

RESEARCH SUMMARY:

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH-SERVING PROFESSIONALS TO PREVENT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



The National Runaway Safeline

NRS is the federally funded national communication system for youth and young adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and those who care about them, which offers crisis intervention services through calls, texts, chats, emails, and an online forum. NRS' frontline staff are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to offer trauma-informed, nonjudgmental, nonsectarian, and nondirective support to contacts.

Youth homelessness is a significant challenge across the United States, with an increasing number of young people under 25 experiencing homelessness on their own.

NRS partnered with the American Institutes for Research to conduct a study analyzing crisis intervention services data from over 100,000 people who interacted with NRS' crisis services staff from 2019 to 2023. This study aimed to illuminate the characteristics, experiences, and challenges of young people accessing NRS services and to identify differences between those in crisis, at imminent risk of homelessness, and already homeless. This information can help program administrators and policymakers better equip communities with resources to prevent youth homelessness.



Homelessness Risk Status

42% were in crisis, which involved a problem requiring resolution but did not involve housing instability

32% were at imminent risk, meaning they mentioned running away or being forced to leave home

26% were homeless, meaning they did not have a safe or stable place to live



What Did We Find?

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Most contacts were young people advocating on their own behalf (78%) and were primarily female, White/Caucasian, and under 18 years old. More than half of young people were at home at the time of outreach to NRS, and only 17% had previously been homeless.

HOMELESSNESS RISK STATUS:

Factors associated with a higher likelihood of young people being in crisis included being 18 and older; being at home; and having issues with transportation, mental health, and human trafficking. Factors associated with young people being at imminent risk included being between 15 and 17; being at home; and facing family dynamics and emotional abuse. Young people who were 15 and older and who were facing economic challenges (e.g., employment and housing instability), juvenile crime, human trafficking, substance use, transportation, neglect, and engagement with the child welfare system were more likely to be homeless.

REFERRALS:

NRS staff discuss natural support networks and offer referrals to community-based services for young people trying to resolve a crisis. Common referrals include family, police, friends, and alternate youth housing. Young people in crisis were generally least likely to receive referrals. Compared with young people who were homeless, young people at imminent risk were more likely to discuss family members, friends, and adults in their natural support network, and were more likely to receive a referral to the police.

What Can Youth Service Providers Do to Prevent Youth Homelessness?

- Ensure that young people and their families can access prevention and early intervention services for a myriad of issues that could result in a young person leaving home.
- Understand the local landscape of resources and make strategic warm hand-offs for community-based resources that can address the comprehensive needs of all family members.
- Ensure that programs serving young people incorporate youth-centered policies in supportive services to promote continuity in program engagement and successful completion.