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Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Worcester, Massachusetts:

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Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Worcester, Massachusetts: Results from the 2012 Point-in-Time Survey

Introduction

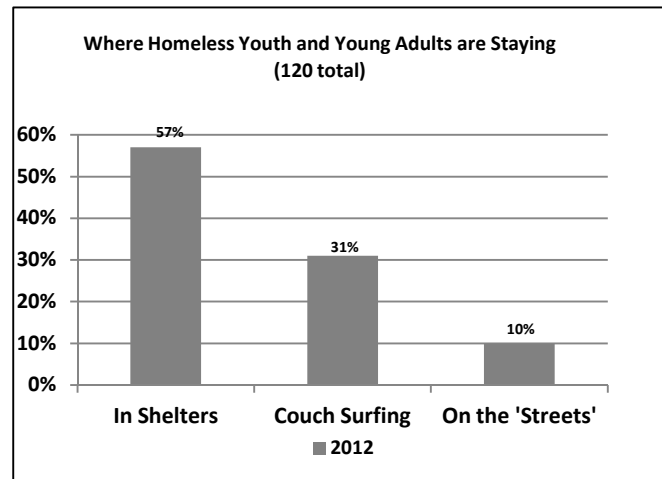
Supporting Worcester's ongoing effort to understand and address youth and young adult homelessness, the Community Roundtable on Youth Homelessness in conjunction with the Compass Project and Clark University conducted the fourth annual Point-in-Time Survey during October of 2012. Young people were surveyed at city shelters, youth programs, outside of schools, in parks, and on the streets of Worcester. Out of the 753 young people (ages 13 to 25) surveyed, 120 (16%) identified as homeless. We define homeless to include young people in shelters, staying with others temporarily (i.e. couch surfing) or on the streets. In addition to these 120 young people, another 220 youth who were housed reported that they had a friend who was homeless. Due to the non-random nature of the data collection, the results can only be used to describe the sample and cannot be generalized to all youth and young adults in Worcester.

As in prior years, when compared to their housed counterparts in the study, homeless youth...

- Have experienced more residential instability and family conflict;
- Have more precarious income situations;
- Are more likely to have children;
- Are more likely to have had involvement with the foster care and/or juvenile justice systems; and
- Have faced more barriers accessing services.

2012 Snapshot

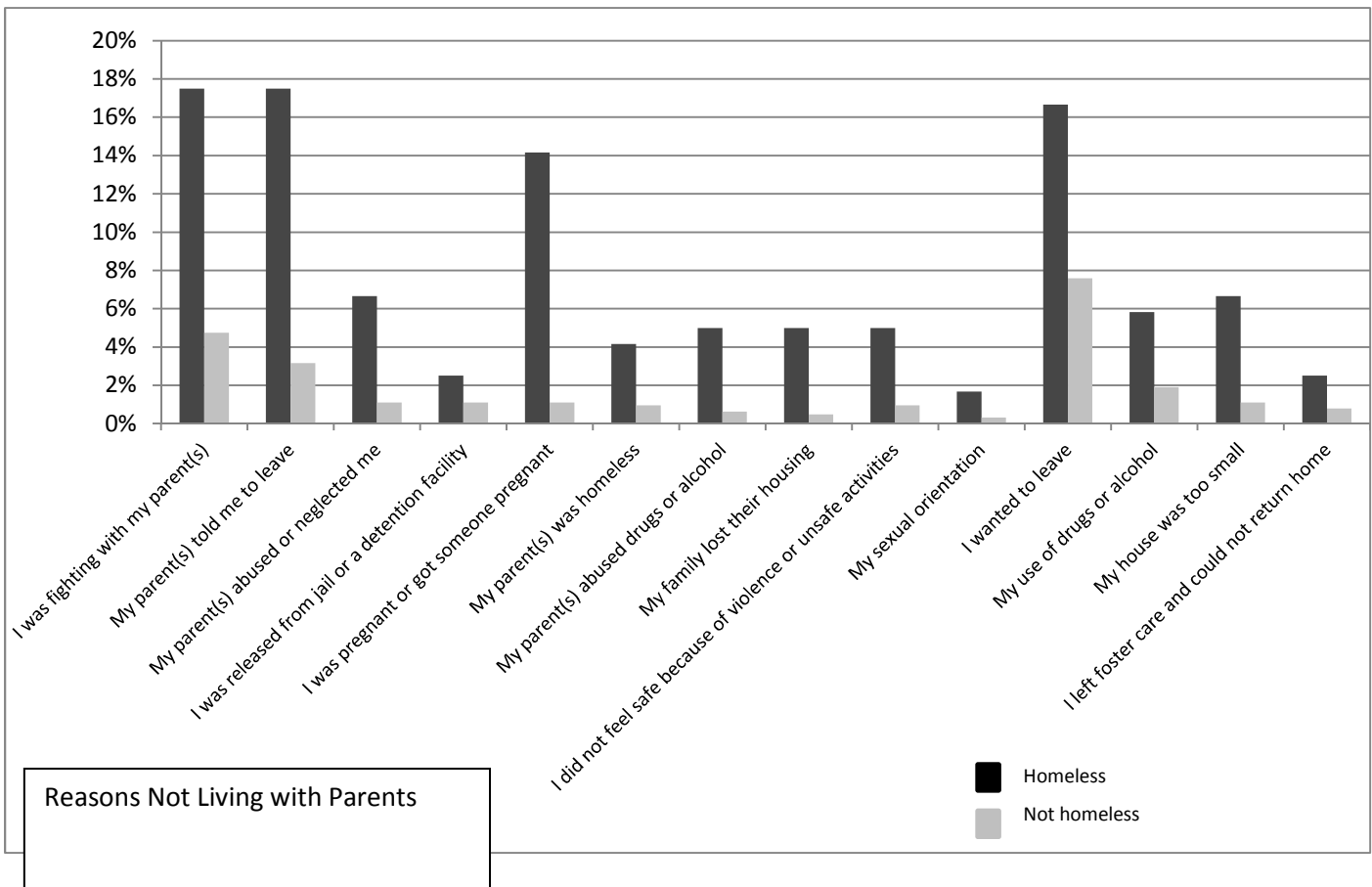
- 753 youth ages 13-25 responded to the survey.
- 120 (16%) respondents were identified as homeless.
- 64.2% homeless respondents were female, 25.8% homeless respondents were male and 2.5% homeless respondents were transgender. Gender was missing on roughly 7% of the surveys.
- 74.2% of homeless respondents identified as straight, 10% bisexual and 3% gay or lesbian.
- Homeless respondents tended to be older than housed respondents. The average age of homeless respondents was 20.5 years, while the average age of housed respondents was 18 years.
- Double the number of homeless respondents had parents who had been homeless as compared to the housed respondents (30% vs. 15%).
- 39% of all respondents had at least one friend who was homeless. 220 (34.8%) housed respondents had at least one friend that was homeless.
- 44.2% of homeless respondents were born in Worcester.
- 84% of homeless respondents have lived in Worcester for more than six months.
- 89% of homeless respondents were U.S. citizens.



HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL STATUS

Homeless respondents have a history of housing instability.

- 86% of homeless respondents have been in their current living situation for 6 months or less while only 23% of the housed group had been living in their current living situation for 6 months or less. In fact, over 60% of the housed group had been in their current housing situation for more than a year.
- Not only had the homeless respondents been in their current residential situation for a short time, they were less likely to be able to stay there for the next 2 weeks as compared to the housed respondents. 68% of the homeless group said they could stay where they were for the next 2 weeks, while over 80% of the housed group said they could stay there for the next 2 weeks. 29% of the homeless group said they couldn't stay in their current location or they didn't know if they could, as compared to 13% of the housed group that could not or was uncertain.
- Homeless respondents moved far more frequently than did the housed respondents. 8% of homeless respondents moved 0 times in the past year while 52% of the housed respondents moved 0 times. 21% of homeless respondents moved 5 or more times in the last year while 4% of housed respondents moved that frequently.
- As in prior years, issues related to parental conflict were the most common reasons homeless respondents were not currently living with their parents. Pregnancy was another common reason for homeless respondents to not be living with their parents.



EDUCATION LEVEL AND INCOME SOURCES

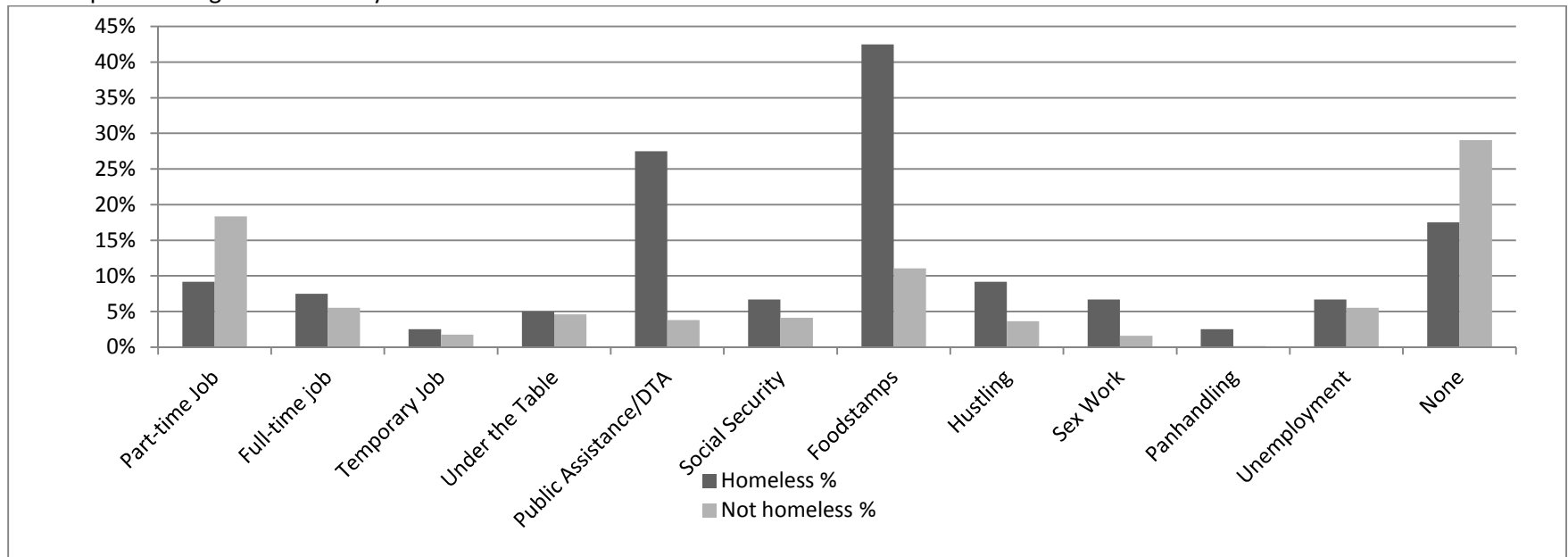
Education

The majority of homeless respondents over the age of 18 has completed high school or has a GED (58%). Eight percent of homeless respondents over the age of 18 are still in high school.

Income

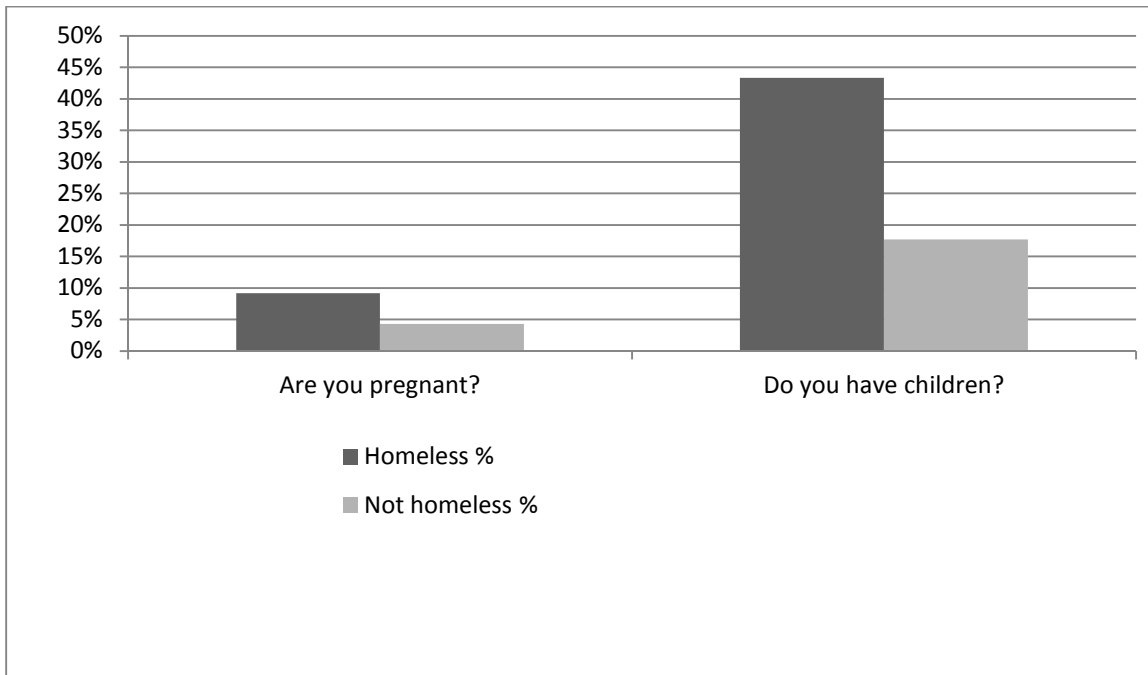
Homeless respondents are more likely to be receiving public assistance or engaging in illegal activities to earn money as compared to housed respondents.

- The most common source of income for homeless respondents is food stamps (43%), followed by DTA (28%). This is likely due to the high percentage of young homeless parents living in shelter.
- The most common response by housed respondents about income was ‘none’ (24%) followed by ‘part-time job’ (18%). This is largely due to the fact that these respondents were younger and more likely to still be dependents in the household.
- Of the homeless group, 9% reported hustling, 6% reported sex work, 5% reported working under the table, and 3% reported panhandling to earn money.



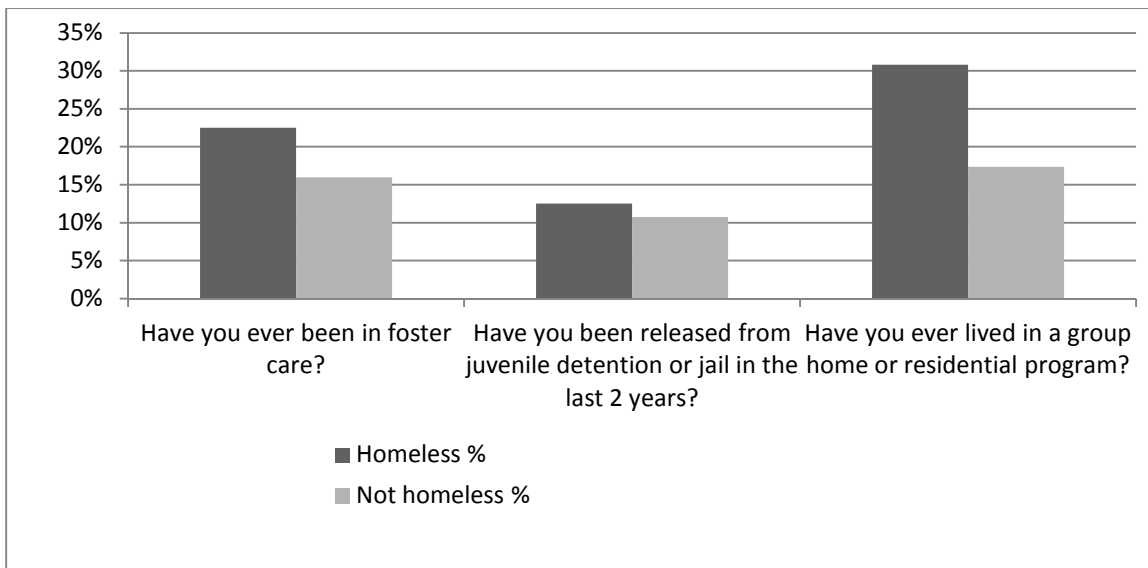
PARENTING

Homeless respondents were 2 times more likely to be pregnant than housed respondents. Homeless respondents were almost 2.5 times more likely to have children than housed respondents.



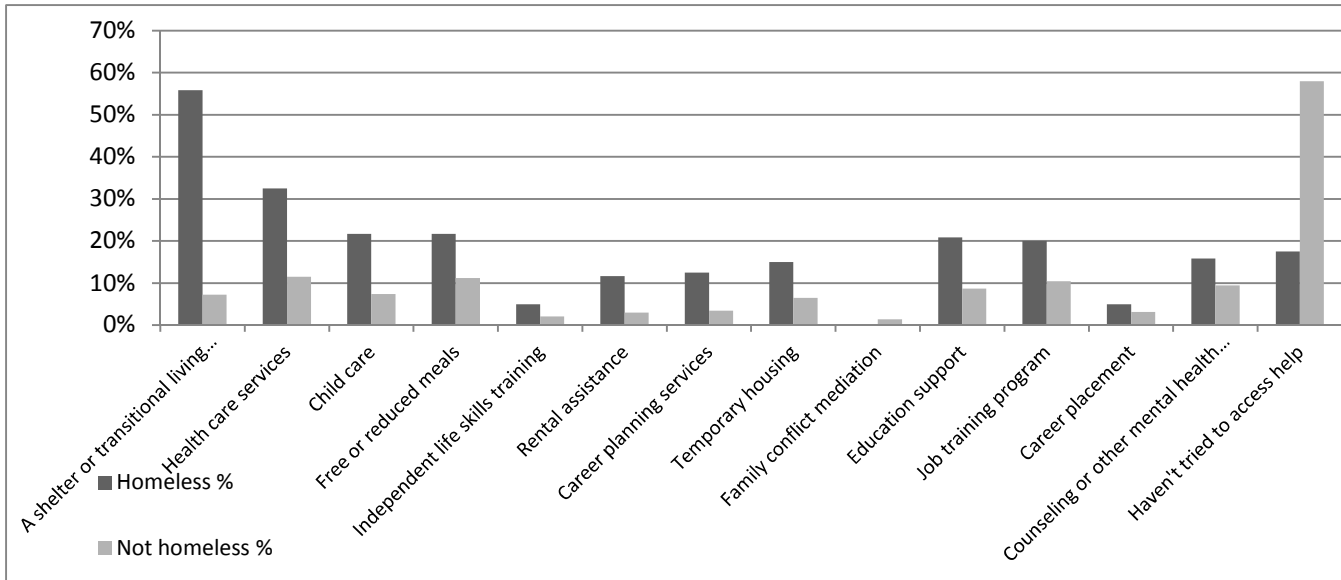
SYSTEMS INVOLVEMENT

Homeless respondents were more likely to have been in foster care, been released from jail or juvenile detention, and have lived in a residential program than housed respondents.

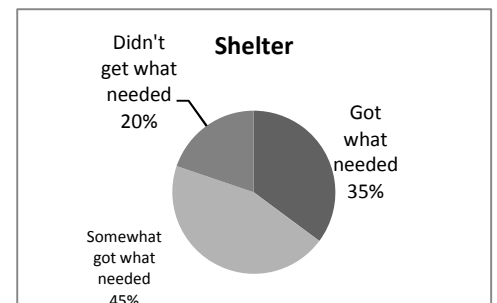
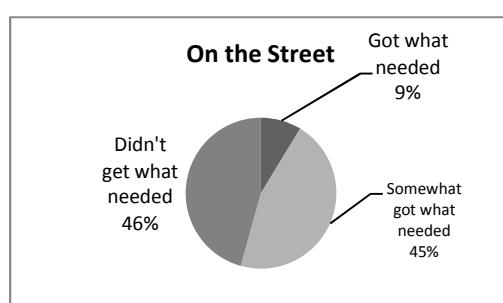
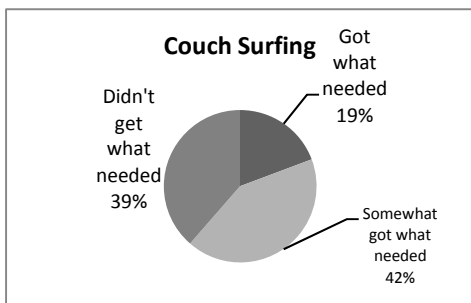
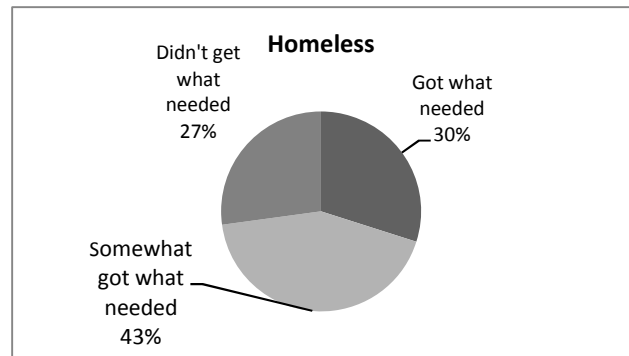
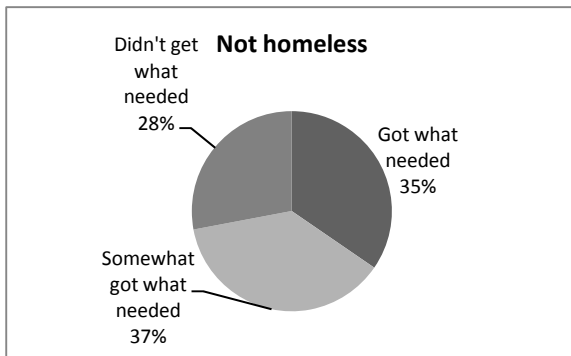


ATTEMPTS TO GET HELP

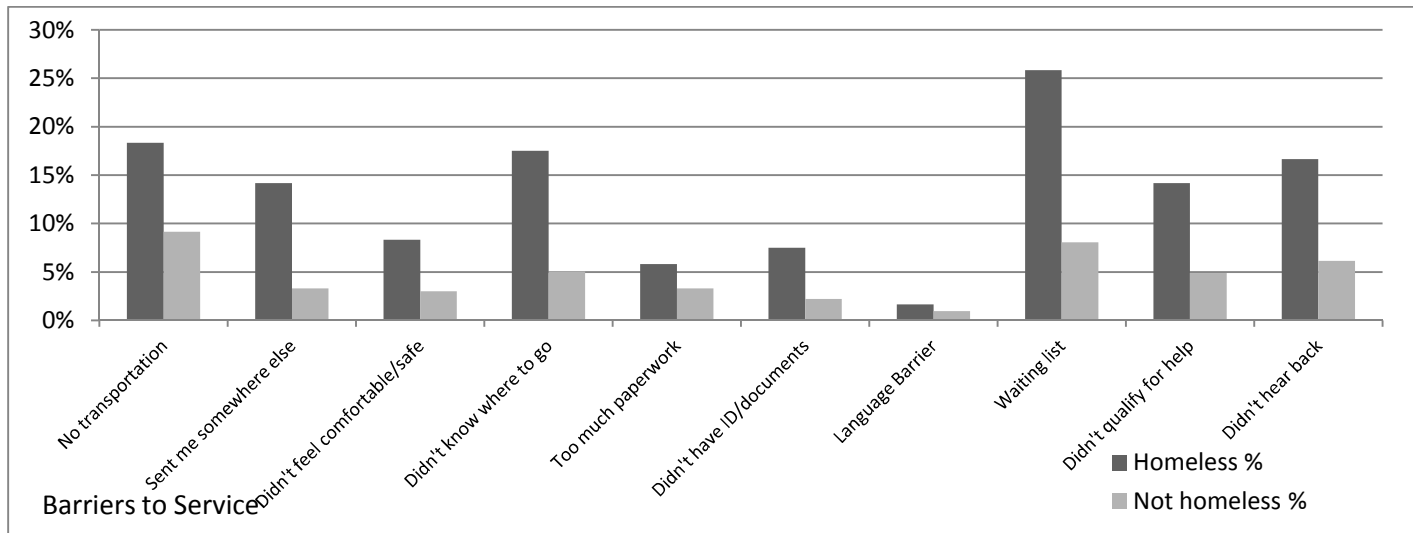
Homeless respondents were far more likely to have tried to access all forms of help included on the survey than housed respondents—with the exception of family conflict mediation. Homeless respondents most frequently attempted to access shelter, health care, childcare, free/reduced meals, education support and job training (listed in descending order).



When asked if they got the help they needed, homeless and housed respondents had similar experiences, although homeless youth were slightly less likely to have gotten what they needed. In breaking down the homeless statistics into three categories, we see youth who are on the streets and who are couch surfing have less success in getting what they need compared to those in shelter. In fact, young people in shelter seem to have as much success in accessing needed services as the housed youth.



When asked why they didn't get the help they needed, the most common reasons given were that there was a wait list, they had no transportation, they didn't know where to go, or they didn't hear back from the place they were seeking help.



Conclusion

The 2012 Point-in-Time Survey of Youth and Young Adult Homelessness has revealed similar trends to prior years. Factors driving youth homelessness include family conflict and instability, lack of stable income sources, a history of housing insecurity, and systems involvement. Unfortunately, young people are also still facing similar barriers in accessing the help they need. Currently, the Compass Project is attempting to address the barriers young people face through the creation of a 'Network' of low-barrier access points throughout the city. We will look to see evidence of the impact of this coordinated community approach in future Point-in-Time Surveys.

Survey Distribution Sites

Abby's House
 Apricot Street
 Boys & Girls Club
 Catholic Charities
 Catholic Worker
 Central MA Housing Alliance
 Community Healthlink
 Gateway to College
 Grafton Job Corps
 Harrington Way
 Henry Lee Willis
 Highland Street
 LSS Florence House
 LUK, Inc.
 Multicultural Wellness Center
 Mustard Seed

Outreach sites (Downtown, Union Station, parks, etc.)
 Pernet Family Health Center
 Safe Homes
 School Age Mothers
 SMOC
 Stand Up for Kids
 Straight Ahead Ministries
 Training Resources of America
 Worcester Community Action Council
 Worcester Housing Authority
 Worcester State University
 Worcester Youth Center
 YWCA/Daybreak

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