

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), school districts are trying to educate more than 111,000 homeless children and youth in our state each year. Almost 16,000 of these homeless Texas youth are “unaccompanied” by any adult. 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 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative 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! TNOYS has continued to undertake more important research on the subject, including a collaborative report with Texas Appleseed building on the Youth Count Texas! findings, titled “Young, Alone and Homeless in the Lone Star State,” and a survey of homeless student liaisons working within the public education system, all of which has helped us develop a better understanding of the needs of homeless youth and how to serve them.

Texas should continue its leadership role in the effort to end youth homelessness by acting on the findings of the Youth Count Texas! study that it commissioned, as well as the additional research that has been conducted.

### ***RESEARCH REVEALED THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH***

In the process of conducting the Youth Count Texas! report that was delivered to the Texas Legislature by TDHCA in December 2016, TNOYS discovered many 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 rather than sleeping outside or in shelters.

Our joint report on youth homelessness with Texas Appleseed found that youth homelessness doesn’t just affect youth who find themselves without homes, it also has broader implications for the communities in which they live because of the impact on the criminal justice systems, education, and other key institutions.

That report identified services that these youth need to help ensure a transition to successful adulthood and avoid the high costs of poor life outcomes, including:

- **Youth-Specific Shelters:** Youth interviewed by Texas Appleseed and the TNOYS overwhelmingly report feeling unsafe in “adult” shelters. Youth-specific shelters are needed at

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an average daily cost of \$200/bed.

- **Transitional Living Programs:** These programs offer housing as well as case management intended to get youth back on track and ready for independent living. Providers report an average cost of \$50 per day.
- **Street Outreach and Drop-in/Day Centers:** These services are needed for youth who are not ready to transition off the street or who face wait lists. The cost is roughly \$500 per youth.
- **Comprehensive Case Management:** This is for youth who may have temporary housing but need help stabilizing. Average cost is \$2,500 per youth.

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

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.

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. HHSP has provided over \$30 million in funding since 2009 to cities with a population of 285,000 or higher, but less than 12% was spent on children 18 or younger. 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.

#### ***Recommendation:***

- TNOYS recommends appropriating an additional \$3 million over the biennium to HHSP and earmarking the increase for services for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.