Connection between Child Welfare Services Involvement and Youth Homelessness
Introduction

• Evidence of a link between youth homelessness and child welfare services involvement comes from studies of young people who aged out of foster care

• Less is known about the risk of homelessness among young people with a history of child welfare services involvement who did not “age out”
Why Does Housing Matter?

- Homelessness or unstable housing impedes efforts to become self-sufficient through education and employment
  
- Other aspects of well-being including physical and mental health may also be compromised
  - High risk of physical/sexual victimization
  - Lack of access to health care services
## Barriers to Safe, Stable & Affordable Housing

| Individual youth characteristics | • Inadequate income and assets  
|                                 | • Lack of human and social capital  
|                                 | • Physical, mental, & behavioral health problems  
|                                 | • Early parenthood  
|                                 | • Criminal record  
|                                 | • No family safety net  
| Child welfare system characteristics | • Inadequate independent living preparation  
|                                 | • Lack of transitional assistance  
|                                 | • Lack of cross-system coordination  
| Housing market conditions | • Lack of affordable housing  
|                                 | • Long waiting lists for housing assistance  
|                                 | • Discrimination  |
Housing Outcomes of Former Foster Youth

• Studies have found rates of homelessness ranging from 11% to 36% and rates of couch surfing or doubling up ranging from 25% to 50%.

• 24% of the 19 year old former foster youth who completed NYTD outcome surveys in 2013 reported being homeless at some point in the past 2 years.
**Midwest Study**

- Longitudinal study of young people transitioning out of foster care in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2002–03</td>
<td>17 or 18</td>
<td>732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>23 or 24</td>
<td>602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2010–11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cumulative Percentage Ever Homeless by Age 26

* Slept in a place where people weren't meant to sleep, or slept in a homeless shelter, or didn't have a regular residence in which to sleep

Dworsky, Napolitano & Courtney (2013)
Predictors of Homelessness

- Each delinquent behavior
- Being male
- Mental health symptoms
- History of physical abuse
- Ran away at least once
- Each placement

*Tentative evidence that close relationships with family may be protective

Dworsky, Napolitano & Courtney (2013)
Effect of Extended Foster Care on Homelessness

• Does extending care until age 21 reduce the rate of homelessness?
  • Better prepared for the transition to adulthood at age 21 due to the accumulation of human and social capital

• Variation in state policy created conditions for a natural experiment
  • Illinois youth could remain in foster care until age 21 whereas youth in Iowa and Wisconsin could not

• Extending foster care to age 21 reduces homelessness among 18 to 20 year olds but no evidence of a preventive effect once youth exited foster care at age 21
Cumulative Percentage Ever Homeless by Age 26: Illinois Compared with Iowa and Wisconsin

Dworsky, Napolitano & Courtney (2013)
Cumulative Probability of Homelessness During the First 30 Months Post-Exit

Dworsky & Courtney (2010)
Practice Implications

- Critical need for better transition planning

- Create placement options that prepare youth to find and maintain stable housing after they age out

- Provide opportunities for youth in foster care to build financial assets

- Help youth maintain relationships with family and/or develop positive relationships with other caring adults
## Typology of Housing Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single site housing</th>
<th>Scattered site housing</th>
<th>Mixture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher level of supervision and support</td>
<td>Lower level of supervision and support</td>
<td>Allows movement from one type of housing to another as needs change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most supportive services delivered on-site</td>
<td>Most supportive services delivered in the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More opportunities for community building</td>
<td>Fewer opportunities for community building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional housing only</td>
<td>May be permanent housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepping stone</td>
<td>More mainstream experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dworsky et al. (2012)
What Do We Know about Housing Programs for Former Foster Youth?

• Programs track youth characteristics, service receipt and outcomes at exit but youth are not routinely followed post-discharge

• Some housing programs have engaged in evaluation activities such as client satisfaction surveys

• Programs have not been rigorously evaluated so we don’t know if they prevent homelessness or improve other outcomes

• Methodological barriers to evaluation (e.g., sample size, randomization)

Dworsky & Dion (2014)
Youth at Risk of Homelessness Planning Grants

• ACF awarded 18 2-year planning grants in 2013

• Develop a data-driven intervention model to reduce the risk of homelessness among the most at-risk youth who are or were in foster care

• Improve outcomes in 4 domains: stable housing, permanent connections, education/employment, and social-emotional well-being

• Grantees recently applied for five 3-year implementation grants
Voices of Youth Count

- PIT counts in ~ 25 sites representing urban, suburban and rural communities to establish a reliable national RHY estimate
- Collect survey data from youth and service providers to examine how existing services align with youth needs
- Analyze existing data from schools, child welfare systems, and provider agencies
- Qualitative interviews to understand the experiences of RHY
- Literature review to identify best prevention & intervention practices
- Analysis of federal, state and local policies related to or with implications for RHY
Voices of Youth Count

• How many unaccompanied RHY are there and what are their characteristics?

• How are they faring and how do they survive?

• What factors are associated with how long or how often youth are runaways or homeless?

• What services are used by RHY and which are most likely to promote better outcomes?

• How are the experiences of RHY influenced by local, state or federal policies?
References


