



BRIEF

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Minor-Age Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Maryland

Findings from Youth REACH MD's 2018 Youth Count, a Maryland survey of unaccompanied youth & young adults experiencing homelessness

Youth REACH MD (Reach out, Engage, Assist, & Count to end Homelessness) is Maryland's effort to better understand the number, characteristics, and needs of youth and young adults who are on their own and struggling with housing to improve the ways we can help. As part of this project, Continuums of Care conduct surveys of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in their jurisdictions. The following findings are from an examination of the responses of youth under the age of 18 who were surveyed in the most recent 2018 Youth Count. A report of the 2018 Youth Count Findings for all youth under age 25 is available at <http://www.youthreachmd.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/YRMD-2018-Report-Final.pdf>.

Youth REACH MD defines *unaccompanied homeless youth* as those individuals who are:

- Under the age of 25;
- Not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian; and,
- Lacking a fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residence.

During the Youth Count, youth are surveyed by local continuums of care (CoCs)¹ in schools, at service providers, and on the street over the course of two weeks. Youth surveyed are considered unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness if they are not in the physical care or custody of a parent or legal guardian, and do not have a safe, regular,

or adequate nighttime residence. All youth and young adults under the age of 25 are considered youth for the purposes of the survey; however, this brief will examine the findings only for youth surveyed who were identified as unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18. Of the 816 youth identified as unaccompanied homeless youth in the 2018 Youth Count, 116 (14%) were under the age of 18. An additional 80 unaccompanied minor-age youth were identified in the Homeless Management Information System² data, but are not included in the summary of the survey results. The youth surveyed during the Youth Count provides only a point-in-time snapshot of the youth who could be identified and surveyed during the two week Youth Count period. It is generally understood that many more youth are experiencing homelessness over the course of a year, but are not surveyed during the two week count period. While these numbers represent an undercount of the true magnitude of youth experiencing homelessness, the results of the Youth Count survey provide a deeper understanding of the characteristics, experiences, and needs of youth experiencing homelessness that is not available through other administrative data sources.

¹ A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals and is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing to provide outreach, intake, assessment, and referral for individuals with housing needs in their community; to provide emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing to those in need; and to monitor both the number of those with housing needs and the scope of the services available to them (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010).

² A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at risk of homelessness that each CoC is responsible for implementing and utilizing to manage care and report to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD Exchange, n.d.).

In the 2018 Youth Count, the youngest youth surveyed who was identified as an unaccompanied homeless youth was 11 years old. The average age of all minor-age youth identified was 16 years of age. Only 21 of the minor-age youth identified met the HUD definition of literal homelessness³, which is often a requirement for accessing shelter services. A summary of the minor-age youth identified by CoC is in the following table.

Continuum of Care	Surveys Administered	Unstably Housed or Homeless	Unaccompanied and Unstably Housed or Homeless	HUD Definition of Homeless	Number of Unaccompanied Youth in HMIS	Count of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (YouthReach + HMIS)
Anne Arundel	148	41	12	2	0	10
Baltimore Co.	140	34	21	1	0	13
Baltimore City	50	42	36	10	89	123
Carroll	5	0	0	0	0	0
Frederick	12	4	3	0	0	2
Howard	20	6	4	0	0	4
Montgomery	77	26	5	1	0	4
Prince George's	44	15	8	2	6	13
Washington	31	13	10	1	0	9
Lower Shore*	14	5	2	1	0	2
Mid-Shore [^]	10	4	4	0	1	4
Southern MD ⁺	91	26	11	3	1	12
Total	642	216	116	21	97	196

* Lower Shore includes Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties

[^] Mid-Shore includes Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties

⁺ Southern Maryland includes Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties

The following tables detail the findings from the 116 youth surveyed who were unaccompanied, experiencing homelessness or housing instability, and under the age of 18. Information reported includes race; gender and sexual orientation; school enrollment and education attainment; pregnant and parenting status; involvement with child welfare, juvenile services, and other service systems; current living situation; housing stability and history; reasons for being unaccompanied; support service usage, barriers, and needs; and income sources. All data reported is from youth self-report via the 2018 Youth REACH survey.

Demographics

As with all youth surveyed, youth identifying as Black/African American and youth identifying as LGBTQ are over represented when compared to the general population. For minor age youth, the percentage identifying as transgender, and the percentage identifying as gay, lesbian, or bi(pan)sexual is even higher than among youth surveyed as a whole. Across all youth surveyed, only 2% identified as transgender, compared with 5% of minor-age youth, and 16% identified as gay, lesbian, or bi(pan sexual), compared with 27% of minor-age youth.

³ The HUD Category 1 definition of homelessness requires that an individual be living in a place not meant for human habitation, emergency shelters, transitional housing, or hotels paid for by a government or charitable organization. (HUD Exchange, 2014). In contrast, the most unaccompanied youth reported living "doubled up" with friends or other relatives.

Race (n=108)

African American/Black	57	53%
White	24	22%
Hispanic	13	12%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2%
Native American	0	0%
Multiracial	11	11%
Other	1	1%

Gender (n=107)

Female	38	36%
Male	62	58%
Transgender (F to M)	1	1%
Transgender (M to F)	4	4%
Other	1	1%
Prefer Not to Answer	1	1%

Sexual Orientation (n=107)

Straight	74	69%
Gay or Lesbian	18	17%
Bi(Pan)sexual	11	10%
Other	0	0%
Prefer Not to Answer	4	4%

Education

The majority of unaccompanied minor-age youth experiencing homelessness are enrolled in high school. Compared with all youth surveyed, substantially more minor-age youth are currently enrolled in school (38% versus 85%).

Currently in School (n =104)	88	85%
Middle School	6	6%
High School	74	71%
GED Program	8	8%
Vocational Training	0	0%

Highest Completed Grade (n =104)

No Education	1	1%
8th Grade or Less	12	12%
9-11th Grade	85	82%
High School	2	2%
GED	2	2%
Some College	1	1%
Post-Secondary Vocational Training	1	1%

Life Experiences

Some minor age youth experiencing homelessness are pregnant or caring for children of their own. Some have had contact with the child welfare, juvenile services, or other service system. Compared with all youth surveyed, minor age youth report slightly fewer of these experiences.

Have Children (n = 108)	7	6%
Number of Children (n = 7)		
One	7	100%
2 - 3	0	0%
4 or more	0	0%
Live with Children (n = 7)	5	71%
Currently Pregnant (n = 39)	2	5%

Foster Care Experience (n = 105)	13	12%
Age left foster care (n = 11)		
0-5	1	9%
6-10	1	9%
11-15	6	55%
16-18	3	27%
Lived in group home (n = 100)	12	12%
Ever stayed in juvenile detention (n = 106)	16	15%
Ever stayed in Jail (n = 104)	4	4%

Living Situation and Housing History

Similar to their older peers, most minor-age youth experiencing homelessness are staying with friends or relatives, do not know how long they can stay there, and have to move very frequently – most at least once a month. Generally, minor age youth experiencing homelessness spend the night in similar places to their housed peers, with fewer staying in shelters or motels (27% versus 10%), transitional housing programs (5% versus 1%), or inside abandoned buildings (11% versus 6%). This is likely due to their age and inability to access shelters, motels and transitional housing programs on their own.

	Where you stayed the night before survey (n=116)		Where you stayed in the last two months (n=116)*	
Staying with friend	49	42%	62	53%
Staying with other family	34	29%	37	32%
Staying with immediate family	10	9%	27	23%
At a shelter/motel	10	9%	12	10%
Outside in the park, on the street, in car, etc.	3	3%	8	7%
In a jail or juvenile detention	2	2%	2	2%
Staying with stranger	2	2%	18	16%
In a group home	2	2%	5	4%
At my own apartment	1	1%	4	3%
In a transitional housing program	1	1%	1	1%
Inside an abandoned building or squatting	1	1%	7	6%
Staying with foster parents	1	1%	0	0%
In a treatment or medical facility	0	0%	3	3%

*More than one answer could be selected for this question.

How long can you stay where you stayed last night (n=114)

As long as I want/indefinitely	19	17%
For the next week or two	15	13%
For the next month	4	4%
More than an month, but not indefinitely	19	17%
I have already left	5	4%
I don't know	52	46%

How long have you been staying at the place you stayed last night (n=103)

1-6 days	23	22%
At least 1 week, but less than 2 weeks	9	9%
At least 2 weeks, but less than 1 month	12	12%
1-6 months	36	35%
More than 6 months	23	22%

How many different places have you spent the night in the past 2 months? (n= 108)

	2-3 places	56	52%
	4-6 places	8	7%
	7 or more	7	6%
	I have spent the night in the same place for the past 2 months	37	34%

Guardian Relationship

When reviewing these findings, it is important to consider that the situations resulting in youth no longer living with their parent or legal guardian are often complex and multi-faceted, which is challenging to fully capture through a survey. To help compensate for this, youth were able to select all applicable answers for questions in this section, and many did. Similar to their older peers, family conflict was identified as the most common reason, which was frequently reported in addition to other reasons, such as substance use or youth's sexual orientation. Compared with all youth surveyed, minor age youth were slightly more likely to select that they were not with their parent or guardian because the parent or guardian was unable to care for them (31% versus 36%). Minor age youth were also more likely to report parent homelessness (15% versus 8%) and their sexual orientation (13% versus 6%) as a reason for not being with their parent or guardian, and were less likely to report it was because there wasn't enough room (4% versus 12%).

Are currently living with parent or guardian (n=116)*

No, I chose to leave	34	29%
No, I was asked to leave	28	24%
No, my parent is unavailable to care for me	42	36%
Yes, I am living with my parent	8	7%

*More than one answer could be selected for this question.

Reasons for not living with parents our guardian (n = 116)*

Fighting	28	24%
Wanted to leave	28	24%
Parents homelessness	17	15%
Parents drug or alcohol use	15	13%
Youth sexual orientation	15	13%
Did not feel safe	14	12%
My use of drugs/alcohol	12	10%
Abuse	12	10%
Parents sick/died	11	9%
Parents unable to provide care	9	8%
Told to leave before 18	6	5%
Not enough room	5	4%
Other reason	4	3%
Currently living with parent	4	3%
Currently in jail/detention	2	2%
Released from jail and could not return home	2	2%
Youth pregnancy or children	1	1%
Immigration related	1	1%
Left foster care and could not return home	0	0%
Eviction	0	0%

*More than one answer could be selected for this question.

Service Usage and Needs

Minor-age youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to report not trying to get help (36%, compared with 18% of all surveyed youth experiencing homelessness). This may be due to a lack of services and/or a lack of knowledge about available services. They generally agreed with their older peers regarding what services would be most useful, though they were more likely to indicate LGBTQ support services (13% versus 6%), which aligns with higher percentage of minor-age youth who identify as LGBTQ and indicate that as a reason why they are not with their parent or guardian. Minor-age youth were also less likely to indicate government cash assistance (6% versus 18%) as a desired service, likely due to their age and inability to access it. More minor age youth also reported not having any source of income (26% versus 17%), and were much less likely to be receiving SNAP benefits than their older peers (4% versus 17%), again likely due to their age, but otherwise reported very similar sources of income when compared to all youth surveyed.

Attempted to get help in the past year (n=116)*

I have not tried to get help	39	34%
Food Stamps/SNAP	32	28%
Mental health services	23	20%
Health care services	14	12%
Food banks or free meals	13	11%
LGBTQ support services	11	9%
Educational support	10	9%
Job training	9	8%
Transportation assistance	9	8%
Drop-in or Teen Center	8	7%
Short-term housing	6	5%
Family support	6	5%
Shelters	6	5%
Long-term housing	5	4%
Government cash assistance	4	3%
Child care	3	3%
Police officers	3	3%
Substance use treatment	1	1%
Legal help	1	1%
Other	1	1%

*More than one answer could be selected for this question.

Reasons for not getting help (n= 116)*

Transportation	36	31%
I received all the help I needed	34	29%
Didn't know where to go	17	15%
Didn't qualify	16	14%
Lack Documents	11	9%
Said they could not help	10	9%
Waiting list	10	9%
Didn't feel comfortable	9	8%
Didn't hear back	8	7%
Didn't follow through	6	5%
Wrong Door	4	3%
Language barrier	4	3%
Didn't like how I was treated	4	3%
Other	4	3%
Paperwork	1	1%

*More than one answer could be selected for this question.

Services that would be the most helpful (n=116)*

Job training	37	32%
Long-term housing	35	30%
SNAP, food banks, or free meals	30	26%
Health care services	22	19%
Transportation assistance	21	18%
Educational support	19	16%
Mental health services	18	16%
Legal help	16	14%
LGBTQ support services	15	13%
Short-term housing	12	10%
Family support	12	10%
Other	8	7%
Government cash assistance	7	6%
Child care	3	3%
Substance use treatment	2	2%

*More than one answer could be selected for this question.

Reported income sources (n=116)*

Family and friends	37	32%
No income	30	26%
Part-time job	25	22%
Selling Drugs	12	10%
Under the table work	10	9%
Panhandling	8	7%
Sex work	7	6%
Full-time job	6	5%
Other	6	5%
Cash assistance	5	4%
SNAP	5	4%
Social Security Income	4	3%
Child support	2	2%
Unemployment benefits	1	1%
Self-employment	0	0%

*More than one answer could be selected for this question.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is particularly challenging to identify minor age unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability, so while we know there are likely substantially more than 116 minor-age youth experiencing homelessness in Maryland, those who were surveyed in Youth REACH MD's 2018 Youth Count provide an important snapshot of the characteristics, needs, and experiences of minor-age youth who are on their own and experiencing homelessness or housing instability. While in many ways they are similar to their older unhoused peers, despite being as young as 11, there are some key differences that are important to note:

1. Minor age youth who are unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness are more likely to identify as LGBTQ, to cite this as a reason for their not being with a parent or guardian, and to request LGBTQ support services. This appears to be a significant service need for minor age youth in particular.
2. Minor age youth are coming into contact with most service systems at lower rates, including child welfare and juvenile services, making them even more challenging to identify and support. However, minor age youth are more likely to be enrolled in school, most commonly high school. This indicates a key point of identification and intervention. School staff and leadership will be key allies in addressing minor-age youth homelessness.
3. Fewer minor-age youth are accessing shelters, housing programs, or other supportive services, which may be due to a lack of services, a lack of eligibility, and/or a lack of knowledge of the services. This indicates a greater need for minor-age youth support services broadly. Increasing services available to minor age youth may also support identification of youth needing support.
4. In the case of minor-age youth homelessness, it appears that more frequently parents or guardians are unavailable to care for them due to a variety factors, including parent homelessness, which was more frequently reported by minor-age youth. This indicates a need to consider how availability of supports for families impact youth homelessness, particularly for minors.