

CHARLESTON YOUTH COUNT



Summary of Findings

Data Source

- The findings provided on this page are drawn from the information collected through 62 in-person interviews with young people experiencing homelessness in Charleston County, in the spring and summer of 2018.

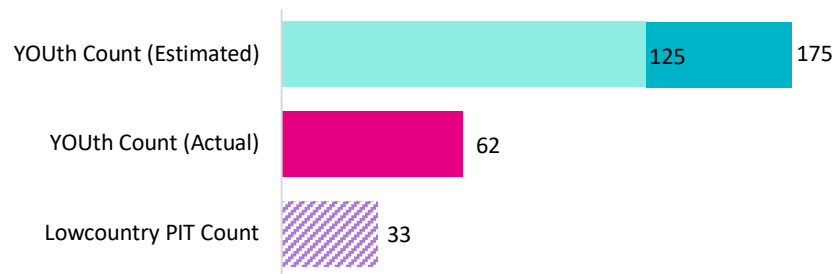
Estimate of Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Charleston County

- There are an estimated 125-175 youth living in places not fit for human habitation in Charleston County – much higher than the 33 individuals identified by the Lowcountry PIT Count in seven counties.

Demographics

- Most of the youth included in this study are not Charleston natives. More than half (52%) were born out of state and 20% were born in another city in South Carolina.
- Fifty-four percent of the population surveyed identify as male, 34% as female, and 12% as non-binary or as transgender.
- More than half of participants (62%) are heterosexual and 38% identify as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer).

Number of Individual Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Charleston County



Number of Youth Experiencing Homelessness. This graph compares the number of surveys/overall estimate of youth in Charleston County with a PIT count completed by the Lowcountry Homeless Coalition (SCICH & Civitas, 2018). It should be noted that the LHC number include 18-24 for the entire Lowcountry region (seven counties) and the YOUth Count numbers account for ages 17-25 in Charleston County alone.

Housing

- Thirty-eight percent of respondents have been experiencing continuous insecure housing for one year or longer.
- Lack of financial resources is the key reason these young people do not have stable places to stay. Two-thirds report that they have been made to leave a housing situation involuntarily in the last 12 months.
- Sixty percent of respondents report having left a stable housing situation due to a fear for their safety.

Hunger

- Two-thirds of these young people surveyed are food insecure – many source their nutrition from soup kitchens, pantries, and/or other charitable sources.

Health

- Seventy percent of the sample report going to the ER at least once in the last year with an average of four emergency room visits annually. Thirty percent report spending at least one night in the hospital in the last 12 months.
- Uninsured housing insecure youth in Charleston County incur an estimated minimum of \$232,564 in unreimbursed hospital costs annually.
- In the past year, 45% percent of respondents were not able to get the medications they need and 83% have not received any immunizations.
- Mental illnesses are prevalent among youth experiencing homelessness. Within this sample, there were 56 reports of anxiety and depression.

Youth Life Experiences

- Thirty-eight percent of respondents report that they were in foster care at some point growing up; 51% report that they have been incarcerated.
- Two thirds report that they have witnessed violence in their homes. Among foster care youth, 84% have witnessed violence with a gun or other weapon.
- Forty percent of respondents report that they have been coerced into sexual activities; 16% report the involvement of a third party in these experiences.
- Half of this sample report interactions with law enforcement in the last year with 56% of these reporting some form of perceived mistreatment.

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Summary of Recommendations

Highest Priority - Local

- Secure funding to allow appropriate social service providers to house and support young women who are experiencing homelessness and are also pregnant.
- Re-open the Safe House program that was started by We Are Family to provide housing, food and adult mentoring to youth experiencing homelessness in caring and safe homes. The program is currently on hold due to lack of funding.
- Build shelter(s) specifically for youth in Charleston county that could serve the Lowcountry region.
- Build and support drop-in centers for youth experiencing homelessness so they can access mental health supports, food, social services and have their basic needs met.
- Educate local, regional and state policy makers, funding sources, social service providers, law enforcement and health care providers about the scope and nature of youth experiencing homelessness in Charleston so that they can develop coordinated interventions beyond the obvious need for shelter and nutrition.
- Train local agencies on Adverse Childhood Experiences and working with LGBTQ+ and other special populations of youth.

Highest Priority - State

- Pass state legislation similar to the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA). This will place emphasis and ideally bring resources to assist youth experiencing homelessness.
- Coordinate training, research, and programs/services through agencies like the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), the National Coalition for the Homeless, the Federal Department of Health and Human Services and Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

- Create a state entity that focuses solely on designing, implementing and evaluating youth homeless programs modeled after USICH.
- Seek general funding and allot grants specifically for the purpose of creating and supporting sexual abuse prevention programs that focus on youth.
- Declassify running away as a status or delinquent offense.
- Fund youth specific services to *prevent* homelessness especially for youth from foster care, with a history of incarceration, and/or who are LGBTQ and may have been cut off from their biological families.
- Develop and evaluate methods to address vicarious victims of violence, especially domestic violence, as part of a strategy to break inter-generational patterns of violence.
- Provide safe and inclusive environments in child welfare, juvenile justice, runaway and homeless youth programs by providing protections based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Train local agencies on Adverse Childhood Experiences and working with LGBTQ+ and other special populations of youth.

Local Law Enforcement

- Develop and then share resources with law enforcement so that their interventions can go beyond relocation of those experiencing homelessness to include referrals to social service agencies that can assist in providing basic human needs for young adults and children without familial support. Provide training for patrol officers.

Local Health Care Providers

- Help identify youth at risk for becoming homeless and refer to agencies who can help. Train medical personnel to observe signs of youth homelessness (and human trafficking) as part of clinical practice. Develop and train clinicians who can effectively serve youth experiencing homelessness.