

Unique needs of unaccompanied homeless minors

Unaccompanied homeless youth face profound threats to their day-to-day survival and well-being. Compared to their peers, these youth are at disproportionately high risk of: school dropout; mental and physical health problems (including substance abuse, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and HIV infection, with little-to-no access to health care); suicide; crime victimization, including homicide, assault, rape, and trafficking; involvement in crime and incarceration; unsafe sexual behavior, including submission to sexual exploitation; unplanned pregnancy; and, unemployment.¹

The vast majority of unaccompanied homeless youth do not become homeless by choice. Many factors contribute to youth homelessness, but studies indicate that the following are the primary causal factors:

- **Family dysfunction and abuse:** Most unaccompanied homeless youth become homeless as a result of family dysfunction and/or abuse in the home. Studies have found that 21-40% of homeless youth were sexually abused and 40-60% were physically abused prior to running away.² Unaccompanied homeless youth commonly experience family violence; heightened family conflict; death or incarceration of a parent or caretaker; and/or parental neglect due to poverty, substance abuse, or other mental illness. Additionally, many unaccompanied homeless youth have been rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, mental illness, and/or pregnancy.
- **Aging out of the foster care system:** Youth who have aged out of the foster care system without the skills and resources to support themselves sometimes become unaccompanied homeless youth. Studies estimate that 12-36% of youth ages 18 or 21 exiting the foster care system in the United States become homeless.³
- **Exiting the juvenile justice system:** Nationally, approximately 100,000 young people exit the formal custody of juvenile justice systems each year.⁴ Many become homeless because they lack the skills and economic opportunity to become self-sufficient, lack family and community support systems, and face barriers to employment and re-enrollment in school.
- **Economic hardship:** Families may be unable to fully support themselves and their children when they are facing economic hardship due to joblessness; lack of education/skills; the rising cost of basic necessities, including sustainable and affordable housing; and the depressed economic climate. Many youth are forced to seek shelter on their own when their families are unable to support them.⁵

¹ Report of the SB764/HB823 Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. November 1, 2013

² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration On Children, Youth, & Families, *Sexual Abuse Among Homeless Adolescents: Prevalence, Correlates, and Sequelae* (November 2002); Marjorie J. Robertson et al., *Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention, and Policy* 8 (1999).

³ R. White, *Introduction*, 83 *Child Welfare* 389, 389-392 (2004).

⁴ Howard N. Snyder, *An Empirical Portrait of the Youth Reentry Population*, 2 *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 39, 39 (2004).

⁵ National Network for Youth, *Homeless Youth in America: Who Are They?*

<http://www.nn4youth.org/system/files/Homeless%20Youth%20in%20America-Who%20Are%20They.pdf> (last visited August 5, 2019).

The 2018 Youth REACH Youth Count highlights that food assistance was by far the most sought-after service by youth, followed by emergency shelter, mental health services, job training, and health care.⁶ In addition to being generally less mature and less skilled than older homeless youth, unaccompanied homeless minors face barriers to accessing services and records and making decisions for themselves based purely upon the legal limitations attached to their age. Examples of these barriers include:

- **Identification and Documentation:** Among the many barriers to housing, employment, and public assistance confronting homeless youth is a lack of identification documents. In Maryland, individuals must present proof of identity in order to secure a job, enroll in community college, or apply for Public Housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, the State Rental Assistance Program, Temporary Cash Assistance, Food Supplement Program benefits, or Medical Assistance. Moreover, it is often necessary to produce one form of identification in order to obtain another; for instance, individuals may obtain a replacement Social Security card only upon showing a State-issued driver's license or identification card, passport, or similar document.⁷
- **Benefits:** In addition to the identification barriers needed to access public benefits, minors face eligibility challenges when a youth is still claimed as dependents of parents or guardian who are currently receiving benefits. Many benefits programs, such as Temporary Cash Assistance and the Food Supplement Program, are not intended for minor-heads of households. Policies such as COMAR 07.03.03.16 requiring a protective payee for a "pregnant or unmarried minor parent" expands the burdens upon an already vulnerable population. Adding barriers to accessing assistance for a population with access to on average fewer resources, makes attaining housing and self-sufficiency even more difficult. Additionally, while there are no regulations prohibiting minors from being certified as their own household, a lack of training from case managers often results inaccurate interpretations of the policy as well as an undue burden placed on the minor to verify that they are not purchasing and eating food with their parent/guardian.
- **Housing:** Many subsidized housing programs are available to adults only; private landlords are often unwilling to contract with minors without the involvement of parents or legal guardians.⁸
- **Employment/Income:** Homeless youth often have limited education and employment experience, which makes finding and maintaining employment difficult, particularly given that the number of jobs for transition-age youth has decreased. A lack of a stable address, clothing, and social capital presents further challenges. Additionally, work permits, which must be signed by a parent or guardian, are required for all minors under the age of 18 to work in Maryland.
- **Healthcare:** Pursuant to a bill enacted by the Maryland General Assembly in 2012, unaccompanied homeless minors can now consent to their own healthcare without risk that

⁶ Miller, A., Unick, J., Hoey, E., & Harburger, D.S. (2019). Maryland Youth Count 2018: A Report on the Findings from Youth REACH MD's Third Survey of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness. Baltimore, Md.: The Institute for Innovation and Implementation, University of Maryland School of Social Work. Pg 24.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. *Putting Positive Youth Development into Practice; A Resource Guide* 3-8 (2007).

⁸ Report of the SB764/HB823 Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. November 1, 2013

their treating clinicians will suffer adverse legal consequences related to the absence of parental consent.⁹ This change in the law represents an important first step in connecting unaccompanied minors with care, but significant barriers remain. In particular, unaccompanied homeless minors cannot easily apply for Medical Assistance (Medicaid) or the Children’s Health Program (MCHP) without the involvement of a parent or legal guardian. The result is that many unaccompanied homeless minors go uninsured, making providers less inclined to treat them, particularly for specialty services, because of the inability to bill for that care.

Public- and private-sector programs and resources available to meet those needs

Emergency housing & non-residential drop-in: There are two federally-funded emergency shelters for unaccompanied homeless minors in two jurisdictions in Maryland, Loving Arms, Inc. in Baltimore City and Sonya’s House operated by YESS! of Charles County. Other programs in Prince George’s County, include Promise Place, operated by Sasha Bruce Youthwork, and the Latin American Youth Center/Maryland Multicultural Youth Center’s host homes. The YES Drop-In Center in Baltimore, which provides a safe space for youth ages 14-25 who are homeless or at-risk to meet basic needs and establish supportive relationships, is the only program of its kind in the State.

McKinney-Vento Act: Federal and state law provides tools to support unaccompanied homeless youth in their education. The McKinney-Vento Act, 42 U.S.C. §11431 et seq., along with the implementing regulations, COMAR 13A.05.09, requires local education authorities (LEAs, also referred to as “local school systems”), acting under the supervision of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), to affirmatively identify and support homeless students, including unaccompanied homeless youth. McKinney-Vento entitles unaccompanied homeless youth, as well as other homeless students specific protections.

SHIP (Student Homelessness Initiative Partnership) of Frederick County: SHIP is a non-profit that provides immediate needs of youth and families experiencing homelessness including, hygiene items; new clothing and shoes; youth activities and experiences; and emergency shelter. SHIP of Frederick County supports the New Horizons program to support the educational needs of homeless students throughout the school year and during the summer.

Thrive@25: Thrive@25 is a three-year, \$2 million implementation grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children and Families, Children’s Bureau to end and prevent homelessness among youth and young adults with current or prior child welfare involvement Child Welfare. This program focuses specifically on youth in the five Mid-Shore counties who are either entering foster care between ages 14-17, in foster care between ages 18-21, or homeless youth and young adults under 21 with child welfare histories.

Gaps in public- and private-sector programs and resources available to meet the needs of unaccompanied homeless minors

⁹ For a description of the new law, see Healthcare for the Homeless, Memorandum: Changes in MD law regarding healthcare services for homeless youth (2013), available at, http://www.hchmd.org/documents/Memotoproviders--youthconsenttohealthcare_000.pdf (last visited October 1, 2013).

The housing options currently available for unaccompanied homeless youth in Maryland are woefully inadequate to meet the need. Loving Arms, Inc. and Rose Street Youth Shelter in Baltimore City, which each have the capacity to serve approximately 8 youth. In Prince George’s County, Promise Place, operated by Sasha Bruce Youthwork, has the capacity to serve approximately 20 youth, and Latin American Youth Center/Maryland Multicultural Youth Center’s host homes, have the capacity to serve 4 youth.¹⁰ Generally, there is a lack of shelter and resources available to serve youth ages 18-24 but even fewer available to unaccompanied minors.

Barriers to access safe shelter for unaccompanied homeless minors

Transition-age youth often avoid adult shelters because of fear of harassment or victimization, yet there are no emergency shelters specifically for this group in the state. According to anecdotal accounts from homeless youth and service providers in Maryland, young people experiencing homelessness are often reluctant to identify themselves or seek help from service providers because they fear that their parents will get in trouble and/or they will be placed in foster care. Maryland’s mandatory reporting laws require health practitioners, police, educators, and human service workers to report any suspected child abuse or neglect, which includes “the leaving of a child unattended or other failure to give proper care or attention.” However, Maryland’s Criminal Law specifies that “neglect does not include the failure to provide necessary assistance and resources...when the failure is due solely to a lack of financial resources or homelessness.” Thus, under current law, the status of being an unaccompanied homeless minor may or may not give rise to mandatory reporting requirements. This may lead to confusion and inconsistency with regard to how and when unaccompanied homeless youth are reported across the State.

Funding information

Children’s Cabinet Interagency Fund
Allowable Costs ¹¹ include, but are not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. All reasonable direct costs associated with activities funded by the Office and/or Children’s Cabinet, except for any indirect costs and direct costs identified as unallowable costs listed in Section V, Subsection 10, Part E; and,2. Bonuses that are:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Are based on documented job performance, a written job appraisal or some other documented, measurable criteria;b. Are available to all employees within the same class;c. Are part of a defined benefit plan; and,d. Do not increase an employee’s salary and/or to circumvent payroll limitations.
Unallowable Costs ¹² include, but are not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Alcoholic beverages;2. Bad debts;3. Contributions and donations to charitable organizations not in support of a defined activity;

¹⁰ Report of the SB764/HB823 Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. November 1, 2013

¹¹ The State of Maryland Policies and Procedures Manual for Local Management Boards Effective January 1, 2018

¹²The State of Maryland Policies and Procedures Manual for Local Management Boards Effective January 1, 2018

4. Defense and prosecution of criminal and civil proceedings, claims, appeals and patent infringement;
5. Entertainment costs;
6. Incentive compensation, as follows:
 - a. That does not involve all sources of funding;
 - b. That is not based on job performance, a written job appraisal or some other documented, measurable criteria;
 - c. That is not available to all employees within the same class;
 - d. That is not part of a defined benefit plan;
 - e. Does not increase an employee's salary and/or to circumvent payroll limitations; and/or,
 - f. That is not issued pursuant to an agreement or an established plan entered into in good faith between the organization and the employees before the services were rendered.
7. Personal use by employees of organization-furnished automobiles (including transportation to and from work) and other assets;
8. Fines and penalties and interest on fines and penalties;
9. Assets, goods or services for personal use;
10. Interest on borrowed capital/lines of credit;
11. Costs of organized fundraising;
12. Costs of investment counsel/management;
13. Lobbying;
14. Losses on other awards;
15. Renovation/remodeling and capital projects;
16. Gifts for Board members and/or employees;
17. Food and beverages, except for:
 - a. Those incurred by Board members and employees traveling overnight on official Board business;
 - b. Bulk drinking water for coolers where tap water is not potable;
 - c. Those routine expenses for the operation of a program serving children and youth (e.g., snacks served to children on a regular basis at an out-of-school time program funded by the Board);
 - d. Meetings/focus groups/forums where the majority of attendees expected are family and/or youth; and/or,
 - e. Special events where the majority of attendees are not Board members or staff or State/local Agency representatives.
18. Costs of training/technical assistance offered by consultants that the Office and/or the Children's Cabinet or one of its member Agencies makes available to the Board and its vendors at no cost;
19. Any plaque or item presented to a speaker, official, legislator, vendor, or other person in recognition of service provided with a value in excess of \$50;
20. Any expenses relating to the establishment, maintenance or liquidation of foundation or other accounts that the Board utilizes for the purpose of maintaining earned reinvestment

<p>and other State funds, to the extent that the Board does not receive prior approval for the expenses;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">21. Investment fees and losses;22. Flex fund expenditures;23. Gift card expenditures, except for incentives for participants attending meetings/ focus groups/forums where:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. The Board purchases only the number of gift cards necessary based on the number of participants;b. The Board, or its vendor/consultant, does not establish or maintain an inventory of gift cards; and,c. The participants are families and/or children/youth.24. For fee-for-service contracts, vendor staff vacation, sick leave and other leave time during which services were not provided.
<p>FY 2020 Grant Awards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Anne Arundel – Pop-Up Youth Drop-In Center● Baltimore County – Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Outreach Services● Charles - After Hours for Opportunity Youth (AHOY) Planning grant● Frederick – New Horizons● Wicomico – Navigation/Local Access Mechanism
<p>The Children’s Cabinet Interagency Fund is authorized by the Human Services Article §§ 8-501–506.</p>
<p>Federal Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● For a complete list of all of the funding sources administered by the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention, please visit: http://goccp.maryland.gov/grants/programs/.● Grant programs that may be able to fund initiatives to address the needs of unaccompanied homeless minors include, but are not necessarily limited to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (BJAG) support a broad range of state and local criminal justice initiatives critical to Maryland's ultimate goal of safe communities. Funds are intended to reduce existing gaps in service that impact violent crime, crime victims, enforcement, prosecution, adjudication, detention, and rehabilitation.○ The Children’s Justice Act Committee (CJAC) provides grants to states to improve the investigation, prosecution, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child victim.○ The Title II Formula (JJAC) funds support reform in Maryland’s juvenile justice system and focus on initiatives and strategies that support the hallmarks of the Developmental Approach to Juvenile Justice Reform, which are:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Accountability without Criminalization;2. Alternatives to Justice System Involvement;3. Individualized Response Based on Assessment of Needs and Risks;4. Confinement Only When Necessary for Public Safety;5. A Genuine Commitment to Fairness;6. Sensitivity to Disparate Treatment, and;

7. Family Engagement.

- The purpose of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) program is to improve the treatment of victims of crime by providing victims with the assistance and services necessary to aid their restoration after a violent criminal act, and to support and aid them as they move through the criminal justice process. Victim assistance includes services such as crisis intervention, counseling, emergency transportation to court, temporary housing and criminal justice support and advocacy.

For more information about these funding sources, please contact Justice Schisler, Chief of Programs, at justice.schisler@maryland.gov.