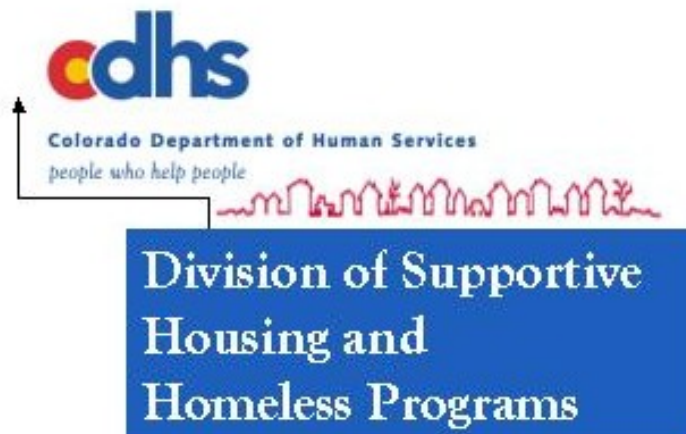


Photos taken by youth at Urban Peak, Family Tree, and Third Way Center for Colorado Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month 2009

Office of Homeless Youth Services 2009 Annual Report

Colorado Department of Human Services
Division of Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs



STATE OF COLORADO



Colorado Department of Human Services

people who help people

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Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor

Karen L. Beye
Executive Director

February 8, 2010

I am pleased to present the 2009 Annual Report for the Office of Homeless Youth Services located within the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs.

Despite the many challenges posed by the current economic environment, significant progress has been made over the past several years as the Colorado Department of Human Services works to design and deliver quality human services for homeless youth, who are some of the state's most vulnerable citizens. Many Colorado youth continue to find themselves in situations without stable housing or support from caring adults. Although challenging, youth homelessness can be effectively eradicated through a vigilant blend of awareness, action, policy decisions, and targeted funding allocations. Through the continued collective efforts of our public and private sectors, Colorado youth will be afforded the opportunities necessary for a successful transition to adulthood.

I want to thank the many staff members of the state departments as well as the staff from the many community based organizations for committing considerable resources to ensure significant progress towards the goals outlined in this report.

The following report highlights the work of the Colorado Department of Human Services in providing leadership to collaboratively tackle the issue of youth homelessness through the Office of Homeless Youth Services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Karen L. Beye'.

Karen L. Beye
Executive Director

OFFICE OF HOMELESS YOUTH SERVICES 2009 ANNUAL REPORT

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING AND HOMELESS PROGRAMS

This report is submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly in support of the Homeless Youth Services Act (C.R.S. 26-5.9) concerning the accomplishments of the Office of Homeless Youth Services. It provides a summary of the Office of Homeless Youth Services activities. More detailed information regarding the planning process, achievements, and services available from the collaborative partners is available on the Homeless Youth Services website at: www.cdhs.state.co.us/shhp/Homeless-Youth.htm.

HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF HOMELESS YOUTH SERVICES

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. This resulted in an ongoing collaborative effort between organizations all over the state to identify gaps, remove barriers, improve access and share information.

Initially, the Office of Homeless Youth Services (OHYS) was housed under the Colorado Department Public Health and Environment. 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 (CDHS), Division of Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs (SHHP). A full time Homeless Youth Coordinator position was created, supported with federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. An Advisory Committee for Homeless Youth (ACHY) was convened in 2004 to assist with planning and implementation of the Statewide Homeless Youth Action Plan. This committee works to annually update the Action Plan, build collaborative networks of services and assist OHYS in providing technical assistance to communities throughout Colorado.

OBJECTIVES OF THE OFFICE OF HOMELESS YOUTH SERVICES

The Office of Homeless Youth Services works with leaders from state and local government, private nonprofit organizations, federal departments, homeless and formerly homeless youth, and other key stakeholders in the community. The Office of Homeless Youth Services seeks to:

- Identify and remove obstacles to the provision of services to homeless youth;
- Improve the quality of services provided to homeless youth;
- Reduce needless expenditures caused by the provision of overlapping services; and
- Identify funding resources available to entities serving homeless youth.

COLORADO HOMELESS YOUTH ACTION PLAN SUMMARY

The Colorado Homeless Youth Action Plan was developed and has been updated annually to ensure that the primary objectives outlined in the Homeless Youth Services Act are accomplished. The following summary outlines the priority areas and key strategies contained in the plan.

Prevention: To prevent youth homelessness by promoting a culture of individual, familial, community, and government responsibility.

Key Strategies:

- Ensure comprehensive and consistent delivery of life skills and other support services for youth emancipating from systems of care and other at-risk youth in local communities;
- Ensure that youth have access to identification and other vital documents upon exit from systems of care;
- Improve the availability, accessibility and effectiveness of programs providing permanent connections, mentoring, and life coaching to youth at-risk of homelessness;
- Promote strengthening of high-risk families by increasing access to community based support and intervention services; and
- Ensure successful discharge planning for youth exiting systems of care.

Housing: To have safe, decent, easily accessible, and developmentally appropriate homes for every youth.

Key Strategies:

- Identify the housing needs and gaps for homeless and at-risk youth in Colorado; and
- Facilitate appropriate housing and shelter development to meet the local needs for homeless and at-risk youth.

Supportive Services: To provide comprehensive, wrap-around services to achieve maximum self-sufficiency or reunification.

Key Strategies:

- Improve youth information and referral process;
- Ensure homeless youth have comprehensive access to developmentally appropriate health, mental health and substance abuse services;
- Increase effectiveness of school homeless liaison services to homeless youth; and
- Develop an array of supportive services to address education, employment, permanent connections, assets, guidance and other needs to ensure homeless youth have the necessary supports for successful transition to adulthood.

Planning and Awareness: To create awareness and establish best practices and policies based upon accurate data and strategic planning.

Key Strategies:

- Recreate and support Colorado Network of Homeless Youth Providers (CONET) to ensure interagency collaboration and coordination of services and resources, and to connect with regional and national efforts to address the issue of youth homelessness;
- Create a public awareness campaign for National Homeless Youth Awareness/Runaway Prevention Month each November;
- Increase awareness and education of homeless youth issues;
- Coordinate research and data activities related to homeless youth;
- Ensure a homeless youth voice to inform policy initiatives; and
- Create and distribute the Office of Homeless Youth Services annual report.

Outreach: To identify and link vulnerable youth to appropriate housing and services.

Key Strategies:

- Train providers on human trafficking issues and victim identification;

- Create homeless youth outreach web pages that include: 24-hour runaway and homeless youth crisis lines, human trafficking and suicide hotlines, and frequently asked questions; and
- Increase collaborative outreach statewide to link homeless and at-risk youth with resources and support.

EMERGING TRENDS

Homeless and runaway youth and young adults are unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and are fending for themselves. Each youth has a unique story regarding his/her journey to homelessness. However, a few of the key indicators that a youth is at risk of experiencing homelessness include child welfare and juvenile justice system involvement; family dysfunction and abuse; mental health and/or substance abuse issues; issues related to sexual orientation; family homelessness; and poverty. Although homeless youth are difficult to count, approximately **1500 homeless youth** were identified during one-night counts of the homeless across Colorado during 2006 and 2007 (Note: a count was not completed by the communities in 2008). Many rural communities are just starting to identify this **very hidden population**. These youth often blend in with their peers and experience stigma, safety, and legal concerns that keep them hidden from view. Despite the uniqueness of each youth, some common traits include the **lack of significant connections** with caring adults, **deficient life skills** and developmental assets necessary for transition to independent adulthood, and **inadequate resources and opportunities** in comparison to their traditionally housed peers.

Due to the current economic climate, it appears that the **number of youth experiencing homelessness across Colorado has increased** over the past year. **Direct service providers reported that they consistently operated over their capacity** in recent months. Data collected from local school districts across the state by the Colorado Department of Education indicates a **29 percent increase in homeless students** from the 2007-2008 school year to the 2008-2009 school year. In addition, a homeless survey conducted in the metropolitan Denver area in January 2009 identified 1135 youth and young adults on their own between the ages of 13 and 24. More young people than ever have been left to fend for themselves during these uncertain economic times.

A **lack of available funding** for prevention and intervention services for homeless youth has become a significant issue for those working to serve this vulnerable population. Designated federal funding for homeless youth has become increasingly competitive across the country resulting in **reduced opportunities for Colorado providers**. For example, only one of the federally funded Transitional Living Program grants for Colorado was re-funded this year and the amount of funding for this project was greatly reduced. In addition, federal funding must be leveraged with local resources, which are becoming increasingly scarce as local budget cuts are implemented. Youth experiencing homelessness require access to an array of developmentally appropriate supportive services. Unfortunately, providers report that **funding for these necessary supports is dwindling at the very same time that demand is skyrocketing**.

Homeless and other transitioning youth are struggling more than ever to secure employment. During October 2009, the **national unemployment rate for youth** between the ages of 16 and 19 reached a record high of **27.6 percent**, which parallels the national unemployment rate during the Great Depression. Providers report that although many youth have a desire and a need to work, viable job opportunities are scarce.

RECOMENDATIONS

The OHYS is continuing to offer recommendations as a part of the Colorado Homeless Youth Action Plan. The following recommendations are most pertinent at this time:

- All **child welfare and juvenile justice system youth exit/discharge plans** include:
 - **Safe and stable housing** appropriate to the needs of the young person prior to exit;
 - At least **12 months of follow up services** which include case management, on-going life skills classes, access to volunteer mentors/life coaches; and
 - Referrals to **developmentally appropriate and accessible support services** such as mental health, substance abuse, education, and vocational training.(The homeless youth shelter and transitional housing system is funded to serve youth that are not involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems).
- State statute reflect that the CDHS, Division of Youth Corrections must **ensure that all youth transitioning to independent living situations be provided their state issued photo identification, Social Security card, and birth certificate** prior to discharge.
- **Amend the Colorado Homeless Youth Act** to allow licensed homeless youth shelters to **serve youth under the age of 18 for up to 21 days**. The current limitation of two weeks of shelter does not always allow enough time to begin addressing the underlying issues with the youth and the family or to develop an adequate reunification or transition plan with the youth. In addition, this change would align Colorado licensing with the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act parameters for homeless youth shelter beds.
- **Amend the Homeless Youth Shelter licensing category** to allow for **alternative homeless youth shelter models** such as host home shelter beds. This type of shelter allows rural communities design their services based on local needs. OHYS will be presenting proposed language to the CDHS, Division of Child Care in early 2010.

2009 HIGHLIGHTS

The OHYS continues to function as the primary coordinating entity, clearinghouse, and expert on homeless youth for Colorado. The OHYS, in conjunction with the members of the Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth (ACHY), continues to make significant progress in carrying out the Colorado Homeless Youth Action Plan. A few of the highlights from 2009 include:

- **Vital Documents Project** – Senate Bill 09-104 and CDHS Rule 08-11-4-1 ensure that youth emancipating from foster care will benefit from having vital documents including a birth certificate, social security card, and state issued identification card, which are necessary for youth seeking employment and housing, and becoming self sufficient. To aid in the implementation of the rule, ACHY members met with the Division of Motor Vehicles and were able to negotiate a streamlined process that removes many of the historical barriers faced by caseworkers. Statewide training was provided to local vital records registrars on the birth certificate acquisition process as well. A waiver for the cost of photo identification for these youth has been crafted and will be implemented in the near future.
- **Mentoring Summit** – A statewide summit held in November 2009 focused on how to link youth that are most at risk of homelessness with positive caring adults. This has long been identified as a gap in the mentoring continuum. The summit featured national and local speakers. Youth and adults partnered to begin forming action plans that will be implemented during 2010.

- **Housing** – The SHHP Family Unification Program for youth was featured in an article by The Finance Project in a publication entitled “Connect by 25”. This article highlighted the innovative approach that Colorado has taken to ensure that these 18-month transitional housing vouchers for inadequately housed former foster youth are being used effectively. In early 2009, SHHP entered into a contract with Mile High United Way to conduct the daily administrative duties associated with the vouchers and to facilitate a new care management model of support services. The care management model partners entered into memorandums of understanding with Mile High United Way and have formed a service network through which supportive services can be provided and public and private services can be leveraged. Once this model has been tested through this pilot, it is anticipated that other housing resources will be linked to the care management network as a continuum of housing for youth is developed.
- **Colorado LINKS for Mental Health Initiative** – Colorado LINKS is working to promote partnerships among state agencies and key stakeholder groups by weaving together existing efforts to create a more coordinated continuum of mental health services for Colorado children, youth, and families. The ACHY entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Colorado LINKS initiative in order to create a stronger partnership, collaborate on common issues and operate with a common framework.
- **State Adolescent Champions** – For the second year in a row, the OHYS partnered with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to host quarterly networking meetings for state agency coordinators of adolescent initiatives and programs. Results include increased cross-systems partnerships, networking, awareness, and collaboration. The group is working to complete a map of adolescent programs in Colorado state government with the goal of continuing to coordinate efforts to break through silos that may exist at the program or agency levels.
- **Rural Collaborative for Homeless Youth** – After the CDHS, Division of Child Welfare was able to secure a federal demonstration grant in late 2008 to create housing and service models for rural youth, a kickoff meeting for interested rural communities was held in January 2009. Urban Peak, a large homeless youth service agency based in Denver, was selected as the lead collaborating partner for the grant. The ACHY acts as a steering committee for the grant and the OHYS provides ongoing technical assistance and support. Six rural regional sites across western and southern Colorado were chosen to participate in the five-year project (Huerfano, Alamosa, Montezuma, Montrose, Garfield, and Moffat counties). During the year, this initial federal grant was used to leverage other funding to begin building out the service model for youth including:
 - The San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center in Alamosa received a Statewide Strategic Use Funds (TANF) grant through CDHS on behalf of the collaborative.
 - Huerfano County Social Services with support from Family Tree, a large homeless youth, domestic violence and family crisis organization, received a second Statewide Strategic Use Funds grant later in the year on behalf of the collaborative.
 - Lutheran Family Services received a federal Basic Center grant, which will fund homeless youth shelter beds for the rural collaborative, primarily using a host home model.
- **National Safe Place** – OHYS hosted a statewide webinar on the National Safe Place outreach model for homeless youth. This resulted in a follow up training for the Rural

Collaborative for Homeless Youth members as they work with National Safe Place to pilot a rural iteration of the Safe Place outreach model.

- **Human Trafficking Training** – The OHYS, in partnership with Prax(us), a statewide agency that serves exploited youth, developed a curriculum on human trafficking and sexual exploitation of runaway and homeless youth. The curriculum is specifically designed for homeless and runaway youth service providers. ACHY members held quarterly trainings. Direct service providers have signed agreements indicating that direct service staff will be required to attend the training.
- **National Governor’s Association Learning Lab** – The work of the OHYS and the Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth members was highlighted by the National Governor’s Association (NGA), Center for Best Practices. An interview with the OHYS in June led to an NGA sponsored Learning Lab being hosted by Colorado in November. Leaders from seven states traveled to Colorado in order to learn about the OHYS and related cutting edge work for youth in transition, and how they might replicate the OHYS in their states.
- **Colorado Homeless/Runaway Youth Awareness Month** – The OHYS partnered with other state agencies, the National Runaway Switchboard, and multiple local government and non-profit agencies to successfully promote November as Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month in Colorado. Governor Ritter, along with 15 local elected officials from communities across the state, issued proclamations declaring November 2009 as Colorado Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month. The proclamations were announced at statewide kickoff events held simultaneously at regional locations across the state on November 2, 2009. As a part of the National Green Light Project, community members across the state were encouraged to replace their porch light with a green light bulb or to wear a green light lapel pin as a mechanism to create public awareness and dialogue regarding the issues facing homeless youth. Leading public and private human service organizations in Colorado partnered for the cause and held numerous events throughout November such as service learning projects through local schools, fundraising events and donation drives, provider training opportunities, and community art contests. A powerful public service announcement was developed and aired on local and cable television stations across the state during the month. In addition, Colorado played host to the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Conference during the month, which afforded the opportunity to highlight the collaborative work of OHYS and related initiatives to over 800 attendees from across the country.
- **Education and Awareness** – The OHYS had the opportunity to testify to the Interim Poverty Reduction and Economic Opportunity Task Force, Housing and Utilities Subcommittee regarding homeless and runaway youth. In addition, the OHYS and ACHY members spoke at several conferences including the Community and School Health Conference, the State Youth Council’s Think Big Youth Forum, The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Annual Conference, and the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Conference.

2010 PRIORITIES

During 2010, the OHYS plans to focus on several important priorities. A few of the projects include:

- **Mentoring** – OHYS will facilitate a series of follow up meetings to the 2009 Mentoring Summit with the goal of piloting an innovative mentoring model for youth at high risk of homelessness and those already experiencing homelessness.
- **Rural Collaborative for Homeless Youth** – This collaborative will continue its move from a planning mode into testing direct service models. Shelter beds will be coming on line during the year and wrap around support services will become more cohesive.
- **Colorado Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month** – In conjunction with national efforts, OHYS will once again use November for a statewide public awareness campaign on the issues facing homeless and runaway youth, and the role the public can play in crafting solutions.
- **Homeless Youth Shelter/Host Home Licensing** – State licensing language to increase flexibility in rural and other underserved areas of Colorado will be presented to the CDHS, Division of Child Care.
- **Homeless Youth Services Funding Summit** – ACHY is planning a summit to train providers as well as to strategize how to sustain existing funding and capitalize on potential future funding for preventing and addressing youth homelessness.
- **Housing** – Recommendations for specific housing models, as well as the gaps and needs in various regions of the state, will be crafted during 2010.
- **State Adolescent Champions** – Quarterly networking meetings will continue and the mapping project is planned for completion by the end of 2010.
- **Statewide Outreach Summit** – A summit is in the planning stages that will allow for homeless and runaway youth outreach providers to connect and explore promising practices to reach vulnerable youth in urban, rural and suburban settings.

SUMMARY

Many Colorado youth continue to find themselves in situations without stable housing or support from caring adults. Although challenging, youth homelessness can be effectively eradicated through a vigilant blend of awareness, action, policy decisions, and targeted funding allocations. Through the continued collective efforts of our public and private sectors, Colorado youth will be afforded the opportunities necessary for a successful transition to adulthood.

For more information on the work of the Office of Homeless Youth Services, please visit www.cdhs.state.co.us/shhp/Homeless-Youth.htm, www.ColoradoHomelessYouth.org or call 303-866-7366.