

# MASSACHUSETTS

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

The state report is a resource to inform donors and funders about the local context of social issues affecting at-risk populations. This analysis can be used to better understand current local trends and the unique social and economic situation in which the

social issue exists. The information below complements the social issue report and the guide to giving by drawing attention to local initiatives related to the social issue.

## FACTS: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN MASSACHUSETTS

The city of Worcester was one of the first places in Massachusetts to conduct a count of homeless youth.<sup>1</sup> In October 2011, researchers found:

**102 homeless youth**

between the ages of 13 and 24 in Worcester,

of whom

**40 percent**

were unable to access the services they needed for reasons including lacking transportation, being put on wait lists, not getting a response from a service provider, and not knowing where to go

## SOCIAL ISSUE INDICATORS

It is difficult to estimate the number of homeless youth in Massachusetts. Counting homeless youth is a complex endeavor that requires a thorough knowledge of what facilities and neighborhoods homeless youth frequent as well as a methodology for reaching hard-to-find youth who may be living with friends or actively hiding. To inform the design of effective statewide policies and programs, state and local practitioners and policy makers are working together to gather data on the homeless youth population's characteristics and needs. Reliable estimates that clearly indicate the number of homeless youth in Massachusetts are not yet available.



## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Youth homelessness is an ongoing problem in Massachusetts, but little is known about the exact circumstances and size of the statewide homeless youth population. Accurate data is the first step towards connecting with homeless youth, improving support systems for them, and ultimately helping them exit homelessness. In addition to data collection, organizations already working with homeless youth are collaborating to share best practices and coordinate their services.

### COUNTING AND SURVEYING HOMELESS YOUTH TO BETTER SERVE THEM

Several Massachusetts cities have counted and surveyed their local homeless youth populations. The methodologies outlined below, developed by the Worcester Teen Housing Task Force and the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA), may serve as models for policy makers as they design a statewide homeless youth count. The survey information gathered will also help non-profits to better understand youth homelessness and target their efforts more effectively to meet youth needs.

#### City of Worcester Count

In a 2011 count, researchers visited 29 locations frequented by homeless youth, including shelters, community centers, and schools. This count was coordinated by the Worcester Teen Housing Task Force, Clark University, and the Compass Project, a group of organizations serving homeless youth in central Massachusetts. As shown in the facts section, the survey found 102

homeless youth in Worcester. Most of these youth live in shelters or “couch surf” with friends and family.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to developing an understanding of the number of homeless youth in the city, the data gathered by the researchers also uncovered information about the characteristics of the population. Homeless youth typically face more challenges than their housed peers, with higher rates of juvenile detention, violence at home, and pregnancy, as outlined in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1: DISPARITIES BETWEEN HOUSED AND HOMELESS YOUTH IN WORCESTER<sup>3</sup>**

Issue	Housed	Homeless
Pregnant or parenting	12%	54%
In custody of social services	13%	24%
Released from juvenile detention	6%	11%
In school	72%	48%
Employed	37%	19.5%
Experienced violence at home	17%	23%

Based on these findings, the report made several recommendations to the city, including that Worcester should:

- Focus on preventing youth homelessness through family intervention to prevent youth from running away from home
- Design a centralized facility specifically for homeless youth so that they can easily find needed services in one place<sup>4</sup>

The Worcester Teen Housing Task Force is still determining the best methods for implementing these recommendations.

### Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance Survey

In 2011, MHSA conducted a survey of approximately 300 homeless young adults aged 18-24 in shelters across the state. MHSA surveyed youth about their general needs and also focused on substance use and the particular needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. The survey was undertaken to help nonprofits better serve and house homeless youth in Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> Below are selected findings.

- Approximately 23 percent of the surveyed young adults had been homeless for one to three months; 27 percent had been homeless for more than one year
- 15 percent of surveyed youth identified themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual
- 62 percent reported some current or past drug use. Marijuana, unprescribed medications, and cocaine were the most common drugs used

The data was gathered in fall 2011, and MHSA is using it to develop recommendations for nonprofits and policy makers.

### POLICY TO SUPPORT HOMELESS YOUTH

Public policy is playing a large role in helping agencies that work with homeless youth to better understand the size and needs of this population. The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (MCH) has focused on unaccompanied homeless youth for five

years, and led a successful effort to obtain funding for a Special Commission on Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness in the FY13 state budget. The commission will conduct a statewide count of unaccompanied homeless youth and develop recommendations for policy makers and nonprofits about the most effective interventions for helping homeless youth aged 22 and under.<sup>6</sup> With a report to the governor due in March 2013, the commission will focus on general barriers to serving homeless youth and the particular needs of minors and LGBTQ youth.<sup>7</sup> The lieutenant governor, who chairs the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness, has also created two Youth Homelessness Working Groups to formulate a definition of youth homelessness and, based in part on the Worcester count, determine the best procedures for a statewide count of homeless youth. These efforts will inform the Special Commission's work to more effectively serve homeless youth.<sup>8</sup>

Policy efforts are also underway to provide funding for homeless youth programs. House Bill 3838, An Act Providing Housing and Support Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, did not pass in the most recent legislative cycle that ended in July 2012.<sup>9</sup> But MCH, MHSA, and other organizations are working to have it passed in the next legislative cycle.

### SERVICE COORDINATION IN BOSTON

In addition to ongoing data gathering and policy efforts, many nonprofits in Massachusetts are collaborating to provide effective services to homeless youth. In Greater Boston, these organizations meet monthly in the Homeless Youth Providers Engaging Together (HYPET) association. Comprised of nonprofits providing youth with street outreach, drop-in centers, shelters, and transitional living programs.<sup>10</sup> Because best practices in this field are still being defined, HYPET members meet to share lessons learned, coordinate services, and develop a comprehensive base.

## REFERENCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

ORGANIZATION	WEBSITE
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice	<a href="http://www.massappleseed.org">www.massappleseed.org</a>
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless	<a href="http://www.mahomeless.org">www.mahomeless.org</a>
Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance	<a href="http://www.mhsa.net">www.mhsa.net</a>
Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness	<a href="http://www.mass.gov/governor/administration/ltgov/lgcommittee/housingcouncil/">www.mass.gov/governor/administration/ltgov/lgcommittee/housingcouncil/</a>
National Alliance to End Homelessness	<a href="http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/issues/youth">www.endhomelessness.org/section/issues/youth</a>

## ABOUT SOCIAL IMPACT RESEARCH

Social Impact Research (SIR) is the independent research department of Root Cause, a research and consulting firm dedicated to mobilizing the nonprofit, public, and business sectors to work collaboratively in a new social impact market. Modeled after private sector equity research firms, SIR conducts

research on social issues and independent analysis of program performance to provide leaders and funders with the rigorous, actionable information they need to make strategic decisions about creating and investing in social impact.

## ENDNOTES

1. Arista, Celeste, et al. "Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Worcester, Massachusetts: An analysis of 2011 Point in Time Data and Service Provider Referral." [www.hfcm.org/CMS/Images/PitDistribute2011v2.pdf](http://www.hfcm.org/CMS/Images/PitDistribute2011v2.pdf).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Public Service Economics. Analysis of Youth Census 2011. Presentation Prepared for the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance. 2012.
6. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. FY2013 Budget Summary: Outside Section 208. July 7, 2012. [www.mass.gov/bb/gaa/fy2013/os\\_13/h208.htm](http://www.mass.gov/bb/gaa/fy2013/os_13/h208.htm); Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. "Governor Patrick Issues His FY'13 Budget Vetoes and Signs the Rest of the Budget into Law." July 9, 2012. [www.mahomeless.org/images/2012-07-09\\_Governor\\_Patricks\\_Budget\\_Signing\\_Decisions\\_New\\_Supplemental\\_Budget\\_Request.pdf](http://www.mahomeless.org/images/2012-07-09_Governor_Patricks_Budget_Signing_Decisions_New_Supplemental_Budget_Request.pdf).
7. Suffradini, Kara and Robyn Frost, "Op-Ed: Making the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission Work for LGBT Youth." The Rainbow Times. August 1, 2012.
8. Interview with Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. August 2, 2012.; Interview with Robb Zarges, Executive Director of Bridge Over Troubled Waters. March 29, 2012.
9. House Bill 3838: An Act providing housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth. Massachusetts State House of Representatives. [www.malegislature.gov/Bills/187/House/H03838](http://www.malegislature.gov/Bills/187/House/H03838); Interview with Kelly Turley.
10. House Bill 3838.