

# Advocacy

## Youth Homelessness

Not all young people who experience homelessness are living in families. Unaccompanied homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 24 have been estimated to make up as much as 12 percent of the homeless population. In San Francisco, youth ages 18-24 have the highest poverty rates of any age group and are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.

### **Causes of Youth Homelessness:**

Numerous studies of homeless youth have found experiences of physical and sexual abuse, parental drug or alcohol use, childhood homelessness, foster care, and juvenile detention. Neglect and lack of emotional and financial support from their families can also cause youth homelessness.

- It is estimated that between 500,000 and 1.3 million youth who run away or are thrown out become homeless.
- A study of youth in shelters indicated that nearly half of youth reported intense conflict or physical harm by a family member as a major contributing factor to their homelessness.
- In the same study 62 percent of youth indicated that a member of their family or household let them know they were not longer wanted.
- Within 2-4 years of exiting foster care, 25 percent of foster children had experienced homeless.
- In a study of homeless youth in Minnesota, 34 percent of homeless youth surveyed indicated they had been in a correctional facility for more than a week.

### **Homelessness & Youth**

The effects of homelessness are especially devastating to youth living in shelters and on the street. Youth are at an increased risk of being physically and sexually abused while on the streets, especially in adult homeless shelters. Local and regional studies report rates of sexual assault of homeless youth ranging from 15-20 percent.

- More than half of youth report being "beaten up" while on the streets.
- Additionally, youth reported being robbed, stabbed, and shot at while on the streets.

The complicated lives of homeless youth make the transition to adulthood exceptionally difficult. Abuse, neglect, lack of role models, and family instability effects a youth's ability to establish and maintain support networks that can be vital in a successful transition to adulthood.

### **Ending Youth Homelessness**

Mainstream homeless programs fail to meet the unique needs of homeless youth. Ending youth homelessness requires a coordinated effort involving a variety of services including support for youth discharged from foster care and the juvenile justice system, access to education for youth

at risk of becoming homeless, and additional research to help advocates better understand the needs of homeless youth.

Statistics-National Alliance to End Homelessness