

As long as there is family dysfunction, abuse, violence, poverty and bigotry in the United States, young people will be kicked out of their homes, run away, be victimized, suffer without protection and lack basic life necessities. However, it is possible to prevent young people from being forced to leave their homes and it is possible to tighten existing safety nets so that young people who find themselves alone and unprotected outside of their homes are brought into safety more quickly. **Below are some ways to invest in effectively influencing federal and state policy:**

## INVEST IN FEDERAL AND STATE POLICY ADVOCACY

**Federal Policy Organizing and Advocacy:** U.S. Congress and federal agencies make decisions about policy and funding that directly affects runaway and homeless youth in America. To effectively educate key decision makers about the urgent and youth-appropriate needs of these young people and their families, all of the interested stakeholders need to be communicating the same message to U.S. Congress and federal agencies. To make this happen we need:

- *One organization to coordinate the message of all of the different stakeholders by structuring campaigns and initiatives with broad-based buy-in and support.*
- *Policy advocates that build and maintain close relationships with key U.S. representatives and federal agency staff.*

**State Policy Organizing and Advocacy:** A state policy initiative for runaway and homeless youth is a vital component to increasing services and resources for homeless youth. In 2009, the National Network for Youth and the American Bar Association drafted Model State Laws for Runaway and Homeless Youth.

- *A national organization to support state-based advocates in elevating runaway and homeless youth issues through the creation of state and local policies.*

## INVEST IN YOUTH VOICE

**Young People as Advocates:** Young people are experts of the runaway and homeless youth experience by virtue of their lived-experience. Young people who have survived homelessness are best able to identify why they became homeless, what could have possibly prevented their homelessness and what services and interventions helped them. These youth experts are the most effective and compelling educators and advocates for homeless youth policies.

- *A national network of youth who are supported, prepared and elevated to speak to the public, media, researchers and policymakers about their real-life experiences and make policy recommendations.*

## INVEST IN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

**Public Education:** Most people are unaware that there are homeless youth in America. The more people learn about youth homelessness the more they will care and want to take action locally and nationally.

- *A national media campaign to raise the general public's awareness and engage them in a campaign to end youth homelessness in America.*

**Grassroots Engagement:** Policy advocates would be more effective in moving youth-appropriate policies if more of the general public cared about youth homelessness and actively engaged in local, state and federal campaigns and policy formation.

- *A coordinated grassroots campaign to engage the general public in collaborative efforts to end youth homelessness.*

## INVEST IN DATA AND RESEARCH

**A National Study:** A national study has never been conducted to accurately estimate the number of runaway and homeless youth in America. 2013 was the first year that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development endeavored to count homeless youth. Homeless youth are difficult to count because they often deliberately try to remain undetected. A youth-inclusive definition of homelessness is vital to counting youth effectively.

- *A national study on the prevalence, needs and characteristics of runaway and homeless youth would greatly aid policy advocacy and public education.*

**Below are brief summaries of some existing federal programs that support runaway and homeless youth (does not include all federal programs that assist these young people and their families):**

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)**

**The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) (P.L. 110-378)**: Provides foundational support to address youth and young adult homelessness across the country. These grants began providing resources in 1974 and allowed local systems of care to be developed and shaped by the unique needs of each region. RHYA funds three key pillars of intervention to help homeless youth: street outreach, emergency shelters for minors and transitional living programs for youth between the ages of 16 and 22.

Current Status: RHYA, usually reauthorized on time, expired September 30, 2013. NN4Y is pushing reauthorization by leading a national working group of 35 organizations. RHYA has never been funded at higher than \$115 million and in the omnibus funding bill for FY 14 was appropriated at \$114.1 million.

**Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) (P.L. 113-65)**: Provides states with funding to support and provide services to youth who are expected to age out of foster care as well as former foster care youth ages 18 to 21, which helps prevent homelessness for an at-risk group of youth. Funds from the program can be used for helping with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support and assured connections to caring adults for older youth in foster care. CFCIP also includes Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) to states to provide resources specifically to meet the education and training needs of youth aging out of foster care. Activities and programs include, but are not limited to, help with education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support and assured connections to caring adults for older youth in foster care.

Current Status: CFCIP is currently funded at a level of \$140 million in mandatory funds and ETV vouchers are funded at \$45 million.

**Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351)**: Increased federal funds available to states who choose to extend assistance to foster youth up until age 21, when those youth meet certain education, training or work requirements or has a medical condition that prevents them from participating in those activities. Services can include housing assistance, vocational and college help, and counseling.

Current Status: This funding goes to states and is based on claims filed by states for federal reimbursement.

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (ED)**

**McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) (CFDA No. 84.196)**: Created to remove barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth in school. It establishes a requirement for all state educational agencies to designate an Office of State Coordinator to develop and implement a state plan, including data collection, and for all local educational agencies to designate a local liaison to identify and support homeless children and youth. Dedicated exclusively to homeless children and youth, formula grants are made to the 50 states, tribes and territories based on each state's share of Title I, Part A, funds. EHCY provides assistance to states to:

Current Status: EHCY was last reauthorized in 2002 and in the omnibus funding bill for FY 14 was funded at \$65.042 million. Due to the low funding levels less than 1 in 5 school districts in the United States receive EHCY money.

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD)**

**McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77)**: Funds local, regional, and state homeless assistance programs through the Continuum of Care (CoC) process. A CoC is a geographical administrative unit through which federal homeless assistance funds are distributed. Homeless assistance providers in a specific geographic area work together to apply for federal funding. HUD ranks the applications and provides funding based on the quality of the application, the performance of the local homeless assistance system, the need for homeless assistance, and the local rankings of individual programs. Funding can be used for permanent and supportive housing, transitional housing, and services. Some funding is also distributed to communities through the Emergency Solutions Grants program.

Current Status: In the omnibus funding bill for FY 14 was funded at \$2.105 billion.