

YOUTH COUNT REPORT



2023

JACKSON
COUNTY
MISSOURI

Summary: For the past three years our community's Youth Action Board (YAB), Youth 4 Change KC (Y4CKC), has wanted to conduct a youth specific homelessness survey. Unfortunately, due to COVID related issues our community has been unable to implement this desired goal. However, in the spring of 2023, Y4CKC and other youth with lived experience led the way in developing and executing a youth specific homelessness survey that we call the Youth Count 2023.



About The Count

Who:

Area youth providers surveyed youth experiencing homelessness from ages 12 to 24

What:

The 2023 Youth Count was a survey that asked youth about their lived experience, involvement with the child welfare and justice systems, potential diagnoses, duration of homelessness, reasons for homelessness, sexual orientation, identity, and more

When:

03/27/2023 - 04/02/2023

Where:

Jackson County, Missouri

Goal

To create an accurate sample of youth experiencing homelessness in Jackson County, Missouri and Wyandotte County, Kansas (MO-604 Continuum of Care).

Purpose

In order to create an action plan and gauge our current effectiveness, we must determine where we are and what we are missing. Simply put, we don't know what we don't know.

"We cannot end what we cannot see and understand."

- We Empower San Antonio Youth

Highlights

01 Youth Guidance & Participation

Y4CKC Developed the questions, shared areas surveyors should go, and more

02 Collaboration

Over 15 different community organizations came together to plan and execute the surveys

03 Diverse Group of Individuals Surveyed

We were able to collect surveys from youth in a variety of different areas, phases of life, and a variety of different backgrounds. Jackson County can be rural, urban, and everything in between

04 Youth Wanted to Share Their Experience

Most of the youth surveyed were more than willing to share their stories and thanked surveyors for asking about their experience

05 Foundation For Future Youth Counts

Every time we work on a project like this, we learn and create a stronger foundation for building and growing our awareness of how to best serve youth

06 1st Time DYS & 16th Circuit Court Participated In a Youth Homeless Project

We were able to include youth within the justice system on our count for the first time

Challenges

About some of the challenges

Homelessness, by its very nature, is a social phenomenon that is not conducive to easy collection of accurate data. People experiencing homelessness don't have fixed addresses. There aren't lists of people experiencing homelessness that can be contacted by random digit dial. Additionally, people experiencing homelessness are pushed to the margins in ways that often render them socially invisible and recipients of a lot of negative treatment, particularly by people unknown to them and those who may be perceived as agents of the state. Consequently, they may be more likely to avoid contact with unknown persons than housed people.

Youth homelessness can be even more difficult to capture because youth are good at hiding their situation. It is not uncommon for youth experiencing housing instability to bounce from place to place with friends, distant relatives or coworkers, often staying on a couch or floor temporarily. Others sleep in cars or cheap hotel rooms. For these reasons, youth that are experiencing homelessness typically experience trauma and end up in places with persistent exposure to trauma. In addition to not wanting others to know they are homeless, many do not identify as homeless if they are not currently living outside.

Colloquial Definitions of Homelessness vs. Official Ones

For our purposes we utilized the U.S. Department of Education's definition of homelessness... "Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." Our primary focus was on unaccompanied youth - youth that are experiencing homelessness and were not currently staying with their legal guardian.

"Statistical representativeness"

Because of the difficulties noted above, it wouldn't be accurate to describe the youth who generously gave of their time to complete this survey as a "random sample." As such, we refrain from using these data to jump to conclusions about the experiences of ALL youth experiencing homelessness in the Kansas City area. With that said, we have confidence that we're accurately reporting on the experiences of the 200 youth we spoke with, along with the experiences of other youth like them.

Individual anecdotes from data collection of youth being mistrustful

Many youth have had severely traumatic experiences. For this reason, it can be difficult for some youth to trust anyone. In particular, youth are (understandably) unwilling to trust people asking questions about their circumstances, and so we don't have insights into their experiences.

Minimize Perceptions of "The Problem"

The biggest challenge we came across as we planned and prepared for this count was the lack of participation from area school districts. We did have many school districts participate, but a few did not. Three districts plainly told our team that they could not ask questions related to homelessness, disabilities, mental health, or LGBTQIA+ identification. Districts also stated that they have missed out on applying for additional mental health grants and offering services because they simply don't have the data to apply for the funding. Their districts won't allow it.

Findings

Summary of the Sample

In total, 203 youths took the survey. Of those, 185 provided answers to the full survey. The youth who completed the survey ranged from 12 to 24 years old with an average age of 18. None of the youth surveyed reported having "a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence". Because of the difficulties noted above, it wouldn't be accurate to describe the youth who generously gave of their time to complete this survey as a "random sample." As such, we refrain from using these data to jump to conclusions about the experiences of ALL youth experiencing homelessness in the Kansas City area. With that said, we have confidence that we're accurately reporting on the experiences of the 200 youth we spoke with, along with the experiences of other youth like them.

Ages Interviewed

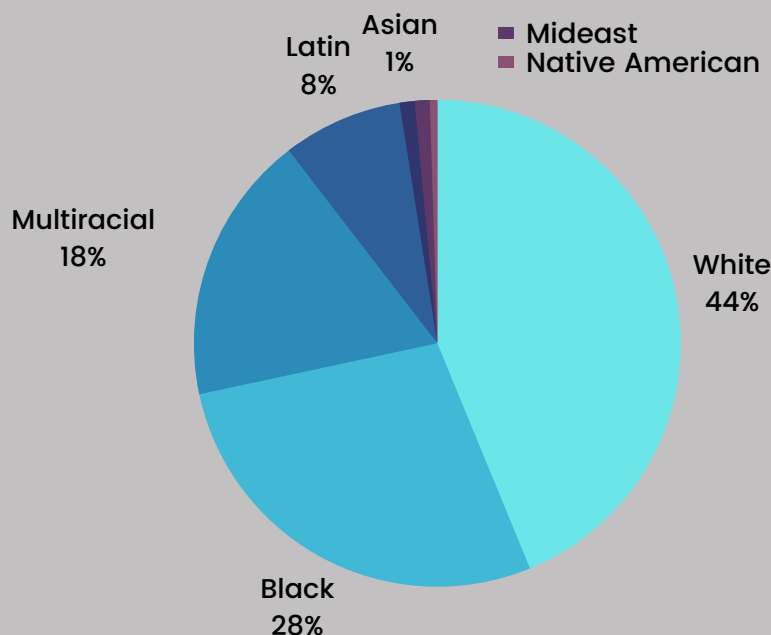
12% of youth aged 13-15

29% of youth aged 16-17

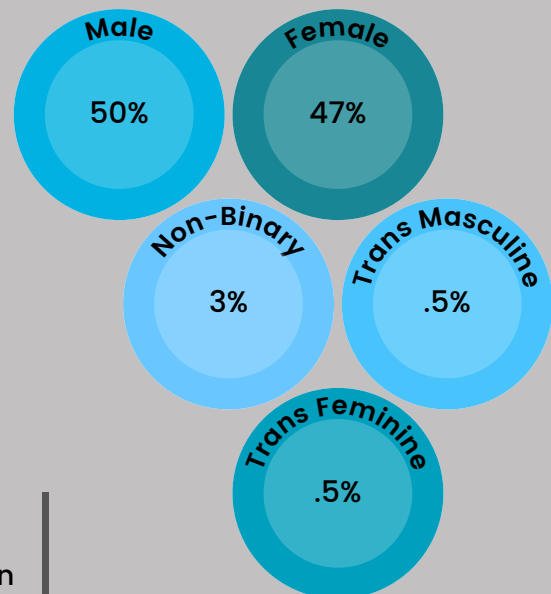
41% of youth aged 18-20

18% of youth aged 21-24

Racial Identity



Gender Identity



Stayed Last Night

41% Group Home or TLP
24% with family (not legal guardian)
13% Friend
9% Shelter
6% Incarceration
6% Other
.5% Hospital
.5% Partner

Findings



What happened that first caused you to become homeless?

43% of youth reported family conflict/kicked out/fight with family

30% of youth reported lack of options/couldn't find a place to live after housing became unstable



Is this the first time you have had nowhere to stay?

51% No

47% Yes

2% Did not answer



Do you ever stay at a shelter?

40% of youth answered "Yes"



Do you identify as LGBTQIA+?

71% of youth said "no"

23% of youth said "yes"

3% of youth said "I don't know"

3% of youth said "refuse to answer"



Do you have a mental health disorder?

42% of youth said "yes"

8% of youth said "I don't know"



Where did you stay last night?

41% "TLP/Group Home"

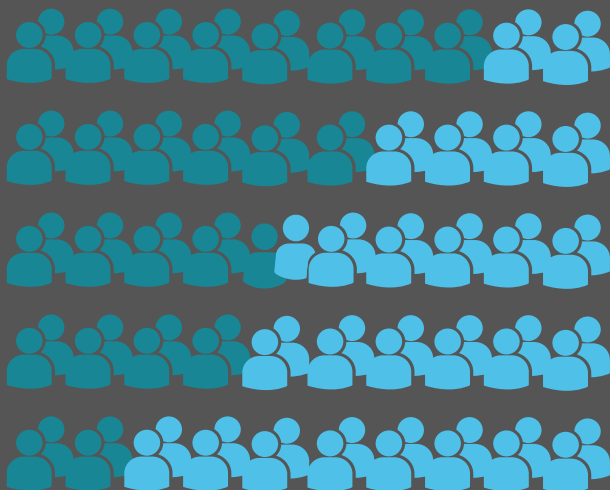
37% "Friend/Other family"

9% "Shelter"

6% "Incarceration"

33%

Youth who identify as LGBTQ experienced a 33% longer duration of homelessness than youth who did not identify as LGBTQ.



51% of youth stated that this was NOT their 1st time being homeless

Findings



20%

Youth reported that they have been in foster care

7%

Youth reported that they are or will become a parent in the next 9 months

11%

Youth reported that they have a developmental disability

6%

Youth reported having a substance use problem
(over 91% reported that they did not)

15%

Youth reported that they have been to jail or prison

9%


Youth reported that they receive disability benefits

Findings

Common problems that youth experience when seeking help...

29%	The system doesn't work / I'm mistreated by people who are supposed to help
23%	I don't want others to find out about my situation
21%	I don't have the right ID/Too much paperwork
21%	The wait is too long
18%	I can't find the help I need
17%	There's no space for me at the places that help
16%	I don't feel safe asking for help
16%	There's no help for people like me
14%	I can't get transportation to places that provide help
9%	I'm worried that seeking help will mean I have to go into foster care
3%	I don't trust anyone

Causes...

 What caused you to be homeless?

- “My parent was bouncing from place to place and had a hard time keeping us in school”
- “I became pregnant and my family kicked me out”
- “I left due to verbal and emotional abuse”
- “My parent had drug and alcohol issues”
- “My parent had mental health issues and my grandparents couldn’t take care of me anymore”
- “My parent is disabled and I couldn’t take care of them or the home anymore”
- “Just not enough money or resources for us to have a home”
- “My parents divorced and neither could care for me”
- “The people my family lived with kicked us out”
- “My parents couldn’t provide food or housing-I have been homeless since age 6”
- “My mom was addicted to drugs and after my dad passed away, I left to leave that all behind”

What You Should Know



We asked youth, What would you want people to know about being homeless?

- "That it's really hard"
- "It's scary and difficult"
- "It can happen to anyone"
- "It's sad, boring, and lonely"
- "It takes a huge toll on your mental wellness"
- "I'm constantly worrying if I'm going to be able to come to school some days and if I do I never have the energy as I'm always worried about my situation"
- "It sucks"
- "We all have struggles, but everyone deserves a safe home and support"
- "It's worse than anyone can imagine"
- "No one chooses to be homeless"
- "It's dangerous and a lot of people try to hurt homeless people"
- "It's depressing and exhausting"
- "You feel unloved, unworthy, and abandoned"
- "It's really hard when you have nowhere to go and nothing to do"
- "You end up in an enabling environment that can start and fuel addictions"
- "You always feel like a burden or an inconvenience and you never have anything to call your own"
- "It's expensive to be homeless"
- "It's not fun to sleep in a tent when it's snowing"
- "As a teenager it's stressful to pay rent and pay for food"
- "You miss out on being a teen because you have to work to take care of yourself"
- "It's hard for people like me who didn't choose this-I am a child forced into being an adult for something that isn't my fault"
- "It's hard because when you're always thinking about what's going to happen next"
- "It's like you turn into a ghost"
- "It sucks, especially if you don't know what you're doing"
- "Do what you got to do to get that help"
- "Lean on good people to help you"
- "I would tell teenagers that are homeless 'don't give up and keep moving forward'"
- "If you have faith in yourself, you can make it"
- "Don't hesitate to look for and reach out to people that can help"
- "It's hard to get help sometimes but don't give up"
- "There are programs-reach out to people and figure out the details"
- "Struggling with mental illness or drug issues can be a cycle, but you should reach out for help and talk to people, it will get better if you believe in yourself. Homelessness is not the end"

Appetite for Change

 These young people are resilient!



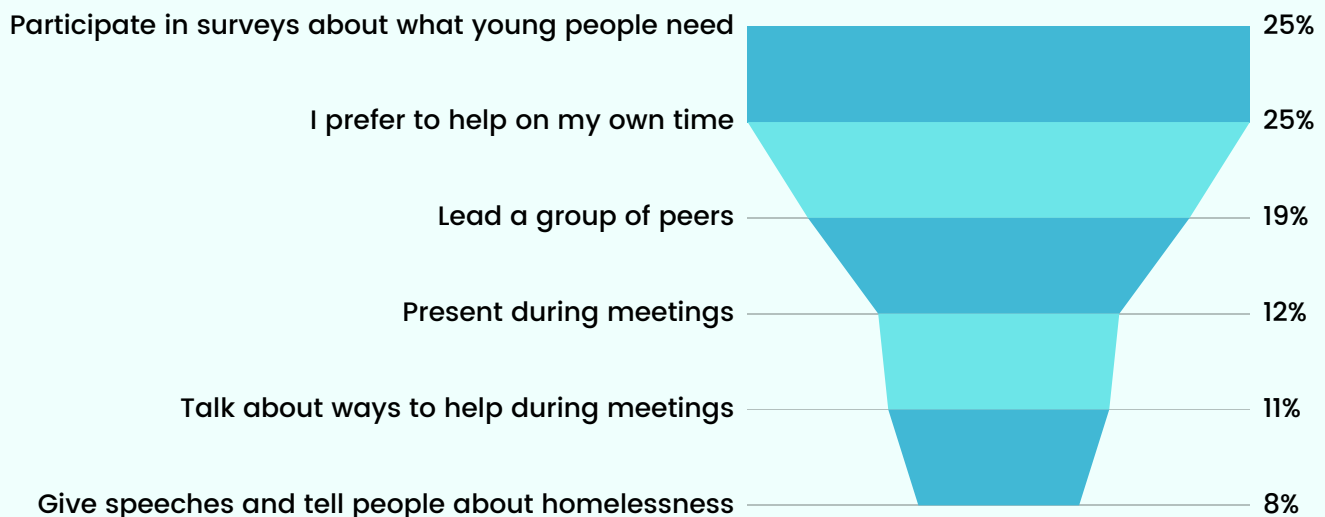
55%

Want to be a part of the solution

55% chose to respond to an additional question asking how they think they would be willing to help solve these problems.



How would youth like to help?





Reflection



Homelessness is not a “one size fits all” problem. When it comes to youth, the reasons one may experience homelessness are as varied as the hobbies, clothing styles, and career aspirations of each individual. For that reason, it can be disheartening to see these statistics and their corresponding quotes. It can become easy to get bogged down by the systems currently in place that allow youth to end up living without adequate housing. But with this study also comes hope. The youth we spoke with are resilient when they shouldn’t have to be. They are strong when others should be doing the heavy lifting. And while accepting of, and ready for help, they know what they need, and are eager to communicate those needs to anyone willing to listen.

No one should live without shelter. It is our hope that this study helps shed light on better solutions as we work together to make that a reality, while youth continue to pave the way. We cannot solve what we don’t know, and thanks to the hard work of far too many to name, and the incredible trust and support of the youth we serve, we now have irrefutable evidence that youth homelessness affects far too many in our community. There’s work to be done in solving homelessness, but in listening to the youth we serve, we have the tools to eradicate it together as a community.



Special Thanks

These Folks Made It Happen!

- Atlas Data Analytics and Consulting LLC
- Drumm Farm Center for Children
- Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness
- Hilltop Residential Center
- Jackson County Division of Youth Services
- Kansas City area school districts
- Kansas City Youth Street Outreach Team
- Our Spot KC
- Pride Haven
- reStart, Inc.
- Rediscover
- Stepping Stone ECH
- Synergy Services
- Youth 4 Change KC