



Preventing Poor Outcomes by Funding Services for Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Texas

Senate Finance Hearing
January 31, 2019

HOW MANY YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS IN TEXAS?



Exactly how many young people experience homelessness in Texas is hard to pinpoint. The difficulty of answering this question is rooted in the impulse of a young person who is homeless to hide, either because of or fear of being returned to a home they left because of abuse or other family problems.

Schools are on the frontlines of identifying students experiencing homelessness, with more than 116,000 students identified by Texas schools as having experienced homelessness at some point during the 2016-17 school year. More than 18,000 of these homeless students are unaccompanied by any adult. As schools work to improve their identification efforts, the number of homeless students they identify increases.

A comprehensive study released by Chapin Hall found that one in 10 young people between the ages of 18 and 25 and one in 30 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 experience homelessness over the course of a year.ⁱ Based on these numbers, **there are an estimated 60,000 unaccompanied 13- to 17-year-olds and nearly 300,000 unaccompanied 18- to 25-year-olds who experience homelessness over the course of a year in Texas.**

DRIVERS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND IMPACT

There is no single reason youth experience homelessness; however research consistently points to:

- Family Problems that can include being kicked out or running away from abuse
- Foster Care Problems or Aging Out of Care
- Re-entry Following Criminal Justice Involvement

The impact on youth is clear. Texas students who are homeless are twice as likely to be referred to In-School Suspension, 2.5 times more likely to be suspended from school, five times more likely to be referred to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program, and five times more likely to drop out.ⁱⁱ Homeless youth are more likely to have contact with the criminal justice system and are at higher risk of being trafficked.ⁱⁱⁱ

WHAT SERVICES DO YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS NEED?

- Youth-Specific Shelters: Youth interviewed by Texas Appleseed and TNOYS overwhelmingly report feeling unsafe in “adult” shelters. Youth-specific shelters are needed at an average daily cost of \$200/bed.

- **Transitional Living Programs:** These programs offer housing as well as case management intended to get youth back on track and ready for independent living. Providers report an average cost of \$50 per day.
- **Street Outreach and Drop-In/Day Centers:** These services are needed for youth who face wait lists or are not ready to transition off the street. The cost is roughly \$500 per youth.
- **Comprehensive Case Management:** This is for youth who may have temporary housing but need help reaching full stability. The cost is \$2,500 per youth.

NEED FOR DEDICATED, CONSISTENT FUNDING

The December 2016 TDHCA report required by the 84th Legislature in HB 679 noted that the decentralized nature of what government funding exists to fund services leads to “chasms between the level of need in a particular area and the availability of services to meet those needs.”^{iv} Without a clear mandate or agency responsible for youth experiencing homelessness and without a consistent funding stream, there are gaps in services. More funding is needed to prevent youth homelessness and provide access to supports and services for youth who encounter homelessness.

Texas’ primary source of state funding to address homelessness is the Homeless Housing and Service Program (HHSP) administered by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs. This program has provided \$30 million in funding since 2009 to cities with a population of 285,000 or higher, but less than 12% was spent on children 18 or younger. It appears that no HHSP dollars are directed to programs for unaccompanied youth.

To ensure homeless youth get the services they need to transition to successful adulthood and avoid the high costs of poor life outcomes, the Texas legislature should add funding to the HHSP program specifically for youth and young adults. An additional allocation of money could support grants to each of HHSP’s eight urban areas.

These grants could have a huge impact; for example, with an additional \$3 million allocated to the HHSP program for homeless youth, it could support:

- 15,000 nights in emergency shelters designed for youth or young adults;
- 60,000 nights in transitional living programs; and
- Street outreach and drop-in center services for 6,000 youth.

Recommendation for TDHCA Funding:

- ✓ **Add funds to the HHSP program per year specifically for youth and young adults.** An additional allocation could support grants to each of HHSP’s eight urban areas.

ⁱ Chapin Hall, *Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America* (Nov. 2017), available at <http://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/national-estimates-of-youth-homelessness/>.

ⁱⁱ Texas Appleseed and TNOYS, *Young Alone and Homeless in the Lone Star State: Policy Solutions to End Youth Homelessness in Texas* (2017).

ⁱⁱⁱ Id.

^{iv} Youth Homelessness in Texas: A Report to fulfill the requirements of House Bill 679 (Dec. 1, 2016).



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