Ending Teen Homelessness:

A Case Study of Los Angeles Youth Network in Hollywood, California©

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By

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ABSTRACT

Across the United States, youth struggle to survive on the streets of urban America. There are an estimated 1.3 million homeless teens in America, however, we know very little about them. The purpose of this study is to shed some light on the realities of being young and homeless. In doing so, this study goes beyond previous attempts to address the issue of teen homelessness in two distinct ways. First, this study makes the important link between the homeless youth population and the service providers attempting to meet their needs by using the Los Angeles Youth Network (LAYN) as a case study. The Los Angeles Youth Network provides services for some of the most hardest to serve homeless youth. It uses a flexible approach that is completely voluntary and the homeless youth can leave at any time. Operating in Hollywood, California, LAYN's primary goal is to get homeless youth off the streets and into positive living situations. Second, this study interviews homeless teens directly in order to gain their perspective. Their struggle to survive on the streets expose the realities of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and violence. The testimonies provided by the youth expose the pain of homelessness and help to make their plight visible.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

> *"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to se me."*
> Ralph Ellison. The Invisible Man.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Visible in urban communities across the United States, homeless teens face the daily challenge of survival. City streets filled with prostitution, violence, and hustling provide homes for displaced youth. Their lives are plagued with histories of abuse, drugs, and neglect. Their struggle to survive in America's urban centers shows us more than the shortcomings of our "civilized" society; it provides a tale of courage and strength. "Officials say the ranks of homeless adolescents are swelling, though exact numbers are unknown because no government or private agencies track homeless teen-agers."[1] According to Jane Gross of the New York Times, 1.3 million American teen-agers are estimated to runaway or get kicked out of their homes annually.[2] Surprisingly, as a society, we know very little about homeless teens. Efforts to assist this marginalized community have been minimal at best. Despite the growing number of homeless teens and the increasing challenge of teen homelessness, the names, the faces, and the stories of the young and the homeless remain invisible.

Teen homelessness threatens the future of many youth. The ability of this youthful population to skillfully camouflage in urban culture appeases our social conscience to do nothing about the situation. Remaining invisible is an important survival strategy of homeless teens in order to escape the dangers of getting caught by local authorities and perhaps forced back into unhealthy living situations. American public knows little about teen homelessness. This makes it

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[1] Billiter, Bill. "For O.C.'s Teen Homeless, Few Doors to Knock On." Los Angeles Times. January 22, 1990.
[2] Gross, Jane. "Running from Abuse to the Streets." New York Times. December 18, 1997, p. A27.

is easier to dismiss this population as "runaways." The invisibility of homeless teens suggests that no problem exists and reinforces lethargic efforts to address the issue.

The possibility of ending teen homelessness seems problematic given the limitations of intervention. First, it is difficult to define who qualifies as a homeless teen. The federal definition of homelessness for youth is "any child who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; children in doubled-up families may be counted as homeless when one family is living with another, due to loss of housing, stemming from financial problems."[3] Despite the attempt of the federal definition to be both specific and general, a good portion of homeless teens are still not covered under this definition of homeless youth. There exists a debate among academics about who counts as a homeless teen. Should youth residing in homeless shelters be considered homeless? Should runaways be considered homeless? What about displaced youth staying with friends or extended family, do they count as homeless? In this paper, I will explore some of the more popular terms used to define homeless teens and highlight the aspects of defining homeless youth that really matter.

Second, the best method of intervention and prevention of teen homelessness is highly controversial. Prevention and intervention pose challenging questions such as: How do we as a society promote positive family living environments, confront alcoholism among homeless teens, or provide quality jobs for a sustainable youthful population? Do we provide more shelters or more services? What are the implications of each? How do we reach a population that perhaps doesn't want to be reached? These questions add to the complexity of improving opportunities for homeless teens. In this study, I will examine a very distinct approach to ending teen homelessness in Hollywood for some of the "hardest to serve" adolescents.

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[3] "Helping Hands." WCCUSD Newsletter About Homeless Children. Volume 1, Number 2. December 29, 1997.

The purpose of this study is to shed some light on what it means to be young and homeless in urban America. I will attempt to go beyond the stigma of homeless teens as grungy squatters, punks, or abused runaways on the streets of Hollywood. Understanding the lifestyles, experiences, and backgrounds of homeless teens is an important step for the creation of policies that address the causes and not merely the symptoms of teen homelessness. In an effort to more fully understand this population, I will examine the Los Angeles Youth Network (LAYN) in Hollywood. LAYN provides a flexible approach to ending teen homelessness as it attempts to provide services for chronic youth. Los Angeles Youth Network has been serving the homeless youth population in the greater Los Angeles area since 1986, primarily with an emergency shelter and a daytime drop-in center.

In addition to examining LAYN, I will interview a small sample of homeless teens. The interview explores personal backgrounds, the identity of homeless youth, the experience of growing up, the needs of homeless teens and how they are met by LAYN, and careers for homeless teens. It tells the life stories of the homeless youth and provides a foundation to begin understanding the young and the homeless. More significantly, sharing the life stories of the homeless youth is an effort to make their struggle visible to the majority.

Finally, I will offer recommendations on how to improve the quality of life for homeless teens and examine strategies to reduce the number of homeless youth drawing from lessons learned at LAYN. Given the dynamics of teen homelessness that will be shared in the pages that follow, large scale efforts seem more urgent than ever before. However, it is unreasonable to place the ultimate responsibility of ending teen homelessness on parent education courses, or on emergency shelters, or in the hands of the limited number of staff working to combat youth homelessness.

1.1 BRIEF BACKGROUND

In the United States, estimates of the homeless population range from 1.2 to 2 million people.[4] This number reflects the amount of people who experience homelessness on any given night during one year. The range of 1.2 to 2 million people seems mysteriously low given the previously mentioned estimate of homeless youth of 1.3 million. In fact, the lines between homeless youth and the overall homeless population are often unclear when estimating the homeless population. It seems that the homeless youth are usually counted separately, but when youth are included in homeless estimates the range greatly increases to 4.95 million and 9.32 million homeless people.[5]

Counting the homeless youth population separately has produced a wide gap as well. Estimates of the homeless youth population range from 500,000 (Levins, 1995) to 4 million (Melson, 1995). Part of the difficulty in counting the number of homeless teens lies in the challenge of determining the best method of measurement and determining who qualifies as a homeless teen. There is some evidence that the characteristics of teen homelessness have changed over time.

American society has always had young people who run away from home. Runaway children were among the earliest immigrants to America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (Melson, 1995). However, the present population of homeless teens must confront daily realities of survival on the streets of modern urban America that most people could never imagine. In 1985, the Academy Award Nominee documentary, Streetwise, showed the daily lives of homeless teens on the streets of Seattle. The teen-agers depicted in this documentary

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[4] National Coalition of the Homeless. May 1998.
[5] Based on estimates from the Clinton Administration. Taken from the National Coalition of the Homeless. May 1998.

confront the challenges of alcoholism and drugs in the home, pimps and prostitutes on the streets, and daily doses of panhandling and hustling.

More recently, <u>Star Maps</u> depicts the lives of teen-age males working as prostitutes on the streets of Hollywood. The movie goes to the extent to portray a teen-age boy who is getting pimped by his own father, who was a former street prostitute himself. Given the knowledge of the stark realities of street life for adolescents and homeless teens in particular, what role has intervention played in terms of policy?

In the 1970's, the U.S. Senate Committee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency held hearings on the increasing number of youth runaways. In 1974, President Ford signed the landmark Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and the Runaway Youth Act, which was amended in 1977 to become the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. This legislation administered several million dollars for 3 consecutive years on local services to runaways. The legislation of the 1970's, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, in particular, accomplished two important goals. First, it drew national attention to youth homelessness as a distinct group of homeless people. Second, a national runaway switchboard was created to assist mobile runaway youth, which is still operating today. Despite the few attempts to meet the needs of the homeless youth population in the 1970's, it was the decade of the 1980's that experienced more national attention in homeless policy.

Homelessness intervention forged its way into the political arena during the decade of the 1980's under a reluctant Reagan Administration. In 1983, a federal task force was created that offered local governments assistance on how to obtain surplus federal property for the growing number of homeless families. A number of attempts at a homeless policy followed including

The Homeless Persons' Survival Act of 1986, Homeless Eligibility Clarification Act of 1986, The Homeless Housing Act of 1986, culminating in the McKinney Act of 1987.

The McKinney Act of 1987 provided federal support to provide a "continuum of care" with programs providing a range of services to homeless people. It covers emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training, primary health care, education, and limited permanent housing. It also established a national definition of homeless as "any person who lacks shelter for a night." In 1990, President Bush amended the McKinney Act with Subtitle VII-B, which added provisions to meet the needs of homeless children and youth. "Meeting the needs of homeless children and youth" is problematic because we have a limited understanding of those needs. Understanding the needs of homeless teens with histories of abuse and neglect is even more challenging. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, "the McKinney Act's greatest weakness is its focus on emergency measures—it responds to the symptoms of homelessness, not its causes."[6]

Where do homeless teens come in the picture of these federal attempts? The primary focus of federal legislation on homelessness has been to assist local efforts to address the issue. The estimated 1.3 million homeless teens benefit from the McKinney Act as a subgroup of the homeless population. However, the limitation pointed out by the National Coalition for the Homeless provides an area left to be discovered for homeless teens. It is interesting to note that the National Coalition for the homeless did not acknowledge homeless teens as a group of their constituency until 1985. (Melson, 1995).

The causes of homelessness do not completely encompass the causes of teen homelessness. According to Jencks (1994), major roles of homelessness include: (1) virtual

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[6] National Coalition of the Homeless. Fact Sheet #1. October 1997.

abolition of involuntary commitment for mentally ill; (2) failure to provide alternative housing for many of those we deinstitutionalized; (3) the crack epidemic; (4) increased long term joblessness among working age men; (5) declining frequency of marriage among women with children; (6) reduction in cash welfare benefits; and (7) the destruction of skid row. Minor roles creating homelessness as outlined by Jencks are: (1) families' growing reluctance to shelter their down-at-heel kin; (2) alcoholism; (3) changes in the private housing market; (4) cutbacks in federal spending for low income housing; and (5) low rent control ordinances.

By comparison, the causes of teen homelessness may include all of the above reasons outlined by Jencks, but four main causes have been identified in the literature. Abusive homes, substance abuse, victims of sexual and/or physical violence, and arrest and/or jail records are the four primary causes cited for creating teen homelessness. (Clary, Harrod, Olney, 1992).

This study will examine the turbulent lifestyles of homeless teens and explore what it means to be young and homeless. Understanding the dynamics of teen homelessness will provide the necessary background to create policies that will adequately address the causes of teen homelessness.

1.2 DEFINING TEEN HOMELESSNESS

Understanding teen homelessness rests on the ability to answer the question: "who qualifies as a homeless teen?" Homeless youth have been labeled a number of terms such as couch kids, runaways, throwaways, displaced youth, at-risk youth, homeless, homeless kids, street kids, system kids and the list goes on. (See Table 1 to view glossary of frequently used terms for homeless teens). Homeless teens include the more visible youth such as punks, prostitutes, pimps, and the less visible teens such as couch kids. The problem with trying to

define homeless teens is that the parameters of who qualifies as a homeless teen change with each term. According to HUD, the definition of homeless is "any person who lacks shelter for a night." Taking a strict interpretation of HUD's definition and applying that to teen-agers gives you the definition of "any person, age 13 to 19, who lacks shelter for a night." Still, many service providers for homeless youth, like LAYN, assist persons beyond the age of nineteen. In this section of the study, I will highlight the most frequently used terms and critique the limitations of their use.

According to the Stewart B. McKinney Act, homeless children are defined as "an individual who lacks a fixed regular, and adequate nighttime residence. (Subtitle VII-B 1990). It goes on to include more homeless youth for accounting purposes with the definition of : an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:

- a supervised, public or privately, operated shelter designated to provide temporary living accommodations;

- an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized;

- a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

The argument has been made that labeling youths homeless only adds to their negative self-image and deters many youths from seeking assistance from agencies associated with homeless services. (Plympton, 1997). Plympton suggests that the term "displaced youth" be used when referring to the homeless teen population in order to combat the negative stigma attached with the term homeless. I disagree with Plympton's suggestion to refer to the homeless youth population as displaced youth. I understand her rationale to remove the negative stigma with the term homeless, however, the label "displaced youth" is not a familiar term for many

Americans and has the potential to take away from the severity of the homeless youth problem in America.

In addition the negative stigma, there is undoubtedly a segment of the homeless teen population not reached by using the federal definition of homeless youth. "Couch kids" are perhaps the most difficult homeless population to reach. These youth utilize their resources to secure shelter from friends and extended family. This population poses a serious challenge in terms of outreach because there is no record of their need. Sleeping on the couch of a friend usually means that the youth is not receiving assistance from service providers. Should this population even be included in the definition of homeless youth? According to staff at *Angel's Flight*,[7] the answer is undoubtedly yes. Prevention of youth turning to the street for shelter is one of the best weapons to combating teen homelessness. The Executive Director of *Angel's Flight* argues "we must make better efforts in prevention, starting with kids that are very young with parent education and the art of communication." Efforts of intervention by *Angel's Flight* include targeting the couch kids of the homeless teen population. In terms of this study, however, it is not feasible to reach the couch kid population directly, unless they seek assistance from LAYN.

The most frequently used term in the literature to describe homeless teens is "runaways." Again, the question of inclusion comes up when speaking about runaway teens. Should teens choosing to run away from their place of residence be included in the ranks of "homeless" people? After all, they have the option to return home. This argument does not take into consideration why homeless teens are running. Although the causes of runaway behavior are

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[7] Angel's Flight provides a full range of programs for runaway and homeless youth. Located in the City of Los Angeles, Angel's Flight "protects youth in crisis, counsels youth in transition, and provides services for youth at risk. Angel's Flight Brochure 1998.

complex, perhaps it is best viewed as a means of coping with and responding to problems in living situations, problems with family, friends, or problems with the institutions in which adolescents grow. (Bradley, 1997). An average of 60% of street youths have been sexually abused in previous homes and situations. (Plympton, 1997). In this study, nearly 60% of the teens interviewed at LAYN shared stories of abusive pasts.

The term "throwaway" is another commonly used term to describe a segment of the homeless teen population. Throwaway is defined as a youth on the streets who is barred from returning home. (Levins, 1995). Reasons cited for youths to get thrown out are numerous and complex. However, it is not uncommon for a pregnant teen to get kicked out of her house, or a teenager having problems with school or the law, or a teenager coming from unstable households plagued with alcohol, drugs, and violence. Throwaways share stories of neglect. Their struggle to survive on the streets stimulates the response of "how can somebody kick that poor kid out to the streets?"

The diversity of the homeless teen population poses a serious challenge to developing a common understanding of the problem and to getting a representative sample of homeless youth. In this study, the terms homeless teens and homeless youth will be used interchangeably to describe the homeless teen population served by LAYN. After examining the numerous terms used to describe homeless youth, it is evident that a flexible definition is necessary to meet the diversity of homeless teens. It is important to note that the definition of homeless teens used in this study relies on the definitions used by LAYN. LAYN uses a flexible definition of homeless youth as they provide services for any youth who walk through the doors of LAYN or any youth they find on the streets. They also provide services for adolescents beyond their teen years. The

data presented in this study will include responses of individuals over the age of 19, but under

the care of LAYN.

TABLE 1: GLOSSARY OF HOMELESS TEEN TERMS

Couch Kids	Youth staying overnight with relatives or friends because of problems at home, usually sleeping on the couch.
Displaced Youth	Youth between the ages of 11 and 18; the streets are their home. (Plympton, 1997)
Homeless Youth	Youth who have no parental substitute, foster, or institutional home. (Melson, 1995)
Runaways	Young people who are away from home at least overnight without parent or caretaker permission. (Artenstein, 1990). Those who left home due to family problems or social conflicts. (Levins, 1995).
Prerunaway	Youth brought to the shelter by a parent.
Situational Runaway	Youth who run away once or twice with no report of abuse/neglect.
Justifiable Runaway	Youth who run away once or twice with history of abuse recorded.
Chronic Runaway	Youth who may have run away 3 or more times.
Squats	Kids living under freeways or in abandoned buildings. (LAYN, 1996).
Street Kids	Long term runaways or homeless youth who have become adept at surviving on the street, usually by illegal means, and are often not seeking shelter. (Bradley, 1997).
System Kids	Youth who have rotated through a variety of placements in the social service and child welfare system. (Bradley, 1997).
Throwaways	Youth who are on the street because they are barred from returning home. (Levins, 1995). Adolescents who left with parental knowledge of their leaving and lack of concern. (Artenstein, 1990). Adolescents who are thrown out or asked to leave. (Janus, 1987).
Castaways	Youth who left home and nothing was reported. (Melson, 1995)

16

1.3 REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE: CAUSES OF TEEN HOMELESSNESS

There is an enormous amount of literature on the topic of homelessness, however, there is not enough attention devoted to understanding teen homelessness. In order to get a general understanding of homelessness, I started my inquiry with The Homeless (Jencks, 1994). His book provides an excellent overview of the spread of homelessness as a political issue. He clearly articulates the complexities of studying the homeless population that have been identified by numerous researchers (mobility, willingness to respond, not wanting to be found). Perhaps his most helpful analysis is his examination of the recent spread of homelessness where he highlights the major roles and minor roles that create homelessness, as discussed earlier.

Jencks, however, admittedly states in his methodology that he ignores teenage runaways despite the fact that they are far more homeless than most children in shelters. He also argues that homeless people are the last hired and the first fired from entry level positions. This fact has dire implications for homeless teens competing with other teenage workers. Jencks' book provided a good starting point on the issue of homelessness, however, my research objective requires literature that targeted teens more specifically.

Susan Ruddick (1996) recently examined homeless youth on the streets of Hollywood. She argues that urban design influences where homeless teens will assemble and in fact that a significant amount of homeless teens come from other localities. Her analysis examines space and its impact on homeless youth and people trying to serve them. Ruddick makes an excellent point in examining this population in terms of the stigma attached with youth groups and briefly compares homeless youth to youth gangs.

Similar to the recent youthful fad to dress and act "hard" like youth gang members, some homeless teens have been able to popularize their situation with a subculture of inhabiting the

urban streets. However, what separates the gang members from the homeless teens is the utilization of social networks to secure housing. The gang provides an extended family for youth, allowing them to utilize the resources of the collective, which often includes housing. In comparison, homeless teens have a community of homeless acquaintances whose relationships have been defined through the common experience of homelessness. In gangs there exists a high degree of hierarchy, control, and they do not want to surround themselves with uncontrolled people. (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991). For homeless youth, the concept of family is tainted with abusive pasts, which do not always provide a role model or practice in discipline.

The problem with examining teen homelessness as an expression of youth culture is that the stories of the abandoned, the throwaways, and castaways are minimized. The seriousness of homelessness among teenagers is lost when you argue that the problem persists as an expression of youth subculture. This is not to say that teen homelessness as an expression of youth subculture does not exist, rather it is not the focus of this study. Comparing the battles over territory on urban streets between youth gangs and homeless youth is a topic for another paper, but an important aspect of understanding youth culture.

Contrary to Ruddick, Tia Jean Plympton (1997) argues that most "displaced youth," as she identifies homeless youth, are not transient, but in fact, they predominantly come from the local community. Plympton adds to the literature an exploration of the role of street families. One limitation to Plympton's analysis is that she does not make connections to the strategies that service providers use to address issues surrounding families of homeless youth. Plympton predominantly examines newly created families on the streets, or replacement families, as she labels them. This seems to be reasonable for the small percentage of homeless youth that have no ties with their biological or legal families.

Melson's analysis provides an excellent literature review of family systems theory in the realm of runaway adolescents. Melson (1995) argues that an adolescent's running away from home is a "problem" only as it is understood and defined in relation to its context. She attempts to represent homeless youth as "explorer runaways." In doing so, the harsh realities of why youth run away, such as abuse, may be missed.

Bruce Clary, James Harrod and Rachel Olney (1992) describe the seriousness of the teen population in their article "Subgroups of the Homeless: Street Kids." They highlight the difficulty of estimating the number of homeless teens because they are an extremely mobile group that have a distrust of adults which complicates data collection. The argue that the academic community knows very little about homeless teens in New England's smaller urban areas. They identify four causes of teen homelessness:

- abusive homes
- substance abuse
- victims of sexual and/or physical violence
- arrest and/or jail records

The article surveys youth from Portland, Maine and argues that most homeless teens come from outside Metropolitan areas to get services offered in the urban centers. A serious limitation to this study is that it does not explore mental problems or adjustment problems of youth. It points at individual causes and in essence ignores larger structural influences that might place increased strain on social ties for homeless teens, like poverty.

Yvonne Vissing (1992) argues that the progression of homelessness begins with family conflict that fragments the family members and that there are logical points of intervention to prevent homelessness. She also reveals the isolated experience of the homeless teen as they are "considered neither child nor adult, they struggle without the privileges of either status but with the burden of both, as children who are developmentally carrying out adult responsibilities." Her

argument fails to address the question on the role of the state to intervene in the family unit. Who will carry out the intervention at its logical points? How do you define the logical points? Vissing sheds some light on the turbulent lifestyles of homeless youth and challenges policy makers to acquire a better understanding of this population.

Recently, Les Whitbeck (1997) surveyed 120 runaway adolescents in four midwestern states. He questioned the policy of mandatory return to parental custody or criminalization for runaway and homeless teens. Whitbeck compared parent responses to adolescent responses regarding measures of parenting, family violence, and adolescent conduct. His findings suggest that the mandatory return policy is ineffective given problematic parent/child relationships. Whitbeck's study is limited by his sample which includes nearly 80% White respondents, which raises some concern over the differences in race/ethnicity for homeless youth. His study is an important step for policy, however, Whitbeck does not represent the experiences of homeless teens on the West Coast or East Coast. In particular, Hollywood has been identified as the most attractive destination for runaway youth, which would not be revealed in Whitbeck's study.

Another recent study examined a sample of intakes into runaway programs in New York City. (Bradley, 1997). Bradley's longitudinal study examines the effects of residential instability, stress, and lack of social supports among runaway adolescents seeking shelter in New York City. His method of inquiry is quite similar to the design of this study, where he examines both the service providers and the runaway adolescents. However, Bradley does not articulate that his study draws from homeless youth that were the "hardest to serve" or "chronic" homeless youth.

In addition to the literature on domestic youth homelessness, there are significant works by writers examining foreign homelessness. In England, Pat Carlen has published a series of

articles and books regarding youth homelessness. He argues that the young, single and homeless in Britain have been abnormalized. (Carlen, 1994). Later he goes on to examine the political criminology of youth homelessness, suggesting that the 150,000 homeless youth in Britain, are actually a 20th century production. (Carlen, 1996). Helen Sykes (1993) of Australia emphatically argues that the main cause of the problem lies in the breakdown of the family and the loss of parenting skills. She further argues that schools contribute to the problems of homeless youth. Closer to home, in Canada, authors highlight the extension of the period of adolescence as contributing to the dilemma of youth homelessness. (Welsh, Archambault, Janus, Brown, 1995). Welsh and his colleagues suggest that adolescence has been extended by two factors, puberty coming sooner for youths and education being prolonged by the increased demands of the technological economy.

In this section of the study, I have explored the literature regarding the causes of teen homelessness. One common theme throughout the literature is the realities of abuse and neglect among the homeless teen population. Previous attempts describing the homeless teen population have been successful at sharing the realities of living on the streets as an adolescent. The niche for this study beyond exposing the plight of homeless teens is making the connection to the service provider and grounding the research in unique case study of LAYN. The findings presented in this study will help to assist service providers in their attempts to ending teen homelessness by learning from the examples of LAYN.

1.4 SUMMARY

The struggles of millions of homeless teens on the streets of urban America warrant immediate attention. Despite their visible existence as a subculture of urban culture, homeless

teens remain invisible and marginalized members of society. Part of the difficulty in reaching the homeless teen population is rooted in the complexity of defining "homeless teens." In this section, I have explored some of the more popular terms used to describe homeless teens and highlighted the limitation of defining such a diverse population. In addition to the controversy of defining teen homelessness, policy directed at homeless youth seems problematic. The attempts to provide services for this youthful population must confront the challenges of drafting legislation for minors. A large segment of homeless teens do not have the right to enter legal contracts because of their age, which limits housing alternatives and employment opportunities. It is the attempt of this study to share the real life testimonies of the homeless youth from LAYN in Hollywood in order to begin to understand feasible solutions to the problem of ending teen homelessness.

> ***There is no typical runaway or homeless youth.***
> Brenda K. Melson
> Runaway Adolescents: A Family Systems Perspective. 1995

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

The quest to gain a better understanding of teen homelessness is filled with many questions. Perhaps the most pressing question for research is "how do I find the homeless teen population?" Initially I pictured myself approaching grungy "punks" on Hollywood Boulevard, but then I realized that I would not include a great portion of the teen homeless population. Once I do find homeless teens, how do I approach them without offending them? I didn't want to offend anyone if I approached them and they were not homeless. After sorting through my initial concerns of gathering data, I proceeded to review literature to get a sense of previous methods used to collect data from the homeless teen population.

After examining several pieces of literature on homeless youth, it became evident to me that the best method of obtaining data on homeless teens was through service providers; using their approaches to dealing with homeless teens as models to be studied. In selecting my case study, I chose a program that was defined as "successful" in dealing with the hardest to serve homeless youth. Why I selected LAYN will be discussed in more detail later in this section of the study.

Previous attempts to research homeless teens rely heavily on secondary methods of data collection or on demographic characteristics. In this study, the personal interviews of the homeless teens themselves opens up a dialog that seems to be undervalued in the literature of the homeless youth population. It makes sense to hear from teen-agers, how to better meet their

needs, instead of dictating their interests to them. As a native of Los Angeles, I wanted to study the homeless youth in Hollywood where teen homelessness has been prevalent for as long as I can remember.

Due to the difficulty in defining the homeless teen population, this study presents findings derived from a sample of convenience at LAYN. It is nearly impossible to obtain a random sample of the homeless teen population because of the controversy of who qualifies as a homeless teen. I designed a survey to include questions that target a youthful population. The survey instrument is completely confidential and anonymous. (See Appendix 1 for Survey Instrument). In reporting the findings of the survey, I have changed the names of the homeless youth in order to ensure their confidentiality.

One of the biggest challenges to overcome is finding a group of teens who are willing to talk. In this study, I was able to recruit homeless youth to participate by offering $5 McDonald's vouchers. The Director of the LAYN Drop-In Center assisted me by providing an office to use to conduct my interviews. In addition, she verbally encouraged youth to participate, which carried a lot of weight with the youth.

At LAYN, I conducted the survey interviews during the month of March. The interviews generally lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour. I collected a total of 17 interviews of homeless teens and conducted numerous interviews with LAYN staff. In addition, I interviewed staff from other service providers for homeless youth. (See Appendix 2). The case study approach allowed me to learn about strategies in ending homeless youth that I could not have been exposed to without grounding my study at LAYN. It also provides the opportunity to examine the dilemma of ending teen homelessness with people who work with homeless teens each and every day. The expertise, experience, and knowledge of people working with homeless teens far exceeds my

own and relaying their wisdom will provide an insider's perspective on ending teen homelessness.

The rationale behind selecting a case study approach was to get a picture of an organization working to end teen homelessness and to identify different strategies regarded as "successful" that could possibly be replicated. In addition, I wanted to gain the teen-agers perspective in order to provide their testimonies of the plight of homeless teens. Now, I will explain more thoroughly the reasoning behind selecting LAYN.

2.1 WHY LOS ANGELES YOUTH NETWORK?

A California non-profit organization, Los Angeles Youth Network serves runaway, homeless, and throwaway adolescents, ages 12-20. LAYN was established through state legislation AB1596, the Homeless Youth Act of 1985 and SB508 in 1988. It provides 20 beds for homeless youth, both male and female, for a maximum of 60 days. Youth staying beyond 3 days must engage in the long-term stabilization program, requiring parental consent if possible. The LAYN programs attempt to stabilize street youth and transitions them off the streets by facilitating their return home, placing them in foster homes or group homes, or teaching them skills and providing the resources needed to live independently. (See Table 2 to view flow chart of LAYN programs). LAYN is the only program in Los Angeles specifically designed for chronic runaways and street youth and boasts a 78% success rate for helping youth find stabilized, healthy alternatives to the pain of street life. Approximately 600 homeless youth are

provided services by LAYN and LAYN serves over 10,000 meals to homeless youth each year.[8]

2.2 LAYN APPROACH

LAYN has defined its role as three-fold: (1) to create innovative direct service programs addressing community needs; (2) offer technical assistance to youth-serving agencies in developing new projects, and (3) to provide community education on the needs and issues of homeless youth. As depicted in Table 2, LAYN attempts to end teen homelessness "one kid at a time" with its arsenal of programs including street outreach, drop-in center, emergency shelter, shelter stabilization, after care and other services. In addition to these major components of the LAYN approach, the programs are complimented by an array of education and support services including substance abuse prevention and intervention, HIV/AIDS risk reduction counseling, mental health services, tutoring, youth mentoring/peer education, and community networking. All of these programs target chronic homeless youth with completely voluntary requirements, meaning that youth participate in the program only if they choose to do so. The strategic approach of LAYN is one of flexibility largely due to the population that they target. Too strict of a program will not engage some of the tougher kids to reach on the streets.

LAYN's approach to teen homelessness is characterized as flexible for the following reasons. First, LAYN uses flexible guidelines regarding who they provide services. LAYN serves youth between the ages of 12-20. This range not only goes beyond teen years, but it starts with younger ages compared to the norm, which is something unique to LAYN. Pat Sheppard at *Bridge Over Troubled Waters* says that service providers in Massachusetts will not consider lowering the target population for youth age 12.

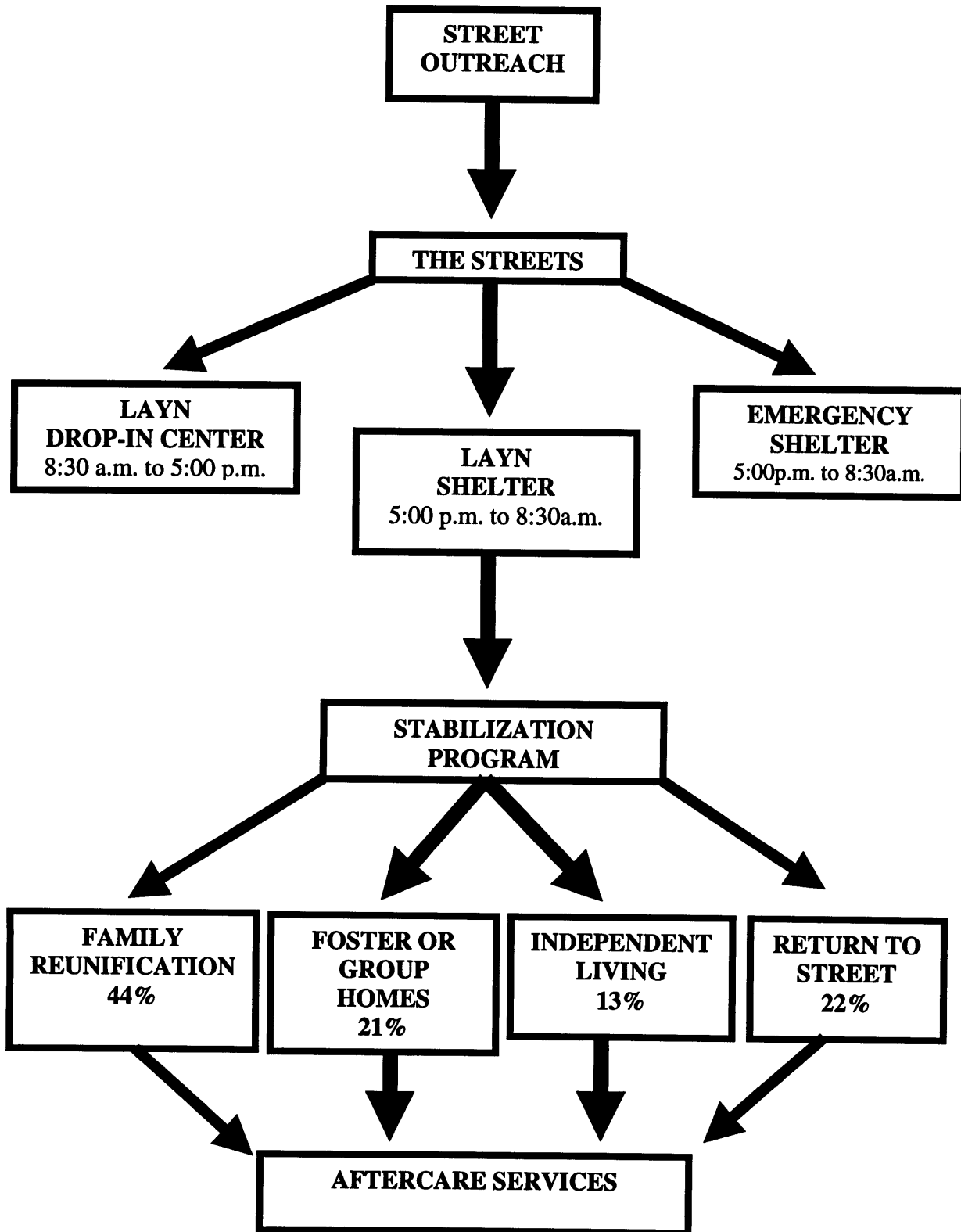
[8] LAYN Fact Sheet. October 1997.

Second, the flexibility of LAYN's program entails providing services for any youth that walks through their doors and needs help. Other organizations have in-depth screening processes that can deter youth from seeking help. According to the Executive Director of *Angel's Flight*, Arlene Ferendali, their programs usually entail a 1 to 2 hour entrance interview with the youth. Also , a good portion of their youth are referrals from the state or other community organizations.

In addition, LAYN's approach is flexible because its primary goal is to get the homeless teens off the streets. Other agencies primary goals include teaching homeless youth life skills, or job training, or obtaining a GED. LAYN's initial concern is to help out the homeless teens who are living on the streets. Their programs are voluntary and allow the teens to exit at any time.

This philosophy of completely voluntary homeless youth meets some challenges in the stabilization program. The stabilization program is the most structured component of the LAYN program. It also requires that participants develop a case plan to pursue one of three options including family reunification, new foster home or group home placement, or independent living. In addition, all participants must pursue an educational plan, either school, G.E.D., or tutoring. Moreover, the rules for remaining in the shelter are stricter, with mandatory participation in group activities and mandatory curfews. Youth in the stabilization program are permitted to stay in the shelter until the completion of their case plans.

The structure of LAYN's programs provides a solid foundation to attempt to end youth homelessness. It is questionable, however, to believe that a chronic street youth can be turned around in just 60 days. In the next section of the study, the testimonies of 17 homeless youth served by LAYN provide the real life human experience to the realities of teen homelessness.

TABLE 2: LAYN PROGRAM FLOW CHART

```
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │   STREET     │
                    │  OUTREACH    │
                    └──────┬───────┘
                           │
                           ▼
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │  THE STREETS │
                    └──────────────┘
              ┌────────────┼────────────┐
              ▼            ▼            ▼
    ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
    │    LAYN      │ │    LAYN      │ │  EMERGENCY   │
    │ DROP-IN      │ │  SHELTER     │ │  SHELTER     │
    │ CENTER       │ │ 5:00 p.m. to │ │ 5:00p.m. to  │
    │ 8:30 a.m. to │ │  8:30a.m.    │ │  8:30a.m.    │
    │ 5:00 p.m.    │ └──────┬───────┘ └──────────────┘
    └──────────────┘        │
                            ▼
                  ┌──────────────────┐
                  │  STABILIZATION   │
                  │    PROGRAM       │
                  └──────────────────┘
```

| FAMILY REUNIFICATION 44% | FOSTER OR GROUP HOMES 21% | INDEPENDENT LIVING 13% | RETURN TO STREET 22% |

AFTERCARE SERVICES

BRIEF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION FROM LAYN FLOW CHART

STREET OUTREACH
Peers and staff contact youth on the streets during day and night hours, providing resources for food, shelter, and counseling.

THE STREETS
Youth leave home or end up on the streets due to physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse; neglect; and abandonment. On the streets they suffer exploitation, violence and emotional trauma. Many survive through prostitution, drugs, and crime.

LAYN DROP-IN CENTER
Youth entering the Drop-In Center program for basic services like food, shelter, clothing, and medical. Youth present their problems and present a case plan for getting off the streets. For many, the Drop-In Center is a safe place during the day. Some youth stay in the Drop-In Center until they are off the streets. Others come to the Drop-In Center during the day while utilizing the night shelter programs according to their individual needs.

EMERGENCY SHELTER
Youth who need basic services such as meals, showers, and a safe place to sleep, can enter the emergency shelter program and stay for up to 3 days. In this program they decide if they want to commit to the requirements of the Stabilization Program, or stay in the Drop-In Center Program.

STABILIZATION PROGRAM
Youth may stay in the stabilization program for up to 60 nights, utilizing the drop-in center during the day. Youth in this program must pursue an educational plan and choose one of three goals: (1) family reunification; (2) group or foster home placement; (3) independent living.

AFTERCARE SERVICES
For up to 6 months after youth leave LAYN, the may return for additional counseling, referrals, food, and toiletries.

Examining Los Angeles Youth Network provides an excellent case study of one of the most popular destinations for homeless teens. New York and Orlando, Florida have been identified as other popular locations for homeless youth. The City of Hollywood has a highly visible segment of the homeless teen population, punks, squats, and panhandlers in particular. "Hollywood is a magnet, particularly for runaway youth."[9] The streets of Hollywood are filled with numerous homeless youth and an interesting mix of homeless teens given the racial/ethnic diversity of the greater Los Angeles area and the attraction of runaway youths from out of state. In addition, Hollywood and Los Angeles in general, are attractive destinations for youth seeking alternative lifestyles under the sun. Punkers, squatters, gangsters, and prostitutes share the Hollywood scene with tourists, movie stars, and millions of Angelinos.

Hollywood also provides the unique opportunity to study homeless immigrant youth and undocumented youth; adding to the diversity of homeless populations not previously examined in the literature. This study will engage the reader in the realities of homeless youth and hopefully stimulate discussion to improve efforts at ending teen homelessness.

In addition to being located in Hollywood, LAYN is the only program in Hollywood specifically designed for the higher risk, long term and chronic street kids between the ages 12 and 20. (See Map 1 for view of LAYN locations). There are an estimated 12,000 homeless children on the streets of L.A. County each day, approximately 10% of them are chronic street youth.[10] According to LAYN literature, over 78% of LAYN youth are transitioned off the streets permanently by either family reunification, foster placement, and independent living. Mindi Levins-Pfeifer, Program Director of LAYN, says that success is defined as kids who leave LAYN into positive living arrangements that are stable. Thus, LAYN 's success serving chronic

[9] Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg. Los Angeles Times. November 7, 1994.
[10] LAYN Fact Sheet. October 1, 1997.

homeless youth provides a good rationale to examine more closely in order to understand the dynamics of ending teen homelessness.

LAYN has the unique motto of "ending homelessness one kid at a time." This raises the question about the implications of such an approach. Is teen homelessness so bad that we only have the resources to engage homeless youth one at a time? Perhaps this motto works for the target population of LAYN, but it leaves little hope for making large-scale improvements to ending teen homelessness.

The success experienced by LAYN is almost puzzling given the relatively flexible approach taken by LAYN staff. In an environment of service providers emphasizing highly structured programs for homeless youth, LAYN serves displaced youth with an "open" policy. This "open" policy operates under the philosophy of youth empowerment allowing kids the opportunity to come and go at their leisure. Additionally, the doors of LAYN are open to any youth who has nowhere to stay. This approach almost seems counterculture to meeting the needs of a predominantly neglected youth population.

MAP 1: LAYN IN HOLLYWOOD

SOURCE: Microsoft Automap. Street Plus. 1988-1996.

It is evident from this map that LAYN is centrally located around Hollywood Boulevard and Sunset Boulevard, which are target streets for displaced youth. Both the Drop-In Center and the Shelter are within a few blocks from the "activity" in Hollywood.

2.3 ANOTHER APPROACH: PROVIDING STRUCTURE IN BOSTON

Contrary to the flexible approach taken by LAYN, the more conventional approach to providing services to homeless teens is a highly structured program that emphasizes the importance of discipline. In Los Angeles, programs at *Angel's Flight* and the *Covenant House* provide more structured approaches in serving the homeless youth. Across the United States, many programs focus on providing structured approaches. From *San Diego Youth and Community Services* in California to *Bridge Over Troubled Waters* (BRIDGE) in Boston, service providers engage in programs that provide homeless youth with strict rules and guidelines. In this section of the study, I will use BRIDGE as an example of a highly structured approach.

BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS (BRIDGE)
Boston, Massachusetts

Founded in 1970, Bridge Over Troubled Waters serves runaways, homeless youth, and other youth at risk. In its 28 years, BRIDGE has grown from a grassroots group of volunteers to one of the premier agencies in the country. BRIDGE is a comprehensive, multi-service, private, nonprofit agency, governed by a board of directors, with over a $1.5 million budget. BRIDGE employs nearly 40 full-time staff, 3 part-time staff, and over 200 volunteers. Most of the volunteers are doctors, nurses, and dentists, who provide medical services for homeless youth.

BRIDGE provides a home for homeless youth with its private transitional house, Trinity House, located on Shawmut Ave. Its 15-bed facility strives to provide a highly structured approach to meeting the needs of its displaced youth. BRIDGE provides services for some of the "hardest to reach" homeless youth. "Who we see are the kids who have the roughest time –

they've aged out of DSS (Department of Social Services) or have exhausted all of their options –

parents, family, and friends."[11]

Located in Boston, BRIDGE offers a wide variety of services for homeless youth.

Complimenting its highly structured residential living program at the Trinity House are

counseling services, medical/dental services, runaway services, family life services,

the education/pre-employment program, and the street outreach program. In 1996, Bridge Over

Troubled Waters received the Hilary E.C. Millar Award from the Society for Adolescent

Medicine for its outstanding and innovative efforts in providing health care for teen-agers and

young adults for over 25 years.

Most youth served by BRIDGE are from the Greater Boston area. Nearly 3,000 youth

receive services by BRIDGE's outreach programs and another 2,300 use services at BRIDGE

offices in one year. Since 1970, over 30,000 homeless youth have received advocacy and

substance abuse services from BRIDGE. BRIDGE has served over 8,000 runaways and over

600 homeless youth have used the transitional residential living programs.

BRIDGE's philosophy entails a long-term commitment to seeing youth as "valued

partners with a lot to offer, rather than as problems to be solved or corrected." Their approach

attempts to foster an independent lifestyle for the youth by supervising school, work, and the

lifestyles of the homeless youth. Family reunification defines much of its success, where 65% of

homeless youth reconcile family relationships. For the others, BRIDGE ensures appropriate

placement. Thus, BRIDGE's successful highly structured program at serving homeless youth

with a variety of services warrants attention.

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[11] Urich, Stacey. Quoting Buddy Henderson, Assistant Director of BRIDGE. The Boston Herald. "Teen Rap; Haven for Homeless Kids; Bridge Helps Many to Cross to Adulthood." December 29, 1997.

BRIDGE SERVICE SUMMARY
Source: BRIDGE Service Summary 1998

BRIDGE Street Outreach Program
BRIDGE's frontline service for reaching youth. Street workers work with young people on their own turf; the streets, shelters, and places where youth gather. Serves as a mean to draw youth into more empowering services, such as counseling and education.

BRIDGE Medical/Dental Services
Free medical and dental care to runaways and throwaways. For homeless youth with limited access to health care, BRIDGE has operated a Mobile Medical Van all over the streets of Boston and surrounding areas for over 28 years. In addition, BRIDGE offers a Nurse Clinic and a Dental Clinic in their downtown offices providing in-depth examinations and treatment, referral to other providers and follow-up.

BRIDGE Runaway Services
Bridge offers a 24-hour hotline, which is a vital component to assisting young people and their parents in crisis. Family intervention is an important part of the program. Runaway services include assessments, individual and family counseling, advocacy, and access to other BRIDGE services for continuing care.

BRIDGE Counseling Services
BRIDGE Counseling Services focus on substance abuse issues, with recovery and continued sobriety as primary goals. Counselors initiate and maintain positive relationships with street youth, empowering them to change their lifestyles and become independent of street life; helping them to build healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives.

BRIDGE Family Life Center
BRIDGE Family Life Center provides pregnant and parenting teens with information, education, support, counseling, and advocacy with other agencies to promote their successful development and their children. Child care is available while mothers participate in BRIDGE counseling or education services. The Family Life Center also provides stress reduction workshops.

BRIDGE Education/Pre-Employment Program
Provides basic education, GED preparation, guidance and job readiness to prepare youth for jobs, training or higher education.

BRIDGE Residential Component
Includes Single Parent House, the Transitional Living Program (Trinity House), and the Cooperative Apartments. BRIDGE residences provide homeless youth (including mothers and their babies) with safe, affordable housing and comprehensive support services in a *structured environment*. The structured environment includes counseling and *independent living skills* education to help them develop healthy, productive, and self-sufficient lives.

DEFINING THE HIGHLY STRUCTURED APPROACH

The structured approach taken by BRIDGE is most evident in its transitional living program at the Trinity House. The Trinity House in Boston is a 9-12 month transitional program serving homeless youth ages 16 to 21 years old. The actual building is a former church rectory and is leased to BRIDGE by the Archdiocese of Boston for one dollar a year. The program at the Trinity House began in 1982 with a grant from Act Together, Inc and later gained support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The target population for the house is street youth who express a desire to leave street life behind and move towards independent living.

The structured approach at the Trinity House entails a commitment by the homeless youth to attend school, work a job, help manage the house, take turns cooking and shopping, receive counseling, and participate in group activities. The above terms are non-negotiable in order to remain in the Trinity House. In addition, youth must abide by house rules which prohibit sex, drugs, alcohol, or weapons in the house. Furthermore, Trinity House staff dictate curfews and prohibit youth from hanging out around Boston's downtown centers for street life.

Youth must also attend mandatory weekly group meetings, which address conflict resolution, develop communication skills, and provide an opportunity for interpersonal feedback. Residents of the Trinity House must open a savings account and pay $50 rent per week. The service portion of the Trinity House, including case management, clinical services, counselors and staff, costs approximately $300,000 per year. The structure of the programs at the Trinity House really intends to provide discipline and stability in the lives of the homeless youth. Counselors at the Trinity House are involved in every aspect of their lives, including career related issues such as school, work, personal relationships, and employment skill development.

In addition, at least one counselor is on site at all times, so there is a staff member available 24-hours a day.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT BRIDGE?

The most compelling characteristic of the programs offered by BRIDGE is the focus on the strengths of the youth and their families. Either in counseling to support healthy relationships with family and/or creating a new sense of family at the Trinity House, utilizing a family structure is an important aspect of BRIDGE's approach. Much of the success at the Trinity House can be attributed to the creation of a strong family atmosphere in which youth are both valued and challenged to succeed. (Pires, Silber, 1991).

One of BRIDGE's greatest strengths is the low turnover it has with its staff and personnel. Over one-third of its staff has been with BRIDGE for 10 or more years. (Pires, Silber, 1991). This fact allows BRIDGE personnel to build trust with the homeless youth because they can feel comfortable knowing that the BRIDGE staff will be around for a while. A key reason identified by BRIDGE administrators is the monitored development of counselors and the fact that staff do not work more than 40 hours per week. BRIDGE feels that it is important for their employees to have sufficient time away from the emotionally intense demands of their jobs.

The services provided by BRIDGE also undergo yearly review to enhance various aspects of their programs. What contributes to the "uniqueness" of the BRIDGE programs is the relationship between BRIDGE and the University of Massachusetts. The partnership with UMASS entails yearly in-house evaluations of BRIDGE program components. The focus of the evaluations is understanding the youth and evaluating the program outcomes.

Another important characteristic of the BRIDGE approach to teen homelessness is the strides that BRIDGE has been able to make in the arena of prevention. In dealing with homeless youth, the strategies of prevention and intervention have blurred lines as they often overlap. Perhaps this is because efforts of prevention often require an intervention of some sort and efforts of intervention may be viewed as preventative efforts. At BRIDGE, efforts in prevention deal with at-risk kids, but not homeless kids. The downtown offices of BRIDGE house the computer resources and job training resources and attract a lot of youth interested in work and gaining computer skills, not necessarily the homeless youth population. According to BRIDGE staff, prevention relies on building trusting relationships, which take time.

Building trusting relationships is a primary goal of BRIDGE staff. In particular, trusting relationships are the most important aspect in dealing with family work. One goal of family intervention is to teach family members to learn how to communicate in a different way. There are substantial challenges in working with families such as cultural differences. An important tool in improving family relationships for homeless youth is to identify who has the seat of power in the parental relationships. According to BRIDGE staff, the seat of power is increasingly becoming single parents, single mothers in particular. The way to move relationships in the right direction is to begin with concrete goals, like focusing on one chore or one homework assignment.

2.4 SUMMARY: FLEXIBLE, NOT STRICT AT LAYN

One of the greatest strengths of the LAYN approach lies in its flexibility to appeal to some of the "harder to reach" homeless youth. LAYN does not pursue a more structured approach to its programs largely due to the dynamics of its target population. Chronic homeless youth might be scared to engage LAYN in a highly structured environment. Strict rules, discipline, and hierarchy are greatly distrusted by many homeless teens. For many youth, as we will see later, one of the biggest reasons why they like the Los Angeles Youth Network is the fact that LAYN staff do not "bother" them with case plans, working, or force them into relationships.

The importance of discipline and strict rules are evident in other programs, like *Bridge Over Troubled Waters*. The philosophy at BRIDGE emphasizes teaching homeless youth life skills, while dealing with the harsh realities of drugs, alcohol, and abuse. One important accomplishment of the BRIDGE approach that is not so evident in the LAYN approach is a sense in the youth about realistic futures. Homeless youth at BRIDGE are made aware of the realities of drug use and alcoholism and how problems will affect their futures. In LAYN youth, there still seems to be a mental disconnect about the future, which will be discussed later.

LAYN attempts to provide services for chronic homeless youth who do not always have any ties with pre-existing families. More strict and structured approaches, like BRIDGE in Boston, are able to utilize pre-existing families more often because they are not serving chronic youth. Despite the proclaimed flexibility in the LAYN approach, it becomes evident that LAYN has some aspects of a strict and structured strategy in the stabilization program. In the next section of the study, I will introduce the homeless teens interviewed at LAYN.

> *Society, at large, is ultimately responsible for teen homelessness. Teen homelessness is growing and spreading into new areas. What scares me is that there is much less tolerance for adolescence. We are pushing teen homelessness deeper underground; into the hands of the pimps and prostitutes, or we are simply locking them up.*
>
> Mindi Levins-Pfeifer -- Program Director -- Los Angeles Youth Network

CHAPTER 3. HOMELESS TEENS INTERVIEWED AT LAYN

This section of the study will present the findings of the 17 survey interviews conducted with homeless youth at LAYN. It is important to note that LAYN provides services to any youth that walks in the door. The demographics of the respondents reflect the diversity of the homeless youth population served by LAYN. It is the intent of this study to go beyond the limitations of merely reporting how many youth answered yes or no to certain questions. Rather, the testimonies, stories, and real life experiences of the homeless youth attempt to provide a clearer understanding about the dilemma of teen homelessness.

In drawing a sample of convenience, I was able to obtain a fairly balanced gender mix of the respondents. Fifty three percent (9 of 17) of the respondents were male and 47% (8 of 17) were female. The average age of the respondents was 17 years old. The youngest adolescent interviewed was 14 years old and two respondents were the oldest at 20 years old.

The racial and ethnic backgrounds of the youth interviewed show an unusually high percentage of adolescents from mixed heritage. Mixed heritage represented 35% (6 of 17) of the respondents which is equal to the number of respondents from Caucasian backgrounds. Latinos represented 18% (3 of 17) of the sample and 2 African-Americans (12%) were interviewed in

this study of LAYN. I did not interview any Asian-American teens. These figures provide a

rough picture of the general demographics of the teens interviewed at LAYN. Now, this study

will explore the experiences of these teens and explore the realities of being young and homeless

in Hollywood. The names have been changed to reflect the people behind the responses, but the

stories, views, and experiences shared by the homeless youth are real.

3.1 INTRODUCING THE HOMELESS YOUTH

Amy is a 15 year old girl who first left home over one year ago. A native of Southern California, she likes to go to the movies for fun. Amy spends most of her time at LAYN playing on the computers, drawing, or just hanging out with other teens. **She was taken away** by social services because her parents have a severe drug problem. Amy was placed in a group home but continually runs away. Amy experiences physical abuse from her stepfather, who blames Amy for the fact that her mom is having an affair with Amy's biological father.

Ben is a 19 year old African-American young man who first **left home** at the age of 8 years old. He likes to hangout around Venice Beach for fun. Ben has been on the streets for a number of years. Ben is originally from Houston, Texas. His dad left when he was very young and his mom died a few years ago. He aspires to be a successful black business man in the not to distant future.

Charles is a 20 year old young man from Las Vegas, Nevada. He first left home at the age of 16 and has been in the Los Angeles area for over 2 years now. He enjoys skate boarding at places like Santa Monica and Venice Beach. **He was thrown out** because he had too many run-ins with the law when he was running with gangs in Las Vegas. Charles has slept on the streets of Hollywood, Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Pensacola, Florida; hitchhiking from place to place.

Diana first left home at the age of 14. She is a 16 year old native of Southern California. **Diana was thrown out** of her house by her mom because she was a "fuck-up." She was sexually molested, physically abused, and emotionally abused by her father. Her family blames her for putting her father in jail. Diana likes to skateboard around Hollywood or just bother tourists for fun. She primarily spends time with her boyfriend, Fred.

Emily is a 19 year old young woman who aspires to be a pediatric nurse. She was raised in Tuscon, Arizona, but has slept on the streets of Hollywood for over four months. She ended up homeless because she spent her money supporting her drug habit resulting in her eviction. Emily was recently admitted to Covenant House, a homeless shelter for 18-21 year olds. She likes to

go out to clubs or raves with her boyfriend. Before moving into the Covenant House, Emily used drugs everyday; including cocaine, speed, heroine, crystal meth, and weed.

Fred has slept on the streets of San Francisco, Las Vegas, Tuscon, and all over Los Angeles. He is from Tuscon, Arizona and enjoys spending time with his girlfriend Diana. They are going to get married during the summer of 1998. He ended up homeless because he did not want Diana to live on the streets by herself when she got thrown out. His parents are not too fond of Diana, so he joined her on the streets. They have mostly slept behind Home Depot, where the security guards don't bother them and the police just check to see if they are carrying any drugs. Fred says that the police treat homeless teens like criminals. At the age of 20, Fred drinks up to a case of beer everyday and has experimented with every kind of drug including cocaine, LSD, crystal meth, heroine, acid, and pot. He recently attempted to end his life by alcohol poisoning.

Gloria is a 14 year old girl from Phoenix, Arizona. She was taken to LAYN at the age of 12 by her mother, who felt that Gloria needed more help than she could provide. Since then, Gloria's mom has moved to San Pedro. Gloria wants to be an actress when she grows up. She like to play on the computers at LAYN or roller blade around Hollywood for fun. She thinks about committing suicide frequently, but stops because she doesn't want to hurt other people.

Henry is a 16 year old native of Hollywood. He considers the "punks" to be his family. Henry wants to be a trash man in a few years. He has slept on the streets of Portland, Berkeley, San Francisco, San Jose, Phoenix and all over Southern California. Along with drinking hard liquor everyday, he uses drugs, primarily cocaine and heroine. Henry recalls a childhood of abuse as he was beaten with hoses, belts, and broomsticks. **He was thrown out** of his home at the age of 13 and sent to Children Services. Recently, his girlfriend left with his son and he does not know how to get a hold of them. He complains of having a weak immune system and feels that he doesn't have much longer to live.

Irene is a 19 year old bi-racial girl who is pregnant 4 ½ months. LAYN does not provide direct services for pregnant homeless youth, however, they offer her referral to other service providers. Irene grew up in foster homes and kept **running away** from them, but was able to complete up to the 9th grade in school. Now that she is old enough, she doesn't have to stay in any placement, however, her alternatives are very limited. She is thinking about pursuing a career as a nurse.

Jennifer is a 15 year old girl from Chicago, Illinois. She currently stays at the LAYN shelter. **DSS took her away from her mother**, who suffers from chronic diabetes, at the age of 8 because her mother was to sick to take care of her properly. Jennifer wants to be a pediatrician.

Lalo is a 16 year old undocumented immigrant from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. He wants to be a Captain of a fishing boat. Lalo never knew his parents. He lived with his aunt and uncle on a ranch in Mexico. **He was abandoned at the age of 12.** One day he came home from school and his aunt, uncle, and cousins were all gone. Lalo waited for them for about a week before he headed north. In the United States, he has been all over the continent including the Carolinas

and Alaska, but he spent most of his time in Texas working as a cattle rancher. He has only been in Hollywood for about two weeks.

Mike is a 17 year old Southern California native who aspires to be a computer technician. **He left his house at the age of 15** because his stepmother and 35 year old stepbrother were very abusive to him. One time they held a shot gun to his head and beat him up. Mike could not tell his dad because he didn't want to ruin his father's family, so he just left. He has slept on the streets of Hollywood and anxiously awaits his wedding with his fiancé.

Nadine is a 16 year old African American girl from Alabama. She was supporting herself with two jobs at McDonald's and Taco Bell. Her mom made her come to California to live with her uncle and go to school. However, when she arrived in California, her uncle refused to let her stay with him. She currently lives at The Way In homeless youth shelter in Hollywood. Nadine is considering a career in the military.

Olga is a 17 year old Latina from Pasadena, California. She aspires to be a second grade elementary school teacher. She blames her homelessness on her boyfriend because she spent most of her money supporting his drug habit. Her daughter was taken away from her by Child Protective Services and placed under the supervision of her mother. Olga remembers a childhood of sexual abuse from her father and vividly recalls getting gang raped while living on the streets.

Pedro is a 18 year old young man from San Salvador, El Salvador. He traveled to the United States at the age of 15. Pedro spent over 4 months on the train in order to cross the American border. He struggles to speak English and plans to return to El Salvador after making some money. Pedro currently lives at the Covenant House.

Robert is a 18 year old boy originally from Seattle, Washington. He has worked with the film crews at the studios in Hollywood. At night, he walks around the streets of Hollywood so that he doesn't have to worry about having a place to stay. He sleeps at LAYN during the daytime. His dad returned to Washington to live with his stepmother. Robert did not want to return to Washington because of trouble with the law there. His father was supposed to come back for him a month ago, but they have since lost contact with each other.

Steve is a 18 year self acclaimed rap star. He has slept on the streets all over Southern California. He currently smokes marijuana everyday. In 1993, he lost his father to a heart attack and his girlfriend and baby in a drive-by shooting in Los Angeles. He copes with his loss by devoting an enormous amount of time and energy to making it in the music industry.

3.2 IDENTITY

The difficulty of defining homeless youth has been clearly laid out in the introduction of this study. Examining the number of terms used to describe homeless teens creates a problem in figuring out the best method to reach the homeless teen population. In addition to the complexities of setting parameters around who qualifies as a homeless youth, the perceptions of identity held by homeless teens themselves contributes to the confusion. The following graph illustrates how the homeless youth at LAYN responded to the label of homeless:

GRAPH 1: HOMELESS IDENTITY

Do you Consider Yourself Homeless?

NO 29%

YES 71%
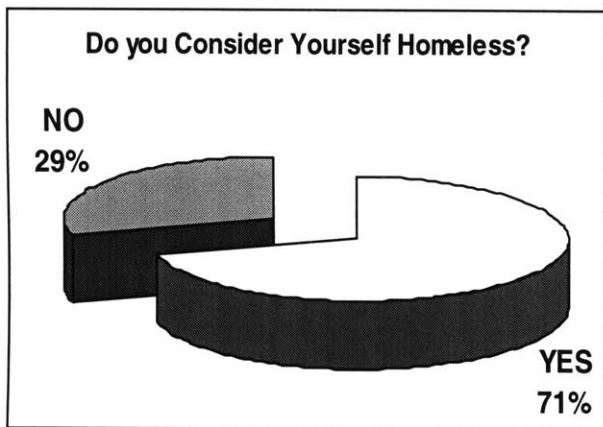
Despite the fact that all of the respondents fit the federal definition of homeless youth and they are all receiving services from LAYN, almost 30% of the youth did not consider themselves homeless. Is this because of the negative stigma attached to the term homeless like Plympton argues?

In this example, Plympton's argument does not seem convincing because these youth are seeking assistance from LAYN, which is a well-known service provider for homeless youth. One possible explanation is that teens residing in shelters do not feel that the homeless label applies to them. "I am not homeless, I live at the Covenant House," said Pedro. Jennifer also says, "I don't consider myself homeless though, because I live here at LAYN. Maybe you should talk with some of the other kids then." For Robert, coming to terms with the realities of his situation is difficult. He believes that his life on the streets is just a transition until his father comes back from Washington. Mike has an interesting perception of his homelessness, "For now, I do consider myself homeless, but it is just something that will pass with time. When I am old

enough to get a real job, I won't have to sleep on the streets of Hollywood or the Santa Monica Pier." Mike views his homelessness as a phase in his life, or as something that is just temporary. Despite the previous claims in the literature, the negative stigma associated with the term homeless has not deterred these youth from getting help from LAYN. Even though each youth views their homeless situation differently, LAYN has been successful at attracting them through word of mouth discussions of homeless youth, which is the first step for getting help.

In addition to the confusion created by the self-identity of displaced youth, distinguishing between runaways, street youths, throwaways, and system kids is unclear, as groups frequently overlap. (Plympton, 1997). A good example of a youth overlapping several terms is Henry, where he was thrown out at the age of 13 and ended up in a placement by Children Services. He kept running away from his placement. Thus, Henry can be considered both a throwaway and a runaway. Irene provides another example of this overlapping label theory. She grew up in foster homes, which qualifies her as a system kid, and kept running away from them. Is Irene a system kid or a runaway? She is both; and a teen in need of help. For LAYN, it is necessary to understand the individual situation of the homeless youth in order to pursue a feasible plan of action. Family reunification might not be the best alternative for a "throwaway," but independent living may seem like a more feasible option. It is for the reason pointed out by Plympton where homeless groups may overlap, that the plan of action depends on the dynamics of each individual case for LAYN.

3.3 COMMUNITY ISSUE OR NOT?

In the literature, Plympton argues that most homeless teens come from the local community. Contrary to Plympton, Ruddick suggests that a significant number of homeless teens come from other localities. Perhaps their differences derive from where they conducted their study. Ruddick examined Hollywood, which is a well-known magnet for runaway teens. According to Mindi-Levins Pfeifer, "most of the homeless youth in Hollywood are not from around here." The youth in this study support Susan Ruddick's and Mindi Levins-Pfeifer's argument that homeless youth in Hollywood are coming from other localities.

GRAPH 2: COMMUNITY TEEN HOMELESSNESS?
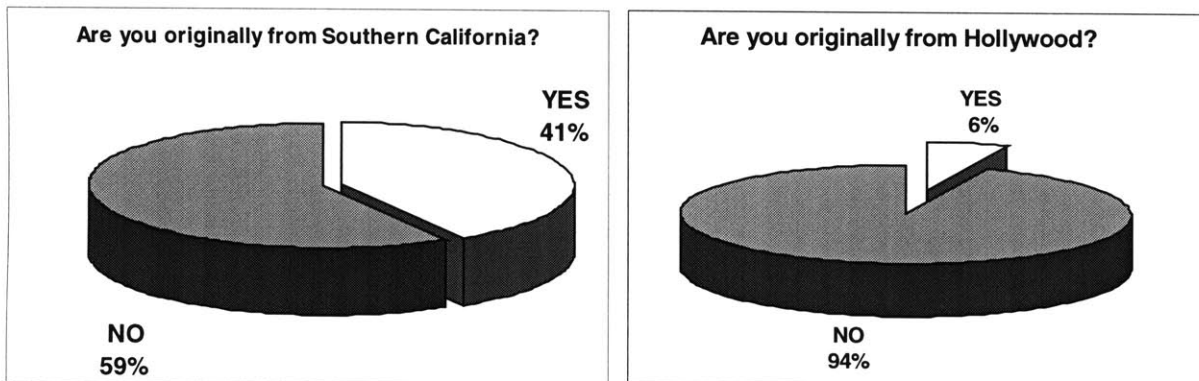
Graph 2 clearly shows that most homeless teens surveyed at LAYN are not coming from Hollywood or from Southern California for that matter. In fact, 47% of the respondents are from out of state. Henry is the only native teen of Hollywood. This finding has implications for educational outreach strategies. It is hard to invest resources in educating local teens when most of the homeless teen population is coming from somewhere else. LAYN's street outreach program, the daytime drop-in center, and the emergency shelter are important components to reach a mobile population that is not familiar with the Hollywood environment.

The issue of locality is one of the most controversial battles debated in realm of teen homelessness. At first, efforts to assist homeless youth were not concentrated in Hollywood because Hollywood residents did not want the burden of homeless youth. (Ruddick, 1996). In the 1980's, however, Hollywood became the center for services assisting runaway and homeless youth in the greater Los Angeles area. Hollywood residents opposing the concentration of services in their city argue that increased services only encourage youth to come to Hollywood. This sentiment is largely fueled by misconceptions about homeless youth. Often, the most visible homeless youth are the punks, squats, prostitutes and pimps, which may give a negative image of homeless youth.

There is not enough evidence to suggest that homeless youth come to Hollywood just for the services. In fact, youth are attracted to the glamour of being around the movie industry and many of them have dreams of becoming a star one day. Moreover, the long term existence of youth on the streets suggests that services are an added bonus to their homelessness. Many youth only receive help through outreach and would not be receiving services at all without street outreach programs. In sum, yes it is true that most teens in Hollywood are coming from other locations, but the availability of services does not seem to be a significant "pull" factor for youth.
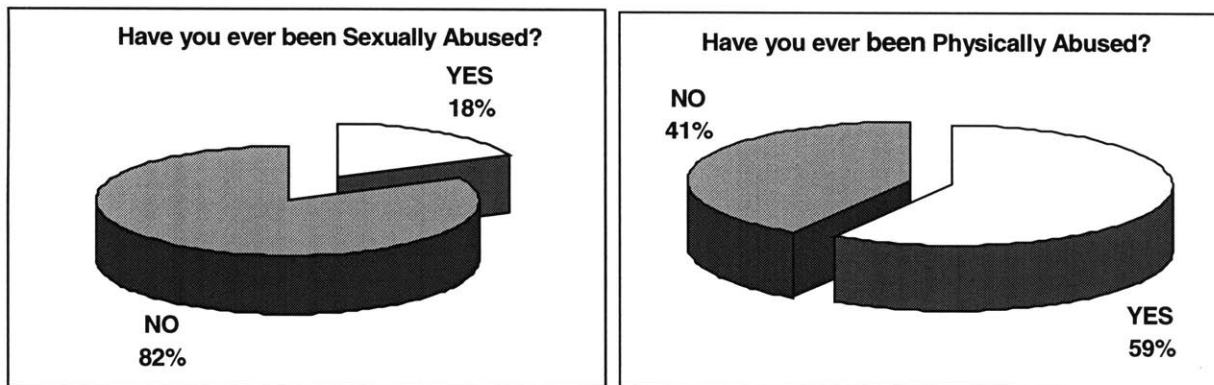
CHAPTER 4. GROWING UP: THE PATH TO HOMELESSNESS

Most adolescents navigate the perilous course from childhood to adulthood without serious mishap. But some stumble. The more obstacles they had to overcome as children, the more likely they are to stumble as adolescents.[12]

Given the diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, and personalities of the homeless youth population, it is nearly impossible to hypothesize a process that leads to a youth becoming homeless. However, it is important to identify similar characteristics of this population in order to gain a clearer understanding. One area that has been frequently documented throughout the literature is the history of abuse. Depending on the sample of the study, the percentage of abuse among homeless teens varies. (Bradley, 1997). In this study, the numbers behind the abusive pasts of the homeless youth are not as telling as the narrative provided by the victims of abuse.

GRAPH 3: ABUSE AMONG HOMELESS TEENS

Have you ever been Sexually Abused?
YES 18%
NO 82%

Have you ever been Physically Abused?
NO 41%
YES 59%

---

[12] "Census Brief: America's Children at Risk." U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. September 1997.

On average, 36% of runaway and homeless youth come from environments of physical

and sexual abuse. (Artenstein, 1990). In Los Angeles, service providers estimate that 26% of

their clients have been sexually abused. (Bradley, 1997). Graph 3 shows that nearly 60% of the

youth interviewed at LAYN experienced physical abuse and almost 20% of the youth report a

history of sexual abuse. Some of the youth reveal the occurrence of sexual abuse in their lives

growing up:

> Growing up was horrible. I was sexually molested, physically beaten and
> emotionally killed.--Diana
>
> I think the most painful part of being young and homeless is that you feel so
> vulnerable. I remember in Ontario [California]...I got gang raped by a bunch of
> gangstas. There were at least 5 of them, they were Bloods; I just try to forget it,
> but it makes me scared to know that it could happen again to me or to other
> young girls. I thought that getting violated would stop when I got away from my
> dad...--Olga

It is disturbing to hear Olga's testimony where she compares her childhood of sexual abuse from

her father to getting gang raped while on the streets. Diana tells a story that combines sexual,

physical, and emotional abuse. In Graph 3, nearly 60% of the displaced youth interviewed at

LAYN report a history of physical abuse. The quickest route to escaping physical abuse is to

physically remove oneself from the abusive person. Thus, physical abuse is a common

characteristic found in the histories of a significant amount of runaways. The youth share with

us some tales of physical abuse:

> My father used to beat me all the time, but he left the scene a long time ago. I
> think he's dead, but I don't know. Growing up really sucked. It was a nightmare.
> I had to go through a lot of bull crap that I prefer not to talk about.--Jennifer
>
> I mostly remember getting beat as a kid. My great aunt would beat me with all
> sorts of stuff; hoses, belts, broomsticks, helmets – just about anything.--Henry

What Graph 3 does not show is that 100% of the respondents tell a story of emotional

abuse. Abandonment, profound neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse occur secondary to that

of emotional maltreatment. (Prime, 1993). In this case, emotional abuse will be defined in terms

of parental behavior that has a demonstrated negative effect on a child's emotional or

psychological development and well-being. (Prime, 1993). In the following excerpts, the youth

share stories of emotional abuse growing up:

> Growing up was a piece of shit filled with abuse, mostly emotional.--Emily

> Growing up in my family was, well, I was, at least my mom says, I was the black
> sheep. My mom went to jail for prostitution and for transporting drugs and my
> dad has been in jail for a long time for murder. As a child, I got disciplined a lot.
> I got called a lot of names too, like fat bitch, little slut, and loser.--Nadine

Their experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse share with us the realities of a

disruptive childhood which make them more likely to stumble as adolescents, as the U.S. Census

argues. In addition to abuse, homeless youth share a story of neglect and abandonment, which

some may also consider abuse:

> I left Mexico when I was 12. I never knew my parents. I lived with my aunt and uncle in
> Guadalajara. It was hard living with them. They didn't treat me as good as they treated
> their real kids. I was always the bottom of the family. Their kids always came first and I
> was always punished for things that I didn't even do. One day I came home from school
> and they were gone. I waited for about a week , but they never came back. So I left. I
> have to say though, as bad as it was, it is even harder on my own. I have crossed the
> border several times, at least 8; in cars, on the back of trucks, walking, running,
> California, Texas. I remember one time crossing through the desert. I wanted to get bit
> by a rattlesnake so I wouldn't have to worry about my life. But, I guess there is a
> purpose for me in life.--Lalo

> To describe my life growing up is simple, hell. I didn't get the chance to grow up. I had
> to be grown up at a young age because after my parents got divorced, my mom went back
> to school full-time. Now she is doing very well, but look what happened to me. I have to
> do whatever it takes to eat, even sell drugs. I don't like to sell, I only sell if I have to.
> --Olga

> My mom and dad broke up when I was six years old. My mom remarried 6 months later.
> I had to take care of my little brothers and sisters because my mom is on drugs. Then,
> my mom and my stepdad split up when I was 12.--Gloria

Olga's testimony really personalizes Vissing's claim that homeless teens carry the burden of

responsibility of adults without experiencing the privileges of being a child or an adult. In the

absence of a childhood, Olga turned to selling drugs to meet her basic survival needs. She is

unable to enjoy the luxury of some adults to obtain a decent wage job and she is unable to enjoy a life free of the responsibility of having to feed herself. Olga shares with us the reality that homeless teens do not have the luxury to be children.

As an undocumented immigrant to the United States, Lalo's experience as a homeless youth is unique to the realm of youth homelessness. His story shares with us the eye-opening reality of growing up without ever knowing your parents and the challenges of crossing the border illegally. Equally important, LAYN must be prepared to provide services for Lalo and other homeless youth with similar backgrounds. According to Mindi Levins-Pfeifer, LAYN is able to meet these challenges by having bilingual counselors and a diverse staff that is familiar with the realities of youth undocumented immigration.

Taking a closer look at how homeless teens grew up provides a better picture of "who" is the homeless teen population for Los Angeles Youth Network. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse are cited in the literature as common characteristics of runaway and homeless youth. The results of this study support this claim as well. The homeless youth share stories of their abusive pasts or tales of neglect and provide an important connection to the understanding of the environments from which they come.

THE CONCEPT OF FAMILY

Family conflict and serious communications problems tend to be the common theme reported as causing homelessness among youth. (Bradley, 1997). The progression of homelessness begins with family conflict that fragments the family members. (Vissing, 1992). For homeless youth, conflict arises for a number of reasons in functional families. In Diana's case, her conflict with her family comes from the fact that her father was incarcerated for

sexually molesting her and now Diana's family resents her for testifying against her father as a molester. For other displaced youth, the source of conflict is not always clear. However, once the ties between the family members are broken, the displaced youth must survive on the streets without the comfort of a family "nest" to fall back on when times get tough. A youth who faces the loss of a functional family must make choices about how to accommodate the loss. (Plympton, 1997). Do homeless teens navigate through the streets without family?

> I consider mainly myself as my family. People just ain't there when you need them. Growing up, my dad and my mom were both alcoholics and they would fight a lot. My dad should have been more responsible and raised us right. He provided a real negative environment-gambling, drugs, real negative. My aunt would always say that me and my brother would follow his footsteps, but I can change that.--Ben

> I have no family anymore. They can kiss my ass. To me, my family is the punks. Everywhere I go, I know I can find em. And now I live to disobey. Getting from place to place is really no big deal. Hitchhiking, buses or walking can usually get you where you want to go. The punks give me all that I need. The person I can trust the most is the guitarist in this punk band. I have known him for a while and we have become like brothers.--Henry

Ben and Henry provide two very different views of the concept of family. Ben claims not to have family beyond himself because of his distrust of people. His family background provided a very negative environment for him; and he does not want to hear that he will grow up to be nothing more than a "loser." Henry, on the other hand, has found a replacement family (Plympton, 1997) that provides all the privileges of a functional family. In Henry's case, punk sub-culture meets all his needs for family. Sanchez-Jankowski (1991) argues that it is possible for youth gangs to provide another type of family for youth coming from dysfunctional families. Although the "punks" are not a gang, they provide a familial role for Henry.

Some people commonly make the mistake to assume that homeless youth do not have families. In fact, at LAYN pursues family reunification as a possible solution to ending teen homelessness for the simple reason that homeless teens do have families; just families with

problems. Most of the teens interviewed keep in contact with their parents or other family members. In some cases, parents are a source of financial support for the homeless youth. In other cases, relationships with parents have agreed upon parameters:

> Now, I only see my dad about once a year. My mom gives me money every now and then, she has begun to start trusting me again, little by little.--Mike

> My parents never give me any money, and I won't ask them. It is like a mutual understanding that we have between us. I don't really want their help. If I screw up , then I should pay the consequences.--Fred

Fred resents his parents for his homelessness and tries to support himself on the street. He still talks to his parents, but his stubbornness will not allow him to ask his parents for help. For Mike, on the other hand, his relationship with his parents improves as he attempts to clean himself up from stealing from his mother to do drugs. Mike's willingness to try to improve familial relationships was surprisingly not that uncommon among the homeless teens interviewed. Other teens expressed an interest to improve relationships with family members:

> I would like to change my relationship with my mom. I want her to start respecting me. She should respect what is inside and it shouldn't matter how I look on the outside. She refuses to talk to me. I try to talk to her and after 30 seconds the bitch hangs up on me. I guess I nagged her too much.--Henry

> I would really like to have better ties with my family. My relatives, you know. If they didn't treat me like shit, I could get along with them. They have a grudge on me for all the things that my mama did. I tried to talk to them, but my family don't talk.--Nadine

The structural fragility of the modern family occurs because the unity of the family depends on the voluntary commitments of its members, which can be redefined, weakened, broken or abandoned as the partners interest change. (Plympton, 1997). Henry and Nadine expose their relationships with family members where their family members do not want voluntary commitments with Henry and Nadine. In cases like Henry and Nadine, perhaps family reunification is not the best alternative for assisting them in their homelessness.

> *As bad as it was, sometimes I wish I could go back in time cause the future looks even more scary. I look to the Lord for support even though I ask Him "Why?" a lot. The lord gives me my philosophy to keep going. Society can knock you off focus, life is hell out there, but I believe in the Lord and when I think about giving up-I can't. People are like hydraulics, they can pull a switch on you. I have no faith in people, they let you down. People can't help me get to my goals. If I put my faith in people, I'd be in the pen or dead in the gutter with my throat sliced. I put my faith in the Lord.*
> Ben, LAYN Homeless Youth from Houston, Texas, age 19.

CHAPTER 5. LIFE AS A HOMELESS YOUTH

This section of the study will examine the lifestyles of homeless youth through the lenses of crime and violence, alcohol and drugs, suicide, and careers of the homeless youth. The world of the homeless youth is based on survival: what needs to be done is done in order to survive. (Artenstein, 1990). In this study, nearly 64% of the homeless youth interviewed at LAYN have physically slept on the streets during some time of their homelessness. Olga provided a testimony highlighting the realities of selling drugs to sustain herself. Life for homeless youth are even much more complex than panhandling, selling drugs, consuming alcohol, or sleeping on the streets of Hollywood. Displaced youth have to navigate around the "dark" influences of the street like gangs, prostitution, crime, and even more significantly they must abide by the unwritten code of the streets. In this section of the study, the homeless youth give a "street kids" perspective about living on the streets.

An under-explored aspect in the lives of homeless teens lies in the realm of "recreation" for homeless youth. By recreation, I mean what do the homeless teens do for fun on the streets? Many of the youth share interests similar to most adolescents such as going to the movies,

hanging out at the malls, or merely watching TV. However, the concept of fun is relative; and

for homeless youth something as simple as confusing tourists is normal everyday recreation.

Here are some excerpts that represent the youth interviewed at LAYN:

> I don't have fun. I just sleep, that is my fun.--Irene

> For fun, we just hang out because we don't have any money to do anything. Sometimes
> we mess with people on the boulevard. --Fred

Like most adolescents, limited financial resources constrain recreational activity. For

homeless youth, financial concerns lie in the area of where is my next meal coming from or

when can I get my next fix? Beyond the questions of food and drugs, homeless youth either do

not attempt to have fun, or they amuse themselves with simple pleasures. Irene and Fred really

epitomize the concept of fun for the youth interviewed at LAYN. It seems that the responses

given by the youth at LAYN highlight the fact that there is no money to have fun and that

bothering people on the boulevard is a form of recreation.

Fun, however, does not describe the realities of being young and homeless. The streets

provide a nocturnal place, threatening, hostile, and unknown; where death is an ever present

possibility. (Lundy, 1995). Survival on the streets for the youth interviewed at LAYN is tainted

with violence and crime. The youth share experiences that highlight the dangers of living on the

streets:

> It is dangerous being young and homeless. I have been shot at, jumped, beaten, and not
> paid for working. I remember one time in the Bronx, I was walking in a park and 4 guys
> came up to me and asked for money. I told them that I didn't have any money so then
> they asked for drugs. I didn't have no drugs either. I don't know what they were on, but
> they started shooting at me.. I just ran. I thought I was going to die, but they missed me
> so many times. I laugh at it now, but I was scared then.--Lalo

> On the street, my x-boyfriend and his mother were supportive for a while. I even stayed
> with them for about 2 weeks. But he be lying too much and playing too many games, so
> I had to be independent again. I used to like kicking it with my x-boyfriend, but that got
> tired. I tried to run him over with his car one time for touching me, so I thought it be best
> if I just moved on.--Nadine

Lalo's experience of getting shot at in New York, exposes the dangers of calling the streets home. An innocent stroll in the park for him could have turned out to be his last. Nadine's example provides a closer look at the fragility of relationships for homeless youth. For a brief time her boyfriend provided shelter for her, however, when her relationship ended with him so did her shelter. Unfortunately, her departure from the relationship was violent. Nadine attempted to hit her boyfriend with a car, which is an extreme form of crime. Most teens share stories of less violent crimes committed while on the streets:

> I have been arrested a few times on the street. Mostly just petty theft, can't blame me for
> trying to get something to eat.--Mike

As a homeless youth struggling to survive on the streets, Mike's crime of stealing some food to eat almost does not seem like a crime at all. Other teens report crimes like AWOLing, drug use, drug dealing, curfew violations, fighting, and "being homeless." Whether committing petty theft or getting shot at in the park, crime impacts the lives of homeless teens while they live on the streets. In November of 1997, four men were accused of recruiting homeless teens to participate in pornographic movies.[13] The case is caught up in the courts at this time, but provides a reminder of the atrocities committed against homeless teens when they are on the streets.

5.1 HOMELESS YOUTH AND DRUGS/ALCOHOL

Substance abuse has been identified as one of the major causes of teen homelessness. (Clary, Harrod, and Olney, 1992). In this study, drugs have contributed to the homelessness of many of the teens interviewed. Amy, for example, was taken away from her parents because they had a severe drug problem. Emily spent her rent money on drugs, which resulted in her

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[13] Fitten, Ronald K. The Seattle Times. "4 Plead Innocent in Child Porn Case." November 22, 1997.

eviction from her apartment in Arizona. Nadine's mother was put in jail for prostitution and drug transporting. Olga lost custody of her daughter because she wasted her money supporting her boyfriend's drug habit. In addition to being identified as a cause of homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse play a significant role in the daily lives of homeless youth on the streets. Each of the youth interviewed reported at least experimenting with alcohol and more than half indicated that they experimented with drugs. Olga previously shared her experience of selling drugs in order to sustain herself. For other youth, alcohol and drugs are an expensive and dangerous coping mechanism.

> For fun, I get loaded. It is expensive though. It is about a $300 per week habit. You got to have friends that kick down or use people's leftovers in their needles cause it is just too damn expensive. I drink everyday. Mostly just hard liquor, but sometimes beer. I try to get my hands on drugs, but I can usually only get cocaine and speed. I don't even mess with pot anymore; it just doesn't do anything to me. Drugs are kind of dangerous on the streets though man, I remember one time I got jumped by a bunch of guys and they stole my drugs.--Henry

Henry highlights many of the dangers surrounding drug use on the streets. He talks about the importance of having friends who share some of their leftovers because the habit of using drugs and alcohol is too expensive. This is potentially dangerous because it could lead to sharing needles, which has many health concerns attached such as HIV/AIDS. Henry also exposes how expensive a drug and alcohol habit can be. Three hundred dollars per week is an expensive habit for an unemployed 16 year old boy. This raises some concern about how a homeless youth can obtain enough money to support a drug and alcohol habit; hustling, selling, other illegal activities are suspect. However, Henry did mention that sometimes a group of homeless youth will pool their money to provide a supply for the whole group. Another important issue Henry raises is the build-up of tolerance over time from drinking alcohol and using drugs. Henry has moved up the potency chain in alcohol as he now drinks more hard liquor and less beer; for drugs he now uses

speed and cocaine because marijuana does not provide a sufficient high for him. In addition, to

the health risks and the costs of a drug and alcohol habit on the streets, Henry touches on the

dangers related to drug use on the streets as he encountered physical harm over drugs.

On the lighter side, Henry's testimony reflects an average view of using drugs and

alcohol held by many homeless youth; for recreation, or in his words, "to get loaded." However,

this recreational activity is illegal and can lead to confrontations with the police. Steve talks

about his experience with drugs and getting caught by the police:

> I smoke weed everyday. It helps to stimulate my mind to create some phat tracks. But
> man, I have been busted before while on the streets for possession. I had some met-
> amphetamines on me. The pigs just had it in for me.--Steve

Steve views his use of marijuana as a avenue to improve his creativity with his music. He also

exposes the reality of getting caught by the police. However, the fear of being arrested by the

police does not seem to deter homeless youth from using or selling drugs. It is evident that the

homeless youth are aware of the impact that drugs have in their lives. Henry and Olga share the

effects of drugs in their lives:

> Drugs ruined my life because my immune system is all shot. I feel like I am dying both
> physically and emotionally. I figure I have about 8 years of life left. I am weak all the
> time and I have no immune system.--Henry

> I have been really lucky to meet my new boyfriend though. He has been a positive
> influence in my life, he don't drink, don't smoke and he don't do drugs. For fun, I try to
> spend time with him, it helps to keep me on the right track.--Olga

Henry believes that drugs have eroded his immune system. He says that he has been

tested for HIV/AIDS and he is not infected, but that he gets sick all the time. Henry's drug use

has destroyed his emotional well-being and affected his physical health. Olga's testimony

demonstrates the negativity she feels towards drugs. By example, her boyfriend provides some

support in her efforts to remain drug free.

Alcohol and drugs play a substantial role in the lives of homeless youth on the street. In addition to being identified as a cause of teen homelessness, drugs play a harmful role in the daily lives of homeless youth on the streets. The youth interviewed at LAYN share personal testimonies regarding the effect of alcohol and drugs in their lives on the streets of Hollywood. Beyond recreational value, or coping mechanisms as psychologists might argue, drugs and alcohol have contributed to the severity of the homeless situation experienced by the youth interviewed. Henry shares testimony regarding the emotional and physical damage drugs have contributed to his life. He also exposes the costs associated with alcohol and drug habits on the street and mentions the dangers that surrounding the drug world for homeless youth. Steve shares the reality of getting in trouble with the law because of drugs. Olga's testimony highlights the personal struggle to escape from drugs by surrounding herself with positive people. For other homeless youth, however, alcohol and drugs may play a role in suicide, evident in the testimonies provided by Lalo and Fred in the next section of this study.

5.2 SUICIDE

Although not always talked about in the open, especially among peers, the notion of suicide is familiar to homeless youth. In fact, one-third of displaced youth have attempted to commit suicide. (Plympton, 1997). In this study, slightly more homeless youth indicated that they have attempted to commit suicide. Even more telling are the testimonies behind the reality of suicide that personalize the emotions that surround suicide.

GRAPH 4: SUICIDE OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Have you ever attempted to commit suicide?

YES
41%

NO
59%
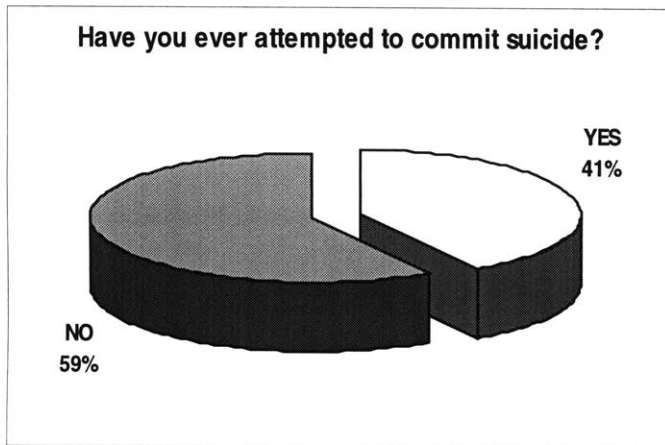
> "Growing up was pain and sorrows. I tried to commit suicide when I was fourteen years old. **We all go through that.** But, I grew out of that, it is like sort of a phase that you go through." --Ben

Ben's view of suicide as a phase that homeless youth go through might explain the fact that 41% of the youth interviewed in this study have attempted to commit suicide at some time in their lifetime. Even more alarming, Emily, Lalo, and Olga have considered committing suicide in the last six months. Emily and Lalo have actually attempted to commit suicide in the last six months. For Emily and Lalo, suicide appears to be more than a phase that they have outgrown.

As briefly mentioned earlier, drugs and alcohol have a link to suicide for homeless youth. For some, alcohol and drugs may provide an escape from the harsh realities of the daily lives of homeless youth. For others, alcohol and drugs contribute to depression and may be the method used to commit suicide:

> My girlfriend worries about me trying to kill myself. I don't really consider what I do as trying to kill myself; what happened was, I tried to hurt myself by getting really drunk. I use to drink about a case of beer a day, but that was too expensive. Now, I just use heroin and speed.--Fred

> I have thought about committing suicide. When I was ten years old, I tried to hang myself back in Mexico. When I was 13, I was going to jump off a bridge, but I couldn't jump. Two months ago, I tried to overdose with heroine, but I just passed out.--Lalo

Fred speaks openly to his girlfriend about drinking until he is dead. He rationalizes getting excessively drunk as only a way to hurt himself, however, his girlfriend argues that he is trying

to kill himself with alcohol. Lalo, on the other hand, openly admits to trying to take his life with heroin. Although he has previously attempted suicide using other methods such as hanging himself or jumping off a bridge, less than two months ago he tried to overdose with heroin.

Knowing that homeless youth are attempting to kill themselves, it is extremely helpful to identify reasons that prevent homeless teens from committing suicide. One commonly acknowledged reason for teens choosing to live is the fear of death. For example, Lalo speaks of a time in his childhood when he considered jumping off a bridge, but he could not go through with it. Perhaps fear prevented him, but fear is not an alternative that can be feasibly replicated in dealing with suicidal homeless youth. Connections with people is one very important reason that has led to the prevention of homeless youth from going through with suicide. Henry and Gloria speak of people in their lives who directly or indirectly prevent them from committing suicide:

> The reason I don't end my life is because I made a deal with the guitarist from the punk band that I kick it with. I told him I would stay alive until after he dies so I can get his records. But really, I don't want to die before I can see my son.--Henry

> My mom threw me out because she said that I need help, more help than she could give me. So here I am. Suicide goes through my mind. But I know that I would never do it. I don't want to hurt myself. I think it is scary and really gross. I know people care about me and I don't want to hurt other people. It sucks that my mom won't let me go home. --Gloria

Henry's testimony highlights the importance of people in his life who have directly and indirectly prevented him from committing suicide. Apparently he has really connected with the punk guitarist, who has influenced Henry to stay alive for at least as long as he does. Perhaps more personal to Henry is the love for his son, who he hasn't seen because his son's mother has ran away with his son and he has no way of contacting them. Gloria expresses two important reasons for not killing herself. She acknowledges the fear of death as discussed earlier and

equally important is the fact that she is aware that if she kills herself, it will bring suffering to other people.

The reality of suicide for homeless teens poses an immediate challenge for service providers. By exploring the issue of suicide with the homeless teens at LAYN, it is evident that suicide is more than just a phase for homeless youth. Given the turbulent lifestyles of the homeless youth population, suicide may be a spontaneous solution to the overwhelming problems encountered by homeless youth. Fred and Lalo share the experience of using alcohol and drugs as a method of suicide. Henry and Gloria share some important reasons that prevent them from committing suicide. Particularly interesting for service providers, Henry and Gloria highlight the importance of people in preventing suicide. Service providers such as LAYN can attempt to make that important personal link for the homeless youth that they serve and help homeless teens choose to stay alive.

5.3 CAREERS OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Helping homeless youth to see the long term picture in life provides an important suicide prevention tool. One way of accomplishing this goal is to probe the homeless youth about their future careers and how they plan to achieve them. In doing this, the importance of education ultimately enters the discussion. For some, homelessness poses barriers to accessing school. Rafferty identifies five characteristics of homeless youth that provide barriers to education including residency, guardianship, immunization, school records, and transportation. (Rafferty, 1995). Rafferty also argues that school personnel are not adequately trained to meet the needs of the homeless youth and may even be insensitive.

GRAPH 5: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Are you currently in School?	Are you currently Employed?
YES 6% / NO 94%	YES 24% / NO 76%
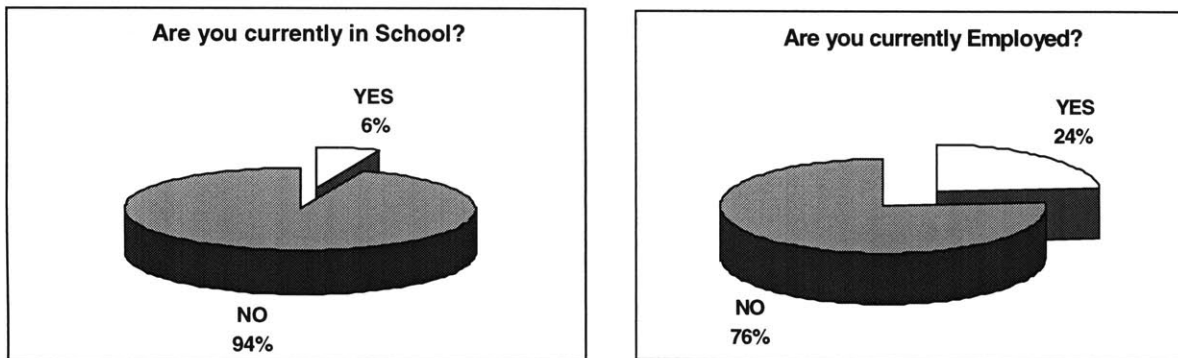
Graph 5 shows that Amy is the only one currently attending school regularly. Of the homeless youth interviewed in this study, Charles, Emily, Fred, and Steve have already graduated from high school. Most of the youth did not want to talk about why they didn't go to school other then they just didn't like it. However, Mike said that when he transferred to a school in Pasadena, it was too easy so he used to ditch a lot. It is evident though, that homeless teens are aware of the importance of education. When asked about what homeless teens need, Lalo responded that homeless teens need education because education is important in order to get the good jobs. Irene also mentioned going back to school to become a nurse. An inspiring note is that LAYN has helped to educate the homeless youth about the importance of school.

Graph 5 also shows that nearly one-fourth of the teens interviewed are currently employed. Additionally, 80% have worked at some time in their lives. Amy, Gloria, and Jennifer are too young to work. Emily and Pedro currently work with Project Step, which is an organization that helps to develop skills for youth. Henry works at a nursery working with plants and Steve works around the music studio to get exposed to people in the music industry. Other youth spoke about doing extra work around the Hollywood studios where they can make up to $200 per day. The fact that these homeless youth are seeking employment provides some

evidence that legal methods of income earning can be effective for homeless youth. Table 3

shows the career objectives of the homeless youth interviewed at LAYN:

TABLE 3: FUTURE CAREERS OF HOMELESS YOUTH

FEMALE		MALE	
NAME	CAREER	NAME	CAREER
Amy	Attorney	Ben	Model
Diana	Don't Know	Charles	Carpenter
Emily	Pediatric Nurse	Fred	Film Maker
Gloria	Actress	Henry	Waste Management
Irene	Nurse	Lalo	Fishing Boat Captain
Jennifer	Pediatrician	Mike	Computer Technician
Nadine	Military	Pedro	Don't Know
Olga	Elementary School Teacher	Robert	Never Thought About It
		Steve	Rapper (Music Industry)

LAYN uses the method of helping youth to identify their career objectives to help bring focus to

long term goals, primarily with the drop-in center resources of counseling, tutoring, and

computer training. More than being an important strategy for the youth to think long term, it

helps to show that these youth are more than just homeless teens. Many aspects of their identity

are overshadowed by the fact that they are homeless. Knowing that they share aspirations and

goals similar to everyone else helps to demystify their existence.

Examining the career aspirations of the homeless youth provides some insight about their

mental well-being. In the literature, Jencks (1994) identifies mental illness as a major cause of

homelessness, however, it does not seem to be a significant factor in teen homelessness. The

homeless youth seem to have a mental disconnect from reality though. This is not to argue

whether they are mentally ill or not, but to raise the point that they seem to be detached from

reality in terms of their career aspirations. It is unclear if the youth really understand the

requirements to become attorneys, nurses, and teachers. Drug use, alcohol use, and missing

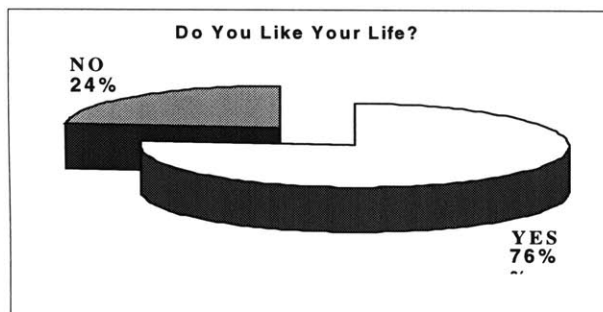school will not lead them into the careers they aspire to attain.

CHAPTER 6. LIFE SATISFACTION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

GRAPH 6: LIFE SATISFACTION

Do You Like Your Life?

NO
24%

YES
76%

THOUGHTS ON LIFE

I like my life. I don't like the situations I am in and the problems that I am facing, but I like my life.--Nadine

I like my life but I got to get back on the right track. --Ben

I may be down and out but I still have a positive attitude. --Charles

Do I like my life? That is a hard question to answer. I am not really satisfied but I am content. I get frustrated a lot. --Fred

I don't like my life right now. Because I am here and not at home.--Gloria

I like my life sometimes. Sometimes I am doing great…but it is hard to accomplish the most simple goals in life, like going to school. --Lalo

My life is hell. I can't see my kid. I have no relationship with my family. I can't see my girlfriend. But, I don't want to die before I can see my son. --Henry

Despite the history of abuse, the struggle of living on the street, and not knowing what the future holds in store, over 75% of the homeless youth interviewed responded that they liked their lives. Labeled as "chronic" homeless youth, this is an inspiring finding for service providers. It suggests that homelessness among some of the toughest kids to reach does not necessarily mean that hopelessness accompanies their homelessness. The youth expressed frustration, dissatisfaction, and anger at some of the particular situations that they encounter on the streets, but overall remained satisfied with life. This demonstrates the commitment of the homeless

youth to struggle through the tough times. Table 4 provides the homeless youth perspective on

what homeless teens need to assist them in the struggle.

TABLE 4: HOLLYWOOD TEENS SPEAK ABOUT THEIR NEEDS

What do you think homeless teens need?

Places like LAYN. Scouting for teens prostituting so they can get help.--Amy

Homeless teens need a place to kick it, sleep, shower, eat, counseling, education, and safe sex education, oh and job training so I can find out about good jobs.--Ben

Homeless teens need more places like LAYN so they have somewhere to go and kick it, and there are resources here to get jobs.--Charles

Homeless teens need food, clothes, and shelter, but I think it is most important to have a house. --Diana

Homeless teens need more places to go when they become adults. A lot of us are approaching 18, 19, and 21 years old, but there is very little help out there for those ages. We are not allowed to stay at the shelter, but we can use the drop-in center at LAYN.--Emily

Homeless teens need places that allow freedom. We should be able to come and go because I don't agree with authority, especially the government, but I can talk for days about that. There should also be people who have experienced what we go through, not all these people just studying us.--Henry

Homeless teens need more maternity homes. Right now, it seems that there are no beds available, because of the waiting lists. Homeless mothers should automatically have a bed available. There should also be more places for their kids to go to, cause I know that I am going to have to work and I will need a place for my kid to stay while I am working. And probably most important, we need financial assistance. Having a kid is expensive.--Irene

Homeless kids need places to stay. More than that, they need education. Education is important because you need it to get the good jobs.--Lalo

I think homeless teens need just the necessities; clothing, shower, food and every now and then a little bit of money. LAYN closes at 4pm and the small lunch snack you get here is not enough to hold you over until the next day.--Mike

Homeless teens need positiveness. There is too much negative out there. A positive atmosphere can change your life.--Nadine

The most important thing that you can give homeless teens is emotional support.--Olga

I think homeless teens have a bunch of services already, they just don't use them.--Robert

Homeless teens got mostly everything they need. Maybe more places to eat at night would be helpful. And some night drop-in centers, especially on weekends, because on weekends there is nowhere to go.--Steve

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Understanding the needs of the homeless youth population is vitally important for service providers trying to meet those needs. In the next section of the study, the needs of the homeless youth population will be examined more closely and how LAYN is meeting those needs.

LIMITATIONS OF THE LAYN APPROACH

According to the United Way of Southern California, there are approximately 4,000 homeless youth in Hollywood every night. The Los Angeles Youth Network provides services for many of these homeless youth. Established as a service provider that targets chronic homeless youth, LAYN fulfills a unique role in the arena of service providers for homeless youth. In this section of the study, I will offer a critique LAYN's strategy to end youth homelessness one kid at a time.

On the surface, LAYN strategy to provide services to chronic homeless youth seems to live up to its definition as a flexible and open program, but in reality the stabilization program of LAYN is not as flexible as it is proclaimed to be. The drop-in center, street outreach, and emergency shelter are designed to meet the immediate needs of the homeless youth on the streets, which are important in their own right. However, evaluating LAYN and the efforts made to place homeless youth, it is in the stabilization program that LAYN's program can be compared to other models.

The stabilization program at LAYN requires the homeless youth to engage in an educational plan and choose a placement goal; either family reunification, group or foster home placement, or independent living. This program is structured to run its course in just 60 days. The youth are free to leave the program at any time, which is the reasoning behind the description as a flexible and open program. In point of fact, most programs offer the opportunity

for youth to leave the program at any time, unless ordered by the court. Even highly structured programs like *Bridge Over Troubled Waters* have voluntary requirements.

Perhaps LAYN describes their services as flexible in order to attract the chronic homeless youth. That raises the question about whether or not the youth served by LAYN are truly chronic homeless youth. Even as chronic homeless youth, the question becomes are the youth served by LAYN categorized as the "hardest to serve?" The youth at LAYN have reached out to LAYN is some capacity, which suggests that they are not the hardest to serve population. In addition, even if the youth use only the services to meet their emergency needs such as the emergency shelter and drop-in center, they have sought help. Some of the hardest to serve homeless teens are the ones who do not seek help, or even the couch kids, who try to exhaust every resource available before turning to the streets or service providers.

This is not to say that the youth served by LAYN are not among the tougher street kids to reach, but to acknowledge the limitations of help by any service provider. Ruddick (1996) raises another criticism of LAYN and its attempts to reach the chronic homeless youth. In examining the history of LAYN, Ruddick highlighted the closed-door policy that LAYN had with the police in order to protect its clients from the police. This policy of protection from the local authorities was an important step to reach out to the harder to serve homeless teens. Today, LAYN encourages the participation of the police. In fact, the police host several educational programs regarding safety and law violations for homeless youth at the LAYN drop-in center. The incorporation of police into the programs offered by LAYN limit their ability to reach the homeless teens that have problems with the law such as drug dealers, pimps, and prostitutes.

Of the needs listed by the homeless youth themselves in Table 4, LAYN provides adequate resources to meet the majority of those needs. However, three areas mentioned by the

homeless youth are not adequately provided by LAYN. The services not met by LAYN are the availability of former homeless youth as employees and role models, resources for pregnant homeless teen mothers, and availability after hours and on weekends.

Henry highlights the importance of role models who were former homeless teens working for LAYN. Given the troubled pasts and unpredictable lifestyles of homeless youth, it is challenging to find staff that are from a background of homelessness. However, other programs across the nation do have staff members who are former homeless teens. For example, Lara Lee is the Program Director for *Visions of Altitude*, which is drop-in center for homeless teens.[14] In 1994, the City of Los Angeles coordinated efforts to have former homeless youth walk the streets educating street youth about the dangers of sharing needles. Thus, former homeless teens are serving as role models in very few programs. It is an avenue worth pursuing in order to have some staff members who can empathize with the situations that the homeless youth face.

Irene sheds some light on the challenges of being young, homeless, and pregnant. She feels that homeless services could be improved by providing more maternity homes for the girls who are pregnant with nowhere to stay. It is not feasible to expect LAYN to cover all the possible services that a homeless teenager might need, but LAYN does do an excellent job at utilizing existing service providers who specialize in a diversity of services. For LAYN, referring Irene to a homeless program that can meet her special needs is an important first step. The fact that there are not enough shelters to meet the demand for pregnant teens is an issue for another organization and a topic for another paper.

Steve exposes the limitations of current service providers at meeting the needs of homeless youth after 5pm and especially on the weekends. However, providing night-time drop-

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[14] Wilson, Anne. Salt Lake Tribune. "Homeless Teens Now Have a Place of Their Own." April 26, 1995.

in centers might not be the best strategy at getting the kids off the streets permanently. Having 24-hour drop-in centers has the potential to deter homeless youth from engaging in a case plan and setting some long term goals to improve their homeless situation.

Acknowledging the limitations to the approach taken by LAYN, it is important to remember the strengths of the program, which is why it was selected for this study. In addition to the numerous strengths of the LAYN approach, hearing from the homeless youth about their perception of LAYN adds another dimension to a critique of their programs.

What do you dislike about LAYN?

I was lucky to find this place for food and shelter. I think homeless teens need help finding work. I like the people at LAYN and they have TV that I can watch. But I think the Covenant House is better for me because they give me more attention.--Pedro

I don't like the no sex rule if you stay in the shelter. --Henry

The rules here kind of suck though. I can't come here high. I just get high when I leave this place.
--Steve

I don't really like LAYN because I want to go home. There is not a lot of privacy here. Cameras in the rooms, tiny rooms at that with 11 beds in a room, I don't feel like I have privacy. LAYN has a good psychiatrist but not always available. There is only 1 and 2 interns. I just want to get better so I can go home. I want more privacy. --Gloria

I dislike that I have to go pretty far away from LAYN to smoke.--Robert

I really don't like LAYN. I am waiting to be transferred to another place. This place is just too wild for me. It seems like there are no rules. I like more calm places. I think there is too much freedom here.--Lalo

I think what I dislike about LAYN is that their help stops when you turn 18. If you are 18 and you want to change, the rules make it hard and won't let you.--Olga

The girls at LAYN have attitude problems. And the staff be acting too smart sometimes, snappy with attitudes. One time they kicked me out for smoking weed and only allowed me back in if I spoke with a case manager. I guess they taught me that I have to earn respect.--Nadine

What I dislike about LAYN is the simple fact that I can not hug my fiancé when I am around this place.--Mike

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What do you like about LAYN?
Source: LAYN Interviews May 1998

I like LAYN cause you can get all the basic stuff, take a shower, change, and help if you want without any pressure. No other shelters are like this. I dislike some stuff that aggravate, but I don't want to complain about this place. What makes LAYN better than other places is that you can just be yourself.--Ben

LAYN is pretty cool. It give me a chance to play games and hang out with the staff that works here. It can be fun sometimes. Plus LAYN has better food than the other shelters and drop-in centers.--Diana

LAYN is not that strict and they help you no matter what you look like. The kids here are really friendly too. What makes it better than other places is that they don't get into your business as much.--Emily

LAYN is cool because it is open 7 days a week and the staff doesn't hassle you that much, it is a relaxed atmosphere. I know what I am doing, I only need to take a shower. LAYN is good for that cause they let you do that and don't bother you about case plans. The downside to LAYN is that it is kind of far from the heart of Hollywood, you know Western and Sunset.--Fred

LAYN, I like that I can smoke and come and go.--Henry

I like LAYN because it has comfortable surroundings. I know everybody here.--Steve

What I like about LAYN is that it is a place that will give you a chance. If you mess up, they just don't kick you out right away like other places. They talk to you and try to work it out. Plus it is open.--Jennifer

LAYN, it's all right. It is laid back. It seems that other places have people who don't enjoy their jobs, but LAYN seems pretty cool.--Robert

What I like about LAYN is that you can hang out and feel safe. And if you really want to, you can put your life back together. It gives you some motivation to stay sober and not to have to turn tricks on the street. Other places like Angels Flight are too damn strict. You have to ask to use the bathroom, you know, they lock you up like a bunch of nuns.--Olga

LAYN, it's cool because you can leave when you want to.--Nadine

What I like about LAYN is that they try. They try to meet your basic needs no matter who you are. Showers are always available and they even have hygiene kits available when they hit the streets. I am sure that they don't have much money, but the little that they do is important. LAYN is a lot better than the other places that I have been to. I leave here with the feeling that I want to come back.--Mike

The comments provided by the homeless youth about LAYN provide a good picture of how they perceive LAYN and LAYN's approach to serve them. Youth expressing dissatisfaction with LAYN represent two distinct poles. One group of kids feel that LAYN is too strict, citing examples of the zero tolerance of drugs and sex. The other group of kids feel that LAYN is too lenient, arguing that there is too much freedom and not enough rules. However, an interesting critique of LAYN is that they do not provide shelter for youth over 18. Homeless youth over 18 are permitted to utilize the drop-in center, but LAYN is prohibited by law to allow homeless youth over 18 to stay in the night shelter.

Most teens interviewed did like LAYN. LAYN has established an environment where teens feel comfortable. They appreciate the opportunity to come and go from LAYN and appreciate the fact that LAYN staff is not overwhelming them with case plans. The homeless teens also comment that LAYN provides a safe place where they can just be themselves.

It is inspiring to see that LAYN has been successful at providing a safe and comfortable environment for chronic homeless youth. Perhaps the success of the LAYN programs stem from the notion that teens feel that they can go to LAYN and not be bothered. Thus, they feel comfortable using LAYN services, sometimes without knowing they are reaching out for help or receiving it.

> *If your study is gonna help homeless kids, I would really like to tell them, find somebody you can trust on the street. Never turn to the needle and don't let them take you alive.*
> Henry, LAYN Homeless Youth from Hollywood, age 16.
>
> *Knowing the precise number isn't as important as moving forward with help.*
> Eve Hickman. The Des Moines Register. February 2, 1998

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

As we approach the end of the millenium, the changing information society is intertwined with rising inequality and social exclusion throughout the world. Social exclusion is a process, not a condition. (Castells, 1998). Youth are at a greater risk because they fall victim to the world that is changing around them, one in which they have little influence. In this study, I have attempted to show the realities of being young and homeless on the streets of Hollywood. In addition, I have explored the role that the Los Angeles Youth Network has played in the arena of service providers attempting to help homeless teens.

7.1 LESSONS FROM LAYN

Knowing the causes and the characteristics of homeless youth is important information to assist service providers in their efforts with homeless youth. Staff members at LAYN have raised the concern that homeless youth are falling deeper underground into the hands of crime or incarceration. Undoubtedly, there is much to learn from an organization that attempts to provide services for the "toughest to serve" population of homeless youth. It is inspiring for others in the field to experience the success of LAYN in dealing with the teens that are not supposed to be

"reachable." Examining LAYN provides some important lessons in the realm of teen homelessness.

Homeless teens are a diverse population. There are numerous causes and characteristics of homeless youth. One of the most important characteristics to acknowledge is that most homeless youth come from backgrounds of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. After examining the list of definitions used to describe homeless teens, there was still a category exposed in this case study. The example of Gloria, who was taken to LAYN by her mother at the age of 12, represents a new phenomenon in the realm of teen homelessness. Gloria does not fit the previous definitions because her mother took the initiative to seek professional assistance. She serves as an example of prevention in youth homelessness; prevention facilitated by a parent or loved one.

In examining LAYN, it becomes evident that chronic youth are not necessarily the "hardest to serve" of the homeless youth population. In some respect, it is difficult to say without looking back on the realities that these youth face in their struggles on the streets. However, these youth have reached out for help and are seeking services from LAYN, which means they can still be reached. Some of the hardest to serve homeless teens have not exposed their situations. In addition, a significant amount of homeless youth interviewed in this study do not even consider themselves homeless. In this study, youth discussed their displacement as a temporary situation that will pass with time.

An important lesson learned from talking with the homeless youth are two significant reasons preventing suicide. The youth identified fear and the inability to hurt loved ones as key reasons for not ending their lives. LAYN can attempt to pursue the latter of the two reasons and become the human link that prevents suicide for homeless youth.

In addition to the insight about suicide prevention, talking with the homeless youth reveals the complexity of their personalities. Many aspects of their identity are overshadowed by the fact that they are homeless. Homeless teens share aspirations and fears about the future, which helps to demystify their existence and normalize their abnormality.

Another issue explored in this study is that a large portion of the homeless youth population served by LAYN comes from other localities. The debate over who should carry the burden of providing services for youth coming from out of state resonates in the minds of Hollywood residents. Important aspects of the LAYN programs are street outreach, emergency shelter, and the LAYN drop-in center in meeting the needs of its mobile homeless teens. LAYN has been successful at attracting the youth to the drop-in center through personal references by homeless teens themselves. Although the drop-in center is only designed to meet immediate needs of homeless youth, it is an important component to help youth off the streets. Additionally, it is an important first step to getting more intense help for street youth, such as counseling.

Described as a flexible strategy, LAYN does have a structured stabilization program, which is the main component that facilitates youth placements. Even flexible approaches to ending teen homelessness require some structure. This is due mainly to the fact that homeless teens seek discipline and stability in their lives. Using the open-door policy is a good hook for troubled youth who may be nervous about asking for help.

Other important components of the LAYN approach lie in its ability to meet the needs of a diverse homeless youth population in Hollywood, beyond the label of chronic homeless youth. For example, at LAYN it is important to have bilingual staff to provide services for immigrants and other predominantly Spanish speaking homeless youth. The issue of homelessness for

young people is no longer the adventurous stories of Huckleberry Finn and it is no longer a predominantly a middle class Anglo issue. Programs that have been serving predominantly white youth a decade ago report that they are serving more minority youth today and seeing more minority youth on the street. (Pires, Silber, 1991). Homeless youth represent a diversity of cultures, classes, races, and personalities. Particular for Los Angeles, there is a large percentage of Spanish speaking youth, which creates the demand for bilingual services.

There are also some limitations of the LAYN approach. The homeless youth interviewed feel that LAYN can better meet their needs in Hollywood by acquiring staff who are former homeless teens. Some programs do have staff members who were previously homeless as youth. In Salt Lake City, the Program Director of *Visions of Altitude* drop-in center is a former homeless teen. There are serious challenges to acquiring former homeless youth as staff members because many homeless youth do not get monitored beyond their teen years.

Another limitation to the LAYN approach rests with the mental well-being of the homeless youth. It is questionable whether LAYN is communicating the realities of career options to the youth. Many of the youth interviewed expose a mental disconnect to their future. It seems that they do not fully understand that drug abuse, alcoholism, and limited schooling is not a formula for success at becoming doctors, nurses, and attorneys. LAYN can do a better job of relating the concrete issues to the homeless youth in order to remove the confusion that being surrounded by the Hollywood environment may cause.

An issue briefly touched upon in this study is the importance of prevention and the role of intervention. The lines of the two strategies of prevention and intervention are often blurred. Drawing from the BRIDGE example, it is evident that efforts of prevention take time because they rely heavily on the foundation of establishing trusting relationships with the youth and their

families. It is questionable if LAYN can fulfill this notion of prevention because many of their youth are coming from other locations. In addition, the stabilization program lasts only two months, which does not provide enough time to build trusting relationships with teens and their families.

LAYN can also learn from BRIDGE's success at retaining an employee base. As discussed earlier, a good portion of the staff at BRIDGE has been working with BRIDGE for over ten years. This stability is important to develop personal relationships with homeless youth. Another component of BRIDGE's program that LAYN should take into consideration is the partnership with the University of Massachusetts. For BRIDGE, the University of Massachusetts performs yearly evaluations of its programs. LAYN has a relationship with UCLA, however, it is largely researched based for the benefit of UCLA. LAYN should attempt to utilize UCLA personnel to provide constructive feedback of the programs offered by LAYN.

7.2 SUMMARY

The mere label homeless suggests that an individual's problems will end with the provision of housing. Homeless youths do need housing, but they also have a complex assortment of other acute problems, including the lack of employment skills and the lack of the basic necessities (clothing, food, health care, etc) that are often otherwise provided by the youth's family. (Plympton, 1997). In this study, homeless youth share stories of abuse, abandonment, and neglect in their lives. They also shed some light on the realities of drugs, alcohol, crime, and suicide in their lives on the streets of Hollywood.

It is unreasonable to expect this study to provide all the answers to ending teen homelessness, but it does provide a greater understanding of the homeless teen population under

the direction of the Los Angeles Youth Network. The results of this study can not speak for the estimated 1.3 million youth on the streets across the United States, however, it begins to reveal the important characteristics of this population; the population served by LAYN in particular.

The Los Angeles Youth Network fulfills an important role in the struggle to help homeless kids. Established as an organization that targets chronic homeless youth, its flexible approach has lead to the empowerment of many youth who would otherwise not seek help. However, the chronic homeless youth are not necessarily the toughest to serve population in the world of teen homelessness. This is not to take away from the important work done by LAYN and its staff, but to acknowledge the fact that many homeless youth are not seeking help.

Perhaps the issue becomes one of policy. This study provides limited analysis of policy implications in the arena of youth homelessness. Future research can help to fill the void in the literature by attempting to find not just a policy, but a network of policies that will help homeless youth become integral members of society. More than mere homeless policy, crime policy, youth policy, and welfare policy, more research is needed to understand the interaction of these policies and the direct impact that they have on the homeless teen population.

In Hollywood, teen homelessness spreads to places with no history of homeless youth. Places like Santa Monica, Pasadena, and Huntington Beach are experiencing an increase in the number of kids sleeping on the streets. Although not always visible to tourists or inhabitants of the communities because of their ability to camouflage in the culture of the street, homeless youth inhabit the streets with the rest of society. Despite the growing number of homeless teens and the increasing challenge of teen homelessness, the names, the faces, and the stories of the young and the homeless remain invisible. By directly talking with the youth at the Los Angeles Youth Network, I hope that this study has helped to expose the realities of teen homelessness.

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APPENDIX 1: SURVEY LOS ANGELES YOUTH NETWORK

PRE SURVEY INTERVIEW INSTRUCTIONS

Remind the participant that participation is completely voluntary. Reassure the participant that status with LAYN will not be affected in any way. Reiterate complete confidentiality with this questionnaire. Thank you in advance for

1. AGE _____
2. MALE _____ FEMALE _____
3. RACE/ETHNICITY

   _____ African-American

   _____ Asian-American

   _____ Caucasian

   _____ Latino (Hispanic)

   _____ Other (Please specify) _____

4. Where are you from?

   CITY _____

   STATE _____

   COUNTRY _____

5. Do you currently have a job?

   _____ YES   _____ NO

   If YES, where are you employed?

   What is your position?

   How much do you make per hour?

   How many hours do you work per week?

HOLLYWOOD

6. Are you in school?

_____ YES   _____ NO

If YES, what school do you attend?

How long have you been there?

What schools did you attend before this school?

Do you have close friends at school?

_____ YES   _____ NO

7. What are your educational/career goals?

8. Do you consider yourself homeless?

_____ YES   _____ NO

9. Have you slept on the streets before?

_____ YES   _____ NO

10. How old were you when you first left home?

_____ YEARS OLD

11. How old were you the last time you left home?

_____ YEARS OLD

12. Who were you living with the last time you left home? (Check all that apply)

_____ Father   _____ Mother

_____ Stepmother   _____ Stepfather

_____ Grandmother   _____ Grandfather

_____ Other Relative   _____ Other (Please Specify) _____

HOLLYWOOD

13. Have you ever attempted to commit suicide?

_____ YES   _____ NO

14. Have you attempted to commit suicide in the last six months?

_____ YES   _____ NO

15. Have you considered committing suicide in the last six months?

_____ YES   _____ NO

16. Have you ever been sexually abused?

_____ YES   _____ NO

17. Have you ever been physically abused?

_____ YES   _____ NO

18. Do you drink alcohol?

_____ YES   _____ NO

If YES, how often do you drink?

_____ Less than one day a week

_____ One or two days a week

_____ 3 or more days a week

_____ A few times a month

19. Do you use drugs?

_____ YES   _____ NO

If YES, which drug(s) do you use?

How often do you use?

20. Have you ever been a victim of a crime while homeless?

_____ YES   _____ NO

21. Have you committed a crime while homeless?

_____ YES   _____ NO

22. Have you ever been involved with prostitution?

_____ YES   _____ NO

If YES, how?

23. Who do you consider part of your family?

24. Are you part of this family?

_____ YES   _____ NO

25. Describe what it was like growing up in your family.

26. As a child, would you consider your household abusive?

_____ YES   _____ NO

If YES, what type of abuse?

HOLLYWOOD

27. Who, if anyone, has been supportive of you throughout your homelessness? (Financially, emotionally,...)

28. Who do you confide in the most? Why? What is the relationship to you?

29. Who do you spend most of your time with?

30. What do you do for fun?

31. Would you like to change any of your current relationships? If so, how?

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32. Of your numerous relationships with people, what relationships have failed? How?

33. Did you make any efforts to change or improve failing relationships? Describe what you did.

34. Why did you leave home?

_____ Parents too strict   _____ Thrown Out (What reason was given?)

_____ Physical Abuse   _____ Sexual Abuse

_____ Emotional Abuse   _____ School Problems

_____ Alcohol/Drugs

_____ Other (Please specify) _____

35. What services do you think homeless teens need?

Are they available?

_____ YES   _____ NO

36. What resources have you used or currently use?

_____ AFDC   _____ Medical

_____ WIC   _____ Food Stamps

_____ Public Hospitals   _____ Free Clinic

_____ Drop-In Centers   _____ Shelters

_____ Religious Institutions _____ Counseling Programs

_____ Employment Services _____ Other (Please Specify) _____

HOLLYWOOD

37. What do you like about Los Angeles Youth Network?

38. What do you dislike about Los Angeles Youth Network?

39. What makes Los Angeles Youth Network better than other places you have been?

40. How did you end up homeless?

41. What do you want to be when you grow up?

42. Do you like your life?

_____ YES   _____ NO

43. Explain why you answered what you did to question 42.

HOLLYWOOD

THANK YOU
HOLLYWOOD

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWS

Arlene Ferendali
Angels Flight
Executive Director

Elizabeth Gomez
Los Angeles Youth Network
Executive Director

Ignacio Gonzalez
Special Assistant to the Supervisor
Office of Los Angeles County Supervisor
Supervisor Gloria Molina, District #1

Mindi Levins-Pfeifer
Los Angeles Youth Network
Drop-In Center
Program Director

Luciann Maulhardt
Casa Youth Shelter
Executive Director

Dan Rierdon
Bridge Over Troubled Waters
Trinity House Counselor

Pat Sheppard
Bridge Over Troubled Waters
Adolescent Runaway HIV/AIDS Services

Lisa Spiegel
Shortstop, Inc
Program Director