

2004 Annual Report  
Colorado Department of Human Services

Supportive Housing and Homeless Program  
Office of Homeless Youth Services  
January 15, 2005

This report is submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly pursuant to the Homeless Youth Services Act (House Bill 02-1159) and House Bill 04-1107 concerning the performance of the Office of Homeless Youth Services and whether the office is effectively and efficiently meeting the goals specified.

History of the Office of Homeless Youth Services (OHYS)

The Legislature passed the Homeless Youth Services Act (House Bill 02-1159) in 2002 in response to the overwhelming and diverse needs of homeless youth in Colorado. The intent of this legislation was to create a vehicle through which services to homeless youth statewide could be improved by coordinating current services and facilitating interagency collaboration to identify gaps, remove barriers, improve access and share information.

Originally, the OHYS was in the Colorado Department Public Health and Environment with proposed funding from the U.S. Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS) to support a full time staff position. However, the funding was not available and the OHYS was in operation for only a year with one half-time staff position (July 2002 through June 2003). The OHYS January 2003 report discusses the Office's first six months of operation during which time a working group was formed, priorities were established and specific recommendations were implemented.

On May 21, 2004 the Governor signed House Bill 1107, -authorizing the transfer of the Office of Homeless Youth Services from the Department of Public Health and Environment to the Department of Human Services, Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs (SHHP). A full time position was created, supported with federal funding ~~from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administered by SHHP~~. The ~~[What took the time between May and the start of interviewing?]~~ Homeless Youth Programs Coordinator was filled as of December 15, 2004 and the process of strategic planning for 2005 is currently in progress.

Duties and Responsibilities of the OHYS as defined by HB 04-1107:

1. Provide information, coordination, and technical assistance as necessary to reduce needless expenditures associated with the provision of overlapping services, and to improve the quality of services for homeless youth.

2. Identify both procedural and substantive obstacles to the provision of services, and make recommendations concerning procedural, regulatory, or statutory changes necessary to remove such obstacles.
3. Obtain information from service providers concerning known services available for homeless youth in Colorado, and post such information on a Web-site on the Internet.
4. Develop, maintain, and make available a listing of all rights and organizations that may be relevant to the homeless youth population in Colorado, including but not limited to a listing of legal, educational, and victim's rights and organizations.
5. Obtain information concerning known funding sources available for the homeless youth.
6. Work with entities to identify issues concerning sharing of information in providing services to homeless youth and to facilitate resolution of such information sharing issues.

These duties, successfully carried out, are intended to further or achieve the following objectives:

- The identification and removal of obstacles to the provision of services to homeless youth;
- Improved quality of services provided to homeless youth;
- Reduction of needless expenditures caused by the provision of overlapping services to homeless youth; and
- Identification of funding resources available to entities serving homeless youth.

In addition, the OHYS is specifically directed to work with the executive directors (or their designees) of -Corrections, Education, Health Care Policy and Financing, Human Services, Public Safety, Public Health and Environment, Judicial, private nonprofit and not-for-profit organizations, appropriate federal departments and other key stakeholders in the community.

### Homeless Youth in Colorado: An Urban Snapshot

In September of 2004, Urban Peak undertook a survey of homeless and runaway youth in three Colorado cities: Denver, Boulder and Colorado Springs. Youth were reached at common points of contact and were not required to be in shelter care nor agree to shelter care, to participate in the study. Over two hundred homeless young people (215), ranging in age from 14 to 21 were surveyed. This data offers important insight about trends that service providers are seeing not only in Denver, but also in surrounding cities. It is worth noting that Urban Peak plans to duplicate this survey every other year in order to develop longitudinal data to assist service providers in developing programs specific to the needs of this population. The gender, ethnic and age composition of this sample was reflective of the population Urban Peak serves: 62% males, 37% females and 1% transgender. The

ethnic composition of the sample (self-reported) was 69% Caucasian, 7% Black, 8% Latino/a, and 7% Native American; an additional 9% fell outside these categories, classified as “Other.”

One-third of the youth interviewed report their living situation as “squatting” which is a slang term for shelter in abandoned buildings, under bridges or other non-traditional locations. Almost 20% of the sample reports having visited the emergency room in the past 30 days; (four hundred times higher than the national average for this age group), and approximately 30% of the sample reported being in the custody of social services. Over one-third of the subjects reported having been in a substance abuse program. This population is largely indigenous to Colorado with 68% of the sample reporting to have been born in this state and 80% stating that they have lived in Colorado for at least the past six months.

The data indicates that this population begins using illegal substances at a very young age with 89% reporting first use before the age of 16 and one in five youth reporting use before turning ten years old. Nearly three quarters (73%) of the sample identified a family member as having a substance abuse problem and 71% of the sample reported having used at one time with a family member. Many youth surveyed have used serious drugs at least once: cocaine (69%), crack (33%), inhalants (40%), heroin (28%), and methamphetamine (53%). Ninety percent (90%) have used a tobacco product in 30 days prior to the survey and over one-third of the population reported smoking more than one pack of cigarettes per day. With respect to alcohol, 50% of the sample reported having engaged in binge drinking (more than five drinks in one sitting) in the past two weeks prior to the survey.

Of equal concern is that almost half of the population reported they had attempted suicide and one in ten reported having exchanged sex for food, money, shelter or clothing.

#### The Office of Homeless Youth Services: Looking to 2005 and Beyond

The directive to the Office of Homeless Youth Services by the state of Colorado is to collect and share information among stakeholders at the state, county, municipal and community level and to facilitate collaboration between stakeholders based on this information. Toward this end, the activities of the OHYS that will commence in 2005 include the following:

- Meet with individuals across all levels of government and at the community level with knowledge of this population or who serve this population of youth;
- Establish an advisory group that represents all systems as well as community providers;
- Identify the needs of this population;

- Identify and “map” which entities currently provides services to homeless youth, what services are being provided, the process in place for ensuring access to these services and how well these services are being provided;
- Identify gaps in the current levels of service;  
~~particularly differences in the rural and urban environments~~
- Identify barriers that homeless young people face in finding out about and getting access to ~~current~~ services ~~available to them~~;
- Identify redundancy or “overlap” in ~~current~~ services;  
~~being provided.~~
- Develop action steps across systems that address the gaps, redundancy, inefficiency, quality, comprehensiveness or access issues identified;
- Prioritize these action steps within a realistic phase-based time frame, taking into account the extent to which action items require additional resources, collaboration and coordination between one or more systems, technical assistance to implement, change in philosophy or additional buy-in from the entities affected;
- Identify the action items that require legislative action for successful implementation, create a set of recommendations endorsed by the advisory group and appropriate CDHS leadership, and submit to the legislature for their consideration;
- Identify current resources available within each system to respond to the action items;
- Identify potential funding opportunities;
- Provide technical assistance to entities for the purposes of information sharing and education, implementation of an agreed-upon action item, or funding opportunities;
- Create an easily-accessible electronic information clearinghouse on youth homelessness, services available to this population in Colorado, juvenile rights as they pertain to homelessness issues, statewide organizations that serve this population, best practices, sources of funding and research.

In 2005, the Office of Homeless Youth Services will focus on the identification of key stakeholders, the needs of the homeless youth population, the gaps and overlap in current services and the barriers to receiving those services. The OHYS will establish an advisory group comprised of stakeholders across systems and levels of government, as well as community providers. In conjunction with the advisory group, the OHYS will develop a strategic plan for 2005 and 2006, including recommendations for change to

facilitate the reduction or removal of gaps, barriers and redundant services to homeless young people in Colorado. The office will continue to facilitate increased interagency communication and offer technical assistance as stakeholders make progress toward the recommendations identified in the strategic plan.