Not all participants responded to every question.

## Service Utilization

- Youth were also asked about visits to medical providers in the last three to twelve months.
- Almost one-third of youth reported that they had seen a family doctor in the past three months (N = 32; 32.7%). Of those who had seen a family doctor, most reported that their experience was very good (N = 8; 25.0%) or good (N = 10; 31.3%). Eleven youth reported that their experience was neither pleasant nor unpleasant (N = 11; 34.4%); and one youth reported that it was very bad (N = 1; 3.1%).
- One-quarter of the youth reported that they had seen a specialist in the past 12 months (N = 25; 25.5%). Of those who had seen a specialist, most reported that their experience was very good (N = 5; 20.0%) or good (N = 14; 56.0%). Five youth reported that their experience was neither pleasant nor unpleasant (N = 5; 20.0%).



- More than one-third (N = 37; 37.8%) of the youth reported that they had been to the Emergency Room (ER) in the past three months. Of those who had been to the ER, their experience was very good (N = 7; 18.9%); good (N = 12; 32.4%); neither pleasant nor unpleasant (N = 10; 27.0%); bad (N = 3; 8.1%) and very bad (N = 2; 5.4%).
- Fifteen (15.3%) youth had stayed overnight in a hospital in the past 3 months. Of those who had stayed overnight in the hospital, their experience was very good (N = 1; 6.6%); good (N = 5; 33.3%); neither pleasant nor unpleasant (N = 4; 26.7%); bad (N = 3; 20.0%) and very bad (N = 2; 13.3%).
- Sixteen (16.3%) youth had received services from their local mental health service provider (Department of Mental Health and Addictions Services or DMHAS). Of those who had received mental health services, their experience was very good (N = 3; 18.8%);

good (N = 5; 31.3%); neither pleasant nor unpleasant (N = 6; 37.5%); and very bad (N = 2; 12.5%).

- More than one-third of the youth had seen a social worker in the past 3 months (N = 38; 38.8%). Youth had seen a social worker at school (N = 20; 52.6%); in the community (N = 6; 15.8%); DCF (N = 11; 28.9%); and through community mental health/DMHAS (N = 9; 23.7%). Of those who had seen a social worker, their experience was very good (N = 5; 13.9%); good (N = 13; 36.1%); neither pleasant nor unpleasant (N = 13; 36.1%); bad (N = 3; 8.3%) and very bad (N = 2; 5.6%).
- Nearly one-third of the youth had seen a therapist or psychiatrist in the past 3 months (N = 27; 27.6%), and most had seen the therapist or psychiatrist in a community mental health setting (N = 15; 60.0%) and in the community (N = 6; 24.0%). Of those who had seen a therapist or psychiatrist, their experience was very good (N = 3; 12.0%); good (N = 12; 48.0%); neither pleasant nor unpleasant (N = 7; 28.0%); bad (N = 1; 4.0%) and very bad (N = 2; 8.0%).
- In addition, 20 youth (20.4%) had received other types of medical attention in the past 3 months.
- Importantly, almost two-thirds of the youth had a physical exam in the past 12 months (N = 58; 59.2%). The majority reported that their exam had been very good (N = 10; 12.0%); good (N = 24; 41.4%); neither pleasant nor unpleasant (N = 19; 32.8%); bad (N = 2; 3.4%) and very bad (N = 3; 5.2%).
- In the past 6 months, half of the youth had gone to the dentist (N = 47; 48.0%).\*

## Social Support

Youth answered several questions related to their perceived social support and their current social networks.

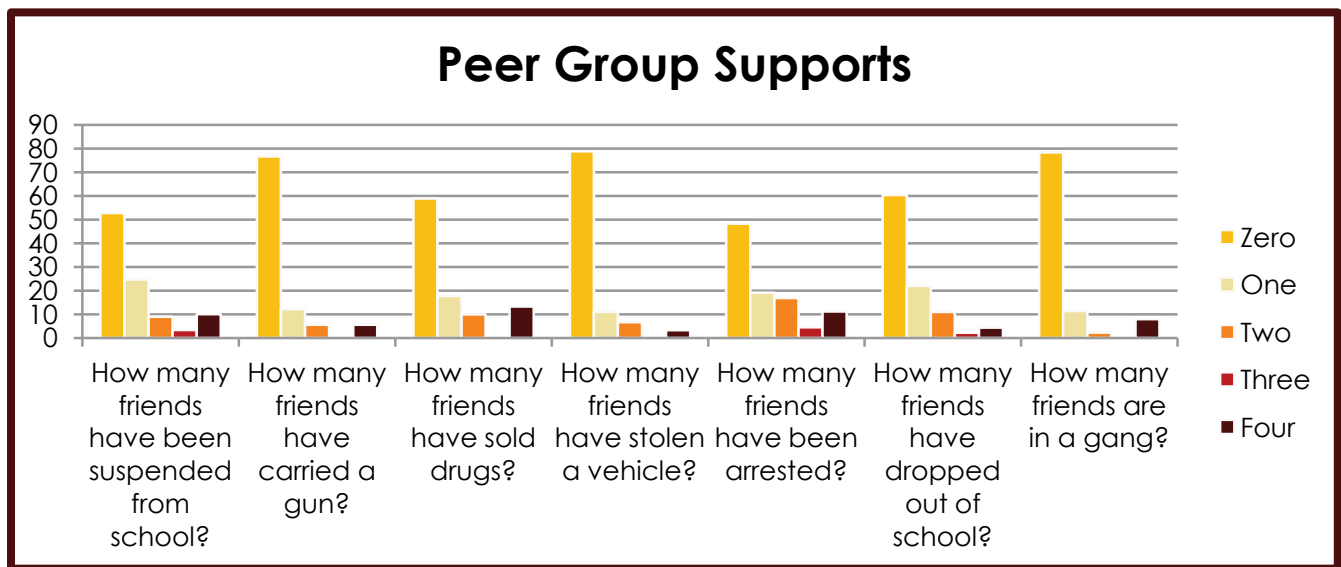
- In general, reports of perceived social support were moderate with an average of 29.43 (SD = 9.54) on a scale that ranged from 9 to 45 with each question being scored from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often).
- The most commonly endorsed items are presented in the table below.

Question	M	SD
<b>Someone will listen to me talk about myself or my problems</b>	3.64	1.33
<b>Someone will show me love and affection</b>	3.64	1.36
<b>Someone will listen to me when I need to talk</b>	3.56	1.31

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

Youth also answered questions about their peer groups to provide a better understanding of their social network.

- As shown in the graph below, most of the youth's friends did not engage in deviant behavior.
- However, several youth indicated that of their four best friends, one or more had been suspended from school (N = 42; 42.9%); carried a gun (N = 21; 21.4%); sold drugs (N = 37; 37.8%); stolen a vehicle (N = 19; 19.4%); been arrested (N = 46; 46.9%); dropped out of school (N = 36; 36.7%); or been members of a gang (N = 19; 19.4%).\*
- Responses from the open-ended questions suggested that friends and romantic partners were sometimes a barrier, but were most often sources of social and emotional support.
- Barriers included losing touch with friends because of moving around, and social tension.
- One participant noted that she had been in an abusive relationship.
- In contrast, several youth reported that best friends provided emotional and tangible supports, such as temporary housing, money, clothes, and food. Romantic partners and significant others were also emotional sources of support. Sometimes, these support networks extended beyond the friends to include additional family members of friends.



\*Not all participants responded to every question.

## Data Comparisons

- The age range (14-24) of participants in this study allow for comparison of characteristics by age group. In line with prior research and federal definitions, we considered unaccompanied children to fall between the ages of 14 and 17 years of age and housing unstable youth to fall between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age.
- The following data compare the two age groups of youth on demographic, educational, employment, family, sexual health, criminal justice, and mental health characteristics.

Demographic Characteristics	14-17 (N =27)		18-24 (N = 67)	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	9	33.3	30	44.8
Female	18	66.7	34	50.7
Transgender	0	0	3	4.5
<b>Race</b>				
Black	8	33.3	33	54.1
White	7	29.2	13	21.3
Mixed	9	37.5	13	21.3
Asian	0	0	1	1.6
American Indian/Alaskan Native			1	1.6
Hispanic/Latino(a)*	14	51.9	19	29.2
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Straight	21	77.8	51	76.1
Gay/Lesbian	1	3.7	5	7.5
Bisexual	5	18.5	9	13.4
Born in US	21	77.8	58	86.6

- As indicated above, youth aged 14-17 years were more likely than youth 18-24 to be Hispanic/Latino(a) ethnicity.<sup>1</sup>
- There were no significant differences between last grade completed and employment status between the two groups.

<sup>1</sup> chi-squared significance test ( $\chi^2$  (1, N = 92) =4.24,  $p$  = 0.04)

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

Education and Employment Characteristics	14-17 (N =27)		18-24 (N = 67)	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Last grade completed</b>				
12	1	4	31	48.4
11	5	20	18	28.1
10	6	24	8	12.5
9	6	24	7	10.0
8	6	24	0	0
6	1	4	0	0
<b>Employed</b>				
Not working	21	77.8	39	59.1
Part Time	6	22.2	22	33.3
Full Time	0	0	5	7.5

- Family of origin characteristics were also similar across age groups. Notably, DCF was less likely to be called on parents/guardians in the 14-17 year old age group and more likely to have been called on parents in the 18-24 year old age group.<sup>2</sup>

Family of Origin	14-17 (N =27)		18-24 (N = 67)	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Raised by</b>				
Mother and Father	10	37	12	18.5
Mother only	13	48.1	34	50.7
Father only	1	3.7		
Other family member	2	7.4	8	12.3
DCF	1	3.7	8	12.3
Foster Parents	0	0	3	4.6
<b>DCF Called on Parents/Guardians*</b>	10	38.5	39	59.1
<b>Removed from home by DCF</b>	11	40.7	25	37.3

<sup>2</sup> chi-squared significance test (x2 (1, N = 92) =3.19 p = 0.07)

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

- There were differences between age groups in housing status and history.
- Specifically, youth in the 18-24 year old age group were more likely to have lived at their current residence for less than 3 months or 3-6 months, and less likely to have lived at their current residence for 6-12 months or more than 5 years as compared to 14-17 year olds.<sup>3</sup>

Housing Characteristics	14-17 (N =27)		18-24 (N = 67)	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Length of Time in Current Residence*</b>				
Less than 3 months	5	18.5	34	50.7
3-6 months	1	3.7	10	14.9
6-12 months	9	33.3	7	10.4
1-2 years	3	11.1	6	9
2-3 years	2	7.4	3	4.5
3-4 years	1	3.7	2	3
4-5 years	1	3.7	2	1.5
More than 5 years	5	18.5	4	6
<b>Number of times moved in lifetime</b>				
Less than 10 times	20	80	40	60.6
More than 10 times	5	20	26	39.4

- There were also differences in mental and sexual health characteristics across age groups.
- Youth in the 18-24 age group were more likely to have experienced three or more traumatic events and less likely to experience two or none when compared to 14-17 year olds.<sup>4</sup>
- Youth in the 18-24 age group were also more likely to have used alcohol/drugs before sex than 14-17 year olds.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> chi squared significance test ( $\chi^2$  (1, N = 94) = 16.85  $p$  = 0.018)

<sup>4</sup> chi squared significance test ( $\chi^2$  (3, N = 78) = 13.57  $p$  = 0.04)

<sup>5</sup> chi squared significance test ( $\chi^2$  (2, N = 89) = 9.51  $p$  = 0.009)

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

## Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Sexual Health

14-17 (N =27)

18-24 (N = 67)

	N	%	N	%
Trauma Exposure*				
No events	2	9.1	0	0
One Event	4	18.2	5	8.9
Two Events	5	22.7	3	5.4
Three or more Events	11	50	48	85.7
Considered suicide attempt in last 12 months	5	19.2	18	27.3
Tried smoking ever	18	69.2	38	59.4
Smoked Marijuana 100 or more times	2	7.7	19	29.2
Ever had sexual intercourse	19	76	61	91
Used alcohol/drugs last time you had sex*	2	10.5	16	26.2

- Criminal Justice history was also similar across groups. However, the 18-24 year olds were less likely than 14-17 year olds to have been referred for a FWSN case or for runaway or being beyond the control of a parent.<sup>6</sup>

## Criminal Justice Characteristics

	14-17 (N =27)		18-24 (N = 67)	
	N	%	N	%
Referred for FWSN Case*				
Runaway*	2	7.7	1	1.5
Being beyond control of a parent*	6	23.1	4	6.1
Truancy	0	0	3	4.5
Ever Arrested	11	42.3	34	52.3
Convicted of a crime	4	16	14	21.5
Ever in prison, jail or a juvenile facility	2	7.4	12	18

<sup>6</sup>  $\chi^2 (3, N = 94) = 9.12, p = 0.028$

\*Not all participants responded to every question.

## Key Informant Interviews

A total of sixteen (16) key informant interviews and one focus group (11 people present) were completed with service providers, representatives of state agencies, and advocates. These interviews asked the respondents to share their perspectives and ideas about the needs and gaps, areas of strength, and challenges experienced in serving young people who experience housing insecurity. Moreover, the respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences and talk about the key needs of this group.

Of the key informants and focus group participants, ten (10) were male and seventeen (17) were female. The informants were from different ethnicities and races: African American, Latino, and White. They ranged in length of time employed in their current position. Most of the informants reported that they had been in their current role or another related line of work for over 10 years. The informants expressed that, given their experiences, they were well qualified to comment on the experiences of young people having housing insecurity and shared that they could provide insight into these experiences.

The summary presented below reflects the general themes expressed during these interviews. In general, this summary covers the goals of the agencies represented, their relationship with young people experiencing housing instability, their responses to these issues, their views about how these responses were received, the role they plan on playing to address this issue, their views on the efforts currently afoot to address this issue, their perceptions of the State's role in addressing this issue, the perceptions about the levels of resources available to address this issue, and the skills needed in order to effectively address this issue.

**Agencies Represented:** When asked about the mission and aims of the agencies, all the interviewees indicated that they were charged with the care and wellbeing of the young people of interest to this work. These agencies spanned Connecticut state agencies, community providers, and advocacy organizations. As they talked about their respective agencies, they discussed the value they place on ensuring that these young people are cared for and receive the services that they need.

**Individuals representing Connecticut state agencies, community providers, and advocates were interviewed about their experience with housing insecure youth.**

**Relationships with young people:** The interviewees shared that they worked with young people in various capacities. Included were: providers of mental health services, child protection, education, legal advocacy, legal supervision, and delivery of housing supports. In these various roles they also had some responsibility for the planning of prevention and supportive services to young individuals in their communities.

**“Housing insecure youth are not easy to work with...”**

**Factors that impact the issue of housing insecurity:** In talking about the experiences of housing insecurity, the interviewees consistently acknowledged that these were *not* easy young people to work with. They consistently referred to factors or experiences that may have played a role in the experiences these young people had, leading to their current housing quandary. Included in their discussions were the role that generational dysfunction played in this negative experience. The respondents stressed their views that families with multiple threats (e.g., low income, housing insecurity, substance use, history of involvement with child protection services, long-standing contact with the judicial system) were more likely, although not exclusively, to have a young person facing housing insecurity. Family factors were also seen as important to the experience of housing insecurity as young people transitioned back into their families from either incarceration or some other institutional stay. ***What the respondents reported was that while families say that the young people are welcome to return, there is a tacit agreement that this disclosure is primarily for release from the institution that they were confined to, but not for consistent housing.*** These personal and familial challenges were also seen as factors that these young individuals had to manage: ongoing experiences related to abuse and neglect. While not all of the housing insecure young people had a history of trauma and abuse, it was the view of the respondents that a significant proportion of them had some history that negatively impacted their current situation.

**Multiple factors impact the experience of housing insecurity for young people**

**LGBT young people are particularly vulnerable to housing insecurity**

Another group frequently identified as especially vulnerable to housing insecurity were gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender young people. These young people were described as more at risk because of their families' reactions to their sexual orientation and the exploitation that they sometimes experience in their communities. All of the aforementioned areas discussed were presented as factors influencing the disrupted attachment patterns seen in this population. There was a call for more understanding of this pattern of attachment with an eye toward developing appropriate intervention strategies.

Academic limitations, either as a result of limited educational history or an organic base, were other important areas to consider. Because of continued disruptions in the educational experiences of these young people – either through constant housing disruptions and limited instruction, they were described as having limited academic skills that negatively impacted their ability to secure and maintain adequate housing. There was also some acknowledgement that these young people also exhibited cognitive impairments, which may or may not have been diagnosed.

**Academic limitations and mental health are factors seen as being associated with housing insecurity**

Mental health was another important factor impacting the housing insecurity experienced by this group. Here the informants highlighted the role that longstanding and persistent

mental health challenges played in their presentation and its role in limiting their access to and use of appropriate services. These mental health challenges were sometimes linked to the traumas experienced (recent and historical). A natural extension of this conversation was the role that emotional dysregulation played in the experiences of housing insecure young people. Managing themselves and their reactions to events were described as sometimes challenging. They also highlighted the encounters experienced in working with these young people, when they presented with histories reflecting either episodic or ongoing trauma perpetration. Here the respondents called for evidenced-based services that specifically integrated all of the areas of concern for these young people in pursuit of a meaningful resolution to their housing instability.

Some of these young people experiencing housing insecurity came from families who were either on the brink of homelessness or homeless. **As a result of this experience, they were separated from their families because of the policies and practices of some of the housing supports.** Housing supports often had age limitations or cut-offs for young people attached to their parents. Another factor that may play a role in the housing insecurity experienced by these young people is the untimely passing or the incarceration of their parents or caretakers.

In discussing unique circumstances that may impact housing insecurity, immigrants who were either recently introduced to or illegally present in the United States and living in the shadows were also described as populations at risk. Factors that impacted these individuals included unfamiliarity with the systems that could positively impact them and their housing needs, mistrust of these systems, and misguided expectations about what was available to them in the US. Further, there were discussions about the unique experiences faced by housing insecure youth who come from immigrant families, especially when there is abuse and neglect. The interviewees also recognized that a number of the individuals experiencing housing insecurity were young parents. This included mothers and their children and fathers who did not have access to their children because of not having a stable place to stay.

As this discussion progressed, the respondents talked about their concern and experience with the increased vulnerability among young people who were housing insecure to trafficking and other exploitative practices by adults.

Young people connected to the juvenile justice system either through the Families with Service Needs (FWSN) or criminal justice systems were described as at risk for housing insecurity. This was related to either their parents' or caretakers' frustration in managing their behaviors, who as a result requested that they leave the home, or constant contact with the juvenile justice system because of criminal offending. Some of the respondents went on to describe how juvenile justice systems provide a "safer," warm place for them to stay with regular meals and acknowledged that they engaged in acts that would result in their arrests or voluntarily presenting to these places with the hope of entry.

All of the groups talked about the special challenges that young people exiting the child welfare system experienced. They described concerns regarding how these young people exited that system, their abilities and strengths when they do, and the supports available to them when they eventually fail. Young people connected to this system were seen as being at greater risk and questions were posed inquiring about how the policies and practices of the child welfare system negatively affected their housing insecurity.

**Child welfare youth need additional support so that they do not end up experiencing housing insecurity**

Often neglected in this conversation, and presented by the respondents as a real issue, is the role that limited and affordable housing stock played in the experience of housing insecurity for these young people. The respondents stressed that they were concerned that due to the limited, low, and or subsidized housing resources available, even when these young people may be able to survive independently, they could not. This was because the resources that they may be able to generate were insufficient to meet their personal care and housing needs.

**Limited amounts of “affordable housing”**

**Responses crafted by these agencies:** The respondents identified a number of approaches taken to address the issues that impact young people experiencing housing insecurity. They were presented in general areas including supports, policy changes, direct intervention, housing, facilitating opportunities to generate innovative ideas to addressing this issue, and vocational and other independent living trainings.

In describing the supports that the interviewees provided, they underscored the “traditional” strategies used (e.g., temporary housing, shelters, and limited apartments). While these supports have been well received they were described as woefully insufficient to meet the demands and needs. **They also talked about the experience of having young people graduate from some of the programs designed to support their housing needs into homelessness.** The failure of these interventions to accomplish the goals presented was seen as a reason for closer examination of these interventions with an eye towards improving the services offered and increasing the graduation of these young people into positive activities.

They also highlighted unique approaches that they have employed in order to support young people experiencing housing insecurity, especially when the resources that they have are at capacity with no relief in sight. Included were safe spaces created where these young people can drop-in, receive food and other basic needs, and showers. They talked about the importance of creating safe spaces that are accepting and where they are free to be themselves. Empowerment approaches were also discussed. The respondent talked about the positive effects that positive youth interventions could have in engaging young people experiencing housing insecurity.

**Areas for growth and development:** The respondents identified a number of critical areas for housing insecure young people. Included were system alignment, integration of best practices through research, increasing resources, enhancing provider skills and knowledge, integrating natural resources at the community level, increasing awareness, developing policy strategies, aligning services across systems, increasing prevention programming, targeting identified vulnerable groups, and increasing the awareness of key policy and decision-makers.

**Systems  
coordination  
is KEY!**

In talking about system alignment, the respondents stressed that the current systems charged with providing services to young people experiencing housing insecurity were not well structured and coordinated in their response. Specifically, they stressed that while the Department of Social Services (DSS), DCF, School Systems, Court Support Services Division (CSSD), and DMHAS through its young adults services programs have been identified as the leads in addressing the needs of housing insecure youth, there is little awareness and **coordination across agencies**. Important in this discussion was their request that young people not have to “commit” to one of these agencies in order to access their services. Further, there was a call for a **stronger network of services** for these young people located in their communities and built using a **strengths-based approach**. As this conversation developed, some argued for the housing insecure young person taking an active role in creating their service plan.

The respondents talked about the role of street outreach workers – initially designed to address violence, in any intervention strategy. Here issues related to urban versus rural needs were discussed. The respondents asked that closer attention be paid to the ways that this issue is represented across these geographical areas. They also asked for the floors and ceilings arbitrarily designated be changed (e.g., Young adult services starting at 18 with a recommendation that it start at 16). Given the “all powerful” role that state agencies play in response to the great needs of those disenfranchised in this state, calls were made that these agencies temper their mindset of “rescuer or savior.” Rather, it was recommended that they be aware of how they are viewed by those they serve, and work hard to collaborate with them in more humble ways. This led to conversation about the importance of acknowledging who is doing the work, assessing if they are effective, and building capacities in those areas where they are.

**Change Connecticut State  
policies and hold realistic  
assessments of community views  
of all agencies involved**

**More evaluation of  
services and more  
data on young  
people experiencing  
housing insecurity**

The respondents reflected on the limited information that all systems had about who these young people are, how have they been using their services, and what are the trends that they are seeing as they enter their care. They also stressed that little effort is taken to evaluate the effectiveness or appropriateness of interventions employed in meeting the needs identified. Moreover, they questioned the generalizability of the observations they have made to the entire population of housing insecure young people.

Because of this, **they asked for systematic data collection** as young people enter those services they are most likely to have contact with. Included are the juvenile justice systems, Police, FWSN courts, DCF, DSS, school systems, and the like. Risks assessments were presented as potential tools to identify young people experiencing housing insecurity as they enter and exit local and state systems. Other states were identified as potentially relevant to this discussion. States like New York and Ohio who are implementing innovative intervention strategies were seen as possible resources and learning institutions where Connecticut could gain from the errors they experienced and successes. While the respondents were clear that no two states were alike, there were important lessons that could be learned. As these discussions progressed, the participants asked that we think about how best to ensure that the housing insecurity experienced by young people integrates a more holistic approach to identifying their needs and adding them in ways that are not bifurcated.

There was attention drawn to **conflicting demands of best outcome and best interest** when working with state systems. To manage some of the natural tensions likely to erupt, the respondents recommended the creation of partnerships between key constituent groups (i.e., state agencies, service providers, advocates, young people, and families). As they talked about this issue, the respondents suggested that there be a special role created for young people (17-19) who could be liaisons for and conduits to services at the community level. Within this conversation, the role of positive youth strategies was highlighted as well as young adult mentors or navigators for their peers (e.g., promotores).

**Coordination and trainings  
so young people  
experiencing housing  
insecurity have ample  
resources to choose from  
that are best aligned with  
their needs**

**Creating opportunities for interested key parties to assemble regularly and develop and recommend ideas for strategies:** In talking about this issue, the respondents were adamant that these exchanges create spaces where “no idea was too stupid to voice.” They also asked that the state systems working with these young people attend to key transitional periods (e.g., as kids exit DCF’s care) and ensure that the young people are adequately prepared to assume the responsibilities of adulthood. There were also discussions about how the policies and practices at the Connecticut state agency level may help to increase the risks posed to this vulnerable population. For example, DCF’s policy of family reunification may be at odds with the real needs of these young people, especially when the family systems they are being reconnected to are not healthy. There was also a call for DMHAS to train and hire skilled clinicians to specifically work with this population. As discussed earlier, there was a call for young people experiencing housing insecurity to take an active role in the development of their service plans. Within these plans, it was recommended that clear expectations from each of the participating state agencies be clearly outlined, so as to reduce confusion around who would be responsible for what in the context of this work. One state system whose role was seen as critical was the educational system. Questions were raised about how this issue presents itself at the public versus private educational institutional systems.

### MORE resources!

All the respondents lamented on the fact that there are not enough resources dedicated to addressing this issue. Some stressed the challenge of prioritizing when the need is great and the resources limited. This was also related to their view that there were not a lot of places to refer young people experiencing housing insecurity. The issue of need and capacity was seen as a critical factor impacting how this issue was addressed at the local and state level. Further, this perception was seen as more pronounced in some urban and most rural areas.

At the provider level, ***there was a call for more supervision and training.*** Present in all of the discussions was an ah-ha moment for the respondents and the institutions they represent where they realized that the young person in front of them was facing housing insecurity. Moreover, they talked about their limited awareness of significant need in this area prior to this experience. The respondents were also clear that any intervention needed to first address the pressing needs that the young person presented. Here, attention to the ways that institutions and other supports neglect or fail to acknowledge that these young people may have a strategy that supports their survival and building from here may be more beneficial in the long run. This call was also coupled with the sometimes-limiting view of service providers and other supports that they “know what’s best for them.” Interventions built on these views were seen sometimes as being related to the overwhelmed experiences of the professionals associated with care and may be a signal that they need to transition into another role. All these strategies were seen as going a long way to “doing a good job” in service of these young people. Being flexible to rapidly respond with alternative interventions was also seen as key in increasing the interventions that providers made.

### Creation of systems and services separate from the adult system

As they talked about flexibility, the respondents stressed the importance of creating unique services for housing insecure youth that are not associated with adult individuals experiencing homelessness. In talking about this issue they underscored the maturational and developmental differences that may leave this group vulnerable to the negative influences of their older counterparts. Some went on to suggest that “dorm” residences be created for this group of young people and the design of policies where “invested others,” outside of the shelter system provide consultation and input into their practices and policies. Given that the young people experiencing housing insecurity are connected to the communities from which they came, there was also a suggestion that interventions involve local storeowners (e.g., Bodega, gas stations) that often serve these young people and are more aware of their circumstances than some may think. Within school settings there also a call for attention to the role that secretaries play in being the eyes and ears of the school institution and it was suggested that their input is invaluable as they are often aware of situations before some teachers and administrators.

At the community level, the respondents identified a need to outreach to the natural supports in the contexts that the young people come from. Included were Boys and Girls

clubs, churches, and schools. These were seen as potentially “neutral” places where entry did not necessarily signal housing insecurity, therefore allowing the young person to save face if this was a limiting factor impacting acknowledgement of their need.

**Program and services should be built on natural supports in the communities**

Further, integrating other resources at the community level and expanding the network of interested individuals were seen as critical to advancing this work. While this approach experienced wide support some cautioned against the entry of “adult focused” service providers into the adolescent and young adult services. Reasons for this caution centered on the developmental and potentially divergent needs and aims of these groups. One especially tricky group of young people to serve at the community level is convicted sex offenders. Respondents talked about their frustration trying to locate these young people back into the communities they came from because of the backlash they experience due to the severity of their offense. While this experience is significant it was seen as one of the many challenges faced at the community level. Some suggested that due to stigma and other factors, these challenges might be exacerbated in more rural and some urban areas.

**Prevention!  
Prevention!  
Prevention!**

Prevention models were identified as particularly important in any strategy. In discussing the issue of prevention, all of the respondents shared that one key strategy has to be the across-the-board **raising of awareness**. Therefore services should be “front-loaded” rather than reactive. The respondents felt that there were clear groups that

needed support and their presentation to any services should signal closer scrutiny for housing insecurity. Included were: young/teen mothers, LGBT youth, adolescent males, juvenile justice involved young people, and adolescents from rural and urban communities. There were also calls to develop strategies that reduce these social challenges that young people face (e.g., teen pregnancy, juvenile justice involvement). The cultural and ethnic divide was also discussed due to the overrepresentation of young people of color experiencing housing insecurity. Prepping staff to comfortably address and manage these differences as they seek to work with young people was stressed. Related were the unique needs of “Black and Brown” boys.

There were several calls for special attention to the plight of young men who are housing insecure and their continued disfranchisement. In these conversations, the respondents asked that any intervention be targeted with an eye towards the **long-term resolution** of the housing challenges. From this perspective the attention should be less on talk and more on action. As they talked about the prevention and intervention strategies, special foci were given to the role that educational and employment interventions can add to moving this work forward. There was also some acknowledgement that with the advent of community policing, some jurisdictions may have special access to information about who at the community level is at greater risk for experiencing housing insecurity because of the challenges currently taking place in their homes.

**Interventions focused on young men and young men of color**

**Decrease the  
INVISIBILITY of this  
population**

The respondents talked about the need for the Connecticut state legislature to acknowledge that this is, and continues to be, an issue. They asked for a special Prevention Council out of the Governor's office that would help increase the visibility of this issue and signal its importance to the future of the state's residents. This conversation was also couched from the perspective of increasing general community awareness and awareness across the state. All the respondents viewed the *invisibility* of this group as a limitation in garnering resources to address their needs. Strategies identified as potentially critical to these efforts included social media and programming. Awareness raising approaches recommended included creating a housing insecure youth day where this issue is front-and-center in the state's discourse around what is needed to support these young people. They also recommended public forums at the state and community levels to raise attention to this issue and identify natural resources that may help to stem the needs. As they talked about the role of the legislature, the respondents stressed that funds be allocated in appropriate ways that are consistent with the needs of the population. A final place where the state legislature was seen as critical to advancing this work was in the role that they could play in revising the current housing statutes to increase affordability and availability of housing for youth.

**Creation of a task force to  
examine and address the  
housing insecurity of young  
people**

## Methodological Lessons Learned

A hybrid strategy building on snowball sampling technique was used in this study. In this approach, we identified local agencies in the cities of interest that served housing insecure young people. Young people served by these agencies served as seeds and were interviewed about their experiences. They were also encouraged to recommend friends experiencing housing insecurity that may not have accessed or used available services. Research staff then made outreach to these young people and they were interviewed. Below are some of the observations from this strategy:

- This strategy was effective in identifying young people experiencing housing insecurity.
- Some of the seeds identified were unwilling to provide the name and contact information of their counterparts with similar housing challenges. They were, however, willing to pass the information of the research assistants on to their friends, allowing their counterparts to make the contact at their convenience.
- While this strategy was effective in identifying a number of young people experiencing housing insecurity, it appears that it was not as effective at identifying young people either involved in or running away from Connecticut's child welfare and juvenile justice systems. These young people may be apprehensive about being involved in services or systems they perceive as connected to the state and, as a result, they may be underrepresented in the sample in this study. Using providers as the primary seed for identifying housing insecure young people may result in missing this particular cohort of the population.
- While there was a challenge in identifying child welfare and juvenile justice involved young people who are experiencing housing insecurity, this more targeted methodology appears appropriate and effective in identifying a subset of them.

## Recommendations

### Cross Systems Reform:

- Create a planning task force to develop and recommend strategies to address housing insecurity for young people.
  - This work should consider the developmental/age, gender, immigrant status, and geographic (i.e., rural, urban, suburban) needs of young people and include, where appropriate, community-based/centered resources
  - This work should consider the physical and mental health challenges of these young people and they should be addressed
  - This work should consider and make recommendations for the alignment or realignment of resources across Connecticut state agencies
  - This work should consider and use positive youth development strategies
- Develop strategies to improve the point-in-time count of the number of housing insecure young people by increasing collaboration across Connecticut state systems and non-profit organizations and expanding the methodology used in gathering data and outreach to capture these young people
  - Develop a specialized methodology to capture housing insecure youth building off of lessons learned from this report
  - During the point-in-time count, data should also be collected regarding the number of unaccompanied young people receiving services across state systems
  - Information should also be collected from key referent state constituent groups: DCF, DSS, CSSD, Judicial, SDE, DOC
    - This data should be grouped – those 17 and under and those between 18 and 24 -- with a focus on the number of young people in their care with questionable or precarious housing
    - This should include the number of young people in DCF's care who are missing from the placement assigned by DCF
    - This should also include the number of young people aging out of DCF's care with no permanent place to live and six (6) months after discharge
    - From DSS' perspective, this could include the number of young people who requested cash or some other social support
- Develop strategies that document the needs of young people experiencing housing insecurity as they enter and exit state and community supports

- A common set of interview questions should be developed and collected at identified state and community agencies that includes an inquiry into how many of their friends are currently in a similar situation to them. This would begin to underscore the scope of the problem
- This data should be collected and reviewed at a central “hub” where they can be analyzed and used to modify Connecticut state and local practices addressing this issue
- Include the voices of all young people in the review, development, and approaches developed to address their housing needs
- Identify and change policies that adversely affect the access and resources available to housing insecure young people. Areas identified include, but are not limited to:
  - Inappropriate age cut off for access to some resources
  - Policies that require commitment to Connecticut state services in order to receive support
- Build on best practice experiences of other states
  - As part of the work of the planning process, a body should review and build on local and national efforts to address the unique needs of housing insecure young people
- Increase the supervision and training at the Connecticut state and local provider level to help providers identify and work with housing insecure young people
- Ensure that service systems address the unique needs of LGBT young people
- Increase awareness of housing insecurity among people across Connecticut
  - There should be a special focus on making young people aware of this issue and the unique ways it presents for their demographic
- Increase the number of prevention focused initiatives that target young people who have the potential to experience housing insecurity:
  - This work should be focused, but not limited, to those groups that have been identified as particularly at risk of experiencing housing insecurity:
    - Young people connected to the child welfare system
    - Young people connected to the juvenile justice system
    - Young people applying for Connecticut state assistance through DSS
    - LGBT young people
    - Young men entering all of the aforementioned systems
    - Young women either currently pregnant or parenting

- Create positive community supports for housing insecure young people that use proven strategies and build on the research on effective mentoring practices
  - Included are supports that harness the resources at the community level and include stable mentors and others that they can connect to
  - Create opportunities to build on natural supports such as family members who are positive role models
- Identify proven strategies for vulnerable young people to reduce their susceptibility to experience early initiation and unhealthy sexual behaviors

### **Housing, Child Welfare & Mental Health:**

- Increase the number of housing resources available for housing insecure young people
- Create a comprehensive crisis response system for young people experiencing housing insecurity who are not involved in Connecticut state systems
- Identify the unique housing needs of young people with histories of sexually-based offenses
- Embed social supports to reduce the collateral challenges experienced by housing insecure young people (e.g., family planning, substance abuse treatment, mental health, trafficking)
  - Identify and change policies that adversely affect the access and resources available to housing insecure young people
    - Included are gender and age exclusion policies that unnecessarily separate families as they access housing and other temporary resources
    - Revise housing policies and practices that result in age and gender exclusions that result in young men being separated from their families as they enter services
- Immediately review housing programs/independent living programs where young people are graduating from housing programs to housing insecurity
- Examine the unique needs, experiences, and number of young people exiting child welfare and mental health systems into housing insecurity
- Strengthen and expand the bridge between the child mental health system and the adult mental health system, recognizing the negative effects that mental health can have on the housing stability and experience of young people
- Require Connecticut state and local agencies to designate liaisons to receive specific training on positive youth development, trauma-informed care, and strategies and

resources for supporting housing insecure young people. These designated individuals will interface with each other to help these young people navigate their respective systems

- Young people being discontinued from child welfare services should have access to legal representation and a clear plan is developed as this transition occurs
- Require DCF to begin transition planning for youth in care settings at age 14, with specific housing plans in place by the youth's 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. For young people at particular risk, address the needs and goals for youth transitioning from DCF to DMHAS by developing one service plan that identifies goals for a successful transition to DMHAS. Train staff to promote regular communication, partnership and mutual understanding regarding engagement, transition and treatment for young people in their care. The young person must be an equal partner in the planning.

### **Employment:**

- Create vocational opportunities that provide young people with the skills to earn livable wages and are tied to housing opportunities

### **Education:**

- Create services that increase the educational outcomes for young people experiencing housing insecurity
  - With this focus, special attention should be paid to the ways that students are frequently moved from school to school
  - Assign independent advocates for all unaccompanied homeless youth (i.e., educational surrogates)
- Ensure that the school representatives designated to address the unique needs of housing insecure young people have the appropriate training and power within the education system to recommend and affect change at the community level
- Require that school secretaries, teachers, administrators and McKinney-Vento liaisons receive training on unaccompanied young people experiencing housing insecurity, including strategies to assist them and the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Require and empower the state department of education to develop and implement an effective monitoring mechanism to ensure school administrators and registrars are trained on the procedures for enrolling unaccompanied youth and determining educational decision-making for them
- Require schools to award partial credit to youth experiencing housing insecurity for partial coursework completed in previous schools and upon mid-term enrollment in a new school, and establish procedures for the award of such credit

- Ensure existing dropout prevention and recovery programs are accessible to youth experiencing housing insecurity, receive specific training on homelessness and conduct specific outreach to housing insecure youth
- Require school systems to designate an academic mentor and develop a graduation plan for housing insecure youth upon their identification in 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, in partnership with the student. The plan should be revised quarterly and reviewed annually

### **Juvenile/Criminal Justice:**

- Discharge plans developed for young people leaving juvenile/criminal justice institutions and placements should include community, in home services that begin while the young person is detained and supports a successful transition back to the community
- Discharge plans should include the young person in the planning process
- In those families where there is concern that the housing options presented (e.g., coming home) are approved but not tenable once they have been released, alternative housing options should be recommended and explored
- Court reviews should include a report regarding the housing transitions services available to the young person upon discharge
- Probation and parole officers should conduct home visits and explore options for non-family placements when it is clear that the young person does not have a stable place to live

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