



The Housing Status and Well-Being of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in Washington State

Melissa Ford Shah, MPP • Chris Albrecht, MA • Barbara Felver, MPA, MES

Report prepared for the Washington State Department of Commerce, Community Services and Housing Division, Tedd Kelleher and Mary Schwartz

THE DSHS CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION provides foster care placement services to children in need of protection because they are abused, neglected, or involved in family conflict. With the exception of youth participating in the Foster Care to 21 or Extended Foster Care programs, youth in Washington State are emancipated from foster care at age 18. The Title IV-E Independent Living Program and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program have been instrumental in focusing attention on and providing resources to foster youth in the transition to independent living.

Past research has found that former foster youth could benefit greatly from more information and support in finding stable housing in their transition to independence.ⁱ Baseline data collected on foster care youth in Washington State for the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) suggests that 37 percent of those surveyed experienced housing instability and 19 percent experienced homelessness (i.e., they lived in a car, on the street, or in a shelter) in the past two years.ⁱⁱ Among survey respondents who received at least one independent living service paid for or provided by the Children's Administration, one-third received training related to locating and maintaining housing.ⁱⁱⁱ However, we do not know from this baseline survey data how many emancipated foster youth needed and received housing assistance, such as rent assistance, transitional housing, or vouchers.

Key Findings

This report identifies individuals who aged out of foster care in State Fiscal Year 2010 or 2011 and experienced homelessness in a 12-month follow-up period. We identify the following key findings:

- 1. About one-third (35 percent) of foster care youth experienced homelessness or housing instability in the year after aging out.** This is consistent with the rate of homelessness (36 percent) identified in a DSHS study conducted in 2004 that surveyed youth in the months following emancipation from foster care.^{iv}
- 2. Former foster youth are most commonly entering housing assistance from foster care homes and temporary stays with friends or family.** Among former foster youth who received housing assistance recorded in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), 29 percent had most recently been living in a foster care home (including group homes) and 26 percent had been staying with friends or family members.
- 3. Former foster youth who experienced homelessness were more connected to social and health services but also experienced a higher prevalence of risk factors.** Homeless youth who had recently aged out of foster care were more likely to receive cash, food, and medical assistance. They were also less likely to have stable employment and more likely to experience substance abuse, mental illness, and arrest in the follow-up period.

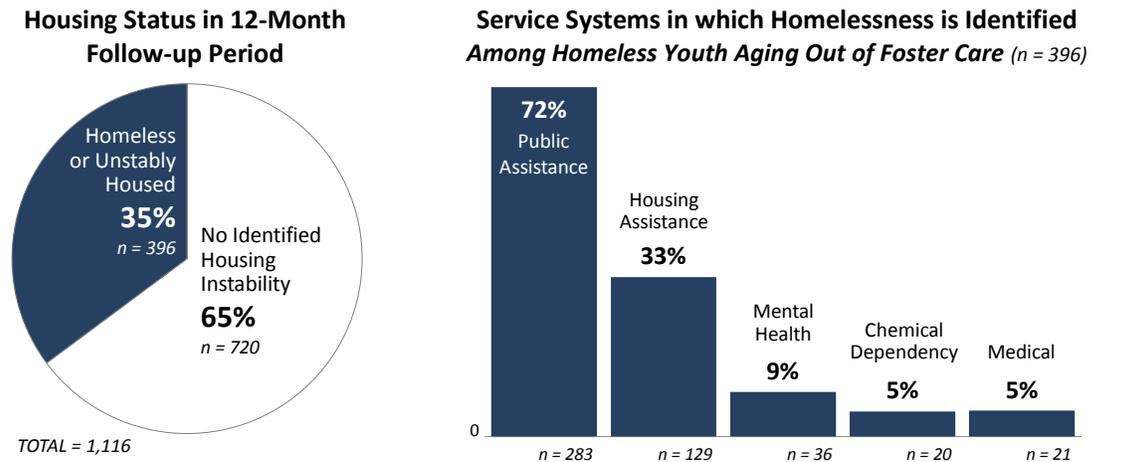


STUDY DESIGN

The study population included 1,116 youth who aged out of foster care at some point in SFY 2010 or 2011. Specifically, this includes individuals who exited out-of-home placement in that period and were 18 years-old or older in the month of exit. For those who exited more than once in the two-year period, we selected the last month in which they exited. We looked at the following measures of well-being over a 12-month period following exit: housing status, receipt of cash, food and medical assistance, prevalence of substance abuse and mental illness, rates of employment and arrest, and average earnings for those who had stable employment.

HOUSING STATUS | Rate of Homelessness

Homelessness was identified using an indicator of homelessness that combines data from five different information systems, including the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).^v In addition to capturing homelessness as defined narrowly, this measure also identifies individuals in unstable living arrangements (such as “couch surfers”). Among the 1,116 individuals in the study population, roughly 35 percent (n = 396) were found to have an indication of homelessness at some point in the 12-month follow-up period. Among the 396 youth who experienced homelessness, 72 percent were identified through the Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES).



NOTE (Chart right): The sum of the percents in these bars exceeds 100 because clients can appear in more than one category.

HOUSING STATUS | Receipt of Housing Assistance

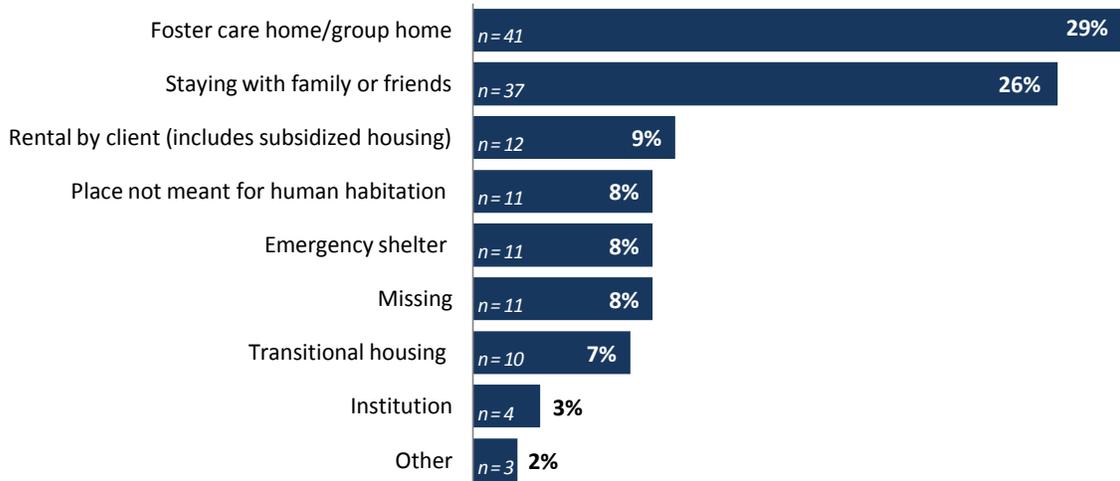
Of the 396 youth who aged out of foster care and experienced homelessness, 152 individuals (38 percent) received some form of housing assistance. Most of these individuals (n = 140) received HMIS-recorded housing assistance; however, 12 individuals did not appear in HMIS but did have a flag in ACES indicating receipt of subsidized housing. It is likely these 12 individuals were receiving housing through a Public Housing Authority.^{vi} Notably, one-third of the individuals who received assistance in HMIS (n = 44 of 140) were served through the Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP), which was created by the state legislature in 2007 to provide housing assistance and case management to former foster youth.

HOUSING STATUS | Entry into and Exit from Housing Assistance

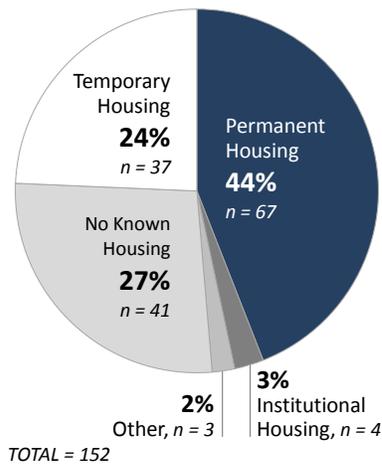
When local housing providers determine eligibility for housing assistance, they enter an individual's prior living situation into HMIS. We looked at the prior living situation of the 140 foster care youth who received housing assistance in HMIS.^{vii} We found that over half were most recently living in a foster care home or had been staying with friends or family members (29 percent and 26 percent, respectively). Roughly equal numbers had most recently been renting their own place, staying in an emergency shelter or a transitional housing unit, or living in a place not meant for human habitation. Only four individuals had been staying in an institution prior to the homeless spell that led to their receipt of housing assistance.

Prior Living Situation as Recorded in HMIS

Among those who received housing assistance in HMIS (n = 140)



Destination at Exit from Housing Assistance



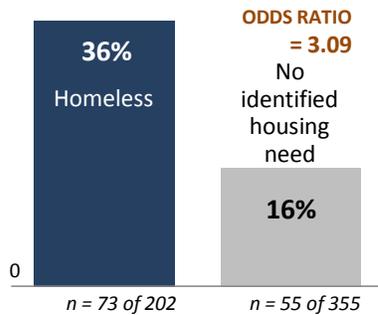
Over two-fifths of former foster care youth who received housing assistance exited to permanent housing

Among the 152 individuals who received housing assistance according to HMIS (n = 140) or ACES (n = 12), 44 percent (n = 67) were in permanent housing by the end of the 12-month follow-up period. This includes 43 individuals who exited HMIS-recorded housing assistance to permanent destinations, 12 individuals who were flagged in ACES as having subsidized housing, and 12 individuals who were still receiving rent assistance or permanent supportive housing recorded in HMIS in the last month of the follow-up period. An additional 24 percent (n = 37) were receiving temporary housing, including 16 individuals who were in an emergency shelter or transitional housing unit in the final month of the follow-up period. Individuals can remain in transitional housing for up to 24 months, and we found that housing providers most commonly delivered IYHP services through transitional housing. Given this, a longer follow-up period would likely be needed to observe exits to permanent housing for youth receiving assistance through the IYHP program.

MEASURES OF WELL-BEING | Receipt of Cash and Food Assistance

Receipt of TANF Cash Assistance in 12-Month Follow-Up Period

Among Female Foster Care Youth who Aged Out in SFY 2010 or 2011



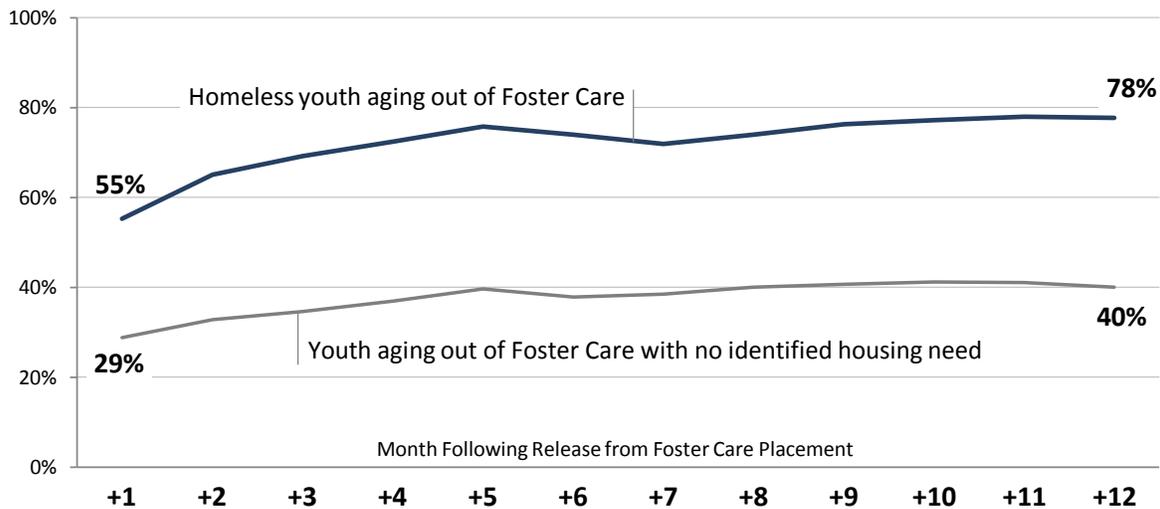
Homeless female youth were more likely to receive cash assistance for low-income parents

A recent RDA study found that 60 percent of pregnant or parenting moms in foster care received TANF cash assistance during their current or prior year in placement.^{viii} Among all of the young women in the present analysis—not restricting to those identified as pregnant or parenting—23 percent (n = 128 of 557) received TANF in the year after aging out of foster care. Consistent with an earlier report comparing housing assistance clients to other DSHS clients, we found a strong association between housing status and TANF receipt.^{ix} Specifically, former female foster youth who experienced homelessness were three times more likely to receive TANF than those who did not have an identified housing need (36 percent compared to 16 percent; Odds Ratio = 3.09). See page 7 for Odds Ratio definition.

Homeless youth were substantially more likely to receive Basic Food assistance

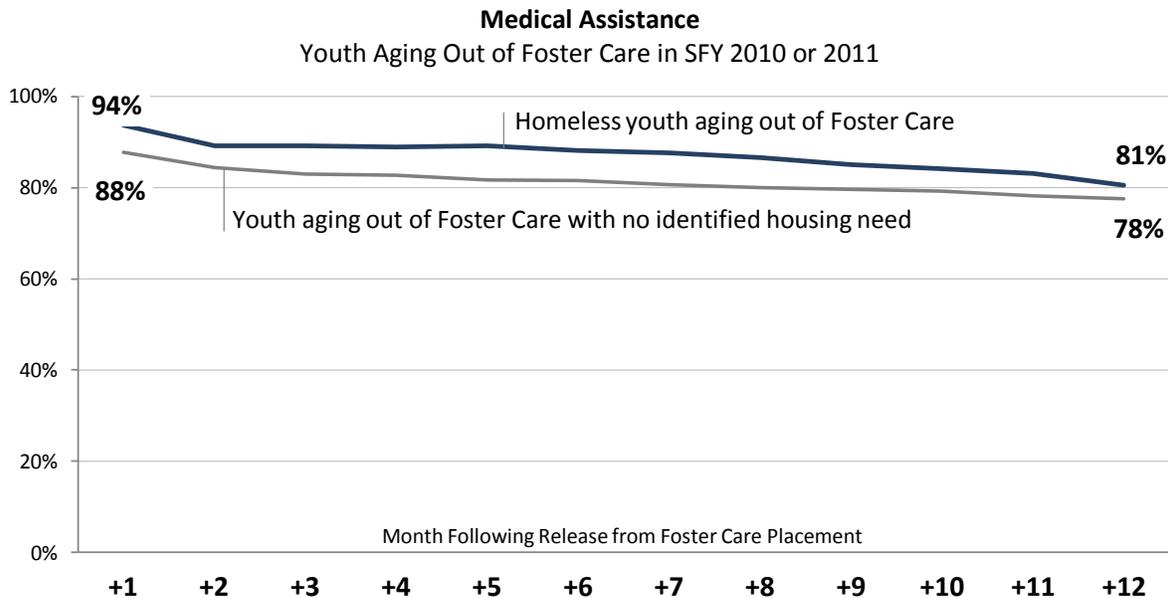
The federally funded Basic Food program is intended to ensure that low-income individuals do not go hungry. Individuals in Washington State qualify for Basic Food if they have incomes at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Over the 12-month follow-up period, the rate of Basic Food receipt increased from 55 percent to 78 percent for homeless youth (+19 percentage points) compared to an increase of 29 percent to 40 percent (+9 percentage points) for those without identified housing needs.

Basic Food Receipt in 12-Month Follow-Up Period
Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in SFY 2010 or 2011



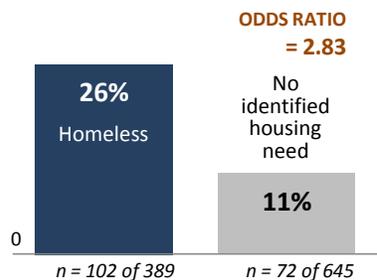
MEASURES OF WELL-BEING | Medical Coverage and Behavioral Health

We examined whether individuals had Medicaid or similar publicly-funded medical coverage in the 12-month follow-up period. Coverage rates were relatively high—though declining over time—for both homeless youth and their peers without identified housing needs.



Substance Abuse Treatment Need

Among those with at least one month of medical coverage in the year

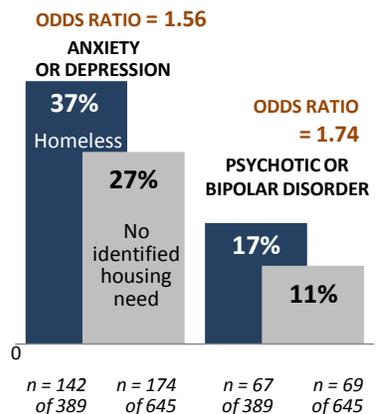


Homeless youth were more likely to have a substance abuse problem

We considered an individual to have a probable alcohol or other drug (AOD) problem if health service or criminal justice records identified diagnoses, treatment, or arrests associated with substance-related problems in the 12-month period following their exit from out-of-home placement. Only individuals who had at least one month of medical coverage in the follow-up period were included in the analysis. Alcohol and drug problems were found to be more prevalent among homeless youth (26 percent) relative to those without identified housing needs (11 percent) (Odds Ratio = 2.83).

Diagnosed Mental Illness

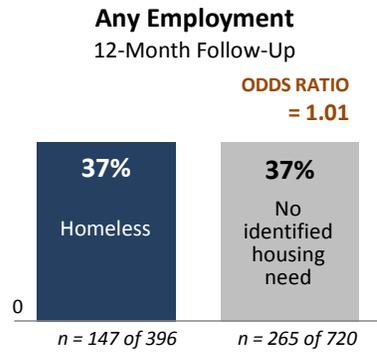
Among those with at least one month of medical coverage in the year



Homeless youth more likely to have a diagnosed mental illness

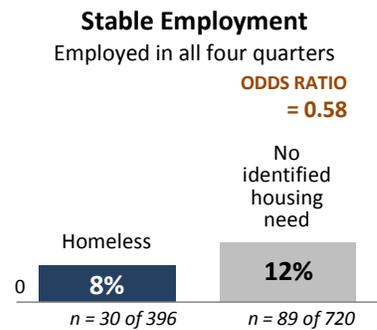
Among individuals with at least one month of medical coverage in the follow-up period, we examined the proportion of each group with diagnosed mental illness. We found that homeless youth were 56 percent more likely to have a diagnosis of anxiety or depression (37 percent compared to 27 percent for their peers without identified housing needs). Homeless youth were also 74 percent more likely to have a diagnosis of psychotic or bipolar disorder relative to their peers who did not have identified housing needs (17 percent compared to 11 percent).

MEASURES OF WELL-BEING | Employment and Criminal Justice Involvement



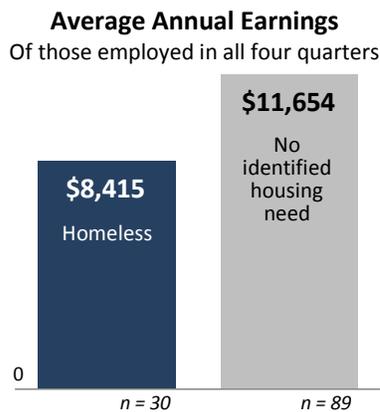
Homeless youth were as likely as those without identified housing needs to work at some point in the follow-up period

We identified an individual as being employed in the follow-up period if they had any earnings reported to the Employment Security Department’s Unemployment Insurance system. Just over one-third of both homeless youth and their peers without identified housing needs were employed at some point in the 12-month follow-up period.



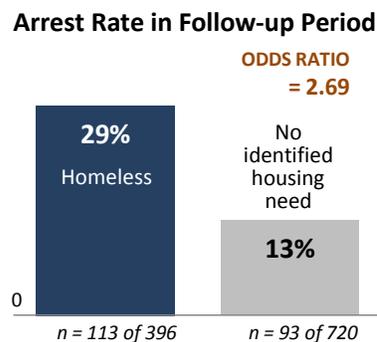
Homeless youth were less likely to experience stable employment across all four quarters of the follow-up period

We then looked at the proportion of individuals in the study population who were employed in *all four quarters* of the follow-up period to assess employment stability. Homeless youth were 42 percent less likely to be stably employed compared to youth who did not have identified housing needs (8 percent versus 12 percent; Odds Ratio = 0.58).



Among those with stable employment, homeless youth had lower average earnings than those without housing needs

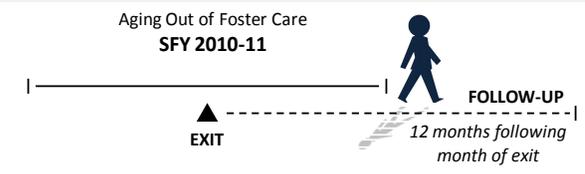
Among those stably employed, homeless youth had average annual earnings of \$8,415 compared to \$11,654 for former foster care youth without identified housing needs. Notably, one of the eligibility criteria for the IYHP housing assistance program is that former foster youth must have annual incomes below 50 percent of the area median income in their county. Both of these groups had average earnings far below 50 percent of the median household income for Washington State, which was estimated to be \$27,750 for calendar year 2011 based on U.S. Census and American Community Survey data.^x



Former foster youth who are homeless are more than twice as likely to be arrested

The rate of arrest as recorded in Washington State Patrol data was higher for homeless youth than for those without identified housing needs.^{xi} While almost 30 percent of homeless youth were arrested at some point in the follow-up period, 13 percent of their peers without identified housing needs experienced an arrest (Odds Ratio = 2.69).

This report examines the experience of individuals aging out of foster care over the 12 months following their last month of exit in a two-year period (State Fiscal Year 2010-11).



We define the month of exit as the last month after an individual turned 18 in which they were no longer in out-of-home placement following a month in which they were in out-of-home placement.

DEMOGRAPHICS	Aged Out of Foster Care <i>Homeless</i> TOTAL = 396		Aged Out of Foster Care <i>Not Homeless</i> TOTAL = 720	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
Age at Exit from Out of Home Placement				
18	340	85.9%	534	74.2%
19	26	6.6%	95	13.2%
20+	30	7.6%	91	12.6%
Gender				
Female	202	51.0%	355	49.3%
Male	194	49.0%	365	50.7%
Race Ethnicity^{xii}				
Missing Race	0	0.0%	1	0.1%
White Only, Non-Hispanic	175	44.2%	369	51.3%
Any Minority	221	55.8%	350	48.6%
Hispanic	57	14.4%	114	15.8%
African American	95	24.0%	121	16.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	18	4.5%	36	5.0%
Native American	104	26.3%	152	21.1%
County of Residence				
King	98	24.7%	127	17.6%
Pierce	63	15.9%	94	13.1%
Spokane	36	9.1%	57	7.9%
All Other Counties	199	50.3%	442	61.4%

WHAT IS AN ODDS RATIO?

EXAMPLE: Calculating the Odds Ratio for Between-Group Differences in the Probability of TANF Receipt

- Among young women, 36% of homeless youth aging out of foster care and 16% of youth aging out without identified housing needs received TANF in the follow-up period.
- Odds Ratio = $(.36/(1-.36)) / (.16/(1-.16)) = 3.09$.
- Interpretation: Among young women, the odds of receiving TANF in the 12 months after aging out of foster care are three times as high for homeless youth compared to those who do not have identified housing needs.

CONTACTS	<p>Department of Commerce Mary Schwartz • 360.725.2982</p> <p>Department of Social and Health Services Melissa Ford Shah, MPP • 360.902.0760</p>	<p>Copies of this paper may be obtained at www.dshs.wa.gov/rda/ or by calling DSHS' Research and Data Analysis Division at 360.902.0701. Please request REPORT NUMBER 11.195</p>
-----------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

ENDNOTES

-
- ⁱ Dworsky, Amy, et al. (2012). "Housing for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care: A Review of the Literature and Program Typology," Washington, D.C.: Mathematica Policy Research, http://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/housingfostercare_literaturereview_0412_v2.pdf.
- ⁱⁱ Sharkova, Irina, et al. (2011). "Transition to Adulthood: An Analysis of the National Youth in Transition Database Survey Data for Washington State," Olympia, WA: DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division, <http://publications.rda.dshs.wa.gov/1450/>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sharkova, Irina, et al. (2012). "Independent Living Services for Foster Care Youth: An Analysis of the National Youth in Transition Database-Reported Services for Washington State," Olympia, WA: DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division, <http://publications.rda.dshs.wa.gov/1474/>.
- ^{iv} Brandford, Carol and Diana English (2004). "Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study: Final Report," Seattle, WA: Office of Children's Administration Research, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/ca/FYTFinal2004.pdf>.
- ^v Shah, Melissa Ford, et al. (2012). "Identifying Homeless and Unstably Housed DSHS Clients in Multiple Service Systems," Olympia, WA: Research and Data Analysis Division, <http://publications.rda.dshs.wa.gov/1457/>.
- ^{vi} An unpublished RDA analysis found that approximately 75 percent of TANF clients residing in King County who received housing assistance through the King County Housing Authority or Seattle Housing Authority also had a flag in the DSHS Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES) indicating receipt of subsidized housing. We therefore assume here that individuals with a subsidized housing flag in ACES who did not appear in HMIS were likely receiving assistance through public housing authorities. Notably, former foster youth between the ages of 18 and 21 are categorically eligible for participation in the Family Unification Program, which provides them up to 18 months of housing assistance through vouchers obtained from local public housing authorities.
- ^{vii} For 8 of the 140 individuals (<1 percent), the prior living situation was collected on an HMIS program start date that occurred more than three months prior to the date the individual exited foster care. It is unclear whether this reflects data quality issues in HMIS, housing instability that occurred before an individual's final out-of-home placement exit in SFY 2010 or 2011, or both.
- ^{viii} Lucenko, Barbara, et al. (2012). "Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Foster Care: Risk Factors and Service Needs," Olympia, WA: DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division, <http://publications.rda.dshs.wa.gov/1467/>.
- ^{ix} Estee, Sharon, et al. (2009). "Persons Served by Washington State Housing Assistance and Social Service Programs: Demographics, Use of Social Services, and Behavioral Health Risk Factors," Olympia, WA: DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division, <http://publications.rda.dshs.wa.gov/1401/>.
- ^x Washington State Office of Financial Management, <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/economy/hhinc/>.
- ^{xi} Local law enforcement agencies are generally required to report only felony and gross misdemeanor offenses into the WSP arrest database. This report somewhat understates the full volume of arrest events in the study population because our data does not include some arrests for misdemeanor offenses that are not required to be reported in this database.
- ^{xii} Individuals with known race were categorized into one of two mutually exclusive groups: White Only, Non-Hispanic and Any Minority. Individuals in the Any Minority group were further categorized as Hispanic, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and/or Native American and may appear in more than one of these four categories.