



# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

*Working Together to Build Strong Communities*

**COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP'S**

**OZARKS ALLIANCE TO *End* HOMELESSNESS**

**HIGH RISK AND HOMELESS YOUTH REPORT**

**DECEMBER 1, 2020**

Research conducted by Community Partnership's Homeless Youth Task Force. Much of the report content was written by Dr. Tim Knapp of Missouri State University, with 2020 updates to statistics provided by students from Evangel University.

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## Executive Summary

Community Partnership's Homeless Youth Task Force releases this report in a world much changed by COVID-19 and the many challenges it has presented to individuals experiencing homelessness. While the data collected here predates the arrival of COVID-19, we recognize the problems of youth homelessness are likely to grow in our community due to new economic stressors, unemployment, and the potential of housing loss. As always, Community Partnership's Homeless Youth Task Force remains active and involved in working to end youth homelessness and supporting those youth at risk of homelessness.

This project, the 9th High Risk and Homeless Youth Survey conducted since 2007, was developed by Community Partnership's Homeless Youth Task Force in conjunction with Missouri State University's Sociology Department. The Homeless Youth Task Force is a committee of Community Partnership's Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness (OAEH), the HUD-designated Continuum of Care for Springfield/Greene, Christian, and Webster counties that serves as the regional planning body for homelessness services and funding. Past High Risk and Homeless Youth Reports and other information on homelessness can be viewed at [cpozarks.org/endhomelessness](http://cpozarks.org/endhomelessness).

Members of the OAEH Homeless Youth Task Force worked to update the survey instrument used in past years with the help, input, and support of The Phoenix Youth Action Board, a committee of the OAEH made up of youth aged 16-24 with lived experience of homelessness. The youth understood that data obtained from the survey is critical for funders, policy makers, and service providers, and could support the community in meeting the needs of homeless youth. Youth perspective was essential throughout this process.

Members of The Phoenix Youth Action Board shared their thoughts on youth homelessness in Springfield, Missouri:

*There is help out there, but kids don't know how to find it.*

*Many homeless youth are scared to get help and are afraid the system will fail them. They have often left home because it's better than what was at home.*

*We want to help other homeless youth to seek out help and resources.*

The results of the 2020 High Risk and Homeless Youth Report include essential information about the experiences of at-risk youth within the community. 119 surveys were submitted, and 58 of those youth reported they had wondered where they would sleep the following night. 60% of the respondents had either witnessed or been victim to traumatic experiences within a caregiving setting, and more than half came from homes where one or both parents battled alcohol or drug addiction. More than 45% of the young people who responded to the survey had been a ward of the state as a minor. Many of the youth responding did not know how to access essential services and reported a need for increased services for homeless youth within the community.

## Methodology

During the first quarter of 2020, online questionnaires were given to youth at the annual Springfield, Missouri Every Youth Counts event, hosted at the Shrine Mosque by several local nonprofits and youth service providers; the Every Youth Counts event is conducted in conjunction with the annual Point-in-Time Count.

Several area nonprofits and service providers came together to produce a one-day event designed to provide extensive and wrap-around assistance for youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness and to collect vital information on youth homelessness in the community. Available services included applications for state benefits, health care, education, and access to job training services. Youth who attended engaged with service providers in a one-on-one capacity.

At this event, and the comparable adult-targeted event, youth were asked to complete a comprehensive survey that incorporated both demographic and personal information. The High Risk and Homeless Youth survey tool meets and exceeds the requirements of the Point-in-Time Count mandated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), collecting a variety of information beneficial for local service providers. The survey targets youth who are literally homeless and those who are unstably housed.

Surveys were also distributed at various local nonprofits frequented by homeless youth. 119 young people completed and returned the survey between January 30, 2020 and February 15, 2020. Not every respondent completed each of the questions on the form, and this is noted when applicable below; most surveys, however, were complete. The age range established for the survey was between the ages of 13 and 24 (the age range utilized by HUD and other federal agencies to define 'youth').

Along with the High Risk and Homeless Youth Survey conducted in the first quarter of 2020, this report will also consider homelessness data provided by Springfield Public Schools, the largest school district in the OAEH catchment area. This data was compiled by Springfield Public Schools' Office of Students in Transition and reflects the federal definition of homelessness used by the Department of Education.

## **Introduction**

### **Defining Homelessness**

Within different systems of care, varying definitions of homelessness exist. HUD has four definitions of homelessness. They are as follows and specify some differences between homeless youth and adults.

- 1) Literally homeless individuals and families lack a fixed, adequate, and regular nighttime residence, meaning they are living in a place not intended for human habitation, are living in emergency shelter or transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they resided for up to 90 days, after having lived in a place not intended for human habitation or in emergency shelter or transitional housing.
- 2) Imminent risk of homelessness means an individual or family will lose their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or doubled up living arrangement, within 14 days.
- 3) Homeless under other federal statutes includes both unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who do not qualify as either literally homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness, but who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes, have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in the 60 days prior to applying for assistance, have experienced persistent instability as measured by two or more moves in the past 60 days, and can be expected to continue in such a status.
- 4) Fleeing/attempting to flee domestic violence is the final category recognized by HUD. These individuals are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, lack another residence, and do not have the resources to obtain other permanent housing.

Many providers within the area rely upon these HUD definitions; however, homeless youth and families are frequently also recognized by local public-school systems under the guidelines of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act.

The McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness includes children and youth sharing the housing of others (living doubled-up) due to economic hardship, loss of housing, or similar reasons; those living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to lack of other housing; those living in emergency or transitional shelters; those abandoned in hospitals; and children in foster care awaiting placement. These criteria are broader than those applied by HUD; however, the HUD definition is included within McKinney-Vento classification, including children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence in a public or private place neither designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation; children and youth living in cars, parks, public spaces, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar places; and children of migrant agricultural workers.

## **Available Housing Resources for Youth**

The Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness (OAEH) has had youth-designated housing projects since 2005 and consistently works to expand those projects and provide more available beds and units for youth in need. As of the 2020 Housing Inventory Count, the community has 3 federally funded housing programs for youth - two HUD-Continuum of Care Rapid Rehousing programs through The Kitchen, Inc. and one Emergency Solutions Grant Rapid Rehousing program through Great Circle. These programs utilize the Housing First model and participate in the local Coordinated Entry System.

Based on the 2020 Housing Inventory Count, The Kitchen, Inc. provides 23 permanent housing units. The permanent housing success rate of these programs has been over 75% since transitioning to a Housing First model.

Based on the 2020 Housing Inventory County, Great Circle provides 11 permanent housing units for youth. Great Circle has been the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Basic Center funded agency for many years. In October 2017, Great Circle was awarded a RHY funded Transitional Living Program to house eight youth ages 16-21. This program was designed to utilize similar programming aspects as successful Rapid Rehousing projects but also provide services to youth unable to access other services due to programming guidelines (e.g. the ability to house youth under 18 and those not literally homeless). Over the last five years, the OAEH has drastically expanded youth-designated housing through these projects. In addition to these youth-specific resources, youth aged 18 and over can also access adult shelter and housing resources.

Great Circle and The Kitchen, Inc. also have emergency shelter beds for youth on an ongoing basis, and youth 18 years of age and older can access emergency shelter at Salvation Army's Harbor House, Victory Mission's Victory Square, and Council of Church's Safe to Sleep. While these beds are limited, in the winter months crisis cold weather shelters offer an increase in available shelter beds. At least some of the youth who reported staying in emergency shelters stayed in crisis cold weather shelters.

## Summary of the Survey Results

The majority of youth who were homeless or unstably housed identified as 'White,' and 70% identified as residents of either Springfield, Missouri or the state of Missouri. Nearly half had previously been wards of the state or in foster care, and 89.6% were currently enrolled in school of some kind or had completed high school or passed the HiSET or GED tests. Perhaps different than in prior reports, the sample age was a bit older: 67.8% of the sample reported they were between the ages of 18 and 24, making issues related to aging out of state systems and the variables of education and employment particularly significant to study findings. Of 102 reporting youth, 58 individuals (56.9%) said they had in the past wondered where they would sleep that night. 40.7% of those responding indicated they identified as LGBTQ+. This corresponds with national findings that LGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness than heterosexual youth.

The High Risk and Homeless Youth Report provides a snapshot of youth within the area but predominantly reaches those youth already accessing services from local youth-targeted providers. Given that, the numbers of homeless and at-risk youth discussed here do not accurately reflect the scope or scale of the problem of youth homelessness in Springfield/Greene, Christian, and Webster counties.

While only 119 youth responded to the survey this year, Springfield Public Schools reports that a total of 1,790 students are McKinney-Vento eligible out of more than 25,000 students. These numbers reflect a significant increase since 2004.

Exposure to significant life trauma (namely emotional, physical, or sexual abuse) and difficult family backgrounds appear to be primary factors contributing to young people being homeless on their own, while underemployment and mental health concerns/disability are likely important secondary factors (see sections X and XI); this is consistent with past reports and national data. Many youth noted shelter as a significant and under met need within the community.

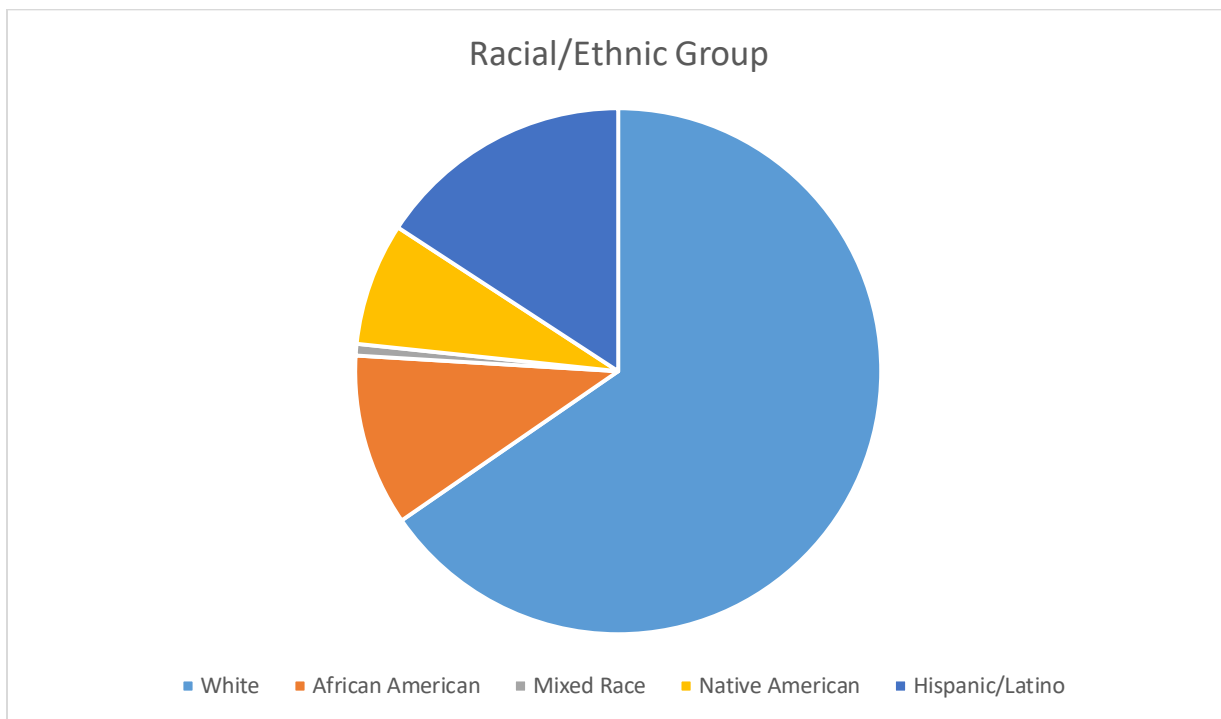
## I. Demographics of the Sample - 119 Persons

Age: The youngest respondent was 12 years old and the oldest was 24 years of age. Nine subjects (7.8%) were 13 years of age. Nine individuals (7.8%) were either 14 or 15 years old. Eighteen respondents (15.7%) were either 16 or 17 years old. Twenty-four people (20.9%) were either 18 or 19 years of age. In total, 53% of those surveyed were 19 years of age or younger. Fifty-four subjects (47%) were age 20 or older. The average (median) age of individuals who completed a survey was 18 years old.

Gender: Sixty-seven respondents (56.8%) were male and forty-five (38.1%) were female. Six individuals (5.1%) identified as “other.”

Racial/Ethnic group: Eighty-seven youth (73.7%) were white. Fourteen respondents were African American (11.9%), and one was mixed race (.8%). Ten people (8.5%) were Native American. Five people (4.2%) responded “other.” One participant did not answer (.8%).

A separate question asked respondents if they are Hispanic/Latino. Twenty-one subjects (17.8%) responded yes, and ninety-seven responded no.

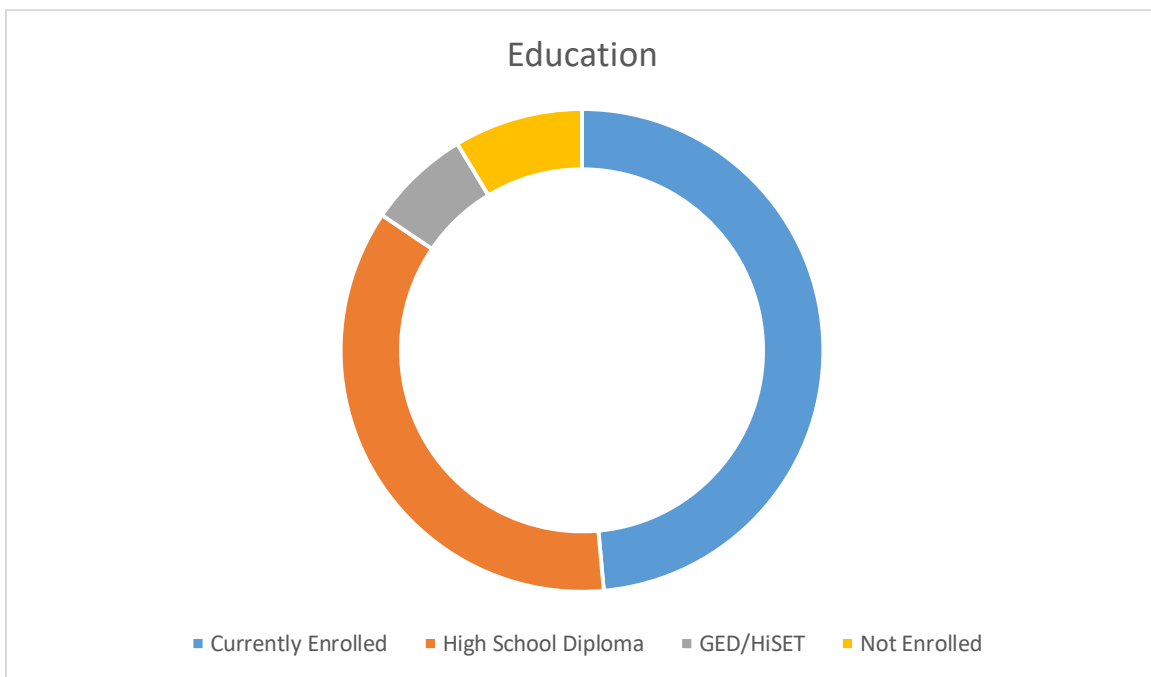


Based on the demographics of Springfield, Missouri, minority youth who self-identified as homeless or unstably housed are over-represented. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Springfield is less diverse than represented by this sample. While 73.7% of the survey sample was white, 88.2% of the overall population of Springfield identifies as white. Only 4.5% of the population of Springfield overall is African American, but 11.8% percent of this sample self-identified as African American. Native Americans represent only .57% of the population of Springfield overall but 8.5% of the youth surveyed. Similar discrepancies are present for other racial and ethnic minorities.



Sexual orientation: Seventy-nine youth were heterosexual, which is 69.3% of the 78 respondents who identified their sexual orientation. Nine people (7.9%) were gay or lesbian. Twenty individuals (17.5%) identified as bisexual. Six young people (5.3%) identified as “other.” In total, 30.7% of youth identified as non-heterosexual. According to the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, only 3.8% of Missourians overall identify as LGBTQ+.

Education status: Thirty-six subjects (34%) are currently enrolled in middle school or high school. Thirty-seven respondents (34.9%) had earned a high school diploma. Eight youth (7.5%) had earned a GED or HiSET. Fourteen respondents are taking HiSET classes (13.2%). Ten individuals (9.4%) were not enrolled in education of any kind. Thirteen youth did not respond to education questions. Youth who had not completed or were not currently enrolled in education primarily reported a need to work, difficulties with transportation, and unstable housing as barriers to education.

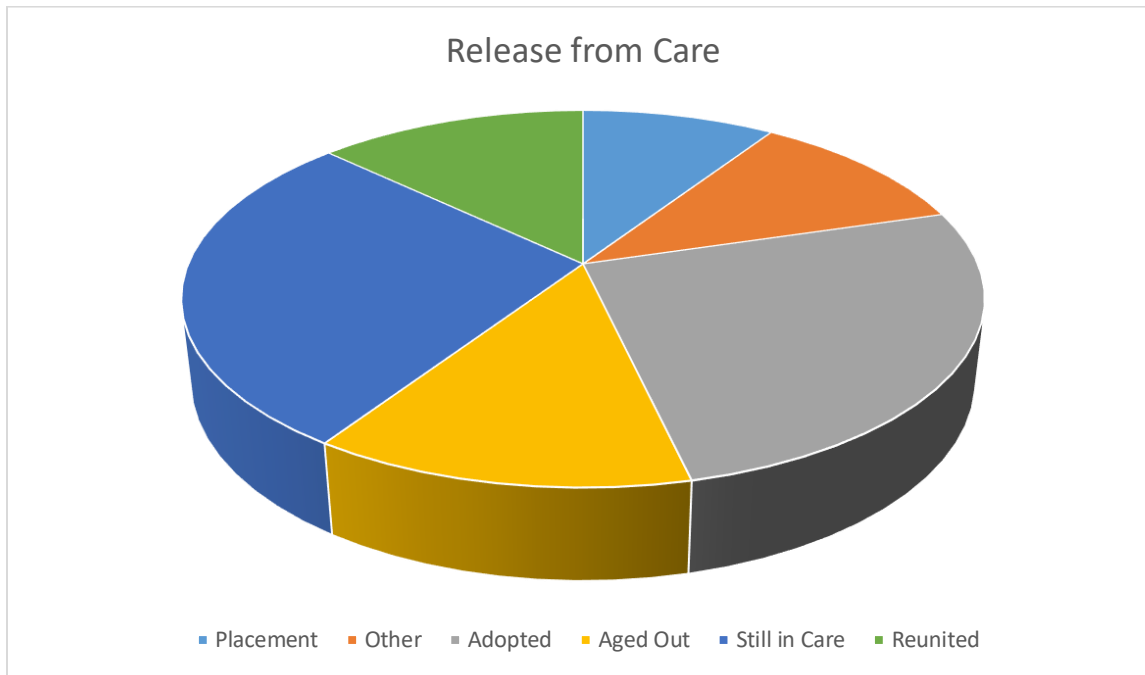


Hometown: Forty-seven youth (39.8%) were from Springfield, Missouri. Thirty-six individuals (30.5%) were from another town in Missouri, and thirty young people (25.2%) listed their hometown as in another state. One youth reported an origin outside the U.S.A. Four people (.8%) did not provide this information.

Ward of the state: Of the youth who provided information, fifty-three (44.9%) had not been a ward of the state in foster care, Division of Youth Services, Division of Family Services Children’s Division, or juvenile justice. Fifty-five respondents (46.6%) had been wards of the state. Ten people (8.5%) chose not to respond. Of those who have been wards of the state, twenty-four (30.8%) are still in care.

Age of release and how released: Of the fifty-five people who had been under state care, fifteen remained in care. Of those individuals who had been released from care, the age of exiting care

varied from age two to eighteen. Seven individuals aged out of care. Among those who had been released, seven were reunited with their family, five were placed with a legal guardian, six were released in an “other” form, and fourteen were adopted.



Adequate support after care: Of thirty-two youth formerly in the care of the state, twenty-two reported they did not receive the support needed to transition out of foster care and live independently, while eleven said they did.

Pregnant and parenting: Of the 108 responses to this question, seventy-six respondents (70.4%) said neither they nor their significant other was pregnant or had a child. Eleven people (10.2%) said they or their significant other might be pregnant, and twenty-one (19.4%) individuals said they or their significant other was pregnant or currently a parent.

## II. Work History

Job status: Of the respondents who answered this question, 77.8% were not employed at the time of the survey. Four individuals worked full time and eight worked part time.

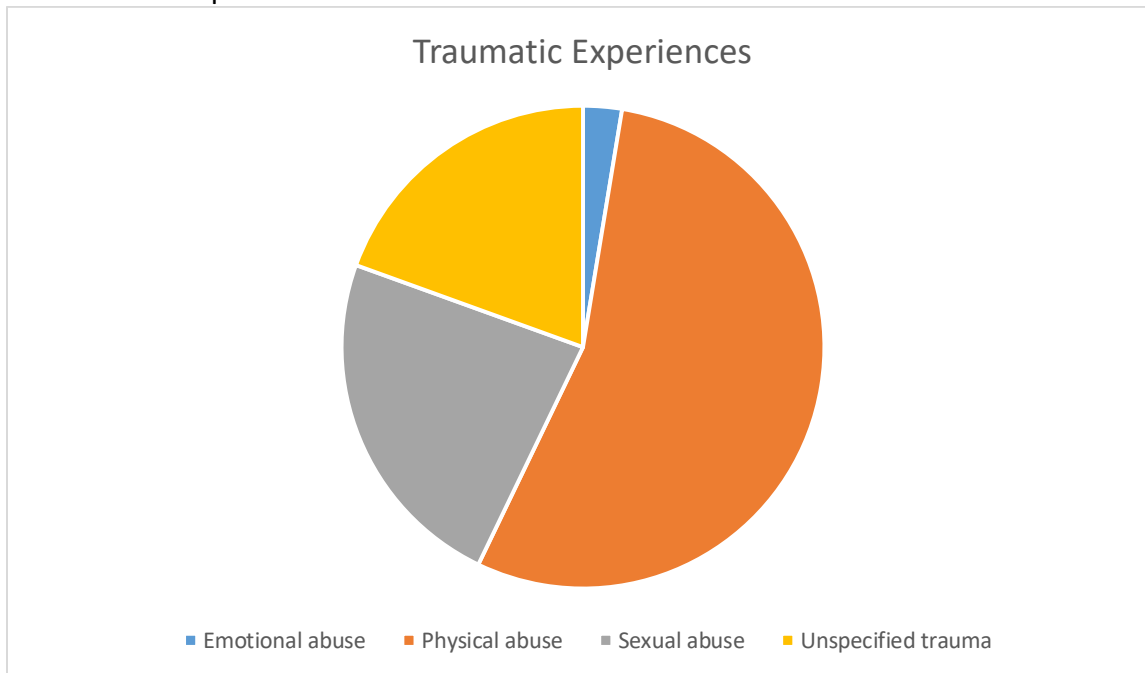
Weekly hours of work: Of the twelve respondents who were working and provided information, 58.7% were on the job 25 hours each week or less, one individual reported working 35 hours per week, and four individuals worked 38 to 45 hours each week. This is a substantive change from last year. In 2019, no individuals reported working fewer than 35 hours each week.

Job history: A total of sixty-nine subjects (almost 65% of 107 responding subjects) had held at least one job in the past year. Among those who had worked for pay in the past 12 months, forty-seven people (43.9%) had held one or two jobs, nineteen individuals (17.8%) had worked two jobs, and two individuals (2.8%) reported three or four jobs. No respondents reported working five to six jobs in the past year.

Other sources of income/meeting daily needs: Respondents reported other sources of incomes and resources used to meet daily needs. Four (3.3%) reported child support as a resource, thirty-four (28.6%) reported food pantries as a resource, forty-five (37.8%) reported food stamps as a resource, twenty-eight (23.5%) reported receiving hot meals from the community, twenty (16.8%) reported using money/resources from family, and nineteen (15.9%) reported receiving money/resources from friends. Seventeen did not respond.

### III. Family Troubles and Running Away from Home

Victim of or witness to repeated household traumas: One hundred youth responded to questions about being victim of or witness to various types of household traumas. Sixty-two respondents (62%) had been the victim of or witness to repeated traumatic events in a caregiving situation. Thirty-eight respondents (38%) had neither witnessed nor been the victim of repeated household traumatic events. Of those who witnessed or experienced violence, two (2%) had witnessed or experienced emotional acts, four (4%) had witnessed or experienced physical events, three (3%) witnessed or experienced sexual events, and one (1%) witnessed or experienced some other form of violent act. All others witnessed or experienced a combination of different types of emotional, physical, or sexual violence. The chart below illustrates the type of violence or trauma witnessed or experienced.



Parents' alcohol or drug abuse: Fifty-five respondents (53.9%) reported that one or both of their parents had an alcohol or drug problem, while forty-seven (46.1%) did not have a parent with an alcohol or drug problem. Seventeen did not respond.

Abuse perpetrated by relative or other person stayed with: Fifty-four respondents (52.4%) reported experiencing some sort of abuse from a relative or other person they had stayed with, while forty-nine respondents (47.6%) did not. Sixteen respondents did not answer the question.

Of those who were abused, two reported being emotionally abused, five were physically abused, and two were sexually abused. The remaining youth had experienced a combination of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse by a relative or another person stayed with.

Runaway: Fifty-two youth, almost half (49.5%) of the respondents, had never run away from home. Among the fifty-three youth (50.5% of the total respondents) who had run away from their home, 49% had run away once or twice, 25.5% had run away three or four times, 9.8% had run away five or more times, and 15.7% had run away seven or more times.

#### **IV. Alcohol/Drug Use and Mental Health**

Youth alcohol or drug problem: Almost two-thirds of subjects, 63.6%, said they themselves have never had a drug or alcohol problem. However, forty-one young people (39.4%) reported they have had or currently have an alcohol or drug problem. Fifteen did not answer.

Use of alcohol or drugs: Over three quarters of respondents had not used alcohol or drugs in the week preceding the survey. Among the entire sample, twenty people (22.9%) had used alcohol and twenty-four people (19.2%) had used drugs.

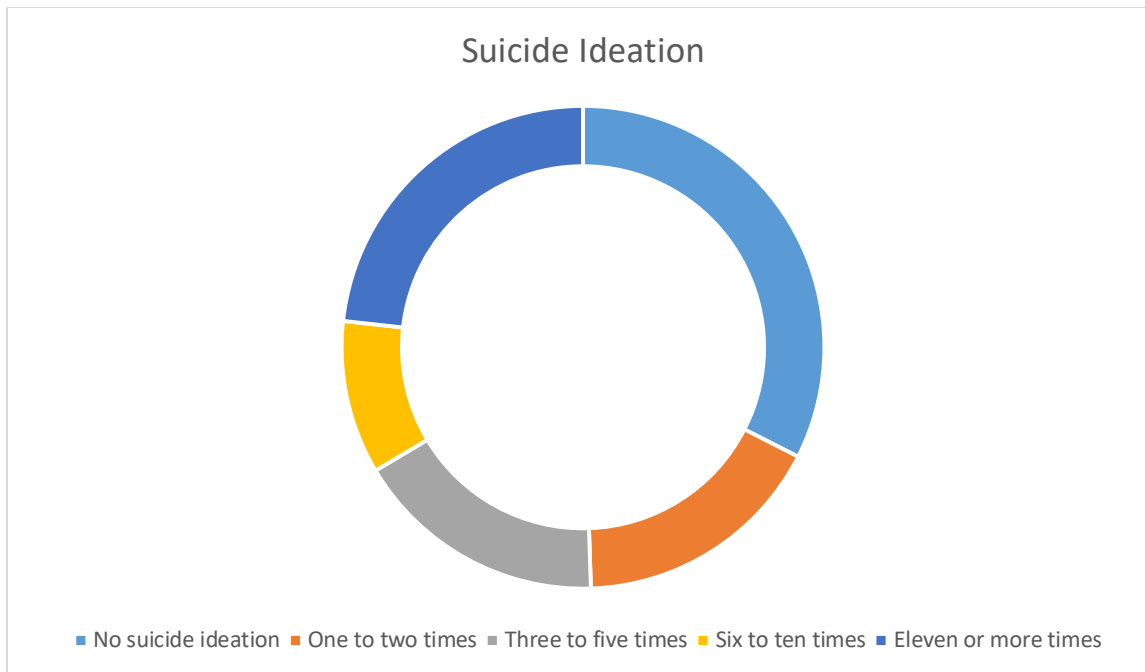
Mental illness: Around half of subjects, 50.4%, had never been diagnosed with a mental illness. Fifty-nine respondents (49.6%) had been diagnosed with a mental illness; of these, 14 respondents (45.2%) also had some other form of disability. Sixteen people responded that they did not know or were refusing to answer.

Mental illness prescription drugs: Interestingly, the number of respondents that had been prescribed medicine for mental illness is higher than the number of respondents who have been diagnosed. Seventy-one participants (68.9%) have been prescribed medication to treat mental illness, while twenty-five (31.1%) have not. Sixteen did not respond.

Counseling services: Twenty-nine respondents (27.9%) had never received counseling services. However, seventy-five youth (72.1%) had received counseling services. Four did not answer.

Self-harm: Fifty-nine youth (56.7%) reported they had self-mutilated, such as cutting or burning themselves, at some point. Forty-five (43.3%) said they had never done so, and fifteen did not respond.

Suicide ideation: Thirty-eight participants (37.3%) had not thought of completing suicide. However, sixty-four (62.7%) had. Among the sixty-four individuals that had considered it, 19.5% had suicidal thoughts once or twice, 19.5% had thought about ending their lives three to five times, 11.8% had considered suicide six to ten times, and 11.8% had thought about suicide eleven or more times.



## V. Homelessness

One question measured whether subjects had ever faced uncertainty of shelter. Of 102 reporting youth, 58 individuals (56.9%) said they had in the past wondered where they would sleep that night.

The amended McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children as young people who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Some examples of children who fall under this definition are: young people who rotate housing (couch surf); those living in campgrounds; youth staying in emergency or transitional shelters; and children living in cars, parks, public spaces, or abandoned buildings. Five questions measured the various conditions of youth homelessness.

Stayed in shelter, housing program, with friends or family, or in a hotel/motel: Of 118 respondents who answered the question, 57 individuals (48.3%) had stayed in a homeless shelter, lived with friends or another family member, or stayed in a hotel/motel within the last week.

Slept in a place not meant for human habitation: Of 118 people who provided information, forty-five (38.1%) had slept in a place not meant to be slept in, such as a vehicle, shed, park, porch, tunnel, or vacant building within the last week.

Homeless with family: Of 108 youth who provided information, 25 (23.1%) had experienced homelessness with their family.

Homeless without family: Of 105 subjects who answered the question, 62 (59%) had been homeless on their own without their family.

Age when first homeless on their own: Of 57 people who had been homeless without their family and provided information, the youngest individual (1.6%) who had been homeless on their own

first experienced it at age six. One youth reported being age 10 (1.6%) and one age 14 (1.6%). Eleven youth (17.8%) first were homeless without their family when they were either 15 or 16 years old, twenty-nine people (46.8%) were first homeless on their own when they were 17 or 18 years old, and nineteen individuals (30.6%) experienced homelessness without their family for the first time when they were 19 years old or older.

Hunger: A separate question asked youth about hunger. Fifty-seven young people (55.9%) said they had wondered where they would get food on any given day. Around 45% had not experienced hunger.

## **VI. Self-Reported Reasons for Being Homeless**

Respondents were asked about 13 factors that could have caused them to become homeless on their own. Among the 57 individuals who had been homeless without their family, three factors were most often identified by youth as having contributed to their experiencing homelessness on their own. Thirty-five (62.1%) reported there had been lots of arguments at home, 26 youth (45.2%) reported verbal abuse, and 22 (39.4%) reported physical abuse. Other significant considerations included disagreements about the rules, an unsafe or unhealthy home, and an inability of family to support the youth.

## **VII. Services for Homeless Youth in Springfield**

The survey asked youth about their knowledge of available services and their thoughts on what services are needed in the area. They were not asked about specific services or service providers.

Knowledge of health care services: Of 92 youth who provided information, 22 (23.9%) did not know how to access health care, but all reporting youth knew how to access needed medications. 25 (27.8%) did not know how to access dental care, and 22 (25%) did not know how to access mental health care. 25 (27.8%) did not know how to get drug and alcohol rehabilitation services. All other youth either knew how to access these services or were already getting these services.

Knowledge of emergency shelter and food: Of the 90 individuals who answered, 26 (28.9%) were not aware of emergency shelter options and 23 (25.6%) did not know how to access emergency food. All other respondents either knew how to get emergency shelter and food or were getting emergency shelter and food.

Knowledge of housing, education, and employment services: Of 92 youth who shared their thoughts, 32 (35.2%) did not know how to access housing services, 27 (29.3%) had no knowledge of how to access educational services, and 30 (33.3%) did not know how to access employment services. The remainder of the responding youth either knew how to get these services or were getting these services.

Knowledge of parenting and domestic violence services: Of the 90 respondents, 31 youth (34.4%) did not know how to access parenting support resources. The remaining 59 youth either knew how to access parenting resources or were receiving parenting support. Thirty-four youth (37%)

did not know how to access domestic violence services. 46 youth knew how to access domestic violence services and resources and 12 youth (13%) were receiving those services.

Need for more short-term shelter: Of 94 youth who provided information, 63.9% agreed or strongly agreed that Springfield needs more short-term shelter for youth (see Table 2). 13.8% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. 22.3% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Need for more transitional shelter: Of 94 respondents who answered the question, 71% agreed or strongly agreed that Springfield needs more long-term transitional housing for youth. 13% of people disagreed or strongly disagreed. 16% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Need for more housing for pregnant or parenting teens: Of 93 individuals who gave their opinion, 67.7% felt that Springfield needs a transitional living program for pregnant or parenting teens; while Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri’s LifeHouse program is a transitional housing program for pregnant women, it serves women ages 18 and up. 14% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. 18.3% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Need for a “one stop shop”: Of 93 youth who provided information, 71% agreed or strongly agreed that Springfield needs a “one stop shop” where youth can get the services they need in one place. 13% of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed. 16.1% neither agreed nor disagreed.

*Table 2: Youths’ views of local services*

Need more short-term shelter	63.9%
Need more transitional housing	71%
Need housing for pregnant/parenting teens	67.7%
Need a “one stop shop” *	71%

\* A one stop shop would provide multiple services directed at homeless or at-risk youth in a single, accessible location

### **VIII. Dangers of Being a Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

Of 91 respondents who provided information, 31 young people (34.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that there are adults in Springfield who endanger or harm homeless youth. Among the respondents, 49 (48%) reported witnessing or experiencing traumatic events while homeless. Of those who specified what they had witnessed/experienced, many described multiple types of events. Thirty-eight reported seeing emotional events, 42 reported seeing physical events, 18 reported seeing sexual events, and 15 reported seeing some other type of violent act.

Many individuals reported doing something they would not normally do to stay in a housing situation. Twenty-four reported they had stayed somewhere they didn’t feel safe; forty-seven reported they had stayed with someone they didn’t know or trust. Eighteen respondents said they had paid something other than money (food stamps, sex, labor/work) to stay in a housing situation, and sixteen people said they stayed with a sexual partner they otherwise would not have stayed with in order to stay in a housing situation.

Youth living on the streets also have to worry about sexual coercion and sex trafficking. Seventeen of the 100 respondents (17%) stated they received something (money, food, shelter, drugs, etc.) in exchange for sex/sexual activity. Of these, four reported this occurred within the last three months. Of 13 respondents, seven reported performing sexual acts once or twice, two respondents reported doing sexual acts three or four times, and one reported performing sexual acts five or six times. Three respondents received something for sexual activity seven or more times.

In a related question, respondents reported on whether they had ever been made, persuaded, or forced to have sex in exchange for things. Ten youth reported they had been made, persuaded, or forced to have sex in exchange for things. Four youth reported they had not been made, forced, or persuaded to have sex in exchange for things.

Youth also face issues with working, including labor trafficking. Ten of 95 respondents (10.5%) reported they had been afraid to quit/leave work due to threats of violence against themselves, their family, or their friends. Twenty-four of 101 respondents (23.76%) also reported they were promised work where the work or payment was different than they expected. Eight respondents also reported they felt forced, coerced, pressured, or tricked into continuing to work in a place they no longer wanted to work due to either workplace violence or difference in expectations.

## **IX. Subgroups and Rates of Unaccompanied Homelessness**

There was no statistically significant difference in the rates of being homeless without family by gender. Rates of homelessness with or without a parent also did not vary across racial groups. Rates of youth experiencing homelessness on their own or with family did not vary based on respondents' sexual orientation.

## **X. Primary Factors Associated with Experiencing Unaccompanied Homelessness**

Three family background variables had statistically significant associations with high rates of young people having been homeless on their own. 70% of respondents who had at least one parent with a drug or alcohol problem had been homeless on their own, compared with 30% of those who did not have a parent with a drug or alcohol problem.

Youth who experienced unaccompanied homelessness were more likely to have experienced or witnessed traumatic events in a caregiving situation than youth who did not experience unaccompanied homelessness.

Respondents who reported homelessness with their families of origin were more likely to experience unaccompanied homelessness.

## **XI. Secondary Factors Associated with Experiencing Unaccompanied Homelessness**

Unemployment was noted as the number one factor for contributing to homelessness or risk of homelessness. Two other factors were associated with high rates of having been homeless on their own: More than half of respondents who had been diagnosed with a mental illness had been homeless on their own, compared with fewer youth who had never been diagnosed with a



mental illness. Over half of youth who had run away from home one or more times had experienced homelessness on their own; youth who had not run away from home were less likely to have experienced homelessness on their own.

Cross-sectional “snapshot” surveys are not designed to identify historical causal processes as well as experiments and longitudinal studies can. However, cross-sectional data sometimes logically imply causal processes that occur over time. In these circumstances, approximate conclusions can be put forth. It is logical to assume that in most (but not all) cases, the negative family experiences mentioned above occurred prior to young people developing a mental illness and/or running away from home. Thus, our tentative conclusion is that the family background variables are primary factors contributing to youth being homeless on their own, while mental illness and running away are important secondary factors.

Of course, in some cases the experience of being homeless on their own leads young people to develop significant anxiety and depression, and some individuals who run away from home and become homeless do not experience difficult family circumstances; the direction of the causal arrow cannot be determined definitively with cross-sectional data. However, some empirical evidence is consistent with our historical causation conclusion that difficult family experiences contributed to some youth developing a mental illness and/or running away from home, which in turn increased the likelihood that young people become homeless on their own.

Two family background factors were associated with having run away from home at least once: A higher number of youth who had at least one parent with an alcohol or drug problem had run away from home compared to youth without a parent with an alcohol or drug problem. Repeated traumas also increased the likelihood of running away from home. Having been homeless with their family did not have a statistically significant association with having run away at least once.

The analysis and discussion above suggest that for many (but not all) youth in our sample, difficult early life family experiences significantly increased the likelihood that youth experience homelessness on their own. Difficult family lives were associated with high rates of mental illness and with having run away from home, which in turn also contributed to youth having been homeless without their family.

## **XII. Policies and Programs to Reduce Youth Homelessness**

As in reports prior, researchers and 2020 updates confirm that reducing the impacts of family homelessness on children and limiting the negative effects that disruptive family conditions and household traumas have on high-risk youth remain significant primary prevention strategies. Secondary prevention strategies include additional resources for those youth with mental health concerns and disabilities, additional housing options for youth and families, and additional support for youth exiting the foster care system. Many local agencies and their collective efforts in the last 8 years of survey implementation continue to address these existing and ongoing vital concerns.

Many of the current concerns being reported by older youth are similar to those being reported by adults over age 25 who are homeless or at risk. In particular, concerns related to unemployment or underemployment that many defined as youth (ages 18-24) expressed as the

major cause of homelessness or risk for homelessness in 2020 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 (2013-2018) estimates, nearly 26% of all residents live in poverty in Springfield, Missouri. At the same time, the area also boasted very low (under 5%) unemployment rates (US Department of Labor, 2018), prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. 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.

Given the significant social changes related to COVID-19, youth homelessness is likely to increase over the course of 2020. Unemployment, both locally and nationally, has skyrocketed. This is likely to further stress limited job and housing opportunities for at-risk youth.

Safe, decent, and affordable housing, in general, also remains a significant concern in the area and has been consistently identified as a Red Flag in Community Focus Reports. As housing costs have risen, many in the area have seen wages remain stagnant (Maciag, December 13th, 2013). This is particularly true for younger workers (some of whom have seen wages decline), both in Springfield and across the nation (Economic Policy Institute, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Homelessness in general, including youth homelessness, remains a significant problem nationally and in the Ozarks. The costs of homelessness are high both for individual youth themselves and for communities. 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 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.

As identified in prior High Risk and Homeless Youth Reports, more outcome assessment studies need to be conducted to identify best practices, and more cost-benefit analyses of teen homelessness prevention programs need to be completed. Nonetheless, a convincing argument

is emerging that providing adequate funding for programs to prevent youth homelessness is a good social investment that saves communities money now and in the future.

It is a substantial challenge to secure adequate and stable funding for primary and secondary prevention programs in a time of tight city budgets, declining federal and state resources, and strained balance sheets for non-profit organizations. What is clear from a growing body of research is that the present and future costs of doing too little are higher than the costs of providing adequate, stable funding for youth homeless prevention programs today. This is more important in a world changed by COVID-19 than it was at any point in the past, and active intervention is essential to reduce the impact on youth homelessness in Springfield and the surrounding communities.

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