

NEW YORK

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 NEW YORK

The data below is from a study done by the New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations in 2011.¹

Number of homeless youth each night in New York City

3,800

Number of emergency shelter beds for youth in New York City

249

Percentage of homeless youth in New York City who cannot access a shelter bed each night

90 percent

SOCIAL ISSUE INDICATORS

It is difficult to estimate the number of homeless youth in the state of New York. 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. Many practitioners and policy makers are working to design accurate count methodologies.

Despite these difficulties, the number of homeless youth in New York State can be estimated using the number of youth enrolled in New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) runaway and homeless youth programs. In 2007, OCFS found the following²:

- 48,161 runaway and homeless youth made contact with outreach programs throughout the state
- 12,216 youth were admitted to runaway and homeless youth programs in the state



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN NEW YORK

Youth homelessness is a significant but little understood problem in the state of New York. Nonprofits and government officials are cooperating to better understand and serve homeless youth by gathering data on this population's characteristics and needs. This data will be used to inform the design of effective statewide policies and programs. Several recent policy initiatives in New York have also provided better protections and services for homeless youth.

COUNTING AND SURVEYING HOMELESS YOUTH TO BETTER SERVE THEM

Empire State Coalition Count

The Empire State Coalition (ESC), a group of service providers that work with homeless youth, has begun the crucial work of counting and surveying homeless youth in New York City. In 2007, it conducted the first survey and count of homeless youth in New York City since 1986. Carried out by researchers from Columbia University and the New School, with funding from the city council, the count surveyed 1,000 youth. Based on survey results, the ESC estimates that there are 3,800 homeless youth on the streets each night, though this number is probably low because so many homeless youth are hidden. This was a pilot count, and ESC is working on methodologies to connect with more youth in future surveys. This data will help providers to better understand and serve the homeless youth population.

New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations Report

The New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations has made significant contributions to advocacy and research about homeless youth. In cooperation with the ESC, the association released the "State of the City's Homeless Youth Report" in early 2012. This report compiles data on trends in the homeless youth population and makes recommendations for actions by city agencies.³ The report's recommendations focus on the general lack of services for homeless youth in New York City. According to this report, the segments of the homeless youth population most in need are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, former foster youth, victims of sex and labor trafficking, youth with substance abuse issues, and youth with mental health issues.

The report also presents several strategies for better reaching homeless youth through social media. One study found that 62 percent of homeless youth own a cell phone and 85 percent have regular Internet access through their phones, youth agencies, or libraries. Half of homeless youth in a recent survey used social networking sites for support, advice, and keeping in touch with family and friends. Considering how difficult it is to reach homeless youth who frequently move around, the association's report states that social media and online tools could present a significant opportunity to connect with and help these youth.⁴

POLICY TO SUPPORT HOMELESS YOUTH

During the 2011-12 fiscal year, there was a 50 percent cut in funding for homeless youth programs in the state of New York. This came at a time when the number of homeless and runaway youth has increased all over the United States because of the recession.⁵ The ESC and other community groups have joined forces to lobby for more funding.⁶ Past lobbying efforts have resulted in a number of policy victories for the field of youth homelessness in New York. Below are several examples of these victories.

New York City Commission for LGBTQ Runaway and Homeless Youth

On October 5, 2009, Mayor Michael Bloomberg created the New York City Commission for LGBTQ Runaway and Homeless Youth. New York City is the first municipality to create such a commission. The ESC's 2007 survey found that at least a third of homeless youth in New York City identified as LGBTQ; thus, addressing the needs of this population is key to helping homeless youth get off the streets of New York.⁷ The recommendations of this commission resulted in more training for city agencies on how to work with the LGBTQ population and encourage family acceptance of LGBTQ youth. In response to the commission's findings, Bloomberg also raised the maximum age for city-funded drop-in centers from 21 to 24 so that these centers can serve more youth in need.

S1088 Education Law

Introduced in 2009 and currently in the NY State Senate's Education Committee, the S1088 Education Law would align state laws with the federal McKinney-Vento Homelessness

Assistance Act, which guarantees homeless youth access to schooling. McKinney-Vento and corresponding state laws are important because they dictate procedures and provide funding for schools to serve homeless youth. These laws also allow homeless youth to stay in their schools of origin and provide funding for transportation if their unstable housing situation forces them to live in another school district.⁸ Research has shown that youth who are able to remain continuously enrolled in the same school have higher rates of exiting homelessness successfully.⁹

Safe Harbour Law and Vacating Convictions Act

New York State is a national leader in developing policy structures to support youth who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. These issues particularly affect runaway and homeless youth, as traffickers often look to recruit street youth who have few social supports and are looking for income. Many homeless youth are also more susceptible to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation because of their histories of abuse.¹⁰ In 2008, the state passed the Safe Harbour Law to decriminalize prostitution for minors, reasoning that minors should not be penalized if forced into the sex industry. This act also funds specialized services for victims of sex trafficking, who often need extensive counseling and legal services to recover from their experiences.¹¹ The 2010 Vacating Convictions Act went further, making it possible for former youth victims of commercial sexual exploitation to expunge past convictions related to this work from their records. A clean record makes it easier for these victims to avoid future prejudice and to access various forms of public assistance.¹²

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

ORGANIZATION

Empire State Coalition

New York City Department of Youth and Community Development

New York State Office of Children and Family Services - Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Directory

Western New York Coalition for the Homeless

WEBSITE

www.empirestatecoalition.org/index.html

www.nyc.gov/html/dycd/html/runaway/runaway.shtml

www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/youth/rhydirectory.asp

www.wnych.org

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. New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations. "State of the City's Homeless Youth Report." 2011.
2. New York State office of Children & Family Services. 2007. <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/RHYA%20Final%20Report%202007.pdf>.
3. The New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations. 2011.
4. Ibid.
5. Urbina, Ian. "Recession Drives Surge in Youth Runaways." *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/26/us/26runaway.html>.
6. The Governor's Proposed 2012-13 New York State Budget: Continued Scarce Funding for Women, Families, and Youth in a Weak Recovery. A Fiscal Policy Institute Report Prepared for The New York Women's Foundation. March 21, 2012.
7. Freeman, Lance and Darrick Hamilton. "A Count of Homeless Youth in New York City." Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services. March 26, 2008.

8. National Conference of State Legislatures. "Homeless and Runaway Youth." April 2010. <http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/human-services/homeless-and-runaway-youth.aspx>.
9. Milburn, Norweeta G. et al. "Adolescents Exiting Homelessness Over Two Years: The Risk Amplification and Abatement Model." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 19(4) 2009.
10. National Alliance to End Homelessness. "Homeless Youth and Sexual Exploitation: Research Findings and Practice Implications." Solutions Brief. October 30, 2009. <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/general/detail/2559>.
11. Polaris Project. "Overview of State Legislative Policy to Address the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children - State "Safe Harbor" Laws." http://www.polarisproject.org/storage/documents/policy_documents/model%20laws/model%20safe%20harbor%20law%20overview%20final-1.pdf.
12. The New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations. 2011.