Outreach and Engagement of Homeless Youth

•**Shane Burroughs**, Street Outreach Program Coordinator, Bucks County Valley Youth House

•**Leigh Howard**, Diana T. Myers & Associates, Inc.

July 20, 2012

Agenda

- Leigh Howard:
  - Welcome & purpose of webinar
  - USICH Youth Framework
  - Update on PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Youth
  - Overview of unsheltered point-in-time (PIT) count
- Shane Burroughs:
  - Introduction to homeless youth
  - Introduction to VYH Synergy Project of Bucks County
  - Preparing for the PIT count
  - Identifying homeless youth
  - Engaging youth
  - Safety on the Streets
- Questions & Answers

Purpose

- Youth update: Federal & State
- Improve efforts to identify and support youth who are homeless and/or at risk of homelessness
  - In preparation of the August 15, 2012 and January 2013 point-in-time counts
- Answer your questions

"Youth"

- Unaccompanied youth: Include individuals, age 24 and under, traveling on their own
- HUD's new homeless definition now includes those who are homeless under other federal definitions, including:
  - Section 387 of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
  - Section 637of the Head Start Act
  - Section 41403 of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994
  - Section 330(h) of the Public Health Service Act
  - Section 3 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008
  - Section 17(b) of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966
  - Section 725 (Education) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

USICH Youth Framework

- Better Data
  - Youth emphasis in point-in-time count
  - HMIS to incorporate RHY funded programs
- Youth Typologies
  - Examine resiliency and risk factors
- Effective intervention
  - Improve crisis response
  - Reunification with family or other trusted adult, is priority when possible
- Effective programs
  - Providing effective housing and services to those with the greatest need

Vulnerable Subpopulations of Youth

Foster Care Youth
- 25% of street youth become homeless on their most recent separation from foster care
- More likely to become homeless, move frequently and live in poor neighborhoods compared to non-FC youth with similar risk factors
- On emancipation, many cannot find stable housing (65% in CA)

LGBTQ Youth
- Overrepresented (20-40%) among homeless youth compared to general population (3-5%)
- 26% are rejected by their family and put out of their homes upon coming out
- 28% drop out due to intolerance, stigma and bullying at school
- Intolerance and mistreatment continue once on the street and in shelters

Juvenile Justice Youth
- In one NYC youth shelter, 30% of youth had been arrested or incarcerated; in another, 30% had been detained or incarcerated

Pregnant/Parenting Youth
- Young women (aged 14 to 17) living on the streets have lifetime pregnancy rates of 48% vs. those in shelters (33%)vs. housed (10%)

Ad Hoc Committee on Youth

- Sub-committee of the PA Agenda to End Homelessness (State's 5 year homeless plan)
- Current activities:
  - August '12 & January '13 PIT counts
  - Survey of youth providers, develop inventory of programs and capacity
  - Focus group with homeless and formerly homeless youth
- Next steps:
  - Analyze data
  - Develop descriptions of model programs
  - Recommendations to State Steering Committee on Homelessness

Overview of Point-in-Time Count

- "Point-in-Time" (PIT) = a snapshot of homeless population on a given night
- Summer Unsheltered PIT count: August 15, 2012
- **Who**: People sleeping/living in a location not fit for human habitation.
- This includes individuals living in the following locations:

  - Streets
  - Vehicles
  - Parks
  - Hunting cabins
  - Tents
  - Campgrounds
  - Barns
  - Truck Stops
  - Abandoned buildings
  - Transportation depots
  - Chicken coops
  - Railroad cars
  - Storage units
  - Lumberyards

Unsheltered Interview Form

Youth questions added:

- Have you been in the care of:
  - the child welfare system?
  - the juvenile justice system?
  - Any other residential treatment center or residential mental health placement?

Interview Form available online at http://www.dma-housing.com/resources/pits/

PIT Count – Resources & Partners

PIT Resource:

- *2012 Booklet for the Unsheltered Point-in-Time Count of the Homeless* - http://www.dma-housing.com/resources/pits/

Partners:

- **Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program:** http://homeless.center-school.org/providers/290/Homeless_map2012.pdf
- **Foster Care**: Child Welfare agencies, Independent Living Programs, Residential Treatment Facilities, Youth Advisory Board
  http://www.independentlivingpa.org/about.htm
- **LGBTQ**: Gay and gay-friendly organizations
  http://www.padiversity.org/oglbty.htm
  http://pennsec.org/local-resources/local-lgbtq-youth-organizations/
- **Juvenile Justice**: Juvenile Detention Centers, Probation officers
  http://www.jdcap.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/JDCAP%20Directory201008.pdf
- **Pregnant/Parenting Teens**: Planned Parenthood, YWCA
  http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-center/findCenter.asp
  http://www.ywca.org/site/apps/kb/cs/contactsearch.asp?c=culRJ7NTKrLaG&b=7527667&state=PA&submit=submit

"Identifying & Engaging Homeless Youth, While Ensuring the Safety of Workers & Youth"

Presented by: Shane Burroughs

Personal Street Outreach experience-

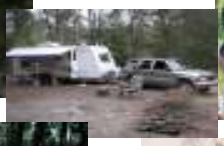
CITIES-

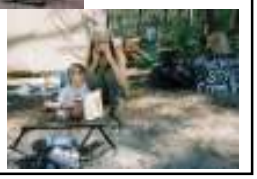
Birmingham, AL
Orlando, FL
Lehigh/Northampton, PA
Bucks County, PA (currently)

MINISTRY OUTREACH-

Various National Forests & Cities Around The U.S.

THE TATTERED STREET COMMUNITY

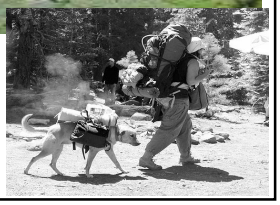




WHO WE SPEND OUR TIME WITH -

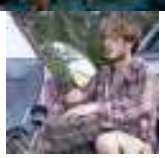
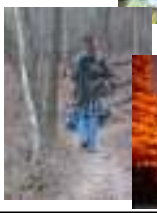
Runaway/Homeless Youth, Nomadic Youth, Gutter Punks, Train Kids/Hobo Youth, Hippies & Rainbows

What is a Rainbow Gathering?



Size ranges between 20 to 20,000 ppl!

A few more Rainbow Gathering Pix-

WHAT WE DO -

We provide a safe environment where people are able to get necessary supplies and have someone to talk to without feeling judged.

THE SYNERGY PROJECT

A STREET OUTREACH PROGRAM OF VALLEY YOUTH HOUSE

ASSISTANCE FOR RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH

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-Valley Youth House-

BUCKS COUNTY STREET OUTREACH PROGRAM

THE SYNERGY PROJECT

- Ages 12 - 21
- Homeless youth **&** youth who are considered high-risk for future homelessness
- Living Situations- woods, streets, couch-hop, cars
- The Synergy Project meets basic needs of homeless youth & attempts to prevent more youth from becoming homeless in the future
- Typically they're suburban youth who are scared, don't know where to go/what to do & yet they're highly motivated to get out of their bad situation! ☺

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What Often Causes Suburban Youth To Become Homeless?

-drug use (parents **AND/OR** youth)
-economic struggles
-abuse
-youth refusing to follow rules @ home
-mental illness (parents **AND/OR** youth)
-sexual orientation and/or gender identity

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What services are provided by **THE SYNERGY PROJECT?**

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Supplies- **We have everything from food, clothes, & hygienic products to camping gear! It's all in the Jeep!**

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THE SYNERGY PROJECT also helps with…

- Transportation
- Finding shelter & jobs
- Referrals
- Peer Support
- Counseling
- "Positive Youth Development"- Getting youth plugged into the program in a variety of ways
- Homelessness Prevention Services
- Education on topics related to homeless living

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How I get around the county

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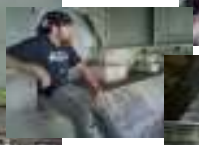
I patrol almost every day BUT most of the youth I work with come from local referrals!

I try to keep an eye on seemingly unlikely places?



“FRIEND”

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WHO IS CONSIDERED A HOMELESS YOUTH?

Youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

This includes children and youth who…

1. **sharing the housing of other persons** due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are **living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds** due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in **emergency or transitional shelters**; are **abandoned in hospitals**;
2. 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** (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));
3. living in **cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations**, or similar settings; and
4. migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (1) through (3).

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-Places homeless youth live-

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-I RUN INTO 2 TYPES OF YOUTH-

Those who choose to be/stay homeless & those who want to find secure housing!

Some *subcultures* exist among homeless youth-

gutter punks, crusties, freight train kids, hitchhikers, hippies, global nomadic youth, band tour youth and MANY others…

Among youth who ***don't*** choose homelessness-

Human Trafficking Victims-

Definition-The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for-

• **sex trafficking** in which a **commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion**, or in which the person induced to perform such act has **not attained 18 years of age**; or

• **labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion** for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

-Signs to look for-

- Shame
- Disorientation
- Malnourishment
- Tattoos/Brandings
- Injuries
- Fearful/Nervous
- Traumatic Bonding (Stockholm Syndrome)
- Inability to come/go freely or to contact people freely
- Live where they work
- Involvement in other criminal activity

-Types of Trafficking-

- Sex
  - -truck stops
  - -spa's & massage parlors
  - -strip clubs
  - -online pornography (including webcam)
  - -prostitution on streets, hotels or at homes
- Labor
  - -door to door sales
  - -farms
  - -restaurants/bars
  - -factories
  - -selling drugs
  - -pan handling
  - -hair/nail/beauty salons
  - -domestic labor in home

-Report Human Trafficking-

- **National Human Trafficking Resource Center**
- The National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) is a national, toll-free hotline, available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year.
- The NHTRC is a program of Polaris Project, a non-profit, non-governmental organization working exclusively on the issue of human trafficking.

***This program is not a government entity, law enforcement or an immigration authority.

Call: 1-888-373-7888

- To report a tip;
- To connect with anti-trafficking services in your area; or,
- To request training and technical assistance, general information or specific anti-trafficking resources.

Identifying & Locating Homeless Youth in your area

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-Who to speak with prior to the count-
(for the purpose of identifying potential homeless youth)

- Police Officers (including local railroad police)
- Food Bank Directors/Volunteers
- School Social Workers
- Park Rangers
- Guidance Counselors, H.S. Teachers & Coaches
- Youth Social Service Agencies (shelters, etc…)
- Church Youth Pastors/Leaders
- Coffee Shop Employees
- Laundromat Employees
- Library Employees
- YMCA Youth Program Coordinators
- YOUTH!!!!!

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-Where to find youth to speak with prior to the count-

- Malls
- Skateparks
- Teen Centers
- Movie Theaters
- Parks
- Playgrounds
- Loitering on Random Sidewalks!!!!! ;-)

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What might we say when we approach youth, prior to the count?

"Hi. We're with a group that's conducting a *confidential* census count of all of the homeless youth (ages 24 & under) in our area. The count's happening on August 15th. We were wondering if any of you know of anyone 24 & under that's living either on the streets, in the woods, in a tent, car, abandoned building or anywhere like that?"

****It's really important to emphasize whatever level of confidentiality that exists- nobody wants to get their friends in trouble*! ☺

****You may want to leave each youth a small photocopied phone number to contact you if they learn of someone who fits that criteria before the date of the count.*

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-The Appropriate Mentality When Working With Homeless Youth-

- The "savior" mentality will offend & drive most youth away.
- They are often EXTREMELY resourceful and can do far more on their own than we sometimes assume.
- Be friendly, confident & show appropriate levels of concern. An overly concerned attitude can be perceived as *pity*. That could be offensive.
- Don't try to look (dress) homeless to connect with them but don't overdress either. Perhaps, dress how you would dress if you went hiking! ☺
- Like homeless adults, they are very often NOT dangerous, mentally ill or addicted, as we are many times led to believe. Most are just like you & me, albeit more guarded & less socially acceptable because of the homeless lifestyle.
- We should never assume that every homeless person wants our help or shelter. Some homeless people are content living the way they are living & *that really is OK*! Our goal shouldn't be to "fix them" but to encourage them to become as self-sufficient as they can be. ☺

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-Where to Look for Homeless Youth-

(more suggestions can be found in the 2012 Summer PIT Booklet- pg.2)

- In front of stores
- Behind stores (dumpsters & loading docks)
- On the streets (sidewalks)
- Train yards (including in/on train cars)- talk with rail police first
- Under bridges
- Bus/train stations
- Parks & playgrounds (picnic tables & on playground equipment)
- Along the edge of creeks, rivers & lakes
- Abandoned & seasonally used buildings
- Camping in woods
- In vehicles
- Cemeteries
- Laundromats
- LIBRARIES!

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-How to recognize a homeless youth-

(what do they look like & what will they be doing)

- Some will be very dirty (hands, fingernails, feet and/or clothing), be close to a large backpack & possible even have a pet (usually a skinny dog) ***BUT*** others hate being dirty & look just like the "typical" youth.
- Some will be panhandling (even in the suburbs), dumpster diving behind a store ***BUT*** others will be hanging out with friends in front of a store until everyone goes home and then they often hang around longer, with seemingly nowhere to go.

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-A Few Other Things to Look For-

- Worn shoes
- Poor hygiene (in general)
- Eating in public places
- Hanging out near public transportation, in front of stores or in parks
- Rolled cigarettes instead of store bought cigs
- Hanging at the same exact place day after day

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#1 CHALLENGE

****Most homeless youth do ***NOT*** want to be found since, in their way of thinking, that could mean having to move locations ***AGAIN***, more trouble with the authorities, the risk of outstanding warrants being uncovered or being sent home (if they are under 18).

Most of these kids just don't like talking with anyone who could be perceived as an authority figure.

The Solution- identify yourself, put their concerns to rest (verbally), don't overwhelm them with lots of people up close to them and then BE GENUINE!

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How do we approach a potential homeless youth?

- If approaching a campsite, announce & identify yourself long before arriving at the site, don't "peak" into tent windows to see if someone is present, only enter the campsite area if you are invited (it is their home!), don't touch anything you're not invited to touch & if you ***MUST*** go at night, use as little flashlight light possible!
- If approaching youth away from their site- unless it is VERY evident that they are homeless, you might want to simply ask them if they know of anyone under 25 who's living in cars, tents, abandoned buildings, in the woods or on the streets. This way, you don't offend them by ***assuming*** they are homeless.
  - ****Make sure they KNOW it's confidential!!!!!!
- Make sure to keep a comfortable distance between volunteers & youth
- If the youth is sitting or laying, the volunteer who is speaking with the youth should crouch or "take a knee." Other volunteers should stand back at a comfortable distance (usually 7-10 feet away from the youth)
- Don't overwhelm the youth with the approach of too many volunteers

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-Ideas for Safety on the Streets-

(additional PIT safety ideas can be found in the 2012 Summer PIT booklet on page 6)

- Patrol with 2-4 people- Never patrol alone! Patrolling with more than 4 workers can feel overwhelming to a street kid but patrolling alone can also make some youth feel uncomfortable.
- When talking with a youth, always have only one person lead the conversation and the second worker is to be the reporter/safety observer- any extra workers will be observing the surroundings for potential safety issues- everyone should know their role before approaching youth.
- Always identify yourself in some way- use a volunteer badge, hat, t-shirt, patch or some other item that is visible to the youth you're approaching- you don't want them to wonder if you are an undercover cop

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Cont.

- Each worker should be carrying a concealed phone in case of a potential emergency- also, each phone should have a PIT home base number in contacts-
- Don't share personal information with street youth- where you or another volunteer live, personal phone numbers, etc…
- Don't conduct any type of "business" with youth
- Attire- No sandals or flip-flops (boots & sneakers are acceptable)- also, clothing should be casual, inexpensive & inoffensive to people in the community- absolutely NO expensive jewelry, wallets or purses! Also, don't wear sunglasses while talking to youth
- Wear bug spray and suntan lotion as necessary
- If possible, become familiar with the dynamics of each neighborhood/area so your team can quickly recognize when things are becoming unstable and unsafe.

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Cont.

- NEVER be in a place that seems unsafe- if you're not comfortable going into a particular environment… don't! If you find yourself in an unsafe environment… leave!
- It's always a good idea to have some sort of code word or phrase to let the team know you've identified a potential safety risk- for example- *"Hey Bill, remember? The office asked you to call them back- you should probably do that real quick."*
- Avoid debate and controversy with the youth or other community members
- Never loan or give money/gifts to street youth
- Each worker should carry some form of picture identification
- Let other workers know what you know about particular youth that maybe they don't know- for example, it can be helpful to know if a youth has recently been arrested, is using drugs or is going thru emotional turmoil

Cont.

- Make sure the police know who you are, what you're doing & what areas you'll be in
- Learn some de-escalation techniques that can help in situations where someone is becoming angry or aggressive- a worker might say something like, "I see you're really upset- is there anything we can do to help or would you prefer we leave for now?"
- Keep a VERY safe distance from illegal activities (drug deals, etc…), heavily intoxicated individuals and situations where people are arguing/fighting or simply becoming agitated
- When possible, let a leader know where the plan to work and patrol is to take place. Some locations warrant a call to the leader before and after being in a "risky" area.

Some safety concepts were pulled from Seton Youth Shelters Virginia Beach, VA; YouthCare in Seattle, WA; StreetWorks, Minneapolis, MN & Yellow Brick Road Street Outreach in Portland, OR

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Questions & Answers

Additional questions:

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