



## Increasing State Agency Coordination to Better Serve Runaway and Homeless Youth

**Problem:** Each year in the U.S., over 2 million youth experience homelessness, with over 110,000 living day-to-day on the streets.<sup>i</sup> Many have histories of being victimized by abuse and neglect and have fled homes with severe conflict. Some youth are rejected or abandoned by their parents. Homeless youth exist in all communities and socio-economic classes, but youth of color, youth with disabilities, youth from families with the lowest incomes, gay and lesbian youth, and former foster care youth are overrepresented.<sup>ii</sup> Once homeless, youth are at heightened risk of physical assaults, rape, solicitation, sexual exploitation, and recruitment by gangs.<sup>iii</sup> Research studies of street and shelter youth show significantly elevated rates of mental health disabilities, chemical and alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, chronic illnesses, and suicide as compared to their housed peers.<sup>iv</sup>

The number of unaccompanied homeless youth in Texas is not clear, but based on calculations using national data, it appears that there may be as many as 150,000 youth aged 12-17 in Texas who have run away from home and slept on the streets in the past twelve months.<sup>v</sup> Despite the large number of these youth, and their high risk of being harmed, there is not a state agency or system focused on meeting their needs. In a recent project conducted by TNOYS, in which homeless youth interviewed other homeless youth, lack of quality housing services, mental health services, employment services, and preparation for adulthood were identified as some of the many challenges for homeless youth. The lack of coordination between public schools and providers of services to homeless youth has also been identified by advocates as a concern.

**Recommendation:** Create a state interagency task force on runaway and unaccompanied homeless youth. Require the task force to conduct an assessment of the needs of runaway and homeless youth, including current gaps in services, and develop an interagency plan for meeting those needs. Require the following agencies to participate on the task force: DADS, DARS, DFPS, DSHS, HHSC, OAG, TDHCA, TEA, TJPC, TWC, and TYC. Offer organizations with expertise in issues impacting runaway and homeless youth opportunities to serve as advisory members to the task force. Include two youth who have been homeless and unaccompanied and two service providers for runaway and homeless youth on the task force.

**Note:** The Council on Children and Families or Texas Interagency Council on Homelessness could be charged with creating this task force, DFPS could be charged with creating it, or the Legislature could create a new, stand-alone task force/group.

---

<sup>i</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. [Letter to President Obama on February 10, 2009.](#)

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>v</sup> Office of Applied Studies. (2003). *Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings.* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 03-3836, NHSDA Series H-22). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.; SC-EST2007-Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Single-Year of Age and Sex for the United States and States: April 1, 2000 to 2007. Source: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau. Release Date: May 1, 2008.

*Proposal by Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) with input from the Texas Homeless Education Office and endorsement by the Child Protection Roundtable (led by TexProtects); For more information contact Christine Gendron at (281) 450-8957 or [cgendron@tnoys.org](mailto:cgendron@tnoys.org).*