Order Code RL33785

CRS Report for Congress

Runaway and Homeless Youth: Demographics, Programs, and Emerging Issues

Updated June 15, 2007

Adrienne L. Fernandes
Analyst in Social Legislation
Domestic Social Policy Division

Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress

Runaway and Homeless Youth: Demographics, Programs, and Emerging Issues

Summary

There is no single definition of the term "runaway youth" or "homeless youth." However, both groups of youth share the risk of not having adequate shelter and other provisions, and may engage in harmful behaviors while away from a permanent home. These two groups also include "thrownaway" youth who are asked to leave their homes, and may include other vulnerable youth populations, such as current and former foster youth and youth with mental health or other issues.

The precise number of homeless and runaway youth is unknown due to their residential mobility and overlap among the 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 a runaway. Estimates of the homeless youth population range from 52,000 to over one million. Estimates of runaway youth — including "thrownaway" youth — are between 1 million and 1.7 million.

From the early 20th century through the 1960s, the needs of a generally unspecified problem of runaway and homeless youth were handled locally through the child welfare agency, juvenile justice courts, or both. The 1970s marked a shift toward federal oversight of programs that help youth who had run afoul of the law, including those who committed status offenses (i.e., running away). In 1974, Congress passed the Runaway Youth Act of 1974 as Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (P.L. 93-415) to assist runaways outside of the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The scope of the act was expanded in 1977 to include homeless youth through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (P.L. 93-415). The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHYP) has since been reauthorized three times, most recently by the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act in 2003 (P.L. 108-96). The law currently authorizes federal funding for three programs — the Basic Center Program, Transitional Living Program, and Street Outreach Program.

The Basic Center Program provides temporary shelter, counseling, and after care services to runaway and homeless youth under age 18 and their families, while the Transitional Living Program is targeted to older youth ages 16 to 21. Youth who use the TLP receive longer-term housing with supportive services, including counseling, educational and vocational training, and health care. The Street Outreach Program provides education, treatment, counseling, and referrals for runaway, homeless, and street youth who have been subjected to or are at risk of being subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation. Congress appropriated a total of $102.9 million for the three programs in FY2006.

Funding authorization for the RHYP is set to expire in the 110th Congress. Reauthorization issues may include changing personnel needs at grantee organizations, evaluation of youth outcomes, and the needs of "disconnected" youth. This report will be updated as relevant funding and legislative activities occur.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Runaway and Homeless Youth: Demographics, Programs, and Emerging Issues

Introduction

Running away from home is not a recent phenomenon. Folkloric heroes Huckleberry Finn and Davey Crockett fled their abusive fathers to find adventure and employment. While some youth today also leave home due to abuse and neglect, they often endure far more negative outcomes than their romanticized counterparts from an earlier era. Without adequate and safe shelter, runaway and homeless youth are vulnerable to engaging in high-risk behaviors and further victimization. Youth who live away from home for extended periods may become removed from school and systems of support that promote positive development. They might also resort to illicit activities, including selling drugs and prostitution, for survival.

Congress began to hear concerns about the vulnerabilities of the runaway population in the 1970s due to increased awareness about these youth and the establishment of runaway shelters to assist them in returning home. Since that time, Congress has authorized services to provide support for runaway and homeless youth outside of the juvenile justice, mental health, and child welfare systems. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), as currently amended, authorizes federal funding for three programs to assist runaway and homeless youth — the Basic Center Program (BCP), Transitional Living Program (TLP), and Street Outreach Program (SOP) — through FY2008.[1] The basic purposes of the programs and funding for the programs are summarized below.

- ***Basic Center Program:*** To provide outreach, crisis intervention, temporary shelter, counseling, family unification, and after care services to runaway and homeless youth under age 18 and their families.

- ***Transitional Living Program:*** To support projects that provide homeless youth ages 16 to 21 with stable, safe longer-term residential services up to 18 months (or longer if the youth has not reached age 18), including counseling in basic life skills, interpersonal skills building, educational advancement, job attainment skills, and physical and mental health care.

---

[1] The RHYP was most recently reauthorized by Title I of the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-96). For text of current law see 42 U.S.C. §4701 et seq.

- ***Street Outreach Program:*** To provide street-based outreach and education, including treatment, counseling, provision of information, and referrals for runaway, homeless, and street youth who have been subjected to or are at risk of being subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation.[2]

Table 1 shows funding levels for the three programs from FY2001 to FY2007, and the Administration's request for FY2008. Since FY2001, funding has generally remained stable for the Basic Center and Street Outreach Programs. Funding for the Transitional Living Program nearly doubled from FY2001 to FY2002 (as shown below), but has remained at about $40 million from FY2002 to FY2007. Although the TLP authorized services for pregnant and parenting teens, the Administration sought funds specifically to serve this population and Congress provided the increased funds to enable these youth to access TLP services. In FY2003, amendments to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (P.L. 108-96) specifically authorized TLP funds to be used for services targeted at pregnant and parenting teens at TLP centers known as Maternity Group Homes. The FY2004 through FY2008 appropriations reflect funding for the Maternity Group Homes as part of the TLP. The fourth Continuing Resolution for the FY2007 budget (P.L. 110-5) generally funds programs at their FY2006 level.[3] However, the FY2006 funding levels for the three components of the RHYP are slightly lower than the FY2007 figures because of an additional transfer of funds from the RHYP accounts to an HHS sub-agency.[4] The Administration's FY2008 request is identical to the FY2007 funding levels.

This report begins with an overview of the runaway and homeless youth population. It describes the challenges in defining and counting the runaway and homeless youth population, as well as the factors that influence homelessness and leaving home. In particular, youth who experience foster care are vulnerable to running away or becoming homeless while in care or after having been emancipated from the system. This report also provides background on the evolution of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act from the 1970s until it was last amended in 2003. The report then goes on to describe the administration and funding of the Basic Center, Transitional Living, and Street Outreach programs that were created from the act, as well as the functions of their ancillary components. (**Table 1** provides BCP funding by state for FY2006 and FY2007.) In anticipation of the possible reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program in the 110th Congress, the report concludes with a discussion of (1) the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program's changing personnel needs; (2) the issue of runaway and homeless youth as "disconnected" youth; and (3) evaluation of youth outcomes.

---

[2] In 42 U.S.C. §4701 et seq., this program is referred to as the Education and Prevention Services to Reduce Abuse of Runaway, Homeless, and Street Youth Program.

[3] The FY2006 appropriation level includes an across-the-board 1% rescission (for most programs) pursuant to P.L. 109-14.

[4] This transfer was made to offset unexpected costs to the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services' Medicare Part D benefit program. The transfer was permitted under Section 208 of the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-149).

Table 1. Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Funding, FY2002-FY2007

($ in thousands)

Program	FY2001 Enacted	FY2002 Enacted	FY2003 Enacted	FY2004 Enacted	FY2005 Enacted	FY2006 Enacted	FY2007 Estimated[b]	FY2008 Request
BCP	48,338	48,288	48,298	49,171	48,786	48,265	48,298	48,298
TLP	20,740	39,736	40,505	40,260[a]	39,938[a]	39,511[a]	39,539[a]	39,539[a]
SOP	14,999	14,999	15,399	15,302	15,178	15,017	15,027	15,027
Total	84,127	103,023	104,202	104,733	103,902	102,793	102,864	102,864

Source: U.S. Department Health and Human Services, *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2003, p. H-48; *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2004, p. H-45; *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2005, p. H-89; *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2006, p. D-41; *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2007, p. D-41; *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2008, pp. 92, 98.

Note: BCP and TLP funding are distributed under the Consolidated Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. SOP funds are distributed separately.

a. Includes funding for the Maternity Group Home component.
b. These are estimated amounts, based on the terms of P.L. 110-5 and the FY2008 appropriations justifications, cited above.

Who Are Homeless and Runaway Youth?

Defining the Population

There is no single federal definition of the terms "homeless youth" or "runaway youth." However, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the agency that administers the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, relies on the definitions from the program's authorizing legislation and its accompanying regulations.[5] The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act defines homeless youth as individuals under age 18 who are unable to live in a safe environment with a relative and lack safe alternative living arrangements, as well as individuals ages 18 to 21 without shelter.[6] The regulations further define homeless youth as being in need of services and shelter that provide supervision and care.[7] Although the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act does not define "runaway youth," the regulations describe these

[5] The U.S. Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development use definitions of homelessness that are different than those used by HHS. The U.S. Department of Justice uses a different definition for runaway youth.

[6] 42 U.S.C. §5732a, as amended by the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act (P.L. 108-96)

[7] 45 C.F.R. §1351.

youth as individuals under age 18 who absent themselves from their home or legal residence at least overnight without the permission of their families.[8]

Although these current policy definitions are distinct, youth can be homeless *and* runaways. The American Medical Association's Council on Scientific Affairs argues that the distinctions between the two groups are artificial and may be counterproductive. Their report on this population concludes that most youth on the streets are both runaways and homeless because they have no home to which they are willing or able to return.[9]

Some definitions of runaway and homeless youth may include a sub-population known as "thrownaway" youth (or "push outs") who have been abandoned by their parents or have been told to leave their households. These youth may be considered part of the homeless population if they lack alternative living arrangements. However, the most recent federal study of *runaway* youth — the National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children-2 (NISMART-2) conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice — includes thrownaway youth in its estimates.[10] The study de-emphasizes distinctions between runaway and thrownaway populations because many youth experience both circumstances, and the categorization of a runaway or thrownaway episode frequently depends on whether information was gathered from the youth (who tend to emphasize the thrownaway aspects of the episode) or their care takers (who tend to emphasize the runaway aspects). Some definitions of runaway and homeless youth, including those used by HHS, include "street youth" because they lack shelter and live on the street and in other areas that increase the risk of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, drug abuse, and prostitution.[11]

Demographics

The precise number of homeless and runaway youth is unknown due to their residential mobility. These youth often eschew the shelter system for locations or areas that are not easily accessible to shelter workers and others who count the homeless and runaways.[12] Youth who come into contact with census takers may also be reluctant to report that they have left home or are homeless. Determining the number of homeless and runaway youth is further complicated by the lack of a

---

[8] Ibid.

[9] "Health Care Needs of Homeless and Runaway Youths," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, v. 262, no. 10 (September 1989).

[10] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "Runaway/Thrownaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics," by Heather Hammer, David Finkelhor, and Andrea J. Sedlak, *OJJDP NISMART Bulletin*, October 2002, at [http://www.missingkids.com/en_US/documents/nismart2_runaway.pdf]. (Hereafter referred to as "Runaway/Thrownaway Children.")

[11] §42 U.S.C. 5732a.

[12] Christopher L. Ringwalt et al., "The Prevalence of Homelessness Among Adolescents in the United States," *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 88, no. 9 (September 1998), p. 1325.

standardized methodology for counting the population and inconsistent definitions of what it means to be homeless or a runaway.[13]

Differences in methodology for collecting data on homeless populations may also influence how the characteristics of the runaway and homeless youth population are reported. Some studies have relied on point prevalence estimates that report whether youth have experienced homelessness at a given point in time, such as on a particular day.[14] According to researchers that study the characteristics of runaway and homeless youth, these studies appear to be biased toward describing individuals who experience longer periods of homelessness.[15] The sample location may also misrepresent the characteristics of the population generally.[16] Surveying youth who live on the streets may lend to the perception that all runaway and homeless youth are especially deviant. Youth surveyed in locations with high rates of drug use and sex work, known as "cruise areas," tend to be older, to have been away from home longer, to have recently visited community-based agencies, and to be less likely to attend school than youth in "non-cruise areas."[17]

Homeless Youth. Though dated, a 1987 GAO report based on a survey of intake workers at federally-funded youth shelters provides one of the few estimates by the federal government. The report estimated that between 52,000 and 170,000 unaccompanied youth age 16 and younger were homeless on any given night.[18] A 1998 study in the American Journal of Public Health used the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 1992 National Health Interview Survey of youth ages 12 to 17 to determine the number of those who were homeless.[19] In the survey, youth were asked whether, in the past 12 months, they had spent one or more nights in a specific type of shelter not intended to be a dwelling place (i.e., in an abandoned building, public place, outside, underground, or in a stranger's home) or a youth or adult shelter. Based on their responses, researchers calculated that 5% of the population ages 12 to 17 — more than 1 million youth in a given year — experienced homelessness. The researchers concluded that the prevalence of staying at a particular dwelling place while homeless was constant across racial groups, socioeconomic status, youth who lived with both parents and those who did not, and youth who lived in cities of varying sizes. However, boys were more likely to

---

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid, pp. 1325-1326.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Andrea L. Witkin et al., "Finding Homeless Youth: Patterns Based on Geographical Area and Number of Homeless Episodes," *Youth & Society*, vol. 37, no. 1 (September 2005), pp. 62-63. (Hereafter "Finding Homeless Youth.")

[17] Ibid.

[18] U.S. General Accounting Office (now the U.S. Government Accountability Office), *Children and Youths: About 68,000 Homeless and 186,000 in Shared Housing at Any Given Time*, GAO/PEMD-89-14, June1989, p. 27, at [http://archive.gao.gov/d25t7/138872.pdf].

[19] "The Prevalence of Homelessness," pp. 1326-1327.

experience homeless episodes, especially as these episodes related to sleeping in a shelter or outside.[20]

Measured characteristics of homeless youth vary depending on the source of the sample and methodology. Some evaluations of homeless youth indicate that gender representation varies across sample locations. Surveys from family shelters suggest either even numbers of females and males, or more females (see below for a discussion of the gender of youth using federally-funded Basic Center shelters).[21] Although studies tend to document that homeless youth generally reflect the ethnic makeup of their local areas, some studies show overrepresentation of racial or ethnic minorities relative to the community (black youth are overrepresented at the Basic Center shelters).[22] The history of homelessness among youth also varies by the sample location. Youth in shelters tend to have short periods of homelessness and have not experienced prior homeless episodes while youth living on the streets are more likely to demonstrate patterns of episodic (i.e., multiple episodes adding up to less than one year) or chronic homelessness (i.e., being homeless for one year or longer).[23]

Runaway and Thrownaway Youth. The NISMART-2, the most recent federal study of runaway and thrownaway youth, estimates that 1.7 million youth under age 18 left home or were asked to leave home in 1999.[24] Of these youth, 68% were between the ages of 15 and 17. Males and females were equally represented in the population. White youth made up the largest share of runaways (57%), followed by black youth (17%) and Hispanic youth (15%). Over half of all youth left home for one to six days, and 30% traveled more than one to 10 miles. An additional 30% traveled more than 10 to 50 miles. Nearly all (99%) runaway and thrownaway youth were returned to their homes. Another study estimates a somewhat smaller number of runaway youth — 1 million to 1.3 million.[25]

Factors Influencing Homelessness and Leaving Home

Youth most often cite family conflict as the major reason for their homelessness or episodes of running away. A literature review of homeless youth found that a youth's relationship with a step-parent, sexual activity, sexual orientation, pregnancy,

---

[20] Ibid., p 1327.

[21] Marjorie J. Robertson and Paul A. Toro, "Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention, and Policy," *The 1998 National Symposium on Homeless Research*, pp. 1-2, available at [http://aspe.hhs.gov/progsys/homeless/symposium/3-Youth.htm].

[22] Ibid., p. 4.

[23] "Homeless Youth," p. 4.

[24] "Runaway/Thrownaway Children," p. 7.

[25] Jan Moore, "Unaccompanied and Homeless Youth Review of Literature (1995-2005)," National Center for Homeless Education, 2005, p. 6, at [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/download/pdf/Homeless%20Youth%20Review%20of%20Literature.pdf].

school problems, and alcohol and drug use were strong predictors of family discord.[26] Of those callers who used the National Runaway Switchboard (a federally-sponsored call center for youth and their relatives involved in runaway incidents) one third attributed family conflict as the reason for their call.[27] Runaway and homeless youth also describe abuse and neglect as common experiences. Over 20% of youth in the NISMART-2 reported being physically or sexually abused at home in the prior year or feared abuse upon returning home.[28] Gay and lesbian youth appear to be overrepresented in the homeless population, due often to experiencing negative reactions from their parents when they came out about their sexuality. In five studies of unaccompanied youth in mid-size and large cities, between 20% and 40% of respondents identified as gay or lesbian.[29]

Youth in Foster Care. Youth who run away often have a history of involvement in the foster care system. On the last day of FY2005, states reported close to 11,000 (just over 2%) foster children as "runaways."[30] These data are similar to what states reported for the last days of FY2003 and FY2004.[31] A study of youth who ran away from foster care between 1993 and 2003 by the Chapin Hall Center for Children (University of Chicago) found that the average likelihood of an individual running away from foster care placements increased over this time period.[32] Youth questioned about their runaway experiences cited three primary reasons why they ran from foster care. First, they wanted to reconnect or stay connected to their biological families even if they recognized that their families were neither healthy nor safe. Second, youth wanted to express their autonomy and find normalcy among sometimes chaotic events. Many youth explained that they already felt independent because they had taken on adult responsibilities beginning at a young age. Third, youth wanted to maintain surrogate family relationships with non-family members. Youth in the study were more likely than their foster care peers to abuse drugs and to have certain mental health disorders.

---

[26] "Homeless Youth," p. 5.

[27] National Runaway Switchboard, "NRS Call Statistics," at [http://www.nrscrisisline.org/news_events/call_stats.html].

[28] "Runaway/Thrownaway Children," p. 8.

[29] Nicholas Ray, "Lesbian, Gay, and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness," National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006, pp. 12-14. (Hereafter "An Epidemic of Homelessness.") [http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/HomelessYouth.pdf].

[30] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, AFCARS Report #13 (Preliminary Estimates for FY2005) (September 2006), p. 1, available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report13.htm]. (Hereafter referred to as "AFCARS Report #13.")

[31] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, AFCARS Report #10 (Preliminary Estimates for FY2003) (June 2006), p. 1; AFCARS Report #11 (Preliminary Estimates for FY2004) (June 2006), p. 1, available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#afcars].

[32] Mark E. Courtney et al., "Youth Who Run Away from Out-of-Home Care," *Chapin Hall Center for Children Issue Brief*, no. 103 (March 2005), p. 2, at [http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1382].

Youth who experience foster care are also vulnerable to homelessness after emancipating from the child welfare system. Each year about 24,000 youth "age out" of foster care, many of whom lack the proper supports to successfully transition to adulthood.[33] Only about two-fifths of eligible foster youth receive independent living services.[34] Of those youth who do receive services, few have adequate housing assistance. Research on youth who emancipate from foster care suggests a nexus between foster care involvement and later episodes of homelessness. In a study of 19-year-olds who had emancipated from foster care in three states, approximately 14% had experienced homelessness since leaving care.[35] A national study of former foster youth found the percentage of the population who experienced homelessness to be much higher — 25%.[36]

Risks Associated with Running Away and Homelessness

Runaway and homeless youth are vulnerable to multiple problems while they are away from a permanent home, including untreated mental health disorders, drug use, and sexual exploitation. In a 1996 evaluation of street youth (ages 13 to 17) in a Hollywood cruise area, about one quarter met clinical criteria for major depression compared to 10% or less of their peers in the general population.[37] However, youth who live on the streets in cruise areas may experience greater challenges than other homeless and runaway youth who stay in other locations. Another study that compared rates for many mental disorders between homeless youth and the general youth population concluded that they were similar, although homeless youth had significantly higher rates of disruptive behavior disorders.[38]

Drug use is also reported among the runaway and homeless youth population. NISMART-2 found that 17% of runaway youth used hard drugs and 18% were in the company of someone known to be abusing drugs when they were away from home.[39] Runaway and homeless youth are also vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, and are at high risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Some youth resort

---

[33] AFCARS Report #13, p. 4.

[34] Mark E. Courtney and Darcy Hughes Heuring. "The Transition to Adulthood for Youth "Aging Out" of the Foster Care System" in Wayne G. Osgood et al., eds., *On Your Own Without a Net: The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Populations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 27-32. (Hereafter "Youth "Aging Out" of the Foster Care System.")

[35] Mark E. Courtney et al., "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth," Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago (2005), p. 9.

[36] Ronna Cook, Esther Fleischman, and Virginia Grimes, "A National Evaluation of Title IV-E Foster Care Independent Living Programs for Youth, Phase 2 Final Report," vol. 1 (1991), *Westat*, pp. 4-11.

[37] "Homeless Youth," p. 7. The clinical criteria are found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3rd Revision, published by the American Psychiatric Association, a handbook used most often to diagnose mental disorders in the United States.

[38] Ibid.

[39] "Runaway/Thrownaway Children," p. 8.

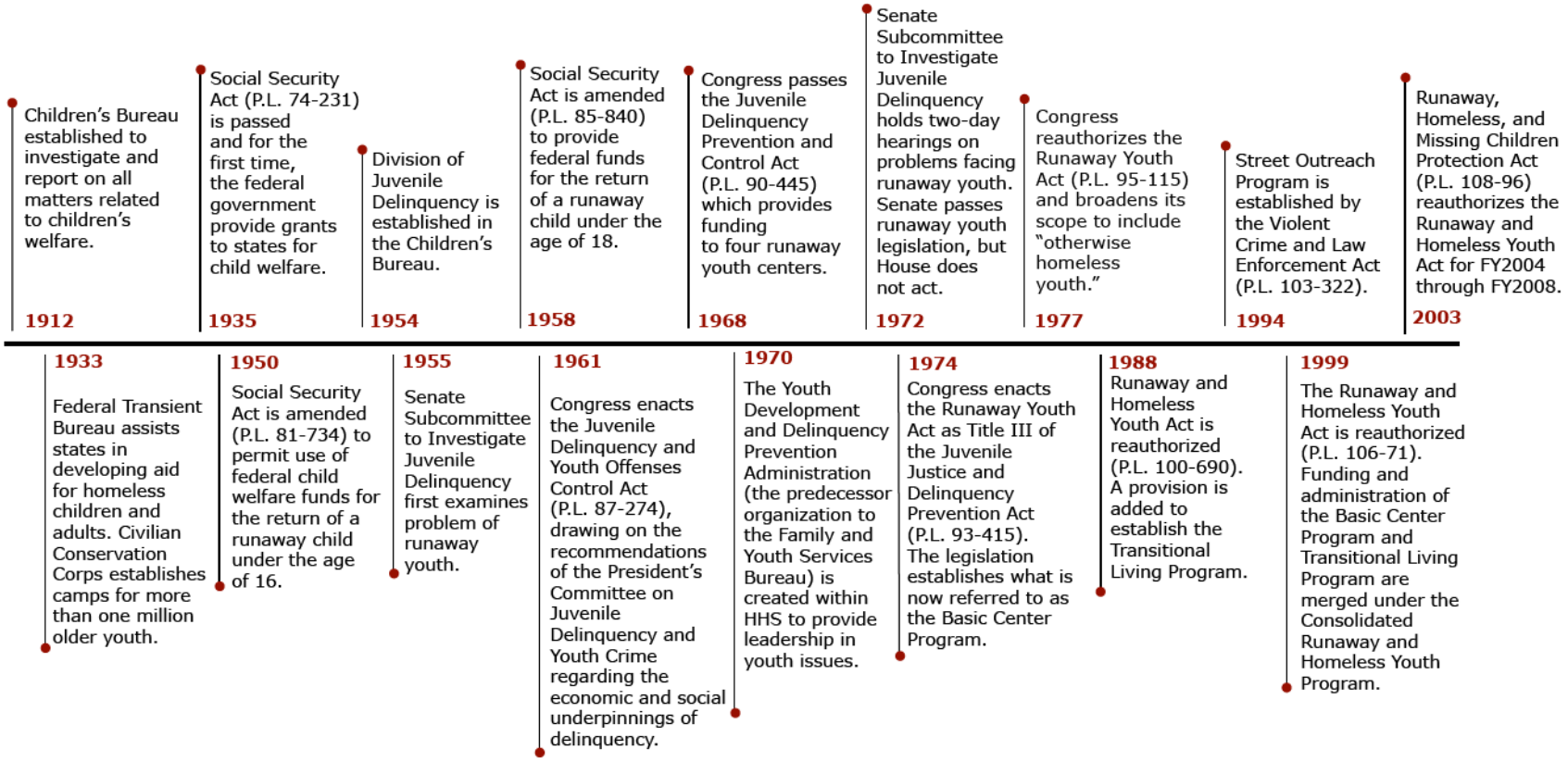
to illegal activity including stealing, prostitution, and selling drugs for survival. Runaway and homeless youth report other challenges including poor health and the lack of basic provisions such as food.[40]

Evolution of Federal Policy

Prior to the passage of the 1974 Runaway Youth Act (Title III, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, P.L. 93-415), federal policy was limited in the area of runaway and homeless youth. If they received any services, most such youth were served through the local child welfare agency, juvenile justice court system, or both. The 1970s marked a shift to a more rehabilitative model for assisting youth who had run afoul of the law, including those who committed status offenses (i.e., running away). During this period, Congress focused increasing attention on runaways and other vulnerable youth due, in part, to emerging sociological models to explain why youth engaged in deviant behavior. The first runaway shelters were created in the late 1960s and 1970s to assist them in returning home. The landmark Runway Youth Act of 1974 decriminalized runaway youth and authorized funding for programs to provide shelter, counseling, and other services. Since 1974, Congress has expanded the services available to both runaway youth and homeless youth. **Figure 1** traces the evolution of federal runaway and homeless youth policy.

[40] Marjorie J. Robertson and Paul A. Toro, "Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention, and Policy," *The 1998 National Symposium on Homeless Research*, pp. 10, at [http://aspe.hhs.gov/progsys/homeless/symposium/3-Youth.htm].

Figure 1. Evolution of Federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Policy, 1912-2003



Source: Created by the Congressional Research Service.

Early Years: 1930s-1960s

Federal Legislation on Homeless Youth. The federal government first addressed the problem of youth homelessness during the Great Depression when it established programs to provide relief services for children and youth, often accompanied by their families, who left home to find work and became homeless. The estimated number of homeless individuals in 1933 was two million to five million, of whom 20% to 30% were boys.[41] Mayors at this time reported that the transient and homeless populations in their cities were sometimes fed, pushed on to other cities, or placed in jail.

In response to the influx of homeless adults and youth to the nation's cities, the Federal Transient Relief Act of 1933 established a Transient Division within the Federal Transient Relief Administration to provide relief services through state grants. Also in 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps opened camps and shelters for more than one million low-income older youth. In 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt created the National Youth Administration by executive order to open employment bureaus and provide cash assistance to poor college and high school students. Together, these programs helped to reduce the number of homeless and transient youth. According to the July 1935 Federal Transient Relief Act's Monthly Report, 50,000 young people were homeless and/or transient at that time.[42] The Transient Division was disbanded shortly thereafter.

Federal Legislation on Runaway Youth. Homeless youth were generally considered a problem that had ended after the Great Depression, but youth running away from home was emerging as a more serious issue. At about the same time the federal government withdrew funding for homeless and transient youth services provided during the Great Depression, it enacted, for the first time, separate and unrelated legislation to assist vulnerable youth — including runaways — through state grants. As originally enacted, the Social Security Act of 1935 (P.L. 74-231) authorized indefinite annual funding of $1.5 million for states to establish, extend, and strengthen public child welfare services in "predominately rural" or "special needs" areas. For purposes of this program (now at Title IV-B, Subpart 1 of the Social Security Act), these were described as services "for the protection and care of homeless, dependent, and neglected children, and children in danger of becoming delinquent."[43] In 1950 (P.L. 81-734), Title IV-B was amended to allow state grants

---

[41] Eric Beecroft and Seymour Janow, "Toward a National Policy for Migration," *Social Forces*, vol. 16, no. 4 (May 1938), p. 477. (Hereafter "Migration.")

[42] Ibid., 477.

[43] In 1962 (P.L. 87-543), child welfare services were formally defined under Title IV-B as "public social services which supplement, or substitute for parental care and supervision for the purpose of (1) remedying or assisting in the solution of problems which may result in, the neglect abuse, exploitation, or delinquency of children, (2) protecting and caring for homeless, dependent, or neglected children, (3) protecting and promoting the welfare of children, including the strengthening of their own homes where possible or, where needed, the provision of adequate care of children away from their homes in foster family homes or day-care or other child-care facilities." P.L. 109-288 (2006) removes reference to homeless

(continued...)

to be used to pay the cost of returning a runaway child under the age of 16 to his or her home state from another state. In 1958, the program was again amended (P.L. 85-840) to increase the age of runaways who could receive this aid to 18 and to include 15 days of maintenance (i.e., room and board) for each child in cases where the costs could not be met by his or her parents or the agency institution legally responsible for the care of that child.

The passage of the 1961 Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act (P.L. 87-274) focused on the environmental and underlying sociological factors of deviant behavior among youth. Unaccompanied minors on the street fit the image of troubled, and potentially delinquent youth. This image was further entrenched as some runaway youth joined the Counterculture Movement of the 1960s.[44] The first runaway centers (Huckleberry House in San Francisco, the Runaway House in Washington, D.C., and branch offices of the Young Women's Christian Association and Traveler's Aid Society) opened during the late 1960s to provide shelter, counseling, and other services to youth and their families. The centers received little, if any, federal funds, and relied primarily on the donations of churches and other non-governmental organizations.

The Runaway Youth Act of 1974

Concerned that an increasing number of runaway youth were entering the juvenile justice system, the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Senate Judiciary Committee conducted hearings on runaway youth in 1972 to explore the problems facing this population.[45] Testimony from government officials, youth workers, and community leaders focused on the lifestyles of youth, as well as their interaction with police and increasing reliance on runaway centers. Runaway youth were concentrated in areas like the Haight District in San Francisco and New York City's Greenwich Village, often staying in filthy, overcrowded houses (known as "pads") with other youth and adults. Police officers routinely sent unaccompanied youth to juvenile detention centers. The few runaway centers operating in the early 1970s were underfunded, understaffed, and unable to help youth cope with the reasons they ran away. A fractured home life and problems with school were most often cited as motivation for leaving home. Youth who ran away because they were abused or neglected were not always placed under the protection of the state. These youth, like most runaways, had to secure permission from their parents to stay overnight at a runaway center.

---

[43] (...continued)
youth.

[44] Karen M. Staller, "Constructing the Runaway and Homeless Youth Problem: Boy Adventurers to Girl Prostitutes, 1960-1978," *Journal of Communication*, vol. 53, no. 2 (2003), p. 331.

[45] U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency. *Juvenile Delinquency*. 92nd Congress, 1st session, January 13-14, 1972. (Washington: GPO, 1972).

The subcommittee also heard testimony regarding the need to establish and federally fund programs to assist runaway youth. At the time, states could only use Social Security Title IV-B funds for runaway youth to return them to their state of origin (not for intrastate transfer). Other federal funding streams that targeted runaway youth were also limited. The Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act of 1968 (P.L. 90-445) authorized funding for approximately four runaway centers from 1968 to 1972. The primary purpose of the legislation was to provide assistance to courts, correctional systems, schools, and community agencies for research and training on juvenile justice issues.

Although the Senate reacted to the hearings by passing legislation to assist runaway youth, the House did not act. However, two years later, in 1974, Congress passed the Runaway Youth Act as Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA, P.L. 93-415). A total of $10 million for each fiscal year, FY1975 through FY1977, was authorized to provide temporary shelter, family counseling, and after-care services to runaway youth and their families through what is now referred to as the Basic Center Program. To receive funding under Title III, states had to decriminalize runaway youth and provide services outside of the juvenile justice system. The legislation also included a provision requiring a comprehensive statistical survey of runaway youth.

Expanding the Scope of the Act

Through the Juvenile Justice Amendments to the JJDPA in 1977 (P.L. 95-115), Congress reauthorized the Runaway Youth Act for FY1978 and expanded its scope to include homeless youth. Such youth became eligible for services provided through the Basic Center Program. Two other programs were later added that targeted specific sub-populations of runaway and homeless youth. Congress established the Transitional Living Program through the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-690) to meet the needs of older youth ages 16 to 21. The impetus for passing the legislation was the success of demonstration transitional living projects in the 1980s. The other major program, the Street Outreach Program, was created in 1994 by the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322). The purpose of the program is to serve homeless youth living on the streets. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act was most recently reauthorized in 2003 by the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act (P.L. 108-96) which extended the program's funding authorization through FY2008.[46]

---

[46] The Missing and Exploited Children's Program, administered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the U.S. Department of Justice, is generally reauthorized with the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. For a discussion of the program, see CRS Report RL31655, *Missing and Exploited Children: Overview and Policy Concerns*, and CRS Report RS21365, T*he Missing Children's Assistance Act (MCAA): Appropriations and Reauthorization*, by Edith Fairman Cooper.

Funding and Description of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program

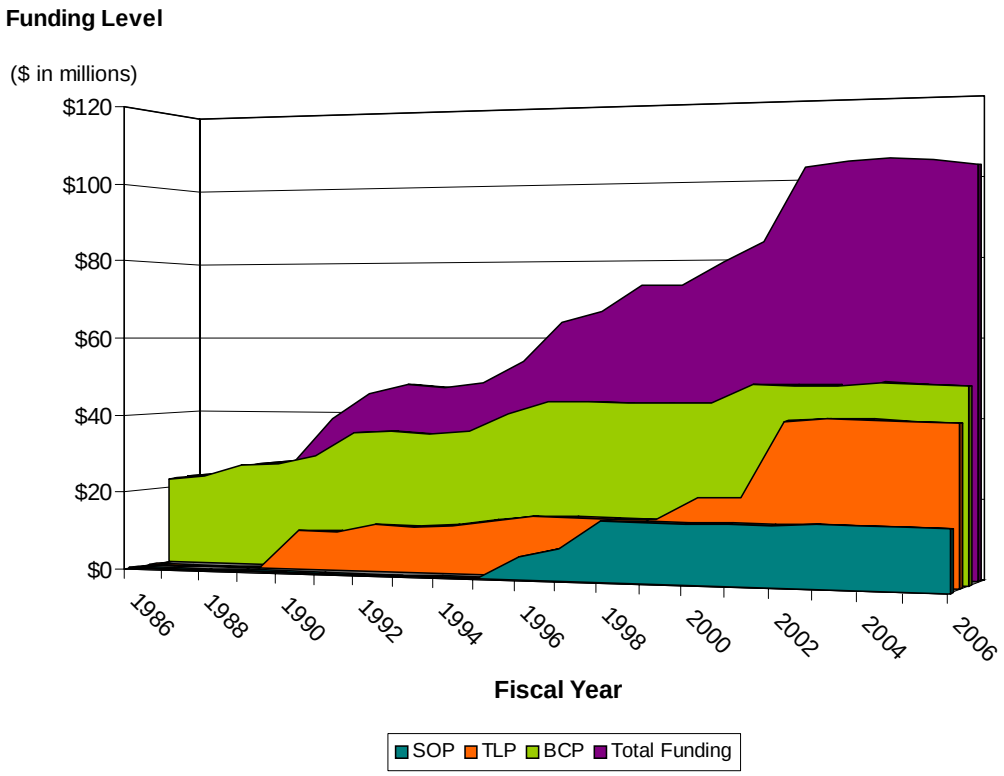
Federal Administration and Funding

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program is administered by the Family and Youth Services (FYSB) Bureau within HHS's Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The funding streams for the Basic Center Program (BCP) and Transitional Living Program (TLP) were separate until Congress consolidated them in 1999 when RHYA was reauthorized by the Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children Protection Act (P.L. 106-71). Together, these programs — along with other program activities, except the Street Outreach Program(SOP) — are known as the Consolidated Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. Although the Street Outreach Program is a separately funded component, SOP services are coordinated with those provided under the BCP and TLP. **Figure 2** provides the program funding levels from FY1986 through FY2006 for the Basic Center Program, and from 1988 and 1994, for the BCP and TLP, respectively, through FY2006.

The 2003 reauthorization (P.L. 108-96) of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act authorized $105 million for FY2004 and such sums as may be necessary for the Consolidated Runaway and Homeless Youth Program for FY2005 through FY2008. Under current law, 90% of the federal funds appropriated under the authorization must be used for the BCP and TLP. Of this amount, 45% is reserved for the BCP and no more than 55% is reserved for the Transitional Living Program. The remaining share of federal funding is allocated for (1) a national communication system to facilitate communication between service providers, runaway youth, and their families; (2) training and technical support for grantees; (3) evaluations of the programs; and (4) HHS efforts to coordinate with other federal agencies on matters relating to the health, education, employment, and housing of these youth.

The Street Outreach Program is authorized to receive such sums as may be necessary.

Figure 2. Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Funding, FY1986-FY2006



Source: Congressional Research Service.

Basic Center Program

Overview. The Basic Center Program is intended to provide short-term shelter and services for youth under age 18 and their families through public and private community-based centers. Youth eligible to receive BCP services include those youth who are at risk of running away or becoming homeless (and may live at home with their parents), or have already left home, either voluntarily or involuntarily. BCP centers were designed to provide these services outside of the law enforcement, juvenile justice, child welfare, and mental health systems. In FY2006, 328 BCP shelters operated in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, America Samoa, and Guam.[47] According to the FY2008 budget justifications, the proposed FY2008 funding level can support 336 BCP shelters, the same number funded in FY2007. These centers, which generally shelter as many as 20 youth for approximately two weeks, are located in areas that are frequented or easily reached by runaway and homeless youth.

---

[47] U.S. Department Health and Human Services, *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2007, p. D-43. According to the ACF budget justification, the Northern Mariana Islands do not have Basic Center Program grantees, although FY2006 funds are available for new awards to the territory, if desired.

The shelters seeks to reunite youth with their families, whenever possible, or to locate appropriate alternative placements. They also provide food, clothing, individual or group and family counseling, and health care referrals. Some centers may serve homeless youth ages 18 to 21 through street-based services, home-based services, and drug abuse education and prevention services.

BCP grantees — community-based public and private organizations — must make efforts to contact the parents and relatives of runaway and homeless youth. Grantees are also required to establish relationship with law enforcement, health and mental health care, social service, welfare, and school district systems to coordinate services. Centers maintain confidential statistical records of youth (including youth who are not referred to out-of-home shelter services) and the family members. The centers are required to submit an annual report to HHS detailing the program activities and the number of youth participating in such activities.

HHS evaluates BCP organizations using the Basic Center Program Performance Standards, which relate to how well the needs of runaway and homeless youth and their families are being met. Nine of these standards address service components (i.e., outreach, individual intake process, and recreational programs) and six focus on administrative functions or activities (i.e., staffing and staff development, reporting, and individual client files).

Funding. BCP grants are allocated by formula to each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico and are then distributed (by HHS) on a competitive basis to community-based organizations. The amount of BCP funding available is based on the jurisdiction's proportion of the nation's youth under age 18, and under the law, these jurisdictions receive a minimum of $100,000. Separately, each of the territories (U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, America Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands) receives a minimum of $45,000 of the total appropriations. Congress appropriated $48.3 million for the BCP in FY2006. See **Appendix Table A-1** for the amount of funding allocated for each state in FY2006 and FY2007.

The costs of the Basic Center Program are shared by the federal government (90%) and grantees (10%). Community-based organizations apply directly to the federal government for the BCP grants. Grants may be awarded for up to three years. Funding priority is given to organizations that have demonstrated experience in providing services to runaway and homeless youth, and to those who apply for less than $200,000 in funding per fiscal year. Funding for the second and third year, however, depends on the availability of funds and the grantee's satisfactory performance.

Youth in the Program. BCP grantees serve only a fraction of the more than one million youth who run away or are homeless. According to the FY2006 NEO-RHYMIS report of all grantees, 48,442 youth used BCP services.[48] Of these youth, 25,772 (53.2%) were female and 22,670 (46.8%) were male. As **Figure 3** shows, the greatest percentage of youth served were ages 15 and 16. The centers also served youth younger than 12 and older than 18. The proportions of youth in each age category are nearly the same as they were in FY2005. Youth who visited the centers represented a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Although white youth made up the majority of the youth served, black and American Indian youth were overrepresented compared to their share of the general population, as shown in **Figure 4**. Hispanic youth of any race comprised 15% of the served population (not shown in the figure), with most Hispanic youth identified as white (42.0%), or not identified as part of a racial group (46.4%). The percentages of youth in each racial and ethnic group are almost identical to those reported for FY2005.

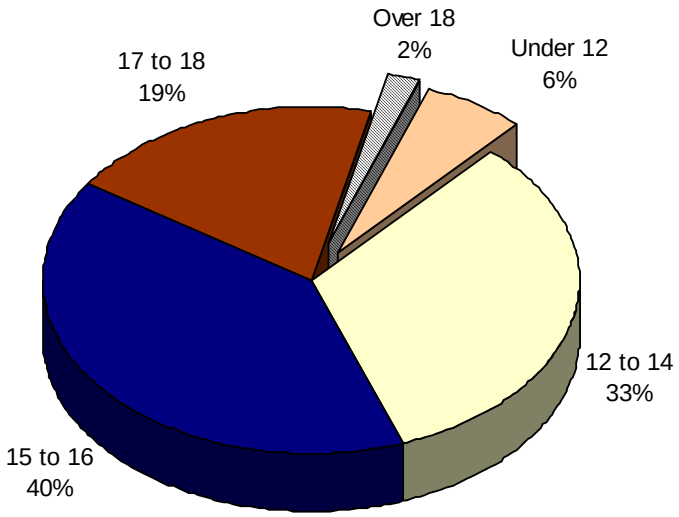
At the time of their entrance to the BCP shelters in FY2006, the majority of youth had lived with their parents and attended school regularly; however, 21% attended irregularly. The greatest share of youth were referred to the shelters by law enforcement agencies, followed by self-referrals, referrals by their parents, and referrals by child protective services. According to the NEO-RHYMIS report, youth received counseling, basic support, life skills training, substance abuse prevention treatment, and participated in recreational activities, among other services at the shelters. Upon exiting, most youth (64.0%) planned to live with their parents. However, youth were also exiting to a relative or friend's home (8.0%), the street (5.9%), and foster care (3.9%). Approximately 4% of youth did not know where they would live upon exiting. These proportions are about the same as they were for FY2005. The remaining youth exited to a shelter, another private residence, or a residential program, among other arrangements. As in FY2005, the issues of concern most cited at the time of exiting, in order of frequency, were family dynamics, education, housing, mental health, and alcohol and drug abuse.

In FY2006, BCP shelters reported turning away 3,422 youth by phone and 306 youth in person due to a lack of bed space.

---

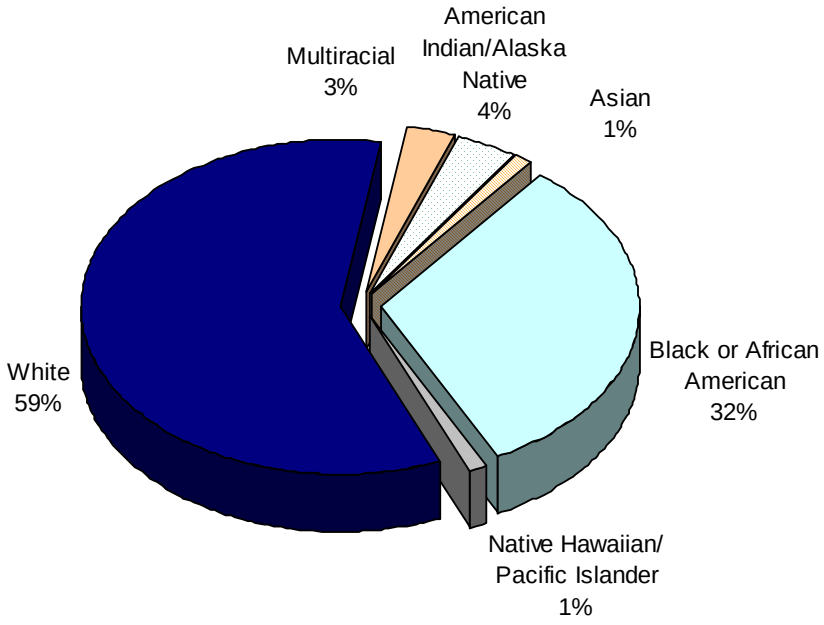
[48] Data on youth served by the BCP, TLP, and SOP are provided in HHS's NEO-RHYMIS reporting system. See [https://extranet.acf.hhs.gov/rhymis/custom_reports.html]. The NEO-RHYMIS (that is, National Extranet Optimized Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System) is explained in the section below on Congressional Oversight.

Figure 3. Age of Youth Served by the Basic Center Program, FY2006



Source: CRS Analysis of NEO-RHYMIS data.
Note: Based on data from 48,442 youth.

Figure 4. Race of Youth Served by the Basic Center Program, FY2006



Source: CRS Analysis of NEO-RHYMIS data.
Note: Based on data from 48,442 youth. Consistent with the Census Bureau classification of ethnicity and race, Hispanic youth can be of any race.

Transitional Living Program

Overview. Recognizing the difficulty that youth face in becoming self-sufficient adults, the Transitional Living Program provides longer-term shelter and assistance for youth ages 16 to 21 (including pregnant and/or parenting youth) who may leave their biological homes due to family conflict, or have left and are not expected to return home. In FY2006, 207 organizations received TLP grants.[49] According to the FY2008 budget justifications, the proposed FY2008 funding level can support 207 TLP grants, the same number as in FY2007. All but five states (Idaho, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Wyoming), Puerto Rico, and Guam appear to have at least one TLP grantee.[50]

Each TLP grantee may shelter up to 20 youth at host family homes, supervised apartments owned by a social service agency, or scattered-site apartments, and single-occupancy apartments rented directly with the assistance of the agency. Shelter is provided for up to 18 months, and youth under 18 may remain in the program an additional 180 days or until the youth turns 18, whichever comes first. Youth receive several types of services:

- basic life-skills training, including consumer education and instruction in budgeting and housekeeping;
- interpersonal skill building;
- educational preparation, such as GED courses and post-secondary training;
- assistance in job preparation and attainment;
- education and counseling on substance abuse; and
- mental and physical health care services.

TLP centers develop a written plan designed to help transition youth to independent living or another appropriate living arrangement, and they refer youth to other systems that can coordinate to meet their educational, health care, and social service needs. The grantees must also submit an annual report to HHS that includes information regarding the activities carried out with funds and the number and characteristics of the homeless youth.

Funding. TLP grants are distributed competitively by HHS to community-based public and private organizations for five-year periods. Congress appropriated $39.5 million in FY2006 for the program. Grantees must provide at least 10% of the total cost of the program.

Youth in the Program. For FY2006, NEO-RHYMIS reported that the Transitional Living Program served 3,637 youth. Of these youth, the majority were female. Approximately 60% were ages 18 or younger and 40% were ages 19 to 21. About 53% of the youth were white, 37% were black, and the remaining youth were

---

[49] U.S. Department Health and Human Services, *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2007, pp. D-44.

[50] See "Locate a TLP Program" on the Family and Youth Services website at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/youthdivision/programs/locate.htm].

identified as another race or multi-racial. About one-fifth of youth in the program had dropped out of school. These demographic figures varied slightly from those for FY2005.

According to the FY2005 NEO-RHYMIS report, prior to living at the TLP shelter youth lived in a variety of locations: the homes of their friends and relatives (30.0%) or parents (18.2%), a family or adult homeless shelter (5.9%), a BCP shelter (7.2%), on the street as a runaway or homeless youth (6.8%), another youth emergency shelter (3.8%), and on the street as a thrownaway youth (3.4%), among other locations. Youth most often self-referred or were referred to the TLP by a relative or friend. While at the TLP shelter, youth received counseling, basic support, life skills training, and physical health care, and they participated in recreational activities, including other services.[51] As in FY2005, youth identified housing, family dynamics, unemployment, education, mental health, and alcohol or drug abuse most frequently as issues of concern upon exiting.

In FY2006, 2,516 youth were turned away from the TLP by telephone and 628 were turned away in person due to a lack of bed space.

Maternity Group Homes. For FY2002, the Administration proposed a $33 million initiative to fund Maternity Group Homes — or centers that provide shelter to pregnant and parenting teens who are vulnerable to abuse and neglect — as a component of the TLP. Congress did not fund the initiative as part of its FY2002 appropriation. However, that year Congress provided additional funding to the TLP to ensure that pregnant and parenting teens could access services (H.Rept. 107-372). A total of $39.7 million was appropriated for the TLP, which included an additional $19.2 million over the FY2001 TLP appropriation to ensure that funds would be available to assist pregnant and parenting teens.

The 2003 amendments to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (P.L. 108-96) provided statutory authority to use TLP funds for Maternity Group Homes. For FY2003 through FY2006, the President requested annual funding of $10 million for such homes, separate from the funding for the TLP grants. Congress again did not appropriate separate funds for the program, though funding remained stable at approximately $40 million for the TLP. The Administration's FY2007 budget request sought to implement a $4 million voucher program for 100 pregnant and parenting youth, but no legislation to implement this was proposed or considered during the 109th Congress, and the Administration's FY2008 budget does not request funding for such a proposal.[52]

Since FY2002, funding for adult-supervised transitional living arrangements that serve pregnant or parenting women ages 16 to 21 and their children has been awarded to organizations that receive TLP grants. Currently, an estimated one-third

---

[51] The average length of youth's stay in the TLP is not available.

[52] ACF staff confirmed in correspondence on March 9, 2007 that HHS does not plan to create a voucher program for pregnant and parenting youth.

of TLP grants fund Maternity Group Homes.[53] These organizations provide youth with parenting skills, including child development education; family budgeting; health and nutrition, and other skills to promote their well-being and the well-being of their children.

Street Outreach Program

Overview. Runaway and homeless youth living on the streets or in areas that increase their risk of using drugs or being subjected to sexual abuse, prostitution, or sexual exploitation are eligible to receive services through the Street Outreach Program. The program's goal is to assist youth in transitioning to safe and appropriate living arrangements. SOP services include the following:

- treatment and counseling;
- crisis intervention;
- drug abuse and exploitation prevention and education activities;
- survival aid;
- street-based education and outreach;
- information and referrals; and
- follow-up support.

Funding. The Street Outreach Program is funded separately from the BCP and TLP and is authorized to receive such sums as may be necessary. Since FY1996, when funding for the Street Outreach Program was first provided, community-based public and private organizations have been eligible to apply for SOP grants. Grants are generally awarded for a three-year period, and grantees must provide 10% of the funds to cover the cost of the program. Applicants may apply for a $100,000 grant each year for a maximum of $200,000 over that period. Approximately $15 million was appropriated to fund 140 projects in FY2006 and 137 in FY2007, many of which operate in coordination with BCPs and TLPs. HHS anticipates that the same number will be funded as in FY2007.

Youth in the Program. According to FY2006 NEO-RHYMIS data, street workers with the grantee organizations made 696,146 contacts with street youth. Of those youth, most received written materials about referral services, health and hygiene products, and food and drink items.

National Communications System

In FY2006, HHS allocated $3.3 million of BCP funds and $1.6 million of TLP funds for training and technical assistance, which included funding for a national communications system, logistical support, HHS's National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth, demonstrations, and the administration of the management information system (known as RHYMIS).

---

[53] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act*, H.Rept. 108-118, p. 9.

A portion of the Consolidated Runaway and Homeless Youth Program funds are allocated for a national communications system (that is, the National Runaway Switchboard) to help homeless and runaway youth (or youth who are contemplating running away) through counseling and referrals and communicating with their families. Beginning with FY1974 and every year after, the National Runaway Switchboard has been funded through the Basic Center Program grant or the Consolidated Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grant. The Switchboard is located in Chicago and operates each day to provide services to youth and their families in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Services include 1) a channel through which runaway and homeless youth or their parents may leave messages; 2) 24-hour referrals to community resources, including shelter, community food banks, legal assistance, and social services agencies; and 3) crisis intervention counseling to youth. In calendar year 2005, the Switchboard handled more than 102,000 calls, 41% of which were from youth and 36% of which were from parents.[54]

Other services are also provided through the Switchboard. Since 1995, the "HomeFree" family reunification program has provided bus tickets for youth ages 12 to 21 to return home. In FY2002, the Switchboard offered family reunification services to 4,872 youth, of whom 1,170 received free bus tickets to return home or to an alternative placement near their home (such as an independent living program) through HomeFree.[55]

Other Activities

Under RHYA, HHS may make funds available to statewide and regional nonprofit organizations that provide technical assistance and training to organizations eligible to receive Runaway and Homeless Youth Program funds.[56] HHS may also provide grants to states, localities, and private entities to carry out research and evaluation projects that increase knowledge concerning, and improve services for, runaway and homeless youth. ACF evaluates each Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grant recipient through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Monitoring

---

[54] The Switchboard also has a special phone line for hearing-impaired callers and access to AT&T's language translation service. Its website provides information to those seeking non-crisis related information. National statistics on use of the National Runaway Switchboard are available at [http://www.nrscrisisline.org/news_events/call_stats.htmlp].

[55] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Report to Congress on the Youth Programs of the Family and Youth Services Bureau for Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003,*October 2004, p. 17. (Hereafter *Report to Congress*.) Report available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/docs/0203_report.pdf].

[56] Technical support providers offer assistance through the Regional Training and Technical Assistance Provider System comprised of one provider for each region. The providers work closely with ACF regional office staff to identify grantee needs and review the results of evaluations conducted by HHS staff. Based on these analyses, the provider needs assessments, and grantee requests, the providers offer several types of services, including regional and state-level conferences that address topics of interest to grantees, on-site and telephone consultations, workshops and training on issues of concern, and resource materials.

System. Staff from regional ACF offices and other grant recipients (known as peer reviewers) inspect the program site, conduct interviews, review case files and other agency documents, and conduct entry and exit conferences. The monitoring team then prepares a written report that identifies the strengths of the program and areas that require corrective action.

In calendar years 2003 and 2006, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program was reviewed through the U.S. Office of Management and Budget's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process.[57] The 2003 evaluation concluded that program results were not demonstrated because the RHYP lacked long-term performance measures and time frames for these measures, as well as adequate progress in achieving its annual and long-term performance goals. The PART review also found that no independent evaluations of the program were routinely conducted. However, in 2006 the program was rated effective because it made improvements to its long-term measures for evaluating youth outcomes. According to the PART evaluation, the re-engineering of NEO-RHYMIS has enhanced HHS staff's ability to evaluate these outcomes (see below for more information about changes to NEO-RHYMIS). The 2006 PART also explains that the program has ambitious targets and time frames for its long term measures. For example, the program plans to increase the proportion of youth living in safe and appropriate settings after exiting TLP services to 85% by FY2008, from its initial benchmark of 79%. More accurate NEO-RHYMIS data has enabled HHS to more effectively evaluate the program internally and through contracts. An analysis by the National Opinion Research Center of FY2002 through FY2004 NEO-RHYMIS data on youth using BCPs, identified factors associated with unsafe exits and ranked high and poor RHYP programs by risk levels of youth in their programs.[58] HHS evaluations have affirmed these findings.

Approximately $4.7 million in BCP funds and $3.5 million in TLP funds was allocated to research and evaluation, training and technical assistance, demonstration and development activities, and program support in FY2006.

Congressional Oversight

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and the House Committee on Education and Workforce have exercised jurisdiction over the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. HHS must submit reports biennially to the committees on the status, activities, and accomplishments of program grant recipients and evaluations of the programs performed by HHS.[59] These reports generally include data on the youth served by the programs which are generated by RHYMIS. The

---

[57] U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Detailed Assessment on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Assessment*, 2003 and U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Detailed Assessment on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Assessment*, 2007, at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/summary/10001064.2006.html]. (Hereafter PART 2003 or PART 2007.)

[58] PART 2007, p. 11.

[59] NEO-RHYMIS data are available online by state, region, and grantee organization at [https://extranet.acf.hhs.gov/rhymis/custom_reports.html].

information system is designed to collect information twice during the fiscal year from program grantees on the basic demographics of the youth, the services they received, and the status of the youth (i.e., expected living situation, physical and mental health, and family dynamics) upon exiting the programs. RHYMIS was updated in 2004 to reduce the burden of reporting the data. Known as NEO-RHYMIS, the new system has received routine data submissions from nearly all (99%) Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grantees, including those in FY2006.[60] In prior years, fewer than half of grantees reported on the number of youth served.[61]

The 2003 reauthorization (P.L. 108-96) of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act required that HHS, in consultation with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, submit a report to Congress on the promising strategies to end youth homelessness within two years of the reauthorization, in October 2005. As of February 2007, the report is nearly complete, but HHS was unable to provide a date that the report will be available.[62]

Additional Federal Support for Runaway and Homeless Youth

Since the creation of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, other federal initiatives have also established services for such youth. Four of these initiatives — Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, Shared Vision for Youth initiative, and Discretionary Grants for Family Violence Prevention Program — are discussed below.

Educational Assistance

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (P.L. 100-77), as amended, established the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program in the U.S. Department of Education.[63] This program assists state education agencies (SEAs) to ensure that all homeless children and youth have equal access to the same, appropriate education, including public preschool education, that is provided to other children and youth. Grants made by SEAs to local education agencies (LEAs) under this program must be used to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and success in school of homeless children and youth. Program funds may be appropriated for

---

[60] Based on conversation with NEO-RHYMIS technical support staff on March 2, 2007. See also *Report to Congress*, p. 2.

[61] *Report to Congress*, p. 2.

[62] Based on correspondence with ACF staff at HHS on March 9, 2007.

[63] Other programs assist homeless youth and their families through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, although none are targeted exclusively to runaway and homeless youth. For additional information about these programs, see CRS Report RL30442, *Homelessness: Targeted Federal Programs and Recent Legislation*, coordinated by Libby Perl.

activities such as tutoring, supplemental instruction, and referral services for homeless children and youth, as well as providing them with medical, dental, mental, and other health services. Liaison staff for homeless children and youth in each LEA are responsible for coordinating activities for these youth with other entities and agencies, including local Basic Center and Transitional Living Program grantees.[64]

To receive funding, each state must submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education that indicates how the state will identify and assess the needs of eligible children and youth; ensure that they have access to the federal, state, and local food programs and the same educational programs available to other youth; and resolve problems concerning delays in and barriers to enrollment and transportation. Education for Homeless Children and Youth grants are allotted to SEAs in proportion to grants made under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which allocates funds to all states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico based on the percentage of low-income children enrolled in a school or living in the nearby residential area. However, no state can receive less than the greater of $150,000, 0.25% of the total annual appropriation, or the amount it received in FY2001 under this program. The Department of Education must reserve 0.1% of the total appropriation for grants to the Virgin Islands, Guam, America Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The agency must also transfer 1.0% of the total appropriation to the Department of the Interior for services to homeless children and youth provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Amendments to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 authorized funding for the program through FY2007. In FY2006, program appropriations totaled $61.9 million.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110) reauthorized and amended the program explicitly to prohibit states that receive McKinney-Vento funds from segregating homeless students from non-homeless students, except for short periods of time for health and safety emergencies or to provide temporary, special, supplemental services. Prior to the reauthorization, homeless children in some districts attended class in separate buildings or schools. Advocates raised concerns that these children, including those enrolled in classes that were equal in quality to the classes attended by their non-homeless peers, were receiving an inferior education because they were physically separated. The act exempted four counties (San Joaquin, Orange, and San Diego counties in California and Maricopa County in Arizona) from these requirements because they operated separate school districts for homeless students in FY2000, as long as: (1) those separate schools offer services that are comparable to local schools; and (2) homeless children are not required to attend them. The Department of Education must certify annually that the school districts meet these requirements.[65]

---

[64] HHS has provided guidance to grantees on meeting the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act, available at [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/aboutfysb/McKinney-Vento_IM.pdf].

[65] The Individual with Disabilities Education Act, last amended in 2004 (P.L. 108-446), includes provisions aimed at ensuring special education and related services for children with disabilities who are homeless or otherwise members of highly mobile populations. For (continued...)

Pending legislation in the 110th Congress would provide additional educational assistance to runaway and homeless youth. If passed, the FAFSA Fix for Homeless Kids (H.R. 601) would amend the Higher Education Act to deem a student independent for financial aid purposes if the student is verified both as homeless and unaccompanied by an LEA liaison for homeless children, a director of a homeless shelter, transitional shelter, or independent living facility, or a financial aid administrator.

Shared Vision for Youth Initiative

In 2003, the White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth, comprised of the heads of executive branch agencies and their designees, issued a report calling for increased federal coordination to improve service delivery to and outcomes for vulnerable youth. In response to the report, the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, and Labor, and the Social Security Administration, partnered to improve communication, coordination, and collaboration across programs that target at-risk youth groups under a initiative called the "Shared Vision for Youth." One of these groups includes runaway and homeless youth.

Together, the agencies have convened an Interagency Work Group and regional forums to develop and coordinate policies and research on the vulnerable youth population. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has led efforts to promote collaboration between the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program and the agency's Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs. The DOL has encouraged local and state workforce investment boards to implement the strategies of the Shared Vision initiative based, in part, on models already implemented through three WIA programs in California, Oregon, and Washington that provide employment and educational resources targeted for runaway and homeless youth.[66]

Discretionary Grants for Family Violence Prevention

The Family Violence Prevention and Services Discretionary Grants Program funds projects that prevent family violence, improve service delivery to address family violence, and increase knowledge and understanding of family violence. The program also provides discretionary grants to a range of initiatives that promote these goals. One such initiative — the Domestic Violence/Runaway and Homeless Youth Collaboration on the Prevention of Adolescent Dating Violence — targets runaway and homeless youth who receive services through the BCP, TLP, and SOP. The initiative was created because many runaway and homeless youth come from homes where domestic violence occurs and may be at risk of abusing their partners or becoming victims of abuse.

---

[65] (...continued)
additional information, see CRS Report RL32716, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Analysis of Changes Made by P.L. 108-446*, by Richard N. Apling and Nancy Lee Jones.

[66] See notice from Department of Labor to state workforce agencies, available on the DOL website, available at [http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=2176].

Collaboration projects are being carried out in nine locations (two in California and one each in Florida, Kansas, Maryland, New York, New Mexico, Oregon, and Pennsylvania) by faith-based and charitable organizations who are recipients, or have been recipients of Runaway and Homeless Youth Program or Family Violence Prevention and Service grants. The grants fund training for staff at these organizations to enable them to assist youth in preventing dating violence. Each organization received $75,000 for FY2005 through FY2007. Grantees must fund at least 25% of the total approved cost of the project.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

Recently emancipated foster youth are vulnerable to becoming homeless. In FY2005, approximately 24,400 youth "aged out" of the foster care system.[67] The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP), created under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-169), provides states with funding to support youth who are expected to emancipate from foster care and former foster youth ages 18 to 21.[68] States are authorized to receive funds based on their share of the total number of children in foster care nationwide. However, the law's "hold harmless" clause precludes any state from receiving less than the amount of funds it received in FY1998 or $500,000, whichever is greater.[69] The program authorizes funding for transitional living services, and as much as 30% of the funds may be dedicated to room and board. In FY2006, Congress appropriated $140 million for the program. Child welfare advocates have argued that the housing needs of youth "aging out" of foster care have not been met despite the additional funds for independent living that are provided through the CFCIP. If, for example, states made available all federal funds allowable under the CFCIP for housing, each youth would receive less than $800 per year.[70]

---

[67] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "AFCARS Report #13 (Preliminary Estimates for FY2005) (September 2006), available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report13.htm]

[68] For additional information on the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, see CRS Report RS22501, *Child Welfare: The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act*, by Adrienne Fernandes.

[69] Prior to the passage of P.L. 106-169, states were awarded a share of independent living funds - $70 million - based on the number of children receiving federal foster care payments in FY1984 under the Independent Living Program.

[70] "Youth "Aging Out" of the Foster Care System," p. 54. Based on the authors' (Mark Courtney and Darcy Hughes Heuring) calculation that as many as 60,000 youth ages 18 to 21 are eligible to receive independent living funds annually through the CFCIP, of which 30% (or about $47 million) are allocated for housing assistance.

Emerging Issues

Funding authorization for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program is set to expire in the 110th Congress (FY2008). Several issues may be relevant to any upcoming reauthorization discussions.

Changing Personnel Needs

A review of testimony from the 2003 reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act before congressional committees overseeing the program indicated that the witnesses were generally satisfied with the services of the program and the mission of the act. Witnesses said that the program had also been successful in serving youth of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.[71] However, they raised concerns about the changing personnel needs within grantee organizations. They indicated that grantees needed financial support to attract and retain professional staff who are bilingual. They reported that bilingual staff who helped youth and their families obtain needed services through the program were often hired away to positions in schools and social service agencies that pay higher salaries.

During CRS site visits conducted at grantee organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area in November 2006, grantees said that staff are needed for more specialized languages, in addition to Spanish. For example, a growing number of Pakistani youth are using services provided by Northern Virginia's only Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grantee. Although many of these youth are fluent in English, their parents and extended families rely primarily on other languages to communicate.

Runaway and Homeless Youth as "Disconnected Youth"

The concept of "disconnected youth" has recently gained currency among policymakers who have raised concerns about the negative outcomes these individuals face in adulthood. "Disconnected youth" have weak social networks of family, friends, and communities that provide assistance such as employment connections, health insurance coverage, housing, tuition and other financial assistance, and emotional support. Researchers have focused on two measurable characteristics to indicate that vulnerable youth groups are disconnected: the lack of high school and/or college attendance coupled with not having a job for at least one year. Approximately two to three million youth ages 16 to 24 are considered "disconnected" under this criteria, a disproportionate share of whom are young minorities in urban communities.[72] Concentrated poverty, community insecurity, and unstable family structures are associated with their poor academic and employment outcomes.

---

[71] U.S. Congress, House Committee on Health and Education, *Subcommittee on Select Education, Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Youth: Strengthening the System*, 108th Cong., 1st sess., April 29, 2003.

[72] Peter Edelman, Harry J. Holzer, and Paul Offner, *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men* (Washington, D.C., Urban Institute Press, 2006), p. 2.

Runaway and homeless youth are vulnerable to becoming disconnected because of separation from their families, absence from school, and non-participation in the economy.[73] Family conflict — rooted in abuse and neglect, school problems, and drug and alcohol abuse — can compel youth to leave home. Family disconnectendess is also evident among many runaway and homeless youth involved in the foster care system. These youth are brought to the attention of child welfare services because of incidents of abuse and neglect. Further, youth "aging out" of the foster care system experience homelessness at a greater rate than their counterparts in the general population, due, in part, to family disconnectedness. Some gay and lesbian youth also experience family disassociation when they come out about their sexuality.[74]

Runaway and homeless youth also spend time out of school while they are away from a permanent home. The FY2006 NEO-RHYMIS survey indicated that 21% of youth were not attending school regularly before entering the Basic Center Program. Of youth in the Transitional Living Program, 21% had dropped out of school. Some homeless youth face barriers to attending school because of transportation problems and the absence of parents and guardians who can provide records and permission for youth to participate in school activities. Finally, some runaway and homeless youth are removed from the formal economy, and resort to illegal activity including stealing and selling drugs in exchange for cash. Other such youth are too young to work legally or experience mental health and other challenges that make working difficult.

Youth Outcomes

Little is known about the outcomes of youth after they leave the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. Local grantee organizations have limited information about youth after they leave care, and research on whether youth experience homelessness as adults is dated. Some grantees may decide to follow up with youth who received services, but HHS does not require longitudinal data collection. The 2006 PART evaluation notes that a longer-term study of runaway and homeless youth is challenging, based on the assumption that these youth would be difficult to locate due to their transient nature.[75] (Conducting such an evaluation may also be financially prohibitive.)

In response to the 2003 PART evaluation, HHS plans to fund an evaluation of the Runaway and Homeless Youth program beginning sometime in 2007.[76] HHS has also revised its four annual performance measures for the program to better capture youth outcomes. NEO-RHYMIS will be used to evaluate the outcomes. The performance measures are the following:

---

[73] Center for Law and Social Policy, Bob Reeg, "The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and Disconnected Youth," in Jodie Levin-Epstein and Mark H. Greenburg, eds., *Leave No Youth Behind: Opportunities for Congress to Reach Disconnected Youth* (July 2003), pp. 56-63.

[74] An Epidemic of Homelessness, p. 2.

[75] FY2006 PART, p. 8.

[76] The agency expects to select a contractor in calendar year 2007. No further information was provided. Based on conversations with ACF staff on November 27, 2006.

- Achieve the proportion of youth served in the TLP entering safe and appropriate settings directly after exiting care at 85% by FY2008 and maintain this level through FY2010 (long-term outcome measure). The 80% target was not met in FY2004. In FY2005, the target of 80% was exceeded by two percentage points. The goal for FY2006 of 83% was not met by one percentage point.

- Increase funding efficiency by increasing the percent of youth who complete the TLP by graduating or who leave ahead of schedule based on opportunity (long-term efficiency measure). The target measures of 43.6% in FY2004, 45.6% in FY2005, and 47.6% in FY2006 were exceeded. The goal for FY2007 is 49.6%.

- Increase the percentage of TLP youth participants who are engaged in community service and service learning activities while in the program (outcome measure). The program exceeded the target of 30% in FY2004, but only reached 27% in FY2005. The goal for FY2006 of 32% was not met by 4 percentage points; the FY2007 goal is 33%.

- Increase by 2% annually, beginning in FY2008, the proportion of youth who are prevented from running away through BCP in-home or off-site services as a percentage of all youth receiving such services, including those youth who must be fully admitted to the shelter despite such preventative efforts (outcome measure). *FYSB plans for the baseline measure to be established in December 2007.*

Although these measures capture information about the immediate living situation of youth after they leave the program, little is known about their longer-term outcomes.

Appendix

Table A-1. Basic Center Funding by State and Territory, FY2006-FY2007

($ in thousands)

State	FY2006 Actual	FY2007 Allotted
Alabama	653	640
Alaska	319	319
Arizona	799	799
Arkansas	277	379
California	5,192	5,192
Colorado	647	647
Connecticut	505	505
Delaware	119	119
District of Columbia	113	100
Florida	2,395	2,483
Georgia	1,258	1,256
Hawaii	162	162
Idaho	225	225
Illinois	1,729	1,840
Indiana	1,008	1,008
Iowa	477	411
Kansas	434	378
Kentucky	573	573
Louisiana	789	639
Maine	265	200
Maryland	600	778
Massachusetts	914	924
Michigan	2,123	1,659
Minnesota	1,032	1,032
Mississippi	447	401
Missouri	773	817
Montana	144	144
Nebraska	454	233
Nevada	307	307
New Hampshire	191	190
New Jersey	1,024	1,251
New Mexico	459	269
New York	3,085	2,082
North Carolina	1,205	1,202
North Dakota	102	102
Ohio	1,526	1,660
Oklahoma	456	494
Oregon	551	501
Pennsylvania	1,660	1,788
Rhode Island	136	136
South Carolina	472	588

State	FY2006 Actual	FY2007 Allotted
South Dakota	111	111
Tennessee	764	837
Texas	3,121	3,148
Utah	315	315
Vermont	100	100
Virginia	1,060	1,060
Washington	880	880
West Virginia	244	244
Wisconsin	845	783
Wyoming	118	118
Subtotal	*43,156*	*42,750*
America Samoa	45	45
Guam	45	45
N. Mariana Islands	0	45
Puerto Rico	200	538
U.S. Virgin Islands	0	45
Subtotal	*290*	*718*
Total	**43,446**	**43,468**

Source: U.S. Department Health and Human Services, *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2007, pp. D-45, D-46, and U.S. Department Health and Human Services, *Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*, FY2008, pp. 96-97.