

Ending Youth Homelessness with Model Approaches in Florida

BY: AMANDA ROSADO AND ELISSA PLANCHER

Youth experiencing homelessness are one of the most vulnerable populations in Florida. On any given night in 2019, 1,452 youth experienced homelessness in Florida, according to the latest Point-In-Time Count figures for the state. Of the 1,452, 37% had absolutely no shelter. Given this population’s extreme vulnerability, it is vitally important for service providers, local governments, and Continuums of Care to adopt and monitor proven programs for addressing youth homelessness.

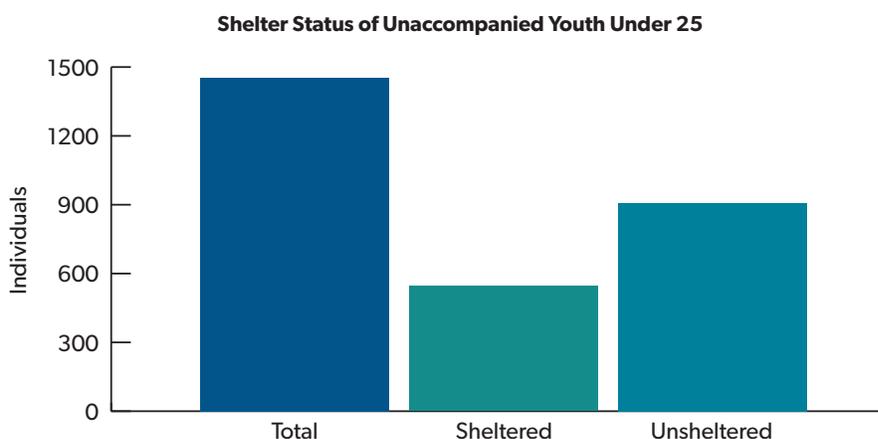
Youth Homelessness in Florida

While the experience of homelessness is traumatic and places people in a vulnerable position, this trauma and risk is heightened for youth. Youth experiencing homelessness face trauma, susceptibility to violence, and are often ill-equipped and unable to access resources available to them compared to other populations. Young people entering the homeless crisis response system oftentimes overlap with other public systems like child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health, and education. Many lack stable support systems and have unaddressed adverse childhood experiences resulting in complex trauma.

Destructive and harmful familial relationships serve as a common catalyst to a young person’s first episode of homelessness. More than half of street youth reported that they became homeless for the first time because they were asked to leave home by a parent or caregiver.¹ Additionally, national data tells us that certain populations tend to be overrepresented within



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2019, Florida Office on Homelessness, Total # of unaccompanied youth under 25.

¹ Retrieved from the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/homelessness-in-america-focus-on-youth>

youth homelessness. For example, LGBTQ youth make up 20% of all youth experiencing homelessness and have a 120% higher risk of homelessness compared to heterosexual and cisgender youth.² Pregnant and parenting youth, youth with special needs or disabilities, and youth of color, particularly African American and Native American, are also more likely to become homeless.³

Understanding how youth homelessness is defined is important for two reasons: 1) it helps us understand the depth of the need, and 2) it determines what assistance is available to meet the need. Youth homelessness includes unaccompanied youth under 18 years old, parenting youth, young adults between the ages of 18 and 24, and transition age youth who fall between 16 and 24 years old. Transition age youth are young people who are at high risk of unsuccessfully transitioning into independent adulthood due to the complexity of their needs, the many challenges they face, and the lack of a support system to assist them.⁴

One way youth experiencing homelessness receive help is through the HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) programs like rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. While these CoC programs provide housing and services that youth desperately need, they are targeted only to youth experiencing certain HUD definitions of homelessness. These definitions overlook a much larger number of youth who are couch surfing or doubled up with friends or family.

Under the Federal McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) provides services to students meeting eligibility for the Title IX Homeless Education Program. The Homeless Education Program serves not only students who qualify for CoC programs, but also the more expansive population of those who are couch surfing or doubled up with friends or family. Using this broader definition, FLDOE reported 96,028 students (under 18) experienced homelessness in the 2017-2018 school year – an increase of 6,513% in comparison to the HUD definitions.

² Chaplin Hall: Missed Opportunities: National Estimate

³ Retrieved from National Alliance to End Homelessness <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/youth/>

⁴ Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. <http://www.yapinc.org/transition>

SPOTLIGHT

Successful Models from the FHC Conference Youth Homelessness Forum

Local initiatives across Florida working to prevent and end youth homelessness are demonstrating that services should be youth-centered and youth should have a voice in local processes. Youth participation creates opportunities for peer to peer sharing, offering a strengths-based, culturally competent approach to integrating youth into decision making on resource utilization in the homeless crisis response system. This participation supports an environment where youth are more likely to engage and obtain assistance to prevent and end their homeless episode. This opens a pathway to stability and economic opportunity.



The Florida Housing Coalition's conference highlighted the following local initiatives in Florida that are helping prevent, reduce, and end youth homelessness throughout the state.

MIAMI HOMES FOR ALL THE HOMY COLLECTIVE

Helping Our Miami-Dade Youth, also known as the HOMY Collective, is spearheading a youth-centered and community-wide effort to prevent and end homelessness among young people, ages 13-24 years old, throughout Miami-Dade County. The collaborative, comprised of 100 agencies, is working toward a collective goal of ensuring all youth have safe and stable housing. The HOMY Collective provides additional support such as education, mentoring, employment, health, and other connections that assist program participants with the tools to retain long-term stability. The Youth Voice Action Council (YVAC) serves as the CoC's Youth Action Board, leading local initiatives to help end youth homelessness.

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Beginning their community-wide effort to address youth homelessness in 2017, Palm Beach County participated in a 100-Day housing challenge. Of those youth served, 100% were found to have high acuity and 81% were youth of color and/or LGBTQ. Leading cross-sector partnerships to address youth homelessness, Palm Beach County successfully developed an infrastructure resulting in a 30% reduction in youth homelessness within their community. Implementing a Housing First philosophy and increasing rapid rehousing proved to be effective, with the initiative exceeding its goal by housing 367 youth in a 20-month period.

Since Palm Beach County's presentation at the Florida Housing Coalition's conference, Palm Beach County was awarded nearly \$5 million dollars to address youth homelessness through HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program. Additionally, Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust and Palm Beach County were both awarded technical assistance through The Grand Challenge to help systems address youth homelessness.

Conclusion

We can prevent and end youth homelessness in Florida. Better integrating youth into the homeless crisis response system and including them in the decision-making process has made a significant impact on ending youth homelessness in communities such as Miami-Dade County and Palm Beach County. These community examples provide a blueprint for how to target housing and resources in an equitable way, to help youth obtain safe and stable housing. Working collaboratively with systems impacting youth and increasing access to affordable housing positions Florida to make real progress in ending youth homelessness.

For assistance in implementing proven programs in your community, reach out to the Florida Housing Coalition. Our experienced and expert staff offer technical assistance and consulting on specific programming, systems changes, and service delivery models in ending homelessness.



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