

Last year, Texas school districts identified nearly 16,000 students who are homeless and without a parent or legal guardian. We know from federal counts that there are many more youth and young adults who are homeless as well but aren't being counted by the school system because they have already completed high school or dropped out. Many of these youth are those who have aged out of Texas' own foster care system – researchers estimate that roughly one in four youth who ages out of foster care ends up homeless.

The Texas Legislature took an important step toward addressing the situation of these vulnerable young people during the last session, when it mandated the first-ever statewide count of youth experiencing homelessness in Texas. Through a contract with the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA), TNOYS helped develop and conduct the survey, called *Youth Count Texas!*, and we learned many important lessons from it. Texas should continue its leadership role in the effort to end youth homelessness by building on the progress made during the last session and acting on the findings of *Youth Count Texas!*.

### **YOUTH COUNT TEXAS! REVEALED THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH**

In addition to the final *Youth Count Texas!* report that was delivered to the Texas Legislature by TDHCA in December, TNOYS drafted a report evaluating the process for the survey, which revealed some notable findings about the youth we spoke with. One of the key findings is that young people facing housing instability have different needs and behaviors than their adult counterparts, requiring unique methods for identifying and supporting them. For example, one challenge encountered during *Youth Count Texas!* and other similar surveys is how difficult it can be to find homeless youth because they tend to avoid identifying as homeless and often couch-surf or sleep at motels to avoid sleeping outside or in shelters.



## IT'S TIME FOR TEXAS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THIS VULNERABLE POPULATION

Few, if any, youth counts have been conducted on a scale as large as *Youth Count Texas!*, in a state as large as ours. The Texas Legislature took a strong step toward establishing Texas as a leader on the issue of youth homelessness by creating the *Youth Count Texas!* survey, and now it is time to solidify that leadership by acting on the findings.

There is currently no state funding earmarked specifically for serving young people experiencing homelessness, and thanks to *Youth Count Texas!*, we know that their situation requires a unique approach. While Texas does have the Homeless Housing and Services Program (HHSP) within TDHCA dedicated to serving our state's homeless population, none of the funding for that program has been earmarked for meeting the unique needs of homeless youth. Providers in Texas rely primarily on federal funding that is increasingly limited, competitive and inappropriate for youth and young adults.

### **TNOYS RECOMMENDS APPROPRIATING AN ADDITIONAL \$2 MILLION PER YEAR TO HHSP AND EARMARKING THE INCREASE FOR SERVICES FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.**

HHSP, which is included in Article VII of the state budget, provides state funding to the eight largest cities in Texas to provide housing, direct services and other critical support to homeless individuals and families. Given the unique situation of homeless, unaccompanied youth, it is important to also include them as a specific population served by this program and expand funding to ensure they are well understood and well supported on the path to adulthood.



*Photo portraits, taken by Liz Moskowitz, depict current and former homeless youth from across Texas who were interviewed as part of the Youth Count Texas! survey. The portraits will be on view in an exhibit at the State Capitol during the 85th Legislative Session in 2017.*

### **THEIR FUTURE IS OUR BUSINESS.**