

**Homeless Youth Council**  
**recommendations to the Evansville-Vanderburgh County**  
**Commission on Homelessness**  
**January 10, 2008**

Utilizing the year-long discussion with the council members and research on programs nationally, fourteen recommendations are submitted for consideration.

It became important early in our discussions to understand and define the two populations of homeless youth: (1) youth in shelters with their families and (2) youth who are unaccompanied (without parents/family). We also realized the importance of including youth who are no longer minors as part of our definition. Consequently, our recommendations primarily address unaccompanied youth between the ages of 13 and 23, further referred to as "youth."

**PLAN for Outcomes** – Using data to develop local outcomes to end youth homelessness

Recommendation #1

We recommend that unaccompanied youth be counted as separate individuals and entered into the Hoosier Management Information System (HMIS) as "head of household."

Recommendation #2

In addition, we recommend that youth-serving agencies collect and share data with HMIS system staff in order to create a better mechanism for tracking the number of youth in the county who are homeless or at risk for homelessness.

Recommendation #3

We further recommend that a housing risk assessment tool be developed relevant to youth and useful to youth-serving agencies in discussing housing needs and options.

**CLOSE the front door to youth homelessness**

According to a 2007 report to Congress by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services entitled *Promising Strategies to End Youth Homelessness* both research and self-reported data from youth suggest common themes in the causes of youth homelessness:

- Family conflict and violence
  - 2003 data from shelters and residential programs funded by the Family and Youth Service Bureaus (FYSB) "indicates that 89.7 percent of runaway youth entering shelters and 75.5 percent of homeless youth joining residential programs rate family dynamics as a critical issue leading to homelessness."
  - One study notes that neglected and sexually abused youth are approximately three times more likely to run away than were non-neglected youth, and other cite sexual abuse as a reason for leaving home for 21 to 42 percent of runaway youth (p. 14).
- Foster Care placement
  - A study of homeless youth in the state of Washington cited in the report to Congress "found that 33 percent of the youth in the study reported a foster home placement." 14 percent reported four or more placements. An Illinois study found that over 50 percent of their sample of youth in foster care "had run away at least once; of these, two-thirds reported more than one run." (p. 15).
  - Youth who are emancipated or age out of foster care are at particularly high risk of homelessness. A 2003 study by the Annie E. Casey foundations cited in the report to Congress "found that 22 percent were homeless for one or more nights within a year of being discharged from foster care and that almost one out of five were homeless for the first time ever for a week or more after leaving foster care" (p. 15.) In addition, the recently released *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21* states that eighteen percent of the youth in its sample "had been homeless at least once since exiting care, and more than half of these adults had been homeless more than once" (p.3).
- Involvement in the juvenile justice system

- The report to Congress cites studies that place rates of incarceration and youth detention among homeless youth from 28 to 46 percent (p. 16).

Interestingly, studies of families cited in the same report demonstrate a correlation in family housing stability and youth homelessness. The report states that a lack of affordable housing for families is “as important in predicting future residential stability as individual characteristics of parents” (p. 26).

Based on these trends, we submit the following recommendations for preventing homelessness among youth:

#### Recommendation #4

Recognizing that family conflict is cited as a primary cause of youth homelessness, we recommend strengthening existing community programs designed to strengthen parenting skills as well as raise awareness of and address abuse and neglect issues.

#### Recommendation #5

We recommend increasing coordination of these services and expanding programs to serve in crisis intervention situations. For example, we support and encourage strong mentoring programs that create stable role models for parents and youth.

#### Recommendation #6

Stable family housing promotes both healthier family dynamics and school attendance; unstable housing has been cited as an indicator of future youth homelessness.

For that reason, we affirm the goals outlined in *Destination: Home – a Ten-Year Journey to End Homelessness in Evansville and Vanderburgh County* that call for an increase in the stock of affordable housing for families.

#### Recommendation #7

We recommend that members of our council work with the Discharge Planning Coalition in planning for youth aging out of the foster care system and those released from juvenile detention centers (locally and regionally) and child caring institutions.

We support the recommendations of the Indiana General Assembly’s Interim Study Committee on Missing and Homeless Children regarding state and local coordination to better provide information on services and educational opportunities for youth aging out of foster care.

## **OPEN the back door to leave youth homelessness**

Evansville is the only city of significant size in the state of Indiana that does not have Drop-In Center or some form of emergency shelter for youth (13 to 17 year olds and 18 to 21 year olds).

#### Recommendation #8

We recommend the development of a center that includes both outreach services and emergency shelter. *Destination: Home* recommends the creation of a one-stop assessment center for the community, and we recommend coordinating the youth center’s assessment services with that planned assessment center.

Models implemented in other communities include mobile outreach teams, 24-hour drop-in centers, and short-term emergency shelter. Successful models stress the importance of providing a safe, nurturing environment with access to health care, mental health and substance abuse services, and educational and vocational opportunities.

## **BUILD the infrastructure**

### **HOUSING**

*Destination: Home* shifts the community’s emphasis from temporary homeless shelters to permanent housing. Just as life in a shelter’s care should only be short-term for adults and families, youth for whom family reconciliation is not feasible need the same opportunity for access to permanent housing.

#### Recommendation #9

For that reason, we recommend the development of permanent supportive housing for youth ages 16 - 21 with intensive case management, and for older youth or young adults (those over 21) in accord with the principles of adult permanent supportive housing models.

### **RAISING INCOMES**

#### Recommendation #10

We recommend increased coordination with our local WorkOne and youth-serving organizations that will result in improved access to educational opportunities and employment skills training.

### **SERVICES**

#### Recommendation #11

The federal government's Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 created the John Chafee Foster Care Independence program (*Midwest Evaluation, p. 1*) Through this program, Chafee funds are available for youth aging out of foster care; however, many of these youth are unaware of the availability of these funds and other services.

We propose increased dissemination of information on this program to youth who visit existing service providers that serve adults.

#### Recommendation #12

Through its McKinney-Vento grant, the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) provides a number of valuable services to homeless youth. We recommend building partnerships to augment the EVSC's work to provide supplemental services to homeless youth that the EVSC cannot currently provide or may not be able to provide in the future if grant dollars are removed. We further recommend collaboration with local organizations to seek ways to remove barriers to accessing those services.

### **AWARENESS**

#### Recommendation #13

To help our area more fully understand the causes, issues, unique challenges and necessary services related to youth homelessness, we recommend development of a public awareness campaign that would be coordinated with the *Destination: Home* Awareness Team. In addition to general public awareness efforts, we recommend development of information designed specifically for youth who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, social services agencies, the faith community, funders, businesses/employers, educators, legislators and other lawmakers, and the courts.

As awareness is raised, avenues for concerned individuals/groups to take action through coordinated service delivery should be created.

### **Accountability and Monitoring of Recommendations**

#### Recommendation #14

We recommend that an ongoing Homeless Youth Coalition be formed to implement the Homeless Youth Council's recommendations and to report on progress to the Commission on Homelessness.

This coalition would be made up of representatives of youth-serving organizations, funders, and other community leaders. Its charge is the development of three- and five-year goals for ending youth homelessness and serving those at risk of homelessness. These goals should correlate with *Destination: Home* strategies and articulate the outcomes we hope to achieve along with the strategies to make them a reality.

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#### Sources:

- *Promising Strategies to End Youth Homelessness: Report to Congress*, Department of Health and Human Services, 2007. [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/docs/reporttocongress\\_youthhomelessness.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/docs/reporttocongress_youthhomelessness.pdf)
- *Destination: Home – a Ten-Year Journey to End Homelessness in Evansville and Vanderburgh County* [www.destination-home.info/images/10-yearplan.pdf](http://www.destination-home.info/images/10-yearplan.pdf)
- *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21* [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org)

## **Participants in Homeless Youth Council meetings:**

Co-Chairs:

Cynthia Smith – Youth Service Bureau and  
Patty Avery – Old National Bank; Aurora, Board of Directors

Ann Burnworth – Youth Resources  
Barb Bennett – Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, Homeless Liaison  
Barbara Jessen – United Methodist Youth Home  
Bill Curtis – Hillcrest Youth Home  
County Commissioner Troy Tornatta – Vanderburgh County Board of Commissioners  
Courtney Edwards – YWCA  
Debra Ordner – University of Southern Indiana student  
Derrick Stewart – YMCA  
Diana Finnin – Work One Southwest  
Drew Ireland – University of Southern Indiana student  
Eric Freeman – Life Choices Maternity & Youth Home  
Evelyn Hansen-Davis – Commission on Homelessness  
Gwen Rode – The Salvation Army  
Jan Davies – Girl Scouts of Raintree Council  
Janie Chappell – Deaconess Cross Pointe  
Judge Brett Niemeier – Vanderburgh County Juvenile Court  
Karen Glazier – Substance Abuse Council—Vanderburgh County  
Kat Isbell – Aurora, Education Specialist (*Destination: Home*)  
Kay Johnson – Girls in Bloom  
Kerri Zeien – United Caring Shelters  
Kevin Gibson – Legal Aid Society  
Lark Buckman – Department of Child Services, Vanderburgh County  
Luzada Hayes – Aurora, Destination: Home Resource Coordinator  
Lyneve Scott – Evansville ARC  
Maree Opatrny – University of Southern Indiana  
Mayor Jonathan Weinzapfel – City of Evansville  
Mike Singleton – Ireland Home Based Services  
Nancy Hill – Southern Indiana Resource Solutions  
Natasha Goodge – ECHO Community Health Care  
Pam Thoren - Tri-State Alliance  
Parri Black – Youth First  
Randy Lewis – Tri-State Alliance  
Shirley Starks – DCS  
Susan Steinkamp – Aurora, Homeless Outreach Team  
Suzanne Draper – CASA  
Terri Lautner-Uebelhor – Catholic Charities  
Tonya Staub – Boys and Girls Club  
Wanda McCarter – AIDS Resource Group  
Wendy James – Albion Fellows Bacon Center  
Wyeth Hatfield – ECHO Community Health Care