

# IMPLEMENTING CHANGE:

## THE STATE ADVISORY GROUP'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING THE INTERSECTION OF HOMELESSNESS AND JUVENILE JUSTICE

Every year, an estimated one in ten young people between the ages of 18 and 25, and one in 30 young people between the ages of 13 and 17 will endure some form of homelessness while unaccompanied by a parent or guardian.<sup>1</sup> This equates to nearly 3.5 million young adults and roughly 700,000 young people under 18.<sup>2</sup> Youth experiencing homelessness are often cited, arrested, and/or incarcerated, instead of receiving the support they need. Youth may also be at greater risk of experiencing homelessness after juvenile justice involvement due to education disruption, their juvenile record and other factors. A recent study conducted by the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall, showed that among youth who said they had experienced homelessness, 46 percent had also been in a juvenile detention facility, jail, or prison, as compared to 15 percent of the general population.<sup>3</sup>

This brief was created to help State Advisory Groups (SAGs) better understand their role in addressing the intersections between juvenile justice and youth homelessness. The following principles and practice recommendations are meant to help SAGs ensure that young people do not become justice-involved because they are experiencing homelessness, and similarly

**46 PERCENT OF YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS HAVE SPENT TIME IN A JAIL, DETENTION FACILITY OF PRISON, AS COMPARED TO 15 PERCENT OF THE GENERAL POPULATION**

that they do not experience homelessness because of contact with the justice system. These recommendations are based on the Coalition for Juvenile Justice's "Principles for Change," a series of policy and practice recommendations that were



developed in conjunction with the National Network for Youth, the National League of Cities Institute For Youth, Education, & Families, and a panel of expert advisors from across the country. The Principles promote cross collaboration between local and state lawmakers, juvenile justice agencies, schools, police, State Advisory Groups (SAGs), and others to better support and serve youth, and to prevent or reduce youth homelessness. This brief outlines the Principles' application to SAGs specifically.

SAGs play a critical role in addressing the intersections between juvenile justice and youth homelessness. SAGs were established as part of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) to provide input to their states on the use of federal funds and to ensure compliance with the Act's core requirements.<sup>4</sup> SAGs can help address the intersection between youth homelessness and juvenile justice by educating state lawmakers and local agencies on the intersection between these two issues, undertaking research, and partnering with organizations to ensure that youth are not criminalized for a lack of stable housing and that they do not experience homelessness when exiting the justice system. We encourage SAGs to take the following steps, as recommended in the "Principles for Change":



## PRINCIPLES FOR CHANGE

**“ENSURE THAT THE LAWS AND POLICIES IN YOUR JURISDICTION DO NOT LEAD YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS TO BE CITED, ARRESTED, OR CHARGED WITH SURVIVAL ACTS OR ‘QUALITY OF LIFE’ OFFENSES.”**

SAGs should work to educate their governor and state legislators about the ways juvenile justice and youth homelessness are intertwined, for example by sharing the research findings discussed above.

**“ENSURE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE DIVERTED FROM JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT WHENEVER POSSIBLE, AND THAT ANY DIVERSION PROGRAMS OR SERVICES ARE APPROPRIATELY TAILORED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.”**

SAGs should prioritize funding for diversion programs and services that meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and work with law enforcement to ensure that young people are not arrested and charged for behaviors that stem from their lack of secure housing.

SAGs should educate funding recipients about the need to modify interventions to effectively serve transient youth. For example, electronic monitoring or other reporting mechanisms will be difficult or impossible for a young person who does not have access to a phone line or a fixed address. This could lead a young person to stay in an unsafe environment in order to be able to be in compliance. Stakeholders should ensure that youth are not excluded from community-based programs and diversion opportunities because of their housing status, inability to pay for fees, or lack of

other resources necessary to participate in alternatives to detention (e.g., a phone). Working with youth who have experienced homelessness, and the providers who serve them every day, can help justice system stakeholders identify common barriers and potential solutions, and ensure an equitable system which serves youth experiencing homelessness just as well as other youth.

### Tools for the field:

A Way Home Canada has recently released a new assessment tool to screen for youth who may be experiencing homelessness or who are vulnerable to homelessness. The tool was created specifically for youth and addresses youth from a strengths-based, resiliency perspective. In such a way it is not just a tool for assessing needs, but can also act as a door for swiftly moving youth along to the services they need. It is based on interviews with 700 youth who were experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles. For more information visit <http://awayhome.ca/2018/01/11/this-is-the-yap-tool/>.

**“WHEN JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT CANNOT BE AVOIDED, ENSURE THAT COMPREHENSIVE TRANSITION PLANNING BEGINS IMMEDIATELY AFTER –AND CONTINUES THROUGHOUT– A YOUTH’S CONFINEMENT OR PROBATION SUPERVISION.”**

State Advisory Groups should ensure that the juvenile justice agencies and community-based providers they work with prioritize transition planning.

- This planning should specifically address long-term housing stability. Agencies should not simply ask if each youth has a place to sleep the night or week they are released, but instead ensure that the youth is positioned to safely return to their homes until adulthood and/or find and keep a new place to live.
- Transition planning should include one or more backup plan(s) in case the planned living arrangements do not work out. Youth should also have a crisis plan, meaning that they know what they would do, and who to call, if they find themselves facing homelessness despite good transition planning.
- Transition plans must be individualized and address the particular needs and circumstances of young people. They should go beyond housing planning to identify and provide needed services such as therapy to address trauma, case management to help with goal setting, and educational and employment services.

- Intake assessments should be used to identify risks or concerns related to housing and other needs (e.g. mental health, substance abuse, disability). Youth should receive ongoing, research-informed, assessment, planning, and service provisions that are prioritized throughout their system involvement. As youth spend more time involved with the justice system, and as they age and have new experiences, their needs may change. They may also be more willing to share information with system professionals as relationships develop and trust grows.
- Planning should occur in partnership with families (as defined by the youth) when safely possible for the young person, and in coordination with juvenile defenders if the jurisdiction allows for post-disposition representation. This planning process should reflect the realities of young people's lives such as where and with whom they feel safest. Services should also be offered to families as appropriate.

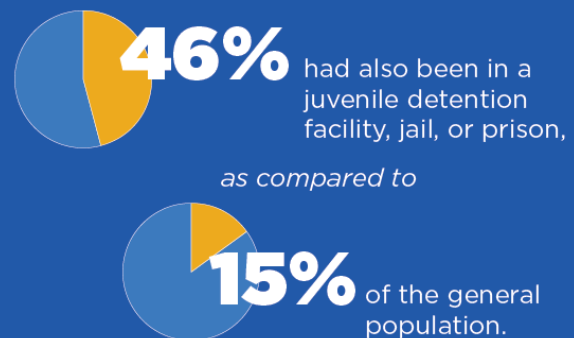
**“ENSURE YOUR COMMUNITY PROVIDES YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH RELATED SERVICES AND SUPPORTS THAT CAN HELP THEM OBTAIN AND KEEP SAFE AND STABLE HOUSING.”**

SAGs should work with state and local justice systems to ensure that youth receive aftercare services, including help with planning and connecting with resources. Resources themselves, such as any needed behavioral health treatment, vocational services, etc., should be provided and at a minimum match what is provided to youth involved with the child welfare system. These services should not be attached to court supervision. Agencies should also help fund community-based providers to support these services. One example of this is the YES (Youth Engaged in Services) program in Massachusetts, which allows youth discharged from the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services to receive services including housing (independent living), case management, secondary education, and employment services and support on a voluntary basis after their required juvenile justice involvement ends.

**“ENSURE YOUTH HELP LEAD AND SHAPE THE IDENTIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY, AND PRACTICE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN JUVENILE JUSTICE AND YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.”**

Youth collaboration is essential when creating policy that impacts young people's lives. Young people with

A recent study conducted by the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall, showed that among youth who said they had experienced homelessness,



lived experience with the justice system and those who have experienced homelessness bring vital perspective to the table. SAGs are required under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act to ensure that there is youth representation on the SAG. They should work to find youth who have lived expertise with the justice system and youth homelessness. For example, the VOICE program in Minneapolis, Minnesota is made up of girls who have been involved in the juvenile justice system. This group oversees the POWER Program<sup>5</sup> (Positive Opportunities for Women of Every Race) and provides support and education for girls who are on probation within their county.

SAGs should work to ensure that youth voice is heard when they are considering changes. This could include creating youth panels and boards to weigh in on proposals, and peer-to-peer outreach. Such engagement with youth should go beyond merely giving youth a seat at the table, but instead seek to ensure meaningful collaboration.

**“ENSURE EFFORTS PRIORITIZE LGBT/GNC<sup>6</sup> YOUTH, YOUTH OF COLOR, AND OTHER OVER-REPRESENTED POPULATIONS TO ADDRESS AND REDUCE THE DISPROPORTIONALITIES THAT EXIST IN THE POPULATIONS OF YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AND/OR INVOLVED WITH THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.”**

SAGs should ensure that the programs and services they fund, as well as their state systems, provide disaggregated data on specific sub-populations of youth at each point they are being served and engaging with the system. Individual privacy should

be protected to the greatest extent possible. In addition to looking at how many youth are involved in these systems, information is needed on how their experiences differ (e.g., which youth are more likely to be detained for the same type of offense), what their pathways into and out of systems are, as well as what services are currently available and where the gaps are. SAGs can work to improve data collection on the gender, race, and ethnicity of the juvenile justice population, including disaggregating race from ethnicity in data collection. SAGs should also assess the effectiveness and outcomes of community-based services and programs for youth of color relative to white youth, and for LGBTQ/GNC youth relative to straight and gender-conforming youth.

SAGs should enact, expand, or update comprehensive anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies, and ensure that both youth and staff are aware of and follow these policies. They should also ensure that any external partners or services for youth, including mental and physical health professionals, provide gender-and culturally-responsive services and can meet the specific needs of the youth being referred.

SAGs should collaborate with LGBTQ/GNC youth and youth of color in designing and developing programming, and encourage them to provide peer support and educational opportunities for other youth experiencing homelessness and/or involved with the juvenile justice system. Also, State Advisory Groups, their Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) committees, and other juvenile justice committees working to address DMC should consider and address issues related to homelessness based on the disparities outlined above. Due to the disparities in homelessness, achieving housing stability for youth of color should be considered a strategy for decreasing DMC in the juvenile justice system. African American youth, for example, have an 83 percent higher risk for homelessness as compared to their white peers.<sup>7</sup> Hispanic youth had a 33 percent higher risk for homelessness. Youth who had experienced homelessness, meanwhile, reported higher rates of justice involvement and detention.

**“ENSURE THAT LAW ENFORCEMENT, COURTS, SCHOOLS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS EMPLOY GENDER-RESPONSIVE, AGE- AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE TRAUMA RESPONSES WHEN WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE.”**

State Advisory Groups should provide and/or fund training on Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma, and should change their systems, policies, and practices to be more trauma-informed.

SAGs should encourage grantees to require mandatory staff training on trauma, and on how race and gender impacts services. They should also encourage grantees to provide evidence-based interventions.

**“UNDERTAKE AND FUND RESEARCH TO HELP UNDERSTAND THE ISSUE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS.”**

SAGs should partner with researchers, juvenile justice agencies, homelessness service providers and juvenile justice advocates to improve data collecting methods.

SAGs should advocate for practice and policy change based on research findings. They may also use this research to help guide funding priorities, bearing in mind that funding is needed both to spur and support innovation, and to continue expanding proven practices. They should also encourage expanded attention to these issues in any research they are currently funding (e.g., asking about youth living arrangements in current data collection efforts in juvenile justice, and asking about justice involvement in current data collection on youth homelessness). Finally, they should encourage, and provide financial support for, outcome data including suggesting that measures related to homelessness be part of programming they fund.

## CONCLUSION

SAGs can play a crucial role in ensuring that young people are not criminalized for a lack of stable housing, and that they do not experience homelessness as a result of coming into contact with the juvenile justice system. SAGs must prioritize these issue within their state. By working to educate state policy makers and current grantees about the intersections of juvenile justice and youth homelessness, SAGs can play a pivotal role in ending the overlap between youth homelessness and justice involvement.

For more information see “Addressing the Intersections of Juvenile Justice Involvement and Youth Homelessness: Principles for Change”, available at: <http://juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/ckfinder/files/FINAL%20Principles%20-%20Ons%20final.pdf>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America. Voices of Youth Count, Chapin Hall. Available at [http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall\\_VoYC\\_NationalReport\\_Final.pdf](http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_NationalReport_Final.pdf). Last accessed Jan. 23, 2018.

<sup>2</sup>Id.

<sup>3</sup>Missed Opportunities.

<sup>4</sup>To receive funding under the JJDP, states are required to: (1) ensure that young people are not incarcerated for behaviors that are illegal only because they have not yet reached the age of 18; (2) ensure that young people who are charged in juvenile court are not placed in adult facilities; (3) ensure that if young people are sight and sound separated from adult inmates; and (4) take steps to address disproportionate minority contact within their justice systems. "POWER Program". 2017. The Link.

<sup>5</sup><https://thelinkmn.org/power/>.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT), Gender

<sup>6</sup>Non-Conforming (GNC).

Chapin Hall. "Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America." (2017) Available at:

<sup>7</sup>[http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall\\_VoYC\\_NationalReport\\_Final.pdf](http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_NationalReport_Final.pdf). Last accessed April 26, 2018.

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