



Preliminary Listing of State Action Steps to Address Youth Homelessness in California

Prepared for

**The California Wellness Conference on the
Health and Well-Being of Transition-Age Youth
“Taking TAY Home -- California Style”**

October 25, 2011

By Ginny Puddefoot, M.P.P., M.P.H.
Director, California Homeless Youth Project

**Preliminary Listing of State Action Steps to Address
Youth Homelessness in California
October 2011**

This listing is a compilation, synthesis, and adaptation of recommendations and strategies identified in many reports and studies, including the following:

- *California Homeless Youth Project and the California Council on Youth Relations. "Voices From the Street: Homeless Youth Speak Out on State Policy." March 2009. <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/08/08-004.pdf>*
- *Division of Adolescent Medicine, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, and the Agencies of the Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership. "No Way Home: Understanding the Needs and Experiences of Homeless Youth in Hollywood." November 2010. http://www.hhyp.org/downloads/HHYP_TCE_Report_11-17-10.pdf*
- *John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes and the California Coalition for Youth. "Too Big to Ignore: Youth Homelessness in California." November 2009. <http://www.cahomelessyouth.org/pdf/Too%20Big%20to%20Ignore.pdf>*
- *National Alliance to End Homelessness. "2011 Policy Guide." July 2011. <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/2462>*
- *State of California. "Governor's Ten Year Chronic Homelessness Action Plan (Final)." February 2010. http://www.hcd.ca.gov/Final_Ten_Year_Chronic_Homelessness_Action_Plan.pdf*
- *United State Interagency Council on Homelessness. "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness." 2010. http://www.usich.gov/PDF/OpeningDoors_2010_FSPPreventEndHomeless.pdf*

This is a work in progress, and the author anticipates significant changes will be made prior to its completion. Please consider it as a draft document for discussion purposes only.

PROPOSED STATE POLICY:

Preventing and significantly reducing youth homelessness in California is a statewide priority. Youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness shall be given priority in state-funded programs.

PROPOSED STATE ACTION STEPS:

1. Governance and Finance

Exercise leadership, vision and innovation to prevent and significantly reduce youth homelessness by:

- Establishing a state Interagency Council on Homelessness to plan, coordinate activities, and access additional federal funds related to all homeless populations, including homeless youth.
- Aggressively pursuing strategies to prevent and significantly reduce youth homelessness through integrated prevention, intervention and support services, and through identifying additional federal funding that can be used to support homeless youth and programs serving them.
- Identifying youth homelessness-related outcome measures and implementing measures appropriate for each agency or department. These outcome measures should be consistent with and complement existing measures currently in place and required by other funders.
- Supporting active and consistent participation of youth, youth-serving organizations, schools, and local governments in policy development, program design, evaluation, and decision-making to prevent and reduce youth homelessness.
- Identifying and advocating for the removal of barriers to providing services to the at-risk and currently homeless youth population, including changes in policy and regulations to allow integration and blending of funding streams to facilitate the efficient use of resources.

2. Definitions and Eligibility

- Develop a consistent definition of homeless youth as including those youth up to age 25 who are living in unstable, unsafe housing situations, and adopt this definition for all state-funded programs serving youth.
- Increase the age eligibility for all state programs serving homeless youth to age 25, and require that state programs adopt this eligibility threshold.
- Expand the eligibility of programs serving systems-affiliated homeless youth (foster care and juvenile justice) to include all youth who are homeless and whose circumstances are similar to those of systems-affiliated homeless youth.

3. Prevention

Promote early identification of those youth at risk of becoming homeless and establish policies and programs to prevent its occurrence by:

- Extending the support services, such as the THP-Plus program, created for foster youth in the last decade to the wider transition-aged youth population whose circumstances are similar to those of foster youth.
- Utilizing federal Family Unification Program (FUP) authorization to provide support and, where feasible, reunify homeless and at-risk youth with families or with other caring adults. In particular, provide increased support and early intervention for families who may be struggling with their child's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Implementing a crisis response to assist youth who are newly homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to better identify and resolve (if possible) the precipitating issues and provide housing and supports as soon as possible.
- Developing a statewide public education campaign to provide information about effective solutions to prevent and reduce youth homelessness. In particular, increase awareness of the causes and prevalence of youth homelessness in the LGBTQ population, and support members of the larger LGBTQ community in becoming foster parents or providing mentorship to these youth.

4. Education

- Fully implement the federal McKinney-Vento Act so homeless students get support to stay in school—including credit transfer programs and resources such as lockers, showers, and transportation vouchers.
- Promote the capacity of schools to identify homeless youth and connect them with appropriate housing and service interventions in the community.
- Engage schools, PTAs and community organizations to address the stigma and barriers that discourage homeless youth from asking for help to attend school.
- Support homeless youth who successfully complete high school or obtain their GED to continue in higher education by giving them priority status for scholarships, financial aid, and on-campus housing.

5. Housing and Supports

- Establish a permanent funding source for housing development that includes the needs of homeless youth.
- Develop a continuum of youth-specific housing and supports—from drop-in centers to permanent housing—that are safe, affordable, low-barrier, responsive to the developmental needs of young people, and include coordinated treatment and support services (where appropriate).
- Identify current youth-specific housing and supports and geographic gaps where no appropriate housing or services exist, and use this information to guide development of future housing and supports to meet the needs of homeless youth.
- Engage homeless youth in designing appropriate services and supports that meet their needs, and in particular address the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth for safety and acceptance.
- Identify best practices for youth-serving programs, including the importance of trauma-informed services and trusting, long-term relationships between staff and youth, and develop technical assistance to support and hold programs accountable for following these best practices.

6. Criminal Justice

- Undo the criminalization of youth homelessness. Prohibit prosecution for “quality of life” violations and status offences, and instead develop a state law enforcement policy that supports homeless youth and makes it safe for them to turn to the police for assistance when they need help.
- Train police and other first responders to communicate effectively with young people in crisis on the streets, and encourage local partnerships between law enforcement, youth-serving programs, and local government to provide appropriate and supportive responses to homeless youth.

7. Data and Research

- Coordinate with existing federal, state and local homelessness data collection efforts to better identify the homeless youth population and collect consistent and complementary data across systems. Promote increased and unduplicated reporting on homeless youth.
- Support a targeted research agenda on homeless youth, including further development of best practices and the unique characteristics and experiences of subpopulations of homeless youth, including how to address family conflict specific to the LGBTQ youth population.