



**Coalition for Juvenile Justice**

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**National Initiatives Launched to Stop Homelessness of Youth and Criminalization of Young People  
Living on the Streets**

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** - Organizations across the country are coming together to help address the often unrecognized needs of youth who are alone and without a home. These young people frequently face criminalization as a result of their situation.

Today, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) and its partners the National Network for Youth and National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families launched 'Collaborating for Change'. This initiative will bring together stakeholders from across multiple sectors to ensure that children do not become homeless as a result of their interactions with the juvenile justice system, and that communities support rather than criminalize youth.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's annual count of people living without a home in communities across the country found that 46,808 youth were living on the streets, without the care or help of their family. The U.S. Department of Education counted over 88,000 unaccompanied homeless youth in the 2013-2014 school year, the majority of which are minors. The National Alliance to End Homelessness, meanwhile, estimates that in a given year, 380,000 minors will at some point be homeless and alone, without the aid of their family.

These children, much like their adult counterparts, are often criminalized instead of being provided with the supports they need. Involvement in the juvenile justice system can also result in homelessness. The Administration for Children and Families interviewed hundreds of homeless youth age 14-21 from across the country and found that almost 44% had been in a juvenile detention center, jail, or prison. Such placements can lead to homelessness in a number of ways:

- A child who is taken out of a dysfunctional or abusive home may not be welcome or able to safely return to his family after "aging out" of foster care;

- Young people with criminal records may not be able to return home due to restrictions on their families' public housing.
- Parents may be unwilling to take children back after an arrest or stay in juvenile detention.
- Students may be placed in a detention facility or jail, where they experience disruption in their education and are unable to successfully complete an educational or vocational program, thus leading to employment difficulties and income insecurity later in life.

With the launch of Collaborating for Change CJJ and its partners plan to make these issues a thing of the past.

"Our children should not be criminalized because they lack a safe home to return to at night, food to eat, or a safe place to sleep. We at CJJ believe that through changes in policy and practice we can stop the criminalization of our most vulnerable youth, and ensure that the juvenile justice system is not a pathway to homelessness," said Lisa Pilnik, Deputy Director of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice.

"Too many young people in America experience homelessness on their own and end up in the juvenile justice system as a result of lacking access to basic needs like housing and food. NN4Y is excited to partner with CJJ on this project to promote solutions that improve existing policies and practice so that young people are provided with what they need instead of being criminalized for their life circumstances," said Darla Bardine, Executive Director of the National Network for Youth.

CJJ and NN4Y will also be collaborating with others who are undertaking similar initiatives. A Way Home America, for example, is a partnership across multiple sectors that launched recently with the goal of ending homelessness among youth and young adults in 2020. The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, meanwhile is working on a project to end the criminalization of both youth and adults who are without a home. Together, these agencies and projects hope to stem the tide on the invisible problem of children living on the streets alone and without a home.

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