

# **The USICH Youth Data Strategy in Action: Analysis of Data on Youth with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness**

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**2015 Children's Bureau Combined Discretionary Grantees Kick-off Meeting  
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# Presentation overview

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- **USICH youth framework and the Children's Bureau's Youth at Risk of Homelessness planning grants (YARH-1)**
- **Goals of the data analysis activities required in YARH-1**
- **Data sources on child welfare involvement and homeless outcomes**
- **Data sources on risk and protective factors**
- **What the YARH-1 grantees learned about youth involved with child welfare at risk of homelessness**
- **Lessons and next steps**

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# The USICH youth framework and the Children's Bureau's YARH-1 planning grants

# The USICH data strategy

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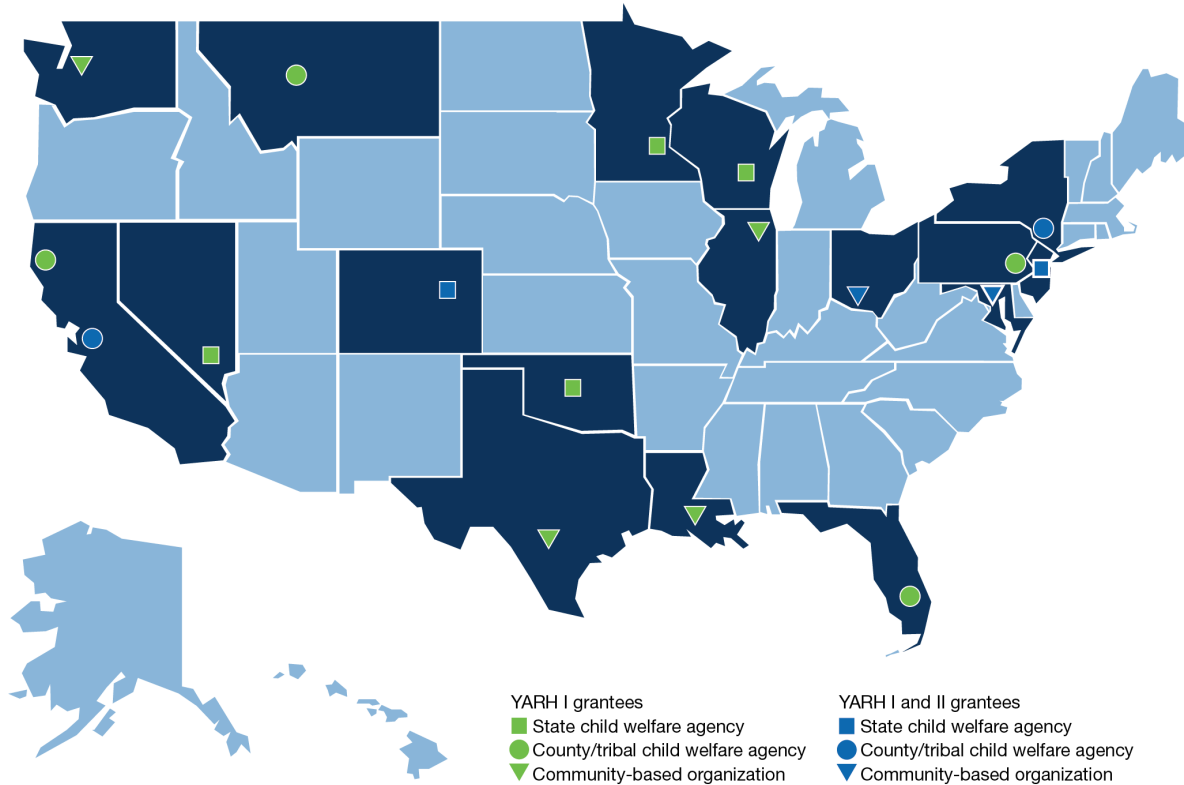
- The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, *Framework to End Youth Homelessness: A Resource Text for Dialogue and Action* (2013) recommended a “data strategy” that would:
  - **Enhance data collection on homeless youth**
    - In particular, enhance Point-in-Time homeless counts
  - **Use community or state data to examine**
    - Characteristics of homeless youth
    - Size of the homeless youth population
    - Risk and protective factors

# YARH-1 planning grants

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- **Planning Grants to Develop a Model Intervention for Youth/Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness**
- **First national effort to implement the USICH youth data strategy for an important at-risk population**
- **18 grantees/24-month planning period (2013-2015)**
- **Charge: develop an intervention to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults with child welfare involvement**
  - **Begin with data analysis to understand size of the at-risk population and risk factors for homelessness in grantee site**

# YARH-1 grantee locations



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# Goals of the YARH-1 data analysis activities

# Goals of the data analysis (1)

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- YARH-1 grantees wanted to learn:
  - What factors *increase the risk* of homelessness among youth in foster care?
  - What protective factors *reduce the risk* of homelessness among youth in foster care?
  - *How many youth* involved with child welfare are at risk of homelessness?
  - *How many homeless youth and young adults* have experienced child welfare involvement?



# Goals of the data analysis (2)

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- The research questions focused on three groups of youth/young adults:
  - Youth in foster care ages 14-17
  - Young adults in transition from foster care
  - Homeless youth with child welfare histories up to age 21
- Types of data needed:
  - Child welfare involvement
  - Homeless outcomes
  - Risk and protective factors

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# Data sources on child welfare involvement and homeless outcomes

# Key sources:

## Data on child welfare and homeless outcomes

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- **YARH grantees needed to match data over time**
  - Youth in the child welfare system at an earlier time
  - Homeless outcomes for youth/young adults at a later time
- **Challenges**
  - Obtaining data outside own agency
  - Measuring homeless outcomes, including homelessness, unstably housed, or doubled-up youth
- **We look first at child welfare data and then at sources of data on homeless outcomes**

# All 18 grantees had child welfare data

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- Most grantees were state or local child welfare agencies; others had a relationship with the child welfare agency
- Child welfare data were readily available and relatively easy to use for analysis (for most grantees)
  - Longitudinal data; information on assessments and services
- But not always
  - Three grantees could request specific child welfare records but did not obtain a representative sample for analysis
  - One grantee could only obtain aggregate child welfare data that could not be linked with other data

# **Data on homelessness: transition surveys and National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)**

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- **Additional child welfare agency data used by grantees**
  - Surveys of youth receiving independent living services (3 grantees)
  - NYTD longitudinal survey (10 grantees)
- **NYTD data: collected by state child welfare agencies for all, or for a sample of, transition-age youth, but response rates vary widely and are low in many states**
  - Youth in foster care at age 17 with follow-up at ages 19 and 21
- **Concerns of many grantees using NYTD**
  - Possible unrepresentative sample
  - Insufficient sample sizes for substate areas
- **Adequate NYTD data could have addressed the question**

# **Data on homelessness: Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS)**

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- Homeless youth are most often served by agencies funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) program
- Federal regulations prohibit sharing individual-level RHY data without consent of youth
  - Consent of the parent or guardian is also required if the youth is a minor
- No YARH grantees obtained RHYMIS data

# Data on homelessness: Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

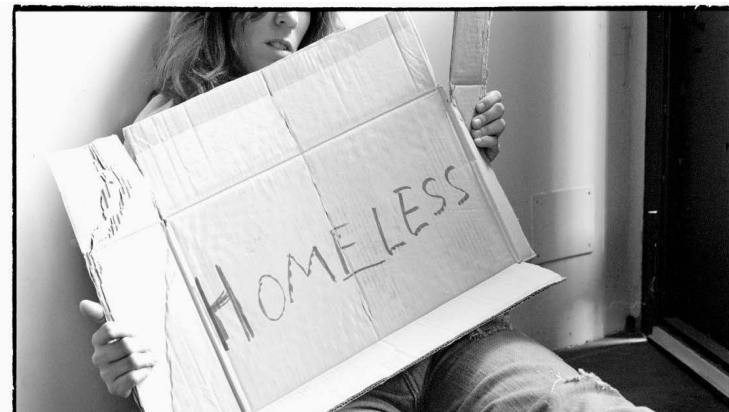
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- HMIS data are collected by HUD-funded Continuum of Care (CoC) agencies
- HMIS data are often pulled together into a single data set by a state agency, simplifying access
- Half of the grantees obtained access to HMIS data
- Challenges in using HMIS
  - Only yielded small number of record matches with child welfare data
  - HMIS includes few homeless youth; only those seeking CoC services
  - Does not include those who are doubled up or unstably housed
  - Some grantees did not trust HMIS data because the number of matches seemed too low

# Data on homelessness: Public assistance, education

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- **Public assistance data (TANF, General Assistance, SNAP)**
  - Includes homeless status and unstable arrangements for some grantees
  - 5 grantees obtained this data source



- **Education data**
  - Can include information on homelessness or unstable housing arrangements—identified by school liaisons for homeless students
  - 4 grantees obtained state education data (1 obtained aggregated state education agency data)
  - 3 grantees obtained local education agency data



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# Data sources on risk and protective factors

# All 18 grantees obtained risk and protective data, but data elements and sources varied

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- **Child welfare agency data: information on youth assessments, placements, runaways, and services received**
  - Behavioral health, educational needs and issues, involvement with juvenile justice
  - Employment activity, school progress
  - Foster care placements and residential status
- **Public assistance agency data (TANF, SNAP)**
  - Income sources and amounts
- **Education agency data**
- **Employment and training agency data**
- **Juvenile justice agency data**
- **Health agency data on behavioral health**

# Four grantees were in sites that have integrated administrative data systems

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- In states or cities with integrated administrative data systems, data came from most of these agencies:

Child welfare  
Public assistance  
Housing, HMIS  
Juvenile justice

Employment  
Education  
Health  
Behavioral health

- Grantees expected to bypass the lengthy MOU negotiations, reducing delays experienced by the other grantees
- However, all four had to obtain either court approvals or agency approvals to obtain data for analysis
  - Two grantees completed analyses within 15 to 18 months
  - Two others were just obtaining access to the data by then

# Approaches to obtaining administrative data from partner agencies

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Most grantees tried to obtain some data from outside their agencies:

- Developed an MOU with an agency to obtain individual-level data
- Developed an MOU with an agency that maintains an integrated administrative database
- Sent records on youth/young adults to another agency that matched those records with its database and sent:
  - De-identified, individual-level data records for analysis
  - Analyses of characteristics of that group of individuals (tables)
- Used publicly available aggregate data on youth with particular characteristics who are as similar as possible to the youth/young adults of interest

# 16 grantees used youth surveys or focus groups to augment or replace administrative data

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- Youth surveys and focus groups often done simultaneously with analysis of administrative data
  - Some grantees expanded regular surveys of transition-age youth
  - Some grantees expanded Point-in-Time counts of the homeless
  - “Snowball” samples were used for longer surveys or focus groups
  - Some efforts were ambitious: over 100 interviews
- Perceived advantages of surveys and focus groups
  - Immediate information
  - Filled in gaps: information on protective factors, service engagement, and homeless episodes
  - More accurate picture of unstable housing episodes
- Disadvantages of surveys and focus groups
  - Transition-age surveys of youth are typically brief
  - Whether snowball samples represent the population is unknown

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# What the YARH-1 grantees learned about youth involved with child welfare at risk of homelessness

# Approaches to the data analysis

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Some grantees used multiple approaches, and some did not describe the approach in detail

- **Linked individual child welfare data with homeless data (9 grantees)**
  - Identified a cohort of youth involved with child welfare, linked them with homeless data; identified factors associated with the homeless group
- **Counted risk factors (and protective factors) in a sample of youth involved with child welfare (5 grantees)**
  - Counted the number of factors experienced by each youth; set thresholds for high risk
- **Described characteristics of homeless youth with child welfare history (7 grantees)**

# Grantees estimating predictive risk of homelessness (1)

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- Nine grantees matched child welfare data with homeless data on youth and young adults
- Fewer grantees estimated a predictive risk model to assess the risk and protective factors associated with becoming homeless
- Analyses focused on different age groups of youth in foster care and on different age groups of homeless youth/young adults



# Grantees estimating predictive risk of homelessness (2)

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Several issues challenged this work:

- **No ordered path from child welfare to homelessness.** Homelessness could occur before or between periods of child welfare involvement as well as after
- **Status of 18- to 21-year-olds as either in or out of the child welfare system is fluid.** Youth may emancipate but then return; state laws vary
- **HMIS and NYTD had limitations for this work.** HMIS missed many unstably housed and homeless youth; NYTD samples could be small or unrepresentative

# Risk of homelessness: percentage of youth in child welfare identified later as homeless

Grantee	Ages 14-17 in foster care	Ages 17-21 in transition	Both groups	Source of homelessness information
Grantee R	11%	12%		HMIS
Grantee H	20			HMIS and county data
Grantee G	12-17	18-25		HMIS
Grantee E		11		City shelter data
Grantee C			28%	HMIS and public assistance
Grantee A			15	HMIS, state education data
Grantee N		21		NYTD
Grantee M		18		NYTD
Grantee F	8	26		NYTD

Source: Grantees' applications for Phase II funding and analyses submitted with semi-annual progress reports (9 grantees linking child welfare data with homeless data or using NYTD).

# Risk and protective factors associated with homelessness (1)

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Grantees using predictive risk models identified several risk factors:

- Numerous foster care placements
- Running away from foster care
- Placement in a group home
- History of mental health diagnoses or behavioral health issues
- Juvenile justice involvement
- Aging out of foster care
- Parenting or fathering a child
- Age at first placement played out differently as a risk factor for different grantees (early placement, i.e., birth to 2 years, or placement in adolescence)

# **Risk and protective factors associated with homelessness (2)**

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**Some grantees using predictive risk models also identified protective factors:**

- Placement with relatives**
- Exiting foster care to permanency (parents or adoption)**
- School progress (high grade point average, enrollment in post-secondary education)**

**But many grantees did not have protective factors in their data**

# Other approaches to estimating risk and protective factors

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Grantees used descriptive approaches informed by past research on risk factors for homelessness

- **Multiple administrative data sources assembled as snapshots of the population from various perspectives**
  - Education, employment, juvenile justice, housing, child welfare experiences
  - Grantees looked across the three engagement groups: 14 to 17 in foster care, 17 to 21 in transition, and homeless with child welfare history
- **Surveys of youth involved with child welfare to assess the incidence of a range of protective factors that could inform interventions**
- **Surveys of young adults who had exited child welfare**
- **Surveys of homeless youth/young adults about prior child welfare involvement**

# Percentage of homeless youth with child welfare involvement

Grantee	Percentage of homeless youth with child welfare involvement	Ages of homeless youth	Sources of data on homeless youth
Grantee R	20%	18-21	HMIS
Grantee J	26	18-21	HMIS
Grantee Q	7-9	18-24	PIT count
Grantee N	11	All ages	PIT count
Grantee L	25	14 and over	PIT count
Grantee H	57	Not reported	Survey of homeless youth statewide
Grantee F	10	18-26	Survey of street homeless youth
Grantee B	5	18-21	PIT count

Source: Grantees' applications for Phase II funding and analyses submitted with semi-annual progress reports (eight grantees conducting these analyses).

# Decisions about the size of the population of youth at risk of homelessness varied

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- Eight grantees provided estimates of the size of the population of youth/young adults involved with child welfare who were at risk of becoming homeless
  - Estimates ranged from 10% to 100%
  - Some grantees based the estimate on an index of risk factors (some also added protective factors) and set a risk threshold
  - Others used the risk factors as screeners, and considered those with particular combinations of the risk factors as at risk
  - Some grantees adjusted the risk threshold so the resulting number of eligible youth could be accommodated by service providers
  - Others viewed all youth in the child welfare system as facing a substantial risk of homelessness
- Most grantees viewed all homeless youth/young adults with child welfare involvement as being at risk of homelessness

# Estimated percentage of youth / young adults at risk of homelessness

Grantee	Ages 14-17 in foster care	Ages 17-21 in transition	Homeless with child welfare involvement
Grantee D	100%	100%	100%
Grantee G	80%	92%	100%
Grantee B	82%	82%	100%
Grantee P	64%	73%	77%
Grantee C	40%	40%	No estimate
Grantee K	30%	42%	No estimate
Grantee R	28%	39%	100%
Grantee A	10%	15%	21%

Source: Grantees' applications for Phase II funding.



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# Lessons and next steps

# Lessons learned about accessing administrative data from other agencies

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- Many grantees obtained multiple administrative data sets and combined them to learn about risk and protective factors for homelessness
- Time required to negotiate MOUs is significant
  - 9 to 18 months was typical, but many agreements took longer
  - Grantees in sites with integrated data systems still had to negotiate to *use the data*
- Some partners shared de-identified or aggregated data
  - Individual-level data with identifiers are needed to assess the risk of homelessness and associated risk and protective factors
- Some agencies that have important data sources did not share the data; cited regulations and sensitivity of data
  - FERPA, HIPAA, RHYMIS consent requirements, social security numbers

# Enhanced child welfare data could support understanding of youth outcomes

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- **Some grantees improved periodic surveys**
  - Expanded transition-age youth surveys to cover social support, connections with adults, and social-emotional well-being
  - Enhanced homeless Point-in-Time counts to include youth, past child welfare involvement, and sometimes several additional questions
- **Better quality administrative data and NYTD data**
  - More reliable and complete data on key risk and protective factors for youth
  - Increase NYTD initial response rates and improve youth tracking to attain higher follow-up rates
  - Expand the survey sample and topics

# Risk and protective factors for homelessness and the size of the population at risk

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- Valid measures of homelessness and unstable housing were not generally available
- Data on risk and protective factors were not consistently available across the grantees
  - All had child welfare data; few had education or employment data
- All grantees assessed risks; only a small number also looked at protective factors
  - Generally a data limitation issue – the data they could access easily focused on risk factors
  - The need to identify a high-risk group of youth for the intervention might have led to greater focus on risk factors
- Estimates of the percentage of youth involved with child welfare at risk of homelessness ranged from 10% to 100%

# Starting conversations about homelessness in the community

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The data analysis and related conversations with partners had benefits:

- Fully engaged partners to assess the risk of homelessness in a high-risk population
- Promoted data sharing among agencies
- Improved understanding of the data
- Increased understanding of risk and protective factors associated with homelessness
- Supported productive discussions about interventions

# For more information

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