

May 3, 2016

Runaway and Homeless Youth: Recent Federal Support and FY2016 Appropriations

Introduction

Youth under age 25 are considered to be homeless or runaways if they cannot remain in a safe environment with a relative and lack safe alternative living arrangements, or leave home while under the age of 18 without the permission of their relatives. Since the 1970s, the federal government has supported efforts to provide these youth with shelter and services. More recent federal efforts are targeted to improving access to services and ending youth homelessness. This In Focus accompanies CRS Report RL33785, *Runaway and Homeless Youth: Demographics and Programs*.

Federal Strategy to End Youth Homelessness

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), established in 1987 as part of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77), is made up of several federal agencies, including HHS, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). USICH created a plan in 2010, entitled *Opening Doors*, which sets out four goals on ending homelessness. One of the goals is to prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020. In 2012, USICH amended *Opening Doors* to specifically address strategies for assisting homeless youth and for improving the educational outcomes for homeless children and youth.

The strategies for preventing and ending youth homelessness include (1) obtaining more comprehensive information on the scope of youth homelessness; (2) building an evidence base of the most effective interventions for different subsets of youth; and (3) improving access to emergency assistance, housing, and supports for historically underserved groups of youth. In 2015, the USICH released guidance that is intended to help local communities coordinate efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness. A 2016 USICH report to Congress by USICH outlines efforts to better coordinate federal programs that assist runaway and homeless youth.

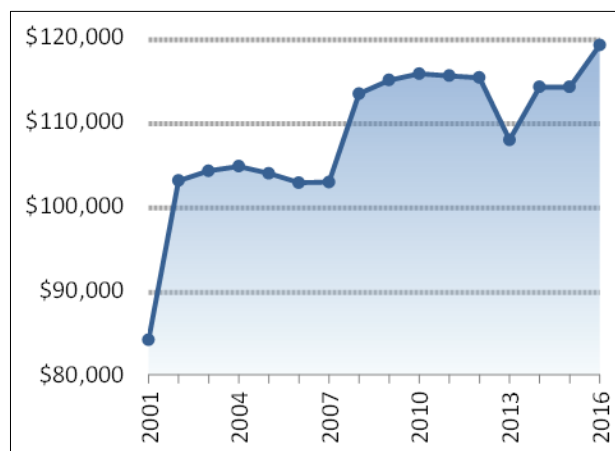
Runaway and Homeless Youth Program

The Runaway and Homeless Youth program was created in 1974 under the Runaway Youth Act (P.L. 93-415). It is made up of three components—the Basic Center Program (BCP), Transitional Living Program (TLP), and Street Outreach Program (SOP). The BCP provides temporary shelter, counseling, and after care services to approximately 30,000 runaway and homeless youth under age 18 and their families each year. The TLP provides longer-term housing and supportive services annually to about 3,000 youth ages 16 through 22 (and sometimes an older age). The SOP

provides street-based education and outreach to runaway, homeless, and street youth who have been subjected to, or are at risk of being subjected to, sexual abuse and exploitation. Related services authorized by the Runaway and Homeless Youth program include a phone hotline to facilitate communication between service providers, runaway youth, and their families; and technical assistance to service providers. **Figure 1** includes funding for the program from FY2001 through FY2016.

Figure 1. Appropriations for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, FY2001-FY2016

Dollars in thousands



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from HHS.

Activities Supported by HUD

Generally, funding appropriated to HUD for services to homeless individuals has not specifically targeted youth; however, such funding has been provided more recently.

- **Continuum of Care (CoC) Program:** The CoC program is the major component of HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants, and supports longer-term housing and services for homeless individuals and families. (The Homeless Assistance Grants account is the primary source of funding at HUD targeted to assist individuals who are homeless.) Funds for the CoC program are awarded to communities. The CoC funding announcement for FY2015 is the second (after the FY2013-FY2014 announcement) to specify that local continuums may score points in their CoC application for serving youth.
- **Comprehensive Approach:** The FY2016 appropriations law (P.L. 114-113) sets aside up to \$33 million from the Homeless Assistance Grants account to implement projects that demonstrate how a

“comprehensive approach” can “dramatically reduce” homelessness for youth through age 24. The law directs this funding to up to 10 communities, including at least four rural communities. HUD is in the process of soliciting input about how funds could be used under the project. Up to an additional \$5 million of the Homeless Assistance Grants is to be made available for related technical assistance and “collection, analysis, and reporting of data and performance measures.”

- **Third Party Eligibility:** The FY2016 appropriations law specifies that youth through age 24 (including those with children) seeking assistance under the Homeless Assistance Grant account are not required to provide third party documentation to establish their eligibility or to receive services. This language appears to be in response to communities that have reported difficulty determining how youth meet HUD’s definition of homelessness (which varies from the Runaway and Homeless Youth program definition) and what is required in terms of documenting homeless status.
- **Technical Assistance and Evaluation:** The accompanying report (House Rules Committee Print 114-39) to P.L. 114-113 directs that \$2.5 million appropriated for HUD is to be used to evaluate youth homelessness programs, in conjunction with HHS.
- **Prevalence and Incidence Study:** The accompanying report to P.L. 114-113 directs HUD to use \$2.0 million to conduct a national incidence and prevalence study of homeless youth as authorized under the Runaway and Homeless Youth program.
- **LGBTQ Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiative:** HUD and the True Colors Funds, a non-profit organization, have provided technical assistance since FY2013 to Cincinnati, OH, and Houston, TX, for identifying strategies to ensure that no young person goes homeless because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning (LGBTQ).

Education for Homeless Children and Youths

The Education for Homeless Children and Youths program was established in 1987 under the McKinney-Vento Act in the Department of Education. 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, transportation to school, and success in school of homeless children and youth. Program funds may be appropriated for 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. During school year 2013-2014, nearly 1.3 million homeless children and youth were eligible for services. FY2016 funding for the program is \$70 million.

Number and Characteristics

Estimates of the number and characteristics of runaway and homeless youth depend on how counts take place, and may depend on the capacity of researchers and communities to conduct counts. Estimates also depend on which definitions of homelessness and runaway are used. Definitions vary among federal programs that serve these youth.

Point-in-Time Counts and Youth Count!

USICH and its federal partners are working with communities to develop better estimates of homeless youth who are not accompanied by their parents or guardians. The primary source of data is from point-in-time (PIT) counts. HUD requires communities receiving funds through the Homeless Assistance Grants to conduct annual PIT counts of people experiencing homelessness, including homeless youth: those under age 25 who are (1) not part of a family (“unaccompanied youth”) or (2) parents with their children and not accompanied by an adult over age 25 (“parenting youth”). The count includes youth who are sheltered (in shelters or transitional housing) or unsheltered (the streets and other places not meant for human habitation). In 2013, USICH provided assistance to nine communities under the *Youth Count!* initiative. This assistance was intended to help communities in general implement strategies for identifying homeless youth. **Table 1** displays the characteristics of youth captured in the 2015 PIT count. The PIT count is not intended to represent the total number of youth who experience homelessness in a given year, and is not a comprehensive national count of the population.

Table 1. Demographics of Youth in 2015 PIT Count
n= 46,808 unaccompanied and parenting youth combined

Characteristics	% of Youth Population
Under age 18	12.6
Ages 18-24	87.4
Female	49.9
Male	49.3
Transgender	0.8
White	48.9
African American	38.5
Asian	1.0
Native American	2.7
Pacific Islander	1.1
Multiple Races	7.9
Non-Hispanic	77.6
Hispanic	22.4
Parenting	21.2
Not Parenting	78.8
Sheltered	62.6
Unsheltered	37.4

Source: CRS, based on HUD, *The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, November 2015.

Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara, Specialist in Social Policy

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.