



CA Homeless Youth Project  
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[cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov](http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov)

**SUMMARY**  
**Programs Serving California's Homeless Youth:**  
**Results of a Point-in-Time Survey**  
*January 2011*

**Introduction**

The CA Homeless Youth Project is a grant-funded research and policy initiative of the CA Research Bureau, the CA State Library, and New America Media. Funding for the project is provided by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation.

Research tells us that the majority of homeless youth—ages 12 to 24—are youth who were “missed” by the child welfare system. These youth are not “systems” youth—foster care, former foster care or juvenile justice-affiliated youth—and therefore are not eligible for many of the programs and supports targeting foster care and former foster care youth.

Research also tells us that homeless youth do not access services for chronically homeless adults or homeless families, for a variety of reasons: their needs are different, they have experienced threats, theft, or harassment in those programs, or they have been turned away from those programs.

Therefore, if we want to address the issue of youth homelessness in CA, we need to provide programs and supports for homeless youth that (1) do not require the youth to have an affiliation with a “system” such as foster care, and (2) are youth-focused and specifically address the unique needs of homeless young people.

**About the Survey**

The CA Homeless Youth Project set out to do a Point-in-Time Survey to see how many programs served these unaccompanied homeless youth, what kinds of services they provided and where they were located. We had no idea how challenging it would be to identify programs specifically serving these youth, but in fact, it took two researchers hundreds (they might even say thousands!) of hours, phone calls and e-mails to try and identify these programs in CA.

This is a survey of all the programs we could find that provide support and services to unaccompanied homeless youth. It does NOT include programs primarily serving chronically homeless adults, homeless families, or “systems” youth (foster care and former foster care youth) for the reasons noted previously. We wanted to count



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programs serving those youth who make up the majority of homeless youth—unaccompanied and with no affiliation with “systems”.

The Survey looked at the following kinds of services:

- ✓ *Street outreach services* staffed by workers who spend time on the street trying to address and solve homeless youth’s immediate needs. The programs often provide meals or food, clothing, blankets, hygiene kits, and referrals to services off-the-street (such as emergency shelters or jobs programs), as well as crisis-intervention and counseling.
- ✓ *Drop-in centers* with specific operating hours (usually afternoons through early evenings), providing a place to sit down, food or snacks, telephones and often computers with internet access, and bathroom facilities (often with showers).
- ✓ *Emergency, temporary and long-term shelters* that offer beds or cots usually in one largish room, with the genders segregated into separate sleeping spaces, often offering lockers, meals, shower and laundry facilities, clothing and counseling. Most emergency/temporary programs limit stays to no more than 30 days. Many long-term shelters provide beds for 12 months or longer.
- ✓ *Transitional housing and independent living programs* providing temporary quarters (either apartments or rooms) for homeless youth with the goal of moving them into permanent housing. Programs often include jobs training/placement, case management, counseling and educational assistance, and youth typically stay between one and two years.
- ✓ *Job training/placement services* that are exclusively focused on job training or finding work for homeless youth.
- ✓ *Education services*, usually attached to transitional housing programs, which offer educational assistance to homeless youth, usually in the form of help in getting a GED or enrolling in school. Two programs in California—one a long-term shelter, the other a residential program—have schools on location.

## Preliminary Findings

Our survey identified a total of only 53 programs of any kind—from street outreach to transitional living—designed to reach unaccompanied homeless youth.

As the map illustrates, just 20 of California’s 58 counties have services of any kind for homeless youth. Almost two-thirds of the state’s counties have no services focused on this population.



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Programs are generally clustered in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, San Diego and a few places in Northern and Central CA. There is a particular lack of services in rural and inland counties in California.

Throughout the state we found:

- ✓ 5 street outreach programs
- ✓ 16 drop-in centers
- ✓ 34 temporary and emergency shelters with 555 beds
- ✓ 6 long term shelters with a total of 67 beds
- ✓ 15 transitional living programs with a total of 396 beds

This totals just over 1,000 beds of any kind for unaccompanied homeless youth in California.

Only 15 programs provided access to long-term housing (e.g., transitional living).

Nine of the programs identified had been affected by budget cuts and funding losses, resulting in cuts to services and/or hours.

Two programs were expanding (At The Crossroads recently completed a drive to create an \$80,000 housing fund and New Morning Youth will be opening a new 12-bed facility in 2011).

One program was begun with moneys from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Dogs and Youth Jobs).

Nearly half of the 53 programs offered some kind of counseling or therapy for their clients, with four programs primarily focused on offering counseling, therapy or other mental health services.

Though not a primary service in any program, case management was offered to youth at more than 20 percent of the programs.

Nearly one-quarter of programs offered some form of family mediation or family reunification for their youth.



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## Conclusions

Despite all the research done to produce this survey, it is still a work in progress. We are not 100% sure we found all the homeless youth programs in the state. But if we “experts” had so much trouble finding these programs, imagine what it must be like for a young person living on the street or couch-surfing to find a program to help.

Based on national survey estimates and California’s youth population, it is likely that 200,000 youth under the age of 18 and thousands of 18-24 year olds homeless for one or more days a year. With just 53 programs providing just over 1,000 beds throughout the state, it seems clear there is a significant gap between the number of programs serving unaccompanied homeless youth, and the number of these youth needing services and supports to get off the street and into safe, stable, permanent housing.

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For more information about the California Homeless Youth Project and this survey, please contact Ginny Puddefoot, Project Director, at 916-653-7381 or [gpuddefoot@library.ca.gov](mailto:gpuddefoot@library.ca.gov) or see our website <http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/>.