



## SECTION 2

# Community Outreach &

## Partnerships

### Internet and Social Media Use among Homeless Youth

Youth whether or not they have a stable living situation use the Internet and social media for many reasons. Conventional wisdom would suggest that because those youth who are homeless and have less access to resources would have lower levels of Internet use. This belief is being called into question by new research. Until recently, little was known about Internet use among high-risk adolescents. Now research is emerging that provides insight into how the Internet and social media are used by this group of young people. Key facts from the research<sup>1</sup> are listed below.

- In general, homeless youth use e-mail to connect with their parents, caseworkers, and potential employers and use social media to communicate with their peers.
- Homeless youth prefer certain interactions through email because it allows for more privacy and personal communications.
- Some studies<sup>2</sup> have found that 80 percent of homeless youth get on-line more than once per week, while 25 percent use the Internet for more than one hour every day.
- Because homeless youth have fewer resources than their peers, Internet and social media are attractive resources because all people are treated equally when using them.
- The Internet and social media allow homeless youth to create and maintain social networks which is a critical part of adolescence.
- Homeless youth use Internet and social media to bridge the gap between street life and life beyond the street.
- In a 2014 study, 64 percent of homeless youth in the study reported using the Internet to send and receive email and 57 percent reported using it to access social networking websites.
- Nearly half of the youth surveyed in a 2014 study said that they gained Internet access from a public library, while 40 percent gained access to it from a youth services agency.
- Youth who maintain an on-line connection to a home-based friend were more likely to look for jobs on-line than youth who were not connected to friends back home.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rice E. and Barman-Adhikari A., Internet use and social media use as a resource among homeless youth, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 19 (2014) 232-247

<sup>2</sup> Guadagno R., Muscanell N., Pollio D., *The homeless use Facebook?! Similarities of social network use between college students and homeless young adults. Computers in Human Behavior* Vol. 29, Issue 1, (January 2013), 86–89