



Youth Count Texas!

Volunteer Training Curriculum

A project of:



IMPROMPTU NETWORKING



- ▣ Have you ever been involved in a youth count?
- ▣ What's exciting about it? What's daunting?
- ▣ What special skills or experience do you have that you can contribute to Youth Count Texas!?

Background Information

*What is Youth Count Texas!
and why is it important?*

What is Youth Count Texas!?

- An initiative of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) to do a statewide study of youth who are homeless in Texas
- A response to HB 679, which passed during the 84th Regular Texas Legislative Session and calls for the statewide study

Who is Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS)?

- TNOYS is a statewide network of the organizations that serve youth who are homeless in Texas.
- The mission of TNOYS is to improve, support, and protect critical services for youth and families in crisis so they can meet their potential.
- TNOYS is contracted by TDHCA to provide support for this project.

Why is this count important?

- HUD reported that in 2014, there were 194,302 children and youth homeless on a given night in the United States. HUD recognizes that the real number may be even higher.
- Homeless youth are at heightened risk for a host of morbidities and negative life outcomes, including mental illness, HIV/AIDS, criminal justice system involvement, and victimization while homeless.

Why is this count important?

- The count will raise awareness about youth homelessness in Texas.
- The needs assessment will inform policymakers as they work to improve services and supports for these young people.
- Quality data will make it easier to measure our progress toward ending youth homelessness.
- Your participation means that your community will be represented in this statewide project.

Don't we already count people who are homeless every year?

- Yes, HUD already requires a Point-In-Time count of homeless persons in January of every year.
- These counts are notorious for underreporting when it comes to youth who are homeless because youth who are homeless are often harder than adults to identify and count.
- Additionally, PIT surveys may not be designed specifically to capture the needs of youth.
- A concerted effort is needed to adequately capture data on this population and their needs.

What is a youth count?

- A youth count is an event where community volunteers come together to canvas streets, parks, green belts, and other areas of a community to get an estimated census of all youth experiencing homelessness in their community.
- We will be conducting a voluntary survey in conjunction with the count in order to gather information on youths' needs for *Youth Count Texas!*

BIG TAKEAWAY



This count presents a **BIG OPPORTUNITY** to educate the Texas Legislature and other leaders about homeless youth in your community and their needs, in order **to generate support** for policies, programs, and services that benefit youth who are homeless.

Survey Research Nuts and Bolts

What are key ethical considerations when surveying people? What guidelines should be followed to ensure integrity of the data?

SURVEY RESEARCH NUTS & BOLTS



- Protecting Confidentiality
- Obtaining informed consent
- Preventing Duplication

Protecting Confidentiality

- What is confidentiality?
 - It means that all the information youth tell us is only for the purpose of this count. We will not share it with others.
 - We won't ask youth for identifying information such as their name or share their personal information with others unless they ask us to do so.
- Why is this important?
 - Confidentiality keeps youth and volunteers safe from harm and ensures that nobody is taken advantage of.

Protecting Confidentiality

- Youth who are homeless might be very shy about talking to you, or they may tell you more than you wanted to know.
- Stay neutral, respectful, and do not share their private information.
- Maintain “professional, work” boundaries.
- Let Team Leaders know if you think a youth is in immediate need of help or resources.

Protecting Confidentiality

- You may need to explain what confidentiality is to the youth you survey.
- You can say something like *“All of your responses are completely confidential. This means we will not share your name or other identifying information about you with anyone, and what you tell us will only be used for the purposes of this survey.”*

Obtaining Informed Consent

- Obtaining informed consent means someone's knowing permission to survey them without using dishonesty, threats, or force. Sufficient information must be presented (in understandable language) so that the person can make an informed decision about participation.
- Obtaining a youth's verbal consent will be sufficient for obtaining informal consent for *Youth Count Texas!*

Obtaining Informed Consent

- State up front that participation in *Youth Count Texas!* is voluntary and is not a requirement to access any services.
- State up front that some questions may be personal. You can skip those questions if they are not comfortable answering them.
- Share information about the survey incentive.
- Ask the person if they would like to take the survey and do not proceed unless they say “yes.”

Preventing Duplication

- “Duplication” is when the same person is surveyed more than once. Duplication skews survey results and reduces the integrity of the data.
- Prevent duplication by sticking to your assigned area, only canvassing each area once, and staying on your side of the street if a street is a boundary for your canvassing area.
- Also prevent duplication by asking each potential respondent if he or she has completed the survey already.

CHECK-IN

- How are you feeling?
- Are you excited to participate in this important initiative to ensure that homeless youth are counted and they have a voice?
- Confidentiality, informed consent, and data integrity are important concepts. Do you feel like you understand them?
- Do you need clarification about anything that we have discussed so far?

Count Guidelines and Logistics

What should volunteers expect if this is their first count? How will the count actually work?

Youth Count Texas! Goals

- Keep everyone safe.
- Collect uniform, accurate, and thorough data on youth who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

Your Safety and Comfort

- Always stay in groups of three or more. Stay within eyesight of your other group members.
- Make sure you and your team members have each other's mobile phone numbers before you split up.
- If you are a Team Leader, make sure all team members feel comfortable with their roles and entering a particular area before you enter.

Your Safety and Comfort

- Wear comfortable and warm clothing and shoes. Take a backpack, water, flashlight, and cell phone.
- You may be walking off pavement, in muddy areas. Wear shoes that can get dirty.
- Check the weather before you leave. If there is a chance of rain, consider taking a poncho or rain coat.

Your Safety and Comfort

- Remain alert and aware of your environment and an exit route at all times.
- Trust your gut. If something doesn't feel safe, chances are high that it's not.
- If you feel uncomfortable or threatened, remove yourself and your team from the situation.
- If you encounter dogs, remain calm and take cues from the owner regarding whether it is safe to approach.

Canvassing Guidelines

- Cover your assigned areas as thoroughly as possible.
- Check intersections, underpasses, 24-hour businesses, campsites, and other areas that your Team Leader has researched in advance.
- Look for people living in cars, tents, commercial establishments, alleys, parks, and at public libraries.

Cultural Competency

What do youth homelessness and housing instability look like? What different types of people should you expect to meet during the count?

Youth Homelessness: What does it look like?

- Homelessness and housing instability are broad terms that include people who are:
 - ▣ Living on the street
 - ▣ Staying at a shelter or other social services program
 - ▣ Couch surfing (staying casually with a friend)
 - ▣ Doubled up (multiple families crammed into one house or apartment)
 - ▣ Staying at a hotel or motel

Youth Homelessness: What does it look like?

- Youth who are homeless may appear to be:
 - ▣ Disheveled and in need of a shower, toiletries, and clean clothes
 - ▣ In need of physical or mental health services, including possibly emergency medical services
 - ▣ Depressed or anxious
 - ▣ Healthy and happy
 - ▣ COMPLETELY NORMAL!

Youth Homelessness: What does it look like?

- It may be helpful to think of young people who are homeless in different categories on a continuum:
 - Homeless young people in crisis
 - Homeless young people without the ability to stay in a stable living environment
 - Homeless young people such as those identified by the McKinney-Vento Education Act
 - Homeless young people who are street dependent and have embraced the street culture

Youth Homelessness: What does it look like?

- 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, 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).

Youth Homelessness: What does it look like?

- 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

Youth Homelessness: What does it look like?

- Homeless young people such as those identified by the McKinney-Vento Education Act:
 - These young people are homeless “couch surfers” who temporarily stay with friends, in cars, or in abandoned homes or buildings.
 - They may NOT want to be found and they do want to fit into their neighborhood and “fly under the radar” many times.
 - They may not consider themselves to be homeless.
 - They may be unwilling to participate.

Youth Homelessness: What does it look like?

- Homeless young people who are street dependent and have embraced 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.

Youth Homelessness: What does it look like?

- According to the True Colors Fund, as many as 40% of youth who are homeless identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender.
- These numbers are disproportionately high compared to the general population.
- Homeless youth who identify as LGBT are at even greater risk for victimization, unsafe sexual practices, and mental health issues than non-LGBT youth experiencing homelessness.

CHECK-IN

- Do you feel like you know what to expect?
- Do you have any concerns about the youth you might encounter when you are canvassing?
- Will you be able to be comfortable with and respectful toward people who may not look or act like you?

Building Rapport with Youth

What is the best way to communicate with youth? How can I make them comfortable when they are talking with me?

Principles of Engaging People

- Whether you are an adult participant, a youth data collector, or a young person experiencing homelessness, best practices are the same!
 - ▣ Every person is worthy of respect and has something to contribute.
 - ▣ We are all doing the best we can with what we've got and all people have untapped resources.
 - ▣ There's no such thing as failure, only feedback.

Approaching People Respectfully

- Consider in advance how comfortable you are with approaching people. Decide ahead of time what you will say to announce your presence.
- Treat campsites or areas where homeless individuals are gathered or sleeping as their home – announce yourself and ask if you may enter from a distance.
- When approaching a car that someone may be living in, try to get the person's attention from a distance, rather than by knocking on the window.
- When approaching people who are sleeping, try to wake them up by speaking in a regular voice rather than by yelling or tapping them.

Building Rapport with Youth

- ❑ Have name badge visible.
- ❑ Approach with a friendly smile and open posture.
- ❑ Ask permission to talk to them.
- ❑ Introduce yourself and explain that you are surveying youth who may be homeless or unstably housed.
- ❑ Explain how this project may help youth like them in the future.
- ❑ Ask if they have any questions before the interview.

Building Rapport with Youth

- ▣ Maintain eye contact and follow their lead.
- ▣ Make sure to respect their space: if they step back, you step back a bit.
- ▣ Use head nods to show agreement.
- ▣ Echo back what they say to show you understand.

Building Rapport with Youth

- Some of the survey questions are very personal and may bring up traumatic memories for the youth you will interview. It is okay if the person being interviewed wants to skip these questions.
- You may want to make statements of empathy while administering the survey to prevent it from being an impersonal test environment.
- Validate the youth and thank them for their honest responses to tough, personal questions.

Survey Instructions and Script

How should I introduce the survey? What key topics do I need to mention?

Survey Script

- ▣ “May I come talk with you?” (if appropriate)
- ▣ “My name is _____ and I am a volunteer for _____. We are doing a survey of youth who are homeless or unstably housed to learn about their needs and improve services.”
- ▣ Confidentiality
- ▣ Informed Consent
- ▣ “Have you completed this survey already today?”
- ▣ “Do you have any questions?”

Survey Script

- ▣ Statements of empathy and affirmation
- ▣ “I know that was a very personal question. That situation must have been very hard for you. Thank you for helping us make sure that policymakers will understand the challenges that young people face.”
- ▣ Refer to survey key if needed.
- ▣ “Thank you again for your time. Your responses will help us make sure that policymakers understand the needs of youth, so that we can improve services.”

The Surveys

- The surveys are long. We want to gather as much information about youths' needs as we can, to improve services.
- We have found that most youth do not mind taking the time to answer all of the questions.
- If you survey someone who does not want to complete all of the questions, that is okay. Just complete as much of the survey as you can.
- If you have questions about something on the survey, you can reference your survey key.

CHECK-IN

- Do you think you will be comfortable talking with youth?
- Do you feel equipped to administer the survey and follow the script?

SUMMARY

What are the most important things that I need to remember?

Don't Forget!

- ▣ You are part of an initiative that is very important!
- ▣ Be ethical
- ▣ Be accurate
- ▣ Be thorough
- ▣ Be respectful
- ▣ Be empathetic
- ▣ Be safe

YOUTH COUNT TEXAS!



THANK YOU for volunteering!