

Background:

Youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness in Texas should be rare, brief, and non-recurring. Factors that lead YYA to homelessness include running away to escape unsafe situations, being kicked out of their home, losing a parent/guardian, aging out of foster care, and general loss of financial security/stability. Across Texas, youth service providers are reporting an increase in the number of youth whose parents are refusing to accept parental responsibility with many cases of parents dropping youth at shelters or refusing to pick them up from mental health hospitals or juvenile probation upon release. Child Protective Services is not intervening when parents refuse to take responsibility for these children. There is no state funding to support these young people now on their own, thus increasing the Texas homeless youth population.

YYA experiencing homelessness have different needs than adults experiencing homelessness and need different types of supports and shelter. However, most communities in Texas do not have shelter for 18-25-year-olds and many do not have emergency shelters for those under 18. In communities where these resources exist, providers are often at capacity and must turn youth away. YYA report being unsafe in shelters with older adults and most prefer to sleep in their car or at a bus stop rather than shelter with adults.

When YYA are experiencing homelessness, they can consent to shelter if they are 16 or older and manage their own budget. However, if they are running away from home, have been kicked out of home, or parents are refusing to pick them up from a mental health hospital or juvenile probation, they cannot consent to shelter and have no place to go.

Housing in Texas is growing increasingly unaffordable and unavailable, and because young adults often earn lower wages, it is even more difficult for them to secure housing. Young people are often excluded from existing affordable housing programs through TDHCA or HUD because of misconceptions about eligibility.¹ Young people who are offered housing through vouchers, like the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing voucher, often face limited options where these vouchers can be used. The only landlords who accept these vouchers typically offer housing that the youth find unsafe, leading some to turn it down.

Snapshot: Homeless Youth and Young Adults in Texas

- In the 2022–2023 School Year, there were about 114,000 K–12 students experiencing homelessness in Texas. Of those, over 16,000 were experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian.²
- Research indicates that young people with a history of foster care, on average, experience longer durations of homelessness compared to their peers without foster care history.³
- More than half (55%) of students in higher education in a Texas sample experienced housing insecurity. College students in Texas were seven percentage points more likely to experience any basic needs insecurity compared to national statistics.⁴
- 25% of YYA in Texas experiencing homelessness have experienced commercial sexual exploitation/trafficking.⁵

Every community is different and each YYA has different needs. Flexible funding is needed to fund such supports as:

- Shelter stays for youth whose parents are refusing to accept parental responsibility until safe housing can be identified or CPS takes custody.
- Mental Health services for YYA experiencing homelessness.
- Drop-in center supports for YYA experiencing homelessness.
- Landlord incentives to accept housing vouchers from YYA.
- Costs of required case management for former foster youth using FYI Housing Vouchers to supplement their rent.
- Rental assistance to prevent YYA homelessness.
- Costs of Supervised Independent Living and Transitional Living Programs to provide housing for youth who need a little extra support as they transition to adulthood.
- Educational and workforce training for YYA experiencing homelessness.
- Capacity building supports to reduce waitlists for shelter and housing for YYA.
- Housing or shelter for youth exiting the juvenile justice system with no place to go.

TNOYS Recommendations:

- Invest state dollars in a flexible funding grant program to serve YYA experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.
- Increase the state's capacity of Transitional Living Programs (TLP) and Supervised Independent Living (SIL) programs.
- Allow youth to consent to shelter or housing when they don't have a parent to consent.

1 National Housing Law Project. An Advocate's Guide to Tenants' Rights in the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program. 2021. <https://www.nhlp.org/wp-content/uploads/LIHTC-2021.pdf>

2 Texas Education for Homeless Children and Youth data for 2022-2023 school year. Homelessness data is based on the McKinney Vento definition of homeless students and is data collected by the Texas Education agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/2024-tehcy-infographic-22-23.pdf>

3 Bender et al. Experiences and needs of homeless youth with a history of foster care. Children and Youth Services Review. 2015. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740915001905>

4 The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. #RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity Among Texas College Students During the Ongoing Pandemic. 2021. https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/RC2020_RCTX.pdf

5 Noel Busch-Armendariz et al., Human Trafficking by the Numbers: Initial Benchmarks of Prevalence & Economic Impact in Texas (Austin: 2016), <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/44597>