



COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIP

Working Together to Build Strong Communities

YOUTH HOUSING STUDY

A REPORT OF SPRINGFIELD'S 2021 SURVEY OF
HIGH-RISK AND HOMELESS YOUTH

Facilitated by

THE OZARKS ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS
HOMELESS YOUTH TASK FORCE

Research conducted by the Missouri State University Sociology and Anthropology Department in collaboration with The Homeless Youth Task Force of Community Partnership's Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness. Data analysis and recommendations were provided by Christina Ryder and Kayla Curry of the Sociology and Anthropology program at Missouri State University. Questions regarding data can be directed to cryder@missouristate.edu.

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YOUTH HOUSING REPORT OVERVIEW

This project is the 9th High-Risk and Homeless Youth Assessment Survey conducted since 2007. Past reports are available at www.cpozarks.org/endhomelessness. Survey development and data collection was conducted by Community Partnership's Homeless Youth Task Force, with technical assistance provided by Institute for Community Alliances. The Task Force is a committee of Community Partnership's Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness (OAEH), which serves as the Continuum of Care for Springfield/Greene, Christian, and Webster counties. Analysis of the data was provided by Missouri State University's Sociology and Anthropology Department (faculty member Christina Ryder, CSP, and student intern Kayla Curry).

During the first quarter of 2021, online questionnaires were given to members of the Homeless Youth Task Force and partner agencies that sought to explore the needs of youth experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness in the Springfield, Missouri metropolitan area. Given restrictions on large gatherings due to COVID-19, survey interviews with youth were conducted and the majority of youth completed the online questionnaire with the assistance of case managers or others responsible for providing services or referrals to services among OAEH partner agencies. This collection methodology differed compared to the 2019 survey where online questionnaires were given to youth at the annual Springfield, MO 'Point-in-Time' count event. Previously, area nonprofits collaborated to provide a one-day event where multiple service providers were on-site to offer basic need items and critical support services, in addition to collecting vital information on who is experiencing homelessness in the community, to meet federal mandates by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Both youth and adults are asked to complete a basic survey regarding their experiences and demographics. In addition to information collected at this event in 2019, surveys were also distributed at various nonprofits that serve youth. The data collection methodology for 2021, unlike the data collection methodology for 2019, only captured the responses of youth who 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 for services. As with prior years, the 2021 survey was also modified slightly to address potentially unclear questions or adjusted to better capture information of benefit to service providers. Given these adjustments in collection methodology, direct comparison of statistics from 2019 and 2021 is limited and not recommended. Despite these limitations, however, many of the same reported reasons for homelessness remain consistent in 2021, as they have since 2007 (namely abuse, trauma, limited housing options, and unemployment or underemployment).

In 2021, 59 young people completed and returned a questionnaire. 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. The age range established for the survey were those between the ages of 12 and 24 (the age range utilized by Housing and Urban Development and other federal agencies in determining a 'youth'). The majority of youth (67.8%) who were homeless or at risk for homelessness identified as 'White'; 68% identified as either Springfield, Missouri or the state of Missouri natives; approximately half identified as either formerly a ward of the state or in foster care; and only 5 (9% of the sample) were not enrolled in some form of education or already a high school graduate. These demographic percentages closely mirror 2019 survey demographics, with the exception of nearly 20% more racial and ethnic diversity representation in survey respondents.

Of 59 reporting youth, nearly 26% of youth who were surveyed reported being currently homeless or unsafely housed at the time of the survey. Among the sample for 2021, there was a reported difference in youth experiencing homelessness among those who identified as 'heterosexual' compared to those who identified as part of the LGBTQ community (see section IX "Subgroups and rates of homeless on their own" below). Previous reports, as well as national data, suggest that non-heterosexual identifying youth are often at higher risk for running away or being asked to leave their home, homelessness in general, and exploitation once homeless (National Council of State Legislatures, n.d.).

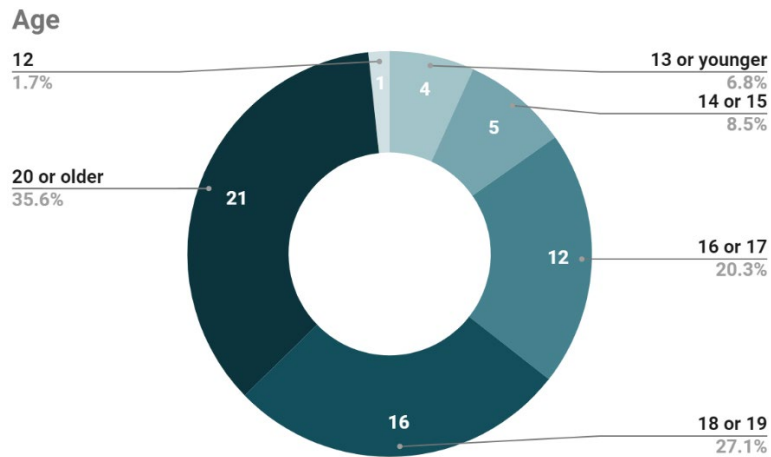
As also with past reports and mirroring national data as well, exposure to significant life trauma (namely emotional, physical, or sexual abuse) and difficult family backgrounds appear to be primary factors that contribute to young people being homeless on their own, while unemployment/underemployment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

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE

59 youth responded to these questions.

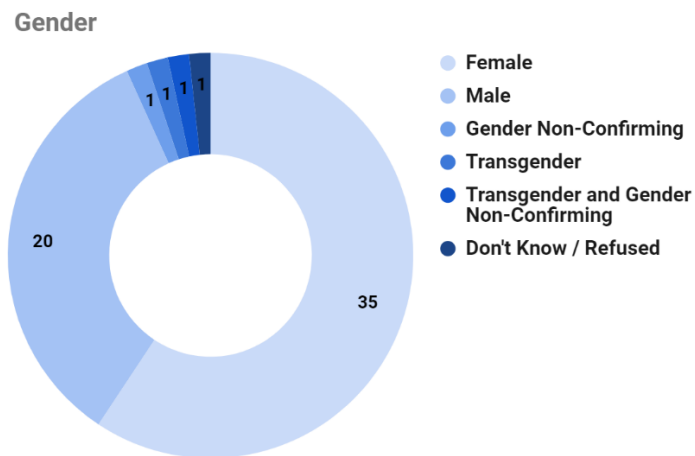
AGE

The youngest respondent was 12 years old, and the oldest person was 24 years of age. Four subjects, 6.8% of the sample, were 13 years of age. Five individuals, 8.5% of the sample, were either 14 or 15 years old. 12 respondents, 20.4% of participants, were either 16 or 17 years old. 16 people, 27.2% of the sample, were either 18 or 19 years of age. 21 subjects, 35.7% of individuals, were age 20 or older. The average (median) age of individuals who completed a survey was 18 years old.



GENDER

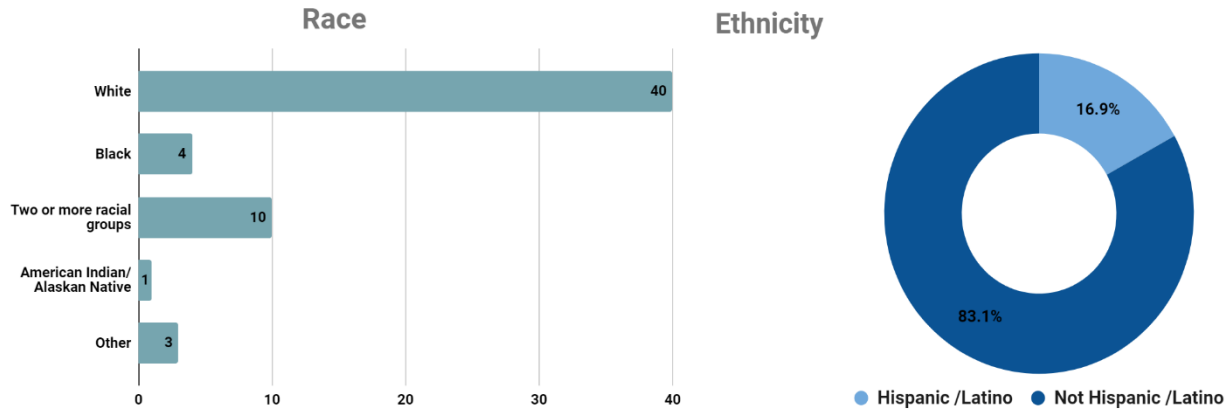
35 respondents, 59.3% of the sample, were females, and 20 (33.9%) were males. One individual was transgender (1.7% of all participants), one was gender non-confirming (1.7% of all participants), one was transgender and gender non-confirming (1.7% of all participants), and one participant marked don't know/refused (1.7% of all participants).



RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

40 youth (67.8% of the sample) were white. Four respondents (6.8%) were Black, and 10 were of two or more racial group backgrounds (15.3%). One person (1.7%) was American Indian/Alaskan Native. Three people responded "Other" (5.1%), which included "Indian" and "Mexican." A separate question asked respondents if they are Hispanic/Latino. 10 respondents responded 'yes' (16.9%), and 49 responded 'no' (83.1%). Given the range of racial and ethnic self-categorization, race and ethnicity did not have any statistical significance on factors for reported

reasons for homelessness. Race, however, does present youth with differing challenges while homeless. For example, half of those who identified as ‘Black or African American’ were afraid to leave a work-related situation due to threats to themselves or threats made to their friends or family. While the circumstances surrounding these events are unclear in this particular survey, on average, research suggests homeless or run-away youth of color are at higher likelihood to be exploited sexually or through informal labor means (such as trafficking) while homeless (Page, 2017).



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

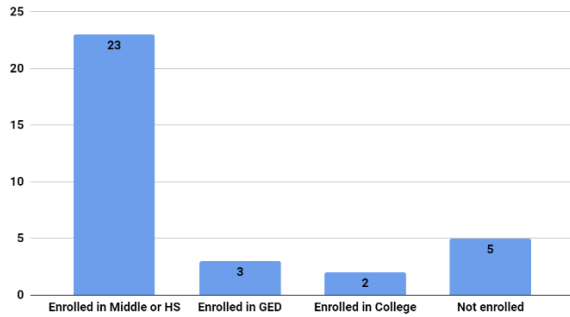
32 youth were heterosexual, which is 54.2% of the 56 respondents who identified their sexual orientation. One person (1.7%) was gay or lesbian. 17 individuals (28.8%) identified as bisexual. One person reported as “bisexual/pansexual” in the “other” category. One person (1.7%) was questioning their sexual orientation, one individual reported as “pansexual” in the “other” category (1.7%), one person responded as “aromid” in the “other” category (1.7%), one person (1.7%) reported “Not your business” in the “other” category, and one person (1.7%) reported “other.” LGBTQ youth were more likely to report 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).

EDUCATION STATUS

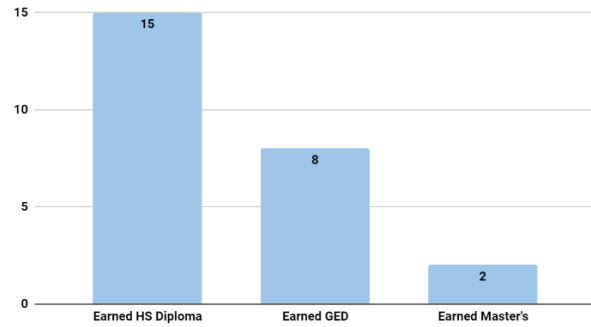
23 subjects (39.0% of the sample) are currently enrolled in middle school or high school. 15 respondents (25.4%) had earned a high school diploma, and eight people (13.6%) had earned a GED. Three respondents are taking GED classes (5.1%), one of whom is taking GED classes while enrolled in middle or high school (1.7%). Of those who earned a HiSET (or GED), two were not enrolled in education. Five individuals were not enrolled in education of any kind (8.5%). Two

individuals (3.4%) are currently enrolled in college. Two individuals earned a Master's degree (3.4%).

Education Status (Enrollment)



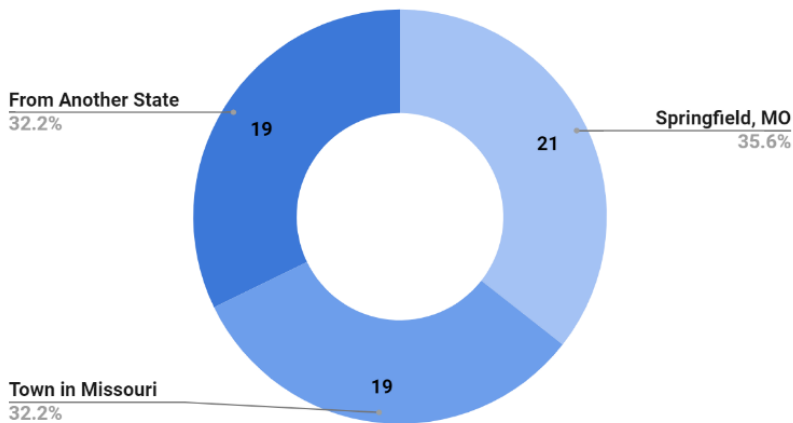
Education Status (Earned)



HOMETOWN

21 youth (35.7% of participants) were from Springfield. 19 individuals (32.2% of the sample) were from another town in Missouri, and 19 young people (32.2% of respondents) listed their hometown in another state.

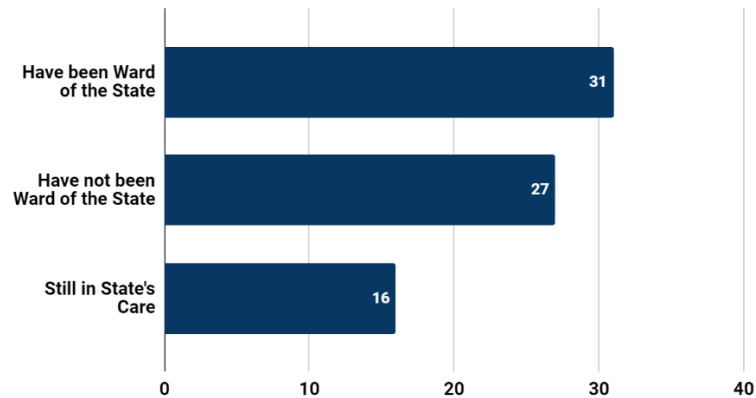
Hometown



WARD OF THE STATE

31 youth (52.5%) had been a ward of the state in foster care, Division of Youth Services, Division of Family Services Children's Division, or juvenile justice. 27 respondents (45.8%) had not been wards of the state. 16 individuals (27.15) are still in the state's care.

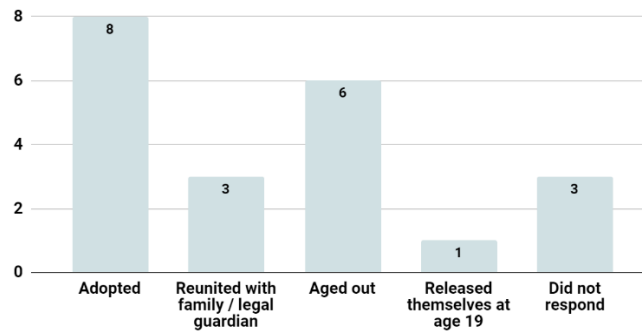
Ward of the State



AGE OF RELEASE AND HOW RELEASED

Of the 31 people who had been under state care, 15 were released. Of these individuals, the mean age of exiting the care system was 14.6 years. Among those who had been released, eight (25.2%) were adopted, three (5.1%) were reunited with their family or a legal guardian, two (3.4%) aged out of the system, one (1.7%) reported releasing themselves at age 19 in the "other" category, and four (22.2%) aged out. Three people out of the 31 individuals who reported having been under the state's care did not respond as to how they were released. 49 people chose not to respond to what age they were when released from the state's care.

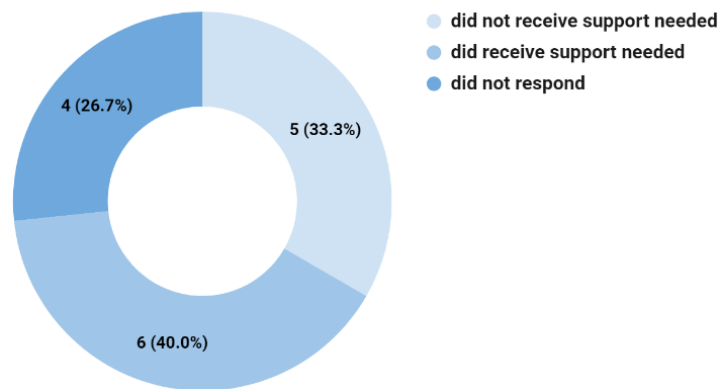
How were you released from the child welfare system?



ADEQUATE SUPPORT AFTER CARE

Of the 15 individuals who were released from care, five (8.5%) reported they did not receive the support needed to transition out of foster care and live independently, while six people (10.2%) said they did. Four people chose not to respond.

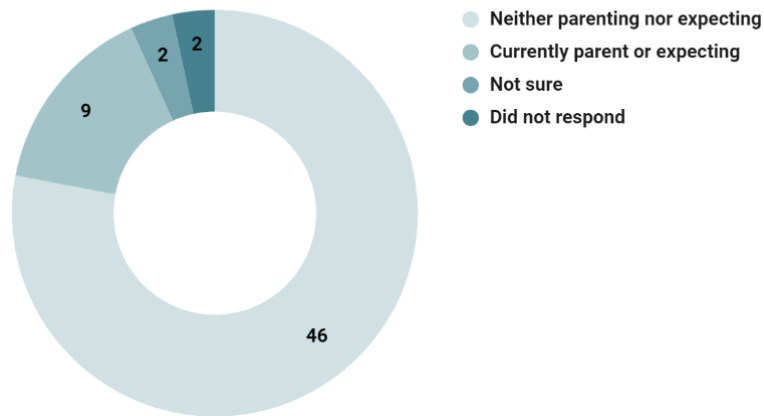
Did you receive adequate support after care?



CURRENTLY A PARENT OR EXPECTING

46 respondents (78.0%) said that neither they nor their significant other was pregnant or have a child. Nine people (15.3%) said they were currently a parent or expecting to be a parent in the next nine months, and two individuals (3.4%) said they were not sure. Two people did not answer.

Youth who are Parenting and/or Expecting

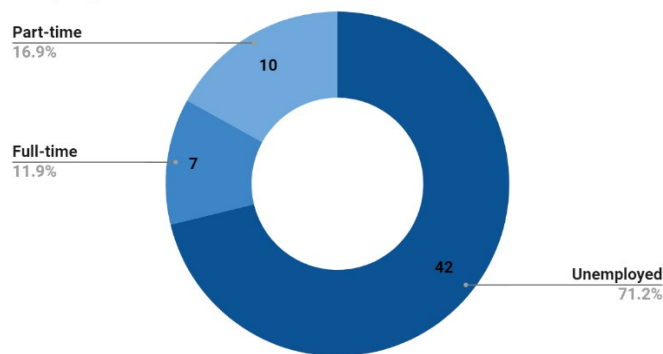


WORK HISTORY

JOB STATUS

Of the respondents who answered this question, 71.2% were not employed at the time of the survey. Seven people (11.9%) worked full time, and 10 (16.9%) worked part time.

Employment Status



WEEKLY HOURS OF WORK

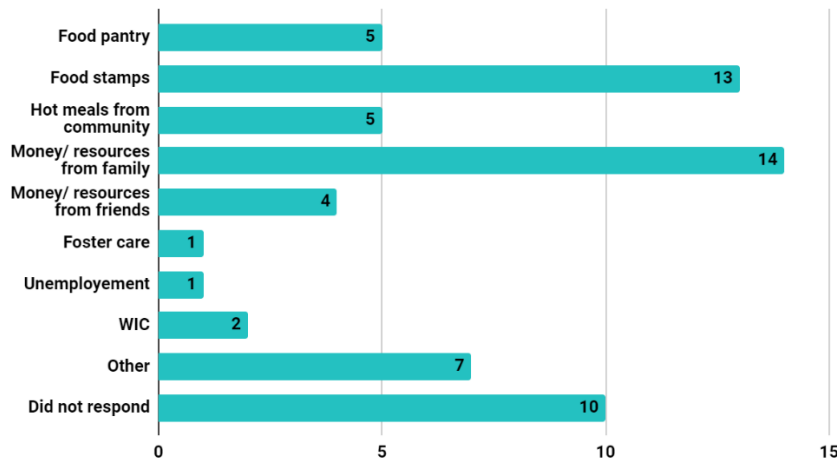
Of the 14 respondents who were working and provided information, 42.9% were on the job less than 30 hours each week, and 57.1% were on the job 30 to 40 hours each week.

A total of 54 subjects (almost 70% of all subjects who responded) had held at least one job in the past year. Among those who had worked for pay in the past 12 months, 25 people (42.4%) had held one or two jobs, and 12 individuals (20.3%) had worked three or four jobs.

OTHER SOURCES OF INCOME/MEETING DAILY NEEDS

Respondents reported other sources of incomes and resources they use to meet daily needs. Five reported using a food pantry as a resource (8.5%), 13 reported food stamps as a resource (39.1%), five reported receiving hot meals from the community (8.5%), 14 reported using money/resources from family (10.2%), four reported receiving money/resources from friends (6.8%), one person reported foster care as a resource (1.7%), one person reported unemployment as a resource (1.7%), two reported WIC as a resource (3.4%), and seven reported “other” (11.9%). 10 did not respond.

How do you meet daily needs outside of employment?

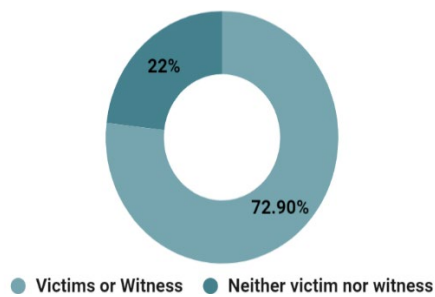


FAMILY TROUBLES AND RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME

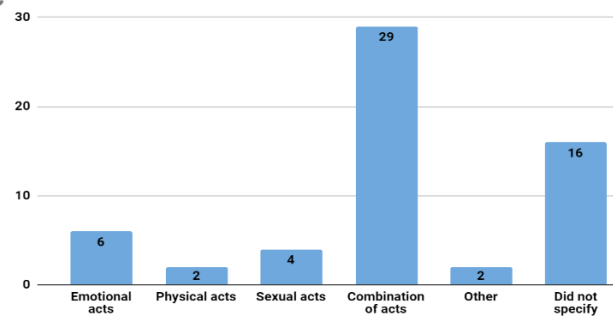
VICTIM OF OR WITNESS TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS

43 respondents (72.9%) had been the victim or witness to traumatic events. 13 respondents, or 22% percent of youth, had neither witnessed nor been the victim of traumatic events. Of those that witnessed acts, six witnessed emotional acts (10.2%), two witnessed physical events (3.4%), four witnessed sexual events (6.8%), and two reported witnessing or experiencing other violent acts (3.4%) 29 witnessed or experienced some combination of events (49.3%), while 16 did not specify.

Have you ever been a victim of or witness to a traumatic event?



Types of traumatic events



PARENTS' ALCOHOL OR DRUG ABUSE

27 respondents, 45.8%, reported one or both of their parents had an alcohol or drug problem, while 26, 44.1% of participants, did not have a parent with an alcohol or drug problem. Six did not answer.

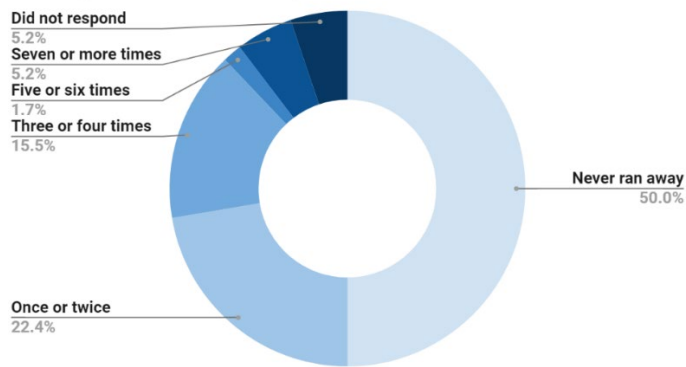
ABUSE EXPERIENCED BY RELATIVE OR OTHER PERSON STAYED WITH

24 respondents, 40.7%, reported experiencing some sort of abuse, while 27 respondents, 45.8%, did not. Of those that were abused, one reported being emotionally abused (1.7%), five were physically abused (8.5%), one was sexually abused (1.7%), and nine had been abused in some combination of the three (15.3%).

RUNAWAY

29 (49.2%) of the respondents had never run away from home. Among the 27 youth (45.8% of the total respondents) who had run away from their home, 22% had run away once or twice, 15.3% had run away three or four times, 1.7% had run away five or six times, and three (5.1%) ran away seven or more times. Three did not respond.

Have you ever ran away?

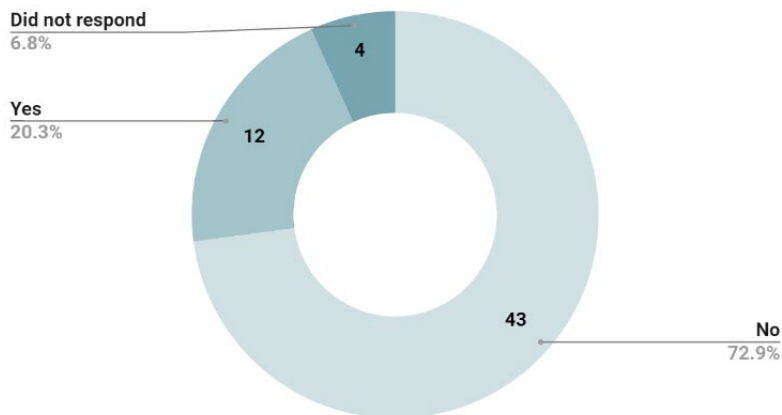


ALCOHOL/DRUG USE AND MENTAL HEALTH

YOUTH ALCOHOL OR DRUG PROBLEM

Over two-thirds of subjects, 72.9%, said they themselves have never thought or been told they had a drug or alcohol problem. However, 12 young people (20.3% of the sample) reported they have had an alcohol or drug problem. Four did not answer.

Self-reported Alcohol or Drug Problem



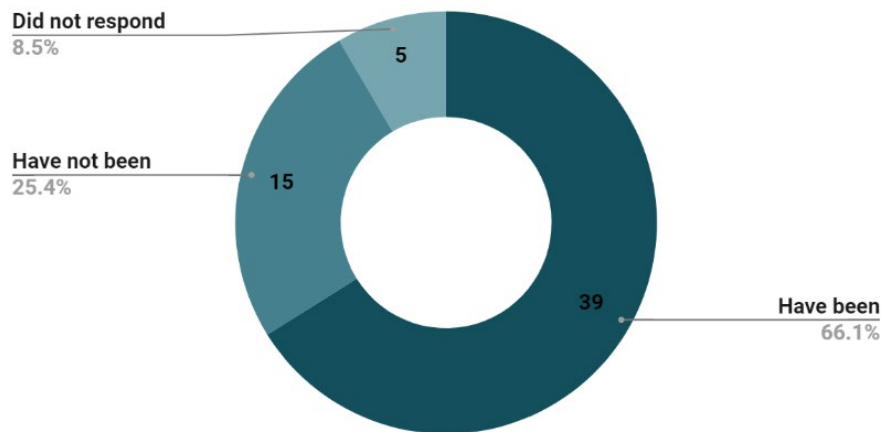
DAYS USING ALCOHOL OR DRUGS LAST WEEK

Over three quarters of respondents (79.7%) had not used alcohol or drugs in the week preceding the survey. Among the entire sample, eight people (13.6%) had used alcohol, and seven people (11.9%) had used drugs.

MENTAL ILLNESS PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

39 participants (66.1%) have been prescribed medication to treat mental illness, while 15 (25.4%) have not. Five did not respond.

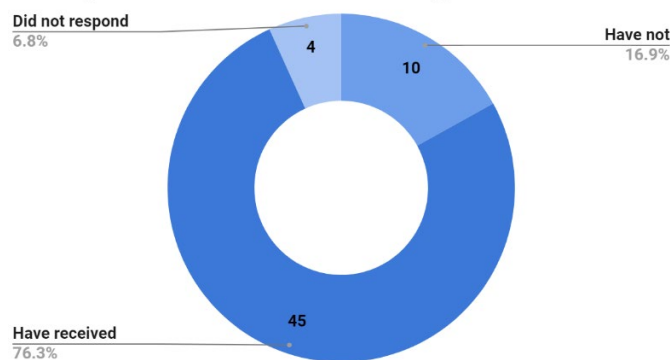
Have you ever been prescribed medication to treat mental illness?



EVER RECEIVE COUNSELING

10 respondents (16.9%) had never received counseling services. However, 45 youth (76.3%) had received counseling services. Four did not answer.

Have you ever received counseling?



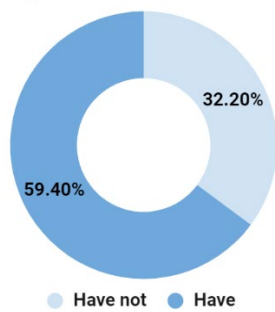
SELF-HARM

32 youth (54.2% of respondents) reported they had self-mutilated, such as cutting or burning themselves, at some point. 24 (40.7%) said they had never done so, and three did not respond.

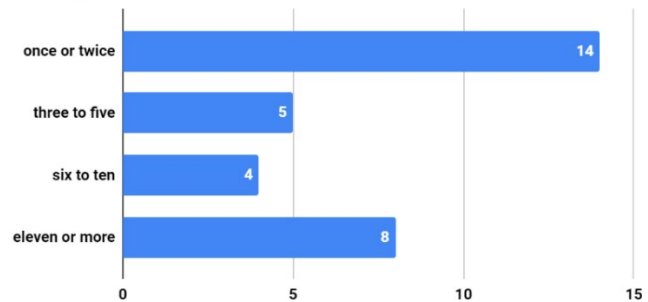
SUICIDE IDEATION

19 participants (32.2%) had not thought of committing suicide. However, 35 (59.4%) have. Among the 35 that have considered it, 25.4% of individuals had suicidal thoughts once or twice, 10.2% had thought about ending their lives three to five times, 8.5% had considered suicide six to 10 times, and 15.3% had thought about suicide 11 or more times.

Have you experienced suicidal ideation?



How many times have you had suicidal thoughts?



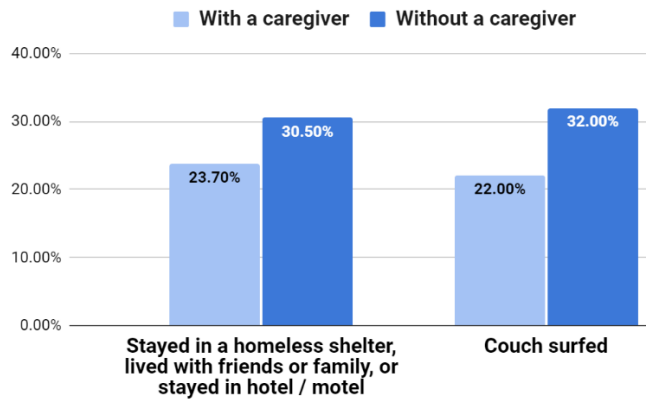
HOMELESSNESS

One question measured whether subjects currently feel homeless or unsafely housed. Of 55 reporting youth, 15 individuals (25.4%) said they were currently homeless or 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.

STAYED IN SHELTER, HOUSING PROGRAM, WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY, OR IN A HOTEL/MOTEL

23.7% of respondents indicated they had stayed in a homeless shelter, lived with friends or another family member, or stayed in a hotel/motel while homeless with a caregiver, and 30.5% indicated they had done so while homeless on their own. 22% noted they had "couch surfed" with a caregiver at some point in their lives, and 32% indicated they had done so while homeless on their own.

Living Arrangements

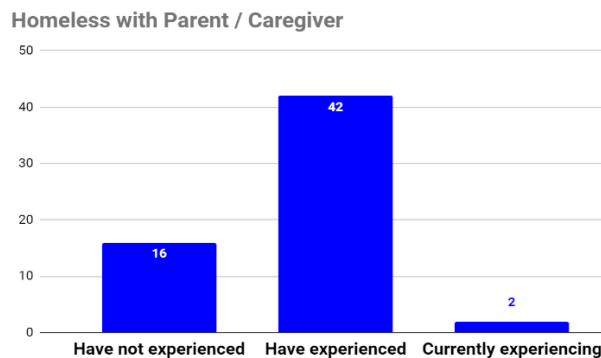


SLEPT IN A PLACE NOT MEANT TO BE SLEPT IN

15% of the reporting sample had slept in a place not meant to be slept in, such as a shed, park, porch, tunnel, or vacant building with a caregiver at some point in their lives, and 27% had indicated they had done so while homeless on their own.

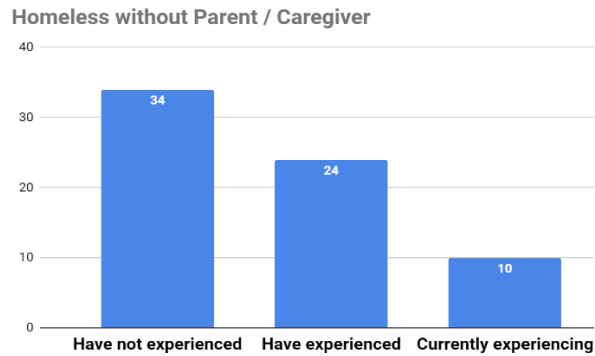
HOMELESS WITH PARENT/CAREGIVER

Of the 58 youth who provided information, 16 youth (27.1% of the total sample) had not experienced homelessness with their parent/caregiver, while 42 youth (72.4%) reported they had experienced homelessness with their parent/caregiver. Two respondents reported they were currently homeless with a parent/caregiver.



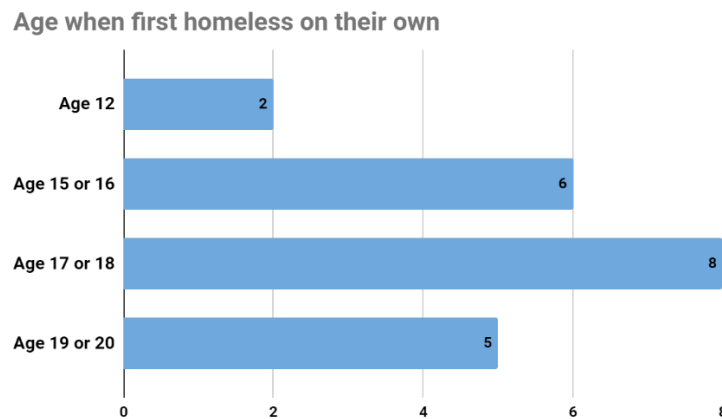
HOMELESS WITHOUT FAMILY

Of the 58 youth who answered the question, 34 of them (57.6% of the total sample) had not been homeless on their own without a parent/caregiver. 24 of them reported they had been homeless on their own without a parent/caregiver. 10 youth reported they were currently homeless at the time of the survey.



AGE WHEN FIRST HOMELESS ON THEIR OWN

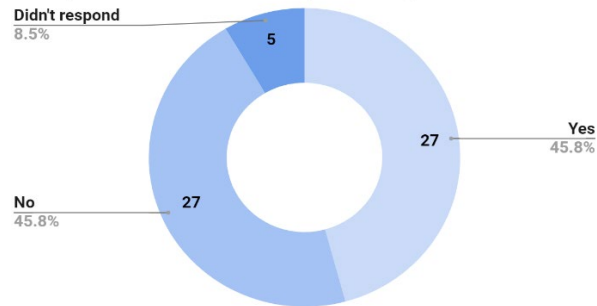
Of 21 people who had been homeless on their own, two individuals (3.4%) who had been homeless on their own first experienced it at age 12. Six youth (10.2%) were first homeless without their family when they were either 15 or 16 years old, eight youth (13.6%) were first homeless on their own when they were 17 or 18 years old, and five individuals (8.5%) experienced homelessness without their family for the first time when they were 19 or 20 years old. The mean and median age at which young people first experienced homelessness on their own was 17 years old.



HUNGER

A separate question asked youth about hunger. 27 young people (45.8% of the sample) said they had wondered where they would get food today. 27 young people (45.8%) had not experienced hunger. Five did not respond.

Have you ever wondered where you would get food?



SELF-REPORTED REASONS FOR BEING HOMELESS

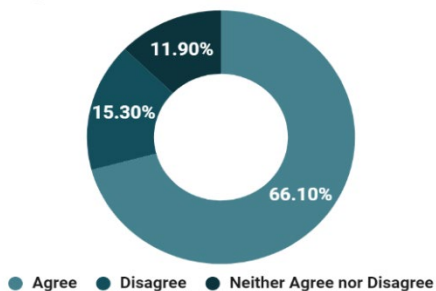
Respondents were asked about factors that could have caused them to become homeless on their own. Among the 24 individuals who answered this question, four factors were most often identified by youth as having contributed to their experiencing homelessness on their own. All noted verbal, physical, or 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 and unemployment/underemployment were also noted by survey respondents.

SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH IN SPRINGFIELD

NEED FOR MORE SHELTER/HOUSING

Of 55 youth who provided information, 66.1% agreed or strongly agreed that Springfield needs more short-term shelter for youth. 15.3% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. 11.9% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

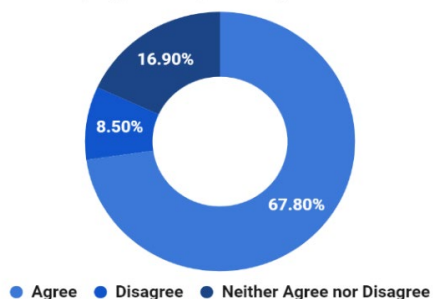
Does Springfield need more short term shelter for youth?



NEED MORE TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAMS FOR PREGNANT/PARENTING TEENS

Of 55 individuals who gave their opinion, 67.8% felt that Springfield needs a transitional living program for pregnant or parenting teens. 8.5% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. 16.9% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Does Springfield need more transitional living programs for pregnant or parenting teens?



NEED FOR A "ONE STOP SHOP"

Of 56 youth who provided information, 62.8% agreed or strongly agreed that Springfield needs a “one stop shop” where youth can get the services they need in one place. 11.9% of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed. 20.3% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 2: Youth views of local services

Need more short-term shelter	66.1%
Need more transitional living programs	67.8%
Need a “one stop shop”	62.8%

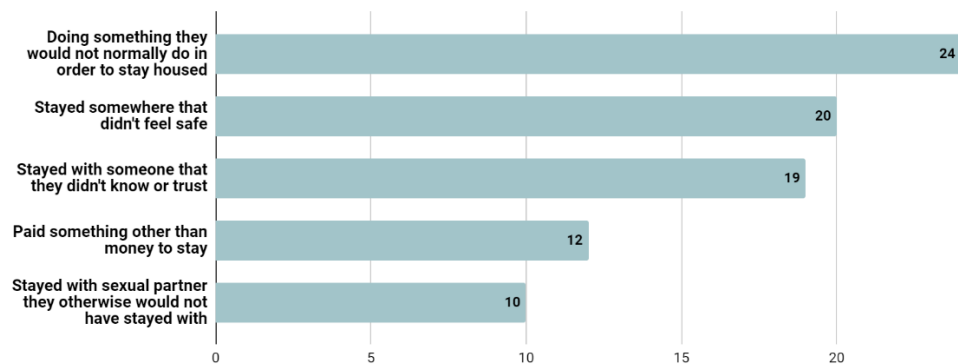
A significant number of youth (nearly half of the sample population consistently) noted they did not know how to access basic need services, such as dental care, medication, and housing services.

DANGERS OF BEING A HOMELESS YOUTH

Of 55 respondents who provided information, 24 young people (40.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that there are adults in Springfield who endanger or harm homeless youth. Among the respondents, 17 (41%) also reported witnessing or experiencing traumatic events while homeless. Of the 16 that specified what they had witnessed/experienced, many witnessed multiple types of events. One reported seeing emotional events, two reported seeing physical events, one reported seeing sexual events, one reported seeing some other type of violent act, and four reported seeing a combination of emotional, physical, sexual, and other violent acts.

24 respondents (40.8% of the total sample) reported doing something they would not normally do in order to stay in a housing situation. 20 of the 24 (83.3%) reported they stayed somewhere that didn’t feel safe. 19 of the 24 respondents (79.2%) said they stayed with someone they didn’t know or trust. 12 of the 24 respondents (50%) said they paid something other than money (food stamps, sex, labor/work) to stay in a housing situation, and 10 (41.7%) said they stayed with a sexual partner they otherwise would not have stayed with in order to stay in a housing situation.

Risky Housing Behaviors

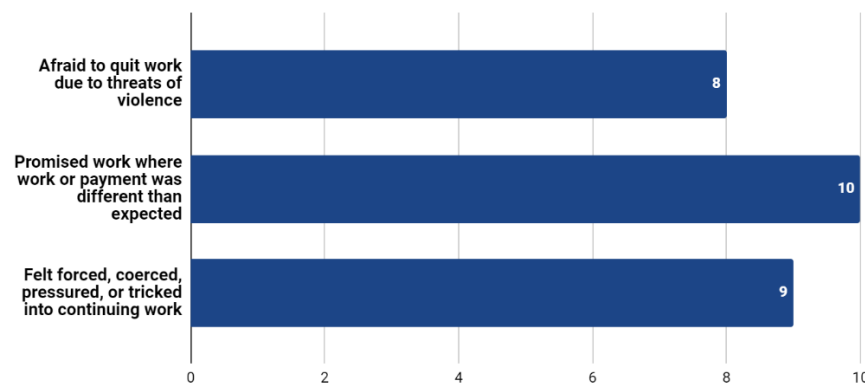


Youth living on the streets also have to worry about sexual coercion. 10 of the 56 who responded (16.9% of the total sample) said they received something (money, food, shelter, drugs, etc.) in exchange for sex or a sexual activity. Of the eight who responded, one reported this occurred within the last three months. Of these eight, four (57.1%) reported they provided sexual acts 3 or 4 times, one respondent reported they provided sexual acts five or six times, and two reported providing sexual acts seven or more times. One respondent did not specify.

In a related question, respondents reported on whether they had been made, persuaded, or forced to have sex in exchange for things. Eight of the 10 who responded (13.6% of the total sample) said they have been made/persuaded/forced to have sex in exchange for something (money, food, shelter, drugs, etc.), and one of the 10 reported this had occurred within the last three months.

Youth also face concerns about harm within employment. Eight of the 54 respondents (13.6%) reported they had been afraid to quit/leave work due to threats of violence against themselves, their family, or their friends. 10 of the 53 who responded (16.9%) also reported they were promised work where the work or payment was different than they expected. Nine 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 the workplace violence or differences in expectations.

Hostile Work Environments



In general, research suggests LGBTQ youth have a 120% higher risk of reporting homelessness and become homeless at earlier ages (due, for example, 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 in this survey more likely to report running away and running away multiple times, but homeless youth that

identified as LGBTQ were also at a higher risk in this survey for reporting housing, labor, and sexual exploitation while homeless.

SUBGROUPS AND RATES OF HOMELESS ON THEIR OWN

There was no statistically significant difference in the rates of reporting as currently homeless or unsafely housed without family by gender. Rates of homelessness also did not vary across racial groups. Current homelessness did, however, vary based on respondents' sexual orientation. Of those who reported being currently homeless or unsafely housed, 30.7% of heterosexual/straight youth reported being currently homeless or unsafely housed, and 69% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and gender non-conforming respondents reported being homeless or unsafely housed. The vast majority of survey respondents reported being neither homeless nor currently unsafely housed. This is possibly a reflection of survey collection methodology in 2020 that was more representative of youth in supportive services (given pandemic-related lockdowns and gathering restrictions) compared to other years where collection efforts were conducted during homeless services events that tended to also capture youth otherwise not engaged with services.

PRIMARY FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ON THEIR OWN

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

Three family background variables were statistically significant among those surveyed. 45% of respondents who had at least one parent with a drug or alcohol problem had been homeless or unsafely housed at some point on their own, 40% reported abuse by a primary caregiver, and 73% reported witnessing traumatic events (these included physical, emotional, and sexually traumatic events).

Significantly, 27% of young people who previously had been homeless with their family had also been homeless on their own, and approximately 52% reported being a ward of the state at some point in their lives. This varies significantly from previous reports, where youth who were homeless with family were more likely to be homeless on their own. Again, a multitude of variables could account for differing figures over the years, including data collection methodologies.

The analysis and discussion above suggests that for many (but not all) youth in the sample, difficult early life family experiences significantly increased the likelihood they have been homeless 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 having been homeless without their family.

SECONDARY FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH YOUTH HOMELESSNESS ON THEIR OWN

Unemployment was noted as the number one factor for, or contributing to, homelessness, or risk for homelessness. The second most reported factor was a long wait list for housing. Given the frequency that trauma and abuse were witnessed and noted as reasons for leaving home, as well as experienced while homeless, it is likely the impact of trauma may not only be a contributing factor to youth homelessness but may also pose significant challenges to at-risk and homeless youth while homeless.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO REDUCE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

As in reports prior, researchers and 2021 updates confirm that limiting the negative effects that disruptive family conditions and household traumas, shelter, and employment options have on high-risk youth remain significant primary prevention strategies. Secondary prevention strategies include additional resources for 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 continue to address these existing and ongoing vital concerns.

Many of the current concerns being reported by youth are similar to those reported by adults over 25 who are also homeless or at risk. In particular, concerns related to unemployment or underemployment and limited housing that many youth (18-24) expressed as the major cause of homelessness or risk for homelessness in 2021 are concerns that are also significant for those at risk of or experiencing 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 boasts very low (under 5%) unemployment rates (US Department of Labor, 2018). Many have noted 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. Additionally, the impact of COVID-19 on area employment has been felt across populations and industries and has had a significant negative impact on vulnerable and entry level workers.

Housing in general also remains a significant concern in the area. 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). COVID-19 has also brought to the forefront the need for shelter and housing for vulnerable populations, including the homeless, many of whom have multiple health related risk factors and lack the ability to access basic resources and services to protect their health and well-being.

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 and for communities. While not possible to measure the precise cost of youth homelessness to communities, that cost is likely 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 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 with prior reports, more outcome assessment studies are needed nationally to identify best practices, and more cost-benefit analyses of teen homelessness prevention programs is 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 now and in the future.

This research as well as other studies among various populations continually demonstrate the negative impact of family violence and trauma on quality of life and life outcomes. The realities of abuse (child abuse, rape, family violence), as well as discrimination and exploitation (although multi-dimensional and often times difficult and time intensive for societies and communities), have ripple effects and both short and long-term consequences for all who reside in that community or society. 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 ultimately the full potential of communities. Investing in family violence prevention strategies, harm reduction strategies, as

well as anti-discrimination and exploitation strategies, also has the possibility of positive financial returns for the community and significant quality of life returns for all community residents.

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