



**LEGAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP FOR YOUTH**

Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC) works to protect, serve and empower vulnerable youth through legal advocacy. We provide holistic legal services to children involved in child welfare cases and juvenile offender matters. Through our new pilot, **Legal Services Partnership for Youth (LSPY)**, we provide direct, free, onsite civil legal services to youth ages 12

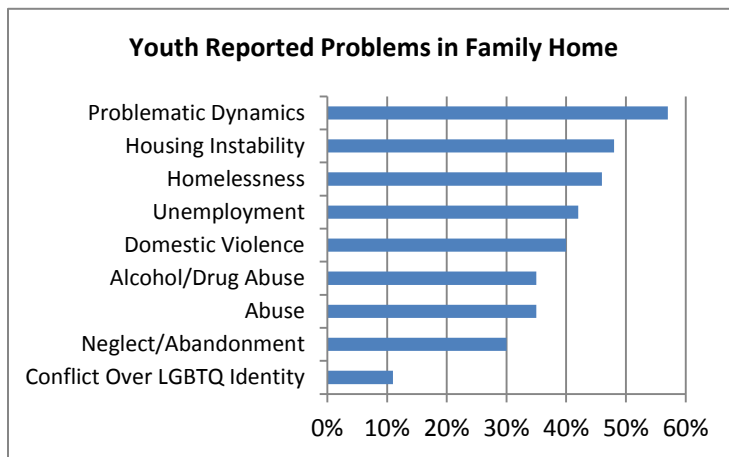
– 24 years, who are or are at risk of homelessness. Through legal advocacy, we are able to assist youth to prevent, reduce or eliminate their experiences of homelessness; sometimes our services have a direct and immediate impact on housing, other times legal advocacy helps to set the stage and pave the way for a path towards more stable housing and long term supports.

***Youth Served***

Since July 1, 2016, LSPY has provided direct legal counsel or representation to 63 youth in King County; 46% of whom were minors at the time of intake.<sup>1</sup> 40% identified as male and 60% as female. 29% of the youth served were Caucasian, **71% identified as racial or ethnic minorities**. 14% reported English as their second language. 49% were born in Washington, 22% were born in other states in the USA and 16% were born outside the USA.<sup>2</sup> **24% of the youth self-identified as LGBTQ** and 40% of these youth reported family conflict regarding their LGBTQ identity. **One-third of all youth reported having (currently or previously) an Individual Education Plan** for special education services.

***Legal Issues and Family Dynamics Confronting Homeless Youth***

Through LSPY, we have assisted youth with a variety of legal issues including, but not limited to, warrants, orders of protection, debt collection, employment law, landlord/tenant, child welfare, immigration, public benefits, medical insurance, emancipation, identification documents, child custody and family law.



Homeless minors have particularly unique and complex legal problems as well as distinct avenues for relief. Unless a minor has been emancipated someone has a legal obligation to care for the youth – the question becomes who bears that responsibility.

Conflict at home can prompt a youth to run away.<sup>3</sup> Some youth are kicked out of their homes because of juvenile offense convictions or self-identifying as LGBTQ. In some instances the landlords are upset by the

youth’s behavior and threaten the family with eviction if the youth is allowed to return home upon release from detention or a Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (“JRA”) facility.

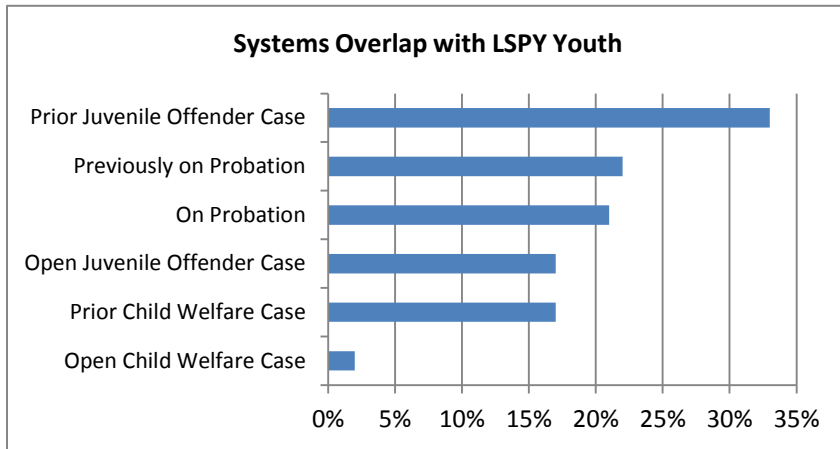
<sup>1</sup> The data in this section is based upon referrals received from June 21, 2016 – December 2, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> 13% were unreported or did not know their place of birth.

<sup>3</sup> Upon intake, we review a list of potential problems within a family home and ask each youth to identify which, if any, are true for their family. This graph reflects responses as of Dec 2, 2016.

### *Systems Overlap*

LCYC represents youth in juvenile offender matters, child welfare cases and youth facing homelessness.<sup>4</sup> Our engagement in all of these systems places us in a unique position to analyze overlap and learn from youth in dual systems. Part of our intake process for LSPY is to learn from the youth about his or her prior or current experiences with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The youth’s self-reports, thus far, are reflected in the graph below.



Additionally, through conversations with 24 LCYC youth involved in juvenile offender matters, 25% reported that their family struggles with homelessness and 33% reported that they (the youth) have been homeless. Upon a review of 97 LCYC child welfare cases, 53% of the families have or currently struggle with homelessness, 27% of the youth themselves had experienced homelessness.

### *LSPY Partners*

LSPY has helped to fill a gap in unmet legal services for youth in King County who are or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. Our unique model, adapted from Bay Area Legal Aid, employs experienced children’s advocates, in partnership with shelter case managers and other nonprofits, to timely provide necessary legal advocacy to youth who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness.

We regularly engage with **YouthCare**’s adolescent shelter staff and youth residents. We provide weekly intake at YouthCare’s Orion Center and bi-monthly intake at **Auburn Youth Resources** adolescent shelter. We are finalizing plans to bring bi-monthly onsite legal services to a local high school.

In addition to our nonlegal partners, LCYC works closely with **Solid Ground** and **Northwest Immigrant Rights Project** (NWRIP) in their areas of expertise – public benefits and immigration.

Through these partnerships we are learning more about the various struggles facing youth on a case-by-case basis and systemic level. We are combining efforts and expertise to improve supports, expand legal advocacy for youth, and identify and respond to systemic barriers.

### *Supporting LSPY*

The Raikes Foundation and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation are primary sponsors of LSPY. To learn more about our services, impact or how you can support these efforts to address youth homelessness visit us online at [www.lcycwa.com](http://www.lcycwa.com) or email our Executive Director at [erinlcyc@gmail.com](mailto:erinlcyc@gmail.com).

<sup>4</sup> Child welfare cases refers to dependency matters in Juvenile Court, cases in which someone (most often the state) has petitioned the court to find a child dependent, ie, abused, abandoned, neglected, or with no parent capable of meeting the needs of the child such that they are at risk. See RCW 13.34.

## *Cross Systems Impact Stories*

LCYC learns from every youth we serve. Below are a few LCYC client stories that highlight the overlap of juvenile court systems and homelessness; all names are fictive to protect the confidentiality of our clients.

**Brooke was living out of a car.** LSPY is helping her to work with collection agencies and multiple courts to remove thousands of dollars in old fines and fees, many of which accrued after warrants were issued because Brooke was homeless and never received notice of court actions. LSPY wrote a letter for Brooke to give to potential landlords and employers explaining old convictions, misleading dates on her criminal history, and why she is more trustworthy and responsible than her criminal history suggests.

**Lucia was on the run** for several months at the start of the child welfare case. DSHS filed the child welfare petition on Lucia and younger siblings, but refused to support Lucia's preferred placement with a suitable adult. Lucia was not present for the first court hearing, she was already homeless in opposition to the child welfare filing. Lucia's LCYC child welfare attorney communicated with her through multiple mediums until Lucia was finally willing to meet in person and eventually consented to engaging with the court process. Lucia was untrusting of adults and DSHS. Lucia's attorney was able to quash the child welfare warrant and set a hearing on shortened time to address placement with a suitable adult. Lucia continues to reside with her preferred caregiver, approved by the court, and is accessing services.

Before LCYC was appointed to represent **Paul** in his child welfare case he had experienced poor treatment in state placement and **bounced through more than 30 placements**, including group homes and foster homes. While waiting on placement Paul also spent several nights in hotels and other make shift accommodations. While bouncing from night to night, DSHS would bring Paul late to school so he could not maintain his high grades. Paul was receiving conflicted medical assessments and advice as well as improper medication dosing. Paul's LCYC child welfare attorney filed an Ombuds complaint to lessen the number of moves he experienced and address overmedication in a group home and poor DSHS oversight. Paul's attorney ensured DSHS transported Paul to school timely and advocated for supportive placement environments. Paul's attorney worked with Paul to keep him engaged and hopeful during periods of upheaval to prevent him from running and engaging in harmful behaviors.

## *Reducing and Preventing Homelessness*

Attorneys on our LSPY team report some instances in which our legal advocacy has had an immediate impact on the youth's housing, while in other instances the legal advocacy plays a necessary part in helping the youth advance towards stable housing and employment in the future. Below are a few stories of direct legal advocacy at work, all names are fictive to protect the confidentiality of our clients.

In order to **help Ernest, a minor, maintain housing with a safe and supportive relative**, he needs help from an LSPY attorney to access SSI benefits and change legal custody from parent to relative.

**Claudia (age 23) was a victim of sex trafficking at the hands of her parent.** Claudia needed legal assistance to obtain an order of protection. An LSPY attorney is also helping Claudia in conversation with an out of state prosecutor's office to proceed in pressing charges. While safe in a shelter, Claudia will be able to focus again on school, employment and longer term housing.

Jasmine, a minor, is temporarily in foster care through a Voluntary Placement Agreement ("VPA"). One parent resides abroad; the other parent is abusive and opposes extending the VPA. The VPA is not a permanent solution. **Jasmine is afraid to return home** and Child Protective Services ("CPS") has no interest in pursuing a child welfare. If Jasmine is forced to return home, she will likely run and end up homeless. LSPY is working with Jasmine while the VPA is in place to assess all legal options and prevent homelessness, potentially through engaging the collaboration of CPS, filing a CHINS or child welfare petition in Juvenile Court, or planning for and establishing emancipation.

DeShawn (age 22) had two warrants which were preventing him from pursuing an opportunity with Job Corps. LSPY helped DeShawn quash both warrants and connected him with public defense to resolve remaining matters. **Quashing the warrants and addressing underlying criminal issues will help DeShawn pursue employment and housing.**

Neil, a minor, was referred to LSPY for services through probation. **Neil was being held in juvenile detention on an offender matter and when his release was approved, his parent refused to welcome him home.** Probation contacted CPS, who refused to intervene. Eventually, probation secured a bed for the youth through a group home facility. LSPY is working with Neil to prevent homelessness by exploring more relatives for placement and all legal options to secure housing and permanency.