

WHY THEY RUN: Marion County's Runaway and Homeless Youth

Runaway... Throwaway:

These are terms used to describe America's youth who have left home, either willingly and without their family's knowledge (runaway), or reluctantly at the hand of their parent or guardian (throwaway).

It can be difficult to comprehend that there are thousands of young people around the country in both urban and rural areas who fit the above description.

But there are facts which cannot be ignored:

- The average age at the first homeless episode is 14.7 years. (YouthCare, Inc., 1998)
- Over 50% of youth in shelters and on the streets report that their parents told them to leave or knew they were leaving and did not care. (Greene J. , Ringwalt, Kelly, Iachan, & Cohen, 1995)
- In 2001, the National Coalition for the Homeless stated that homeless youth are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population
- Most homeless adults 1st experienced homelessness as a teen.
- Youth under the age of 18 are at higher risk for homelessness than adults.
- Approximately 1.6 million youths (7 %) ages 12 to 17 had run away from home and slept on the street in the past 12 months. (SAMHSA Office of Applied Studies, 2004)
- In November 2002, the Department of Health and Human Services reported that between 21% and 40% of runaway youth had been sexually abused, compared to between 1% and 3% of the general youth population. (American Civil Liberties Union, 2003)
- According to a national homeless youth sample, 33% had been in foster care, 51% had been physically abused, and 60% of girls and 23% of boys had been sexually abused. (YouthCare, Inc., 1998)
- Federally funded programs serve only a fraction of the nation's homeless youth population. In 2007, federally funded programs made over 700,000 contacts with youth through street outreach programs but served 47,400 (less than 10 percent) with shelter and housing. (Congressional Research Service)
- It costs \$53,665 to maintain a youth in the criminal justice system for one year, but only \$5,887 to permanently move a homeless youth off the streets. (Unknown Author. (2007). *Treatment for Homeless Youth Pays Off in Long Run*. Retrieved July 19, 2007 from [http:// www.huliq.com/7079/treatment-for-homeless-youth-pays-off-in-long-run](http://www.huliq.com/7079/treatment-for-homeless-youth-pays-off-in-long-run))

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OUR COMMUNITY

- In 2005, the Oregon Homeless and Runaway Work Group estimated that 24,000 youth aged 11 to 21 had run away, been abandoned, or were homeless in Oregon during 2002-03¹.
- Salem Police Department reported 788 runaway youth in 2006.
- A disproportionately large concentration of runaway and homeless youth lives in Marion County. The county has 13.3% of the state's runaway teens but only 9% of the total youth population.
- During the 2009-10 school year, 19,040 homeless students attended Oregon public schools — the highest ever recorded. This is a 5.5 percent increase from last year. The percentage of homeless students in Oregon has increased 134 percent since the state began counting seven years ago.
- In 2007, the State Department of Education reported at least 1,168 runaway or homeless youth enrolled in Marion County schools. During the academic year of 2009-10, Marion County's largest school district, Salem/Keizer, identified 822 youth as runaway/homeless school age children. High school students are the most likely to become homeless. Of the 822 homeless students, 238 were in high school; 136 in 12th grade. These numbers continue to increase.
- In Oregon, homeless and runaway youth funds have diminished to 10-20% of what they were six or eight years ago because of legislative budget cuts in the past three sessions. Funds for the Commission on Children and Families were cut 70% in the 2005-07 biennium budget, which resulted in a loss of funding for local shelter and prevention programs.
- In 2001, Oregon's legislature adopted the governor's new program that closed many youth facilities and froze juvenile detention budgets in order to allocate more delinquency prevention funds on infants and preschoolers. This "Oregon Children's Plan" reduced or eliminated funds for shelters serving homeless and troubled teens. This redirection of state dollars in 2001-2003 away from programs serving high risk teens has not been replaced.
As a result, an entire population of children remains in the margins of available resources; many have become Salem's "throwaway kids."

¹ Calculated by factoring the 1,992 unaccompanied homeless youth served in Oregon's shelter system over the course of one year by 12 Researchers in the U.S. Health and Human Services Inspector General's Office indicate only 1 in 12 homeless youth are actually served in shelters

LOCAL RESOURCES FOR RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH

Education

Salem Keizer Homeless Education Program

- Swift reengagement of homeless youth to appropriate educational setting
- Can sign as guardian in some cases
- Free school supplies and transportation services (bus passes)
- Identification documents
- Tutoring and computer lab for high school completion
- Advocates for educational placements
- Referral to local services

Shelter

HOST Youth and Family Program/Transitional Living Program, NW Human Services

- Overnight emergency shelter for youth 11 years – 17 years, 9 beds
- Basic needs supplies/services
- Family communication sessions
- Parenting Classes
- Transportation
- In-house counseling
- Referrals to services through in-house case management
- Transitional Living Program
 1. Longer term shelter for up to 6 older youth in transition to independence.
- Emergency Overnight Shelter for 11 to 24 year olds

HOME Youth & Resource Center, Community Action Agency

- Day shelter Monday through Friday
- Safe, positive environment
- Meals, showers, clothing, toiletries, positive activities
- Help with employment, education, life skills
- Runaway and Homeless Youth Project is based at HOME

Father Taafe Homes

- For pregnant and parenting teens, some of whom have been homeless.

First Nazarene Church

- Offering Host Homes for homeless youth beginning Fall 2010.

Individuals taking in RHY

- There are an unknown number of individuals who are caring for single or multiple numbers of runaway or homeless teens, sometimes for several months.
- Several local churches are researching options for sheltering RHY ranging from emergency shelter to host homes

Marion County RHY Project – Based at HOME Youth & Resource Center

- Street outreach several times/week to connect with RHY
- Outreach to community, businesses, schools, partners
- Case management
- Basic needs supplies/services

- Family contact and assistance
- Identification documents
- Primary contact of many local new and chronic homeless youth
- Advocacy
- Community education around RHY issues
- Can enroll youth in Healthy Kids program to obtain health insurance

Salem Police Department

- Contact with families who file run reports
- Contact with youth on the run (transport home, detention, or local shelter)
- Keep records of new and chronic runs
- Partners with RHY Project staff for swift identification and return of homeless youth.

Department of Human Services

- Food security for youth and access to medical care/insurance
- Child abuse reporting and investigating
- Foster care overseers
- Assistance to non-biological parents taking care of youth

Alternative Education Placements for RHY

- Job Corps (education, housing, financial incentives, food, medical, job skills training, college incentives. Homeless youth are a priority)
- Chemeketa Community College (early college high school program and GED course in a college campus setting)
- Worksource Oregon (classes and assistance with job search skills and employment searches)

Counseling and other services for RHY

- Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous (teen support groups on Sat.)
- Bridgeway – drug and alcohol assessment and treatment center
- Catholic Community Services – drug and alcohol assessments and treatment; Functional Family Therapy Program, Counseling, programs and homes for foster youth.
- Mano a Mano Family Center – resource and assistance services for Hispanic youth and families
- Marion County Health Department – prenatal testing and services, drug and alcohol services, mental health
- New Perspectives – counseling for families and youth
- New Solutions – wrap around services and gate-keepers; NOT a counseling agency
- NW Human Services – crisis line, medical and mental health providers who take OHP, counseling at HOST and TLP.
- Oregon Support Family Network (family advocacy and education group assisting families of disabled youth and youth with mental health/behavioral health issues)
- Psychiatric Crisis Center (PCC) – mental health crisis line 24 hours a day; assessments for hospitalization and referrals

- Rainbow Youth – local support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth as well as their straight allies
- Women’s Crisis Center – sexual assault and domestic violence advocacy agency. Representatives come monthly to HOME Youth & Resource Center for groups or assistance. Special trainings on sex trafficking; accompany the RHY Outreach team to provide information and support to young girls on the streets.

Mediation

- Neighbor to Neighbor – free, staff trained to work with youth and families, neutral facilitators

Mentors

- Youth Impact/Mid-Valley Mentors – Free mentorship agency connecting at-risk youth with local adults to build trusting relationships and increase youth self-esteem and self-efficacy. Generally best suited as preventative rather than for older youth, chronic runaways or homeless youth.

Sexual Health

- Marion County Family Planning – free teen health clinic, education, free birth control, pregnancy tests, proof of pregnancy, referral to STI testing, no religious affiliation, referrals.
- Planned Parenthood – education, low cost birth control, pregnancy tests, proof of pregnancy, referral agency, no religious affiliation
- Pregnancy Resource Center – free, faith-based adoption and pregnancy referrals, pregnancy tests, maternity and infant clothes/items

WHY THEY RUN

1. Family conflict and dysfunction is consistently given as the primary reason for youth homelessness. This is true nationally as well as here in Marion County. It can cover a wide range of conflicts:

- Poor communication skills; inability to set appropriate boundaries and consequences
- Abuse and neglect
- Violence and fighting
- Conflict with parents over religion, sexual identity or pregnancy.
- Economic distress and families' inability to support older teens. This leads to families telling their older youth to leave home until they can become employed, regardless of the slim likelihood of the teen's finding either a safe place to live or a job.

2. Other reasons include: drugs/alcohol by parents and/or youth; gang involvement by parents and/or youth

The following charts include information from 57 runaway and homeless youth who were case managed by Marion County's Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) staff at HOME Youth & Resource Center.

The 3 charts are:

1. Reasons cited by youth for being homeless
2. What services the youth are requesting
3. What needs of were successfully met

Although these summaries were done in 2008, documentation since that time has revealed no changes or differences in any of these areas.

WHY THEY RUN

Reasons for Homeless Status as Identified by Youth

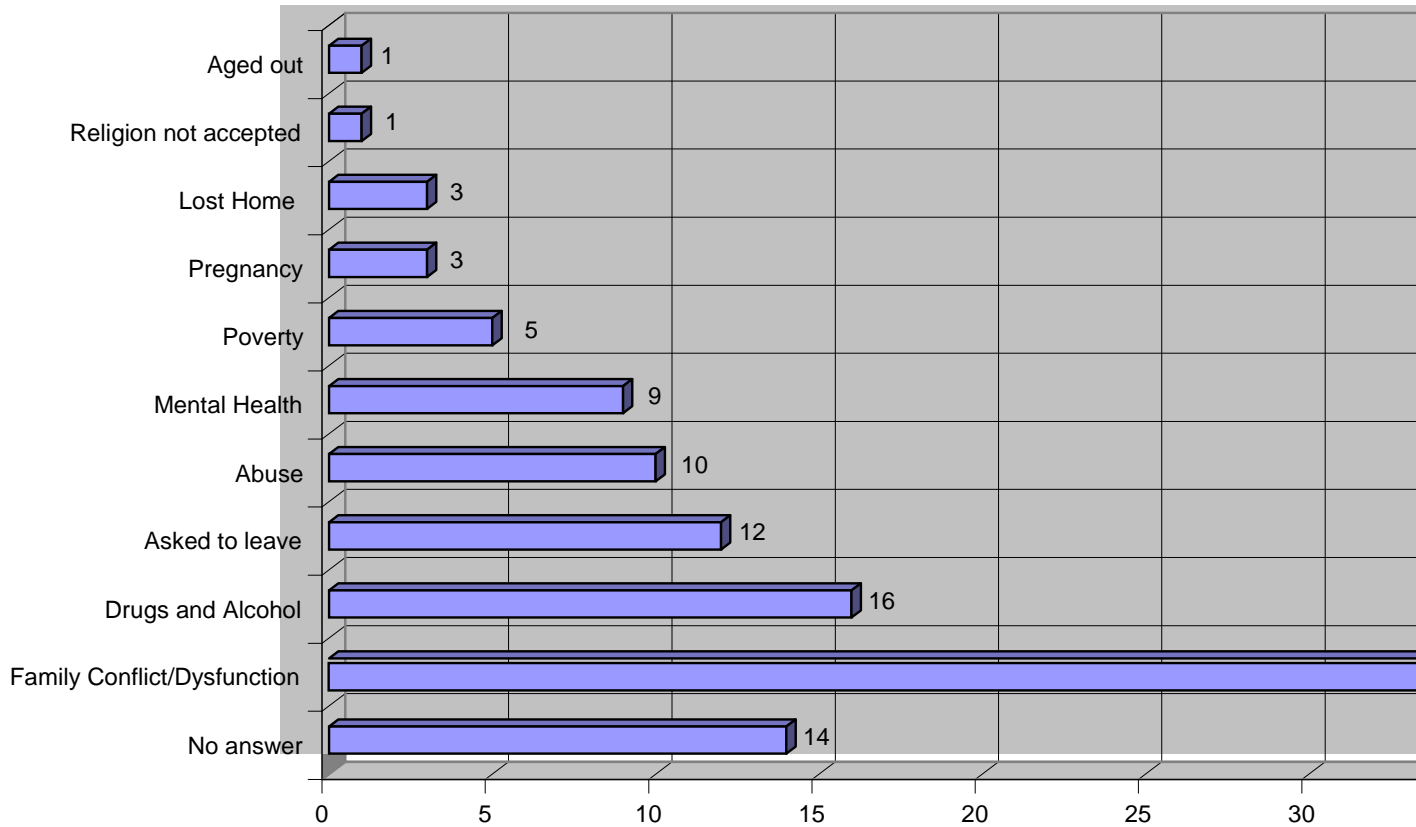


Figure 1

The above chart is from information gathered at intake by Marion County's Runaway and Homeless Youth Project in 2008. Information obtained since that time continues to reveal the same reasons given by teens for leaving home.

All youth requesting case management are asked to fill out an intake form. Services are based on the self-identified needs of each youth, who is asked to give basic demographic information, as well as their interpretation of why they are where they are, what they feel they need, and any other information relevant to assisting them to become self-sufficient.

Data Definitions:

Aged Out: Came under case management at the age of eighteen. May or may not have been homeless previous to eighteenth birthday.

Religion not accepted: Theology/Faith in conflict with members of the household previously living with.

Lost Home: Foreclosures, parent incarceration, inability to pay rent, Family left home without the youth, job loss, kicked out of doubled up housing, etc.

Pregnancy: Asked to leave because of pregnancy disclosure, or left home due to fear of pregnancy disclosure.

Poverty: Insufficient income (for youth or family member) to obtain, or maintain, stable permanent housing.

Mental Health: Non-treated mental health status interfering with the ability to function on a daily basis in home/school/community environment. Most commonly noted: Severe depression, bi-polar, autism, asperger's syndrome, and oppositional-defiant disorder.

Abuse: Verbal, sexual, and/or physical abuse in the home environment. Abuse outside of the home environment (primarily sexual assault) also noted leading to insufficient negative coping skills such as a run response.

Asked to leave: Parent/Guardian has requested, or demanded, the youth to leave his/her home.

Drugs and Alcohol: This is defined as either the youth or parent/guardians substance abuse.

Family Dysfunction/Conflict: Poor communication, violence, poor family structure, fights, neglect, etc.

No Answer: Youth may choose not to answer any question on the intake form. "No answer" could indicate the youth does not identify as a traditional homeless person, they do not wish to disclose why (we have seen this in rape cases), or because of continuing stigma around the word homeless.

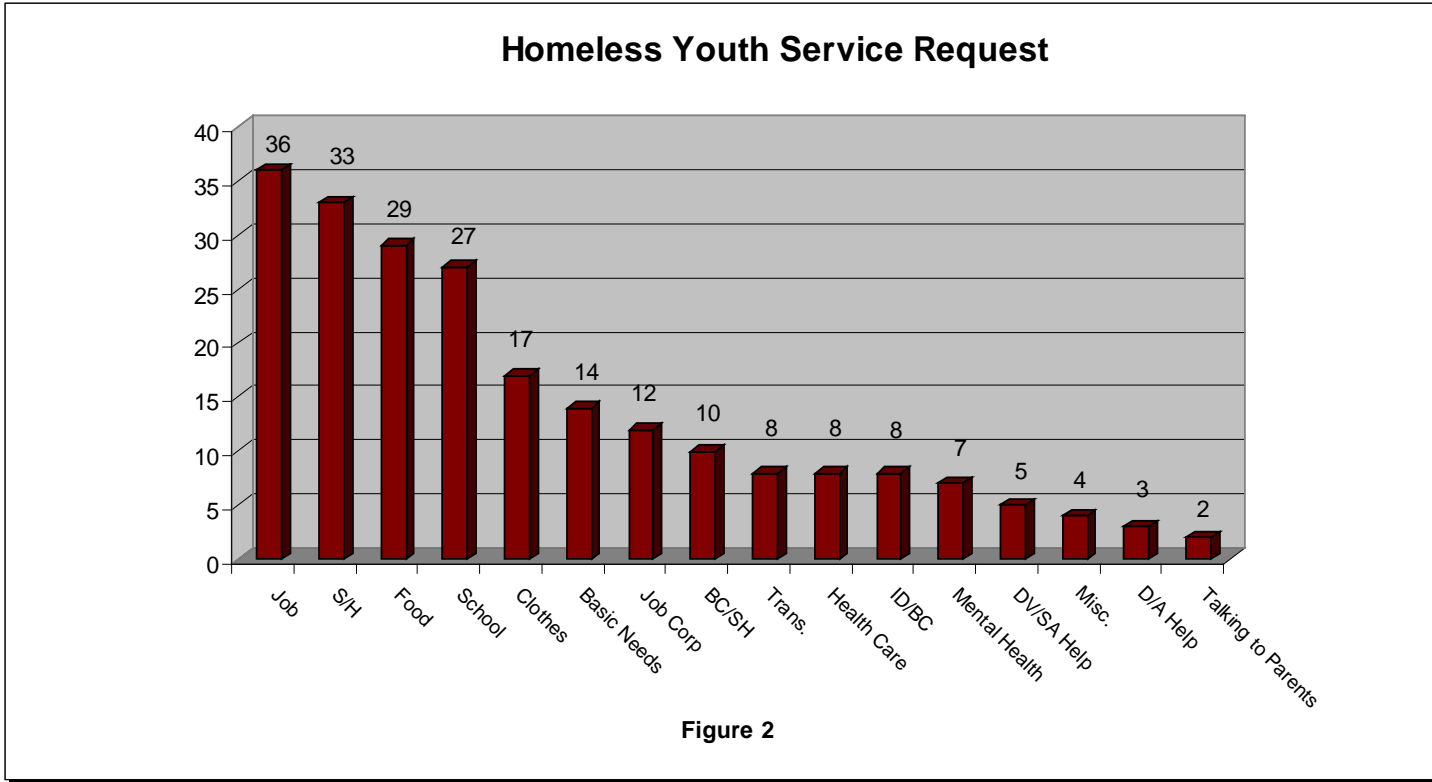
Figure 1:

Fifty-seven youth were case managed.

All identified why they have become homeless based on pre-given data, as well as given an area for fill in if their particular circumstance was not listed.

Case managed youth frequently identify one or more reasons for leaving home.

It must be noted that not all data presented reflects all youth served, or all outcomes for the year. Youth may, or may not, identify a desire to be under case management. *Some may state a desire for agency referral only, or request help without the case management definition and/or paperwork. Case managed youth represent a standard population sample of homeless youth served in Marion County by the RHY team, as well as the needs identified for this group.*



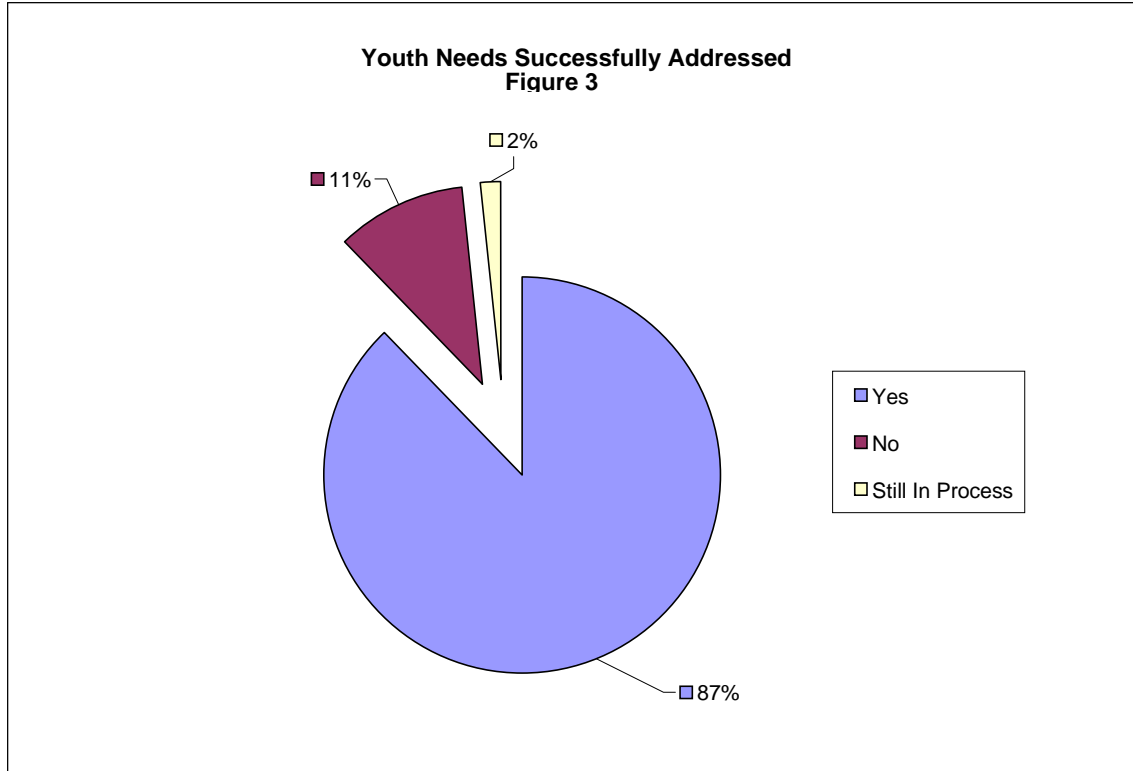
Youth are asked to identify what services they need under case management. Youth frequently make multiple requests on each intake form. There are usually multiple barriers to safety, food security, education, and resources for the adolescent homeless population. There is never a “one size fits all” approach nor a “one size fits all” need.

Figure 2: Self-identified youth requests for services, referrals, and advocacy.

Data based on fifty-seven case managed youth intake forms. Frequently, youth select multiple areas of need. Although family conflict/family dysfunction is the highest cited reason for leaving home, youth ranked communication with parents as the lowest level of need. Employment and shelter were the highest requested service by homeless youth. To date, these are also the most difficult resources to access in Marion County.

Data Information:

- S/H: Shelter and Housing
- Basic Needs: Hygiene items/ Feminine Products/Etc.
- BC/SH: Birth Control and Sexual Health
- DV/SA: Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault/Abuse/Rape
- Misc.: Furniture/Military/LGBTQ community connections/Legal
- D/A Help: Drug and Alcohol assessment, treatment, and counseling
- ID/BC: Oregon Identification Card/Birth Certificate



Case plans are developed to address need on a priority basis, as well as ability to access services for each need. The above graph depicts only those 57 youth who chose to be under case management. It does not reflect all youth served through the RHY Program or all outcomes successfully completed. Case managed youth do, however, provide data for an accurate standard population sample of youth service, and outcomes achieved, by RHY team staff.

Figure 3: Case Managed Youth who have successfully addressed one **or more** of the self-identified needs documented on the RHY Intake Form.

- 87% of case managed youth have successfully achieved one or more self-sufficiency goal, safety goal, or educational goal identified at intake.
- 11% of case managed youth have not successfully addressed one or more self-identified need. Reasons include but are not limited to: homeless youth migration out of the area, reunification with parent/guardian, no further contact with case manager, adjudication, or institutionalization.

2% (one youth) of case managed youth are still in the process of completing the requested service as identified on their initial Intake form. In this particular case, we are awaiting an Oregon birth certificate so the youth may apply for an Oregon ID card to obtain employment