

Worcester Teen Housing Task Force

2009 Survey of Homeless Youth

Worcester Teen Housing Task Force Youth Survey Subcommittee: Anne Bureau, Worcester Community Connections at WCAC; Erin Burns- Maine, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance; Laurie Ross, Clark University; Hilda Ramirez, Worcester Youth Center, Steve Lundrigan, Unlocking Potentials for Growth; Maurie Bergeron, LUK Inc.; Julio Joyner and Amaryllis Chaves, The Henry Lee Willis Center; Brooke Doyle, Community Healthlink; Jeff Fogle and Meghan DePatsy, Dept. of Children and Families; Parlee Jones, Abby's House; Rosa Fernandez, UMass Memorial

Background

In 2008, a group of local providers and leaders began meeting to address the housing needs of local youth in the greater Worcester area and quickly grew into what is now known as the Worcester Teen Housing Task Force. Based on anecdotal reports from DCF workers, the Worcester Youth Center, and other local agencies, the group observed a rising number of young people were asking for help securing housing and were confused about what resources were actually available. The group compiled a list of resources available to this population and identified specific gaps in services. Through this project, the group discovered that while there were a few housing options for various specialized groups of youth (i.e., pregnant or parenting females; those in recovery from substance abuse) and case management / referral programs, there were few to no actual housing programs for youth under the age of 18 or for those age 18 years and older who did not fit into certain specialized subpopulations. The diverse set of youth-serving agencies involved in the task force expressed the many barriers that young adults were facing in trying to obtain housing, particularly those youth leaving the Department of Youth Services (DYS) or foster care system, and youth in unstable housing situations, many without sufficient income to support themselves.

The Task Force met with various city and state housing leaders to advocate for additional housing resources for teens and make sure that recent additional housing funds were spent on services relevant to their particular needs. It became clear that data was needed of the estimated number of homeless youth in the city and a suggestion to undertake a survey of all homeless youth. The Central MA Housing Alliance, which undertakes the annual point in time survey of homeless individuals in the city, suggested that we implement a point in time survey to target homeless youth and offered their assistance with the study.

Methodology

The Task Force reviewed similar studies of homeless youth including: *Clark County Homeless Youth Study* of Las Vegas, Nevada; Baltimore, MD Homeless Census 2009; Loveland, CO *Homeless Youth Point-In-Time Count/Survey Report of 2003*; *Finding Homeless Youth – Patterns Based on Geographical Area and Number of Homeless Episodes*, Los Angeles, CA.; and the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services *A Count of Homeless Youth in New York City*, March 26, 2008. The Task Force began working with Erin Burns- Maine, coordinator of CMHA’s Annual HUD Point-In-Time Count, and Professor Laurie Ross of the Community Development and Planning Department at Clark University to design and implement a survey of homeless youth in Worcester. The Task Force presented a draft of the tool to two unique focus groups of local youth to obtain their input and help us identify sites to administer the survey. To view the final one-page survey tool, please see Appendix A.

On August 26, 2009 surveys were distributed by 16 local youth programs, 9 GED/Education Sites, 7 Emergency Housing Sites, 10 Transitional Housing Sites, 2 Eating Sites, 9 Community Centers, and 3 Outreach teams. Agencies handed out the one page survey (in English and Spanish) to all youth who participated in their programs that day (participating agency list, see Appendix B). Each survey included the contact phone number to address any questions or concerns with the survey tool. In order to address concerns with duplication, each respondent answered if they already filled a survey out that day, and, if so, the duplicate survey was not counted. All surveys were marked with a site number to maintain organization once submitted to the Task Force.

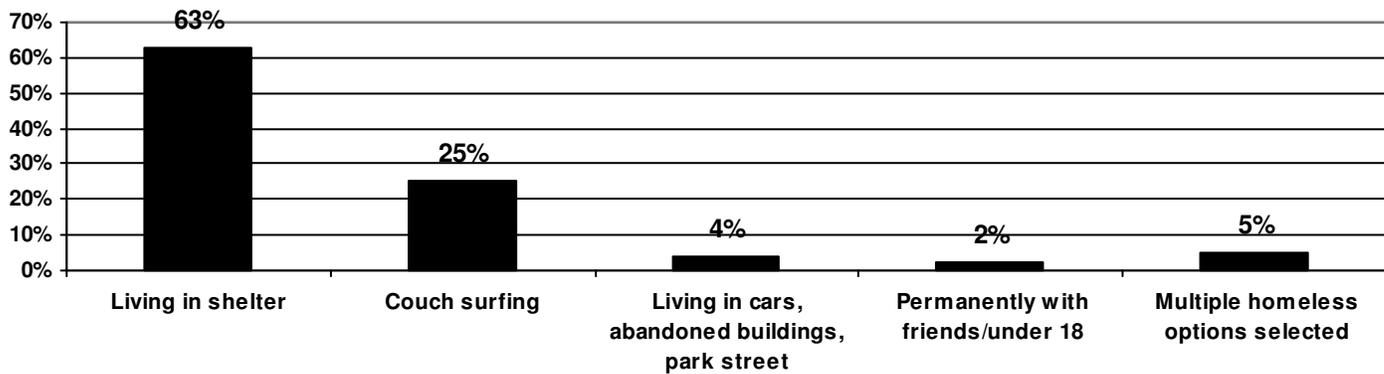
Results

General and Gender, Age, Race/ Ethnicity

- 513 people responded to the survey
- 142 (28%) were homeless (shelter, couch surfing, permanently with friends if under 18, living in car, abandoned building, park, street).
- 239 of the respondents (47%) have friends who are homeless. 150 of them are not themselves homeless.
- 58% of the sample is female—55% of the homeless sample is female.
- 40% is male—44% of the homeless sample is male.
- 1% of both the whole sample and homeless sample is transgender
- The average age of the sample is 18. Females’ average age is 18.6. Males’ average age is 18.2.
- The homeless youth tend to be older. Homeless females’ average age is 19. Homeless males’ average age is 18.5.
- Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the sample at 48% and also the largest ethnic group to be homeless. Followed by White, African American, Multi-racial/ethnic, and Asian.
- Black female homeless youth are the oldest age group with an average age of 19.8. Asian homeless males are the youngest age group at an average age of 16.5.
- 63% of the Homeless sample was living in a shelter (91 youth). Of the 91 youth in shelter, 58 are female and 33 are male

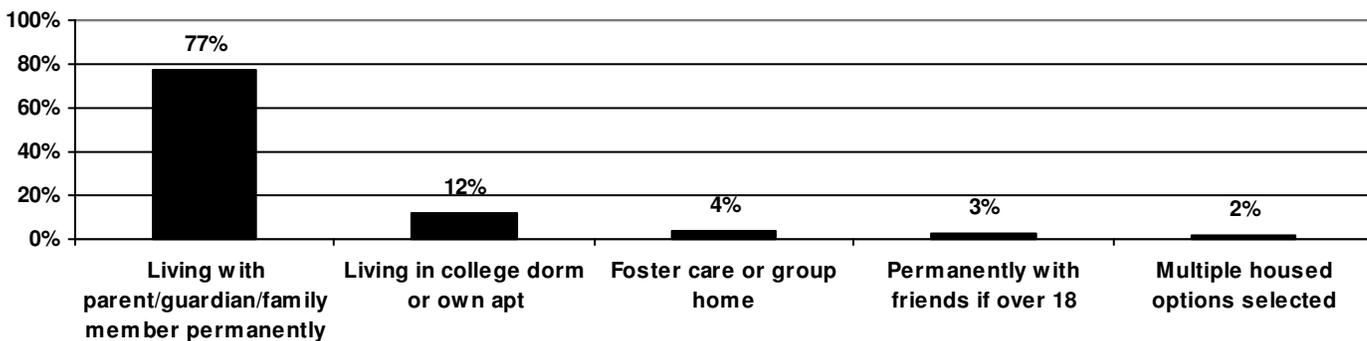
Residential Status

Of the 142 homeless respondents:

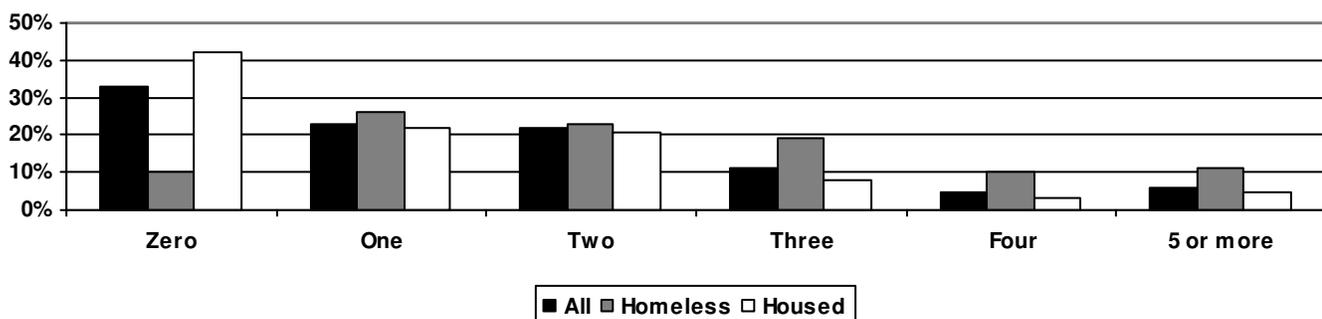


- 63% of the Homeless sample was living in a shelter (91 youth)
- 37% of the Homeless sample was living in another arrangement other than shelter (couch surfing, living in cars, abandoned buildings, park, street) (51 youth)
- Of the 91 youth in shelter, 58 are female and 33 are male
- Of the 35 youth who are couch surfing, 13 are female and 21 are male
- Of the 6 youth living in cars, abandoned buildings or on the streets, 1 is female and 5 are male
- Of the 3 youth under 18 who are permanently with friends, 1 is female and 2 are male
- Of the 4 youth who selected multiple homeless options, 2 are female and 2 are male.

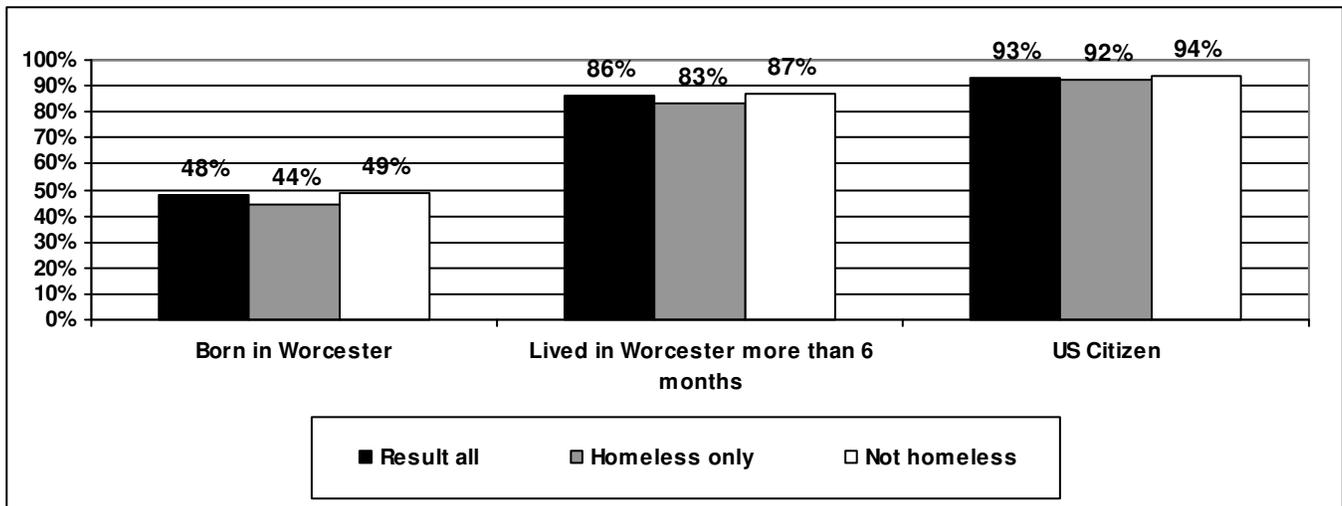
Of the 371 housed respondents:



Number of Moves in Past 12 months

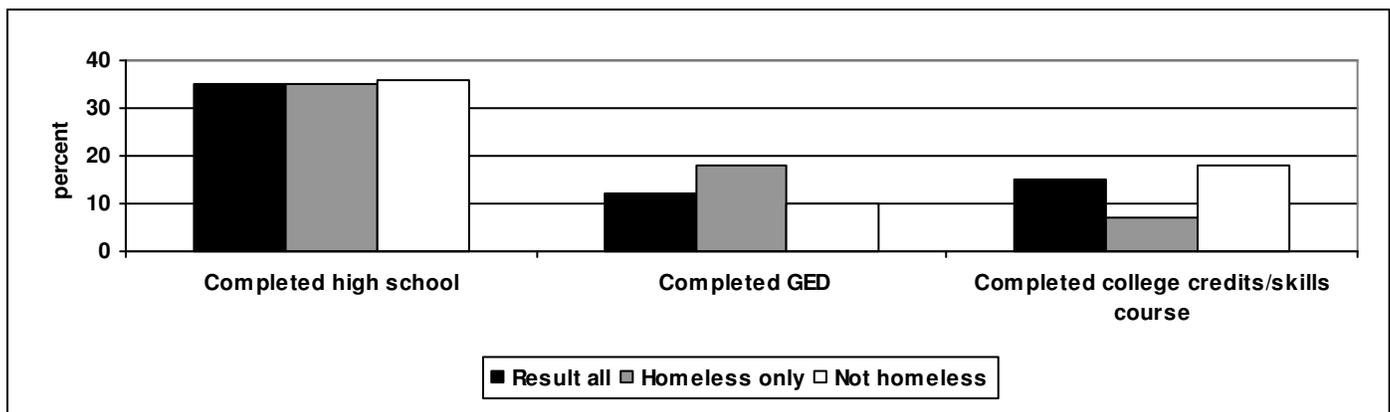


Residency and Citizenship Status



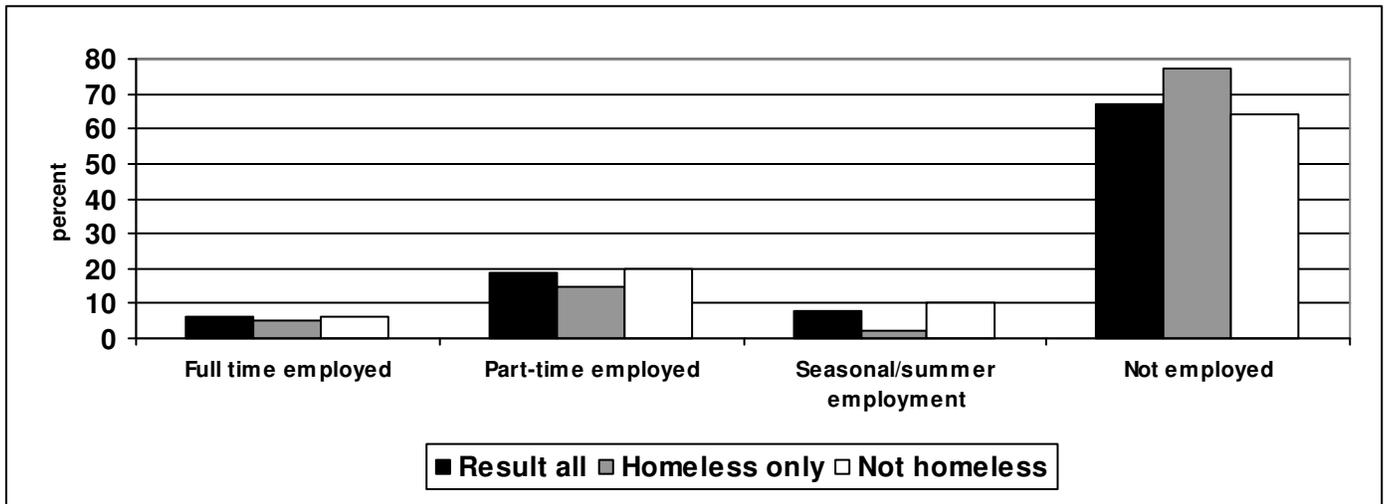
- Over 40% of housed respondents reported moving 0 times in the past year, while only 10% of homeless respondents moved 0 times.
- Alternatively, 40% of homeless respondents moved 3 or more times in the past 12 months, while 16% of housed respondents moved this frequently.
- 48% of the sample was born in Worcester—44% of the Homeless sample was born in Worcester
- 86% of the sample has lived in Worcester for more than 6 months—83% of the homeless sample has lived in Worcester more than 6 months.
- 93% of the sample is US citizens—92% of the homeless sample is US citizens.

Education and Employment¹



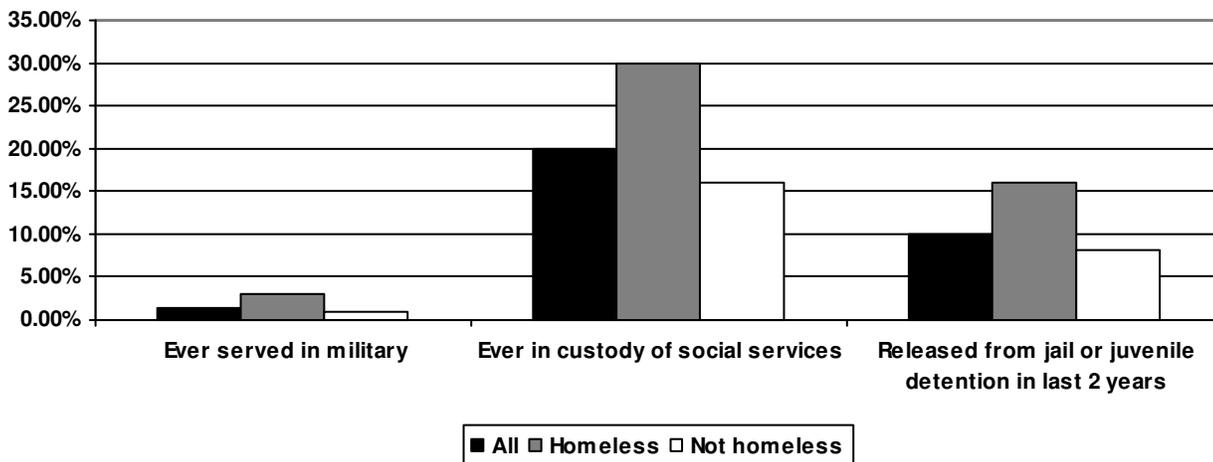
¹ It should be noted that the Worcester Community Action Council youth summer employment program was underway at the time of the survey; therefore the number of employed youth represented here may have been skewed. The WCAC Summer Program did a housing status count separate from this study that found 47 of their 440 male participants and 29 out of their 339 female participants were homeless, runaway, or in foster care.

Education and Employment (contd.)



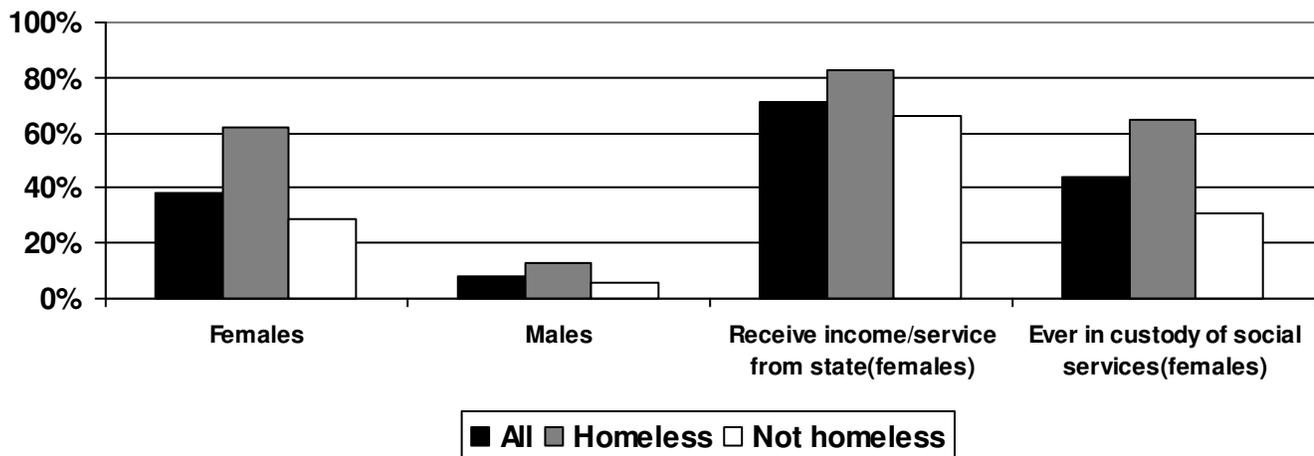
- Roughly 18% of homeless youth completed a GED, while only about 10% of housed youth completed a GED.
- Roughly 18% of the housed sample completed college credits or additional skills course, while roughly 7% of the homeless sample has pursued higher education.
- Rates of full time employment are low for both homeless and housed youth, at less than 10% for all; although housed respondents are slightly more likely to be working in full time employment
- Homeless participants are less likely than housed participants to be working part-time or in seasonal jobs.
- 77% of the homeless sample was not employed, while 64% of the housed sample was unemployed.

Involvement with Government Programs & Services



- 30% of the homeless respondents reported being involved with social services, while only 16% of the housed sample has been involved with social services.
- 16% of the homeless sample reported being released from jail and/or juvenile detention in the past 2 years, while only 8% of the housed sample reported being released from jail or detention.
- Rates of involvement in the military are low for both homeless and housed participants, however, homeless youth are more likely to have been involved in the military

Pregnant/Parenting



- Overall, 26% of the sample reported being a parent or pregnant.
- 38% of the females reported being a parent or pregnant and 8% of the males reported being a parent.
- 62% of the homeless females reported being a parent or pregnant, while only 29% of the housed females reported being pregnant or a parent.
- 71% of the females with children reported receiving income or services from the state—83% of the homeless parenting females reported receiving income or services from the state
- 44% of the females with children reported ever being in the custody of social services. 65% of the homeless parenting females reported ever being in custody of social services.

Trends

- Homeless participants are less likely than housed participants to be working part-time or in seasonal jobs but Rates of full time employment are low for both homeless and housed youth, at less than 10% for all; although housed respondents are slightly more likely to be working in full time employment
- A higher percentage of homeless respondents (30%) reported being involved with social services vs. only 16% of the housed sample.
- A higher percentage of the homeless sample (16%) reported being released from jail and/or juvenile detention in the past 2 years as compared to the housed sample (8%).
- A higher percentage of homeless females reported being a parent or pregnant (62%) as compared to only 29% of the housed females.
- Homeless parenting females were more likely than housed participants to have been in the custody of social services (65% vs. 44%)

Challenges

- The survey required moderate levels of staffing. Not all agencies were able to station someone at front entrance to ensure that all eligible youth who visited the site that day were asked to fill out the survey. One site did allow us to station a staff person at the entrance, which proved to be very burdensome as their program ran from 8:00am to 6:00 at night.
- Many youth were skeptical and afraid to speak with outreach workers. Although our outreach teams were dressed in casual clothing, and were approachable, many young people had experienced trauma and wouldn't speak with these survey administrators. In fact, on day of the survey, outreach staff from the Willis Center ran into a group of approximately 15 youth behind a building on a downtown street. When they attempted to approach with the survey tools the youth scattered. One youth told the workers that they were all homeless but did not want to respond to a questionnaire.

Summary & Conclusions

As with most initial efforts, this count had limitations including the prospect of double-counting and undercounting. It is important to mention that the survey most likely undercounted the number of youth in unstable living situations as many of these young people were apprehensive about completing the survey and speaking with outreach workers. Additionally, surveying community programs will not access the more transient homeless youth that may not have access to or take part in community programs and groups. This effort did however lay the ground work for future counts on the homeless youth population in Worcester, MA, and the surrounding areas.

This survey produced an extensive dataset that illustrates the demographics and life situations experienced by Worcester youth aged 13-22. Of the total 513 respondents, 142 reported being homeless. It should be noted that this is a high percentage of the total sample due to 17 housing programs being included in the survey sites. However, even with this disproportionate number of surveys from housing programs, 37% of homeless young people were *not accessing any housing services*. Due to their extremely unstable living situation, the 51 young people in this group of respondents are at a severe disadvantage in pursuing their academic opportunities, employment, and are more likely to become parents at a young age. These results present compelling evidence of the need for additional resources for homeless youth and youth who are at risk of becoming homeless.

Acknowledgements

The Worcester Teen Housing Task Force would like to thank Grace Carmark of the Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, Jill Dagilis of Worcester Community Action Council, Tom Gregory and the City of Worcester Leadership Council, Brooke Doyle of Community Healthlink, Laurie Ross of Clark University for their support with this study. And a special thank you to Hilda Ramirez of the Worcester Youth Center for hosting all of our Task Force Meetings. The Task Force would also like to thank Jim Dupre of Dismas House, Colleen Messom, of WCAC Job and Education Center, and the Clark University Community Development and Planning graduate students who helped enter surveys into the database: Morning Star Padilla, Amy Tran, Josiah Lamp, Anthony Oduro, Zhengi Lu, and Demetri Yannopoulos.

This study would not have been possible without the support and assistance of all participating agencies in administering surveys and giving feedback on the study to the Task Force.

A digital copy of this report is available on the Central MA Housing Alliance website: www.cmhaonline.org
For more information please contact: Anne Bureau, Worcester Community Connections, Abureau@wcac.org or Erin Burns- Maine, Central Mass. Housing Alliance eburnsmaine@cmhaonline.org

Site #:

<p>Worcester Teen Housing Task Force 2009 Point-in-Time Survey for Persons 13-22 Years of Age</p>
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This is an anonymous survey. DO NOT put your name anywhere on this paper. We represent a youth organization in Worcester called the Worcester Teen Housing Task Force and we are trying to determine what information and services young people in the Worcester area need based on their current living situation. **This survey is confidential** and the information will allow the task force to provide you with better services. Thank you for your help!

For questions or concerns please contact Anne Bureau at 508-254-9903.

Gender: Male Female Transgender **Age:** _____

Ethnicity: *(you may circle more than one)*

White Black or African American Latino/Hispanic American Indian Asian/ Pacific Islander
 Other *(please specify)*: _____

Were you born in the City of Worcester? Yes No Don't Know

How long have you lived in the City of Worcester? Less than 6 months More than 6 months

Are you a United States Citizen? Yes No Don't Know Prefer Not to Answer

What is the highest grade level in school that you have completed? _____

Do you have: High School Diploma GED Certificate Some College Credits Certificate from a skills program

Are you currently employed? Part time Full time Season/Summer No

Do you receive income or services from state or local programs? Yes No Don't Know

Are you pregnant or have child(ren)? Yes No

Where do you mostly stay?

- ___ With parent / guardian/or other family member in home permanently (even if parents are divorced)
- ___ Temporarily staying with friends / couch surfing (not on the lease)
- ___ Living in cars, abandoned buildings, in the park, streets, etc.
- ___ Permanently living with friends
- ___ Living in a shelter / transitional housing program or state funded hotel
- ___ Foster care or a group home
- ___ Living in college dorm or my own apartment
- Other *(please specify)*: _____

How many times have you moved in the past year? 0 1 2 3 4 5 or more

Do you have friends or know of any young people who are homeless? Yes No

If yes, where do they sleep?

Squat/Street Couch Surfing Relative/Friend(s) Motel Shelter Car Other

Have you ever served on active duty in the military? Yes No Don't Know

Have you ever been in the custody of social services? Yes No Prefer Not to Answer

Have you been released from juvenile detention or jail in the last 2 years? Yes No

Have you already filled out this survey today? Yes No

Appendix B: Agencies Participating in Count

Youth Serving Agencies & Community Centers

- YWCA
- The Bridge
- Worcester Youth Center
- YMCA- Greendale
- The Genesis Club
- Friendly House
- Girl`s Inc.
- East Side CDC
- HOPE Coalition
- Oak Hill CDC
- Green Island Nhbd. Center
- Pernet Family Services
- Pride Productions
- South East Asian Coalition
- The Dream Center
- Quinsigamond Village Community Center
- YOU Inc.
- Boy Scouts of America
- South Worcester Nhbd. Center
- GBV Health Center-Youth Educator Program
- Pleasant St. Nhbd. Network

Housing - Emergency

- Abby`s House Shelter
- Homeward Bound – Catholic Charities
- Youville House -
- THAYER DETOX – Community Health Link (CHL)
- Friendly House Shelter
- Interfaith Hospitality Network
- Shepard`s Place I – The Willis Center
- Shepard`s Place I I
- Mass Vets Shelter
- PIP Shelter – SMOC
- Daybreak - YWCA
- The Village – Central MA Housing Alliance (CMHA)
- Catholic Worker House
- The Village
- Shelter SOAP(Worcester) – CHL
- Hotel/Motel DHCD

Outreach

- Community Healthlink Outreach
- WCAC Outreach
- Willis Center Outreach

GED / Job Training

- Catholic Charities
- Centro Las Americas
- Clark University
- Family Ties
- Latino Education Institute
- Literacy Volunteers of Worcester
- Lutheran Social Services
- Quinsigamond Community College
- Refugee Apostolate
- Southeast Asian Center
- St. Bernard`s Church
- St. Peter`s Church
- Training Resources of America
- Worcester Community Action Council
- Worcester Housing Authority
- Worcester Public Schools
- Worcester State College
- Worcester Youth Center
- YOU Inc.
- Salter College
- Grafton Job Corps
- Rob Roy School
- Workforce Central

Housing – Transitional

- Oasis House – Community Health Link (CHL)
- Respite – HEART Beds
- Medial Respite – Worcester
- Y Beds
- Frances Perkins – Friendly House
- Foundations
- Jeremiah`s Hospice – Jeremiah`s Inn
- DHCD Transitional – Worcester Housing Authority
- HUD Transitional
- Teen Living Program – YOU Inc.
- Teen Parents
- Transitional Housing - YWCA
- Dismas House
- Aurora II – SMOC
- Worcester Respite - CHL

Appendix C: Complete Datasheet

Variable	Result all(n=513)	Homeless only (142)	Not homeless (371)
Female	58 ^c %	55%	59%
Male	40%	44%	39%
Transgender	1%	1%	1%
Average age	18 (13-24)	19 (13-22)	18.2
Average age female	18.6	19.4	18.3
Average age male	18.2	18.5	18
Latino	48%	48%	47%
White	28%	26%	28%
African American	12%	16%	11%
Multi	8%	8%	8%
Asian	4%	1.5%	4.5%
Born in Worcester	48%	44%	49%
Lived in Worcester more than 6 months	86%	83%	87%
US Citizen	93%	92%	94%
Completed high school	35%	35%	36%
Completed GED	12%	18%	10%
Completed college credits/skills course	15%	7%	18%
Full time employed	6%	5%	6%
Part-time employed	19%	15%	20%
Seasonal/summer employment	8%	2%	10%
Receive income/services from state	37%	49%	33%
Pregnant or parenting	26%	42%	20%
Females	38%	62%	29%
Males	8%	13.3%	6%
Receive income/service from state(females)	71%	83%	66%
Ever in custody of social services(females)	44%	65%	31%
Homeless (shelter, couch surfing, permanently with friends if under 18, living in car, abandoned building, park, street) (142)	28%		
Living in shelter	63%		
Couch surfing	25%		
Living in cars, abandoned buildings, park street	4%		
Permanently with friends/under 18	2%		
Multiple homeless options selected	5%		
Not homeless (371)	72%		
Living with parent/guardian/family member permanently	77%		
Living in college dorm or own apt	12%		
Foster care or group home	4%		
Permanently with friends if over 18	3%		
Multiple housed options selected	2%		
Number of moves in past year			
Zero	33%	10%	42%
One	23%	26%	22%
Two	22%	23%	21%
Three	11%	19%	8%
Four	5%	10%	3%
More than 5	6%	11%	5%

Appendix C: Complete Datasheet (contd.)

Variable	Result all(n=513)	Homeless only (142)	Not homeless (371)
Friends that are homeless (239)	47%	63%	40%
Living in shelter	28%		
Relatives/Friends	24%		
Couch surfing	11%		
Street/squatting/car	6%		
Motel	1%		
Multiple homeless options selected	13%		
Blank	17%		
Ever served in military	1.4%	3%	<1%
Ever in custody of social services	20%	30%	16%
Released from jail or juvenile detention in last 2 years	10%	16%	8%
Race/ethnicity, gender, age			
Black female	18.3 (28)	19.8(12)	17.2(16)
Latino female	18.8 (135)	19.5(35)	18.6(100)
Multi female	17.6 (26)	18.5(8)	17.1(18)
White female	18.8 (75)	19.3(16)	18.7(59)
Asian female	17.8 (6)	0	17.8 (6)
Black male	18 (30)	18.7 (9)	17.8(21)
Latino male	17.8 (78)	18.5 (24)	17.5(54)
Multi male	17.7 (10)	19(3)	17.1(7)
White male	18.8 (54)	18.4 (20)	19(34)
Asian male	17.7 (12)	16.5(2)	18(10)
Employment and Education			
High School Diploma/full time work	5%	9%	4%
GED/full time work	12%	4%	17%
College credits/full time work	18%	12.5%	18%
High School Diploma/no work	63%	67%	61%
GED/nowork	71%	87%	61%
College credits/no work	47%	62.5%	45%
High School Diploma/part time work	25%	22%	26%
GED/part time work	15%	9%	19%
College credits/part time work	34%	25%	35%
High School Diploma/ seasonal work	7%	2.2%	9%
GED/ seasonal work	2%	0	3%
College credits/ seasonal work	1.5%	0	2%