



Massachusetts Youth Count 2017

A report from the Massachusetts Commission on
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth on homelessness, housing
instability, and access to services among youth and young adults
under the age of 25 in the Commonwealth.

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Structure of the Massachusetts Youth Count	1
2.0 Youth Count Methodology.....	2
2.1 Refinement of the Uniform Survey Tool	2
2.2 Continuum of Care Engagement	3
2.2.1. Key Planning and Implementation Activities.....	4
3.0 2017 Youth Count Results and Analysis.....	5
3.1 Housing Status and Reasons for Homelessness	6
3.1.1 Where Slept the Night Before Taking the Survey	6
3.1.2 Why Respondents Were No Longer with Parent or Guardian	8
3.2 Education, Employment, and Other Income Sources	9
3.2.1 Education	9
3.2.2 Income Sources.....	11
3.3 Service Utilization by Unaccompanied Homeless Youth.....	13
3.4 Subpopulations.....	16
3.4.1 Pregnant or Parenting.....	17
3.4.2 Systems Involvement.....	19
3.4.3 LGBTQ	23
3.5 Demographics.....	26
3.5.1 Age	26
3.5.2 Race/Ethnicity	27
3.5.3 Gender	28
3.5.4 Sexual Orientation	28
3.5.5 Place of Birth.....	29
3.5.6 Demographic Summary	29
4.0 Conclusion.....	30
5.0 References	32
6.0 Attachments.....	33

“There are more homeless youth out there than the world realizes and it needs to be more known.”

— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In May 2017, the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (the Commission) conducted the fourth annual Massachusetts Youth Count (Count), a statewide initiative to survey unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. The Commission defines an unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) as a person who:

- 1) **Is 24 years of age or younger; and**
- 2) **Is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian; and**
- 3) **Lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.**

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts understands that to ensure the health and wellbeing of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness—undoubtedly one of society’s most vulnerable populations—it is critically important to determine the scope of the problem. To that end, the 2017 Count builds on momentum from the groundbreaking 2014 Count, which was the first statewide effort of its kind in the United States. The 2014 Count also established a baseline against which progress in addressing unaccompanied youth homelessness can be measured. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services allocated \$150,000 from its Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17) administrative line item (4000-0300) to continue the state’s commitment to better understand the scope of homelessness among unaccompanied youth. This report is being submitted to comply with that requirement. The ultimate goal of the Count is to produce information that will guide the development of policies and programs to reduce homelessness among unaccompanied youth. This report presents the process and outcomes of the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count.

1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT

Three key organizing entities supported the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count: the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (the Commission), the Identification and Connection Working Group (the Working Group) of the Commission, and 16 local Continuums of Care (CoCs).¹

The ***Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth*** provides oversight for the initiative and is responsible for reporting on its progress annually to the Governor’s Office, the Legislature, and the Office of the Child Advocate. The Executive Office of Health and Human Services chairs the Commission, and at the time of the 2017 Count, the Commission included 28 members, representing youth, state government, service providers, and advocates (see Attachment A for members of the Commission).

¹ A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.

The **Identification and Connection Working Group** of the Commission organized and facilitated the Massachusetts Youth Count on behalf of the Commission. For the 2017 Count, its primary responsibilities were to update the Count methodology; edit the uniform survey tool based on feedback from youth, CoCs, providers, and Commission members; coordinate a statewide conference for stakeholders to prepare for the Count; and implement the Count in partnership with CoCs.

The **CoCs** implemented the Youth Count at the local/regional level. Each CoC has a unique geographic area to cover, a mix of resources and providers, and high demand for homeless services.

2.0 YOUTH COUNT METHODOLOGY

The Commission, through the Working Group, provided technical assistance to the 16 participating CoCs in Massachusetts that executed the Youth Count survey in 2017. The Count's uniform survey tool was administered during a two-week period in May 2017. The Working Group developed guidelines for CoCs to work with diverse partners to identify young people who may or may not be connected to schools, employment, or social services and to engage youth volunteers, also known as "Youth Ambassadors," to assist with implementation.²

The Working Group formulated a set of guidelines based on best practices to conduct a youth count (see Pergamit et al., 2013). Recommended practices included forming a local planning committee, providing stipends to youth volunteers, conducting focused youth outreach and marketing of the count, training all volunteers, engaging diverse partners, providing day-of coordination and quality control, and seeking creative ways to engage youth under 18.

2.1 REFINEMENT OF THE UNIFORM SURVEY TOOL

To develop the 2017 uniform survey tool, the Working Group started with the 2016 survey tool and worked to further address limitations, reduce confusion, and encourage completion of each question by survey participants. Very minor modifications were made to the 2017 tool as follows:

- The question asking, "What is your age?" was moved to directly before Date of Birth (Questions 3a and 3b).
- HiSET degree was added to the question about whether the participant has a high school diploma or GED (Question 14).
- Questions about being in juvenile detention and adult jail were combined into one question (Question 20).

² Please see the Commission's September 2014 report entitled "Massachusetts Youth Count 2014: Overview and Analysis" for more history on the Count's methodology and its development:
<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/eohhs/cyf/mayouthcount2014.pdf>.

- A question asking for all income sources was added back to the tool after being removed for the 2016 Count. Respondents could check as many as applied and also could describe any income sources that were not on the list (Question 22).
- The question about exchanging sex for money or other necessities (Question 23) is now after the question about income sources.
- Domestic violence/sexual assault counseling was added as a service option to the question on help sought over the past year (Question 24).
- Agender and Two-Spirit were added as options to describe gender identity (Question 28).
- Asexual was added as an option to describe sexual orientation (Question 29).
- An official-use-only question about survey date, site, and administering organization was added to the paper survey, but not the Survey Monkey (question not numbered).

The survey was administered using Survey Monkey as well as through a paper version. The paper survey was available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, Khmer/Cambodian, and Brazilian Portuguese. The electronic form in Survey Monkey was available in English and Spanish. See Attachment B for the final 2017 Uniform Survey Tool.

2.2 CONTINUUM OF CARE ENGAGEMENT

Once the methodology and updated survey tool were complete, the Working Group worked with the CoCs to develop the outreach strategies. Engagement with the CoCs during this phase included email and telephone conversations providing basic information about what the Working Group was hoping to accomplish, grant information, and an overview PowerPoint presentation that described the Commission and the proposed methodology.

CoCs were invited to attend a half-day Massachusetts Youth Count Conference at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, which was held on March 9, 2017. The Commission and Working Group's goal for the conference was to orient everyone to the initiative, provide information about the methodology and survey tool, and facilitate a discussion among CoCs and other partners about promising Youth Count practices, with a particular focus on authentic engagement of youth. Approximately 40 people were in attendance, including at least one representative from each of the CoCs. Following the Massachusetts Youth Count Conference, the Working Group co-chairs began providing ongoing technical assistance to each CoC. Additionally, each CoC had the opportunity to apply for a capacity-building grant in the amount of \$7,500 from the Commission to help with financial costs of conducting the Youth Count. Not all CoCs accepted the grant; some were able to administer the survey with other resources.

2.2.1 KEY PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Debriefing calls were made with 14 out of the 16 CoCs that participated in the 2017 Youth Count. Table One summarizes key components of their counts and includes the number of surveys collected as well as the percent and number of respondents meeting the Commission's definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth.

Table One: Summary of Key CoC Planning and Implementation Activities

Continuum of Care	Planning Committee	# Days Survey Period	Outreach to LGBTQ Youth	Outreach to Youth Under 18	Youth Ambassadors	Street Count /Out-reach	Magnet Events	Used Incentives	Total # Surveys Collected	% Commission Definition (#)
Boston	Yes	14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	587	26.4% (155)
Attleboro/Taunton	Yes	7	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	107	4.7% (5)
Balance of State	Yes	14	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	331	9.7% (32)
South Shore	No	14	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	69	43.5% (30)
Cambridge	No	14	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	47	36.2% (17)
Cape	No	14	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	74	6.7% (5)
Fall River	Yes	14	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	193	5.7% (11)
Hampden	Yes	7	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	120	55% (66)
Lowell	Yes	14	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	330	8.2% (27)
Lynn	Yes	17	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	83	36.1% (30)
New Bedford									332	7.2% (24)
Newton									6	0% (0)
North Shore	Yes	14	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	105	32.4% (34)
Somerville	Yes	14	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	76	21.1% (16)
3 County Rural	No	14	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	103	17.5% (18)
Worcester County	Yes	14	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	148	20.9% (31)

Nine out of the 14 CoCs interviewed formed a special planning committee for the Count. The remaining CoCs used an existing committee or subcommittee to plan and conduct the Count. Only five of the CoCs reported using special outreach strategies to LGBTQ populations; yet, a higher percentage of youth meeting the Commission definition reported an LGBTQ identity in 2017 as compared to 2016. Nine of the CoCs reported conducting special outreach to youth under 18; in 2017 a higher percentage of youth meeting the Commission definition were under 18. Eight of the CoCs utilized youth ambassadors; nine conducted street outreach; seven held magnet events; and 13 utilized incentives for youth ambassadors and/or to compensate youth for filling out the survey.

Surveys were collected in 144 out of the 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts (41%). Surveys from respondents who met the Commission definition were collected in 52 of these cities and towns.

More details on successes and challenges from the 2017 Count can be found in Attachment F.

3.0 2017 YOUTH COUNT RESULTS AND ANALYSIS³

In total, 2,900 surveys were completed and entered into the database for analysis. Respondents over the age of 24, duplicates, and surveys with ambiguous housing status were removed (i.e., if a respondent chose multiple, contradictory items to the question, “Where did you sleep last night?”). If it was not clear whether a survey was a duplicate, it was included in the database. A total of 2,711 surveys were included in the final analysis.

These 2,711 responses were analyzed to determine the number that met the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth that was adopted by the Commission (See Section 1.0 for the definition). In 2017, a total of 501 survey respondents met the Commission’s definition. Table Two presents the total number of included surveys and the total number meeting the Commission’s definition. Out of the 501 meeting the Commission definition, 354 total unaccompanied respondents also met the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness (i.e., slept in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, domestic violence safe havens, and places not meant for habitation the prior night).

An additional 246 youth and young adults were currently experiencing homelessness, but were accompanied by a parent or guardian. Of the housed youth, 558 of them reported being homeless at some point in the past. Fifty housed, unaccompanied respondents reported not having a safe place to stay for the next 14 days. Lastly, it is important to note that the Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE) reported that there were 1,038 unaccompanied homeless students in Massachusetts publicly funded schools during the 2016-2017 school year. These additional data points suggest a higher level of homelessness and housing instability than revealed by the numbers of youth and young adults meeting the Commission’s definition at the time of the Count.

TABLE TWO	2017 MA COUNT
TOTAL # SURVEYS	2,711
TOTAL # HUD DEFINITION	354
# HOMELESS/ACCOMPANIED BY PARENT OR GUARDIAN	246
# CURRENTLY HOUSED BUT HOMELESS IN PAST	558
TOTAL # COMMISSION DEFINITION	501
# UNDER 18	28
# LGBTQ	114
# FOSTER CARE INVOLVEMENT	150
# JUVENILE/CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT	132
# PARENTING/PREGNANT	129

³ Throughout the findings section, unless otherwise specified, the term “respondents” refers to youth and young adults who meet the Commission definition for unaccompanied homeless youth.

Surveys from the 1,266 respondents who had reported never being homeless were analyzed to provide a point of comparison for several of the variables of interest (e.g., education and employment, system involvement, etc.). These housed, never-homeless respondents included 80 unaccompanied youth and young adults. The remaining housed, never-homeless respondents were still with family.

The results of the 2017 Youth Count survey indicate that there are actually multiple populations of unaccompanied homeless youth. While lack of access to safe and stable housing is the common denominator, there appear to be distinct clusters of causes, service needs, barriers, and coping strategies among different subpopulations and across different regions of the state. These subpopulations include young people who identify as LGBTQ, who have been involved in foster care or the justice system, and who are pregnant or parenting. More attention to the intersectional identities of young people who meet the Commission definition is needed to prevent and intervene in youth homelessness and housing insecurity.

“Sometimes it is harder than other times to survive, and it is not a topic that everyone is comfortable opening up about. It is something that is prevalent throughout every community, but it is also a very sensitive subject. Some people deny themselves from finding help because they are ashamed of having the title ‘homeless’ tied to them. I personally, have no problem speaking about my situation, but I know how hard it is. Growing up in hotels, shelters, and even couch surfing there was a time in which it was hard for me. There is a lot of support as well, I just don’t think it is easy to come upon for those who don’t know where to look.”

— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

3.1 HOUSING STATUS AND REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

“It’s horrible, being hassled by the police for just trying to sleep.”

— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

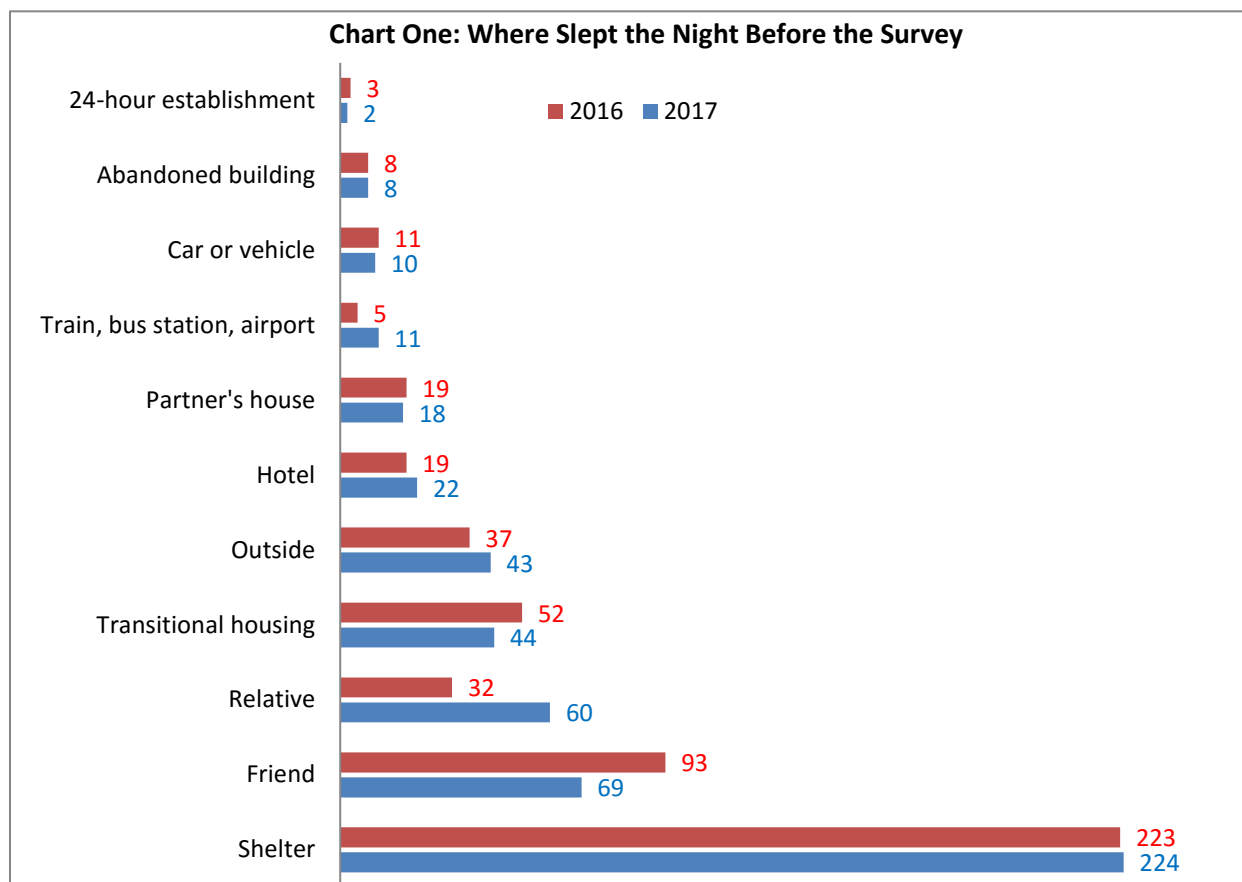
3.1.1 WHERE SLEPT THE NIGHT BEFORE TAKING THE SURVEY

Chart One provides information on where the respondents slept the night before taking the survey.⁴ In 2017, 290 out of the 501 respondents (58%) had stayed at a shelter, transitional housing, or a hotel on the night before the Count. Of these, 224 (45% of all respondents) slept in a shelter, including youth-focused shelters, adult family shelters, and single adult shelters. This represents a third year of increase in the shelter population. In 2016, 44% of the respondents were in shelter and in 2015, 42% were in shelters.

⁴ The total number of places a respondent slept adds up to 511 even though 501 individuals who met the Commission definition were identified. This is due to some respondents checking more than one option. Only in cases where all the options checked would indicate homelessness were the surveys kept in the analysis.

Like in the two prior years, the next most common response was staying with family, a partner, or a friend, with 147 or 29% of respondents. Sixty of the respondents staying with a family member, partner, or friend either knew that they did not have a safe place to stay for the next 14 days or were unsure whether or not they did. Seventy-four respondents reported being unsheltered, meaning they stayed outside or another place not meant for habitation. At close to 15% of respondents, this is several percentage points higher than last year's Count. Most CoCs conducted their counts through service-based strategies and nine reported doing street-based outreach. Given relatively limited street-based counts, the actual number of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults who were couch surfing or living on the streets was likely higher.

The following CoCs had higher rates of respondents reporting that they slept in a location not meant for habitation than the state rate of 14.7%: Balance of State (18%); Boston (19%); Lynn (20%); Somerville (25%); and Three County (28%).

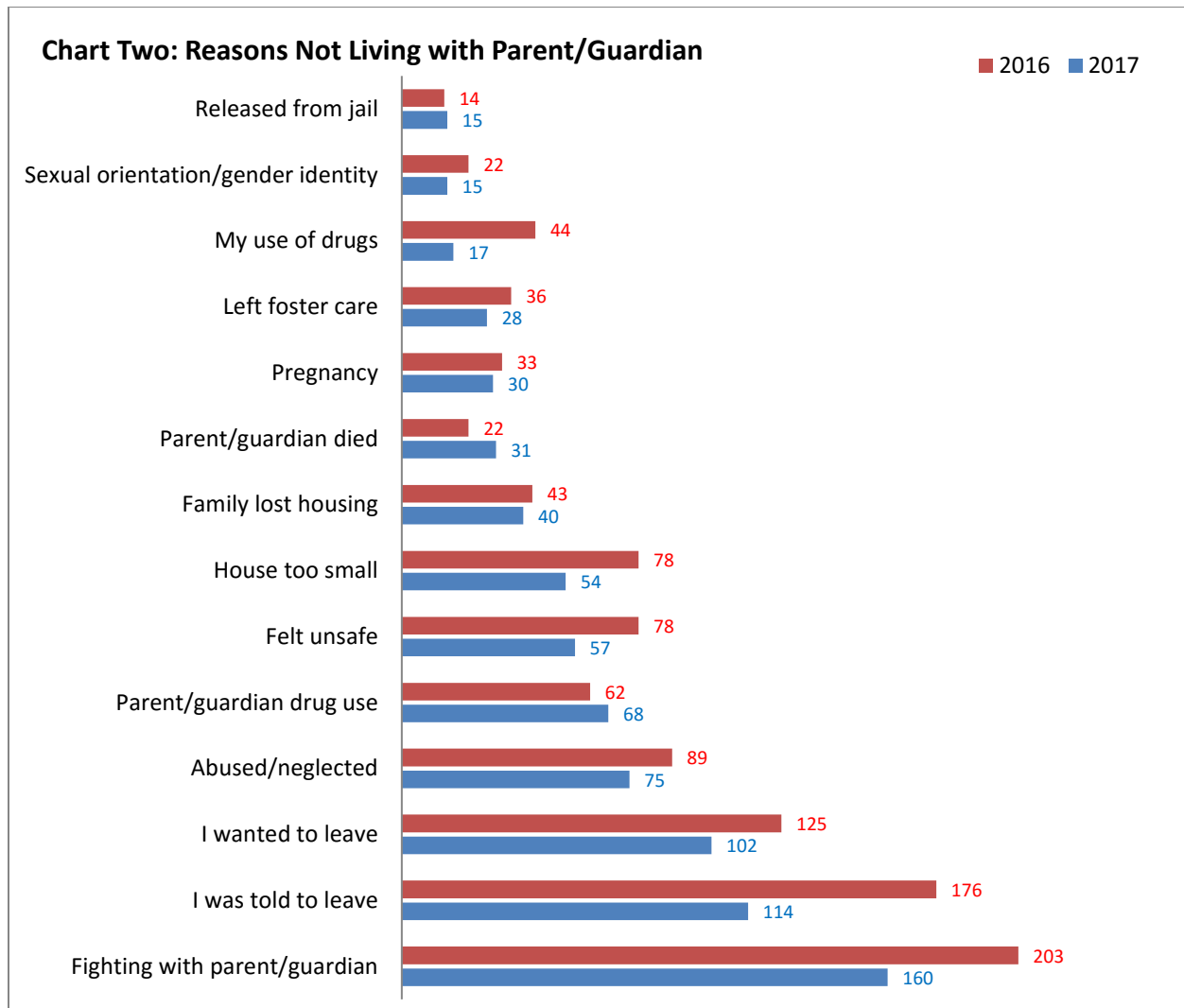


3.1.2 WHY RESPONDENTS WERE NO LONGER WITH PARENT OR GUARDIAN

In order to gain insight into young people's path to homelessness, the survey included a question about why the respondent was no longer with their parent or guardian. As presented in Chart Two, the survey provided 14 options and respondents could choose as many as were relevant to their situation.

Like in 2015 and 2016, the top reasons unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults were not living with their families were due to family conflict. Fighting, being told to leave, abuse/neglect, and feeling unsafe were among the top reasons young people were not with family. Interestingly, while these were the top reasons, fewer respondents reported them in 2017 as compared to the prior two years.

In 2017, there was a 9.6% increase in the number of youth who reported not being with family due to parent/guardian drug use (2016=62 vs. 2017=68) and a 40.9% increase due to parent or guardian death (2016=22 vs. 2017=31). While these are not large numeric increases, they were the only reasons that substantially increased from 2016 to 2017. For young people under 18 years old, parental substance use was the second most frequent reason they were not living with parents; and for young people ages 18-20, it was the fourth most common reason. Looking at this issue regionally, Boston (34%) and South Shore (13%) had the most respondents reporting parental substance abuse as a reason they no longer live with family. Alternatively, no youth on the Cape, in Fall River, or in Somerville reported parental substance use as a reason.



3.2 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND OTHER INCOME SOURCES

The survey included questions regarding school enrollment, educational attainment, employment, and income sources. These questions provide insight into challenges homeless youth and young adults may experience in achieving housing and economic stability in the future. The employment questions asked in 2017 differ from 2016 in that they include more questions about youth's income sources.

3.2.1 EDUCATION

Of the respondents who met the Commission definition, 261 of them (52%) reported having a high school diploma or equivalent; 207 respondents (41%) reported not having a diploma. Thirty-three

respondents left this question blank. Eighty-three respondents who did not have a diploma were still in school.

Table Three provides more information about all respondents to the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count survey who were not in school and did not have a diploma, because the Chapin Hall Voices of Youth Count study identified this as a major risk factor for youth homelessness.⁵ Table Three shows that 261 individuals who took the survey reported not being in school and not having a diploma. Out of these 261, 119 met the Commission definition, or 45%. As a point of comparison, only 43 respondents (16%) who had never been homeless were not in school and did not have a diploma; 66 (25%) formerly homeless but now housed respondents were not in school and did not have a diploma. In more straightforward terms, respondents who met the Commission definition were almost three times more likely to be out of school without a diploma than housed, never-homeless respondents.

Looking just at the respondents who met the Commission definition, roughly 24% were not in school and did not have a diploma. These respondents tended to be older than the other two groups, with an average age of 21.1.

Table Three: Rates of Being Not in School and Not Having a Diploma by Housing Status	Commission Definition	Housed, Formerly Homeless	Housed, Never Homeless
Out of Total Sample (N=2711)	119/261 45%	66/261 25%	43/261 16%
Out of Respondents Who Met Commission Definition (N=501)	119/501 23.7%	NA	NA
Average Age	21.1	18.9	17.4

The following CoCs' rates of respondents not being in school and not having a diploma exceeded the state rate: Balance of State (25%); Fall River (36.4%); Hampden County (28.8%); Lowell (25.9%); Lynn (26.7%); New Bedford (45.8%); and North Shore (26.5%). Regional efforts between Fall River/New Bedford and Lynn/North Shore may be warranted on this issue.

“As a homeless student with independent status, [state university name] should have some type of program or housing assistance for us during breaks. It's unfair. We have to pay \$5,000 plus to stay here for the summer in the dorms. I'm on my own, I can't afford that. I sleep in my car sometimes, I'm trying to get an education and a career and it just seems so hard because of this. It's a lot of stress on me & I feel like no one actually cares enough to give you assistance.”

— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

⁵ For more information on the Chapin Hall study, visit: http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_NationalReport_Final.pdf.

Respondents with systems involvement were even more likely to not be in school and not have a diploma. For respondents with foster care involvement the rate was 27.3%, and for respondents with criminal justice involvement the rate was 35.6%. Respondents who were pregnant or parenting with custody of their children were less likely to not be in school and not have a diploma at a rate of 20%.

Although questions about higher education involvement were not included in the 2017 Youth Count survey, the issue of homelessness on Massachusetts' college campuses has been coming to light with attention from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. The following open-ended response from a 2017 Youth Count respondent reinforces the need to address homelessness among college students.

3.2.2 INCOME SOURCES

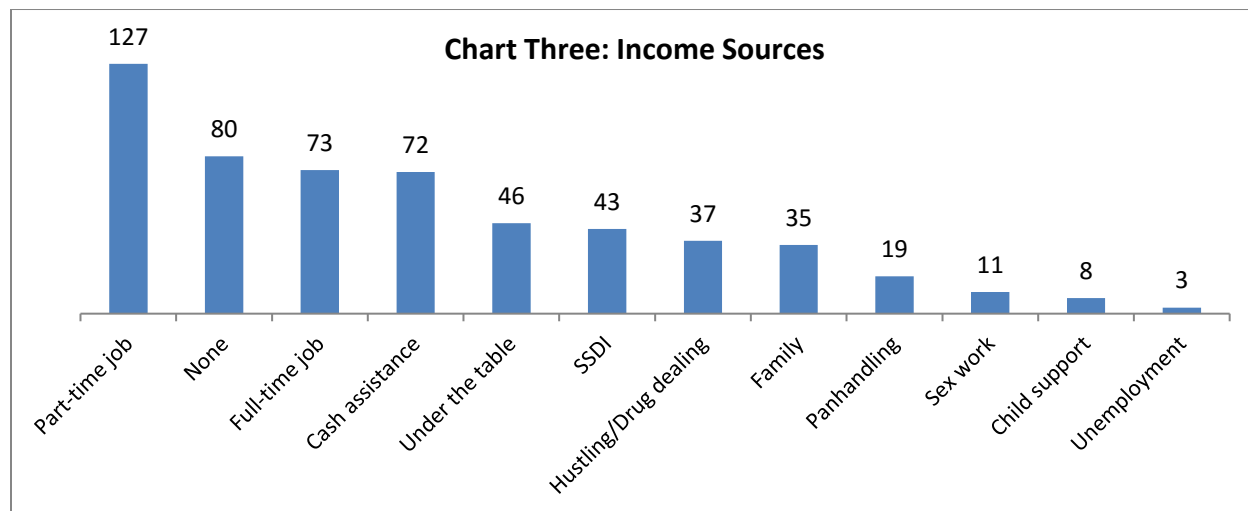
In 2017, respondents were asked about their current sources of income. They could choose as many as were relevant to them. Chart Three provides details about the number of respondents who reported receiving income from each source.

One-quarter of the respondents reported working at a part-time job. This represented the largest source of income for unaccompanied youth and young adults currently experiencing homelessness. Having no income was the second most common response, at 15.9% of respondents. Full-time employment was the third most common response at 14.5%. Hustling or drug dealing only represented 7% of reported income sources; panhandling represented 3.7%; and sex work represented 2.1%. These results indicate that many of the respondents reported being engaged in legal activities to earn money. Fall River was a bit of an outlier, in that respondents from there did not report full- or part-time employment as one of their top three income sources; their top three were Family, Cash Assistance, and SSDI. Fall River was also noteworthy in that 87% of respondents indicated that they received some or all of the help they needed (see below for more details on this question). This high rate of connection to services may explain why these respondents received more of their income from benefits. Alternatively, the high unemployment rate in this region may provide context to understand challenges young people face in accessing jobs.

Respondents also were asked about past involvement in exchanging sex for money, housing, or other necessities. Sixty-eight respondents or 13.5% of unaccompanied youth who were homeless reported yes to this question. UHY were over six times more likely to exchange sex for money or other necessities as compared to housed and never-homeless respondents. Of housed, never-homeless respondents, 2.2% reported having ever exchanged sex for money or other necessities.

Forty-one percent of the respondents who had exchanged sex for money or other necessities were in Boston. Forty-four percent identified as LGBTQ. It is important to highlight that slightly over one-quarter of young people who identified as LGBTQ reported having ever exchanged sex for money or other

necessities and that this is almost double the state rate. Only looking at gender, 28 females, 29 males, and 5 gender nonconforming UHY reported having ever exchanged sex for basic necessities.



The following extended quotation from a 2017 Youth Count respondent provides context to understand challenges young people face in securing safe housing and employment opportunities and illustrates how shortcomings in various systems can drive young people to engaging in sex work to secure basic necessities.

“It's really hard being homeless and I feel that youth should be put as top priority at shelters especially if they are making an effort to better themselves like myself. I've waited months to get into a shelter in my home state and was never selected. The only shelter that took me in was a thirty-day shelter in which I left and still remained homeless. I had went out of my way to get enrolled into job trainings but failed to get a job due to lack of transportation, education and professional attire. When you are in that lifestyle of being homeless you literally degrade yourself for your next meal or a roof over your head whether it be panhandling or selling your body. As a female I put myself at risk more than once and hope to never have to return to that lifestyle and that services work a little harder to help the youth, male or female. I've seen men sell their bodies as I did myself because I could not manage to sell drugs but instead created a nasty habit of abusing them. In all being homeless can damage a youth's life and perception of the world in their eyes and more than likely those kids don't always make the best decision for themselves.”

— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

3.3 SERVICE UTILIZATION BY UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

A major goal of the Massachusetts Youth Count is to gain a better understanding of the kinds of services unaccompanied homeless youth need and the challenges they face accessing them. The survey tool included three questions related to service utilization. The first asked about the types of services respondents tried to access in the past year. The second asked if they got all, some, or none of the help they needed. The third asked about service barriers. Due to the way questions were asked, there is no way to determine youth's ability to access any one particular service type.

Starting with service types, respondents could indicate services they had previously sought from a list of 13 service types. Respondents could also indicate they had not tried to access any help. Chart Four shows the distribution of these responses. The four top most sought out services remained the same in 2017 as compared to 2016 and 2015: housing—both shelter and long-term housing; nutritional assistance; and cash assistance. Although shelter was the most sought service, not all were found to be youth-friendly, as explained by one 2017 Youth Count respondent: ***"I'm afraid all the time—all the shelters have older people and nothing for younger people. I feel out of place."***

In spite of family conflict continuing to be a major driver of unaccompanied youth homelessness, only 8.5% of respondents reported seeking family support services. This service was the 11th most sought out service out of the 13 options. Note, domestic violence and sexual assault counseling were added as a service option starting with the 2017 survey tool.

The number of respondents who reported not seeking help increased by almost 70%—from 33 in 2016 to 56 in 2017. This was the only response to this question that increased from last year. It is not clear why young people were not seeking help, and more research is needed to understand this troubling trend. One potential explanation could be gendered patterns in help seeking. In 2017, 40% of respondents reported being female; 45% reported being male; and 5.5% reported being gender nonconforming. This is a shift as compared to 2016 when 55% of respondents reported being female, 43% reported being male, and 2% reported being gender nonconforming. When examining the gender of those not seeking help, 14% of males reported that they did not seek help, while only 10% of females reported not seeking help, and 0% of gender nonconforming youth. The increase in males as respondents may be part of the reason for the increase in the number of respondents not seeking help. If this is the case, then attention to gender-specific barriers facing males and help seeking may be needed.

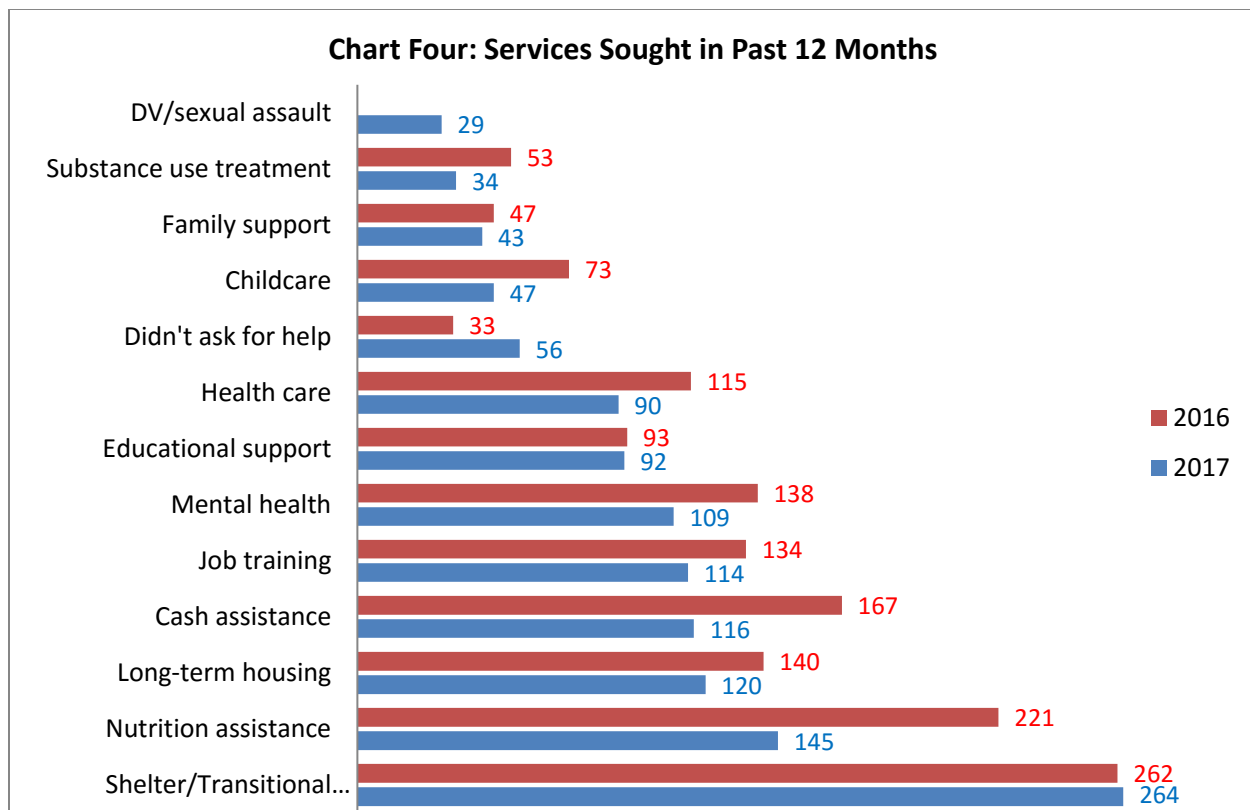


Chart Five shows that one-quarter of the unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults felt they received all the help they needed. The majority received some of the help they needed, and 21% reported receiving none of the help they needed. The percent of respondents reporting that they received none of the help they sought increased from 16% in 2016 to 21% in 2017.

Chart Five: Received the Help Needed?

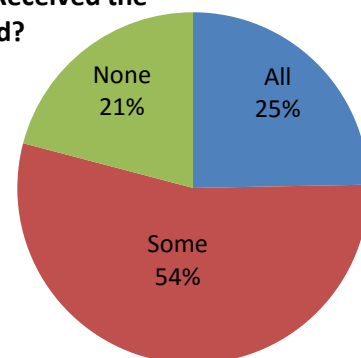
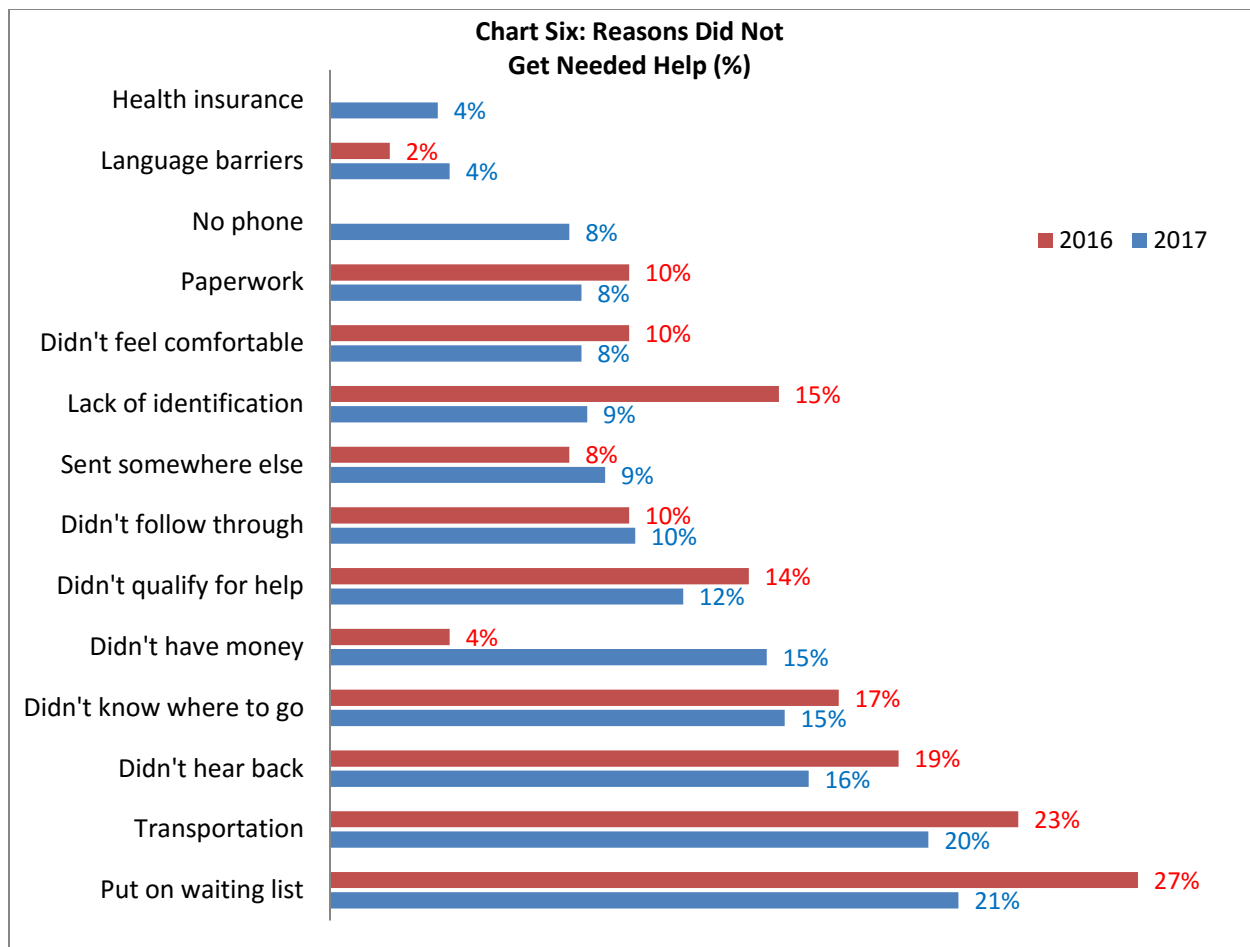


Chart Six provides reasons why young people reported that they did not get the help they needed. The top three reasons remained the same from last year—waiting lists, transportation, and not hearing back from the provider. Yet, the percent of respondents reporting each one decreased from 2016. The following reasons increased in 2017: didn't have money; sent somewhere else; and language barriers. Not having identification or needed documentation decreased 6.4 percentage points as a barrier from 2016 to 2017. The 2017 survey added two new barriers for respondents to select: not having health insurance and not having a phone. Both reasons were selected by fewer than 10% of the respondents.

The Youth Count 2017 data indicates that there is a discrepancy between reasons cited for youth homelessness and accessed resources. Although the Youth Count data indicate that UHY are experiencing homelessness due to a range of issues at home, including fighting, abuse, and neglect, most are not accessing counseling resources or treatment programs. Services least accessed by UHY include domestic violence/sexual assault counseling (6%), substance use/alcohol treatment programs (7%), and family support (8%). UHY are primarily accessing temporary shelter services. One 2017 Youth Count respondent provided some insight into the need for services intentionally designed for young people:

“A lot of us have more issues than just being homeless, like drug use or mental illnesses. We need more support designed for youth and young adults around these problems...More outreach programs that can supply jobs, resume assistance, transitional programs for those who get out of prison, after school programs and educational assistance.”

— 2017 Youth Count Respondent



3.4 SUBPOPULATIONS

As the Commission was interested in learning more about the experiences of vulnerable subpopulations, the survey tool contained questions to determine the number of youth who were pregnant or parenting, who had history of systems involvement, who had veteran status, and who identified as LGBTQ. Table Four presents an overview of these populations as compared to respondents who reported being housed and never homeless.

TABLE FOUR: VULNERABLE POPULATIONS		
Meets Commission Definition (501)	Population	Housed, Never Homeless (1266)
25.8% (129)	Pregnant/Parenting	3.6% (46)
29.9% (150)	Foster Care Involvement	4.6% (58)
26.4% (132)	Juvenile or Criminal Justice Involvement	3.8% (48)
22.8% (114)	LGBTQ	18.2% (231)
5% (13)	Military	<1.0% (10)

As compared to respondents who were housed and never homeless, young people who met the Commission definition were 7 times more likely to be pregnant or parenting; 6.5 times more likely to have had foster care involvement; 7 times more likely to have had justice system involvement; and 5 times more likely to have been in the military. Respondents who met the Commission definition were only slightly more likely to report an LGBTQ identity. In the following section, a closer examination is provided of the experiences of each of these populations with homelessness and service acquisition.

3.4.1 PREGNANT OR PARENTING

Of the 501 youth who met the Commission definition, 129 (26%) were pregnant or parenting. Of these respondents, 85 (66%) of these young people had custody of their child(ren). This is a large drop from 2016 when close to 85% of parenting respondents had custody of their child(ren). Only 3.6% of housed and never-homeless youth and young adults were pregnant or parenting and 76% of them had custody of their children. CoCs with a rate of young parenting higher than the state rate were: Balance of State (31.2%); Hampden (42.4%); Lowell (51.8%); New Bedford (33.3%); North Shore (29.4%); and Three County (27.8%). Interestingly, almost 24% of pregnant/parenting respondents with custody of their children were born outside of the United States. This is almost 10 percentage points higher than the state rate of 15%. Twelve parenting respondents identified as male; 69 were female; and two were transgender or two-spirit.

Table Five provides a rank ordering of where pregnant/parenting respondents with custody of their children stayed the night before the survey as compared to respondents who met the Commission definition as a whole.

Table Five: Rank Ordering of Where Slept the Night Before the Survey	Commission Definition	Pregnant/ Parenting
Shelter	1	1
Friend	2	2
Other relative	3	5
Transitional housing	4	5
Outside	5	3
Hotel	6	4
Partner	7	9
Train/Bus station	8	7
Car	9	0
Abandoned building	10	7
24-hour establishment	11	0

The top two locations that pregnant/parenting respondents stayed the night before mirror the state: shelter or at a friend's house. Sleeping at a hotel or sleeping outside ranked higher for pregnant/parenting respondents than respondents as a whole.

Table Six provides a rank ordering of reasons why pregnant/parenting respondents with custody of their children were no longer living with their parents as compared to respondents who met the Commission definition as a whole.

Table Six: Rank Ordering of Reasons Respondents are Not With Family	Commission Definition	Pregnant/Parenting
Fighting with parent/guardian	1	1
I was told to leave	2	3
I wanted to leave	3	2
Abused/neglected	4	6
Parent/guardian drug use	5	7
Felt unsafe	6	8
House too small	7	5
Family lost housing	8	9
Parent/guardian died	9	11
Pregnancy	10	3
Left foster care	11	9
My use of drugs	12	13
Sexual orientation/gender identity	13	13
Released from jail	13	12

The reasons pregnant and parenting respondents were not living with their parents/guardians that differed most significantly from the sample as a whole were pregnancy and the house being too small.

All of the pregnant/parenting respondents with custody of their children reported seeking help. Table Seven provides a rank ordering of services sought by pregnant/parenting respondents with custody of their children as compared to all respondents who met the Commission definition.

These young people sought cash assistance and childcare more often than respondents who met the Commission definition as a whole. They also were more likely to get the help they needed: 29% reported getting all the help they needed, and only 7% of them reported not getting any of the help they needed. It is encouraging that this vulnerable group reports getting help. The reasons pregnant/parenting youth gave about why they did not receive help mirror that of the state, with the exception of not qualifying for help. This was one of the top reasons for pregnant/parenting respondents, but not respondents as a whole.

In terms of income sources, 43% of these respondents reported receiving cash assistance; this is 29.5 percentage points higher than all respondents who meet the Commission definition. These respondents

were also more likely to be receiving child support and much less likely to report panhandling or having no income at all.

Fifty-four UHY respondents (42%) who were pregnant or parenting had had foster care involvement. Thirty-four of these young people reported having custody of their child(ren). Of the seven pregnant/parenting respondents with custody of their children who had slept outside the night before, 4 of them had had foster care involvement (57%).

Table Seven: Ranking Ordering of Services Sought	Commission Definition	Pregnant/ Parenting
Shelter	1	1
Nutrition	2	3
Long-term housing	3	5
Cash assistance	4	2
Job skills/training	5	6
Mental health	6	7
Education	7	8
Healthcare	8	9
Haven't sought help	9	0
Childcare	10	4
Family support	11	10
Substance use	12	12
Domestic violence/sexual assault counseling	13	11

3.4.2 SYSTEMS INVOLVEMENT

FOSTER CARE

Thirty percent of respondents meeting the Commission definition had ever been in foster care; this is 2 percentage points higher than last year. Only 4.6% of housed, never-homeless youth and young adult respondents had ever been in foster care. Not only are respondents with experience in the foster care system at higher risk of being homeless, they also tended to be sleeping in more unsafe locations. Thirty-nine percent of youth who slept outside the night before the Count had previous foster care involvement. Of all youth with foster care involvement, 11% slept outside the night before the Count, as compared to 8.5% of all respondents who met the Commission definition. The percent of UHY from the following CoCs exceeded the state rate of having ever been in foster care: Boston (39.4%); Lowell (44.4%); North Shore (44.1%); and Worcester (37.7%). The lowest rates of unaccompanied homeless

youth with foster care involvement were found in Fall River (9.1%) and New Bedford (16.7%).⁶ Roughly 45% of respondents with foster care involvement identified as male and 45% identified as female. Close to 38% of respondents who identified as LGBTQ had a history of foster care involvement; which is roughly 8 percentage points higher than respondents as a whole.

As Table Eight indicates, respondents meeting the Commission definition with foster care system involvement were more likely to not be living with parents due to abuse and neglect and leaving foster care than other respondents.

Table Eight: Rank Ordering of Reasons Respondents are Not With Family	Commission Definition	Foster Care
Fighting with parent/guardian	1	1
I was told to leave	2	3
I wanted to leave	3	4
Abused/neglected	4	2
Parent/guardian drug use	5	5
Felt unsafe	6	7
House too small	7	8
Family lost housing	8	9
Parent/guardian died	9	11
Pregnancy	10	9
Left foster care	11	6
My use of drugs	12	14
Sexual orientation/gender identity	13	13
Released from jail	13	12

These young people were more likely to have sought job skills and training services and domestic violence help, but less likely to have sought long-term housing than all respondents who met the Commission definition (See Table Nine).

They reported receiving the help they sought at similar rates to all respondents who met the Commission definition. In terms of income sources, youth with foster care involvement reported part-time jobs, no income sources, and cash assistance as their top three sources. Twenty-nine respondents with foster care involvement (19%) reported having ever exchanged sex for basic necessities. This is 5.5 percentage points higher than respondents who met the Commission definition as a whole.

⁶ It would be important to understand if these two CoCs have intentional strategies to reduce the likelihood that youth exit foster care into homelessness. If they do, these strategies should be shared with other CoCs.

Table Nine: Rank Ordering of Services Sought	Commission Definition	Foster Care
Shelter	1	1
Nutrition	2	3
Long term housing	3	6
Cash assistance	4	4
Job skills/training	5	2
Mental health	6	5
Education	7	7
Healthcare	8	8
Haven't sought help	9	12
Childcare	10	9
Family support	11	9
Substance use	12	12
Domestic violence/sexual assault counseling	13	11

JUVENILE OR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Of the respondents meeting the Commission definition, 26.3% had ever been in juvenile detention or been incarcerated. Only 3.8% of housed, never-homeless youth and young adults who were surveyed had ever been detained. The young people with juvenile or criminal justice system involvement had an elevated likelihood of having slept in a place not meant for habitation the night before the survey; 17.4% of them reported sleeping in a vehicle, outside, or in an abandoned building. This is almost 3 percentage points higher than respondents who met the Commission definition as a whole. Conversely, these young people were less likely to utilize formal housing supports. Fifty percent of respondents with criminal justice involvement stayed in a shelter, transitional housing, or a hotel the night before, as compared to 58% of all respondents who met the Commission definition. The percent of UHY respondents from the following CoCs exceeded the state rate of having ever been detained in the juvenile or criminal justice systems: Boston (32.3%); Hampden (28.8%); Lowell (29.6%); Lynn (33.3%); New Bedford (45.8%); and Three County (27.8%). In terms of gender, respondents with justice system involvement differ substantially from others who met the Commission definition in that 74% reported as male and 16% as female (Commission definition: 40.3% female and 45.1% male).

Respondents who met the Commission definition with justice system involvement were more likely to not be living with family due to parental substance use than other respondents (Justice system=18%; Commission=13.5%). Other reasons that ranked higher for respondents with justice involvement than for UHY respondents as a whole were the house being too small, leaving foster care, and being released from jail (See Table Ten).

Table Ten: Rank Ordering of Reasons Respondents are Not With Family	Commission Definition	Justice System
Fighting with parent/guardian	1	1
I was told to leave	2	2
I wanted to leave	3	4
Abused/neglected	4	5
Parent/guardian drug use	5	3
Felt unsafe	6	7
House too small	7	5
Family lost housing	8	9
Parent/guardian died	9	10
Pregnancy	10	11
Left foster care	11	8
My use of drugs	12	11
Sexual orientation/gender identity	13	12
Released from jail	13	8

These young people were more likely to have sought job skills and training services and substance use services than other respondents (see Table Eleven) and more likely to report that they received none of the help they sought.

Table Eleven: Ranking Ordering of Services Sought	Commission Definition	Justice System
Shelter	1	1
Nutrition	2	3
Long-term housing	3	3
Cash assistance	4	5
Job skills/training	5	2
Mental health	6	5
Education	7	7
Healthcare	8	8
Haven't sought help	9	11
Childcare	10	12
Family support	11	10
Substance use	12	9
Domestic violence/sexual assault counseling	13	13

In terms of income sources, these young people were more likely to have reported hustling or drug dealing to earn money and much less likely to report receiving cash assistance than all respondents who met the Commission definition. Roughly 20.5% of respondents with justice system involvement reported having ever exchanged sex for basic necessities. Seventeen of these young people identified as male; 7 as female; and 3 as gender non-conforming.

DUAL INVOLVEMENT

It is important to note that 61 UHY respondents (12%) reported both foster care and justice system involvement. These young people were more likely to have slept the night before in a place not meant for habitation than the state rate (17.5% dually involved youth vs. 14.7% state rate). These young people were less likely to access shelter, transitional housing, or a hotel; their rate of using these programs was 50.7% vs. 58% of the respondents statewide who met the definition. Half of these respondents were from Boston. For dually involved respondents, 66% were male. Sixty-seven percent of female UHY respondents with criminal justice involvement also had involvement in the foster care system; as a point of comparison, 41% of UHY males with criminal justice involvement also had foster care system involvement.

3.4.3 LGBTQ⁷

In total, 566 out of the 2,711 respondents reported an LGBTQ identity (20.8%). Of the 566 LGBTQ youth and young adults, 114 met the Commission definition for an unaccompanied homeless youth (20.1%). LGBTQ respondents represented 22.8% of all youth who met the Commission definition and 18% of all respondents who were housed and never homeless. For youth who identified as LGBTQ, the average age they reported leaving their home permanently was 16.9 years old. This was slightly younger than the average age of respondents as a whole, which was 17.1 years old. LGBTQ respondents who were not currently homeless also were more likely than all respondents to have been homeless in the past (24.4% vs. 20.5%). In this regard, the Massachusetts Youth Count findings about the housing vulnerability of LGBTQ young people echo the Chapin Hall Voices of Youth Count findings.

LGBTQ respondents were more likely than all respondents meeting the Commission definition to have slept in a shelter the night before (44.7% Commission vs. 50% LGBTQ). LGBTQ youth were also more likely to have slept in a place not meant for habitation the night before the survey than other respondents (14.7% Commission vs. 17.5% LGBTQ). Sleeping outside was the third most common response for LGBTQ youth, while it was the fifth most common response overall (see Table Twelve).

⁷ A breakdown of gender identity and sexual orientation is provided in the Demographics section (Section 3.5).

Table Twelve: Rank Ordering of Where Slept the Night Before the Survey	Commission Definition	LGBTQ
Shelter	1	1
Friend	2	2
Other relative	3	4
Transitional housing	4	4
Outside	5	3
Hotel	6	8
Partner	7	6
Train/Bus station	8	6
Car	9	9
Abandoned building	10	10
24-hour establishment	11	0

Out of the LGBTQ respondents, 17% reported parental substance use as a reason they were not with family; this is roughly four percentage points higher than all respondents who met the Commission definition. LGBTQ youth were more likely to report that abuse and neglect and sexual orientation/gender identity were the reasons they were not with their families than respondents who met the Commission definition as a whole (see Table Thirteen).

Table Thirteen: Rank Ordering of Reasons Respondents are not with Family	Commission Definition	LGBTQ
Fighting with parent/guardian	1	1
I was told to leave	2	3
I wanted to leave	3	4
Abused/neglected	4	2
Parent/guardian drug use	5	5
Felt unsafe	6	6
House too small	7	8
Family lost housing	8	9
Parent/guardian died	9	9
Pregnancy	10	12
Left foster care	11	11
My use of drugs	12	12
Sexual orientation/gender identity	13	7
Released from jail	13	14

Respondents who reported being LGBTQ had a slightly different list of top four services sought. In addition to shelter, nutrition assistance, and cash assistance, LGBTQ respondents reported mental health services in their top four. For respondents as a whole, mental health was the sixth most often

sought out service. Long-term housing ranked eighth out of the 12 service options for LGBTQ respondents, which was much lower as compared to other respondents (See Table Fourteen).

Table Fourteen: Ranking Ordering of Services Sought	Commission Definition	LGBTQ
Shelter	1	1
Nutrition	2	2
Long-term housing	3	8
Cash assistance	4	4
Job skills/training	5	5
Mental health	6	3
Education	7	7
Healthcare	8	6
Haven't sought help	9	8
Childcare	10	13
Family support	11	10
Substance use	12	12
Domestic violence/sexual assault counseling	13	11

Rates of receiving the help they were seeking were identical to all respondents meeting the Commission definition. The top barriers faced by LGBTQ respondents were identical to respondents meeting the Commission definition. LGBTQ youth were less likely to identify not having money as a barrier. Looking at some of the other reasons LGBTQ youth did not access services reveals actionable findings. For example, 13% of LGBTQ youth indicated that they did not feel comfortable or safe accessing services, as compared to 8% of straight/cisgender youth. Further, 23% of LGBTQ youth indicate that they did not know where to go, as compared to 14% of straight/cisgender youth. As one 2017 Youth Count respondent stated, ***“There are so many queer homeless youth. We need more outreach, education and services.”***

In terms of income sources, LGBTQ respondents reported employment (both full and part time) and cash assistance as their top income sources. Forty-four percent of those who had ever exchanged sex for money identified as LGBTQ. It is important to highlight that slightly over one-quarter of young people who identified as LGBTQ reported having ever exchanged sex for money or other necessities, which is almost double the state rate.

“Please continue to research and address the causes of youth homelessness and recognize that many youth are kicked out of or made to feel unsafe in their homes because of their gender identity, expression, or sexual orientation.”

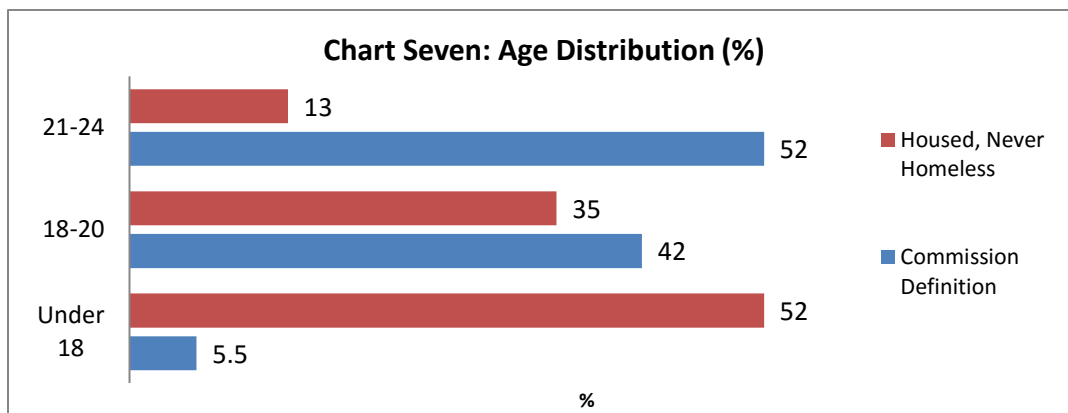
— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

3.5 DEMOGRAPHICS

The Commission included several questions to understand demographic characteristics of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults. In this section, information about the age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and place of birth are provided.

3.5.1 AGE

Similar to last year, the majority of survey respondents meeting the Commission’s definition of unaccompanied homeless youth were between the ages of 18 and 24. Roughly 5.6% of responses from those meeting the state’s definition for homelessness came from youth under the age of 18. This was an increase of 4.1 percentage points from 2016 (see Chart Seven).



The average age unaccompanied homeless youth left home was 17.1. Respondents from the following CoCs indicated leaving home before the statewide average: Boston (16.8); Balance of State (16.9); Lowell (16.4); New Bedford (17.0); and Somerville (16.7). It is important to note that 103 respondents meeting the Commission definition did not provide an age when they left home. Of the 398 that did provide an age, 51% indicated that they left home before the age of 18.

Nine of the CoCs did targeted outreach to youth under 18. Roughly 34% (923) of all surveys were from young people under 18 years old, but only 28 of these respondents met the Commission definition. This indicates that outreach efforts are reaching younger youth, but not unaccompanied homeless youth.

More research into why CoC outreach efforts are not reaching unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18 is needed.

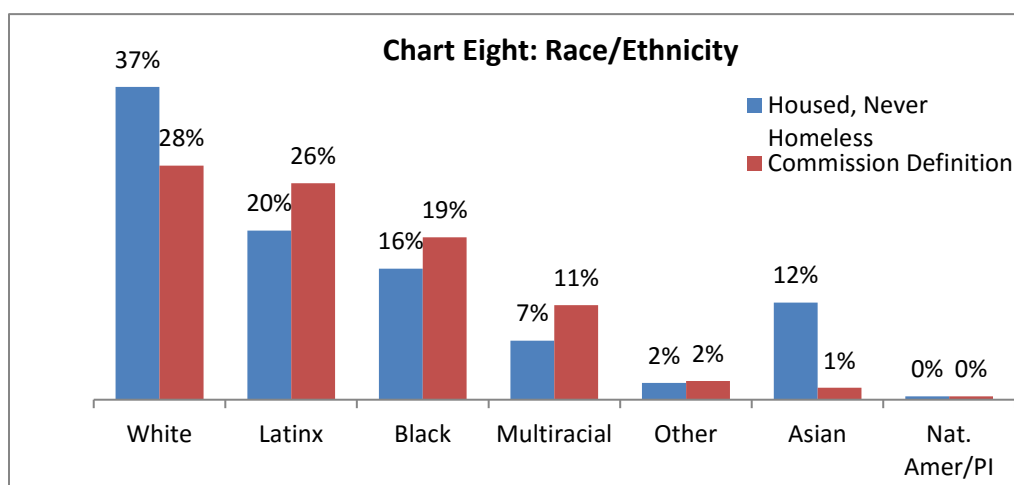
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) data suggest that there are significantly more unaccompanied homeless youth under 18 in the public schools across the state. Data from 2016-2017 school year indicate that there were 1,038 unaccompanied homeless youth. Massachusetts public schools capture the largest number of unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18. While issues of consent, privacy, and federal confidentiality standards would need to be addressed, administering the Massachusetts Youth Count survey in the schools would allow for a much deeper understanding of circumstances and experiences of these very vulnerable young people.

“I think the younger you are the more vulnerable you are when you become homeless. I hope that there will be more programs and faster housing for the youth.”

— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

3.5.2 RACE/ETHNICITY

Respondents were able to select multiple options for race on the survey tool. Chart Eight indicates the distribution of those responses.



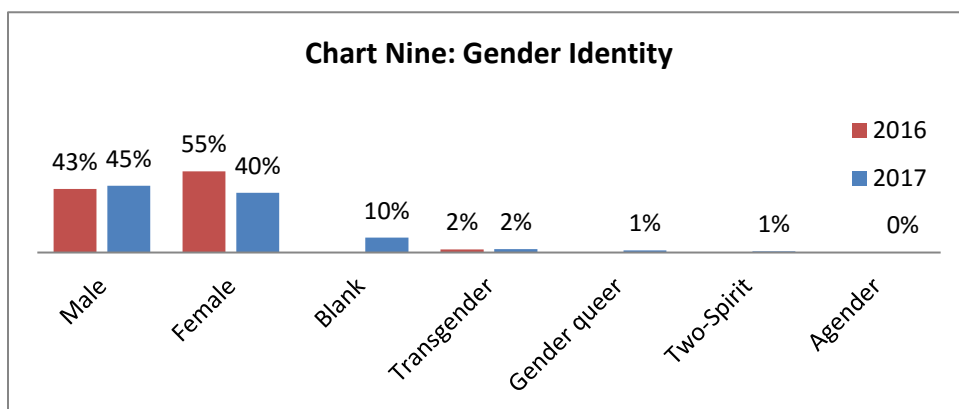
These findings align with the Chapin Hall study indicating that youth of color are at higher risk of homelessness than their White counterparts. Cumulatively, Black, Latinx, and Multiracial respondents constituted over 55% of the respondents who met the Commission definition but constituted only 46% of all youth surveyed. White respondents made up 31% of all youth surveyed and 27% of those that met the Commission definition. In contrast, the majority of Massachusetts residents are White (~82%) and

61% of students in Massachusetts schools are White. While only 7% of the population of Massachusetts identifies as Black/African American, 19% of UHY respondents were Black/African American. Similarly, U.S. Census data show that only 10% of Massachusetts residents are Hispanic/Latino, but 25% of UHY respondents self-identified as Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx.

3.5.3 GENDER

Of the 501 UHY respondents, 40.3% identified as female, which is a 14.7 percentage point decrease from last year. Roughly 45.1% of respondents identified as male. Of the remaining respondents,

2.2% identified as transgender; 1.4% as gender queer; 0.2% as agender; and 0.8% as two-spirit. Roughly 10% of respondents left this question blank (see Chart Nine).

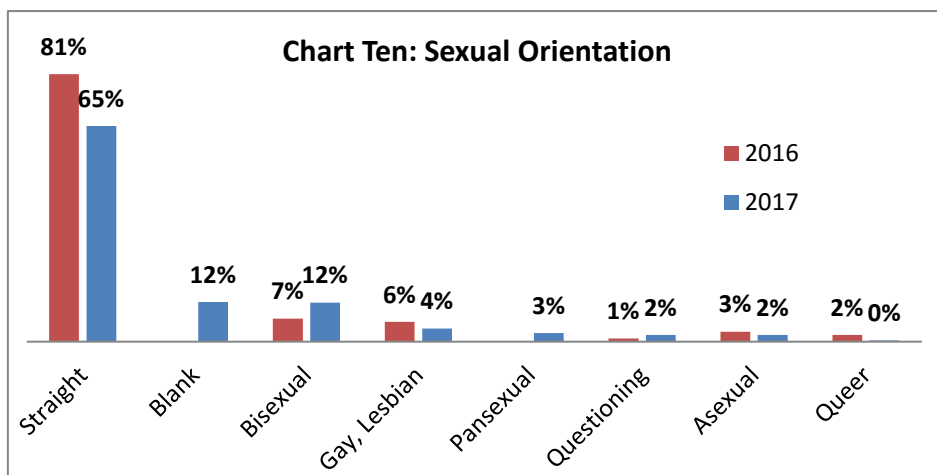


3.5.4 SEXUAL ORIENTATION

In order to better understand the experiences of unaccompanied homeless youth by sexual orientation, the survey tool included the following question: “What is your sexual orientation? Please check the answer that best describes you.”

The phrasing and

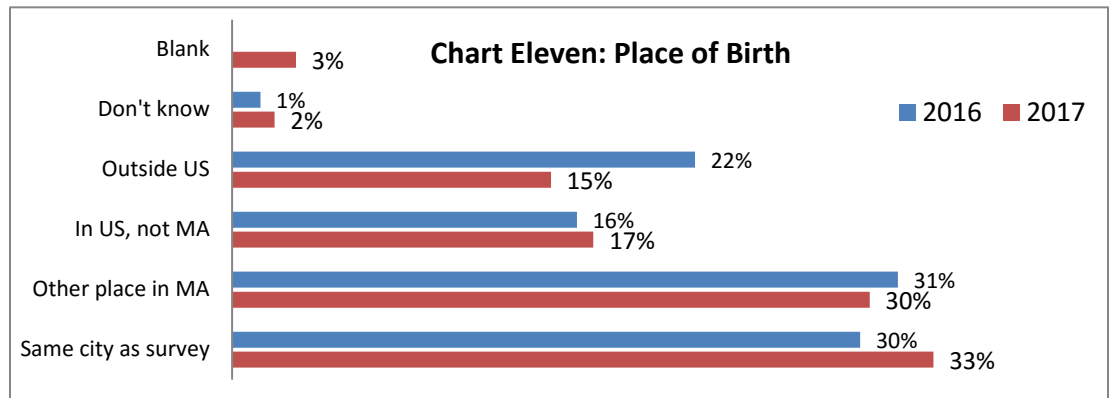
response categories were designed to be as inclusive as possible. Chart Ten shows the breakdown of responses. The most common response was straight, at 65.3% of responses. This was a 16 percentage point decrease from last year. All responses for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning totaled 23%; and 12.6% were blank (see Chart Ten).



**“This is the first survey where I’ve been able to accurately place my gender and sexuality.”
— 2017 Youth Count Respondent**

3.5.5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Of the 501 respondents meeting the Commission’s definition of homeless youth and young adults, 63% were born in Massachusetts; 33% of



respondents were born in the same city or town in which they took the survey (see Chart Eleven).

3.5.6 DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Table Fifteen provides a summary of demographic characteristics of youth meeting the Commission definition over the past four years. Due to differences in CoCs’ approaches to data collection, we urge caution in attributing annual changes to trends in the unaccompanied homeless youth population.

Table Fifteen: Demographic Characteristic	% Survey Respondents			
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Under 18 Years Old	6.3%	10.1%	1%	5.6%
Asian	2.8%	7.0%	3%	1.4%
Black/African American	21.8%	33.0%	41%	19.2%
Multiracial	9.9%	9.0%	7%	11.2%
Native American/Pacific Islander	3.6%	5.0%	4%	0.4%
White	42.1%	46.0%	45%	27.7%
Other	15.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%
Blank				12.4%
Hispanic/Latino/Latina				25.5%
Female	55%	56%	55%	40.3%
Male	41%	41%	43%	45.1%
Transgender/Other	2%	<1%	2%	5.5
Blank				10.0
Straight	80%	78%	81%	65.8%
Gay/Lesbian	7%	4%	6%	4.0%
Queer	1%	1%	2%	0.4%
Bisexual	8%	10%	7%	11.8%
Asexual/Pansexual/Other	2%	<1%	3%	4.5%
Questioning/Don't Know	<1%	1%	1%	1.6%
Blank				12.6%

4.0 CONCLUSION

***“Please help. Tired, depressed and close to ending life.
I have nothing and just want a place to live safely by myself.”***
— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

In the United States, over four million children, youth, and young adults experience homelessness during a 12-month period (Chapin Hall, 2017). As staggering as this figure is, it is just a glimpse into the nature of the problem. Unaccompanied youth homelessness is an intersectional, multilayered issue. UHY experience higher rates of health issues, such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); unwanted pregnancy; dental disease; and mental illness than other young people (Christiani et al., 2008; Edidin et al., 2011). Depressive symptoms and suicidality are prevalent among Black homeless youth (Gattis & Larson, 2016). Youth of color, in combination with LGBTQ identification, face a blend of racism and gender and sexual discrimination that heighten social exclusion and barriers to services (Irazábal & Huerta, 2015). In addition to being at a higher risk of becoming homeless, LGBTQ youth face higher rates of assault, police harassment, and substance dependency, and are more likely to be asked to exchange sex for basic needs and shelter than non-LGBTQ homeless youth (Lambda Legal).

These national findings mirror what was learned in the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count. Youth of color and LGBTQ youth were impacted by homelessness at disproportionate rates and experienced problems with greater severity. Of all subpopulations in the Massachusetts Youth Count sample, LGBTQ respondents were most likely to have ever exchanged sex for basic necessities.

When comparing UHY to their housed, never-homeless counterparts, their vulnerability is apparent. UHY respondents were:

- 7 times more likely to be pregnant or parenting;
- 6.5 times more likely to have had foster care involvement; and
- 7 times more likely to have had justice system involvement.

Respondents with systems involvement were more likely to not be in school and not have a high school diploma. These young people were also more likely to have slept in a place not meant for habitation than other UHY in the sample.

In spite of family conflict continuing to be a major driver of youth homelessness, only 8.5% of respondents reported seeking family support services. Another troubling trend in 2017 was that the number of respondents who reported not seeking help increased by almost 70%. For the respondents who did seek help, only 25% of them reported receiving all the help they needed. Being put on a waiting list, transportation, and not hearing back from the provider were the three largest barriers to youth accessing available services across the state. Services tend to be located only within population-dense and urban centers, increasing the difficulty for youth to travel to and from service providers. Through these findings and personal accounts, it is evident that offering services, such as shelter and food, is necessary but not sufficient to end unaccompanied youth homelessness. UHY also require greater access to services specifically designed for young people and relating to mental health, social supports, and economic stability.

It is difficult to capture a complete understanding of UHY, as the population can be transient and often cannot, or choose not to, identify themselves as homeless. This report offers insights into the needs of UHY in Massachusetts and barriers that youth face in seeking resources. These findings inform an analysis of priorities and recommendations for the state to best address both the immediate and the long-term needs of the state's homeless youth population.

“Upon completion of this survey, I’m contemplating if any action will come of these statistics, or if they will be just that. Statistics.”

— 2017 Youth Count Respondent

5.0 REFERENCES

- Chapin Hall Voices of Youth (2017). Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America, National Estimates. http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_NationalReport_Final.pdf.
- Christiani, Ashley, Angela Hudson, Adeline Nyamathi, Malaika Mutere, and Jeffrey Sweat. (2008). Attitudes of Homeless and Drug-Using Youth Regarding Barriers and Facilitators in Delivery of Quality and Culturally Sensitive Health Care. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing* 21(3), 154–63.
- Edidin, J. P., Ganim, Z., Hunter, S. J., & Karnik, N. S. (2012). The Mental and Physical Health of Homeless Youth: A Literature Review. *Child Psychiatry Hum Dev*, 43(3), 354-375. doi:10.1007/s10578-011-0270-1
- Gattis, M. N., & Larson, A. (2016). Perceived Racial, Sexual Identity, and Homeless Status-Related Discrimination Among Black Adolescents and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness: Relations With Depressive Symptoms and Suicidality. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 86(1), 79-90.
- Irazábal, C., & Huerta, C. (2016). Intersectionality and planning at the margins: LGBTQ youth of color in New York. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(5), 714-732.
- Lambda Legal., N., N., & N. (n.d.). *NATIONAL RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES FOR SERVING LGBT HOMELESS YOUTH* (Rep.).
- Pergamit, M., Cunningham, M., Burt, M., Lee, P., Howell, B., & Dumlao, K. (2014). Counting Homeless Youth: Promising Practices from the Youth Count! Initiative. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Note: The Massachusetts Youth Count involves extensive collaboration, including in the development of this report. Analysis and writing of this report was completed by Laurie Ross, PhD, Associate Professor of Community Development and Planning at Clark University, with consultation and involvement from CoCs, the Commission, and the Identification and Connection Working Group.

6.0 ATTACHMENTS

- A) Members of the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth
- B) Final 2017 Uniform Survey Tool
- C) Rank Ordering of Selected Responses by Population Characteristics (i.e., Foster Care, Justice System Involvement, Pregnant/Parenting, and LGBTQ)
- D) CoC Reports
- E) Vulnerable Population Reports
- F) Implementation Successes and Challenges
- G) Open-ended Responses on 2017 Youth Count Survey

Attachment A: Members of the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Seat	Name	Designee
Secretary of Health and Human Services or Designee—CHAIR	Secretary Marylou Sudders	Linn Torto
Department of Children and Families	Commissioner Linda Spears	Amy Mullen
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	Commissioner Mitchell Chester	Sarah Slautterback
Department of Public Health	Commissioner Monica Bharel	
Department of Mental Health	Commissioner Joan Mikula	Joe Vallely
Office of Medicaid	Assistant Secretary Daniel Tsai	
Department of Transitional Assistance	Commissioner Jeffrey McCue	
Department of Housing and Community Development	Undersecretary Chrystal Kornegay	Gordie Calkins
Department of Youth Services	Commissioner Peter Forbes	Rebecca Moore
Direct Service Provider—Appointed by the Governor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lisa Goldsmith, DIAL/SELF • Kevin Lilly, Samaritans Steps • Lisa Goldblatt Grace, My Life My Choice 	
Senate Chair of Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities	Senator Jennifer Flanagan	
House Chair of Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities	Representative Kay Khan	
1 Member of the Senate	Senator Harriette Chandler	
1 Member of the House	Representative James O'Day	
1 Member Appointed by the Senate Minority Leader	Senator Bruce Tarr	Maureen Flatley
1 Member Appointed by the House Minority Leader	Representative Brad Jones	Representative Kate Campanale
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless	Kelly Turley	
Massachusetts Task Force on Youth Aging out of DCF care	Erin Bradley	
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice	Deb Silva	
MassEquality	Deborah Shields	
Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance	Caitlin Golden	
Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition	Mason Dunn	
Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth	Grace Sterling-Stowell	
Youth who have experienced homelessness—Appointed by the Child Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jamila Bradley • Lauren Leonardis • Kitty Zen 	

Attachment B: Final 2017 Uniform Survey Tool

2017 Massachusetts Youth Count Housing and Homelessness Survey

This survey is being administered by the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and the local Continuum of Care, so that the state and local providers can better understand the housing and service needs of youth and young adults under the age of 25 in Massachusetts. Over the past two years, the results of similar surveys have helped the Legislature to invest a total of \$3 million in housing and services for young people who have experienced housing instability. Your answers will remain confidential. There are 30 questions. **Please respond to all of the questions you feel comfortable answering.** We greatly appreciate your participation!

1. Have you already taken this survey in the past two weeks? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. What are your initials (the first letter of each of your names)? ____ / ____ / ____ (first/middle/last)

3a. What is your age? ____ years old

3b. What is your date of birth? ____ / ____ / ____ (month/day/year)

4a. What is your primary language? _____

4b. If your primary language is one other than English, are you taking this survey in your primary language?

- ☐ Yes, someone is reading the questions to me in my primary language
- ☐ Yes, this paper or electronic version has been translated into my primary language
- ☐ No, I am taking this survey in a language that is not my primary language

We are asking the following set of questions to better understand your housing situation.

5. Where did you sleep last night?

[CHECK ONE OPTION THAT BEST MATCHES YOUR ANSWER]

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter (emergency, temporary) | <input type="checkbox"/> Car or other vehicle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transitional housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned building/vacant unit/squat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hotel or motel | <input type="checkbox"/> On a train/bus or in train/bus station |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Own apartment or house | <input type="checkbox"/> 24-hour restaurant/Laundromat or other business/retail establishment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent or guardian's home | <input type="checkbox"/> Anywhere outside (street, park, viaduct) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other relative's home | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital or emergency room |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foster family's home | <input type="checkbox"/> Residential treatment facility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home of friend or friend's family | <input type="checkbox"/> Juvenile detention center or jail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home of boyfriend/girlfriend/partner | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify: _____) |

6. How long have you stayed/lived in the place you stayed last night?

- ☐ Fewer than 6 months ☐ 6-12 months ☐ More than 12 months

7. Do you have a safe place where you can stay on a regular basis for at least the next 14 days?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

8. Are you currently experiencing homelessness?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No, but I have experienced homelessness in the past ☐ No, and I never have experienced homelessness
☐ Unsure Comment: _____

(Please continue onto the next page.)

We are asking the following set of questions to learn if you are "accompanied", that is living with your parent or guardian, and your history of being out on your own.

9. Have you ever left home and been out on your own?

- ☐ Yes, I left when I was ___ years old, and have not returned home
☐ I left home when I was ___ years old, but later returned home
☐ I still am with my parent/guardian/foster parent, and have not left home yet

10. If you are **not** living with your parent/guardian/foster parent now, what are the reasons?

[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent | <input type="checkbox"/> I left foster care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My parent/guardian/foster parent abused drugs or alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> I was released from jail or detention facility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My parent/guardian/foster parent died | <input type="checkbox"/> I was/am pregnant or got someone else pregnant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My house was too small for everyone to live there | <input type="checkbox"/> My sexual orientation and/or gender identity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) | <input type="checkbox"/> My use of drugs or alcohol |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I did not feel safe due to violence or unsafe activities in my house | <input type="checkbox"/> I was told to leave |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My family lost our housing | <input type="checkbox"/> I wanted to leave |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

We are asking the following set of questions to better understand your demographics (place of birth, age, education, income, etc.), as well as your experiences in trying to access needed resources.

11. Where were you born?

- ☐ In this city/town ☐ Another place in Massachusetts ☐ Outside of Massachusetts, but in the U.S.
☐ Outside the U.S. ☐ Don't know

12. Which city/town are you in right now, taking this survey? _____

13. Have you been staying overnight in the city/town where you are taking this survey?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No, I am staying in _____ (city/town)

14. Do you have a high school diploma, HiSET degree, or GED?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

15. Are you currently attending school or another education program?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

16. Are you currently employed at a job for which you receive a pay stub or pay check?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

17. Have you ever served in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

(Please continue-- two pages to go!)

18. Have you ever been in foster care?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

19. Have you ever lived in a structured group home or residential program?

☐ Yes ☐ No

20. Have you ever been in juvenile detention, prison or jail?

☐ Yes ☐ No

21a. Are you pregnant or parenting?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

21b. If you are parenting, do you have custody of your child(ren)? In other words, are you responsible for caring for your child(ren) on a day-to-day basis?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable

22. What are your sources of income? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time job | <input type="checkbox"/> Sex work/turning tricks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time job and/or temporary job | <input type="checkbox"/> Panhandling/spanging |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Money from "under the table" work | <input type="checkbox"/> Child support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cash assistance from DTA/Welfare or DCF | <input type="checkbox"/> Money from family members or friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Security/disability payments | <input type="checkbox"/> None |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment benefits | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hustling/selling drugs | |

23. Have you ever exchanged sex (including sexual intercourse, oral sex, or any sexual interaction) for food, a place to stay, money, or other necessities? ☐ Yes ☐ No

24. In the last year, have you tried to get help from any of the following services/programs?

[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter or short-term/transitional housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Nutritional assistance (such as Food Stamps/SNAP or free meals) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Long-term housing (such as Section 8 or public housing) | <input type="checkbox"/> Cash assistance (such as DTA/Welfare benefits or Social Security Disability benefits) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational support (enrolling in school or GED/HiSET program) | <input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence/sexual assault counseling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job training, life skills training, or career placement | <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling or other mental health services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health care services | <input type="checkbox"/> Substance use/alcohol treatment program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family support (such as conflict mediation or parenting support) | <input type="checkbox"/> No, I haven't tried to access help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child care | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

25. Did you get the help you needed?

☐ Yes, all of the help I needed ☐ Some of the help I needed ☐ No, none of the help I needed

(One page to go!)

26. If you did not receive all of the help you needed, why was that? [CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't know where to go |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sent somewhere else | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't qualify for help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language barrier | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't feel comfortable/safe |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Put on waiting list | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't follow through or return for services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paperwork | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't ask for help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I.D./documents | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have money |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't hear back | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have regular access to a phone or email |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have health insurance | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

27. What is your race/ethnicity? [CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White | <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian/Alaskan Native |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify: _____) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian | |

28. How would you describe your gender identity? [CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female | <input type="checkbox"/> Genderqueer/Gender-Nonconforming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Agender |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender – Male to Female | <input type="checkbox"/> Two-Spirit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender – Female to Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify: _____) |

29. Which of the following best fits how you think about your sexualorientation? [CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gay, Lesbian | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Pansexual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Straight | <input type="checkbox"/> Asexual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Queer | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify: _____) |

30. Do you have any comments or insights you would like to share with the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?

Thank you!

As noted above, all of your answers will remain confidential. Your participation is deeply appreciated and a key contribution in helping Massachusetts better understand housing instability among youth and young adults.

For more information about this survey and the work to expand housing and resources for youth and young adults experiencing housing instability, please contact the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth: massachusettsyouthcount@gmail.com.

For official use only-- Survey date: _____ Survey site: _____
Administering organization/Youth Count Ambassador: _____ 4

Attachment C: Rank Ordering of Selected Responses by Population Characteristics

Table C1: Rank Ordering of Where Slept the Night Before the Survey	Commission Definition	Foster Care	Justice	Pregnant/ Parenting	LGBTQ
Shelter	1	1	1	1	1
Friend	2	2	2	2	2
Other relative	3	2	4	5	4
Transitional housing	4	5	5	5	4
Outside	5	4	3	3	3
Hotel	6	7	7	4	8
Partner	7	6	6	9	6
Train/Bus Station	8	8	9	7	6
Car	9	9	7	0	9
Abandoned building	10	9	10	7	10
24-hour establishment	11	9	0	0	0

Table C2: Rank Ordering of Reasons Respondents are not with Family	Commission Definition	Foster Care	Justice System	Pregnant/ Parenting	LGBTQ
Fighting with parent/guardian	1	1	1	1	1
I was told to leave	2	3	2	3	3
I wanted to leave	3	4	4	2	4
Abused/neglected	4	2	5	6	2
Parent/guardian drug use	5	5	3	7	5
Felt unsafe	6	7	7	8	6
House too small	7	8	5	5	8
Family lost housing	8	9	9	9	9
Parent/guardian died	9	11	10	11	9
Pregnancy	10	9	11	3	12
Left foster care	11	6	8	9	11
My use of drugs	12	14	11	13	12
Sexual orientation/ gender identity	13	13	12	13	7
Released from jail	13	12	8	12	14

Table C3: Ranking Ordering of Services Sought	Commission Definition	Foster Care	Justice	Pregnant/ Parenting	LGBTQ
Shelter	1	1	1	1	1
Nutrition	2	3	3	3	2
Long-term housing	3	6	3	5	8
Cash assistance	4	4	5	2	4
Job skills/training	5	2	2	6	5
Mental health	6	5	5	7	3
Education	7	7	7	8	7
Healthcare	8	8	8	9	6
Haven't sought help	9	12	11	0	8
Childcare	10	9	12	4	13
Family Support	11	9	10	10	10
Substance use	12	12	9	12	12
Domestic violence/sexual assault counseling	13	11	13	11	11
How much help received?	Commission Definition	Foster care	Justice	Pregnant/ Parenting	LGBTQ
All	25%	19%	21%	29%	25%
Some	54%	60%	55%	64%	54%
None	21%	21%	24%	7%	21%

Attachment D: CoC Reports (with 10 or more respondents who met the Commission definition)

- Boston
- Balance of State
- South Shore
- Cambridge
- Fall River
- Hampden
- Lowell
- Lynn
- New Bedford
- North Shore
- Somerville
- County Rural
- Worcester County

To access these reports, please visit: <http://www.mahomeless.org/advocacy/item/massachusetts-youth-count-2017>.

Attachment E: Vulnerable Population Reports

- LGBTQ Youth
- Foster Care-Involved Youth
- Justice-Involved Youth
- Pregnant/Parenting Youth with Custody of Child(ren)

To access these reports, please visit: <http://www.mahomeless.org/advocacy/item/massachusetts-youth-count-2017>.

Attachment F: Implementation Successes and Challenges

In order to understand how the CoCs planned, implemented, and organized this work, debriefing calls were conducted with CoC representatives. Findings about implementation successes and challenges are summarized below.

Successes

- CoCs brought new and long-time partners to the table and developed relationships with providers who would support future counts. YouthHarbors was noted several times as a partner that is able to access youth in schools. Hampden County highlighted their partners who are specialized in reaching homeless and runaway youth as a reason they were able to engage a high percentage of young people who met the Commission definition.
- The Count raised awareness about the issue of youth homelessness in communities; and, more specifically, young people learned about service availability as evidenced by an increase in calls for help in the months following the Count in some CoCs.
- CoCs that utilized youth ambassadors expressed a higher degree of satisfaction with the model than last year—both in terms of the number of young people who want to help work on the issue of homelessness and the knowledge the young people brought to the Youth Count process. For example, Lynn’s Youth Ambassadors were very helpful in connecting young people who were couch surfing to the Youth Count process. It appears that rather than have Youth Ambassadors be responsible for administering and returning surveys themselves, the model works better when the Ambassadors are integrated into teams with staff such as youth workers or outreach workers.
- Boston developed a systematic approach to utilize Youth Ambassadors and street outreach workers in conjunction with hotspot research to collect a large number of surveys from unaccompanied homeless youth staying in a wide array of living arrangements.
- South Shore utilized HMIS reports to identify who to survey in shelters, providing a more systematic approach to ensure the entire population of unaccompanied youth who were homeless and in shelter were surveyed.
- North Shore reported success utilizing handheld devices for youth to take the survey, increasing young people’s access to the Youth Count process.
- Several CoCs used social media to advertise the count and to direct young people to the survey. CoCs mentioned wanting more training on how to best utilize social media, learn about formats other than Facebook, and use social media analytics to understand who is being reached and who is not.
- From a state perspective, it was noted that the Youth Count is becoming a more regular feature of the calendar, which helps the CoCs plan. CoCs were also positive about state funding for stipends and incentives.

Challenges

Many of the challenges that CoCs face negatively impact their ability to reach doubled-up and couch-surfing youth, youth under 18 who meet the Commission definition, and LGBTQ youth. Some of these challenges include not being able to administer the survey in the schools; the size/geographic diversity of regional CoCs, which makes it challenging to do street counts and coordinate the count more generally; and the fact that several CoCs that had partners who connect with the LGBTQ community had a more difficult time engaging them in 2017 than last year. That young people tend not to identify themselves as homeless can exacerbate these challenges.

Three challenges that were identified through the debriefing calls are already being addressed for the 2018 Count.

- Some CoCs reported a sense of Youth Count fatigue. To combat this, they reported needing earlier and more definitive communication from the state about the timing of the count; to receive the final version of the Uniform Survey Tool earlier; and to have earlier access to the state grants to support the count. COMMISSION RESPONSE: In November, the Commission announced the dates for the 2018 Count, released the Notice of Funding Availability for Youth Count grants, and publicized the date for the Youth Count Conference at Holy Cross. Starting these processes months earlier should allow the CoCs to get prepared and energized for the 2018 Youth Count.
- In general, CoCs are supportive of a spring count. Several CoCs suggested starting the Count earlier so that college students and youth residents at seasonal shelters can be more easily reached. COMMISSION RESPONSE: The 2018 Count will run from April 23 through May 13 so that these populations can be more easily included.
- CoCs reported that the lag time between the Count and receiving results was problematic because it reduced the buy-in of partners who did not see the results of their efforts. CoCs also expressed the need for more individualized findings so they could demonstrate the extent of the problem locally. COMMISSION RESPONSE: The final set of raw data was shared with the research partner in September 2017. Initial findings were shared September through November 2017 in Commission meetings and subcommittee meetings. CoC-specific reports were developed and distributed in January 2018. The final report was completed in January 2018 and released that spring.

A final challenge that will be addressed in the months leading up to the 2018 Massachusetts Youth Count is for the state to develop marketing materials and mechanisms to encourage youth across the state to take the survey independent of CoC efforts. The analysis of cities and towns where no surveys were administered can help guide the implementation of statewide efforts to increase the coverage of Massachusetts Youth Count outreach efforts. Adding a Survey Site question to the Uniform Survey Tool

that gets entered into the database will greatly facilitate our understanding of where young people take the survey and whether it was completed via a Youth Ambassador, Street Outreach, Agency-based, or the Web/Social Media.

Attachment G: Open-ended Responses on 2017 Youth Count Survey

The following themes emerged from an analysis of the open-ended response to the final question on the 2017 Youth Count Survey, **“Do you have any comments or insights you would like to share with the MA Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?”** Illustrative quotations follow each theme. Additional quotations were integrated throughout the report.

Need for youth shelters/youth-focused services:

- “I’m afraid all the time- all the shelters have older people and nothing for younger people. I feel out of place.”
- “More youth shelters”
- “There need to be more young adult programs. Shelters are all for old people--What about people my age--I don't feel comfortable going to shelter for older people.”
- “Why isn't there a lot more youth programs? I think the younger you are the more vulnerable you are when you become homeless. I hope that there will be more programs and faster housing for the youth.”
- “Making help more accessible for teens and young adults in Massachusetts should be a top priority. More services for the youth should be made available.”

Need for accessible locations and programs that serve multiple needs:

- “A lot of us have more issues than just being homeless, like drug use or mental illnesses. We need more support designed for youth and young adults around these problems. Placing us with older adults is not helpful.”
- “Food assistance should be offered at schools for students with housing issues”
- “Homeless youth need more support with mental health.”
- “More direction and help with housing, cash assistance, jobs, and a few more things. I don't know how to do/sign up for anything.”

Address policies that inadvertently harm young people and/or are barriers to moving ahead:

- “Being too responsible and working more than 2 or 3 jobs can screw you over to where you might need to spend money for motels instead of receiving the help that’s needed. Example: working 5pm-5am (shelters kick everyone out by 8!) 3 hours of sleep?”
- “Keeping teen mothers with their father of child in shelter even if father of child is 21 or older”
- “People who try and work should at least qualify for childcare even if they aren't working a full time job.”
- “There should be a law that states clearly. ‘You cannot kick your kids out unless they're over 18.’”
- “As a homeless student with independent status [state university name] should have some type of program or housing assistance for us during breaks . It's unfair. We have to pay \$5,000 plus to stay here for the summer in the dorms. I'm on my own , I can't afford that. I sleep in my car sometimes, I'm trying to get an education and a career and it just seems so hard because of this. It's a lot of stress on me & I feel like no one actually cares enough to give you assistance.”

Provide more assistance with housing:

- “I would like to share that it is extremely difficult to find out and file for section 8. i have visited and asked numerous people before i learned how to file for. i am still unsure about housing”
- “More studio apartments could be useful.”
- “Why is it so hard to get an apartment when in need?”

Address other service gaps:

- “In the near future can you work with young adults that are couples that are struggling with no credit, and low income? No criminal record. There are really no services that help with no credit. Just something to think about.”
- “Can you eventually work with young adult couples in the future?”
- “That family shelters accommodate the children's needs. Possibly a play area because they didn't ask to be here they shouldn't have to stay in a house all day.”
- “We should have singing and dance classes more kinds of things to keep us moving.”
- “Sometimes the hang out places aren't supervised and I got harassed and teased by other youth so I haven't gone back.”
- “More youth homeless programs, housing and substance abuse”
- “More youth services, housing (transitional housing), and mental health services.”

Assist youth who are homeless with advancing their education:

- “I really need help to finish my education. I really want to go to a 4 year college and do my master's degree.”
- “I'm trying to get a job but it's very hard due to my education and not having a GED”

Attend to the ways gender identity and sexual orientation exacerbate housing challenges:

- “Need more services for females at risk on the streets due to assaults, kidnapping, trafficking...etc”
- “Growing up as a man you don't always grow up with good support to show you the right steps to make or have time to make bad choices.”
- “Homeless youth get no help especially if you're a man that's not on drugs or has a kid. I've been homeless off and on for years and never get help.”
- “Needs to be options for homeless LGBTQ youth”
- “There should be more options for the LGBTQ community.”

Highlight the programs that work:

- “I had a great experience living at the shelter Hildebrand family self-help in 15 Morse street. Everyone was awesome over there. Special my caseworker she did I great job helping me and my son searching for housing and helping me find a better job thanks good every day for having her in my life . I also thanks marpha for being a great person always taking care of us making sure we are getting help we need. The house was very clean. Everything was great thank u again.”
- “If it was not for the Thrive program at HHC, I would not be on my feet and would have had to drop out of school.”
- “It would be nice to keep places like Youth on Fire open because they've helped me get off the streets faster than other program I've seen. Plus need more places like them.”

- “More funding for more programs like DIAL/SELF available throughout MA”
- “This time around yuh guys have taken the right steps on support for homeless families (wayfinders). Maybe a health evaluation before placement would help figure out ppl's needs.”

Youth want this survey to help address these issues and raise awareness about unaccompanied youth homelessness:

- “Hopefully this helps.”
- “Hopefully this works. Many youth are looking to better themselves.”
- “I believe awareness is key, the more aware we are of the problem the closer we can get to the source, so this survey is beneficial to getting to that source to help and benefit this generation in the millennium”
- “I think that finding out more to provide help is beautiful. Thank you!”
- “I hope u guys do something for us.”
- “I think it's ridiculous that I have not had more help paying for school. I think how expensive school is in the first place is even more ridiculous. Hopefully this survey will actually be considered and help towards an effective solution.”
- “Pay more attention”
- “Please help deteriorate the problem of homeless youth in Boston.”
- “Please help the homeless youth!”
- “We deserve to be heard! Not all of us want to stay homeless we're trying to get our life together too!”