

While many youth in America were reaching typical life milestones - such as learning to cook for themselves, learning to drive, developing lasting relationships with friends and significant others – 40,799 homeless unaccompanied youth across the country in 2017 were likely experiencing these milestones much differently, if at all. They were at an increased risk of abuse, exploitation, and may drop out of school. They were likely to be involved in the criminal justice system and spend time behind bars. They were less likely to go to college and have stable employment. The experience of homelessness for unaccompanied youth may be traumatic, however, with a coordinated and community-wide plan our Continuum of Care can ensure that every unaccompanied youth has the chance to develop resiliency and grow into a happy, healthy, and productive adult by obtaining permanent and stable housing.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines homeless unaccompanied youth as “a person under the age of 25, not accompanied by a parent or guardian, or who are with their own children, and are experiencing homelessness.” The developmental milestones this population is experiencing make them extremely vulnerable when faced with poverty and homelessness.

Unaccompanied homeless youth are divided into two categories: Unaccompanied Minors and Unaccompanied Transition Age Youth. In this report the term “unaccompanied youth” refers to all unaccompanied minors and transition age youth aged 11 to 24 years.

Unaccompanied Minors are youth aged **11 to 17 years**. They may be involved in the foster care system or juvenile justice system or may be staying at a shelter or housing program funded through the Runaway Homeless Youth Act. These unaccompanied youth are not typically placed in adult shelters.

Unaccompanied Transition Age Youth are individuals aged **18 to 24 years**. These youth often come in contact with the homelessness services system through any of our CoC's adult shelters or drop-in centers, through the Department of Social Services, or through our outreach teams.

Youth are often challenging to track because they “couch-surf,” meaning they stay at a friend's or acquaintance's house for a short time before they leave or are asked to leave, and then repeat this pattern. “Couch-surfing” is excluded from HUD's literal definition of homeless (residing in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or in a place not meant for human habitation), so our CoC conducted its second annual youth-specific point in time count in October of 2017 in order to gain more insight into this “couch-surfing” population.

This report pulls data from several sources that include data from our local Homeless Management Information System database for the Federal Fiscal Year 2017: October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017, HUD's Annual Point in Time Count on January 24th, 2018, and our CoC's own BeCounted! End Youth Homelessness campaign in October of 2017. The majority of the information we have about youth homelessness is derived from Erie and Niagara Counties, although we do have some school district data from Genesee County. As we move forward we hope to be better able to collect and utilize data from our rural counties.

Main Findings

- 926 Unaccompanied Youth were identified in HMIS as experiencing homelessness in in FFY 2017
- 112 unaccompanied youth identified as “couch-surfing” in the 2017 BeCounted! End Youth Homelessness campaign
- 57 percent of youth experiencing homelessness identified as female, and 42 percent as male
- 50.5 percent youth experiencing homelessness were Black; in Erie County
- 20 percent of youth were parents
- Most youth reported becoming homeless after having to leave a family member's or friend's residence

	2016 HUD Point in Time	2016 Be Counted WNY	2017 HUD Point in Time	2017 Be Counted WNY	2018 HUD Point in Time
Age 11 - 17	26	38	13	130	16
Age 18-24	47	79	57	63	60
Couch-Surfing	NA	46	NA	112	NA
Total	73	163*	70	305**	76

Table 1: HUD Point in Time and Be Counted WNY Point in Time

**In 2016, only youth considered literally homeless were counted, and school district data was not included*

***In 2017 we were able to gather data from surveys distributed to school age students in 5 school districts across the CoC in addition to surveys given at several sites around WNY*

The table above is a comparison of HUD's annual Point in Time count of homelessness and the BeCounted! End Youth Homelessness campaign survey data. The Point in Time count is an annual census of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January, as required by HUD. This data is used to compare region's homelessness and to obtain a nation-wide estimate of those experiencing literal sheltered and unsheltered homelessness.

Demographics of Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness

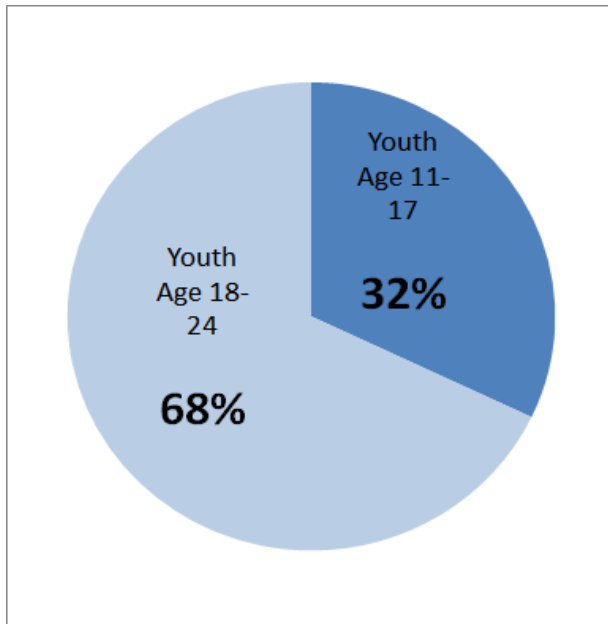


Figure 1: Percentages of youth aged 11-17 and 18-24

Based on data from 926 unaccompanied and parenting youth, we found that 78 percent of those youth were being served in Erie County, 21 percent in Niagara County, and 1 percent in Orleans County. Wyoming and Genesee County do not currently have youth providers using HMIS; therefore we may be missing data on youth from these counties. The youth identified are those residing on the street, in emergency shelter, or in transitional housing. Several youth specific emergency shelters, transitional housing, and rapid rehousing programs currently operate in Erie and Niagara Counties. Youth may also access Coordinated Entry through adult shelters and drop in centers.

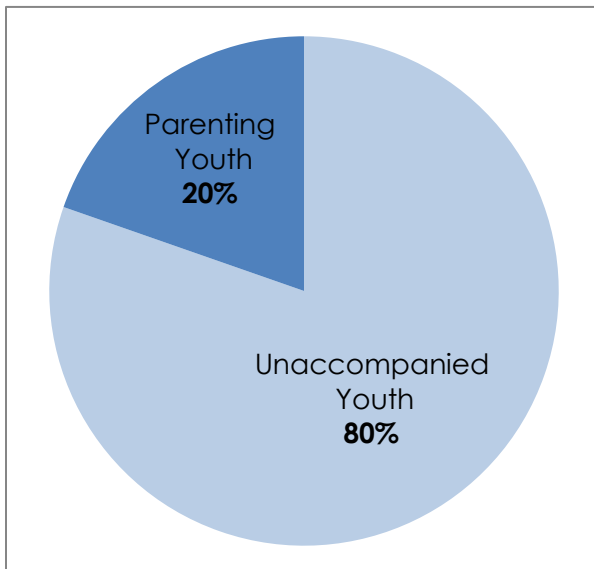


Figure 2: Percentages of unaccompanied and parenting youth

Pregnant and Parenting Youth

While the majority of the unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness do not have children, the 20 percent of youth who are parenting are likely to have a myriad of needs that should be addressed while they are enrolled in a housing program. These needs may include child care, parenting classes, transportation, and perinatal care.¹

¹ National Network for Youth, "Pregnant and Parenting Homeless Youth". https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/luseBrief_Pregnancy-and-Parenting-2007_2010ish.pdf

Residence Prior to Homelessness

The table below shows the top five self-reported locations where youth had resided before they began to experience homelessness. Our data shows youth often report being forced to leave a family member's or friend's residence. A fair amount of youth also report that prior to this latest episode of homelessness, they were residing in emergency shelter or hotel/motel with a voucher from Department of Social Services. It may be helpful to collect further information on these youth's whereabouts previous to their utilization of emergency shelter, in order to better understand their experience of homelessness. A fairly low number of youth reported that their residence prior to homelessness was foster care, despite research suggesting that youth exiting foster care may have a higher chance of experiencing homelessness or unstable housing more than the general youth population.² More longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine the relationship of foster care and homelessness in Western New York. Other categories of responses are hospital, hotel, interim housing, psychiatric center, halfway house, Safe Haven, substance use treatment facility, transitional housing, data not collected, and client refused. The most significant categories are listed here:

Residence	% Percentage of the Total (926)
Staying with Family	45 %
Staying with Friends	15 %
Emergency Shelter	13.5 %
On the Street or Public Place (not meant for human habitation)	6.5 %
Rent or own	5.5 %
Jail or prison	5.4 %

Table 2: Percentages of youth and their residence prior to program entry

Gender Identity

Unlike what we see in the general homeless population each year in HMIS, more unaccompanied youth are female than male (in general, about 38 percent of homeless individuals across all ages in HMIS reported to be female). Of unaccompanied and parenting youth ages 11-24, 57 percent identified as female. As for males, about 60 percent of the general homeless population reported to be male, and about 42 percent of the youth reported to be male.

Gender Identity	Percentage of Youth (out of 926)	% of General Homeless Population in Western New York
Female	57 %	38 %
Male	42 %	60 %
Transgender	.4 %	-

Table 3: Percentages of youth and their gender identity

² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Housing for Youth Aging out of Foster Care". https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/youth_hsg_main_report.pdf

Race and Ethnicity

Similar to the general population of individuals experiencing homelessness³, Black individuals are overrepresented in the unaccompanied youth population in Western New York, at 50.5 percent (regardless of ethnicity). Also notable is that white and Black individuals also identifying as Hispanic or Latinx make up about 13.8 percent of this population experiencing homelessness (HUD does not differentiate between Hispanic/Latinx and includes both in one category under “ethnicity”). This diversity and overrepresentation of people of color and of Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity in our community shows a need for trauma-informed and culturally responsive interventions for youth.⁴

Reported Race and Ethnicity	Youth in HMIS	% Percentage of the Total (926)
Black and Non-Hispanic/Latinx	437	47 %
White and Non-Hispanic/Latinx	234	25 %
Black and Hispanic/Latinx	31	3%
White and Hispanic/Latinx	97	10.50 %
Mixed Race and Non-Hispanic/Latinx	62	6.70 %
Mixed Race and Hispanic/Latinx	9	1%
Native American and Non-Hispanic/Latinx	8	.9%
Native American and Hispanic/Latinx	4	.4%
Pacific Islander and Non-Hispanic/Latinx	3	.3%
Pacific Islander and Hispanic/Latinx	5	.5%

Table 4: Percentages of youth and race / ethnicity

*Excludes data not collected or missing data

*Latinx is a gender-neutral term to describe those who identify as what would previously be described as Latino/Latina.

³ 2017, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “Annual Homeless Assessment Report 2017”. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

⁴ National Network for Youth, “What Works to End Youth Homelessness?” <https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015-What-Works-to-End-Youth-Homelessness.pdf>

“BeCounted! End Youth Homelessness” Campaign: A Youth-Specific Point-in-Time Count

In October of 2017, our CoC conducted its second youth-specific point in time count, called the BeCounted! End Youth Homelessness campaign. Homeless Alliance along with several homeless services agencies across Western New York coordinated the youth campaign, which was advertised through posters, social media, radio interviews, and even a short documentary⁵. The campaign counted approximately 583 youth (both with their parents and unaccompanied) between the ages of 11 and 24 identifying as at-risk, unstably housed, or experiencing homelessness. Surveys were given at 29 sites across Western New York. Five school districts participated by including questions about homelessness on their Youth Risk Behavior Survey – City of Buffalo, City of Niagara Falls, Letchworth, Lakeshore, and Depew. (The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is given every two years). The BeCounted! Campaign sought to count not only youth experiencing literal homelessness, but also youth who were at-risk, unstably housed, or temporarily staying with friends, relatives, or strangers. The following section contains the data compiled from the BeCounted! surveys.

Main Findings

- 305 unaccompanied youth were experiencing literal homelessness, were unstably housed or at-risk, or “couch-surfing”
- 30.5 percent identified as a parent
- 41 percent identified as male, 32 percent as female, 14 percent as transgender, and 2.5 percent as “another” gender (unspecified). 9.5 percent did not respond
- 41.5 percent of those who reported their sexual orientation identified as LGBTQ or questioning
- The average age of unaccompanied minor youth experiencing homelessness was 15.5 years

Age

The majority of minor youth were between the ages of 14 and 16 years old. According to the Centers for Disease Control, individuals aged 12 – 19 (teenagers) are going through many developmental changes such as becoming more independent from their parents, developing intimate relationships, and may be experiencing mental health issues for the first time. The teenage years are also a prime time for youth to engage in risky health behaviors such as substance use, sexual activity, and running away from home. In addition to poor impulse control by the very nature of the adolescent brain, homeless youth may be at an increased risk of engaging in risky health behaviors because of lack of supervision, stress and anxiety, and exploitation from strangers offering a place to stay.

⁵ Community: The Youth Task Force has launched the Be Counted: End Youth Homelessness Campaign". <http://wblk.com/community-the-youth-task-force-has-launched-the-be-counted-end-youth-homelessness-campaign/>

Reported Age	Percentage
11 – 13 years	23 %
14 – 16 years	37.5 %
17 – 19 years	25 %
20 – 24 years	5 %
No Response	9 %

Table 5: Percentages of youth and their reported sexual orientation

Locations of Homelessness

Of the 583 youth identified as literally homeless, 305 identified as unaccompanied youth (those who identified they were NOT with their parents the previous night). The table below shows where youth reported to have spent the night prior to responding to the survey. The majority of unaccompanied youth report couch-surfing; which may disqualify them from receiving homelessness assistance under HUD. HUD-funded programs are required to document the homeless history of their clients, and it can be challenging to document that a youth has indeed been homeless if they have not been utilizing emergency shelters or living on the street. Also significant is that 25 percent reported spending the night unsheltered. According to HUD's 2017 AHAR, unaccompanied youth across the country were more likely to experience unsheltered homelessness (55 %) compared to all individuals experiencing homelessness (48 %).

Where did you sleep last night?	Percentage of Unaccompanied Youth
Shelter	19 %
At a Motel	8.5 %
Transitional Housing	10.5 %
On the Street or other public place	25 %
Couchsurfing	37 %

Table 6: Percentages of unaccompanied homeless youth and where they reported staying the previous night

LGBTQ

Of the 305 unaccompanied youth experiencing literal homelessness or couch surfing, 217 responded to the question asking about their sexual orientation - 41.5 percent identified as LGBTQ or questioning. Thus, interventions for youth experiencing homelessness should be sensitive to and aware of the unique issues of LGBTQ⁶ youth. A fairly high number of youth, 88, did not provide a response to this question asking about sexual orientation.

*LGBTQ Status	Number of Unaccompanied Youth who responded
Heterosexual or straight	58.5 %
Bisexual	15 %
I don't know or questioning	13 %
Gay or lesbian	11 %
**Pansexual	13 %

Table 7: Percentages of youth and their reported sexual orientation

*88 individuals did not provide a response so were not included in calculating these percentages

**Pansexual refers to an attraction to one's personality, regardless of gender

⁶ *LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer) is an umbrella term including one's identity and expression of sexuality and gender. This generally includes most individuals not identifying as heteronormative or cisgender

School Age Youth and The McKinney-Vento Act

The experience of homelessness for children can be traumatic and can disrupt typical learning and development⁷. In order to alleviate some of the traumatic stress involved with experiencing homelessness, the federal government created the McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth program (EHCY). Through this program, public schools are required to have McKinney-Vento liaisons on staff to identify and assist students who are unaccompanied and homeless and/or experiencing homelessness with their families. These students are eligible for assistance with transportation and other services to ensure they receive a quality education despite experiencing homelessness⁸. In addition to being eligible for assistance for school, homeless children also are prioritized for enrollment at Head Start and Early Head Start agencies.

NYSTEACHS is an open database of student demographics for New York State. This database tracks students falling under the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless, which is more expansive than the HUD definition to include those living doubled-up, couch-surfing, at-risk of homelessness, or otherwise unstably housed. The following charts show the number of students in each school district per year who receive assistance under the McKinney Vento Act. These numbers include students who are unaccompanied as well as students experiencing homelessness with their families.

Erie County	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
AKRON CSD	<4	<4	0	0	<4	0
ALDEN CSD	0	0	0	0	<4	<4
ALOMA D. JOHNSON CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	0	0
AMHERST CSD	13	<4	12	5	16	18
BUFFALO ACAD OF SCIENCE CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	0	0
BUFFALO CITY SD	1033	909	1,391	2125	2311	1687
BUFFALO UNITED CHARTER SCHOOL	31	31	33	11	20	15
CHARTER SCHOOL FOR APPLIED TECHNOLOG	0	18	29	27	35	29
CHARTER SCHOOL OF INQUIRY	37	41	0	No data	0	0
CHEEKTOWAGA CSD	20	17	47	54	60	54
CHEEKTOWAGA-MARYVALE UFSD	10	12	26	21	60	22
CHEEKTOWAGA-SLOAN UFSD	12	20	<4	17	17	22
CLARENCE CSD	23	26	16	15	12	6
CLEVELAND HILL UFSD	0	5	28	28	9	19
DEPEW UFSD	12	13	9	16	13	18
EAST AURORA UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT	0	<4	<4	0	0	0
EDEN CSD	10	15	30	13	8	9
ELMWOOD VILLAGE CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	<4	0	0	0
ENTERPRISE CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	0	10	12	18

⁷ National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE, "Early Care and Education for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness." <https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/early-childhood.pdf>

⁸ National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE, "The Educational Rights of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness: What Service Providers Need to Know". https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/service_providers.pdf

EVANS-BRANT CSD (LAKE SHORE)	22	48	69	31	44	28
FRONTIER CSD	9	12	14	5	12	34
GLOBAL CONCEPTS CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	10	12
GRAND ISLAND CSD	<4	11	7	13	9	15
HAMBURG CSD	<4	<4	<4	5	8	6
HEALTH SCIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL	0	<4	8	6	11	10
HOLLAND CSD	11	<4	<4	7	9	<4
IROQUOIS CSD	7	10	22	10	<4	6
KENMORE-TONAWANDA UFSD	131	116	104	93	111	135
KING CENTER CHARTER SCHOOL	5	8	9	9	6	5
LACKAWANNA CITY SD	7	<4	10	14	17	32
LANCASTER CSD	16	5	5	10	<4	8
NORTH COLLINS CSD	0	0	0	<4	<4	0
ORACLE CHARTER SCHOOL	<4	<4	<4	0	0	0
ORCHARD PARK CSD	21	39	17	10	19	8
SOUTH BUFFALO CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	<4	<4
SPRINGVILLE-GRIFFITH INST CSD	6	8	<4	7	8	10
SWEET HOME CSD	7	6	33	31	32	55
TAPESTRY CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	<4	6	10	7
TONAWANDA CITY SD	19	30	42	51	32	26
WEST BUFFALO CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	<4	<4	<4	<4
WEST SENECA CSD	66	61	39	48	39	52
WESTERN NY MARITIME CHARTER SCHOOL	12	12	13	6	7	10
WESTMINSTER COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	0	7	<4	5
WILLIAMSVILLE CSD	7	18	19	18	14	13

Table 8.1: Erie County McKinney-Vento Homeless Counts by School District

Niagara County	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
BARKER CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	5	<4	0	<4	18	13
LEWISTON-PORTER CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	<4	<4	<4	<4	<4	<4
LOCKPORT CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	80	84	88	98	116	173
NEWFANE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	5	<4	0	<4	5	<4
NIAGARA CHARTER SCHOOL	0	0	0	0	0	9
NIAGARA FALLS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	27	53	59	76	91	112
NIAGARA-WHEATFIELD CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	38	34	62	73	71	74
NORTH TONAWANDA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	14	15	18	20	15	16
ROYALTON-HARTLAND CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	8	5	11	19	17	13
STARPOINT CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	7	7	7	7	6	<4
WILSON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	<4	<4	<4	<4	<4	<4

Table 8.2: Niagara County McKinney-Vento Homeless Counts by School District

Genesee County	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
ALEXANDER CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	<4	<4	0	<4	<4	5
BATAVIA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	31	34	43	73	93	48
BYRON-BERGEN CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	11	<4	<4	<4	<4	<4
ELBA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	8	9	9	<4	<4	8
LE ROY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	<4	<4	<4	6	<4	6
OAKFIELD-ALABAMA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	11	7	15	9	5	8
PAVILION CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	8	17	12	10	<4	<4
PEMBROKE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	0	<4	<4	9	<4	7

Table 8.3: Genesee County McKinney-Vento Homeless Counts by School District

Orleans County	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
ALBION CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	25	45	27	21	26	15
HOLLEY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	31	37	25	15	32	<4
KENDALL CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	6	21	11	13	<4	11
LYNDONVILLE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	0	<4	0	0	<4	<4
MEDINA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	6	<4	12	19	22	32

Table 8.4: Orleans County McKinney-Vento Homeless Counts by School District

Wyoming County	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2015-2016
ATTICA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	6	10	<4	9	9	14
LETCHWORTH CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	8	5	10	<4	<4	<4
PERRY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	41	36	22	9	15	17
WARSAW CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	17	37	27	14	15	15
WYOMING CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	0	0	<4	<4	<4	<4

Table 8.5: Wyoming County McKinney-Vento Homeless Counts by School District

Conclusion

For the last several years, Homeless Alliance has applied for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project grant through HUD. This multi-million dollar grant would be used to solidify a coordinated community plan to end youth homelessness as well as support the creation of innovative youth-specific services. We have not yet received this grant, but each year we are increasing the scope of our data in youth homelessness and developing partnerships with key community stakeholders. It is through collaboration, creativity, and innovative use of new and current resources that will get us closer to ending youth homelessness.

Policy Recommendations

- Promote evidence-based, low-barrier, housing first programs for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.
- Research supports the effectiveness of a 24 hour youth-specific drop in center where youth can congregate safely, learn independent living skills, obtain toiletries and food, and be linked with housing and other services.
- The majority of UY responding to the BeCounted! survey reported to be couch-surfing (37 %), therefore funding should be allocated to allow interventions for these youth falling outside of HUD's literal definition of homelessness.
- Increase collaboration among systems that serve at-risk and homeless youth, such as the child welfare system, schools, employment and education agencies, and homeless services providers.
- More research and policy is needed on homeless youth who are survivors of human trafficking and other physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation.
- More research is needed on the trajectory of youth aging out of foster care into homelessness.
- Given that the average age of youth homelessness was 15 years; our community should create a data-informed prevention program that partners with local districts to identify school-age youth at-risk of becoming homeless.