

2007 Survey of Springfield's
High Risk and Homeless Youth

June 11, 2008

Conducted by:
Housing Collaborative
Homeless Youth Subcommittee

2007 High Risk and Homeless Youth Survey Results

The Housing Collaborative Homeless Youth Subcommittee surveyed 264 high risk and homeless youth at eight educational, residential and other assorted youth service locations in Springfield, during a one month period. The goal of the survey was to better understand characteristics of Springfield's high risk and homeless youth, to determine their needs and to ascertain their attitudes about various types of homeless service program models.

Within the entire sample, minority populations were overrepresented when compared to the broader population of Springfield, the average age of respondents was 17.3 years and gender distribution was close to even. The respondents were overwhelmingly unmarried (94%), but a quarter already had a child of their own or were expecting their first child.

In terms of education, 77% of respondents had an education level of less than 12th grade, with 22% of those (43 youth), not currently attending any educational program. There were significant differences noted between subgroups on education and are discussed further in the Subgroup Analysis section on page 3.

Respondents were employed at a 31% rate, with a third of those employed full-time and two thirds part-time. Employed youth had an average hourly wage of \$6.93 per hour and an average length of employment of 4.3 months in their current job. According to the Missouri Family Wage Calculator, a single person living in Greene County, with no children and no employer provided healthcare needs to earn \$7.50 per hour "to make ends meet, without any public or private supports." Of the 47 employed youth also reporting their wage, only 23% (n=11) were making \$7.50 or more per hour.

The survey results yield a clearer picture of the past experiences and current needs of local high risk and homeless youth. Over half of the respondents indicated involvement with the Children's Division, Juvenile Office, Probation and Parole, or Division of Youth Services and 22% of those (57 youth) had been involved with more than one service. The average length of service involvement reported was 38 months (See Table 1).

From 2005-2007, 44.1% (93 of 211) of youth entering Rare Breed Transitional Living Program were former wards of the state, in either the foster care or juvenile justice systems. Former foster wards entered at a 31.3% rate and former juvenile justice wards entered at a 12.8% rate. The state average of former youth ward entries to federally funded transitional living programs is 20.9%, less than half the rate documented locally.

Nearly one-half (46%) of the respondents had run away from home and they reported an average of 3.5 runaway attempts. The national runaway estimate for all youth by the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) shows that one in seven (14%) youth between 10 and 18 years old will runaway at some point. Springfield high-risk and homeless youth were over three times more likely to runaway than the nationwide estimate for all youth.

Another 45% of respondents said they had been homeless at some point during their lives, with the average length of homelessness at 13 months. The top five reasons given for homelessness were Family Issues (73%), Financial Issues (47%), Relationship Issues (32%), Emotional Abuse (28%), and Physical Abuse (23%), (See Table 2 and Graph 1).

Of the 51 youth indicating they had been homeless and stayed at a homeless program as a 16-22 year old without a guardian, 87% felt the shelter was equipped to serve the needs of their age group. When asked about shelter service availability, the respondents said the following were least provided - Legal Help, Dental Care, Addiction Recovery, Mental Health, Financial Help, Community Service Options, and Health Care. Over 70% of youth, using a homeless program as a 16-22 year old, stayed at one local youth transitional living program.

Respondents were asked about services they need or are currently seeking. Employment Help was the most needed service mentioned by 3 in 10 youth. Dental Care, Education, Clothing and Financial Help rounded out the top five

needed services, with need rates ranging from 16% to 19%. Also of note, 22 youth indicated they needed or were currently seeking Shelter, presumably due to present homelessness or unstable living arrangement (See Table 3, Graph 2).

Respondents were also asked about their attitudes towards different homeless program models – Faith Based Shelter, Non-Faith Based Shelter, Emergency Shelter (short-term), Transitional Living (long term). Youth ranked each service from 1 to 4 with 1 being the type of program they preferred most and 4 being the least preferred type of program. Transitional living program was most preferred rated as a 1 or 2 by 64%, emergency shelter 58%, non-faith based shelter 47% and faith based shelter 39%.

Across the entire sample, a picture of general life and family instability was revealed. Springfield's high risk and homeless youth were likely to have experienced a tumultuous childhood, with homelessness, runaway attempts, school failure and foster care or penal system involvement being common experiences. Issues of family functioning, financial hardship, relationship difficulties and abuse were commonly cited as reasons for homelessness among youth respondents.

Subgroup Analysis

Survey responses were compared between subgroups of the survey sample and yielded informative results. Responses of homeless youth were compared to responses of non-homeless youth, runaway compared to non-runaway, and those completing surveys at Rare Breed Youth Outreach Center (RBYOC) compared to all others.

Homeless/Non-Homeless

Homeless youth were significantly more likely than non-homeless youth to be older, have children, have runaway before, and to be currently seeking survival aid of food, clothing, shelter, health and dental care, and also needing or seeking legal help, financial help, and support group services. Homeless youth were also significantly more likely to know about local homeless program resources, to attend the RBYOC and to have completed the survey at RBYOC. In terms of homeless program model preference, homeless youth were more likely than non-homeless youth to indicate transitional living services as their most preferred and Faith-based Shelter as their least preferred, with no other significant differences noted.

Runaway/Non-Runaway

Runaway youth were significantly more likely than non-runaway youth to be involved with Children's Division and the Juvenile Office. Runaway youth were significantly more likely to have been homeless. They were also more likely to report emotional abuse, family issues, physical abuse, mental health issues, and addiction as reasons for homelessness, than non-runaway homeless youth. While this does not definitively point to a causal relationship, we can posit that runaway youth citing more acute reasons for homelessness may have been more likely to have runaway as a coping strategy to escape a dangerous or unhealthy living situation.

RBYOC/Non-RBYOC

Youth completing the survey at RBYOC were significantly more likely than all other respondents to be older (2 years older on average), married, pregnant, have children, have been homeless (65% for RBYOC, 23% for non-RBYOC) and to cite physical abuse as a reason for homelessness. RBYOC respondents were also significantly more likely to be seeking survival aid of food, clothing, shelter, health and dental care, and also needing or seeking education, employment help, financial help, legal help and support group services. (See Table 4 and Graph 3). Of special note, RBYOC surveyed youth dropped out of school at a 51% rate compared to the 5.5% dropout rate for all others.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given their often tumultuous upbringing, frequent family conflict, and high rate of homelessness, high risk and homeless youth require longer term, specialized rehabilitative and remedial education services. These services are paramount to success in reconnecting youth to mainstream society and functioning effectively in that environment.

<u>Conclusion 1</u>	Too many local high risk youth run away and they run away too many times.
<u>Recommendation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HYS will develop a deeper understanding of the local intervention system for runaways to determine where improvements can be made, in order to more effectively intervene with runaways and their families, thus reducing risks of multiple runaway events. • HYS will recognize National Runaway Prevention Month in November 2008 to increase awareness of issues facing runaways and to educate the public, so that they may have the knowledge to help prevent youth from running away. • HYS will evaluate NRS's Runaway Prevention Curriculum for use in Springfield and explore possible curriculum implementation strategies. • Implement Safe Place program in Springfield to provide more safe places and service entry points for high risk youth, thus reducing negative consequences associated with running away.
<u>Conclusion 2</u>	Too many local high risk youth experience homelessness.
<u>Recommendation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support continued operation, advancement and expansion of local homeless youth services. • Develop prevention and intervention strategies that focus on the family, such as improving communication, conflict resolution skills, and understanding of adolescent development. • Participate in Homeless and Hunger Awareness week to educate the public about the plight of homeless youth.
<u>Conclusion 3</u>	Too many local high risk youth drop out of school and do not finish their basic education.
<u>Recommendation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local education providers to increase early identification, appropriate intervention strategies and services for high risk youth, allowing them to complete basic education. • Investigate the adoption of distance learning options, so youth can complete basic education. • Initiate discussions about the expansion of alternative education availability. • Support current local initiatives to improve the condition of local children and youth.
<u>Conclusion 4</u>	Not enough local high risk youth employed, nor employed at sufficient living wage.
<u>Recommendation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in conjunction with educators to develop increased availability and accessibility of trade skills oriented education programs. • Increase youth access to basic youth employment education services.
<u>Conclusion 5</u>	Too many youth with long term service involvement and not getting needed skills
<u>Recommendation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventive interventions with youth aging out of foster care and youthful offenders should be expanded. • Advocate for adequate and easily accessible aftercare services for former wards.
<u>Conclusion 6</u>	Family instability, lacking financial resources, relationship issues and abuse - root of issues
<u>Recommendation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop prevention and intervention strategies that focus on the family, such as improving communication, conflict resolution skills, and understanding of adolescent development. • Pursue discussions among local parallel entities to develop formal and effective partnerships.
<u>Conclusion 7</u>	Too many local high risk youth indicate needs for many basic services
<u>Recommendation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to identify and secure adequate and consistent funding to effectively address the high levels of basic needs for youth and to expand service types and availability. • Advocate for existing programs and services to become more "user friendly" for youth.
<u>Conclusion 8</u>	Further investigation of local high risk and homeless youth is needed.
<u>Recommendation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelop and complete second High Risk and Homeless Youth Survey • Develop review of existing research literature related to high risk, homeless, disconnected, and street youth.

Table 1

Number of Services Involved	Percentage and Total Number
Involved with 4 services	3% (n=7)
Involved with 3 services	5% (n=14)
Involved with 2 services	14% (n=36)
Involved with 1 service	32% (n=85)
Involved with 0 services	46% (n=122)

Table 2

Reason for Homelessness		Reason for Homelessness	
1. Family Issues	73%	8. Sexual Abuse	10%
2. Financial Issues	47%	9. Mental Health Issues	10%
3. Relationship Issues	32%	10. Legal Issues	6%
4. Emotional Abuse	28%	11. School Issues	5%
5. Physical Abuse	23%	12. Pregnancy	4%
6. Addiction	16%	13. Health Issues	3%
7. Other	12%	14. Sexual Identity	1%

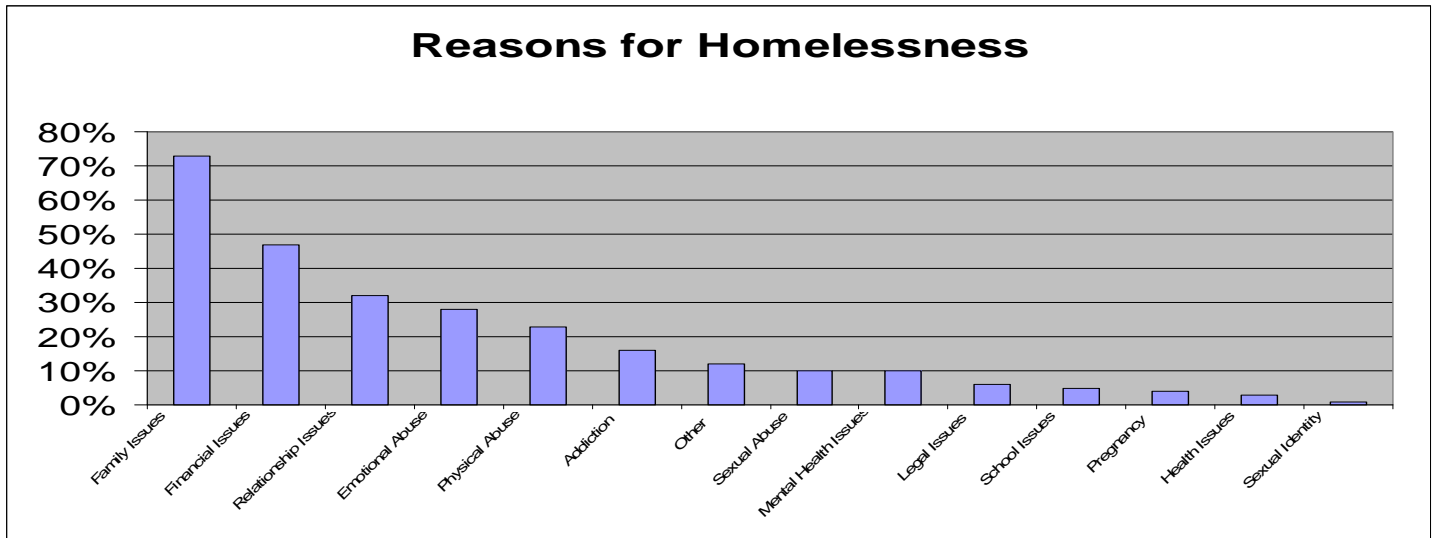
Table 3

Service “Needed” or “Seeking”	Full Sample Percentage
1. Employment Help	29% (n=77)
2. Dental Care	19% (n=50)
3. Education	18% (n=48)
4. Clothing	17% (n=45)
5. Financial Help	16% (n=41)
6. Food	15% (n=40)
7. Health Care	13% (n=33)
8. Life Skills Classes	9% (n=24)
9. Shelter	8% (n=22)
10. tie Mental Health Services	8% (n=21)
10. tie Legal Services	8% (n=21)

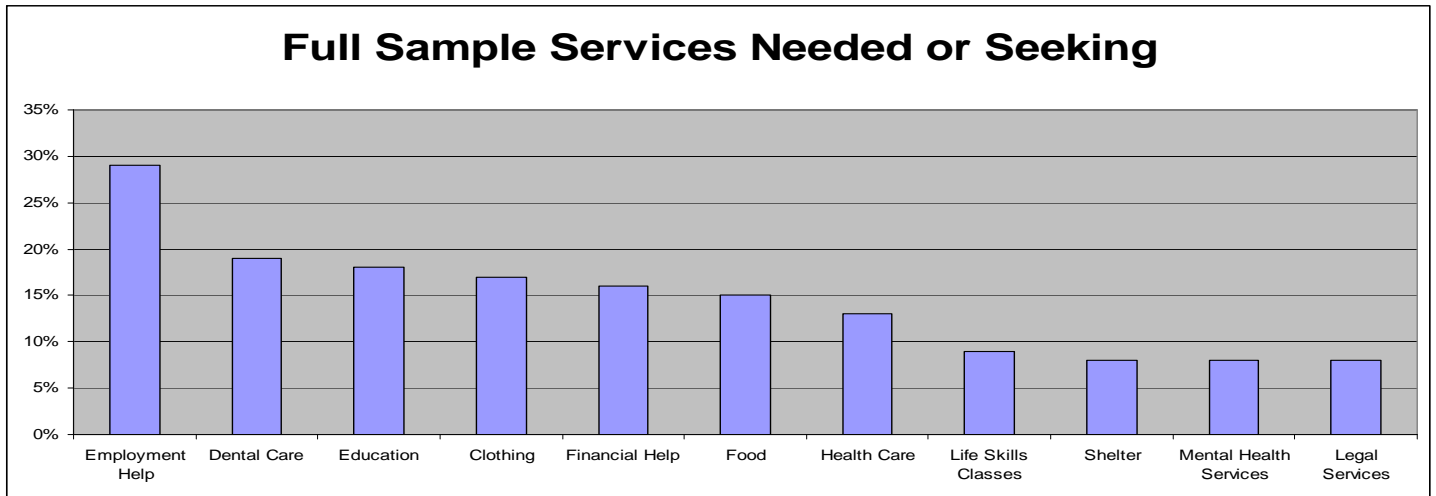
Table 4

Service “Needed” or “Seeking” RBYOC Youth Service Rank	Percentage of RBYOC Sample	Percentage of Non-RBYOC Sample	Non-RBYOC Service Rank
1. Employment Help	40.0% (n=55)	17.5% (n=22)	1.
2. Dental Care	29.0% (n=40)	7.9% (n=10)	4.
3. Clothing	26.8% (n=37)	6.3% (n=8)	5.
4. Food	25.4% (n=35)	4.0% (n=5)	8.
5. Financial Help	24.6% (n=34)	5.6% (n=7)	7.
6. Education	23.2% (n=32)	12.7% (n=16)	2.
7. Health Care	20.3% (n=28)	4.0% (n=5)	8.
8. Legal Services	13.1% (n=18)	2.4% (n=3)	11.
9. Shelter	13.0% (n=18)	3.2% (n=4)	10.
10. Mental health	9.4% (n=13)	6.3% (n=8)	5.
11. Life-Skills Classes	8.0% (n=11)	10.3% (n=13)	3.
12. Support Groups	8.0% (n=11)	0.8% (n=1)	14.
13. Addiction Recovery	5.1% (n=7)	2.4% (n=3)	11.
14. Community Service Options	3.6% (n=5)	1.6% (n=2)	13.

Graph 1



Graph 2



Graph 3

