

Arizona Department of Economic Security Homeless Youth Intervention Program (Report Highlights)

November 2001

The Homeless Youth Intervention Program (program), administered by the Department of Economic Security (DES), began in January 2000 to serve Arizona's homeless youth who are under the age of 18 and are not being served by Child Protective Services or the juvenile justice system. DES defines homeless youth as those who lack a permanent nighttime residence, have left home overnight without permission, or are at risk of leaving or being thrown out of the family residence. The program's goal is to reunify homeless youth with their families. When that is not possible, the program works to help youth become self-sufficient.

Our Conclusions:

One-half of the youths were either reunified with their families or designated self-sufficient when they left the program. However, many of these youths come from families with serious, long-term problems, including physical and sexual abuse and alcohol and/or other drug problems, and these youth could easily become homeless again. To address these issues, the program needs to focus on addressing youths' critical behavioral needs and increase their families' involvement in the process. In addition, DES should monitor program costs related to the capitated rates and housing costs.

Program Services

Youth entering the program work with a case manager to complete an *assessment* and subsequent *service plan* that *identifies needs and goals*. While in the program, youth receive a variety of services to address their needs and help them achieve their goals including temporary shelter, clothing, and substance abuse counseling. Ninety-four youth had exited the final phase of the program at the time of auditors' review. These youth were:

- ◆ 69% female
- ◆ 61% White
- ◆ 66% age 16 or 17
- ◆ 63% reported being a victim of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse
- ◆ 60% from alcohol- and/or other drug-using families

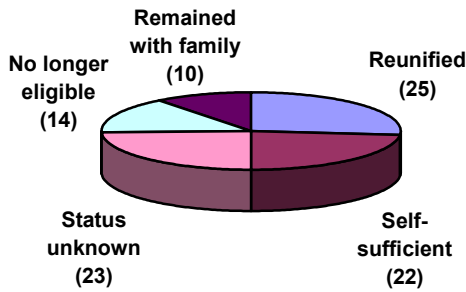
- ◆ 66% reported current or past alcohol or substance use.
- ◆ 72% either a runaway or kicked out of home.

Program Needs to Increase Youths' Focus on Behavioral Needs

Although it appears the program has had some initial impact, more can be done to address youths' behavioral needs to help ensure the youths remain with their families or stay self-sufficient.

Many reunified or self-sufficient—One-half of the program youths were either reunified with their families or on the road to self-sufficiency when they left the program. However, half of these youth went to unstable or unknown living situations.

Youth Status at Case Closure



Return to unstable situations—Many youths originally came to the program from unstable family situations and, when they left, they returned to unstable situations. For example:

Susan

Susan's grandmother contacted the program because Susan had been running away and using drugs. Susan was placed in temporary shelter but then left the program and returned to her grandmother's home. Susan and her grandmother never showed up for scheduled counseling appointments. After many attempts, the case manager finally contacted the grandmother 3 weeks later and learned that Susan was "doing terrible," and was running away all the time. After repeated attempts to contact Susan again, the case was closed.

Youth considered self-sufficient may also, in reality, be experiencing difficulties. For example, one youth was living on her own when she left the program, but her utilities were cut off and she was months behind in rent.

Many situations unknown—The stability of the living situation for one-third of the reunified or self-sufficient youth is unknown. The

program is supposed to follow up with youths after they leave the program, but has not consistently done so.

Need more goals related to behavioral needs

—Youths work with their case managers to help develop their own service plans. Goals in the plan can address basic needs such as obtaining food, clothing, and shelter, or goals can address steps towards reunification and/or self-sufficiency, such as family counseling sessions or attending school. Youth met:

- 73% of basic needs goals;
- 49% of reunification goals
- 54% of self-sufficiency goals

However, youth seldom set goals addressing critical, self-damaging behavior, such as drug use and mental health problems, which limit successful reunification. Consider the following:

- 66% of youth are current or past substance users
- 35% report mental health problems
- Less than 3% of the goals set by the youth addressed these problems.

Linda

Linda reports a previous diagnosis of manic depression (bipolar disorder), but she is not taking medication for her mental illness. She admits to drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana and crystal-methamphetamine. Linda has only one service plan goal, but it incorporates a number of need areas. The goal reads "Survival—Basic Needs, Continue Education, and Lower Stress." The five tasks accompanying her goal read as follows: "Clothes," "Food," "Research place to live," "Pay for G.E.D.," and "Spirituality books."

More family involvement needed—Family involvement is critical to reunification; however, family members were rarely involved in developing and completing service plan goals.

- Only 25% of the family reunification tasks involved family members.
- Only 19% of the cases had a family assessment, although this is required for participation.

The program should:

- ✓ Conduct systematic follow-ups with youth after they leave the program.
- ✓ Help youth develop goals that address their critical behavioral needs.
- ✓ Complete family assessments and increase the level of family involvement in completing goals.

Program Costs Should Be Monitored

Two aspects of program costs need to be better monitored:

DES should monitor program costs—The program contractor is paid a separate, capitated rate for the three phases of services—referral, assessment, and service plan. Because this is a new program, the contractor used estimated costs to set the capitated rates. However, program cost data is now available, and it shows that the capitated rates paid for the assessment and service plan phases exceed the actual costs of the service.

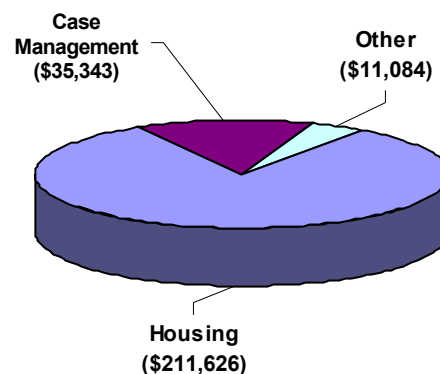
Capitated Rates vs. Costs

<u>Program Phase</u>	<u>Capitated Rate</u>	<u>Actual Cost</u>
Referral	\$ 44	\$ 46
Assessment	220	60
Service Plan	3,168	2,745

DES should monitor program costs and ensure that the capitated rates more closely approximate program costs in future contracts.

The program should monitor housing costs—Youth in need of housing receive either shelter care or transitional living placement. These services are among the most expensive services the program provides. Eighty-two percent of the program’s costs for services were for housing.

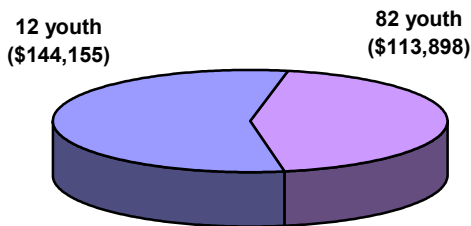
Costs by Type of Service



No limit on housing stays—Unlike other programs, this program has not established a limit on how long a youth may stay in shelter care or transitional living. However, 12 of the

program's 94 youth have stayed in housing for extended periods—one youth was in shelter care for 128 days. Largely as a result of the high housing costs, these 12 youth cost more to serve than the other 82 youth combined.

Costs of Housing Services



Housing costs and stays should be monitored—The program has managed its outreach efforts so it can serve all youth who enter the program. However, since high housing costs could hinder serving additional youth in the future, the program should monitor housing costs and DES should develop policies, as needed, to ensure that the cost of a youth's housing is justified by his or her needs.

DES should:

- ✓ Monitor program costs and ensure capitated rates better approximate actual costs in future contracts.
- ✓ Develop a policy, as needed, to limit the number of days in shelter care and transitional living.

The program should:

- ✓ Monitor housing costs.

To Obtain More Information

- A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling (602) 553-0333 or by visiting our Web site at:

www.auditor.gen.state.az.us

- The contact person for this report is *Carol Cullen*.