

**CHESTER
COUNTY
HOMELESS
YOUTH
COUNT
2018**



Decade to
Doorways

INTRODUCTION

Widespread agreement among policy makers, service providers, advocates, and countless others agree that ending youth homelessness and closing the gaps in the community that prevent youth from staying stably housed requires better data about the number and characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness, and stronger, more coordinated systems of support for these youth.

On May 2nd and 3rd, 2018 Decade to Doorways (D2D) surveyed a total of 140 homeless or unstably housed youth throughout Chester County (CC), Pennsylvania to identify their most urgent needs and determine where the county lacked resources in stabilizing their lives. 96 of those 140 youth surveyed identified as homeless or unstably housed. Working with the best practices identified in "Voices of Youth Count" (VOYC) by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, and Data Analytic Expert Andrew Palomo from Valley Youth House (VYH) who had led three youth counts in Pennsylvania prior, Decade to Doorways adapted these practices to best suit the needs of Chester County. The following sections outline the methods used to identify unstably housed and homeless youth in Chester County.

OBJECTIVE

Collect original data and document the diverse experiences of homeless and unstably housed youth 13 to 25 years old in Chester County, PA.

GOALS

- More clearly define the size of the population
- Deliver actionable information to the field dedicated to ending youth homelessness
- Use data to apply for funds and allocate resources in a more productive way
- Improve the accuracy of the methods used to count youth experiencing homelessness

DEFINITIONS

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD) DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

HUD defines homelessness as those youth who live in a place not meant for human habitation, emergency shelter, transitional housing, or hotels paid for by a government or charitable organization.

THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless as any youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This definition is utilized by the PA Department of Education to identify youth experiencing homelessness.

CC YOUTH COUNT DEFINITION OF YOUTH

For the purpose of this count, Decade to Doorways defined youth as anyone ages 13 to 25 years old as defined by HUD.

CC YOUTH COUNT DEFINITION OF HOMELESS AND UNSTABLY HOUSED

For the purpose of this count, Decade to Doorways defines homeless and unstably housed as a youth experiencing homelessness (living on the street, in shelter, transitional housing, a hotel/motel not paid for by the individual/family) as well as any youth who self identified their living situation as unstable.

METHODOLOGY

PAPER SURVEY & GOOGLE FORM

The survey was adapted from the Chapin Hall Voices of Youth Count example and customized to better fit Chester County. The paper form was then directly translated into a Google form allowing the survey to also be administered and taken online. The survey was available in English and Spanish. A total of 140 surveys were collected.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

- Age
- Area of County
- Where did you sleep last night?
- Do you feel stable?
- High school diploma/GED
- Current education status
- Employment
- Government benefits
- Foster care
- Criminal record
- Children & Custody
- Race
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Resources needed to improve current situation

GETTING THE WORD OUT

D2D sent out flyers to specific locations to encourage youth to stop by and take the survey. The surveyors were compensated with pizza and gift cards.

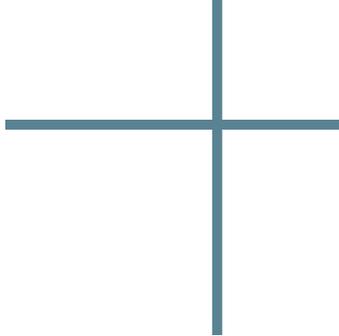


METHODOLOGY

WHERE WE SURVEYED

- West Chester Area School District
- Phoenixville Area School District
- West Chester University of PA, West Chester
- The Garage Youth Center: Kennett Square
- The Garage Youth Center: West Grove
- The Parkesburg Pointe, Parkesburg
- The Coatesville Youth Initiative, Coatesville
- St. Mary's Shelter, Phoenixville
- Community Youth and Women's Alliance Shelter (CYWA), Coatesville
- Chester County Youth Center, West Chester
- Kennett Area Community Services, Kennett Square
- Phoenixville Area Community Services, Phoenixville
- Young Mom's, Kennett Square
- Oxford SILO, Oxford
- Open Hearth, Inc., Phoenixville
- Chester County Juvenile Probation, West Chester
- Career-Corps, Exton
- PA Home of the Sparrow, Coatesville
- The Bridge Academy, Coatesville
- Valley Youth House, West Chester

**MANY OF THE SURVEYS
WERE ADMINISTERED
THROUGH A GOOGLE
FORM AND ALL WERE
ANONYMOUS,
THEREFORE SOME
PARTNERS MAY NOT BE
LISTED HERE**



METHODOLOGY

TIMELINE

- D2D determined through Chester County's Youth Homelessness Taskforce that action was to be taken to collect credible numbers of the unstably housed youth in the county.
- Andrew Palomo from Valley Youth House (VYH) presented on the past Youth Counts held in Pennsylvania. D2D decided to contract with VYH to conduct a Youth Count for Chester County.
- On February 23rd, D2D held it's first **leadership meeting**. The meeting was attended by VYH staff, school district homeless liaisons, Department of Community Development (DCD) staff, CareerLink staff, emergency shelter staff, Children, Youth and Family staff, youth center directors and more. At this meeting, the group determined the count would be done with a survey and youth would be compensated (\$5 gift cards, pizza/snacks at the surveying locations discretion).
- Key stakeholders were identified and recruited for a **Stakeholder Team**.

LEADERSHIP TEAM & STAKEHOLDER TEAM MEMBERS

From VOYC

| Essential | Potential |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth, Currently or Recently Experiencing Homelessness or Housing Instability (ages 13-25) - After school and Family Support Program Representatives - Behavioral Health Department Staff - Benefits/Human Services Staff - Child Welfare/Social Services staff - City/Community Colleges Staff - Continuum of Care Representatives - County/Municipal Government Representatives - Emergency Room/Hospitals/Clinics/Safe Spaces Staff - Homeless Service Providers Staff (youth, family, and adult) - McKinney-Vento Liaisons/School Staff - Public Health Department Staff - Public Library Staff - Sex/Human Trafficking Task Force Representatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Community Members - Faith Based Organization Representatives - GED Program Staff - Legal Aid/Family Court/ State's Attorney Representatives - Transition-Age Youth/Youth-Focused Collaborative Representatives - Parks and Recreation Department Staff - Police/Sheriff/Highway Patrol Staff - Prisoner Re-Entry/Jail Staff - Probation/Juvenile Justice Staff - Transportation District Staff - Veterans' Services Officers - Workforce Development Program Staff |

METHODOLOGY

TIMELINE CONTINUED

- **Provider Focus Groups** were held in the North, South and Central parts of the county. The focus groups were open to all county providers that work directly with youth. The purpose was to identify how/where to find homeless and unstably housed youth.
- **Youth Focus Groups** were held at the Coatesville Youth Initiative and Valley Youth House. At these focus groups, unstably housed youth gave insight on the barriers in the county that hinder their stability and how/where to find unstably housed youth.
- D2D collaborated with school district homeless liaisons and superintendents to survey identified homeless students within the district high schools. D2D also collaborated with West Chester University's homeless liaison to administer the survey to homeless or unstably housed college students.
- D2D organized "**Come and be Counted**" locations at the Coatesville Youth Initiative and The Kennett Garage as the area schools were not able to survey inside the schools due to privacy concerns.
- On May 1st, one day before the count, D2D looked into the Homeless Management Information System to determine if there were any youth ages 13-25 years old in the county shelters. Those who had youth were visited by volunteers during the count.
- **13 volunteers** were trained and eight of these volunteers were organized into six teams over the two days (May 2 and 3) where they surveyed five locations, three of these locations (youth drop in centers) were visited both days. **Youth Leaders**, a group of formally homeless or unstably housed youth, were also trained and each volunteer team was led by one or two of these youth.
- The survey was also transferred onto a Google form and sent to approximately 12 youth service providers in the county where their staff administered the survey to homeless or unstably housed youth.

METHODOLOGY

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Engaging with the school districts was equal parts important and challenging. Under federal law, McKinney-Vento Liaisons are responsible for identifying homeless and unstably housed youth in the school system. Looking at these numbers (see table below), D2D was able to identify the schools most critical to engage based on their high number of homeless youth (highlighted in red).

Thanks to the help of the district homeless liaisons and superintendents, D2D was able to get the survey approved at West Chester Area School District and Phoenixville Area School District. Kennett Consolidated School District and Coatesville Area School District homeless liaisons' coordinated with D2D to organize and advertise a "come and be counted" site where students were able to take the survey in an alternate location after school for compensation.

| School District | Homeless Youth ('16-'17 School Year) |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 21st Century Cyber CS | 0 |
| Achievement House CS | 16 |
| Agora Cyber CS | 122 |
| Avon Grove CS | 0 |
| Avon Grove SD | 101 |
| Chester Co Family Academy CS | 0 |
| Chester County IU 24 | 0 |
| Coatesville Area SD | 201 |
| Collegium CS | 0 |
| Downingtown Area SD | 31 |
| Great Valley SD | 0 |
| Kennett Consolidated SD | 166 |
| Octorara Area SD | 35 |
| Owen J Roberts SD | 14 |
| Oxford Area SD | 69 |
| Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School | 67 |
| Phoenixville Area SD | 49 |
| Renaissance Academy CS | 11 |
| Tredyffrin-Easttown SD | 18 |
| Unionville-Chadds Ford SD | 13 |
| West Chester Area SD | 83 |

- A TOTAL OF 996 STUDENTS IN THE '16-'17 SCHOOL YEAR WERE IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS AND SERVED UNDER THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT.

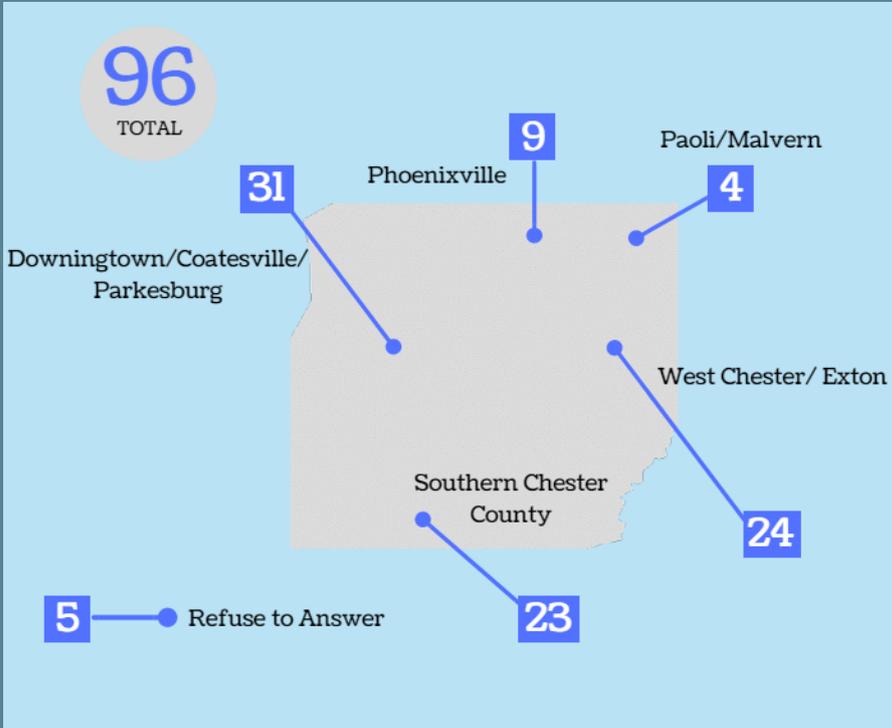
- PENNSYLVANIA HAD A TOTAL OF 30,264 STUDENTS IN '16-'17 SCHOOL YEAR EXPERIENCING HOMELESS AND BEING SERVED

- 17% OF HOMELESS YOUTH IN CHESTER COUNTY ARE UNACCOMPANIED

- 14% OF HOMELESS YOUTH IN PA ARE UNACCOMPANIED

DEMOGRAPHICS

OF THE 140 YOUTH SURVEYED, 96 FIT CHESTER COUNTY'S DEFINITION OF HOMELESS OR UNSTABLY HOUSED



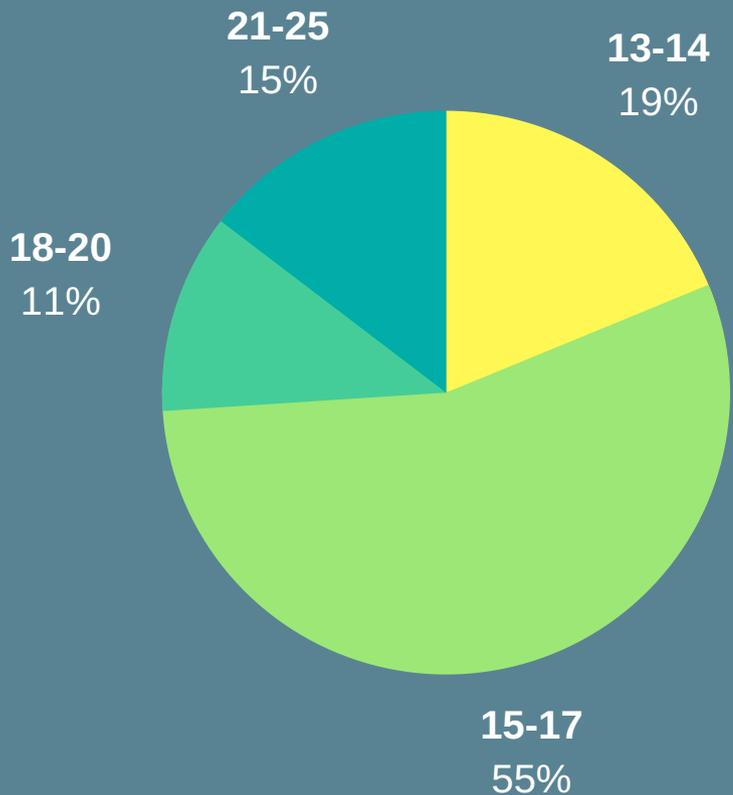
UNSTABLY HOUSED BY REGION OF CHESTER COUNTY

Each part of the county either had a volunteer team assigned to administer surveys or their area providers conducted the surveys online with their unstably housed youth.

AGE

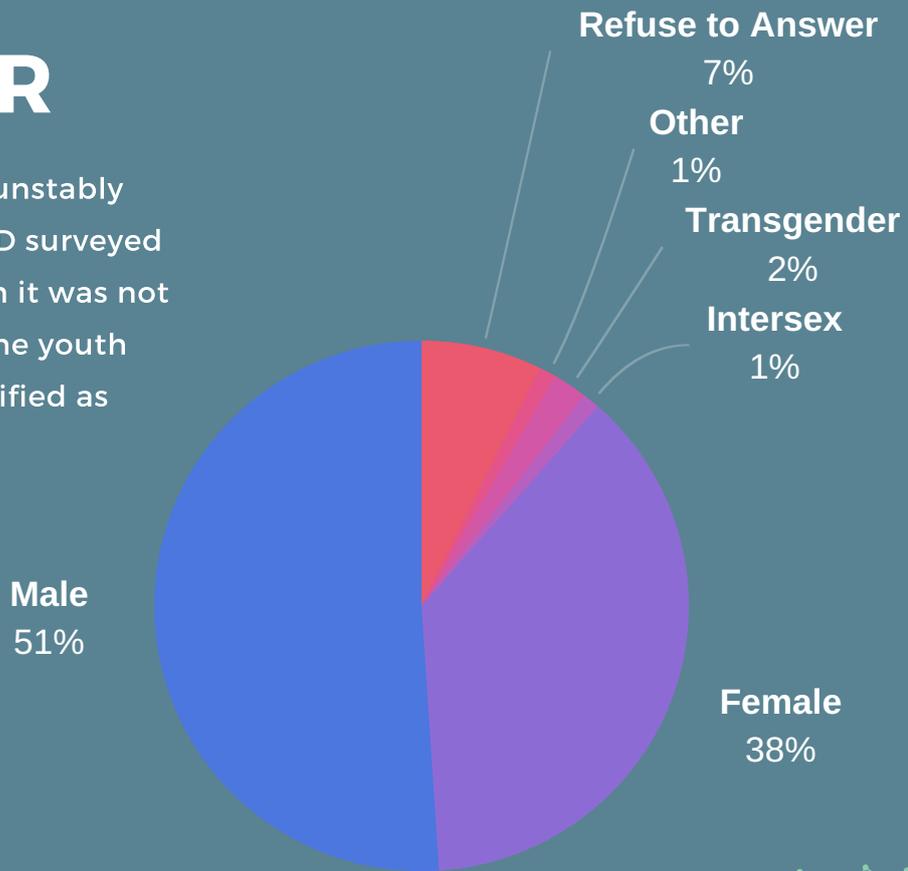
55% of surveyed unstably housed youth were between 15 to 17 years old.

Average Age
16.8



GENDER

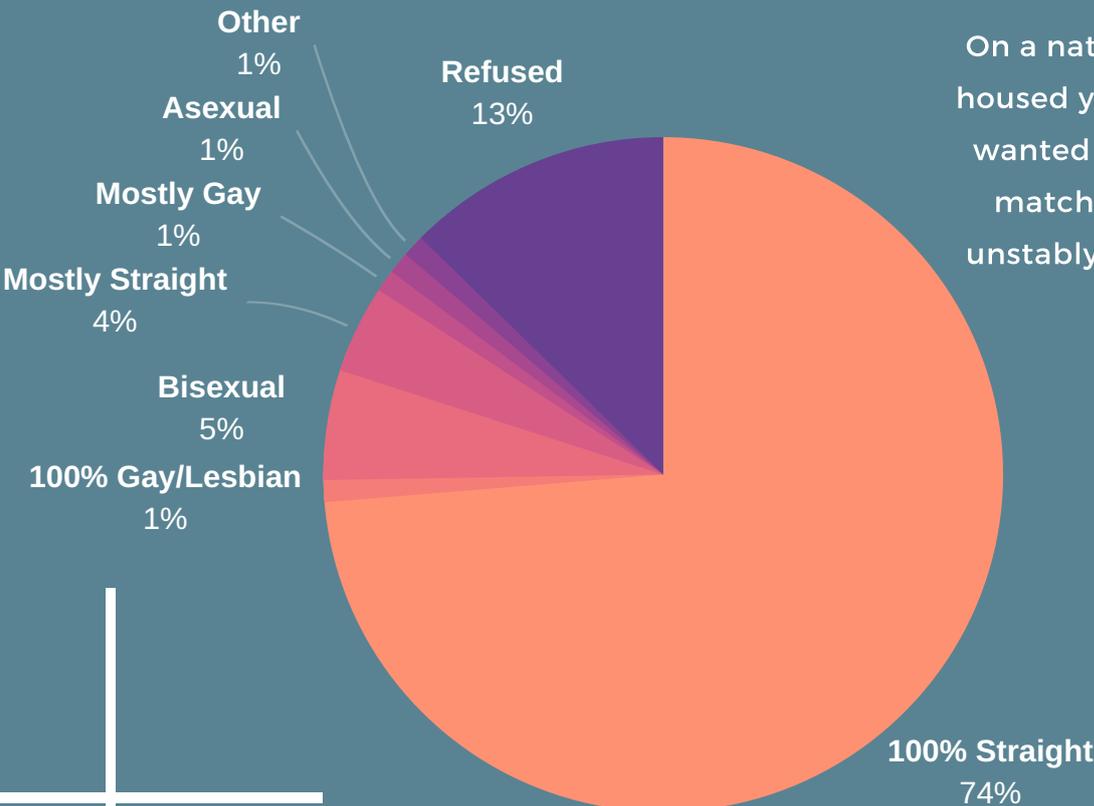
51% of Chester County's unstably housed population that D2D surveyed identified as male. Although it was not a choice on the survey, one youth wrote in that they identified as intersex.



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

ORIENTATION

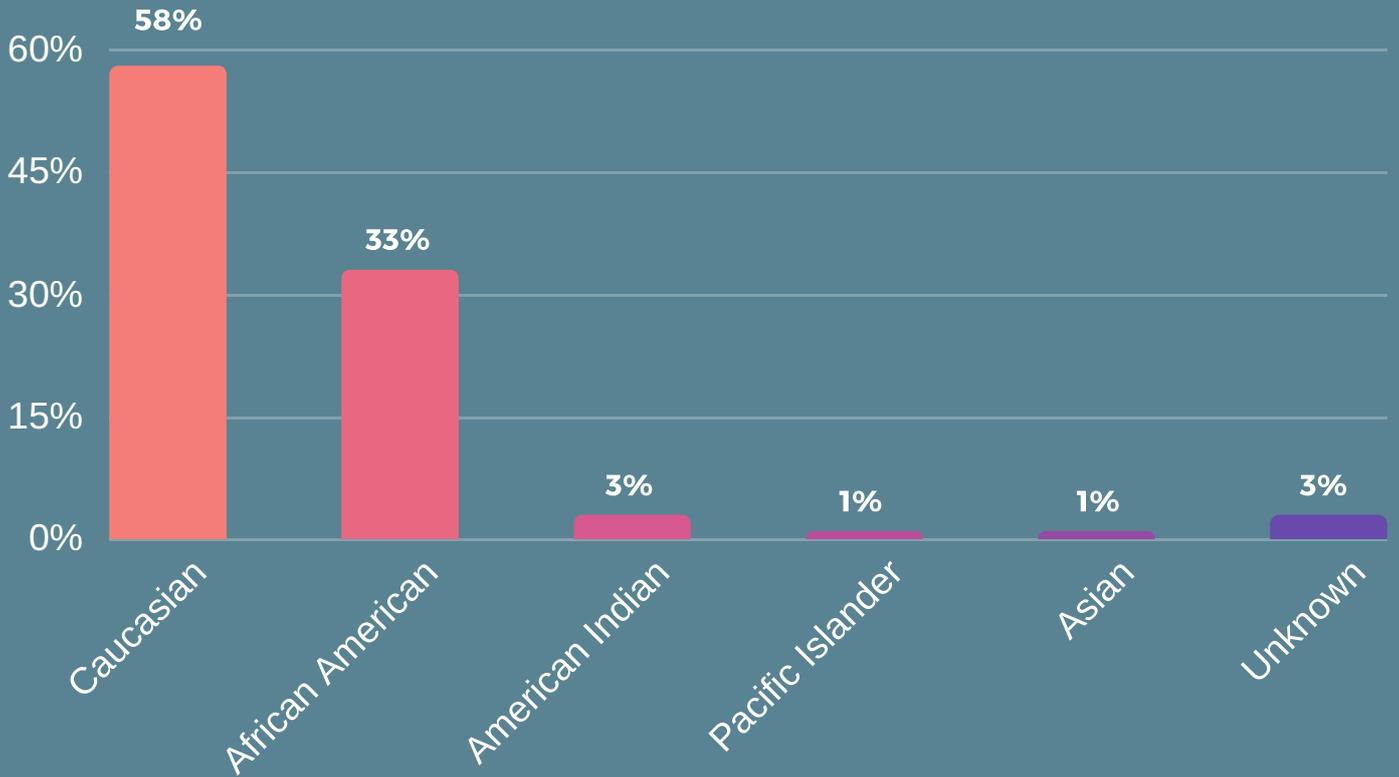
On a national level, 40% of unstably housed youth identify as LGBTQ. D2D wanted to see how Chester County matched up. 13% of homeless or unstably housed youth identified as LGBTQ.



RACE

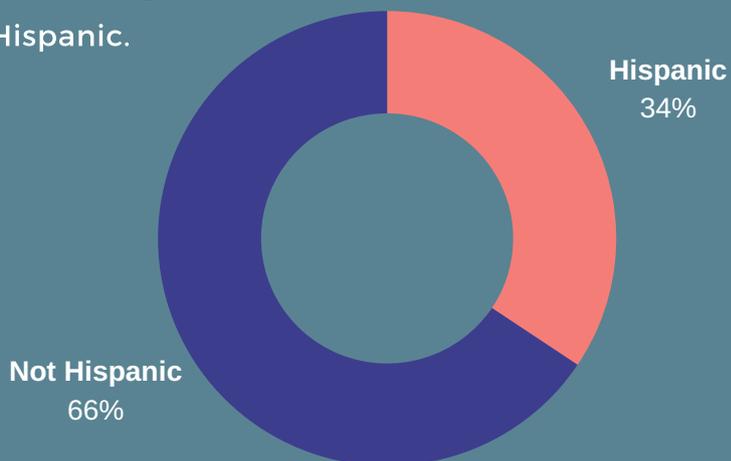
The majority of homeless and unstably housed youth were Caucasian (58%), followed by African American (33%).

15%
identify as more than one race (mixed)

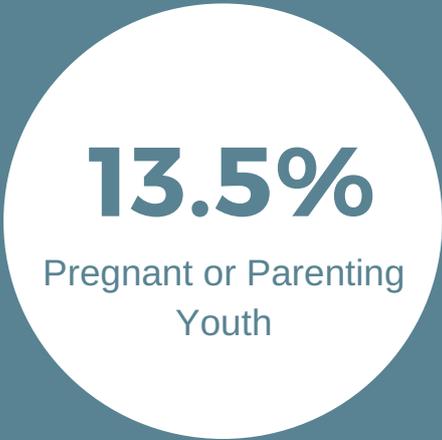


ETHNICITY

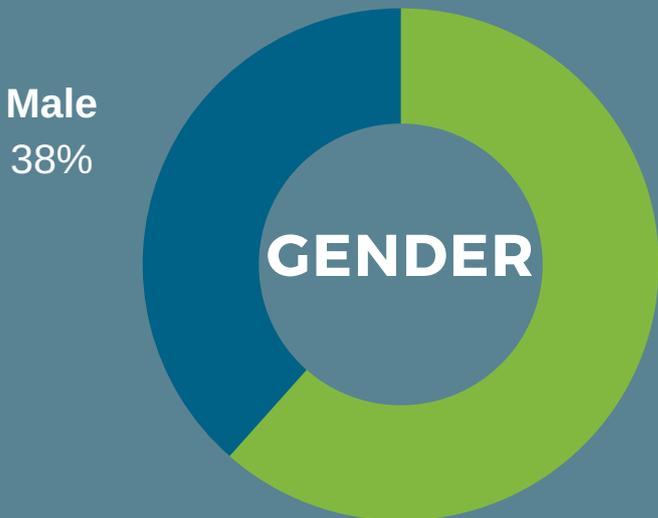
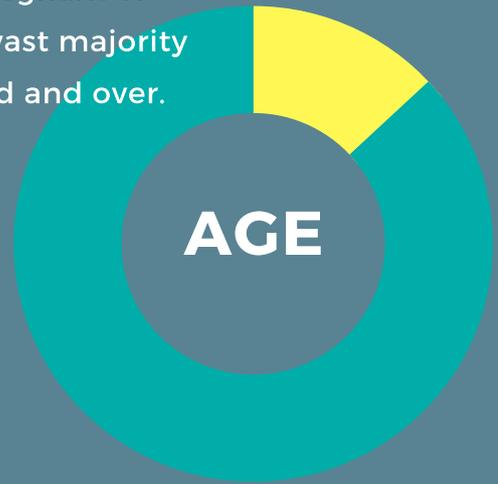
34% of surveyed homeless and unstably housed youth identified as Hispanic.



PREGNANT OR PARENTING YOUTH

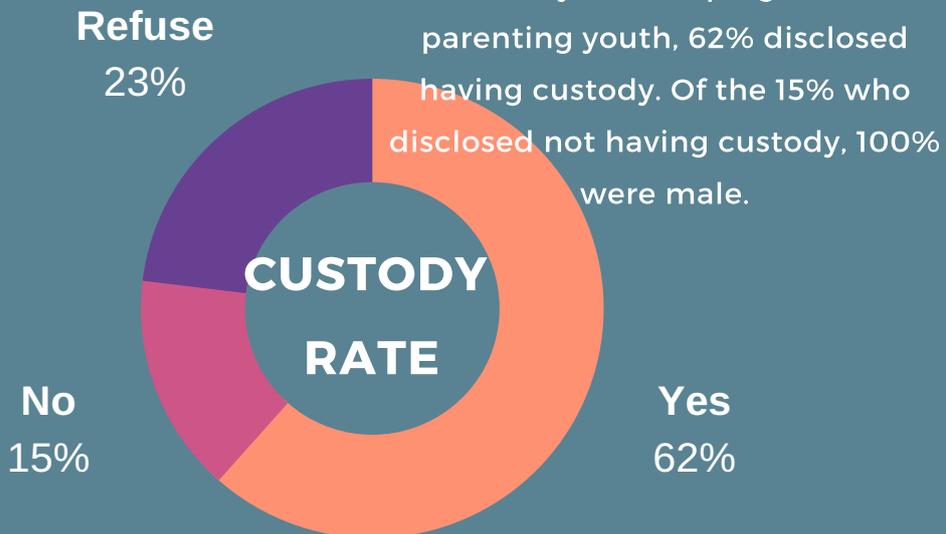


Of the 13.5% of homeless and unstably housed pregnant or parenting youth, the vast majority (87%) are 18 years old and over.



Of the 13.5% of homeless and unstably housed pregnant or parenting youth, 62% are female and 38% are male.

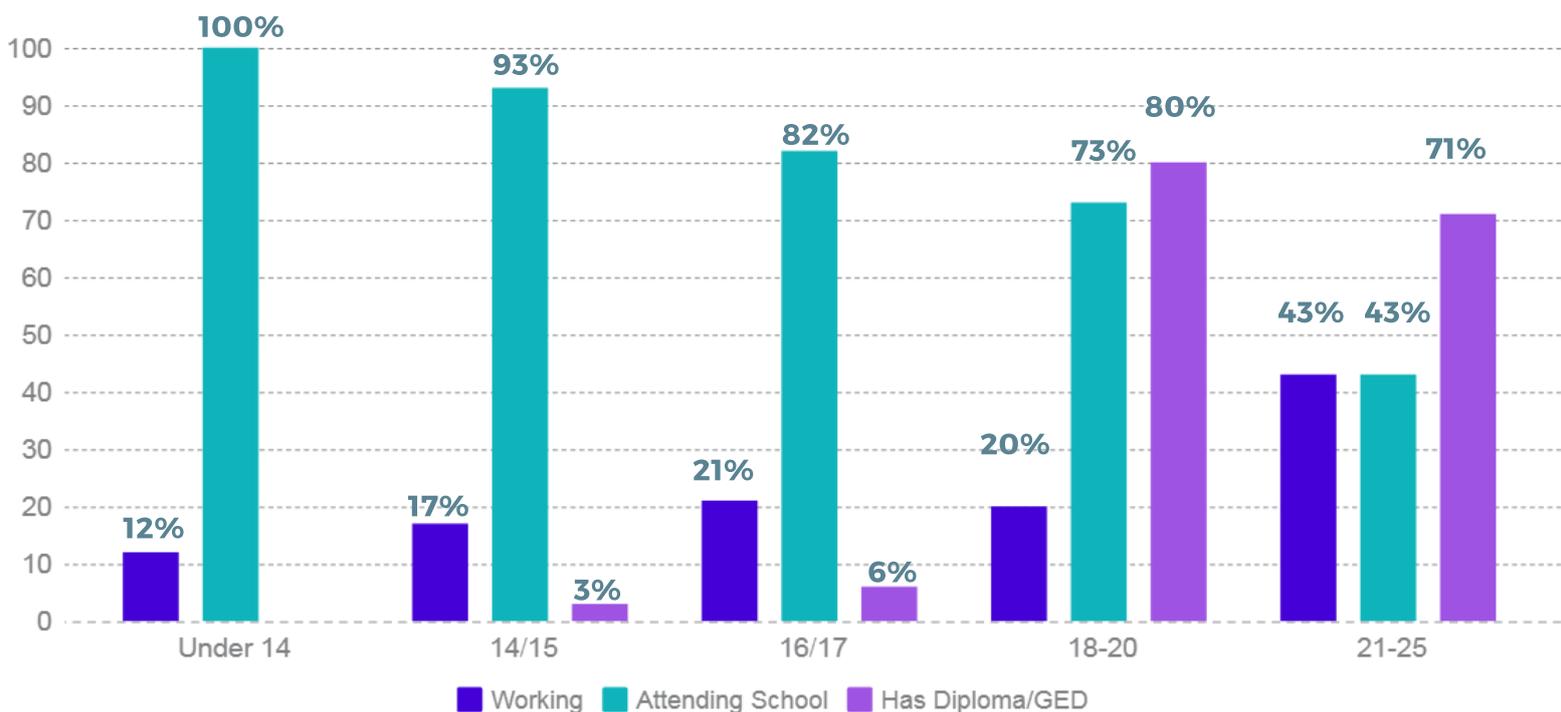
Of the 13.5% of homeless and unstably housed pregnant or parenting youth, 62% disclosed having custody. Of the 15% who disclosed not having custody, 100% were male.



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

43% of homeless or unstably housed youth aged 21 to 25 are currently employed at a job for which they receive a paycheck. 67% of those employed 21 to 25 year olds are also currently attending school or another educational program.

Education and Employment



CURRENTLY RECEIVE GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

21%
REPORTED YES

Public or government benefits, such as Medicaid, food stamps, SSI, or welfare cash assistance.

SYSTEM ENGAGEMENT

CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT BY AGE



CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT



Of total surveyed youth reported having been in juvenile detention, prison or jail

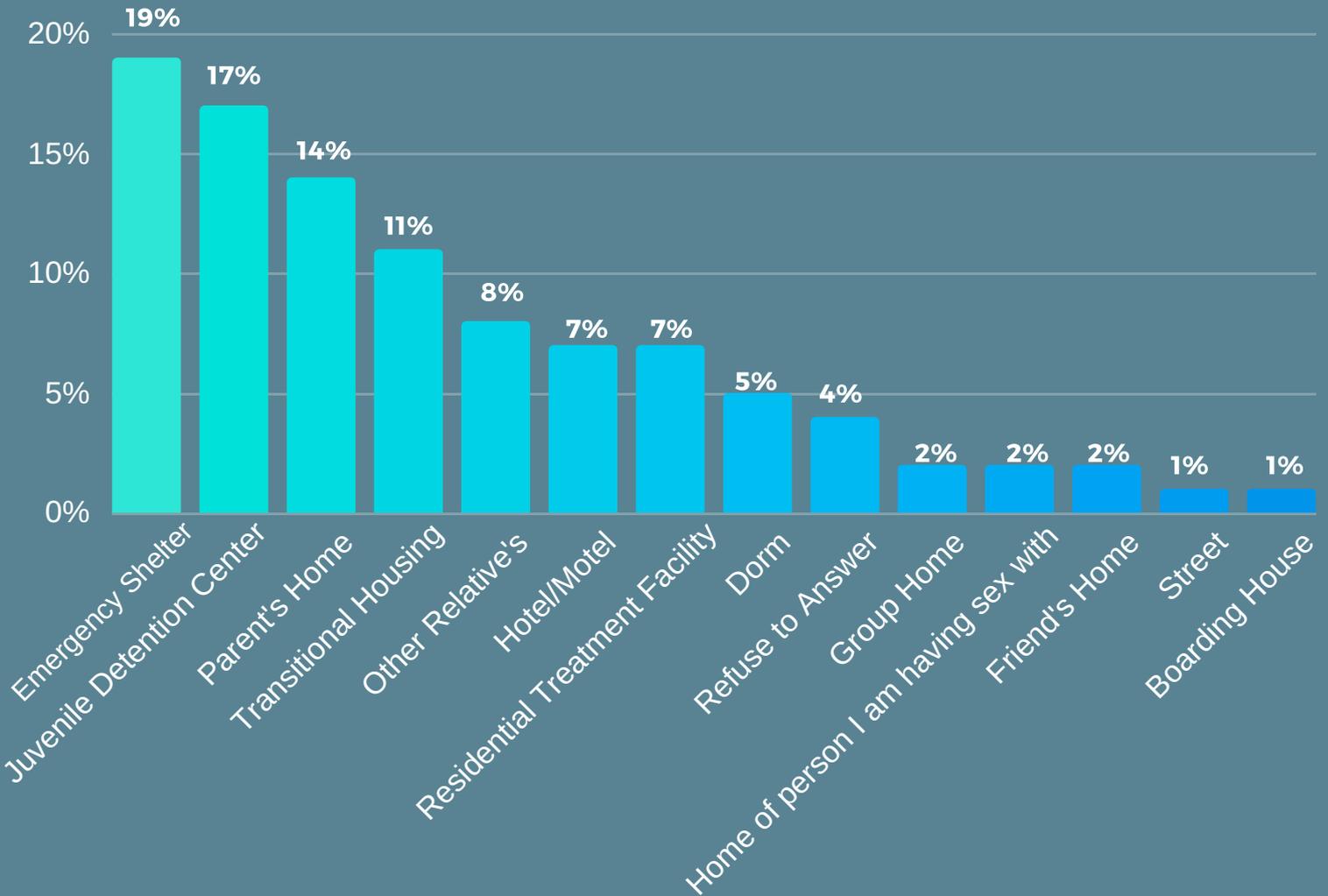
FOSTER CARE



Reported having ever been in the Foster Care System

*Note on pg. 15 - 17% of youth were reporting from Juvenile Detention Center

WHERE DID YOU SLEEP LAST NIGHT?

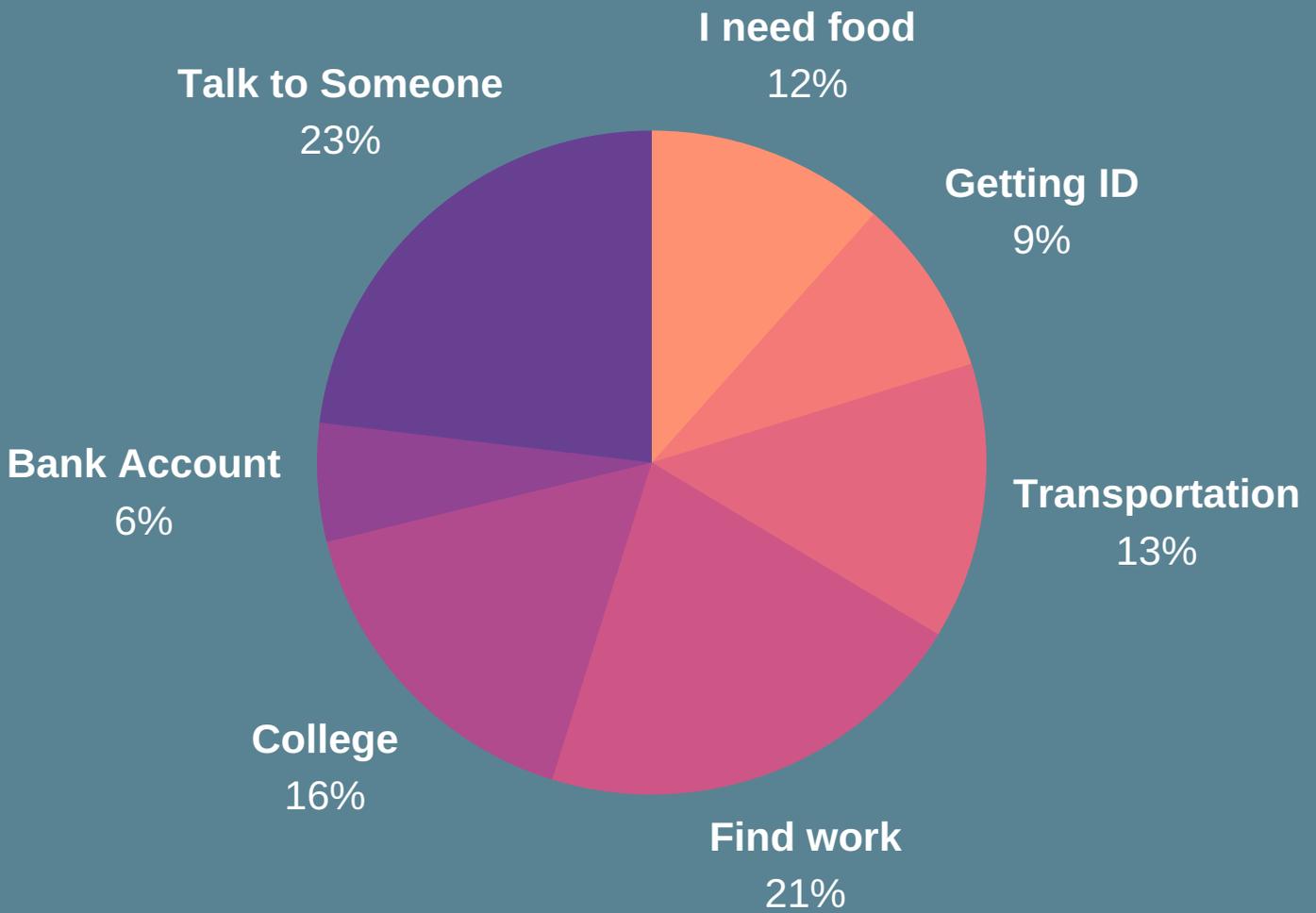


62%

of the surveyed youth are not considered homeless under the federal HUD definition and thus do not have access to adequate resources to address their needs.

RESOURCES NEEDED TO IMPROVE CURRENT SITUATION

WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU NEED TO IMPROVE YOUR CURRENT SITUATION?



WRITE INS

- Housing
- Creative Saving Habits/401k
- Finish Program
- Raise
- Money
- Credit

LIMITATIONS & IMPROVEMENTS

As the first ever Chester County Homeless Youth Count, there are a plenty of improvements to consider for the next time. A significant limitation was our ability to reach unstably housed 21 to 25 year olds. The majority of our homeless and unstably housed youth were found in drop-in centers and public schools, 55% of surveyed homeless and unstably housed youth were ages 15-17 which means that older youth may have been missed as they are harder to find.

Another barrier was our ability to survey in the schools. Privacy in these settings is extremely important but can also provide a huge barrier when it comes to being able to gather information from students inside the public school system. More time must be allotted to get the surveys approved by schools boards and superintendents.

Chester County may also consider adding a few questions to the survey to expand upon the stability of a youth's current living situation. Asking about the length of time they are able to stay where they are, how many times they have moved in the last 90 days and how long they have been at their current location could be helpful in determining a youth's stability.

Acknowledgments:

Thank you to all of our wonderful volunteers, service providers, shelters, youth centers, homeless liaisons and schools districts who lent us their space, time and knowledge. The 2018 Chester County Youth Count was a HUGE community effort and could not have been done without the help of each of YOU!

HEAR FROM THE YOUTH

"Older people, they've experienced more and they know about stuff and they know their way around things, but like if I would need a shelter or if I was to go somewhere, I'm still learning and I'm still like taking everything in and trying to understand things."

"...if you have a youth shelter instead of having like three or four adults there that are like just kind of like whatever, they lock the doors and make sure stuff doesn't happen and they yell at you. You should have people there that are actually trying to build connections and trying to better their lives."

"I think we should have like a big brother big sister program."

"I don't know how to explain it, let's say you have a family member who is an alcoholic or like has another issue or something, you would not want to be put in that situation so you might wanna run away and get out of it."

"Like some kids may take it for granted. The way I look at it though is like dang, I want to be able to provide for my kids like this so I need to get on my grind, but some other kids can't do that."

"They're not, like, safe and their living condition... they got a lot on their plate that they got to think about."

(Talking about a friend who is couch surfing)

"I know I need something I just don't know what it is."