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**An Assessment of the Human Right to Safe and Sanitary Housing
for Transitional Age Youth in Mendocino County**



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A Capstone Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
Applied Community Development Sequence
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Abstract

This research project assesses whether or not the human right to safe and sanitary housing is being adequately met for transitional age youth, 18-24 year olds, in Mendocino County, California. Field research, in the form of surveys, interviews, and focus groups, was collected. Based on the findings, it is plausible to conclude that this human right is not being sufficiently met for the TAY population. Recommendations to better meet this human right in Mendocino County are provided.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Michaelene Cox of the Politics and Government Department at Illinois State University. Her guidance and assistance has been the foundation of my research. I would also like to extend my thanks to the Stevenson Center for Economic and Community Development at Illinois State University. Their support has pushed me and kept me moving through my atypical path of graduate school. I am also grateful to Redwood Children's Services for their encouragement and in-kind contributions to my capstone research. Finally, I would like to thank all of the youth in Mendocino County who participated in this research project and allowed me to use their insight and voices to produce this capstone paper.

Chapter I INTRODUCTION

The Arbor on Main is a youth resource center in Ukiah, California that serves 15-24 year old residents. The center serves as a hub that connects youth in this age group to community resources that they may need as well as offers classes to help youth learn independent living skills. By nature, the center has a focus on homeless, foster, and at-risk youth. The key researcher in this project, Jamie Boban, worked as Youth Development Specialist at the Arbor on Main for 11 months during 2012-13 as her Stevenson Center professional practice graduate internship. Her close work with this population led to many observations. First, she noticed that many youth at age 18 were not equipped to provide for themselves. She noticed a high number of youth who needed resources and assistance in solving their housing issues in Mendocino County. For instance, she noticed that countless youth experienced housing instability. At a given time, a youth might be living with a parent or staying with friends, however, the next week she might be on the street. This cycle of housing instability and homelessness kept coming up. The key researcher noticed this reoccurrence and wondered what was the cause. She questioned if the human right to safe and sanitary housing was being met for this unique population.

Social service systems of care in Mendocino County focus on either children or adults. Transitional age youth, defined as 18-24 year olds, are usually forced to fit into adult systems of care. However, their particular needs and level of development do not

neatly fit in into child or adult classifications. There has been increasingly more attention paid on behalf of social service agencies to this specific age group. More and more youth-serving agencies are requesting services and systems be tailored to meet the needs of transitional age youth.

This research project will assess whether or not the human right to safe and sanitary housing is being met for transitional age youth (TAY) in Mendocino County. Based on the key researcher's direct observations and interaction with at-risk, transitional age youth, it is likely that the human right to safe and sanitary housing is not adequately being met in Mendocino County for this population. An investigation of why such a high rate of housing instability exists and how the county as a whole can address the situation and work to improve meeting this right is the focus of this study.

In order to form this assessment this paper will first provide a background of homelessness and housing as a human right. Second, the paper will address the process that the key researcher used to conduct her field research. Third, the paper will focus on her research findings and provide a detailed analysis of them. The paper will conclude with recommendations for the community to mitigate youth homelessness.

Chapter II LITERATURE REVIEW

Housing as a Human Right

The right to safe and sanitary housing is a human right included in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other internationally recognized treaties and documents. However, there is not much literature on the human right to housing for transitional age youth. Most research on this topic is focused on either children or adults. Additionally, a gap occurs between the existence of this human right and its implementation and actualization.

Policy

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948. The UDHR expresses and equally guarantees the rights of all people without discrimination. These rights are inherent to all human beings and are interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible. The UDHR addresses a comprehensive range of economic, social, cultural, political, and civil rights. Specifically, Article 25 of the UDHR refers to the human right to an adequate standard of living. The United Nations further defines adequacy of housing, but the term lends itself to subjectivity. Most scholars agree that housing must be habitable and comply with health and safety standards to be considered adequate (Thiele 72).

The existence of this human right is not enough, however. States have an obligation towards meeting the human right to safe and sanitary housing (Kabir 98). In order to do so, policy must support this right. Surprisingly, the U.S. Constitution does not explicitly state the right to housing (Foscarinis 37). However, there is some federal policy that supports this human right. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was signed into law in 1987 to address the human right to safe and sanitary housing in the United States. This federal act provided the structure for homeless services and programs to be administered at the local level (McKinney-Vento Act).

Implementation

While the human right to safe and sanitary housing exists through international treaties and national policies, the actualization of this right on the ground is far from sufficient. Housing units in Mendocino County that are in multi-unit structures equate to only 13 percent, which is well below the California's state average of about 30 percent (US Census Bureau). Affordable housing, which is generally defined as spending no more than one third of household income on housing (HUD.gov), is over 55 percent for the county as a whole. However, over 80 percent of 15-24 year old renters in Mendocino County spend more than a third of their income on housing (US Census Bureau). Low-income housing units are very limited in number in Mendocino County as well. This trend is not unique to Mendocino County. In fact, over the past twenty years, very few public housing units have been built in the U.S. and several federal housing programs have been significantly reduced in funding or cut all together (Gomez 107).

Effects of Housing

Most scholars agree that adequate housing is intertwined with many other aspects of life. Having a secure place to live allows individuals to maintain physical and mental health, wellbeing, and overall quality of life (Kabir 98). Specifically, having adequate housing affects one's ability to gain and keep employment, enables education, reduces violence, and fosters social relationships (Gomez). Beyond individual health and wellbeing, adequate housing affects community health to a great degree as well (Thiele 714).

For societies that lack the right to housing, many implications are seen. Homelessness, high levels of housing unaffordability, limited security of tenancy, and housing stress, insecurity, and health issues are all characteristics of the human right to safe and sanitary housing not being properly met (Morris). Homeless rights advocacy groups have been working for years to put a homeless bill of rights into law in California. Currently, this bill of rights is being debated in the state legislature as Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5). The homeless bill of rights attempts to secure the following rights for people in California who are homeless:

- Freedom from discrimination based on homeless status
- Property rights
- Access to public space
- Right to safety
- Right to engage in life sustaining activities
- Right to privacy/confidentiality of housing status, poverty status, and health status
- Right to counsel

If passed, this bill would give residents in California who are homeless the legal right to sleep in cars that are legally parked, to receive benefits through public programs, to receive legal counsel when cited, even for infractions, and to possess personal property on public space. The bill also means officials could not force people who are homeless into shelters or social service programs (Sanders 1).

AB 5 also offers its own definition of homeless, which attempts to create a state standard. It defines the homeless as

“those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and who have a primary nighttime residence in a shelter, on the street, in a vehicle, in an enclosure or structure that is not fit for human habitation, sub-standard apartments, dwellings, doubled up temporarily, or who are staying in transitional housing programs. This includes anyone staying in residential hotels without tenancy rights, and families with children staying in residential hotels whether or not they have tenancy rights” (AB 5).

This definition encompasses more people than the other commonly used definitions and gives a more accurate picture of people who experience homelessness.

In order to combat the limited right to safe and sanitary housing, a holistic approach must be taken. Focusing only on providing a roof over heads is not enough. Individuals have the right to live somewhere in security, peace, and dignity (Gomez 3). Safe and sanitary housing and an adequate standard of living is much more than just a physical residence.

Chapter III RESEARCH METHODS

This project poses three research questions: Is there a high rate of homelessness among TAY in Mendocino County? If so, why? And, how can the county as a whole decrease homelessness and housing instability for young people in the area? In order to answer these questions, this study draws upon review of local, public data, focus group discussions and surveys with local transitional age youth, and interviews with social service providers. The following sections outline the steps taken and methods used in this study.

Institutional Review Board Protocol

Illinois State University's policies and procedures regarding research with human subjects were reviewed by the key researcher, who also completed an extensive training on the protection of such participants in research. Based on these policies, a protocol of the research plan was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review. The protocol outlined research methods to be used to compile the assessment. It included the populations to be included in the research, how participants would be recruited and used in the study, and any foreseen risks or benefits for participation. The protocol also included documents to obtain consent for participants. As mandated by the University's IRB, the key researcher informed potential participants about the objectives of the project, sought their consent, informed them of their rights, and assured them that all

participation was voluntary. Potential participants were made aware that they could decline participation or withdraw participation at any time without penalty. Survey participants were assured anonymity while focus group and interview participants were assured confidentiality.

Review of Local and Public Data

A review of existing public information occurred in order to support this research project. Knowledge gained from this review was used to support findings of other research methods.

Focus Groups

Two separate focus groups were held as part of this research project. The first focus group was conducted on February 21, 2013 at the Arbor on Main Youth Resource Center in Ukiah, California. It included eight youth participants, five females and three males, between the ages of 18-24. The second focus group occurred on March 20, 2013 at the Laytonville Healthy Start Family Resource Center in Laytonville, California. It included six participants, five females and one male, between the ages of 18-24. Youth were recruited through flyers posted at each center and word of mouth. Each focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes. Each group of youth was presented with a set of five questions to guide and facilitate discussion. The questions included:

- Is there a high level of TAY homelessness in Mendocino County?
- Why do you think that is?
- Is there a lot of assistance specifically for TAY in Mendocino County? How effective is it? How can it be improved?
- Does homelessness affect TAY in achieving their personal goals? Is safe and sanitary/clean housing necessary for TAY to succeed?
- What would you like to be different for TAY in Mendocino County?

After each focus group occurred, discussion notes, taken by the key researcher, were compiled and common themes along with unique ideas were noted. These notes are explained more in the “Research Findings” section of this paper.

Agency Representatives Interviews

Twelve representatives from 11 social service agencies throughout the county, who are community stakeholders in the area of homelessness, participated in interviews with the key researcher. The key researcher identified several local agencies that serve the homeless population throughout the county. The agencies were contacted directly with an IRB-approved script. Usually the agency identified which employee would be best for an interview. Interview participation was completely voluntary. Potential participants were informed of the project’s objectives, their rights and risks of involvement, and made aware they could decline or withdraw their participation at anytime without penalty. Once consent was obtained, agency representatives were asked a series of seven questions and participated in a discussion with the key researcher. They were also asked to share any reports their agency produced. The seven questions included:

- In what capacity do you serve the homeless population in Mendocino County?
- About what percent of your cliental is transitional age youth, 18-24 year olds?
- Does your organization have modified services specifically for this population?
- What do you see as the main cause(s) of homeless among TAY in Mendocino County?
- In your opinion, what are the effects of homelessness on youth?
- Do you think Mendocino County needs more resources and support for young people who experience homelessness? If so, what are your suggestions?
- How can the county as a whole decrease housing instability and homelessness for TAY?

Representatives from the following agencies participated in this study.

- Buddy Eller Center/Ford Street Project
- Community Development Commission of Mendocino County
- Hospitality Center & Shelter
- Laytonville Healthy Start Family Resource Center
- Mendocino County Office of Education
- Mendocino County Youth Project/Transitional Living Program
- Nuestra Alianza de Willits Family Resource Center
- Redwood Children's Services/ Arbor on Main Youth Resource Center & Transitions (Housing Program)
- Safe Passage Family Resource Center
- Ukiah Community Center
- Willits Food Bank

Like the focus groups, after each interview occurred, discussion notes were compiled and common themes along with unique ideas were noted.

Surveys

In order to assess the specific causes and effects of homelessness among transitional age youth in Mendocino County, a survey was designed and approved by the IRB. A copy of the survey can be found under Appendix A. At-risk youth, ages 18-

24, were targeted for this survey. Any youth between those ages that visited the Arbor on Main Youth Resource Center in Ukiah, California in February or March of 2013 were asked directly by the key researcher if they were willing to complete a survey.

Additionally, at-risk youth, between the ages of 18-24, who visited the Laytonville Healthy Start Family Resource Center in Laytonville, California on March 20, 2013 were asked by the key researcher to complete a survey. All youth had the option of declining or ending participation at any time. Fifty-one surveys were completed in total. The survey asked 16 questions and gave youth the option of providing additional comments about young people who experience homelessness in Mendocino County.

After all surveys were completed, the key researcher compiled responses, made correlations, and noted additional responses.

Chapter IV RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research findings include responses to surveys completed by transitional age youth, discussions among focus groups with TAY participants, and answers to interview questions with social service providers. The information gathered attempts to answer the question of whether or not the human right to safe and sanitary is being met for transitional age youth in Mendocino County. If not, this project looks at why there is such a high rate of homelessness among this population and how the county as a whole can improve the way it meets this human right.

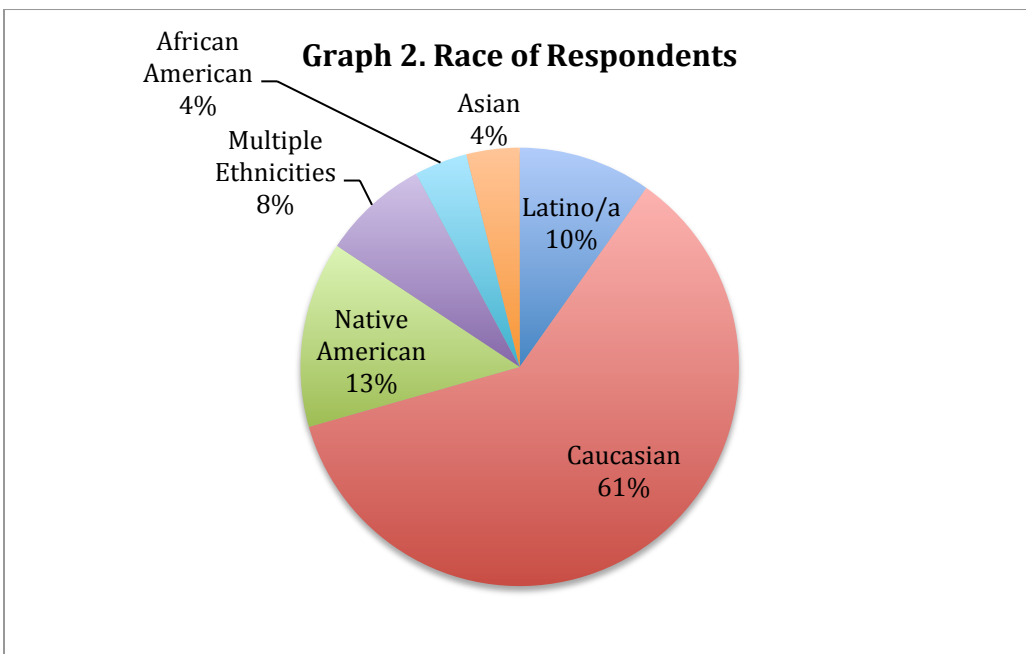
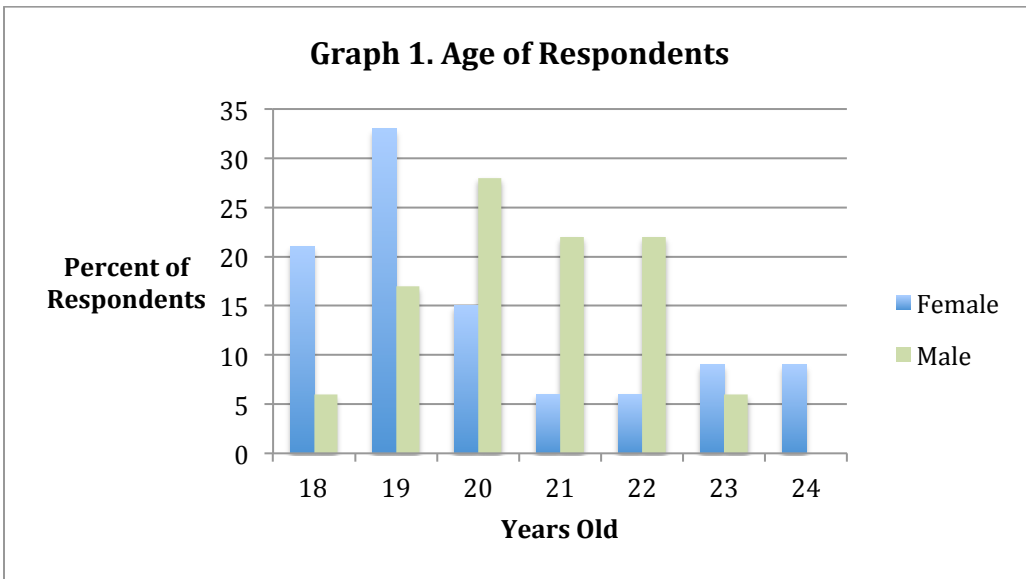
Survey Results

A 16-question survey was distributed to at-risk, transitional age youth who visited the Arbor on Main Youth Resource Center, a non-profit agency in Ukiah, California that serves as a hub to connect youth to community resources and aid in their transition to adulthood, in the months of February and March 2013. It was also distributed to transitional age youth who visited Laytonville Healthy Start Family Resource Center, a similar agency that serves people of all ages, in Laytonville, California on March 20, 2013. A total of 51 surveys were completed.

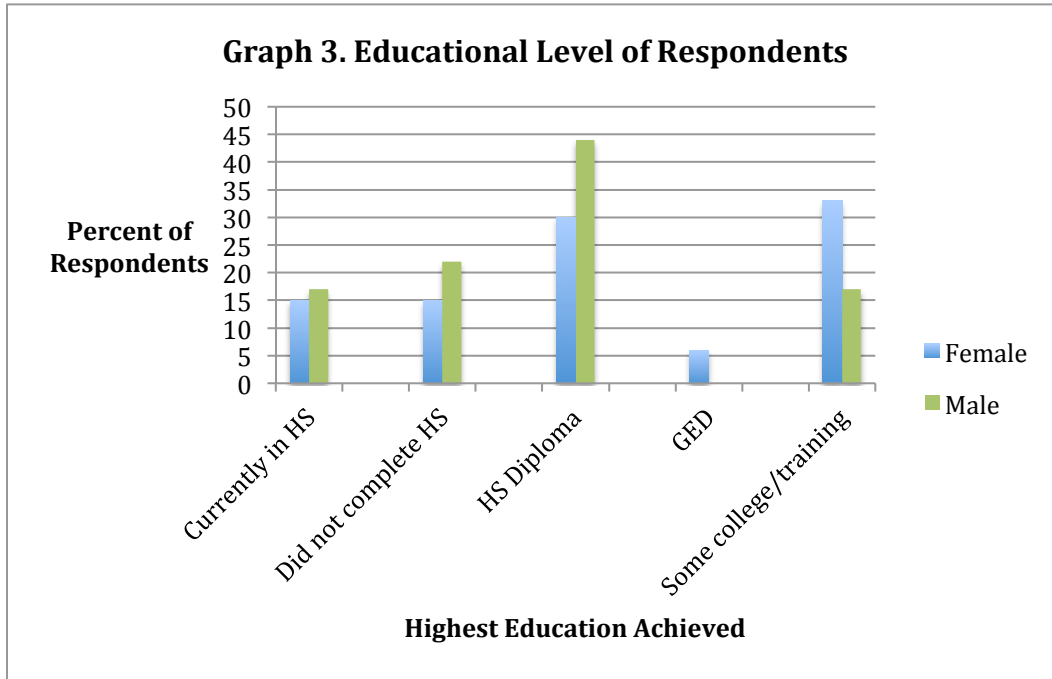
Respondent Demographics

Of the 51 respondents, 18 were male and 33 were female. Ages varied between 18 and 24, with the highest concentration of respondents being 19 years old.

Respondents' racial background was diverse as well. Both demographics are illustrated in the graphs below.



Most of the youth respondents had either a high school diploma or GED or some college or vocational training. Educational levels, for males versus females, are illustrated below.

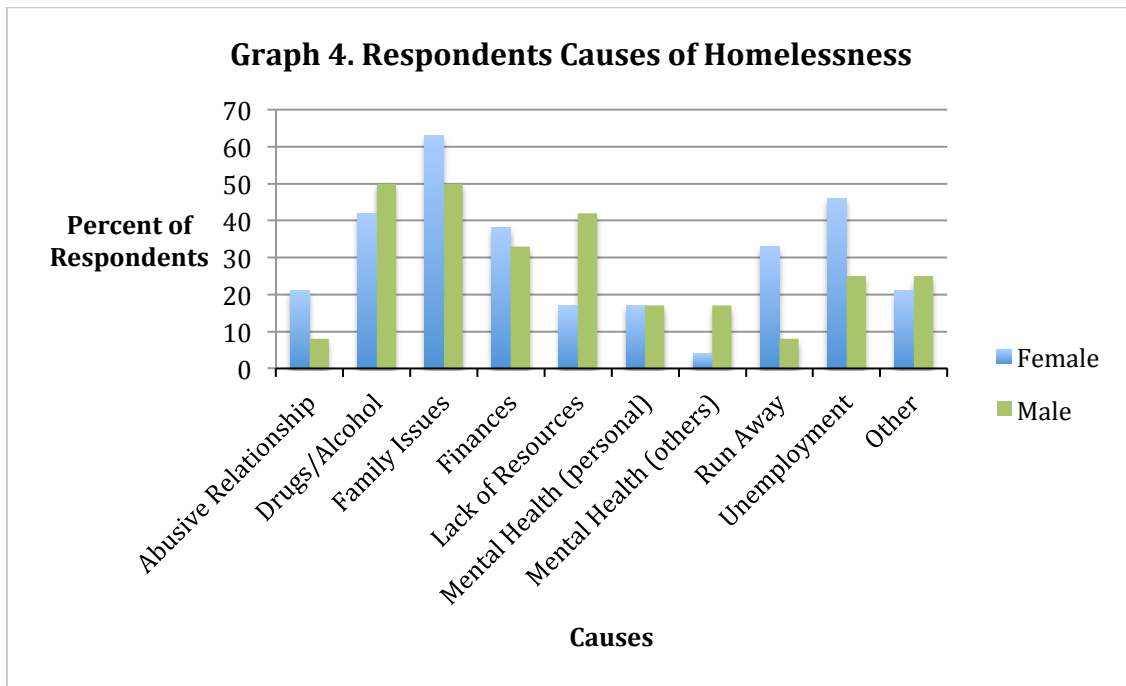


Forty-one survey respondents were residents of Ukiah. Six respondents were residents of Laytonville. One respondent was a resident of Talmage, one a resident of Point Arena, one a resident of Redwood Valley, and one a resident of Philo, all areas of Mendocino County. About three fourths of respondents reported living in Mendocino County for over five years. One respondent reported living in the county for less than a month, two reported living in the county for three months to one year, and nine respondents reported living in Mendocino County for one to five years.

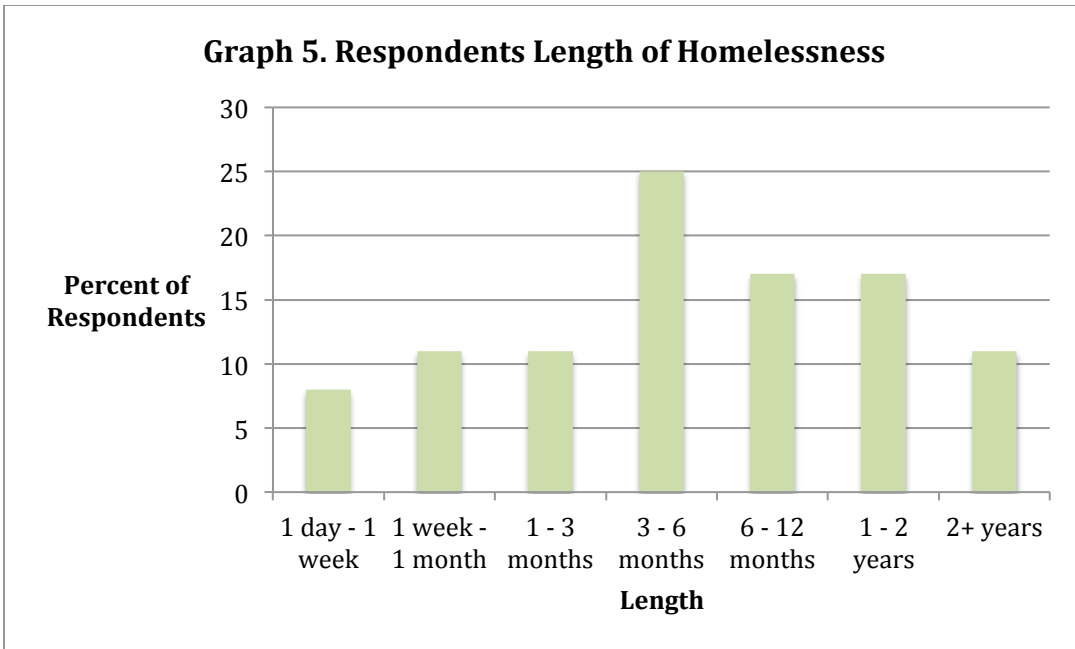
Respondents' Experience with Homelessness

Over 70 percent of respondents reported having experienced homelessness sometime. Of the approximate 30 percent who responded that they never experienced homelessness, 80 percent reported their past and current housing to be safe and sanitary.

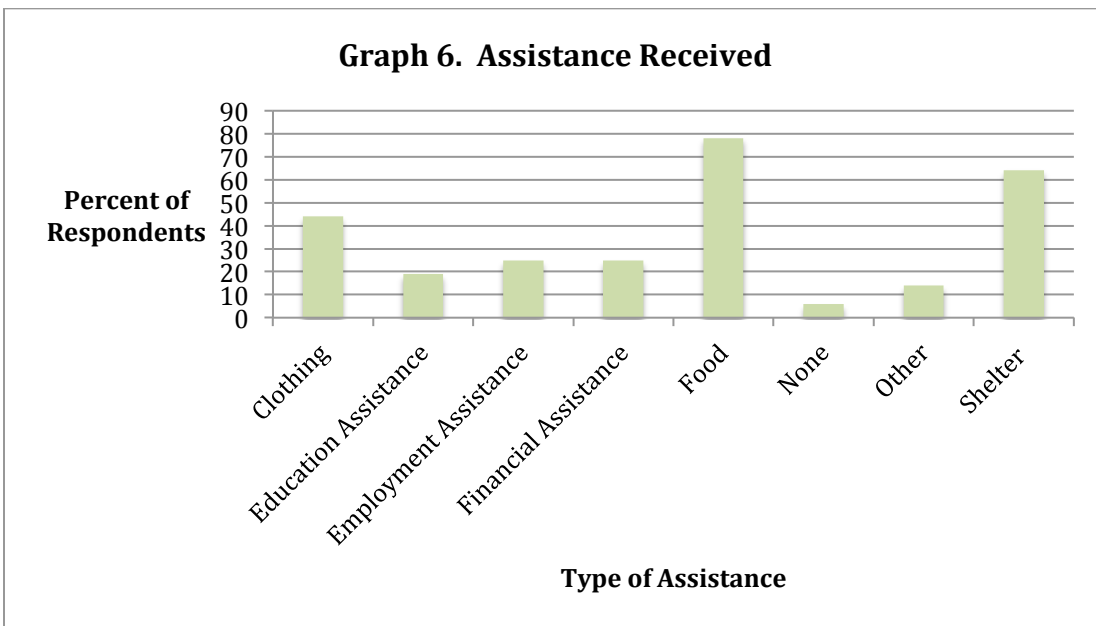
The reported causes of homelessness varied. For females, the main cause of homelessness indicated was family issues. For males, the main cause of homelessness indicated was drugs and alcohol use as well as family issues. Respondents' noted causes of homelessness are displayed below.



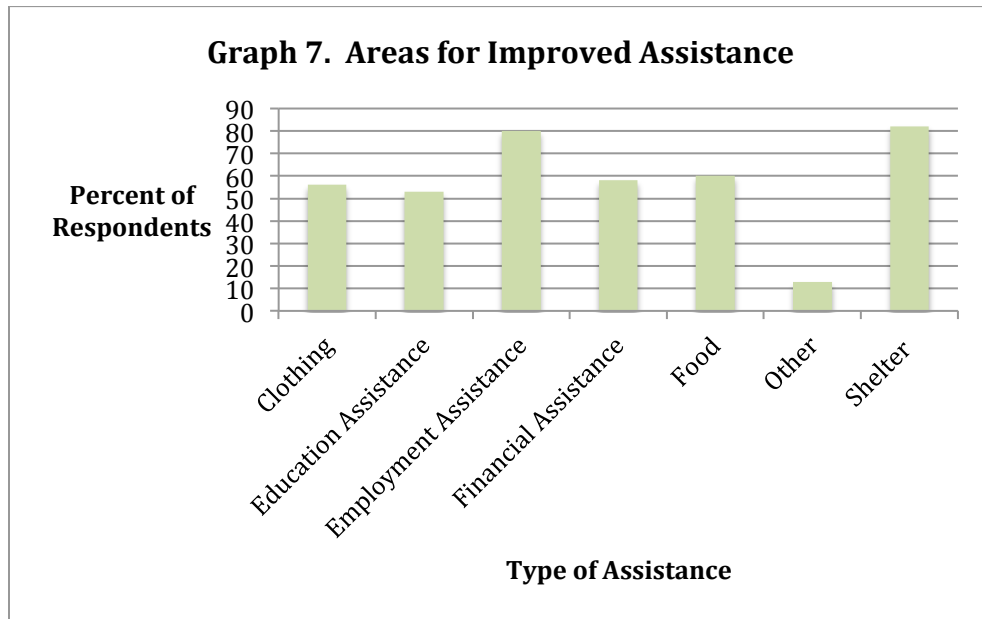
Youth responses to the length of their most recent experience with homelessness varied. The most frequent response was three to six months.



Of the youth that responded yes to having experienced homelessness, 82 percent reported seeking assistance for their situation. The type of assistance received varied, with food being the most frequent type of assistance received followed closely by shelter.



For respondents who indicated they received assistance for their homelessness, 71 percent stated that the assistance was age appropriate. Eighty-six percent indicated that the assistance they received was helpful. When asked if Mendocino County needs more resources and support for young people who experience homelessness, 94 percent of respondents said yes. The types of additional/improved resources needed in Mendocino County for young people who are homeless, as expressed by survey participants, are displayed below. Shelter and employment assistance were the most frequently indicated types of additional assistance needed or assistance needing improvement.



The last question of the survey gave respondents an opportunity to provide additional comments about young people who experience homelessness in Mendocino County. Twenty-one of the 51 respondents provided a comment. Please see Appendix B for these responses.

Focus Group Findings

In both focus groups, youth overwhelmingly agreed that Mendocino County had a high rate of homelessness among their age group compared to other areas. This was especially true after participants were introduced to the definition of homelessness that was used for this research project, which was “unable to get or keep regular, safe, secure, adequate housing.” The expanded definition encompasses many more youth than traditional definitions, including those considered “couch surfers” or those with unstable housing situations. Participants responded that any youth could become homeless at some point in their transitional age years due to various causes of instability and that many had friends who stayed in shelters.

Youth reported that a high rate of homelessness existed among their peers for many reasons. Some youth do not want to live with their families and want to party, while others do not have any family. Participants also noted that many youth’s parents used drugs, and they did not want to be around that environment. Others stated that early pregnancies were often an issue for housing instability. One youth noted that many parents are no longer teaching independent living skills and parent/child relationships are diminishing.

When asked if there was enough assistance specifically for TAY in Mendocino County, participants’ responses varied. Youth in the Ukiah focus group tended to note that there was more assistance than in other areas of the county. Youth in Laytonville noted that there was virtually no assistance for TAY in their area. Overall, most youth agreed that resources of all types are limited in such a rural area. Youth noted that

housing resources for TAY only benefited a small portion of the population because of their requirements (i.e. former foster youth, young parent, mental health issues). Youth noted that many of their peers relied on friends for assistance but hoped the community could come together to better serve transitional age youth. One youth noted that if the state and county had more money, there would be more transitional housing programs for youth.

Youth expressed that being without housing absolutely affects a young person's ability to achieve personal goals. One youth stated that having a home base is crucial for organization and stability. Others noted that when trying to get employment, young people are already at a disadvantage with lack of experience. This leads to low levels of self-esteem and being homeless as well gives transitional age youth more reason to lack confidence. One participant noted that hardship can become a comfort zone to some people, and getting out of the routine of emotional distress can be very difficult and unsettling for youth. This is one reason why some youth become complacent with their situations.

Several participants noted that they want more jobs to be available for young people in Mendocino County. Also, many youth wanted to see an increase and expansion of services for their age group. Additionally, one youth noted that he did not understand the logic of homelessness being illegal. He would like to see the laws and policies surrounding the illegality of not having a residence changed.

Interview Findings

About half of interviewees from various social service agencies reported that their organization did not have modified or specific services for transitional age youth. Interviewees stated that there were many causes of homelessness among TAY in the area. The main causes expressed, from their perspectives, were:

- Lack of jobs
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of education (including self-sufficiency/independent living skills)
- Dysfunctional families and foster care system
- Poverty
- Culture of drug and alcohol use
- Mental health issues
- Lack of priorities and motivation

The main effects of homelessness on transitional age youth stated in interviews were:

- Social stigma and feeling left out
- Trauma (even Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and mistrust
- Sense of being lost
- Inability for daily living skills
- Continued poverty
- Unintended babies
- Lack of security
- Damage to psyche/self esteem
- Loss of hope
- Poor health

All interview participants agreed that Mendocino County needs more resources for young people who experience homelessness. Several participants noted that more jobs and training opportunities must be available for youth throughout the county. Several participants also stated that more funding for housing programs is key to decreasing homelessness for TAY. One participant specifically noted that the County

could provide programs through Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing funds to help. Continuing and increasing funding for mental health services and access to drug treatment programs as well was noted as a significant way to reduce youth homelessness and housing instability. One participant stated that addressing the key causes of homelessness, like poverty and drug use, rather than the effects was most important. One agency representative noted that the community must “see TAY as a resource, not a problem.” She believed that finding something for youth to do (such as California Conservation Corps or Youth Build) would give youth a better chance at learning to support themselves and give them something they can offer to the community. Providing housing and education together to give youth a foundation is key. She also noted that bringing about more awareness of transitional age youth as a distinct population group would help.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results of the survey, focus group discussions, and interview answers provided significant findings for this research project. Discussion and analysis of those findings grouped into common themes follow.

High Rate of Homelessness Among Transitional Age Youth

Participants in this research project overwhelmingly agreed that Mendocino County had a high rate of homelessness among transitional age youth compared to other areas. Mendocino County is unique in that it is home to a large transient population. Because the county is part of the Emerald Triangle, a tri-county area in northern California with the largest marijuana producing economies in the nation, its population often swells with young travelers. This increased population of homeless youth puts an additional strain on resources.

Limited Resources in Rural Area

The rural and vast geography of Mendocino County that physically separates communities and the small population size of just over 85,000 residents make resources for young people who experience homelessness hard to come by. While there are housing resources for homeless youth in the area, they are tied to specific populations and centralized in one area. Housing programs are available to youth who are

parenting, have open mental health cases, or were formerly in foster care. However, there is a much larger population of homeless youth than those specific programs serve. Besides housing programs for homeless youth, youth services in general are limited. This is especially apparent in outlying areas of the county. Ukiah, Willits, and Fort Bragg, while still restricted in general, are able to offer more resources to transitional age youth because they have the highest concentration of population and as a result have more funding available. Outlying communities lack resources for this population significantly more. There is also an inability for residents to walk to social services and a lack of well functioning public transportation to get them there. More isolated areas, such as the northern part of the county, have even smaller populations and sources of funding. Youth in those areas find that they and their peers experience immense idleness.

Drug/Alcohol Abuse

Many transitional age youth suffer from drug and alcohol abuse. Because there are limited resources and opportunities for young people, many youth experience immense boredom, which often leads to unhealthy behaviors like drug and alcohol abuse. Selling drugs is often one of a very few sources of income for young people in the area. Additionally, drug treatment services are extremely limited in Mendocino County. Most treatment facilities are out of county, and often time youth only access them after going to jail and being mandated to attend rehabilitation.

Unintended Pregnancies

While most transitional age youth are not considered teens, pregnancy in this population is still an issue. High rates of unintended pregnancies and births exist. Often, transitional age youth have no reliable way of supporting children through their own means. More and more young parents are relying on public assistance to provide for their children. This exacerbates and continues a cycle of poverty, which many TAY themselves were brought up in. Additionally, it is very rare for transitional age youth parents to stay together or even parent together. This also contributes to the breakdown of functional family units, which is noted in more detail below.

No Job Opportunities and Lack of Affordable Housing

High rates of unemployment and limited job opportunities affect transitional age youth and contribute to their homelessness. With limited number of employment opportunities, young people often compete for jobs with older, more experienced adults. Even if they do obtain employment, it rarely pays a living wage. Without steady, reliable income many youth find they are not able to support themselves and often turn to illegal forms of income. Similarly, education, in order to obtain better-paying employment, is not incentivized. Youth can more easily get income through the marijuana industry without having to invest years of training and thousands of dollars into education.

Affordable housing units in Mendocino County are very limited as well. Often individuals and families are on waiting lists for years before they obtain low-income

housing. Additionally, there are many expensive barriers to building homes and residential properties that prohibit people and companies from building more housing units in the area. Infrastructure is severely lacking to assist those who would like to build housing units in certain parts of the county.

Breakdown of Functional Family Units

Many youth lack self-sufficiency and independent living skills due to a lack of positive role models in their lives. Families are more and more breaking down and being headed by single parents, often unstable themselves. Poverty and drug and alcohol abuse is, unfortunately, common for many families in this area. For many youth, growing up without a role model to learn positive behavior from is detrimental to their future.

Additionally, the foster care system is lacking support for youth. In many cases, there are not enough foster parents to take in children and youth. Independent living skills are not learned. When they age out of foster care, many youth have nowhere to go or lack the skills needed to support themselves.

Serious Effects of Homelessness on Youth

The effects of homelessness on transitional age youth are extreme. Many youth experience trauma in their lives that have caused them or contributed to their homelessness. These experiences often lead to issues of mistrust and cause barriers in

their lives. The effects of their homelessness often cause them to be uncomfortable with or even against seeking assistance.

For many homeless youth, the lack of security and safety in their lives does damage to their psyche. They suffer from a feeling of being unable to escape themselves or their situation often leading to serious mental health issues.

So many of the causes, effects, and issues of homelessness among transitional age youth in Mendocino County are inter-related. However, it is clear that drugs and alcohol use is a huge contributing factor to youth homelessness in the area. Family issues, which are a complex area of problem, play a large role as well. Youth are limited by the opportunities in a rural setting and see additional forms of shelter and employment assistance as avenues for help. A conclusion and several recommendations for decreasing homelessness and housing instability for TAY in Mendocino County follow.

Chapter VI CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on information gathered from public data, surveys, focus groups, and interviews in this research project, an assessment can be made. With over 70 percent of survey respondents reporting that they experienced homelessness, several main factors, such as family issues, drug and alcohol use, and unemployment, identified as causes of housing instability, and the serious effects of homelessness on this population identified, a conclusion is evident. The human right to safe and sanitary housing for transitional age youth in Mendocino County is not being adequately met. A high rate of homelessness among this population and limited avenues for assistance is evident.

Several community members, including youth and social service providers, contributed significant insight into improving how the human right to safe and sanitary housing for transitional age youth is met in Mendocino County.

“Seeing Youth As A Resource, Not A Problem”

An attitude shift in how the community views transitional age youth is necessary. As stated by one interviewee, community members need to start “seeing youth as a resource, not a problem.” Communities should recognize youth for their potential, skills, and remarkable resiliency (Aledort et al 9). Not all young adults are sources of problems, and when guided correctly, they are huge resources. Youth need to be given meaningful ways to contribute to their communities and be included in decision-making

processes that affect their lives. Additionally, tapping into youth's potential through positive mentorship is key in supporting youth through transition to adulthood.

Increased Recognition of Transitional Age Youth As a Distinct Population

Based on recent research studies, it is now known that brains continue to fully develop until age 25. Society cannot expect youth to be fully functioning adults at age 18. Without complete brain development, consequential thinking is more difficult for young people and risky behavior is more common (Aledort et al 5). Youth often do not have the capacity to be completely responsible, emotionally-developed adults. Keeping this in mind is imperative when social service agencies are serving the TAY population. Often, transitional age youth fall through cracks between child and adult systems of care. Paying special attention to this transition and offering peer support is critical.

Better Networking Among Social Service Agencies

Because of Mendocino County's geography, which includes several hills and valleys that separate areas without consistent and reliable public transportation, communities become isolated. There are many agencies serving the homeless population throughout the county, and transitional age youth could benefit from these services. It is crucial that agencies are closely connected and aware of what is available for their clients. This would cut down on unnecessary duplication and result in more referrals. Agencies should also consider participating in the county's Continuum of Care (CoC) group. The CoC is a group mandated by the Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD), where homeless-serving agencies throughout the county convene monthly to maintain and improve services to the homeless in Mendocino County.

More Funding for Mental Health Services

It has become common knowledge that mental health breaks first occur in teens and young adults. Left untreated, these illnesses can have lasting and devastating impacts on the lives of youth. More funds and support need to be directed to mental health treatment and prevention services. Helping youth in their most fragile state is an investment in their lifelong health. Youth that are supported with these services have better chances of recovery and positive outcomes in all aspects of their lives including stability, self-sufficiency, and independent living.

Day Shelters/Hygiene Centers

While Mendocino County has two shelters, they are for overnight use only, and guests must be out of the facility by 8am until 5pm. This leaves many homeless people with nowhere to go for hours each day. Many youth have expressed the need for day shelters; places they can go to bathe, do laundry, use the restroom, and the like. The current AB 5 supports this idea, and the bill aims to make 24-hour access to clean water and safe restrooms law. However, it would not require cities and counties to add more facilities (AB 5). Day shelters in local communities would give youth who experience homelessness a home base and a place where they can clean up and feel confident about themselves.

More Accurately Including Youth in the County's Biannual Point in Time Homeless Count

The Point in Time Homeless Count is done every other year throughout the county as mandated by HUD. The most recently released data from Mendocino County's Point in Time Homeless Count indicates that there were 1,456 homeless individuals throughout the county in 2011, which seems low based on the key researcher's direct observations. However, the numbers coming out of this count directly result in the amount of funds received for homeless services. Based on the key researcher's first-hand experience with Mendocino County's Point in Time Homeless Count and community opinions, it is evident that transitional age youth are not being accurately included in this count.

In order to better capture this population, adjustments need to be made in the Point in Time Count. Including more homeless youth participants, providing incentives for youth to be counted, and exploring the possibility of conducting a dedicated count of homeless youth on a separate occasion to be included in the overall Point in Time Count are some options for improving this inaccuracy (Auerswald et al 2). Additionally, expanding the traditional definition of homeless to include couch surfers and youth with unstable housing situations would benefit this population greatly

Shelter Specifically for TAY with County-wide Transportation

A homeless shelter, specifically for youth ages 18-24, would benefit TAY in Mendocino County. Allowing youth who are homeless to be served in one facility with only their peers would make for a comfortable setting. Additionally, this shelter must

provide transportation throughout the county to serve all those in need, especially in outlying areas. Providing transportation to and from multiple locations throughout the county on a weekly basis would be extremely beneficial.

Exploring the possibility and implementation of these recommendations would be a beneficial start for TAY in Mendocino County. Above all, community members must be mindful of the, sometimes tumultuous, journey from child to adult and support youth the very best they can.

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7 *Are you or have you ever been homeless?*
(Homeless: unable to get or keep regular, safe, secure, adequate housing)

Yes _____
No _____

8 *If no: Would you consider your past and current housing to be safe and sanitary/clean?*

Yes _____
No _____

If yes: What is/was the cause of your homelessness? (Check all that apply.)

- Abusive relationship _____
- Drugs/alcohol _____
- Family issues _____
- Finances _____
- Lack of resources _____
- Mental health issues (personal) _____
- Mental health issues (of others) _____
- Run away _____
- Unemployment _____
- Other (Please explain.) _____
- _____
- _____

How long did your most recent homelessness last?

- 1 day - 1 week _____
- 1 week - 1 month _____
- 1-3months _____
- 3-6months _____
- 6-12 months _____
- 1-2 years _____
- 2+ years _____

Did you seek assistance?

Yes _____

No _____

What kind of assistance did you receive? (Check all that apply.)

Clothing _____

Education assistance _____

Employment assistance _____

Financial _____

Food _____

Shelter _____

None _____

Other (Please explain.) _____

Did you feel the assistance was appropriate for your age?

Yes _____

No _____

Was the assistance you received helpful?

Yes _____

No _____

N/A _____

9

Do you think Mendocino County needs more resources and support for young people who experience homelessness?

Yes _____

No _____

10 *If yes: What additional/improved resources are needed in Mendocino County for young people who are/have been homelessness?*

Clothing	_____
Education assistance	_____
Employment assistance	_____
Financial	_____
Food	_____
Shelter	_____
None	_____
Other (Please explain.)	_____

11 *Please provide any additional comments about young people who experience homelessness in Mendocino County.*

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B*Additional Comments from TAY Survey Respondents*

- Thank you Mendocino County.
- Most are just young kids who want to have fun and don't work too hard for things. A lot of youth just never had a successful role model.
- It's cold blooded.
- Very little job opportunities, people like adults, look down on us or our families (main cause).
- Too many resources require you to be 18+ but what about youth who have been kicked out or forced to provide for themselves? More services are needed for youth under 18.
- We need to do activities that raise money for homeless young parents and teens as well as better shelter.
- Homeless youth feel more stressed and often go crazy!
- I was a minor living with my mom when we were homeless and the county helped us a lot. There is a lot the county will help with if you actually ask for help.
- Arbor is great!
- They seem to lose faith and give up too easily.
- It is very difficult especially for moms with children. I wish they would take some of the abandoned houses and fix them up and make a shelter specifically for young moms with children.
- I think Mendocino is full of anti-corporate people so a lot prefer to not support a system they don't believe in. Those people, which I think we always need as a society, should be offered clothing and food to keep doing what they're doing.
- I find the Arbor to be a very useful resource. I feel if they had more places like it homelessness would fade.
- There is no job opportunity or any thing to do so people are becoming homeless in this county. Young people really need some thing to do.
- There should be a shelter or some type of place. We shouldn't have to rely on individuals to help. We should hold fundraisers to help homeless people find shelter.
- They get into drugs because of nothing to do.
- It's sad there are too many young kids that are homeless. They just need more help and jobs.
- I think that the more people/youth that become homeless, the less will be done because by the time people notice the increase there will be nothing to do.
- I think they need more shelter assistance for a larger age range than 18-21 (TLP).
- There are resources, just not enough. I think there should be more places like TLP. I think there should also be a homeless shelter for young kids so that they are not mixed in with old, drunk bums at the shelter we do have.

- When young parents are in or at the shelter, I feel like that they should get special attention to their specific needs.