

SUMMIT VI: PAVING THE WAY

REAL SOLUTIONS TO CONFRONT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY



HOMELESS
CHILDREN'S
EDUCATION
FUND

November 13, 2015 • Wyndham Grand Downtown

OVERVIEW

Imagine being 18 years old and suddenly finding yourself out on the streets. Who would you call? Where would you turn? For far too many youth in our region, homelessness is a daily reality.

On November 13, 2015, the Homeless Children's Education Fund (HCEF) convened 400 community stakeholders for a day of learning and dialogue focused on taking action to confront youth homelessness in Allegheny County. The event drew diverse participants from HCEF's Homeless Education Network, including educators, social workers, researchers, advocates, funders, and youth.

The summit recognized outstanding work being done by dedicated organizations and individuals throughout the Pittsburgh area and honored the accomplishments of young people who are pursuing their life goals and inspiring others along the way.

The summit also challenged our community to do much more. HCEF's vision is for all youth experiencing homelessness to have the same educational opportunities as their stably housed peers. We must not settle for anything less than a future in which all young people are able to grow into adulthood with a sense of purpose, connectedness, and hope.

This event was made possible through the generous support of Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield. Key partners included the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Auberle, the Service Access for Youth Collaborative, and the members of our 2015 Summit Steering Committee.



Youth Homelessness in the U.S.



2,000,000

Number of youth who experience one night of homelessness each year in the U.S.



100,000

Number of youth sleeping long-term on the streets in the U.S.



25%

Percentage of former foster care youth who report becoming homeless for at least one night within 4 years after exiting foster care.

Sources: (1) (2) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, (3) Healthcare for the Homeless.

Evan Frazier, Senior Vice President of Community Affairs at Highmark Health, served as emcee of Summit VI.



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SUPPORT FROM LOCAL OFFICIALS



Senator Wayne Fontana emphasized how our community must come together to better serve homeless youth and discussed the State Task Force on Homeless Education as an example. The task force brought together various organizations to study the demographics of PA's homeless population. The work concluded with a report highlighting 13 recommendations to implement changes. There has been progress toward improving the system, but our work is far from done. Senator Fontana reinforced his commitment to ensuring that all youth have the opportunity to obtain a quality education.

**"KNOWING IS NOT ENOUGH:
WE MUST APPLY.
BEING WILLING IS NOT ENOUGH:
WE MUST DO."
- Leonardo da Vinci**

Amie Downs, Allegheny County Communications Director, spoke on behalf of County Executive Rich Fitzgerald on the importance of this work. "You are making amazing inroads into the lives of these children on a daily basis," she said. "It takes each of us to make a difference in all of us."

UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH TASK FORCE

In 2014, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS) established a community Task Force on Unaccompanied Youth to implement recommendations for improving services to unaccompanied youth. **Abigail Horn**, Senior Advisor at DHS, reported on outcomes of this work in 2015:

1) Expand the eligibility window for existing services through age 24: The Familylinks Downtown Outreach Center extended the maximum age to 24.

2) Plan services for ages 18-24: In June 2015, the first annual YOUTH Count survey collected responses from 56 unaccompanied youth on their housing stability, service connections, and life experiences. The responses showed a high level of multi-system involvement.

3) Open a drop-in center downtown:

After a competitive RFP, Auberle was selected to open the 412 Youth Zone, a comprehensive one-stop center for unaccompanied youth (see side bar.)

4) Increase shelter options for youth:

The Pittsburgh Youth Collaborative (a Google Group) was created to share services, forge connections among existing services, and ultimately better serve youth.

5) Review quality of entire continuum and increase training: Relationships were established with law enforcement, curriculums are being developed to provide trainings, and there has been research for federal and local funding to expand and develop services.

Abigail noted that the task force has been successful because of the dedicated involvement of many community organizations.

AUBERLE 412 YOUTH ZONE

Auberle Executive Director **John Lydon** described the upcoming 412 Youth Zone as a one-stop center for services, a place with opportunities for fun and creativity, and a welcoming environment. With a target population of 1,500 youth ages 16 to 24, the center will offer a wide range of services, including education, workforce development, legal aid, medical care, and creative programming.

The center will be open to homeless youth as well as those aging out of foster care. Youth have been heavily involved in the design of the center and will have leadership opportunities once it is open.

Many of these services are made possible through partnerships with other organizations. Ongoing collaboration will be key. The ultimate goal is for the center to be welcoming, comfortable, and create a sense of belonging for the youth.

The 412 Youth Zone building will officially open in January.





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COMMUNITIES COMING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS LGBT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

An “Impact of Silence” opening activity asked participants to list 1) the three most important people in their lives, 2) their three favorite places, and 3) three things they spend most of their time doing. Participants were then instructed to describe their weekend activities without using anything from their lists. For such an easy topic, it became a difficult conversation.

This “Impact of Silence” activity provided a little bit of insight into the lives of LGBT youth. They often have to engage in conversation while focused on what they can and cannot say while still feeling safe; how can they focus on education or a job if they don’t feel safe and are not able to be their authentic selves?

Dr. Jama Shelton opened her keynote presentation with these powerful questions. As Deputy Executive Director at the NYC-based True Colors Fund, Jama leads 40 to None Network, a national network dedicated to eliminating LGBT youth homelessness.

LGBT youth represent up to 40% of the homeless youth population and only 7% of the general youth population. LGBT youth most frequently cite identity-based family rejection as the reason they became homeless. They tend to experience homelessness for longer periods of time and face worse physical and mental health conditions.



Jama traced these outcomes to systemic oppression and urged summit participants to confront ideologies and institutions that invalidate or reject individuals on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or race.

She advised service providers to pay close attention to LGBT youth and youth of color when delivering programs. “When you center services on the experience of the most marginalized, you create a system that better serves all.”

Jama offered specific questions to ponder:

1. Who are you thinking about when you develop your policies, construct your buildings, and create curriculums?
2. Do your policies, by their existence or absence, say who is real and who is not?
3. How are you making spaces to validate who someone is?

She concluded with an impactful quote from a youth: “I don’t mind ignorance, but I mind aggressive ignorance.”

Resources:

Download Dr. Shelton’s keynote presentation slides at www.homelessfund.org/summit2015resources.html

Join the 40 to None Network truecolorsfund.org/our-work/community-organizing/network/

True You (launching soon)
Breaks down different learning topics related to LGBTQ youth in lesson format



“I CAN’T SAY WHO I AM UNLESS YOU AGREE I’M REAL”
(Amiri Baraka)



HOMELESSNESS AFFECTS LGBTQ YOUTH DISPROPORTIONATELY.



● LGBTQ Youth

● Non-LGBTQ Youth

An estimated 40% of all homeless youth in the United States identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. (Source: True Colors Fund)



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HIP HOP SAVED MY LIFE

In the early 90s, a Pittsburgh teen puts aside his hip hop dreams to help his HIV-positive sister care for her two kids. He ultimately ends up living on the streets after school and through college. A small job opportunity becomes the chance he needs to turn his life around.

He starts Ya Momz House, a production company, eventually winning an Emmy for his work. Throughout this journey, he discovers that "the best way to move forward is to give back." Today, he runs Hip Hop on L.O.C.K., an award-winning arts education program that touches the lives of thousands of youth.

Emmai Alaquiva shared his true story of overcoming homelessness in a lively keynote performance that got audience members rapping, scratching, and breakdancing. He left summit participants, especially the youth, with this important message: "Sometimes we are uncomfortable, but that is one of the key things in us changing our lives."



"YES, I WAS HOMELESS, BUT INSTEAD OF ASKING FOR CHANGE, I ASKED FOR CHANGE IN MY HEART. I ASKED FOR CHANGE IN MY COMMUNITY."



CONCURRENT SESSIONS & COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

This year's summit provided numerous opportunities for participants to learn, share, and connect with others. Over 20 panel discussions, hands-on workshops, and dialogue sessions were offered. Highlights included:

- Forging Partnerships with Law Enforcement to Support Homeless Youth
- Mentoring Highly Mobile Youth
- Empowering Youth Through Art
- Making Housing Work for LGBTQ Youth
- Changing the System: Political Advocacy for Homeless Youth

HCEF thanks the many organizations and individuals who led concurrent sessions:

3ENow
 ACTION-Housing
 Allegheny Co. Dept. of Human Services
 Allegheny County Jail
 Allegheny Intermediate Unit
 Alliance for Infants and Toddlers
 Art Expression, Inc.
 Auberle
 Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation
 City Charter High School
 Community Human Services/Project Silk
 Duquesne University

Education Law Center
 Familylinks
 Goodwill YouthWorks
 Manchester Bidwell Corporation
 MANY

The Mentoring Partnership
 OASIS Recovery Center
 Penn State University
 Phase 4 Learning Center
 Pittsburgh Bureau of Police
 POWER

Proud Haven
 Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board
 University of Pittsburgh
 WC&S Community-Sourced Mixtape
 Woodland Hills School District





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YOUTH RESILIENCE AWARDS



The HCEF Youth Resilience Award honors young people (age 16-24) who have experienced housing instability or crisis, yet continue to demonstrate a commitment to pursuing their life goals and using their voices to create positive change in the community.

"I KNEW THAT BEING HOMELESS WASN'T MY LAST STOP. THE THING THAT KEPT ME MOVING WAS MY PASSION."

(Colin W.)



This year HCEF honored five young adults who have inspired and impacted those around them in profound ways:

- Shonice H. (presented by Grace Enick)
- Kylar A. (presented by Jen Rozell)
- Lezlee F. (presented by Angela Keeley)
- Taylor K. (presented by Jess Netto)
- Colin W. (presented by Tim Kelly)



SUMMIT VI STEERING COMMITTEE

Assistant Chief Maurita Bryant
Pittsburgh Bureau of Police

Dr. Wayne Centrone
Center for Social Innovation

Dr. Erik Garrett
Duquesne University

Cashmere Gore

Monica Hershberger
Homeless Children's Education Fund

Abigail Horn
Allegheny County
Department of Human Services

Chuck Keenan
Allegheny County
Department of Human Services

Bridgette Kennedy
Bidwell Training Center

Cheryl Kleiman
Education Law Center

Dr. Joseph Lagana
Homeless Children's Education Fund

Chris McAneny
Women's Center & Shelter

Jennifer Staley McCrady

Jess Netto
Community Human Services
/Project SILK

Susy Robison
Homeless Children's Education Fund

Laura Saulle
Homeless Children's Education Fund

Cynthia Shields
Three Rivers Workforce
Investment Board

Dr. Jeffrey Shook
University of Pittsburgh

Bill Wolfe
Homeless Children's Education Fund

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY


240

Number of youth age 18-24 estimated to be living on the street, in abandoned buildings, and in shelters in Allegheny County in 2014.


2-5 X

Amount by which the homeless youth count could increase if doubled-up or couch-surfing youth were included.

Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services



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PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

97% OF ATTENDEES SAID THEIR WORK WOULD PROBABLY OR DEFINITELY CHANGE AS A RESULT OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE SUMMIT.

"I FEEL ENCOURAGED TO ADVOCATE FOR NEW SOLUTIONS AND TO SUPPORT CURRENT INITIATIVES."

- Educator

"I'M GOING TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUTH CHALLENGES IN THE CITY USING THE CONNECTIONS I MADE HERE."

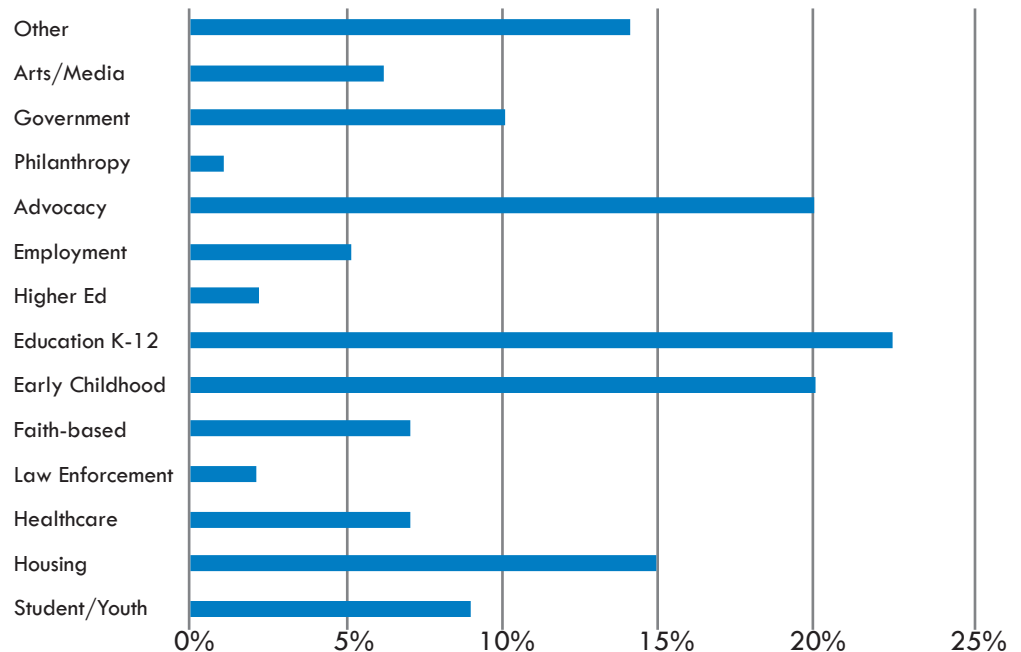
- Housing Specialist

"I WILL FOLLOW UP WITH CONTACTS AND PARTNER TO IDENTIFY AT-RISK YOUTH AND EDUCATE THEM ON THE RISK OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING FOR HOMELESS AND RUNAWAY LGBT YOUTH."

- Service Provider

How Summit Participants Described Themselves

Participants were asked to choose the word(s) that best described their work in the community. They were allowed to choose more than one word.



Other Quotes from Participants:

"I wanted to connect with more youth-centered organizations. Homeless youth is a group that I am just starting to work with and this was very enlightening."

- Healthcare Provider

"I was hoping to gather new information, get ideas for old information, and share info. All of these goals were met, plus more."

- Youth Advocate

"Homelessness is not seen by just looking at a youth. Sometimes you must ask the right questions to get more." - Housing Specialist

"It was good to learn policy and areas of opportunity, as well as debrief on action items and potential solutions, coalitions, and collaborations" - Summit Participant

"I really appreciated the anecdotal experiences and the opportunity to hear on both the personal and policy levels."

- Summit Participant



HOMELESS CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FUND

creating hope through learning
www.homelessfund.org

For More Information:

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SAVE THE DATE

SUMMIT VII • NOVEMBER 18, 2016