



CA Homeless Youth Project
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION & UPDATE

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The California Homeless Youth Project (HYP) brings attention to homeless youth in California. The project is a California Research Bureau (CRB) research and policy initiative conducted in collaboration with the California Council on Youth Relations, a project of New America Media (CCYR/NAM), with funding from The California Wellness Foundation. The project is committed to bringing youth to the policy table and to informing policymakers, opinion leaders, and other stakeholders about unaccompanied homeless youth; it seeks to improve understanding of these young people who are on their own and the issues they face. These include the family conflict and other reasons for being on the street, lack of shelter and educational opportunities, health and mental health needs, and the effect of interactions with law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system. This five-year project will continue through June 2011.

During the first two years of the project, consultant and journalist Nell Bernstein and CCYR/NAM completed a street-outreach survey that employed 40 homeless or formerly homeless young people interviewing over 200 of their peers around the state. In addition, CCYR organized focus groups of homeless youth in several cities. The key project report, ***Voices from the Street: A Survey of Homeless Youth by Their Peers***, summarizes the research findings about homeless youth's experience of and trajectories into homelessness, as well as ideas for changes in policy, law, and service delivery that they believe would improve their prospects for attaining stability and meeting their own life goals. These findings were presented at a series of CRB public policy forums focusing on specific issues affecting homeless young people.

The third year of the project culminated with the production of the *Voices from the Street: Homeless Youth Speak Out on State Policy* DVD, which highlights the major findings from the survey and public policy forums and presents homeless youths' policy recommendations. The HYP also published a number of project reports, including *The Educational Success of Homeless Youth in California: Challenges and Solutions* and *Preparing Youth to Participate in State Policymaking*; *Homeless Youth: Bibliography and Resources*; and our report, *Relationships Beget Relationships: Why Understanding Attachment Theory is Crucial to Program Design for Homeless Youth*. These reports are designed to address specific topic related to homeless youth and provide some tools for those interested in working with homeless youth on a policy or programmatic level.

In addition to developing and distributing these resources, the HYP has engaged stakeholders and policymakers in direct discussions with homeless youth. The project held convenings in both Los Angeles and San Francisco in September 2009 to share information and discuss project activities with homeless youth service providers, youth, researchers, and other interested parties. These events provided a unique opportunity for participants working with the homeless youth population to meet and discuss policy issues with each other and with the youth population they serve. Convening participants continue to work with the project on specific activities.

In December 2009, the HYP presented a public policy forum on *The New Face of Youth Homelessness* to legislative staff and other policymakers in the State Capitol. Youth and service providers described how life has become increasingly precarious and difficult for youth during the past two years due to the economic crisis.

Current Activities

In June 2010, we launched our new **HYP website** at <http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov> to provide policymakers and others with information and a range of policy resources on unaccompanied homeless youth, with a focus on young people in California. A major feature of the website is the Video Wall, which highlights the voices of homeless youth as they describe their lives. Visitors can also view the DVD online and stay updated on project activities.

Also in 2010, the HYP has been developing a number of special topic reports which will soon be released through our website. Topics include *California Population Estimates*, *California LGBTQ Homeless Youth*, *Sexual Exploitation of Homeless Youth*, *Community Responses to Homeless Youth: Local PTAs and Education*, and *Current California Statutes Related to Homeless Youth*.

During the coming year, the HYP will be deepening our focus and seeking solutions to two key issues consistently raised by homeless youth involved in the project:

- **Information about available resources is fragmented and access to appropriate, supportive services needs to be increased.** We are completing a statewide, county-by-county inventory of existing programs that specifically serve unaccompanied homeless youth and which will include both an analysis of our findings about available resources and a current listing of resources to be used by service providers, youth, and others. Our intention is to expand this inventory so that it becomes an interactive youth-centered online resource. The California Coalition for Youth (CCY) operates the statewide Crisis Line which offers support and referrals to youth needing assistance or in crisis situations, and we are working closely with CCY to develop and implement this resource.
- **Law enforcement interactions with homeless youth are frequently negative despite the fact that homeless youth are at high risk for victimization while they are living on the street.** The research, homeless youth, and service providers all describe how the criminalization of homelessness affects their everyday lives and serves to perpetuate, rather than deter, prolonged housing instability. The HYP will focus on this area through a range of activities, including policy forums and a work group of youth, service providers, researchers, and others that will provide expertise and technical assistance to policymakers about this issue.

The HYP will also continue to raise awareness and increase understanding that homeless youth, while they are often overlooked in both policy and program, are a population of young people deserving of support and respect as they work to stabilize their housing situations and lives.

For more information about the California HYP, to access copies of reports and other resources, to hear the voices of youth, or to request a DVD, please visit our website at:

<http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov>