



Report of Springfield's 2025 Survey of High-Risk and Homeless Youth

Research conducted by the Homeless Youth Taskforce of the Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness and the Christian, Greene, and Webster Counties Continuum of Care. Data analysis and recommendations were provided by Christina -Ryder, CSP of the Center for Ozarks Poverty Research (COPR) housed with the Sociology, Anthropology, and Gerontology Department at Missouri State University in September of 2025. Questions regarding data can be directed to cryder@missouristate.edu.

Report of Springfield's 2025 Survey of High-Risk and Homeless Youth

This project is the 11th High-Risk and Homeless Youth Assessment Survey conducted since 2007, and was developed, and data collection was conducted by, the Homeless Youth Task Force of the Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness and the Ozarks Christian, Greene, and Webster Counties Continuum of Care. Analysis of the data was provided by Missouri State University's Sociology and Anthropology Department (faculty member Christina Ryder, CSP/CSA (Certified Sociology Practitioner/Certified Applied Sociologist)).

During the first quarter of 2025, a questionnaire was provided to members of the Homeless Youth Subcommittee and partner agencies by the Homeless Youth Task Force that sought to explore the needs of at-risk and homeless youth in the Springfield, Missouri metropolitan area. Similar to 2021 and 2023, survey interviews with youth were conducted and the majority of youth completed the questionnaire with the assistance of case managers or others that are responsible for providing services or referrals to services among Continuum of Care partner agencies. This collection methodology differed compared to pre-COVID era surveys where online questionnaires were given to youth at the annual Springfield, MO 'Point in Time' count, otherwise referred to as 'Every Voice Counts' events. At the Springfield, Every Voice Count event, area nonprofits provide a one-day event designed to provide extensive and wrap around assistance for homeless persons or those at risk of homelessness (including applications for benefits, haircuts, clothing, and other basic need items) in addition to collecting vital information on who is experiencing homelessness in the community. Both youth and adults are asked to complete a basic survey regarding their experiences and what types of services may be most helpful. In addition to information collected at this event, 2007-2019 surveys were also distributed at various catchment nonprofits where many homeless youth frequent in order to obtain support and services. The data collection methodology for 2021, 2023 and 2025, unlike the data collection methodology in previous years, only captured the responses of youth that were either already, or desired to be, engaged with services or agencies. This likely influenced several responses, including answers to current homelessness and housing. This survey interview and collection methodology also potentially had several benefits for service providers as it allows for case managers and others to obtain additional information about youth life experiences and needs that may allow for additional resource connections and referrals to be made. As with prior years, the 2025 survey was also modified slightly in order to address potentially unclear questions or adjusted to better capture information of benefit to service providers. Given these adjustments in collection methodology, direct comparisons from statistics from 2007-2019 and 2021-2025 are limited and not recommended. Despite these limitations however, many of the same reported reasons for homelessness remain consistent in 2025 as they have since 2007 (namely abuse, trauma, limited housing options, and unemployment or underemployment). Where possible and comparable, 2025 data results in light of 2023 data results are discussed.

In 2025, 72 youth completed and returned a questionnaire (this is 13 more youth who completed the survey in 2021 and 2023). Not every respondent completed each of the questions on the form, and this is noted in the sections when applicable below, however, most surveys were complete. Of those that responded to the survey in 2025, all were between the ages of 13-23 (the age range utilized in Housing and Urban Development and other federal agencies to define a 'youth' is between the ages of 12-24). The majority of youth (67%) that were homeless or at risk for homelessness identified as 'White,' and 84.7% as either Springfield, Missouri or Greene County natives. Approximately seventy percent identified as having a developmental, learning, mental health, or behavioral disability (with 18.1% of those indicating a disability, noting this disability kept them from obtaining stable housing or employment). Approximately 43% identified as male, 47% as female, and 10% as either non-binary or transgender. Sixty seven percent identified as heterosexual.

Approximately seventy percent identified as either formerly a ward of the state or in foster care, approximately 28% had a job (primarily part time employment, or between 20-30 hours per week), 11 percent of youth had a child/children and/or were expecting a child, and 97% were either high school graduates or currently enrolled in some form of education (middle school, high school, college and/or high school equivalent programs). Despite a greater number of respondents, these demographic percentages mirror 2019, 2021, and 2023 survey demographics, with the exception of nearly 20% more racial and ethnic diversity representation in survey respondents from 2019 through 2025 as well as higher percentages of self reported gender non-conforming identities and non-heterosexual orientations. It is also significant to note that in prior reports, and while not represented in the 2025 survey, respondents have been as young as 12 years old through 24 years of age.

Of 72 youth, approximately 55% reported to experiencing homelessness at least once in their lifetime, 35% of youth that were surveyed reported at the time of the survey as currently homeless or couch surfing on the day of the survey, and nearly 26% of all respondents reported that they considered where they stayed in the week prior to the survey unsafe. Among the sample for 2025 as in 2021 and 2023, there was a reported difference in experiencing homelessness among those that identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community and gender non-conforming compared to those that identified as heterosexual and cisgender (see section IX “Subgroups and rates of homelessness on their own”). Previous reports, as well as national data suggest that non heterosexual identifying, as well as gender non conforming youth, are often at higher risk for running away or being asked to leave their home, are at a higher risk for homelessness in general, and are at a greater risk for exploitation once homeless (National Council of State Legislatures, n.d.). In the 2025 survey, transgender youth were more likely to be currently homeless at the time of the survey. As with the 2023 survey, members of the LGBTQ+ population and youth of color were disproportionately more likely to report having witnessed or being a victim of traumatic events in their lifetime including while homeless. LGBTQ+ youth were also more likely to report being exploited in work related situations while homeless and more likely to report sexual exploitation while homeless. As in the 2023 report, female identifying youth and LGBTQ+ youth were also more likely to report staying somewhere unsafe and staying with a sexual partner longer for safety. Similar to national data, those that reported being in the foster care system or a ward of the state at some point in their lives were also more likely to report experiencing homelessness (particularly with a caregiver) and have witnessed or experienced traumatic events in their lifetime (including while homeless). LGBTQ+ youth, youth with disabilities, and girls were more likely to report acts of self harm and contemplating suicide. Female identifying youth were more likely to report sexual abuse and slightly more likely to report to currently fleeing an abusive intimate partnership at the time of the survey.

As also with past reports and mirroring national data as well, exposure to significant life trauma (namely emotional, physical, or sexual abuse) and difficult family backgrounds appear to be primary factors that contribute to young people being homeless on their own, while lack of rental history, lack of income, unemployment/underemployment and limited shelter and access to basic need resources are important secondary factors (see sections X and XI below).

I. DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE- 72 persons

Age: The youngest respondent was 13 years old, and the oldest person was 23 years of age. 73% percent of respondents were age 18 or younger. The average (median) age of respondents was between 16 and 17 years old.

Gender: Twenty five respondents, 47.2% of the sample identified as female, and 43.1% identified as male. Approximately 10 percent identified as ‘other’, gender non-conforming, transgender, and/or as non-binary. Those that identified as transgender more likely to report currently being homeless, more likely to leave as a result of abuse, more likely to have experienced or witnessed traumatic events while

homeless, and more likely to struggle with food insecurity. Female identifying youth and nonbinary youth were much more likely to report being forced to have sex in exchange for food, housing, or other basic needs. Female identifying and non-binary/transgender youth were also more likely to report self-harm and more likely to report fleeing domestic violence.

Racial/Ethnic group: Forty eight (66.7% of the sample) were white, 8.3 percent were Black, 5.6% as American Indian/Alaskan native, 5.6% as Latino/Hispanic, and twenty two percent reported that they were of various two or more racial group backgrounds (N= 10). Given the range of racial and ethnic self categorization options, race and ethnicity did not have any statistical significance on factors for reported reasons for homelessness or experiences while homeless other than a slightly greater propensity of witnessing traumatic events in their lifetime (including while homeless).

Sexual orientation: Forty eight youth (66.7%) identified as heterosexual, 3 individuals (4.2%) identified as gay or lesbian, fifteen individuals (20.8%) identified as bisexual, and one individual reported as pansexual (1.4%). Approximately 7% were questioning their sexual orientation, were unsure how to respond, or otherwise didn't know or refused to answer. As in the 2023 report, LGBTQ+ youth were more likely to report that they were asked to leave home or having arguments at home as contributing factors to homelessness and were more likely to report sexual and labor related exploitation than heterosexual homeless youth. (See Section VIII). Those identifying as non-heterosexual in the 2025 survey were more likely to report being homeless at the time of the survey, more likely to report being coerced into employment, more likely to report being forced to have sex in exchange for food, housing, or other basic needs, more likely to report to self harm, more likely to report fleeing domestic violence situation, and more likely to report witnessing traumatic events in their lifetime and while homeless.

Education status: Nearly 67% of the sample were currently enrolled in middle school or high school, and approximately 30% of respondents at the time of the survey had earned a high school diploma, GED, or college degree. Approximately 3% reported that they were not currently enrolled in any type of education program at the time of the survey.

Physical, Mental, and Behavior Health: Approximately seventy percent identified as having a developmental, learning, mental health, or behavioral disability (with 18.1% of those indicating a disability, noting this disability kept them from obtaining stable housing or employment). Forty eight percent noted being at the emergency room 1-5 times in the last year.

Hometown: Thirty three respondents reported as either being from Springfield, Missouri or the greater metropolitan area of Springfield (Nixa, Republic, Ozark). Over 93% identified as being from the state of Missouri. Among those not from Springfield and the larger Springfield metropolitan community but who were from the state of Missouri, nearly an identical percentage reported being from rural communities in Missouri as urban and suburban communities (namely Kansas City, Joplin, Branson, and St Louis).

Ward of the state/Age of Release/How Released: Fifty youth (69.4%) had been a ward of the state in foster care, Division of Youth Services, Division of Family Services Children's Division, or the juvenile justice system at some point in their lives. Of the youth who reported having been under state care, 47.2% were still in the care of the State at the time of the survey. For those who had been released from care, the mean age of exiting the care system was between 16-18 years. Many of these youth upon release were either reunified with family (4.2%), aged out of care (6.9%), were adopted (5.6%), or were under the care of another type of legal guardian (4.2%). Those that reported being in foster care were more likely than their peers to have been homeless with a caregiver.

Adequate support after State Care: Of the 30 individuals who were released from care, only eleven youth (19%) reported that they received the support needed to transition out of foster care and live independently.

Currently a parent/expecting: Two of those surveyed were expecting a child and had 11.1% reporting having children at the time of the survey. Of those who currently had children, half had children in their care at the time of the survey, and half had spent the night prior to the survey with their children. Approximately 50% of youth with children reported that their child(ren) were living with a relative (namely grandparents or extended family), in foster care, or with another designated/chosen legal guardian. Of those expecting children, all but one respondent indicated that they did not know where to obtain child related resources.

II. EMPLOYMENT

Job status: Of the respondents who answered this question (N=50), 69.4% were not employed at the time of the survey and 27.8% reported being employed between 8-40 hours per week.

Weekly hours of work: Of those working (27.8% of the total sample), 11 youth reported working from 15-30 hrs per week (approximately 60%) and nine reported working 30+ hours per week (approximately 40% of those employed at the time of the survey).

Knowledge of Employment Related Resources: Of those that were not currently employed at the time of the survey, 31.9% indicated that they were aware of local resources related to finding employment and/or connected to local resources that could assist in obtaining employment.

Knowledge of Resources and Use of Aid Programs: This year's question differed slightly from previous surveys and asked two service related questions if a person reported to not having a job or if they identified as a parent. Approximately half of those that did not have a job indicated that they were aware of employment related resources and approximately half of those that were parents were aware of parent related resources in the community. Approximately 47% reported being on Medicaid and 50% of those who had prescription medications reported that they had access to these medications.

III. FAMILIAL CHALLENGES

Victim of or witness to traumatic events: Eighty four percent had been the victim or witness to traumatic events at some point in their lives. This included witnessing acts of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. LGBTQ+ youth, female identifying youth, and formerly DFS involved populations were more likely to report experiencing or witnessing traumatic events than their heterosexual, other gender category, or non DFS involved peers.

Parents' alcohol or drug abuse: Sixty one percent of the total sample reported that one or both of their parents had an alcohol or drug problem. This was also noted among respondents as a primary reason for running away or leaving home.

Abuse experienced by a relative or other person stayed with: Approximately 57% of respondents reported being abused by someone that they had stayed with.. Of those that had experience abuse, 26.4% reported being both physically and emotionally abused, 4% reported emotional abuse, 1.4% sexual abuse, with the remaining reporting a combination of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Female identified youth were significantly and disproportionately more likely to report sexual abuse than male identifying youth and were slightly more likely to report fleeing intimate partner violence at the time of the survey.

IV. ALCOHOL/DRUG USE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Youth alcohol or drug problem: Over two-thirds of participants, 77%, said that they had not used drugs in the week prior to the survey and approximately 76% reported that they had not used alcohol in the week prior to the survey. Sixty three percent of participants reported that they themselves do not believe that they have a drug or alcohol problem or that anyone else has told them that they have had a drug or alcohol problem. At the time of the survey, approximately 76% had not received services or treatment for a drug or alcohol addiction.

Days used alcohol or drugs last week: Among the entire sample, 13% reported using alcohol and seven people (12%) had used drugs in the week prior to the survey. These percentages are similar to percentages reported in 2023.

Mental Health/Disability: Approximately seventy percent identified as having a developmental, learning, mental health, or behavioral disability. 18.1% of those indicating a disability, noting this disability kept them from obtaining stable housing or employment.

Mental illness prescription drugs: Eighty two percent of respondents reported that they had been prescribed medication for mental health concerns at some point in their lives and 50% reported having access to their medication at the time of the survey.

Self-harm: Approximately 53% reported that they had self-mutilated, such as cutting or burning themselves, at some point in their lives. This percentage has remained consistent since the HRHY survey in 2019. LGBTQ+ youth, youth with disabilities, and girls were more likely to report self harm.

Suicidal ideation: At the time of the survey, 45.8% of the sample population reported having considered completing suicide at least once in their life. This percentage is approximately 20% less than the percentage reported in 2023. LGBTQ youth, youth with disabilities, and female identifying youth were more likely to report having considered completing suicide.

V. HOMELESSNESS

One question measured whether respondents were currently unsafely housed at the time of the survey. Of 72 total respondents, as in the 2023 survey, approximately 26% reported being currently unsafely housed. For this survey, “Homeless” means staying in temporary housing, like staying with a friend/adult, in a shelter, in a hotel/ motel, sleeping in a place not meant to be slept in (shed, porch, park, car, tunnel, vacant building, etc.), or not having a fixed, adequate nighttime residence.

Homeless with parent/caregiver: Of 72 survey respondents, approximately 36% percent had been homeless with a parent or caregiver at some point in their lives. The median (average age) when first homeless with a caregiver was 10 years of age. Age 1 was the youngest a respondent indicated that they had become homeless with a caregiver and age 15 was the oldest a participant had reported being homeless with a caregiver. Those who were homeless with a caregiver were almost twice as likely to report having been homeless on their own. Twenty two percent of respondents who had been homeless with parent/caregiver reported living temporarily living with family and friends and 19% of those that had been homeless with a parent or caregiver reported that they had slept outside, camped, slept in a car, or slept in an abandoned building with that parent or caregiver. Formerly DFS involved youth were overwhelmingly more likely to report having experienced homelessness (particularly with a caregiver).

Chronically homeless with family: 9.7% of all survey respondents reported being homeless with a caregiver and staying on the street or in shelters for one year or more and 11% reported being homeless with a caregiver for 4 months or more in the past 3 years.

Homeless without family: Thirty three percent of respondents reported being homeless at least once on their own without a parent or caregiver. Of those that reported being homeless at least once, 1^% of those respondents reported being currently homeless at the time of the survey. Those that were homeless with a caregiver at some point in their lives were more likely to report being homeless later on their own.

Age when first homeless on their own: Of those who had been homeless on their own at least once, the mean and median age at which young people first experienced homelessness on their own was 15-17 years old. Three respondents indicated that they were between 11-13 when first homeless on their own.

Currently Unhoused: 11.1% of all survey respondents reported being currently homelessness at the time of the survey. Of those that have been homeless on their own at least once, the average number of times that individuals have experienced homelessness is between 1-4 times. Approximately 13% of the total sample reported being homeless between 5-7 times.

Staying temporarily with family or friends: Approximately 26% percent of all respondents (and approximately 79% of those who experienced homelessness on their own) noted that they had “couch surfed” while homeless on their own.

Slept in a place not meant to be slept in: 79% of those who had experienced homelessness on their own had slept in a place not meant to be slept in, such as a shed, park, porch, tunnel, or vacant at some point in their lives while homeless on their own. This accounted for 26% of total survey respondents..

Chronically homeless on their own: Approximately 29% of those who reported having experienced homelessness at least once reported staying on the streets or in shelters for one year or more. This accounted for approximately 10% of the entire sample population. 54% of those who reported being homeless on their own at least once reported staying on the streets or in shelters for a collective four months or more in the past three years.

Hunger: A separate question asked youth about hunger. Approximately 43% reported that they were unsure of where they would get food on the day of the survey.

VI. SELF-REPORTED REASONS FOR BEING HOMELESS

Respondents were asked about factors that could have caused them to become homeless on their own. Among those who answered this question, four factors were most often identified by youth as having contributed to their experiencing homelessness on their own. All noted verbal, physical, or sexual abuse; an unsafe living environment; and/or disagreements at home as being primary reasons for being homeless on their own. Parental drug and alcohol abuse, being kicked out due to gender identity/sexual orientation, and parental unemployment/underemployment were also noted by survey respondents. When asked what prevented respondents from being able to obtain housing on their own, a lack of rental history, unemployment or underemployment, and addiction were noted as primary barriers once homeless and/or on their own. These self reported reasons have been statistically consistent across survey respondents for more than 4 high risk and homeless youth survey reports (or 8 years).

VII. CRIMINAL JUSTICE INTERACTION

Approximately 60% of respondents reported having at least 1-7 interactions with the criminal justice system in the past year, with the majority indicating 1-2 interactions. It is unclear the nature of these interactions, however local advocates and service providers have reported increased policing of the homeless in the region in the last several years. For example, the lack of affordable and accessible housing (particularly for those with disabilities), and the lack of low barrier access/emergency crisis shelter in Springfield has resulted in several large homeless encampments throughout the City. The City of Springfield Police Department and Greene County Sheriff's Department have made national headlines for its clearing and burning of these homeless encampments, including one during Christmas week in

2022 (Lingo, 2021). Ever expanding legislation since 2023 in the State of Missouri also makes it illegal to camp on state owned roadways and land. Cities who do not comply with the new legislation can be sued by the State Attorney General (Bates, 2023). Ongoing threats from the federal government to remove and institutionalize unhoused persons, according to advocates and service providers, have further criminalized homelessness, further empowered law enforcement towards acts of violence towards the unhoused, and has increased police and homeless persons interactions in general.

VIII. DANGERS OF BEING A HOMELESS YOUTH

Of 61 respondents, approximately 32% specified what they had witnessed/experienced acts of violence or traumatic events while homeless. Of these 32%, all noted witnessing emotional, physical, or sexual violence with most reporting witnessing many acts within multiple forms of abuse.

Twenty six percent of all respondents reported doing something they would not normally do in order to stay in a housing situation. Twenty six percent also reported staying somewhere they did not feel safe in order to have shelter.

Youth living on the streets also have to worry about sexual coercion. Ten of the 72 who responded (approximately 14% of the total sample) said that they received something (money, food, shelter, drugs, etc.) in exchange for sex or a sexual activity. In a related question, respondents reported on whether they had been made, persuaded, or forced to have sex in exchange for things. Of the 10 who responded (14% of the total sample), approximately 90% said that they have been made/persuaded/forced to have sex in exchange for something (money, food, shelter, drugs, etc.). Of those 9 individuals, 2 reported that such coercion had happened within the last 3 months. LGBTQ+ and girls were more likely to report having been sexually coerced in order to obtain food, housing, or other basic needs.

Youth also face concerns about harm or exploitation within employment. Two of 72 respondents (approximately 3%) reported that they had been afraid to quit/leave work due to threats of violence against themselves, their family, or their friends. Twenty five percent also reported that they were promised work where the work or payment was different than they expected. Ten respondents (13.7% of the total sample) also reported that they felt forced, coerced, pressured, or tricked into continuing to work in a place they no longer wanted to work due to either the workplace violence or difference in expectations. LGBTQ+ youth were more likely to report work related deception than their heterosexual counterparts.

Forty eight percent noted being at the emergency room 1-5 times in the last year.

In general, research suggests that LGBTQ+ youth have a 120 percent higher risk of reporting homelessness and become homeless at earlier ages (for example, due to family rejection of their orientation). LGBTQ+ youth also often face increased instances of sexual assault and exploitation compared to youth who identified as heterosexual and cisgender (Human Rights Campaign, 2017). It is significant to note that not only were homeless youth that identified as LGBTQ and gender nonconforming in this survey more likely to be homeless on their own, but homeless youth that identified as LGBTQ+ and female were also at a higher risk in this survey for reporting labor and sexual exploitation while homeless.

IX. SUBGROUPS AND RATES OF HOMELESSNESS ON THEIR OWN

The vast majority of survey respondents reported being either currently housed or safely housed. This is possibly a reflection of survey collection methodology in 2021-2025 that was more representative of youth already engaged in supportive services or in foster care (see methodology description above) compared to other years where collection efforts were conducted during homeless service events that tended to also capture youth otherwise not engaged with services. Transgender youth were more likely to

report being homeless at the time of the survey. Rates of homelessness also did not vary across racial groups.

X. PRIMARY FACTORS ASSOCIATED YOUTH HOMELESSNESS ON THEIR OWN

When asked what contributed to youth being homeless on their own, most cited parental drug and alcohol abuse, verbal, sexual or physical abuse by a caregiver, an unsafe living situation, and arguments at home.

As with prior reports, 3 family background variables were statistically significant among those youth surveyed who had experienced homelessness at least once. 57% of respondents who had at least one parent with a drug or alcohol problem, 61% reported abuse by someone they had stayed/lived with, and 84% reported witnessing traumatic events (these included physical, emotional, and sexually traumatic events). It is also significant to note that 36% percent of respondents were homeless with a caregiver at some point in their lives. Being homeless with a caregiver was highly correlated with respondents reporting that they also have been homeless on their own.

The analysis and discussion above suggests that for many (but not all) youth in the sample as in 2021 and 2023, difficult early life family experiences significantly increased the likelihood that they have been homeless on their own. Difficult family lives were associated with high rates of mental health concerns, which in turn also was correlated to having been homeless at least once in their lives.

XI. SECONDARY FACTORS ASSOCIATED YOUTH HOMELESSNESS ON THEIR OWN

Lack of a rental history, income, resources, as well as unemployment were noted as the primary factors contributing to youth homelessness, or risk for homelessness, once homeless on their own. Given the frequency that trauma and abuse were noted as reasons for leaving home as well as witnessed, as well as experienced while homeless, it is likely that the impact of trauma may not only be a contributing factor to youth homelessness but also may also pose significant dangers to, and challenges for, at-risk and homeless youth while homeless.

XII. REPORTED NEEDED SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH IN SPRINGFIELD

Need for more short term/crisis shelter/housing: 72% of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that Springfield needs more short term shelter for youth.

Need for more long term shelter/housing: 77% agreed or strongly agreed that Springfield needs more long term shelter and housing for youth that are homeless or at risk for homelessness.

Need more transitional living programs for pregnant or parenting teens: 79% felt that Springfield needs a transitional living program for pregnant or parenting teens. Fourteen percent neither agreed or disagreed.

Table 1: Youth views of local services

Need more short term shelter	72%
Need more long term shelter	77%
Need more transitional living programs	79%

In addition to these services, counseling, affordable rental housing, day shelter/clubs, transportation services, financial literacy and credit assistance programs, additional food resource options, mentorship, and more resources for expectant parents were noted as also needed for youth experiencing homelessness or at risk for homelessness. These recommendations are further supported by a ‘a high risk and homeless youth services inventory’ conducted in 2024 by the Homeless Youth Task Force of the Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness and the Ozarks Christian, Greene, and Webster Counties Continuum of Care. It is significant to note that based on the youth services inventory, there are many agencies that are currently

providing many of the services that have been noted as gaps in service by both youth and service providers. While this may give the illusion that there are many community resources to meet these needs, difficulties in service coordination, accessibility, or simply not enough of a particular service (i.e. enough food resources) were noted by both youth and practitioners in 2024 focus groups and are considered significant factors when interpreting reported community service gaps.

Youth Combined Service Inventory Results Summary (2024)

Among both younger (13-17) youth and older (17-24), while there exists some differences in life experience, life stages, and rites of passage into adulthood (and therefore some age specific unique needs), all reported needs that are also reflective of larger community needs and also been identified as needs among adults and families in the Ozarks, particularly since the onset of the pandemic. These include access to: food (food costs have increased significantly since 2020), affordable housing (rental costs have also risen significantly), high/living wage employment (an ongoing national and local discussion), work readiness skills and supportive education, more transportation options (particularly among a fragmented transportation in the Springfield MSA), and additional mental health and mental health crisis services (a national and local reported need among many communities). Youth also reported the need for additional supportive services and coordinated case management. Of particular significance is that both focus youth age groups identified streamline or less cumbersome application processes for access to shelter, food, and employment as a community need in accessing services.

Service Provider Combined Services Inventory Results Summary (2024)

Service providers reported similar needs and gaps in service for youth particularly around supportive services and coordinated case management. Needs were also mentioned among service providers that are reflective of larger community and larger national concerns. These include resources and services where the need for such resources and services greatly exceeds the amount of service available or accessible. Concerns such as affordable housing and crisis shelter, a general lack of funding for additional resources and staff, a lack of accessible physical or mental health care for low income persons, application processing delays and waitlists (considered to be due to state and government staff capacity), bureaucracies, laws and policies, as well as intersections with factors and needs within other institutions (such as the foster care system), were noted as presenting significant barriers to high risk and homeless youth in the Ozarks and those agencies that seek to serve them. One of the most actionable items in addressing reported gaps in addition to coordinated case management noted in focus groups was the need and desire for additional financial literacy, work readiness, and life skills training for youth (such as those noted by the 'Education Focus Group'). It is also significant to note that both high risk and homeless youth as well as service providers noted the significant need for community services that are sensitive and trained to address the needs of diverse and marginalized communities.

Previous poverty related studies in the Ozarks region have identified housing, childcare, transportation, access to nutritious food, living wage employment opportunities, as well as healthcare disparities as significant barriers to reducing poverty and homelessness. The pandemic illuminated these challenges for the Springfield MSA and greater Ozarks region as it did for many communities across the State, United States, and internationally. Subsequent inflation since the pandemic has also been evident in these same domains. Housing costs have increased dramatically, food prices have also gone up significantly, healthcare shortages, transportation and gas have increased, and all while wages have remained relatively stagnant (particularly for younger workers). The same investments in affordable housing, food access, employment that offers a living wage, affordable childcare options, and healthcare access that are beneficial for the larger community are also beneficial for the high risk and homeless youth population. Additional reported opportunities that could be beneficial include investments in coordinated case management and additional life/work readiness/financial literacy skills training.

XIII. POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO REDUCE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

As in reports prior, researchers and 2025 updates confirm that limiting the negative effects that disruptive family conditions and household trauma, shelter, and employment options have on high-risk youth remain significant primary prevention strategies. Secondary prevention strategies include additional resources for those youth with mental health concerns, additional housing options for youth and families, and additional long term housing and support strategies for youth exiting the foster care system. Many local agencies and efforts in the last several years of survey implementation are, and continue to address, these existing and ongoing vital concerns.

Many of the current concerns being reported by youth are similar to those reported by those adults over 25 who are also homeless or at risk. In particular, concerns related to unemployment or underemployment and limited housing that many youth expressed as the major cause of homelessness or risk for homelessness in 2021 are concerns that are also significant for those at risk for homelessness or who have experienced homelessness over the age of 25. According to American Community Survey (2013-2022) estimates, nearly 26% of all residents live in poverty in Springfield, Missouri. At the same time, the area also boasts very low (under 5% unemployment) rates (US Department of Labor, 2018). Many have noted that these figures often point to employment or employment opportunities that do not provide enough income for individuals and families to meet basic needs. Of course, for those with mental health challenges or disabilities, the ability to find and retain adequate employment (including the employment options that may be feasible or available due to physical or mental health limitations) may be even more limited. The age of respondents and some limitations on the ability to work may also be present. Of course, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on area employment has been felt across populations and industries, and has had a significant negative impact on vulnerable and entry level workers.

Housing (and in particular affordable housing options), in general, also remains a significant concern in the area. Affordable residential housing in particular, has been noted in several community assessments (including the American Rescue Plan Needs Assessment and the 2040 Forward SGF - the City's Comprehensive Plan), as a significant and urgent need for all community members. As housing costs have risen, many in the area at the same time have seen wages remain stagnant (Maciag, December 13th, 2013). This is particularly true for younger and entry level workers (some of whom have seen wages decline), both in Springfield, and across the nation (Economic Policy Institute, 2015).

Given current federal and State budget reprioritization initiatives, it is recommended that data continue to be captured on food security, housing, and among marginalized populations within the unhoused community as federal and State agencies have reduced or eliminated many data collection instruments or activities. The instruments/activities include USDA food insecurity survey and the Ozarks Lesbian and Gay Archives (OLGA) which recorded the experiences of LGBTQ+ Ozarks residents.

XIV. SUMMARY

Homelessness in general, including youth homelessness, remains a significant problem nationally and in Springfield. The costs of homelessness are high both for individual youth themselves and for communities. While it is not possible to measure the precise cost to communities of youth homelessness, that cost likely is very high. As the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2015, p. 1) noted, "more needs to be known about the costs associated with youth homelessness but we know that high rates of medical and behavioral health care and incarceration are costly. These costs compound over a lifetime as today's homeless youth become tomorrow's homeless adults."

Cost-benefit analyses have been conducted on only a few homeless youth programs; however, those programs do appear to be cost effective. For example, Cincinnati's Lighthouse Youth Services housing programs cost about \$85 per day, compared with \$216 per day to house a youth in a juvenile justice

facility (Root Causes, 2012, p. 5). A study conducted by Portland State University researchers of Oregon programs for runaway and homeless youth estimated that every \$1 that the state spends on services for those youth provides over \$4 in savings (Cahn, Jamieson, Schweitzer, and Slevin, 2009). And, Thompson (2010) noted that programs to prevent long-term youth homelessness in northwest Minnesota cost taxpayers less than high jobless and incarceration rates, frequent emergency room visits, and increased use of mental health and social services do. As with prior reports, more outcome assessment studies are needed nationally to identify best practices, and more cost-benefit analyses of teen homelessness prevention programs are also needed. Nonetheless, a convincing argument is emerging that providing adequate funding for programs to prevent youth homelessness (such as investments in housing and employment resources or options where possible) is a good social investment that saves communities money in services and policing both now and in the future.

Individuals often respond uniquely to difficult internal or external life experiences. It is significant to note that those youth that had experienced either trauma, familial abuse, and/or societal discrimination by virtue of being in a marginalized group were more likely to report self harm and suicidal ideation. Nationally, the rates of self-harm vary widely however it is estimated that in the general public, between 2 and 6 people out of every 100 (or 2% to 6%) engage in self-harm at some point in their lives. Self harm rates are significantly higher in those that have experienced trauma (National Center for PTSD, n.d.). Suicidal ideation is correlated with not only high rates of traumatic incidents, but specifically complex or multiple episodes of trauma (CPTSD Foundation, n.d.).

As discussed in multiple HRHY reports spanning over a decade, this research as well as other studies among various populations continually demonstrate the negative impact of trauma and family violence on quality of life and life outcomes. The realities of abuse (child abuse, rape, family violence) as well as discrimination and exploitation has ripple effects and both short and long term consequences for all those that reside in that community. These realities continue to impact social service programs, can impact the workforce and therefore local economies, long term individual productivity and health, and have consequences that destroy life potential, families, and quality of life. Investing in family violence prevention strategies, trauma and mental health services, harm reduction strategies, as well as anti-discrimination and anti-exploitation strategies, also has the possibility of positive financial returns for the community and of course, significant quality of life returns for all community residents.

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