



INFORMATION PACKET MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Osborne and City Council

From: Jane S. Brautigam, City Manager
Paul J. Fetherston, Deputy City Manager
Karen Rahn, Director, Housing and Human Services
Valerie Watson, Human Services Planner

Date: March 1, 2011

Subject: Information Item: Youth Homelessness and Emergency Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This memorandum provides background information on youth homelessness, specifically unaccompanied homeless young people under eighteen years of age who are on their own and not under the care or supervision of a parent or guardian, and related emergency services needs in Boulder.

During public participation at the Jan. 4, 2011 City Council meeting, Mr. Jim Rianoshek, executive director of Attention Homes, requested city support in addressing youth homelessness in Boulder. He presented information on the increase of homeless youth in Boulder and throughout the country. He stressed that the most rapidly increasing subpopulation of homeless in the United States is youth and called for the city to consider a strategic plan for youth homelessness.

FISCAL IMPACT

Sheltering and emergency services for unaccompanied homeless youth in Boulder are supported through the 2010 funding allocations of the Human Services Fund and the Housing Fund of the Department of Housing and Human Services (HHS).

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND IMPACTS

- Economic: The cost of transitional housing for a homeless youth is estimated at \$12,000 a year while the cost of housing a youth in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems with public funds ranges between \$25,000 and \$55,000 per year. A recent Colorado report

indicates that it costs \$53,665 to maintain a youth in the juvenile justice system for one year, and approximately \$5,887 to permanently move a homeless youth off the streets.

- **Social:** Without the stability of a home it is more difficult to obtain and maintain other basic necessities of life and avoid more costly interventions such as emergency medical care, drug and alcohol treatment and mental health services. Addressing youth homelessness in a sustainable, comprehensive and coordinated manner helps homeless youth into more stable daily living. To be most effective in addressing homelessness in the long-term, services for homeless youth should be balanced with the needs of other homeless populations and with other critical human services needs, in coordination with other community resources.

BACKGROUND

Characteristics of Homeless Youth

According to Colorado's Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth (government, non-profit and faith-based agencies working to end youth homelessness in Colorado by improving the quality, availability and accessibility of services provided to homeless youth and those at risk of homelessness) youth become homeless for a wide variety of reasons. Unaccompanied homeless youth have service needs and options distinct from homeless families and adults (eighteen to twenty-four years of age). Homeless youth experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, conduct disorder, post traumatic stress disorder and poor health and nutrition compared to their housed peers. High risk behaviors are also common and include drug and alcohol abuse, trading sex for food, shelter and money.

Youth homelessness is largely a reflection of family breakdown and youth generally fall into one of the following categories:

- *Runaways:* most commonly fleeing physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect by their parent or guardian, substance abuse in the home and the affects of untreated mental illness,
- *"Throw aways"/ expelled:* forced to leave or abandoned, typically due to conflict over the sexual orientation of the youth, substance abuse either by the parents or the youth, family poverty or homelessness and behaviors stemming from untreated mental illness,
- *Discharged from institutional care:* including emancipated foster youth and youth discharged from youth correctional facilities, and
- *Teen parents:* may also fall into one of the previously mentioned categories, but have the added challenge of caring for a young child of their own.

ANALYSIS

National studies report increases in the number of families who are homeless and reflect increasing numbers of homeless families with children and increased numbers of doubled up and unaccompanied youth across the country. In its 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development reported that slightly more than 170,000 families were homeless in 2009, about a 30 percent increase since 2007. The report notes that about three fifths (61 percent) of homeless family members are children under age 18.

Estimates of the number of homeless youth in Boulder are reported by local service providers and through point-in-time homeless counts conducted every two years. These counts, conducted

across the country, provide a snapshot showing the number of homeless people in a community and suggest what resources are needed to address homelessness at the local level. The most recent biennial point-in-time count was held in January 2011. The information from this count is not yet available. The previous 2009 point-in-time homeless count reported nineteen unaccompanied homeless youth in the City of Boulder.

Prior to 2009, point-in-time counts in Boulder did not ascertain whether youth were unaccompanied. Point-in-time counts have, however, reported on the number of all children who were homeless over time. In 2009, 214 homeless children under age eighteen were counted and in 2006, 100 homeless children and youth were counted. The Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) reports registering 14 unaccompanied youth this school year (up to Jan. 26, 2001) in City of Boulder high schools, the majority of whom are 16 to 18 years of age. BVSD staff believe there are more unaccompanied youth in Boulder schools who are living with relatives or friends and who have not been identified as homeless.

Data provided by Attention Homes indicates there are up to 200 homeless teens on Boulder County's streets at any given time. This estimate is higher than anticipated by other service providers in Boulder (e.g., Boulder County and Boulder Shelter for the Homeless) and by point-in-time counts. The estimate is partly based on a street survey of youth conducted by Attention Homes in downtown Boulder during August 2010 in which 42 teens completed surveys during a six hour period.

Emergency Services for Homeless Youth in the City of Boulder

For a variety of reasons including personal safety, youth avoid or are ineligible for services in shelters that serve a largely older clientele. Boulder Shelter for the Homeless limits its services to individuals over eighteen years of age. Homeless youth are referred by Boulder Shelter and other local referring agencies to Attention Homes and, if they are teen parents with infant children, to the Emergency Family Assistance Association's (EFAA) family shelter program. Two or three City of Boulder homeless teens with infant children were provided shelter by EFAA in the last year. While Carriage House and Boulder Outreach for Homeless Overflow (BOHO) staff report providing drop-in and emergency shelter services to small numbers of homeless youth, staff of both agencies stress that youth should be served by youth serving organizations. Attention Homes is the only Boulder agency that targets emergency shelter services to homeless youth.

Non-residential emergency services targeted to homeless youth in Boulder are provided by BVSD, StandUp for Kids and Family Tree. BVSD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Program identifies children and youth enrolled in the school district living in homeless situations and provides appropriate services. One service is immediate school enrollment even when the student lacks paperwork normally required for enrollment; another is immediate placement in the Free and Reduced Lunch/Breakfast Program. The McKinney-Vento Act also allows for students to remain in their "school of origin," which could be the school they attended before becoming homeless or the school they last attended, and mandates that transportation be provided. Fees for school programs are waived for this group, evaluations are expedited and attempts are made to put services in place for students to achieve academic success.

StandUp For Kids is a Boulder chapter of a national organization whose mission is to end the cycle of youth homelessness. This organization serves the homeless youth population by doing street outreach and providing a drop-in center. Volunteers walk the streets of Boulder handing out food, clothing and hygiene products. The drop-in center, located in the Masonic Lodge at Pine and Broadway in downtown Boulder, is open five days a week and provides youth with hot meals, showers, internet and a safe place. The agency offers assistance with securing identification, GED testing, medical referrals, legal referrals, job hunting, life skills and mentoring. Over 70 youth from the City of Boulder and elsewhere in the county have been served through StandUp for Kids since June, 2010.

Family Tree is a Denver based agency mandated to provide a broad range of services and shelter to families and youth in metropolitan Denver to overcome child abuse, domestic violence and homelessness. Gemini, the children's services division of Family Tree, operates a job training focused resource center at Canyon and 18th Street in downtown Boulder. It also provides outreach services and is working to build new partnerships in Boulder to provide runaway and homeless youth with greater access to resources. For example, Gemini Boulder outreach staff work with the Boulder Police Department to coordinate services and provide education and training to officers and other law enforcement staff referring youth to metropolitan Denver area shelters, including Gemini. Nineteen Boulder County homeless youth and their families were provided services at the Boulder resource center in 2009. (Family Tree does not record how many residents are from the City of Boulder.)

Attention Homes' Service Model

Attention Homes historical model is primarily providing residential treatment services to youth who are in programs such as juvenile justice or transitioning from foster care. As a funder and service provider, Boulder County's youth services model has recently evolved, emphasizing prevention and early intervention services rather than a focus on system services. The focus is on maintaining family unification and preventing children and youth from entering foster care and juvenile justice. As a result, its referrals, over time, of youth to Attention Homes for residential treatment has decreased along with funding. In 2010, Attention Homes' demand for services decreased from serving as many as 20 to between six and nine youth residents each day. In response, the agency merged its Broadway House and Chase House programs into its Broadway Avenue facility and has since completed an assessment of community need and redesign of its programs.

Attention Homes conducted a survey of youth on the streets of Boulder in August 2010 to determine the unmet needs of homeless youth in the City of Boulder and Boulder County. Through this survey and consultations with a range of youth serving organizations (including StandUp for Kids, Family Tree's Gemini Program, Carriage House, Boulder Shelter for the Homeless, BVSD and St. Vrain McKinny Vento staff) agency staff learned that there is a need for outreach services, meals, internet access, showers, laundry services, a day drop-in center, basic medical services, a shelter and various related services. Attention Homes has added outreach, drop-in and aftercare services, beginning in November 2010, to its residential treatment, counseling and safe shelter to at-risk youth. These services are described below:

1. **Street Outreach Services:** builds relationships with street youth through direct contact where teens are living, meets basic survival needs on the street and provides referrals to necessary services.
2. **Drop-In Services:** builds relationships with street youth through direct contact in center, meets basic needs (food, clothing, showers, hygiene items) in a safe environment, provides referral to necessary services and increases teen's social support network through communication with family and friends.
3. **Emergency Shelter Services:** provides safe, overnight shelter for up to twelve youth per night, long-term housing options and/or family reunification, referral to necessary services and up to a year of after-care services.
4. **Aftercare Services:** reinforces pro-social behaviors, teaches youth and family long-term, health relationship skills, provides assistance in obtaining jobs, housing and social support systems.

City of Boulder Youth Served and Funding

Historically, Attention Homes has served lower than targeted numbers of City of Boulder homeless youth. For this reason, in 2002 the agency was not awarded city funds. In 2004, when the agency served 27 city youth, it received \$20,000 to support its services. Since then, the city has provided \$19,604 annually to support the agency's Broadway House (youth shelter). During this period, the agency has consistently served fewer than targeted City of Boulder homeless youth (serving between 14 and 73 percent of its targets each year). Over the last five years, the agency has provided at least 30 days of safe shelter to an average of five youth each year. In 2010, the agency contracted to provide these services to seven City of Boulder youth and served one.

Between Dec. 15, 2010 and Feb. 14, 2011, ten unduplicated youth have been provided shelter in Attention Homes' newly opened emergency shelter, five from the City of Boulder.

Ten-Year Plan to Address Homelessness

City Council accepted the Boulder County Ten-Year Plan to Address Homelessness (Ten-Year Plan) on April 20, 2010. It provides a blueprint for how communities will work together to prevent homelessness, address issues that keep people in homelessness and create housing and supportive services needed to end homelessness. Central to this plan is the Housing First model to address homelessness among people of all ages, focusing on early intervention and permanent supportive housing. The Ten-Year Plan acknowledges the many social conditions that contribute to homelessness. Among the social conditions noted that pertain specifically to youth, the Ten-Year Plan stresses family violence and youth being unequipped to deal with emancipation and their transitions from institutions and systems of care such as foster homes and youth detention and mental health institutions.

City staff suggest that, rather than developing a new strategic plan for homeless youth, which would, in many ways duplicate the Ten-Year Plan, homeless youth service providers continue to work collaboratively to prevent homelessness and to develop comprehensive wrap-around services tailored to meet the needs of homeless youth, consistent with the Ten-Year Plan:

- Support better information exchange, improved coordination of services, development and implementation of more effective case management and outreach efforts, and augmentation of the use of cross-system data to focus government and non-profits systems in ways that have a more lasting impact on homelessness.
- Provide reintegration programs to those leaving institutional systems.
- Provide temporary shelter, alternative housing and supportive services for those who are temporarily homeless.

NEXT STEPS

1. Staff has met with Attention Homes and suggested they apply to the Human Services Fund for homeless youth shelter services for the 2012-2014 fund round. Applications will be available in spring 2011.
2. Staff has offered technical assistance to Attention Homes to help them develop funding applications which will assist them in securing funds from other potential sources.