

Homeless and Runaway Youth in Colorado

FACT SHEET

Background

Too many Colorado youth have been left to fend for themselves, without a safe and stable place to stay. **Between 1200 and 1500 youth and young adults ages 12 to 24 are homeless in Colorado right nowⁱ.**

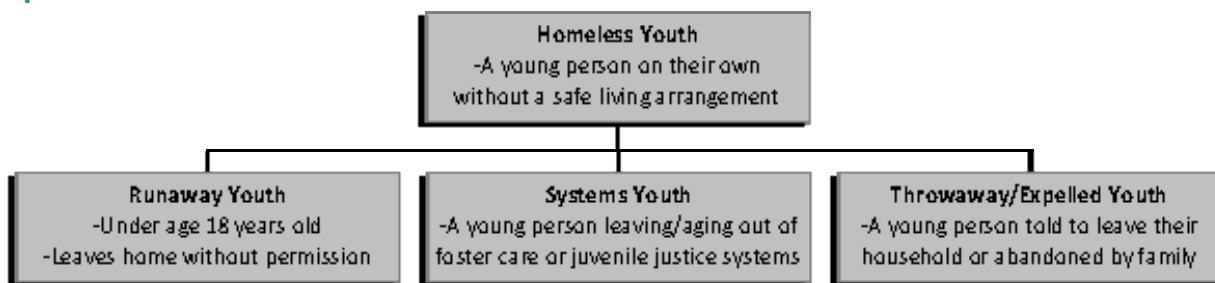
The National Runaway Switchboard, a federally designated communication and support center for homeless and runaway youth, operates a 24-hour crisis hotline. **Callers to this hotline who are under the age of 12 have increased by 172 percent since 2000 and callers between the ages of 12 and 13 have increased substantially as wellⁱⁱ.**

Homeless and runaway youth face unbelievable circumstances and obstacles in their lives. Youth homelessness is largely a **reflection of family breakdown**. Homeless youth often **flee homes where they experience physical, sexual, or emotional abuse**. Other key factors include parental substance abuse or mental health issues. Family conflict surrounding the sexual orientation, parenting status, or disability status of the young person is also common.

Risk Factors

Youth on their own are at great risk for further victimization and exploitation. **Thirty percent of homeless youth will be actively recruited for the purposes of sexual exploitation and other forms of human trafficking within 48 hours of leaving home**. Colorado is situated along a key domestic sex trafficking routeⁱⁱⁱ. Youth on their own operate in survival mode and experience negative outcomes in the areas of health, education, and work force. Without prevention and early intervention, these youth are not likely to transition successfully to adulthood. Instead these youth are at high risk for HIV infection, suicide, incarceration, dropping out of school, teen parenting, and system dependence^{iv}.

Population Breakdown



Making a Difference

Advocates are working hard on this issue, but your help is needed. Several years ago, the **Colorado legislature passed the Homeless Youth Services Act, which created the Office of Homeless Youth Services to coordinate current services, identify gaps in services and systemic issues, and to facilitate a coordinated response to the issues.**

In response to the legislative intent, the Colorado Homeless Youth Action Plan was developed and is currently being implemented in order to prevent and address youth homelessness in Colorado and to ensure that the primary objectives outlined in the Homeless Youth Services Act are accomplished^v. Other state and local efforts are represented in this work, however **local champions are needed to further this work through volunteering, donating, and organizing in communities across the state.**

November 2008 is Colorado Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month

Activities will be executed to raise awareness of the issue and to provide opportunities for community involvement.

A statewide kickoff event is scheduled on November 6, 2008. All month, various local youth service agencies are planning activities for youth and open houses for community members. During the last week of the month, local community groups are encouraged to plan donation drives, volunteer recruitment activities or other awareness raising activities to benefit local youth serving organizations. To get involved, please visit:

<http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/shhp/HomelessandRunawayYouthAwarenessMonth.htm>.

Contact Information

For more information or to become a part of the solution, please contact Andy Johnson, Homeless Youth Coordinator with the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs at 303-866-7366 or andrew.johnson3@state.co.us. You may visit the Office of Homeless Youth Services website at: <http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/shhp/Homeless-Youth.htm>.

For more information on the educational rights of homeless youth, please contact Dana Scott, State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth with the Colorado Department of Education at 303-866-6930 or scott_d@cde.state.co.us. You may also visit Colorado's McKinney-Vento webpage at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/homeless_index.htm.

ⁱ Colorado Interagency Council on Homelessness. *The Colorado Statewide Count, Summer 2006 and Winter 2007*.

<http://www.colorado.gov/cich/pit.htm>

ⁱⁱ National Runaway Switchboard (2008) *Callers to National Runaway Switchboard Getting Younger*.

http://www.1800runaway.org/news_events/TrendsStatistics.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ Lloyd, R. & Orman, A. (2007). *Training Manual on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*. CSEC Community Intervention Project, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

^{iv} National Network for Youth. (n.d.) *NN4Y Issue Brief: Unaccompanied Youth Overview*.

http://www.nn4youth.org/media/factsheets/IssueBrief_Unaccompanied_youth.pdf

^v Colorado Department of Human Services (2008), *Office of Homeless Youth Services Annual Report 2007*.

http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/shhp/PDFs/Final_2007_Annual_Report_OHYS.pdf