



WHEREVER I CAN LAY MY HEAD: HOMELESS YOUTH ON HOMELESSNESS

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New Moms
New Phoenix Assistance Center
Special Assistant to the Mayor on Homelessness
Teen Living Programs
The Night Ministry
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New Phoenix Assistance Center
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research about the issue of homelessness largely has focused on understanding the characteristics and addressing the needs of homeless adults and families in our communities. Much less research has been conducted to document the characteristics and needs of homeless youth. In recent years, a number of studies have come out in Illinois that address the situation of homeless adults and families as well as youth. Yet there remains a lack of data documenting the perspective of homeless youth concerning their own needs. Providing services that youth report they need can serve as a gateway to other needed services.

In the summer of 2003, the Chicago Department of Health sponsored a symposium on the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth.¹ Discussions during this meeting made it clear that assessing the needs of homeless youth would require looking beyond those who were living in shelters, and that the needs of subgroups within the homeless youth population were likely to vary considerably. In response to this need for more information about homeless youths' needs, the City's Department of Children and Youth Services (CYS) partnered with the Night Ministry,² an agency with a history of addressing the needs of marginalized youth, to commission the Center for Impact Research (CIR) to conduct a study of the needs of homeless youth in the City of Chicago. The purpose of this study was to learn what the youth themselves identify as their needs, and to understand the differences in these needs among a variety of subgroups—those experiencing their first episode of homelessness, those cycling in and out of homelessness, and those experiencing chronic homelessness. Both the non-profit service providers and the City

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Questioning.

² The Night Ministry is a non-profit, non-denominational organization that responds to the needs of people on the nighttime streets of Chicago, serving homeless and runaway youth, working poor adults, uninsured and underinsured people seeking medical assistance. It provides direct services, outreach and shelter, as well as advocacy and public policy work and leadership/training on these issues (<http://www.thenightministry.org>).

hope that identifying and meeting these needs not only will act as a gateway to other needed services, but also will expedite resolution of problems that result in homelessness and lead to the establishment of permanent, stable, and safe living situations.

With guidance from the Homeless Youth Task Group of the Chicago Continuum of Care³ and an advisory group composed of government policy makers and program personnel and non-profit agency directors,⁴ CIR conducted a survey of homeless youth in Chicago between the ages of 14 and 21 during April and May 2004. Twelve youth, nine of whom were homeless, were recruited and trained to interview homeless youth for the project. They conducted 400 interviews with homeless youth throughout Chicago—at bus stops, fairs and festivals, on trains, streets, and basketball courts, in parks, shelters, schools, homes, drop-in centers, churches, and restaurants.

In addition to conducting the survey, CIR interviewed homeless youth service providers, advocates, and public policy personnel working at public and private agencies. These interviews provide further information about the needs of homeless youth and the resources currently available to them, as well as ways that the various systems serving homeless youth might be improved.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey and interviews with providers and policymakers yielded extensive data, much of which is presented in the full report. This executive summary presents the major recommendations identified by CIR and the Homeless Youth Task Group and Advisory Group.

- **Create an Interagency Task Force on Homeless Youth with members from the State, City, nonprofit service providers, and funders .**

We recommend that the City and State form an interagency task force to bring together representatives from the many agencies that come into contact with homeless youth in the public and private sectors, including private foundations that are committed to addressing this issue as part of their philanthropic support. Better coordination between and among public and private service providers and increased interagency referral will improve the State's ability to serve this population. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), because of their contact with many of these youth prior to homelessness,

³ Homeless Youth Task Group members are: Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; Unity Parenting/Harmony Village; Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Administration for Children and Families; Thresholds; the Night Ministry; New Moms; and Click Services.

⁴ The project's Advisory Group members are: Chicago Department of Human Services; Chicago Continuum of Care; Special Assistant to the Mayor on Homelessness; New Phoenix Assistance Center; Teen Living Programs; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Administration for Children and Families; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; and the Night Ministry.

may be especially well placed to do preventive work with youth at risk for becoming homeless. Coordination with other city and state agencies to support DCFS and CPS in these efforts is crucial.

➤ **Improve continuity, coordination, and accessibility of services**

Homeless youth have a range of interrelated needs, yet service providers tend to specialize in addressing one or two specific service areas. It is difficult for youth to identify and obtain all the needed services from assorted providers in multiple locations. Furthermore, youth may find that their inability to meet one need, e.g., obtaining identification documents, or transportation, becomes an obstacle to accessing other needed services such as Head Start or job training.

We recommend that the Federal, State and City agencies, service providers, private foundations and homeless youth representatives work together to improve the continuity, coordination, and accessibility of services for homeless youth. Ideally, youth should be able to obtain a variety of related services in one location. However, given the current fiscal constraints and the potentially high costs of such comprehensive services by each service provider, youth would benefit from intensive case management designed to identify providers, coordinate services, and “fill in the gaps” by providing transportation vouchers, assistance with legal documents, and other services necessary to help youth overcome obstacles to accessing existing resources.

➤ **Recognize and address the differing needs of homeless youth subgroups.**

While many of the needs and experiences identified in this survey were expressed by homeless youth across the spectrum of the subgroups, other needs and experiences varied widely among subgroups such as youth who had been in the foster care or juvenile justice system, and youth of different genders and ages. In some cases, these differences simply require a heightened level of sensitivity in service provision, while in other cases, different services are required. Five of the groups that warrant particular attention are youth living on the street, young teens, pregnant and parenting youth, LGBTQ youth, and youth with criminal records.

Youth living on the street

This study exposed a divide between the needs of youth who live on the street and the needs of youth who have found shelter off the street. While both groups lack resources, youth who live on the street were significantly more likely to report having basic needs.

Given the sheer quantity of needs identified by youth living on the street, as well as the degree to which they lack the most basic resources of daily life, a specialized approach to this population is necessary. There needs to be an increase in outreach to youth living in less-accessible locations such as abandoned buildings, parks, trains, and cars in order to assist street youth in meeting their unique and complex needs.

Young teens

Youth ages fourteen to fifteen were significantly less knowledgeable than older youth about where they could seek assistance. This lack of knowledge increases the vulnerability of the youngest homeless youth to abuse and prevents them from accessing available services. These youth were also more likely than older youth to be experiencing crisis homelessness rather than chronic or episodic homelessness. It may well be that young teens in crisis today are tomorrow's chronically homeless youth.

We recommend that specialized outreach to young teenagers be implemented in an "adolescent and youth friendly" manner. This outreach should be designed to publicize the availability of youth services and encourage young teenagers to access them. Outreach methods with this group in particular should address the factors leading to their current homelessness to prevent future or continued lack of safe shelter.

Pregnant and parenting youth

Housing

This study uncovered an extremely high pregnancy/parenting rate among homeless females. Yet, only one shelter in Chicago accepts pregnant and parenting youth under the age of 18, and it can only accommodate five pregnant/parenting girls and five children. We recommend expanding emergency housing options for this population.

Childcare

Nearly one-half of the parenting youth, and over 90% of the youth who were both pregnant and parenting, cited childcare as a current need. Subsidized programs require identification, pay stubs, school records, or other documentation that can be hard for homeless youth to obtain. We recommend that youth applying for subsidized childcare or Head Start be offered assistance in obtaining the documents necessary for enrolling in these programs.

Lack of reliable transportation, as well as lack of access to information about childcare, may also prevent parenting youth from locating and using childcare. We recommend that childcare services be integrated into or coordinated with other homeless youth services.

WIC outreach

A large number of pregnant and parenting youth, virtually all of whom are likely to be eligible, cited WIC as a current need. We recommend implementing targeted outreach to pregnant and parenting youth to inform them of and enroll them in this program. Hospitals and community prenatal clinics that serve homeless youth may be ideal sites for reaching this population.

LGBTQ youth

Some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth have needs that differ in severity and type from the homeless youth population at large. While their needs may appear to mirror those of non-LGBTQ youth, their sexual orientation and/or gender adds an additional layer of challenge to meeting these needs

Transgender youth in particular reported high levels of service needs; they were also more likely to have been arrested and to have been sexually abused.

We recommend an expansion of LGBTQ services for homeless youth, such as drop-in counseling, support groups, and health care sites. We also recommend that the existing hotlines for LGBTQ youth be further publicized in order to help these youth manage conflicts with their families regarding their sexual orientation and obtain the services that they need.

Youth with criminal records

Many youth reported convictions for misdemeanor and felony crimes. However, there appear to be only a small number of providers who assist homeless youth with expungement, and youth may not be aware of this service or know how to find these few providers. We recommend that information about and assistance with record expungement be integrated into existing youth service programs. School re-entry and job training and placement providers may be especially well placed to offer these services.

➤ Improve and expand preventive interventions targeting youth with difficult family relationships.

Nearly 80% of youth identified “bad relationship with family” or “disagreement with family” as a significant factor in their current homelessness. Although state programs to address family stress exist, this research did not obtain information as to the effectiveness of programs or the extent of their coverage. We recommend that the State and City work with schools, community centers, and other sites that interact with youth to raise awareness of the role of family problems in youth homelessness. Providers should be encouraged to offer or refer youth and adults for counseling, support groups, and other assistance in addressing difficulties in family relationships. We also recommend that the State and City work more closely with existing organizations to expand their outreach to youth and their families via schools, churches, and service providers.

➤ **Expand opportunities for education and job training and placement.**

In the survey the youth reported a high level of need for services far beyond those of housing. In particular, large numbers of youth requested educational and job assistance, both when queried about these needs directly and when asked more generally what they wanted to tell the City. The youth clearly demonstrate that they understand the importance of education and employment for escaping from homelessness, yet they report that few of them obtain this crucial assistance. We recommend that outreach be carried out to enroll homeless youth in school or GED programs and expand job training and placement programs tailored to youth.

➤ **Conduct further research about homeless youth.**

While this study was not designed to determine the total number or geographic distribution of homeless youth in Chicago, a census of homeless youth across the state would be instructive in determining the level and location of services needed to assist this population. Furthermore, because this study was restricted to homeless youth in Chicago, homeless youth elsewhere in Illinois may have different needs and perspectives and may face different issues that should be assessed. A complete census of all homeless youth in Illinois to determine the number, location, demographic profile, and service needs of this population would be highly useful.⁵

After completing a statewide census of homeless youth, a regional assessment of services available to meet the needs of these youth should be conducted. This research project found a significant disparity between the needs reported by homeless youth in Chicago and the services available for meeting them. The levels of need and services available may vary considerably between regions and should be determined in order to ensure adequate access to services.

In addition to the data documenting the extent of youth homelessness and the resources and limitations of the current service system, additional research assessing the reasons for youth homelessness and effective means of intervention and prevention is recommended.

➤ **Reassess funding and resources for homeless youth.**

The data from this study in conjunction with a statewide census and data on resources will help government and private funders reassess the level of resources required to address the extensive and complex needs of homeless youth. Funds shifted from other programs may not be able to meet this need; new funds may be necessary in order to de-fragment the existing services and create expanded and coordinated assistance for youth who lack safe and stable housing.

⁵ In the period between the completion of the report and its release, the Illinois Department of Human Services commissioned the University of Illinois at Chicago to conduct a census of homeless youth in the spring of 2005.

In response to the research and this report, the Homeless Youth Advisory Group has proposed the following next steps:

- Convene a youth summit to explore the issues raised in this report.
- Bring existing partners and agencies together to gain a fuller understanding of the youth perspective and to help them better advocate for youths' needs; and to coordinate services to serve homeless youth.
- Create a summary version of the report for youth and adults.
- Incorporate youth advisors into governmental groups on the city, state, and federal levels.
- Use this report to educate legislators about the needs of homeless youth.

CONCLUSION

The needs and resources of homeless youth as documented in this research do not come as a complete surprise to service providers or policymakers involved with this population. The finding of this study that merits particularly close attention is that there are particular groups of homeless youth who are at even greater risk than others because of their age, pregnant/parenting status, sexual orientation, or place of residence. Addressing the needs of these youth requires different outreach efforts and resources than those for other homeless youth.

Although there is scope for improving the continuity, accessibility, and quality of services, existing resources are insufficient to meet the needs of homeless youth. New and expanded resources are necessary to help homeless youth become stable and safely housed and to prepare them for self-sufficiency. The type and amount of resources must be determined through a statewide census of homeless youth. This census will document the number homeless youth who are living in each of the state's regions, their needs, and the resources available for meeting them. The information provided by this census will enable policymakers, service providers, and advocates to judiciously and effectively prioritize needs, develop services, and allocate resources.

INTRODUCTION

Research about the issue of homelessness largely has focused on understanding the characteristics and addressing the needs of homeless adults and families in our communities. Much less research has been conducted to document the characteristics and needs of homeless youth.⁶ In recent years, a number of studies have come out in Illinois that address the situation of homeless adults and families⁷ as well as youth.⁸ Yet there is a lack of data documenting the perspective of homeless youth concerning their own needs. Much of the available information is obtained from interviews with service providers and other professionals. Although such insight into the needs of homeless youth is crucial, it is equally important to know how the youth assess their own needs. Providing services that youth report they need can serve as a gateway to other needed services.⁹

This study was not designed to enumerate or estimate the number of homeless youth in the City of Chicago. Although a census of homeless youth in the entire state would be highly valuable,¹⁰ the purpose of the study was to identify the needs of homeless youth, as identified by homeless youth, by asking the youth directly.

In the summer of 2003, the Chicago Department of Health sponsored a symposium on the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth.¹¹ Discussions during this meeting made it clear that assessing the needs of homeless youth would require looking beyond those who were living in shelters, and that the needs of subgroups within the homeless youth population were likely to vary considerably. In response to this need for more information about homeless youths' needs, the City's Department of Children and Youth Services (CYS) partnered with the Night Ministry,¹² an agency with a history of addressing the needs of marginalized youth, to commission the Center for Impact Research (CIR) to conduct a study of the needs of homeless youth in the City of Chicago. The purpose of this study was to learn what the youth themselves identify as their needs, and to understand the differences in these needs among a variety of subgroups—those experiencing their first episode of homelessness, those cycling in and out of homelessness, and

⁶ For an overview of the literature, see M. Robertson and P. Toro, "Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention and Policy," 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, <http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/progysy/homeless/symposium/3-youth.htm>.

⁷ "Facing Homelessness: A Study of Homelessness in Chicago and the Suburbs," Regional Roundtable on Homelessness: Homeless Needs Assessment Project, 2003.

⁸ "Youth on the Streets and on Their Own: Youth Homelessness in Illinois," Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, 2001.

⁹ Robertson and Toro, p.2.

¹⁰ Such a census is currently being undertaken by the University of Illinois at Chicago.

¹¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Questioning.

¹² The Night Ministry is a non-profit, non-denominational organization that responds to the needs of people on the nighttime streets of Chicago, serving homeless and runaway youth, working poor adults, uninsured and underinsured people seeking medical assistance. It provides direct services, outreach and shelter, as well as advocacy and public policy work and leadership/training on these issues (<http://www.thenightministry.org>).

those experiencing chronic homelessness. Both the non-profit service providers and the City hope that identifying and meeting these needs not only will act as a gateway to other needed services, but also will expedite resolution of problems that result in homelessness and lead to the establishment of permanent, stable, and safe living situations.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

At the outset of the project, CIR met with staff from the Night Ministry and the City of Chicago Departments of Youth Services and Family Support Services to determine the initial scope and focus of the project. First, the groups had to decide on the definition of homelessness to be used for the project. According to the definition of homelessness in the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, individuals have to meet two criteria in order to be considered homeless.¹³ They must lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. And, they must have a primary nighttime residence that is one of the following: a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. However, this definition does not encompass the many precariously housed youth who “couch surf,” staying in homes with friends, relatives, or acquaintances for varying periods of time, but where the length of their stay is temporary or uncertain.

The age range of the youth to be included in this study also had to be determined. In addition, although homeless youth are often defined as being between the ages of 14 and 18, service providers, advocates and policy makers who work with this population have argued that the needs of youth between the ages of 18 and 21 in many ways resemble those of youth under the age of 18 and thus, many of the programs that address the needs of homeless youth include youth between the ages of 14 and 21.

Finally, there was concern that youth living with a parent or guardian should not be included in the survey. The Regional Roundtable on Homelessness documented the needs of this group through a large survey in 2001.¹⁴ Thus, the following working definition of homelessness was adopted for this project:

A youth between the ages of 14 and 21, unaccompanied by a parent or other adult guardian, who is without a permanent, safe, stable place to sleep.

¹³ The Act was signed into law in 1987 and originally consisted of 15 programs providing a range of services to homeless people, including the Continuum of Care Programs: the Supportive Housing Program, the Shelter Plus Care Program, and the Single Room Occupancy Program, as well as the Emergency Shelter Grant Program, <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/rulesandregs/laws/index.cfm>.

¹⁴ “Facing Homelessness: A Study of Homelessness in Chicago and the Suburbs,” Regional Roundtable on Homelessness: Homeless Needs Assessment Project, 2003.

This definition encompasses precariously housed youth who are staying in temporary, unsafe or unstable housing.

It was important that the research be designed to ensure access to a broad range of youth, both in terms of duration of homelessness and the type of current living situation. Recent research on homeless youth commonly uses one of four methods to create a sample of respondents:¹⁵ sampling large groups of teens from the general population and examining the subsample within this group who have been homeless; sampling shelter residents; sampling youth in clinical or medical settings; and sampling youth on the streets where homeless youth tend to assemble. These methods lead to over or under representation of particular subgroups of homeless youth, skewing data depending on the particular subgroup's connection to social services, age, level of deviancy, and the length and frequency of homelessness. Although we were not concerned that the youth sampled in this study precisely mirror the subgroup percentages occurring in the larger population of homeless youth, it was important to those requesting the data that as many different types of homeless youth as possible be included in the study.

The Homeless Youth Task Group of the Chicago Continuum of Care served as the working group during the project, providing guidance on the development of the survey, access to potential youth surveyors and respondents as well as feedback on the analysis of survey data.¹⁶ In addition, an advisory group composed of government policy makers and program personnel and non-profit agency directors provided guidance throughout the project.¹⁷

THE SURVEY

When collecting data from marginalized and at-risk populations, the use of peer surveyors increases the likelihood that potential respondents will choose to participate in the research. Furthermore, respondents often feel more comfortable being interviewed by a peer than by a professional researcher, who may seem unfamiliar and whose intentions may seem unclear or threatening. Twelve youth, nine of whom were homeless, were recruited and trained to interview homeless youth for the project. These youth surveyors were recruited through homeless youth drop-in centers and service providers. There were seven female and five male surveyors, eight between the ages of 16 and 21, and four between the ages of 22 and 26. Five of

¹⁵ Robertson and Toro, p. 2.

¹⁶ Homeless Youth Task Group members are: Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; Unity Parenting/Harmony Village; Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Administration for Children and Families; Thresholds; the Night Ministry; New Moms; and Click Services.

¹⁷ The project's Advisory Group members are: Chicago Department of Human Services; Chicago Continuum of Care; Special Assistant to the Mayor on Homelessness; New Phoenix Assistance Center; Teen Living Programs; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Administration for Children and Families; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; and the Night Ministry.

the surveyors had been living in youth shelters, but by the end of the project, three of the five had to leave the shelters. Three of the female surveyors were pregnant, and two others already had children.

The surveyors attended two-hour training sessions on three consecutive days, during which they learned about survey research methods and the goals of the project. They also practiced administering the survey and made suggestions for its revision. The survey included primarily closed-ended and multiple response questions, with a variety of open-ended questions for obtaining greater detail to enrich the data. The sessions provided in-depth training on appropriate ways to ask questions and query respondents, addressing issues related to ensuring confidentiality and the safety of both surveyors and respondents.

During April and May 2004, surveyors interviewed homeless and precariously housed youth throughout Chicago—at bus stops, fairs and festivals, on trains, streets, and basketball courts, in parks, shelters, schools, homes, drop-in centers, churches, and restaurants. Surveys were completed in approximately 25 to 35 minutes and respondents received a \$10 store gift card as an incentive to participate and in appreciation for their time. Surveyors were paid \$15 for each completed interview. Four hundred surveys were administered in order to achieve statistically significant data at a 95% confidence interval. Of the 400 interviews, nine were discarded due to problems with appropriateness or validity. The youth surveyors spoke to an additional 200 individuals who were determined to be inappropriate for the research, either due to being outside of the age limits (14-21), living with a parent or guardian, or having a permanent and safe place to stay. These individuals were provided with a resource list for homeless and at-risk teens.

In addition to conducting the survey, CIR interviewed homeless youth service providers, advocates, and public policy personnel working at public and private agencies. These interviews provide further information about the needs of homeless youth and the resources currently available to them, as well as ways that the various systems serving homeless might be improved.

The youth surveyors and the project advisory groups reviewed the draft report and provided suggestions for changes and additions to the data analysis and final recommendations.

THE DATA

The 391 surveys were administered to youth in a non-random manner, with the twelve youth surveyors traveling throughout the City to interview youth wherever they encountered them.¹⁸ Thus, the data in this report present an accurate picture of this group of homeless and precariously housed youth. However, we do not know the extent to which the demographics of the respondents, for example, gender, age, education, length of time homeless, reflect those of the larger youth homeless population. Wherever possible, we have presented data from other sources to provide a larger context for the survey data.

Subgroup differences are presented when they are statistically significant ($p < .05$) and when the strength of the relationships is sufficiently strong to merit attention.

In this report, the surveyed youth will be referred to as “homeless youth.” The researchers recognize that some of the youth currently have a place to stay, but in all cases, their housing is unsafe, unstable, or temporary.

¹⁸ Two surveyors who were staying on the west and south sides of the City dropped out before the interviewing began. They were replaced by two youth who were staying primarily on the City’s north side. As a result, the surveyors included six youth who interviewed respondents primarily on the City’s north side, three on the west side, and three on the south side.

DEMOGRAPHICS

AGE

The respondents were between the ages of 14 and 21 years, with just over one-half of the youth age 18 or younger.¹⁹ In terms of their legal status, 40.2% of the youth are minors and 59.8% are adults.

Table 1: Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
14	16	4.1%
15	30	7.7%
16	52	13.3%
17	59	15.1%
18	58	14.8%
19	67	17.1%
20	53	13.6%
21	56	14.3%
Total	391	100.0%

ETHNICITY AND RESIDENCY STATUS

The ethnic identity of the respondents reflected a far larger percentage of non-whites than found in the Chicago or Illinois populations. Although some studies of homeless youth have documented a similar overrepresentation of members of racial or ethnic minorities relative to the local community, others have found no significant differences.²⁰ In this study, the differences are substantial. At 7.7%, the percentage of youth who reported being multi-racial is three to four times higher than as reported for Chicago²¹ or Illinois.²²

¹⁹ Surveyors encountered homeless individuals who were both younger than 14 and older than 21, but because of this study's definition of homeless youth, only persons between the ages of 14 and 21 were interviewed.

²⁰ See Robertson and Toro, p. 6.

²¹ American Community Service Profile, U.S. Census Bureau, 2002.

²² U.S. Census, 2000.

Table 2: Ethnic Background

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent	Chicago Percent	Illinois Percent
African American/Black	187	47.8%	35.8%	15.1%
Hispanic/Latino	111	28.4%	27.9%	12.3%
White/Caucasian	78	19.9%	47.1%	67.8%
Native American	22	5.6%	0.2%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	11	2.8%	4.0%	3.4%
Other	9	2.3%	10.4%	5.8%
Refused/Missing	7	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	391			

*Totals exceed 100% due to respondents selecting multiple ethnic backgrounds.

Most of the respondents reported being U.S. citizens; 1.3% identified their residency status as other than U.S. citizen. A slightly higher percentage of the youth identified their parents as being non-U.S. citizens, although most of their parents are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. Given that only an estimated 84% of Illinois residents are U.S. Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents,²³ the youth in this survey have a disproportionately low percentage of non-citizens/non-permanent residents. However, the available data does not indicate whether this figure is disproportionate to the percentage of non-citizens/non-permanent residents among the general population of homeless youth.

Table 3: Residency Status of Youth and Their Parents

	Youth	Parents
U.S. Citizen	96.7%	90.7%
Legal Permanent Resident	1.0%	4.9%
Other/Refused/Don't Know	1.3%	4.5%
Total	100%	100%

n=387

²³ Derived from census figures for Illinois, available at www.census.gov, and from estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident and non-citizen immigrant population in Illinois provided by Marissa Graciosa, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (interview, August 10, 2004).

GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Gender identity of the respondents was fairly evenly split between female and male, with almost 4.9% of the youth identifying as trans (transgendered/transsexual).²⁴

Table 4: Gender

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Female	189	48.3%
Male	176	45.0%
Trans	19	4.9%
Refused	7	1.8%
Total	391	100.0%

Table 5: Gender by Where Living

	Living in a home	Living on the street	Living in a motel	Living in a shelter*
Female (n=189)	51.3%	24.9%	9.0%	24.3%
Male (n=176)	44.3%	41.5%	10.8%	18.2%
Trans (n= 19)	21.1%	26.3%	36.8%	26.3%
(n=391)				

Total row percentage exceeds 100% due to youth respondents reporting more than one current residence.

*not statistically significant

As reported in a number of homeless youth studies, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are overrepresented when contrasted with the estimated percentage of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Questioning) persons in the general population.²⁵ In this survey, LGBTQ youth comprise one-third of the respondents.

Table 6: Sexual Orientation

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Straight	242	62.0%
Bisexual	76	19.5%
Lesbian	25	6.4%
Gay	24	6.1%
Queer	5	1.2%
Don't Know	7	1.8%
Other	1	*
Refused	10	2.6%
Total	390	100.0%

²⁴ Youth were simply asked to self-identify their gender from among these three options, and so it is not possible to know what definition each youth ascribed to "trans." However, Human Rights Campaign, the largest gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender advocacy organization in the U.S., defines "transgender" as "an overarching term that includes those expressing gender characteristics that don't correspond with characteristics traditionally ascribed to the person's sex or presumed sex, including *transsexuals* (the medical term describing people whose gender and sex do not line up and who often seek medical treatment to bring their bodies and gender identities into alignment) and *cross-dressers* (those who identify with their biological gender but sometimes dress in the clothing of the opposite gender)."

www.hrc.org/Template.cfm?Section=Coming_Out_as_Transgender&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=21795. Accessed on August 24, 2004.

²⁵ "Youth on the Streets and on Their Own: Youth Homelessness in Illinois," p. 9.

EDUCATION

Forty percent of the youth reported being enrolled in school. Of the respondents aged 17 and younger, 56.1% are in school, as compared to 29.5% of those aged 18 and older. The majority of the respondents enrolled in school (58.0%) are in high school; 25.0% are taking GED (General Educational Development - high school equivalency) classes; and 15.4% are in college or vocational educational classes. Less than 1% of respondents (n=3) are enrolled in elementary school.

Although 40% of the respondents are in school, their current educational level extremely low, with only one-third of the having completed their high school/GED program or a higher level of education.

Table 7: Highest Grade Completed for Youth Under 18 Years Old

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
6th	4	2.8%
7th	4	2.8%
8th	12	8.5%
9th	25	17.6%
10th	45	31.7%
11th	41	28.9%
12th/GED	10	7.0%
13th+	1	0.7%
Total	142	100.0%

Table 8: Highest Grade Completed for Youth 18+ Years Old

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
6th	1	0.5%
7th	4	2.1%
8th	5	2.6%
9th	18	9.5%
10th	19	10.0%
11th	39	20.5%
12th/GED	65	34.2%
13th+	39	20.5%
Total	190	100.0%

As would be expected the older youth have achieved a higher level of education than their younger counterparts, although only 54.7% of the youth aged 18 or older have completed high school. Despite older youth having an overall higher level of education than younger youth, a greater percentage of older youth have not attained the educational level standard for their age.²⁶

²⁶ This assumes that a 14-year-old should have at least finished sixth grade, that a 15-year-old should have at least finished seventh grade, and so on. Given that the surveying was done in April and May, a significant percentage of these youth should be one grade higher than we are assuming. Thus, our statistics likely underestimate the percentage of youth who are below the grade level appropriate for their age.

Table 9: Youth Below Appropriate Grade Level by Age

	Percentage Below Grade Level
14 years	12.5%
15 years	6.7%
16 years	7.7%
17 years	13.6%
18 years	20.7%
19 years	38.8%
20 years	49.1%
21 years	66.1%

n=391

With the exception of 14-year-old respondents, as age increases, the percentage of youth who are an educational level below that which is expected for their age, increases dramatically, with almost two-thirds of the youth age 21 below grade level, as compared to less than 15% of the youth age 16 and younger.

EMPLOYMENT

Slightly less than one-third (29.3%) of the youth are working, ranging from fast food and restaurant work to employment as cashiers or in the retail sector. Among youth aged 16 to 17, 23.4% are working; 37.1% of youth between 18 and 21- years old are working. Eleven percent of the youth reported income from panhandling, prostitution, or selling drugs.²⁷

Table 10: Employment

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Cashier	22	19.1%
Retail/sales	20	17.4%
Fast food	14	12.2%
Restaurant	12	10.4%
Prostitution	8	7.0%
Telemarketing	5	4.3%
Interviewer	4	3.5%
Other*	24	20.9%
Refused	6	5.2%
Total	115	100.0%

* Includes jobs with less than 3.5% response including car washer, factory work, maid/housekeeping, panhandling, and selling drugs.

²⁷ Homeless youth employment is also discussed in “Homeless Census and Homeless Youth/Foster Teen Study,” Monterey County Department of Social Services, 2002, p. 49. In this study, 53% to 57% of homeless youth in California found were working, depending on the time of year.

Those youth who are employed work a median of thirty hours per week, with a range from six to sixty-five hours. Their earnings range from \$2.13 per hour to \$15.00 per hour for legal employment, with a mean of \$6.40 per hour. Of the youth reporting earnings above \$13.33 per hour, 80% of their jobs were types of criminal activity. Respondents engaged in non-legal employment (prostitution, drug selling, panhandling) reported earning between \$15.00 and \$150.00 per hour.

Those youth who are staying in a shelter are earning more, on average, than their peers living outside of a shelter. Of youth living in a shelter, 21.1% are earning less than \$6.40 per hour, as compared to 51.3% of their peers living outside of a shelter, while 78.9% of shelter youth are earning between \$6.50 and \$12.50 per hour, as compared to only 38.2% of the youth outside of a shelter.

Table 11: Earnings by Where Living

	Earnings				
	Less than \$5.50/hr.	\$5.50 - \$6.40/hr.	\$6.50 - \$7.50/hr.	\$8.00 - \$12.50/hr.	\$13.33+/hr.
Living in a shelter	15.8%	5.3%	52.6%	26.3%	0.0%
Living outside of a shelter	22.4%	28.9%	25.0%	13.2%	10.5%

n=95

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

Among the homeless youth in this study, 20% reported receiving government assistance, including Food Stamps, TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families), WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), SSI (Supplemental Security Income), and Medicaid.

Table 12: Receiving Government Assistance

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent*
Food Stamps	53	13.6%
WIC	27	6.9%
TANF	17	4.4%
SSI	7	1.8%
Medicaid	6	3.2%
Other	6	3.2%
None	311	79.9%

n=391

*Total percentage for survey responses exceeds 100% due to respondents reporting receipt of more than one form of government assistance.

Food Stamps is the most commonly received benefit for the 10.3% of respondents under age 18 who are receiving any type of government assistance as compared to 26.5% of youth over age 18, who primarily receive Food Stamps, WIC and TANF.

CHILDREN

One-quarter of the survey respondents (24.6%) are parents. Of the male youth, 23.4% have children as compared to 28.0% of the female youth. The respondents have a total of 130 children, with 84% under five years old. Sixty-five of the respondents have one child; 26 have two children; and four have three or more children.

Table 13: Number of Children

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
0 Children	294	75.6%
1 Child	65	16.7%
2 Children	26	6.7%
3+ Children	4	1.1%
Total	389	100.0%

Table 14: Children's Ages

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
<1 year	13	10.0%
1-2 years	61	46.9%
2.5 - 5 years	50	38.5%
6-9 years	6	4.6%
Total	130	100.0%

These rates of parenthood are high when compared with other studies of homeless youth that have recorded rates of 6% to 22%.²⁸ In addition, 26.5% of the female youth surveyed for this project reported being pregnant, which is 6% to 15% higher than pregnancy rates among homeless youth as reported in other studies.²⁹ When rates are examined together, 48.4% of the girls surveyed in this project are either parenting or pregnant. Given these high pregnancy and parenting rates, it is striking that only one shelter in Chicago currently accepts pregnant and parenting youth under the age of 18, and even that shelter has only five cribs available.³⁰

Over 95.6% of the respondents who are parents reported that their children are not living with them; 4.4% said that their children are currently living with them—6.8% of the mothers and 3.5% of the fathers (*see Table 16*).

CURRENT LIVING SITUATION

When asked where they are living, homeless youth gave a wide range of responses, with 13.6% reporting that they are currently living in two to six different places.

²⁸ Robertson and Toro, p. 12.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview with Lacinda Hummel, Policy Director, Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, August 17, 2004..

Table 15: Where Currently Living

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent*
In a relative's home	93	23.8%
Couch surfing	88	22.5%
In a shelter	83	21.2%
In a motel	44	11.3%
On the street	40	10.2%
On a train	36	9.2%
In a car	34	8.7%
In a basement	30	7.7%
In a building (abandoned or under construction)	15	3.8%
In a park	13	3.3%
With a friend	13	3.3%
Other	6	1.5%

n=391

*Total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple current living sites

When the responses are collapsed into a smaller number of categories, almost half of the homeless youth are staying in someone's home either entirely or in combination with other living arrangements. However, in all cases, living "in a home" does not mean a secure, safe, or stable living situation.

Table 16: Where Currently Living

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent*
In a home (couch surfing, with a friend or relative)	180	46.0%
On the street (train, car, basement, park, abandoned building, building under construction)	130	33.2%
In a shelter	83	21.2%
In a motel	44	11.3%
Other	6	1.5%

n=391

*Total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple current living sites.

Just over one-half of the youth reported living with someone else, most often a friend, non-custodial relative, or girlfriend/boyfriend. Seventeen of the youth reported more than one response when asked with whom they were living.

Table 17: With Whom Currently Living

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent*
No one	183	46.9%
Friend	66	16.9%
Relative (adult)	64	16.4%
Girlfriend/Boyfriend	51	13.1%
Other Non-custodial Adult	19	4.9%
Children	17	4.4%
Spouse/Partner	6	1.5%
Other	3	8.0%

n=390

* Total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple current living sites.

LENGTH, FREQUENCY, AND CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

In their interviews, the youth indicated that they have had a range of experiences regarding their patterns of homelessness. About one-fifth of the respondents have been homeless for a month or less in their current episode of homelessness, while over one-half have been homeless in their current episode for over two months.

Table 18: Length of Current Episode of Homelessness

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
1-2 Nights	3	8.0%
3-6 Nights	16	4.1%
1-2 Weeks	31	8.0%
3-4 Weeks	29	7.5%
1-2 Months	109	28.0%
>2 months	201	51.7%
Total	391	100.0%

Although important information, the length of the current episode of homelessness does not indicate the frequency of experiences of homelessness, with almost one-half of the respondents having had more than one episode and the total of all episodes of homelessness ranging from a few days to much of the youth's life.

Almost three-quarters of the youth who have been homeless multiple times have been without safe and stable housing for over a year, with over one-quarter having been homeless for over three years.

Table 19: Total Number of Homeless Episodes

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
1 Time	203	53.2%
2-4 Times	84	22.2%
5+ Times	94	24.7%
Total	381	100.0%

Table 20: Total Length of Time Homeless for Youth with Multiple Homeless Episodes

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
0-2 Months	18	10.0%
3-11 Months	34	18.9%
1-3 Years	81	45.0%
>3 Years	47	26.1%
Total	180	100.0%

As might be expected, older homeless youth have been homeless more often than the younger youth. Just over one-third (35.6%) of the 14 and 15-year-old youth were homeless at least once before, as compared to slightly over one-half (55.1%) of the youth aged 20 and 21.

The longer the youth are homeless, the less likely they are to be living on the street, with the exception of youth who have been homeless for one to two weeks or one to two months.³¹

Table 21: Length of Time Homeless for Youth Living on/off the Street

	1-2 nights	3-6 nights	1-2 weeks	3-4 weeks	1-2 months	>2 months
Living on street	66.7%	43.8%	54.8%	34.5%	27.5%	31.3%
Not living on street	33.3%	56.3%	45.2%	65.5%	72.5%	68.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	n=3	n=16	n=31	n=29	n=109	n=201

Based on the survey data, the respondents were grouped as experiencing one of three types of homelessness:

- Initial Crisis Homelessness: Youth who have not been homeless before and their current episode of homelessness has been less than two months.

³¹ For the remainder of the report, the categories from Table 5 are used to describe where youth are living: in a *home* (couch surfing or with a friend or relative); on the *street* (in a train, car, basement, park, abandoned building or building under construction); in a *shelter*; or in a *motel*.

- Episodic Homelessness: Youth who have been homeless more than once, with the total of all homeless episodes being less than one year.
- Chronic Homelessness: Youth who have not been homeless before and whose current episode of homelessness is longer than two months; or youth who have been homeless before and whose total time homeless is more than one year.

Using these definitions, slightly over half of the respondents are experiencing chronic homelessness; almost one-third are experiencing initial crisis homelessness; and 13.9% are experiencing episodic homelessness. The only age subgroup that deviates from this pattern is the youngest (age 14 to 15). Among this group, almost one-half of the respondents are experiencing initial crisis homelessness, as compared to slightly over one-third in the category of chronic homelessness.

Table 22: Category of Homelessness

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Initial Crisis	126	32.9%
Episodic	52	13.6%
Chronic	205	53.5%
Total	383	100.0%

The distribution of youth in these categories for the total population of homeless youth cannot be determined using these data, given the survey methods used in this study. However, unlike some previous research concerning homeless youth in which differences in categories of homeless youth were reported when comparing youth in shelters and on the street, data from this study did not show any significant differences in categories of homelessness for youth in shelters, on the streets, in homes, or motels.

Age, however, had a significant relationship with homelessness category. While the ranking of homelessness categories for youth who are minors and those 18 years or older is the same, the percentage of minor youth experiencing chronic homelessness was 13.5% lower than that of youth aged 18 and older, while minor youth experiencing crisis homelessness was 11.2% lower.

Table 23: Category of Homelessness by Age

	Youth Under Age 18	Youth Age 18+
Crisis	39.6%	28.4%
Episodic	14.9%	12.7%
Chronic	45.5%	59.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

n=383

When asked what led to their current homelessness, youth reported many factors, with over one-half of the youth attributing their situation to three or more factors.

Table 24: What Led to Current Homelessness

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent*
Bad relationship with family	156	40.5%
Disagreement with family	147	38.2%
Being shut out/locked out	136	35.3%
Domestic violence	104	27.1%
Family economics	92	23.9%
Drug/alcohol use by family	80	20.8%
Parental neglect	79	20.5%
Emot/phys/sexual abuse	71	18.4%
Sexual orientation	52	13.5%
Drug/alcohol use by you	51	13.2%
Bad relationship, non-family	46	11.9%
Being pregnant	43	11.2%
Change in parents housing	38	9.9%
Being a parent	23	6.0%
Personal economics/choice	18	4.7%
Mental problems/illness	16	4.2%
DCFS ³² not listening/visiting	16	4.2%
	n=385	

*“My mother’s new husband hated me.
That was the reason.”*

*- Female, age 18,
homeless for five years*

“[My] parents moved away without me.”

*- Transgender, age 17,
homeless for six years*

*“[There is a] perception that the youth want
to be homeless...that isn’t true. They’ve
‘chosen’ to be homeless in whatever way
because it feels safer than the original
environment. They are making the best
choices they think they can.”*

*- Sandra Reyes, Project
Director, Counseling
Center of Lakeview*

*Total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple factors leading to homelessness.

Although 64.8% of the youth reported ever being abused, slightly over one-fourth (26.8%) of these abused youth said that it was a factor that led to their homelessness. Similarly, 35.0% of the youth reported a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, and almost one-third (32.8%) of these respondents said that this factor led to their homeless status. However, in the case of pregnancy, 51 of the female youth reported being pregnant, and 43 of these same respondents reported their pregnancy as a factor leading to their homelessness, although we are not able to determine from the data whether it was their current or a previous pregnancy that was a contributing factor.

The respondents were last raised primarily by parents, with grandparents and other relatives accounting for an additional 30% of the youth.³³

³² Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

³³ The question was worded “Who last raised you” in case youth had multiple adults who were responsible over a period of time for raising them.

Table 25: Who Last Raised You

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Parents	220	56.6%
Grandparents	71	18.2%
Other Relatives	47	12.0%
Friends	26	6.6%
Foster Parents	11	2.8%
Adoptive Parents	9	2.3%
Self	3	0.8%
DCFS	2	0.5%
Total	389	100.0%

Although a popular perception is that many of our homeless youth find their way to the city from more rural settings or come from other states, nearly 80% of the respondents came from Chicago and another 8.2% from suburbs of Chicago.

Table 26: Location of Home Prior to Homelessness

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Chicago	310	79.7%
Chicago suburb	32	8.2%
Illinois (not Chicago or Chicago suburb)	3	0.8%
Out-of-state	44	11.3%
Total	389	100.0%

Of those youth who came from outside of Illinois, 35% were from the Midwest, with the remaining 65% coming from 13 states across the U.S., as well as Puerto Rico and Asia. When youth who were not from Chicago were asked why they came here, a large percentage responded that they believed that Chicago offered better opportunities, or that they came with people with whom they had a significant connection (friends, family, partners), while only a few responded that they came to Chicago to get away from family.

Table 27: Why Non-Chicagoan Youth Came to Chicago

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent	
Better opportunities/ wanted to be in city	19		<i>“Friends brought me for better opportunities for my son and I.” - Male, age 17, homeless for six months</i>
Came with friends	11	15.3%	
Work/school	8	11.1%	
To get away from family	7	9.7%	
Came with partner*/other parent of kid(s)	7	9.7%	
Came with family	6	8.3%	
Came for prostitution/drugs	6	8.3%	
Other/refused	8	11.1%	
Total	72	100.0%	
	n=72		

*Includes boyfriends, girlfriends, spouses

STATE CHILD WELFARE

Of the respondents, 13.4% have been involved with Substitute Care through the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) compared with 0.6% of all Illinois youth under the age of 18.³⁴ However, 21.7% of the youth experiencing chronic homelessness had been in DCFS foster care, a group home, or adopted compared with 3% to 4% of the youth who are experiencing crisis or episodic homelessness.

A number of studies have discussed the connection between involvement in the child welfare system and later experiences of homelessness, focusing on the similarity between the factors leading to involvement in the child welfare system and those leading to homelessness, including parental neglect, parental substance abuse, and domestic violence.³⁵

³⁴ Derived from census figures for Illinois, available at www.census.gov, and from Substitute Care figures from the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services, available at www.state.il.us/dcfs/foster/index.shtml. Accessed on August 10, 2004.

³⁵ See “Homeless Census and Homeless Youth/Foster Teen Study;” “Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention and Policy,” p. 8; and “Youth on the Streets and on Their Own: Youth Homelessness in Illinois,” p.8-9.

Table 28: Reason for Involvement with DCFS

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Parental substance abuse	13	25.0%
Abandoned/locked out	7	13.5%
Parental neglect	6	11.5%
Domestic violence	6	11.5%
Other family problems	5	9.6%
DCFS investigation	3	5.8%
Ran away	2	3.8%
Other	6	11.5%
Refused/don't know	3	5.8%
Total	52	100.0%

Of the respondents who were in foster care, a group home, or adopted, 28.8% reported their reason for being homeless as the same as that which led to their involvement with DCFS. Reasons cited by these youth for both situations most frequently were parental neglect, drug abuse by family, domestic violence, and other family problems.

An area of current concern involves youth who become too old for the child welfare system but lack the necessary life skills to function independently and secure safe housing and employment.³⁶ Just under 10% of the youth who had contact with DCFS in this study reported that they had “aged out” of the system.³⁷ In the case of the 52 respondents who were involved with DCFS, almost one-half reported running away or leaving their foster care, group home, or adopted home before they had aged out due to being uncomfortable or unaccepted by their family or peers. This reported discomfort or lack of acceptance ranged dramatically in severity, from “I didn’t like the people where I was staying” to “they wanted to do unnecessary mental tests on me.”

³⁶ “Homeless Census and Homeless Youth/Foster Teen Study,” p. 66.

³⁷ For those DCFS wards who do not return to their homes or are not adopted (or cared for by a subsidized guardian), their cases are closed by a judge when they become “an adult,” and they are no longer considered wards of the State. In Cook County, this tends to happen close to a youth’s twenty-first birthday, while in other parts of Illinois, it tends to be closer to 18. This process is referred to as “aging out” of the system. In addition, DCFS has a Youth Housing Assistance Program available to former DCFS wards up to age 21 to help them find housing within 6 months of their case being closed due to ‘aging out’ of the system. There also are limited funds available to help these youth move into new housing (such as for security deposits) as well as a crisis cash assistance program. Interview with Ted Ernst, Youth Housing Assistance Coordinator, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, August 31, 2004.

Table 29: Reason for Leaving DCFS

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Not comfortable/to get out/ran away	23	46.0%
Left with parents	6	12.0%
Got too old	5	10.0%
Placed elsewhere	3	6.0%
Abuse (by adults and/or kids)	3	6.0%
Successfully discharged	2	4.0%
Other	5	10.0%
Refused/don't know	3	6.0%
Total	50	100.0%

SHELTERS

Slightly more than 40% of the respondents have stayed in shelters at some time. When asked to evaluate their last experience in a shelter, responses ranged widely from excellent to terrible.

**Table 30:
Last Shelter Experience**

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Excellent	11	7.1%
Good	20	13.0%
Okay	60	39.0%
Bad	29	18.8%
Terrible	34	22.1%
Total	154	100.0%

Nearly three-fifths (57.3%) of the respondents who have stayed in a shelter reported having had a bad experience. When asked what happened that led to this assessment, 44.2% reported experiences involving dangerous conditions and a severe lack of safety.

Table 31: Cause for Bad Shelter Experience

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent	
Violence	3	3.5%	Concerns about safety and security 44.2%
Raped	6	7.0%	
Fighting	12	14.0%	
Safety problems	3	3.5%	
Theft	14	16.3%	
Abusive/disrespectful staff	8	9.3%	Poor management 31.4%
Confusion/disorganization/bad case management	7	8.1%	
Cold/bad smell/rats/sleep on floors/crowded	9	10.5%	
Bad food	3	3.5%	
Religious coercion	4	4.7%	Rules and regulations 16.3%
Restrictive rules	3	3.5%	
Discharged/forced to leave	7	8.1%	Other 16.2%
Other/refused	7	8.1%	
Total	86	100.0%	

When asked what they expected from shelters, responses included “a place to sleep” and “food” as well as a variety of other services and conditions.

Table 32: Shelter Expectations

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent*
Shelter/bed/sleep	121	37.0%
Decent food	82	25.1%
Good environment	57	17.4%
Good staff/caseworker	52	15.9%
Safety	52	15.9%
Job/school help	36	11.0%
Help finding housing	35	10.7%
Living skills	30	9.2%
Clothing	27	8.3%
Showers	13	4.0%
More freedom	8	2.4%
Help with ID	8	2.4%
Storage	5	1.5%
Help with government assistance	5	1.5%
Other (includes "everything," "expects bad things," and "address/phone")	9	2.8%
Don't know/don't use	51	15.6%
Refused	13	4.0%

*“Stability, comfort, compassion. I think it should be a friendly, helpful, safe place to stay.”
- Female, age 18, homeless for five years*

n=327

*Total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple expectations.

ARRESTS AND ILLEGAL BEHAVIOR

A little less than one-half of the youth (46.5%) reported having been arrested. As the length and frequency of homeless episodes increase, so does the likelihood that respondents have been arrested, with 55% of those who are chronically homeless reporting having been arrested, as compared to 48% of the episodic homeless, and 33% of the initial crisis homeless youth. Respondents have been charged and convicted of crimes ranging from violating curfew to attempted murder.

Table 33: Arrests and Convictions

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent*	Percentage of Arrests that Led to Convictions
Drugs - possession and/or selling	72	39.6%	62.5%
Shoplifting/ stealing/ robbery/ possession of stolen goods	40	22.0%	52.5%
Prostitution/ selling sex	25	13.7%	76.0%
Assault and/or battery	14	7.7%	28.6%
Trespassing/ criminal trespassing	14	7.7%	35.7%
Fighting/ disorderly conduct	8	4.4%	25.0%
Weapons	8	4.4%	75.0%
Curfew	7	3.8%	14.3%
Domestic violence	6	3.3%	16.7%
DUI	6	3.3%	100.0%
Car theft	5	2.7%	60.0%
Aggravated battery	4	2.2%	75.0%
Attempted murder	3	1.6%	33.3%
Other	3	1.6%	0.0%
Refused	7	3.8%	

n=182

*Total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple arrests.

Of the 96 youth who had ever been convicted of a crime, 31.2% were minors at the time they completed the survey, indicating that their convictions involved the juvenile justice system. This represents just under 8% of all youth surveyed. Since youth were not asked how old they were when they were convicted, it is likely that some non-minors who reported past convictions were younger than eighteen at the time they were actually convicted. Taking this into account, 8% should be viewed as the minimum proportion of homeless youth who experienced involvement with the juvenile justice system; the true proportion may be significantly higher.

When controlling for gender, males and trans youth have been arrested at significantly higher rates than female youth.

Table 34: Arrests by Gender

	Male	Female	Trans	Total
I've been arrested	56.8%	37.0%	52.6%	46.5%
I've never been arrested	42.6%	63.0%	47.4%	52.7%

n=391

Furthermore, as length of homelessness increases, so does likelihood of being arrested. While 33.3% of youth experiencing initial crisis homelessness had ever been arrested, 55.6% of youth experiencing chronic homelessness had been arrested.

Youth were asked specifically about whether they had engaged in stealing, selling or trading sex, and selling or trading drugs for a place to stay or some other resource. The numbers are high of youth reporting all three behaviors. However, the differences between males and females regarding selling or trading sex and selling or trading drugs are significant.

Table 35: Percent Youth Engaged in Stealing, Selling/Trading Sex or Selling/Trading Drugs

	Stealing*	Selling/ Trading Sex	Selling/ Trading Drugs
All Respondents	58.2%	24.2%	51.5%
Female Respondents	50.3%	30.9%	43.4%
Male Respondents	53.6%	12.7%	61.1%
n=	388	385	388

*differences in stealing by gender are statistically insignificant (p>.05)

Female and male youth reported similar levels of stealing, but female youth had engaged in selling or trading sex at almost 2.5 the rate of the male youth, and male youth had engaged in selling or trading drugs at almost 1.5 the rate of the female youth. One other subgroup difference was observed regarding trading or selling drugs. Those youth experiencing episodic homelessness reported the highest level, with 63.5% trading or selling drugs, as compared to 59.4% of those experiencing chronic homelessness, and 34.1% of those experiencing initial crisis homelessness.

ABUSE

Almost two-thirds (65.1%) of the respondents reported having been abused. Female respondents reported higher rates of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. However, the largest difference in rates of abuse pertains to sexual abuse, where female respondents reported abuse at a rate more than 2.5 times higher than males.

Table 36: Percent Youth that Experienced Emotional, Physical and/or Sexual Abuse by Gender

	Emotional Abuse *	Physical Abuse*	Sexual Abuse
All	53.5%	50.1%	26.6%
Female	58.0%	53.2%	36.4%
Male	50.9%	47.4%	13.9%
Trans	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
n=	387	387	384

*Differences in physical and emotional abuse by gender are statistically insignificant ($p > .05$)

Another important difference among subgroups regarding abuse is that as age decreases, the percentage reporting experience of abuse increases sharply.

Table 37: Percent Youth that Experienced Emotional, Physical or Sexual Abuse by Age

	14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
Youth experienced some form of Abuse	84.4%	70.0%	61.8%	54.6%	64.8%
n=	45	110	123	108	386

NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH

An important focus of this research was to learn from homeless youths their own perspective on their needs. Youth were asked about their needs in general, and then were queried about 46 potential needs. Youth reported high levels of service needs, averaging 12.6 needs per respondent.

Table 38: Current Needs of Homeless Youth

Current Needs	Percent Reporting Need*	Current Needs	Percent Reporting Need*
Permanent housing	94.9%	Mental health/counseling	17.4%
Free transportation	79.5%	Connection to family	16.5%
Job placement	75.1%	Peer counseling	15.3%
Clothing	67.1%	Child care**	15.3%
Job training	66.0%	Education-elem/high school	14.4%
Medical services for self	59.2%	WIC**	13.3%
Food	57.6%	Substance abuse services	12.8%
Place to do laundry	55.5%	Clearing record of felony	12.5%
Phone number/address	55.2%	Medical services for child	11.9%
Place to store belongings	52.9%	LGBTQ services	10.7%
Place to shower	45.3%	Parenting support**	10.2%
Dental services	44.9%	Pregnancy services**	9.7%
Getting legal documentation	39.4%	HIV services	9.2%
Hygiene kits	37.2%	Head Start/Early Head Start	8.2%
Condoms	34.1%	Protection from gangs	8.2%
Education-GED	30.3%	Child's education	7.7%
Temporary housing	29.6%	Getting out of the sex trade	6.9%
Life skills, not services	29.3%	Disability services	5.9%
Money management skills	25.4%	DV services	4.9%
Optometry services	24.6%	Getting kids back from DCFS	2.8%
Education-vocational	23.3%	Education-ESL	2.0%
Legal services	19.5%		

*The total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple needs. Total number of respondents = 385-391, depending on the question from which the data were derived.

**One respondent said "maybe" to needing pregnancy services, parenting support, childcare and WIC. If included as a "yes," each of these responses would increase by 0.3%.

*"I need permanent housing to get me out of the streets,
food, clothes, some place warm."*

- Male, age 19, homeless for more than two months

*"The real question is what
I don't need because I need a lot."*

- Female, age 15

"School, job, home, love."

- Female, age 19, homeless for seven months.

Although many of the needs were reported consistently across the various subgroups of respondents, other needs showed significant differences, depending on the age, living situation, and identity of the respondents. Living on the streets, gender, age, and category of homelessness (chronic, episodic, periodic) were the most frequent differentiating factors. The following section identifies the needs that differed significantly from the overall levels of need.

HOUSING

Permanent housing, the most frequent need reported by the youth, increases in importance to respondents as age increases.

Table 39: Need Permanent Housing

By Age (n=390)				
14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
87.0%	93.7%	96.8%	97.2%	94.9%

Temporary housing, reported as a current need by 29.6% of all youth surveyed, was identified as a need by 48.5% of youth living on the street.

Chicago providers concurred that housing is a pressing need for this population, but one that frequently goes unmet due to a lack of shelter beds and low-cost housing as well as discrimination. Jessica Dubuar, PATH Program Coordinator at Howard Brown Health Center, and Lacinda Hummel, Policy Director at the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, both stressed that the shortage of Chicago shelters for minors is a serious obstacle. Dubuar said that due to heavy demand, "It is practically impossible to get anyone in [at existing youth shelters]." ³⁸ Hummel noted that even if a minor is able to secure a place in a temporary shelter, "there is currently no housing available where youth under 18 can stay for more than 120 days,

³⁸ Interview, June 2, 2004

and this isn't really long enough for a lot of them to transition to independence."³⁹ Hummel added that older youth also face barriers to securing housing, encountering discrimination from landlords even when they are able to afford the rent: "There is a need for advocacy with landlords and guidance for youth in how to approach landlords so they can actually rent an apartment."⁴⁰

FOOD AND CLOTHING

Food and clothing were reported as current needs by well over one-half of the respondents (57.6% and 67.1% respectively) and the percentages jumped dramatically when controlling for gender and residence.

Table 40: Need Food

By Gender (n=389)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
49.7%	61.4%	89.5%	57.6%

Table 41: Need Food

By Residence (n=389)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
89.2%	41.7%	57.6%

Almost one-half of the males reported needing food, over 60% of the females, and nearly 90% of the trans youth, as well as almost 90% of the youth on the street.

Table 42: Need Clothing

By Gender (n=389)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
69.9%	60.4%	100.0%	67.1%

Table 43: Need Clothing

By Residence (n=389)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
91.5%	54.8%	67.1%

More male youth reported a need for clothing than female youth; all trans youth reported this need. Again, youth on the street reported needing clothing much more often than those not on the street.

HEALTH CARE

Youth were asked about a number of different types of health service needs, and responses varied significantly, based on residence, gender, age, and homelessness category. Almost three-

³⁹ Interview, August 17, 2004.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

quarters of all youth on the street reported needing medical services for themselves, as compared to just over one-half of the youth not on the street. Twice as many youth living on the street reported the need for hygiene kits than youth living elsewhere.

Table 44: Need Medical Services

By Residence (n=387)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
72.7%	52.5%	59.2%

Table 45: Need Hygiene Kits

By Residence (n=387)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
58.9%	26.4%	37.2%

Condoms were reported as being needed by almost twice as many males as females, and slightly under half of the youth living on the street, compared to just over one-quarter of the youth living elsewhere.

Table 46: Need Condoms

By Gender (n=387)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
40.9%	23.2%	68.4%	34.1%

Table 47: Need Condoms

By Residence (n=387)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
48.1%	27.1%	34.1%

The need for HIV services was reported by many 9.2% of respondents, compared to 34.1% who said they needed condoms. However, once again, the need for HIV services among males and trans youth and those living on the street was significantly higher than the need as reported by females and those off the street.

Table 48: Need HIV Services

By Gender (n=391)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
9.1%	7.9%	26.3%	9.2%

Table 49: Need HIV Services

By Residence (n=391)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
14.6%	6.5%	9.2%

Almost twice as many youth reported needing dental services as optometry services. As the age of homeless youth increases, so does the percentage of them reporting a need for dental services. Reported need for optometry services, on the other hand, does not increase with the age of the respondents. However, there was significant difference in need for optometry services based on gender, with trans and male youth both reporting higher levels of need for this service than that reported by female youth.

Table 50: Need Dental Services

By Age (n=385)				
14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
31.1%	37.3%	49.2%	53.7%	44.9%

Table 51: Need Optometry Services

By Gender (n=391)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
28.4%	18.5%	36.8%	24.6%

Needs for substance abuse services varied significantly depending on homelessness category, residence, and age. Those youth experiencing initial crisis homelessness reported much lower levels of need in this area compared with those youth experiencing episodic or chronic homelessness. Youth on the street reported a need for substance abuse services at twice the level of those youth not on the street. And as the age of respondents increases, so does the reported need for substance abuse services, with 20 to 21-year old respondents reporting a need for substance abuse services over four times the level reported by 14 and 15-year-old youth. Sue Mackey, Manager of Youth Facilities for Teen Living Programs, noted that youth between 18 and 21 often face an additional barrier to obtaining effective substance abuse services because they are generally referred to adult treatment centers, despite the fact that an adolescent model may be more appropriate.⁴¹

Table 52: Need Substance Abuse Services

By Homelessness Category (n=383)			
Crisis	Episodic	Chronic	Total
6.3%	17.3%	15.6%	12.8%

Table 53: Need Substance Abuse Services

By Residence (n=383)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
20.0%	9.2%	12.8%

Table 54: Need Substance Abuse Services

By Age (n=385)				
14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
4.3%	11.7%	12.0%	18.3%	12.8%

Like substance abuse services, need for disability services varied significantly depending on homelessness category, residence, and age. The largest differences were by homelessness category and age. Youth experiencing chronic homelessness reported needing disability services five to ten times more frequently than youth experiencing crisis or episodic homelessness. And as the age of the homeless youth increases, the need for these services also increases, with those in the oldest age group reporting a need for disability services over 100 times more frequently than respondents in the youngest age group. Once again, the level of need for this type of service is much higher among youth living on the street as compared to those living in other situations.

⁴¹ Interview, May 25, 2004.

Table 55: Need Disability Services

By Homelessness Category (n=381)

Crisis	Episodic	Chronic	Total
0.8%	1.9%	10.3%	6.0%

Table 56: Need Disability Services

By Residence (n=389)

On Street	Not on Street	Total
10.0%	3.9%	5.9%

Table 57: Need Disability Services

By Age (n=389)

14-17	18-19	20-21	Total
0.1%	8.1%	11.0%	5.9%

COUNSELING AND SOCIAL SERVICES

When asked about counseling, either traditional mental health services or peer counseling, 15% to 17% of youth reported a need for these services. Again, youth living on the street were twice as likely to report a need for these services as homeless youth living elsewhere.

Table 58: Need Mental Health Services / Counseling

By Residence (n=390)

On Street	Not on Street	Total
26.2%	13.1%	17.4%

Table 59: Need Peer Counseling

By Residence (n=391)

On Street	Not on Street	Total
23.1%	11.5%	15.3%

Self-reports, however, may underestimate the true need for mental health services in this population. Gwen Mastin, CEO and President of the New Phoenix Assistance Center, observed that most homeless youth “don’t recognize that they need counseling—who they are, why they are, what they are supposed to be. There is no parental involvement and thus no guidance. All the things that you see in good childhood development don’t take place.”⁴²

Although 10.7% of all respondents reported needing LGBTQ services,⁴³ when looking only at those youth who do not identify as straight, 29.7% reported needing LGBTQ services. Significantly higher percentages of male and trans respondents reported needing LGBTQ services than female respondents, with over one-third of male youth and one-half of the trans youth reporting this need.

⁴² Interview, May 20, 2004.

⁴³ These services may include case management, counseling, psychotherapy, social activities, support groups, HIV/AIDS treatment, general health and medical services, safe space, social support, and workshops. Interview with Jessica Dubuar, PATH Program Coordinator, Howard Brown Health Center, September 1, 2004.

Table 60: Need LGBTQ Services

By Gender (n=138)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
34.8%	21.9%	56.3%	29.7%

The need for life skills, which include money management, laundry, shopping, anger management, and negotiating skills, was reported by over 25% of the youth. According to Mackey, this need is often misinterpreted by agencies that serve homeless youth: “Lots of agencies experience resistance from clients and think that there is a lack of desire or motivation, but they [homeless youth] don’t know how to do it—make a bed, get around the city. It’s been an embarrassment, and they can’t say so comfortably.”⁴⁴ Males and trans youth as well as youth living on the street reported higher levels of need for these services than females and youth living off the streets.

Table 61: Need Life Skills

By Gender (n=389)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
31.8%	24.1%	42.1%	29.3%

Table 62: Need Life Skills

By Residence (n=389)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
38.0%	25.0%	29.3%

Over 25% of the youth also reported needing money management skills, but rather than this need varying by gender or residence, it was closely correlated with age, with an increase in need as age increased.

Table 63: Need Money Management Skills

By Age (n=390)				
14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
17.4%	18.0%	29.8%	31.2%	25.4%

Relatively few youth reported needing domestic violence services or help getting out of the sex trade. However, over one-quarter of trans youth reported the need for domestic violence services; the need for help getting out of the sex trade was significantly lower for youth staying in shelter as compared to those on the street, in motels and homes.

⁴⁴ Interview, May 25, 2004.

Table 64: Need Domestic Violence Services

By Gender (n=391)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
4.5%	3.2%	26.3%	4.9%

Table 65: Need Help Getting Out of Sex Trade

By Residence (n=391)		
In Shelter	Not in Shelter	Total
2.4%	8.1%	6.9%

EDUCATION

A significant number of youth reported needing help with their education. A total of 14.4% of all respondents reported needing educational resources or services, with higher percentages of younger youth and those on the streets reporting this need as compared to older youth and those who are living off the streets.

Table 66: Need Elementary or High School Education

By Age (n=390)				
14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
31.1%	18.9%	9.6%	8.3%	14.4%

Table 67: Need Elementary or High School Education

By Residence (n=390)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
23.3%	10.0%	14.4%

When looking at youth who are not in school, these numbers increase to even higher levels, with 52.4% of 14-15 year-olds and 23.5% of the male youth who are not in school reporting a need for help in this area. High levels of need for help with GED and vocational educational services were also reported by the youth.

Table 68: Need GED Classes

By Residence (n=391)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
38.5%	26.2%	30.3%

Table 69: Need Vocational Education

By Age (n=390)				
14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
15.2%	15.3%	27.2%	30.3%	23.3%

Levels of need for help with GED and vocational education are higher for older youth, as well as for youth who are living on the street.

EMPLOYMENT

The desire for help in preparing for and securing employment was extremely high among the youth. Two-thirds reported a need for job training or job readiness services, and three-quarters said that they needed job placement services. The only significant difference in the reported

need for job placement services had to do with residence. Youth living on the street reported needing job placement at a significantly higher percentage than those not living on the street.

Table 70: Need Job Placement Services

By Residence (n=390)				
On Street	Shelter*	Home	Motel	Total
83.7%	79.5%	68.9%	63.6%	75.1%
				%

*not significant at p<.05

PREGNANCY AND PARENTING

When examining the needs related to pregnancy and parenting, we looked separately at three groups of youth: the 96 youth (24.6%) who have children; the 51 (13.0%) who are currently pregnant; and the 13 (3.3%) who are both pregnant and parenting.

Youth in all three groups reported needing parenting support, with slightly over one-quarter of those with children, slightly less than one-third of those who are pregnant, and over one-half of those who are both pregnant and parenting.

Table 71: Need Support with Parenting

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Parenting youth (n=96)	26	27.1%
Pregnant youth (n=51)	16	31.4%
Pregnant and parenting youth (n=13)	7	53.8%

The need for childcare was reported by a large percentage of the parenting youth, with almost one-half responding that they needed this service. Because most of the respondents who are parents are not living with their children, the need for daycare may apply to children who are residing with friends or family. It may also refer to the daycare that the respondents would need in order to be able to care adequately for their children.

The only significant subgroup differences regarding the need for childcare were for parents in terms of gender, with almost twice as many females (62.3%) reporting this need as males (31.7%). And for mothers who are also pregnant, the level of need jumped dramatically, with over 90% stating that they needed this service.

Table 72: Need Childcare

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Parenting youth (n=96)	46	47.9%
Pregnant and parenting youth (n=13)	12	92.3%

A similar pattern was found when looking at the need for Head Start/Early Head Start and child education resources. One-quarter to one-third of the parenting youth reported a need for these services. However, 84% to 93% of youth who are both parenting and pregnant said that they needed these resources. As with the need for childcare, many more mothers (45.3%) reported needing Head Start/Early Head Start services as compared to father (17.1%).

Table 73: Need Head Start/Early Head Start

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Parenting youth (n=96)	31	32.3%
Pregnant and parenting youth (n=13)	12	92.3%

Table 74: Need Child Education Resources

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Parenting youth (n=96)	25	26.0%
Pregnant and parenting youth (n=13)	11	84.6%

Over 25% of the youth with children reported needing help to access WIC services (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), while over twice that percentage of pregnant youth and those youth who are pregnant and parenting reported needing help with accessing WIC.⁴⁵

Table 75: Need WIC

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
Parenting youth (n=96)	27	28.1%
Pregnant youth (n=51)	31	60.8%
Pregnant and parenting youth (n=13)	9	69.2%

Those parenting youth who live in a home expressed a far greater need for WIC than parents who did not live in a home (41.7% as compared to 14.6%). Similarly, pregnant youth living in homes had a much higher rate of need for WIC services (75.0%) as compared to those not living in a home (36.8%). And pregnant youth who are living in shelter have a significantly lower percentage of need for WIC services (22.2%) compared to their peers living outside of shelter.

⁴⁵ Depending on income and other factors, children are eligible for WIC until age five.

Finally, a small percentage (10.4%) of youth who are parents responded that they needed help getting their children back from DCFS. Over six times as many parenting females reported this need (15.1%) than parenting males (2.4%).

LEGAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND OTHER SERVICES

The need for legal services was reported by almost one-half (48.6%) of all respondents as well as within each of the subgroups examined. However, a significantly greater need was reported for a number of these services by males and trans youth, those on the street, and with increasing age, although these differences were not present for all service needs.

The need for legal documents—birth certificates, driver’s licenses, and social security cards—was reported by 39.4% of the youth. Without these documents, youth are often unable to obtain employed and housing and access certain services and resources. Youth who are older and living on the street reported a greater level of need for legal documents than those who are younger and living off the street.

**Table 76:
Need Legal Documentation**

By Age (n=391)				
14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
32.6%	29.7%	42.4%	48.6%	39.4%

**Table 77:
Need Legal Documentation**

By Residence (n=391)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
57.7%	30.3%	39.4%

The need for legal services or representation was reported by almost 20% of the youth. Once again, youth who are older reported a greater need for legal services as did male and trans youth.

Table 78: Need Legal Services

By Age (n=389)				
14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
13.0%	10.9%	20.2%	30.3%	19.5%

Table 79: Need Legal Services

By Gender (n=389)			
Male	Female	Trans	Total
21.8%	14.8%	26.3%	19.5%

A felony record creates barriers to securing housing, employment, and other services. The need for legal services to clear a felony from their records⁴⁶ was reported by 12.5% of the youth. Male

⁴⁶ Expunging crimes from a juvenile record requires that the youth appear in person at Juvenile Court after filing Notice and Petition forms for each arrest. Youth must be at least 17 years old or at the end of their court case or sentence,

and trans youth and those living on the street or in a motel have significantly higher needs for this service than female youth or those living in homes or in shelter.

Table 80: Need Clearing Record of Felony

By Gender (n=389)

Male	Female	Trans	Total
19.9%	3.7%	21.1%	12.5%

Table 81: Need Clearing Record of Felony

By Residence (n=391)

On Street	Not on Street	Total
19.2%	9.2%	12.5%

Table 82: Need Clearing Record of Felony

By Residence (n=391)

In Motel	Not in Motel	Total
22.7%	11.2%	12.5%

Finally, 32 of the youth reported needing protection from gangs. For youth who are members of a gang, they may be expected or required to engage in particular activities with other gang members or on behalf of the gang that they do not want to do. For youth who have left a gang, they, their friends, or family may face retribution for rejecting the gang. They also may be afraid of being drawn back into the gang’s control. Although there were no significant differences by age or residence as seen in other types of legal service needs, significant differences were evident by gender, with males and trans youth reporting a need for protection from gangs at four to five times the frequency of females.

Table 83: Need Protection from Gangs

By Gender (n=391)

Male	Female	Trans	Total
13.1%	3.2%	15.8%	8.2%

DAILY LIFE NEEDS

The lack of a permanent residence creates numerous problems in daily life for the respondents. Although most of the following needs affected nearly one-half of the youth overall, youth living on the street reported the greatest level of daily life needs, with youth experiencing episodic homelessness also showing greater need in a couple of these daily life areas.

Over 75% of the youth living on the street reported needing a phone number and/or an address that they could use, particularly when trying to access resources and services, such as applying for jobs or looking for housing or shelter.

whichever is later. Only certain types of offenses can be expunged, including Class B and Class C misdemeanors. Class A misdemeanors and felonies (other than murder or felony sex offenses) can be expunged under particular conditions as well. See “Fresh Start: Balanced and Restorative Justice,” brochure of the Juvenile Justice Bureau, Cook County State’s Attorney.

Access to bathing facilities was particularly acute among youth on the street, with over 75% reporting this need compared with almost one-half of all respondents.

Table 84: Need Phone Number/Address

By Residence (n=391)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
77.7%	44.1%	55.2%

Table 85: Need Place to Shower

By Residence (n=391)				
On Street	In Shelter	In Home	In Motel*	Total
77.7%	22.9%	36.1%	36.4%	45.3%

*not significant at p<.05

The need for a place to do laundry and store belongings was also mentioned by a large percentage of youth living on the street or experiencing episodic homelessness.

Table 86: Need Place to Do Laundry

By Residence (n=391)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
80.0%	43.3%	55.5%

Table 87: Need Place to Do Laundry

By Homelessness Category (n=391)			
Crisis	Episodic	Chronic	Total
51.6%	78.8%	52.7%	55.9%

Almost twice as many youth on the street as those living elsewhere reported needing a place to do laundry, while those youth experiencing episodic homelessness reported a higher frequency of need than those experiencing crisis or chronic homelessness. The same subgroup differences as seen in the need for access to laundry facilities are seen with the need for a place to store belongings, with youth on the street and experiencing episodic homelessness reporting higher rates of need.

Table 88: Need Place to Store Belongings

By Residence (n=391)		
On Street	Not on Street	Total
81.5%	38.7%	52.9%

Table 89: Need Place to Store Belongings

By Homelessness Category (n=383)			
Crisis	Episodic	Chronic	Total
45.2%	69.2%	54.1%	53.3%

KNOWING WHERE TO SEEK HELP

When asked whether they know how to access social services if they need or want them, less than one-half of the respondents reported knowing who to contact or what to do. Of the three categories of homeless youth, those experiencing episodic homelessness report the lowest levels of knowledge regarding where to get social services. Furthermore, youth experiencing episodic homelessness often reported higher levels of need than youth experiencing initial crisis or chronic homelessness.

Table 90: Know Where to Seek Help

	Category of Homelessness			
	Crisis	Episodic	Chronic	Total
I know where to get help	44.4%	34.6%	53.7%	48.0%
I do not know where to get help	55.6%	65.4%	46.3%	52.0%

n=383

Table 91: Know Where to Seek Help

	Age				
	14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	Total
I know where to get help	26.1%	45.0%	52.8%	53.2%	47.6%
I do not know where to get help	73.9%	55.0%	47.2%	46.8%	52.4%

n=391

With increasing age, knowledge of where to go for help also increases, with just over one-quarter of the youngest youth knowing where to go, as compared to just over one-half of the oldest youth.

Forty percent of the respondents have particular places that they tend to go for services, with the majority of the youth accessing services at community-based organizations and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) local offices.

Table 92: Where Youth Go for Help

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent*
Shelters/soup kitchens	118	76.62%
Community based organizations	63	40.91%
IDHS	54	35.06%
Friends/family	16	10.39%
School	10	6.49%
DCFS	2	1.30%
Other	11	7.14%

n=154

*The total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple places that they go for services.

RESOURCES USED

Over two-thirds of the respondents had used some type of resource to address their multiple needs. In some cases, friends, relatives, or other homeless youth provided the assistance. However, in most cases, a public agency or private organization was the resource provider. Many youth made use of more than one resource or service, with 43.2% reporting using three or more resources and almost 20% reporting using six or more resources.

Table 93: Number of Resources Used

	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent
0 Resources	127	32.8%
1-2 Resources	93	24.0%
3-5 Resources	94	24.3%
6+ Resources	73	18.9%
Total	387	100.0%

Youth were asked about the same 46 need areas identified earlier in the survey to determine whether or not that had accessed resources, and what individual, agency, or organization had provided these services. The youth were then asked to rate the provider, on a scale from terrible (1) to excellent (5). Finally, youth were asked to provide comments as to what they liked and disliked about the services.

Table 93 summarizes the respondents' assessment of the resources that they have accessed. Resources are presented according to the frequency that youth reported using them, and the mean score refers to the assessment scores that the youth assigned to the providers, averaged across all providers.

Table 94: Resources Used by Homeless Youth

Resource Used	Percent Reporting Use of Resource*	Mean Score Across Providers**	Resource Used	Percent Reporting Use of Resource*	Mean Score Across Providers
Temporary housing	40.4%	2.9	Dental	2.6%	3.8
Food	37.0%	3.5	Education-vocational	2.6%	4.1
Health services for me	23.1%	4.4	HIV services	2.6%	3.3
Clothing	22.8%	3.3	Peer counseling	2.6%	4.0
Transportation	18.9%	4.1	Life skills, not services	2.3%	3.3
Condoms	17.5%	4.5	Child care	1.8%	4.3
Education-elem/high school	12.4%	3.9	Parenting support	1.8%	3.7
Government support	12.2%	4.5	Head Start/Early Head Start	1.3%	5.0
Shower	12.2%	3.9	Money management skills	1.3%	3.5
Laundry	9.6%	4.1	LGBTQ services	1.0%	4.5
Hygiene kits	7.2%	4.0	Connection to family	0.8%	3.5
Job training	6.7%	3.9	Sex trade related services	0.8%	4.8
Store belongings	6.7%	3.3	Legal services	0.8%	3.0
WIC	6.7%	4.0	Disability services	0.5%	3.5
Pregnancy services	6.4%	4.4	Education-ESL	0.5%	4.0
Phone number/address	6.2%	3.7	Child education	0.3%	NA
Education-GED	5.7%	4.4	Clearing record of felony	0.3%	4.0
Mental health/counseling	5.1%	4.0	Fathering support	0.3%	3.5
Health services for child	4.4%	4.5	Protection from gangs	0.3%	4.0
Permanent housing	3.9%	5.0	Substance abuse services	0.1%	4.0
Getting legal documentation	3.6%	4.0	Domestic violence services	0.0%	NA
Job placement	3.4%	3.7	Getting kids back from DCFS	0.0%	4.0
Optometry (glasses)	3.1%	2.6			

*The total percentage exceeds 100% due to respondents listing multiple expectations. Total number of respondents = 385 to 388, depending on the question from which the data was derived.

** 1 2 3 4 5
Terrible Bad Okay Good Excellent

The next section of the report presents a summary of positive and negative comments by the youth regarding service provision for each of the resource areas that they accessed.

HOUSING

TEMPORARY HOUSING

Youth reported accessing temporary housing services more than any other resource. The 40.4% of the youth who used temporary housing services gave providers a mean score of 2.9 (3.0 is okay; 2.0 is bad), nearly the lowest score received by any of the services.

Positive comments related to respondents' sense of relief that they had a place to go and occasionally referred to the services or resources that they were receiving.

She's an angel because she took me and my son in.
It's keeping me off the streets and it provides me with food and a place to stay.
I'm grateful for anything as far as a place to sleep.
I feel safe here. They're trying to help me.
It's cool here.
I like the resources they give me.

Negative comments provide detail about many of the issues that were discussed in the previous section about shelters. Most of these negative comments concerned the condition of the housing, the treatment of residents, dangerous conditions, and a general sense of discomfort in not being in their own environment.

Pipes are busted.
I hated the food and the uncleanliness of the * place. It stinked bad as hell.
Too many bugs and rats.
Nasty as hell.
It's too crowded.
It's dirty – too many hookers.
I didn't like the none caring staff because most of them looked down on me, and it seemed like they were just trying to get paid.
I'm tired of that place. They treat you like you're a kid and they talk to you in any kind of way.
Case management was no good and inconsistent.
They have unfair rules.
Fighting a lot.
People stole my clothes.
I don't like the fact that it's not my own.
She [respondent's grandmother] has Alzheimer's.

PERMANENT HOUSING

In the case of permanent housing, only 3.9% of the youth had accessed these services, but those who had accessed them gave them a 5.0 (excellent) rating.

Positive comments made reference to the quality of the environment and the care they received.

They treat you like family.

A place to stay and food to eat.

FOOD AND CLOTHING

FOOD

Over one-third of respondents (37.0%) reported using food resources, including soup kitchens and food pantries, which received a mean score of 3.5 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments referred to the food being free, sufficient, tasty, and healthy.

I like that I get fed every night and dislike nothing.

[They're] always there when I need food.

They supply enough for everyone to be full.

It's not that good, but it's something.

Free food for me and my baby.

Come in handy when I'm hungry.

Good food.

I liked that I wasn't hungry.

Negative comments referred to the quantity and quality of the food, with several comments about the way that food is used to control the youth.

Not enough food for the month.

Too little food.

Not enough to go around.

Stale food – not a lot of variety.

Food sometimes had mold on it.

Some makes me sick to my stomach.

They use food as a control device.

CLOTHING

Over two-thirds reported using clothing resources, giving them a mean score of 3.3 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments referred to the quantity, quality, variety, and cost of the clothing.

I get all the clothes I want.
Large supply.
Warm in winter and cool in summer.
They had all sizes, good selection.
Sometimes they have cute stuff.
Clothes are cheaper.
I get free clothes.
The fact that they cared.

Negative comments referred to the quantity, quality, and variety of clothes.

They barely give us anything.
They have holes in them.
Stinks and has bad smell.
Most are raggedy.
They need smaller sizes.
They didn't have shoes or bags.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Government support was reportedly used by 12.2% of the youth, with a mean score of 4.5 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments expressed appreciation for programs that provide food, money, and other assistance for free.

I have a good worker who makes sure I get all the help I need.
Free money to take care of my baby.
When I'm hungry, I got my LINK card.
It's all free.
It really helps me out.
It's a good system.

Negative comments primarily concerned the desire for more resources, and more efficient, assistance.

Not enough money.

Their services could be faster.
They could give me more.

HEALTH CARE

HEALTH CARE FOR SELF

Health care services are another resource that was used by a significant number of youth, with 23.1% of the survey respondents reporting accessing this service with an overall mean score of 4.4 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments stressed relief at being able to obtain health care, as well as appreciation for caring and helpful staff.

They are nice and try to help us.
It's free service, because I don't got insurance.
Like that I got help when I needed it.
They are caring people.
It really helps me – I would be in debt.
The fact that they cared.

Negative comments overwhelmingly concerned long waits and understaffing.

The wait sucks – need more staff.
Too many people so little time.
It's a long process to get help.

HEALTH CARE FOR CHILD

One half of the youth with children living with them and 17.9% of all respondents with children reported obtaining health care services for their children, with a mean score of 4.5 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments expressed the respondents' desire to protect their children's health, as well as appreciation for kind and understanding staff.

Helped my child be healthy.
Her doctor is very nice and organized.
Baby's health is taken care of.

Negative comments primarily concerned understaffing and delays.

Takes too long, unconcerned.

Understaffed.

CONDOMS

Almost 18% of the youth reported getting condoms from a variety of providers, with a high mean score of 4.5 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments related to satisfaction with obtaining condoms for free, noting that they wanted to protect themselves from pregnancy and disease. They valued thoughtful and caring staff and a wide selection of condoms.

Free protection.

Variety!!

Always remind me do I need them.

Because it's helping me protect myself from HIV.

All I have to do is ask for some.

They don't break, won't have no more kids.

Negative comments were few and largely concerned lack of availability or variety.

They are not big enough or plentiful enough.

They only have one kind.

HIV SERVICES

HIV Services were said to be used by 2.6% of the youth, with a mean score of 3.3 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments referenced youths' desire for HIV testing and appreciation for professionalism and anonymity.

I liked it because it was free and anonymous.

Got me the test to see if I had HIV.

Negative comments noted logistical difficulties and delays.

Slow services.

I didn't have carfare to come get my test results.

It was hard to get my results without a phone.

DENTAL CARE

Only 2.6% of the youth reported obtaining dental care, with a mean score of 3.8 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments primarily reflected youths' concern for their dental health.

Liked my teeth clean.
Teeth are taken care of.

Negative comments were related to the perception that dental clinic staff treated Medicaid clients poorly.

Treats you like crap if you have Public Aid.
Treat you bad if you have medical card.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Just over 3% of the youth reported using optometry services, with a mean score of 2.6 (2.0 is bad; 3.0 is okay).

Positive comments referred to youths' satisfaction in having vision correction needs met.

Because now I can see better.
I can see better with glasses.

All of the negative comments concerned disrespectful attitude from staff.

Bad attitude.
Disrespect.

COUNSELING AND SOCIAL SERVICES

MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND COUNSELING

Mental health care or counseling services were used by just over 5% of the youth, with a mean score of 4.0 (4.0 is good).

Positive comments largely pertained to the helpfulness of therapy.

They're personable and they keep me sane.
I got a lot from it. They help me better understand.
Great listener in solving problems.

Negative comments were few and reflected concerns that the help they had received was insufficient.

They had counseling but they didn't get to the bottom of my problems.

PEER COUNSELING

Peer counseling services were used by 2.6% of the youth, with a mean score of 4.0 (4.0 is good).

Positive comments expressed appreciation for an understanding listener.

Very understanding.

It was okay, just need to get understanding.

The few negative comments concerned hostility and lack of follow-up.

They didn't follow up on my issues.

Arguing.

LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

Just over 2% of the youth reported receiving life skills training, with a mean score of 3.3 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments expressed satisfaction with learning necessary living skills.

It taught me how to avoid things.

They taught me basic life skills.

Negative comments mainly reflected the opinion that the training was either not intensive enough or did not include new information.

Don't learn anything from the classes.

Don't have it often. Don't teach me anything I don't know.

EDUCATION

ELEMENTARY/HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

More than 12% of the youth reported getting help with their elementary or high school with a mean score of 3.9 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments reflected the desire for education and appreciation for helpful and concerned teaching staff.

Teachers are concerned.

I got my education.

Because the staff is respectful, helpful.

Got my high school diploma.

I'm still in school. It's all I got right now.

Negative comments described problems with gangs, poor teachers, and lack of discipline.

But in a way, not good because people want to fight.

Some of the teachers are lazy.

Too much gangs.

They let people go wild.

GED

Slightly less than 6% of respondents reported obtaining GED services, with a mean score of 4.4 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments expressed youths' positive feelings about furthering their education and understanding their classes.

I'll be able to say I know something, or have a GED.

I understand pretty well.

I'm finishing up high school.

Negative comments concerned classes that were too fast-paced, unprofessional, or undisciplined.

The students are out of control.

Sometimes they go too fast.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Vocational education services were reported used by 2.6% of the youth, with a mean score of 4.1 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments reflected appreciation for the opportunity to learn and the hope that vocational education would improve their life prospects.

They are trying to help me so that I could graduate and move on in my life.

I 'learnt' something new.

I completed everything, I got my GED, my driver's license, and my trade.

Negative comments were few and expressed the desire for better organized and more comprehensive services.

A little disorganized.

I disliked the lack of medical attention.

EMPLOYMENT

JOB TRAINING

Job training programs were accessed by 6.7% of respondents, with a mean score of 3.9 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments expressed the desire to improve job prospects, and several respondents noted that they found training enjoyable.

They really trained you to do better in life.
They helped me with preparing for a job.
We have fun.

Negative comments were related to inconvenience or ineffectiveness.

They need to do a better job with placing us in jobs.
Bad hours. Inconvenient location.
They don't really train you, they just tell you who's hiring.

JOB PLACEMENT

Job placement services were used by 3.4% of the respondents, with a mean score of 3.7 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments primarily concerned the desire for employment and satisfaction at successfully finding a job.

Good jobs opportunity.
They helped me get my job.
Liked I got a job.

Most negative comments concerned inconvenience and delays.

Too far from family.
I hated how long they told me I had to wait before I can start work.

PREGNANCY AND PARENTING

PREGNANCY SERVICES

Pregnancy services, including prenatal healthcare, delivery, and parenting support were reported used by 6.4% of the youth, with a mean score of 4.4 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments expressed relief at being able to obtain pregnancy care for themselves or their partners.

They give me what I need.
Helped girlfriend bring our boy into the world.
Like that people are helping me with my baby to be born.

Negative comments expressed dissatisfaction with understaffing and inefficiency.

Too many clients, need more organization.
I disliked the waiting list!

WIC

WIC use was reported by 18.2% of the pregnant youth/mothers, with a mean score of 4.0 (4.0 is good).

Positive comments primarily noted that respondents were glad to have their and their children's nutritional needs met for free. Prompt service and good supplies were also appreciated.

Very well organized, and fast working.
It helps me and my kids a lot.
Liked got free food.

Negative comments mainly focused on the limited supply.

It's only so much I can get with WIC.
WIC barely provides anything.
It was all right, but they don't give you everything you need.

LEGAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND OTHER SERVICES

HELP OBTAINING LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Almost 4% of the youth reported using help to obtain legal documentation, with a mean score of 4.0 (4.0 is good).

Positive comments noted helpful staff, good service, and success in obtaining needed documentation.

It was easier than I thought.
Because now I have my legal documents.

They really did follow through.

Negative comments reflected dissatisfaction with delays.

Took too long to get.

It took too long to get my birth certificate.

DAILY LIFE NEEDS

PHONE NUMBER AND ADDRESS

Slightly more than 6% of respondents reported using a service provider for a telephone number or address, with a mean score of 3.7 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments demonstrated the desire to stay in touch with others through mail or telephone messages.

They give you your messages.

People can reach me.

Like I got a place to get my mail.

Negative comments were related to lack of privacy or unreliable service.

My mail gets lost.

Too much personal information, missing out on jobs.

PLACE TO STORE BELONGINGS

Almost 7% of the youth reported storing their belongings at a social service provider or in someone's home with a mean score of 3.3 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments indicated appreciation for a secure and private place for belongings.

No one took my belongings.

Because I get to keep my things in my private area.

My belongings aren't on the street.

Negative comments reflected lack of security and insufficient space.

They gave away my stuff.

Not enough room.

People steal, what can you do?

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation assistance (provision of rides or passes to use public transportation) was accessed by 18.9% of the respondents, with a mean score of 4.1 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments referred to specific transportation needs and appreciation for having them met. They also lauded supportive staff.

My counselor provides me with enough bus cards⁴⁷ to get home, school, and work.
They are supportive with me and give me bus cards.
They provide seven-day [train/bus passes] for me to get back and forth to work.
I get to school.

Negative comments overwhelmingly referred to the scarcity of transportation assistance.

It hard to even get actual passes.
Sometimes they don't have it.
Never have any bus cards on time.

LAUNDRY

Almost 10% of the youth reported accessing services with free laundry facilities, with a mean score of 4.1 (4.0 is good; 5.0 is excellent).

Positive comments expressed relief at being able to have clean clothing and appreciation for free laundry facilities.

I'm grateful I'm able to wash my clothes.
Like my clothes clean.
I can do my laundry for free.

Negative comments mainly referred to poorly maintained machines.

Only two washers and two dryers that don't work well.
Machines are always broken.
Washer and dryer needed to be more clean.

SHOWERS

Services providing shower facilities were said to have been accessed by slightly more than 12% of the youth, with a mean score of 3.9 (3.0 is okay; 4.0 is good).

Positive comments most commonly expressed relief at being able to stay clean.

⁴⁷ Youth receive CTA bus/train passes from some service providers who receive funding for this resource either from government programs or from private foundations.

I get to shower every day.
Kept body clean.
Like that I smell good.
Like my body clean.

Negative comments described crowded and unsanitary shower facilities.

Dirty shower, mildew everywhere.
Not enough bathrooms.
Nasty shower, dirty facilities as a whole.
Too many people.

HYGIENE KITS

Just over 7% of the youth reported using hygiene kits, with a mean score of 4.0 (4.0 is good).

Positive comments largely referred to the availability and high quality of supplies.

They always have enough.
It's excellent because I got every hygiene product.
All needed supplies were, not cheap ones.
They got most everything in them.

Negative comments noted the scarcity or low quality of supplies.

Need better selections and more in kit.
There was cheap stuff and not enough.
I disliked the fact that they were stingy with supplies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Create an Interagency Task Force on Homeless Youth with members from the State, City, nonprofit service providers, and funders .**

We recommend that the City and State form an interagency task force to bring together representatives from the many agencies that come into contact with homeless youth in the public and private sectors, including private foundations that are committed to addressing this issue as part of their philanthropic support. Better coordination between and among public and private service providers and increased interagency referral will improve the State's ability to serve this population. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), because of their contact with many of these youth prior to homelessness, may be especially well placed to do preventive work with youth at risk for becoming homeless. Coordination with other city and state agencies to support DCFS and CPS in these efforts is crucial.

- **Improve continuity, coordination, and accessibility of services**

Homeless youth have a range of interrelated needs, yet service providers tend to specialize in addressing one or two specific service areas. For example, a youth's lack of employability may be related to a lack of education, basic life skills, appropriate clothing, and transportation. A youth who leaves school may be coping simultaneously with the need for a safe and stable residence, reliable childcare, and appropriate mental health care. It is difficult for youth to identify and obtain all the needed services from assorted providers in multiple locations. Furthermore, youth may find that their inability to meet one need, e.g., obtaining identification documents, or transportation, becomes an obstacle to accessing other needed services such as Head Start or job training.

We recommend that the Federal, State and City agencies, service providers, private foundations and homeless youth representatives work together to improve the continuity, coordination, and accessibility of services for homeless youth. Ideally, youth should be able to obtain a variety of related services in one location. For example, a provider with the primary mission of improving employability could offer GED services, job training and placement, money management education, clothing assistance, childcare referral, and transportation assistance. However, given the current fiscal constraints and the potentially high costs of such comprehensive services by each service provider, youth would benefit from intensive case management designed to identify providers, coordinate services, and "fill in the gaps" by providing transportation vouchers, assistance with legal documents, and other services necessary to help youth overcome obstacles to accessing existing resources.

➤ **Recognize and address the differing needs of homeless youth subgroups.**

While many of the needs and experiences identified in this survey were expressed by homeless youth across the spectrum of the subgroups, other needs and experiences varied widely among subgroups such as youth who had been in the foster care or juvenile justice system, and youth of different genders and ages. In some cases, these differences simply require a heightened level of sensitivity in service provision, while in other cases, different services are required. Five of the groups that warrant particular attention are youth living on the street, young teens, pregnant and parenting youth, LGBTQ youth, and youth with criminal records.

Youth living on the street

This study uncovered the divide between the needs of youth who live on the street and the needs of youth who have found shelter off the street. While both groups lack resources, youth who live on the street were significantly more likely to report having basic needs such as food, clothing, facilities to shower, do laundry, and store belongings, and an address and phone number. Youth living on the street were also more likely to report needing condoms, HIV services, substance abuse services, disability services, mental health care, peer counseling, life skills education, elementary/high school education, GED assistance, job placement, and assistance in obtaining legal documentation and expunging criminal records.

Given the sheer quantity of needs identified by youth living on the street, as well as the degree to which they lack the most basic resources of daily life, a specialized approach to this population is necessary. There needs to be an increase in outreach to youth living in less-accessible locations such as abandoned buildings, parks, trains, and cars in order to assist street youth in meeting their unique and complex needs.

Young teens

Youth ages fourteen to fifteen were significantly less knowledgeable than older youth about where they could seek assistance. This lack of knowledge increases the vulnerability of the youngest homeless youth to abuse and prevents them from accessing available services. These youth were also more likely than older youth to be experiencing crisis homelessness rather than chronic or episodic homelessness. It may well be that young teens in crisis today are tomorrow's chronically homeless youth.

We recommend that specialized outreach to young teenagers be implemented in an "adolescent and youth friendly" manner. This outreach should be designed to publicize the availability of youth services and encourage young teenagers to access them. Outreach methods with this group in particular should address the factors leading to their current homelessness to prevent future or continued lack of safe shelter.

Pregnant and parenting youth

Housing

This study uncovered an extremely high pregnancy and parenting rate among homeless females. Yet, only one shelter in Chicago accepts pregnant and parenting youth under the age of 18, and it can only accommodate five pregnant and parenting girls and five children. We recommend expanding emergency housing options for this population.

Childcare

Nearly one-half of the parenting youth, and over 90% of the youth who were both pregnant and parenting, cited childcare as a current need. Many of these youth also requested Head Start/Early Head Start and child education resources. Chicago has a substantial number of Head Start/Early Head Start and other low-cost or free childcare providers, but all of these subsidized programs require identification, pay stubs, school records, or other documentation that can be hard for homeless youth to obtain. We recommend that youth applying for subsidized childcare or Head Start be offered assistance in obtaining the documents necessary for enrolling in these programs.

Lack of reliable transportation, as well as lack of access to information about childcare, may also prevent parenting youth from locating and using childcare. We recommend that childcare services be integrated into or coordinated with other homeless youth services such as job training, life skills education, and school re-entry. At a minimum, such programs should provide information about, and facilitate enrollment in, appropriate childcare. Ideally, programs should provide childcare on-site.

WIC outreach

A large number of pregnant and parenting youth, virtually all of whom are likely to be eligible, cited WIC as a current need. We recommend targeted outreach to pregnant and parenting youth to inform them of this program and enroll them in it. Hospitals and community prenatal clinics that serve homeless youth may be ideal sites for reaching this population.

LGBTQ youth

Some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth have needs that differ in severity and type from the homeless youth population at large. While their needs may appear to mirror those of non-LGBTQ youth, their sexual orientation and gender adds an additional degree of challenge to meeting these needs. For example, health services that they access need to understand and be sensitive to their particular health care needs and risks and provide information and resources in ways that encourage healthy behavior in this population.

Transgender youth in particular were more likely to report needing food, clothing, condoms, HIV services, life skills education, legal services, criminal record expungement, protection from gangs, and domestic violence services; they were also more likely to have been arrested and to have been sexually abused. A significant number of LGBTQ youth reported needing LGBTQ services. Finally, nearly one-third of LGBTQ youth cited sexual orientation as a factor in their homelessness.

We recommend an expansion of LGBTQ services for homeless youth, such as drop-in counseling, support groups, and health care sites. Providers at such sites should be aware of, and be trained to assist with, the complex needs of transgender youth. We also recommend that the existing hotlines for LGBTQ youth be further publicized in order to help these youth manage conflicts with their families regarding their sexual orientation and obtain the services that they need.

Youth with criminal records

Many youth reported convictions for misdemeanor and felony crimes. A criminal record is a barrier employment and therefore seriously impedes efforts to overcome homelessness. However, there appear to be only a small number of providers who assist homeless youth with expungement, and youth may not be aware of this service or know how to find these few providers.

We recommend that information about and assistance with record expungement be integrated into existing youth service programs. School re-entry and job training and placement providers may be especially well placed to offer these services.

➤ Improve and expand preventive interventions targeting youth with difficult family relationships.

Nearly 80% of youth identified “bad relationship with family” or “disagreement with family” as a significant factor in their current homelessness. Although there are state programs to address family stress, this research did not obtain information about their effectiveness or the extent of their coverage.

DCFS has opportunities to intervene with some of the youth who are experiencing family difficulties. However, the majority of respondents had not been involved with DCFS. Thus, although their family problems were severe enough to motivate youth to run away, their situation either had not warranted DCFS involvement or DCFS was not aware of the severity of the problems.

Teens who have run away or been thrown out of their home have access to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) for assistance. In 2003, over 25,000 calls were taken from Illinois.

Forty-three percent of these calls were from youth, and 39% of the youth who called were still living at home (in crisis or contemplating running away). Almost one-half of the calls to the NRS are from parents, relatives, and other adults who are concerned about a youth with whom they are connected, who is either thinking about running away or has already left.⁴⁸

We recommend that the State and City work with schools, community centers, and other sites that interact with youth to raise awareness of the role of family problems in youth homelessness. Providers should be encouraged to offer or refer youth and adults for counseling, support groups, and other assistance in addressing difficulties in family relationships. We also recommend that the State and City work more closely with existing organizations to expand their outreach to youth and their families via schools, churches, and service providers.

➤ **Expand opportunities for education and job training and placement.**

In the survey the youth reported a high level of need for services far beyond those of housing. In particular, large numbers of youth requested educational and job assistance, both when queried about these needs directly and when asked more generally what they wanted to tell the City. The youth clearly demonstrated that they understand the importance of education and employment for escaping from homelessness, yet they reported that few of them obtain this crucial assistance. For example, although over 30% of the youth identified GED assistance as a current need, less than 6% have obtained this service. Similarly, fully 75% of the youth reported needing assistance with job placement, and two-thirds reported needing job training. However, less than 7% of youth have received job training, and barely 4% have received job placement services.

We recommend that outreach be carried out to enroll homeless youth in school or GED programs and expand job training and placement programs tailored to youth.

➤ **Conduct further research about homeless youth.**

While this study was not designed to determine the total number or geographic distribution of homeless youth in Chicago, a census of homeless youth across the state would be instructive for determining the level and location of services needed to assist this population. Furthermore, because this study was restricted to homeless youth in Chicago, homeless youth elsewhere in Illinois may have different needs and perspectives and may face different issues that should be assessed. A complete census of all homeless youth in Illinois to determine the number, location, demographic profile, and service needs of this population would be highly useful.⁴⁹

After completing a statewide census of homeless youth, a regional assessment of services available to meet the needs of these youth should be conducted. This research project found a

⁴⁸ <http://www.nrscrisisline.org/2003stat.asp>, accessed on September 1, 2004.

⁴⁹ In the period between the completion of the report and its release, the Illinois Department of Human Services commissioned the University of Illinois at Chicago to conduct a census of homeless youth in the spring of 2005.

significant disparity between the needs reported by homeless youth in Chicago and the services available for meeting them. The levels of need and services available may vary considerably between regions and should be determined in order to ensure adequate access to services.

In addition to the data documenting the extent of youth homelessness and the resources and limitations of the current service system, additional research assessing the reasons for youth homelessness and effective means of intervention and prevention is recommended.

➤ **Reassess funding and resources for homeless youth.**

The data from this study in conjunction with a statewide census and data on resources will help government and private funders reassess the level of resources required to address the extensive and complex needs of homeless youth. Funds shifted from other programs may not be able to meet this need; new funds may be necessary in order to de-fragment the existing services and create expanded and coordinated assistance for youth who lack safe and stable housing.

NEXT STEPS

In response to the research and this report, the Homeless Youth Advisory Group has proposed the following next steps:

- Convene a youth summit to explore the issues raised in this report.
- Bring existing partners and agencies together to gain a fuller understanding of the youth perspective and to help them better advocate for youths' needs; and to coordinate services to serve homeless youth.
- Create a summary version of the report for youth and adults.
- Incorporate youth advisors into governmental groups on the city, state, and federal levels.
- Use this report to educate legislators about the needs of homeless youth.

CONCLUSION

The needs and resources of homeless youth as documented in this research do not come as a complete surprise to service providers or policymakers involved with this population. All youth who are without a safe and stable place to live are likely to have multiple needs and inadequate resources for meeting them.

The finding of this study that merits particularly close attention is that there are particular groups of homeless youth who are at even greater risk than others because of where they live, their age, pregnant/parenting status, sexual orientation, or criminal record. Addressing the needs of these youth requires different outreach efforts and resources than those for other homeless youth.

The youth interviewed for this survey were interested in the study and were articulate about their experiences and views. They expressed anger, sadness, and desperation—and hope for their own survival. Repeatedly, the youth spoke of their desire to improve their living conditions, their well-being, and their prospects through education, training, and employment. However, often they are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the gap between the barriers they face and their ability to access or follow through with the limited available help.

The City of Chicago is taking concrete steps to identify and address the needs of these youth. In FY'04, the Mayor's budget included for the first time a \$465,000 line item specifically to target the needs of homeless youth, and this allocation at approximately the same level will be included in the FY'05 City budget.⁵⁰

The City's commitment to addressing the particular needs of homeless youth as part of its overall efforts to end homelessness through the activities of the Chicago Continuum of Care's Homeless Youth Task Group⁵¹ and the establishment of the Department of Children and Youth Services to better meet the needs of its youth, overseeing programs that among others are targeted at "the prevention of teenage homelessness and [the provision of] services to those who are homeless."⁵² These efforts on the part of the City need to be recognized and encouraged.

Although there is scope for improving the continuity, accessibility, and quality of services, existing resources are insufficient to meet the needs of homeless youth. New and expanded resources are necessary to help homeless youth become stable and safely housed and to prepare

⁵⁰ Interview with Renae Ogletree, Director, Youth Services Division, City of Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services, September 13, 2004.

⁵¹ <http://www.chicagocontinuum.org/homelessyouthhome.htm>

⁵² Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services informational sheet, provided by the Night Ministry, September 13, 2004.

them for self-sufficiency. The type and amount of resources must be determined through a census of homeless youth documenting the number homeless youth who are living in each of the state's regions and City's neighborhoods, their needs, and the resources available for meeting them. The information provided by this census would enable policymakers, service providers, and advocates to judiciously and effectively prioritize needs, develop services, and allocate resources.

APPENDIX:
HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT

HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT

At the conclusion of each interview, homeless youth were asked what they would like to tell City of Chicago officials. Their answers were coded into 14 subject categories, with some responses falling into multiple categories.

Table 95: What Homeless Youth Want to Say to City of Chicago Officials

Subject Category	Total	Percentage
Homeless youth need help (general)	90	23.4%
City should improve housing options	63	16.4%
City doesn't care/doesn't understand/doesn't do its job properly	62	16.1%
Specific suggestions for programs and interventions	30	7.8%
City should improve employment opportunities	20	5.2%
Urgency and severity of homeless youth problems	19	4.9%
Positive comments about the City	16	4.2%
City should provide food/clothes	12	3.9%
Personal stories/hopes for future	15	3.9%
Desire to be treated with dignity	12	3.1%
City should listen to homeless youth	11	2.9%
City should meet other specific needs	13	0.9%
Other	16	4.2%
Don't know	23	6.0%

n = 385 (excluded responses: no comment, refused)
 Total percentage exceeds 100% due to comments that spanned multiple subjects.

NEED FOR ATTENTION AND GENERAL ASSISTANCE

By far the most common concern, expressed in almost one-quarter of the comments, was need to pay attention to the homeless youth population and to assist them.

They really need to focus on their youth because we're the future. This is the real world and it's hard.

Please don't let us down and please have a heart to help the people who need it.

To pay more attention to people like me because the streets of Chicago are dangerous and I never know what to expect. Not knowing whether or not I will eat one day or shower the next is really depressing.

No one has time to help the homeless, yet they complain that we are bothering them and they want us to stop dealing drugs. Little do they know, that is how some of us survive. Instead of complaining about us, people should try to help us.

Don't just place us, help us! And follow up on us!

Really do something, instead of just sitting on your hands and letting us destroy ourselves like this.

Be more conscious of the needs of us homeless youth.

Please help the homeless, because if you don't, who will.

I haven't been in this situation long, but I don't like it. The City needs to help all of us, stop slackin'.

Help us please!

Us homeless youth need your help. Don't be talking political, be what the people need – as a leader.

CONCERNS ABOUT HOUSING

In their comments, they frequently referred to their need for housing— both temporary shelters and affordable long-term housing.

Have cheaper rent for homeless youth.

To try and have Section 8 available for those of us without children but in need of an apartment.

Build more homeless shelters for youth. And well-organized.

Build more shelters so homeless youth won't go back into the streets every three or four days.

Have more clean and available shelters with more resources to help us because these days the streets are better than most shelters.

Have cheaper apartments for homeless youth with and without children.

NEEDS FOR OTHER RESOURCES

Many comments described specific needs for food, clothing, employment assistance, transportation, laundry, and other resources.

I would tell them to give us jobs too. Better help them better themselves!

Have more shelters for youth to sleep at, places where you can get free clothes, water, food to eat and can be clean.

Please offer more for trans youth. There isn't much, let alone enough.

Make rent cheaper to rent. Have places to wash your clothes for free.
Have free transportation.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Many youth chose to share personal stories of their life on the streets, as well as their hopes for the future.

That I'm one of the teens that sleeps on the streets with my two children even though I have a job but I don't make enough to pay my bills and it is really hard out here so if you can hear me please help the teen youth because there are a lot more just like me.

I wish I could stop selling drugs and get out of this game.

Please help me. I want to get out of the gang but I'm scared I might get killed first and I appreciate the \$10 gift certificate and the referral list.

It's a struggle especially with a baby and all but I hope one day I can look behind this and said I made it.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAMS AND INTERVENTIONS

Some youth offered specific suggestions about ways to improve services, including adding new services, improving administration of and access to existing services, increasing efforts to inform youth about resources available to them, and hiring better staff.

Stop opening and closing resources. You've done it twice to me. I just got case management at TLP [Teen Living Programs] – they closed. Keep resources open.

You should develop a 24-hour homeless youth center to keep us out of trouble and away from drugs.

I need information, but no one will tell me anything.

Open more youth oriented sites that are not prejudiced. The workers need better standards and need to abide by those standards. Maybe it could be required for workers to have struggled or been homeless.

Open housing where people can work crazy hours (evenings) and sleep days.

...Train staff better on youth issues.

They need to make services or information about them more available.

URGENCY AND SEVERITY OF PROBLEMS FACING HOMELESS YOUTH

Frustration and desperation are evident in comments on subjects, but some respondents specifically cited the urgency and severity of youth homelessness, imploring the City to respond quickly.

Hurry up because times are getting drastic. People who need help can't wait forever.

You need to realize how bad this situation really is.

Hurry up time is waiting on no one. We can't be as patient as you want us to be.

Hurry the * up.

Open more sites for us. We're desperate. So desperate, we've all turned to gangs or drugs by now. It may be too late.

Time is running out, you bastard.

I just hope that you guys know how bad things really can get.

COMMENTS ON THE CITY'S RESPONSE TO HOMELESS YOUTH

About 4% of the youth made positive comments about the City's efforts to assist homeless youth.

I think they do a pretty good job.

I would say thank you for their efforts in trying to decrease the number of homeless youth. If no one appreciates it I just want to say that I do.

I would have to say thank you for the little help I have gotten.

Thank you for taking time out to listen to our problems.

However, almost 16% of respondents expressed the view that the City does not care, does not understand them, and/or has not met its responsibilities to homeless youth.

What the hell are you waiting for—more people to be like me? You bastards don't even care.

You have wasted the * time of every homeless youth in Chicago. When are you going to start doing your job?

You have hurt a lot of damn people by your action so what's the next move that you intend to make.

You have no time for us and now you want to help? Then get the * started.

Now all of a sudden you are concerned about youth. What about the ones that have died out here?

You have failed to do your job and now everyone must pay, bastard.

In addition to these general criticisms, some youth demonstrated a keen awareness of current political battles, arguing that more money should be allocated to homeless youth programs instead of being spent on other projects.

Stop thinking of money and how many * tourists you can attract and spend more time helping and cleaning his nasty * city.

...Build more shelters and save the programs that exist...This wouldn't just help us, it will help the city as well. More than a new sport stadium will!

Quit being selfish. Young people live on the street that are hungry. Stop putting money towards the casino.

DESIRE TO BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY

Several youth expressed the view that they are treated as less than human and voiced their desire for dignity and respect.

If you open services for youth, check out the places yourself once in a while. Ask yourself (and be honest) if you'd shower, sleep, or eat there. If

your answer is no, why subject us to it? We bleed red too. We're just homeless.

If DHS had some compassion for the people that call instead of treating us like cattle.

Stop trying to send us where you wouldn't send a dog!

The next time they see someone on the street, don't cross to the other side. Look us straight in the eye.

NEED TO LISTEN TO HOMELESS YOUTH

Finally, youth requested that the City take time listen to and try to understand their lives in order to better serve the homeless youth population.

I think they should keep doing surveys, so that they are more aware of what we need. Go ask youth that are in homeless shelters as well what they need.

It's good that they are making an effort to help us but they should really take what we have to say into consideration.

They need to expand their horizons by going out on the street and talk to homeless youth because that's how they know what we need.

THE NIGHT MINISTRY

The Night Ministry is a non-profit, non-denominational social service organization that creates hope throughout the communities we serve. We listen and respond to the needs of people we meet on Chicago's nighttime streets - regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or social status. Through our outreach and health programs and our youth housing and outreach programs, we connect youth and adults in need to basic resources and opportunities for support, housing, employment, education, and more.

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Founded in 1975, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) focuses its work on issues of economic and social justice. CIR uses community-based research to advocate for and achieve changes in public policy and programs. The Center works collaboratively with diverse partners, who are all striving to eliminate the fundamental causes of poverty and injustice. CIR is focusing its current work in four project areas: Working Families; Children and Adolescents; Seniors; and Alternatives to Incarceration.

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