

Evaluation of Chicago's Plan to End Homelessness --Youth Component

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Agenda

- 1. Background of study
- 2. What We've Learned about Homeless Youth
- 3. What We've Learned about Programs
- 4. Key Points

Background

- Collaborative Research Project
 - Partners & Stakeholders
 - Goals
 - Components
 - Focus groups, system testing, and participant observations
 - Longitudinal study
 - Program interviews
 - Youth component

Youth Component



Methodology

- Qualitative
 - One to two hour semi-structured open ended interview.
 - Randomly selected
- Interview Sample
 - At the time of the survey, there were 152 youth over 18 years old in 13 programs in the youth homeless system.
 - We interviewed 32 youth at a total of 10 programs.
- We also drew on focus groups conducted in first year of study.
 - 3 focus groups with a total of 20 youth at 3 separate programs conducted during June and July 2009. (North, South and West Sides)
- We report primarily on interviews
 - Where we find resonance, we note both interviews and focus groups
- These are youth <u>in</u> the homeless youth system. This is an important contextual point to keep in mind!

Who Was Interviewed

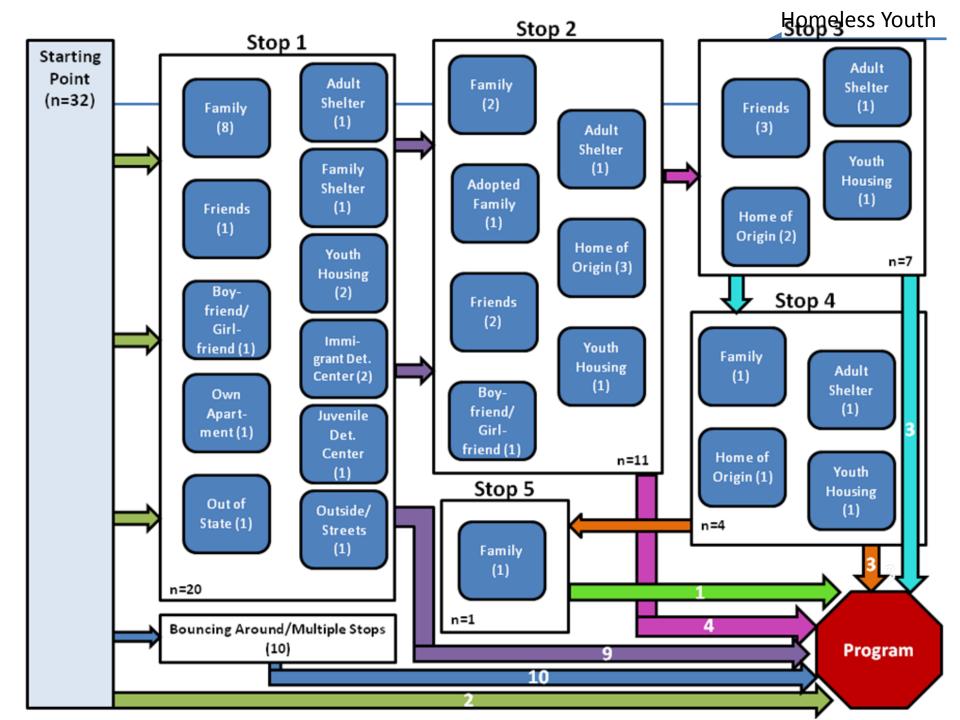
Descriptive	Youth (n=32)
Age (years)	
Mean Median Range	19.75 20 18-22
Gender	
Male Female Transgender	12 (37.5%) 19 (59.4%) 1 (3.1%)
Race & Ethnicity	
Black Hispanic Other Multi-racial	21 (65.6%) 2(6.3%) 2 (6.9%) 7 (21.9%)
Parent ²	10 (31.3%)

Descriptive	Youth (n=32)	
Pregnant	4 (12.5%)	
Criminal Record ³	2 (6.3%)	
Mental Health Needs	4 (12.5%)	
Substance Abuse Needs	2 (6.3%)	
Length of Time in Program	2 wks. To 2 yrs., 9 mos.	
<1 Month 1-3 Months 4-7 Months 8-12 Months >1 Year	3 (9.4%) 13 (40.6%) 3 (9.4%) 7 (21.9%) 6 (18.8%)	
Length of Homelessness	Approx. 2 months to 4 yrs.	

¹ One program was excluded from our sample because they only serve minor clients. Two more programs were left out from our sample because they did not respond.

² One additional respondent was pregnant at time of interview.

³ One additional respondent had his criminal record expunged.



What we found out about the youth

No Safe and or Stable Home Base

- Often about instability, conflict and poverty in their families of origin.
 - Result in youth either being kicked out or leaving on own accord
- A number of overlapping, immediate reasons for homelessness emerged.

Overlapping Reasons

- Chaotic, disorganized, turbulent family life (75%)
 - Family/head of household conflict
 - About a third of these youth describe their own behavior contributing to conflict
 - Family violence
 - Five specific descriptions of physical violence (including intimate partner violence)
 - Also, sense of violence a sub-text in many descriptions
 - In about 1/3 of these youth mentioned family member (s)' abuse of substances

Overlapping Reasons

- Family's capacity (or lack thereof) to support youth
 - Family could no longer afford to support youth
 - Extremely crowded households
- No family (immigrant/refugee)
- Time to become independent
- A few youth cited their becoming pregnant
- Limits of Sample: Little discussion of "typical" causes of youth homelessness

Youth's Family Networks

- Detached distant relationship with family (19 youth)
 - Due to history of conflict and neglect
 - Some participants specifically mentioned being mistreated by family members and focused on family members' emotional unavailability and lack of support.
 - Some youth shared they are at peace with their decisions to minimize contact with family and do not hold a grudge against family for mistreating them.
 - Some youth mentioned substance abuse as a main reason they have minimal contact with family members.
- Reestablishing relationships with family members (9 youth)
 - In process of reestablishing ties with family members with whom historically had conflict-ridden relationships
 - For many of these participants, relationships with family members, specifically parents, have been improving since moving away from home and into current programs.
- Historically close relationships with certain family members remain strong (14 youth)
 - Some youth remain close with majority of family members
 - Other youth only close to 1-2 family members
- No contact with family (2 youth)



Goals & Attitudes

- Youth presented as active agents of change in their lives.
- Youth expressed valuing education and employment as means to becoming independent and self-sufficient and reported taking active measures to finish their education and find work.
- Youth connected independence and selfsufficiency to achieving their housing goals, which were to be able to afford their own apartments.

Goals & Attitudes

Independent

Desire to be self-sufficient; adult-like manner

Motivated

Active pursuit of goals (employment, education); value taking initiative

Positive

 A number of participants shared they've had no bad days since being in program or every day/many days have been good day/their "best day"

Hopeful

 A number of participants described their best day as a day when something made them feel motivated and thus hopeful for the future

Confident

Some participants explicitly express feeling more confident/self-assured

Reflective

 A few participants explicitly reflected on changing/growing since entering program and seeing things in new ways

Dedicated

 A few participants talked about specific ways they try to help others, better their communities/society

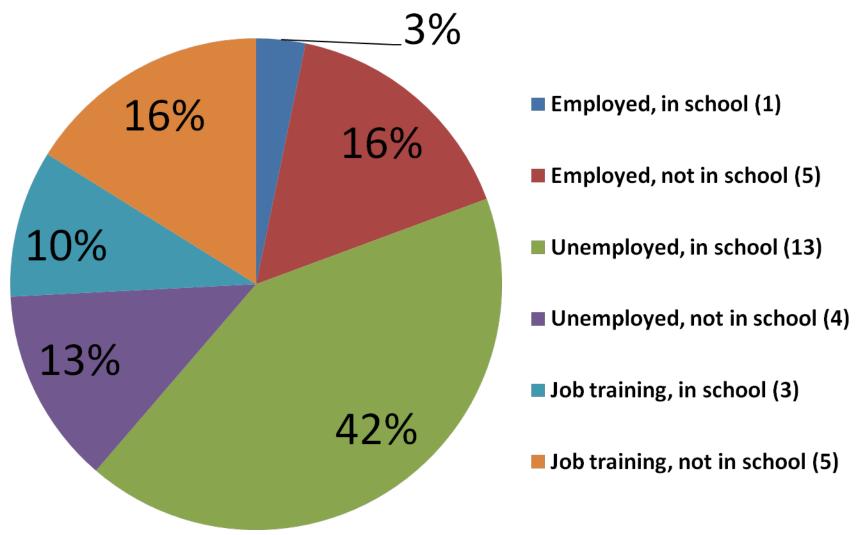
School and Education key reference point

		N	
In School (17 youth)			
	High School	5	
	GED Program	5	
	Community College	6	
	4 Year College	1	
	Enrolled in school <i>before</i> entering the program	4	
	Enrolled in school <i>after</i> entering the program	13	
Not in School (14 youth)—but school still the reference point			
	Applying to an educational institution	2	
	Taking time off	5	
	Plan to eventually further their education	4	
	Waiting to take the GED exam	3	

Employment Status

		N	
Employed (6 youth)			
(4 youth are looking for a second or higher paying job)			
	Security industry	1	
	Fast food industry	2	
	Customer service	1	
	Food service	1	
	Motivational speaker	1	
Job Training Program (8 youth)			
	Paid Internship	6	
Unemployed, Not in Job Training (18 youth)			
	Actively Looking for Work	12	
	Not Looking for Work	6	
	Pregnant	2	
	Waiting to receive social security benefits	1	
	Demands of school	1	
	Waiting for work permit	1	
	Going to the Army	1	

Intersection of Education & Employment



Youth seeking Family and Community

- Programs provide sense of family, community
 - Welcomed or cared for by staff
 - "My best day...I think it was really the first day. Yeah, so, the first day I got in there, I think the whole staff was really warm and inviting, and I can honestly say they are way more inviting than my family was. I think [program staff] is like a second family that I have. They are my second family."
 - Staff members, specifically case managers, act as stable, supportive figures to youth, in contrast to young people's chaotic home lives.
 - Provide emotional support
 - Offer guidance
 - Encourage youth to succeed
 - Ensure participants' needs are met
 - Help manage conflicts between residents

What we found out about the programs

Process to Enter Programs

- Overall take-away point: Youth showed great deal of initiative and perseverance in researching, contacting, and gaining access to programs
- Planned entry, carefully weigh options
 - Focus group: importance of "doing your research before going to a program"

Finding Programs

Help-seeking, navigate system on own

- Internet searches 8 youth
- 311 2 youth, not very helpful
- DFSS 2 youth, helpful (interviews), mixed reviews (focus groups)
- 18 youth said they considered another youth housing program during their searches

Referred from other providers

- Adult shelters to youth programs 3 youth
- Youth programs to youth programs 11 youth
- Extensive outreach teams seem particularly effective 7 youth
- School counselor, social worker 2 youth
- Lawyer, advocate 2 youth, both had immigration issues

Word of mouth

- Past or current program participant, ex. friend, sibling, cousin 6 youth
- Helping person, ex. family member, boss, pastor 4 youth

Intake Process

- Varies from program to program and individual to individual
 - Some are put on a wait list and interviewed after spot opens.
 - Others have interview and are contacted when a spot opens.
 - Some have multiple phone interviews and meetings before a formal interview is conducted.
 - In emergency situations, youth can circumvent wait list.
 - Many youth consistently called program to inquire about open slots.
 - Felt this improved their chances of securing a spot.
 - Youth initiated calling regularly to check on spot.
 - Corroborated by focus group: "You've got to be on your business.
 You've got to show them you're about something."

Waiting Lists

Time on waiting list was anywhere from 1 day to 2 years, depending on the availability of spots in the program

"It's a struggle as far as it's hard, and there is a process for it. There are a lot of programs now in Chicago, and they all feel obligated to fill, so don't get discouraged as far as you going into the intake. It's a process, and you may get turned away, but you come back 2 or 3 months later, or they tell you to give them a call within the next 3 months. Just don't get discouraged, but the beds [that] are filled are for you, so you have to keep in mind that it's not going to be like I call them, and you are in. So it's not immediate."

Youth's Experiences in Current Programs: Community

- Programs foster friendships among residents.
 - Group meetings, special events (ex. BBQs, parties) bring residents together.
 - Corroborated by focus groups
- Challenges to Community
 - Staff: A few instances of strained relationships with staff, as is common in any family-like relationship.
 - Feel staff are being judgmental, believing house gossip
 - Frustrated by rules, ex. curfew, inconsistent enforcement
 - Residents: Participants much more commonly talked about distant, tense relationships with other residents than with staff.
 - Conflicts, confrontations lead to "drama"
 - Do not trust other residents, therefore limit contact

Services

Education-related

- Financial assistance
- GED help
- Help choosing school
- Help enrolling in school
- Encouragement (pre and during school)
- School advocacy

Employment-related

- Job listings, referrals, leads (passive vs. active)
- Referrals to job fairs
- Skills-based services (ex. interviews, resumes)
- Assistance with employment prerequisites
- Job training program (one program stands out)

Housing-related

- Weakest service offered
- Savings 6 programs have mandatory savings programs
- Housing referrals 5 programs offer some type
- Aftercare 5 programs
- Financial assistance 2 programs
- Program extensions 2 programs

Services

Material support

- Room and board, food, clothes, personal products, etc.
- Financial assistance
- Help obtaining ID (Social Security card, birth certificate, state ID)
- Life skills
 - Teach practical skills and cover personal topics that reflect participants' needs and life course stage
 - Budgeting/money management
 - Cooking, grocery shopping
 - Housekeeping
 - Health (including sexual health)
 - Laundry
 - Relationships
 - Social skills
 - Substance abuse prevention

Transportation

- CTA cards
- Staff rides

Healthcare

- On-site services at 5 programs
- Referrals to free clinics, Stroger by 4 additional programs

Childcare

On-site and referrals by 2 programs (specifically serve parents)

Positive Assessment of Case Management

- Youth value concrete assistance of case managers
 - ID
 - Apply for TANF/SNAP
 - School enrollment, GED application fee, financial aid
 - Job and housing referrals
- Youth value relational aspects of case management
 - Confidentiality, trust, honesty
 - Humor, share personal information
 - Available
 - Follow through
 - Helpful referrals
 - Hold youth accountable
 - Emotional support and invested in youth
 - Listen to personal problems w/o judgment
 - Have someone to turn to for help dealing with stressful situations (ex. conflicts with residents)
 - Respect youth's boundaries, goals
 - Helps youth stay focused on goals
 - Contributes to youth's stability in program
 - One way program provides sense of family, community
 - Contrast to past experiences w/ adults

Youth's Ratings of Programs

Comparison between Experiences of Youth in the Youth System and Youth in the Adult System

Caring and Service Quality

 Youth receiving services in the Youth System gave the programs and program staff a higher rating than youth-aged individuals in the adult system (Adult System Mean = 34.88, Youth System Mean = 40.50*).

Service Helpfulness

Youth clients described their programs to be more helpful than the youth-aged individuals in the adult system (Adult System Mean = 15.88, Youth System Mean = 17.59*).

Usefulness

- Youth clients reported that their programs more often found them openings and services in other programs (Adult System Mean = 11.31, Youth System Mean = 13.73*).
- * Difference between the means was significant at the 0.05 level.

What is Missing: Youth Identify Unmet Needs

Education

- Need help identifying, enrolling in, paying for college
 - Current assistance limited to GED, high school
- College opportunities

Employment

- Connecting to jobs, jobs with career ladders.
- Need comprehensive job training programs, paid internships, actual jobs
 - Interested in careers that will allow them to perform skilled work and become financially independent, a goal that generally is out of reach when employed in low-wage service sector positions
- Limited assistance programs offer reflects lack of affordable housing in Chicago

What is Missing: Youth Identify Unmet Needs

Housing

- Immediate, transitional housing
 - Need for programs vs. shelters
 - Lack of housing programs for age 21-24 group
 - Need for more "trans-friendly" programs
 - Need financial security for existing housing programs
 - Longer program stays
 - Housing locations all over the city, currently concentrated in certain neighborhoods
- Long-term
 - Need for low-income, affordable housing
 - Uncertainty regarding how youth will afford own apartments after "graduating" from current programs

But I think the biggest part is like, you know, they could offer options like... other places to live. Because I know some people don't make enough money to afford an apartment very long. So, um, I think the biggest thing they could offer more places to move in...like they could offer low cost options.

Key points

Agencies as Agents of Transformation

- Beyond housing, programs provide developmental and practical skills for youth to develop the necessary personal capital to survive on their own.
- Youth in these homeless programs are in a transitional life stage.
 - Need space and support to develop key life and social skills
- Many youth reflected on how they have become more independent while in their current programs, particularly through life skills services and staff's guidance and support.
 - Indicated increased independence was helping them to prepare to live on their own

Agencies as Agents of Transformation

"I just feel so grown up now. Let's see...if this program...everything they do like, at first it is annoying because you are not used to it, like me my problem was that I had a really big problem with authority because I never really had anybody to tell me what to do and I actually have to do it, you know what I am saying. So how like it was a lot of tough, tough, tough love for me...but mmm let's see, everything, everything that seems regular like your savings and making sure you have a clean apartment, have workshops for learning how to cook and like all types of things that you are supposed to know how to do. You are living on your own and transitioning from a kid to an adult. It seems so everyday but it is really useful, it is really, really helpful, and all of that is part of the transition. 'Cause I couldn't cook for, I couldn't cook to save my own life (giggles) when I first got here. Oh my goodness, I was terrible. Mmm shopping the way you grocery shop like they are really big on that, like buying junk food, and they are not really gonna tell you what to buy, but they will help you pick out. They will make suggestions on the right stuff to buy."

Homeless Youth are an Unique Group

- Our findings support the CAEH Youth Constituency Group (1/19/12) assertion:
 - "Youth who are homeless are not mini adult homeless people nor do they experience homelessness in the same way as adults; therefore all proposed responses to the specific additional barriers and challenges that they face must be developed through a lens of developmentally appropriate and cultural competency."

New Policy Approach

- There is a policy approach—that was identified to us in discussions with advocates and providers as we reviewed our preliminary findings—that we especially want to highlight.
- We advocate a shift in how funders and providers conceive of providing services to homeless youth by adopting a "Transition Age Youth" framework.* This framework recognizes that:
 - 1. All youth need support as they transition to adulthood and thereby destigmatizes homeless youth
 - 2. Different youth need different types of support and thus a "one-size-fits-all" approach to homeless youth services is inadequate
 - 3. Homeless youth are unique from homeless adults and constitute a niche group within the larger homeless population that requires specialized services.

^{*} The California Institute of Mental Health, for example, uses a "Transition-Age Youth" framework in its approach. See: http://www.cimh.org/Services/Transition-Age-Youth.aspx.

Possible Further Research

- The participants in our study reflect the experiences and perspectives of youth who have the ability to advocate for themselves and suggest that some homeless youth likely do not possess the skills that are needed to gain entry to some of Chicago's homeless youth programs.
 - How many homeless youth are either not seeking out these programs' services or are unable to finish these programs and why?
 - What is happening to homeless youth who are not accessing these programs' services?



Questions/Comments?

Resources

Research reports on all evaluation components

http://loyolacurl.squarespace.com/projects/evaluation-of-chicagos-10-year-plan-to-end-homelessness.html