

The USICH Youth Data Strategy in Action: Analysis of Data on Youth with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness

**2015 Children's Bureau Combined Discretionary Grantees Kick-off Meeting
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Presentation overview

- **USICH youth framework and the Children's Bureau's Youth at Risk of Homelessness planning grants (YARH-1)**
- **Goals of the data analysis activities required in YARH-1**
- **Data sources on child welfare involvement and homeless outcomes**
- **Data sources on risk and protective factors**
- **What the YARH-1 grantees learned about youth involved with child welfare at risk of homelessness**
- **Lessons and next steps**

The USICH youth framework and the Children's Bureau's YARH-1 planning grants

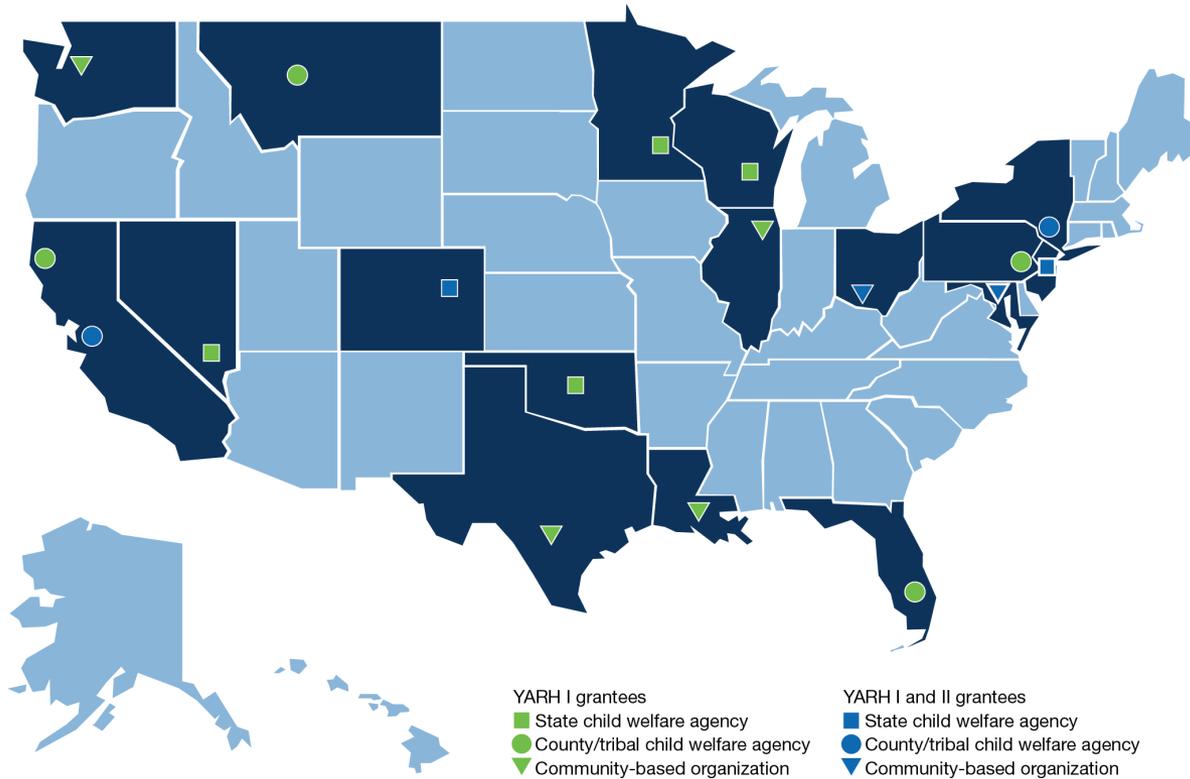
The USICH data strategy

- The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, *Framework to End Youth Homelessness: A Resource Text for Dialogue and Action* (2013) recommended a “data strategy” that would:
 - **Enhance data collection on homeless youth**
 - In particular, enhance Point-in-Time homeless counts
 - **Use community or state data to examine**
 - Characteristics of homeless youth
 - Size of the homeless youth population
 - Risk and protective factors

YARH-1 planning grants

- **Planning Grants to Develop a Model Intervention for Youth/Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness**
- **First national effort to implement the USICH youth data strategy for an important at-risk population**
- **18 grantees/24-month planning period (2013-2015)**
- **Charge: develop an intervention to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults with child welfare involvement**
 - **Begin with data analysis to understand size of the at-risk population and risk factors for homelessness in grantee site**

YARH-1 grantee locations



Goals of the YARH-1 data analysis activities

Goals of the data analysis (1)

- YARH-1 grantees wanted to learn:
 - What factors *increase the risk* of homelessness among youth in foster care?
 - What protective factors *reduce the risk* of homelessness among youth in foster care?
 - *How many youth* involved with child welfare are at risk of homelessness?
 - *How many homeless youth and young adults* have experienced child welfare involvement?

Goals of the data analysis (2)

- The research questions focused on three groups of youth/young adults:
 - Youth in foster care ages 14-17
 - Young adults in transition from foster care
 - Homeless youth with child welfare histories up to age 21
- Types of data needed:
 - Child welfare involvement
 - Homeless outcomes
 - Risk and protective factors

Data sources on child welfare involvement and homeless outcomes

Key sources:

Data on child welfare and homeless outcomes

- **YARH grantees needed to match data over time**
 - Youth in the child welfare system at an earlier time
 - Homeless outcomes for youth/young adults at a later time
- **Challenges**
 - Obtaining data outside own agency
 - Measuring homeless outcomes, including homelessness, unstably housed, or doubled-up youth
- **We look first at child welfare data and then at sources of data on homeless outcomes**

All 18 grantees had child welfare data

- Most grantees were state or local child welfare agencies; others had a relationship with the child welfare agency
- Child welfare data were readily available and relatively easy to use for analysis (for most grantees)
 - Longitudinal data; information on assessments and services
- But not always
 - Three grantees could request specific child welfare records but did not obtain a representative sample for analysis
 - One grantee could only obtain aggregate child welfare data that could not be linked with other data

Data on homelessness: transition surveys and National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

- **Additional child welfare agency data used by grantees**
 - Surveys of youth receiving independent living services (3 grantees)
 - NYTD longitudinal survey (10 grantees)
- **NYTD data: collected by state child welfare agencies for all, or for a sample of, transition-age youth, but response rates vary widely and are low in many states**
 - Youth in foster care at age 17 with follow-up at ages 19 and 21
- **Concerns of many grantees using NYTD**
 - Possible unrepresentative sample
 - Insufficient sample sizes for substate areas
- **Adequate NYTD data could have addressed the question**

Data on homelessness: Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS)

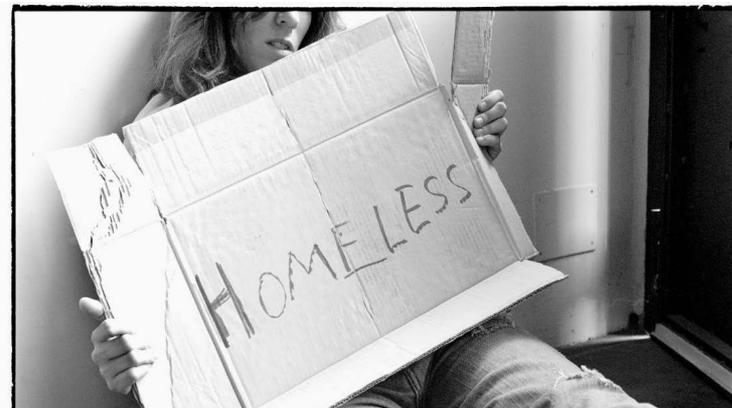
- Homeless youth are most often served by agencies funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) program
- Federal regulations prohibit sharing individual-level RHY data without consent of youth
 - Consent of the parent or guardian is also required if the youth is a minor
- No YARH grantees obtained RHYMIS data

Data on homelessness: Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

- HMIS data are collected by HUD-funded Continuum of Care (CoC) agencies
- HMIS data are often pulled together into a single data set by a state agency, simplifying access
- Half of the grantees obtained access to HMIS data
- Challenges in using HMIS
 - Only yielded small number of record matches with child welfare data
 - HMIS includes few homeless youth; only those seeking CoC services
 - Does not include those who are doubled up or unstably housed
 - Some grantees did not trust HMIS data because the number of matches seemed too low

Data on homelessness: Public assistance, education

- **Public assistance data (TANF, General Assistance, SNAP)**
 - Includes homeless status and unstable arrangements for some grantees
 - 5 grantees obtained this data source



- **Education data**
 - Can include information on homelessness or unstable housing arrangements—identified by school liaisons for homeless students
 - 4 grantees obtained state education data (1 obtained aggregated state education agency data)
 - 3 grantees obtained local education agency data

Data sources on risk and protective factors

All 18 grantees obtained risk and protective data, but data elements and sources varied

- **Child welfare agency data: information on youth assessments, placements, runaways, and services received**
 - Behavioral health, educational needs and issues, involvement with juvenile justice
 - Employment activity, school progress
 - Foster care placements and residential status
- **Public assistance agency data (TANF, SNAP)**
 - Income sources and amounts
- **Education agency data**
- **Employment and training agency data**
- **Juvenile justice agency data**
- **Health agency data on behavioral health**

Four grantees were in sites that have integrated administrative data systems

- In states or cities with integrated administrative data systems, data came from most of these agencies:

Child welfare
Public assistance
Housing, HMIS
Juvenile justice

Employment
Education
Health
Behavioral health

- Grantees expected to bypass the lengthy MOU negotiations, reducing delays experienced by the other grantees
- However, all four had to obtain either court approvals or agency approvals to obtain data for analysis
 - Two grantees completed analyses within 15 to 18 months
 - Two others were just obtaining access to the data by then

Approaches to obtaining administrative data from partner agencies

Most grantees tried to obtain some data from outside their agencies:

- Developed an MOU with an agency to obtain individual-level data
- Developed an MOU with an agency that maintains an integrated administrative database
- Sent records on youth/young adults to another agency that matched those records with its database and sent:
 - De-identified, individual-level data records for analysis
 - Analyses of characteristics of that group of individuals (tables)
- Used publicly available aggregate data on youth with particular characteristics who are as similar as possible to the youth/young adults of interest

16 grantees used youth surveys or focus groups to augment or replace administrative data

- Youth surveys and focus groups often done simultaneously with analysis of administrative data
 - Some grantees expanded regular surveys of transition-age youth
 - Some grantees expanded Point-in-Time counts of the homeless
 - “Snowball” samples were used for longer surveys or focus groups
 - Some efforts were ambitious: over 100 interviews
- Perceived advantages of surveys and focus groups
 - Immediate information
 - Filled in gaps: information on protective factors, service engagement, and homeless episodes
 - More accurate picture of unstable housing episodes
- Disadvantages of surveys and focus groups
 - Transition-age surveys of youth are typically brief
 - Whether snowball samples represent the population is unknown

What the YARH-1 grantees learned about youth involved with child welfare at risk of homelessness

Approaches to the data analysis

Some grantees used multiple approaches, and some did not describe the approach in detail

- **Linked individual child welfare data with homeless data (9 grantees)**
 - Identified a cohort of youth involved with child welfare, linked them with homeless data; identified factors associated with the homeless group
- **Counted risk factors (and protective factors) in a sample of youth involved with child welfare (5 grantees)**
 - Counted the number of factors experienced by each youth; set thresholds for high risk
- **Described characteristics of homeless youth with child welfare history (7 grantees)**

Grantees estimating predictive risk of homelessness (1)

- Nine grantees matched child welfare data with homeless data on youth and young adults
- Fewer grantees estimated a predictive risk model to assess the risk and protective factors associated with becoming homeless
- Analyses focused on different age groups of youth in foster care and on different age groups of homeless youth/young adults

Grantees estimating predictive risk of homelessness (2)

Several issues challenged this work:

- **No ordered path from child welfare to homelessness.** Homelessness could occur before or between periods of child welfare involvement as well as after
- **Status of 18- to 21-year-olds as either in or out of the child welfare system is fluid.** Youth may emancipate but then return; state laws vary
- **HMIS and NYTD had limitations for this work.** HMIS missed many unstably housed and homeless youth; NYTD samples could be small or unrepresentative

Risk of homelessness: percentage of youth in child welfare identified later as homeless

Grantee	Ages 14-17 in foster care	Ages 17-21 in transition	Both groups	Source of homelessness information
Grantee R	11%	12%		HMIS
Grantee H	20			HMIS and county data
Grantee G	12-17	18-25		HMIS
Grantee E		11		City shelter data
Grantee C			28%	HMIS and public assistance
Grantee A			15	HMIS, state education data
Grantee N		21		NYTD
Grantee M		18		NYTD
Grantee F	8	26		NYTD

Source: Grantees' applications for Phase II funding and analyses submitted with semi-annual progress reports (9 grantees linking child welfare data with homeless data or using NYTD).

Risk and protective factors associated with homelessness (1)

Grantees using predictive risk models identified several risk factors:

- **Numerous foster care placements**
- **Running away from foster care**
- **Placement in a group home**
- **History of mental health diagnoses or behavioral health issues**
- **Juvenile justice involvement**
- **Aging out of foster care**
- **Parenting or fathering a child**
- **Age at first placement played out differently as a risk factor for different grantees (early placement, i.e., birth to 2 years, or placement in adolescence)**

Risk and protective factors associated with homelessness (2)

Some grantees using predictive risk models also identified protective factors:

- Placement with relatives
- Exiting foster care to permanency (parents or adoption)
- School progress (high grade point average, enrollment in post-secondary education)

But many grantees did not have protective factors in their data

Other approaches to estimating risk and protective factors

Grantees used descriptive approaches informed by past research on risk factors for homelessness

- **Multiple administrative data sources assembled as snapshots of the population from various perspectives**
 - Education, employment, juvenile justice, housing, child welfare experiences
 - Grantees looked across the three engagement groups: 14 to 17 in foster care, 17 to 21 in transition, and homeless with child welfare history
- **Surveys of youth involved with child welfare to assess the incidence of a range of protective factors that could inform interventions**
- **Surveys of young adults who had exited child welfare**
- **Surveys of homeless youth/young adults about prior child welfare involvement**

Percentage of homeless youth with child welfare involvement

Grantee	Percentage of homeless youth with child welfare involvement	Ages of homeless youth	Sources of data on homeless youth
Grantee R	20%	18-21	HMIS
Grantee J	26	18-21	HMIS
Grantee Q	7-9	18-24	PIT count
Grantee N	11	All ages	PIT count
Grantee L	25	14 and over	PIT count
Grantee H	57	Not reported	Survey of homeless youth statewide
Grantee F	10	18-26	Survey of street homeless youth
Grantee B	5	18-21	PIT count

Source: Grantees' applications for Phase II funding and analyses submitted with semi-annual progress reports (eight grantees conducting these analyses).

Decisions about the size of the population of youth at risk of homelessness varied

- Eight grantees provided estimates of the size of the population of youth/young adults involved with child welfare who were at risk of becoming homeless
 - Estimates ranged from 10% to 100%
 - Some grantees based the estimate on an index of risk factors (some also added protective factors) and set a risk threshold
 - Others used the risk factors as screeners, and considered those with particular combinations of the risk factors as at risk
 - Some grantees adjusted the risk threshold so the resulting number of eligible youth could be accommodated by service providers
 - Others viewed all youth in the child welfare system as facing a substantial risk of homelessness
- Most grantees viewed all homeless youth/young adults with child welfare involvement as being at risk of homelessness

Estimated percentage of youth / young adults at risk of homelessness

Grantee	Ages 14-17 in foster care	Ages 17-21 in transition	Homeless with child welfare involvement
Grantee D	100%	100%	100%
Grantee G	80%	92%	100%
Grantee B	82%	82%	100%
Grantee P	64%	73%	77%
Grantee C	40%	40%	No estimate
Grantee K	30%	42%	No estimate
Grantee R	28%	39%	100%
Grantee A	10%	15%	21%

Source: Grantees' applications for Phase II funding.

Lessons and next steps

Lessons learned about accessing administrative data from other agencies

- Many grantees obtained multiple administrative data sets and combined them to learn about risk and protective factors for homelessness
- Time required to negotiate MOUs is significant
 - 9 to 18 months was typical, but many agreements took longer
 - Grantees in sites with integrated data systems still had to negotiate to *use the data*
- Some partners shared de-identified or aggregated data
 - Individual-level data with identifiers are needed to assess the risk of homelessness and associated risk and protective factors
- Some agencies that have important data sources did not share the data; cited regulations and sensitivity of data
 - FERPA, HIPAA, RHYMIS consent requirements, social security numbers

Enhanced child welfare data could support understanding of youth outcomes

- **Some grantees improved periodic surveys**
 - Expanded transition-age youth surveys to cover social support, connections with adults, and social-emotional well-being
 - Enhanced homeless Point-in-Time counts to include youth, past child welfare involvement, and sometimes several additional questions
- **Better quality administrative data and NYTD data**
 - More reliable and complete data on key risk and protective factors for youth
 - Increase NYTD initial response rates and improve youth tracking to attain higher follow-up rates
 - Expand the survey sample and topics

Risk and protective factors for homelessness and the size of the population at risk

- Valid measures of homelessness and unstable housing were not generally available
- Data on risk and protective factors were not consistently available across the grantees
 - All had child welfare data; few had education or employment data
- All grantees assessed risks; only a small number also looked at protective factors
 - Generally a data limitation issue – the data they could access easily focused on risk factors
 - The need to identify a high-risk group of youth for the intervention might have led to greater focus on risk factors
- Estimates of the percentage of youth involved with child welfare at risk of homelessness ranged from 10% to 100%

Starting conversations about homelessness in the community

The data analysis and related conversations with partners had benefits:

- Fully engaged partners to assess the risk of homelessness in a high-risk population
- Promoted data sharing among agencies
- Improved understanding of the data
- Increased understanding of risk and protective factors associated with homelessness
- Supported productive discussions about interventions

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