NATIONAL NETWORK for YOUTH

Responding to **Youth Homelessness**

a key strategy for preventing human trafficking

The National Network for Youth has been a public education and policy advocacy organization dedicated to the prevention and eradication of youth homelessness in America for over 40 years. As the largest and most diverse network of its kind, NN4Y mobilizes over 300 members and affiliates—organizations that work on the front lines every day to provide prevention services and respond to runaways and youth experiencing homelessness and human trafficking. Learn more at www.nn4youth.org.

NATIONAL NETWORK for YOUTH

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Reviewers

Karen Countryman-Roswurm, Matthew Morton, Morgan Silverman, Leslie Briner, and Christina Anne Sambor

NN4Y National Youth Advisory Council

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Writer

Lisa Pilnik, JD, MS
Director of Child & Family Policy Associates

Special thanks to:

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introduction

An estimated 4.2 million young people (ages 13–25) experience homelessness annually, including 700,000 unaccompanied youth ages 13 to 17.[1] Many of those young people will become victims of sex or labor trafficking. Research from numerous studies have found trafficking rates among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness ranging from 19% to 40%.[2] Although the varying populations and methods of these studies do not allow for a definitive number, this means, using the lower end estimates, that about 800,000 of the youth and young adults who experience homelessness in a year may also be victims of sex or labor trafficking in cities, suburbs, rural communities, and American Indian Reservations across the country.

Some youth experiencing homelessness are even more vulnerable to trafficking than these incredibly high numbers suggest, and interviews with these youths illustrate some common themes and pathways.[3]

- Basic needs, such as the lack of a safe place to sleep at night, often play a role in their trafficking experiences.
- Homelessness and trafficking begin early, often well before age 18.
- LGBTQ youth and youth who have been in foster care experience trafficking at higher rates than other youth experiencing homelessness.
- Girls and young women are more likely to experience trafficking, but boys and young men also experience high levels of trafficking.
- Youth experiencing homelessness who have also been victims of sex trafficking are more likely to have mental health and substance use issues, to have experienced physical and emotional abuse by parents or guardians, and to have a history of sexual abuse.

Using this research, policymakers, service providers, and advocates can and must bring about change to meet the basic needs of young people to prevent and address homelessness and trafficking.

Prevalence of Homelessness and Human Trafficking among Youth and Young Adults

Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

Groundbreaking nationwide research released in November 2017 revealed **over 4 million American youth and young adults experienced homelessness in a single year.** The study, part of the Voices of Youth Count initiative of Chapin Hall at The University of Chicago, found that 1 in 10 young people ages 18 to 25, translating to 3.5 million individuals, experienced homelessness. At least 1 in 30, or 700,000 youth ages 13 to 17, experienced homelessness—*unaccompanied by a parent or guardian*—over the same 12-month period.[4] In the study, young adults ages 18 to 25 were asked about their own experiences. Conversely, the data on minors were based on reports by adults in their household and could be significantly undercounted, as adults may be wary of reporting that youth in their care have run away or been kicked out.

Sex and labor trafficking[5]

There is not equivalent research on how many youth and young adults are victims of sex and/or labor trafficking. Advocates and researchers estimate *hundreds of thousands of individuals are trafficked in the United States* (including children and adults, and sex and labor trafficking), with some estimates as high as 2 million youth at risk for or experiencing sex trafficking alone.[6]

In 2016, the National Human Trafficking Hotline and BeFree Textline received 7,572 calls from trafficking victims or those concerned about possible victims. Of the sex trafficking victims discussed during those calls, 59% were trafficked for the first time at or before age 17 and another 24% between ages 18 and 23. For labor trafficking, 46% of victims were first trafficked at or before age 17, with an additional 21% first experiencing labor trafficking between ages 18 and 23.[7]

Co-Occurrence

Covenant House International, one of the largest providers of youth homelessness services, recently partnered with researchers to examine the prevalence of trafficking among the youth they serve. In a study conducted in collaboration with Loyola University New Orleans's Modern Slavery Research Project, researchers interviewed youth ages 17 to 25 in 10 cities[8] in the United States and Canada. Many of the young people had been victims of sex trafficking (14%), other forced labor (8%), or both

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(3%).[9] The reported types of forced labor included work in factories, agriculture, and domestic situations, but predominantly (81% of cases), youth were forced to sell drugs.[10] Overall, *nearly one in five (19%) of the young people interviewed had been trafficked.*[11] Covenant House also partnered with researchers at the University of Pennsylvania's The Field Center, who interviewed almost 300 youth experiencing homelessness in three additional cities[12] and also found high levels of sex trafficking, totaling 17% of interviewees.[13]

Earlier studies of homeless youth and young adults have found even stronger connections between homelessness and trafficking. A study of youth experiencing homelessness in Louisville, Kentucky, and Southern Indiana (Kentuckiana), using the Youth Experiences Survey (YES), found slightly more than 40% of youth had been victims of sex trafficking.[14]

A study of young adults experiencing homelessness in Arizona, also using the YES, found 33.2% had been a victim of sex trafficking.[15] Although that study only interviewed young adults, it is notable that more than a third of sex trafficking victims said they were first trafficked before age 18.

A 2016 report from The University of Texas at Austin estimated 25% of youth experiencing homelessness in Texas had been sex trafficked.[16] It also summarized findings from previous research in other states, including a study of youth and young adults ages 12 to 24 in "three suburban shelters across the Colorado front-range," in which "28% acknowledged involvement in commercial sex."[17]

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children® estimated 1 in 7 of the nearly 25,000 youth reported to them as runaways in 2017 were sex trafficking victims and noted 88% of those children and youth had been in foster care or social services care when they were discovered to be missing.[18]

Photo: Javier Sanchez Mingorance

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Youth Experiencing Homelessness and Trafficking: Strength and Risk Factors; Common Pathways

> "Homeless youth are in survival mode, everything sounds good to them if it can get them a meal or a place to lay their head."
>
> —Aja Ellington, NN4Y National Youth Advisory Committee Member

The studies discussed above do more than simply help give a sense of the number of young people who experience homelessness and trafficking. The information young people generously shared with researchers about themselves and their experiences illustrate some common pathways between homelessness and trafficking, as well as possible protective or risk factors. While this paper is primarily focused on disrupting the pathways from youth homelessness to trafficking, much of the research and policy recommendations discussed could also be relevant to individuals who first experience trafficking and may be more vulnerable to homelessness as a result.

Characteristics of Young People Experiencing Homelessness

According to the Voices of Youth Count report, youth were more likely to experience homelessness if they were:

- Not high school graduates (3.5 times higher risk for those without a GED or diploma)
- Young parents (3 times higher risk)
- LGBTQ (2 times higher risk)
- Black (nearly 2 times higher risk)
- Hispanic (nearly 1.5 times higher risk)

Many youth experiencing homelessness had also previously been in the care of public systems, with *nearly one-third having been in the child welfare system and almost half having been incarcerated*, including in a juvenile detention facility. The study also found youth homelessness was just as prevalent in rural as urban areas.[19]

A 2016 study funded by the federal Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) interviewed more than 650 youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in 11 U.S. cities and found:

- Participants had been homeless for an average of almost two years (23.4 months), and the average age at which they first experienced homelessness was 15.
- Seventy-four percent had been kicked out of their homes, and 71% said they could not go home if they wanted to.
- When asked why they became homeless for the first time, 51% said they were asked to leave by others they were living with, 25% said they couldn't find a job, and 24% said they were being physically abused or beaten. Twenty-three percent said they became homeless because of a caretaker's drug or alcohol issues (respondents could choose more than one answer).
- Fifty-seven percent had been physically abused.
- Thirty percent had been sexually abused during childhood.

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The FYSB report also showed previous contact between these young people and systems or agencies that should have provided some assistance or support (beyond any private services that may have been provided). The report noted:

- Fifty percent of participants had foster care histories, and those youth experienced longer periods of homelessness (27.5 months compared to 19.3 months for other youth).
- Thirty percent had been in inpatient mental health care.
- Nearly 62% had been arrested and almost 44% had stayed in juvenile detention or in a jail or prison.
- Nearly 53% reported they were unable to stay at shelters because they were full, and almost 43% couldn't stay at shelters due to lack of transportation.
- Nearly one quarter of youth living on the street reported they left home because they were being physically abused or beaten.

Across the United States, there are only 3,459 dedicated emergency shelter beds and 8,189 dedicated transitional housing beds for the 4.2 million youth experiencing homelessness in a year.[20] If young people cannot find safe shelter, they will continue to be vulnerable to trafficking and long-term homelessness. There is more demand than supply for virtually every service and support needed by young people at risk for homelessness and trafficking, from mental health services to supports for young parents. For example, only 22% of school districts in the United States receive McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth funding,[21] and only $134 million of the $2.38 billion spent by HUD in 2016 was spent on youth-specific services.[22]

Young people experiencing homelessness are often "criminalized" for their homelessness, being arrested and charged for simply sitting, sleeping, or relieving themselves in public, or for acts of survival, such as stealing food or money or seeking shelter in unused buildings. Many youth

Homelessness looks different at different ages. Younger people are more likely to experience homelessness as "couch surfing," that is, staying temporarily with friends, acquaintances, or family members, but not having a safe permanent home to return to, which often turns into unsheltered homelessness. They have less work experience and educational attainment, making it more difficult to obtain living-wage employment. Minors may lack legal rights, such as the ability to contract for housing. Youth who grew up in foster care, the juvenile justice system, or in disrupted or challenged families may not have developed life skills, such as how to cook, apply for jobs, or pay bills.

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avoid seeking services because they fear being reported to child welfare or law enforcement, and many have been arrested and have juvenile or criminal records. These experiences can make it even harder for youth to exit homelessness or recover from trafficking experiences, as past justice involvement can cause young people to be rejected for housing and/or employment. Incarceration is also a harmful experience that has been linked to increased mental health challenges and poorer educational and vocational outcomes.[23]

Young People Who Survive Labor and/or Sex Trafficking

In an analysis of sex trafficking cases undertaken by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and the Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (STIR), just over one fifth of victims reported being transported from another state by their trafficker.[24] In these cases, the trafficker commonly used "romance and promises to convince the victim to enter into prostitution." In more than half of the cases analyzed (56.2%), traffickers also used physical violence to keep victims from going to law enforcement or leaving. Nearly one third of victims were recruited over social media, and in just over one third of cases, traffickers used online platforms to advertise their victims. Researchers also noted "over half of the juvenile victims *did not have a missing person's report* in the National reporting systems which made identifying them more difficult as well as there not being a proactive search for the missing minors" [emphasis added].

A national study focused on sex trafficking of minors, also undertaken by STIR, similarly found high levels of violence being used to control victims, with over 36% of cases involving sexual violence and more than one quarter involving physical assault with a weapon.[25] The victims in more than half of the cases studied *were runaways*. That study also found victims were transported across state lines (to an average of 2.7 states) and technology was frequently used (67.3% of cases used websites, email, and smartphones).

There is significantly less research available on how youth become victims of labor trafficking. Calls to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline indicate domestic work and agriculture are the most common types of labor trafficking overall. However, for minors, reports are most commonly about traveling sales crews, peddling rings, and begging rings. A Polaris report on traveling sales crews noted 34% of hotline cases on this issue involved potential minors, saying traffickers work by "targeting low-income, young people" and "promising fun, travel and high earnings."[26] Instead, managers control the sales crew members and "may deny crew members food, confiscate their driver's licenses, or threaten them if they do not meet their sales quotas."[27] Polaris also notes these workers are often abandoned "in unfamiliar areas without means to return home" and/or are physically or sexually assaulted.[28] In the Loyola/Covenant House study, which only interviewed youth experiencing homelessness, most youth who experienced labor trafficking were forced to deal drugs.[29]

Pathways and Experiences Linking Homelessness and Trafficking

The Loyola/Covenant House study authors explained that youth experiencing homelessness were at risk for trafficking "because they tend to experience a higher rate of the primary risk factors to trafficking: poverty, unemployment, a history of sexual abuse, and a history of mental health issues . . . Homeless youth indicated that they struggled to find paid work, affordable housing, and support systems that would help them access basic necessities."[30] Earlier research has also shown large overlaps among trafficking, homelessness, and previous abuse. In a study of runaway and homeless youth participating in an intervention for youth at risk of or experiencing trafficking, 61% reported they "had been pushed, shoved, or grabbed in anger by a caregiver," and 83% said "someone caring for them had slapped them in the face or head." Seventy percent of youth in the study had lived in a group home and/or shelter in the past.[31]

Analyzing the Loyola/Covenant House findings, as well as the previous research discussed throughout this paper, a number of important themes emerge about the connections between trafficking and youth homelessness. Note that as discussed above, African American youth experience homelessness at nearly twice the rate of White youth and Hispanic youth experience homelessness at nearly 1.5 times the rate of White youth. The studies discussed in this paper did not address (or did not find) additional racial disproportionalities in trafficking rates among youth who were

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already experiencing homelessness, but given the marginalization and systemic biases faced by young people of color, and their higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness in the first place, it is particularly important to focus on serving African American and Hispanic youth when making policy and practice changes to prevent homelessness, and therefore trafficking.

Both girls and boys experiencing homelessness are vulnerable to sex trafficking

In the Kentuckiana YES study, 47.6% of female interviewees and 32.3% of males had been victims of sex trafficking.[32] The Arizona YES study found a history of sex trafficking among 38.6% of female interviewees and 25.5% of males.[33]

In the Loyola/Covenant House study, rates of *any* trafficking were higher among young women than young men (24% vs. 16%).[34] Twenty percent of the young women interviewed had experienced sex trafficking, and 7% had experienced labor trafficking.[35] Young men were more likely to have experienced labor trafficking than young women, but young men were still more likely to experience sex trafficking than labor trafficking (11% vs. 9%).[36]

LGBTQ youth are particularly at risk

The Arizona YES study also found LGBTQ youth were more likely to report having been victims of sex trafficking.[37] In the Loyola/Covenant House study, LGTBQ youth were also much more likely to have been victims of sex trafficking (24%, compared to 12% of non-LGBTQ youth) and equally likely to have experienced labor trafficking.[38] Levels of sex trafficking among the Field Center/Covenant House study were also higher among LGBTQ youth (39% of those who had been victims of sex trafficking were LGBTQ, with 60% of transgender interviewees having been victims of sex trafficking).[39]

These experiences begin early

More than one third of interviewees in the Kentuckiana YES study had been sex trafficked before age 18, and the average age of first sex trafficking experience in that study was 16.4 years.[40] The Covenant House/Loyola study also found a median initial age of 16 for those who had been trafficked.[41]

Unmet needs and past challenges are associated with trafficking

Participants in the Kentuckiana YES study reported their need for money (55.6%) or a place to stay (48.1%) led to their trafficking experience, and about half of the victims in the Arizona YES study reported their need for money and/or a place to stay led to their victimization.[42] Additionally, one of the trends identified over the six-year study period (2010–2015) in the STIR national report was an "[i]ncrease in sex traffickers providing their minor victim with shelter as a recruitment tool."[43]

Both YES studies also showed youth who had experienced homelessness and sex trafficking were more likely than those who had only experienced homelessness to *struggle with mental health and substance use issues*, have experienced *physical abuse by a parent or guardian*, have experienced sexual abuse, and have had negative experiences with law enforcement.

The Kentuckiana YES study found sex trafficking was more common among respondents who had ever been expelled from school, as well as those who had children of their own.[44]

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Protective factors

The Field Center study also highlighted two positive experiences that impacted youth: Having at least one caring adult in their life and higher education levels were both identified as protective factors.[45]

Many youth experiencing homelessness and trafficking have experienced abuse and/or been in foster care

In the Loyola/Covenant House study, youth who had been in foster care were also more likely to have been trafficked, making up 29% of sex trafficking and 26% of labor trafficking victims identified, even though they were only 21% of the sample.[46] Many of the youth had become homeless after aging out of the foster care system, and overall the youth in the study "reported their fear of sleeping on the streets left them vulnerable to sex and labor traffickers and to survival sex."[47]

Almost every one of the sex trafficking victims (95%) in the Field Center/Covenant House study *had been sexually or physically abused as children*, with many saying that having had supportive parents or family members could have kept them from being trafficked.[48] (Consistent with these high levels of maltreatment, 41% of the youth who had been sex trafficked had been placed in out-of-home care, with many experiencing frequent moves.)

The Arizona YES study was administered over three consecutive years, allowing researchers to analyze and compare data over that period. The trends identified included increases in sex trafficking victimization among LGBTQ youth and increases in certain mental health concerns (suicide attempts, depression, anxiety, PTSD) and in the percentage of youth who had experienced sex trafficking after being kicked out of their homes.[49]

Solutions/Policy Recommendations

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In a country with the resources of the United States, no young person should ever experience homelessness or trafficking. The new research outlined above must spur action. Without more effective approaches and solutions, 4.2 million more young people will experience homelessness—with potentially 800,000 also becoming trafficking victims—next year. This research illustrates how often young people experiencing homelessness are victims of trafficking. It also shows us some of the pathways and circumstances that make youth vulnerable to both homelessness and trafficking. These include family rejection or conflict, family or individual poverty, lack of healthy relationships with trusted adults, the need for a safe place to sleep, and substance use and mental health challenges. All of these could be overcome with the right resources. Many of the recommendations below focus on providing services and supports to address youth homelessness and to meet youth and family needs. That is because, as the above discussion illustrates, *homelessness prevention and services are trafficking prevention*.

Photo: Jan Andersen

All policy and practice changes undertaken to prevent youth and young adult homelessness and trafficking should be guided by and accomplished in partnership with young people. The recommendations below have been shaped by input from NN4Y's National Youth Advisory Council, as well as service provider members of NN4Y. All services and supports should be undertaken in a culturally competent and trauma-informed manner, ensuring they meet the needs of the young people who most often experience homelessness and trafficking, including LGBTQ young people, youth of color, and young people who have experienced abuse.

I was pregnant, homeless, and forced into trafficking at 18. I bounced from friend to friend and shelter to shelter. I became a mother, got my first apartment and also got evicted at 19. After I mended family relationships I was able to get family support while working and going to school in efforts of securing a brighter future for myself and daughter. I graduated with my Associates degree at 22 and with that degree I was able to jump into my career and jump out of the check to check lifestyle. Despite my efforts to build a brighter future for myself and my daughter, I am still always denied housing because of my past. I feel as though I am left with the dilemma of living with an abuser or living in various unstable housing situations. If I were to go to my local social services agency and tell them I need housing, their solution after reviewing my income would be to buy a hotel room. Do I really have a choice? Or is youth homelessness and trafficking truly a never-ending cycle?

—Sherry, NN4Y National Youth Advisory Committee Member

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The systems and agencies that are working to address the needs and barriers discussed above should collaborate to prevent both homelessness and trafficking. This includes housing and homelessness services, education, child welfare services, juvenile and criminal justice/law enforcement, and health/nutrition and other social services agencies that address homelessness, poverty, and/or human trafficking. Public and private funders need to ensure those systems and agencies have sufficient and flexible enough resources to disrupt this cycle. Specifically:

Policymakers should address homelessness and reduce vulnerability to trafficking by reauthorizing the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act and the Trafficking Victim Protection Act, passing laws addressing homelessness and trafficking at the state level consistent with the recommendations in this paper, and funding those laws at levels adequate to meet the tremendous need outlined above. Policymakers on both sides of the aisle have acknowledged that ending youth homelessness is key to stopping trafficking,[50] but making this a reality will involve directing adequate resources to fighting these interrelated problems and changing federal and state laws. It is worth noting that funding directed toward addressing these issues can result in long-term public savings in other areas, such as behavioral health and criminal justice systems.

Relevant Laws[51]

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) (P.L. 110-378) provides foundational support to address youth and young adult homelessness across the country. RHYA funds three key pillars of intervention to help homeless youth: street outreach, emergency shelters for minors, and transitional living programs for youth between the ages of 16 and 22.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act requires school districts to remove barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and opportunity to succeed in school for homeless children and youth. All school districts are required to designate a homeless liaison, proactively identify homeless children and youth, and provide transportation to stabilize the educational experiences of homeless students.

Policymakers must also align and expand federal and state definitions so all youth experiencing homelessness and/or trafficking can receive needed services. This includes passing the Homeless Children and Youth Act. Currently the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the biggest federal funder of housing and homelessness services, uses a definition of homelessness that is narrower than other federal agencies, and one that does not fit with current research on youth homelessness. Under the HUD definition, which is also used in some states, a young person who is "couch surfing" is not considered to be homeless. This means youth and young adults who clearly do not have safe and consistent housing often cannot access services through the largest federal funding streams. Broader definitions that reflect more recent research on youth homelessness already exist in federal law, such as in the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, and should be adopted by HUD. Federal, state, and local laws that increase access to homelessness or trafficking services and support should be enacted or reauthorized so youth are supported in moving be~~yond these experiences, rather than bei~~ng arrested and criminalized on account of their homelessness.[52] Laws preventing housing discrimination based on race or ethnicity should be strengthened and better enforced, and young people should have better opportunities to move past credit issues or justice involvement, which can create lasting barriers to getting and keeping housing.

Housing and homelessness services agencies should address homelessness, and therefore reduce vulnerability to trafficking, by quickly and appropriately responding to a young person's homelessness, with a range of options designed to meet the needs of youth and young adults in different circumstances. (In general, the continuum of services offered by homelessness providers across the country includes street outreach, drop-in centers, emergency shelter, education and employment supports, family intervention services, physical and behavioral health care, transitional housing, independent housing options, and aftercare services. See National Network for Youth's "Proposed System to End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness" and "Federal Policy Solutions to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness" for more.[53]) This includes

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the ability to access housing for youth who may face the most barriers, such as poor credit histories or juvenile/criminal records. Transitional and other housing programs supported by public agencies need to be incentivized to keep, rather than eject, young people for minor acts of "noncompliance"—particularly behaviors that stem from trauma or undiagnosed/unmet behavioral health needs. Providers serving youth experiencing homelessness and victims of trafficking already collaborate closely in many communities across the country, and homelessness providers are increasingly recognizing how many of the youth they serve have experienced trafficking. These efforts should be continued, and informed by the research shared above and supported by federal and local policies, and funding should continue to increase. In all communities,

The recommendations in this paper specific to homelessness services and providers address how to effectively respond to (rather than prevent) homelessness because young people who come into contact with these programs and providers are generally already experiencing homelessness. Although some homelessness programs may engage in prevention activities, these providers are generally extremely under-resourced and devote most of their efforts to meeting the needs of youth currently in crisis (including helping those youth exit homelessness as quickly as possible in ways that avoid future experiences of homelessness). Prevention efforts in homelessness services often take the form of systemic reform, for example, a homelessness provider engaging in a cross-systems workgroup with agencies that are serving youth before they become homeless (e.g., child welfare, schools, juvenile justice) to help identify common pathways to homelessness. Meeting the immediate needs of youth experiencing homelessness and providing supportive service can reduce the length and severity of homelessness, prevent additional experiences of homelessness, and ensure basic needs are met, all of which may reduce young people's vulnerability to trafficking. Once adequate crisis services are funded and available, homelessness providers will have a greater capacity to engage in prevention, working with downstream systems that see youth before they first experience homelessness.

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everyone working with or on behalf of young people experiencing homelessness and/or trafficking, from direct service providers to supervisors and managers who set practices and policies within agencies, need to be educated about the intersection of homelessness and trafficking. The research discussed in this paper, and knowledge shared by young people themselves, should inform the way providers serve youth and young adults.

Child welfare systems should offer services to any youth who lacks a safe and stable home. They should provide services that can allow youth to safely reunify with family members, when possible, and otherwise provide placements that meet youths' needs in such a way that they want to stay in them. This can include providing mediation and behavioral health support for families in conflict or providing housing support to enable families to live together in a safe and stable setting. Responses to youth who "run" from care should not be punitive and should instead focus on finding the least restrictive setting that a youth feels comfortable and safe enough in to want to stay, along with providing supportive interventions that can help stabilize placements and prevent problems.[54] Child welfare agencies should also work to reduce caseworker turnover and keep youth with assigned caseworkers and in the same placements until they exit system custody, as well as keeping youth with family members whenever safely possible. They should also provide necessary training to biological and foster families as well as specialized placements for youth with special needs. Child welfare agencies should also provide transition planning that prepares youth to become independent and self-supporting adults. This includes youth having the education and vocational training they need, as well as social capital/supportive relationships, financial support, and life skills needed for independent living. As outlined above, youth experiencing homelessness and trafficking are much more likely to have experienced child welfare involvement than the general population. Although it may be there are common risk factors that lead to child welfare involvement, homelessness, and trafficking, the child welfare system should use its involvement with a young person as an opportunity to reduce risk factors for homelessness and trafficking by building strength and protective factors, including self-sufficiency skills and social capital, such as healthy relationships with caring adults.

Preventing Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness Requires Investing in Families

Family conflict is the most common cause of youth homelessness. Helping youth and families develop healthy relationships is a key strategy to preventing homelessness and trafficking. Even when a young person cannot be safely or successfully reunified with family members, addressing experiences that led to the young person leaving home can be helpful. Supporting families experiencing homelessness can also prevent youth from experiencing unaccompanied homelessness. For young parents, homelessness should be prevented or addressed by providing developmentally appropriate housing and other supportive services. Young parents should receive whatever services they need to successfully care for their own children, so young families can stay together rather than being vulnerable to child welfare involvement and disruption.

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Education systems should be proactively identifying and providing services to youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This includes educating teachers, counselors, administrators, and McKinney-Vento liaisons about the warning signs and prevalence of homelessness and trafficking among their students. Federally funding McKinney-Vento liaisons at appropriate levels and supporting early childhood education are key to these efforts. Providing information about homelessness and trafficking warning signs and available services as part of mandatory health and wellness courses can also help young people facing these experiences and the peers who may be able to support them. Education systems must also ensure policies and practices are in place to protect youth from discrimination or other negative consequences based on possible homelessness. Dropout prevention and credit recovery programs should be instituted or updated to target youth experiencing homelessness.

Mental health and substance abuse (e.g., behavioral health) agencies should provide in-home and residential services from clinicians with appropriate expertise and experience. Community-based care is ideal when it meets a young person's needs, but for youth who do not have stable housing, or require more intensive treatment, having residential programs with targeted services is essential. When this does not happen, youth experiencing mental health or substance abuse issues often end up utilizing the very limited beds in runaway and homeless youth programs and not getting the targeted services they need. Mental health and substance abuse agencies should partner with housing and homelessness service providers, as well as policymakers, to educate them about the increased levels of trauma, mental health issues, and substance abuse that are more common among young people who have experienced homelessness and trafficking.[55] Given the large percentage of youth experiencing homelessness who report mental health and/or substance abuse issues, and the barriers these young people face in accessing services in the community, behavioral health agencies should partner with homelessness services providers to provide clinically and developmentally appropriate services onsite. Behavioral health providers should also ensure all youth who need care are able to receive it by providing care to minors as far as allowed by "mature minor," emergency care, or other laws or policies and by educating policymakers on the need to extend or expand these laws so minors who are not currently in the physical custody of parents can have their needs met.

Young people experiencing homelessness are, by definition, a highly mobile population, and youth who are trafficked are frequently transported across state lines. This means there must be service providers able to identify and assist youth with these experiences in every state and in every community.

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What do vulnerable youth need to avoid being trafficked?

Housing and culturally competent homelessness services, including prevention, crisis response, and assistance finding employment and meeting basic needs.

Education supports to help them graduate high school despite instability at home.

Housing and culturally competent homelessness services, including prevention, crisis response, and assistance finding employment and meeting basic needs.

Parenting support for young people who have their own children.

Child welfare systems that meet their needs without causing additional trauma and prepare youth for self-sufficient adulthood.

Family-based interventions to repair relationships with parents and other relatives (when safe and desired by youth).

Law enforcement and justice responses that protect rather than punish youth who are trying to stay safe and meet basic needs.

section III.

Justice and law enforcement agencies should prevent or address homelessness and reduce vulnerability to trafficking by ensuring youth are not criminalized for survival acts or in misguided attempts to "protect" them. Courts in particular should avoid ordering secure confinement for survival acts, as incarceration can put youth in physical and psychological danger, is associated with poorer educational and vocational outcomes, and increases criminal justice involvement.[56] They should also ensure appropriate transition/re-entry services are offered to prevent young people from experiencing homelessness after juvenile or criminal justice involvement.[57] Given the growing role of technology in exploitation of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, appropriate government agencies and the private tech sector should work with law enforcement and service providers' efforts to prevent and address youth homelessness and trafficking.

All agencies serving youth who may be experiencing homelessness and/or trafficking should ensure their own staff are knowledgeable about how to work effectively with youth who've experienced trauma. They should also work with other local agencies (e.g., schools, behavioral health clinics, other social services) to provide information about signs of and resources to address homelessness and trafficking.

Community leaders and policymakers should provide funding to local agencies to engage in homelessness prevention activities, such as services to build or repair family relationships (with individuals the young person identifies as family). These services could potentially be provided by one of many different youth- and family-serving agencies, but it is essential that they are supported by additional funding, rather than as an additional expectation of an already-strapped agency. Community leaders and policymakers should also support the creation of regional and national workgroups to help address work siloed by state borders.

All stakeholders should ensure the above recommendations are carried out with a focus on reaching and serving those who most often experience homelessness and trafficking, including LGBTQ young people, youth of color, young people who have experienced abuse, and young people who haven't graduated from high school. They should also ensure that policy and practice responses are designed and implemented in collaboration with young people who have lived expertise.

conclusion

From frontline social services providers to state and federal policymakers, many professionals can play a role in disrupting the all-too-common pathway from homelessness to human trafficking. To do so, policymakers and communities must:

- Listen to what youth share about their experiences, needs, and preferences;
- Use research to inform practice and decision making;
- Change laws and policies so that they support, rather than penalize, youth who've already experienced barriers that can increase vulnerability to trafficking and/or homelessness; and
- Adequately fund prevention and crisis-response services and support relevant education for youth, professionals, and other community members.

To learn more about the National Network for Youth's work on these issues, or to partner with NN4Y on future efforts, please contact Darla Bardine, Executive Director, at darla.bardine@nn4youth.org.

Photo: Elwynn

appendix a: federal definitions

Federal Definitions of Homelessness[58]

RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH ACT

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services The Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Act (42 USC 5701 § 387) defines "homeless youth" as individuals who are not more than 18 years of age if seeking shelter in a Basic Center Program, or not more than 21 years of age or less than 16 years of age if seeking services in a Transitional Living Program, and for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement.

MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT

U.S. Department of Education

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 USC 11302) defines children and youth as homeless if they "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence," including sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons; living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to lack of alternative accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; and living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar places.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009 amends and reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act with substantial changes, including an expansion of HUD's definition of homeless: (1) An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; is living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or is exiting an institution where they temporarily resided. The primary change from existing practice is that people will be considered homeless if they are exiting an institution where they resided for up to 90 days (previously 30 days), and were homeless immediately prior to entering that institution; (2) An individual or family who is losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or a doubled-up situation, in 14 days (previously seven days) and lacks resources or support networks to remain in housing; (3) Unaccompanied youth and families who are homeless under other federal statutes (such as the education definition or the RHY Act definition) who have experienced a long-term period without living independently in permanent housing, have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves, and can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions,

The HEARTH Act, as written and implemented in regulation and funding announcements creates confusion and imposes undue burdens on young people experiencing homelessness. For instance, young people who are temporarily staying with others usually lack clarity as to the length of time they can remain in that setting, and their arrangements are subject to change with little to no notice.

appendix a: federal definitions

substance addiction, histories of childhood abuse, the presence of a disability, multiple barriers to employment, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against an individual or a family member; (4) Individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member.

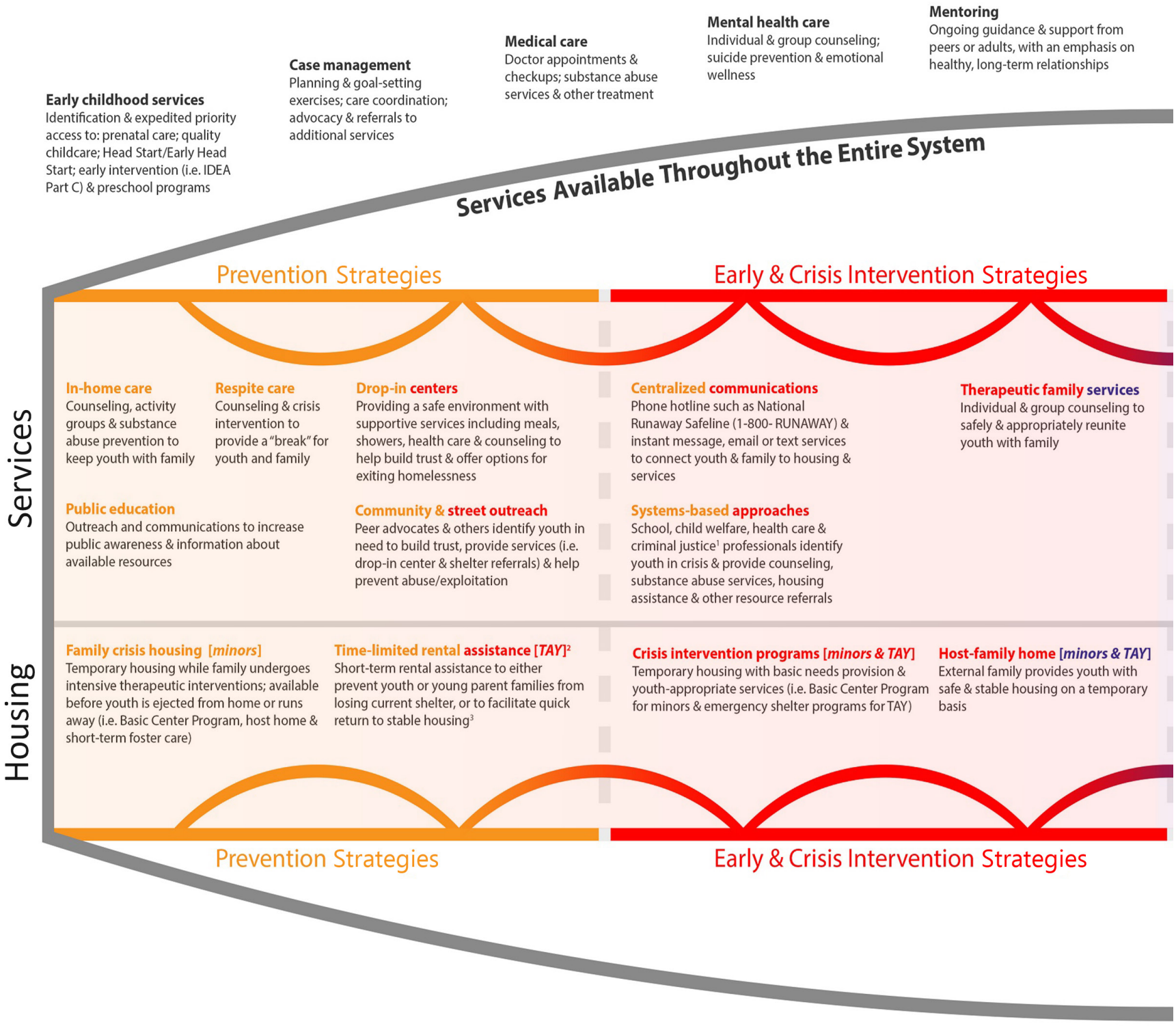
Federal Definitions of Trafficking[59]

THE TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PROTECTION ACT/TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PROTECTION REAUTHORIZATION ACT

"Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age (22 USC § 7102).

Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery (22 USC § 7102)."

appendix b: NN4Y proposed systems



Key

Support services or housing models that belong to one stage are identified by one color.

Support services or housing models that belong to two or more stages are identified by two or more colors. Each color appears in sequential order, beginning with the stage of origination.

NATIONAL NETWORK for YOUTH

Proposed System to End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

All support services & housing models should be implemented according to the following principles:
Positive Youth Development, Trauma-Informed Care, Cultural Competence, Client Centered Care & Strengths-Based Family Services

Family support services
All-family counseling; parenting assistance & affordable/accessible childcare for young parent families

Legal services
Direct representation for civil & criminal matters, record expungement and assistance obtaining ID

School-based services
Adequately trained and resourced McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons; case management; health care; sexual health education & student support communities (i.e. Gay/Straight Alliances)

Postsecondary education
Financial aid; priority for work study; tuition waivers; priority for housing; housing during academic breaks; single points of contact & campus support services (i.e. food, health & counseling)

Longer-Term Services

Education & technical training
Support & re-engagement for students; middle, high school & postsecondary instruction; GED & technical programs

Life skills building
Self-care, money & household management; goal-setting & problem solving development

Workforce development
Skills training, employment assistance, internships, career planning & other professional preparation

Nurturing permanent connections
Family reunification, kinship care placements, legal guardianships & supportive services to build long-term relationships with caring adults

Aftercare Strategies

Post-family reunification
Counseling, supportive services & referrals to address ongoing needs

Post-housing support
Case management, counseling & referrals

Follow-up
Periodic contact with youth & family to determine progress & provide additional services or referrals

Post-exit community outreach
Opportunities for youth to re-engage with needed services at any given time

Services

Housing

Congregate transitional housing [*minors & TAY*]
Congregate setting with preparation for independent living (i.e. Transitional Living Program, Transitional Housing & Maternity Group Homes[4])

Extended rental assistance [*TAY*]
Full to partial rental assistance, basic life needs provision & supportive services while youth pursue education or vocational training

Supportive housing [*TAY*]
Non-time-limited accommodations & supportive services for youth with the most significant challenges

Permanent affordable housing [*TAY*]
Long-term, deed-restricted rental housing for very low-income youth

Transition in place [*TAY*]
May include 24-hour access to staff & independent living skills training, with option of taking on apartment lease before or after program completion

Longer-Term Strategies

Core Outcomes to Measure Success

Stable housing: safe, stable & developmentally appropriate housing with access to supportive services as necessary

Permanent connections: healthy attachments to peers, mentors, family & other caring adults

Education, training & employment: employability through supported academic success, development of workplace skills & connections to employers

Health & social/emotional well-being: physical health; ability to create & maintain positive relationships with others, solve problems, experience empathy & manage emotions

Self-sufficiency: self management with regard to finance, cooking, shopping, laundry, transportation, parenting & household management

endnotes

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11 Ibid.

12 Philadelphia, Phoenix, and Washington, DC.

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43 Roe-Sepowitz, D., Gallagher, J., et al., “A six-year analysis of sex traffickers of minors: Exploring characteristics and sex trafficking patterns.” Arizona State University Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research (April 2017).

44 Supra note 14.

45 Supra note 13.

46 Supra note 9.

endnotes

47 Ibid. Note that the term "survival sex" is usually used to describe exchanging sex for food or other things individuals literally need to survive, and trafficking is typically used to describe situations where another individual exerts force or uses coercion or fraud. However, research has "demonstrated a great deal of fluidity between the two. What started initially as survival sex frequently turned into coercive and violent trafficking experiences." Covenant House. "Homelessness, survival sex and human trafficking: As experienced by the youth of Covenant House New York" (May 2013). Also, under federal law, it is always trafficking if the victim is under age 18.

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55 For more on addressing trauma and mental health needs of trafficking survivors, see, e.g., Countryman-Roswurm, K. I., & Shaffer, V. A. (2015). It's more than just my body that got hurt: The psychophysiological consequences of sex trafficking. Journal of Trafficking, Organized Crime and Security, 1(1), 1; Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A narrative therapy approach for use with sex trafficked women and girls. Women & Therapy, 40(1–2), 55–72.

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NATIONAL NETWORK for YOUTH

Responding to **Youth Homelessness**

Contact:
www.nn4youth.org
info@nn4youth.org
(202) 783-7949

Address:
741 8th St SE
Washington, DC 20003
United States

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