
Ending Youth

Homelessness

Salt Lake County Task Force
to End Youth Homelessness

February 2011

- They deserve a safe place of their own!



Executive Summary

Ending Youth Homelessness

A Report from the Salt Lake County Task Force to End Youth Homelessness

Homeless youth are those ages 15 to 22, who are unaccompanied by their families and lack stable housing. They live on the street, in shelters, in places not meant for human habitation, and precariously housed with friends or acquaintances.

Purpose

The Salt Lake County Task Force to End Youth Homelessness was formed in December 2009 to bring experienced and concerned community stakeholders together to create a plan to end youth homelessness in Salt Lake County.

Members of the Task Force include representatives of state and local governments, school districts, faith-based groups, nonprofit social service organizations and concerned citizens.

Goals and Objectives

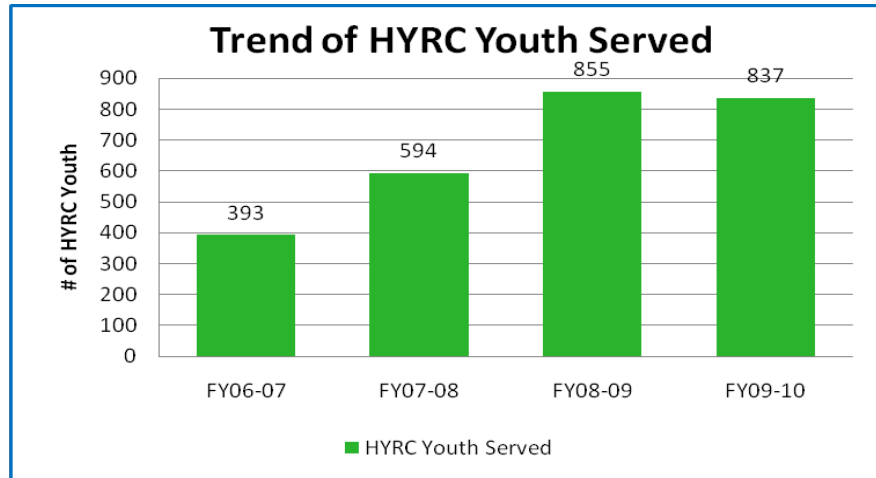
1. Gain a clear understanding of the scope of youth homelessness in Salt Lake County.
2. Understand the needs of youth experiencing homelessness.
3. Research best practices in other communities.
4. Identify potential resources to expand existing services and/or establish new services.
5. Produce a plan to end youth homelessness which addresses gaps in prevention, emergency services and housing.
6. Create better collaborative systems to address the problems related to youth homelessness.

The goal of the Salt Lake County Homeless Task Force is to end youth homelessness in Salt Lake County. The group studied the problem through research, site visits and a survey. It concluded the number of youth experiencing homelessness is growing, and that prevention measures, services, and housing are inadequate. To deal with the issue the community needs housing, and education and employment programs specifically designed to meet the needs of homeless youth. In addition the youth must have access to affordable health care, counseling and case management.

The Problem

According to 2009 Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates, on any given night in the United States, as many as 1,558,917 people are homeless. Unaccompanied youth make up 2.2 percent of those in shelters, but this number does not include youth living on the streets or other public places, abandoned buildings, or in the homes of friends or acquaintances. It's estimated the actual number of young people experiencing homelessness nationally is well over 110,000 on any given night.

Locally the number of homeless youth is rising rapidly. On any given night in Salt Lake County it is estimated there are 500 youth between the ages of 15 and 22 who are homeless, although service providers indicate a more thorough assessment is needed to more accurately reflect the number of



homeless youth. The Volunteers of America, Utah (VOA) Homeless Drop-in Center saw 855 unduplicated youth seeking aid in FY 2008-09 when funding was available to be open two additional days of services a week. In 2010, when the previous days and times of operation resumed, the number served was 837.

“Homeless youth begin sexual activity at an earlier age (median, 12 vs. 13 years for homeless vs. school-based youth), were less likely to have used birth control at their first sexual experience, and were twice as likely to have ever been pregnant. Same sex activities (boys only), multiple sex partners in the past 30 days, depression, and substance use behaviors were reported more often by the homeless sample. The homeless youth were twice as likely to have visited an emergency department in the past 12 months. After adjustment for other risk factors, homelessness was an independent predictor of depression, emergency department use in the past 12 months, and history of pregnancy.”

NIH

Both permanent and transitional housing for youth is limited. As of June 2010 in Salt Lake County, there were 41 transitional housing slots for homeless youth. There were no emergency shelter beds nor permanent housing units designated for homeless youth at that time. There are 24 beds available through the Salt Lake County Youth Services, which are primarily used by youth who are not homeless and often placed there by law enforcement and/or family or legal guardian. Stays in the crisis unit are limited to 21 days and youth leave with a housing placement arranged prior to discharge.

The Task Force estimates Salt Lake County needs 50 additional emergency service beds, 150 additional transitional housing beds, and 300 permanent housing beds to meet the immediate needs of the homeless youth.

Supportive services for homeless youth are also limited, and access to community services for this population is difficult. Although some education, employment, health, mental health and substance abuse treatment services exist in our community barriers, such as mistrust of authority, isolation or lack of transportation, prevent the youth from connecting with those services.

Research indicates homeless youth suffer from high rates of respiratory and skin infections, gastrointestinal problems, malnutrition, depression, suicidal ideation, trauma, substance abuse and HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, Youth on the street are at extreme risk of victimization and they utilize emergency services at a higher rate than the general youth population.

Causes

Homelessness is triggered by both short-term and long-term crisis. The group is diverse and includes runaways, throwaways (those discarded by their families), street entrenched, gang involvement, drugs and alcohol, and those who are part of homeless families.

In a Volunteers of America Utah, survey, seventy-five percent of all homeless youth indicated they had experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. A significant number of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth (GLBTQ) leave to find an environment less traumatic and more accepting than what they experience at home. Forty-one percent of the youth report they identify as GLBTQ. Nationally 12 to 36 percent of youth transitioning from foster care experience homelessness; 25 percent of all homeless youth report having aged out of foster care.

Risk factors include emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, domestic violence, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce and incarcerated household members. Often the young people experience more than one of these factors in their homes. The recent rise in the number of youth experiencing homelessness can be at least partially attributed to the current economic climate. As financial stressors increase in families so does the likelihood for conflict and violence to occur. As well, many youth who are old enough to obtain employment are told to find a job, and if they are unable to, are asked to leave their home.

Education and employment are essential if homeless youth are to reclaim their lives.

Survival and Potential Long-Term Outcomes

Street-living youth become involved in high-risk survival behaviors to meet their basic needs. These include prostitution, pimping, pornography, panhandling, theft, selling stolen goods, mugging, dealing drugs, or conning others for goods. However, about one-third are legitimately employed.

Homeless youth often have limited service interactions outside of frequenting local drop-in centers for food, clothing and showers. Their distrust of adults and institutions, transient nature, low self-esteem and concern for daily survival, combined with high-risk behaviors, create a population at risk of physical and mental illnesses, as well as social isolation and marginalization.

Homeless youth have limited formal job skills, and low literacy and educational levels. This means that as adults they are at higher risk of chronic or long-term episodic homelessness, unemployment, poor educational outcomes, health issues, early parenthood, long-term dependency on public assistance, substance abuse and increased rates of arrest. (HHS)

Task Force Actions

The Task Force focused on three areas of youth homelessness:

- ❖ **Prevention/discharge planning:** Determine the best methods of preventing youth from becoming homeless, with specific emphasis on those aging out of foster care and the Juvenile Justice System.
- ❖ **Emergency services:** Provide effective and efficient crisis intervention and care in dealing with the physical, emotional and mental health needs of homeless youth.
- ❖ **Housing:** Establish the most successful types of emergency, transitional and permanent housing for youth, and explore methods of providing adequate facility numbers of each.

Methodology

- ❖ Monthly meetings and discussions to determine gaps in services and existing best practices.
- ❖ The Task Force consulted information and research provided by individual members and agencies represented on the task force, the Utah Department of Human Services, HUD, and the State Homeless Coordinating Council.
- ❖ Task force members traveled to other communities to study best practices and investigate how they might be implemented in Salt Lake City.
- ❖ In January 2011, a survey of homeless youth service providers and other Task Force members was conducted.

Initial Findings

1. Prevention and Discharge Planning

✦ Existing Services include:

- VOA Homeless Youth Resource Center
- Pride Center Tolerant Intelligent Network of Teens
- School District Homeless Liaisons
- DCFS/TALNET
- Juvenile Justice System Youth Visions: works with youth before they are released to help them find housing
- Salt Lake County Youth Services

✦ Gaps/Needed Services include:

- Shortage of resources which work with families to reduce the forces driving youth homelessness.
- Youth aging out of custody (DCFS Foster Care, Juvenile Justice System) do not have an adequate safety net or skills necessary to assist with transition to adult responsibilities.
- Few programs deal with the needs specific to LGBTQ youth.
- Better developed outreach to sub-populations of homeless youth (i.e. those at risk for sex trafficking and prostitution).

2. Emergency Services

✦ Existing Services

- VOA Homeless Youth Resource Center/Street Outreach Program
- Pride Center Tolerant Intelligent Network of Teens
- Church Programs (Sacred Light)
- Salt Lake County Youth Service
- VOA Employment Specialists work with youth to help them become employed and rent in the private sector

✦ Gaps/Needed Services

- There is no emergency shelter specifically for youth.
- Hours of operation at facilities which do exist are limited.
- Physical space is limited at facilities.
- Resources (trained personnel) to provide long-term individualized services are limited.
- There is no current shared database and information system.
- There are no programs training first responders (EMS, police) on how to work with homeless youth.
- There is a serious lack of grooming facilities (showers, toilets, hygiene facilities, laundry) for homeless youth.

3. Supportive Housing

➤ Existing Services

- Vouchers and other housing funding sources
 - FUP: Section 8: 10-20 available for youth
 - HARP: Housing Assistance Rental Program, 8 vouchers (case management required)
 - HPRP : Rapid Re-Housing through The Road Home for families (w/ supportive services)
- Palmer Court: four set-aside apartments serving up to eight youth
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Youth Mentor Project: five bed transitional home for boys (w/ supportive services)
- Milestone II: six bed transitional housing for girls(established after the start of the Task Force)
- VOA Transitional Home: Women 16-19: seven bed transitional home (w/ case management)

➤ Gaps/Needed Services

- There are no permanent supportive housing options specifically for youth in our community.
- Need more housing case management if housing resources for youth increase, along with the funding to support case management and supportive services.
- Need more supportive services (employment counseling, mental health services, educational opportunities and health care) to complement housing resources for youth.

Site Visits

Members of the task force visited homeless youth facilities in Minneapolis, Washington D.C., Seattle and San Francisco.

❖ General findings:

- Salt Lake is doing better than expected in service delivery (i.e. not as far behind as feared).
- The mood of facilities from the attitude of the greeters to the professional staff is very important in providing a welcoming atmosphere for clients and others.
- State laws with regard to unions, emancipation, and/or age of consent dramatically impact the success of programs serving homeless youth.
- Proper training for and use of volunteers is important.

❖ Specific Findings:

- Most agency housing units were eight to 20 units per site. This was smaller than expected, however the agencies report the small facilities are effective and manageable.
- Agencies made good use of unused spaces in the community, i.e, community centers and churches.
- Successful agencies value research and evaluation.
- Successful agencies put an emphasis on education and employment.
- Quality of service is more important than number of youth served.
- Youth respond positively to directed time and purposeful activities.
- Facility design is important in creating positive atmosphere.
- Strong programming is essential and must meet the needs of the individual clients.
- Successful agencies provide continued support to youth transitioning out of homelessness.
- Agencies focus more on transitional and permanent housing than emergency housing, recognizing however, that emergency housing is essential. Youth moved rapidly from emergency shelter to transitional and permanent housing promotes successful change.
- Salt Lake's homeless youth population demographics are in many ways similar to larger cities.
- Peer mentoring and support is an important aspect of programming.
- Services for youth in general work well, not just the homeless (i.e. integration)
- Programs targeting specific segments of the homeless youth population (i.e. LGBTQ, undocumented, sex trafficked/prostituted youth) promote success
- Prevention services should include:
 - Reuniting runaways quickly with families before they have time to become entrenched in the homeless sub-culture.
 - Improvements in the foster care age-out process.
 - Specific programs for LGBTQ youth, along with continued outreach to families, DCFS and other community support groups.

- Salt Lake has serious gaps in services and facilities which include:
 - Lack of appropriate housing
 - Lack of adequate space for programs
 - Connections in the community with educational institutions and employers
 - Coordinated services which offer systematic, consistent and sustainable programs
 - Access to substance abuse and mental health care
 - Lack of community understanding regarding the intensity of the services needed by the homeless youth population
 - Consistent, reliable reporting on status of homeless youth and outcomes.

Obstacles to successful solutions

- NIMBY: Communities are often reluctant to allow supportive housing in their neighborhoods. Any plan to build facilities will require a great deal of education and community involvement.
- Lack of employment opportunities for youth: Not only are employers reluctant to hire homeless youth, the youth themselves are unprepared. They have few job skills and lack an understanding of basic work ethics.
- Lack of educational competency in youth: Many homeless youth dropped out of school and had negative experiences either academically and/or personally when they did attend.
- Youth's mistrust of adults and institutional settings: Their personal experiences have left them with little reason to trust authority figures or the institutions most of us take for granted. Without this trust, they are unable to form appropriate relationships or take the steps necessary to improve their lives.
- Lack of adequate funding for housing and programs.

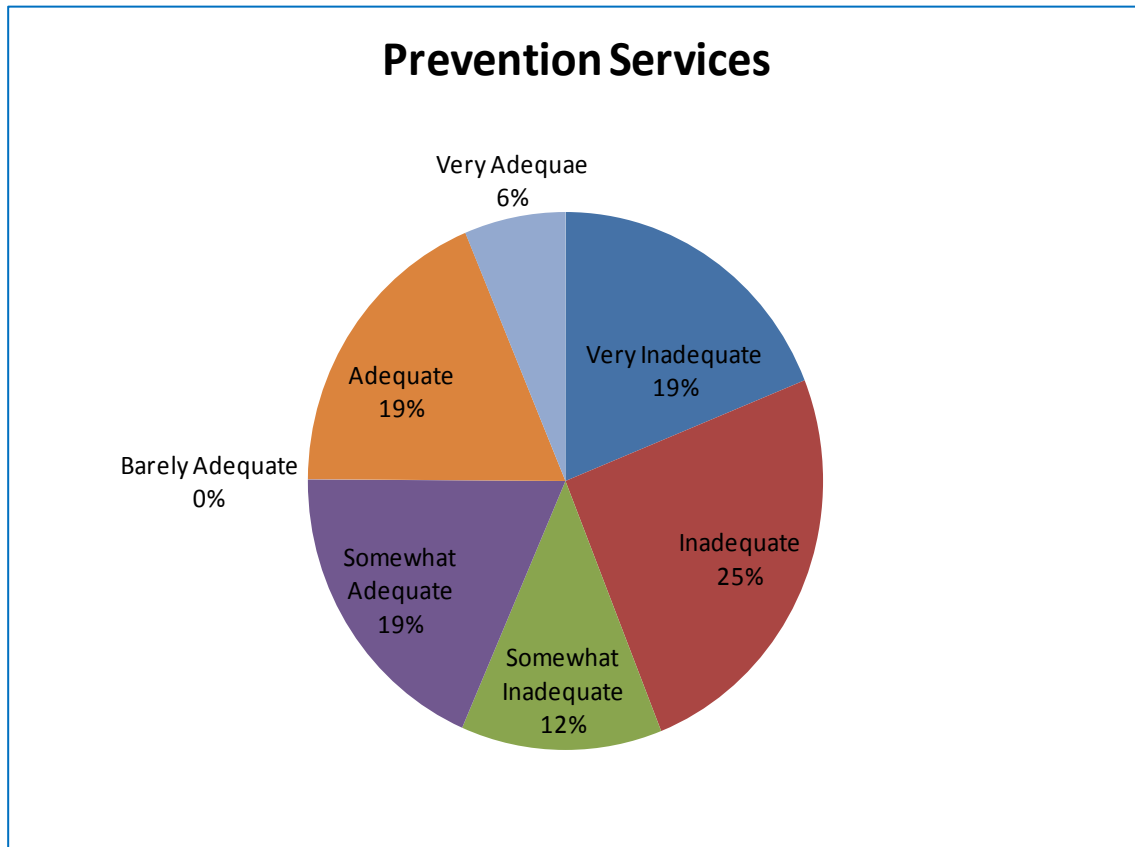
Alert!

- ◆ U.S. born youth are being trafficked into Utah for prostitution and drug activity.
- ◆ Social media plays a role for both good and ill for homeless youth.

Survey

The survey was conducted in January of 2011 and was conducted through *Survey Monkey*, an internet survey program. The questionnaire was sent to homeless youth service providers and Task Force Members in the Salt Lake County area. There were 16 respondents.

1. The first question dealt with existing prevention services. Over half (56.3%) of those responding found prevention services very inadequate, somewhat inadequate or inadequate.



✘ Comments

"The major gap is funding and awareness."

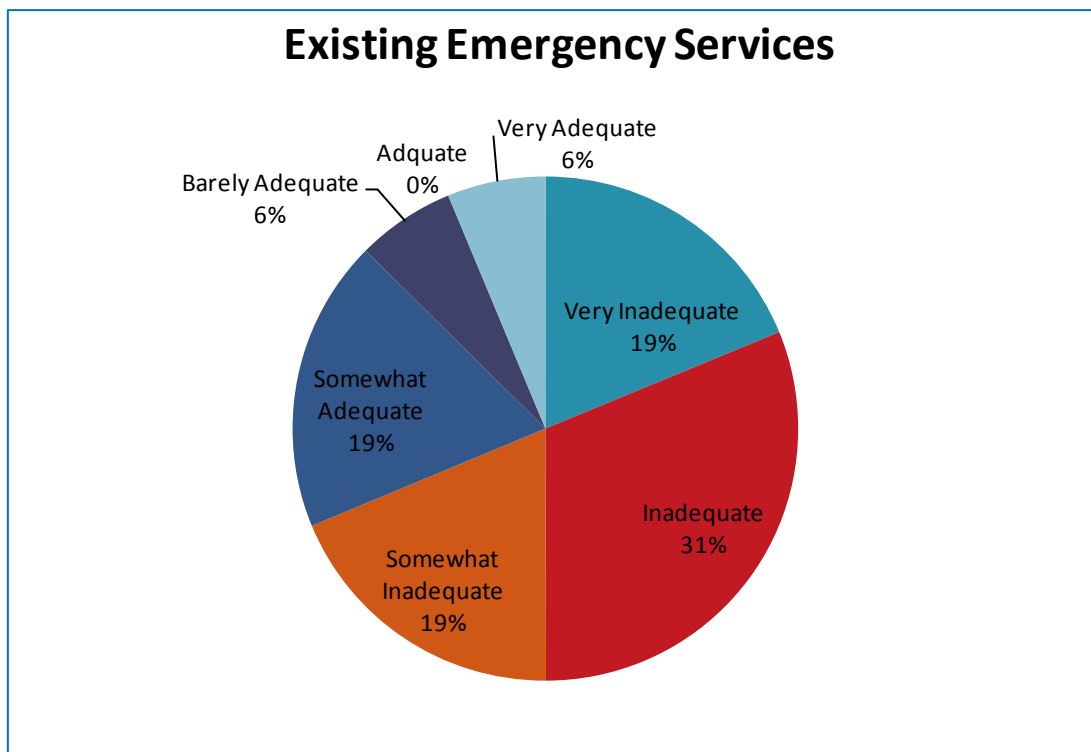
"Quick resource information for youth—one-stop shopping or website information."

"Shelter for both single/non-parent boys and girls."

"A continuum of services available through one point of access for youth—a safe place to stay while looking for employment or hooking up with services to empower them to be able to work."

"Shelter. Rights for agencies to deliver housing or other prevention services if kids are still minor."

2. Group two asked respondents to evaluate existing emergency services. Nearly 70% deemed existing emergency services to be very inadequate, inadequate or somewhat inadequate.



✘ Comments

"We need youth apartments, more youth shelters and more access to services in general."

"Emergency housing. Information and referral for specific support issues."

"Very limited resources that assist youth in getting their needs met and moving them to more permanent housing."

"Need full service shelter with more capacity, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing and more street outreach."

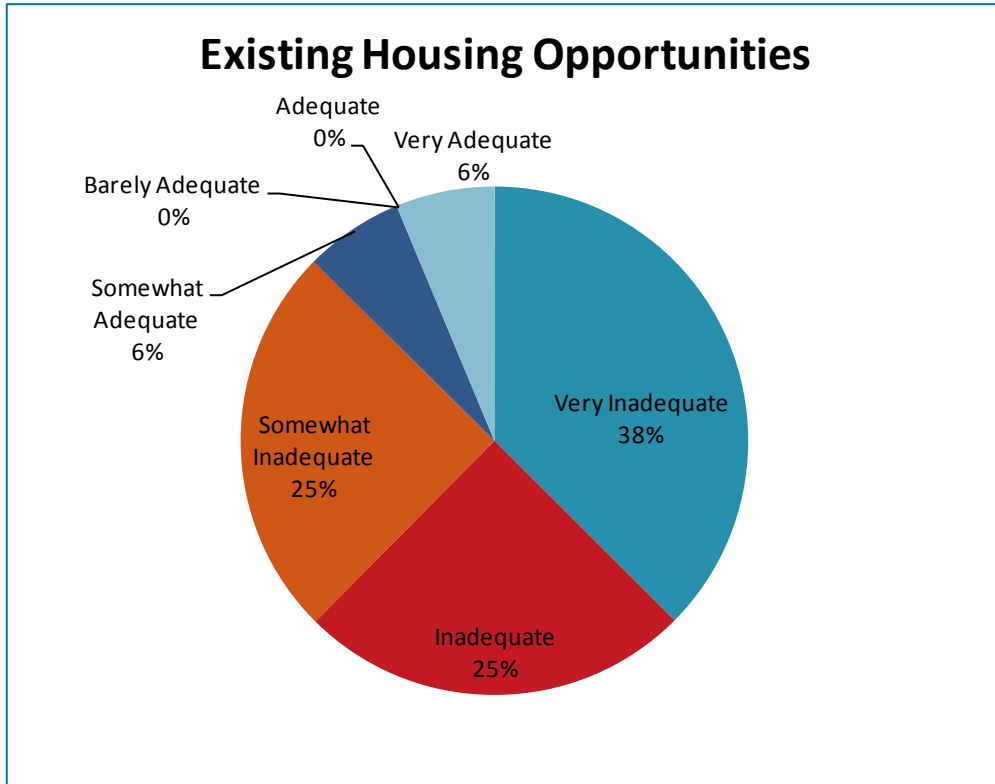
"Not enough funding, resources, legislation and support from the community. Not a clear understanding of what the youth are going through. The community doesn't know exactly how to help out."

"Need youth shelter, better care for kids ageing out of foster care, LGBT parental foster homes."

"They aren't youth friendly. Too many restrictions, too much paper work, etc. We need to go to them. If we are not able to access the youth who need services through the typical mainstream ways, we need to get creative and get them the services."

"Legal emancipation, obtaining ID documents, WFS services, healthcare, mental health care and housing."

3. The third set of questions dealt with housing. Overwhelmingly (87.5%) the respondents agree that Salt Lake lacks housing opportunities for the homeless youth.



✘ Comments

“Just need more options for homeless youth housing.”

“There is so little opportunity; it is in itself a gap.”

“Resources are so limited and the need so great.”

“Money and outreach.”

“Funding for subsidies and case management using existing housing stock. Some small apartment complexes focused on youth. More permanent supportive housing as well as transitional subsidies.”

“We take them to VOA. They help, but the VOA is swamped and needs an actual overnight shelter.”

“Youth shelter, host home program, allow LGBT Families to adopt and foster.”

“An array of options depending on temperament, personality, and situation of youth.”

“We need housing that supports those who are not yet of legal age.”

“More shelter for girls, some/any shelter for boys.”

"Immediate room and board housing situations, shared apartment, scattered low-income housing."

"Housing for the specific group of youth aged 16-21, with appropriate supportive services."

"Kids that transition out of foster care and have no safety net to catch them."

4. Respondents were also asked to name any projects to aid youth experiences homelessness, which are currently available or "in the works."

"The VOA project."

"I don't know."

"The County is providing some limited overnight shelter assistance, but it is limited, not easily accessible, and inadequate capacity to meet the need."

"Operation Shine America 2011 Projects."

"Community Awareness Training: We are currently working with DCFS, law enforcement, emergency rooms, community organizations, churches, universities, high schools and community groups."

"Youth Ambassador Program. We mentor homeless youth on how to advocate for themselves, how to advocate for their community, how to mentor other youth, and how to raise awareness on the homeless youth epidemic."

"OSA's annual national campaign to raise awareness of homeless youth. Operation Shine American 2011 Our Time to Shine, National Sky Lantern Event March 20th."

"The County Housing Authority's support of the Youth Mentor Project's housing trial seems to be a good public-private partnership addressing this pressing issue."

"Youth shelter."

"Bud Bailey Apartments will house a handful of youth aging out of foster care."

"VOA shelter for boys."

"Salt Lake County Youth Homeless Project—collaboration with community partners to create options for youth exiting DCFS and JJS custody to prevent homelessness."

Recommendations and Plan

After studying the data, members of the task force compiled a list of initial recommendations, namely to:

- Increase emergency, transitional and permanent supportive housing options
- Expand access to affordable housing
- Increase access to education and employment opportunities
- Create improved processes to successfully bridge youth from state custody into the community to prevent homelessness
- Continue providing training and materials regarding LGBTQ youth in order to create supportive environments to prevent homelessness
- Expand government and private partnerships
- Establish sustainable operating funds
- Improve data collection and analysis

These recommendations will be addressed in a five-year plan to end youth homelessness in Salt Lake County. The plan will address the goals for expanding prevention efforts, emergency services and supportive housing, and outline their implementation. Appropriate Utah State and Salt Lake County entities, along with Salt Lake County Social Service Providers will oversee completion of the Five-Year Plan.

Task Force Members

Canyons School District	Sacred Light of Christ Church, Salt Lake City
Catholic Community Services	Salt Lake County
Community Foundation of Utah	Salt Lake County Youth Services
Crusade for the Homeless	Salt Lake Tribune
State Division of Child and Family Services	State Community Services Office
State Department of Housing and Community Development	Salt Lake County Youth Government
State Division of Workforce Services	Salt Lake City School District
Family Promise of Salt Lake	Salt Lake Community College
Granite School District	The Road Home
Housing Authority of the County of Salt Lake	U. S. Census Bureau
Housing Authority of Salt Lake	Utah Pride Center
State Division of Services for People with Disabilities	Utah Youth Mentor Project
State Office of Housing and Urban Development	Valley Mental Health
State Juvenile Justice Services	Volunteers of America
Maggie St. Claire	West Valley City Housing Authority
Operation Shine	YWCA

Addendum

This chart provides the 2010 housing inventory for homeless youth and a draft of units which would become part of the Five-Year Plan to End Youth Homelessness.

Housing Inventory Chart for Homeless Youth

6/30/10

Type of Housing	Organization Name	Program Name	Target Gender /Age	# of units or beds	Rental Subsidy	Services by	Apply through
TH Group home	Volunteers of America, Utah	Transition Home	Females 16 - 19	7 rooms 7 people	No set rent; HHS funded	VOA	VOA
TH Community Living	Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Sandy	Milestones Pilot Project	Males 18 – 22 Foster Care	5 rooms 5 people	Salt Lake County HARP; \$50.00 minimum; progressive scale	Utah Mentor Project	DCFS
TH	SL City HA	Family Unification Program (FUP) to Section 8	F or M 18 + Foster care; have had DCFS involved	5 - 10 vouchers	SL City HA	Not Required; linked to community services	TALnet
TH	SL County HA	FUP to Section 8	F or M 18 + Foster care; have had DCFS involved	5 - 10 vouchers	SL County HA	Not Required; linked to community services	TALnet
TH	Salt Lake County	Housing Assistance Rental Project (HARP)	F or M 18+	9 vouchers	Salt Lake County; processed by County HA	VOA	County HA
Options Not Specific to Homeless Youth							
ES	Salt Lake County Youth Services	Crisis Unit Up to 21 days	F or M minors	24	No set rent; HHS and County funded	Youth Services	Youth Services