Invisible Crisis: Youth Homelessness in Rural Communities
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Who is in the room?

Shelter/housing provider
Community services provider
Schools
Youth
Mental health services

OTHERS?
Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is a research and policy center, focused on a mission of improving the well-being of children and youth, families, and their communities.

Chapin Hall provides public and private decision-makers with rigorous data analysis and achievable solutions to support them in improving the lives of society’s most vulnerable children, youth and families.

Voices of Youth Count

- National policy research initiative designed to fill gaps about:
  - Who experiences homelessness as a young person?
  - How and when youth become homeless?
  - How many youth experience homelessness?
  - How can we intervene so that youth homelessness becomes rare, brief, and one time?

Legislative Impetus

2008 Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Reauthorization

- Requires estimates at 5-year intervals of the incidence and prevalence of RHY, ages 13-25
- Authorizes Congress to appropriate such sums as may be necessary to fund the studies

Funds were NEVER appropriated
"The precise number of homeless and runaway youth is unknown due to their residential mobility and overlap among populations. Determining the number of these youth is further complicated by the lack of a standardized methodology for counting the population and inconsistent definitions of what it means to be homeless or runaway."

Congressional Research Service, 2013

What we know: Previous estimates of youth homelessness

- MV schools data (2014-15, unaccompanied students): 95,000
- Ringwalt (1992-93 YRBS – 12-month prevalence; youth 13-17): 5% – 7.6% (1 – 1.6 million)

Population-based surveys capture far larger numbers than PIT / admin data counts

Public-Private Partnership
VoYC 22 Partner Communities

Comprehensive Data Collection

What is “rural”?  
- No single definition  
- Classify areas as rural based on range of characteristics, such as population size or density, household density, resident interpretation, and presence (or distance from) metropolitan areas  
- Rural communities have fewer people spread over a larger landscape, less access to services and economic opportunities, and greater hiddenness of social problems
About 4.3 million youth, ages 13-25, experience any form of 'homelessness' in a year.

1 in 10

Young adults ages 18 to 25 endures some form of homelessness in a year. Half of the prevalence involves couch surfing only.

1 in 30

Adolescent minors ages 13 to 17 endures some form of homelessness in a year. A quarter of the prevalence involves couch surfing only.
Limited Services

- Half of the small VoYC counties had no programs specifically for runaway and homeless youth; those that did had only 1-2 programs
- Broader youth serving organizations were primary service providers for youth experiencing homelessness
- Lack of services tailored to youth shapes young people’s experiences

Coalition Building

Some youth are at greater risk of homelessness

- 346% Youths with less than a high school education or below are 346% higher risk
- 162% Youth reporting annual household income of less than $15,000 had a 61% higher risk
- 83% Black or African American youth had an 83% higher risk
- 120% LGBT youth were 120% higher risk
- 33% Hispanic, non-white youth had a 33% higher risk
- 200% Unmarried parenting youth had a 200% higher risk

2.2x

American Indian or Alaskan native youth had 2-2.2 times the risk of experiencing homelessness
Working across systems

- 29% Ever in Foster Care vs. 2% of general youth population
- 46% Ever in Detention or Incarceration vs. 15% of general (older) youth population

(Source: VoYC Brief/Youth Surveys)

Homelessness starts early

1 in 4 youth interviewed in 5 communities had prior experiences of family homelessness or housing instability

(Source: VoYC In-depth Interviews)

Youth homelessness in rural communities looks different than in urban communities

(Source: VoYC Brief/Youth Survey)
Youth experiences of homelessness is fluid

91% of youth experienced at least one of the following types of negative housing arrangements in depth interviews:

- Strayed
- Homeless
- pounded

72% of those who slept on the streets or in public places do not feel safe.

“(Camping is) the only place I can stay clean.”

Rural youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to be out of school and work than youth in large counties.

57% of rural youth who are homeless are out of school or work.

46% of rural youth who are homeless are working while homeless.
What Works?

We’re Still Learning...
OPPORTUNITY

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Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in Rural America

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