

Youth who are homeless in Connecticut

Runaway and unaccompanied youth are an invisible population in Connecticut. Most are couch surfing or staying with others for short periods of time. They are counted differently by each state agency, or not counted at all, as they are not identified by adult shelter system or point in time counts. They're at risk for sexual abuse, being lured into prostitution, physical abuse, criminal justice involvement, illness and suicide.

An invisible, vulnerable population

These youth fall into homelessness and linger there for many reasons:

- Fleeing abuse at home
- Rejected or forced out by families
- In and out of state programs
- Fear of DCF and foster care
- Not connected to formal supports
- Avoid or are unaware of limited services

The result? These vulnerable youth become disconnected from the larger community and subject to victimization and exploitation:

- Sleeping in hallways of apartment buildings
- Assaulted and victimized on streets and in adult shelters
- Attend school sporadically
- Moving around a lot, unaware of legal right to transportation to school
- Stigma of homelessness
- Engaging in prostitution and survival sex to earn money
- Higher rates of assault and rape
- High prevalence of physical and mental health issues: HIV/AIDS, depression, suicide attempts, mental health and substance abuse disorders

No place to go, falling through the cracks

Youth experiencing homelessness often face numerous obstacles to obtaining housing security. No state system or institution takes ownership for this population and there are extremely limited crisis options:

- Only **4** Connecticut private agencies provide crisis housing intervention, respite services or street outreach, and none are in Hartford
- Statewide, there are only **15** shelter beds statewide for youth under 18 years old
- Gender inequality can limit resources, with **teenage boys not allowed in many family shelters**

Key findings of *Invisible No More* study of youth experiencing homelessness

The Reaching Home Campaign commissioned Yale University to conduct the state's first study of homelessness among youth, which showed the following trends:

- **89%** of the young people were sexually active with an average of **5.6** sexual partners
- **23.5%** first experienced sexual intercourse at age **12** or under
- **27%** of the kids received special education services
- **32%** dropped out
- **53%** had contact with DCF
- **37%** had been removed from the home by DCF
- **49%** moved more than **6** times in their lifetime
- **50%** were arrested at least once in their lifetime
- **39%** reported having been incarcerated in jail, prison, juvenile detention or a residential facility

Download the study at: www.pschousing.org/files/InvisibleNoMoreReport.pdf

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Opening Doors in Connecticut...

...to a Future Where **Everyone** Has a Home

Understanding the scope of the problem

The youth identified through the study gives us a better understanding:

- The study quickly identified **98** youth who are homeless in Hartford, New Haven, New London and Bridgeport
- Separate from this study, Waterbury alone identified **40** youth who are homeless in just 2 days

Other programs reach out to youth, but how many more are we missing?

- In one year, street outreach programs provided **1,774** youth with health and hygiene products
- In one year, street outreach programs provided **5,414** youth with food
- DCF identified **187** children and youth as victims of prostitution between Apr 2008 - Dec 2013

The need for intervention is critical:

- These youth have nowhere to go
- Suicidal thoughts are prevalent
- Youth often don't recognize themselves as homeless and therefore do not seek out services available for those experiencing homelessness
- Youth who are homeless often engage in early and unsafe sexual activity, with some regularly trading sex for money and a place to sleep

Current Initiatives

Homeless Youth Program

We currently do not have a crisis response system to provide temporary safety and shelter and supportive services for these kids. The Governor and Legislature approved our request for \$1 million to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families to address this need. This funding will bring much needed services to Hartford and other areas of the state to provide crisis outreach, drop-in and respite options for kids in crisis.

We will continue to work to address the immediate need for crisis response services by building on and expanding the funding that was restored. Essential to this work is our ability to develop more adequate data on the scope and nature of the problem.

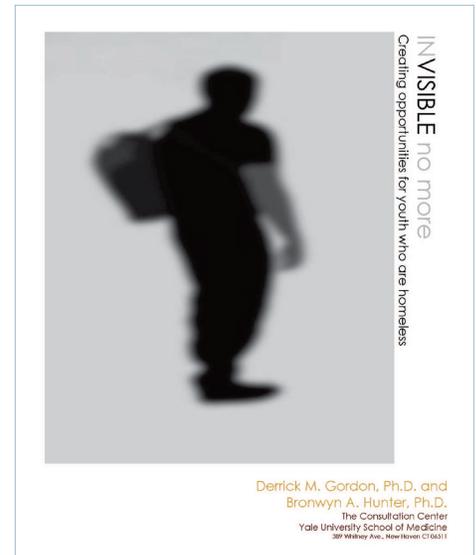
Statewide Youth Count

Traditional means of collecting data on this population are ineffective. Youth who are homeless are more difficult to track down than their adult counterparts and are often unwilling to talk to the adult volunteers who seek to engage them. Consequently, we have a poor understanding of the scale of the issue and difficulty in effectively serving this population.

Reaching Home has worked with state partners to design a statewide count of youth experiencing homelessness based on the emerging best practices from other communities. The count will be implemented through the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness.

For further information, please contact: Stacey Violante Cote, Center for Children's Advocacy, Chair of the Reaching Home Runaway and Homeless Youth Workgroup, sviolante@kidscounsel.org, or Alicia Woodsby, Executive Director, Partnership for Strong Communities, alicia@pschousing.org.

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Homelessness is unacceptable. Homelessness is solvable and preventable.
Homelessness is expensive. Invest in solutions.