Youth Homelessness

Almost **2.5 million** children experienced homelessness in 2013.

That's 1 in 30 youth.

Source: American Institutes for Research, *America's Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness*, 14 (2014).

nearly 44%

have stayed in a jail, prison, or juvenile detention center

almost 78%

have had at least one interaction with police

nearly 62%

have been arrested

more than 75%

experienced abuse before being homeless

over 40%

identify as Black or African American

up to 40%

identify as LGBTQ

over 50%

"agreed to be sexual" in exchange for money or a place to spend the night

over 25%

identified as Hispanic or Latinx

almost 24%

reported caring for children or being pregnant

over 50%

have been in foster care or a group home

Source: Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau: Street Outreach Program Data Collection Project Final Report (April 2016).

National Juvenile Defender Center | www.njdc.info | (202) 452-0010 | inquiries@njdc.info

What Can Juvenile Defenders Do?

Identify youth experiencing unsafe and/or unstable housing

- Build a trusting relationship with your client that allows them to feel safe to discuss their living situation and work with you to address it.
- Does the underlying allegation signal a lack of housing stability? For example, is it a "survival crime" such as shoplifting, loitering, trespassing, domestic violence, prostitution, etc.?
- Is the client bouncing between the homes of different family or friends?
- Is there a lease with the youth's name listed as an occupant? Is the parent or guardian's name on the lease (or, for example, are they living with mom's boyfriend)?
- Did your client's family move in with other members of the extended family due to financial hardship?

Contextualize charges to the realities of experiencing homelessness

- Are there ways to negotiate a dismissal or a diversion program due to a client's homelessness?
- How does your client's narrative mitigate for leniency?

Ensure the youth is not being kept in detention due to unstable housing

- Work with your client to identify alternative housing that may be acceptable to the court, such as family members, neighbors, group homes, or other non-secure placements?

Create an achievable disposition plan that ultimately assists your client in obtaining safe and stable housing

- Engage your client in developing a disposition plan that promotes their goals. Many standard conditions of probation may be challenging or even unattainable for a young person with unstable housing. Propose alternatives that better ensure success.
- Start creating disposition and reentry plans as early as possible and include contingency plans, as circumstances often change with little to no notice.

Partner with civil legal aid attorneys

- Where possible, build internal defender office capacity to address civil legal needs in-house through the development of expertise and staff positions.

Stay informed

- The ABA's Homeless Youth Legal Network provides information, resources, a legal services directory, and a listserv to foster collaborations to address existing gaps in civil legal services for youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. www.ambar.org/hyln
- A collection of legal handbooks for addressing youth homelessness in MN, WA, IL, TX, & NY. Even if that's not your state is not included, the information may help you identify resources to investigate in your own community. The handbooks cover issues like medical rights, public benefits, and housing. www.homelessyouth.org
- NJDC's website includes information and resources about the collateral consequences of juvenile adjudications, including the impact of homelessness. www.njdc.info/collateral-consequences