LOS ANGELES YOUTH HOMELESSNESS: CAUSES AND CHALLENGES

COMMON REASONS LA’S YOUTH ARE HOMELESS

- Economic or family issues are the most common causes of a child or youth becoming homeless.
  - Many young people have run away from physical, emotional or sexual abuse.¹
  - Sometimes parents force children to leave because of their sexual orientation, social circle, drug use, or other reasons. ²
  - Another major contributing factor is poverty. California has the highest child poverty rate in the United States – one in four children is poor. ³

- An important contributing factor is Lack of affordable housing. Most youth would prefer stable housing in a safe environment but cannot afford rent.
- Foster youth are at high risk of becoming homeless before the age of 21.
- Lack of Shelter Beds in facilities designated for Transition Age Youth contributes to youth sleeping in unsafe locations including the streets.
- Every year more and more young people sleep outdoors. On a single Los Angeles night in January 2014 only one in five homeless youth had a roof over their head. ⁴

BARRIERS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

- Only a third of Los Angeles’ homeless youth use shelters. There aren’t enough beds, but youth also don’t have enough information on available resources and feel they were stigmatized for using services in the past. ⁵
- Children and young adults in Los Angeles are not staying homeless out of choice. Nine out of 10 said that they would change their situation if they could. ⁶
- A 2008 survey of homeless California youth found that despite hardships and danger, 40% felt safer after leaving home because they were able to leave behind an abusive family situation. ⁷
- Youth respondents and researchers agree that the city’s high rent prices and low wages make it very difficult to overcome homelessness.
- Being homeless typically drives a youth farther away from people they can trust, and presents formidable barriers in obtaining an education or employment training and the means to overcome trauma. ⁸
- In addition, the criminalization of homelessness creates a vicious cycle in which young people are ticketed for sleeping outdoors, cannot pay the fine, acquire a criminal record and find it even harder to get back on their feet.

POOR POLICY PLANNING: LAST YEAR CALIFORNIA WAS RANKED SECOND-FROM-LAST IN NATION ON PUBLIC POLICY AND PLANNING ON BEHALF OF HOMELESS YOUTH. ⁹

² Ibid.
⁴ Los Angeles Point in Time Homeless Count (2014).
⁵ Voices from the Street, CSH Los Angeles, LA County Housing Inventory for Youth (2014).
⁶ Voices from the Street.
⁷ Ibid.