

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**.ⁱ
 - >Sometimes **parents force children to leave** because of their sexual orientation, social circle, drug use, or other reasons.ⁱⁱ
 - >Another major contributing factor is poverty. California has the **highest child poverty rate** in the United States – one in four children is poor.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 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**.^{iv}

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.^v
- 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.^{vi}
- 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.^{vii}
- 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**.^{viii}
- 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.^{ix}

ⁱ Neil Bernstein and Lisa Foster, *Voices from the Street: A Survey of Homeless Youth by Their Peers* (2008).

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Children's Defense Fund – California, *Ending Child Poverty Now* (2015).

^{iv} *Los Angeles Point in Time Homeless Count* (2014).

^v *Voices from the Street*, CSH Los Angeles, *LA County Housing Inventory for Youth* (2014).

^{vi} *Voices from the Street*.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid; David Crary and Lisa Leff: *Number of Homeless Children in America Surges to an All-Time High: Report* (2014). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/17/child-homelessless-us_n_6169994.html

^{ix} *America's Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness* (2014)