

youth homelessness | facts

According to the 2011 Homeless Count, 24% of those reported as homeless in Indianapolis were under the age of 24, and 16% were under the age of 18.

Youth homelessness is different than adult homelessness. This is due to several factors, not the least of which is the relative vulnerability of the youth population.

Oftentimes, young people who are homeless are escaping from severe abuse or they have been kicked out of their homes by their parents or other family. Many times they are afraid of being returned to abusive situations, and this can make them hard to find, track and serve. Young people are far less likely to have the kind of secondary support structure needed to deal with such situations and they find themselves on the streets (NAEH.org).

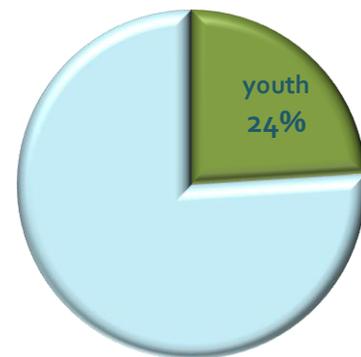
Unfortunately, the shelter and service system is usually not equipped for youth and the issues they face. Shelters and other assistance providers are designed for adults. Often they do not understand the needs of homeless youth and may lack the resources to provide the necessary interventions. Shelters can be dangerous places for this vulnerable population.



Life on the Street

Young people forced to live on the street many times will resort to petty crime or prostitution to survive. They are more likely to engage in drug use as well. More severe consequences of youth homelessness and exposure to living on the street include:

- Rape
- Sexual exploitation
- Assault
- Mental illness
- Physical illness including HIV/AIDS
- High rates of suicide
- Abduction



Institutionalized Youth

A large contributing factor to youth homelessness is discharge from state institutions such as foster care or juvenile detention. Without a home, family support, or other resources, homeless youth are often arrested for offenses like running away or breaking curfew. In addition, as youth age out of the foster care system or are released from juvenile detention, they may lack support systems and opportunities for work and housing. In fact, 25 percent of former foster youth nationwide reported that they had been homeless at least one night within two-and-a-half to four years after exiting foster care. The Coalition for Homelessness and Intervention and Prevention (CHIP) reported in its 2011 Indianapolis Homeless Count that 21% of youth surveyed reported being recently out of foster care.

Sexual and gender orientation

Where only between two and 10 percent of the general population identifies as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning), 20 to 40 percent of homeless youth identify as such. This is a leading factor in youth being kicked out of family homes. Homophobia in general is a leading cause for youth remaining on the streets. Youth who feel they

are excluded or who are excluded due to sexual identity.

What you can do

There are a few key measures that communities and governments can take to improve outcomes for youth homelessness.

- Locally, urge City leaders to focus efforts on early intervention services for family preservation and housing options when youth cannot return home are key to ending youth homelessness.

It's a small investment for one child ...

According to the **National Alliance to End Homelessness** (NAEH), fewer than 4,000 homeless youth are housed each year.

It only costs \$11,800 to house a homeless youth for one year.

Costing two- to five-times more at \$25,000-55,000, the alternative—placing youth in in-patient treatment, foster care, or jail—is dismal.

- On the national level, the federal government should increase the budget for the Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program, which currently allots just \$800 per youth per year, making it impossible to house the majority of youth aging out of foster care under this program.

- Funding should also be increased for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in order to increase services like outreach and emergency shelter.

And, never forget the ways in which poverty, racism and homophobia contribute to and perpetuate youth homelessness.

Contact CHIP at (317) 630-0853 to find out more about how you can help end youth homelessness in Indianapolis.



An option: transitional housing

Just like it sounds, transitional housing is a housing model designed to “transition” a person from one housing option to another. Generally, support services are provided in Transitional Housing and the client begins to “graduate” from the program into greater self-sufficiency, usually within two years. “Transition In Place” is a model where the client can stay in the same housing and the services transition out, thus preventing the upheaval of moving and a new housing search.