

# THE UNEMANCIPATED YOUTH PROJECT

A joint project of the DC Children's Trust Fund,  
the DC KIDS COUNT Collaborative,  
and the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect





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Asian American Leadership, Empowerment, And Development for Youth and Family (LEAD)

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Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington (Eastern Branch)

Covenant House Washington

For the Love of Children (FLOC)

Healthy Babies Project, Inc.

Latin American Youth Center (LAYC)

Metro TeenAIDS

Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Inc. (SBY)

Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL)

Trinity Youth Services (TYS)

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# THE UNEMANCIPATED YOUTH PROJECT

## Introduction

An estimated 1,682,900 children experienced an episode of leaving home voluntarily without permission or at the request of a parent or guardian, according to data for 1999 the most recent available (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak 2002). These “runaway/throw-away” episodes have the potential of placing youth at risk for any number of deleterious consequences. The longer the youth remains detached from parental or guardian supervision, the more likely the potential for harmful outcomes. Recently, three organizations that focus on child welfare issues facilitated a study pertaining to youth who may find themselves experiencing these circumstances in Washington, D.C.

The Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (MACCAN) was established by legislation passed in 1988 to advise the Mayor and directors of governmental agencies on matters related to the protection of children and the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

MACCAN is a 21-member multidisciplinary committee currently chaired by Kinaya Sokoya, executive director of the D.C. Children’s Trust Fund (DCCTF). Established in 1993 as a result of D.C. City Council legislation, DCCTF is a private, non-profit organization created to foster the well-being of the District’s children and their families by defining and developing standards for primary prevention of child abuse and neglect. DCCTF also maintains fiscal management and responsibility of the D.C. Kids Count Collaborative for Children and Families. The Collaborative is an

alliance of public and private organizations that advocate for the interests and wellbeing of children and families in the District of Columbia through research on related indicators including economic security, family attachment, community support, education, safety and health.

MACCAN and DCCTF in cooperation with D.C. Kids Count Collaborative, embarked on a research project focusing on a specific segment of youth. The Unemancipated YouthProject (UYP), made possible by funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, was designed to explore the needs and challenges of youth ages 13 to 17 who are virtually living on their own in Washington, D.C. without formal parental or guardian supervision. These youth may be 1) runaways from home, foster care, or institutions; 2) throwaways asked to leave home by their parents or guardians; 3) living away from their parents or guardians by mutual agreement; or 4) homeless and alone due to family disintegration or dysfunction. They may, for instance, spend brief or extended periods living with relatives or friends, from one place to another, in transitional housing or a youth shelter, alone or with a partner in a room or apartment, or even on the streets.

Unemancipated youth are minors under 18 years of age who have not emancipated by court proceedings and are therefore under the authority of their parents or guardians.

*Emancipation is not available in every state in the United States. Where it is available, emancipation is a legal process by which minors can*

*attain legal adulthood before reaching the age at which they would normally be considered adults (this is called the "age of majority"). The rights granted to legally emancipated minors might include the ability to sign legally binding contracts, own property, and keep one's own earnings. However, each state has different laws governing emancipation and some states simply have no law or legal process concerning emancipation. (Juvenile Law Center, 2005)*

In the D.C. metropolitan area, both the states of Maryland and Virginia have specific legal statutes and guidelines for emancipation; however, like 22 states in the U.S., Washington, D.C. has no law or formal legal process for emancipation status (Juvenile Law Center, 2005).

The Unemancipated Youth Project was designed to learn more about minors who may have experienced living on their own as well as organizations that may encounter these youth. While there is no data available on the prevalence of runaway and/or homeless youth in the District, recent findings reveal that overall homelessness in the District has increased for the third consecutive year. For example, the number of families applying for emergency shelter at the District's central intake facility increased by 7 percent from 3,100 in 2003 to 3,326 in 2004. These new applicant families included an estimated 6,993 children under age 18 (D.C. Kids Count, 2005). It is a 46% upgrade from 2001. According to a recent assessment of non-profit resources for children and youth, of the more than 1,100 children and youth focused providers in the metropolitan region, 347 are located in Washington, D.C. There are about three providers for every 1,000 children in the District which is a relatively high rate compared to those in most neighboring counties in the metropolitan area (Twombly, 2004). However, few offer residential services to runaway, throwaway, and/or homeless youth.

Sasha Bruce Youthwork is one of the only organizations in Washington, D.C. that provides short-term shelter to youth ages 11 to 17 in need of a temporary residence and supportive services, including youth liv-

ing on the street in crisis (SBY, 2005a). Sasha Bruce Youthwork (SBY) is a key provider of comprehensive residential and non-residential services to youth, particularly at-risk youth, and their families. Between August 2004 and August 2005, SBY housed 203 youth under age 18, 43% were males and 57% were females. In addition, SBY operates a 24-hour crisis hotline for youth that receives approximately 87 calls per month (SBY, 2005b).

The need for youth shelter services, appears to exceed availability. The UYP may contribute significantly to efforts to develop services and shape policy targeted towards this potentially vulnerable population. UYP research findings aim to offer recommendations for effective approaches to the way in which the child welfare system responds to these youth and recommendations to enhance available supports to foster their successful transition into adulthood.

With oversight from MACCAN, implementation of the UYP primarily proceeded under the direction of DCCTF. The UYP was conducted in two phases commencing in March 2005 and ending in June 2005. Phase I included the participation of a small sample of youth organizations and addressed two main questions: 1) What type of services are available to youth via these organizations? And 2) How do these youth organizations view the needs and circumstances of youth living on their own? Phase II centered on youth participants and via focus group discussions also addressed two research questions: 1) What are the background characteristics and experiences of these youth? And 2) What are their perceptions regarding the needs and circumstances of youth living on their own?

This report includes the following information: Background literature on runaway, throwaway and homeless youth, Research Methodology, Phase I Research Findings, Phase II Research Findings, Recommendations of Youth and Youth Organizations, and Implications. This report also includes five appendices containing pertinent components of the UYP implementation.

# Background on Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Youth

## History of the Epidemic

Homeless youth have been evident in the United States since its early history, dating back to the Revolutionary era when a person was seen as capable of independent living in late adolescence, to the early 20th Century, when the first large instance of homelessness among young people in the U.S. was seen in the Great Depression. Yet, it was not until the 1960's that the issue of runaway youth was considered a significant societal problem, primarily because runaway instances began to permeate socio-economic boundaries. What was once a silent problem associated with poverty, became a dilemma in the middle and upper-class during this decade. As an act of social rebellion, adolescents ran away from their affluent families to escape the educational and professional advantages of their class. In response, Congress introduced the Runaway Youth Act of 1974, the first legislation to specifically address youth homelessness. The Act provided funds to create temporary homeless shelters for youth, with the purpose of reuniting them with their parents or guardians (Smollar, 2001).

In 1997, Congress revised the Runaway Youth Act to reflect the changes in the runaway youth population. Homeless shelter staff began reporting that a large portion of the youth they served were not traditional runaways, but what would later be termed "throwaways," youth whose parent or guardian had either asked them to leave or did not care that they left. More extensive services were required for this group of young people and their families, especially if reconciliation was to be attained (Smollar, 2001).

## Runaway and Throwaway Youth

The Department of Health and Human Services defines a runaway as a youth, age 21 or less who was away from home or alternative care placements at least overnight without the permission of parents or legal guardians (insert ref). A runaway episode may or may not be reported by the guardian. Runaways may take lodging on the streets, in a shelter, or in the home of a friend or relative.

While conducting research on missing children in 1990, the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NIS-MART-1) discovered that the term "runaway" was too broad to cover the complexity of circumstances involved in a young person's decision to flee his or her home. The study found that children often leave home because of intense family conflict, physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse. Moreover, many youth are asked to leave or leave with the consent of their parent or guardian. In these instances, the child's flight is involuntary and they are not permitted to return home. NISMART-1 coined the term "throwaway" youth to characterize young people who were forced out of their homes and/or were not allowed to return (Finkelhar, Hotaling, and Sedlak, 1990). However further investigation suggested that the distinction between runaway and throwaway episodes is less clearly defined than first believed. NISMART-2, a follow-up to the first study combined the experiences into a category called runaway/throwaway youth.

Runaways/Throwaways comprise 45% of the children reported missing to authorities each year. Based on NISMART -2 estimates, in 1999, a full 1,682,900 youth in the U.S. had experienced a runaway/throw-

away episode: 68% ages 15-17, 28% ages 12-14, and 4% ages 7-11. There were equal proportions of males (50%) and females (50%). About 57% of these youth ages 7-17 were White, non-Hispanic; 17% were African American, non-Hispanic; 15% were Hispanic and 11% were classified as another race/ethnicity. According to NISMART-2 findings, most runaway/throwaway youth, 77%, were gone for less than a week, 30% traveled a distance of 1-10 miles, 31% traveled 10-50 miles, and 23% traveled over 50 miles.

### ***Homeless Youth***

Homeless youth is a broader term defining young people who live unaccompanied in a variety of circumstances for extended periods of time. This may include long-term runaway or throwaway youth, street youth who live outdoors or in abandoned buildings or public places (i.e. subways, bus stations, all-night diners), youth whose families are homeless, youth who reside in youth or adult shelters, youth who reside in a vehicle, unaccompanied minors from abroad, youth who have lived with someone they do not know because they have no other option, and young people who are permanently abandoned because their parents are incarcerated, addicted to drugs or alcohol, mentally ill or physically handicapped.(Slavin., 2001)

## **Causes of Youth Homelessness**

There are various complex reasons a youth of today may have a runaway episode or become homeless. It is clear that youth who runaway do so in response to difficult conditions in their home environment, including family conflict and abuse, economic problems, and residential instability (NCH, 1999).

### ***Family Conflict and Abuse***

Two studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that 46% of runaway youth had been physically abused, 17% had suffered sexual abuse, and 38% were emotionally

abused. A survey conducted by the National Association of Social Workers also determined that 66% of runaway and homeless youth had an alcoholic parent, while 25% had a parent who abused drugs (Westat, 1997). Parental substance abuse is strongly linked to family dysfunction where neglect, abandonment, and physical and psychological abuse are present (ACF, 1995).

Throwaway adolescents leave home when everyday family conflict becomes severe. Difficulties with a stepparent, pregnancy, sexual activity, and tensions in blended family situations are among reasons parents and children come into considerable conflict. Family discord may reach a crisis point, in which a young person is either given an ultimatum to leave, or decides to leave with the full knowledge and consent of the parent or guardian. (Slavin, 2001). A notable percentage of throwaway youth are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning (LGBTQ), which often becomes a source of friction in a household. Studies conducted in Houston, Los Angeles, and New York City estimate that between 16 and 38 percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, 2001).

### ***Teen Pregnancy***

Pregnant and parenting teen girls may be forced to leave home because a parent disapproves of the adolescent's pregnancy or because the parent does not have the space or funds to support the additional child. In a study conducted in Chicago, IL, 51% of homeless adolescent females surveyed reported being pregnant, while 28% already had at least one child (Levin, Bax, McKean, and Schoggen, 2005).

### ***Family Homelessness***

A growing subgroup of the homeless youth population is from families who become homeless due to a financial crisis. Families with children make up about 40% of the overall homeless population. Adolescents may be separated from their homeless families by shelter, transitional housing, or child welfare policies, or they may leave with the notion that the family would do bet-

ter without having to take care of them (Shinn and Weitzman, 1996). The number of young people who are homeless due to their families' homelessness may continue to increase considering such a high percentage of today's runaway and homeless youth have children of their own. Children in homeless families are much less likely to escape poverty as adults due to lack of an education (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2001).

### ***Youth in Foster Care***

Another group at high-risk for becoming homeless are youth who are wards of the state. A high percentage of children in foster care have runaway episodes while in their foster care placements: 56% of foster children reported having run away from their placements at least once and as many as 5 times (Barth, 1990). In a federal study of former foster care wards, 25% had experienced homelessness after being emancipated from the child welfare system, a process that occurs when a ward is between the ages of 18 and 21 (Cook, 1991). There is no evidence to say that foster care in itself causes homelessness, however, many of the factors that cause a youth to be placed in foster care are the same factors that lead to the runaway/throwaway/homeless experience (i.e., parental substance abuse, neglect, physical or sexual abuse, chronic depression). The current foster care system does not provide the resources necessary to ensure that wards will have the life skills, financial support, and job training necessary to transition into adulthood successfully (CCH, 2001).

## **Consequences of Youth Homelessness**

### ***Episodic Runaway/Throwaway Experiences***

The consequences of homelessness in youth increase in severity the longer the young person is without a stable home. Runaways/throwaways who are gone for less than a week usually do so as a cry for help in response to strenuous situations in their home environment. Most youth in this category

remain close to the home, and reside in the home of a friend or relative during their episode. In a substantial number of cases, the caretaker becomes aware of the child's whereabouts in a timely manner (21%) (NISMART, 2002). There is a good chance, in these instances, that an intervention may be made and with the help of counseling services there can be a successful reconciliation between parent and child. If not, the youth is in danger of becoming a chronic runaway who eventually finds himself or herself permanently homeless (NISMART, 2002).

However, there is a subgroup of youth who have a short-term runaway or throwaway episode who end up in dangerous circumstances during their time away from home. One source of conflict leading to an adolescent's flight is his or her substance abuse, either in rebellion to the parent's instruction, or in response to the substance abuse they see modeled in the parent's behavior. A startling 19% of runaways reported being dependent on substances, 18% were in the company of someone abusing drugs while away, and 17% reported using hard drugs during their runaway episode. Twelve percent of youth reported having runaway to a place where criminal activity was known to occur, and 11% admitted to having participated in criminal activity (NISMART, 2002). It is clear that this subgroup of runaway/throwaway youth need extensive social service and treatment for psychological and emotional trauma and substance abuse upon being returned to their families, especially if there is a chance that abuse and drug use may also be present in the home (NISMART, 2002).

## **Consequences of Chronic Homelessness**

### ***Criminal Activity***

On their own, young people lack the finances to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and medical care. A homeless youth may first turn to panhandling for change as a way to meet these needs, yet they will eventually engage in illegal practices such as prostitution, drug sales, and pornography for income

(Slavin,2001). In a study on homeless youth in Chicago IL, 7% reported prostitution as their current employment, and of those making over \$13.33 an hour, 80% were engaged in illegal forms of employment. Forty-six percent of the youth surveyed reported having been arrested. (Levin, Bax, McKean, and Schoggen, 2005). Young people who are homeless also lack the necessary emotional support and guidance in dealing with past physical or sexual abuse, and current arduous conditions in street life. A large percentage turn to drug and alcohol use.

### ***Survival Sex***

Homeless teens with no means of income commonly engage in “survival sex”, exchanging sexual acts for money, food, or other basic needs. In the Chicago study formerly cited, 30.9% of females and 12.7% of males reported having ever sold or traded sex (Levin, Bax, McKean, and Schoggen, 2005). Homeless youth who are addicted to drugs are more likely to have survival sex to feed their need for intravenous drugs, which puts them at a higher risk for HIV, and other sexually transmitted disease, sexual exploitation and unwanted pregnancy. Approximately 10% of youth in shelters and 14% of youth living on the streets reported ever having an STD. A study of HIV-prevalence in four cities found a median HIV-positive rate of 2.3% for homeless young people under age 25 (Robertson, 1996). However, rates may be higher, as only 52% of shelter youth, and 69 % of street youth in one study reported having ever been tested for HIV.

### ***Poor Mental and Emotional Health***

In addition, homeless youth have high rates of chronic depression, mental illness, and severe behavioral problems. One study found that rates of conduct disorder, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and clinical depression were three times higher in runaway youth than in youth who have not runaway (Robertson, 1989). In a study of adolescents ages 12-17 and

residing in shelters, the rate of disruptive conduct disorders was about 39%, using the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (McCaskill, 1998). Severe depression and trauma often leads to suicide among this segment of youth. In a sample of 5,015 youth who had at least one runaway/throwaway episode , 4% had attempted suicide prior to running away (NIS-MART, 2002). In another study of homeless adolescents, 26% of shelter youth, and 32% of street youth reported having ever attempted suicide. Suicide attempts were more likely among older youth (18-21) and females.

### ***Unstable Education***

Youth who are homeless and on their own may not attend school because they are consumed with trying to meet their basic needs. Furthermore, they are unable to meet guardianship and immunization requirements, may be in poor health, and may lack school supplies. (NCH, 2001) In a study in four Midwestern cities, 42% of boys and 32% of girls had dropped out of school after becoming homeless (Whitbeck and Hoyt, 1999). Studies also show that many homeless youth have had difficult school histories that may lead them to give up on school altogether once becoming homeless: 25-35% report having been held back a year (Clark & Robertson, 1996; Robertson, 1989; Upshur, 1986, Young Godfrey, Matthew and Adams, 1983), and one-fourth were placed in remedial classes (Clark and Robertson, 1996). In a report on homeless youth in Detroit, Michigan, 85% of the sample group had been suspended from school, and 26% had been expelled (Toro, 1998). By age 18, only 54.7% of youth had completed high school in a sample group of homeless youth in Chicago (Levin, Bax, McKean, and Schoggen, 2005). Without an adequate education, homeless young adults who wish to better their lives may find it very difficult to secure a good job in the future and escape their life of poverty.

## **Types of Support Available to Homeless Youth**

Through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act of 1997 (reauthorized in 2003), Congress funds street outreach, youth shelters, and transitional living programs. Through the Sexual Abuse Prevention (Street Outreach Program) street workers are trained to give homeless youth living on the streets information that will link them to shelter programs, counseling services, and medical facilities. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Basic Shelter Grant Program provides funding for non-profit agencies to offer shelter services to runaway and homeless youth under age 18. Shelters are short term living quarters where a homeless youth can meet their basic needs such as food, clothing and medical assistance. Many shelters offer counseling to reunite runaways, throwaways, and chronically homeless youth with their families, or link them to independent living programs when reunification is not possible (CWLA, 2003; Slavin, 2001). There are also more comprehensive non-profit runaway and homeless youth agencies where a young person can get more extensive services such as substance abuse counseling, job search and training, child care for homeless youth with children, and education assistance (Slavin, 2001). Funding for the Transitional Living Program (TLP) provides resources for young adults between the ages of 16 and 21 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The goal is to promote self sufficiency and reduce the likelihood of long-term dependence on social services. The TLP offers transitional housing, and a constructive plan for employment, education, life skills and money management training, and any treatment options that may be applicable to his or her needs (CWLA, 2003; Slavin 2001).

In addition to these options, there are many private non-profit groups that offer services for homeless youth with specific needs, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning youth (LGBTQ), international refugees, and the mentally or physically handicapped (Robertson & Toro, 1998).

## **Methodology**

DCCTF conducted the Unemancipated Youth Project in two phases, beginning in March 2005 and ending in June 2005. During Phase I, we mailed a letter (see Appendix A). to the executive directors of selected youth organizations in Washington, D.C requesting their completion of an enclosed survey aimed at learning how they characterize their organization, the population of youth they serve, and the needs and circumstances of teens living away from home in general. The letter also requested permission to conduct a focus group with youth from the organization during the second phase of data collection. Phase II involved six focus groups with youth from a subgroup of the organizations that participated in Phase I of the project. Phase II was designed to collect descriptive information about the background and experiences of youth participants via a pre-focus group survey and then to capture their perspectives about teens living on their own by way of the focus group discussion.

## **Data Collection**

DCCTF began the selection process by reviewing various lists and descriptions of youth organizations in Washington, D.C. to identify a small diverse sample of both residential and nonresidential youth programs that may encounter youth living on their own. The main selection criteria were: 1) a private sector organization 2) serving youth inclusive of ages 13-17. The aim was to reflect an array of existing programs and resources available to youth across the city as well as the diversity of youth involved. To gather information from each youth organization, DCCTF created a survey (see Appendix B) that includes questions about the characteristics of the organization and their perspectives on unemancipated youth living away from home. DCCTF initially targeted 14 youth service organizations in Washington, D.C. with a goal of obtaining at least 10 to 12 completed surveys. In March 2005, letters were mailed to the executive director of each youth organization explaining the nature and purpose of the study and requesting their

participation. In the letter, DCCTF asked that the enclosed survey be completed by the executive director or a designated staff person and mailed or faxed back to DCCTF by the date indicated. The letter further explained that the UYP project director would follow-up with a phone call to provide more information about conducting a youth focus group and to schedule a convenient day and time. DCCTF also emphasized that the anonymity of focus group participants and confidentiality of individual youth organizations would be maintained throughout data collection and report development.

### ***Participating Youth Organizations***

DCCTF followed up with phone calls to each organization; when necessary numerous attempts were made to contact a representative. In most cases, the executive directors or their designated staff members were responsive and very cooperative. In fact, four organizations completed and returned the survey prior to follow-up. Two of the 14 youth organizations

declined participation explaining either that their organization does not serve youth ages 13-17 or that they do not encounter youth living away from home. Of the 12 remaining organizations, one was unresponsive to requests for participation and was later determined ineligible based on selection criteria. Another promised to complete and return the survey but failed to do so; however, the organization participated in a youth focus group during Phase II of the UYP.

In all, ten of 11 youth organizations completed and returned the survey to DCCTF and the one remaining organization participated in the focus group phase of the study only. Table 1 lists the 11 youth organizations that participated in Phase I and/or Phase II of the Unemancipated Youth Project. Table 1 indicates the name and address of each organization as well as whether the organization offers housing or residential programs to youth and/or nonresidential programs to youth who reside elsewhere.

**Table 1 – Youth Organizations Participating in the Unemancipated Youth Project**

YOUTH ORGANIZATION	ADDRESS	PROGRAMS
Asian American Leadership, Empowerment, And Development for Youth and Family (LEAD)	1323 Girard Street, NW Washington, DC 20009	Nonresidential
Associates for Renewal in Education	45 P Street, NW Washington, D.C. 20001	Nonresidential and Residential
Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington (Eastern Branch)	Eastern Branch 261 17th Street, SE Washington, D.C. 20003	Nonresidential
Covenant House Washington	2001 Mississippi Ave., SE Washington, D.C. 20020	Nonresidential and Residential (for ages 18-22 only)
For the Love of Children (FLOC)	1816 12th Street NW Washington, D.C. 20009	Nonresidential
Healthy Babies Project	801 17th Street, NE Washington, DC 20002	Nonresidential
Latin American Youth Center (LAYC)	1419 Columbia Road, NW Washington, DC 20009	Nonresidential and Residential
Metro Teen AIDS	651 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Basement Suite Washington, DC 20003	Nonresidential
Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Inc. (SBY)	741 8th Street, SE Washington, D.C. 20003	Nonresidential and Residential
Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL)	410 7th Street, SE Washington, D.C. 20003	Nonresidential and Residential
Trinity Youth Services (TYS)	2122 2nd Street, NW Washington, DC 20001	Nonresidential and Residential

## Youth Focus Groups

Phase II included six focus groups conducted with youth from five organizations during May and June 2005. Table 2 shows the five youth organizations that participated in Phase II of the project.

**Table 2 - Youth Organizations Participating in the Focus Group Phase of the UYP**

Youth Organization	Youth Participants
Covenant House Washington	Nonresidential Youth
Metro Teen AIDS	Nonresidential Youth
Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Inc. (SBY) *	Residential Youth
Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL)	Nonresidential Youth
Trinity Youth Services (TYS)	Residential Youth
* We conducted two focus groups with youth residents of Sasha Bruce during Phase II.	

We requested the participation of 8 to 10 youth for each group. DCCTF developed questions for youth participants pertaining to their background and experiences in the form of a pre-focus group survey (see Appendix C) and a focus group protocol (see Appendix D). We encouraged service providers to recruit at least 8 to 10 youth to ensure the participation of at least 6 to 8. Across the six focus groups the number of participants ranged from four in a group home where only five youth resided to 11 in a nonresidential program that offered an after school program for teens. The UYP project director moderated each focus group and a staff member of DCCTF served as the recorder. As promised, focus group participants were provided refreshments and given an incentive gift at the session's end. Prior to disseminating the pre-focus group youth survey, the moderator introduced the UYP and explained the format and goals of the focus group. She also read aloud a youth assent form stressing that participation is voluntary and confidential. The youth were asked to raise their hand if they agreed to the terms of the assent form and intended to participate in the study. The moderator then distributed the pre-focus group survey and asked

participants to complete the form anonymously and return it in an envelope provided. When all forms were returned, the moderator reviewed the rules and format of the focus group and reminded participants that the discussion would be audiotaped for accuracy and clarity. Across the six focus groups, a total of 40 youth participated.

### **Limitations of the UYP**

The UYP is an exploratory study involving a small sample of 11 youth organizations and 40 youth participants from five of the agencies. Findings from this study are not generalizable to the population of 347 or more youth organizations in D.C. or the population of youth involved in these organizations. In fact, the youth selected by the organization for involvement in the UYP constitute a convenience sample and are therefore not representative of the agency's population of youth participants. In addition, some survey items asked respondents to provide an average or approximate number rather than an exact count based on their organization's records. This caveat is an important consideration in interpreting youth organization findings.

# RESULTS PHASE I: Survey of Participating Youth Organizations

## Characteristics of Participating Youth Organizations

This section summarizes findings from the survey distributed to the UYP’s small sample of youth organizations in Washington, D.C. As indicated earlier, ten of the 11 youth organizations participating in the UYP completed the survey. Two of the ten survey respondents were the executive director of the organization, one was the organization’s vice president, and the remaining seven held directorship or managerial positions overseeing various aspects of service provision.

The first section of the questionnaire asked respondents to identify the geographic area(s) their organization primarily serves. Table 3 shows the number of organizations represented in each city ward or suburban segment. The majority of these programs, seven of ten, serve wards 6, 7, and/or 8. Similarly, six programs serve wards 1 and/or 5. In contrast, only two organizations primarily serve ward 3.

**Table 3 – Number of participating youth organizations serving each D.C. ward or suburb (N=10)\***

<b>D.C. Ward or Suburb</b>	<b>Number of Youth Organizations *</b>
Ward 1	6
Ward 2	3
Ward 3	2
Ward 4	5
Ward 5	6
Ward 6	7
Ward 7	7
Ward 8	7
Maryland Suburbs	4
Virginia Suburbs	3

*\*The sum exceeds ten due to multiple responses.*

Additional survey items pertaining to characteristics of the organization included primary language(s) of service provision, identification as a faith-based entity, and provision of residential services, nonresidential services or both. Two organizations indicated both English and Spanish as their primary languages of service provision and one indicated Vietnamese. The other seven are English only organizations. Only one respondent reported that their youth organization is faith-based. Four of the 10 organizations provide residential as well as nonresidential services that are inclusive of youth in the focal age range of 13 to 17 and the other six provide nonresidential services only.

We compiled a list of 25 activities and services and asked respondents to indicate which their organization provides. The number of services identified ranged from three to 23 across organizations with an average of 12 activities and services. Table 4 displays the distribution across participating organizations. Most commonly, they offer a mentoring program to youth; nine of ten respondents identified this type of service. Similarly eight youth organizations provide recreational activities, social activities, and/or case management. The vast majority of respondents, seven of ten, indicated that one of their services is to refer youth to resources available elsewhere. Activities common to six organizations include outreach, meals, and/or HIV/STD prevention. At the opposite end of the distribution are the less common activities and services. For example, only one of these ten organizations offers pastoral/spiritual counseling, and similarly only one offers English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) support.

**Table 4 - Number of participating youth organizations  
providing each service or activity  
(N=10)\***

<b>Available Services and Activities</b>	<b>Number of Youth Organizations</b>
Mentoring	9
Recreational Activities	8
Social Activities	8
Case Management	8
Referral to Resources	7
Meals	6
HIV/STD Prevention	6
Outreach	6
Clothes	5
Drop In Center	5
Individual Counseling	5
Tutoring	5
Vocational/Job Readiness	5
Shelter	4
Group Counseling	4
HIV Counseling	4
Education Assistance	4
HIV Testing	3
Family Planning/Contraception	3
Advocacy	3
Substance Abuse Programs	2
Family Violence Programs	2
Respite Care	2
Literacy	2
Pastoral/Spiritual Counseling	1
E.S.L. Program	1
Responses from "Other" Category are listed below:	
After School and Summer Programs	1
Foster Care	1
Parenting Education	1
D.C. Public Schools ("Making Proud Choices" Curriculum)	1
* The sum exceeds ten due to multiple responses.	

**Residential Programs of Participating Youth Organizations**

As previously stated, four of the ten participating youth organizations provide housing or residential programs to youth. DCCTF asked respondents to describe their residential programs by completing a segment of survey items. Findings show that one of the four residential programs provides housing for males only while the other three provide housing for both males and females. Regarding the age range of youth served across these four residential programs, the average minimum age is 13 and the average maximum age is 20. Their capacity to house youth ranges from a low of six to a high of 45. When asked how many different youth under age 18 they housed last program year, responses ranged from 8 to 292 with an average of 126 youth across the four organizations. On average, these programs serve 29 youth each month with a range of eight to 52.

To provide more insight into the origin of youth entering these residential programs, we asked respondents to approximate the proportion of youth under age 18 entering their residential program directly from living in 11 specific circumstances. One of the four respondents indicated that more than 75% of youth enter their program from living at home with parents or guardians, while 25-49% were with relatives and 25-49% were on the street. Another reported that 50-75% were living at home with parents or guardians, and 5-24% were in foster care or with relatives. According to a third residential service provider, 25-49% of youth enter their program from at home with parents or guardians, 25-49% enter from a group home, and another 25-49% enter from a juvenile detention center. Finally, the fourth residential service provider reported that 50-75% of youth entering their facilities were living on the streets, and 25-49% were in a shelter.

**Table 5 - Number of residential youth programs reporting the proportion of youth entering from each living arrangement (N = 4)**

<b>Living Arrangement</b>	<b>More than 75%</b>	<b>50-75%</b>	<b>25-49%</b>	<b>5-24%</b>	<b>Less than 5%</b>
At home w/ parents/guardians	1	1	1	—	1
With relative(s)	—	—	1	2	1
With friend(s)	—	—	—	1	3
With significant other	—	—	—	—	4
In own place	—	—	—	—	3
In a shelter	—	—	1	—	3
In a group home	—	—	1	—	3
In foster care	—	—	—	2	2
In a detention center or jail	—	—	1	—	3
In an institution	—	—	—	—	4
On streets	—	1	1	—	2

**Nonresidential Programs of Participating Youth Organizations**

While only four of the ten organizations offer residential provision to youth, all ten offer services to youth who live elsewhere, referred to here as nonresidential services. These ten organizations serve both males and females inclusively in their nonresidential programs. The age range of youth participants spans from six to 25 with an average minimum age of 10 and an average maximum age of 21 across organizations. The number served on average each month ranged from four to a high of 800 youth in an organization that has a component program operating in the District of Columbia public schools. Overall, an average of 180 youth participates in the nonresidential programs across these 10 organizations each month.

Similar to the residential program section of the survey, we included an item that asked respondents of nonresidential programs the approximate proportion of participants that are living in each of the listed circumstances. One respondent indicated that he was unable to provide the requested information on nonresidential program participants. According to respondents in six of nine programs, the vast majority of their youth participants, more than 75%, are living at home with their parents or guardians. One service provider reported that more than 75% of the participants in their small nonresidential program are living in foster care. Another respondent indicated that 50-75% are with their parents or guardians and 25-49% live with other relatives. In the case of another nonresidential program, living circumstances are more diverse; 25-49% of youth live with their parents or guardians, another 25-49% are with other relatives, and about 5-24% are in foster care.

**Table 6 – Number of nonresidential youth programs reporting the proportion of youth currently in each living arrangement (N=10)**

<b>Living Arrangement</b>	<b>More than 75%</b>	<b>50-75%</b>	<b>25-49%</b>	<b>5-24%</b>	<b>Less than 5%</b>	<b>don't know</b>
At home w/ parents/guardians	6	1	1	—	—	1
With relative(s)	—	—	4	—	4	1
With friend(s)	—	—	—	—	7	1
With significant other	—	—	—	—	6	2
In own place	—	—	—	—	8	1
In a shelter	—	—	—	—	7	2
In a group home	—	—	—	1	7	1
In foster care	1	—	—	2	6	1
On streets	—	—	—	1	4	2

## Youth agency perceptions regarding youth living on their own

### *How youth on their own support themselves*

The youth organization survey included two open-ended questions regarding the perceived needs and circumstances of youth living on their own based on encounters with these youth. First, DCCTF asked respondents to describe how to their knowledge youth on their own support themselves. Of the nine respondents to the question, seven listed more than one source of support. Nearly all respondents reported that to their knowledge youth help to support themselves through **part-time or low wage employment**. Five of nine respondents pointed out that youth often rely on **assistance from family and friends** in combination with employment or illegal activities.

*To my knowledge they take on jobs and get assistance from extended family members and friends.*

*Most youth support themselves through part-time-jobs supplementing this with assistance from family and friends.*

*Reliance on friends, illegal activity and or jobs.*

Five respondents also referred to **illegal activities** as primary or supplemental sources of income for youth living on their own. They most commonly named prostitution and/or illegal drug sales.

*By working sometimes including commercial sex work or survival sex. They sometimes combine resources with other peers to find housing or will rely on friends for places to stay and food.*

*Some youth also engage in illegal activities to obtain funds with the most common being drug sales and prostitution.*

Finally, two of nine respondents noted that some youth receive **public assistance** to financially support themselves. According to one respondent, youth sometimes use their prior home address to qualify for TANF

when they are away on their own. Another asserted that state funds are a primary source of support.

### *How they describe the primary needs of youth living on their own*

When asked to describe the primary needs of youth living on their own, nearly all agency respondents listed the **basic necessities** of food, clothing, safe, affordable housing, access to medical care **and/or the financial resources** needed to secure these necessities. Five respondents indicated that **job skills, education or vocational training** are also primary needs of youth on their own.

*Safe inexpensive housing options; the emergency housing available to youth is not safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender youth, job training that will assist them in finding employment that can sustain them financially.*

*Money would probably be first on the list of primary needs but also job training so that youth will be able to learn the correct way to obtain money.*

*Housing (permanent residential), job readiness, and preparedness*

Similarly two respondents specifically referred to the importance of providing youth with fundamental **independent living skills** along with other supports. As one respondent indicated “*They need life skills knowledge to help them deal with living on their own. They need basics- food clothing, shelter, money, clothes; living skills.*”

In addition, five respondents pointed out that youth on their own are in need of **adult guidance and emotional support**. One explained that “*Many youth also require less tangible things such as adult supervision, a structured life and parental guidance and contact.*” Two service providers noted that mentoring by positive adults is essential. Other mentions included supportive services, therapy, spiritual guidance and “*counseling to explore whether they can reunite with family or kin*”.

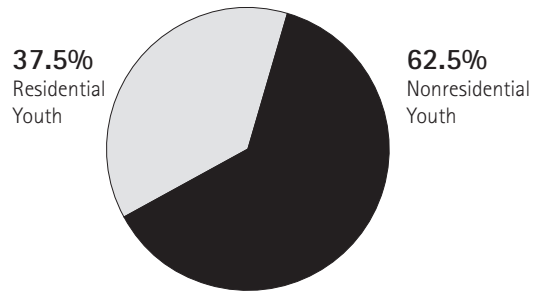
# RESULTS PHASE II: Youth Focus Groups

## Youth Pre-Focus Group Survey Findings

### Demographics

A total of 40 youth participated in the six UYP focus groups across organizations. As Figure 1 shows, fifteen (37.5 %) focus group participants resided in the youth organization’s group home or youth shelter program and 25(62.5%) lived elsewhere and participated in the organization’s nonresidential youth program(s). They are referred to here as residential youth participants and nonresidential youth participants respectively.

**Figure 1 – Percentage of Residential and Nonresidential Youth Participants**



**Table 7 - Demographic Characteristics of Youth Focus Group Participants (N=40)**

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Grade completed *</b>	
Male	24 (60%)	7th	1 (2.6%)
Female	16 (40%)	8th	6 (15.4%)
		9th	13 (33.3%)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		10th	15 (38.5%)
African American	39 (97.5%)	11th	2 (5.1%)
Latino/Dominican	1 (2.5%)	12th	2 (5.1%)
<b>Age in years*</b>		<b>Work Status</b>	
13	2 (5.1%)	Not working	32 (80%)
14	6 (15.4%)	Part-time	7 (17.5%)
15	12 (30.8%)	Full-time	1 (2.5%)
16	14 (35.9%)		
17	4 (10.3%)	<b>Own Children</b>	
18	1 (2.6%)	No	38 (95%)
Mean Age = 15.4		Yes	2 (5%)
		<b>Sexual Orientation *</b>	
		Straight	31 (77.5%)
		Gay	4 (10%)
		Lesbian	1 (2.5%)
		Bisexual	3 (7.5%)

\* N=39 for these variables.

Table 7 presents demographic information on the 40 youth participants. As shown, 24 (60%) were males and 16 (40%) were females. They ranged in age from 13 to 18 (one participant) with an average age of 15.4 years. Thirty-nine participants were African American and one was of mixed ethnicity including Latino and Dominican. Their level of education ranged from 7th grade to 12th ; most were completing the 9th or 10th grade. Eight youth or 20 percent of participants were working at least part-time at the time of their focus group. According to survey responses, only two youth (5%) have a child of their own. Regarding sexual orientation, 31 (77.5%) of youth described themselves as straight, four (10%) indicated that they are gay, three (7.5%) are bisexual and one (2.5%) is lesbian.

**Experiences living in various facilities**

The pre-focus group youth survey included a series of items aimed at ascertaining additional information about the background and experiences of youth participants. For example, we asked the 40 youth whether during their lifetime, they have ever been placed in or spent any time in foster homes, group homes, a psychiatric hospital, juvenile detention, or jail. Table 8 indicates that 13 (32.5%) have spent time in a group home, seven (17.5%) have been in a juvenile detention facility and six (15%) have been in jail. Five participants (12.5%) reported time in a psychiatric or mental hospital and four (10%) have spent at least some time in a foster home.

**Table 8 - Number of Youth Reporting Experience Living in Five Types of Facilities (N=40)**

Type of Facility	Number of Youth
Group Homes	13 (32.5%)
Juvenile Detention	7 (17.5%)
Jail	6 (15%)
Psychiatric or Mental Hospital	5 (12.5%)
Foster Home	4 (10%)

As a follow-up item, we asked participants whether they have ever left any of these places and stayed away overnight without permission. According to their

responses, only two have ever done so. One was a residential youth who indicated that he had been in four of the five types of facilities listed with the exception of jail, and the other was a nonresidential youth who reported that he had been in juvenile detention and left or stayed away overnight without permission.

**Experiences living away from home**

As an indicator of possible problems in the home, we included the following question: “Has Child Protective Services ever visited the home of your parent(s) or guardian(s) for any reason?” Fifteen youth, more than a third (37.5%) of participants, reported that Child Protective Services (CPS) has visited their home at least once. Among residential participants, seven of 15 (46.7%) indicated that CPS has visited the home of their parent(s) or guardian(s). Among nonresidential participants, the proportion was 32% or eight of 25 youth.

We discovered that more than half of youth participants have experienced living away from home for a brief or extended period of time. Twenty-five participants (60%) acknowledged that they have spent time living away from home without permission or explicit parental agreement. Participants in this category included 13 residential youth who were currently living away from home as well as 12 or 48% of the 25 non-residential youth.

We asked youth where they usually spent the night when they were living away from home. Of the 23 respondents to the question, 12 (53.2%) were residential youth and 11 (47.8%) were nonresidential youth. Eight youth (34.9%) selected multiple responses from the list provided. Overall, respondents indicated relatives (47.8%) and friends (39.1%) most frequently. Table 9 shows that five youth (21.7 %) reported that they stayed with a partner, four residential youth (17.4%) reported that they usually stayed in a shelter and two residential youth (8.7%) referred to a group home. Additional responses among individual youth were on the streets, juvenile detention (Oak Hill) and another state. As Table 9 further reveals, responses of residential youth were more dispersed across categories than those of nonresidential youth.

**Table 9 - Reported Living Arrangements of Youth Participants while Living Away from Home (N=23)\***

<b>Living Arrangements Away From Home</b>	<b>Residential Youth</b>	<b>Nonresidential Youth</b>	<b>Total Youth</b>
With Relatives	4	7	11 (47.8%)
With Friends	3	6	9 (39.1%)
With Partner	4	1	5 (21.7%)
A Shelter	4	—	4 (17.4%)
A Group Home **	2	—	2 (8.7%)
On Streets	1	—	1 (4.3%)
Juvenile Detention **	1	—	1 (4.3%)
Another State **	—	1	1 (4.3%)

\* The sum exceeds 23 due to multiple responses

\*\* These responses were written in the “other” category by respondents.

Next, we asked youth participants whether they experienced any problems or difficulties when they spent nights living away from home. Youth participants were given a list of eight potential problems from which to select as well as an option to write in additional problems or to indicate that they had “no problems”. Table 10 shows that among 13 residential respondents to the item, six (42.9%) indicated they had no problems, and among 12 nonresidential respondents eight (57.1%) indicated they had no problems when they spent nights living away from

home. In contrast, three residential respondents and one nonresidential respondent reported more than one problem. Table 10 reveals that difficulties with “money for things you needed”, “problems with police”, and “finding transportation” were each cited by five (21.7 %) respondents. Problems with “getting food”, “getting clothes” and “finding a place to clean up” were each reported by three respondents (13 %). Two respondents (8.7 %) reported having a problem “finding a place to sleep” and one (4.3%) reported difficulty “getting medical care”.

**Table10– Reported Problems of Youth Participants while Living Away from Home (N=23)**

<b>Problems While Living Away from Home</b>	<b>Residential Youth</b>	<b>Nonresidential Youth</b>	<b>Total Youth</b>
No Problems	6	8	14 (60.9%)
Money for things needed	4	1	5 (21.7%)
Finding transportation to school, work, or some other place	3	2	5 (21.7%)
Problems with police	4	1	5 (21.7%)
Getting Food	2	1	3 (13%)
Getting Clothes	2	1	3 (13%)
Finding a place to clean up	3	—	3 (13%)
Finding a place to sleep	1	1	2 (8.7%)
Getting medical care	1	—	1 (4.3%)

\*The sum exceeds 23 due to multiple responses.

Finally, to verify their current living arrangements, we asked youth where they live now. All 25 nonresidential participants indicated that they currently live with their parent(s) or guardian(s); one further explained that he lives with foster parents. As expected, among the 15 residential participants, 11 reported residence in a youth shelter and the remaining four currently reside in a group home.

### **Youth Focus Group Perspectives**

The six focus groups included three groups of residential youth and three groups of nonresidential youth. Overall, residential focus group participants were seemingly more candid and thoughtful in their comments throughout the discussion than were their nonresidential counterparts. They were also more cooperative and forthcoming from the onset, perhaps because most residential participants considered the topic relevant to their own circumstances. In general, nonresidential participants became engaged in their respective focus group discussion after the facilitator emphasized the significance of the research endeavor

and importance of their input. However, once underway, a great deal of consensus in responses emerged both within and across groups. Findings from the youth focus group are presented here by discussion topics and prevailing themes.

### **Why teens leave voluntarily or are asked to leave home**

#### ***Abuse and neglect***

Issues of **abuse and neglect** surfaced early on in discussions regarding the reasons teens leave home. According to several participants, teens flee abusive home environments or leave home because they feel they are “neglected”, “unwanted”, “unloved”, uncomfortable in the home, or not treated right.”

*“You’re not being treated right -period” “Abuse” “Yes. Neglect”*

In one focus group, a youth shared a personal reason for leaving home. The comments typified perceptions of neglect and in this case even rejection.

*“I left home because my mother was putting her boyfriend before me. It’s like she didn’t really care too much about me when it came to him. He was right and I was wrong all the time in any situation. So, I just couldn’t deal with that anymore”*

## **Disregard for parental authority**

Across focus groups, youth participants agreed that in many instances teens leave home to **avoid adherence to parental rules and regulations**. Youth desire freedom from curfews and strict monitoring of their behavior and activities.

*“If your parent try to keep you locked up in the house and don’t let you go outside talking ‘bout ‘This a bad neighborhood wait til we move’ And they ain’t gonna move for like two years talkin’ ‘bout wait til we move.”*

Similarly, participants across focus groups agreed that in many instances teens are asked to leave home because they are **disobedient and refuse to follow rules**. Parents may feel their teen is “out of control” and disrespectful to their authority. Participants cited examples of problem behaviors such as skipping school, breaking curfew, using drugs and bringing drugs into the home. Most notably, participants cited pregnancy as one of the main reasons a teen girl may be asked to leave home.

*“Because they’re pregnant or they don’t want to follow their parents’ rules.”*

*“If you’re going out smoking weed everyday and coming home high, you’re mother’s not going to want you there”“Disorderly conduct”*

## **Family problems**

Family problems in general may prompt some teens to leave. Youth participants noted that teens “may not like what’s going on in their home” or they may feel in general that “things aren’t going right”. As several youth noted, these family problems could stem from, for instance, **parental drug use or poor financial circumstances**.

*“Cause you don’t want to see your mother on crack or heroin”*

*“If your mother or someone’s an alcoholic, that’ll make you want to leave the house too.”*

In the same vein, youth in several focus groups pointed out that teens may be asked to leave or allowed to move out because of **parental drug abuse, lack of financial resources to provide for the family, and poor parenting skills**. They suggested that parents may ask teens to leave because they are no longer able to care for them or no longer desire to do so. One teen in a residential focus group provided a personal example of such a scenario.

*“Sometimes the parent has a boyfriend or girlfriend or whatever and they just want to be with them. They’re not really thinking about their children especially when they get to the teenage point. It’s like they feel like they can go on their own.”*

## **Stressful environment**

In several focus group discussions, participants also pointed out that teens sometimes feel **pressure, stress or even depression** related to their home circumstances and/or environment. While the emphasis on stress and depression was usually described in the context of domestic issues the overall environment was considered a source of unease as well. For some teens, the neighborhood is unsafe or poses a

risk to their well being, which compels them to leave home.

*“They probably don’t feel safe in the household  
.... bad neighborhood”*

*“It could be a dude or somebody next door pick-  
ing on you and he says ‘If you come around the  
next day you gonna get your body beat”*

## **Conflict regarding sexual orientation**

Less common but notable reasons mentioned during some focus groups related to sexual orientation. In one residential focus group, a youth referred to leaving home because of confusion and discord surrounding his **parent’s homosexual lifestyle**. In another group discussion, participants alluded to teens feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome in the home because they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Three of six focus group discussions revealed that **parents sometimes reject their children because of their lifestyle**. For example, participants pointed out that some parents are ashamed of or in conflict with their gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender teen.

*“Sometimes when the children stay true to themselves and let the parents know how they feel and who they are - The parents can’t handle it to the fact of they have to tell them to leave....So basically sexuality.”*

*“Some people try to like abandon them or just start mistreating them because of the sexuality they choose to live by - the lifestyle they choose to live by.”*

## **Who teens turn to for help when they are considering leaving home**

### **Teens usually first turn to their friends....**

When asked where teens go to get help when they are thinking about or considering leaving home, a salient consensus point emerged across focus groups. Youth participants often chimed in unison **“friends”**. They agreed that teens are most likely to first confide in and seek help from their **friends**. Participants enthusiastically provided follow-up examples including friends and peers, best friends, boyfriends, and girlfriends.

*“Friends, girlfriends, boyfriends....”*

*“Their best friend or somebody they know they can talk to and trust.”*

## **Someone they trust**

A prevailing sentiment among participants was that in a crisis situation like considering leaving home, teens turn to **people who love them and they can trust**. Participants referred to close family members, a parent outside the home, older siblings and grandmothers. Following the theme of trust, common responses also included school counselors, teachers, and principals. In each group less common references emerged, such as a friend’s mother, support centers like SMYAL or Freestyle, a crisis hotline, church to speak with a pastor, and God.

*“Some people go to support centers or some take it back to the school and get the school involved like school counselors.”*

*“It all depends on your sexuality because if you’re like a homosexual they’ve got different organizations you can go to like here at SMYAL or like if you’re a heterosexual they’ve got places like Freestyle.”*

## Where teens seek help when they leave home

### A safe place

According to participants across groups, once they actually leave home, teens are most likely to first go to **the home of a friend or relative**. Participants in several focus groups also pointed out that some teens seek housing in **a youth shelter like Sasha Bruce**.

*“The first place is a friend’s house and then when the friend’s parents get tired of them they go to a relative.”*

*“I ran away before and I went to a shelter.”*

Most importantly teens tend to seek help from **someone they trust or where they feel safe**. Interestingly, several youth participants noted that teens may contact the police for help. Additional individual responses across groups included a school counselor, a mentor, a church, a safe house, police station, D.C. General Hospital, planned parenthood, or Child and Family Services Administration (CFSA).

*“Child and Family Services. I went there.... I think some kids will go to Child and Family Services if they really want help”.*

*“I called the police on myself. I got tired of keep running. I called the police and told them what happened.”*

### A hidden or risky place

In two focus groups, one with residential youth and the other with nonresidential youth, participants pointed out that **some teens do not seek or receive help**. As one participant asserted, the main goal of some teens is to flee to **wherever they think their parents will not be able to find them**, especially when the teen has left home without parental agreement.

Other participants noted that in such instances, teens may take risks like **staying in abandoned houses, meeting and going home with a stranger or moving from place to place**.

*“Also if they on their own because they had a disagreement with their parents they’d go to where their parents can’t reach them where their parents can’t ambush them and send them home. I know of a lot of people who left and their parent wasn’t too fond of them leaving and they went over one of their friends houses that their parent knew and their parent went and got them and took them back home. ...So you’ll go some where that your parent won’t know where you’re at.”*

*“Some teens go to a party and meet someone and go home with them.”*

## What teens living away from home need

### Monetary or material resources

When asked what kind of help they think teens living away from home need, youth participants most commonly referred to **monetary or material resources**. Food, clothing, housing, and money usually topped the list. Similarly, in considering special challenges they themselves would face on their own, participants most often referred to the lack of money or financial resources as well as basic material resources.

*“If they’re living on their own they’re gonna need clothes, food, education, they’re going to need a lot”*

### Emotional support and guidance

Another prevailing theme across groups was related to emotional support. Participants described the

importance of, for instance, **family support, guidance and discipline from caring adults**, and even **love and affection**. As some pointed out, teens may also struggle with issues such as loneliness, depression, or low self esteem and need professional counseling and/or family therapy to address underlying causes. Youth participants in residential programs all had first hand experience living away from home, and interestingly, they tended to emphasize the mental and emotional needs of teens more than participants in nonresidential programs.

*“They need therapy, family support, counseling, love and affection and self love.”*

*“They need someone like a mentor like a big sister or big brother to spend time with them and all that.”*

*“They need counselors that care and are not just telling you stuff cause that’s their job.”*

Teens need **help to counteract the intense peer pressure and negative influences** they encounter while away from parental supervision. A few participants pointed to peer pressure as a notable challenge they would face living on their own.

*“Peer pressure”. “Sexual pressure....Pressure to have sex when you don’t want to.”*

*“It could be pressure to do things you don’t want to do.”*

*“...Like becoming a prostitute.You don’t want to be a prostitute. Cause your looking for love.You don’t want to just have sex.That’s what I mean by finding love in the right place.”*

### **Independent living skills and resources**

According to some youth, to enhance their ability to survive on their own, teens need independent living skills and assistance getting started. Also mentioned

were jobs, job training, education and other resources as needed (e.g, substance abuse programs, child-care, health care, etc.)

*“They need to know how to be independent.”*

*“Since they’re on their own they need know how to be on their own.”*

## **How teens on their own support themselves**

### **Illegal activities**

Another issue of major concern to youth service providers and policy makers alike is how teens living on their own financially support themselves. The pervasive perception expressed by participants across focus groups was that teens on their own usually become involved in illegal activities to support themselves. Participants readily provided examples of the illegal activities these teens engage in including prostitution, street hustling, robbing, selling drugs, and stealing cars.

*“That’s what happens to most of them.Their parents are not around and they can’t get no financial help and so they go out and try to get their own help and the main thing out now is selling drugs.”*

*“Jobs, prostitution, selling drugs, hustling.”*

*“Hustling, stealing cars to take to the chop shop.”*

### **Legitimate sources**

Legitimate sources of support were cited as well. Across focus groups youth participants asserted that some teens find **available jobs**; a couple of participants included small intermittent odd jobs like pumping gas for cash and selling bottled water on the streets. There were a few other responses related to

legitimate sources of support for teens. For example, a couple of participants referred to **monetary support from family members** and others cited **government assistance** and help from an agency or organization like Covenant House Washington.

*“By taking responsibility like getting a job and trying to finish your education.”*

## **Barriers to helping teens living on their own**

### ***Embarrassment and shame***

Intervention for teens living on their own requires knowledge of their existence; however, focus group participants across sites explained that teens are often ashamed or embarrassed and do not want others to know they are living away from their parents or guardians. They may hide their circumstances to avoid being teased, shunned, pitied, or labeled a runaway by their friends and peers.

*“Ashamed.” “Because they’ll think they’re run-aways.”*

*“They may not want others to know they’re in a group home or wherever ‘cause they’ll tease them.”*

### ***Fear of intervention***

Some youth participants pointed out that teens do not want others to know their personal circumstances. They may be concerned that they will be found by authorities and returned home or that their parents will be investigated under suspicion of abuse or neglect. They may desire to protect their parents from potential legal liability.

*“If they runaway and they don’t want anyone to know like their counselors or something maybe it’s because they would call child protective services or something and they don’t want their parents to get in trouble.”*

## **View of Child and Family Services as a last resort**

When asked under what circumstances a teen should be reported to Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), youth participants mainly referred to instances of personal endangerment. The prevailing perspective was that CFSA is a resource of last resort mainly for extreme circumstances. Examples given across groups included violence in the home, abuse, and unsafe living circumstances. The main consensus point appeared to be that teens should be reported to CFSA only when they are at risk of harm or are putting others at risk.

*“Under no circumstances unless they’re harming themselves..... Or putting other people in danger.”*

*“ I feel as though any child who doesn’t have anywhere to stay or is in an unfit home should be reported so they can get help. So they can be placed in a better place.”*

In two focus groups, residential participants suggested that teens who lack the necessary skills to live on their own should be reported to CFSA, especially when there are no supports in place. A related reason noted by participants was abandonment of the teen when the family refuses to accept them back. Nonresidential participants in one focus group asserted that CFSA should be notified as soon as the teen runs away.

## **What Youth and Youth Organizations Recommend**

The UYP provided participating youth organizations and youth focus group participants an opportunity to propose recommendations for the way various entities respond to the needs and circumstances of youth living on their own. We asked youth organization respondents to offer their written recommendations for service provision and policy development based on two open-ended items placed at the end of their survey. Similarly, we concluded each youth focus group discussion with a series of questions designed to elicit youth recommendations for involvement from private entities, community organizations, churches, social service providers, teachers, and D.C. government. The recommendations of youth and youth organizations are outlined below. In addition, we provide a detailed outline of recommendations in Appendix E.

### ***Youth recommendations for private agencies, community organizations, and churches***

- ◆ Provide material support to youth
- ◆ Provide sources of communication
- ◆ Churches should offer support and mentoring programs for youth

### ***Youth recommendations for social workers, case workers, and teachers***

- ◆ Express sincere care and concern for youth
- ◆ Provide effective counseling and support to youth
- ◆ Provide referrals to resources

### ***Youth Organizations: Recommendations for service delivery***

- ◆ Improve the quality and availability of service delivery
- ◆ Offer additional services and activities
- ◆ Increase information and public awareness of services
- ◆ Develop and implement a count (census) of homeless youth living in area

### ***Youth recommendations for D.C. government***

- ◆ Provide housing and shelter
- ◆ Provide more resources for youth including:
- ◆ Provide jobs and job training
- ◆ Help youth on their own stay safe

### ***Youth Organizations: Recommendations for public policy***

- ◆ Increase housing and shelter options
- ◆ Provide for the well-being of youth living on their own
- ◆ Increase public awareness
- ◆ Enhance prevention services
- ◆ Assess and emancipation requirements
- ◆ Evaluate existing programs

# IMPLICATIONS

Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is recognized that there are limits in generalizing the findings. However, the findings provide guidance for developing and/or enhancing policies and practices that support both teens and families. New non-punitive strategies are needed to help teens in need and parents who have children with challenging behaviors. Both preventive strategies and intervention services are needed on the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels.

In the report, three themes emerged that need to be addressed:

- ◆ The challenges of blended families and families headed by single parents;
- ◆ The scarcity of resources and preventive services for families of teens who are presenting behavioral challenges;
- ◆ A perception that the environment is hostile or unsafe.

## Single and Blended Families

According to the 2005 KIDS COUNT Fact Book, “Every Kid Counts in the District of Columbia,” in 2004, 6 out of 10 children lived in a household headed by a single person, 5 out of 10 living with a single woman. 52% of the children living with single women were poor. Single parents have adult relationship desires and needs. The challenge is providing support so that adult relationships do not conflict with parenting. Based on the data, many single women do not have the resources to secure the support they need. Subsidized services are needed. Respite care is needed for these parents and mentors are needed for their children. When marriage or cohabitation is being con-

sidered by a single parent, counseling on negotiation, discipline, boundaries, and conflicting loyalties of children are needed. These services may prevent youth from feeling (and being) neglected and running away from home.

## Resources for Families in Crisis

Currently, there are minimal services and/or help for parents who have children with special needs or teens with challenging behaviors. There are also limited preventive services available to help prevent youth from leaving their home, being put out of their home, or being placed in foster care or a group home setting. To get help, some parents believe they have no recourse but to give up their rights and put the child into the child welfare system. The names of these parents are then placed on a registry as neglectful.

Some parents, stressed with the challenges of survival and raising younger children, may allow the teen to go out on their own in an effort to maintain the current household. Other teens leave their homes due to issues of violence against them, parental drug use, witnessing domestic violence, feeling neglected and abandoned, and living in a “disorderly environment.” If the family received the help they needed when they need it, placement, criminal activity, and the teens abruptly leaving their homes may have been prevented. More front-end services that do not penalize parents who ask for help are needed. A range of services should be offered including resources for parents having difficulty communicating with their teens to those having difficulty accepting their child’s alternative lifestyle.

## **Safe Communities**

Based on per capita violent deaths in 2005, the District of Columbia was found to be the third most dangerous city in the country. Parents are responding to this danger by keeping their children at home. For some youth, this is perceived as being “locked up” (see page 20). Many of the teens described not feeling protected by their parents or people in their communities, stating that their protection was solely centered on their ability to keep themselves safe. These reactions are connected to family and community stressors that include high degrees of violence, drug selling and use, and communities that are disconnected with young people. The young people requested greater supports at school, more opportunities for adult mentorship, and improved recreational activities for the diverse interests of young people.

The District of Columbia must intensify its efforts to reduce crime and provide more safe green spaces for children and youth so they can go outside, enjoy nature, and engage in constructive activities. Recreational areas should be patrolled as are the commercial areas. Adult mentorship programs should be strengthened and increased. Schools should end their “zero tolerance” policies and practices; and should be better utilized to provide counseling and case management supports. The young people interviewed also mentioned churches as a viable place for help. Faith based communities should be included in efforts to reach out to communities and help young people believe that we can keep them safe again.

### ***On the individual level:***

Parents and caregivers must be educated and coached on positive parenting strategies. All youth should receive life skills education to prepare them for successful adulthood. More services should be available to reduce risky youthful behaviors. More school and community-based counseling services should be available. Additional services are needed in the areas of substance abuse and intimate partner abuse.

### ***On the relationship level:***

Adults and youth must learn how to forge and maintain positive relationships. Mentors should be assigned to all at-risk youth. Where possible, estranged fathers should be urged to reconnect with their children.

### ***On the community level:***

Youth must be heard and their recommendations implemented. Safe neighborhoods with ample recreational centers and social services must be a top priority. Gang intervention is needed. Non-punitive family preservation services must be provided for parents who are having difficulty controlling their children’s behavior. Opportunities for greater collaboration with faith-based communities should be increased to help communities re-engage young people and become more communal and connected.

### ***On the societal level:***

Public officials should consider modification of the child abuse mandated reporting laws to ensure anonymity for youth in this circumstance and more flexibility in service provision. The current laws appear to be a deterrent to youth seeking help. Parents should be held accountable for the health and safety of their children but they also need support in times of need. The District of Columbia should expedite implementation of strategies to achieve the 6 goals in its positive youth development strategy:

- ◆ Children are ready for school;
- ◆ Children and youth succeed in school;
- ◆ Children and youth are healthy and practice healthy behaviors;
- ◆ Children and youth engage in meaningful activities;
- ◆ Children and youth live in healthy, stable, and supportive families;
- ◆ All youth make a successful transition to adulthood.

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# A P P E N D I C E S

## APPENDIX A

March 16, 2005

(Executive Director)  
(Youth Organization Name)  
(Youth Organization Address)

Dear (Executive Director):

On behalf of the D.C. Children's Trust Fund (DCCTF) and the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (MAC-CAN), we commend your organization on its dedicated service to youth in the District of Columbia. We share your commitment to promoting the well-being of our youth and therefore request your participation in our very important project.

The Unemancipated Youth Project, made possible by funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is designed to explore the needs and challenges of youth ages 13 to 17 who are virtually living on their own in Washington, D.C. without formal parental or guardian supervision. They may be runaway, throwaway or homeless youth who find themselves living in a youth shelter, informally with friends or relatives, alone or with a partner in a room or apartment, or even on the streets. We are interested in learning more about youth who have experienced these circumstances as well as organizations that may encounter these youth. We believe this project will contribute significantly to efforts to develop services and shape policy targeted towards this potentially vulnerable population.

Your organization is one of 12 we have asked to participate in our project. We intend to reflect the array of existing programs and resources available to youth across the city as well as the diversity of youth involved. **Your organization's input is critical to the success of this project. We ask that you or a designated staff person: 1) complete the enclosed brief survey about your organization and 2) permit us to conduct a focus group with 8 to 10 youth in your organization.**

The findings from this research will be compiled in a final report and disseminated to Mayor Anthony Williams as well as other policy makers, service providers, youth advocates, funders, and our participating youth organizations. You will also be invited to a Summit on Unemancipated Youth in September 2005.

**To facilitate this important endeavor, please complete the enclosed brief survey and fax it back to our Project Director, Angela Greene, at 202-667-2477 by Wednesday, March 30, 2005. She will call you soon to provide more information about conducting a focus group with youth from your organization and to schedule a convenient day and time in early April. We will provide lunch or refreshments during the focus group and a token gift of appreciation to each youth participant at the end of the session. Please be assured that we will maintain the anonymity of all focus group participants; and to maintain the confidentiality of individual organizations, all survey responses will be presented in aggregate form.**

In closing, we thank you very much in advance for your time and assistance. And again, we commend your commitment to our youth. If you have any questions regarding this project, please feel free to contact Angela Greene at (202) 667-4940.

Sincerely,

Kinaya Sokoya, Executive Director  
D.C. Children's Trust Fund and  
Chair of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on  
Child Abuse and Neglect

# A P P E N D I C E S

## APPENDIX B

### Youth Organization Survey

Name of Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Respondent \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Respondent \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

*Section A. Please complete the following items.*

**1) What area(s) does your organization primarily serve?**

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ward 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ward 6           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ward 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ward 7           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ward 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ward 8           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ward 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> Maryland Suburbs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ward 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Virginia Suburbs |

**2) Does this organization provide residential services, non-residential services or both residential services and non-residential services?**

- Residential Services (services to those housed by the organization)  
 Nonresidential Services (services to those living elsewhere)  
 Both Residential and Nonresidential Services

**3) What types of services does this organization provide?**

**Please check all that apply:**

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter/housing               | <input type="checkbox"/> Substance Abuse Programs      | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meals/Food                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Violence Programs      | <input type="checkbox"/> Education Assistance     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing                      | <input type="checkbox"/> HIV Counseling                | <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational/Job Readiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drop-in Center                | <input type="checkbox"/> HIV Testing                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Activities        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Case management               | <input type="checkbox"/> HIV/STD prevention programs   | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational Activities  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Counseling         | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Planning/Contraception | <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group Counseling              | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Care                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral/Spiritual Counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> Referrals to other resources  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respite Care                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Tutoring                      | (please specify)                                  |

**4) What are the primary languages of service provision?**

- English     Spanish     Vietnamese     Other \_\_\_\_\_

*Section B. Residential Services (Please complete this section if your organization provides residential services (shelter/housing) to youth under age 18. If your organization provides both residential and nonresidential services please be sure to complete this section and section C.)*

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Do you provide residential services for males only, females only or both males and females?

- Males only                     
  Females only                     
  Both males and females

6) For what age range of youth do you provide residential services? From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

7) How many youth could your facility house at any given time? \_\_\_\_\_

8) How many different youth under the age of 18 resided here for at least some period during your last program year? \_\_\_\_\_

9) On average, how many different youth under age 18 reside here each month? \_\_\_\_\_

10) Approximately what proportion of youth under age 18 enter your residential program directly from living:

	More Than 75%	50-75%	25-49%	5-24%	Less than 5%	Don't know
At home with parents/guardians						
In own place						
In a shelter						
In a group home						
In foster care						
In an institution						
In a detention center or jail						
With relative(s)						
With friend(s)						
With significant other						
On streets						
Other _____ (specify)						

*Section C. Nonresidential Services (Please complete the following items if your organization provides nonresidential services to youth under age 18. If your organization provides both residential and nonresidential services please be sure to complete this section and section B.)*

11) Do you provide nonresidential services for males only, females only or both males and females?

- Males only  
 Females only  
 Both males and females

12) For what age range of youth do you provide nonresidential services? From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

13) On average, how many youth under age 18 does your organization serve each month? \_\_\_\_\_

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14) Approximately what proportion of youth under age 18 who participate in your nonresidential services are living:

	More Than 75%	50-75%	25-49%	5-24%	Less than 5%	Don't know
At home with parents/guardians						
In own place						
In a shelter						
In a group home						
In foster care						
In an institution						
In a detention center or jail						
With relative(s)						
With friend(s)						
With significant other						
On streets						
Other _____ (specify)						

*Section D. Please complete the following items. (Please refer to your experiences with unemancipated youth under age 18 who are living on their own outside of formal parental or guardian supervision. They may be runaway, throwaway, or homeless youth living in any number of informal or temporary arrangements.*

15) To your knowledge, how do youth living on their own financially support themselves?

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16) How would you describe the primary needs of youth living on their own?

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17) What are your recommendations for service delivery targeting youth living on their own?

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18) What are your recommendations for public policy targeting youth living on their own in Washington, D.C.?

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# A P P E N D I C E S

## APPENDIX C

### D.C. Children's Trust Fund - Unemancipated Youth Project Pre-Focus Group Youth Survey

Please complete this survey by answering the following questions as honestly as you can. Your answers will be confidential and anonymous; so please do not write your name anywhere on this survey. If there is a question you do not want to answer, you may skip it. Thank you!

1) How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

2) What is your gender?  Male  Female

3) What is the highest year of school you will have completed this June 2005?

- |  |                                     |   |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No Formal Education | <input type="checkbox"/> 8th grade  | <input type="checkbox"/> 12th grade/High School Graduate                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5th grade or less   | <input type="checkbox"/> 9th grade  | <input type="checkbox"/> Completed a GED                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6th grade           | <input type="checkbox"/> 10th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> Some College or Vocational School beyond High School |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7th grade           | <input type="checkbox"/> 11th grade |   |

4) Are you currently enrolled in any kind of school?  Yes  No

5) Are you Hispanic (Latino/a)?  Yes  No

6) What is your racial group? Are you?  White  
 African American (Black)  
 American Indian or Alaskan Native  
 Asian or Pacific Islander (including Asian Indian)  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7) Are you currently working?  No  
 Yes, Part-time  
 Yes, Full-time

8) Do you have any children? If yes, please tell us how many?  No  
 Yes, I have \_\_\_\_\_ child(ren)

9) Do you consider yourself:  Straight/ Heterosexual  Transgender  
 Gay/ Homosexual  Not sure/Questioning  
 Lesbian/Homosexual  Don't Know  
 Bisexual

10) In your lifetime, have you ever been placed in or spent any time in.....

Foster homes  Yes  No A psychiatric or mental hospital  Yes  No Jail  Yes  No

Group homes  Yes  No Juvenile detention or a youth home  Yes  No

Have you ever left any of these places and stayed away overnight without permission?  Yes  No

12) Has Child Protective Services ever visited the home of your parent(s) or guardian(s) for any reason?  
 Yes  No

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13) Have you ever spent at least one night living away from home when.....

You left even though a parent or someone who helped raise you didn't give you permission to go or want you to go	Yes	No
You left home with permission but then didn't return home when you were expected	Yes	No
A parent or someone who helped raise you knew you were leaving but didn't care if you left or not	Yes	No

14) What is the longest amount of time you have ever lived away?

\_\_\_\_\_ years    \_\_\_\_\_ months    \_\_\_\_\_ days    \_\_\_\_\_ weeks    \_\_\_\_\_ I've never lived away

15) During these times when you were living away, where did you usually spend the night?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> With relatives                         | <input type="checkbox"/> In a shelter   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> With friends                           | <input type="checkbox"/> On the streets (e.g., a public place, a car, a park, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> With partner (boyfriend or girlfriend) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)_____                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In own rented room                     | <input type="checkbox"/> I've never lived away                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In own rented apartment                |   |

16) When you spent the night(s) living away from home, did you have problems or difficulties with any of the following?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting food                | <input type="checkbox"/> Finding transportation to school, work, or some other place |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting clothing            | <input type="checkbox"/> Money for things you needed                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finding a place to sleep    | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with police  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finding a place to clean up | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)_____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting medical care        | <input type="checkbox"/> No Problems   |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> I've never lived away                                       |

17) Where do you live now?

- With parent(s) or guardian(s)
- With relatives
- With friends
- With partner (boyfriend or girlfriend)
- In own rented room
- In own rented apartment
- In this group home
- In a shelter
- On the streets (e.g., a public place, a car, a park, etc.)
- Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

# A P P E N D I C E S

## APPENDIX D

### **DCCTF – Unemancipated Youth Project Focus Group Questions**

What makes a teen decide to leave home?

Why are some teens asked to leave their home?

Where do teens go to get help as they are thinking about or considering leaving home?

Where do teens go when they leave home?

Where do teens go to get help after they have decided to leave home or are asked to leave?

What kind of help do you think teens who are living away from home need?

Why do you think some teens do not want others to know they are living away from their parents or guardians?

What do you think are the special challenges you would face living on your own before age 18?

How does a teen financially support him or herself when living on his or her own?

How should social workers, caseworkers or even teachers better respond to teens that are living on their own?

# A P P E N D I C E S

## APPENDIX E

### What Youth and Youth Organizations Recommend

#### *Youth recommendations for private agencies, community organizations, and churches*

◆ **Provide material support to youth**

- Fundraising and monetary assistance
- Donations
- Shelter

◆ **Provide sources of communication**

- Crisis help lines
- Anonymous help
- Websites to get advice

◆ **Churches should:**

- Be a sanctuary
- Welcome youth
- Get more teens involved
- Offer mentoring programs that provide one on one counseling

#### *Youth recommendations for social workers, case workers, and teachers*

◆ **Express sincere care and concern for youth**

- Do a better job of listening to youth
- Get to know youth and become their friend
- Do not prejudge youth to be rebellious or delinquent because of their circumstances
- Show empathy by putting themselves in the youth's shoes
- Try to understand their choices and decision making

◆ **Provide effective counseling and support to youth**

- Provide guidance in the right path: "Don't talk to us lead; us in the right direction"
- Do a better job of helping youth stay out of the streets
- Provide more support groups

◆ **Provide referrals to resources**

- Help youth find jobs and housing
- Make sure youth are aware of available resources and programs

# A P P E N D I C E S

## ***Youth Organizations: Recommendations for service delivery***

- ◆ **Improve the quality and availability of service delivery**
  - Display of sensitivity to the needs of youth
  - Follow-up and support of youth living on their own
  - A youth friendly atmosphere with a variety of open hours
  - Capacity to monitor youth as they are linked to other services
  - Ensure that staff are trained to work with LGBTQ youth
- ◆ **Offer additional services and activities**
  - Provide for basic needs of youth
  - Increase funding availability of housing options
  - Shelter services
  - Preventative counseling services
  - Case management and counseling services
  - Improve access to medical, educational, and employment opportunities
  - Vocational /entrepreneurial skills and training with self esteem and character development
  - Life Skills training
  - Independent Living Programs
  - Outreach
  - Health Fairs
  - Table sessions with information and advice
- ◆ **Increase information and public awareness of services**
- ◆ **Develop and implement a count (census) of homeless youth living in area**

## ***Youth recommendations for D.C. government***

- ◆ **Provide housing and shelter**
  - Safe secure facilities
  - Shelters that are accessible to youth
  - Convert abandoned buildings into shelters
  - More youth shelters in general
  - More group homes and foster homes
  - More staff working with youth in shelters and group homes
- ◆ **Provide more resources for youth including:**
  - More independent living programs
  - Independent living programs for youth younger than 16
  - Financial assistance
  - Bank accounts for youth
  - College scholarships
  - After school tutorial programs
  - Mentoring programs
  - More recreational programs
  - Keep youth go go clubs open

# A P P E N D I C E S

## ◆ **Provide jobs and job training**

- More jobs and job training
- Summer jobs
- Year round jobs
- Job Corp Programs
- Help finding jobs

## ◆ **Help youth on their own stay safe**

### ***Youth Organizations: Recommendations for public policy***

#### ◆ **Increase housing and shelter options**

- Allocate more funds for existing housing programs serving homeless youth,
- Give priority to shelters and transitional housing to teens especially those with children
- Develop a housing program specifically for LGBT youth as there are currently no safe housing options for them in terms of emergency or transitional housing..

#### ◆ **Provide for the well-being of youth living on their own**

- Funding and programs that reach specifically teens that are displaced and living on their own
- Agency or mechanisms in place to monitor their well-being and that their needs are being met.
- Make sure youth living away from their parents are not criminalized but provided with the help they need

#### ◆ **Increase Public Awareness**

- Increase awareness of homelessness in community.
- Increase acceptance and positive perception of therapeutic services.
- Recognize this population amongst the homeless and as high risk teens

#### ◆ **Enhance Prevention Services**

- Allocate more funds for prevention programs, i.e. preservation
- Allocate more funds for existing housing programs serving homeless youth,
- Increase educational programs designed to prevent/address domestic violence and sexual violence towards youth
- Formal policy around comprehensive health and sex education in public schools
- Develop a coordinated approach to involve police and courts for families with youth who are hard to control.
- Insure the education they need to succeed after graduation: a more student centered approach to literacy and overall academic achievement.

#### ◆ **Assess Emancipation Requirements**

- Develop specific requirements for declaring independence as a youth. (e.g., Youth should be required to have a high school diploma and full-time job before status is granted. They also should be placed in an independent living program and prove they have the skills to live on their own).

#### ◆ **Evaluate existing programs**

- Evaluate the effectiveness of services provided to youth living on their own and reform policies based on results.









MAYOR'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
on CHILD ABUSE and NEGLECT



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