

Missed Opportunities: Pathways from Foster Care to Youth Homelessness in America

Foundational evidence for understanding the scale, scope, and urgency of youth homelessness in America

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Each year, nearly 4.2 million adolescents and young adults in America experience some form of homelessness. *Missed Opportunities: Pathways from Foster Care to Youth Homelessness in America* focuses on the subset of young people who experience homelessness after spending time in foster care.

We found that:

1. Between one-quarter and one-third of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness had a history of foster care.
2. There are multiple pathways to homelessness from foster care. Some young people become homeless after aging out of foster care, but youth who were reunified with their families or adopted also experienced homelessness.
3. Youth who had been in foster care experienced more adverse events than their peers.
4. Young people's entry into foster care was often part of a larger pattern of family instability and was perceived by some young people as the beginning of their experience with homelessness.

Recommendations

Improve preparation for independent living: Child welfare systems need to do a better job preparing youth in foster care for their transition to adulthood and helping them navigate the challenges they face during that transition.

Expand housing assistance: Assistance with housing is particularly critical to preventing homelessness among youth who have exited foster care.

Help youth develop meaningful, permanent connections with caring adults: Our findings suggest that youth who had been in foster care do not have a supportive network of adults to whom they can turn for help.

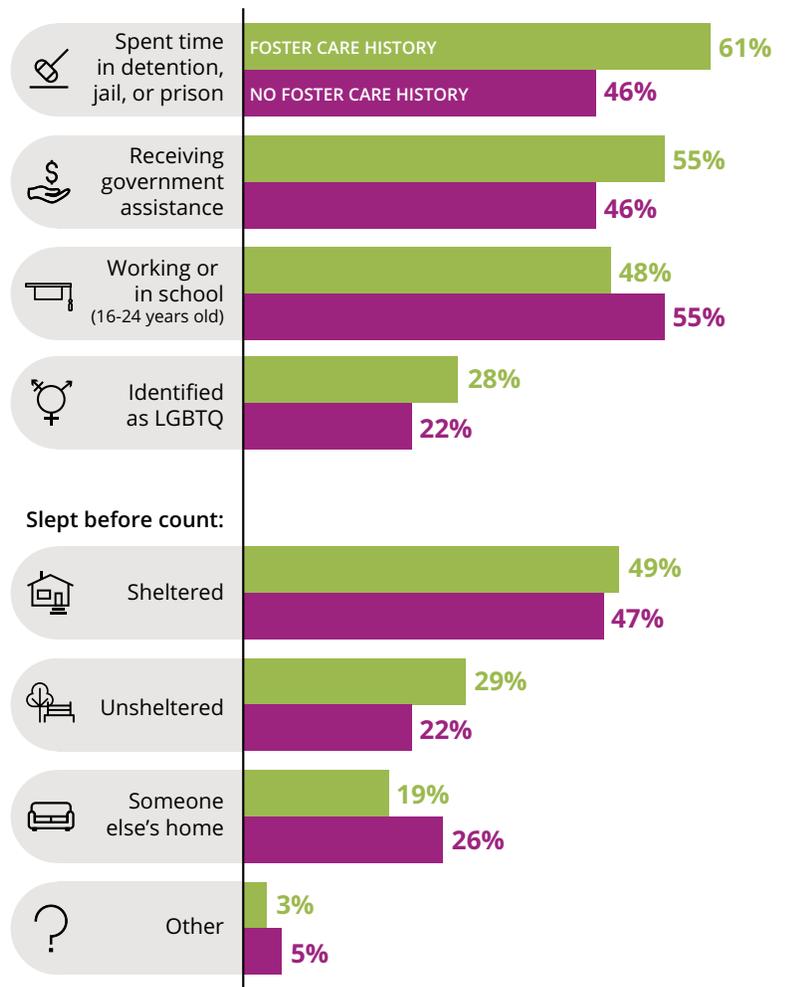
Provide trauma-informed services: Services for youth experiencing homelessness have to be sensitive to their trauma history and avoid re-traumatization.

Address family homelessness: Intervening with families experiencing homelessness could help prevent youth homelessness by reducing unnecessary foster care entries.

Prevent entry into foster care: Fund programs to help prevent children and youth from entering foster care.

Support reunified or adoptive families: Youth who exit foster care through reunification or adoption are also at risk for homelessness; federal child welfare funds should be used to provide stabilization services to children who have been adopted or reunified and to their families.

Differences between youth experiencing homelessness with and without a foster care history



(Source: VoYC Brief Youth Surveys)

Build the evidence base for interventions to prevent homelessness among youth who have a history of child welfare involvement: We need more research to know how to prevent homelessness among this group of young people.