Assessing and Addressing the Needs of Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Los Angeles and San Francisco

(Huffington Post, 2016)

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Abstract:

Each year over two million children in the US will experience homelessness for a period of time. Throughout the United States, agencies serving youth are not consistently addressing the varying needs of LGBT youth experiencing homelessness. The following research outlines youth homelessness throughout the US, but specifically in Los Angeles and San Francisco. The research discusses the various paths into homelessness, homeless policies, stories from the streets, and an overview of the current situation in each city. It was quickly discovered that many young people chose not to seek help from homeless youth agencies due to the fact that they view this option as unsafe. The main methodology for the research was seven semi-structured interviews conducted with staff from the following homeless youth providers: Larkin Street Youth Services, LAYN, My Friend's Place and the Los Angeles LGBT Center.

The findings highlight a number of themes directly answering the primary and sub research questions. The findings specifically highlight the ways homeless programs are addressing LGBT needs, the gaps that exist in current programs, policy on youth homelessness, the importance of safe spaces and employment programs and the uncertainty surrounding a Trump future. Recommendations are made both on a state and local level. They provide potential solutions to a variety of the gaps and issues raised during the data collection. Ultimately, it is clear that there is a need for much more work in this sector to ensure that no more young people are faced with homelessness.

Introduction:

Every year over two million children in the US will be homeless for a period of time. Unfortunately, these numbers are continuing to rise annually. Time and time again, the primary cause of homelessness in young people is emotional, sexual, or physical abuse from family members or guardians. This research paper examines youth homelessness throughout the US, but specifically in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Prior to beginning this research project, I had hoped to learn more about the barriers youth face when deciding whether to seek help at youth homeless providers. However, throughout my research I quickly learned that the numbers of youth experiencing homelessness have decreased over the past five years; however, the rates of LGBTQ youth who experience homelessness are quickly on the rise. Having spent the first semester of my junior year interning at the Los Angeles LGBT Center, I care deeply about the rights of LGBTQ people and was immediately drawn to this fact. I quickly uncovered that most shelters in the US are not adequately addressing the very specific needs of LGBTQ youth and that they continue to be a high target not just on the streets, but also within shelters and in programs for homeless youth. Additionally, throughout my initial research I discovered that many young people chose not to seek help at shelters and programs due to the fact that they view it as unsafe or simply just a poorer option than being on the streets. Through my interviews, I learned much about these barriers that youth face when they are deciding whether or not to seek help. I wanted to learn more about these gaps in the system and hoped to learn about policy being written to address these issues. My paper hopes to present the current system and point to the changes being made throughout the country to help youth experiencing homelessness,

and LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. In conclusion, I knew immediately that the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States would greatly affect this sector. Thus I also discuss the affect his presidency will have on youth homeless shelters and programs.

To examine potential barriers homeless youth face in Los Angeles and San Francisco my research questions include two primary research questions: How can shelters better help the needs of youth experiencing homelessness, particularly in larger cities such as, San Francisco and Los Angeles? What are the barriers facing youth in accessing shelters in San Francisco and Los Angeles? My secondary sub-questions are: How do the programs offered by youth homeless agencies affect the lives of youth experiencing homelessness? How are youth homeless programs addressing the specific and varying needs of LGBT participants? What organizing and political action is being taken to minimize the numbers of those who are homeless? How can agencies serving youth experiencing homelessness strengthen their programs? Are programs and services provided to LGBTQ specific youth experiencing homelessness properly funded and are there protections in place to meet their needs?

Definitions:

According to the US Department of Education a homeless person as "(A) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...and (B) includes (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; (ii) children

and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings…;(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and (iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purpose of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstance described in clauses (i) through (iii)" (Briggs, 2013).

It is very difficult to fully measure the homeless population due to the fact there are not definitive numbers or census data about those experiencing homelessness. Although the United States Census Bureau does not currently collect any data about people experiencing homelessness, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development has information regarding temporary housing and shelter usages. Additionally, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development makes estimates about the homeless population. Thus, some of the numbers within this paper are not completely exact due to the somewhat inconclusive and scattered data collection that occurs on homelessness.

Literature Review:

Part 1: Youth Homelessness in the United States

All populations experience and are susceptible to homelessness, however some specific groups are disproportionately represented. Various studies have shown that on any day of the year, approximately 353,000 to 503,000 youth between the ages of 12 and 24 are homeless in the United States. These youth experiencing homelessness spend their nights sleeping in abandoned buildings, public parks, or their cars and have absolutely no

permanent place to call home. The places they reside and the experiences they have on the streets would not be considered anywhere near suitable for human residence or life. Many youth put themselves in dangerous situations by exchanging sex for temporary housing with strangers. They eventually lack an education altogether as well as any job experience, which ultimately makes it highly difficult to attain a job that provides a livable wage. All these factors together lead youth off track towards an otherwise positive future (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2014).

Part 2: Paths into Youth Homelessness:

Although reasons as to why a young person becomes homeless do vary, there are many common paths and reasons as to why it occurs. The vast majority of youth experiencing homelessness have been involved with various systems of care such as juvenile justice or foster care. Many have chosen to leave their former homes due to instability or various forms of assault, or have experienced a history of inconsistent housing. According the National Coalition for the Homeless, there are three related categories for the primary causes of youth homelessness. These three categories are "family problems, economic problems, and residential instability" (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007). Many chose to leave after deciding to no longer endure sexual or physical abuse, parental neglect, or issues of addiction.

For many youth experiencing homelessness, familial instability pushes them to the streets prior to adulthood. Large numbers of youth surveyed by Larkin Street Youth Services, a homeless service agency in San Francisco, reported that conflict or continual fights was what led them to become homeless. The National Coalition for the Homeless cited the 1995 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Study, which reported that

half of youth said their parents either kicked them out or knew their children were leaving and simply did not care. Since that report was published, these numbers have increased. In 2014, "ninety percent of minor youth accessing shelters through the federally funded Basic Center programs, state that they experience difficulty at home such as constant fighting or screaming" (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2014). One of the most common occurrences among homeless youth is a history of child abuse, both sexual and other forms, domestic violence and neglect. A study done by the Covenant House, a youth homeless agency located in cities across the US, discovered roughly 50% of residents of shelters "reported intense conflict or physical harm by a family member as a major contributing factor to their homelessness" (Covenant House, 2016). Even with a high GDP of $16.8 trillion, the United States still has the "world's second highest rate of poverty" (Phillips, 2015). 40% of the homeless youth in the US identify as LGBTQIA+. For these homeless youth, family rejection is the primary reason for their homelessness. Additionally, many also experience physical abuse in their homes. These homeless youth end up feeling very alone and unfortunately often find the need to figure it all out on their own.

A large number of the homeless youth population has a history with the foster care system. A number of studies demonstrate that there is a strong correlation between a history of foster care and experiencing homelessness for a long period of time. Researchers at the University of Chicago used a study done by the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth to examine this correlation. The study followed over 700 individuals when they were ages 17 or 18 in 2002 and 2003 until 2010 when they were age 26. They examined these participants during the time when they were transitioning out of foster care. The National Coalition for the Homeless reports that some

youth become homeless upon discharge from their previous residential placements because they have become too old to be in the foster system. The study showed that "consistent with results from prior studies, the researchers found a high rate of homelessness among the Midwest Study sample. By age 26, 36% of the young people whose outcomes were known had reported at least one episode of homelessness" (University of Chicago, 2016). Thus, over one in three youth in this area had experienced homelessness for at least one episode after exiting the foster care system. For youth in this system, upon discharge they are not given any income support or temporary/permanent housing. This contributes to the reason that the largest age group of the current homeless population is kids ages 15-17. The Covenant House reports that due to the fact that the government does little to support youth leaving the foster care system, one third of them end up in the street (Covenant House, 2016). In addition to child welfare, many homeless youth have a history with the criminal justice system. According to the Report *What Works to End Youth Homelessness?*, they found that in four American cities "20-30% of homeless youth adults had been arrested"(National Network for Youth, 2015). However, Larkin Street Youth Services reports that "for younger youth many of these arrests are probably due to status offenses, behaviors that are crimes solely due to age, such as running away or underage alcohol consumption...Many of the other arrests likely stemmed from activities associated with daily survival such as panhandling, loitering or sleeping outdoors" (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2014). As a result of a criminal history, these youth most often report extremely unstable housing.

The third main reason as to why youth become homeless is economic instability. It is fairly common that some youth become homeless with their families due to difficult

financial situations. Families can experience financial instability due to a lack of employment opportunities, no medical insurance, limited access to affordable housing or lack of a livable wage (Homeless Coalition for the Homeless, 2007). This population of homeless youth often start off being homeless with their families and eventually get separated because of child welfare policies or shelter/transitional housing. Forty percent of youth experiencing homelessness report that while living with their parents they either lived in public housing or previously received public assistance (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2014). It is not uncommon for family shelters to not accept older youth into their programs, which is another direct path to youth becoming homeless. Additionally, many youth chose not to contact social services because they fear they will be brought back to their various unsafe family situations.

The reasons as to why LGBT youth become homeless differs somewhat from non-LGBT identifying youth. However, it is somewhat common knowledge that LGBT youth make up a disproportionate amount of the homeless population in the United States. Obtaining specific information regarding status and demographics about LGBTQ youth experiencing homeless is difficult due to the fact that many youth do not feel comfortable openly disclosing this sensitive information about their sexuality or gender expression. Thus, these statistics tend to have a larger margin of error, which tends to be quite common among invisible and stigmatized populations. All too often when youth disclose to their families a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender identity, conflict and negative reactions occur. This occurrence is somewhat new due to the fact that in the past, most LGBT identifying people would wait until adulthood to come out to their families. According to Cray, Miller, and Durso, “Youth are coming out to their families at younger ages, and all too

often are being met with family rejection or abusive responses that force them out of their homes. These youth are also vulnerable in foster care, schools and juvenile justice facilities; the social safety nets intended to help them improve their lives as they enter adulthood drive them into the streets" (Cray, Miller, Durso, 2013). According to Nicolas Forge and Geoffrey Ream, the approximate number of those who experienced familial rejection is around 14-39%. There are many factors as to why a family would chose to reject their child for being LGBT. Religious beliefs play a large role in familial rejection. Not all LGBT youth experiencing homelessness get kicked out however, some chose to leave their homes due to the terrible conditions they no longer want to endure. The study *Homeless Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Youth in NYC: Insights from the Field* uses the example of "parents taking their children's disability money and spending it on drugs" as a common occurrence and reason as to why LGBT youth chose to leave (Forge, Ream, 2014).

Part 3: Responses by Service Organizations:

Throughout the country there are organizations working hard to solve homelessness and to provide direct help to those who need it and seek it out. Over the past 10 years, "the percentage of homeless youth providers serving LGBT clients have increased from 82%-94%. Responding agencies noted that a lack of sufficient funding was a serious barrier in service provision" (The Williams Institute, 2012). According to Gary Gates of UCLA, "finding additional resources to address those challenges will be critical to solving these difficult problems" (The Williams Institute, 2012). The National Network for Youth reports that "local community-based nonprofit organizations are leading a national movement that focuses public funding toward innovative solutions to end youth homelessness...Collaboration between public systems (child welfare, juvenile justice, and

public school systems) and community-based organizations is effective in leveraging the resources and strengths of what each has to offer" (National Network for Youth, 2015). In addition, outreach is a vital part of early intervention for youth experiencing homelessness. Outreach can be tough for a number of reasons one of which is that youth tend to chose to live away from the adult homeless population. Many youth living on the streets are not being reached and thus, are unable to enter services. Youth often fail to enter services on their own "due to concerns of personal safety, fear of entering the foster care system, lack of awareness that there are targeted programs for homeless youth, or word-of-mouth that no beds are available" (National Network for Youth, 2015). Thus, youth oriented homeless agencies are working to implement more outreach programs within their existing structures.

Part 4: Stories from the Streets and Shelters:

The stories and experiences homeless youth have while living on the streets do vary somewhat. For many youth, their time living on the streets is viewed as safer and happier than their experiences at their former homes. For LGBTQ youth, this is often due to the extreme sense of betrayal and feelings of disgust from their families that run deep. This sense of worthlessness often follows youth onto the streets and thus makes them high targets for sexual predators because they are often viewed as already damaged. Thus, rape and assault is very common for youth living on the street. (Lowrey, Shepard, 2010) The "street life" experiences overall provide great trauma to youth, however they are also forced to adapt in unique ways that deter them from preparing for life in "conventional society." (Auerswald, Eyre, 2002) A large part of "street life" is "street mentors" and street families. Youth almost always band together with other homeless youth and create these

groups. These street families are usually great forms of support due to the fact that many have shared experiences, whether it be on the street or from their past familial experiences. Youth experiencing homelessness consistently have had tragic and scary experiences with adults their entire lives, and thus have difficulty trusting them. According to the study, *Homeless Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in New York City: Insights from the Field*, many youth adhere to a "Code of the Street," which is "the idea of providing for the safety of one's own body and property through maintaining a reputation for the ability to cause violent retribution, arguably a special case of the 'culture of honor' that emerges in any human environment where people cannot count on conventional authorities for protection" (Ream, Forge, 2014).

All too often many youth homeless shelters pose tough obstacles for LGBT youth. According to the study, *Community Building(s): Creating Accessible Homeless Shelters for LGBT Youth,* "most homeless shelters are inaccessible to LGBT youth because they have policies for family housing accommodations that assume heterosexual family models; are constructed with a binary separation of sleeping space based on gender, which doesn't necessarily accommodate transgender or intersex youth; and often, mandate that participants take part in religiously oriented programming that is not always inclusive of LGBT identities" (Shultz, 2015). This is very common in many youth homeless shelters throughout the US where they choose to push religion onto participants, encouraging praying and reading the Bible. This is problematic in a separate way because no young person seeking help should be exploited to promote a separate belief system. However, this is a unique problem for LGBT youth experiencing homelessness because for many, they became homeless because of the varying religious beliefs of their parents and family. Even

in shelters, LGBT youth are frequently targeted and experience homophobic harassment and violence not just by other youth participants, but also by homeless shelter staff. There are stories of transgender youth being targeted and beaten in communal showers, while staff watch and take no action. The stories are heartbreaking. The study *Surviving on the Street: The Experiences of Homeless Youth* shows data that demonstrates it is very common for LGBT youth to chose sleeping in the streets instead of in large shelters. (McCarthy, Hagan, 1992).

Part 5: Lasting Effects of Homelessness on Youth

Health Disparities: Various studies have been conducted to point to the clear correlation between duration of one's homelessness and a higher risk of harmful health outcomes (Journal of Housing and Community Development, 2015). Youth experiencing homelessness demonstrate much higher rates of both chronic and acute health issues. A study conducted "reveal[s] increased rates of multiple infectious, respiratory, gastrointestinal, and dermatologic diseases and otitis media, diarrhea, bronchitis, scabies, lice and dental caries" (Briggs, 2013). There is a much higher prevalence of asthma among homeless children than those in low-income housing. Nutrition is a huge issue among homeless youth. Children who lack a home often spend much of their time worrying about the lack of available food, often skip meals or consume lots of food with very low nutritional value. These factors all contribute to the high rates of obesity, stunting or extreme malnutrition among homeless youth (Briggs, 2013).

Access to Healthcare: Youth experiencing homelessness face the hard challenge of accessing health care while living on the streets. They often have to mainly rely on emergency services of care or simply receive poor, fragmented care. Youth face a number

of barriers, which prevent them from getting favorable medical attention. The primary barriers include: “difficulty obtaining affordable, accessible, and coordinated health care services; frequent and unpredictable changes in living circumstances that prevent timely presentation for care, follow-up and communications with healthcare providers; inadequate access to storage places for medication and medical supplies; and potential exposure to violence or fear of violence that limits freedom” (Briggs, 2013). Additionally, “studies varying in sample size have reported rates of depression between 16-54% for homeless youth age 18-24 compared to a rate of 10% for the general youth population of the same age group” (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2015). Youth living on the street are unable to receive behavioral health support due to a lack of access to the appropriate care. There have been some efforts made by pediatricians to address these critical barriers, however health disparities among youth experiencing homelessness continue.

Educational Achievement: Homeless youth experience “psychosocial development” problems, which very often interrupt with their overall educational achievement (Briggs, 2013). Thus, eventually obtaining a job is highly difficult, which ultimately continues a highly negative cycle of homelessness and lack of income throughout the lives of youth. Transgender youth face gender-specific discrimination when attempting to obtain employment. This is particularly common in areas of the United States where gender expression and gender identity are not “protected by equal employment laws” (Shultz, 2015). Among certain populations of homeless youth, language and speech deficits exist, which lead to much lowered rates of literacy than other school children their age. According to a study done on adolescents who are homeless, “just 34% of those students

attained a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED) by 18 years of age" (Barber, Fonagy, Fultz, Simulinas, Yates, 2005).

Victimization and Criminal Activity: Homeless children more often than not are separated from their families and either are completely alone on the streets or band together with other homeless youth. This often makes them higher targets for exploitation and violence. Homeless youth and especially homeless teens are "more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviors, have teenage pregnancies, engage in drug use, experience mood and anxiety disorders, and face violence than youth with homes" (Briggs, 2013). Violence LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness face is very shocking. According to a study done by the Center for American Progress, "twenty-eight percent of LGBT youth had been physically assaulted, compared to 18 percent of other youth; twenty-two percent of LGBT youth had been sexually assaulted or raped - more than three times the rate among other homeless youth; one in three LGBT homeless youth had been a victim of a hate crime due to their sexual orientation or gender identity" (Cray, Miller, Durso, 2013). Additionally, homeless youth are much more likely to be forced into criminal, "underground economies" in order to attempt to fill their basic, human needs. These activities include theft, selling drugs or panhandling, which is also known as "street hustling." Only 10 percent of youth living in youth shelters engage in these activities, whereas over half of those on the street do. Survival sex is also highly common among youth experiencing homelessness, particularly LGBT youth.

Part 6: Homelessness Policy Implications and Issues:

Development of Accurate Picture: Every two years, **c**ommunities conduct an overall count of the homeless people living around them as a part of a HUD mandate Point-

In-Time count for areas that receive federal funding for homelessness programs. Youth experiencing homelessness that are included in this Point-In-Time count are different than those who are able to receive access to HUD helpful homelessness programs. (National Network for Youth Policy Advisory Committee, 2015) This creates a large problem because this count is what is used to determine what resources are needed in the community to help address homelessness. The lack of representation in the Point-In-Time count demonstrates that this specific group is not seen as a priority and thus will not receive HUD services. This also conveys that the numbers released by this count are not a fully accurate representation of the existing homeless population. In 2008, Congress agreed to conduct a national study on the overall prevalence and needs of homeless youth in the US. However due to the extreme lack of funding, this study never happened. (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2014)

End Criminalization: Homeless youth are forced to conduct normal, daily activities outside, such as sleeping and eating. Unfortunately, these necessary survival activities are continuously becoming highly criminalized throughout the US. Quality of life laws are becoming more common, which prohibit such things like sitting or sleeping in cars or public places, loitering, etc. A study revealed that the state of California has the most anti-homeless laws than any other state in the United States (The Policy Advocacy Clinic, 2015). California has many laws, which restrict such things like sitting, standing, etc. in public spaces. These laws create tough barriers for those experiencing homelessness to stabilize their lives due to criminalization. If these quality of life laws are broken, youth receive tickets, which they ultimately are unable to pay and can result in arrest or jail time. These laws are not effective in any way because they do not decrease the prevalence of these

activities. Most importantly, these types of laws do not help address the root problem and causes of youth homelessness. Housing availability and services within communities need to be increased (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2015).

Housing Availability: There needs to be an increase in youth housing programs. In order to do this there needs to be an expansion of transitional and permanent support housing for youth. Improving emergency shelters is vitally important, however the extreme lack of housing options just perpetuates the cycle of homelessness for many youth. To decrease the extreme reliance on emergency shelters, there needs to be a large amount of transitional housing options. The current system meets only 10 percent of the needs per night (National Network for Youth, 2015). Youth are often turned away from programs due to the lack of availability of beds. In 2014, roughly 2,425 youth were denied access to emergency housing because of capacity issues (National Network for Youth, 2015). Additionally, the extreme lack of affordable housing in the US plays a very large role in youth homelessness. A study done in San Francisco found that a lack of affordable housing was the primary reason for their homelessness (Applied Survey Research, 2013). 55% of people surveyed reported not being able to pay their rent. If our cities and communities do not provide sufficient access to affordable housing, there will not be a shift in the growing numbers of homelessness. Oftentimes the funding within HUD is distributed elsewhere and not given to the necessary programs to address the shortage of affordable housing. The future of HUD and the funding for these needed programs is very much unclear right now following the appointment of Ben Carson.

Part 7: Overview of Current Situation in the US:

Unfortunately, the current climate of youth homelessness in the United States is not very uplifting. According to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report, in January of 2015, 564, 708 people were homeless on a given night. Out of these 564,708, 31% of them were spending the night in unsheltered areas, meaning they were on the streets. Out of this number, one fourth were youth. Luckily, the report presented information which showed that homelessness as a whole in the United States has declined 2% from 2014 to 2015 and 11% from 2007. These numbers are highly uplifting and clearly demonstrate that there have been positive and big steps taken to address this epidemic of homelessness. The report showed that 23% of people experiencing homelessness are under 18, 9% are between the ages 18 and 24, and 68% are over the age of 24. Luckily, the population of those who are sheltered is primarily the younger group of people.

Part 8: LGBT Youth Experiencing Homelessness

As a preface, the literature written on LGBT youth experiencing homelessness is not very extensive and was difficult to find. Thus, much of the literature used in this study comes from similar sources. The study done by the Williams Institute along with the True Colors Fund, confirms that the numbers of LGBT youth actively seeking shelter and help from youth shelters has increased greatly over the past ten years. The LGBT Youth Provider Survey conducted by the Williams Institute provides the data backing up the notion that only a small portion of homeless youth programs are completely dedicated to LGBT youth. This same survey confirmed that the top three barriers to improving LGBT services were a complete lack of state, local and federal funding, in that exact order. (The Williams Institute, 2012)

It is estimated that 40 percent of the 1.6 million youth experiencing homelessness in the US identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. LGBT youth represent roughly 7 percent of the overall population, demonstrating that these numbers are disproportionately high (True Colors Fund, 2016). Between 2007 and 2014, the national rate of youth homelessness has declined by 11 percent, however over the past 10 years the rate of homelessness among LGBT youth has unfortunately increased by 12 percent. 82 percent of those who work with youth experiencing homelessness reported that ten years ago they had worked with lesbian, gay or bisexual youth, however today this number has grown to a reported 94 percent who have worked with lesbian, gay or bisexual youth. When asked about working with transgender youth less than half reported they had ten years ago. Unfortunately, in the last few years over three quarters reported they now have worked with transgender youth. This number is not all that surprising due to the fact that the terminology around transgender issues has become much more common in everyday life and politics. Of course transgender people have always existed, however, with the increased knowledge and information throughout American society about transgender people, it makes perfect sense why this number has increased so drastically. While attempting to find data about the LGBT specific programs for homeless youth, it quickly became apparent that only a small portion of homeless youth programs are completely dedicated to LGBT youth. Only 24 percent of existing programs in the United States are designed solely for LGBT youth. This clearly exposes the large gap in the system of homeless youth services for LGBT youth. One would expect that because the homeless LGBT population is so large, there would be enough programs to address their needs. However, due to much stigma and prejudice that still exists in the US, this is not yet the

case. Additionally, there is an extreme lack of government support and funding to improve and expand the existing services for homeless youth. With the election of Donald Trump as US President and the appointment of Ben Carson as head of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, there is little hope that funding will improve in the next four to eight years.

Methodology:

To answer my research questions I used a qualitative methods approach. I reviewed existing literature highlighting the reasons youth become homeless, stories from the streets, existing prevention policy as well as current shelter conditions. I conducted research through semi-structured interviews with youth homelessness professionals in both San Francisco and Los Angeles. A total of seven interviews were conducted with staff from one of the following four organizations: Larkin Street Youth Services in San Francisco, Los Angeles Youth Network (LAYN), My Friend's Place, and the Los Angeles LGBT Center. The purpose for conducting semi-structured interviews was so that participants could answer my questions, but also had the flexibility to add their own experiences and stories as well. The interviews focused on a variety of themes ranging from services offered to how shelters address LGBT specific needs. The data collected was the primary source of information within this study. These interviews were conducted both in person and on the phone and were intended to understand the existing system and what best practices look like in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. The interviews provided ample information on services and programs that actually work to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness, but also clearly uncovered that there are large gaps that still exist. I asked a

wide range of questions addressing a number of topics such as, funding, protections for LGBT youth, barriers youth face when deciding to seek help, eligibility and policies addressing homeless youth.

Leading up to my data collection work, I reached out to a number of staff at various Los Angeles based and San Francisco based organizations who work directly with youth experiencing homelessness. I contacted these staff members via email, by phone and through past connections I had. For every person who agreed to speak with me, I set up a time to interview them either in person or on the phone. Three of the seven interviews conducted were in person; the remaining four were done on the phone. All of the interviews were recorded, with the permission of the interviewee. I found that recording each interview greatly helped my analytic process due to the fact that I could revisit the interviewee's direct words regularly.

Throughout the interview process, the questions I asked changed because I learned more about what actually constitutes as a good question. Three of the interviews were conducted with staff at Larkin Street Youth Services in San Francisco. One interview was conducted with a staff member at Los Angeles Youth Network (LAYN). Two interviews were conducted at My Friend's Place. And the final interview was conducted at the Youth Center on Highland at the Los Angeles LGBT Center. I chose to interview three people from Larkin Street from three different programs due to the fact that Larkin Street is a very large organization and I hoped to gain a well-rounded understanding. I also chose to conduct two interviews at My Friend's Place to gain two different perspectives from a programing side and the other from a housing/social worker side. I chose to conduct an interview with someone from the LA LGBT Center to gain the LGBT-specific agency perspective. And

finally I chose LAYN as my final interview because their programs and services are somewhat different than the other three organizations. The data from the seven interviews is organized in a variety of themes. In addition to the distinct themes, there is an in depth description of each organization interviewed along with the services they offer youth experiencing homelessness. The recommendations section will follow the findings section, which will provide the interpretation of the data collected and will address why the data is significant.

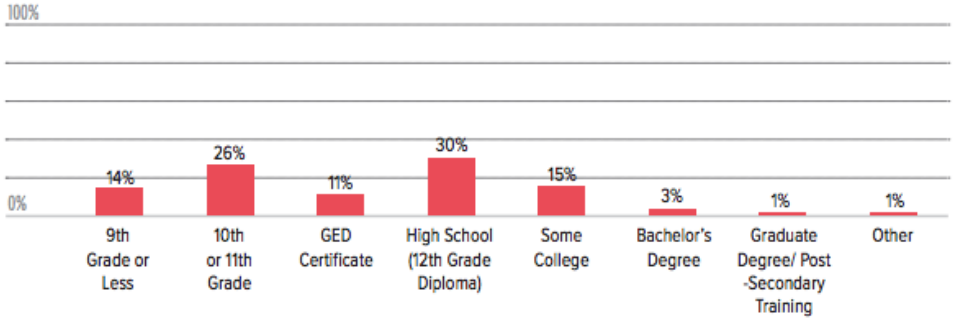
Background to Findings:

Homelessness in San Francisco and Los Angeles

San Francisco:

To the everyday San Francisco resident, it seems as if homelessness is all around them. According to a study done in 2015, "1,441 youth between the ages of 18 and 24 are either sleeping on the streets or in shelters on any given night. Over 20 percent of San Francisco's homeless population is between the ages of 18 and 24 years old" (Downing, 2015). A large 40 percent of the youth experiencing homelessness in San Francisco are without a high school diploma or a GED. The below figure demonstrates the various education attainment levels among youth experiencing homelessness in San Francisco.

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT AMONG UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND TRANSITIONAL-AGE-YOUTH



2015 n:151

Source: Applied Survey Research. (2015). San Francisco Homeless Survey. Watsonville, CA.

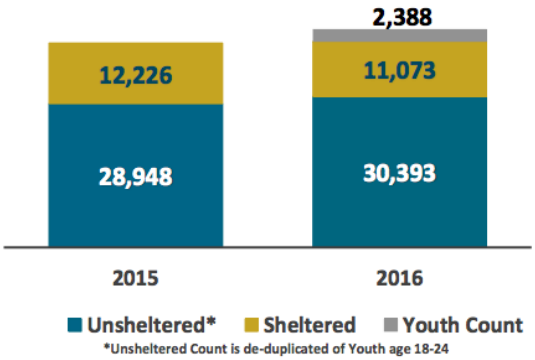
San Francisco is struggling to meet the needs to those experiencing homelessness, much to do with the massive housing crisis occurring in the Bay Area. Over the past 20 years, San Francisco has added 1,500 units per year. However, the population is rapidly growing by thousands for many reasons, one of which is the tech boom in Silicon Valley. This annual increase in housing units is no longer beneficial in the way it needs to be. There is also massive pushback on housing development within the city from residents because they do not want low-income units in their backyards. Currently, the city of San Francisco annually spends $265 million on services for the homeless and supportive housing those who were once homeless. Half of that is currently funded by the federal government. HUD annually disburses the McKinney-Vento homeless grant from Washington to various cities in the US. In January 2017, the city learned that they will receive $32 million this year, which is $5 million more than they received in 2015 (Fagan, 2017). San Francisco residents unfortunately failed to pass Proposition S in November, which would have created housing for the homeless. They did, however, pass Proposition Q, banning tents throughout the city. What this will mean for the future of San Francisco's homeless residents is unclear.

However, homeless service providers are nervous about the upcoming years and how the new administration will affect their sector. Sherilyn Adams, the executive director at Larkin Street Youth Services, reported to the San Francisco Chronicle that "there are obviously concerns about the placement of Trump's Cabinet members, but we can't let that define our work or what we need. It only informs how we have to advocate for the system's change (Fagan, 2017).

Los Angeles:

In recent years, Los Angeles has topped New York City as the city with the highest numbers of "unsheltered" homeless people in the United States. The "unsheltered" population in Los Angeles accounts for those living on the sidewalks, in tents, cars or other makeshift shelters. The City of Los Angeles reports that since January 2014, Los Angeles has housed over 21,000 people experiencing homelessness. In 2014-2015, there was an estimated 55,000 youth experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles. The following figure shows the increase of homeless youth in Los Angeles from 2015 to 2016. It demonstrates the sheltered vs. unsheltered youth count.

Unsheltered + Sheltered + Youth Count



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2016

Many federal housing professionals blame the rising numbers of homeless individuals on Congress' inability to fund affordable housing in Los Angeles for the homeless. However, a huge step was taken recently when voters approved the $1.2 billion project to build 10,000 homeless and low-income housing units over the next ten years (Holland, 2016). The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority received $230 million this year, "including $65 million from the county and $60 million from the city, both big increases from the year before" (Holland, 2016). The city just conducted the Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count and the results of that report will be released soon.

Description of Organizations and Services Provided

Larkin Street Youth Services:

Larkin Street Youth Services is an organization based in San Francisco, California. They offer a wide range of programs for the young people who come in that are highly effective. Larkin Street reported that "three out of four youth who complete Larkin Street's comprehensive programs exit street life" (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2016). These

comprehensive programs include street outreach, shelter, housing, education, employment, life skills, behavioral life support and various medical clinics. Larkin Street has two emergency shelters, Lark-Inn for Youth and Diamond Youth Shelter. Lark-Inn is for youth ages 18-24 and Diamond Youth Shelter is for youth ages 17 and under. Both of these emergency shelters offer emergency beds, meals, and showers. In addition to the two emergency shelters, Larkin Street has two drop-in centers: Haight Street Referral Center and the main Engagement and Community Center. Both of these drop-in centers offer the typical drop-in services such as, meals, personal hygiene supplies, laundry, showers, case-management, individual and group counseling. Due to the nature of a drop-in center, neither of these centers is open 24/7 and is not open on weekends.

Housing Services at Larkin Street:

In addition to emergency shelters and drop-in services, Larkin Street offers a number of community based housing options. These housing services are: LEASE, a supportive housing option for emancipated foster care youth ages 18-24, Castro Youth Housing Initiative, which is a supportive housing option for LGBTQ youth ages 18-24, Routz, a housing option for youth with behavioral health needs ages 18-24, Ellis Street Apartments permanent housing, Edward II studio apartments, and Pathways, which is a rental subsidy program. Additionally, Larkin Street offers three transitional housing services, one of which is community based housing for youth who are HIV positive.

Medical and Educational Services:

Larkin Street offers medical services at the Michael Baxter Larkin Street Youth Clinic for comprehensive primary care as well as sensitive services. The clinic not only offers aid to direct medical problems, but also works to promote wellness in general. The clinic at

Larkin Street is directly operated in partnership with the San Francisco Department of Public Health. It is open five days a week and youth do not need an appointment to receive services. Youth at Larkin come in for a variety of reasons such as, pregnancy tests, physicals, TB testing or prescriptions. Every year the Larkin Street clinic provides services to roughly 700 youth (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2016). Larkin Street offers education and employment services at Larkin Street Academy. Larkin Street Academy offers the following programs: computer classes, college readiness classes, job readiness programs, job placement and retention, tutoring, internships, GED tutoring and classes, and secondary and postsecondary school enrollment and support. The GED program uses a mixed approach of individual and small group instruction in order to prepare the youth effectively for the 5-part GED test. Additionally, drop-in tutoring and classes are available every weekday. Many youth experience anxiety about GED testing, thus, Larkin offers weekly field trips to testing centers to ensure youth feel completely comfortable on test day.

Statistics about Larkin Street:

The following numbers come directly from the Larkin Street Youth Services 2016 Annual Report. Larkin Street's total revenue in 2016 was $17,628,682. That is broken up in a few ways. City, state and federal funding amounted to $9,423,582. Money received from foundation grants was $3,588,401. Individual and corporate contributions amounted to $2,476,914. These are the three primary sources of funding for Larkin Street, however, there were a number of other smaller funding areas in 2016. The total expenses in 2016 equal $17,245,192. Program services amounted to $14,502,093, general and administrative services were $1,660,101 and fundraising was $1,082,998.

In 2016, Larkin Street Youth Services served a total of 2,534 youth in San Francisco.

The housing programs served a total of 80,066 housing nights. 583 youth were successful in accessing Larkin Street Academy and 63 of those youth were successfully placed in jobs through Larkin Street Academy. The age breakup of youth served at Larkin Street in 2016 is as follows: 10% were between the ages 12-17, 29% were aged 18-20 and 57% were 21 and older. 75% of the total youth served reported being heterosexual. 20% reported being gay, lesbian or bisexual. And 4% reported they were unsure or questioning their sexual identity.

Los Angeles Youth Network (LAYN):

Housing at LAYN

Los Angeles Youth Network is a homeless youth agency based in Los Angeles. LAYN's programs include outreach, housing, education, employment assistance and supportive services. They serve youth in Los Angeles ages 12-21. The youth they house either come in directly from the street or have sometimes been placed by the Department of Children and Family Services (Los Angeles Youth Network, 2016). LAYN has an emergency shelter, a group home and a transitional living program. The emergency shelter offers 23 beds for up to 30 days at a variety of separate locations. When a young person seeks help at the LAYN emergency shelter they will receive basic care services such as food, clothing as well as a variety of supportive services such as educational services, case management, mental health counseling and job development. LAYN is one of the only licensed long-term group homes in Los Angeles. Due to how short the emergency shelter program is, "the intensive supportive services provided are geared to ensure that all youth in placement achieve a level of personal success" (Los Angeles Youth Network, 2016). The group home has 12 beds and on average youth stay up to two years. Many of the youth in

the group home transitioned in from the emergency shelter through LAYN's "Continuum of Care" model. The group home is designed to support the varying needs of the youth who live there, which have almost all experienced extended periods of intense trauma. The long-term housing in the group home is preferred because staff are able to provide extensive support that may not be possible to offer during the short term stay at the emergency shelter. The group home is closely affiliated with the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). The option to live in the group home is only offered to youth with a current DCFS case. The long length of stay in the group home "allows for [the] clinical staff to work intensively with the youth to help them develop the tools necessary for self-sufficiency and ultimately, self-sustaining independent living" (Los Angeles Youth Network, 2016). The Transitional Living Program (TLP) has 17 beds, which are scattered in various off site locations. Upon entering TLP, each young person will immediately receive extensive educational support in order to fulfill their individual academic goals. During a young person's stay in the TLP they are expected to gain employment readiness skills so they can thrive and support themselves once leaving the program. The program is designed so the youth have extensive one-on-one services to help them develop positively and achieve their life goals.

Education and Employment Programs

The goal of the education program at LAYN is to accurately address and customize school placement for each young person based on their specific needs. When youth initially enter the education program at LAYN they are interviewed about their academic goals and educational history to ensure they are appropriately placed. LAYN often works on placing youth in traditional school settings, but they also have close relationships with several

"GED programs, independent study schools, continuation and community day schools, and adult school programs" (Los Angeles Youth Network, 2016). In the emergency shelter and group home, tutoring services are regularly offered. The tutoring sessions are meant to ensure the individual success of each young person in their school assignments. In addition to tutoring in their school assignments, youth have the option to receive SAT/ACT preparation. LAYN is in partnership with both Los Angeles Unified School District and Schools on Wheels.

The employment program at LAYN is directly woven into the housing programs offered. This is vital because employment tends to be the only way youth exit homelessness. The employment team at LAYN "provided over 250 youth with job readiness training and placed over 20 youth into internships of which some turned into permanent employment opportunities" (Los Angeles Youth Network, 2016). Youth participate in a program comprised of six sessions, which include topics on resume writing, employee rights, job searching, completing applications, and interviewing. LAYN reports that youth within their employment program tend to show a 20% increase in their overall employment skills. If youth are successful in the housing program they immediately become eligible for a "community internship." LAYN partners with a number of organizations that place youth in the community internship. Some of the business owners include: Tender Greens, League of Women Voters, Alma Restaurant, Dress for Success, Rose City Coffee Cart, Wood and Vine Restaurant and Hairrion Salon. These various partners provide six month long internships for the youth.

Statistics

The following data all comes from the 2015-2016 LAYN Annual Report. The total

revenue in 2015 was $4,841,473 and was $4,286,373 in 2016. In 2015, LAYN received $2,655,347 in federal awards and other government grants. In 2016, they received $3,208,047 in this same area. In 2016, LAYN received $749,750 through private foundation grants. Through local government contracts, they received $196,172 in 2016. Their total expenses in 2015 were $4,100,470 and was $4,360,624 in 2016. The breakdown of that is as follows. In 2016, $2,335,912 was spent on Emergency Shelter programs, $1,006,311 in the Group Home program and $533,570 in the Transitional Living Program. General and administrative expenses totaled to $147,826 and the fundraising expenses totaled to $337,005.

My Friend's Place:

My Friend's Place (MFP) is a homeless youth agency located in Hollywood, California. MFP has three programmatic strategies to help youth achieve self-sufficiency. The first one is the Safe Haven, which is the gateway to all the services and is where the young people who come in can have their basic needs met. This is their drop-in center, which provide everything needed for basic survival. This includes food, showers, clothing and access to medical attention. The second program is the Transformative Education program, which targets young people who haven't always succeeded in more traditional school environments. The goals of the this program are: 1) help encourage positive behaviors, 2) help youth acquire marketable skills, 3) teach youth the necessary skills and provide them the resources to improve their self-sufficiency, and 4) create a way for staff to build rapport with the young people who are more hesitant to access the mental health and intensive health services. The third program is the Health and Wellbeing Program, which are primarily clinical social workers who are doing case management and crisis

intervention. They also focus on everything from stress reduction and harm reduction to help improving interpersonal relationships. The most common workshops are on: partner violence, substance abuse, mental health issues and sexual health issues. The entire list of services includes: crisis intervention, conflict mediation, individual or group counseling, violence prevention, health assessments, pregnancy and parenting, advocacy and case consultation, STI and HIV testing (which is offered off-site at one of their medical partners), anger management, and substance abuse education.

My Friend's Place has a reputation in Hollywood as the drop-in center that works with a lot of young people who have not been successful at other agencies. They help create pathways through their services for youth to be able to rejoin the community. Unlike a lot of other Hollywood based agencies, My Friend's Place has a really high tolerance for certain behaviors that other agencies would find undesirable. There is large number of youth that other providers won't work with due to safety reasons, that My Friend's Place will work with. Additionally, they are well known for their creative arts programs. At any given week they offer roughly 15 creative arts workshops, which are used as intensive trauma treatment. My Friend's Place is directly partnered with many organizations throughout Los Angeles. Some of them are: Angel's Flight, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, Covenant House California, Department of Mental Health, Hollywood Arts, and Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center. The entire list of all of their partners is quite extensive.

Statistics

In 2016, My Friend's Place worked with over 1,400 youth experiencing homelessness through 20,000 visits at their drop in center in Hollywood. 66% of the participants identify as male and 33% as female. A study done by the California

Endowment revealed that the youth at My Friend's Place have much higher rates of past trauma, drug abuse, and mental health challenges than youth at any other agency in Los Angeles (My Friends Place, 2016). My Friend's Place is 100% funded by private donors and receives no government funding whatsoever. In 2015, MFP received a total of $2,100,140 through grants and contributions. In 2015, their total functional expenses equaled $1,432,967 (MF Place Inc., 2015).

Youth Center on Highland at the Los Angeles LGBT Center:

The Los Angeles LGBT Center is the largest LGBT organization in the world and currently employs roughly 600 people. The Center serves more LGBT people than anywhere else in the world and works in tons of ways to serve this population. The Youth Center on Highland at the Los Angeles LGBT Center offers a wide range of services for LGBT youth experiencing homelessness. The main ones are: drop-in services, housing, youth development programming, employment programming, education programming and a mentoring program. The drop-in services they offer are much like all other drop-in centers where they provide access to showers, clothing, food, case management and crisis intervention. For the housing, there are 26 shelter beds, 32 transitional beds and then 59 rapid rehousing slots. In addition to drop-in services, the Youth Center member services include: HIV testing and counseling, addiction recovery services, and art/music groups. The youth development program, LifeWorks, is a leadership and mentoring program. They offer peer training advocacy, group mentoring and outreach. The overall goal of LifeWorks is to create a safe space for LGBTQ youth where they are able to realize their goals and future aspirations with the help of inspiring role models. They have community activities such as planting community gardens or doing a community cleanup. The education

program has both an onsite charter high school as well as a GED program. The Center also has partnerships with UCLA, Cal State Northridge, LAUSD and 5 Keys Charter School. The Youth Center receives federal funding, some city funding and county funding. In addition, they also receive funding from private foundations and private donors. At the Los Angeles LGBT Center, the total Annual Operating Revenue is $83,900,011. Due to the large size of this organization, if was not possible to find specific numbers for the Youth Center on Highland.

Findings:

Barriers to Seeking Help:

Many youth experiencing homelessness often choose not to seek help from programs who support and house homeless youth. When participants discussed why this was the case, a number of themes quickly became very apparent. One participant from My Friend's Place responded saying, "I think the barriers are that these are young people who have had horrific experiences with adults. They have really good and valid reasons to not want to trust adults, or systems or places." As previously described in Paths Into Homelessness, these horrific experiences such as, abuse (sexual, emotional or other forms) or continual familial conflict, are oftentimes the primary reasons youth become homeless in the first place (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2017). Most, if not all, youth experiencing homelessness have really solid reasons not to trust adults because they have been let down or betrayed their entire lives. In addition to a lack of trust of adults, many homeless youth have long histories of being within institutions such as child welfare and the foster care system where they also have had negative experiences. A participant from

Larkin Street spoke to this saying "A lot of youth come in with systems fatigue where they've been in foster care and they're been in shelters and they've been bounced around, had to answer certain questions and follow certain guidelines. And for some people they're so fatigued and so sick of the system." This extreme lack of trust in adults and in institutions is a main reason why youth choose not to seek help from one of the many incredible organizations waiting to help them. One of the participants from My Friend's Place highlighted how important it is for them to do everything with so much intentionality such as simply making sure their organization does not look institutional. She said, "There are so many things we do with so much intentionality and I think the young people know it. Like even just our environment, we sometimes go to great means to not look institutional. We want to look like a living room, not like a waiting room. And the young people will pick up on that…[And] all staff is on first name basis [with the youth]....We don't require someone to tell their life story and all of the [difficult] details of their lives in order to get services. So a young person really can dictate the information that they want to share and to what end." The goal of this is to ensure that youth feel safe and it is part of how they work to build trust, which is key to their future success in the programs. Another aspect, which goes along with this, is that many youth simply do not know their own rights in terms of confidentiality. As discussed above in Responses by Service Organizations, oftentimes youth will not come into drop in centers or shelters because they are in fear that the organizations will call their parents, guardians or the police, which is clearly the last thing they want (National Network for Youth, 2015).

Youth homelessness programs in San Francisco, like Larkin Street, are working on a pilot coordinated entrance system, which is working to bridge the gaps between different

agencies to ensure that youth do not fall through the cracks. The system works so that when youth first come into an agency they will go through an assessment tool, which will then create a coordinated care system. However, through the development of this system it was uncovered that may youth just simply do not feel comfortable in crisis shelters. In crisis shelters people get their things stolen, there are fights and violence and a trend of constant trauma occurring. Due to the fact that these shelters are usually in high crisis mode at all times, youth decide that these environments are not worth it. Young people are not interested in going to a crisis shelter first and instead chose to couch surf or sleep in a tent because it feels safer to them. A participant from Larkin Street said "[This] feels safer to them, then going to a space with unpredictable peers or [the potential to] experience [more trauma]. So a lot of the young people that I've met have not been interested in going to a crisis shelter first, even if they have been on the street or couch surfing or [have been] in a dangerous situation just because they don't want to be in that kind of [messy] environment. They'd rather wait until they can get into the transitional living programs because they are more stable." If crisis shelters could attempt to make their environments feel safer, more youth might seek them out. However, it is really difficult to determine how exactly they could achieve this. It would ideal to eliminate the mandate requiring youth to go through crisis shelter as a first step.

LGBT-Specific Programs:

Every organization stated that some elements of their programs such as, HIV testing and gender neutral bathrooms, are meant specifically for the varying and unique needs of LGBT youth. How extensive these elements and programs are, however, did vary greatly among the four organizations interviewed. A participant from My Friend's Place described

these elements saying "One of our very big partners is the Youth Center on Highland, which is the drop-in center by the Gay and Lesbian Center and absolutely they have more comprehensive and specialized services than we do. But yes we do [have LGBT specific services]. All of our bathrooms are all gender restrooms. The showers are private. We have two testing partners, one is Children's Hospital and one is San Fernando Valley Community Testing. They are testing here [at My Friend's Place] any time from 1-2 times a week. They are a big partner provider. In terms of specialized services, that's kind of it. We have a lot of staff who are queer and are open about being queer. [We have] no tolerance for hate speech." They lack extensive specialized services for LGBT youth due to their complete lack of government funding, but are still very well connected with organizations that primarily serve LGBT youth.

Larkin Street is currently working to ensure that all bathrooms are gender neutral, although it is a longer process than one would expect. They also have their LGBT specific housing program called the Castro Youth Housing Initiative, which started in 2004. A participant from Larkin said, "We have a specific set of services for youth that are HIV positive. We do a lot of HIV prevention work. I guess it's been up and down over the years depending on funding in terms of how extensive it is. But we are currently doing HIV prevention work." They also have an HIV residential program, which has a clinic onsite so that youth who are HIV positive can get all their needs met in one single location. LAYN does not have any concrete services for LGBT youth. LAYN shared that they "definitely talk about assertive gender pronouns and we make sure that everyone is being respectful of however anyone else identifies. And [we make sure] not to disclose anyone's status or identity without them consenting to it." They put a large focus on gender pronouns to

normalize the habit. At the LA LGBT Center, it became obvious that it is very important for LGBT youth to have spaces that are solely meant for LGBT people. Out of the four organizations, Larkin Street and the LA LGBT Center were the only two who provided these spaces.

Importance of Safe Spaces:

All of the organizations continuously expressed that it is vitally important for youth experiencing homelessness to have safe spaces. Youth homelessness agencies are working hard to build trust with young people, which can prove particularly hard because many of these young people have been betrayed and hurt their entire lives. My Friend's Place recognizes that "it's our job to build trust. And we never think that a young person should have to come in here and give us a bunch of information, some of it super painful about their lives, in order to get a burrito. That just doesn't make sense." This goes along with their "low barrier" approach. All of the participants interviewed from other agencies echoed similar sentiments. Each of these organizations work really hard to implement tactics that will ultimately create safe spaces. One participant from MFP said that "we're almost like a family to a lot of the young people and many of them didn't have that anywhere else. And so we're sort of their stand in family unit." There is huge value in that, but that feeling is not automatic. LAYN spoke about their services saying for many youth "it's really all about the relationship and the healing...They get so much out of it. They get long term relationships with staff like mentors and tutors. I think it's the first steps for a lot of our young people to have a safe place where they are. They are coming to a safe place for the first time. So it's very uncomfortable and a very scary feeling for a lot of them. So we do everything that we can to try to make it as safe and as open and welcome as we can."

It is hard to define concrete things that organizations are doing to ensure youth are fully comfortable.

All organizations reported having signs up saying things like “Hate Free Zone” or simply “Safe Space.” They work really hard to create expectations of respect and respecting people’s differences. A participant gave a more concrete example saying right now “there’s one person who's on meth and is really uncomfortable in her own skin and [is] needing to connect and needing support. Sometimes we’ll just end up sitting with someone and talking them through that [type of] situation.” Small gestures like this add immensely to the overall feeling within organizations. All staff at these organizations are properly trained and know how to handle tough situations very well. They understand clearly that the needs of the youth always come first and always offer support where they need it, but never forcing anything upon them. At LAYN, the small size of their organization “creates a more homelike environment...we’re a house. There’s bedrooms and everyone has a key to the house, which is different. No other program has keys like that to a house. So the youth really get the feeling that they’re living on their own. They get the sense that this is their ownership over the house. We don’t have staff 24/7, which is another big difference so there has to be a strong trust that is built pretty much right off the bat that we trust them to be in the house with everyone else without staff present.” There is huge value in this because for many young people it is the first time adults have given them concrete responsibility and trust. Feeling trusted is vital for them to feel completely safe.

For LGBT youth, it is important to have LGBT specific spaces available and accessible. They need these spaces so that they can build community and resilience and have space to be advocates for themselves and each other. They are an extremely

vulnerable population and are even more vulnerable on the streets. This is why it is really vital they have their own places to go. The LA LGBT Center said that within non-LGBT specific agencies "young people have to identify a gender and then stick to it [which] is challenging. And so [it is key that they have] the ability to flow throughout their gender exploration while in programming [during] this very transitional age. And so if I'm dabbling with my gender identity, presenting how I feel comfortable that day is important and...that's challenging in programs that are very gender specific." All of the housing offered at the Los Angeles LGBT Center is gender neutral because that is what makes sense in that environment. It is also key for staff to have the proper training on relatively simple things such as announcing their preferred gender pronouns when they introduce themselves to normalize this. Thus, having LGBT specific environments are key because according to the LGBT Center "having that shared experience is important and having spaces for young people to talk about it [is vital because]…isolation is so huge for [LGBT youth]. There isn't necessarily a community for them. And so I think that that's important for them is to be able to build community and whatever that looks like." Non-LGBT specific agencies need to work to set up a way for LGBT youth to access certain things they need without always having to ask for them.

Importance of Employment Programs:

It is very clear that all of these organizations see the vast importance on placing focus on employment programs. My Friend's Place highlighted this saying "young people primarily exit homelessness either through a supportive family or friend or through a job. We know that if young people are hitting us, that supportive friend or family doesn't exist. So we have to figure out this employment situation." Thus, the need to develop strong job

training programs is that much more important. My Friend's Place recently launched their work preparedness program in October which "targets youth who have never been employed or have not been able to keep a job. And it uses the work platform to teach the social and emotional skills that a person needs to be successful in employment and everywhere." Unfortunately, there seems to be a common misconception about homeless youth and they are often seen as a liability. Many of the employment programs offered by these organizations are working to change that perception and helping the community see homeless youth as an asset instead of a liability. Organizations are working on ways to have a more blended program model that really support young people in both having a career path and an academic path. To ensure continued success, Larkin Street said they "actually try and keep [youth] connected in education and employment [programs] once they leave our housing programs."

Gaps Within Existing Programs:

In my research, Larkin Street Youth Services gradually became my clear example and model of what an organization serving youth experiencing homelessness should look like. Their extensive programs offered and their wide variety of housing options make them look almost perfect in terms of how effectively they address the varying needs of all the young people they serve. The other organizations interviewed, including Larkin Street, all had lists of ways they want to expand and improve their existing programs. These organizational goals were all very similar across the four organizations I spoke with, ultimately pointing to the clear gaps that exist within youth homelessness programs. The

primary gap within these programs was a lack of a political organizing branch. Every Los Angeles based organization spoke of wanting to further develop a political organizing arm in order to solve the overarching problem. My Friend's Place said that "in time MFP wants to have more of a political organizing arm. It's always been of interest. It's just that analogy that there's kids in the river and we keep pulling kids out, but we need to...go to the source and figure out [how to fix the problem]." All organizations hope to implement more robust preventative services. It is very apparent that this is the primary gap in the system. The LA LGBT Center expressed that "there's definitely the goal to increase prevention. [However, it can be tough] trying to see where that fits, because funding for homeless services don't fund prevention [work]." Organizations are working to understand what preventative measures actually look like and how to integrate them into their existing programs.

Additionally, another place for evolution for some organizations was implementing a more extensive aftercare program. Larkin Street, for example, said they just "launched a new, more extensive After Care program in July. So we collect information from [youth] when they're exiting out [and] they give us a variety of ways to contact them. That's now an electronic medical record. And then it prompts a reminder to specific staff to follow up with young people… So that we can see how they're doing and check in on their progress, offer support and document how they're doing for our own records." Aftercare is important because it can keep youth connected to the various educational and employment programs. It also helps hold organizations accountable for the young people and ensures that they do not fall back into homelessness. LAYN has a very informal aftercare program and is currently working to create a better system to track the longer outcomes. However, they said that within their current system they "continue to follow up with [youth] and offer

them services, provide them opportunity. [For example,] last year I took one of our After Care youth and she co-presented with me at a national conference on homelessness, which is so cool because her voice is the most important." My Friend's Place does not have an aftercare program due to the fact that most of their work happens in the drop-in center. Because of this they do not have a follow up program yet. After Care programs currently do not receive enough funding, but there needs to be ongoing support after youth leave programs to ensure they receive a continuation of care.

Another gap that became very apparent was the need for more programs focusing on behavioral health. The importance of having strong behavioral health programs was a large theme throughout most of my interviews. Larkin Street expressed that "there is a [huge] need for behavioral health support… particularly in the mental health support [area]." As stated above in Lasting Effects of Homelessness on Youth, most young people experiencing homelessness have endured terrible situations and often have intense backgrounds of extreme trauma and depression. Additionally, often times behavioral concerns serve as the only reason youth are denied services at youth oriented homeless programs. Larkin Street confirmed this saying "the only barrier to entry would be if there is a behavioral concern." If programs developed stronger behavioral health programs, these issues would be more readily addressed and solved through intensive therapy and counseling. According to Larkin Street, "mental illness is the number one reason people make that choice [not to seek help in the first place]." Thus, there is a need for more extensive behavioral health support services as well as mental health and substance abuse programs.

Most programs offered for people experiencing homelessness are targeted to adults

who are homeless. During my interviews, staff from both San Francisco and Los Angeles based organizations clearly stated that youth will almost never seek help an adult homeless shelter. A participant from Larkin Street said "a lot of services are not youth oriented. Even some of those [adult] agencies do serve youth. [However], if youth aren't their primary focus, [most of] the services are designed for an older adult population. Many youth do not feel safe in adult shelters. There's a lot going on. It's a very different environment." The average age of someone experiencing homelessness in San Francisco is 55. Many youth do not feel safe in adult shelters because they tend to be very large. Due to how different the environment is, adult shelters can ultimately be very scary for young people because it is not their peer group.

The most obvious gap is a need for more housing. Even within a large organization, not every single person coming in seeking shelter can be housed. In addition to an increase in emergency beds, there needs to be a wider variety in types of housing for homeless youth. LAYN made this clear by saying there needs to be "different kinds of housing because… for some youth living in an apartment is the best thing for them and for some youth living in a house is the worst thing." Not all types of housing will be immediately effective for all youth. Having a variety of different types of housing will ensure that the varying needs of young people are met appropriately.

Finally, a participant from Larkin Street spoke about staff wages saying "across the country, folks who do this work are underpaid and it's really hard to retain people. [It is really important] that youth can see consistency and be served by people that are happy and excited to come to work and are not stressed about whether they can pay rent and the electrical bill when they get their next check." This connects back to the importance of safe

spaces for youth through their ability to develop trusting relationships with staff. Having consistency within homeless youth programs is vital for the success of the young people in them. The exact numbers surrounding staff wages were not disclosed during the interviews, however, it was clear that this is a prominent issue for staff across the sector.

Policy and Outreach:

Both Los Angeles and San Francisco have committees comprised of youth homelessness agencies. In San Francisco, the Youth Policy Advisory Committee (YPAC) works with the Department of Supportive Housing and Homelessness to inform them on the needs of youth specifically. The Los Angeles equivalent is the Los Angeles Coalition to End Homelessness. This coalition is made up of nearly all the Los Angeles providers and they get together and discuss ways to broaden programs and systems as well as look to where the primary challenges stem from. Larkin Street reported that "San Francisco was just awarded one of 10 of the HUD demonstration grants... [which will provide] an opportunity to really create a system of services and responses." The grant awarded equals $2.9 million and its purpose is to end youth homelessness (Pastore, 2017). The current plan of how the money will be distributed has yet to be made, but the money will help to ensure the City is focused on youth when talking about homelessness. It will also help to create a more comprehensive system that will prevent and hopefully end youth homelessness.

There is very little political organizing happening around youth homelessness. In San Francisco, there are a few organizations focusing more on outreach than political organizing. One San Francisco organization is called Taking it to the Streets. Larkin Street said "they're not specifically focused on youth, but they do work with a lot of youth that are

not successful at Larkin Street." Another San Francisco organization is At The Crossroads, which focuses primarily on street outreach. According to Larkin Street, in "California [homeless youth providers] work as a part of a California Coalition for Youth to be able to expand funding for emergency services and housing. We got 5 million in the budget this year to expand emergency services and drop in for communities." With this money, they are planning to create a comprehensive system that will ideally end homelessness by 2020, or at least set them on the track towards that goal. The comprehensive model will address all sides of youth homelessness and will directly address prevention, intervention, long-term solutions and after care. Larkin Street touched on the fact that part of this comprehensive model is spending time "working with the educational systems, both secondary and post-secondary to support young people who are in school. Often, young people at City College and young people in state colleges are experiencing homelessness. [So there is a need to figure out how to achieve] persistency and retention for folks and catch people before they drop out." The comprehensive model will work to create a more blended model. A participant at Larkin Street finally noted that as "a country and as a community [we need to] find it wholly unacceptable and intolerable that any young person experiences even one night on the street" to fully achieve this comprehensive goal.

In addition, the LA LGBT Center reported that the "United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has put out the Opening Doors, which [is] the plan to end homelessness by 2020. It [has] different phases… and there [are] different policies [within the plan]." The main trend is that agencies and those who work around youth homelessness all want there to be more policy and organizing around prevention. The current system does not do much at all in this area. LAYN also spoke about highlighting

"restorative justice programs as opposed to incarceration [and the importance of] decriminalizing [survival activities such as], selling drugs and sex work." She continued to say that she "still... hears people sometimes talking about street kids…[and] hears the word 'hobo.'" This is the wrong mentality and continues and encourages the stigma around homeless youth.

An Uncertain Future:

Throughout all the interviews, when asked about Donald Trump and the new administration, the common responses were ones of complete uncertainty. Someone at Larkin said "I have no idea [what will happen] because this administration is so unpredictable." Another participant said, "Part of the scariness is the uncertainty. We don't quite know what the administration's intentions are, what their positions are on the issues that impact homeless youth." As of now, they have no way of knowing what the future holds in terms of funding and policy that affect youth experiencing homelessness. For those interviewed at Larkin Street, "the threats to freeze funding to sanctuary cities is really scary." San Francisco and Los Angeles are both sanctuary cities. However, when asked, Los Angeles organizations did not express this concern as explicitly as those from Larkin Street. Luckily, they reported that San Francisco "Mayor, [Ed Lee], has thankfully stood up and said we are not going to change [existing] policies." In terms of uncertainty within San Francisco law, a participant from Larkin reported that "a proposition passed at the end of last year making tents illegal in this city. However, we have a new Department on Homelessness [and they are the ones who] are supposed to enforce that rather than the Police. The Department of Homelessness doesn't agree with that policy… [So] it's kind of just frozen." The uncertainty surrounding this Proposition mixed with the uncertainty of the Trump

administration has created stress for San Francisco based organizations.

For now, these organizations have no way of knowing what the Trump administration's positions are on issues that impact homeless youth, making the future very uncertain. Staff from Larkin Street expressed that "what we do know is that it's more important now than ever to have a coordinated effort at all levels. Whether that's the city or the state, but especially on a national level, [there needs to be] coordinated efforts of different advocacy groups that are focused on youth homelessness. [This will] ensure that we can speak with a unified and loud voice about what the needs are and what we want to see." Luckily, throughout the US people are riled up and are actively looking for ways to make a difference and participate.

Recommendations:

State:

1. Based on LAYN's discussion on the decriminalization of survival activities, California state government needs to create a similar movement as the Right to Rest campaign to protect the rights of those experiencing homelessness. The Right to Rest campaign did not pass, but its initial goal was to protect the rights of homeless people so that they would be able to eat, sleep and move freely within California's public spaces. It is so vitally important for the state to decriminalize these daily survival activities. Many youth experiencing homelessness will end up having altercations with the police or getting

arrested simply for doing what they need to get through the day. There is way too much stigma surrounding homeless youth and the assumption that they are all just bad kids, which is nowhere near the case. Youth experiencing homelessness deserve to have the most basic human rights without the constant fear of jail or harassment from authority figures.

2. Raise the wages of social workers and those involved in work with homeless youth, as well as the entire homeless population. The current wages made by those doing this work are extremely low and staff tend to be underpaid. It's tough for organizations to retain people due to the fact that staff may be constantly worrying about paying their own bills. Funders giving money to these amazing programs want to see the highest percentage of their money as possible going directly to the youth. Seeing that a percentage of their money went to salaries is not something funders want to see. This narrative really needs to change and people providing money to these programs, whether it be the city, state or individuals, need to understand how important it is to pay staff living wages. If livable wages are provided, there will be a much higher retention of staff. Youth will benefit greatly from this because they will be able to see consistency. Prioritizing this not just within agencies, but also on a broader, state level is really important.

3. There needs to be much more LGBT-specific funding. With this type of funding, organizations would be able to create high quality programs that are specifically designed to meet the very specific needs of LGBT youth. Non-LGBT specific organizations have implemented all that they are able to, to ensure the safety, happiness and overall success of their LGBT clients. However, for many agencies they are only able to do the bare minimum because they lack the proper funding to expand. By increasing LGBT-specific funding,

agencies would be able to work towards building the safe spaces necessary for LGBT youth to thrive. Additionally, many homeless youth providers offer hygienic supplies such as makeup for the young women, but do not readily acknowledge that a young gay man may want to have access to those supplies as well. In addition to increased awareness of this fact, funding would make it easier for shelters to make these supplies more accessible to all. Finally, there needs to be more in house HIV testing and programs for HIV-positive youth. Continual and easy access to these sorts of programs seem to be less common in California except at LGBT-specific agencies.

4. The California Department of Social Services, Department of Education and the Juvenile Justice system need to work to reform the systems that transition kids into homelessness. Part of this is working with the California Department of Social Services to fix the child welfare system to ensure that youth have positive experiences and do not fall through the cracks as often as they do within the current system. California Department of Social Services needs to create a more effective plan for youth once they age out of foster care. Within the existing system, once youth turn 18 they are left completely on their own, which as seen in previous sections, often results in chronic homelessness. In addition to Social Services, there needs to be work to improve the juvenile justice system and children's mental health programs. This connects with the direct reasons youth become homeless in the first place. So many youth experiencing homelessness have undiagnosed mental illnesses or are simply not receiving the proper help or treatment they need. Finally, there needs to be more direct work with the educational systems to ensure youth in school do not drop out. This is key to their future success because the failure to make academic achievements could potentially continue the trend of their homelessness, forcing them into

a cycle of chronic homelessness. There needs to be direct work and reform within these educational institutions to attempt to catch the young people before they drop out or stop attending school. This will ensure their individual success and will increase their chances of future employment.

Local:

5. The City of San Francisco needs to overturn Proposition Q. As mentioned in the Background section, San Francisco passed a law (Proposition Q) in November 2016 to ban homeless tents throughout the city. However, the city failed to pass the proposition (Proposition S) which would fund housing for homeless people. The passing of this law without providing a viable alternative is extremely cruel. Within the current system in San Francisco, there are not nearly enough beds or shelters to house the growing homeless population. San Francisco is quickly becoming more unaffordable each day because of the tech boom and the increasing number of young, wealthy professionals moving in. The failure to pass solid options for affordable housing just worsens this issue. San Francisco residents and organizations need to petition the new proposition in order to ensure it is repealed as soon as possible. It does not achieve anything in aiding the lives of people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, for many youth who chose to avoid crisis shelters, these tents are the only private, personal and safe spaces they have to themselves.

6. Homeless youth providers in Los Angeles and San Francisco need to develop political organizing sectors that work to end homelessness. The organizations interviewed knew very little about movements in either Los Angeles or San Francisco working on direct action. Upon further, personal research, it became apparent that these types of movements hardly exist in California. Solutions could be anything from creating movements that

demand for higher wages and improved access to affordable housing to hosting conferences led by formerly homeless youth. This type of direct action could greatly decrease the numbers of youth living on the streets. Many organizations, like LAYN, recognize how impactful it is to have the youth participating in this work and having them as the ones speaking at public committee meetings and hearings. The youth are the ones who can humanize the issue and create the needed sense of urgency many officials lack. Along with this, there is a great need for homeless youth agencies to develop more preventative services. However, the framework for what preventative services look like is still very unclear. I would recommend future research on the development of preventative services.

7. Aftercare programs are highly effective and greatly benefit youth exiting their programs. Not all agencies serving youth experiencing homelessness have formal aftercare programs currently. There should be more continuity developed in aftercare programs to ensure the continuation of care persists. It is tough right now to develop a solid aftercare program because it could potentially require hiring another person or increased funding. Within these organizations, money is not freely flowing making it tough to decide where it is most needed. Aftercare programs oftentimes ensure that youth stay on the right path towards individual success and are vital to the young person's overall journey. Thus, funding for these programs and the creation of them should occur within all youth homeless agencies.

Conclusions:

Within the United States, large numbers of youth live without a home or a place to

sleep for a period of time. There are so many wonderful and life changing organizations and people who work very hard to impact the young people they encounter. The services offered and long-term relationships formed within these programs clearly do have a massively positive impact on the lives of youth experiencing homelessness. It became very apparent during this study that there is an extreme need for more preventative services due to the fact that the homeless youth populations continues to grow. No one has any concrete ideas of what these services would look like. Thus, there is a need for further research as to how these services would work. There is so much more work that still needs to be done to ensure that no more young people endure the hardships that so many people before them did. As a nation, we need to have a shared belief that it is not in any way acceptable and we should not accept the current situation as the norm.

Appendix:

The following are the questions that were asked during the interviews with youth homeless programming professionals.

1. Why did you initially get involved in this work? What is the urgency in it for you?
2. What services do you offer the youth that come in?
3. How do you believe the services offered by your organization impact the lives of the youth who come in?
4. Do you have services that specifically address the varying needs of LGBT youth that come in? (such as private showers, HIV/AIDs clinics, etc.)
5. How do you believe LGBT youth experiencing homelessness can be properly integrated into youth homeless shelters and programs that aren't solely meant for LGBT youth without feeling singled out or made to feel different?
6. Are there protections put in place to meet the needs of LGBT youth who come in?
7. How do you receive funding? Do you receive federal grants (privately funded)
8. Are programs and services provided to LGBTQ specific youth experiencing homelessness properly funded?
9. Are you aware of any existing policies or policy being written to address the gaps that exist in the system pertaining to LGBT youth?
10. How does this organization differ from other organizations serving youth experiencing homelessness? Why do you think it stands out in the work to help young people?
11. How do you determine whether or not someone is eligible to receive help from your organization?
12. What do you do if someone is not eligible?

13. I've read a lot of literature and other studies stating that many young people chose not to seek help from shelters and other similar programs viewing them as potentially unsafe or just not a good option. Why do you think youth often chose not to seek help and what are the common barriers keeping them from shelters?

14. How can shelters better meet the needs of youth who are choosing not to use the programs offered? Such as LGBT youth?

15. Are there ever situations where certain participants are targeted? If so, can you provide an example?

16. Do you stay in touch with young people once they stop seeking help from your organization? How do you track their improvement once they leave this shelter?

17. How do you think youth homelessness will actually be fixed in terms of policy? What needs to be done? Do you know of any organizations in San Francisco or Los Angeles organizing around youth homelessness?

18. How will Trump and the new administration affect your organization as well as the bigger picture of youth homelessness in terms of policy, organizing and funding?

19. Are there any changes you'd like to see within your own organization or similar ones you know of? If so, what are they? What would you like to do that you can't do now?

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