

# Invisible Crisis: Youth Homelessness in Rural Communities

Beth Horwitz  
Housing Ohio Conference  
April 9, 2019





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## Who is in the room?








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

**OTHERS?**



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## Context Setting




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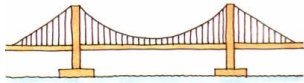
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Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is a research and policy center, focused on a mission of improving the well-being of children and youth, families, and their communities.



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.

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## 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?




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## Legislative Impetus

2008 Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Reauthorization

- Requires estimates at 5-yr 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




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*“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

- AHAR – Jan. 2016 PIT counts (UHY under 25): **36,000**
- 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

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## Public-Private Partnership



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## Comprehensive Data Collection

**COUNT**

- Local counts
- National prevalence

**SURVEYS**

- Youth
- Households
- Providers

**INTERVIEWS**

- Youth in-depth experiences

**REVIEWS**

- Intervention evidence
- Policy entry points


Ending Youth Homelessness

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# 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



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# Youth Homelessness in Rural Communities

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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.



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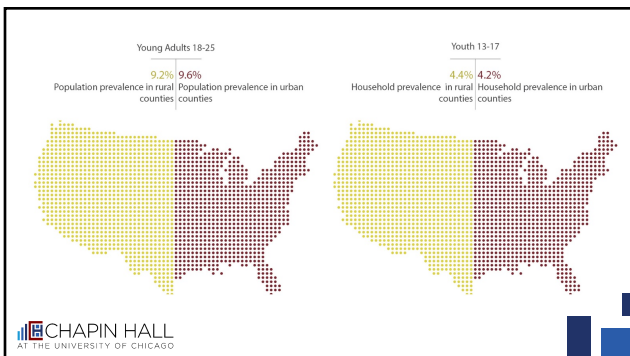
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## Limited Services

- 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

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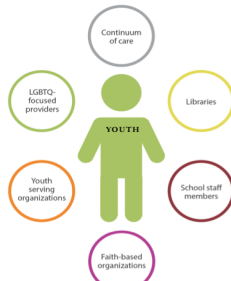
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## Coalition Building




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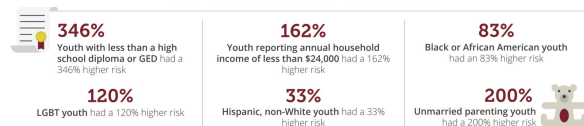
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## Some youth are at greater risk of homelessness



**2.2x**

American Indian or Alaskan Native youth  
had 2.2 times the risk of reporting homelessness.

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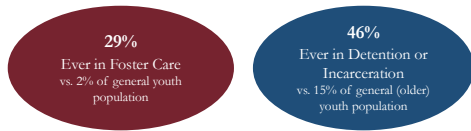
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## Working across systems



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(Source: VoYC Brief Youth Surveys)

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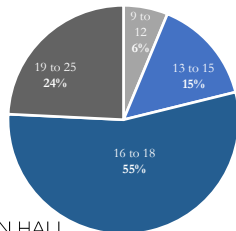
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## Homelessness starts early



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

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(Source: VoYC In-depth Interviews)

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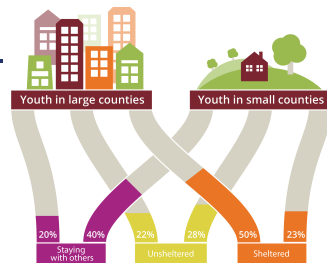
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## Youth homelessness in rural communities looks different than in urban communities



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Source: VoYC Brief Youth Survey

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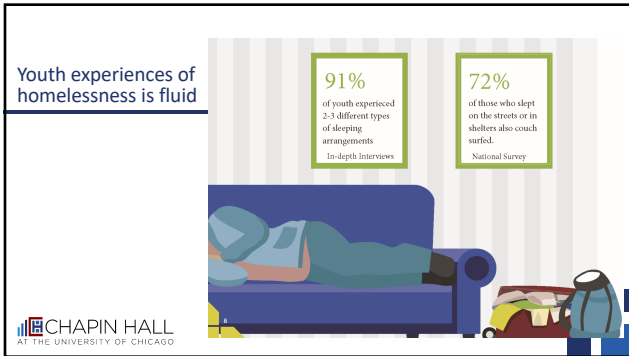
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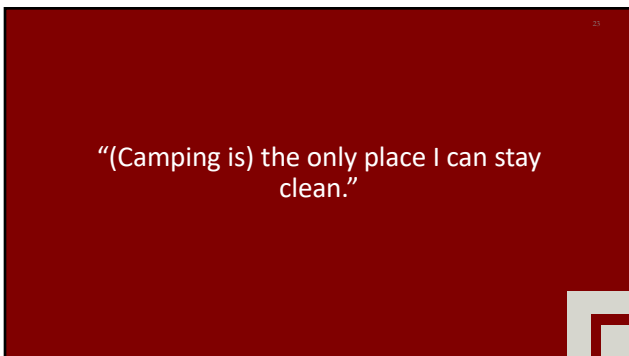
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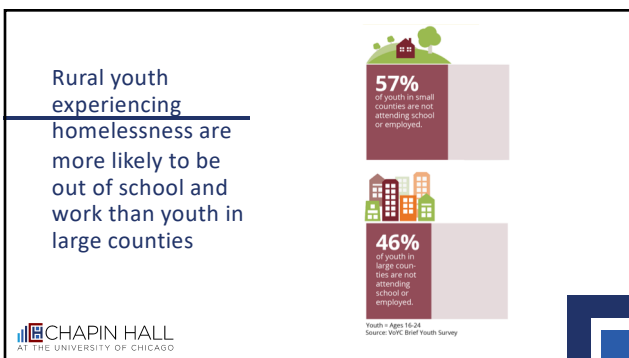
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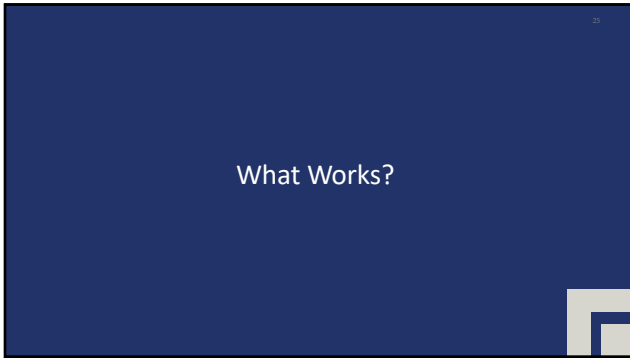
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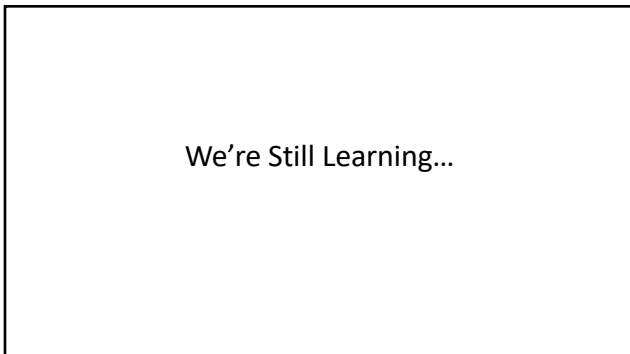
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[www.voicesofyouthcount.org](http://www.voicesofyouthcount.org)  
e: bhorwitz@chapinhall.org



**Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in Rural America**

October 2018

The fifty in a series of Research-to-Impact Briefs by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago on understanding and addressing youth homelessness.

In briefs of Youth Count's first Research-to-Impact brief, researchers estimated that nearly 4.2 million youth and young adults in America experienced some form of homelessness during a 12-month period. Rural Opportunity Youth Homelessness in Rural America highlights research related to the specific experiences of young people who reside in the vast areas of the country that have fewer people and more widely dispersed services. The findings show that rural youth homelessness is just as prevalent as homelessness in urban areas, however, in rural areas youth experience of homelessness are even likely to be hidden, and these youth face unique challenges accessing education, jobs, services, and support.







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