

CULTURALLY SENSITIVE DATA GATHERING

When training youth volunteer data collectors to increase their cultural sensitivity, we are talking about more than accepting that different ethnic groups and people of different heritage are discriminated against. Many homeless young people are on the streets because they have been exploited or trafficked or are marginalized and oppressed in response to their lifestyles or life choices.

Youth Street Culture

- Street youth may have distrust of adults, in general
- Street youth perceive that the public views them negatively, as outcasts
- Many street youth want to remain unknown; they are in the shadows by choice
- Some street youth are on the streets and in crisis and may want services to help them off the streets

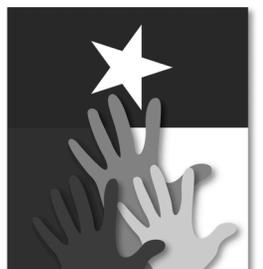
Types of Street Youth

It may be helpful to think of homeless young people on a continuum since homeless young people can move from category to category.

1. Homeless young people in crisis
 - These youth are on the streets and want help to get off the street.
 - They may have been kicked out of a placement (such as a foster home, residential treatment center, or emergency shelter), their home, or recently released from a care facility.
 - They can be easy to talk to and want some referral information and anything that will help them make it from day to day (support services).
2. Homeless young people without the ability to stay in stable living environments
 - These young people can have mental health or substance use issues and are unable to remain in stable living environments because of their behavior.
 - They may only want to get support services from providers that will allow them to remain “free” from the constraints of stable living situations.
 - These youth are easy to talk to if you can trade food, money, or supplies for their participation.
3. Homeless young people such as those identified by McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act¹
 - These young people are homeless “couch surfers” who temporarily stay with friends, in cars, or in abandoned homes or buildings.

¹ Access online at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>

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- They may NOT want to be found and they often do want to fit into their neighborhood and “fly under the radar”.
 - They may be unwilling to participate.
4. Homeless young people who are street dependent and have embraced the street culture
- These young people may have lived on the streets long enough to adapt to street life and feel a sense of belonging and “family” with others on the streets.
 - They may use support services to communicate with others, to get free services and supplies, or to find resource information.
 - These young people may NOT want to share too much about themselves or be unwilling to participate in a youth count since they may have turned their backs on “society” and/or have negative views of people who want to know more about them.

Volunteer Cultural Sensitivity

Youth and adult volunteer data gatherers need to show homeless young people that they are cross-cultural. To do so volunteers must:

- Be aware of cultural differences they may encounter and accept their reality and value in all their communications and data gathering.
- Be aware of their own biases and the possible impact of their own cultural values and attitudes they have about working with the diversity of youth culture, including LGBTQ youth, ethnic youth, disenfranchised groups, etc.
- Anticipate that there may be areas of cross-cultural miscommunication and misinterpretation and use their skills to avoid or correct these.
- Be informed about the diverse youth cultures they may come in contact with. It is okay usually to ask about the homeless young person’s beliefs and cultural trappings.²

² Diller, J.V. (2007) *Cultural diversity: A primer for the human services, 4th Edition*. Belmont CA: Brooks/Cole, p.23

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