



# Children's Action Alliance

*A Voice for Arizona's Children since 1988*

## Homeless Youth in Arizona

Updated April 2009

### HOMELESS YOUTH NATIONALLY<sup>1</sup>

- Homeless youth are individuals under the age of eighteen who lack parental, foster, or institutional care.
- In the United States each year over 1.6 million youth living on their own experienced homelessness with approximately 575,000 youth living on the streets day-to-day.
- Family conflict and violence are the primary causes of youth homelessness, as 46 percent of homeless youth have been physically or sexually abused. An estimated 62 percent of homeless youth indicated that a member in their family or household let them know they were no longer wanted.
- Twenty to forty percent of homeless youth are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning, Intersex, or Two-Spirited (GLBTQI2-S), and their coming out often leads to being kicked out of their homes or being physically abused.
- Some youth may become homeless when their families suffer financial crises resulting from lack of affordable housing, limited employment opportunities, insufficient wages, no medical insurance, or inadequate welfare benefits. These youth become homeless with their families, but are later separated from them by shelter, transitional housing, or child welfare policies.
- Research studies of youth experiencing homelessness show significantly elevated rates of mental health disabilities, chemical and alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, chronic illness, and suicide as compared to their peers with stable housing.
- Because of their age, homeless youth have few legal means by which they can earn enough money to meet basic needs. Many homeless youth find that exchanging sex for food, clothing, and shelter is their only chance of survival on the streets. Thus, homeless youth are at a greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS or HIV-related illnesses.
- The effects of homelessness are especially devastating to youth living in shelters designed for adults and on the streets. Youth are at an increased risk of being physically and sexually abused while on the streets or in adult homeless shelters. Local and regional studies report rates of sexual assault of homeless youth ranging from 15-20 percent. GLBTQI2-S youth who experience homelessness are seven more times likely to be victims of a violent crime.
- A very high percentage of homeless youth have had previous institutional placements. Within 2 to 4 years of exiting foster care, 25 percent of foster children had experienced homelessness.

## **ARIZONA'S HOMELESS YOUTH<sup>2</sup>**

- Youth homelessness in Arizona has grown more than 80% in the past five years, with the total number of homeless youth per year jumping from 11,399 in 2003 to 20,723 in 2008.
- In Maricopa County, 6,250 youth experience homelessness on a day-to-day basis; 1,711 in Pima County. In January 2007, a point in time street count data report of Arizona's 13 rural counties reported 44 homeless youth.
- In 2005, Arizona law enforcement agencies filed 5,302 arrest reports for runaways. For youth under age 18, 36 percent were Hispanic, 50 percent were White, 9 percent were African American, 4 percent were American Indian, and less than one percent was Asian.<sup>3</sup>
- Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) surveyed homeless youth providers and found 50 percent of youth experiencing homelessness either ran away or were "thrown away" by their families. Ten percent reported leaving home due to violence in the home. Forty percent reported the presence of substance abuse in their home.
- From July 2007 to June 2008, DES conducted a statewide informal survey with homeless youth. 9,496 youth indicated they had received homeless support services. During this same time period, 1,227 youth were turned away from services.
- In 2008, there were an estimated 80 emergency community beds and 63 transitional housing beds to serve homeless youth under 18 years of age.
- The primary needs of youth experiencing homelessness include basic services (food, clothing, and shelter), health and mental health services, and a sense of safety. Housing is a barrier to youth due to lack of affordability, court records, and lack of credit history.
- Homeless youth agencies that provide the necessary intensive services for homeless youth have experienced a decrease in funding over the past few years. This results in fewer resources for homeless youth, including critical services that ensure basic needs are met, and the ability to provide emergency shelter, case management and transitional housing.

## **ARIZONA ACTION<sup>4</sup>**

- From January 2000 through March 1, 2009, the legislature appropriated \$400,000 per year to the DES for the Homeless Youth Intervention Program (HYIP). DES then contracted with community based programs to provide outreach to homeless youth not involved in Child Protective Services or the Juvenile Justice System. Due to DES FY 2009 budget reductions imposed by the State Legislature, these contracts were eliminated on March 1, 2009<sup>5</sup>.
- The goal of HYIP was family reunification or increased self-sufficiency skills for the youth when family reunification was not an option. The program's focus was to provide intensive wrap-around services to youth and to provide the assistance and support needed to achieve self sufficiency. Between February 2000 and February 2009, 1381 youth had been referred to HYIP. Ninety four percent of these youth were engaged in services, and 69 percent successfully completed the program.

## SOURCES

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: National Alliance to End Homelessness, Fact Checker: Youth Homelessness; National Alliance to End Homelessness, Homeless Youth Letter to the Obama Administration, February 2009; and The National Center on Family Homelessness, America's Youngest Outcast: State Report Card on Child Homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> All information is from: The Current Status of Homelessness in Arizona and Efforts to Prevent and Alleviate Homelessness, Arizona Department of Economic Security, December 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Arrest report information on runaways obtained from Arizona Department of Public Safety: Crime in Arizona 2005 report.

<sup>4</sup> Information provided by staff at Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development. In June of 2007 HYIP received 143 referrals; the program only had sufficient resources to accept 117 of those referrals. Eighty six percent of these youth received services and successfully completed the program. In July of 2008 HYIP received 146 referrals; again the program only had sufficient resources to accept 117 of those referrals. Currently, 91 youth have received and successfully completed services. The remaining 21 youth are still participating in the program and data on their outcomes cannot be calculated until the file is closed. As of March 16, 2009 the Homeless Youth Intervention Program (HYIP) had 104 youth receiving services, however due to contract eliminations, services may have to be prematurely closed due to insufficient funding and community based resources.

<sup>5</sup> Arizona Department of Economic Security: *Fiscal year 2009 budget reductions: Children, Youth, and Families*.