# Are Unaccompanied Youth at Risk for Human Trafficking?
# A Closer Look

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# Risks of being a youth experiencing homelessness:

- Death
- Violence
- Suicide
- Drugs
- Criminal Activity and Offenses
- Human Trafficking

# Definition: Unaccompanied Youth: living without parents or guardians

In the United States:

- there are approximately 550,000 unaccompanied, single youth and young adults up to age 24 who experience a homelessness episode of longer than one week

- the most commonly quoted number of homeless youth under the age of 18 is just under 1.7 million, with all youth estimated at over 4 million in the United States

*- National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Throwaway Children (*NISMART)

# DEFINING THE ISSUE

# Pennsylvania: A Snapshot:



- In 2016 there was a total of 388 beds for youth in the city of Philadelphia.

- Our largest provider, Covenant House (CHP) had to turn away approximately 550 unaccompanied youth. They only were able to serve 512 unaccompanied youth that same year. It is estimated that we are approximately 500 beds short in Philadelphia.

- Currently, CHP has two locations in Pennsylvania: Philadelphia and York, where they now serve approximately 3,200 youth annually (CHP, 2019).

- Youth homelessness is a major problem, especially among LGBTQ teens.

- According to reports, within the last 10 years the number of high school students in Philadelphia who have experienced homelessness has increased 73 percent. That would mean that one out of every 10 high school students in Philly has experienced homelessness.

- According to Department of Human Services Chief Learning Officer Gary Williams, approximately 50 percent of foster care youth will become homeless once they age out of the system.

# 2018 HUD Point in Time Count (Philadelphia)

300 Unaccompanied Youth Were Identified:

153 Emergency Shelters

29 Transitional Housing

22 Safe Haven

96 Unsheltered

# Unaccompanied Youth: the causes:

- Economic Problems:
  - Pervasive poverty & multi-generational poverty
- Family Problems:
  - Principal reasons – physical/sexual abuse, drug addiction, parental neglect
  - Youth were either told to leave or their parents knew and didn't care
  - Shelter systems that separate families
- Residential Instability
  - Foster care, mental health placement – often become homeless upon discharge
- Natural disasters

# Defining "Unaccompanied Youth":

- Unaccompanied: children and youth who are not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian.

- Many children **under the age of 18** who temporarily reside with someone who is not a parent or legal guardian falls under this definition.

  - **Not when an "arrangement of convenience"**

- The McKinney-Vento law states that this can be for "any reason."

- This includes **runaways.**

- Children **over the age of 18** who have been "kicked out" of their home, or left due to safety reasons, are living in substandard housing or who are "doubled up" will also meet this definition.

- There is no age range or **citizenship** requirement.

# "Host" Families: Key Points

- Schools cannot require that a family who "takes in" a student obtain guardianship.
- Guardianship can only come from a judge.
- A notary cannot establish legal guardianship.

# Rural Vs. Urban:

Rural:

- Living in cars, parks, campgrounds, barns, tents, hunting cabins; run down homes often without running water or heat, windows are gone, roof covered with tarps; often doubled-up with other families
- Stable populations (do not move as frequently)
- More families identified
- Homeless is a "hidden" issue – people are under a roof
- Less likely to accept or seek our services
- Fewer resources available
- More politically conservative

# Rural Vs. Urban:



Urban:

- More people living in shelters and transitional housing.

- Doubled-up families are rarely ID'd.

- Transient populations (families will move in and out of locations)

- More single adults identified

- Homelessness is a more "visible" issue – people sometimes on the streets

- Open to & often seeking services

- More resources and funding available

- More politically liberal

# Types of Unaccompanied Youth



*Using data from a sample of 250 youth from Detroit, researcher Dr. Paul Toro identified three subpopulations of homeless youth:*

- "**Low-risk**" youth who tend to be younger, maintain more stable relationships with their families and school, and experience the least amount of homelessness over time;

- "**Transient**" youth have less stable connections with school and housing as they moved in and out of homelessness repeatedly, but still did not have prominent mental health or substance abuse problems and retained relationships with their families; and

- "**High-risk**" youth who are more likely to have dropped out of school, have unstable relationship with their families, struggle with mental health and substance abuse issues, and experience long stretches of homelessness.

# Interventions for Youth under the Age of 18

- ❑ Reunification with family
  - ❑ Statistics show that most unaccompanied youth eventually reunite with family
  - ❑ Safety issues always need to be considered
  - ❑ However, even when not safe for them to do so – research shows there is benefit for all unaccompanied youth to have family intervention and counseling if possible
- ■ Referral to Children and Youth Services
  - ❑ Not always able to open case, based on criteria
- ■ Host homes
  - ❑ Formal
  - ❑ Informal (most common)
- ■ Youth Shelter
- ■ Independent living

# Interventions for Young Adults Ages 18 to 24

- Reunification with family (when appropriate)
- Independent living (lease)
- Host Homes
    - Formal
    - Informal
- Rapid rehousing/transitional housing/permanent supported housing
    - Placement through Housing Services
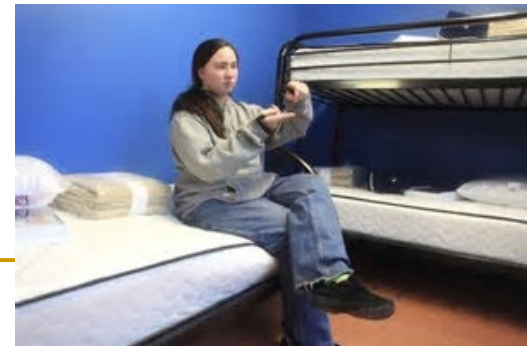- Shelter
    - Temporary solution

# Improving the response

- **Improve the crisis response.**
  - There are too few shelter programs to meet the existing need and, as a result, youth are regularly turned away without a place to sleep.
  - communities should also consider alternative models to house youth - from having a more flexible shelter system to a host home option.
  - In rural communities the options are often non-existent.

- **Prioritize family reunification or support as the initial intervention**.
  - Most youth return home to family and programs interacting with youth can facilitate that process when safe and appropriate.
  - Often, it is necessary to provide ongoing support after the youth returns to the family.
  - Family intervention could be done earlier to avoid a youth separating from their family altogether.

# Improving the response. . .continued

- ***Expand available transitional living/host home programs.***
  - We know that some of the most vulnerable youth are not able to access the supports they require because so many of them remain on the streets. More needs to be done to provide youth with longer-term housing options when reunification with family is not possible.
  - NOTE: Ensure that programs are accepting of LGBTQ youth as they may be at particular risk for family separation because of a lack of acceptance. Additionally, LGBTQ youth may be at high risk for sexual exploitation and violence on the street.





- ***Improve data collection and performance measurement.***
  - Better data on both the number of homeless youth and the effectiveness of interventions is critical.
  - They can fully include youth in local efforts (Point-In-Time counts) and participate in HMIS. This will create data that can be used to examine the interaction of homeless youth with other public systems and can create an unduplicated count of homeless youth.

"NEARLY EVERY PROSTITUTE WE SEE WAS A CHILD ONCE TRAFFICKED AGAINST THEIR WILL." – SCOTT ARNOLD, GRACEHAVEN SAFE HOUSE

# Human Trafficking DEFINITION:



❑ Intentionally, knowingly or recklessly engaging a child in a form of trafficking

  ❑ **Sex trafficking** in which the person is induced to perform a commercial sex act has not attained 18 years of age
    ■ **There are no "teenage prostitutes"**

  ❑ Recruitment, harboring, transporting, providing or obtaining of a person for the purpose of:
    ■ **A commercial sex act**
    ■ **Labor or service**,
    ■ Use of **force, fraud, or coercion** for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery

# Who is at risk?

- 83% of sex trafficking victims are US citizens, according to the Department of Justice.
- 12-14 years old, average age at entry (ECPAT-USA), Polaris data has average age at 19 with 44% 17 or younger upon entry.
- 80-90% were sexually abused as children prior to entry.
- 64% reported unstable housing at the time of recruitment (ECPAT-USA).
- 199,000 instances occur within the United States each year (World Population Review).
- Average charge is $125 per encounter, most are sold at an average of 12-15 times/day. Trans or LGBTQ sales are a much higher rate, $500-$1,000.
- Most buyers are white, middle to upper class, married men. This describes 80% of buyers, according to Polaris.

# Risk factors & Vulnerabilities:

- Children who frequently **run away**
- Children who have experienced **childhood sexual abuse**, especially if unreported or unaddressed
- Having an **unstable home life**
- **Insecure housing**, frequent moves
- Involvement in the **child welfare system**
- Children with **substance abuse** issues/living with someone with substance abuse issues
- Children in households with **domestic violence**
- Children who identify as **LGBTQ** especially if rejected by family
- People of **color**
- Immigrants with **limited English** proficiency

# Identifying Victims:



- If a child has run away four or more times over the course of a year, there is an 80% change that they have experienced sex trafficking. – US Dept. of Justice
  - Chronic runaways
  - Truancy or not enrolled in school
  - Youth who "lives with someone" or staying with someone who has "taken them in"
  - Lack of healthy relationships
  - Not allowed to freely contact family or friends

**John Jay College of Criminal Justice:** "…**boys comprised about 50 percent of sexually exploited children in a sample study done in New York**, with most being domestic victims. However, the percentage of male victims may be higher due to the underreported and subversive nature of the crime."

**International Organization for Adolescents:** "We're conditioned as a community to identify female victims more readily, because that has been the more prominent focus of the anti-trafficking movement."

**Steven Pricopio, program coordinator of Surviving Our Struggle**: "Boys are bought and sold in both online and offline venues such as clubs and bars and websites such as backpage.com. (60% of buyers are male)… However, 40 percent of the boys also reported that they had served a female client."

*If you have blinders on, you will be looking for a 45 year old, middle-aged male trafficking a 16 year old girl, and you will miss the 25 year old female trafficking the 11 year old boy.*

# 2019 Statistics: States with highest number of Human Trafficking Cases

- California (1656)
- Michigan (383)
- Georgia (375)
- Nevada (313)
- Illinois (296)
- North Carolina (287)
- Pennsylvania (275
- Arizona (231)
- Washington (229)
- New Jersey (224)



FACT: Human Trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world, second only to the Drug Trade.

# Who are potential traffickers?



- Family members ("Familial")
- Foster parents
- Friends
- Gangs ("Gang/Gorilla")
- Trusted adults
- "Boyfriend" who profits from selling a minor to a buyer (aka "Romeo Pimp")
- Drug Dealers (aka "Booster Pimp")
- Anyone

  *One study estimates 30% or shelter youth and 70% of street youth are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. They may engage or be coerced into "survival sex" to meet daily needs for food, shelter, or drugs. (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), 2019.*

# Signs to look for:



- Increased virtual behavior
- Avoids answering questions, lets others speak for them
- Frightened, resistant or belligerent to law enforcement
- Does not ask for help, resists offers to get out of the situation (child does not self-identify as victim)
- Preoccupied with "getting money" posts photos of cash
- Withdraws from prior activities, friends
- Unexplained gifts
- New tattoos, particularly "branding"
- Talks about frequent travel, may not know locations
- Notebooks with names, phone numbers, dollar amounts
- Signs of physical abuse
- STD's
- Presence of new older friends, new boyfriend/girlfriend
- Suddenly has large amounts of cash
- Multiple cell phones
- Hotel keys, receipts or other hotel-related items

# How to keep unaccompanied youth safe:

- Prevention/Education
  - Challenge myths and misconceptions
  - Talk about on-line safety
- Intervention
  - Display appropriate concern when a student is "missing"
  - Ask non-judgmental questions
- Access to Services
  - In most communities, domestic violence services are a first contact or a local task force

# Strategies for Identification:

- Providing education and training to key support staff with districts:
  - Building secretaries
  - Guidance Counselors
  - Principals
  - Nurses
  - Bus Drivers
  - Home & School Visitors
  - Behavioral Support Staff

# Strategies, continued. . .

- ## Add content to registration **AND** withdrawal forms that would "flag" potentially homeless families.

  - Check lists of potential living situations
  - Know addresses of shelter, churches, "safe" houses, campgrounds, hotels/motels
  - Know informal resources
  - Avoid the word "homeless"
  - Follow up with interview

- ## Content related to Human Trafficking is also important

# Sample Questionnaire

- "<u>Section A</u>: In what type of setting is the student living now?
    - In an emergency or transitional shelter (formal or informal)
    - Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of other adequate accommodations
    - In a motel, hotel, church, campsite, cabin, barn or car
    - In a park, public campgrounds, public space, abandoned building or similar setting
    - In substandard housing (example:  no heat, tarp over the roof, no running water, windows boarded up)
    - Other places not ordinarily used as regular housing for humans
    - I am a young person living without parent or guardian
        - *Continue to Question 2 if you checked any box in Section A. . ."*

# Strategies, continued. . .



- Establish relationships with outside entities:
  - Churches
  - Social Service Agencies
  - Foster Care Providers
  - Shelters
  - Fire Department
  - Police
  - Red Cross
  - Salvation Army
  - Hotel/Motel owners
  - Food Pantries
  - Campground owners

# Strategies, continued. . .

- Focus training on teaching staff to assist with identification of existing homeless students

- If district has multi-district classrooms, educate those staff as well

- Provide in-service to Vo-Tech and Alternative Education staff that serve your district

- Display information related to educational rights in key places and in basic language

- Educate families and parents within district

# Strategies, continued. . .

- Build on community spirit:  Rural families often will take in students and help provide for them; staff and other students provide rides and other assistance.

- Build on the small town mentality: "We take care of our own."
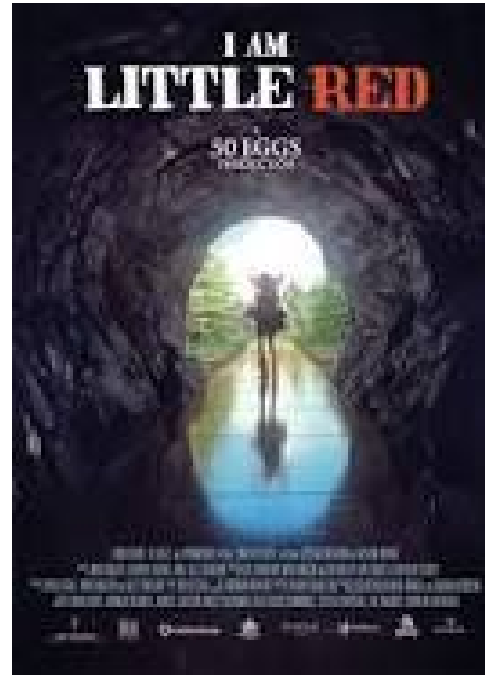
# Strategies, continued. . .



- Use **social media** to educate and reach students
- Place information in areas where youth congregate
- Find the community resources that exist and are informal
- Make information available to students *everywhere*:
    - Gym locker rooms
    - Back of bathroom stalls – Example: "The Potty Press"
    - School Counselors office
    - Student handbook
    - District website
    - With items that are donated/handed out
    - Student mentors/outreach

Sample Curriculum for Middle-High School Students:

# I AM LITTLE RED

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