

State of Arizona  
Office  
of the  
Auditor General

**PERFORMANCE AUDIT**

**HOMELESS YOUTH  
INTERVENTION  
PROGRAM**

**Report to the Arizona Legislature  
By Debra K. Davenport  
Auditor General**

**November 2001  
Report No. 01-32**

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DEBRA K. DAVENPORT, CPA  
AUDITOR GENERAL

STATE OF ARIZONA  
OFFICE OF THE  
AUDITOR GENERAL

WILLIAM THOMSON  
DEPUTY AUDITOR GENERAL

November 15, 2001

Members of the Arizona Legislature

The Honorable Jane Dee Hull, Governor

Mr. John L. Clayton, Director  
Department of Economic Security

Transmitted herewith is a report of the Auditor General, An Evaluation of the Homeless Youth Intervention Program. This evaluation was conducted pursuant to Laws 1999, Ch. 328, §1(D). I am also transmitting with this report a copy of the Report Highlights for this evaluation to provide a quick summary for your convenience.

As outlined in its response, the Department of Economic Security agrees with the findings and recommendations.

My staff and I will be pleased to discuss or clarify items in the report.

This report will be released to the public on November 16, 2001.

Sincerely,

Debra K. Davenport  
Auditor General

Enclosure

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## SUMMARY

The Office of the Auditor General has completed an evaluation of the Homeless Youth Intervention Program (program) administered by the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). The evaluation was conducted pursuant to Laws 1999, Ch. 328, §1(D).

The program's goal is to reunify homeless youth with their families. It facilitates the reunification process by providing services and working with youths and families to improve parent-child relationships. When reunification is not possible, the program then works to enhance the youth's ability to become self-sufficient.

The Arizona Department of Economic Security administers the program. The Legislature appropriated \$800,000 for its first 18 months of operation, from January 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001, and \$400,000 for fiscal year 2002 program operations. DES contracted with the Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development to operate the program. Tumbleweed provides services through one site in Maricopa County, and oversees two subcontractors who provide services through two sites in Pima County and one site in Yavapai County. The program provides youths with services in three phases: referral, assessment, and service plan; and receives capitated payments for each phase.

**Program Should Work  
To Increase Youths' Focus  
on Reunification or  
Self-Sufficiency  
(See pages 13 through 23)**

Even though half of the program's youths were reunified with their families or on the path to self-sufficiency at case closure, this does not mean they are now living in a stable situation. These

youths often enter the program while living in volatile environments that frequently involve serious, long-term problems. Therefore, when they leave the program, many youths return to a living situation that is still unstable. For example, one girl who had repeatedly run away from her grandmother's home was reunified with her grandmother after a week in the program. However, neither she nor her grandmother appeared for scheduled counseling services and 3 weeks later, the girl again ran away. Over half of the program youths who reunited with their families, and half of the youths who appeared to be on the path to self-sufficiency, were living in an unstable situation or in a situation in which the stability is unknown. The program needs to systematically track youths after they leave to measure the program's impact on their lives in critical areas, such as the youth's living situation, family relations, and ability to live independently. While the program has collected follow-up information for some youths, it has not done so consistently.

Although many youths who leave the program return to unstable living conditions, a majority do complete some of the goals they set while in the program. However, most of the completed goals are designed to meet basic needs, such as shelter/housing or providing cash assistance for food. Youths complete fewer goals related to reunifying with their families or becoming self-sufficient. Further, the service plans' goals and tasks developed under the program often fail to address critical behavioral issues, such as substance use treatment or mental health problems. Even though two-thirds of the youths reported current or past alcohol and/or other drug use and more than one-third reported mental health problems, only 6 of 223 goals youths set were related to these issues. For example, one youth with mental health and substance use problems had only one goal, which addressed basic needs but not mental health or substance use problems. The program should assist youths in developing goals that address critical behavioral needs and help them see the connection between addressing such needs and achieving reunification or self-sufficiency goals.

In addition, even though most youths identified family relationships as their main stressor in life, family members were rarely involved in the development and completion of service plan

goals. Only 25 percent of the tasks youth identified as part of their reunification goals involved family members, and only 6 of 36 case files evaluators reviewed included a family assessment. The program should increase efforts to involve the family in the assessment and service plan phases.

### **DES Should Monitor Program Costs (See pages 25 through 30)**

DES needs to monitor program costs related to the capitated rates and housing costs. First, although the capitated rate for the referral phase approximates the actual costs incurred, the capitated rates paid for the assessment and service plan phases are higher than actual average costs. Specifically, the capitated rate for the assessment phase is 267 percent, or \$160 higher, than the average cost to perform the assessment. Further, the capitated rate for the service plan phase is 15 percent, or \$423, higher than the average cost of services. The initial rates were based on the estimated costs from Tumbleweed, the program contractor. DES has since renewed Tumbleweed's contract through June 30, 2002, and anticipates that it will renew it one additional year. DES should monitor program costs so that it can ensure that the capitated rates more closely match actual costs in future contracts.

Although the program is able to serve all youths who enter it now, high housing costs for a few more youths could hinder the program from serving additional clients. More than 80 percent of the program's expenditures are for housing, and most of this money has been spent to house 12 youths. These 12 youths were in shelter care and/or transitional living for an average of 108 days each and accounted for over 56 percent of all of the monies spent during the service plan phase. While other homeless youth programs strictly limit the length of time they will support youths in shelters, this program has the flexibility to support its clients for longer periods.

## **Summary**

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However, to ensure that the program can help as many youths as possible, DES needs to consider policies that control housing costs, such as limiting shelter care and transitional living stays based on reviews of youths' progress while they are in the program.

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Office of the Auditor General has completed an evaluation of the Homeless Youth Intervention Program (program) administered by the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). The evaluation was conducted pursuant to Laws 1999, Ch. 328, §1(D).

### **Program Established to Serve the Needs of Homeless Youths and their Families**

The Homeless Youth Intervention Program was established by the Legislature to serve Arizona's homeless youth who are not currently served by Child Protective Services (CPS) or the juvenile justice system. According to a 2000 DES report on the status of homeless youth, approximately 3,250 youths under 18 were served by homeless youth programs. However, almost 1,000 youths who sought services did not receive them because existing programs lacked sufficient capacity or ability to serve youths' behavioral needs.

In its first 15 months of existence, the program served 94 youths.<sup>1</sup> The typical client was a 16- to 17-year-old White female. Many reported being victims of some form of abuse (physical, sexual, and/or emotional), came from families with alcohol and/or other drug use problems, and often had substance use problems of their own. In over 70 percent of the cases, the youth was either a runaway or had been kicked out of the home.

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<sup>1</sup> As seen in Figure 1 (see page 8), between February 1, 2000 and April 30, 2001, the program received 151 referrals, assessed 105 youths, and developed and closed service plans for 94.

**The program's goal and objectives  
are as follows:**

**Goal:** Reunify homeless youth with their families.

**Objective 1:** To enhance the parent-child relationship by providing the necessary resources and services to enable a safe and stable environment for family reunification.

**Objective 2:** To increase youths' ability to be self-sufficient.

**Program Provides  
a Continuum of Services  
to Eligible Youths**

The program provides a variety of services to meet the diverse needs of the homeless youth population. Specifically, these services include:

- **Family reunification/preservation**—Activities, such as family counseling, provided to youths and their families in order to stabilize (preserve) the family or safely facilitate reunification.
- **Case management**—Regular one-on-one counseling with each youth at least once a week.
- **Emergency supplies**—Medical care and items necessary for daily living, such as food and clothing.
- **Shelter care**—Youths are provided a place to live where basic needs, such as food and clothing, are met. In addition, youths receive training in living and employment skills, as well as character education and counseling.
- **Employment training**—Education on and assistance in obtaining and maintaining employment. For example, the program provides one-on-one and group assistance in resume and job interview preparation.

- **Transitional/independent living program**—Youths are placed in supervised apartment living and receive training in living and employment skills, as well as character education and counseling.

The program delivers services and programs based on the Youth Development Approach (YDA), which focuses on providing youths with the services and support needed to make a successful transition into adulthood. For example, many homeless youth come to the program with an immediate need for shelter, food, and clothing. Once these needs have been met, many of them pursue education and employment skills. By providing a continuum of services, the program meets the youth's needs within a community setting and offers participants the opportunity to learn basic skills, set service plan goals, participate in program activities and services that enable them to take control of their futures, and successfully make the transition to adulthood. The program also provides families the resources needed to support young people, strengthen family ties, and enhance family functioning.

### Youth Development Approach (YDA)

Is based on the premise that a youth cannot be coerced into receiving a service or addressing a specific problem area. Rather, the youth decides what, if anything, he or she needs and wants.

The program provides services to youths who meet eligibility criteria. Specifically, Laws 1999, Chapter 328 states that services can only be provided to youths who are not currently served by either Child Protective Services or the juvenile justice system, are under the age of 18, and are considered homeless. DES provides the following three definitions of homeless youth:

- **Homeless**—Youth and/or their families lack a permanent nighttime residence.
- **Runaway**—Youth has left home overnight without permission from parents or guardians.
- **At Risk**—Youth is at imminent risk of leaving or being thrown out of the family residence.

In addition, the youths and their parents/guardians must consent to participate in the program. However, family members do not have to participate in order for the youth to receive services.

### **Program Administration and Budget**

DES administers the program. The Legislature appropriated \$800,000 for its first 18 months of operation, from January 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001. Further, the Legislature appropriated an additional \$400,000 for fiscal year 2002 program operations. Table 1 (see page 6) shows the program awards and expenditures for fiscal years 2000 through 2002.

On January 11, 2000, the Department contracted with Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development, at which time program development was initiated. On February 1, 2000, the program started accepting referrals. Tumbleweed provides services through one site in Maricopa County, and oversees two subcontractors who provide services through two sites in Pima County and one site in Yavapai County. Table 2 (see page 7) shows Tumbleweed's expenditures.

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*Homeless youth were served in Maricopa, Pima, and Yavapai Counties.*

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### **Program Provides Services and Receives Payment in Phases**

The program provides youths with services in three phases and receives capitated payments for each phase. In the referral phase, the youth is referred to the program, screened for eligibility by DES and, if eligible, is contacted by a program case manager. If the youth and his/her parents or guardians consent to the youth's participation, the youth moves to the assessment phase. In this phase, the case manager and youth discuss the youth's current living situation, family relationships, and various mental and behavioral health concerns. Following the assessment, the case manager meets with the youth and/or family members to develop the service plan. In this phase, the program provides services to assist in keeping or reuniting the youth with family, or enabling the youth to become self-sufficient. Services may include temporary shelter and transitional living placement, family

support and stabilization, 24-hour crisis services, independent living skills, character education, and job training. Many of these services are provided by case managers who also meet with the youth on a regular basis to record completion of tasks and goals and to revise the service plan as needed. Figure 1 (see page 8) shows the descriptions of each phase, the number of youths who participate in each phase, and the number of youths whose cases were closed at each phase.

DES allocates program monies to Tumbleweed for each youth served, depending on the phase(s) of service provided. Tumbleweed receives \$50 for each youth referral, \$250 for each youth assessment completed by a case manager, and \$3,600 for services prescribed in the youth's service plan. Tumbleweed withholds 12 percent of these capitated fees for administrative expenses, such as staff salaries and office equipment.<sup>1</sup> The remaining monies are used to provide services to the youths enrolled in the program, including case management.

As seen in Figure 1 (see page 8), between February 1, 2000 and April 30, 2001, the program received 151 referrals, assessed 105 youths, and developed and closed service plans for 94.

### **Program Participant Demographics**

After reviewing the demographic and background information for the 94 youths who had service plans closed before May 1, 2001, evaluators found that 66 percent of the youth were between 16 and 17 years old, 69 percent were female, and 61 percent were White (20 percent were Latino, 13 percent were Black, and 6 percent were Asian, Native American, or other). In addition, youths reported the following problems at intake:

- Twenty-eight percent were at risk of being homeless, 32 percent were runaways, and 40 percent were homeless, kicked out of the home, or taken to the program by family members.

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<sup>1</sup> With the 12 percent administrative fee withheld, capitated payments are: referral—\$44, assessment—\$220, and service plan—\$3,168.



**Table 1**

**Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Arizona Department of Economic Security  
Schedule of Program Appropriations, Expenditures, and Carryforward Balances  
Years Ended or Ending June 30, 2000, 2001, and 2002  
(Unaudited)**

	<b>2000<sup>1</sup> (Actual)</b>	<b>2001 (Actual)</b>	<b>2002 (Estimated)</b>
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant Appropriations <sup>2</sup>	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000
Contract services expenditures <sup>3</sup>	<u>173,300</u>	<u>570,000</u>	<u>456,700</u>
Excess of appropriations over (under) expenditures	226,700	(170,000)	(56,700)
Carryforward balance, beginning of year		226,700	56,700
Carryforward balance, end of year	\$226,700	\$ 56,700	\$ 0

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<sup>1</sup> The Homeless Youth Intervention Program started accepting referrals February 1, 2000; therefore, the 2000 financial activity is for only 5 months of the fiscal year.

<sup>2</sup> The 2000 and 2001 appropriations are exempt from A.R.S. §35-190, relating to the lapsing of appropriations; however, any remaining 2002 appropriations lapse.

<sup>3</sup> Amount is payment to Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development for contracted services. These payments include a 12 percent administrative costs allowance. See Table 2 (page 6) for certain financial information of the Center.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of the *State of Arizona Appropriations Report* and various reports of the Arizona Department of Economic Security Financial Management Control System for the year ended June 30, 2000 and 2001; and Department of Economic Security estimates of financial activity for the year ended June 30, 2002.

**Table 2**

**Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development  
Schedule of Program Revenues and Expenses  
Years Ended June 30, 2000 and 2001  
(Unaudited)**

	2000 <sup>1</sup>	2001
Revenues:		
Department of Economic Security reimbursements	\$173,300	\$570,000
Expenses:		
Personal services	15,834	63,203
Employee-related	2,604	11,178
Other operating <sup>2</sup>	12,415	53,077
Shelter care <sup>3</sup>	49,588	149,090
Contractor payments <sup>4</sup>	<u>85,723</u>	<u>261,016</u>
Total expenses	<u>166,164</u>	<u>537,564</u>
Excess of revenues over expenses	\$ 7,136	\$ 32,436

<sup>1</sup> The 2000 amounts are for only 5 months of the fiscal year because the Homeless Youth Intervention Program did not begin accepting referrals until February 1, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Includes rent, utilities, client-related materials and supplies, office-related equipment and supplies, printing, telephone, training, insurance costs, and general administrative costs.

<sup>3</sup> The amount represents the Center's charges for providing shelter care.

<sup>4</sup> Amounts paid to other providers for services outside the Center's service area, primarily for shelter care.

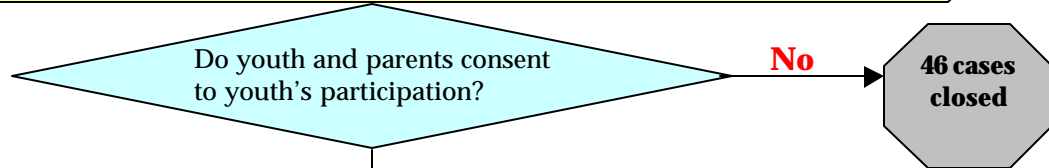
Source: Auditor General analysis of information provided by the Tumbleweed Center.

**Figure 1**

**Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Program Referral, Assessment, and Service Plan Phases  
February 1, 2000 through April 30, 2001**

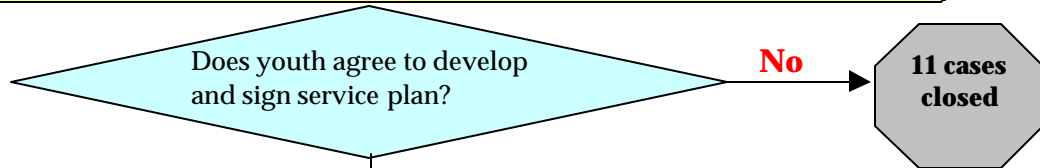
**Referral Phase—151 youth**

After a youth is referred and screened for eligibility, a program case manager tries to locate the youth within 48 hours. When the youth is located, the case manager describes program services and consent requirements.



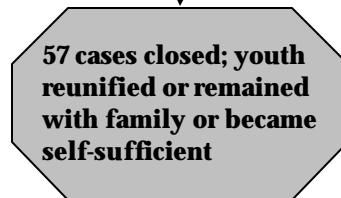
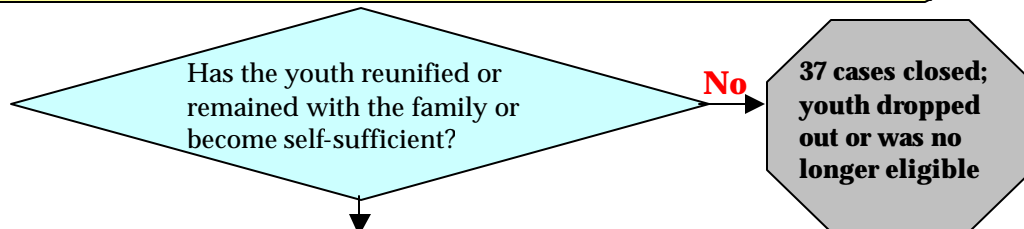
**Assessment Phase—105 youth**

Case manager meets with youth alone or with youth and family and conducts assessment of youth's current living situation, family relationships, abuse history, and other personal history relevant to youth's homelessness.



**Service Plan Phase—94 youth**

Case manager and youth review youth and family needs, establish goals, identify tasks necessary to achieve each goal, assign target dates and persons responsible for completing each task, and meet regularly to update service plan and goal completion information.



Source: Auditor General staff analysis of program's service specifications and Department of Economic Security program data for 151 youth whose cases were closed before May 2001.

## Introduction and Background

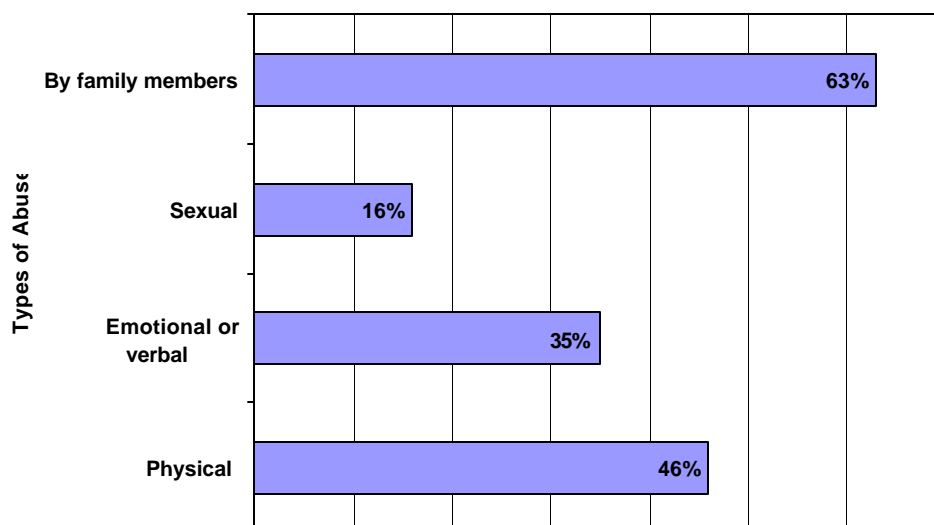
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- Sixty-six percent reported current or past alcohol and/or other drug use.
- Sixty percent reported problems with alcohol and/or other drug use within the family.
- Sixty-three percent reported that they have been victims of some type of abuse (emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse) from one or more family members.
- Sixty percent reported that a family relationship was the main stressor in their lives.

Figure 2 shows the types of abuse histories reported by the participating youth.

Figure 2

**Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Reported Rates of Prior Abuse  
February 1, 2000 through April 30, 2001**



Source: Auditor General staff analysis of program case file information for 94 youths whose service plans were closed before May 2001.

### **Scope and Methodology**

This evaluation, as directed by legislation, examines the program's impact and effectiveness, extent to which the program's goals and objectives were achieved, the number of youths who received services, demographic and provider information, and the average cost of services provided. It also includes an analysis of information collected on 94 youths between February 1, 2000 and April 30, 2001, and presents the following two findings:

- The program should work to increase youths' focus on reunification or self-sufficiency.
- DES should monitor program costs.

Various methods were used to assess the program, specifically:

- **Interviews**—The evaluation team interviewed two program directors, four program managers, five case managers, and four DES contract administrators to develop an understanding of program implementation and oversight.
- **Case File Analysis**—For the 94 closed cases, evaluation staff reviewed case management progress notes and follow-up documentation to determine reunification and self-sufficiency outcomes at and beyond case closure. Evaluation staff also coded and summarized case file information collected in the Youth Assessment and Youth Service Plan forms to determine program participant characteristics, the types of goals youths identified, and their progress in achieving their goals.
- **Data Validation**—Thirty-eight percent of the program's case files were reviewed in order to verify the completeness and accuracy of the service costs and youth background information in the DES database.
- **Cost Data Analysis**—Cost data was analyzed to determine total and average cost of all closed cases by phase and types of services received. Phase of service analysis included 152 referrals, 105 assessments, and 94 closed service plans.

- **Review of DES 2000 Annual Report on Homeless Youth in Arizona**—Evaluators reviewed the report methodology and structure, the status of homeless youths in Arizona, and barriers identified by agency directors that limit their ability to serve runaway and homeless youths.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Auditor General and staff express appreciation to the director of the Department of Economic Security; the staff of DES' Division of Children, Youth and Families; and the Homeless Youth Intervention program managers and staff for their cooperation and assistance throughout the evaluation.

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## FINDING I

# PROGRAM SHOULD WORK TO INCREASE YOUTHS' FOCUS ON REUNIFICATION OR SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Although it appears the program has had some initial impact, more can be done to improve the stability of youth outcomes. Evaluators determined that one-half of the program youths were reunified with their families or on the path to self-sufficiency when they left the program. However, many of these youths are in unstable living situations and most could easily again become homeless. Further, while they were involved in the program, youth were more likely to complete goals aimed at meeting basic needs, such as food or shelter, rather than goals aimed at reunification or self-sufficiency. In order to help more youths become truly reunified or self-sufficient, the program should revise service plan procedures to address youths' critical behavioral needs and increase family involvement throughout the youth's participation in the program.

### Half of Youths Reunified or on Path to Self-Sufficiency

Evaluators determined that at the time of case closure, 47 of the 94 youths were reunified with their families or were on the path to self-sufficiency, and another 10 youths were still living with their families.<sup>1</sup> Since the program lacks specific outcome definitions, evaluators reviewed program files and developed the following classifications of the youth's status at closure:

- **Reunification**—Youth is returned to live with a family member or guardian.

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<sup>1</sup> Of the 94 youths who had service plans that were closed before May 2001, 23 dropped out of the program and could not be contacted and 14 were no longer eligible to participate because they became involved with Child Protective Services or the courts.



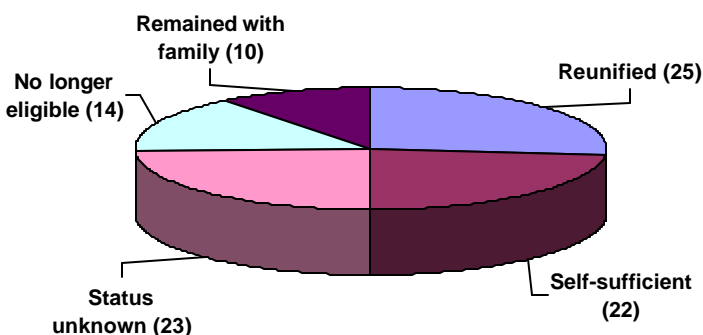
- **Self-sufficiency**—Youth now lives on his/her own with or without some program assistance.
- **Family Preservation**—Youth had been living with his/her family during program participation despite being at risk of running away or being thrown out of the home, and continues to live at home with family members.

As shown in Figure 3, evaluators found that at case closure, 25 youths were reunified with family members, 22 were on the path to becoming self-sufficient, and 10 continued to live with their families.

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**Figure 3**

**Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Youth Status at Case Closure  
February 1, 2000 through April 30, 2001**



Source: Auditor General staff analysis of program case file information for 94 youth where service plans were closed before May 2001.

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### **Nearly Half of Youth in Unstable or Unknown Living Situations at Closure**

Even though half of the program youths were reunified with their families or on the path to self-sufficiency at case closure, for

many, this may be only a temporary condition. Over half of the reunified youth and half of the self-sufficient youth were in unstable or unknown living situations. In order to track the stability and quality of the youths' outcomes, the program should conduct follow-up interviews with its clients at several points in time after they leave the program.

The family relationships and living situations for the homeless youth population are typically volatile and often involve serious, long-term problems such as physical, verbal, or sexual abuse and substance abuse. Further, some of the youths have repeatedly changed residences or have run away and returned home only to run away again. Therefore, a further assessment was needed of the quality and stability of the youths' relationships and living situation both when they leave the program and later. Accordingly, evaluators further classified the youth's reunification or self-sufficiency status at closure as stable, unstable, or unknown.

***More than half of reunification cases unstable or of unknown stability***—As Table 3 illustrates, evaluators determined that 13 of the 25 youth reunified at case closure were in unstable situations or situations in which the degree of stability was unknown.

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**Table 3**

**Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Youth Stability at Case Closure  
February 1, 2000 through April 30, 2001**

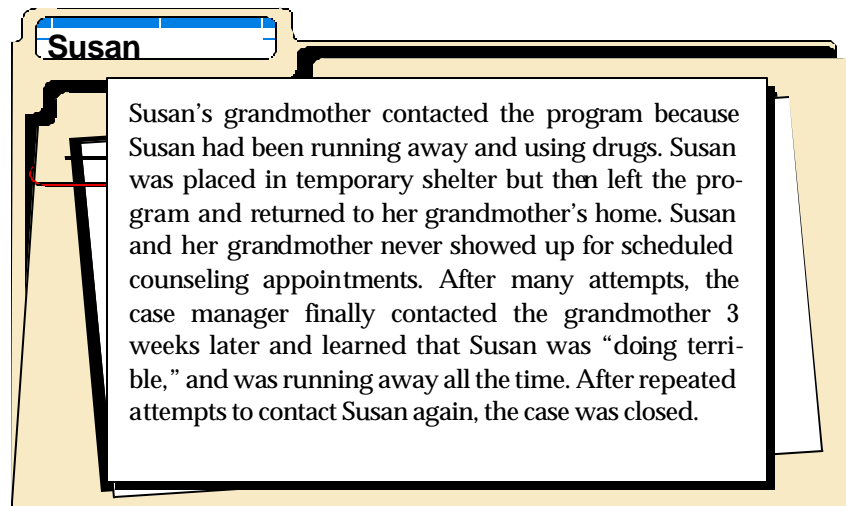
Status	Status Stability			Total
	Stable	Unstable	Unknown	
Reunified	12	3	10	25
Self-sufficient	11	3	8	22
Remained with family	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>10</u>
Total	30	7	20	57

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of program case management progress notes for 57 youth who were eligible and in contact with the program at case closure and whose service plans were closed before May 2001.

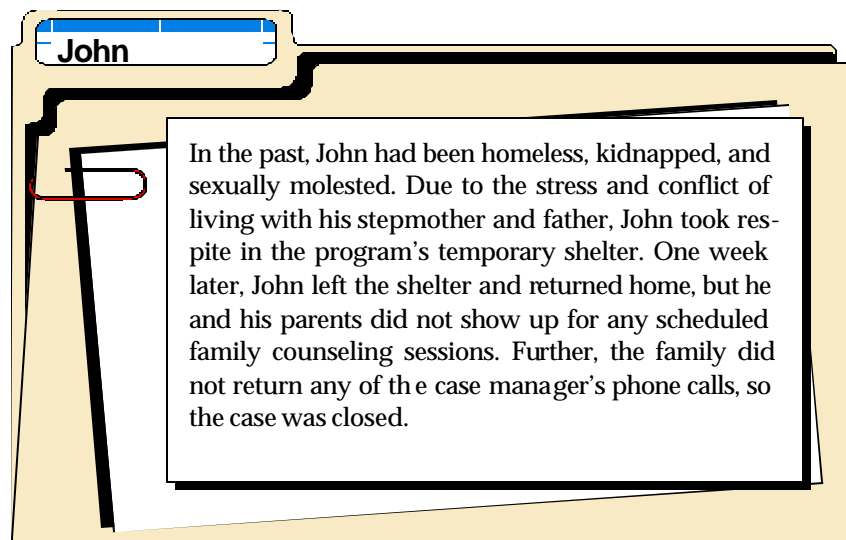
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Specifically, three reunification cases were considered unstable because the case manager notes indicated that even though the

youth was with family, he or she was “not doing well” or “still running away.” Consider the following example of a youth reunified with her family but in an unstable situation:

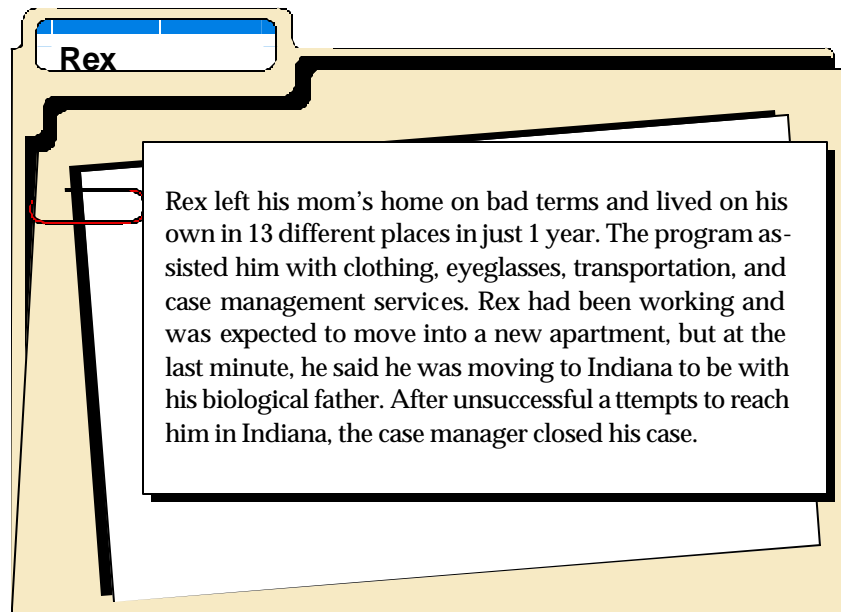


Further, the stability of the living situations and family relationships of the remaining ten reunified youth are still unclear. The case manager notes and closure documentation on many of these youths indicated only that the youth was returned to live with the family and was out of contact with the program. In the example below, it is not clear whether the youth and family had improved their relationship or whether the youth was likely to run away again.



By contrast, 12 reunification cases were considered stable because case manager notes indicated that the youth was returned to live with the family and was “doing fine,” “happy,” or “in regular family counseling to address family issues.”

**Half of the self-sufficient cases were unstable or of unknown stability**—Similar to the reunified youth, half of the youth who evaluators classified as self-sufficient at case closure were in unstable situations or in situations where the degree of stability was unknown. Specifically, three youths were considered self-sufficient but unstable. For example, one youth was living on her own when she left the program, but her utilities had been cut off and she was months behind in paying her rent. Further, the stability of eight other self-sufficient youths was unclear at the time of case closure. For example:



Finally, even most of the youths classified as self-sufficient and stable were in conditions that could change because their living situation was only temporary. Nine of the 11 youth were still in independent or transitional living programs at the time of case closure and only 2 were living on their own.

**Program should track youth outcomes after case closure**—At the time of this evaluation, 74 of the 94 closed cases were due for scheduled 30-day followups. Of these cases, case managers had successfully contacted 18 youth. The program needs to system-

atically track youth after they leave it to measure its impact on their lives in critical areas, such as the youth's living situation, family relations, and ability to live independently. Further, as stated in the contract with DES, the program is expected to conduct follow-up or assessment of participants' achievement in order to conform with the "best practice" for service delivery. Follow-up information has not been collected consistently and it has not been analyzed and included in the program's monthly reports to DES.

To effectively use follow-up information to measure outcomes, the program should implement the following processes:

**Actions Needed for Effective Followup**

1. Modify intake forms to better ensure youth can be contacted once they leave the program. Such modifications should include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of people who would know where the youth is living.
2. Contact youth at 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals.
3. Complete all steps of the follow-up process at all sites and sufficiently train all staff to administer the same interview schedule.
4. Analyze completed follow-up interviews and include summarized information in the monthly reports to DES.
5. Provide additional information to the youth if during the follow-up program staff identify additional concerns or youths are in need of more services.

## **Youths Primarily Complete Goals That Meet Basic Needs**

Although many youths who leave the program return to unstable living conditions, the majority do complete some goals while involved in the program. However, most of these goals are those that are more easily met, such as food or shelter. Youths complete fewer goals specifically related to reunifying with family or becoming self-sufficient. Youths' success in meeting the reunification or self-sufficiency goals may be limited because the service plans often fail to address critical behavioral issues, such as substance use, and most service plans do not involve family members, despite a clear need to do so.

As part of the Youth Development Approach used by the program, youths and case managers develop service plans together. Once goals are identified, the case manager and the youth separate each goal into smaller tasks and assign target completion dates and the person responsible for completing each task. In a typical service plan for the 94 closed cases, 2 to 3 goals were identified, each with 5 to 6 tasks.

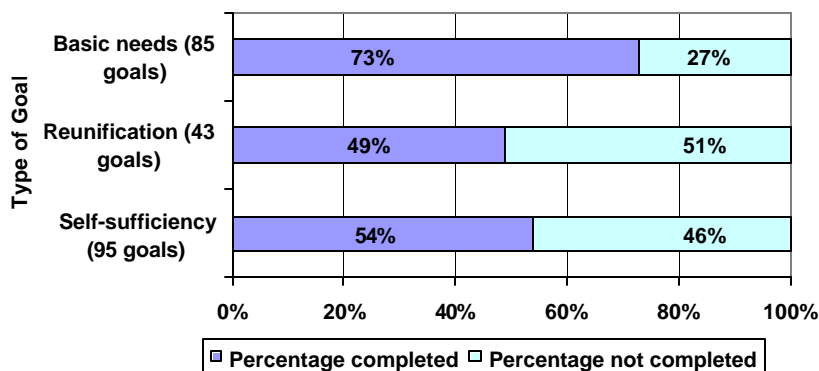
<b>Examples of Different Goals</b>	
Basic needs goals:	
	“Find youth a temporary place to live”
	“Provide youth with cash assistance for food”
Reunification goals:	
	“Begin weekly family counseling sessions with youth and family”
	“Buy bus ticket to return youth to family”
Self-sufficiency goals:	
	➤ “Get youth a job”
	➤ “Assist youth in maintaining a budget”

***Basic needs goals completed at higher rates than self-sufficiency or reunification goals***—Although more than half of the 94 youth had at least 75 percent of their service plan goals completed, youth were more likely to complete goals related to meeting basic needs rather than those related to reunification or self-sufficiency. As Figure 4 (see page 20) illustrates, 73 percent of the

basic needs goals were completed, compared to 49 percent of the reunification goals and 54 percent of the self-sufficiency goals.<sup>1</sup> The higher completion rate of the basic needs goals reflects the program’s strength in serving the immediate needs of its troubled client population. In contrast, the lower completion rates for reunification and self-sufficiency goals reflect the program’s struggle with moving youths to goals beyond their immediate needs.

**Figure 4**

**Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Service Plan Goal Completion Rates  
February 1, 2000 through April 30, 2001**

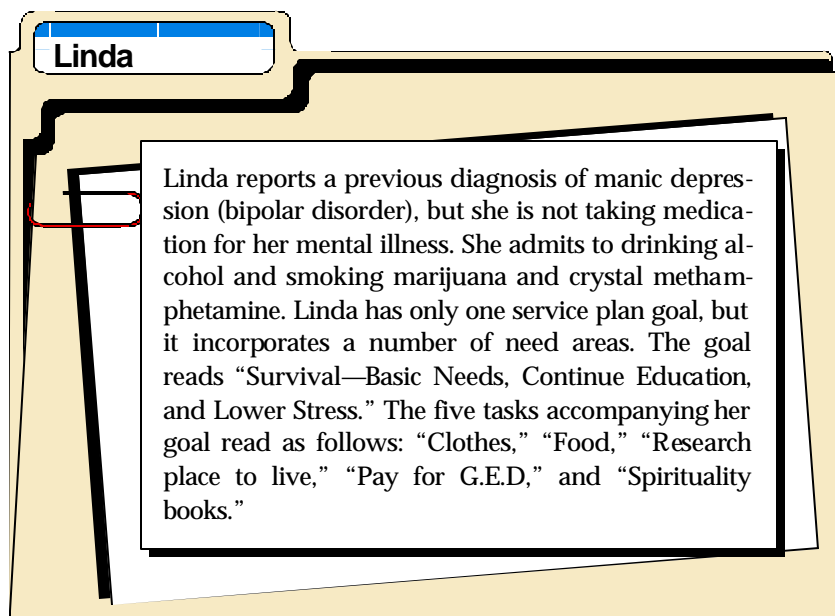


Source: Auditor General staff analysis of program case file information for 94 youth where service plans were closed before May 2001.

***Service plans seldom address critical behavioral needs—*** Although program participants suffer from self-damaging behavior and family problems that can impact their ability to achieve self-sufficiency or reunification goals, service plans seldom address these problems. Specifically, during the assessment phase, two-thirds of the 94 youth reported current or past alcohol and/or other drug use and 35 percent reported mental health problems. However, only 6 of the 223 service plan goals related to substance use treatment or mental health issues. The following

<sup>1</sup> Youths and case managers identified 85 basic needs goals, 43 reunification goals, and 95 self-sufficiency goals.

case illustrates the gap between needs identified at assessment and goals developed in the service plan phase:



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*Youth may not identify goals that address critical behavioral needs.*

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***Failure to address critical needs may be due to limitations in the program model***—The Youth Development Approach used by the program is based on the premise that a youth cannot be forced to receive a service or to address a specific problem, such as abuse history. Rather, the youth decides what, if anything, he or she wants or needs to address. However, critical behavioral problems, such as drug abuse or physical abuse, can contribute to the problems in the youth’s current living situation and family relationships and can impede progress toward family reunification or self-sufficiency. The program should assist youth in developing service plan goals that address these critical behavioral needs and help youths see the connection between addressing such needs and achieving reunification or self-sufficiency goals.

***Family involvement minimal***—Although most youths identified family relationships as their main stressor in life, family members were rarely involved in the development and completion of service plan goals. A lack of family involvement is a barrier to meeting the needs of homeless youth seeking reunification, according to DES’ 2000 annual report on Arizona’s homeless youth. While the 94 youth typically set 4 to 5 tasks for each goal, only 25 percent of the tasks associated with reunification goals involved their family members. Further, a review of 36 youth



## ***Finding I***

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case files found that only 19 percent included a family assessment, although the program requires this assessment to be completed for all youths. Family assessments help the case manager, youth, and family to identify family issues that should be addressed in the youth's service plan. Conducting family assessments in addition to youth assessments and involving family members in service plan tasks could improve the program's ability to address problems that stem from family relationships. Therefore, the program should complete family assessments for all youths and increase efforts to involve the family, by telephone or in person, in the assessment and service plan phases.

## **Recommendations**

1. The program should improve follow-up efforts in order to better determine its impact on the lives of the youths it serves. Specifically, it should:
  - a. Modify intake forms to better ensure youth can be contacted once they leave the program. Such modifications should include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of people who would know where the youth is living.
  - b. Contact youth at 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals as required.
  - c. Complete all steps of the follow-up process at all sites and sufficiently train all staff to administer the same interview schedule.
  - d. Analyze completed follow-up interviews and include summarized information in the monthly reports to DES.
  - e. Provide additional information to the youth if during the follow-up program staff identify additional concerns or youths are in need of more services.
2. The program should assist youths in developing service plan goals that address critical behavioral needs identified at assessment.
3. The program should complete family assessments for all youths in the program as required and increase the level of family involvement at the assessment and service plan phases.

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## FINDING II

## DES SHOULD MONITOR PROGRAM COSTS

DES needs to monitor program costs related to the capitated rates and housing costs. The capitated rates for two of the three program phases are higher than actual costs. Therefore, DES should monitor program costs so that it can ensure that the rates in future contracts more closely reflect actual service costs. Further, more than 80 percent of the program's expenditures were for housing, and most of this money went to house relatively few youths. While other homeless youth programs limit the length of time they will support youth in shelter care, this program has the flexibility to provide shelter for longer periods. However, to ensure that the program can help as many youths as possible, DES needs to consider policies that control housing costs.

### Some Capitated Rates Exceed Actual Costs

DES should ensure that the capitated rates for the program phases more closely reflect actual service costs. Evaluators reviewed program costs and found capitated rates exceeded program costs for two of the three program phases.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, DES should monitor program costs so that it can ensure that capitated rates more closely match actual service costs in future contracts.

**Capitated rates exceed costs for two phases**—As shown in Table 4 (see page 26), while the capitated rate approximates the actual average cost for services provided during the referral phase, the capitated rate for the assessment phase is 267 percent higher (\$160) than the average cost. Further, the capitated rate for the service plan phase is 15 percent higher (\$423) than the average cost.

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*Capitated rates exceed average assessment and service plan costs.*

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<sup>1</sup> The capitated rates referred to in this finding are for the delivery of program services and are as follows: \$44 for referral phase, \$220 for assessment phase, and \$3,168 for service plan phase. These rates do not include the 12 percent administrative fee that Tumbleweed withholds for administrative expenses.

**Table 4****Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Comparison of Capitated Rates to Average Actual Costs  
February 1, 2000 through April 30, 2001**

<b>Program Phase<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Capitated Rate<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Average Actual Cost</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Referral	\$ 44	\$ 46	(\$ 2)
Assessment	220	60	160
Service Plan	3,168	2,745	423

<sup>1</sup> Of the 151 youth referred to the program, 105 participated in the assessment phase and 94 participated in the service plan phase.

<sup>2</sup> Does not include 12 percent administrative fee.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of Department of Economic Security program cost data for 151 youths whose cases were closed before May 2001.

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***DES should monitor program costs for use in future contract decisions***—DES should ensure that the capitated rates more closely approximate program costs in future contracts. The existing capitated rates were established based on estimates developed by the program contractor, Tumbleweed. Since the program was new, Tumbleweed estimated its costs for each service phase based on various factors, such as shelter care, the dropout rates of youth in other programs, and DES' service specifications for the program. In addition, Tumbleweed compared the services it should provide with the services provided by DES' Family Builders program, and considered the capitated rates DES paid for this program in arriving at its estimates.

DES extended its original contract with Tumbleweed through June 30, 2002. DES anticipates that it will renew the contract for 1 additional year. Given that the program is relatively new and only 15 months of cost data was available at the time of this evaluation, DES should monitor program costs so that it can ensure capitated rates more closely match actual service costs in future contracts.

## **Program Should Monitor Housing Costs**

The program spends a large amount of money on housing costs for only a few youths, but does not monitor them to ensure that the housing costs for each youth are justified by his or her needs throughout program participation. The program provides youth two primary types of housing: short-term shelter care and longer-term transitional living placement. Evaluators found that 82 percent of the service plan phase costs were for housing and a majority of the service plan costs were incurred by 12 youth. Since high housing costs could hinder the program from serving additional clients in the future, it should monitor shelter care and transitional living costs and DES should develop policies, as needed, to manage these costs.

***Youths are provided shelter care and/or transitional living placement***—The program provides two primary types of housing to youth: shelter care and transitional living placement. Shelter care is typically a short-term respite to allow youths an option other than living with their families or living on the streets. When youths are placed in shelter care, their basic needs of housing, food, clothing, and transportation are met. However, youths do receive some independent living and life skills training, counseling, and character education.

Transitional living is typically a longer-term placement designed for youths who are trying to attain self-sufficiency rather than returning to live with their families. Youths who are placed in transitional living reside in their own apartments where they live on their own, although not completely independent of program staff. Similar to youth in shelter care, the youth receive skills training, counseling, and character education. When the youth becomes employed, a portion of his or her pay is put into a savings account to help the youth live independently.

***Most service plan phase costs paid for housing 12 youths***—As shown in Figure 5 (see page 28), nearly \$212,000 of the \$258,053 of service plan phase costs, or 82 percent, were for housing. The remaining 18 percent of service plan phase costs were attributed to case management and other services.

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*Eighty-two percent of service plan costs were for housing.*

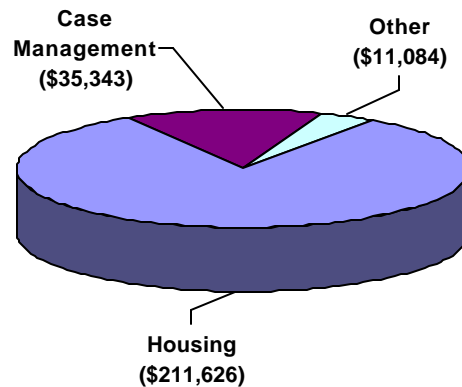
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Further, as Table 5 (see page 29) illustrates, 12 youths incurred a total of \$144,155, or 56 percent, of total service plan phase costs. Most of these 12 youths' costs were for housing. Their average length of stay in shelter care and/or transitional living was 108 days, at an average cost of \$11,102. In comparison, the average length of stay for the other 82 youth was 9 days, at an average cost of \$956.

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**Figure 5**

**Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Service Plan Phase Costs by Type of Service  
February 1, 2000 through April 30, 2001**



Source: Auditor General staff analysis of Department of Economic Security program data for 94 youths whose service plans were closed before May 2001.

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***Program should monitor and manage housing costs***—Since the program's inception, it has not had any youth on a waiting list to receive services. However, staff have managed their outreach efforts so that they can adequately serve all youth who enter the program. Since high housing costs could hinder the program from serving additional clients in the future, it should monitor shelter care and transitional living costs and develop policies, as needed, to manage these costs.

**Table 5****Homeless Youth Intervention Program  
Average Actual Cost of Service Plan Services  
February 1, 2000 through April 30, 2001**

<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Average Cost per Case</b>			<b>Total</b>	<b>Total Cost</b>
	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Case Management</b>	<b>Other Services</b>		
12 most expensive	\$11,102	\$712	\$199	\$12,013	\$144,155
82 less expensive	956	327	106	1,389	113,898
94 total	2,251	376	118	2,745	258,053

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of Department of Economic Security program cost data for 94 youth whose service plans were closed before May 2001.

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*Limitless housing stays may address the needs of some youths while hindering service to others.*

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The program has not established a maximum number of days that a youth can spend in shelter care or transitional living placement, but federal guidelines for other programs limit shelter stays to 15 days and transitional living to 18 months. Because of problems with the program's categorization of housing data, evaluators were unable to determine the total number of days youth received housing services, and how many of these days were in shelter care and how many were in transitional living placement. Further, evaluators were unable to determine how much of the nearly \$212,000 spent for housing was for shelter care versus transitional living. For example, in some cases, the program coded transitional living costs as shelter care costs and vice versa. However, evaluators were able to obtain accurate data for 3 of 11 youth with high housing costs and found that they spent extended amounts of time in shelter care, ranging from 33 days to 128 days.

Given that shelter care is typically a short-term respite, the program needs to develop processes to monitor youths' housing situations. First, the program should ensure that it categorizes housing costs appropriately. Second, the program should systematically review the cases of youths in shelter care or transitional living to determine the cost and the ongoing purpose and justification for housing each youth. Such a review could help ensure that the cost of the youth's housing is justified by his or



her needs throughout program participation. Finally, DES should develop policies, as needed, to limit the number of days a youth can stay in shelter and transitional living based on his or her progress while in the program.

### **Recommendations**

1. DES should monitor program costs and ensure the capitated rates better reflect actual service costs in future contracts.
2. The program should ensure that it categorizes housing costs appropriately.
3. The program should monitor housing costs and youths' progress while in shelter care or transitional living.
4. DES should develop policies, as needed, to limit the number of days a youth can stay in shelter care and transitional living program based on the youth's progress while in the program.

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# **AGENCY RESPONSE**

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**ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY**

1717 W. Jefferson, P.O. Box 6123, Phoenix, Arizona 85005

Jane Dee Hull  
Governor

John L. Clayton  
Director

Ms. Debbie Davenport, CPA  
Office of the Auditor General  
2910 North 44<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 410  
Phoenix, AZ 85005

Dear Ms. Davenport:

The Department wishes to thank the Office of the Auditor General for the opportunity to respond to the recently completed draft evaluation of the Homeless Youth Intervention Program.

I am pleased your findings indicate the program has had an impact on the youth we serve. The findings indicate that in the first fifteen months of its existence the program was able to serve ninety-four youth. It was also determined that one-half of the youth served were reunified with their families or on the path to self-sufficiency when they left the program.

Included in the draft report is the recommendation that the Department needs to consider policies that control housing costs, such as limiting shelter care and transitional living stays based on the reviews of youths' progress while they are in the program. The Department welcomes the opportunity to work with the providers in making these changes.

We agree with both findings contained in this draft report. The recommendations pertaining to each finding will be implemented as indicated in our accompanying response.

Finally, please accept our appreciation for the time and effort invested in this important evaluation. We wish to specifically recognize Jeff Kleist and Tara Lennon for their hard work during the evaluation process.

Sincerely,

John L. Clayton

Enclosure

**Department of Economic Security Response  
To The  
Homeless Youth Intervention Program Evaluation**

The Department wishes to thank the Office of the Auditor General for the opportunity to review and respond to the revised preliminary draft Homeless Youth Intervention Program (HYIP) evaluation. The time and effort spent evaluating the program is appreciated.

**FINDING I: Program Should Work To Increase Youths' Focus On Reunification Or Self-Sufficiency**

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the following recommendations will be implemented.*

- 1) The program should improve follow-up efforts in order to better determine its impact on the lives of the youths it serves is agreed to. Specifically, it should:
  - a) Modify intake forms to better ensure youth can be contacted once they leave the program. Such modifications should include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of people who would know where the youth is living.

*The finding of the of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The Department will modify intake forms to include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of people who would know where the youth is living.*

- b) Contact youth at 30, 60, and 90 day intervals as required.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The Department will implement procedures to contact youth at 30, 60, and 90 day intervals.*

- c) Complete all steps of the follow-up process at all sites and sufficiently train all staff to administer the same interview schedule.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The Department will complete all steps of the follow-up process at all sites and sufficiently train all staff to administer the same interview schedule.*

- d) Analyze completed follow-up interviews and include summarized information in the monthly reports to DES.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The Department will request follow-up interviews and request that summarized information is included in the monthly reports to DES.*

- e) Provide additional information to the youth if during the follow-up program staff identify additional concerns or youths are in need of more services.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The Department will request that during the follow-up, program staff identify additional concerns or youths that are in need of more services.*

The Department recognizes that the Homeless/Runaway Youth Program is still in the implementation phase and has program improvements that need to be made. The Department agrees to design a monitoring tool and process that will improve follow-up efforts and increase our success in locating youth after they leave the program. The process will be used on a 30, 60, and 90 day interval schedule and all staff will be trained at regular intervals and on an as-needed basis.

The monitoring will be designed to ensure that program data is captured and reported appropriately.

2. The program should assist youths in developing service plan goals that address critical behavioral needs identified at assessment.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The program will assist youths in developing service plan goals that address critical behavioral needs identified at assessment.*

When providers begin services for the youth, it is crucial that the basic needs of the youth are met. The providers should gain the youth's trust, and show the youth that they are genuinely concerned for the youth's safety and well-being. The first approach with runaway youth is to reunite them with their families whenever possible.

Once the primary needs are met, the provider can have a more stable base from which to operate. Over time the provider can explore the longer-term needs as part of a case plan to enhance the youth's stability and self-sufficiency, which would include addressing substance abuse issues or mental health needs.

The engagement of clients and the development of rapport is paramount. Since this program is wholly voluntary and designed to address those youth who are outside of the Juvenile Court and Child Protective Services systems, providers cannot force a youth to be involved in services in which the youth are unwilling or unable to participate. The providers have no means to compel them into treatment, job placement, or housing. It would be ill-advised to withhold services, pending the youths compliance with unrealistic timelines and goals.

3. The program should complete family assessments for all youths in the program as required and increase the level of family involvement at the assessment and service plan phases.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to with the understanding that the assessment is not a traditional family assessment, but rather an assessment that is used to gather background information, including relevant information pertaining to the youth. The program will complete assessments for all youths in the program as required and increase the level of family involvement at the assessment phases. The Program is voluntary and does not require family involvement for involvement participation.*

**Finding II: DES Should Monitor Program Costs**

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the following audit recommendations will be implemented.*

1. DES should monitor program costs and for future contracts renegotiate the capitated rates to better reflect actual service costs.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The Department will monitor program costs, and for future contracts, renegotiate the capitated rates to better reflect actual service costs.*

2. The program should ensure that it categorizes housing costs appropriately.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The program will ensure that housing costs are categorized appropriately.*

3. The program should monitor housing costs and youths' progress while in shelter care or transitional living.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The program will monitor housing costs and youth's progress while in shelter care or transitional living.*

4. DES should develop policies, as needed, to limit the number of days a youth can stay in shelter care, and transitional living program based on the youth's progress while in the program.

*The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented. The Department will develop policies, as needed, to limit the number of days a youth can stay in shelter care, and transitional living program based on the youth's progress while in the program.*



## Other Performance Audit Reports Issued Within the Last 12 Months

<p>01-1 Department of Economic Security— Child Support Enforcement</p> <p>01-2 Department of Economic Security— Healthy Families Program</p> <p>01-3 Arizona Department of Public Safety—Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) Program</p> <p>01-4 Arizona Department of Corrections—Human Resources Management</p> <p>01-5 Arizona Department of Public Safety—Telecommunications Bureau</p> <p>01-6 Board of Osteopathic Examiners in Medicine and Surgery</p> <p>01-7 Arizona Department of Corrections—Support Services</p> <p>01-8 Arizona Game and Fish Commission and Department—Wildlife Management Program</p> <p>01-9 Arizona Game and Fish Commission—Heritage Fund</p> <p>01-10 Department of Public Safety— Licensing Bureau</p> <p>01-11 Arizona Commission on the Arts</p> <p>01-12 Board of Chiropractic Examiners</p> <p>01-13 Arizona Department of Corrections—Private Prisons</p> <p>01-14 Arizona Automobile Theft Authority</p> <p>01-15 Department of Real Estate</p> <p>01-16 Department of Veterans' Services Arizona State Veteran Home, Veterans' Conservatorship/ Guardianship Program, and Veterans' Services Program</p>	<p>01-17 Arizona Board of Dispensing Opticians</p> <p>01-18 Arizona Department of Correct- ions—Administrative Services and Information Technology</p> <p>01-19 Arizona Department of Education— Early Childhood Block Grant</p> <p>01-20 Department of Public Safety— Highway Patrol</p> <p>01-21 Board of Nursing</p> <p>01-22 Department of Public Safety— Criminal Investigations Division</p> <p>01-23 Department of Building and Fire Safety</p> <p>01-24 Arizona Veterans' Service Advisory Commission</p> <p>01-25 Department of Corrections— Arizona Correctional Industries</p> <p>01-26 Department of Corrections— Sunset Factors</p> <p>01-27 Board of Regents</p> <p>01-28 Department of Public Safety— Criminal Information Services Bureau, Access Integrity Unit, and Fingerprint Identification Bureau</p> <p>01-29 Department of Public Safety— Sunset Factors</p> <p>01-30 Family Builders Program</p> <p>01-31 Perinatal Substance Abuse Pilot Program</p>
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## Future Performance Audit Reports

Department of Health Services—Behavioral Health Services Reporting Requirements