

# **Philadelphia Youth Homelessness Needs Assessment**

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**Jessica Sones, MSW**  
Youth System Coordinator  
City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services

**Key Input and Review From:** *John Ducoff*, Covenant House PA; *Marybeth Gonzales*, Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services; *Jahleel Harlem*, Young Adult Leadership Committee; *Joseph Hill-Coles*, Youth Service Inc and Young Adult Leadership Committee; *Marcia Hopkins*, Juvenile Law Center; *Donald Jackson*, Attic Youth Center and Young Adult Leadership Committee; *Tyrone Jones*, Young Adult Leadership Committee; *Kerry Krieger*, Delta Community Supports; *Michele Mangan*, Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services; *Allison Moore*, Valley Youth House; *James Thompson, Jr.*, Young Adult Leadership Committee; *Lauren Whitleigh*, Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services; *Joe Willard*, People's Emergency Center

## Overview

The Philadelphia Youth Homelessness Needs Assessment is the result of a 4-month collaborative process involving public and private stakeholders, including youth with lived experience. The assessment analyzes the current needs and resources for youth experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia, and uses this analysis to determine current service gaps and proposed solutions. The needs assessment is informed by multiple data sets gathered over the past 2 years, recognizing there is neither a definitive methodology for estimating the number of youth experiencing homelessness nor a standard, widely agreed-upon definition of youth homelessness. The format of this assessment will present gaps analysis and service needs and proposed recommendations first, and then will present the data which informs these recommendations.

## Gaps Analysis and Service Needs

Using the quantitative and qualitative data sources noted in this needs assessment, along with community-wide discussions with the stakeholders of the Young Adult Leadership Committee<sup>1</sup> and Philly Homes 4 Youth Coalition<sup>2</sup>, the following gaps in resources and services for youth experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia were identified:

### ***HOUSING, PREVENTION, AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICE NEEDS***

- 1. There is an overall lack of youth-dedicated supportive housing programs**  
A robust investment in both long-term housing interventions and medium-term housing interventions will be required to address the needs of youth experiencing and at risk of homelessness in Philadelphia. Through the unit projections analysis conducted by the Philadelphia Continuum of Care (CoC) in December 2017, it was estimated that Philadelphia has an unmet need of:
  - 668 units of moderate or high intensity housing (such as permanent supportive housing or non-time limited housing assistance),
  - 622 units of time-limited, moderate intensity housing (such as rapid rehousing or transitional housing), and
  - 394 units of prevention assistance.<sup>3</sup>
- 2. The existing housing inventory for unaccompanied youth is not available to all.**  
Several of the youth-specific programs that exist for youth in Philadelphia experiencing homelessness require youth to meet additional eligibility criteria, e.g. must have a history with the child welfare system. While having these type of housing programs for specific populations is important and meets a critical need, these additional criteria exclude some

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<sup>1</sup> Continuum of Care and Office of Homeless Services youth advisory/action board

<sup>2</sup> Community-wide coalition to prevent and end youth homelessness made up of youth leaders and over 40 public and private partner organizations

<sup>3</sup> The Philadelphia Continuum of Care 5-year strategic plan, which includes the unit projections analysis, will be published in summer 2018.

young people, resulting in service gaps for youth who do not qualify for these programs.

3. **Our community lacks housing and prevention resources for youth who are at risk of homelessness and who are couch surfing, despite high prevalence of couch surfing in our community.**

a. These young people do not qualify for HUD-funded housing interventions that require individuals to be “literally homeless” (i.e. in shelter or living in an unsheltered situation) or fleeing domestic violence to be eligible. The Voices of Youth Count study, and particularly the In-Depth Interviews, demonstrated that most youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Philadelphia couch surf at some point during their experience of homelessness (97% of the Philadelphia youth who were interviewed stated that they couch surfed at some point during their experience of homelessness) and need support services from a variety of systems<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, our community will require a robust investment in youth-specific prevention resources and housing supports for youth at risk of homelessness, as evidenced by the unit projections analysis conducted as part of the Philadelphia CoC strategic planning process.

b. Some prevention resources within Philadelphia’s homeless assistance system present barriers for youth to access them due to funding restrictions, such as requiring identification documents or proof of eviction. These prevention resources are often geared toward individuals with an established rental history (for example- individuals seeking eviction prevention assistance who can provide documentation of a lease in their name) which young people often do not have.<sup>5</sup>

4. **Limited age eligibility for housing and prevention resources for youth exiting the child welfare system prevents access to needed services for youth at high risk of homelessness.** There are three homeless dedicated housing resources on the 2017 Housing Inventory Chart specifically for youth ages 18-21 who have exited the child welfare system and are experiencing homelessness that are jointly funded with CoC and DHS funds; however, there are no dedicated housing resources for youth ages 21-24 who have exited the child welfare system.<sup>6</sup> This population is known to be vulnerable to experiencing homelessness as youth can remain in foster care in Pennsylvania up to age 21, but services and supports through the foster care system end at age 21.

5. **Our community lacks innovative housing models that allow flexibility to meet the unique needs of young people.** The Voices of Youth Count In-Depth Interviews highlighted that the current array of federally funded housing interventions for youth (transitional housing, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing) may not meet the unique needs of all young people and often do not allow flexibility to tailor interventions to individual youth<sup>7</sup>. An innovative continuum of housing programming would allow

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<sup>4</sup> Curry & Samuels, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Office of Homeless Services, 2018

<sup>6</sup> Philadelphia Continuum of Care, 2017a

<sup>7</sup> Curry & Samuels, 2017

youth to transition to services that are more or less intensive based on need, and would allow programs to tailor interventions to the needs of the youth they serve.

6. **Young people experiencing homelessness need an array of supportive services to transition successfully to permanent housing outcomes.** Our community must fully integrate supportive services into all youth housing interventions, including case management, education and employment supports, health and mental health services, life skills supports, and resources to build permanent connections to caring adults. Connections to education and employment opportunities build young peoples' capacity to support themselves as they transition to adulthood and reduces the risk of recidivism into future homelessness. Connections to caring adults provide support such as mentoring, emotional and concrete resources, and a social safety net to support long-term success in stable housing. Social and emotional wellbeing is another crucial aspect of support for young people, and includes connecting youth to health and mental healthcare but also connecting young people with opportunities to build competencies and feel connected to their communities<sup>8</sup>. The Voices of Youth Count In-Depth Interviews highlight the importance of approaching the holistic needs of a young person and pairing housing and supportive services to support young people to be successful in transitioning to adulthood and securing long-term housing stability<sup>9</sup>. Without connections to an array of developmentally-appropriate supportive services, young people are at increased risk for future homelessness
  
7. **Housing and service interventions in Philadelphia must be designed to meet the needs of specific subpopulations that are over-represented within Philadelphia's youth homelessness population, and use holistic approaches that support the intersectionality of youth identities.** Voices of Youth Count and Point in Time (PIT) Count data highlight that LGBTQ youth, youth of color, parenting youth, and youth with history of involvement with child welfare and justice systems are over-represented within Philadelphia's population of youth experiencing homelessness.<sup>10</sup> Youth-serving programs must be intentional about creating programs that meet the unique needs of these young people, that integrate principles of trauma-informed care and Positive Youth Development, and that promote U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness' (USICH) four core outcomes for youth: stable housing, well-being, employment and education, and permanent connections.

## Proposed Solutions

These proposed solutions are informed by the needs assessment and analysis in this report, as well as input from the Young Adult Leadership Committee, Philly Homes 4 Youth Coalition, and focus groups with young people experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia conducted in fall

<sup>8</sup> United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Curry & Samuels, 2017

<sup>10</sup> Curry & Samuels, 2017; Office of Homeless Services & Valley Youth House, 2017, Philadelphia Continuum of Care, 2017b

2017 as part of the Philadelphia CoC strategic planning process.

1. **Expand and diversify youth-dedicated housing inventory, including innovative housing models.** New or expanded housing resources for youth should have broad and inclusive eligibility criteria to ensure that programs can serve *all* young people experiencing homelessness in our community, and be designed to meet the unique needs of subpopulations which are overrepresented within youth experiencing homelessness, specifically: LGBTQ youth, youth of color, parenting youth, and youth with history of involvement with child welfare and justice systems. A “one size fits all” approach will not work to meet the unique and varied needs of youth experiencing homelessness in our Philadelphia Specific innovative housing models that our community would like to implement include:
  - a. host homes,
  - b. extended rapid rehousing and rental assistance models such as rapid rehousing 2.0 and transition-aged youth rental assistance models,
  - c. non-time limited housing options for youth who need permanent housing supports,
  - d. post-transitional housing assistance (first, last, security) for youth exiting transitional housing
2. **Extend age eligibility for all youth-dedicated housing programs up to age 24**
3. **Prevention and diversion options specifically designed for youth, which could include:**
  - a. Family reunification/mediation tailored to young adult population
  - b. Short-term rental assistance or other financial supports paired with case management and aftercare
4. **Supportive services that meet the specific needs of youth:**
  - a. Resources to support full implementation of youth-friendly coordinated entry, including:
    - Staffing of youth access points
    - Community navigator team, which can provide support to youth on the by name list who are awaiting housing placement (case management, support obtaining vital documents, etc.)
  - b. Drop in center(s) that are accessible to youth throughout the city with access to showers, laundry, storage, meals, transportation support, case management, and other services. These could serve as the primary, but not only, access points for coordinated entry. A model of this is the Hub of Hope, a partnership between the City of Philadelphia, Project HOME, and SEPTA (public transportation system) which “offers a safe place where people can enjoy a warm cup of coffee, take a shower and wash laundry, and speak to peers or case managers to begin the process of finding a permanent home.”<sup>11</sup> Youth leaders in Philadelphia, specifically the members of the Young Adult Leadership Committee, advocate for

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<sup>11</sup> Project HOME, 2018.

- a youth-dedicated space similar to the Hub of Hope where youth experiencing homelessness can receive services.
- c. Aftercare services for youth to ensure success in permanent housing, that includes case management and supportive services

## Summary of Key Findings from Data Sources

### **VOICES OF YOUTH COUNT**

In 2016, Philadelphia was one of 22 cities across the United States that participated in the Voices of Youth Count initiative conducted by Chapin Hall out of the University of Chicago. The Voices of Youth Count study included a PIT count of youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability on a single night in August 2016. The Voices of Youth Count study introduced a new methodology for counting youth experiencing homelessness, by using “Youth Guides”- young adults with experience with homelessness- to identify locations for the Youth Count and to survey youth during the Count.<sup>12</sup> This new youth-driven methodology has helped the Philadelphia CoC to better capture the population of youth experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia, which is often hidden, and Philadelphia has continued this methodology for future PIT counts. Philadelphia was also one of 5 cities that participated in the Voices of Youth Count In-Depth Interviews. The *Philadelphia County Technical Report on Youth Homelessness: Findings from the In-depth Interviews* provides rich qualitative data and insight into trajectories of young people’s housing instability experiences, young people’s experiences while homeless, and how youth navigate housing instability and seek supports within their environment.<sup>13</sup> The data from these interviews provide unique insight into solutions for preventing and ending youth homelessness in our community.

The August 2016 Youth Count street count identified 263 young people ages 13-25 experiencing homelessness and housing instability (this did not include youth residing in emergency shelters and transitional housing). 50 of these young people reported residing unsheltered on the night of the PIT count.<sup>14</sup>

The Voices of Youth Count youth count findings and In-Depth Interview findings highlight key themes about the needs of youth experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia. Some of the key themes include:

- **There are specific subpopulations of young people in Philadelphia that are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness than their peers.** These overrepresented groups include: LGBTQ youth (31% of population of youth experiencing homelessness in August 2016 youth count), youth of color (90%), pregnant and parenting youth (34% of females pregnant or parenting; 15% of males parenting or expecting a child), youth with history in child

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<sup>12</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2017

<sup>13</sup> Curry & Samuels, 2017

<sup>14</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2017

welfare system (29%), and youth with history in justice system (34%).<sup>15</sup>

- **Couch surfing is a near universal experience among youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Philadelphia.** 97% of Philadelphia youth who participated in the In-Depth Interviews reported that they couch surfed during their experience of homelessness. In the other 4 counties that participated in the In-Depth interviews, between 85% and 95% of youth reported couch surfing at some point during their experiences of homelessness.<sup>16</sup> This highlights the need for housing options to support this population of young people, who may not be eligible to access all mainstream homeless assistance resources due to eligibility criteria based on adult homeless experiences (e.g. a requirement that the youth be “literally homeless” to qualify for housing assistance such as residing in shelter or in an unsheltered situation).
- **Adolescent onset of youth homelessness:** 75% of youth in the In-Depth Interviews (across all 5 cities that participated) reported onset of homelessness between 13 and 18.<sup>17</sup> This highlights the need to target prevention interventions and resources for an adolescent population and tailor resources that can continue with young people throughout their transition to adulthood. This also highlights the importance of a cross-system “upstream” homelessness prevention strategy in coordination with schools, the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and other systems that serve youth and young adults.

The Voices of Youth Count National Prevalence Study found that 1 in 10 young adults ages 18-25 endures some form of homelessness in a year.<sup>18</sup> Comparing that to American Community Survey data for Philadelphia from 2016, which projected that there were about 130,000 youth age 20-24 in the city, this suggests as many as 13,000 young people experience homelessness in Philadelphia within the course of a year.<sup>19</sup>

### ***PIT COUNT JANUARY 2017***

During the January 2017 PIT Count, 539 youth ages 24 and under were counted as being sheltered and unsheltered, including 242 parenting youth ages 18-24, 271 unaccompanied youth ages 18-24, and 26 unaccompanied youth under age 18. 451 youth ages 24 and under were residing in emergency shelter or transitional housing and 88 youth ages 24 and under were identified as residing unsheltered on the night of the PIT count. 12.5% of adult households in the January PIT Count (sheltered and unsheltered) were young adults ages 18-24 (513 out of 4,115 total adult households).<sup>20</sup> The PIT Count numbers are generally agreed to be a conservative estimate of youth homelessness, as this population is often hidden.<sup>21</sup> Charts in **Appendix A** provides a demographic breakout from the January 2017 PIT Count of youth ages 18-24 (excludes youth under 18).

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<sup>15</sup> Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2017

<sup>16</sup> Curry & Samuels, 2017

<sup>17</sup> Curry & Samuels, 2017

<sup>18</sup> Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2011

<sup>20</sup> Philadelphia Continuum of Care, 2017b

<sup>21</sup> Cutuli, 2017

### ***YOUTH COUNT AUGUST 2017***

In the August 2017 Youth Count (youth-specific PIT count), 251 youth were found to be homeless or unstably housed. 156 youth indicated they were homeless by HUDs definition (slept in an abandoned building, on the streets, subway, under a bridge, in a vehicle or in the woods/encampment, shelter, or hospital the prior night). 95 reported sleeping unsheltered the night before. 26% of youth identified as LGBTQ. 40% reported a child welfare history. 36% reported a history with the juvenile justice or criminal justice system.<sup>22</sup> As noted above, the PIT count numbers are generally agreed to be a conservative estimate of youth homelessness, though the implementation of a youth-specific PIT count methodology driven by participation in Chapin Hall's Youth Count initiative has improved Philadelphia's ability to count this population.<sup>23</sup>

### ***SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA HOMELESS STUDENT DATA & YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY 2013***

According to the 2015-2016 Pennsylvania Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program State Report, the School District of Philadelphia identified 5,518 homeless youth during the 2015-2016 school year. Of the youth identified, 76% (3,467) were students and 24% (1,079) were not yet school-age. 11% (617) were high school students.<sup>24</sup> The 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) surveyed School District of Philadelphia high school students and found that 11.7% of high school students reported being homeless in the last 30 days.<sup>25</sup> This is estimated to be approximately 3,600 students. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey does not capture youth ages 24 and under who are out of high school which would likely increase this number.

The discrepancy between the findings of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and the youth-specific point in time counts highlight that the PIT count methodology, even if focused specifically on capturing youth, likely captures only a small percentage of the number of youth experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia (Cutuli, 2017).

### ***2017 HOUSING INVENTORY CHART***

There are 294 non-emergency units (transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing) dedicated to young adults in the 2017 Housing Inventory. These young-adult dedicated units represent 5.7% of the non-emergency housing inventory for adults (294 out of 5,105 units).<sup>26</sup> Of the 294 non-emergency units dedicated to young adults, 133 of these units are newly dedicated to young adult subpopulation for FY17/FY18. 66 of the 294 units require DHS history and that the young person be referred prior to age 21. In FY17, OHS funded 25 new emergency housing beds for youth and 25 new rapid rehousing beds for youth due to new City Council and OHS funding to serve this population.

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<sup>22</sup> Office of Homeless Services & Valley Youth House, 2017

<sup>23</sup> Cutuli, 2017

<sup>24</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017a; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017b

<sup>25</sup> Cutuli, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> (Philadelphia Continuum of Care, 2017a).

### ***FY17 HMIS DATA- YOUNG ADULTS IN HMIS PROJECTS***

FY17 Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services HMIS data on young adults ages 18-24 demonstrates that a sizeable number of young adults enter the emergency shelter system, but few young adults successfully transition into transitional or permanent housing. Chart in **Appendix B** shows the young adults ages 18-24 in HMIS projects during FY17, broken down by project type, gender, and household makeup (with or without children). The chart below demonstrates that young women with children are more likely to enter transitional or rapid rehousing projects after emergency shelter than single young adult men or women. This is largely due to availability of resources, as there are more transitional and permanent housing resources for young adult women with children than for young women without children or young adult men without children as evidenced by the Housing Inventory Chart.

FY17 Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services HMIS data demonstrates that very few single young adults access “general adult” transitional housing, rapid rehousing, or permanent supportive housing programs (less than 30 total placements for the entire fiscal year)- see chart below. Chart in **Appendix C** shows the young adults ages 18-24 in HMIS projects in FY17, broken down by 1) youth dedicated vs. adult dedicated projects, 2) project type, 3) gender, and 4) household makeup (with or without children). A higher number of young adult parenting women accessed general adult transitional housing and rapid rehousing resources during FY17. This level of access may change with the roll out of coordinated entry prioritization which begins in 2018 and should be monitored closely to determine need for additional youth dedicated resources.

### ***FY17 RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH PROVIDER DATA- YOUTH SERVED UNDER AGE 18***

Federally funded Runaway and Homeless Youth providers operate emergency shelter, outreach, and transitional living programs in Philadelphia for youth and are the primary service providers in Philadelphia for youth under 18 experiencing homelessness. Philadelphia had 3 operational Runaway and Homeless Youth programs in FY17 that served youth ages 17 and under, with the following capacity:

- **Basic Center Program (shelter)/Youth Service Inc-** 24 beds (unaccompanied youth)
- **Basic Center Program (shelter)/Pathways PA-** 5 beds (unaccompanied youth)
- **Street Outreach Program/Valley Youth House-** Annual goal to engage 3,120 unduplicated youth annually ages 21 and under

According to data provided to the Office of Homeless Services by these providers, programs served a total of 403 youth under 18 during FY17:

- **Basic Center Program/Youth Service Inc:** 68 youth under 18 served in emergency shelter
- **Basic Center Program/Pathways PA:** 38 youth under 18 served in emergency shelter
- **Street Outreach Program/Valley Youth House:** Engaged a total of 297 youth under 18 and connected 8 youth under 18 to shelter. Note: Valley Youth House Street Outreach Program also serves youth up to age 21.

Note: Two additional Runaway and Homeless Youth funded Basic Center programs have become operational since FY17: Connection Training Services and Forget Me Knot Youth Services. Pathways PA also operated 2 federally funded Runaway and Homeless Youth Transitional Living Programs in FY17 that served youth ages 18-22.

### ***UNIT PROJECTIONS ANALYSIS FROM 2017/2018 PHILADELPHIA CONTINUUM OF CARE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS***

In summer 2017, the Philadelphia Continuum of Care (CoC), guided by a Steering Committee comprised of community stakeholders, engaged Corporation for Supportive Housing to support the process to develop a new 5 Year Plan to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in Philadelphia. In addition to holding numerous focus groups and a planning charrette with community stakeholders, a Unit Projections Subcommittee examined HUD-mandated reports on homelessness and program performance (PIT Count, Annual Homelessness Assessment Report, and Annual Performance Report), aggregate data from a youth-serving shelter not participating in HMIS, and national and local data on the housing needs of young people experiencing homelessness to identify the gaps in **need for additional units of** a) prevention resources, b) time-limited, moderate intensity housing, and c) moderate or high intensity housing needed for youth ages 18-24 experiencing or at risk of homelessness Using the data available, the following calculations were made:

1. Number of youth who experience homelessness in Philadelphia annually
2. Percentage of youth who would require prevention, time-limited, moderate intensity housing, and high intensity housing to resolve their homelessness
3. Number of additional units/resources needed by the system based on the need for said units compared to the number of units available through turnover in the current inventory

Using available data, the CoC estimated that approximately 1,500 transition-aged youth experience homelessness annually in Philadelphia. The CoC then used a projection analysis to estimate the number of additional units needed in the system to effectively address youth homelessness and estimated the following projected need:

- 668 units of moderate or high intensity housing (such as permanent supportive housing or non-time limited housing assistance),
- 622 units of time-limited, moderate intensity housing (such as rapid rehousing or transitional housing), and
- 394 units of prevention assistance.

### **Areas for Further Exploration**

The following areas merit further exploration, but sufficient data was not available for this needs assessment and data analysis:

- The discharge outcomes of youth ages 17-21 exiting the child welfare and juvenile justice system, including their immediate housing plan upon exit from the care of the child welfare or juvenile justice system as well as their housing status within specific

timeframes following exit from these systems (for example: 6-12 months post-discharge). Efforts will continue to be made to work with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems to obtain this data.

- This analysis did not delve into the specific needs of youth with mental health needs who are experiencing homelessness, and the type of housing and service interventions that are most appropriate to serve these young people. Our community recognizes that not all youth with behavioral health needs will qualify or need the long-term supports of permanent supportive housing, but will likely need housing services and supports that are intensive and tailored to the unique needs of the young person. Ongoing analysis of coordinated entry data, as well as data from the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services, will be necessary to ensure that young people with a wide range of behavioral health needs who are experiencing homelessness are matched with the most appropriate array of supports.

## Citations

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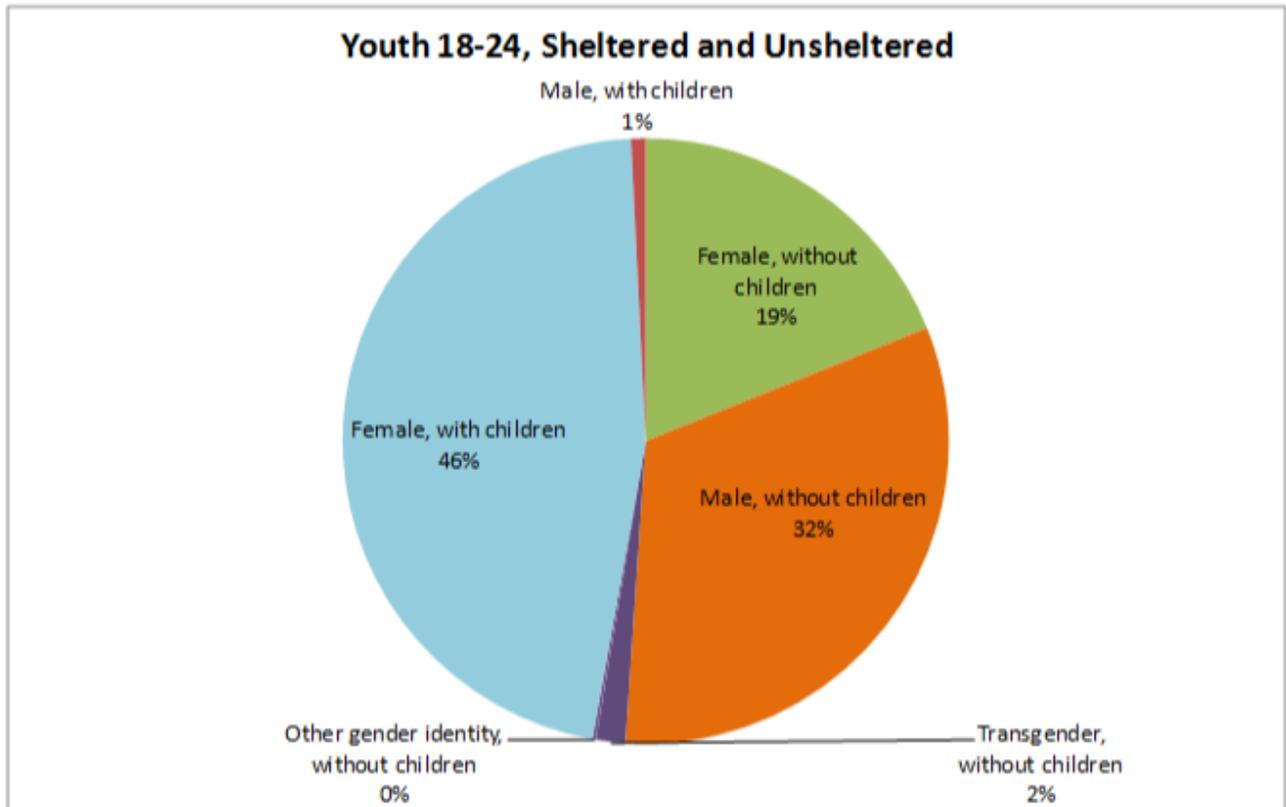
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## Appendix A

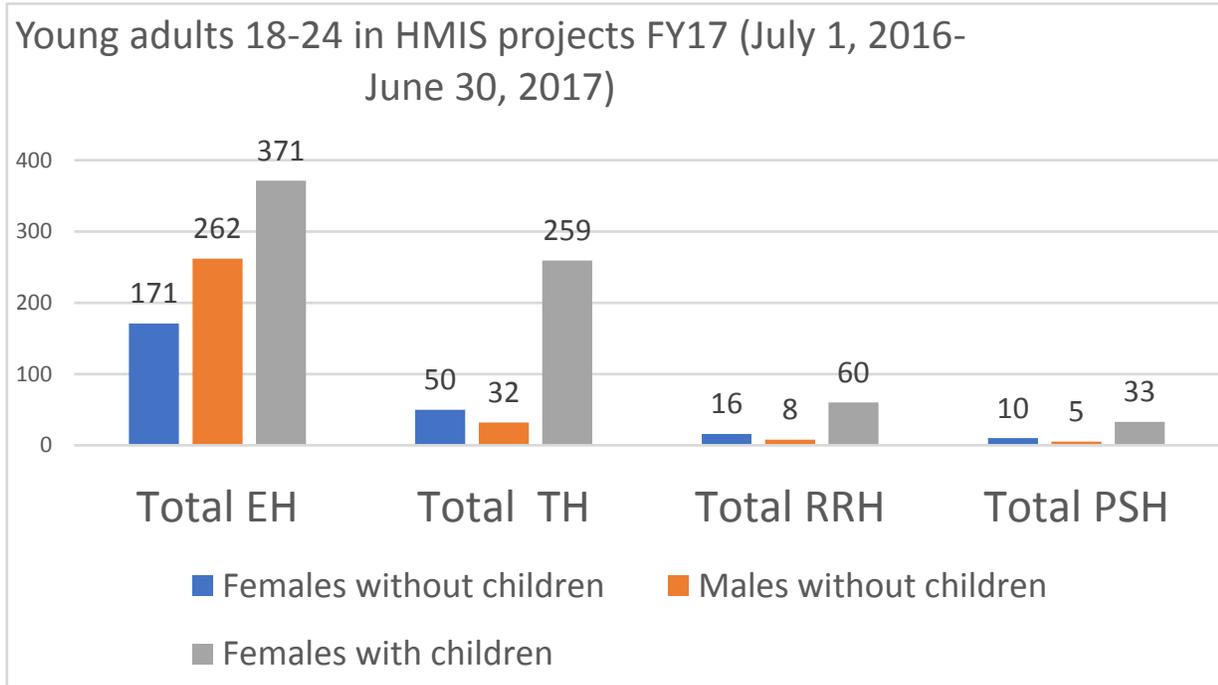
Demographic breakout from January 2017 PIT Count for youth ages 18-24 (excludes youth under 18):

January 2017 PIT Count Youth 18-24 Sheltered and Unsheltered					
	Head of Household Type	Head of Household Total, Sheltered	Head of Household Total, Unsheltered	Total Sheltered and Unsheltered	% of Total Young Adult Households
<b>Unaccompanied youth households</b>					
	Female, without children	79	18	97	19%
	Male, without children	101	64	165	32%
	Transgender, without children	8	0	8	2%
	Other gender identity, without children	1	0	1	0%
	<b>TOTAL Unaccompanied youth</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>271</b>	
<b>Parenting youth households</b>					
	Female, with children	237	1	238	46%
	Male, with children	3	1	4	1%
	<b>TOTAL Parenting youth</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>242</b>	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>513</b>	



## Appendix B

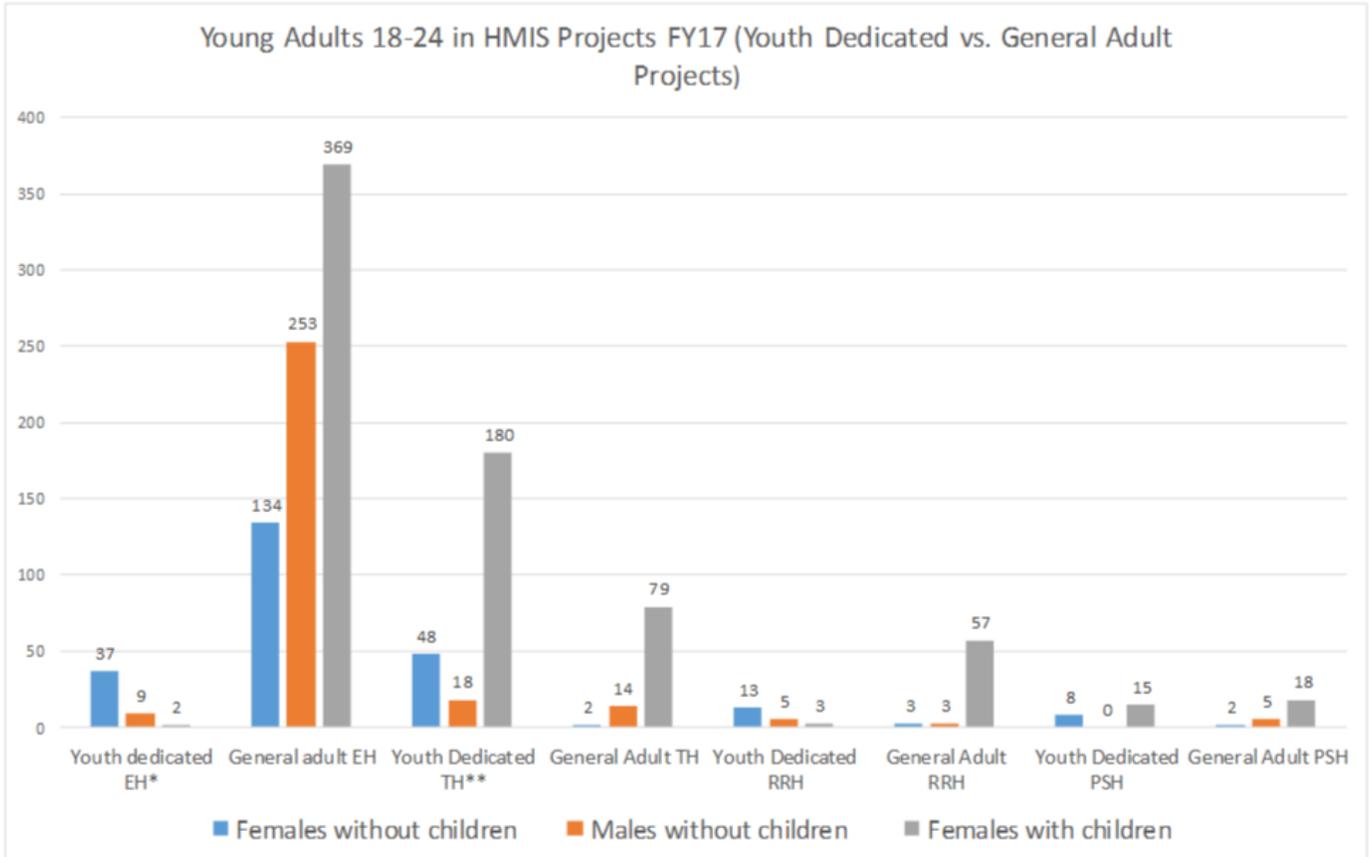
Young adults ages 18-24 in HMIS projects during FY17, broken down by project type, gender, and household makeup (with or without children):



**Note:** Unduplicated by project type. Young adult may be counted more than once in total count if they were enrolled in more than one project type during FY17.

## Appendix C

Young adults ages 18-24 in HMIS projects during FY17, broken down by 1) youth dedicated vs. adult dedicated projects, 2) project type, 3) gender, and 4) household makeup (with or without children):



**Note:** Unduplicated by project type. Young adult may be counted more than once in total count if they were enrolled in more than one project type during FY17.