YOUTH COUNT!

PROCESS STUDY

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Contents

Acknowledgments

Glossary of Terms

- **Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF)** is a division of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that houses programs that target children, youth and families that include assistance with welfare, child support enforcement, adoption assistance, foster care, child care, and child abuse

- **American Community Survey (ACS)** is an ongoing statistical survey conducted by the US Census Bureau that samples a small percentage of the population every year.

- **Balance of State Continuums of Care (BOS—CoC)** is an organization of homeless service providers spread across a large part of a state that plans and manages homeless assistance resources and services to effectively and efficiently end homelessness.

- **Continuums of Care (CoC)** are local planning bodies responsible for coordinating the full range of homelessness services in a geographic area, which may cover a city, county, group of cities and counties, metropolitan area, or even an entire state.

- **Couch Surfing** describes situations where runaway or homeless youth are living in unstable and/or temporary living arrangements such as the couches or spare bedrooms of friends, lovers, or other family members. (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2009)

- **Doubled Up** is either living with family, friends, or other non-relatives. There are various definitions and parameters of doubled up that range from very general to specific.

- **US Department of Education (ED**) is the cabinet-level department that establishes policies on education, collects data on America's schools, and disseminates research.

- **Federal Interagency Youth Homelessness Working Group** is a working group made up of federal staff from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), US Department of Education and the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to focus specifically on the homeless youth population.

- **Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the US Department of Education. (ED.gov 2013)

- **Health and Human Services (HHS)** is the cabinet-level department that serves as the principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services.

- **Housing and Urban Development (HUD**) is the cabinet-level department responsible for programs concerned with the nation's housing needs, fair housing opportunities, and improvement and development of the nation's communities.

- **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** is a database managed by the local CoC that records and stores client-level information on the characteristics and service needs of homeless persons. HMIS enables unduplicated counts of people using homeless assistance services over time and is the basis of the information on annual prevalence reported to Congress in Annual Homeless Assessment Reports.

- **IRB Institutional Review Board** is a committee that has been formally designated to approve, monitor, and review behavioral research involving humans.

- **LGBTQ** is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning. An umbrella term that is used to refer to the community as a whole.

- **Local Education Agencies (LEAs)** are a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state to operate local public primary and secondary schools.

- **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** is a federal law that provides federal money for homeless shelter programs and was the first significant federal legislative response to homelessness.

  - **Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009** amends and reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act with changes that include: a consolidation of HUD's competitive grant programs; the creation of a Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program; and a change in HUD's definition of homelessness and chronic homelessness (HUD 2012).

  - **Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY)** implements the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act ensuring that homeless children and unaccompanied youth have access to public school educational programs and services that allow them to meet the same state academic standards to which all students are held.

- **National Alliance to End Homelessness** is a nonprofit, non-partisan, organization that works toward preventing and ending homelessness in the United States by improving policy, building capacity, and educating opinion leaders.

- **National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)** is an annual, cross-sectional household survey that serves as the primary source of information on the health of the non-institutionalized, civilian population.

- **National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART-2)** consists of several complementary studies designed to estimate the size and nature of the Nation's missing children problem and includes a large national survey (more than 16,000 households) of parents and other primary caretakers who were interviewed about their children's experiences, a survey of juvenile facilities, and a large-scale survey of police departments. (DOJ 2002)

- **National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)** provides national and state-level data on the use of tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs (including non-medical use of prescription drugs) and mental health in the United States and is administered by SAMHSA.

- **Point in Time (PIT) Count** is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January. These counts reveal the number of homeless persons in shelters and on streets at a single point-in-time. Each count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally. (HUD 2013)

- **Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment** is a law intended to protect the rights of pupils and the parents of pupils in programs that receive funding from the US Department of Education.

- **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)** administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau, HHS, authorizes federal funding for three programs—the Basic Center Program, Transitional Living Program, and Street Outreach Program—to assist runaway and homeless youth and is the only federal law that focuses on unaccompanied, homeless youth.

- **Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY)** As defined by RHYA, are youth with unstable or inadequate housing, i.e., youth who stay at least one night in a place that is not their home because they could not stay at home, ran away from home, did not have a home, and/or stayed at a shelter, outdoors, in a squat, a car or public transportation, under a bridge, or in a temporary arrangement with another person (i.e., couch surfing). (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence 2009)

- **Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS)** is an automated information tool designed to capture data on the runaway and homeless youth being served by FYSB's Basic Center Program and Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth (TLP). (Family and Youth Services Bureau 2012)

- **Service-Based Enumeration (SBE)** provides people without conventional housing an opportunity to be included in the census through enumerating selected service locations, such as shelters and soup kitchens that serve people without conventional housing.

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA**) is a branch of HHS that works to improve the quality and availability of substance abuse prevention, alcohol and drug addiction treatment, and mental health services.

- **Throw Away Youth** are either youth who are asked or told to leave home by a parent or other household adult, without adequate alternative care being arranged for the child by a household adult, and with the child out of the household overnight; or youth who are away from home and are prevented from returning home by a parent or other household adult, without adequate alternative care being arranged for the child by a household adult, and the child is out of the household overnight. (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence 2009)

- **Unaccompanied Homelessness/ Unaccompanied Youth** are youth in homeless situations who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

- **US Department of Justice (DOJ)** is the cabinet-level department responsible for the enforcement of the law and administration of justice.

- **US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)** coordinates the federal response to homelessness and creates a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to reduce and end homelessness in the nation while maximizing the effectiveness of the federal government in contributing to the end of homelessness. (USICH.gov 2013)

- **Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System (YRBSS)** monitors priority health risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States.

Executive Summary

Homelessness is devastating for young people. They often can't attend school, let alone graduate. They experience high rates of violence, sexual assault, physical illness, and behavioral disorders. To cope, many engage in drug use, prostitution, survival sex, or other illicit activities. Knowing how many youth are homeless is a critical first step in helping them, but it's not easy to count a hidden population. Nine communities across the United States set out to improve their counts through the Youth Count! Initiative. The Urban Institute observed their work and drew out promising practices and lessons for improvement.

Why Is It Important to Count?

We don't know how many youth are currently homeless. Not knowing the true size of the population makes it hard to measure progress in ending and preventing homelessness. Data collection that accompanies counts can provide a clearer picture of the characteristics and subgroups of homeless youth, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) youth, to better tailor services to their distinct needs.

Why Is It So Hard to Get an Accurate Count?

Government and nonprofit estimates of the number of homeless youth vary widely, from tens of thousands to over a million. Part of the difficulty is that different counts use different age ranges and definitions of homelessness. Also, methods often used for counting homeless adults don't accurately capture survival strategies common to youth, such as being mobile and transient, latching onto friends and staying in groups, or trying to hide in plain sight. Add to that the fact that many homeless youth don't want to be found. They may be fleeing abuse or fear being placed in foster care. Most aren't connected to formal supports such as the child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health systems, and many avoid or are unaware of available services.

What Is the Youth Count! Initiative?

The Obama administration has pledged to end homelessness for children, youth, and families by 2020. As part of that broader strategy, four federal agencies[1] launched Youth Count! to improve counts of unaccompanied homeless youth—those not connected to their families. Nine sites participated in the pilot. Boston conducted its point-in-time count in December 2012, the rest in January 2013.

The sites used various strategies, including conducting surveys, expanding their coverage areas to include places where youth

Nine Youth Count! sites
• Boston, MA
• Cleveland, OH
• Hennepin County, MN
• Houston, TX
• Los Angeles, CA
• New York City, NY
• King County/Seattle, WA
• Washington State
• Winston-Salem, NC

[1] The US Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Department of Education, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children, Youth and Families.

congregate, involving housed and homeless youth in the counts, and coordinating with schools. Five sites held magnet events with free meals and activities to draw in youth who don't use shelters or can't be located on the street. Many sites also engaged LGBTQ service providers in the counts.

Promising Practices

Through pre- and post-count interviews, observations during the count, and document review, the Urban Institute evaluated the pilot sites' strategies to examine how their experiences might guide future efforts. Some promising practices stood out.

- *Engage youth service providers.* These partnerships create opportunities to improve service delivery to homeless youth.
- *Engage LGBTQ partners.* Much can be learned from these service providers, particularly about how to find LGBTQ homeless youth, promote the count within the LGBTQ community, and create an environment where LGBTQ youth feel welcome.
- *Involve youth.* Youth were particularly helpful in pretesting and advising on the survey design, acting as outreach workers or guides to find homeless youth, and engaging homeless youth in the count.
- *Hold magnet events.* On the whole, magnet events successfully brought youth in to participate in the count. But they largely attracted homeless youth that were already connected to services, like shelters.
- *Use social media to raise awareness and outreach.* **Data** from other studies indicate that even youth living on the street use social media. It's unclear how effectively social media reached youth, but some count organizers felt that homeless youth used social media to spread the word about the count, leading to a larger-than-expected turnout at magnet events.
- *Measure housing instability, not homelessness.* Sites that asked survey questions about housing status were better able to measure broader definitions of homelessness. This allows communities to identify larger needs, beyond shelter alone.

Room for Improvement

Through site observations and interviews, we also found common themes for improvement.

- *Expand coverage.* Street counts could be improved by looking beyond known hot spots where youth gather to include areas selected at random.
- *Survey everyone or a representative sample.* The eight sites that surveyed youth were inconsistent in whom they picked to participate. In some sites, counters picked people to survey based on appearances, but most homeless youth look like their non-homeless peers. Sites that use a survey focused on housing status and who tell counters to approach everyone who looks the right age may end up with a more representative sample.
- *Determine the best survey.* Sites developed their own surveys, which led to inconsistent wordings, lengths, and protocols. More consistency is needed to reach a national estimate. Also, sites should pretest their surveys to identify the best wording, examine the effects of the survey length, and determine what type of training counters need.

- ***Engage schools.*** Sites had various degrees of success including schools in Youth Count! The data that schools use to identify homeless youth for school enrollment purposes should not be used for point-in-time counts, but schools can be important partners and should be engaged to help conduct outreach and raise awareness about the count.
- ***Improve outreach for magnet events.*** Future events should focus on attracting populations that aren't already connected to youth or homeless services.
- ***Avoid duplicate counts to prevent overestimating the number of homeless youth.*** Efforts should include methods to prevent counting the same youth twice. Technical assistance could help sites identify homeless youth who have already been counted.
- ***Improve training and quality control.*** Training sessions should include a comprehensive curriculum and should require counters to practice interviews. Also, future counts should include quality control procedures, such as observing counters at random intervals.
- ***Add a post-count debrief.*** After completing a count, sites should gather feedback from counters, service providers, and other participants. That feedback should be used to improve future counts.

Recommendations

We advise improving HUD's point-in-time counts of the homeless, which help shelters identify need, by focusing on homeless youth through magnet events and expanded coverage, and creating partnerships with schools, homeless youth providers, and those serving LGBTQ youth. We also recommend launching a national study on the characteristics of homeless youth. Possible methods include a school-based survey of all students and a survey of youth who use homeless shelters and other services, or a respondent-driven survey—where homeless youth receive incentives for referring others—that can reach hard-to-find youth and can provide estimates about subgroups (e.g., the share of homeless youth who are LGBTQ or who are couch surfing). In addition, policymakers should consider using existing national surveys to count doubled-up or couch-surfing youth.

If improved strategies are taken to scale nationwide, future counts may produce more accurate and useful data on the size and scope of the homeless youth population—taking us a step closer to preventing and ending homelessness.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Introduction

Youth Count! is an interagency initiative of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), the Department of Education (ED), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF). Youth Count! aims to "develop promising strategies for counting unaccompanied homeless youth."[2] In late 2012, nine communities were invited by the federal agencies to participate in Youth Count! The initiative was designed to improve collaboration in conducting point-in-time (PIT) counts among HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) providers, ACYF Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers, state and ED Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and other local stakeholders, in the expectation that such collaboration would improve communities' ability to include homeless unaccompanied youth in their PIT counts. A consortium of funders[3] selected the Urban Institute to conduct a cross-site process evaluation, with the goal of identifying Youth Count! strategies that could be adapted and taken to scale to produce credible and useful data nationwide. As part of this evaluation, researchers traveled to each of the Youth Count! sites to observe local efforts and identify challenges and best practices going forward. This report presents the Urban Institute's findings and recommendations.

Homelessness among Unaccompanied Youth

Unaccompanied homeless youth—those who are not connected to their families—face significant barriers to stable psychological, social, and emotional development. Homeless, runaway (youth who leave home of their own volition), system (youth who have been in and out of government programs) and throwaway youth (that is, those youth who are rejected by their families and cannot return home), often find it impossible to attend school, let alone perform well (National Coalition for the Homeless 2007; Murphy and Tobin 2011). In fact, fewer than one quarter of homeless youth in America graduate from high school (Murphy and Tobin 2011), facing common educational barriers such as a lack of transportation, stigma about homelessness, and a lack of support from the school district.[4] Ultimately, homeless youth face many other impediments to supporting themselves emotionally and financially, exacerbating the psychological and social conditions that often led to the homelessness in the first place. Homelessness exposes unaccompanied young people to higher rates of violence, sexual assault, involvement in illicit activities, physical illness (including HIV/AIDS), and behavioral disorders (Health Resources and Services Administration 2001; Hillis et al. 2012; National Network for Youth 1998; Rice 2011; Robertson 1989; Rotheram-Borus et al. 1991).[5] Their experiences while homeless set the stage for

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[2] For more on Youth Count! see http://www.usich.gov/population/youth/youth_count/.

[3] The following organizations supported this research: the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack County; Sisters of Charity Foundation; Hennepin County Administrator's Office; Funders Together of Houston, including, di Portanova Foundation, Frees Foundation , Simmons Foundation, United Way of Houston; California Wellness Foundation; Buckhantz Foundation; True Colors Fund; Palette Foundation; Weston Foundation; Gill Foundation; Arcus Foundation; United Way of King County; Raikes Family Foundation; Medina Foundation. We provide more detail on page 6 about this funding consortium.

[4] See *Education Barriers for Homeless Youth*, National Network for Youth (NN4Y) Issue Brief available for download here: http://www.nn4youth.org/system/files/IssueBrief_Education.pdf.

[5] Safe Horizon: http://www.safehorizon.org/index/what-we-do-2/helping-youth-14/streetwork-homeless-youth-facts-220.html.

developmental difficulties as they transition into adulthood and, potentially, prolonged dependency on expensive social services. Challenges in recognizing the true scope of homeless youth and their needs, diminish necessary and tailored spending and advocacy efforts (Auerswald, Lin, Petry, and Hyatt 2013).

Difficulties counting youth

Although policymakers recognize that homelessness among unaccompanied youth is a significant social problem, the actual numbers and characteristics of homeless youth remain unknown, for both methodological and pragmatic reasons. These estimates are generally not comparable because they use different age ranges, define homelessness in different ways, and use different search strategies. Additionally, the methods commonly used for counting adult homeless (e.g., shelter counts), do not accurately capture the survival strategies common to youth, such as being mobile and transient, latching onto friends and staying in groups, or trying to hide in plain sight.

The hidden, transient nature of homeless youth makes accurately counting them problematic (Raleigh-DuRoff 2004). Most are not part of formalized systems such as the child welfare, juvenile justice, or mental health systems and are considered a "hidden population." There are several factors that contribute to their being hidden or "lost in the shuffle" (Slavin 2001). First, many youth lack knowledge of services available. Homeless adolescents are in this unstable environment during a phase of life when they should be developing the critical skills and behaviors that facilitate functional participation in society. Without positive adult role models and a connection to standard socializing institutions (i.e., home and school), the youth learn from one another without the guidance and acquired knowledge of adults (Rew 2008). Next, unaccompanied youth underuse services because of perceived restrictive rules (e.g., the age minimum of a shelter) and concerns about confidentiality and mandated reporting (De Rosa, Montgomery, Kipke, Iverson, Ma, and Unger 1999). Finally, many shelters serve only adults, so in many cases even if youth sought shelter services, they may not meet the criteria for entry.

Very often, homeless youth fear the police or avoid social services involvement (Baer, Peterson, Wells 2004; Pergamit and Ernst 2010; Street Youth Task Force 2002; De Rosa, et al. 1999; Levin, et al. 2005). The various root causes that have led to homelessness, such as fleeing abuse, being kicked out of one's home, or escaping an inconsistent and unstable environment, relate to unaccompanied youth's distrust in people, especially authority figures (McManus, and Thompson 2008). Youth may fear being returned to the environment from which they left, have a pre-existing, contentious relationship with the "system" based on past experiences, or develop fear and paranoia as a symptom of the trauma they suffered prior or during homelessness (McManus, et. al, 2008; National Conference of State Legislatures 2010). Additionally, homeless youth often engage in illicit activities such as drug use, prostitution, or survival sex as coping mechanisms, and therefore avoid being detected to remain hidden and out of trouble (Kidd, and Scrimenti 2004). These fears are also coupled with a wariness of the stigma attached to being homeless and caution of being taken advantage of or being placed into foster care (if they are under 18) (Kurtz, Jarvis, Lindsey, and Nackerud 2000; Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, and Brokaw 2005).

A final contributor to the hidden nature of the homeless youth is victimization. As many as half have been assaulted or robbed, and one in ten runaways reports being raped (MacLean, Embry, and Cauce 1999). Much of the victimization is related to the unaccompanied youth's drug use, and the consequences are amplified by a lack of timely physical and psychological treatment.

Current estimates of homeless youth

Consequently, existing counts and estimates of homeless youth vary widely. For example, the federal government notes figures ranging from 22,700 (from a 2009 HUD count of sheltered homeless youth collected through Homeless Management Information Systems) to 1.6 million (estimated in 2004 by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]). SAMHSA's estimate reflects the number of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 who had run away from home and slept on the street during the previous year. Additionally, one US Department of Justice study, published in 2002, estimated that approximately 1.7 million young people were homeless at some time during the course of a full year; data was collected through the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (Hammer, Finkelhor, and Sedlak 2002). The National Alliance to End Homelessness, a national nonprofit, estimated in 2009 that the number of youth on the street was 110,000,[6] and then in 2012 used the NISMART-2 data to estimate the number of youth under age 18 who were away from home for more than week, generating an estimate of 380,000.

Table 1: Estimates of the numbers of homeless youth

Estimate of unaccompanied youth	Source	Methods	Timeframe
22,700	US Department of Housing and Urban Development	Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) shows that unaccompanied youth are about 2.2 percent of the sheltered population.	2009
1.7 million homeless youth under the age of 18 (1,682,900)	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the US Department of Justice: National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART-2)	Based on three components: the National Household Survey of Adult Caretakers, the National Household Survey of Youth, and the Juvenile Facilities Study.	1999 data collected, published in 2002
1.6 million youth (7 percent) between the	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services	National Survey on Drug Use and Health.	2004

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[6] See *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan for Preventing and Ending Homelessness*, 2010 available for download: http://www.usich.gov/opening_doors/.

ages of 12 and 17 had run away from home and slept on the street during the previous year.	Administration		
110,000 street youth	National Alliance to End Homelessness	NISMART-2	2009
380,000 youth under age 18 away for more than week	National Alliance to End Homelessness	NISMART-2 looked at specific amount of time spent homeless and frequency.	2012
150,000 youth age 18–24 use shelter	National Alliance to End Homelessness	Used Annual Shelter count: AHAR (collects 18-30) and applied general census proportions to captured 18-24 population.	2012

Importance of Counting Homeless Youth

Obtaining more accurate, detailed information on the prevalence, characteristics, and needs of homeless youth is a critical first step in developing an appropriate continuum of care and infrastructure of supports that will end or prevent their homelessness. In addition to understanding the number of youth who experience homelessness, it is important to know patterns of youth homelessness (e.g., street homeless, couch surfing, or a mixture), how long youth homeless spells last, continuing contacts with family, and if it is possible for a youth to return home. Better data on youth homelessness will strengthen the ability of agencies to advocate for resources locally and nationally. Further, getting a clearer picture of the characteristics of the homeless youth population and its subpopulations (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning [LGBTQ] youth, youth aging out of foster care, pregnant and parenting youth) will allow social services agencies to tailor resources to their specific needs.

Policy Context

Homelessness among unaccompanied youth has received increasing attention from the federal government. *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* released by the Obama Administration in June 2010, sets the goal of ending homelessness for children, youth, and families by 2020. In *Opening Doors* and its amendments*,* USICH commits to "incorporate best practices of homeless prevention . . . and the provision of services for youth who are currently homeless," and acknowledges that the needs of homeless youth are distinct from those of homeless adults and families. More recently, in February 2013, USICH published the *Framework to End Youth Homelessness*. This articulates two complementary strategies for achieving the goals outlined in *Opening Doors*: a data strategy, to "get better data on the numbers and characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness," and a capacity strategy "to strengthen and coordinate the capacity of federal, state, and local systems to

act effectively and efficiently toward ending youth homelessness" (USICH 2013, 3). USICH's data strategy includes four steps (USICH, 5):

1. Developing better strategies for counting youth in PIT counts of homelessness.
2. Coordinating the federal data systems collecting data on homelessness: HMIS for agencies serving all people experiencing homelessness individuals and families, and Runaway Homeless Youth Information Systems (RHYMIS) for agencies funded by HHS to serve runaway and homeless youth.
3. Launching a national study on the prevalence of youth homelessness and the characteristics of homeless youth.
4. Using a national study methodology to make periodic estimates of youth homelessness over time.

The Youth Count! Initiative is part of the strategy outlined in number one, to improve the PIT counts of homelessness so that communities are collecting more accurate numbers on unaccompanied homeless youth.

Youth Count! Initiative

To address the first step, a federal interagency youth homelessness working group, made up of staff from HUD, HHS, ED, and USICH, launched Youth Count!, a nine-site initiative to develop "promising strategies for counting unaccompanied homeless youth" in conjunction with the local HUD PIT counts.

To capture the number of homeless in the United States, HUD requires a PIT count. The PIT count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January. The sheltered count occurs annually and a street count (a count of unsheltered homeless) occurs every other (odd) year. These counts reveal the number of homeless persons in shelters and on the streets at a single point in time. Each count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally. Counts are further broken down into subpopulation categories based on information on length of homelessness, mental illness status, substance abuse, veteran status, HIV/AIDS status, and victimhood of domestic violence (HUD 2013).

Currently, the HUD PIT count, which is the main data source for tracking progress toward the goal of ending homelessness, is more effective at providing estimates for the general homeless population than for the homeless youth population. However, HUD PIT counts are conducted in every community around the country, and HUD requires that communities collect data on homeless youth. Improving these counts presents the best opportunity for capturing information on the numbers and characteristics of homeless youth. Additionally, at the local level, several communities have incorporated creative strategies to push the boundaries of data collection and obtain more accurate numbers on youth homelessness. The Youth Count! Initiative was designed in part to identify such promising practices for conducting collaborative PIT youth counts that engage a diverse continuum of stakeholders and understand the challenges involved in producing reliable, useful data on homeless youth.

Federal Youth Count! partners launched the initiative within a very tight time frame. Sites were selected in September 2012, and local planning took place until the end of January 2013, when most of the counts were conducted.[7] To support the pilot sites, the Youth Count! Initiative included a series of webinars in November and December 2012. The four webinars covered (1) an introduction to the initiative, (2) outreach and sampling, (3) training and preparing for the youth count, and (4) strategies for counting homeless youth, including HMIS and school data. The federal partners also convened a series of open forum calls designed to allow sites to facilitate dialogue among the sites regarding barriers and strategies as sites were planning their local counts.[8] Lastly, as a reference tool, the federal interagency youth homelessness working group developed a list of core data elements (CDEs) for collecting demographic and socioeconomic information from unaccompanied homeless youth. Many of the sites involved in the Youth Count! initiative used this reference tool to develop site-specific CDEs.

Youth Count! Cross-Site Process Study

Through philanthropic support, led by Funder's Together to End Homelessness, the Urban Institute was selected to conduct a cross-site process study to understand the pilot sites' strategies for counting homeless youth, identify promising practices, and highlight lessons learned that can be used to develop better methods for PIT youth counts across the country. The process study was funded by a consortium of foundations and local public agencies and included the following: the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack County; Sisters of Charity Foundation; Hennepin County Administrator's Office; Funders Together of Houston, including, di Portanova Foundation, Frees Foundation , Simmons Foundation, United Way of Houston; California Wellness Foundation; Buckhantz Foundation; True Colors Fund; Palette Foundation; Weston Foundation; Gill Foundation; Arcus Foundation; United Way of King County; Raikes Family Foundation; and the Medina Foundation.

As part of the evaluation, researchers from the Urban Institute conducted semi-structured interviews with key stakeholder groups during the planning stage, in-person observations of all but one[9] of the youth PIT counts, semi-structured interviews with key informants following the counts, and analysis of data from stakeholder interviews and surveys. The process study addressed a set of questions:

- Did Youth Count! increase the number of youth in the 2013 PIT compared to previous PITs?
- Did Youth Count! sites actively engage different types of agencies not previously participating in a PIT count, leading to expanded youth participation in the count?
- Did Youth Count! sites use new communication techniques (e.g., web-based, social media), and if yes, did these techniques attract more youth to participate?
  Did Youth Count! fulfill the expectations of local planners, including the youth who helped plan the count?
- Did Youth Count! sites employ strategies that other communities could effectively replicate?

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[7] Boston was the exception; its Youth Count! was conducted together with its PIT in mid-December, as has been its tradition for more than three decades. Thus of the nine Youth Count! sites, Boston had significantly less time to plan.
[8] Archives of these webinars can be found on the ICH website here http://www.usich.gov/population/youth/youth_count/.
[9] Boston conducted its count in December 2012, prior to the Urban Institute's contract.

For each element of the framework below, we describe the local approaches and gather perceptions as to why they were chosen and what effects flowed from those choices:

- *Planning*. Which organizations were involved in planning, outreach, counting, and absorbing lessons learned?
- *Target populations*. Which populations were selected, and how were they defined? Who was left out and why? What are the consequences of leaving them out?
- *Coverage*. What strategies were used to find and engage members of each target population? Where were the hot spots where youth congregate? Did the count use known locations? Did youth receive incentives to participate? If yes, was the availability of incentives widely known in advance; if so, did they increase participation? How complete was participation by youth and other service providers?
- *Time frame*: Did the count take place during the day, evening, or both? Did it take place in one 24-hour period or on multiple days?
- *Relationship to PIT*. How was the youth count integrated with the HUD PIT count, especially regarding older youth in adult shelters and collection of important data elements and other information not required for the HMIS?
- *Training and quality control.* How were counters/surveyors recruited, and how were they trained?
- *De-duplication and analysis*. How did sites assemble the data, de-duplicate, analyze, and report the results? How have they or will they use the data locally?

This final report documents the approaches of the pilot youth counts in each of the nine sites.

Chapter 2: Youth Count! Pilot Sites

Youth Count! is a partnership among federal agencies and communities across the country. The interagency working group sought volunteers from among the country's CoCs, and selected the final nine sites based upon several considerations. These included the potential for local philanthropic funding to support the count, local leadership and interest from RHY providers, active collaboration between the CoC and LEA homeless liaisons, the presence of youth service providers, and geographic diversity. Once the final selection was made, USICH reached out to each community's CoC lead, state homeless coordinator, and (where applicable) RHY providers. Because their strategies will inform federal guidance regarding including youth in PIT counts, sites were asked to integrate their youth PIT count strategies into their required 2013 HUD count, using methodologies consistent with HUD guidance, and to conduct surveys of homeless youth. Nine sites were selected to participate in the pilot:

- Boston, Massachusetts
- Cleveland, Ohio
- Hennepin County, Minnesota
- Houston, Texas
- Los Angeles, California
- New York City, New York
- King County/Seattle, Washington
- Washington State (with focus on Whatcom County)
- Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Each Youth Count! pilot site is described briefly here; appendix A provides a longer summary of each site.

Boston, Massachusetts

Boston was the first of the nine sites to conduct its youth count, which occurred on December 12, 2012, the night of Boston's annual PIT count. The youth component continued for another seven days, through December 18. Boston's effort was spearheaded by the Boston Emergency Shelter Commission, the lead agency in Boston's CoC. The youth count targeted unaccompanied youth ages 24 and younger, with a specific focus on youth ages 18 to 24 because the planners believe that this group comprises the majority of Boston's homeless youth.

Boston's youth count had sheltered and unsheltered components; both began concurrent with the annual PIT count. The unsheltered count was largely overseen by nonprofit service providers, who administered the youth survey as part of their general street outreach and direct service activities (e.g., providing primary health care). The survey had 25 questions covering demographics, living arrangements, sexual orientation, education, income, and where the person slept on December 12. In both the sheltered and unsheltered count, surveys were mostly self-administered, handed out by staff or put in places for youths to take and fill out on their own initiative. A school count was administered during the same week. The school survey was modified from the general youth survey; some questions

were deemed inappropriate by school administrators and eliminated from the survey. Unlike the general survey, the school survey required parental consent. School staff administered surveys in Boston's public and nine charter high schools. Boston held a YouthCount! debriefing this spring to discuss how to improve future youth counts.

Cleveland, Ohio

Cleveland's youth count was a collaborative effort of several partner agencies, overseen by the Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services. It occurred over several days, between midnight on January 23 and midnight on January 28, 2013. Although the youth component was not an explicit part of the general PIT count conducted on January 22, counters with the general PIT count carried youth surveys and administered them if they encountered unstably housed youth ages 24 and under. The multi-day time period was selected to capture a broader swath of youth whose housing security status might fluctuate by the day of the week.

The Cleveland youth count relied heavily on social media to publicize the count, and also to collect data on youth. A large share of the youth surveys were entered using an online youth survey form, accessed through terminals at Youth Count! events, shelters, drop-in centers, and other outlets. This figure includes a significant number of survey responses that staff manually entered into the online form based on responses recorded on paper survey cards used for street outreach and in places without computer access. The survey was administered by staff at partner agencies and a small group of youth volunteers with ties to partner agencies. The youth count consisted of several components—the unsheltered count was conducted in known hot spots and as part of regular street outreach; shelter providers administered the youth survey as part of regular services; and youth count volunteers also administered surveys in some shelters. The sites also incorporated Youth Count! events, participating in a community-wide annual homelessness "Stand Down"[10] and holding two large drop-in events plus daily drop-ins at a storefront in a major shopping and transportation hub. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District shared administrative data on unaccompanied youth in grades K–12. In its high schools, the school district helped publicize the Youth Count! survey and events. The district, however, administered its own alternative survey in high schools, which did not include questions they deemed too sensitive, including those on sexual orientation and gender identity. Responses to this alternative survey were shared with partners aggregated by grade level.

Hennepin County, Minnesota

Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness, the lead agency in the area's CoC, oversaw the county's first unaccompanied homeless youth count. The multi-agency, multi-partner effort was aligned with its general PIT count, occurring over one night (January 23, 2013) and one day (January 24, 2013). The county developed its own paper-based youth survey that collected all CDEs, asked youth where they slept on the night of January 23 and additional information about when and why they left home. The

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[10] http://www.handsonneo.org/HomelessStandDown.

survey relied on verbal consent and gave youth the option to self-administer the survey or have it read to them; in most cases, counters administered and filled out the surveys for respondents.

Focusing on youth (ages 25 and under) in schools, juvenile detention centers, shelters, and on the streets, the youth count involved several components. Social workers in 200 Hennepin County schools administered a slightly modified version of the youth survey (which did not ask for demographics since schools already have this information) on January 24 and 25. The county also asked all probation officers to review their caseloads and survey any precariously housed youth. The sheltered count was administered by paid staff or non-youth volunteers on the night of January 23, which was, coincidentally, the coldest night of the year. For the unsheltered count, held on the morning of January 24, counters were sent to known locations where youth typically go when shelters close. Hennepin County also held a magnet event at YouthLink, the county's main youth drop-in center. The site has already begun planning for next year's youth count. One possibility to improve the counts is conducting a school-wide survey of housing status for all students.

Houston, Texas

The Houston Coalition for the Homeless (the Coalition) organized Houston's first youth count, which was aligned with the general PIT count and consisted of an unsheltered and sheltered component, and a school count. (The site held an unofficial practice count a week before the official count.) The official sheltered and unsheltered PIT counts for adults and youth took place on the night of January 29, 2013. For the youth count, researchers at the University of Texas-Houston School of Public Health developed a youth-specific survey and later analyzed the responses. The survey contained 17 questions on demographics, sleeping locations, sexual orientation, gender identity, reasons for homelessness, and education status. Youth respondents were given a $5 McDonald's gift card as incentive for completing the survey. The site targeted youth ages 24 and younger, and was specifically interested in youth who are traditionally hard to count (doubled up, couch surfing, etc.). For the first time, the Coalition partnered with an LGBTQ-focused service center specifically to better reach LGBTQ through the count. Schools felt the youth survey's questions were too sensitive, and administered their own survey between January 30 and February 1 that asked only a couple of questions about housing status, and only of youth known to the schools' homeless liaisons. Only schools with significant numbers of economically disadvantaged or homeless students (per status at enrollment, if identified) were included in the count—14 high schools and three middle schools in eight school districts participated.

The general PIT and youth sheltered count was overseen by staff and volunteers at mainstream homeless and domestic violence shelters, and youth activity centers. The Coalition also hired volunteers, mostly graduate students in public health, to administer surveys at shelters that requested additional support counting youth. Volunteers with the Coalition attended a training session the day before the count. Houston's unsheltered youth count was overseen by Covenant House Houston, the area's only youth shelter, which serves 18- to 21-year-olds. Covenant House staff organized three outreach teams that drove around known places frequented by unaccompanied homeless youth, and surveyed and tallied them. These three youth count teams consisted of staff and past and present youth residents of

Covenant House; team members administered the surveys on the evening of the count. Covenant House was also in contact with counters in the adult PIT count; PIT counters were instructed to call Covenant House if they encountered any unaccompanied youth. On the day following the evening count, Coalition volunteers visited mainstream homeless, domestic violence, and youth shelters, and youth activity centers, and surveyed unaccompanied, homeless youth about where they stayed on the night of January 29.

King County/Seattle, Washington

Since May 2011, King County/Seattle has conducted Count Us In (CUI), a youth-specific PIT count that is distinct from HUD's general PIT count. To coordinate with Youth Count!, CUI occurred in January, marking the first time it took place in winter. CUI surveyed youth between 8 a.m. on January 24 and 5 a.m. on January 25. In contrast with the general PIT count, which asked for housing status the night of January 24, the CUI survey asked youth where they stayed the night of the 23rd. CUI's target population was homeless youth ages 12 to 25 who slept outside or in a tent, car/RV, hotel/motel, or abandoned/foreclosed building/squat on the night of January 23; there was a specific focus on youth of color. The one-page youth survey covered all but five CDEs, and was administered by all 18 participating agencies, either over the phone or in person. Agencies participating in CUI received stipends to support their efforts, and some directed these and other funds toward incentives.

CUI had both unsheltered and sheltered components, as well as magnet events and a limited school count. Five agencies, three in Seattle and two elsewhere in the county, conducted a street search to identify youth for the survey; they targeted known locations and primarily operated during the day of January 24. One agency also sent teams in mobile vans to different communities, and each team had a formerly homeless youth to help locate currently homeless youth. Youth shelters administered the survey the night of January 24, and the number of youth and young adults in shelter/transitional housing on January 23 was pulled from HMIS data. Surveys were not conducted at county schools (it is illegal in Washington to do so), but 15 of the 19 school districts submitted homeless youth numbers. Most participating agencies surveyed youth during regularly scheduled service hours; some also showed movies or held other activities to attract youth. Five agencies hosted slumber parties where youth were surveyed. These slumber party events were the only component of CUI that contributed numbers of youth to the CoC's general PIT count, as their whereabouts on the corresponding night was clearly known. Only youth at a slumber party event in the early morning of January 25 and youth staying in shelter and housing programs in the community were included in the total PIT count submitted to HUD.

Los Angeles, California

This marks Los Angeles' fifth annual youth count, which is overseen by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), the CoC's lead agency. LAHSA provided guidance to 22 youth-serving agencies across the city's eight service planning areas. The youth count consisted of an unsheltered street count, which took place during the day of January 22, 2013, and a sheltered youth count, which took place on January 29, 30, and 31. The shelter count was administered by shelter staff, and involved

youth ages 24 and younger who sought services and shelter during the sheltered count. The unsheltered count consisted of a tally of homeless youth; due to concerns about Institutional Review Board (IRB)issues and the sensitive nature of survey questions Los Angeles was the only site that did not do a youth survey. The site targeted unaccompanied youth ages 24 and younger, dividing them into two groups: (1) under age 18, and (2) 18 to 24 years old. To get more information about the 18- to 24-year-old group, the site added two questions to the general PIT survey for adults. The questions asked about sexual orientation and foster care involvement. LAHSA will compare responses to these questions for the 18-to-24 age group and the rest of the homeless population.

As part of the youth count, each service planning area was covered by teams that counted youth in pre-identified hot spots (Hollywood proved the exception: due to a significant homeless youth population, it used multiple teams from various youth serving agencies and a grid system to ensure 100 percent coverage). Teams were composed of staff from service agencies, and each participating service provider was responsible for recruiting homeless youth to provide expertise during the count. Counters relied on predetermined tactics to identify youth demonstrating characteristics of homelessness or who were known to be homeless. No identifying information was collected, just the age, sex, and location of the youth. LAHSA worked with schools to get numbers for youth who were homeless at the time of enrollment. LAHSA believes the data may be useful in supplementing data collected during the youth count.

New York City, New York

New York City's youth count included only youth who attended magnet events at 13 drop-in centers and transitional/supportive housing residences located throughout the city's five boroughs. It did not include searches of outdoor or public locations.

New York City's first youth count was organized by the city's CoC, and relied on partnerships with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, Department of Homeless Services (DHS), and Association of Youth Providers. The youth count occurred on the evening of January 28, 2013 and though it coincided with the timing of the city's general PIT count organized by DHS, the two counts operated independently of each other. NYC public schools were not involved in the count, which targeted runaway and homeless youth aged 24 and younger.

Youth learned about the count through social media and through word-of-mouth from staff at service centers they frequented throughout the day. Each of the drop-ins served food and held activities to occupy and attract youth on the evening of January 28. At the drop-ins, volunteers helped youth fill out a 27-question youth survey created by the CoC; for completing the survey, respondents received a $10 gift card and a transit card worth two rides. Questions on the youth survey gathered information on, among other things, where youth spent the previous night and other recent nights, if they had ever stayed in an adult shelter, education, employment, sexual orientation, gender identity, and whether they had ever been in foster care or juvenile detention. The only connection between the general PIT count and youth count—other than the timing and the fact that counted youth were added to the PIT

total—was that general PIT count volunteers had the option to direct homeless youth to the CoC's youth count, though they were not mandated to do so.

Washington State (focus on Whatcom County)

Whatcom County was one of four counties in the Washington Balance of State CoC to participate in the youth count. The Whatcom youth count's lead agency was Northwest Youth Services (NWYS), which provides shelter and services to homeless youth. The youth count took place between January 24 and February 6, 2013 and included an unsheltered count on January 24 and a sheltered count, with a magnet event. For the sheltered count, Whatcom shelters and warm-meal programs surveyed youth on the night of January 24. NWYS staff interviewed youth between January 24 and 31. East Whatcom Regional Community Center staff interviewed walk-in youth clients between January 24 and February 6. NWYS also held a magnet event on the evening of January 24, inviting youth ages 13 to 24 to use the facilities and be interviewed. NWYS took the lead in the unsheltered count, which focused largely on Bellingham and was largely youth-led. Paid, formerly homeless peer outreach workers helped NWYS develop a targeted canvassing strategy for the unsheltered count.

The youth survey targeted unaccompanied youth ages 24 and under. It was developed by the four participating counties (Whatcom, Clallam, Skagit, and Thurston) in collaboration with the Washington Department of Commerce (HMIS administrator), though each county modified the survey to meet its needs. The survey included many CDEs, and some additional CDEs were obtained through indirect questions about foster care, sexual orientation, gender identity, and justice involvement. Signed consent was required in order to enter identifying information into HMIS. There was no collaboration with the schools, as state laws prohibit sharing individual-level information about homeless youth with service providers. In the future, the Balance of State planning group expects to work with state-level personnel over the next year to build relationships with schools.

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Winston-Salem's youth count was incorporated into the general PIT count on January 30 and January 31, 2013, primarily in the form of a youth-targeted magnet event, Youth Spot, which took place on the night of January 30. Also, as part of the general count, a youth-specific survey was administered to homeless youth. The lead agency, United Way of Forsyth County, has several years of experience with general counts, but this was the first year it included a youth focus through Youth Spot and the development of a separate youth-specific survey. A youth board of formerly homeless or foster care youth advised organizers on survey design, outreach, and event planning. Framed as a housing status survey, the youth survey consists of questions developed by a local data organization. It was to be administered to anyone 24 years old and under experiencing any kind of housing problem. Youth surveys were given to some street counters and shelters. Ultimately, the only completed youth surveys were administered by staff at Youth Spot.

The Youth Spot magnet event took place in a downtown location and offered snacks, games, and movies; it drew about a dozen attendees between ages 18 and 24, who mostly came from one shelter and thus would have been counted anyway. The low attendance was partly due to lack of advertising. North Carolina's mandatory reporting law compelling adults to report homeless youth to the police may also have made youth wary of Youth Spot. The unsheltered count for the regular PIT divided the city into seven regions, each covered by a team of volunteers who first asked for age and were supposed to administer the youth-specific survey to anyone 24 years old or younger, but the unsheltered count did not identify any homeless youth. Shelters were supposed to administer the youth survey to any youth accessing services; though some shelters provided transportation to Youth Spot, many were not aware of or did not receive the youth surveys. Next year, Winston-Salem will try to simplify the survey procedure to integrate with the regular PIT count and facilitate broader shelter participation.

Chapter 3: Planning

Expanding PIT homeless counts to obtain better estimates of unaccompanied homelessness youth requires major effort. All nine pilot sites did significant planning for the count, but all noted that they needed more time. This chapter describes the planning undertaken by the pilot sites, including the planning period, participants involved, the resources they tapped, and the challenges they faced.

Planning Period

All nine pilot sites felt the pressure of the short time frame to plan their local Youth Count! The nine communities committed to Youth Count! October 2012. Most aimed to conduct their youth count during the last 10 days of January 2013 that HUD specifies for the PIT count, giving them a short time to plan, mobilize, and complete the count. Eight sites held their youth counts between January 22 and January 30, 2013. Boston, which has conducted its PIT count during the same time for the past 33 years, conducted its youth count on December 12, 2012, coterminous with its PIT count. Boston thus had only six weeks to get organized. New York City had to contend with the disrupting effects of Hurricane Sandy in the middle of its planning period. In addition, the FY 2014 CoC applications for continued funding of homeless programs were due to HUD on January 18, 2013—an intense, time-consuming undertaking that created time conflicts for CoC staff and for staff at some youth-serving agencies that receive HUD funding.

Participants Involved in Planning

The CoC lead agency was the Youth Count! lead in all nine sites. Other participants included homeless youth service providers; other agencies with an exclusive or primary youth focus; agencies with RHY funding; adult homeless shelters, especially family and domestic violence shelters; state and local education and school district officials; and interested stakeholders, such as United Way or government agencies responsible for youth services. The number of different stakeholders that participated in planning and organizing youth counts ranged from three in Whatcom County, a largely rural county in the Washington State, to 20 or more in Hennepin County, Houston, King County/Seattle, and other larger Youth Count! communities. Participation levels reflected both the existence of relevant agencies and pre-Youth Count! levels of organization for serving homeless and other troubled youth.

Two pilot sites engaged existing youth-focused networks. In Boston, the CoC lead took the challenge of Youth Count! to Homeless Youth Providers Engaging Together, an association of Boston and Cambridge agencies, some of whose members took on most of the Youth Count! planning and organizing. In Houston, the CoC lead engaged the Homeless Youth Network as one participant in a larger planning structure that involved subcommittees working on different tasks.

Not all pilot sites have such strong youth provider networks, but previous youth counts had created a network of involved stakeholders that took part and expanded for Youth Count! Hennepin County has conducted homeless counts four times a year for many years, and has worked to include unaccompanied youth in those counts in recent years, though 2013 marked Hennepin's first official

youth count. As a result, it had considerable prior experience, which helped make planning and execution go relatively smoothly. This year marked the fifth time Los Angeles made a special effort to count homeless youth as part of its PIT count, so planners could reach out to a known group of previously involved agencies. For 2013, Los Angeles expanded its geographic coverage area, reaching locations that previously had been left out. Similarly, this was the third iteration of the King County/Seattle Count Us In effort for youth. The prior experiences helped there, but changing the time frame from spring to January to coincide with the HUD PIT count introduced some new challenges.

Planning Roles

Sites with multiple stakeholders involved in Youth Count! planning typically established a smaller group, usually of three to five people or organizations, to serve as a steering committee, or as subcommittees as in the case of Hennepin County. All pilot sites had the autonomy to make decisions about their count's general framework—when to hold the count, what activities to include, who to involve, and what definition of homeless youth to employ. Specific planning roles included youth-specific survey development (all but Los Angeles), organizing the unsheltered count (identifying locations and people to conduct the searches—all but New York City), organizing magnet events (five sites), arranging for surveys in schools (four sites), working with adult shelters to conduct surveys, and advertising/spreading the word. In the sites that did youth-specific unsheltered counts, identifying unsheltered hot spots and conducting youth-specific street searches were tasks assigned to the youth-serving agencies with street outreach experience, often with the help of current and former homeless youth. In communities that held magnet events, planning and execution usually fell to the agencies hosting the events. Some sites used separate groups to organize the shelter count and the survey.

Planning Resources

All nine sites participated in Youth Count! webinars and reported that they were helpful. The communities with prior experience counting homeless and other troubled youth benefitted from lessons they learned from previous years, as well as the organizational connections that have grown from those efforts. Lessons from previous youth counts led these communities to make some of the following changes: modifying their surveys, changing the timing of the count, expanding school involvement, and soliciting greater participation from youth-serving agencies. A couple of sites started survey development with a survey previously used for a different purpose (i.e., for youth, but not for a homeless count). One community involved a university-based sampling specialist in planning the unsheltered counts for both adults and youth, and several used university or other data-savvy people to help with analyzing the Youth Count! results. No sites reported performing a literature search, and several commented that they did not have time for much resource identification other than the webinars and were happy that the webinars covered a lot of what they needed.

Planning the Date

Eight of the sites' youth counts coincided with the dates of 2013 HUD PIT count, including night searches and next-day survey administration, if these were already part of the adult PIT. The exception, Los Angeles, held its unsheltered youth count a week prior to the HUD PIT count. Boston, Cleveland, Houston, King County, and Whatcom County extended the time for counting youth up to a week, because they felt it gave them a chance to reach more youth. Sites took different approaches to

establishing a count corresponding to the PIT's 24-hour period; one added to the PIT only those youth counted during the same night as the PIT, while others added youth counted later for whom homeless status could be determined on the night of the PIT.

Planning Challenges

The sites identified a number of challenges in designing their youth counts.

Too little time. All nine sites felt pressure from the short planning period. Multiple demands cut into planning time, count organizing, and the ability of some youth-serving agencies to participate in the count. The time frame proved to be especially problematic for programs and agencies that had to get IRB approval for a survey. Boston had less than half the time of the other sites and New York City faced the added pressure of coping with damage from Hurricane Sandy. All nine sites felt they could have gotten more agencies and other stakeholders involved given more time, and all said they would work on this for the next count.

Too little capacity and too many hats. A number of sites reported that they had very little capacity to carry out the count and the staff person within the lead agency had to wear other "hats" in addition to designing and implementing the count. Since most CoCs do not have research staff, this is a common problem with the PIT counts in general. Also, the CoC funding applications were due to HUD right before the counts took place at the end of January and many of the providers we talked to were involved in the application process.

No additional resources. Similar to the PIT counts, there was no additional federal funding available to support the youth counts. The nine pilot sites had to seek funding support elsewhere—either from grants where permissible or from private sources—or they had to rely on staff and volunteers to conduct the count. The lack of resources meant that sites had to rely on internal capacity for research design, implementation, and analysis. Some of these tasks would be better suited for research organizations or universities.

Lack of expertise. Most of the staff in charge of designing the youth counts was not trained researchers. Some sites did rely on methodological expertise supplied by researchers from local universities or research firms, but there were limits to relying on these sources without additional resources to compensate them for their time. As one site noted, they did not ask the university to help design the count because they had to rely on them to analyze the results and did not want to ask too much.

Chapter 4: Involving Youth in the Count

Involving youth in the local counts can enhance their coverage, accuracy, and acceptability to other youth, as well as giving those specific youth a chance to have their contributions valued. But it also takes work and planning. As part of its webinar series that supported this initiative, ACYF presented ideas on how sites could include youth in the local counts and highlighted the importance of training so that youth were fully prepared to fulfill their roles, whatever they might be.[11] We found that at almost all of the pilot sites, youth were involved in various ways, including contributing to the planning and implementation. Only one site did not include youth in planning for or conducting the count at all. Boston, which conducted its count in mid-December instead of the end of January, cited the tight turnaround in developing and administering the survey as a barrier to including youth. Staff from Boston expressed interest in including youth in the design, planning, and implementation of future counts. Most organizations relied more on paid, professional staff than on volunteers of any age to administer surveys. This chapter describes the different ways youth were involved in the count. Table 2 provides an overview by site.

Table 2: How sites involved youth in Youth Count!

	Design advice and cultural competency	Identifying hot spots, known locations, or raising awareness	Testing the survey instrument	Counters and surveyors	Street or encampment outreach
Site					
Boston					
Cleveland	X	X	X	X	
Hennepin County			X		X
Houston				X	
Los Angeles		X		X	
New York City				X	
Seattle/King County		X			
Whatcom County			X	X	X
Winston-Salem	X	X	X		

Providing Design Advice and Cultural Competency

Youth have their own culture and language (Janssen, Dechesne, and Van Knippenberg 1999; Schwartz and Merten 1967; Steinberg 2008). Several sites reported their belief that it helped to consult with young people on the design of the count to make sure the design and survey were "culturally

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[11] See "Training and Preparation for Youth Count!: Involving Youth, Universities, & Volunteers Youth Count!" webinar series http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/resource/training-for-youth-count.

competent." One approach to making sure the count considered the viewpoint of youth was to create an advisory board. Winston-Salem, for example, created a youth board of formerly homeless or foster care youth. The board, assembled by a local organization providing counseling and services to youth transitioning out of foster care, gave advice on survey design, outreach and advertising strategies, and magnet event planning. Board members even told the count organizers how to dress at the magnet events ("No pearls, wear jeans!") to make youth attending the event more comfortable.

Testing the Survey Instrument

Several sites including Hennepin County, Cleveland, Houston, and Whatcom County conducted focus groups or consulted youth about the survey design. In Hennepin County, People Serving People, a family homeless shelter, conducted a focus group with six participants, most of whom were women and mothers of young children. The final version of the survey was revised based on their feedback. Before its youth count, Whatcom County asked youth to take the survey and provide feedback. Cleveland assembled a focus group of youth under age 24 who were either previously homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to discuss issues related to the survey.

Raising Awareness

Youth were also involved in raising awareness about the count. For example, Cleveland engaged youth through social media tools such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. The extent to which these strategies succeeded in attracting more youth to participate in the count is not clear, since there is no counterexample or history available for comparison. From an investment perspective, it takes staff time to update social media tools and fully engage the public, but on the other hand there is no fee associated with using these tools and they can reach a lot of people. Cleveland was the Youth Count! site that made the most extensive use of social media. Its Facebook account received 80 likes and its Twitter account was followed by 315 people. Count organizers also used a YouTube channel as a platform to encourage youth to post videos about experiences with homelessness.

Identifying Hot Spots and Known Locations

During their planning phase, a number of sites (Cleveland, Los Angeles, Seattle/King County, and Winston-Salem) asked youth to identify places homeless youth may congregate. The youth pointed to afterschool hangouts or identified encampments where homeless youth might sleep. Several sites augmented information provided by street outreach teams with assistance from current and former homeless youth who helped identify indoor and outdoor youth hot spots. Indoor hot spots included transportation hubs, all-night cafes and restaurants, food banks and feeding programs, health clinics, libraries, recreation centers, and shopping malls. Outdoor hot spots included specific street locations, encampments in and beyond central cities, parks and vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and in one case, a railroad yard with empty boxcars.

These strategies worked reasonably well but were subject to the same challenges faced in regular PIT count efforts to identify hot spots. Several sites noted that places known as youth hangouts were empty or nearly empty when youth count enumerators reached them. In Whatcom County, two of the three known camps were empty because police had cleared them out a few nights before.

Street or Encampment Outreach

In Hennepin County, Houston, and Washington State, youth were involved in outreach and engagement. In Hennepin County, StreetWorks sent three peer street outreach workers to recruit youth to complete the survey. Northwest Youth Services received a street outreach grant prior to the youth count, which enabled it to hire two formerly homeless youth to participate in pre-count and day-of youth count activities. On the day of the youth count, the peer workers joined the paid outreach workers to conduct the survey. One peer worker also worked as part of a two-person team including a paid outreach worker, so that no peer outreach worker or paid outreach workers were on their own.

Counting or Surveying Homeless Youth

In addition to outreach, where youth were included to engage homeless youth at given locations and encourage them to take the survey, some sites had youth administer the survey directly. Youth were quite effective at engaging their peers in the count, but their effectiveness in conducting the surveys varied considerably. In some sites (Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington State), youth filled the roles of volunteer or paid counters. In New York City, several locations (Covenant House and Schaefer Hall) had youth volunteers who at some point in time were homeless and used services at those locations. In Los Angeles, each participating service provider was responsible for bringing homeless youth from their program. Each youth was included in the team of counters and adults from the service agencies that went out during the count. Youth counters involved in the count received $50 gift cards to Target or Ross for participating in the count, compensating them for their expertise and time.

Some Youth Count! sites resisted the idea of youth surveying other youth. Staff at these sites expressed concerns with respect to youth asking their peers about sensitive topics and whether youth were well-equipped to ask questions or handle situations professionally. Staff at the King County/Seattle site, for example, discouraged participating agencies from having youth administer the survey; the site wanted surveyed youth and young adults to feel that the survey was confidential, and thought that youth might not be as willing to answer sensitive questions to a peer. Hennepin County did not have youth administer the survey because it felt that adding training was not feasible given current workloads.

Chapter 5: Defining the Population

The first step to getting a better count of unaccompanied homeless youth is to make sure the population is defined clearly. Youth Count! left it up to the sites to define unaccompanied homeless youth and as a result, sites varied in their approach.[12] To define the population, the pilot sites had to operationalize three terms: homeless, unaccompanied, and youth. Many of the homeless service providers involved in Youth Count! have grants from different federal agencies, including HUD, HHS, and ED. All of these agencies have different definitions of homelessness and the pilot sites adopted their preferences based on these definitions, or developed their own definition. This chapter describes the federal definitions of homelessness and how the sites defined the population.

Federal Definitions of Homeless

HUD, ED, and HHS all administer programs that serve homeless youth; these programs, based on statute, use different definitions of what constitutes homelessness. HUD provides emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing funded by the McKinney Homeless Assistance programs. HHS provides funding for basic centers, transitional living, and street outreach through programs authorized by the RHYA. ED provides services to homeless youth through the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY). Services offered under EHCY include expedite enrollment, transportation to school, tutoring, and mental and physical health referrals. Each agency has its own definition of homeless youth.

Department of Housing and Urban Development

HUD recently refined its definition of homelessness following changes required by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing HEARTH Act of 2009.[13] The revised definition comprises four broad categories of homelessness, and includes a new category that applies specifically to families with children or unaccompanied youth. According to the new definition, individuals who qualify as homeless include the following:

- People who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or who are exiting an institution after up to 90 days, provided they were in shelter or a place not meant for human habitation prior to entering the institution.
- People who are losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel, hotel or doubled-up situation, within 14 days and lack resources or support networks to remain in housing.
- Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state. This applies to families with children or unaccompanied youth (up to age 24) who have not had a lease or ownership interest in a housing unit in the last 60 or more days, have

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[12] It is important to note that, for the purposes of the PIT, sites still only reported on youth that met the HUD definition.
[13] The final regulation on HUD's new definition of homelessness went into effect on January 4, 2012. For more on what this act includes, please visit HUD's website http://www.hudhre.info/hearth/.

had two or more moves in the last 60 days, and who are likely to continue to be unstably housed because of disability or multiple barriers to employment.

- People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening situations related to violence; have no other residence; and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

Department of Education
ED's definition of homeless children and youth refers to school aged individuals who lack a "fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence," and includes

1. Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.
2. Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
3. Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
4. Migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (1) through (3).

Department of Health and Human Services
HHS administers Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) funds to street outreach, shelter, and transitional living programs that address the needs of runaway and homeless youth. RHYA covers several categories of youth in need, including homeless youth, runaway youth, street youth, and youth at risk of separating from the family. They are defined as follows:

- Homeless youth refers to an individual who, depending on the particular circumstance, is less than 22 years old and for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who has no other safe alternative living arrangement.
- Runaway youth refers to an individual who is younger than 18 years old and who absents him- or herself from home or a place of legal residence without the permission of a parent or legal guardian.
- Street youth means a runaway youth or indefinitely or intermittently homeless youth who spends a significant time on the street or in other areas that increase the risk to such youth for sexual abuse or exploitation, prostitution, or drug abuse.
- Youth at risk of separation from the family refers to an individual who is less than 18 years of age, and either has a history of running away from the family; has a parent or guardian who is not willing to provide for his or her basic needs; or is at risk of entering the child welfare or juvenile justice system as a result of the lack of services available to the family to meet these basics needs.

Definition of "Homeless"

Most of the pilot sites—Boston, Cleveland, Hennepin County, Houston, King County/Seattle, New York City, Winston-Salem, and Washington State—wanted to capture the housing instability that often characterizes youth homelessness. These sites asked general housing questions with the goals of being able to quantify how many youth met the HUD homeless definition and how many met the ED definition. Boston, for example, collected eight different measures of homelessness among school-age youth from which it can construct groups meeting both ED and HUD definitions. Houston kept its parameters close to those of the RHYA (i.e., unsheltered, sheltered, doubled up, or in a motel without someone 25 years or older from the person's household). Only Los Angeles limited the population to the HUD definition, but it did not do a survey and so had only a person's location to use as a guide to homeless status.

Definition of "Youth"

The definition of youth is driven by the age range of unaccompanied youth, as decided by the pilots. Almost all of the sites used 24 years old as the upper age cut off. King County was the only pilot site that went above 24 years old, capping its age range at 25 years old. For the lower end of the age range, most of the sites left it undefined. King County/Seattle set the lower age at 12 years old; Cleveland set it at 13 years old.

Definition of "Unaccompanied"

Most of the sites used ED's definition of unaccompanied status–not staying with a legal parent or guardian. This is usually straightforward for youth who are homeless, sleeping on the street or in shelter, but not for youth who are doubling up with friends or family. For doubled-up youth, it is less clear whether or not they are unaccompanied; for example, youth who are staying with kin informally, even with state recognition. Schools pay careful attention to parent/legal guardian status, and count every child, of whatever age, as an unaccompanied youth if the caretaker is not the parent and not a legally established guardian. Thus, schools may list children as young as six as unaccompanied youth if they are not living with a parent or guardian.

Table 3 summarizes how each of the sites defined homeless, youth, and unaccompanied for the purposes of Youth Count!

Table 3: Defining "unaccompanied homeless youth"

	Homeless	Youth	Unaccompanied
Boston	Developed eight different measures of homelessness among school-age youth.	24 and under	Not with parent or legal guardian.
Cleveland	Tried to tease out youth living in doubled-up or couch surfing situations; also included youth in shelters or on the streets, and in vehicles or abandoned buildings.	From 13 to 24	Not staying with legal guardian or parent.
Hennepin County	Staying in shelter; juvenile detention centers; transitional housing; with friends or relatives; in emergency foster care; in a hotel paid for by someone else; outside; in an abandoned building, public space, car or other place not meant for human habitation; or all night on the bus or in another public place.	24 and under	Not living with parents or legal guardians or in their own place.
Houston	Kept parameters close to those of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (i.e., unsheltered, sheltered, doubled up, or in a motel without someone 25 or older from the person's household).	24 and under	Not living with parents or legal guardians, or in a motel/doubled-up situation, not living with someone 25 or older from the same household.
Los Angeles	Used the HUD definition.	24 and under	Not staying with legal guardian or parent.
New York City	Asked questions that allowed sorting into youth who meet HUD, ED, and HHS definitions, including unstably housed youth (couch surfers)	24 and under	Not with parent or legal guardian.
King County/Seattle	Youth who stay with their parents, a friend or a relative or in their own apartment or house, but who do not know if they can stay at that place for the next month. Youth in transitional housing or shelters, or who slept in one of the following places: outside, a tent, in a car or RV, in a hotel or motel, or in an abandoned or foreclosed building or squat.	From 12 to 25 for youth count; from 12 to 24 for PIT count	Not with parent or legal guardian.
Washington State	Used both the HUD and ED definitions of homeless youth, counting those literally defined as homeless and youth who are doubled up or couch surfing.	24 and under	Not with parent or legal guardian.
Winston-Salem	Left the definition deliberately broad; aimed to survey anyone experiencing housing problems of any kind, including couch surfers, temporary runaways, and any doubled-up youth, as well as those who are chronically homeless.	24 and under	Not with parent or legal guardian.

Target Populations

Some pilot sites identified populations they wanted to reach during the count. These populations included couch-surfers and doubled-up youth, pregnant youth or youth with young children, youth living in juvenile detention centers, youth of color, and LGBTQ youth. If a site targeted a subpopulation, it usually included some type of outreach activity to make sure that the subpopulation was counted. For example, Hennepin County reached out to detention center caseworkers to administer the Youth Count! survey. However, follow-through to ensure the surveys were completed was limited due to lack of capacity. Sites that wanted to target pregnant teens often looked to family shelter providers to count this subpopulation, though they recognized that youth often do not use adult shelters. Some sites (Winston-Salem and Houston, for example) have no shelters for youth under 18, who will often double up with friends or family, so they were particularly interested in reaching youth in those situations. Making sure doubled-up youth are counted remains a big challenge, according to all the sites.

LGBTQ Youth

LGBTQ youth comprise a significant share of the homeless youth population. Though precise estimates are hard to come by, the National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that LGBTQ youth comprise approximately 20 percent of all homeless youth.[14] A recent survey of service providers put the estimate as high as 40 percent (Durso and Gates 2012). Regardless of the exact proportion, LGBTQ youth are overrepresented among homeless youth, and ending youth homelessness requires special attention to this subpopulation. LGBTQ youth who become homeless may be at risk for sexual exploitation and violence on the street. Because they may feel unwelcome or uncomfortable at many homeless shelters, LGBTQ youth may choose not to access shelters or other services. Getting better estimates of the size of the LGBTQ homeless youth population and the background, issues, and needs of this subpopulation is a first step toward providing them with better services. The sites adopted several strategies to identify and engage LGBTQ youth in the count.

Asking survey questions specifically about sexual orientation. All of the sites that conducted a survey asked questions about sexual orientation and gender identity. Most sites directly asked the questions, while others like Whatcom County included sexual orientation and gender identity as possible responses to a question about why the youth left home. We discuss survey questions on this topic further in chapter 6.

Partnering with LGBTQ agencies. Collaborating with agencies that serve the population was a common method that sites used to increase their LGBTQ youth outreach. For example, Houston's lead agency partnered with Montrose Center, a LGBTQ-focused social services center. Although Hennepin County did not do any specific targeting of LGBTQ youth, the site's planners believe they captured some of the population through the LGBTQ Host Home Program, a program that provides LGBTQ youth with safe homes and support. King County/Seattle did some targeting of LGBTQ youth and young adults by partnering with the Lifelong AIDS Alliance, but key informants noted that outreach to LGBTQ youth

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[14] http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/lgbtq-youth

could have been improved, particularly by partnering with additional organizations that target and specifically serve LGBTQ youth. Many of the key LGBTQ-serving agencies in Boston and Cleveland were key partners in those counts.

Conducting counts in places that LGBTQ youth frequent. Less frequently, sites identified community locations where LGBTQ youth are known to congregate. For example, prior to Whatcom County's youth count, organizers had planned to survey youth at the Bellingham Alternative Library, a known hangout for LGBTQ youth. Unfortunately, due to lack of capacity on the day of the unsheltered youth count, no teams were dispatched to this site and there were no additional activities or outreach that targeted this population.

Showing signs of support through the use of LGBTQ messaging. Two of the sites—Houston and Winston-Salem—showed support for LGBTQ youth by wearing stickers from the True Colors Fund, a foundation dedicated to ending homelessness among gay and transgender youth.

Chapter 6: Youth Count! Surveys

Youth Count! not only sought to quantify the number of unaccompanied youth who were homeless at a point in time, but also to understand their characteristics and how long they had been homeless. To collect these data, pilot sites administered survey questionnaires. This chapter describes the survey design (i.e., introduction, length, mode, respondents, pre-test, IRB, and consent), survey questions, use of incentives and challenges with responses.

Survey Design

Eight of the nine sites developed a questionnaire to survey youth. Los Angeles chose not to survey youth, relying instead on its counters' best judgments to collect general demographic information (i.e., age range, sex, and location) for homeless youth. For the most part, sites adopted the CDEs they found in the federal interagency youth homelessness working group reference tool. A majority of sites (Boston, Cleveland, Hennepin County, King County/Seattle, Whatcom County, and Winston-Salem) also referred to existing surveys (PIT count surveys, other homeless surveys, and other surveys of youth for various purposes) to inform their survey protocols. A few sites solicited external help. Winston-Salem worked with a local community policy research organization to design its youth survey. Hennepin County convened a subcommittee with representatives from shelter and outreach providers, youth-serving organizations, and schools to develop more in-depth and service-relevant questions and to pre-test its survey. Finally, Houston looked to its local university's school of public health for survey development.

Introducing the survey. When administering the survey, each site developed a script for explaining the survey's purpose. A majority of the sites framed its surveys as "housing status" surveys rather than "homelessness" surveys. The rationale behind this approach was that it was less stigmatizing and that the survey would include all vulnerable youth, rather than only those who were homeless, as the site wanted to develop services for prevention and assistance to all youth facing unstable housing. Further, many youth do not consider themselves homeless if they are doubling up or couch surfing, and might not respond to a survey about homelessness. As a result, most sites asked volunteers and staff to refrain from using the term "homeless" when presenting the survey to youth. They typically informed youth that the survey would be used to learn more about where the youth stay and how to improve services for youth and direct more resources toward them. Boston and Hennepin County are the only two sites that framed their surveys as homeless youth surveys to the respondents themselves.

Length. A majority of sites included about 17 to 25 closed-ended questions and a couple of open-ended questions. King County/Seattle kept its survey to one side of one page to minimize burden and maximize the response rate. New York City's survey was two columns on both sides of the page. Winston-Salem had the longest survey, with about 38 closed-ended questions.

Mode of administration. In most sites, adults administered the surveys; however, in some sites (Houston, Cleveland, and Whatcom County) youth also administered surveys. Most of the adult surveyors were staff of youth-serving agencies, but interns and volunteers were used extensively in

some sites (such as in Houston). Other volunteers were often professionals, as in New York City, which recruited volunteers for the youth count from among staff of the many family, children, and youth serving agencies other than those devoted to homeless and high-risk youth. Among sites that did not allow youth administration of the survey, this decision stemmed from concerns about youth asking their peers sensitive questions and whether youth were well-equipped to answer questions or handle situations professionally.

Unlike the other sites, which relied on an interviewer reading the questions to the youth, Boston and Cleveland allowed youth respondents to complete the survey on their own. Boston distributed surveys to many youth-serving programs, which in turn had the surveys available and asked youth to take, complete, and return them. Cleveland created a poster describing the purpose of the count and requesting youth complete the survey online, though survey cards were also distributed to some youth to complete the survey on paper. The posters and the survey cards were distributed widely through agencies and programs likely to encounter youth. At the magnet events in Cleveland, counters helped the youth complete the portion on housing stability and generally had youth complete the remaining sections independently (demographics, education/employment, and personal history). Cleveland's surveyors found that, contrary to their expectations, many youth were more wary of privacy violations via the web than they were talking directly to surveyors and having their answers recorded by hand.

In most sites, most surveys were completed in person during outreach on the streets and in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, drop-in centers, and other known locations such as libraries, abandoned buildings, shopping malls, and fast-food restaurants. In one site, caseworkers at youth-serving agencies called clients they knew were waiting for housing; if the youth had not already taken the survey and was willing, the caseworker would administer the survey on the phone.

Respondents. Prior to the unsheltered count, outreach staff worked to target known hot spots and youth camps, and assigned/dispatched teams to these locations. For example, in Whatcom County, staff at NWYS hired two formerly homeless youth to help develop a strategy for surveying youth at sites where youth are known to congregate, such as bus depots, food banks and distribution centers, and youth camps. In determining who to survey, most sites relied on the knowledge and expertise of experienced, professional youth outreach staff and workers. These outreach workers often had direct experience working with homeless populations, and either directly administered surveys or provided interview technique guidance to peer interviewers or volunteer interviewers (most of whom had experience working with youth).

In many locations, volunteers joined outreach workers and staff on the day of the count and visited the targeted sites to survey youth. Volunteers were trained by outreach staff to approach anyone who looked like they might be within the age range. In some sites, counters were told to interview all youth they came across within the target age range; while in other sites, counters were trained to survey only youth within the age range who appeared to be unsheltered or unstably housed. This latter approach is problematic, as it is likely to miss people who don't fit the surveyors' stereotypes of what homeless people look like. One unsheltered adult approach is to count/interview everyone encountered and sort

out those who are literally homeless afterward. During the unsheltered count, all sites discouraged counters from waking people up to complete the survey.

For the shelter count, youth providers surveyed youth who used their shelter or related services or attended magnet events while the count was in progress. In Whatcom County's youth count, for example, a youth provider hosted a magnet event between 12:01 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. on January 24, during which youth between the ages of 13 and 24 were invited to partake in the drop-in center's activities. A volunteer and outreach worker surveyed youth who were present at this event. In most sites, shelter staff and volunteers surveyed youth utilizing shelter services during the time of the count. In Houston, shelters and service providers conducted a practice count of youth using their services a week before the count. If they felt based on this trial run that they needed assistance surveying youth during the actual count, they asked the lead agency to send volunteers to help administer surveys.

Some sites had social workers and other case managers call people in their caseloads they believed were homeless or unstably housed to learn about their housing status. In Hennepin County, probation officers reviewed their caseloads and surveyed potentially precariously housed youth over the course of a week. In Houston, case managers at a center for youth aging out of foster care called youth on their rosters to ask them about their housing status.

Pretesting the survey. As part of their planning efforts, several sites conducted focus groups and/or tested their surveys with youth to assist in survey development. Cleveland assembled a focus group of youth ages 24 and under who were previously homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to discuss issues related to the survey. Houston tested its youth survey on eight homeless youth in the month prior to the count, and also organized focus groups and tested the survey on unaccompanied homeless youth two weeks prior to the count. Hennepin County organized two youth groups to pre-test and vet the survey questions for clarification, wording, and flow before the survey was declared complete, and revised its survey based on the group's feedback. In Washington State, the youth survey was tested and amended based on youth feedback.

Institutional Review Board and consent. Most sites did not go through an IRB process and all tried to avoid it. One of the reasons Los Angeles did not administer youth surveys was that planners did not want to go through a lengthy IRB process and thought that it would be difficult to get it approved. New York City, the only site that did submit its plans to its IRB, was denied approval of the survey in the street count due to the sensitivity of the questions and the likelihood that interviewer training would not be sufficient to reduce the risks. As is true for many CoCs, New York City trains its PIT counters for about an hour just before they go out to their assigned street locations; most of the training focuses on logistics, as the city's count does not include a survey.

Before surveying youth, some sites asked youth for verbal consent; others did not. Surveyors were instructed to explain to respondents the survey's purpose and how collected information would be used. In Whatcom County, youth were asked to sign a consent form so that their information could be entered into the HMIS. If youth refused consent, then their information would not be entered into the HMIS, but could still be used by the local organization as information on their homeless youth

population. Even with consent, no names or identifying information was sent to the state's HMIS. In Houston, each interviewed youth was provided with a letter of information that described the study.

Survey Questions

The federal interagency youth homelessness working group offered technical assistance to the Youth Count! Initiative sites by hosting a series of webinars. One of the webinars included a reference tool on how to collect data on homeless youth, including, (1) how to frame the surveys, (2) how to identify relevant data collection elements, and (3) how to ensure culturally appropriate and sensitive data collection. Webinar presenters provided suggestions for questions designed to capture information on homeless youth—including possible response categories. Many of these were taken from existing national youth surveys that have been well-tested, have had a lot of previous input, and are credible. These are referred to as the CDEs. The 16 CDEs were grouped into the following four categories:

- Demographics: Age, sex, Hispanic origin, and race.
- Homelessness: Location on the night of the count, time at current location, and time homeless during current episode (some sites also included questions to elicit the types of places where respondents slept or stayed over the past week or, sometimes the past several months).
- Education/employment: School enrollment status, educational attainment, and employment status.
- Subgroups: Sexual orientation, gender orientation, pregnancy status, parenting status, foster care involvement, and juvenile and adult criminal justice involvement.

The table below shows the CDEs collected by each site.

Table 4: Core data elements (CDEs) by site

	Boston	Cleveland	Hennepin County	Houston	King County/ Seattle	NYC	LA[*]	Whatcom County	Winston-Salem
Demographics									
Age	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sex	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Hispanic Origin	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Race	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Homelessness									
Location night of count	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
How long at location	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
How long homeless during current episode				x		x			
Education/Employment									
School enrollment status	x		x	x	x	x		x	x
Educational attainment	x		x	x	x	x		x	x
Employment status	x		x	x	x	x		x	x
Subgroups									
Sexual orientation	x	x	x	x	x	x			x
Gender identity	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Pregnancy status	x	x	x	x		x		x	x
Parenting status	x	x	x	x		x		x	x
Ever in foster care	x	x	x	x	x	x			x
Juvenile/criminal justice involvement	x	x	x	x	x	x			x
Los Angeles did not conduct a survey as part of its youth count, but counters recorded age and sex as part of their tally.									

Demographics. Eight sites collected all four demographic CDEs; Los Angeles did not collect information on youth's Hispanic origin or race. Eight sites recorded the youth's exact age, while Los Angeles reported the youth's age as either "under 18" or "18 and 24 years old." Most sites used the five race categories

suggested by USICH: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and other. Some sites included "multi-racial" as a possible category. Sites also asked about Hispanic origin.

Homelessness. All sites that conducted a survey identified where youth stayed the night of the count as part of that survey. Most sites referred to the CDE's 15 places as response categories. Some added to the list (the site with the longest list included 30 possible responses), others shortened the list (the site with the shortest list had seven responses), and one left it open-ended with plans to categorize all responses during data analysis. All sites also asked youth how long they had been staying at their current location. Only Houston and New York City asked youth how long they had been homeless during their current episode; the remaining seven sites did not collect this information.

Beyond the suggested CDEs, many sites asked about the youth's history of homelessness (see table 5). In fact, at least two sites requested similar additional information for nine items. Three sites asked youth if they could stay where they slept the night of the count for a certain period of time. A few other sites were interested in the number of times a youth had been homeless. A handful of sites asked youth to list all the places they lived for a certain period of time (ranging from "the last seven days" to "the past three years"). Most provided closed-ended responses, such as: with my parents, in a shelter, in jail, in my own apartment, and outside. Two sites asked youth the age they first left home. A majority of sites asked for the reasons youth ran away from home or became homeless. Some sites asked youth why they left foster care; a few sites asked youth if they had been without a regular place to stay for more than a year. Finally, a couple of sites asked youth what city was their last permanent housing, as well as the last time they had permanent housing.

Some questions about housing history asked whether the youth's parents have ever been homeless; if the youth had friends who were homeless; if the youth ever lived in a group home or residential program; the number of moves in the past two years; if the youth ever left home because of domestic violence; how long the youth had lived in the city/county where the interview took place; the reason the youth came to that city/county; if the youth ran away from home or lived away from parents before he/she turned 18; if the youth ever stayed in an adult shelter; how long the youth has been without a permanent place to live; if the youth paid rent for a room/apartment; if the youth had family members that lived with him/her; and if the youth had been living in an emergency shelter and/or on the streets (including bus stations, etc.) for the past year or more.

Some sites probed more about the youth's history with foster care, including the age at which the youth was placed in foster care; the jurisdiction under which the youth was placed in foster care; if the youth had a place to go after he/she left foster care/group home; if the youth was under 18 years old and was in foster care and if still in foster care; and if the youth was still in foster care when youth turned 18 years old.

Education/employment. In seven sites, youth self-reported all four of the education/employment CDEs. Two sites—Cleveland and Los Angeles—did not collect any of the four education/employment

data elements. Four of the sites—Boston, Hennepin County, New York City, and Whatcom County—asked youth about their sources of income. Most provided categories for the different possible sources of income; however, lists varied in detail across sites.

Beyond the CDEs, a few sites asked for more detail about the youth's education and employment. Some of the education questions asked if the youth was enrolled in school, if he/she was trying to get back into school, if the youth was in school the day of the count, the name of the youth's school, and if the youth finished his/her last year in school. The employment questions covered the last time the youth had a job and if employed, how many hours the youth worked in a typical week.

Subgroups. Six sites asked youth all six of the questions to understand subgroup memberships. King County/Seattle, Los Angeles, and Whatcom County omitted one or more elements. King County/Seattle did not ask about gender identity; Whatcom County did not ask about sexual orientation; and Los Angeles did not ask about gender or sexual orientation. Cleveland, New York City, and Hennepin County asked one combined question about whether youth were pregnant or parenting children. The follow-up questions allow for identification of current parents from young women who are pregnant for the first time, but cannot distinguish whether a current parent is also pregnant. King County/Seattle and Los Angeles did not ask youth if they were pregnant or parenting.

Los Angeles and Whatcom County did not ask youth if they had ever been involved with foster care or the juvenile/criminal justice system. However, Whatcom County's survey asked youth why they left home, and two of the answer categories were "aged out of foster care" and "ran away from foster care." Tabulating these responses will understate the percentage of youth ever in foster care. Cleveland and Winston-Salem only asked for juvenile involvement in the past 12 months, while other sites did not ask for a specific period.

Beyond the CDEs, some sites probed for more information about youth who are parents. For example, five sites asked parenting youth if their children lived with them, and three asked parenting youth how many children they had. Question wording may also have influenced the answers. For example, non-custodial parents may not have answered affirmatively to the question "Are you pregnant or parenting?". Better wording might have been, "Do you have children, or are you about to have one?" depending on whether the goal is to find out parental status versus having responsibilities for care of children.

Table 5: Additional Data Elements Collected by Sites

	Boston	Cleveland	Hennepin County	Houston	King County/ Seattle	NYC	LA	Whatcom County	Winston-Salem
Homelessness									
If can stay where slept the night of the count for a period of time	X				x			x	
Number of instances of homelessness			x			x		x	
Where youth lived for a period of time (i.e., last three months or years)				x	x	x		x	
Age when first left home	X		X						
Reason for running away or becoming homeless	x	x	x			x		x	x
Reason left foster care				X					X
If been without a regular place to stay for more than a year			x	x				x	
City of youth's last permanent housing				x				x	
The last time youth had a permanent residence								x	x
Health history									
Disability status		x	x	x				x	
Veteran status	x	x	x	x				x	x
Domestic violence		x	x					X	
AIDS/HIV		x						X	
Substance abuse		x						X	x
Developmental disability		x						X	

	Boston	Cleveland	Hennepin County	Houston	King County/ Seattle	NYC	LA	Whatcom County	Winston-Salem
Mental health issues		x		x				X	
Subgroups									
If children live with them	x		x	x		x			x
Number of children			x					x	x
Income									
Sources of income	x		x			x		x	

Additional data elements. Several sites included additional questions that were not asked at other sites. Most added detail to the youth and family housing history or youth education and employment history, but some pertained to personal and health history and use of public and social services not covered by the CDEs.

- **Personal and health history.** Some sites asked where youth were born. Six sites asked if youth had ever served in the military, and a few sites asked if youth had ever been diagnosed with a disability. A few sites asked about the youth's involvement with domestic violence, if the youth had a substance abuse problem, and if the youth had mental health issues. Two sites asked if youth had HIV/AIDS or a developmental disability.
- **Public and social services.** A few sites asked about the types of services youth receive. For example, sites asked if the person ever tried to get public and social services (and if not, the reasons the youth did not try to apply for these services); involvement with courts, jails, detention centers, or probation; if youth ever traded sex for anything (i.e., housing, money, food, drugs, other); and if the youth participated in any of the surveying site's programs.

Use of Incentives

Five of the eight sites that conducted youth surveys used tangible incentives to encourage youth to engage with the interviewers and complete the survey.[15] Availability of the incentive was advertised as part of the general mobilization effort to attract youth to participate in the count, and our observations and anecdotal evidence from Youth Count! partners suggest that the incentives worked for many youth. Key informants in a number of communities said they were glad they had been able to offer incentives.

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[15] Having formerly homeless youth engage street youth in the survey process, as described earlier, could also be seen as an intangible incentive to participate, in the communities that used this strategy.

Some sites provided incentives to all of the agencies involved in the count, while one site left it up to the agencies hosting magnet events to decide what incentives to give. New York City gave every youth who completed a survey a Metrocard good for two rides and a Visa card with $10 credit that could be used for whatever a youth chose to buy. Houston gave every youth either a backpack filled with hygiene items and information about services (also offered in the adult PIT), a $5 McDonald's card, or both. Winston-Salem offered bag lunches. King County/Seattle left it up to each magnet event host or street outreach agency to choose the incentives it would offer. As mentioned, magnet events also incentivized participation with food, movies, and games, as well as the clear attraction of a warm, dry place to hang out with friends for the night.

The three communities that did the survey without incentives did not want to set any expectation that youth should be paid to cooperate with efforts to improve service delivery, nor did they want youth taking the survey more than once to get the incentive.

Survey Challenges

Generally, most sites reported cooperation with the survey. Though several sites reported that youth seemed uncomfortable about answering certain questions, on the whole, youth were willing to participate once they understood the purpose of the pilot youth count (to better target services and meet the needs of homeless youth).

Some survey questions made youth uneasy or unwilling to be fully honest in their answers. In Hennepin County, for example, respondents were hesitant about sensitive questions; specifically, these questions asked if youth had ever traded sex for anything (i.e., money, housing, food, etc.) and if youth had ever been in a household where there was domestic violence.

Most sites asked youth about their housing status and determined homeless status based on the responses. Some surveys included questions such as, "Are you homeless now?" or "How long have you been homeless this episode?" In at least New York City and Houston, training for interviewers told them *not* to use this word, even though it was on the paper survey. Neither site gave a consistent alternative, however, instead telling volunteers to improvise and invent other ways to determine housing status. Volunteers that did not attend the training read the question as written and reported that youth often reacted negatively to the use of the word "homeless".

Also, at a public housing complex in Houston, surveyors were swarmed by youth who wanted to participate in the survey, and when interviewers came to the question about sexual identity, surveyors felt that many youth were not fully honest in their responses because they were surrounded by their peers. The sexual and gender identity questions gave some respondents pause in many sites. Questions that attempted to identify transgender youth were particularly problematic, not only with youth, but also with interviewers, who may have been uncomfortable asking the question, or may simply have stumbled over the long and awkward wording. Sexual orientation and gender identity questions may not work for all youth in all parts of the country, or at least these particular questions may not.

Chapter 7: Sampling Strategies and Coverage

Homelessness among unaccompanied youth comes in many different forms: sheltered by homeless service providers, youth service providers, the faith-based community, and others; unsheltered, sleeping on the street, in encampments, on park benches, in abandoned buildings, in cars, among other places not meant for sleeping; or doubled up, living with family or friends temporarily or "couch surfing" and changing locations from night to night. Each of the nine pilot sites had to develop strategies for ensuring that the counts covered (or systematically sampled) places where unaccompanied homeless youth slept or hung out during the day. For the most part, all nine sites focused their efforts on four areas: counts in shelters, unsheltered counts, magnet events, and schools. This chapter describes the coverage strategies utilized by the sites.

Shelter Counts

All nine sites incorporated counts and data from youth sleeping in adult and youth shelters and transitional housing programs into their Youth Count! efforts. The shelter count component of the youth counts were very similar to what CoCs have been doing as part of their HUD PIT counts for years. Thus, shelter counts were not where pilot sites needed to apply their greatest creativity.

Shelter types

Shelter counts involved two components: (1) youth-specific shelters and transitional housing programs, and (2) adult singles, family, and domestic violence shelters. All but three pilot sites had at least one residential program specifically for homeless or runaway youth, and all of these programs conducted surveys of youth staying in those shelters. Exceptions were Houston, Whatcom County, and Winston-Salem, which do not have relevant residential programs. Adult emergency shelters and domestic violence shelters were often included because 18- to 24-year-olds use these adult shelters. This was particularly true for young mothers, who in some communities comprise 30 to 40 percent of families in family or domestic violence shelters.

Conducting the survey

Seven of the eight sites that used a survey obtained survey data for youth through shelter counts.[16] Administering the surveys was something new for residential program staff, who could rely on the data in RHYMIS (for youth agencies) or HMIS (for adult shelters) in previous counts to supply the information needed for the PIT count. For Youth Count!, planners had to elicit interest and willingness from relevant programs, explain what was needed to shelter staff, discuss and plan how and when shelters would administer the surveys, train shelter staff, train volunteers if they were used, and monitor how things went. In general, this process went well, and all sites collected and used the shelter data. Shelter staff did the interviews in most locations, with the help of trained volunteers in shelters that expected large numbers of youth on the night of the count (e.g., Houston).

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[16] Los Angeles did not do a survey at all, relying completely on HMIS data to describe sheltered youth. New York City did a survey but only at magnet events; no surveys were done with youth staying in shelters. King County did conduct the survey in youth shelters, but the entire shelter count came from HMIS. If a youth marked on the survey that they had stayed in shelter or transitional housing the previous night, their survey data was not entered to eliminate duplication.

Variations on the shelter count and survey included longer time frames and some telephone contacts. Sites that employed a weeklong time frame for their youth count asked shelters, as well as other youth-serving agencies, to survey any youth who appeared during the week after the official PIT time period. If these youth were to be added to the PIT count, the interviewers also ascertained where the youth had slept or stayed on the night of the PIT count to determine if the youth met HUD's homeless definition for that night. At least one site that lacked a youth shelter but had youth-serving agencies with unstably housed youth on housing waitlists had caseworkers call those youth during the week after the count to ascertain housing status during the PIT time period.

Nonshelter counts

All nine pilot sites included streets or other nonshelter locations in their youth count.[17] In doing so they had to make a series of decisions common to all unsheltered homeless counts, complicated by the realities of homelessness among youth and the ways it differs from adult homelessness. Any unsheltered homeless count must answer various questions:

1. Whether to use a geography-based strategy, a service-based strategy, or both.
2. If a geography-based strategy, whether to cover a CoC's entire geography, and if not, what part (e.g., downtown only, downtown plus certain transportation corridors, and so on).
3. Whatever geography is chosen, whether to cover it entirely (i.e., by searching every block) or use a sample.
4. If a sample, whether to do a simple random sample or stratify and include certainty blocks (virtually all communities that sample also select with certainty blocks with high odds of encountering homeless people).
5. Which types of places to search and which to leave alone. Here planners must establish the instructions they give searchers—attempt to enter abandoned buildings or not; with vacant lots, parks, and other outdoor spaces, count only the people you can see from the street, or walk back to see what is behind the oil drums stacked in the corner; enter commercial establishments (e.g., laundromats, McDonald's, all-night movie houses) and approach customers or not, and so on. Some CoCs treat such places as hot spots for their geographically based strategy and others treat them as service locations.
6. Whether to use service-based enumeration (SBE), meaning one would go to programs, agencies, and even businesses known to serve or accommodate homeless people in general and homeless youth in particular, and if yes, whether to do it by itself or in conjunction with a geographic strategy.
7. Whether to do a survey.

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[17] New York City's youth count did not involve a street search, but did survey potentially unsheltered youth who attended magnet events at 13 locations across all five boroughs. The youth-specific count was held completely separate from the general PIT count, and youth staying in shelters were only counted as part of the general PIT count.

8. If doing a survey, whether to survey all people encountered or sample—usually by using a random start and then taking every *n*th person. This question must be answered whether one is talking about a shelter situation, a street situation, or a line in a soup kitchen or health clinic.[18]
9. If doing a survey, whether to do it at the same time one does the unsheltered count, or later; if later, how, where, and with whom.
10. If doing a survey in conjunction with a nighttime street search, whether to wake people up.

Most CoCs combine a partial or complete street search strategy, hot spots or known locations, and some service-based enumeration. Systematic sampling strategies are rare, and confined to the biggest jurisdictions (New York City and Los Angeles County). Most include several types of service location as hot spots, such as all-night commercial establishments, transportation hubs, hospitals and clinics with a large homeless clientele and their grounds, feeding programs, and drop-in/multiservice centers. These are in addition to outdoor hot spots such as encampments, parks, and similar locations. Most do some form of survey, either on the night of the count or during the days following it, to obtain population characteristics.

The Youth Count! sites mostly did not follow their CoC's lead in selecting their dominant strategies; notably, they downplayed strategies based on geography, making little attempt to cover territory (except in Los Angeles). They opted instead for variations on service-based enumeration, focusing on youth-serving agencies or activities. The SBE approach characterizes even those sites that did street searches structured around the usual routes of outreach teams—the teams were the service agencies in these cases and took enumerators along their usual service routes. It is true that those routes usually visited geographical hot spots—places they expected to encounter homeless youth—but that is what they do every time they go out. It is still a service-based strategy, not a geographically based one, and the routes change as the popularity of or easy access to locations comes and goes. SBEs appeared to be a more effective way to identify homeless youth than geographically based efforts.

We look first at the programs and locations that Youth Count! communities chose as their focus, and then examine several other aspects of these counts, including their relationship to the adult PIT count, their timing, the strategies they used to attract youth, and what happened with the efforts to work with school districts.

Programs and locations: where they looked
Locations incorporated into the Youth Count! pilots were of two types—service and outdoor. Most pilot sites enlisted the participation of nonresidential youth-serving agencies, which surveyed youth accessing their services within the 24-hour PIT time frame and, for the three communities that extended their

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[18] This question assumes that one wants to be systematic about who gets surveyed. Some Youth Count! sites were systematic, usually by deciding to survey everyone at a particular location, but some were not. The latter included street searches with instructions to guess at who was homeless and who was a youth, magnet events where an agency staff person selected youth she thought would be "right" for the count (i.e., homeless), which meant the surveyers had no chance to interview anyone who wasn't, and survey self-administration approaches that had no way to control who took the survey and who completed it, among others.

youth counts, during the follow-up week. These nonresidential youth-serving agencies included health clinics with a youth focus; shelter health clinics accessible to nonresidents; HIV/AIDS programs, clinics, and drop-in centers; street outreach teams; youth drop-in and multi-service centers; behavioral health programs with a youth focus; agencies serving LGBTQ youth, and related agencies.

One of the more important benefits of organizing for Youth Count! was the expanded network of connections formed among youth-serving and other agencies that helped with planning, and the willingness of new partners to serve as counting/surveying locations. Site summaries in appendix A provide more detail on the types of places included; here what is important to note is that they were chosen specifically for their youth connection.

Relationship to the adult PIT count

Youth-specific unsheltered counts and surveys took place within the same 24-hour time frame as the HUD PIT count in eight sites; all structured their youth counts to produce homeless youth numbers that could be added to the PIT count. However, the Youth Count! and the PIT counts were not completely integrated in any of the pilot sites. Some sites started their youth counts a few hours before the PIT's official time frame, and three extended their youth counts for a week following the PIT count. New York City, for instance, began interviewing youth at magnet locations at 10 p.m. on January 28, while the HUD PIT street count occurred between midnight and 3 a.m. on the same night (technically January 29). Boston, Cleveland, Hennepin County, and Houston continued identifying and interviewing youth through many channels for up to a full week after the PIT count, reasoning that the longer time frame would help them capture a significantly larger number of youth. King County extended its time frame past that of the adult count. These sites also collected data to indicate whether a youth was homeless on the night of the PIT count, but only some sites (Boston, Hennepin, and Houston) added the youth counted and interviewed post-PIT to the PIT count.

Time of day

Seven sites counted youth during evening hours. Los Angeles conducted daytime counts, and Hennepin County conducted its street search starting at 5 a.m. the morning after the night count (when it was still dark but timed to when people would be waking up). Three sites also included evening hours during the week after the PIT count. Boston kept collecting surveys during the regular evening runs of its youth outreach mobile medical van and also at shelters. Cleveland and King County/Seattle also continued to collect surveys from youth who used any of a variety of services operating in the afternoon and evening (including a very popular shopping mall in Cleveland).

The three sites that held a weeklong youth count all sought to identify and interview youth during the day at the many service centers and other locations. If outreach programs operated during daytime hours, they collected surveys from youth encountered during their regular runs. In addition, Houston's regular PIT includes survey data collection at known locations on the day after the count (nighttime activity is almost exclusively counting only, as most is done by car canvass), so the youth count followed the same practice, going to camps and hot spots known as youth hangouts. In King County, surveys were

only conducted on the day of January 24 through 5 a.m. on January 25; the adult PIT occurred between 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. on January 25.

Strategies to attract youth

Sites used several strategies to attract youth and encourage participation in their surveys, including advertising, holding magnet events, spreading the word through social media, and incorporating formerly homeless youth as part of the Youth Count! search teams. The latter two strategies are discussed in other sections of this report; here we describe advertising and magnet events.

All sites advertised their youth counts, getting the word out through posters, flyers, radio spots, meetings of relevant organizations, church bulletins (in locations where the churches offered the primary shelter opportunities for youth), social media, mailing lists, and word-of-mouth. Most sites wish they had could have done more, and sooner and over a longer period of time. The aim of these activities was to: (1) attract youth to shelters or magnet events on the night of the count; (2) make youth more likely to cooperate with searches of non-shelter locations, whether indoors or out; and (3) put adults in contact with homeless or at-risk youth and get them to encourage other youth to participate.

Communities that involved youth-oriented street outreach programs incorporated the programs' usual routes and strategies into their non-shelter/street searches. Agencies with street outreach teams also took the lead in organizing outdoor searches as part of planning, and the teams themselves took the lead during the count itself. At least one site went only to the locations known to its street outreach teams.

Magnet events

Five sites (Cleveland, King County/Seattle, New York City, Whatcom County, and Winston-Salem) held magnet events to draw youth in to participate in the count. These events were intended to attract youth who do not use shelters or cannot be located on the street and thus be able to add them to the count. Some of these youth would have been staying in well-hidden places not meant for habitation, but another set of them would have been youth who are doubled up or couch surfing. The magnet events formed a key component of the five sites' youth counts.

Most magnet events occurred at youth-serving agencies. These agencies are equipped to engage youth and are places that youth may already know. The events took place during the day and night in various forms. Generally, they offered food and drink to entice youth to attend. Some were more expansive, offering movies, games, dances, raffles, etc., and even clothing and other supplies. In some drop-in centers, youth could make use of facilities such as laundry and showers.

Drop-in centers in several cities hosted magnet events that included the opportunity to spend most of the night. In particular, five event locations in King County/Seattle offered slumber parties where the youth could spend the night and partake in various activities. In some places, such as Whatcom County, the event location was not a licensed shelter, so youth were not allowed to officially spend the night;

however, they were allowed to "take a nap." Winston-Salem's event was held at a centralized location at the downtown headquarters of the Urban League and youth were not allowed to sleep over.

Although not technically magnet events, some sites added survey locations that did not involve typical service providers. King County/Seattle developed partnerships with both Seattle Public Libraries and King County Public Libraries, where tables were set up to administer the survey. Snacks were provided to draw youth in. Cleveland opened a storefront on the main level of Tower City Mall, a key shopping and transportation hub in the city, where youth could come in to take the survey. Some snacks and drinks were available (as well as some coats and toiletries kept in the back), but these were not advertised.

Magnet event challenges

Most informants felt that their magnet events were successful. New York City noted that the word spread through social media, leading to a larger turnout than anticipated. King County/Seattle reported that many more youth came through the service providers than would be expected on a typical day. However, other sites like Cleveland reported that inclement winter weather and temperatures depressed turnout to events. In Winston-Salem, the site's event only attracted about 10 to 15 youth, most of whom came from a single shelter. Although the site had advertised the event, the advertising appears to have been ineffective as some shelters were unaware of the event. Furthermore, Winston-Salem did not attract any youth under age 18. North Carolina requires all adults to report known homeless youth under 18 years old to the police, which makes these youth less likely to seek services or attend a Youth Count! event.

Though most sites felt their events were successful, they felt that youth in attendance were already involved with service-providing organizations. It was these organizations that advertised and generally hosted the events, so naturally, many attendees at their events were also their clients. This was particularly true of sleepover events, such as the slumber parties in King County/Seattle. In King County/Seattle, only youth at slumber parties were included in HUD's PIT count. Thus, daytime count activities may have surveyed additional youth, doubled-up and couch surfing youth would have no particular reason to attend the slumber parties; they would be included in King County's Count Us In, but not in the PIT count. Similarly, in New York City, only youth in the drop-in centers at night were included in the PIT count. This number was well below the daytime number as most drop-in centers actually closed for a few hours and reopened for the evening. Many youth were likely disinclined to return if they had other sleeping arrangements.

The reliance on service-providing organizations to host events and publicize the youth count limits the population covered in other ways, too. In Whatcom County, areas outside the main city of Bellingham do not have youth shelters or other youth-serving organizations. This would be true in other rural areas as well and thus restricts coverage to youth in cities. Even suburban youth may be missed if there are no local agencies involved.

School Counts

School participation

Most sites are enthusiastic about the possibility of including schools in youth count efforts; however, this year, they had mixed success engaging schools. In many cases, the limited planning time reduced both the number of schools participating and the degree to which they could participate. Schools in six sites had some level of participation in the Youth Count!. Several communities involved multiple school districts. In Boston, the Massachusetts Department of Education helped organize the school count. The survey was administered in public high schools and Boston's nine charter schools. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District pulled aggregated administrative data on homeless youth in kindergarten through eighth grade and administered an alternative survey to youth identified as unaccompanied in high schools. In Hennepin County, Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) participated; MPS constitutes the largest school district in Minnesota. In Houston, the Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO) coordinated the participation of 17 schools in eight school districts in the CoC, which includes Houston, the rest of Harris County, and Fort Bend County; some charter schools also participated. THEO targeted 14 high schools and three middle schools with records indicating significant numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth, according to the ED definition. Fifteen of 19 school districts in King County supplied counts of homeless students, but most did not participate in the survey. In Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Unified School District supplied data about homeless students, but none of the other school districts in Los Angeles County participated in the youth count. In Winston-Salem, the serious illness of a key contact prevented the school district from participating.

Several issues limited the value of data collected at participating schools. Schools in only four communities administered a version of the local youth count survey; [19] in all four of these communities, several questions were omitted, particularly questions on gender and sexual identity. Some school districts included no more than a few questions, usually about housing status. In three of the four communities, schools administered the survey to youth identified as homeless and unaccompanied when they enrolled for the school year. They have no way of knowing about youth who become homeless at some later time, although they should be able to tell when a youth homeless at enrollment had stopped being homeless because that youth would no longer be eligible for transportation services through the schools' homeless liaisons. Hennepin County made an effort to fill these gaps by examining all paperwork that social workers and parents turned in, looking to identify youth who were homeless and unaccompanied at any point in the year, noting the school and the social worker who helped them. Social workers were asked to check in with students identified in the last week before the count. If they had time, the social workers could also survey the other youth identified throughout the year.

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[19] In King County, the schools did not administer the survey, but some counselors in schools in the east side of the county called youth they knew to be homeless to either administer the survey or tell them where they could meet a Friends of Youth team to take the survey; mostly the latter.

Schools differed in who administered the surveys. In-school social workers administered the survey in Hennepin County; school staff administered the survey in Houston; life-skills coaches administered it in Cleveland; and RHY liaisons administered it in Boston.

Some sites tried to enlist schools to put up Youth Count! posters or distribute flyers. Compliance was likely mixed, with at least one site being skeptical that schools put up any posters. As an alternative, schools could direct youth to a location to take the survey or, in Cleveland, to the online survey. However, compliance was likely low for this, too. Some school districts were unwilling to direct students to other locations due to potential liability issues (for example, if a student was injured traveling to another location).

Data from schools was supplied in different ways. In King County/Seattle, an attempt was made to get the number of homeless students on the day of the count. No attempt was made to de-duplicate this number from the Count Us In number of homeless youth; count planners intend to use the schools' total number in its reports on Count Us In, presenting it as a complement to the Count Us In tally. In Cleveland, schools shared aggregated data by grade level and demographics. In an attempt to de-duplicate, Cleveland sent the school district the individual-level data (with date of birth, race, and sex) collected during its youth count to schools and asked the school to report whether it believed these youths were also included in its data. In Houston, schools provided de-identified data to the lead agency to analyze and determine if youth met the definition of homelessness used in the site's youth count.

Challenges involving the schools

Schools could play an important role in counting unaccompanied homeless youth, particularly those under age 18. However, several barriers made it difficult for schools to fully participate in Youth Count! First, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) restricts the ability of schools to share information about their students without parental consent. FERPA provisions are not interpreted consistently, however. Some school districts will not share any disaggregated data, while others will provide de-identified individual-level data. According to the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment to the General Education Provisions Act school districts must gain parental consent for youth to participate in a survey. This requirement is problematic when trying to identify unaccompanied youth who, by definition, do not live with their parents.

Second, schools use a definition of homelessness that differs from the definition used by HUD, and the HUD definition prevails in the PIT count. Among various differences, ED's homeless definition includes children living in households that are temporarily doubled up due to hardship or loss of housing. ED's definitions reflect schools' responsibilities to serve youth whose residential instability interferes with school attendance, but many of these youth would not meet HUD's homelessness definition. Thus, the school-focused enumeration of homeless youth tends to identify youth in homeless or itinerant families, but likely undercounts unaccompanied youth.

Third, schools do not always assess the homeless status of their students on an ongoing basis; most homeless students are identified at the time of initial enrollment for the school year. Youth who become

homeless after the beginning of the school year may be missed. Counts based on homelessness at a point in time other than the date of the youth count will miscount the number of homeless youth for that specific point in time.

Fourth, as noted, schools were unwilling to administer the complete youth surveys used in their respective communities, due to concerns about question sensitivity. Although the schools' amended surveys may provide adequate information for counting homeless youth (subject to the issues discussed above), the truncated surveys used by most of the participating school districts do not yield information sufficient to developing a deeper understanding of these youths' characteristics and needs. As mentioned, one alternative—which would be to direct students to locations where they can be surveyed—is problematic since schools believe they face liabilities. Furthermore, compliance on the part of schools and students is likely to be a significant problem. Also, because of Paperwork Reduction Act requirements, ED could not ask or require LEAs to collect additional data, or even reverify what they do collect cumulatively over the school year.

Chapter 8: Implementation

Recruiting volunteers, training them, and exercising quality control are all critical for a successful youth count. Many sites recognized that their practices this year left room for improvement, and plan to use the lessons they learned from this count to strengthen future homeless youth counts. This chapter describes the implementation and challenges that surfaced during the counts.

Volunteer Recruitment

Staffing the count was one of the most important steps in the implementation process. When considering staffing, sites had to consider their planned activities, strategies for reaching homeless youth, confidentiality issues, and the sensitivity of the information being collected. These considerations determined who would be the most effective volunteers to target for each of the sites. Most sites looked to partnerships developed as a part of the youth count, relying primarily on youth-serving agencies to provide staff and volunteers for magnet events and survey administration.

In sites that held magnet events, the CoCs relied on youth-serving agencies to staff the events on the day of the count. Most often, the youth-serving agency relied on its own outreach and program staff to do the actual surveys. Some sites also relied on community volunteers recruited by the youth-serving agencies or the central planners (New York and Hennepin County).

Almost all of the sites that conducted surveys and tally counts relied on youth-serving agencies to assist in the administration of the survey and to take the lead in recruiting volunteers. Volunteers consisted of staff from youth-serving agencies (program, shelter, and outreach staff), formerly homeless youth (in Cleveland, Houston, Winston-Salem, Whatcom County, and King County/Seattle) and currently homeless youth (in Los Angeles and Houston). Some sites that included homeless youth in the planning process were reluctant to have them administer the survey. One site noted that its planners were concerned about the accuracy of the survey responses if a youth administered the survey—homeless youth might provide significantly different responses to their peers compared to staff that were familiar and comfortable with interacting with homeless youth. Los Angeles—which relied on currently homeless youth volunteers—chose not to perform surveys, and focused on tallying homeless youth. In this case, teams of staff from youth-serving agencies relied on the expertise and knowledge of the youth volunteers to help identify homeless youth, since many of the youth volunteers were homeless themselves.

Another issue that arose with youth as surveyors was the turnover in potential youth volunteers. In one city, all or most of the youth at a particular youth shelter who were trained to do interviews a week before the final count were no longer present the night of the count itself and did not do any interviews. As a result, a new group of youth, that did not receive training, was recruited from among the shelter residents on the night of the count. The result was great variation in procedures for identifying youth to interview and in the quality of interviews. If a community wants youth involved in conducting surveys specifically it may be better to recruit youth who once were homeless but are now more stable or to provide training on the night of the count.

Training

All sites except Boston provided training to their Youth Count! volunteers. Training differed across sites in terms of the subjects covered and the length and rigor of the training. Training topics were dependent on each site's planned activities and the relationship of the youth count survey to the CoC's PIT count. Who was required to attend trainings also varied, with one site relying on agency leads to relay training information to Youth Count! volunteers. Overall, there were inconsistencies in implementation that the sites could remedy with more effective training. In follow up interviews, some sites identified training as an area targeted for improvement.

Training sessions ranged from 45 to 90 minutes across the sites. Most often, sites conducted trainings in the hour or two before people went out to do the count. However, some sites (Houston, King County/Seattle, and Hennepin County) provided multiple trainings both on the day of the count and the day(s) prior to the count. Other sites provided ad-hoc training to volunteers as questions arose from respondents self-administering the survey. Surveys conducted simultaneously on the night of the adult PIT count (Houston, Winston-Salem, and Hennepin County) combined training for both counts.

Commonly covered topics during trainings were (1) the purpose of the count, (2) safety, (3) survey protocol, (4) strategies for asking sensitive questions, and (5) location assignments. There seemed to have been assumptions that volunteers from youth-serving and homeless agencies would have adequate experience and knowledge of how to identify and approach homeless youth. One site realized this gap in training when a volunteer approached the site lead following the street count and remarked on the difficulty of identifying which youth were homeless. Another site's organizers mentioned that they had made a mistake in believing that their primary partner, a youth-serving agency, would have a robust knowledge of youth interview techniques.

During count observations, the Urban Institute team witnessed many inconsistencies in the practices of volunteers. The most common concern across sites was the inconsistency of survey implementation. Volunteers often altered questions they believed were awkwardly worded, and provided lead-ins or justifying questions by suggesting to the respondent that "they had to ask." The lack of standardization in how questions were asked could lead to responses that cannot be compared across respondents. As discussed above, a lack of consistency in how to identify and approach homeless youth will result in an inaccurate count if volunteers are not equipped to approach youth to administer a survey or ask about their housing status, or if different surveyors do it differently. Finally, one site that conducted the Youth Count! survey in conjunction with the PIT count saw inconsistent administration of the survey because volunteers had difficulty identifying which survey to use. Clearly identifying surveys or combining surveys with skip patterns could help volunteers more effectively administer the appropriate survey. More effective training could help rectify many of the inconsistent practices.

Quality Control

Quality control has many dimensions. It begins with well-designed survey instruments, protocols, and standardized procedures. Rigorous and consistent training provides interviewers with the tools they need to collect accurate and consistent data. Supervision and monitoring help identify whether procedures are being executed properly and problems can be identified and addressed in a timely fashion. In addition to the lack of rigorous and consistent training described above, few efforts were made to ensure surveys were implemented consistently. All sites relied exclusively on their trainings to prepare volunteers for the count. There was no explicit supervision or monitoring of those conducting surveys. Thus, it is unknown to what extent volunteers, youth-serving agencies, and shelter staff followed instructions and information from the trainings. However, Urban Institute staff observed numerous variations of survey administration that were inconsistent within and across sites.

Chapter 9: Assembling Data and Dissemination of Results

Once surveys are ready for analysis, sites had to de-duplicate their data, analyze it, and disseminate the results. The results, format, and audience for the data vary by site. At the time of writing this report, some sites had not completed their analysis. Thus this chapter describes the de-duplication methods sites used and their plans for reporting results.

De-duplication

Any count of homeless people, whether youth or adults, will not be accurate unless survey administrators have a way to assure that each person is counted only once. Homeless people move around even within a one-night or 24-hour time frame. During the course of the week that several Youth Count! communities used to locate and survey youth, each youth could be approached at several different locations as he or she seeks food, shelter, laundry facilities, or social services. Because different venues participated in the Youth Count! pilots, there was significant potential for a youth to be counted more than once. For example, a youth might have been asked to take the survey in multiple locations; or a person might have been counted in an unsheltered location during the day and also in a shelter at night. Youth might also have been counted at school as well as in magnet events or drop-in centers as part of the same youth count. All sites had to have ways to produce an unduplicated count, through procedures known as de-duplication.

Several sites took similar approaches to data de-duplication. We first discuss common approaches and then address the specific issue of overlaps of unsheltered and sheltered youth, and youth included in the youth count and in the school count. Some sites focused on preventing double counting, trying to avoid youth completing the survey more than once, while other sites focused on eliminating duplicate surveys after the fact. Since this was the first time that several of the Youth Count! sites had focused on youth and they did not have much time to structure their approach, de-duplication plans were mostly quite simple. Common approaches are described below.

Ask the respondent. Volunteers at nearly all the sites were instructed to preface the surveys by asking youth if they had already completed a survey. In sites that offered incentives to complete the survey, there was concern that youth would want to complete the survey multiple times. In some situations, particularly at magnet events, sites tried to make youth aware they would receive the incentive even if they had taken the survey before; therefore there was no reason to take the survey twice. However, it is unknown how successful this was at keeping youth from answering the survey more than once.

Create a unique ID. Several sites used a few pieces of information about the youth to establish a unique identifier. In New York City, the interviewer first asked for the initials of the youth's first and last names, then the month and day of the interviewee's birth. This created a six-character identifier that analysts checked across all surveys received. Hennepin County used the youth's birth date, including year. Boston tried to collect data through its survey to create a unique identifier containing the same elements as its HMIS identifiers; however, because the surveys were largely self-administered, the

information provided was seldom complete. Whatcom County used a variation of this approach, collecting a youth's full name and date of birth and using the information to check against HMIS for possible shelter use. Once any duplicates were eliminated, the county purged the names and sent only unique identifiers along with the survey data to the state agency that was compiling it.

Use survey information. Hennepin County, Houston, and King County/Seattle reviewed responses to surveys conducted during the day to see if a youth reported staying in a shelter the night before. If yes, the youth was not counted in the unsheltered tally. For de-duplication purposes, Houston's survey also asked whether youth were in school on the day the schools did their survey.

Use location information. For the unsheltered part of the count, Hennepin County and New York City recorded cross-streets or other indicators of the location where a youth was counted or surveyed. This location information was cross-checked and any surveys that seemed to be from the same location were further checked for demographic and other responses that might indicate they were for the same person.

Recognition. Winston-Salem and Houston reported that its surveyors saw so few people that they would recognize anyone attempting to complete the survey twice. In Los Angeles, outside of the Hollywood service area, one or two survey teams were responsible for the entire geography their service planning area. This was true of seven of the eight service planning areas in the county, so team members also would know if they saw someone twice. In Hollywood, each of the several search teams was assigned to a non-overlapping set of blocks; avoiding duplication relied on recognition and the assumption that youth would not move from one search area to another during the count's relatively short time frame.

Control the event. New York City counted for only a few hours, beginning at 10 p.m. and doing the count at only a few indoor venues. At each venue youth lined up at 10 p.m. and received a card with a number on it. The numbers were unique to each venue, and youth were interviewed in numerical order. As count venues were fairly widely scattered, it was quite unlikely that a youth would take the survey in one site and then move on to another site to be interviewed again.

De-duplication of Shelter and Street Surveys

Several of the techniques just described were employed to de-duplicate shelter and street surveys. Most commonly, sites created a unique identifier to check against HMIS and/or used survey data on where youth stayed the previous night. Los Angeles had a unique twist on de-duplication—it recruited large numbers of homeless youth to help with the canvassing throughout the county, and had them fill out an application. The application contained many data elements similar to the CDEs. LAHSA, the lead agency in Los Angeles, checks this information against the HMIS to determine whether the youth used shelter services on the previous night.

De-duplication Involving Data from Schools

As discussed in chapter 7, incorporating data on homeless youth from school systems was particularly challenging. In addition to the issues discussed, there is substantial potential for duplication between school data and other Youth Count! data. Several sites developed ways to de-duplicate youth count data from school count data. Cleveland, facilitated by researchers at Case Western Reserve University who assisted with data analysis, checked individual-level survey responses against its records of homeless students based on race, sex, and date of birth. It then reported the total number of potential duplications. Houston's survey asked youth whether they were in school the day of the school count, and the name of the school; this information was checked against data obtained from schools. Los Angeles did its street search for youth during the school day, and reasoned that any youth counted on the streets would not have been in school that day, although it had no clear way to adjust school data to account for missing youth.

Reporting and Dissemination

In most of the sites, the lead Youth Count! agency, which was also the lead agency for the CoC, received the youth count and survey data, and was responsible for analyzing it and sharing it with the larger community. These agencies are logical choices for this work because they organized the Youth Count! activities, administer the HMIS, and have overall reporting responsibilities for the CoC. Exceptions include King County/Seattle, where staff and interns at the United Way received and analyzed the data; Cleveland, which contracted with a Case Western Reserve professor to do the analysis and write the report; and Houston, which is working with a professor from the University of Texas-Houston to produce the report.

Most sites are using their Youth Count! data to supplement their PIT counts. Cleveland and King County/Seattle have already drafted preliminary reports. Many of the sites are still trying to determine the most effective uses for the information collected during Youth Count! All sites realize the limitations of the data collected, as many sites relied on practices and methods they had not previously used to attract and count homeless youth. Across the sites, there is uncertainty about data quality, comprehensive coverage, and the implications of the information collected. All sites were cautious about the data they collected; most believe that the information will help benefit future counts but planners have tempered expectations about the accuracy of current efforts.

Sites with a history of counting homeless youth can compare the results of this year's count to previous years. However, these sites are cautious about any differences that arise when comparing the data. The use of new strategies and the expansion of partnerships make it difficult to determine whether any changes in the number of homeless youth are real.

Media Coverage

Several sites had broad media coverage of Youth Count! as it was happening, with articles focused on the local efforts to count homeless youth and the growing need to get an accurate picture of this

population. Some articles focused on the human-interest side of Youth Count!, interviewing survey respondents, while others sought to highlight the effort broadly in the local context. Sites did not specify intentions to disseminate data to media outlets once the data had been gathered.

One site suggested that while it was positive to have media coverage of its count, the coverage may have discouraged youth from answering honestly or participating altogether. Their experience suggests that communities should carefully think about a media strategy in the future. The media can be invaluable partners in advertising the events in advance, and also in disseminating details of the count to the community, but possible negative aspects of their involvement need to be considered.

Chapter 10: Promising Practices, Areas that Need Improvement, and Recommendations to Improve Counting Youth in PIT Counts

The nine participating sites launched Youth Count! in a very short time. Every community that participated was successful in designing, planning, and implementing a new strategy for counting homeless youth in their community or augmenting an existing strategy. The counts were widely covered by the media, raising awareness about youth homelessness and underscoring the importance of the task. The scope of this process study is not to assess the accuracy of these counts, but rather to describe what happened and examine how these local experiences might provide guidance for future counts. Therefore this chapter focuses on lessons learned, which can help inform the development of future counts at the local level as well as guide HUD, HHS, ED, and USICH on where technical assistance is needed to arrive at a national estimate of unaccompanied homeless youth. The Urban Institute team identified cross-cutting implications in two areas: promising practices, and areas that need improvement. We also make specific recommendations for improving the count of homeless youth in the point-in-time counts.

Promising Practices

During our observations and interviews, a few practices stood out as promising—worthy of further testing and replication in improving the counts at the nine pilot sites and other sites that pursue counting homeless youth.

- *Engaging youth service providers.*
  Almost all of the nine pilot sites reported that Youth Count! brought more youth service providers to the table with the CoC. Many of these providers had experience counting and surveying the population at the agency level and shared their expertise for Youth Count! In addition, developing these partnerships provides the opportunity for improving service delivery to youth experiencing homelessness by identifying the means for service integration.

- *Engaging LGBTQ partners.*
  Many of the nine pilot sites engaged LGBTQ service providers in the counts. These sites had a strong focus on reaching this population and a higher comfort level asking survey questions. Much can be learned from LGBTQ service providers, particularly about how to increase coverage strategies by counting in locations where LGBTQ youth congregate, promoting the count within the LGBTQ youth community, and creating an environment where LGBTQ youth feel welcome.

- *Involving youth in the counts (outreach and design, not administration).*
  The sites that involved youth in the count all reported finding their insights useful; in particular, youth were helpful in pre-testing and advising on the survey design, during the count as outreach workers or guides to identify hot spots where homeless youth hang out, and helping engage the youth found there. Sites reported many concerns about including currently homeless youth as interviewers.

- *Magnet events.*
   On the whole, magnet events were successful at bringing in large numbers of youth. Although they appear to have attracted primarily service-involved youth, events such as King County's slumber parties that allowed youth to be counted as part of the PIT count may have increased the number of youth included in the PIT. To some extent, events leading up to the slumber parties are probably needed to draw youth into the right venues before they find alternative sleeping arrangements for the night of the count.

- *Social media for raising awareness and outreach.*
   Only one site, Cleveland, used social media as a deliberate strategy for outreach, raising awareness, and attracting youth to participate in the count. It is unclear how successful these tools were for directly engaging youth. Informants in New York City felt that once youth learned about the count, they used social media to spread the word, leading to a larger than expected turnout atthe magnet events. Data from other studies indicate that even youth living on the street are using social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Guadagno, Muscanell, and Pollio 2013; Pergamit and Ernst 2010b).

- *Measuring homelessness.*
   The multiple definitions of homelessness create difficulties for sites trying to sync with the PIT count while gathering data on a broader population of homeless youth. The PIT count is intended to measure the number of homeless individuals to determine the level of need for shelter; it does not require an expanded definition of homelessness. However, communities are interested in identifying a broader set of service needs among homeless youth, needs that may apply to a broader population. Many sites dealt with this problem by using several questions that, in combination, were supposed to allow analysts to identify subsets of those counted to correspond to the different definitions of homelessness. Sites that framed their survey as being about housing status, rather than homelessness, further increased their ability to measure broader definitions of homelessness. However, these questions were not consistent across sites, making it impossible to aggregate data. Further, there were some problems with aggregating the data to apply different definitions within sites largely because answer categories were often not mutually exclusive.

Areas that Need Improvement

Through many of our site observations and interviews, we identified certain common areas needing improvement. Some areas were identified by the sites themselves, some by the Urban Institute research team, and some by both.

- *Expand coverage.*
   In general, Youth Count! pilot sites used three main methods to count homeless youth—shelter counts, street counts, and magnet events. Shelter counts should be fairly straightforward to organize; however the street counts and magnet events are of limited value as currently designed. Most street counts were designed to focus on hot spots, areas where homeless youth were known to congregate. Although one would want to include hot spots in a survey design,

focusing on them exclusively would be like conducting the census only in large cities. Homeless youth who do not go to these hot spots will be missed. By not including other locations, we do not have any idea of the percentage of homeless youth that can be found in these hot spots. A design that would include hot spots, but also randomly select blocks or block groups would improve the reliability of the street counts. Conducting such a count for youth only would not make sense in terms of resources; but could be used as part of integrating youth count efforts into the PIT count. As we have noted, the magnet events mostly attracted service-involved youth. Some of these youth may also be found in shelters and some may be found in the street count. The value-added of these events is to attract youth who would not be found in the shelter or street count; in other words, youth doubled-up or couch surfing. Service-involved youth may comprise a part of the doubled-up or couch surfing population; however the group that does not access services is missed. Additional innovations will be needed to improve coverage of this hidden population.

- *Engage schools.*
  Sites had various degrees of success at including schools in the Youth Count! initiative. Efforts to use schools for actual counts proved problematic. Some sites attempted to have schools put up posters about the count or refer students to places where they could take the survey. However, efforts to involve schools in raising awareness of the count were limited and seen as secondary. Schools can be important partners in the count. They present a location where many youth can learn about the count and pass along that information to homeless youth they know who may not be attending school. Much more should be done to engage the schools to help raise awareness about the count and encourage students to participate.

- *Survey everyone or a representative sample.*
  Although eight of the nine sites surveyed youth, the selection of who was surveyed was inconsistent across sites. For example, in some sites, sheltered youth were surveyed and unsheltered youth were not. In some sites, particularly where the youth count was integrated with the PIT count, counters were expected to determine which individuals were homeless based on appearance, and further, which homeless people were adults and which were unaccompanied youth. Some communities, such as Houston, instructed counters to ask the first question or two, one of which asked for age, and then select the right survey form. This rarely worked well. This is a difficult task based largely on guesswork. Most homeless youth look like their housed peers. Some sites used homeless youth to identify other homeless youth; however, this relies mostly on their recognition of youth they've seen on the street, not their ability to determine if a youth is homeless. Approaches that do not include all youth or that do not randomly select whom to survey result in samples that are not representative of the homeless youth population. Sites that used a survey focused on housing status and told surveyors to approach all people who appeared to be in the right age group might be expected to produce a more representative sample (to the extent their procedures were followed).

- *Determining the best question wording, survey length, and mode of administration.*
  All sites developed their survey questionnaires on their own, deciding on the questions, length, and mode of administration (i.e., in-person, self-administered, etc.). Sites had access to resources on possible data elements and all generally chose to include a set of core data elements in their questionnaires. Some sites received help from experienced survey designers. The resulting surveys varied significantly in length and we do not know if survey length may have impacted survey completion and the count. Some sites asked surveyors to administer separate surveys for youth and adults, which sometimes led to confusion. Some sites chose to use multiple modes of administration, while others did not. However, even when the protocol required the counter to administer the survey, some counters would allow some youth to fill out the questionnaire without help if they wanted to and appeared able to do so. To create a national estimate, one would want consistent administration of a standardized survey across and within sites. Cognitive pre-testing should be conducted to identify the best wording of questions, to examine the effects of survey length and mode(s) on survey participation and item nonresponse, to determine how best to frame/introduce the survey as a whole, and certain questions in particular, and what level of training is needed for surveyors to implement the survey reliably and validly.

- *Improve outreach for magnet events and use as an engagement tool for disconnected youth.*
  The magnet events in many sites were the cornerstone of the Youth Count! effort. In most sites, these events attracted significant numbers of homeless youth. Despite this, they appear to have largely attracted youth already engaged with organizations providing services to homeless youth. Magnet events have the potential to draw in currently unconnected homeless youth. Youth who do not want to use shelters may still show up for free food and youth-oriented activities. The pilot sites put considerable effort into bringing youth-serving agencies into the Youth Count! partnership and these agencies played key roles in creating the magnet events. Future planning should focus on how to attract hidden populations to magnet events and/or determine if other strategies, locations, or service types are needed to reach this group.

- *Improve de-duplication and integration with the PIT count.*
  De-duplication is critical to ensure that the counts are accurate and do not overestimate the size of the homeless youth population. In some ways, de-duplication relies considerably on how integrated the youth count efforts are with the PIT count efforts. A handful of the sites that participated in Youth Count! did not fully integrate their youth count efforts, making it difficult to de-duplicate with the PIT counts (since the counts were done at different times and a youth could have been counted during both efforts). In addition to integrating the counting efforts, technical assistance could help communities develop viable strategies for creating unique identifiers and other methods of de-duplication.

- *Improve training.*
  All nine pilot sites held a staff and/or volunteer training before the count. These trainings were either integrated with the PIT count training or held separately. Either way, they were usually

brief and did not include a comprehensive curriculum; some did not review the survey questions or have surveyors practice doing an interview to provide direct experience with the questions and question wording before administering them. Survey firms have developed protocols for training interviewers that can be adapted for the PIT count. These include a set of objectives such as understanding the population; how to approach youth and gain cooperation; how to answer questions about the purpose of the count; a review of the questions in the survey; stressing that the mode must be followed and all questions asked as written; a discussion of the purpose of each question so that counters can address youths' concerns and determine if the youth is understanding the question correctly; and how to create an identifier for de-duplication and the importance of doing this correctly. Doing practice interviews and getting feedback about how to improve one's technique are essential components of interviewer training. A training curriculum should be developed at the national level and used by each site so as to create standardization.

- *Add quality control.*
  None of the nine pilot sites included any procedures to control the quality of the count or the survey administration. Observing counters in action at random intervals, especially as they administer surveys, provides real-time information about the count and allows for feedback to counters not following procedures correctly. Although this places an additional burden on sites to provide staff for this level of oversight, the quality of the data will be improved and be more likely to produce a credible estimate of the number of homeless youth.

- *Seek feedback and debrief after the count.*
  Some, but not all Youth Count! sites held debriefings following the count. In many sites, feedback was collected in an *ad hoc* manner, making it unclear whether the identified strengths and weaknesses of the count process were representative. After completing a count, sites should create a mechanism to gather feedback systematically from counters, service providers, and others involved in executing the count. This feedback should be synthesized and reviewed to provide insights for improving future counts.

Improving the PIT Count for Counting Homeless Youth

The PIT counts required by HUD vary significantly in quality. These counts have major limitations as precision instruments, but provide the best data available on how many people are homeless at a point in time. Some Youth Count! sites fully integrated their activities with the PIT count, while others conducted a totally separate count. To improve the local counts of unaccompanied homeless youth, we recommend sites

- Allow for adequate planning time
- Fully integrate the youth count with the PIT count, by encouraging CoCs to create a special focus on unaccompanied youth—not separate counts
- Encourage CoCs to create a specific planning subcommittee, and identify ways to expand coverage to include unaccompanied youth

- Encourage CoCs to develop and expand youth-focused partnerships, especially with LGBTQ service providers and the schools;
- Encourage RHY providers to participate in the PIT count
- Support additional initiatives by communities to identify how to attract hidden populations to magnet events or determine if other strategies, locations, or service types are needed to reach this group
- Encourage CoCs to involve youth in planning and outreach
- Define the population clearly (age, homelessness, unaccompanied)
- Expand PIT count coverage so that it better counts youth
    - Expand to include day coverage for youth
    - Go beyond youth hot spots and develop a comprehensive sampling plan
    - Hold youth magnet events and explore ways to enhance the attraction of non-service-involved youth to magnet events
- Instead of administering a separate survey for youth, add a few questions on sexual orientation and gender identity to the PIT count survey
- Utilize common data elements and question wording to provide national consistency
- Test survey designs including modes of administration, framing of the survey, questionnaire length, and question wording
- Devise means of de-duplicating surveys
- Explore the use of social media to increase awareness of the count
- Improve training
- Add quality control
- Develop systematic feedback mechanisms.

HMIS is an important part of data gathering for the PIT counts. In many communities, data from the HMIS produce the one night sheltered count, which is summed with the unsheltered count to provide a total number of people who experience homelessness at a point in time. Similar to the HMIS, RHY providers submit data through RHYMIS. Since coverage and participation from RHY providers is critical to improving the count of unaccompanied homeless youth, integrating RHYMIS and HMIS is a logical next step to getting better data on youth through the PIT counts. Specifically, HHS and HUD should work together to

- Conduct a compatibility crosswalk on variables collected for RHYMIS and HMIS; identify and fill gaps that prevent the two systems from providing comparable data that would be combined for the PIT count[20]
- Encourage RHY providers to synchronize with HMIS for the PIT count, including aligning age categories for unaccompanied youth
- Adding sexual orientation and gender identity questions to HMIS

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[20] This process has begun with HUD's recently released "Draft Homeless Management Information Systems Data Standards."

Finally, while it's important to include the schools as partners in the counts, we do not recommend integrating aggregate data collected for the school McKinney-Vento program with the PIT count. These two data sources serve different purposes and the methodologies differ too much to combine them. We do however, recommend that CoCs spearheading PIT counts work with schools to raise awareness about the counts in schools and encourage students to attend magnet events to be counted.

There are a number of places HUD could provide technical assistance to communities to improve the counts. Specifically, developing a sampling plan, improving counter training, administering surveys (including asking difficult questions about sexual orientation and identity), and the best ways to de-duplicate the count.

Chapter 11: Launching National Surveys to Get Better Counts of Homeless Youth and Information on their Characteristics and Needs

The PIT count provides a way to produce regular estimates of youth experiencing homelessness so that shelters can identify the level of need for their services. However, estimating the number of unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness more broadly requires a multi-layered strategy. Toward that end, we recommend

- Launching a national study on the characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness
- Using existing national surveys to count doubled-up and couch surfing youth

Launching a National Study on the Characteristics of Youth Homelessness

To obtain information about the characteristics, background, and needs of homeless youth, we recommend a multi-pronged approach. We propose a school-based survey of all high school students, a survey of homeless youth derived by using respondent-driven sampling, and a survey of service-using youth conducted at the service-providing locations. Each of our proposals would require testing and piloting before full implementation nationwide. Since these activities are beyond the scope and capacity of the local PIT count efforts, a research organization or university would need to implement them.

School survey
As noted above, the data collected in schools for the McKinney-Vento Program are collected for different purposes and use different methodologies, making them inappropriate for inclusion in the PIT count. However, schools provide an important focal point for finding and interviewing adolescents. We propose a survey be conducted in schools to identify homeless youth and obtain information about them. Evidence exists that such a survey can be conducted. For example, Pergamit and Ernst (2010) conducted a small survey in several schools in Chicago and Los Angeles to identify youth who had ever run away and their knowledge and use of services. YouthCatalytics (formerly the New England Network for Child Youth and Family Services) conducted an intriguing study in four New England high schools where they asked youth to identify teenagers they know (including themselves) who were not living at home.[21] This study found significant percentages of transient and homeless youth consistently across the four schools. This methodology, although not without flaws, allows identification of homeless youth by asking students rather than relying on reports from teachers, administrators, or other school staff. In a related point, Pergamit and Ernst (2010) found that youth who had run away or had seriously thought about running away were much more likely than other youth in their school to know youth who had run away. This suggests that the YouthCatalytics method may do well at identifying homeless youth both in school and not in school on the day of the survey.

Conducting a survey in schools allows all youth to participate, as we suggest above for any future Youth Count! survey. The school survey should not focus exclusively on homelessness, but instead collect

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[21] https://www.youthcatalytics.org/research/homeless-and-transient-youth-estimation-pilot/

information on housing status, in conjunction with other key information. The questions should be formed to measure all definitions of homelessness, similar to most Youth Count! survey instruments.

A school survey that does not accompany the PIT count can be conducted on a sample of schools; it need not be conducted in all schools, even in a given area. A national sample could be formed and states or local areas could choose to supplement the national sample in order to obtain estimates for their area. Numerous federal surveys use schools as the basis for their sample. The methods typically employed get around many of the challenges we identified in chapter 7.

Although a unique survey for the purpose of collecting information on homeless youth may be preferred for some purposes, it may be more practical to add questions to an existing national survey such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, conducted by the CDC. This survey, conducted biennially in high schools throughout the country, forms part of CDC's Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System (YRBSS) that collects information on six categories of health risk behaviors among youths and young adults: (1) behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence; (2) sexual behaviors that contribute to HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancy; (3) tobacco use; (4) alcohol and other drug use; (5) unhealthy dietary behaviors; and (6) physical inactivity. In addition, YRBSS monitors the prevalence of obesity and asthma among this population (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2013). Given these topics of interest, it seems appropriate to consider adding questions about housing status and homelessness, as ample evidence now exists that unstable housing and literal homelessness increase a person's risk of engaging in harmful behaviors and incurring the health consequences.[22]

Another survey to consider would be Monitoring the Future, a survey of eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders conducted annually by the Survey Research Center in the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The survey, funded through continuing grants from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (part of NIH), collects information on the behaviors, attitudes, and values of American adolescents with a particular focus on alcohol and drug use.[23] The sample, regularity, and topics of this survey make it an appropriate candidate for collecting information on housing instability and homelessness among youth.

Despite the many strengths of a school survey, it is not without its weaknesses:

- The need for parental consent can still pose a barrier to obtaining useful data. However, in the YRBSS, roughly 90 percent of all schools used passive consent, where parents must opt out of allowing their children participate, rather than active consent, where parents must sign to allow participation (CDC 2013). Passive consent provides a much greater likelihood of student

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[22] See, for example, Logan, Frye, Pursell, Anderson-Nathe, Scholl, and Korthius (2013); Kidder, Wolitski, and Pals (2008); Cheung and Hwang (2004); Metraux, Metzger, and Culhane (2004); Ennett, Bailey, and Federman (1999); and Ennet, Federman, Bailey, Ringwalt, and Hubbard (1999).

[23] http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/

response and does not limit the participation of youth not living with parents or guardians, the key population of interest.

- The ability to achieve privacy for the students filling out the questionnaire could affect the honesty of their responses. However, the protocols for established surveys, such as the YRBSS, attempt to provide for privacy since these surveys already ask sensitive questions.
- Although a survey like the YRBSS asks sensitive questions, schools may object to adding certain questions such as gender identity and sexual orientation. The schools that participated in Youth Count! were unwilling to include these questions, and resistance would likely be widespread. This would limit our ability to estimate the prevalence of LGBTQ youth who experience homelessness or understand how they differ from heterosexual youth.
- A school survey may miss students not present in school the day the survey is administered, either temporarily or permanently (i.e., dropouts). Methods such as those employed by YouthCatalytics may overcome some of these coverage shortfalls; however youth who have been gone for some time, youth who are loners, or youth who never reveal their housing status to anyone may be missed.
- Any survey in high schools limits the age range covered. Youth over 18 will mostly be excluded. Younger youth, too, will be missed unless the survey is also administered in middle schools. Pilot sites that put a lower bound on the age range they included typically went down to age 13 (others did not put on any lower limit). Including only high school students would generally restrict the population to age 14 and above.

Respondent-driven sample

To counter some of the weaknesses of a school survey, we also propose using respondent-driven sampling to measure the characteristics and needs of homeless youth. Respondent-driven sampling (RDS) is a method used for hard-to-reach populations. It involves starting with a set of individuals in the population of interest (seeds) and having them refer individuals they know in that population. Those individuals are then asked to refer others they know; the process continues until certain conditions are met. Referring youth receive an incentive for every youth they refer that actually comes in to be surveyed. Unlike snowball sampling, RDS is conducted in a way that allows one to weight the sample to account for the fact that the sample was not collected in a random way (Heckathorn 1997, 2002; Sagalnik and Heckathorn 2004).

RDS cannot be used to create population estimates; however, it can be used to estimate prevalence of characteristics within a population. For example, RDS could be used to estimate the percentage of homeless youth who are LGBTQ, the percentage that are couch surfing, or the percentage attending school. Its ability to generate these sorts of measures makes RDS an appealing methodology for studying the homeless youth population.

Ideally, an RDS sample could be followed longitudinally, allowing for a better understanding of how homeless youth fare over time, including the patterns of living arrangements they use. RDS respondents typically receive an incentive for bringing in additional sample participants. Incentives can also be used to keep them engaged so that they can be found for follow-up interviews. Longitudinal surveys of

homeless youth have had some success (Milburn, et al. 2007; Hobden, et al. 2011) and a solid RDS sample could be expected to provide a solid basis for following homeless youth over time. Testing of new methods for contacting these youth—such as text messages and use of social media—could help improve our ability to contact the sample youth over time.

RDS relies on several assumptions, and the protocol for executing the RDS process can influence the ability of this method to achieve its potential. RDS has been used for various populations, with several studies focusing on populations at risk, such as intravenous drug injectors; however, to date its usage for assessing youth homelessness has been limited. Considerable pilot testing would be required across a variety of communities. How to obtain the original seeds for each sample, how many seeds are needed, and how best to execute the protocol may differ across communities, requiring broad testing. However, building off the partnerships developed as part of Youth Count! could provide a diverse set of service agencies geographically dispersed in a community, forming a solid organizational structure for executing the RDS sample.

Survey of service-involved youth

Although we have stressed that the benefits of the magnet events in Youth Count! were limited due to their apparent attraction of only service-involved youth, surveys of this subpopulation are still useful. In fact, collecting information about this subpopulation and comparing it with information collected from a broader homeless population, via a school survey or RDS, could be helpful in understanding who chooses to engage in services and who does not. Thus we propose to include specific surveys of service-using youth. The Youth Count! magnet events do not really accomplish this objective. Although their participants are primarily service-using, we don't know how well they represent all service-using youth.

Alternatively, each service-providing agency could collect survey information from youth when they come in for help from that agency. All organizations in a community could collect the survey over, say, one designated week, creating an identifier, and/or asking questions to allow for de-duplication both within and across agencies.

Using existing national surveys to count doubled-up or couch surfing youth

The proposed school survey and RDS samples are intended to provide detailed information about homeless youth, not an estimate of the number of homeless youth (although the school survey has the potential to provide an estimate of the number of homeless high school age youth who are attending school). Thus these surveys do not provide the estimates needed on the size of the homeless youth population.

We separate these two data needs and propose that a national estimate of youth homelessness be obtained in other ways. No single methodology will provide an overall estimate, which requires a combination of approaches. Three subpopulations need to be estimated: youth on the street, youth in shelters, and youth who are doubled-up or couch surfing. The PIT count, is intended to capture the first two groups, but does not capture the couch surfing group. As noted, the magnet events of Youth Count! probably missed a large proportion of the couch surfing population that was not engaged in services.

One way to try to estimate the couch surfing youth population is to add questions to one or more existing surveys. The existence of complementary information on the selected existing survey(s) should be one factor in selecting the best survey to use; however, the ability to create a good national estimate should be the first priority.

Capturing the couch surfing youth population using a national survey would best be accomplished by using a survey that already creates a household roster. These surveys ask the respondent to name all household members, generally gathering a few pieces of demographic information about each; the particular data elements depend on the survey. In general, the survey asks the respondent to name all the people living or staying in the household. Questions would need to be included to discern who was only staying in the household temporarily. Despite the wording of the questions, couch surfers are most likely not included in these rosters as the respondent would not consider them members of the household. As a result, questions would be added to try to determine if there were people staying at the household on a temporary basis who would not be included in another household's roster. Follow-up questions would be used to determine if the person was a homeless youth or an out-of-town guest.

Large-scale national surveys that build household rosters include the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), an ongoing survey conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics, and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), an annual survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; two surveys with useful complementary information. Other surveys may also be identified that could be used for the purpose of estimating youth homelessness. Three surveys worth mentioning are the American Community Survey (ACS), the American Housing Survey (AHS) and the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART).

The Census Bureau collects the ACS as a replacement for the long form in the decennial census. The strength of the ACS is its size; the survey collects information from over two million households and is ongoing. Furthermore it is designed to provide community level estimates. Its weakness is that it is a simple survey. The Census Bureau limits the number and type of questions that can be added, which may make getting sufficient clarifying information problematic. The questionnaire asks about any person living or staying in the household for more than two months. Questions to identify couch surfers would need to be added, probably building a separate roster. Unlike the NHIS or NSDUH, the ACS is self-administered, making it difficult to provide adequate clarification to define the target population.

The Census Bureau collects the AHS on behalf of HUD. Conducted every two years, the national sample comprises 60,000 housing units. A supplemental sample allows for subnational estimates for several metropolitan areas. The same housing units have been retained in the sample for nearly 30 years with additions for new construction and replacement to account for survey attrition. Household composition captures individuals for whom the housing unit is their usual place of residence (i.e., the place where the person lives and sleeps most of the time). Like the other surveys, questions about couch surfers would need to be added with additional context and instructions provided. Note that a redesign of the AHS is anticipated to be implemented in 2015 and there has been some discussion of adding questions to capture people who are doubling up or living temporarily in the household. A new sample will be drawn

and some changes may be implemented with regard to the longitudinal nature of the sample and the way metropolitan areas are oversampled; however, none of the expected changes should impact the capture of household composition.

The NISMART is collected through a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The survey's design captures youth under age 18 who have run away, been thrown out, or were otherwise missing from their home at some point over the last 12 months. One key component is a household telephone survey. Given the survey's target population, the topic provides a good backdrop for adding questions about youth staying in the household who are doubled-up or couch surfing. Although the survey does not currently ask about older youth, the questions that would be included to expand the scope of the survey could include questions about any youth or young adult staying temporarily in the home. One weakness of using the NISMART is that it is collected only periodically; the three times it has been collected are more than 10 years apart, with the third incarnation in the field this year. For the NISMART to provide estimates often enough to be used for monitoring the size of the homeless youth population, its periodicity would need to be substantially increased.

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Appendix A

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Lead Agency
Boston Emergency Shelter Commission

Partner Agencies
Massachusetts Department of Education (developed the strategy for counting youth, helped develop the survey, helped convene schools)
Youth on Fire (Cambridge youth-serving agency)
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Bridge Over Troubled Waters

Other Key Agencies and Organizations
Home for Little Wanderers
Boston Public Health Commission—Homeless Services Bureau
JRI Health—Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Support Services (GLAS)
Pine Street Inn (largest Boston emergency shelter)
St. Francis House
Fenway Health—Sidney Borham Jr. Health Center (health service for youth)
Shelters, drop-in centers, and rapid rehousing providers
Schools (public and charter)

Youth-serving agencies in Boston and Cambridge participate in Homeless Youth Providers Engaging Together, an ad hoc organization with the goal of improving services for high-risk and homeless youth. When it became clear that Boston was going to be part of the pilot Youth Count!, Jim Greene of the Emergency Shelter Commission (the lead CoC agency in Boston) took the challenge to this group. Members were very interested in the youth count, and most said they would help. The reality of time constraints caught up with most of them, however, as they did not have enough time to clear the survey and procedures through their IRBs, boards of directors, and so on for the 2012 Youth Count! Despite these difficulties, Boston's Youth Count! ended up involving 13 different youth-serving programs in Boston and Cambridge, compared with previous years when only the four programs run by Bridge Over Troubled Waters contributed. The committee expects even greater participation next year.

DATE OF COUNT

Boston's youth count was held on the night of December 12, 2012, the historic timing (the 33rd anniversary) of Boston's point-in-time (PIT) count. This means that Boston had approximately six fewer weeks than the other sites to prepare for its count. People in Boston felt that they had just heard about Youth Count! and had just begun discussing it as a possibility when they found themselves committed. The commitment to go ahead with the youth count came in late October 2012, and most partner agencies found out about the Youth Count! pilot in early to mid-November, giving them only a three- to four-week window to prepare. They realized that this was a rushed commitment; as a result, a lot of the

collaborative agencies that were initially interested weren't able to obtain the necessary approvals to participate this year.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

While the City of Boston has counted the homeless annually for 33 years, this was the first time the count included a special focus on youth. The city has an extremely well-established PIT count protocol, but found that the homeless youth population had been significantly undercounted and that the city's methodology for counting homeless adults did not capture homeless youth well. For example, staff believe there is a fairly large homeless youth population in the city, but the general count identified only 40 or so youth in previous years.

Next year is likely to be different. In July 2012, the state legislature created a special commission to count homeless young adults; the lieutenant governor has put a major emphasis on reducing youth homelessness and, as a starting point, wants to know how many youth there are and their ages. The commission expects to issue its first planning report for addressing the problem in March 2013, with a final report in December. The state established 10 regional subcommissions on homeless youth, and four were set to actually conduct a count, with Boston one of them. The University of Massachusetts also has programs serving homeless youth, and there has been a groundswell of interest in counting homeless youth, so they now have a mandate to do this. Efforts for 2012/January 2013 were necessarily truncated, but the expectation is that the pilot youth counts are laying the groundwork for doing much better in the future. Boston certainly expects that this will happen, given enough time for all the partnership agencies to review a survey, get approval, recruit volunteers, and create a plan for doing the count.

Including schools in the Boston youth count was complicated by issues with the perceived reliability of the McKinney-Vento data, the high proportion of charter schools, and IRB issues concerning the types of questions that the schools can ask and the data they can collect.

With all the above in mind, Boston will definitely be conducting this count again in December 2013, with much more lead time and many additional partner agencies.

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

The target of Boston's Youth Count! was primarily youth age 24 and younger, with a specific focus on youth age 18 to 24, whom officials believe make up the largest segment of Boston's homeless youth population.

Boston found from the results of its participation in CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) that between 4.1 and 4.7 percent of a school's population is homeless, and 2 percent are unaccompanied, and this has been consistent over the years. Boston has augmented the standard YRBS with eight different measures of homelessness among school-age youth, from which it can construct groups meeting both the HUD and Department of Education/McKinney-Vento definitions of homelessness.

While all Homeless Youth Providers Engaging Together (HYPET) network agencies have culturally competent staff to provide services to LGBTQ youth and young adults, the inclusion of Boston GLASS, and Youth on Fire as survey partners helped ensure a special emphasis on LGBTQ youth.

Youth Count! was part of Boston's 33rd annual homeless street count. While the PIT count took place on December 12, 2012, the Youth Count! actually continued for a full week afterwards, ending on December 18, 2012. Below we describe the several methods of the count.

PIT Youth Count: Unsheltered
The street survey began during the PIT night count and then went forward for a week. The street count was largely conducted by nongovernmental providers, including Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Youth on Fire, Sidney Borham health center, and GLASS. These organizations' outreach workers used the two-page youth survey (described below) when conducting their street search. The surveys were administered largely by handing them out to the homeless youth and having them return it. Sidney Borham followed the same practice, placing a stack of surveys on the reception counter and inviting youth to complete them.

During the week of the youth count survey, organizations would do 3 to 4 hours of day street outreach, as well as medical outreach in a van in the evening (following a regular schedule of stops so their clients, largely homeless youth, knew where they would be). To actually get the youth to take the survey, outreach workers told the youths that results would benefit homeless youth by documenting the need for services. Responses were heavily dependent on the group dynamic within the van at its various stops. For example, if an influential person in the group took the youth count survey, then everyone in the group would take it. If that didn't happen, or that person refused, then the rest of the group wouldn't take it either. The outreach worker we interviewed estimated that 65 percent of youth seeking help on the nights of the youth count actually took the survey. No attempt was made to assure its completeness, nor was any incentive offered.

One of the innovations they had this year was to find a time when they were most likely to see unaccompanied youth with health workers. As a result, they got a lot of volunteers from their health clinics, including the Home for Little Wanderers and their Youth Resource Network. The Boston Public Health Bureau located in the Pine Street Inn, Youth on Fire, the St. Francis House, and the schools also helped with the youth count. Thirteen youth-serving agencies each participated in the count and administered at least one survey, compared to previous years when only Bridge Over Troubled Waters' four programs participated. Extending data collection over a full week also produced more completed surveys.

PIT Youth Count: Sheltered Count
The youth-serving organizations involved in the unsheltered count also helped with the sheltered count which also occurred over a week's time beginning on December 12, 2012. Organizations such as GLASS, the Sidney Borham Institute, and Youth On Fire primarily administered surveys through service sites, and Bridge Over Troubled Waters completed surveys mostly through their temporary shelters to the unaccompanied youth. These surveys were largely self-administered, meaning that staff from these organizations handed them out or placed them for the youth to take and fill them out. Some organizations actually had individuals ask the questions, but the Emergency Shelter Commission left it up to these organizations' discretion since these groups knew their clients best. However, time constraints meant that the youth count did not benefit from having volunteers available to administer the surveys to youth, as happened in most other Youth Count! communities. Further, essentially no

training was done on either the survey itself or approaches to encouraging youth to participate. As a consequence, only a few surveys were completed through this manner.

School Count

This was the first time Boston used a modified version of a youth count survey in the schools; as a result, the city had some difficulty actually conducting it. The survey was also administered during the week starting December 12 and was administered both in public and Boston's nine charter schools serving high school–aged youth. The schools each have liaisons that work with unaccompanied youth, and these liaisons helped administer the surveys. As noted below, the school survey required parental consent and was much shorter than the unsheltered and sheltered surveys since there were a number of questions it couldn't ask. In addition, the school survey could not use identifiers since they would reveal the person's identity too easily. As a result, the school survey did not gather information on very many individuals, and the information it did gather was quite limited.

In sum, the Boston Youth Count! was able to collect information on a total of 191 unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults.[24] While this total represents an increase over prior years that relied solely on the one-night PIT count, the actual number of homeless youth in the Boston is estimated to be much higher. A more systematic focus on unaccompanied homeless youth in the Boston Public Schools, an alignment of state interests and organizations, and new partners joining efforts to assist these efforts should improve the count in years to come.

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

The survey used in Boston was largely based on one used by Worcester for its homeless youth count. It was tweaked to reflect Boston based on the input of nine different partners who were part of the Boston/Cambridge workgroup. This was done by convening a subgroup that went through the survey question by question to make it more applicable to Boston. They also looked at the order of the questions to ensure they didn't start with negative or potentially threatening questions. They wanted the youth providers to think about how this would field test. Some of the organizations talked to their youth clients about the survey and how it felt to them. They wanted to be sensitive with questions regarding sexual orientation.

The survey developers did look at the Youth Count! core data elements (CDEs) and also looked at their McKinney-Vento survey and tweaked their survey a bit. They paid particular attention to gender and sexual orientation questions to be as sensitive as possible. They had just enough time to improve their survey, but they would like to improve it further next year and compare it to other surveys. They believed that if they had a four- or five-page survey, they would have lost a lot of people, so additional length is not an option; instead, they must ask better questions and perhaps frame better. Several of the 58 surveys collected by Bridge Over Troubled Waters inadvertently cut off the foster care questions and are therefore missing data on this issue. The city's process was to cast a wide net, and participating agencies had a lot of flexibility/little guidance on how to administer the survey. Some of the residential agencies had it self-administered while others had the staff actually conduct it. Because the organizers lacked the staff capacity and time to supervise survey administration, they really left it up to the agencies to conduct the surveys since they knew their clients the best. The organizers had a debrief meeting with the agencies in the spring and discuss what went well and what didn't and how to improve

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[24] www.bphc.org/programs/esc/homeless-census/Forms%20%20Documents/2012-2013%20Key%20Findings.pdf.

it in the future. The biggest challenge in the future will be mainstreaming the questions they asked without inadvertently creating a perverse incentive to call youth "homeless" to get funding.

Survey Topics
Youth Count PIT survey: The survey itself is two pages long and consists of 25 questions. The survey asks questions about demographics, living arrangements, sexual orientation, education, sources of income, service receipt, and where one spent the night of December 12. The survey includes a unique identifier at the end, which is First Letter of First Name/ Third Letter of First Name/ Last Two Letters of Last Name/ Last 4 SSN #-#-#-#. If unknown, use 9-9-9-9, Gender Code [0=Female 1=Male 2=Transgender Male to Female 3=Transgender Female to Male 4 = Other 8 = Don't Know 9 = Refused], Month-Month/Day-Day/4-digit Year of Birth. For example, December 12, 2012 = 12-12-2012.
Student/school survey: The school survey was much shorter than the street survey. Administrators from the schools found that some of the questions regarding gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, and other questions could not be asked in schools. In addition, the schools found that the need for consent and the perceived lack of confidentiality really hampered the count. A lot of schools wouldn't ask any student to take the survey unless there was parental consent, which seems a particularly troublesome requirement when the target group is likely to have experienced tension, instability, or disruption in the relationships with their parents. So in the end, there were only a couple of questions the schools could ask. The school liaisons also found that they couldn't use the unique identifiers in these schools because the number of surveys from any one school was so small that with the location identified, it would be easy to figure out a person's identity.

Incentives
Providing incentives was left up to the partners, including Bridge Over Troubled Waters, GLASS, and several others. The Urban team could not determine what incentives were offered, and they seem to have differed depending on the organization involved. Since most of the partners allowed youth to take the surveys on their own, it would have been difficult in any event to convey an incentive to a youth for completing and returning the survey.

Consent
Consent differed by where the survey was delivered. Surveys in the schools required parental consent whereas it was not required in other areas. This basically meant that the schools didn't get many surveys back.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

Youth were not involved very much in planning or conducting the surveys. Due to the tight turnaround in actually developing and then administering the survey, the organizations working on this did not involve the youth very much. In addition, organizations did not really use volunteers of any age to administer the survey. This may change in the coming years, however.

DE-DUPLICATION METHODS

Boston is still working on de-duplication, but the basic approach was to use the format of the HMIS unique identifier and ask for it at the end of the survey. This was done by putting the date of birth at the end of the survey. However, Jim Greene pointed out that surveys received from providers that had not previously participated in the city's PIT count had incomplete or missing identifiers. Over the course of

the week of youth data collection, people potentially taking the survey during the days following December 12 were asked whether they had already taken one, and were not given a second one if the answer was yes. The organizers are learning many lessons about this.

There were a number of challenges identified in the planning and conduct of Youth Count! As mentioned earlier, the amount of time allocated for developing the survey and then conducting the survey was far less than for the other sites, with most of the partners given only three weeks to prepare. In the end, 191 Youth Count! surveys were completed, although the Boston homeless youth population is estimated to be larger than that. Below we enumerate some of the challenges.

Not Enough Time to Plan
As mentioned before, Boston was notified that it was to conduct this survey in late October and then began notifying partners in November, giving many of them just a three-week turnaround time period to actually plan, develop and then conduct the survey. This strained a lot of organizations. Some had to focus solely on the overall PIT count and could not focus on the youth portion of the survey. In addition, the Boston Emergency Shelter Commission was also working on Youth Count! during the same time as the McKinney-Vento application, and staff found that this also cut into the amount of time they could devote to Youth Count!

As a result of the time constraints, a number of partners could not actually participate. For example, Massachusetts was dealing with an ex-offender reentry crisis in which the evidence from many drug cases turned out to be tainted by laboratory workers in the Commonwealth's crime lab. As a result of this crisis, many persons convicted of drug offenses were released into the streets, and the Boston Center for Youth and Family's Street Worker program had to prioritize this reentry population over helping with the youth count. Another organization called PACT works with very high risk youth who have court or gang involvement. The organization was so overburdened it could not help with Youth Count! surveys. However, it will be available to help next year. Thus there are additional potential partners who had capacity issues this year and could not help out, but might in the coming years. The organizers are looking to incorporate new partners, especially those working with high-risk youth in communities of color in the coming years, and try to take into account the other needs and responsibilities they have.

School Survey
One of the major problems with the school surveys was the fact that organizers had to shorten the survey and therefore could not ask several questions. In addition, the school survey required parental consent, and few youth were able to obtain this consent or were not willing to ask. As a result, very few surveys were collected from the schools even though it is estimated that there is a fairly large homeless population in the Boston schools.

Another problem with the school count was uncovered when a Homeless Education Specialist with the Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth surveyed liaisons about counting homeless youth. The school liaisons found many youth wouldn't come forward because they were protecting the adults housing them. The guess is that these youth didn't participate because they didn't want to harm their siblings, who might be taken into state care; their parents, who would be charged; the adults aiding and abetting the youth; and themselves, who might get moved out of the school. The City of

Boston had two or three programs that are doing outreach with the schools to find children who are couch surfing. Boston has been building up a system where there is a liaison in most of its schools, as required under McKinney.

Survey Administration
Outside the schools, most surveys were self-administered by youth at organizations such as Bridge Over Troubled Waters, GLASS, and other partners. While the reasons for this are related to a lack of volunteers and time to plan and execute the surveys, it also led in large part to a paucity of surveys completed. Bridge Over Troubled Waters was able to turn in 58 surveys in total, a larger number than any other partner. However, the self-administration of the survey provided little oversight as to who actually filled them out or how well. In addition, through self-administration, these organizations weren't really able to induce too many participants to fill out the survey, reducing the overall "take" of the count.

LESSONS LEARNED

The city has recognized that it must work together with many partners long before the actual count to bring partners on board, develop the survey, get the survey cleared through the various agencies' institutional review boards and/or boards of directors, train individuals to administer the survey, and bring in volunteers. As noted by one of the individuals interviewed, this year's youth count was seen more as a means of building logistics and communication for how to conduct the youth count, rather than getting an actual count itself. In the coming years, Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will work on a longer timeline and, with more partners to more fully develop the survey, develop better strategies of identifying youth, and bring in volunteers to help conduct the survey.

CLEVELAND, OHIO[25]

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services (lead agency)
Bellefaire JCB
AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland
Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, Next Step
Cleveland Christian Home
Humility of Mary Housing Ministry, Opportunity House
Sisters of Charity Cleveland
Cleveland Metropolitan School District (Project Act)

DATE OF COUNT

The youth count survey was officially administered from midnight Wednesday, January 23, 2013, to midnight Monday, January 28, 2013. Drop-ins and other outreach events took place throughout this period. The Cleveland all-persons point-in-time count took place Tuesday, January 22, 2013. Outreach workers and shelter staff carried Youth Count! survey cards to administer surveys as they conducted the all-persons PIT count. The multiday time frame was selected to capture a broader swath of youth whose housing security status may fluctuate by the day of the week.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

While some partner agencies had developed youth surveys in the past, this count represented the first time Cleveland initiated a community-wide effort to specifically count homeless youth.

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Cleveland's count included youth age 24 and under. During outreach, survey administrators informally used a minimum age threshold of 13. Cleveland's survey instrument inquired about housing situation, without asking directly about homelessness. Based on the survey questions, the county intended to be able to classify youth as homeless following both the US Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definitions of homelessness.

The Cleveland count intended to target several special subpopulations, including LGBTQ youth and young people with children or who are pregnant. Cleveland was also interested in capturing youth who do not have a stable home with their parents.

COUNT METHODS

The Cleveland count was centered on an online youth survey disseminated through special drop-in events, shelters, mailing lists, and social media (including Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook). Paper versions of the youth survey were also used for street outreach and in cases where Internet access was

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[25] Includes Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland.

not available. The survey was administered by paid staff of several partner agencies, along with a smaller contingent of youth volunteers with ties to these agencies.

Unsheltered Count
Cleveland conducted street counts based on known hot spots in the area, including the Tower City Mall, transit centers, cafes, and community centers. They did not anticipate finding many youth on the streets, as it was too cold in Cleveland to stay outside for long periods. Survey administrators approached youth, introduced the youth count, and asked youth to fill out a paper version of the survey on their own on the spot. Regular street outreach teams working for partner agencies also administered youth count surveys during their normal outreach rounds during the week.

To capture more youth through community partners and key individuals that work with youth (e.g., parole and probation officers), partner agencies developed mailing lists of key contacts in the community. The mailing lists provided these contacts with information about Youth Count! events and the link to the online survey, with the intention that the key contacts would help further disseminate the survey.

Sheltered Count
Shelter providers participated in the distribution of survey cards and/or posters throughout the youth count. This included the two main shelter locations that provided coordinated intake services and assessments. All shelter providers were asked to either administer the survey to any individual age 24 or younger or provide access to the online survey if the client did not want to complete a survey card. Youth count staff and volunteers also visited shelters throughout the city at different times on different days and asked the shelter directors to help identify youth in the facility.

Magnet Events
The Cleveland site hosted a series of drop-ins where youth could fill out the survey at different times of the day. There were two large drop-in events open to the public, one at the AIDS Taskforce on Friday night (January 25, 2013) and one at Bellefaire on Saturday afternoon (January 26, 2013). These sites represented Cleveland's east and west sides, respectively. There were also daily drop-ins at the Tower City Mall, a key shopping and transportation hub in the city, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. The youth count initiative had a storefront on the mall's main level that served as a base station for staff and volunteers approaching youth in and around the mall. Youth count volunteers and staff further established a presence at the annual Homeless Stand Down, a community-wide collaborative event that aims to provide vulnerable populations in Cleveland with resources, services, and referrals to local agencies to better meet their needs.

School Count
The Cleveland Metropolitan School District provided administrative data on youth in grades K–12 identified as unaccompanied, following the Department of Education definition. The Cleveland Schools did not administer the county youth count survey, citing concerns from the Ohio Department of Education about questions on sexual orientation and gender identity. The school district was able to share aggregated, grade-level data on youth identified as homeless, including basic demographic data. According to representatives from the school district, schools displayed Youth Count! posters and life skill coaches distributed Youth Count! flyers with links to the original online survey, but the schools did not actively direct youth to take the youth count survey.

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

The survey collected all core data elements and all traditional elements about unsheltered counts. The survey also asked about sexual orientation.

Survey participants received no incentives for filling out the survey. Youth volunteers who helped administer the survey received bus passes and/or $10 mall gift certificates.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

Cleveland assembled a focus group of youth under age 24 who were previously homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless to discuss issues related to the survey. They incorporated youth feedback (particularly on the stigmas attached to being identified as homeless) into the design of the survey. Youth with connections to the partner agencies also helped administer the survey and staff the drop-in events.

Cleveland aimed to engage youth through social media. It sought to use its YouTube channel as a platform to encourage youth to post videos about experiences with homelessness.

DE-DUPLICATION METHODS

Cleveland included a survey question inquiring whether the respondent had previously completed the survey. It matched these responses against the respondent's date of birth. The site had previously planned to use the last four digits of Social Security numbers, but realized this presented a security risk with the online survey format.

De-duplication between the youth count survey data and the aggregated school data was more challenging. The Cleveland Schools were sent individual-level data on respondents' date of birth, race, and sex. This demographic data was used to cross-check with the school data. Schools were then able to report the number of respondents they believed were counted twice.

SITE-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

It was cold in Cleveland, resulting in fewer youth outside at observable outdoor locations. Hot spots normally frequented by homeless youth were empty.

The Tower City Mall had a policy that prohibited youth under 18 from entering the mall during specified hours to prevent truancy. This rule was suspended during the week of the youth count, but organizers believed that youth may have been less likely to self-identify as youth during those times.

LESSONS LEARNED

Survey Design
During survey administration, youth sometimes required clarification on the response options for the opening housing status question, which asked the respondent where he or she slept the night before. Among youth over 18, many did not know whether to indicate if they were or were not staying with a

legal guardian, as they were their own legal guardians. Respondents were also uncertain about what "couch surfing" and "doubling up" meant. Once provided the definition of these terms, youth sometimes offered alternate vocabulary more popular among youth.

The design of the housing status question also made it more difficult to categorize youth as homeless under the ED and HUD definitions of homelessness because it allowed respondents to check off multiple answers. This posed methodological challenges for sorting respondents into different categories of housing insecurity. It has been suggested that future surveys should have two separate questions on housing status: one on whether the respondent stayed with his or her legal guardian and another on housing situation.

In addition to refining these questions, youth count organizers believe it would be helpful to include additional questions in the future. One suggestion was the addition of a question inquiring whether the respondent has a key to his or her place of residence and/or 24-hour access. Organizers also believed a question on employment would be valuable.

Coordinating with Partners, Securing Buy-In
Partner agencies in the youth count found that securing political buy-in from local officials and media attention from the press facilitated greater access and more positive responses to the survey. A memo from the Cuyahoga County Executive to local agencies allowed staff and volunteers to more quickly and easily gain permission to administer the survey throughout Cleveland. With more planning time, Youth Count! partner agencies believe they could have built an even stronger and wider network of connections to local organizations to garner more responses. Partner agencies expressed interest in reaching out to health organizations in the future to leverage their access to the target population.

Cleveland experienced some challenges in planning and coordinating with a wide array of partners. Agencies initially at the table became less involved over time in some cases, requiring some partner agencies to shoulder more of the burden of executing the survey, planning events, and coordinating outreach. There were particular challenges in coordinating between the community partners and the school district, including confusion over the definition of homelessness used in the youth count. The school district received information from both partner agencies in the youth count and other education offices. As a result, the numbers of homeless youth captured through the schools and the number captured through the youth count survey were difficult to reconcile to paint an overall picture of homeless youth in the area. More planning time and clearer guidance on data to be collected across agencies may help overcome these challenges in the future.

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Hennepin County Office to End Homelessness (OEH): OEH was the lead agency for Hennepin County's Youth Count! It also leads the Minneapolis/Hennepin County Continuum of Care (CoC). OEH was established in concert with Heading Home Hennepin, the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County's 10-year plan to end homelessness by 2016, with the responsibility to coordinate the plan's implementation.

St. Stephen's Human Services (SSHS): A nonprofit organization that connects people to housing and supportive services, which has a homeless street outreach team. SSHS was one of the two major homeless street outreach organizations that administered the unsheltered survey of homeless youth.

StreetWorks: A collaborative effort among 13 youth-serving agencies that offers an array of housing options and services, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, drop-in centers, meal sites, clothing, HIV/STD prevention, medical care, mental health counseling, alcohol and chemical dependency treatment, employment opportunities, educational programs, and life skills programs. It was the second of two major homeless street outreach organizations (along with its other partner organizations) that administered the unsheltered survey of homeless youth.

People Serving People: An emergency family shelter, which provides emergency housing and community services to families experiencing homelessness. It administered the sheltered survey of homeless youth.

YouthLink: A youth drop-in center that provides comprehensive social supports from health and wellness services, to access to benefits, to education and employment services, to housing and legal assistance. YouthLink is the main youth service organization in Hennepin County and operates the Youth Opportunity Center.

Minneapolis Public Schools: The largest school district in Hennepin County and administrator of the Youth Count! survey through its social workers.

Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation: The Juvenile Probation Division, which seeks to enhance public safety by reducing the risk that adolescent offenders will commit new crimes, involved probation officers to administer the homeless youth survey. The Adult Probation Division also administered the survey to its probationers under the age of 25.

Other youth-serving and homeless-serving organizations: Hennepin County also partnered with family shelters, drop-in centers, soup kitchens, food banks and other social services organizations to help with outreach, engagement and survey implementation.

DATE OF COUNT

Hennepin County shelters and transitional housing programs administered its sheltered count during the evening on January 23, 2013. The unsheltered count was conducted during the day on January 24 and youth were asked to report where they spent the previous night.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

Hennepin County has a long history of counting the homeless In addition to the annual PIT count, for the last five years it has conducted a quarterly unsheltered count. The county has also been a part of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation's (Wilder) triennial statewide homeless counts, which started in 1991 and was just recently completed for 2012. For this research, in-depth surveys, lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour, are completed with homeless people living in shelters, transitional housing

programs, drop-in service locations, and non-shelter locations such as encampments and abandoned buildings. Some of the organizations/agencies involved with the Wilder research were integral partners for the county's Youth Count!

As a result, Hennepin County has a fairly well-developed methodology for counting homeless who are both sheltered and unsheltered. Youth Count

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

The county targeted unaccompanied youth in schools and shelters, youth on the streets, youth who are pregnant or with young children, and youth enrolled in juvenile or adult probation. While the county did not do any specific targeting of LGBTQ youth, it believed it captured some through its GLBT Host Home Program. While the site intended for all counters across the county to wear Cyndi Lauper True Colors stickers, which advertise being LGBTQ-friendly, none of the counters shadowed wore them. StreetWorks noted that while counters did not wear the stickers, youth were aware that they would receive the same courtesy from one outreach worker to another, no matter their sexual orientation.

Hennepin County is defining homeless youth as those who are 24 years old or under and are unaccompanied (not staying with a legal guardian or parent). There is no minimum age. The site is using the HUD definition and ED definition, counting youth who are doubled up or couch surfing. Since the site is asking about their housing status, not whether or not youth are homeless, the site will have information that allows them to disaggregate the numbers and report out according to the HUD definition.

COUNT METHODS AND TRAINING

Planning
The county had a little over three months (end of October to beginning of January) to plan Youth Count! During its planning stages, OEH convened three working groups (two in November and one in December); in attendance were representatives from the CoC, state, Hennepin County Youth Contracts and Office to End Homelessness, People Serving People Family Shelter, St. Stephen's Human Services (SSHS), Salvation Army Single Adult Shelter, YouthLink and Youth Opportunity Center, Minneapolis Public Schools, Justice Probation, and other homeless and youth-serving organizations. They discussed how to align the survey with the PIT count, who exactly was to be surveyed (unsheltered unaccompanied youth, and youth in emergency shelters or transitional housing), and what other partners should be brought to the table. A number of subcommittees were formed to divide the work. One committee organized the shelters' count, while another organized the transitional housing programs' count. Other subcommittees organized the unsheltered count, developed and pretested the survey, and focused on communication and volunteer recruitment.

With SSHS's experience conducting the unsheltered count, they had a fairly well-developed methodology in place. In addition, with YouthLink and the Youth Opportunity Center's involvement with the 2012 Wilder survey, the county had an updated list of locations and contact information for emergency shelters, transitional housing programs and non-shelter hot spots.

Across the last two working sessions, the subcommittee went question-by-question through the survey. They also relied on two youth groups to pretest the survey for clarification, wording, and flow, prior to

finalizing the survey instrument. During the last meeting, the group assigned organizations to specific locations for the unsheltered count. In addition, two representatives from Minneapolis Public Schools described their strategy for surveying youth in schools. School districts, aside from Minneapolis, first heard about the upcoming survey in mid-December from the state school liaison. They got the survey one week in advance. Probation directors agreed to be part of the survey in mid-December. They gave the survey to their probation officers one week in advance.

Sheltered Count
Shelter staff administered the sheltered count the night of the count—January 23. County staff worked with CoC staff to ensure an accurate list of shelters, youth- and homeless-serving organizations, and faith-based organizations and communicated about the survey a month prior to survey implementation. They ensured that everyone understood that the youth survey was taking place simultaneously as the adult PIT. At most shelters, paid or volunteer staff administered the survey; and at some shelters, youth helped administer the survey.

Unsheltered Count
The unsheltered survey took place during the day on January 24 with similar methods used in the annual PIT count. Instead of sending out counters the night of January 23 to wake up homeless people, counters were sent out to known locations early the next morning. The known locations were identified as places youth go when shelters close. These included libraries, drop-in centers, transit stations, and soup kitchens. Counters also looked for youth at campsites, abandoned buildings, and a railroad station with abandoned boxcars. Homeless street outreach workers from SSHS (eight staff and some volunteers and StreetWorks (five teams of two staff/volunteers) were deployed in pairs and teams to administer the unsheltered youth survey. StreetWorks sent out three peer outreach workers, between the ages of 17and 21 to help engage youth in the survey.

School Count
Hennepin County worked with the state liaison, who contacted 200 schools in Hennepin County, to use social workers to administer the homeless youth survey. The schools used a modified version of the survey that was approved by Minneapolis Public Schools' district attorney. The only difference between the school survey and the county survey was the school did not ask for demographic information, as schools already had this information. Minneapolis Public Schools identified 120 unaccompanied youth since the beginning of the school year. Social workers in each of the schools called the students to their offices to find out if they were unaccompanied the night of January 23. If so, they asked them to fill out a survey. They surveyed youth both on Thursday (January 24) and Friday (January 25), to account for those who may have been absent on one of the days.

Justice Count
The county asked all probation officers to review their caseloads and to survey over the next week youth they believe to be precariously housed. Both juvenile and adult probation officers surveyed their probationers over the course of one week. They surveyed those on their caseloads as "traditional supervision."

Training
Training looked different from organization/agency to organization/agency. For example, SSHS and StreetWorks conducted their own trainings with their outreach staff; schools worked with social workers; Justice Probation trained its probation officers, and shelters and drop-in centers trained their caseworkers. Across all trainings, however, staff reviewed the same materials. They discussed the

purpose and goal of Youth Count!, site assignments, survey protocol, and strategies for asking sensitive questions. Trainings were held the day or a week before survey implementation and lasted approximately an hour. Most organizations/agencies felt their staff were well prepared since most had conducted previous counts (i.e., homeless shelter staff and street outreach workers) and others worked with homeless youth in their normal jobs (i.e., probation officers and social workers).

Marketing

Marketing varied across organizations and agencies. People Serving People put flyers in client mailboxes, posted flyers around its buildings, and instructed its caseworkers to encourage clients to participate. StreetWorks worked with librarians to pass out flyers and information about the Youth Count! survey. YouthLink informed youth about the survey as they entered the building. Most sites reported relying on word of mouth.

Survey implementation

All of the surveys were paper-based. Across the county, counters provided youth the option to complete the survey on their own or to have the counter read the survey to them. In most cases, counters read the survey to youth and filled in youth's responses. Counters used their judgment when asking questions for better flow; in other words, counters did not read the survey questions verbatim.

Magnet events

YouthLink, a youth drop-in center, saw the most foot traffic of homeless youth. A little over a hundred youth pass through the center to access services daily. One youth reported that the overwhelming amount of press and public officials present made taking the survey slightly uncomfortable. Some people interfered with surveys being taken either by intruding on personal conversations or by talking to youth who were in the middle of filling out the surveys.

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

Hennepin County developed its own questions for the survey as well as used the same wording from past quarterly unsheltered surveys. The survey collected all core data elements (CDEs). However, the survey also asked youth the following questions:
- How long they stayed where they slept the night of the count;
- If it has been more than a year since they lived with a parent/guardian or had own apartment/house;
- The number of times they have been homeless in the past three years;
- Age when they first left home, and reason for leaving home;
- If they receive public assistance or have any other sources of income;
- The last time they held a job;
- Involvement with foster care or juvenile justice system;
- If they have ever been a victim of domestic violence or ever traded sex for anything; and
- If they have a diagnosed disability.

While most youth were comfortable with the survey questions, a good share grew uncomfortable with two intrusive questions: if they have ever been a victim of domestic violence or ever traded sex for anything. Staff believe youth did not answer these questions honestly.

The site did not plan to use incentives because it did not want people lining up multiple times, duplicating its count. They also want to cut out the "do something for us, we give you something"

phenomenon. However, at YouthLink and with some of StreetWorks' outreach workers, counters provided youth with transit tokens.

The county did not go through, or attempt to go through, an IRB process; instead, it consulted with its county attorney. Prior to each interview, counters asked for youth's verbal consent. Staff and volunteers used their judgment to approach youth in public places.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

Youth were involved in two aspects of the Youth Count: vetting the survey questions and engaging youth to participate in the survey. One of the youth was an unaccompanied youth, who moved from being homeless to being stably housed. Other youth involved were part of a focus group at People Serving People, a family homeless shelter. There were six participants total, most of whom were women and mothers of young children. They ensured that questions made sense and followed a logical flow. The final version of the survey was revised based on their feedback. Youth were also involved with youth outreach and engagement. StreetWorks sent three peer outreach street workers to help recruit youth to complete the survey.

The county decided to not have youth administer the survey. It felt that adding a whole component of training and sending youth to do the work would add too much bureaucracy. There were also concerns with youth asking their peers about sensitive topics and concerns if youth were well-equipped to answer questions or handle situations professionally.

DE-DUPLICATION METHODS

To address duplication, counters asked youth upfront if they had already filled out the survey. For those who did not stay in a shelter (even those in shelter were asked their birthday to de-duplicate), counters asked youth to give them their month and day of birth and compared answers where birthdates were the same. This was the primary plan for de-duplication. It was unlikely most people would get surveyed more than once. If a youth stayed at a shelter the night before, the counter will assume the person was surveyed.

Additionally, surveys with the same cross streets noted as the address stayed at the previous night were checked against each other for similar answers. Finally, surveys that indicated the person had stayed at their parents or their own apartment or in a location outside Hennepin County were discarded. Eight surveys were duplicates and 32 surveys were ineligible (Initial N = 499, Final N = 459).

SITE-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

While Hennepin County overall felt its homeless youth survey went well—exceeding its coverage and expanding its partner collaborations—there were a number of challenges.

First, the night of the count was the coldest day of the year in Hennepin County at about 20 degrees below zero. Due to these circumstances, shelters stayed open all day, instead of closing for their normal hours, and shelters did not turn people away. In turn, staff believe the unsheltered count was not an accurate count. They believe campers and street-based youth went into shelters or found somewhere to double-up or couch surf for the night. As a result, they think their unsheltered counts will be much lower

than previous years. However, as it turned out, the unsheltered count was just about the same as last year: the staff had a similar number of surveys and their social mapping of adults had about the same number.

Second, at the main youth drop-in center, where over a hundred of homeless youth pass through daily, an overwhelming amount of press and public officials were present. According to one youth we interviewed, some media were intrusive on youth being surveyed. This may have impacted youth's honesty, comfort levels, and overall participation in the survey.

Third, StreetWorks does not think it captured youth involved with gangs and sex-trafficked youth. It also believed it missed transient youth that sleep in Hennepin County during the evening, but hang out in St. Paul during the day. Also, while StreetWorks feels it does a good job in the urban core, it does not think it did a good job reaching homeless youth in the suburbs.

Finally, there is a growing problem with unaccompanied youth from the refugee population, particularly Somali youth. During the 1990s, there was a huge Hmong population, and Hmong youth had trouble adjusting to immigrant parents and American culture. This problem, however, has dissipated, and the Hmong community is less affected. Now, the Somali population has grown, and alcohol use among Somali youth is a major problem. The county debated if it should translate the survey for Somali youth but decided not to because most are English-speaking. The county got 20 African surveys and 17 Asian surveys, although Asian will be much more than Hmong. Most of the African surveys are probably Somali.

LESSONS LEARNED

After the implementation of the homeless youth survey, the planning group reconvened a couple times to discuss what worked, what did not, and lessons learned. As a result, Hennepin County noted several things it would do differently for future homeless youth counts.

First, it would plan for a longer period of time. While the timing of this count was not in county staff's control, they believe that having a longer period of time to plan would allow for more coverage, strategic partnerships, and outreach to hard-to-reach populations (i.e., those involved with gangs, domestic violence, or sex-trafficking).

Second, the county is looking at the timing of the survey. Most organizations/agencies suggested administering the survey in the spring or summer for a more accurate count. The county plans to administer the survey again next spring and may incorporate some of the questions into its quarterly unsheltered survey that it is beginning to plan for April 2013.

Third, the county wants to revamp the questions a bit and add more information on how long homeless youth lived in Minnesota and where they are from originally. It had neglected to gather information that would tell the county how many were originally from suburban Hennepin, for example.

Also, the county wants to engage more partners. For example, it hopes to reach out to Metropolitan Community and Technical College, an urban two-year college located in downtown Minneapolis. Previous work by students there has found that about 10 percent of students are homeless. County staff would also strategize how to engage suburban providers to get at homeless youth living in the suburbs.

Fifth, Hennepin County is considering a school-wide survey for all students, asking about students' housing statuses generally. They believe they will catch more homeless youth that schools and social workers cannot identify on their own. Since virtually every student takes an English class every semester, they are thinking of asking all English classes to implement the survey for the next youth count.

In late-June, Hennepin's Office to End Homelessness held a "community conversation" about the results of the youth PIT survey. About 80 community providers and concerned citizens attended the meeting. After the presentation, groups formed around youth involvement in corrections, GLBT youth, youth victimization, and youth employment opportunities. The community agreed that the survey results were informative, and plan to do the youth survey again next year.

HOUSTON, TEXAS[26]

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Lead Agency
Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County

Partner Agencies
School of Public Health, University of Texas (developed the count methodology, conducting data analysis, and supplied volunteers)
Covenant House Texas (provided guidance on interacting with youth in count)
Texas Homeless Education Office (coordinated participation of school districts and developed school survey)

Other Key Agencies and Organizations
Houston Department of Health and Human Services
School districts in Houston, Harris County, Fort Bend County (CyFair Independent School District (ISD), Fort Bend ISD, Galena Park ISD, Houston ISD, Klein ISD, YES Prep Charter Schools)
Homeless Youth Network of Houston/Harris County (collaborative of public and private agencies serving homeless youth in the greater Houston area)
Shelters, drop-in centers, and rapid rehousing providers (Bering United Methodist Open Gate, DePelchin Children's Center, Fort Bend Women's Center, Houston Alumni Youth Center, Houston Area Women's Center, Kinder Shelter, Montrose Grace Place, Salvation Army Social Services, Star of Hope Mission, Youth Advocates)

DATE OF COUNT

The practice, first run of the general unsheltered PIT count occurred on Tuesday, January 22, and the official count occurred on Tuesday, January 29, both from 5:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. The official Youth Count occurred at the same time as the official PIT count on January 29. The sheltered count occurred the evening of and day after, as well as variously throughout the week, with shelter staff surveying people who fell into the category of unaccompanied youth. Schools verified unaccompanied youth status for the evening of January 29 between January 30 and February 1. Surveys at drop-in centers for the evening of January 29 were conducted between January 30 and February 3.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

Houston has a well-developed methodology for its PIT count, which was the basis for its youth count. Since 2011, and in consultation with UT's School of Public Health, Houston has made significant progress in designing a new methodology to increase the completeness and accuracy of its PIT count.

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[26] Includes Houston, Harris County, and Fort Bend County.

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Houston defined youth as those who are 24 years old and younger (no minimum age). In determining unaccompanied status, Houston kept its parameters close to those of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (i.e., unsheltered, sheltered, doubled-up, or in a motel without someone 25 or older in the person's household). The site targeted unaccompanied youth in schools, in shelters, and on the streets. While there was no specific targeting of LGBTQ youth, the survey included several questions aimed at learning about LGBTQ status. Moreover, for the purposes of the youth count, this was the first year that the Coalition partnered with Montrose Center, an LGBTQ-focused social services center. The employee recruited from Montrose Center by the Coalition had experience doing street outreach with LGBTQ youth, and the Coalition feels that the more they work with people who have an LGBTQ focus, the more they will reach this subpopulation. Open Gate and Montrose Grace Place hold LGBTQ-friendly dinners, and the Coalition went there as well.

The school count was organized by the Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO). Because organizers felt that most unaccompanied youth are around high school age, THEO targeted high schools (specifically, high schools with significant numbers of unaccompanied youth). It also included a sample of three middle schools, to gauge whether they should be included in future counts.

COUNT METHODS

The 2013 youth count occurred as part of the general PIT count, relying on the same methodology. The general, unsheltered PIT count used an Incident Command Structure with 500 volunteers divided between 10 staging areas. There were two components: 80 surface area teams that drove around and tallied any homeless people they saw, and 19 specialized outreach teams that actually engaged and interviewed the homeless. These surveys were added to the ones that were done as part of the sheltered count, on January 30, at service organizations and shelters.

PIT Youth Count: Unsheltered
Covenant House (CH) Texas has expertise working with unaccompanied and runaway homeless youth; it took the lead on the unsheltered youth count, organizing three specialized youth outreach teams. Staff and youth at Covenant House used their knowledge to identify places where unaccompanied youth congregate, and split their three outreach teams between these areas. The three teams consisted of volunteers, youth, and CH staff driving around the areas identified by CH as places where unaccompanied youth congregate, and surveying people who were 24 and younger. Once someone was surveyed, the interviewer was supposed to note the street address/intersection and a physical description of the person on a tally sheet. In practice, the Coalition reported that the CH team members did not always do this thoroughly, or even at all, leading Coalition staff to the conclusion that more training is required.

The three teams also were in contact with the specialized outreach teams and surface area teams that were part of the general PIT count and that were instructed to call the CH teams if they spotted unaccompanied youth. The CH teams conducted the actual survey with youth; if one of these teams was unavailable or too far away, a regular specialized outreach team was authorized to conduct the youth survey. (According to the incident commander, there were no call-ins to any of the CH teams.) The team was instructed not to wake people.

While CH oversaw the street youth count, the Coalition oversaw training for administering the survey. CH staff and youth volunteers participated in the January 22 practice run, and the intent was to have the same youth participate in the January 29 count. However, due to high turnover, many of the youth who participated in the practice count were no longer staying at CH on the day of the official count, so staff had to recruit new youth to conduct outreach. These youth did not participate in the formal training on January 28, and received an impromptu training session from the Coalition about 30 minutes before conducting the actual count. The training was a bit rushed, and many nuances of the training on January 28 were lost. For example, on one team, the youth who was administering the surveys didn't mention that people could fill in a fake name on the form for the McDonald's gift card. Moreover, at the training on January 28, volunteers were told they didn't have to read survey questions word for word, and were instructed to improvise; with respect to a survey question (#9) that read "How long have you been homeless this episode?" volunteers had been instructed *not* to use the word "homeless," and to find other ways to find out about youth housing status. This information was not necessarily communicated at the CH training, and on the observed counts and follow-up with CH volunteers, it was clear that volunteers read the questions as worded in the survey.

The three volunteers I spoke with knew not to use that word, but noted that they also heard other people using that word. They suggested that the question should have been reworded to be more sensitive and more informative; for example, someone suggested that they could have asked, "Where did you stay last night?" or perhaps used the phrase "lack a permanent home" instead.

PIT Youth Count: Sheltered Count
Staff, case managers, and volunteers at mainstream homeless, domestic violence, and youth shelters, and youth activity centers conducted surveys on the night (and during the week of) the count. The Coalition worked with places that provide shelter and services to youth (e.g., family and domestic violence shelters) to organize a preliminary count (without surveys) on January 22. Based on this initial count, shelters and rapid re-housing providers gauged how many clients/residents were in the target age group, and if there were significant numbers, informed the Coalition whether they would need additional volunteers and support to conduct surveys on January 29. Volunteers for youth surveys had experience working with this age group, or were graduate students in social work or health science at UT; on January 28, they attended one of six training sessions on administering youth surveys. The training sessions focused on explaining the Coalition and the purpose of the count, and then discussing the survey, sensitivity in administering the survey, obtaining consent, and how to phrase tricky questions.

For those shelters, drop-in centers, and so on, that already provided service on the night of January 29, the Coalition sent volunteers to conduct surveys, if necessary. For example, the Coalition sent volunteers to Youth Advocates' break-dancing night, to survey unstably housed youth in attendance. Otherwise, since they have regularly scheduled nights where they provide service, the Coalition just used information from their regularly scheduled night that week and tied it back to January 29.

School Count
The youth count had trouble coordinating with the school definition; schools felt they could not do any count that deviated from ED's definition. THEO's survey differentiated between kids who were with/without someone who is over 25. They collected and gave de-identified information to the Coalition, which will analyze the data to fit into its definition for the count.

Staff at schools verified unaccompanied youth status for the night of January 29 for students who were previously identified as homeless or unaccompanied. The Coalition worked with THEO to identify schools with a significant amount of economically disadvantaged students or students who were previously identified as either homeless or unaccompanied. THEO identified 17 schools (14 high schools and 3 middle schools) within eight school districts. THEO expected to do probably 250–300 school surveys.

Starting on January 30, staff pulled previously identified homeless or unaccompanied youth from nonessential classes (e.g., study hall), and proctored the PIT school survey. Students were pulled out of class based on information that was gathered in August, when they enrolled as homeless or unaccompanied.

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

Survey Topics
Youth Count PIT survey: The survey had 17 questions, was closely based on the survey provided by USICH, and collected all CDEs. The survey was tested on 8 homeless youth in December and was the subject of focus groups and testing with unaccompanied homeless youth between January 7 and 11.

Student/school survey: School staff started by asking if students were "with" a parent or legal guardian. If not, then interviewers specifically asked students about their living situation: "where did you sleep last night (or on January 29 if doing the survey on January 30)?" For homeless students, staff were instructed to ask if they were on their own or "with anyone else." "With" was defined as being with someone who is more than an acquaintance or happens to be in the same place at the same time. If they were "with" someone, then the respondents were asked how many people they were with that were (1) under age 18, (2) between the ages of 18 and 24, (3) or over age 25. For the first two groups, students were asked if any of the people they were with were in school on January 29, and if so, what school (these are for data de-duplication).

Incentives
For the regular unsheltered PIT count, respondents were given backpacks with hygiene kits and information on housing and support services. Unsheltered youth respondents received the same backpack, as well as a $5 McDonald's card. In schools and at shelters and drop-in centers, youth respondents received the McDonald's gift card only.

Consent
Youth respondents were provided with a letter of information about the study. Consent was verbal. However, during the unsheltered count, surveyed youth were asked to sign their names on a sheet to receive the McDonald's card; some interviewers did not make it clear that respondents did not have to provide their real names.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

The youth count's organizers wished they had done a better job of engaging unaccompanied youth in the initial planning. Youth were not involved in the planning process, though Houston did test the youth count survey on youth, and youth were involved in conducting street outreach. It seems that a byproduct of being late to involve youth is that youth that were recruited to participate in street outreach received very little guidance and training about administering the survey, as well as the

purpose of the count itself. Additionally, planners might have gotten a better sense of where unaccompanied homeless youth congregate had they involved youth in the planning process earlier, which was noted by several volunteers. For example, the youth volunteer at Youth Advocates noted that this may not have been an appropriate place to survey a large amount of the target homeless youth population, since most of the 25–30 people they talked to were actually stably housed.

DE-DUPLICATION METHODS

The Coalition wanted to make sure it didn't double count youth counted in schools and youth counted on the street or included in the shelter count. Question 12 of the youth survey was designed to de-duplicate from the school count, and asked respondents if they were in school on January 29, and if so, for the name of the school.

For the school survey, questions 2A and 2B were designed to assist in de-duplication efforts. These questions ask whether students live with other homeless/unaccompanied students, and where they go to school. The evaluator from the UT School of Public Health will tabulate the data, and cross-check to ensure that a person from one high school who says they're living with someone from another high school (in a homeless/unaccompanied situation) won't be counted twice.

The Coalition also reported that it relied on youth to speak up if they filled out the survey before, and because they were dealing with such a small population, staff members often were able to recognize whether they had surveyed a person before.

SITE-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

The youth count planners cited several major challenges as barriers to an effective count, notably the inability to collect data from schools that was needed for the parameters of the youth count, the lack of shelters for youth under the age of 18 (which made getting an accurate count nearly impossible), and the need for more effective training.

School Survey
One of the challenges of using the school survey data is that if a student was permanently living with a relative or friend, but had not gone through a legal process to confirm the living arrangement, then the student was still surveyed. The questions differentiated between whether a youth was living with someone older or younger than age 25, but the Coalition still has no way of determining if the living arrangement was sporadic/temporary or stable.

The Coalition had wanted schools to administer its youth count survey, but the schools were worried that the questions were legally too sensitive to ask. The Coalition came up with a potential solution: rather than have schools ask these potentially sensitive questions, have schools refer youth to agencies who *can* ask these questions. The Coalition had also wanted to hold events near schools, but school districts felt there were too many liability issues and were unwilling to refer students to other sites or events, or even to publicize the count.

The different definitions of homelessness used by HUD and ED were also hard to deal with, particularly for the school districts. The school definition is different from the HUD and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act definitions, and interpretations of "homeless" and "unaccompanied" and even "youth" vary.

Schools also reported that they felt many students weren't self-identifying as homeless or unaccompanied because they didn't want the school or child welfare to intervene.

Lack of Youth-Focused Services
Getting an accurate count is difficult in Houston due to the city's lack of licensed shelters for youth who are under age 18. Covenant House is the only youth shelter, and it only serves 18- to 21-year-olds. The lack of shelter for youth under age 18 forces kids who are kicked out of their homes or are otherwise not living with their families to get into situations where it's much harder to count them (such as in hotels or on couches). Currently, Houston has no licensed shelters for youth who are 18 and under. The Kinder Shelter and Parks Youth Ranch provide temporary shelter for unaccompanied youth under 18; but because they are not licensed as transitional shelters, they do not provide permanent placement for underage youth. Both shelters are required by state law to attempt to gain consent from a parent/guardian within 48 hours of a minor arriving there; if consent is not secured, child protective services must be notified and the youth will be placed in foster care if family reunification is not possible. For this reason, very few homeless youth access the shelters, which primarily house youth who are in the Child Protective Services system and awaiting placement. The Kinder Shelter conducted surveys with homeless youth staying in their shelter on January 29.

Covenant House
Staff from Covenant House reported that, on January 22, they did not find many youth in the places they usually hang out; volunteers for the PIT practice on January 22 reported having the same experience, finding the usual encampments empty.

Covenant House participated in the practice count on January 22, but many of the youth outreach workers who participated then did not participate on January 29 for the official count, due to high turnover rates. This meant that most of the street outreach interviewers were conducting the survey for the first time, and many did not comprehend what the Coalition was looking for, surveying people over 24 and people who were not unstably housed, and improperly filling out tally sheets.

Other Problems
Other problems related to the geographic scope, and also timing. Houston's coverage area is huge and sprawling, about 644 square miles, and the area has an inadequate mass transit system. With respect to timing, staff mentioned that they had a very limited amount of time to organize the youth count, and had to simultaneously complete their CoC grantMoreover, the time they had to train the youth at Covenant House for the street count was very short, and they wish they had done a better job of providing a more thorough training session.

LESSONS LEARNED

For future youth counts, Houston's planners will strive for better preparation and planning for outreach volunteers and staff, and hope to develop more robust, effective surveying techniques and methods for reaching target populations.

For future counts, the Coalition will ensure that partners and inexperienced volunteers (like youth participating for the first time as interviewers) listen to a survey being administered at least once before administering it. One way to do this would be to require volunteers to participate in the preliminary

count (though this proved problematic for CH, due to its high turnover). In the past, the CH staff were incorporated into the Coalition's special outreach working group, and would train alongside the volunteers in the official count; next year, the Coalition plans to involve CH more deeply in the planning process. This will allow CH to get more training and also suggest ideas for improving the youth count.

Volunteers and Coalition staff members also talked about incorporating a snowball method into future youth counts, in which they actually talk to youth and get information about where youth have stayed or are staying, so they can reach more people. The Coalition mentioned that it would reorder the survey, because the more intrusive questions were at the front, and it would be easier to build rapport with respondents if such questions are asked nearer to the end of the interview. Similarly, planners felt that the school survey could be improved to get a better understanding of unaccompanied youths' living situations: right now, the school survey just asks whether people are staying with someone who is over age 25; the Coalition believes that the entire school partnership and survey needs rethinking. Coalition staff also want to build better partnerships with youth shelters and youth-serving organizations; they felt they could have done a better job of pulling together youth advocates for the youth count.

KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Steering Committee Agencies
King County, Housing and Community Development Division (lead agency)
City of Seattle Human Services Department, Youth and Family Empowerment Division (steering committee member)
Friends of Youth (steering committee member)
United Way of King County (steering committee member)
YouthCare (steering committee member)

Participating Agencies
45th Street Youth Clinic (Neighborcare Health)
Asian Counseling and Referral Service
Atlantic Street Center
Auburn Youth Resources
Therapeutic Health Services, Central Youth and Family Services
Consejo Counseling and Referral Services
Friends of Youth
King County Public Library
Lifelong AIDS Alliance HEYO Outreach
New Horizons
Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets (PSKS)
POCAAN/Communities Uniting Rainier Beach
Seattle Parks and Recreation
Seattle Public Library
Teen Feed
Union Gospel Mission
YMCA Young Adult Services
YouthCare

DATE OF COUNT

King County conducted its youth count, called Count Us In (CUI), separately from the community's larger point-in-time (PIT) count, though the time frames for the two overlapped this year, and activities for the two counts were closely aligned. CUI interviewers began conducting surveys at 8 a.m. on Thursday, January 24, 2013, and continued until 5 a.m. on Friday, January 25, 2013. Each participating agency was given the latitude to decide when, within that timeframe, that its staff and/or volunteers would administer the survey. Further, the CUI survey asked youth and young adults about where they stayed the night before (the night of January 23). Because of this, the CUI count represents the number of youth and young adults were homeless or unstably housed on the night of January 23. In contrast, the community's PIT count was conducted only between 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. on January 25 and as such represents the number youth and young adults who were homeless on the night of January 24. Count planners had about 2.5 months from the time they found out that King County was selected as a Youth Count! pilot site to the date of CUI.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

King County began conducting CUI in May 2011, focused solely on runaway homeless youth providers. A second CUI survey of youth and young adults was fielded in May 2012, which expanded the effort to include additional youth development agencies, specifically those serving unstably housed youth. A key informant described Count Us In as the community's count of unstably housed and homeless youth and young adults. Since its inception, CUI has been completely distinct from the general PIT count. However, to coordinate with the Youth Count! pilot, this year CUI was conducted in January, making 2013 the first year that the timing overlapped with the larger PIT count and the first time CUI was conducted in the winter. When they were first creating the CUI survey in 2011, planners referenced the existing literature to determine what questions to ask and how long the survey should be. In each year of CUI, count planners approached a wide range of service providers and other agencies (e.g., local government) in the community to administer the survey to the youth and young adults with whom they work. The number of participating providers increased with each year of conducting CUI. Initially, providers were hesitant to participate because they believed youth would not be willing to complete the survey. However, after finding that youth were willing, providers have come to the table more readily.

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Generally, the target population for CUI was homeless and unstably housed youth and young adults. CUI planners defined unstably housed as youth and young adults who did not stay in shelter or transitional housing and either could not or did not know if they could stay in the same place as they stayed on the night of January 23 for the following month. One targeted subpopulation was unstably housed youth of color. They also did some targeting of LGBTQ youth and young adults by partnering with the Lifelong AIDS Alliance as part of this effort, but key informants noted that outreach to LGBTQ youth could be improved, particularly by partnering with additional organizations that target and specifically serve LGBTQ youth. They made an effort to survey youth and young adults who do not use services that are explicitly homeless youth services by partnering with a diverse set of service providers (see "Agencies Involved in Count" above). However, count planners note that Count Us In primarily engages youth already working with some sort of service provider and likely undercounts youth and young adults who do not engage in any services. There was not an explicit focus on pregnant youth, parenting youth, or youth living in detention centers.

For CUI, King County did not use either of the HUD or ED homeless definitions. The site defined an unsheltered homeless youth or young adult as someone between the ages of 12 and 25 who responded that he or she had slept in one of the following places on the night prior to the count, January 23: outside, in a tent, in a car or RV, in a hotel or motel, or in an abandoned or foreclosed building or squat.[27] This number was combined with the number of homeless youth and young adults staying in shelter or transitional housing for the night of January 23, 2013, that was pulled from the local homeless

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[27] The housing status question on the survey did not clearly capture whether a youth or young adult staying in one of the aforementioned places was with his or her family or unaccompanied because the response options were not mutually exclusive and exhaustive.

management information system (HMIS) system[28] to create the total number of homeless youth and young adults—both sheltered and unsheltered—for CUI.

For the number of youth included in the general PIT count, King County uses the HUD homeless definition. For the PIT, homeless youth were those between the ages of 12 and 24 at a slumber party site (see next section) from 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. on January 25 or staying in a shelter or transitional housing program on that night.[29] The PIT count was broken out into two age groups per HUD's guidance: young adults age 18 to 24 and youth under age 18. Youth and young adults were not required to complete a CUI survey to be counted toward the PIT count's youth number; however, they were encouraged to complete a CUI survey if they had not already done so.

COUNT METHODS

CUI was an effort to quantify the number of homeless and unstably housed youth and young adults in King County and was distinct from the community's larger PIT count. The sections below describe methods for CUI and then how youth and young adults are included in the PIT count.

Training and Monitoring
In order to train staff and volunteers across the participating agencies, count planners offered two dates for a 1.5 hour training session. Each participating agency was required to send one staff person to one of the trainings with the expectation that the staff person who attended the training would then brief the rest of his/her agency's staff and volunteers on the CUI procedures. The training session focused primarily on walking through the survey instrument and explaining each question and response category. Training leaders stressed the importance of the first question ("Have you taken this survey yet today?") to prevent duplication and explained that incentives should be offered to all youth and young adults, regardless of whether they had completed the survey already so youth did not take the survey multiple times in order to get more incentives. When administering the survey, staff and volunteers were trained to use the survey as an engagement tool, so that the experience was friendly and the tone conversational. There was no requirement to read the survey questions verbatim. CUI planners did stress a preference for having staff and volunteers complete the survey with youth rather than having the youth fill it out by him/herself.

Planners noted the benefits of this training method. Because the training is short and the planners provide resources explaining the survey questions and how to talk about the survey, providers feel the training is a good use of their time. However, observations of interviews being conducted showed that the practices stressed in training were not uniformly carried out. For example, youth were not always told that they did not need to complete the survey to receive an incentive. CUI procedures are not formally monitored.

Magnet Events

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[28] Key informants say that all homeless youth shelters in the county enter data into HMIS as do the majority of adult shelters with the exception of some faith-based providers. Not all homeless youth service providers enter data into RHYMIS.
[29] King County also conducted a street count for its general PIT from 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. on January 25. King County does not wake up those they find sleeping on the street during their PIT street search. Because of this, it is often impossible to determine the age the people they find in the street count.

Most agencies surveyed youth at their offices or drop-in centers during regularly scheduled service hours. Some agencies also screened movies or conducted other activities (e.g., raffles) to draw youth and young adults into their agencies so they could be surveyed. A count planner noted that these special events resulted in more youth and young adults coming into agencies than would normally be seen on a typical day, suggesting that special activities and/or incentives were successful in attracting youth and young adults to partner agencies. These "magnet events" are described as the core part of King County's youth count strategy, and planners believe they are successful in part because they draw youth and young adults into places they would not normally frequent. Magnet events were not all hosted by service providers. Both the Seattle and King County public library systems participated in CUI. At each participating branch, there were tables where youth could go to complete the survey. The City of Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation administered surveys at local community centers along with providing food and drinks.

Five sites also hosted slumber party events for youth and young adults. These sites also hosted events (e.g., movies, raffles, video game tournaments, etc.) to draw youth into the slumber parties. CUI surveys were administered to youth at these events, though youth and young adults were not required to complete the survey to attend the slumber party event. According to a key informant, slumber party sites primarily captured youth already engaged in services.

Street Search
Five agencies, three in Seattle and two elsewhere in King County, conducted a street search to administer the survey to youth and young adults. The street search teams surveyed youth primarily between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., though teams could opt to stay out longer, and targeted known locations. Friends of Youth sent out teams in mobile vans to different communities. Each team comprised at least two staff persons, including one who acted as the team lead. The team lead was connected to the community as an outreach worker or case manager. Each team also had a "peer lead"—a formerly homeless youth to help direct the team about where youth congregate and help engage youth (see the "Involving Youth in the Count" section below).

Shelter Counts
As described above, the number of youth and young adults in shelter or transitional housing on the night of January 23 was pulled from the local HMIS system. If a youth indicated that they spent the previous night in shelter or transitional housing on the CUI survey, his/her survey data was not included in order to avoid de-duplication.[30] Youth shelters also administered the survey on the night of January 24, but because the survey asks about the previous night, youth that had completed the survey at a shelter may not have been counted as sheltered youth.

School Counts
CUI planners asked all of the school districts in King County to submit their number of homeless youth for January 23. Fifteen of the 19 school districts in the county submitted their number of homeless youth. No attempt was made to de-duplicate this number from the CUI number of homeless youth; however, count planners intended to use the schools' total number in its reports on CUI, presenting it as an alternative number to complement the CUI data.

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[30] This does mean, however, that data on sheltered youth are lost for indicators included in the CUI survey but not maintained in HMIS.

PIT Count

For the PIT count, King County primarily relies on the slumber parties described above and a shelter count to determine the number of homeless youth.

Magnet Events

Slumber party events were also the main method for conducting the count of youth for the PIT count. Only those youth and young adults at a slumber party event between the hours of 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. (regardless of whether they have completed the CUI survey) on Friday, January 25, as well as those youth and young adults staying in other shelters and transitional housing programs in the community were counted for the HUD PIT count. The slumber party method was first used as part of the PIT by PSKS, a homeless youth shelter and drop-in center, about 10 years ago, and King County expanded the use of slumber party sites across the county three years ago.

Shelter Counts

Similar to CUI, King County used HMIS to determine the number of youth and young adults that stayed in shelter or transitional housing. For the PIT count, however, the number was for the night of January 24.

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

The CUI survey was framed as a housing status survey rather than a homelessness survey, asking where the respondent has stayed rather than whether or not the respondent is homeless. It was one page and included all but five CDEs: pregnancy status, parenting status, where the respondent is staying tonight,[31] how long the respondent has been staying at that location, and the length of the current homeless episode.

The CUI survey was administered by participating agencies' staff and "veteran" volunteers to youth either over the phone or in person.[32] Nine of the 18 agencies participating in Count Us In planned to call youth and young adults currently receiving case management from the agency and survey youth in person. Some youth also filled out the surveys themselves, though this was not encouraged. The remaining nine community partners only surveyed youth in person. While there was no requirement to read the survey verbatim, onsite observations showed that interviewers varied in how conversationally they approached the survey questions. Because the survey was framed as a housing status survey, everyone who was known to be or looked to be within the eligible age range was approached to complete the survey.

Some agencies offered incentives. Each agency participating in Count Us In was given a stipend to support its count activities. The stipends ranged from $500 to $1,200, depending on each agency's planned activities and service area, but most stipends were about $700. Agencies that wanted to offer incentives could choose what incentive they wanted to offer and use this money to pay for those

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[31] The survey asks about where the respondent stayed the night before rather than the coming night. A count planner says this is because most surveys are conducted during the day, and it is difficult for youth to forecast where they will sleep.

[32] Interviewers do not record whether a survey was completed over the phone or in person.

expenses. Agencies used a range of incentives including snacks, bagged lunches, bus tokens, and $10 gift cards to grocery store.

There was no formal informed consent procedure for the survey. Staff and volunteers administering the survey were instructed to use their relationship and rapport with the youth and young adults they served to explain the purpose and importance of the survey. Further, they were trained to be very clear that the youth did not need to complete the interview in order to get the incentive (if offered), receive services, or participate in any special events going on at that location. However, onsite observations showed that this practice was not universally followed. The CUI survey instrument and procedures were not reviewed by an IRB.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

The steering committee discouraged participating agencies from having youth administer the survey. They wanted youth and young adults to feel like the survey was confidential and thought that youth might not be as willing to answer questions, some of which are sensitive, to a peer. Friends of Youth used "peer leads"—formerly homeless youth and young adults—to help its street outreach identify known spaces where youth and young adults often congregate and help engage young people. Other agencies used youth and young adults that they serve to help plan Count Us In incentives, meals, and other activities. A count planner notes that having some say in planning the activities was fun and empowering for the youth. However, one key informant noted that getting youth more involved in Count Us In is one area in which they can improve in coming years.

DE-DUPLICATION METHODS

The primary method of de-duplicating the survey was to ask the youth or young adult whether he or she has already taken the survey that day. In order to make the survey experience easier to recall, all staff and volunteers administering the survey were instructed to wear a Count Us In t-shirt with the CUI logo. The survey instrument and outreach materials also used this same logo to make the count more identifiable. Staff and volunteers were also instructed to explain the survey and other places where the youth may have taken it. Further, as mentioned above, staff and volunteers administering the survey were supposed to explain to youth and young adults that they would get whatever incentive was being offered regardless of whether they had taken the survey already so that youth did not have a reason to complete multiple surveys. However, site observations showed that this practice was not universally followed.

The sheltered count from HMIS was de-duplicated from the street search and magnet event counts by not entering data for youth and young adults who said they stayed in shelter or transitional housing the night before when completing the CUI survey. No attempt was made to de-duplicate the CUI number of homeless youth and young adults from the school count, which was presented as a distinctly different number.

Staff and interns at United Way of King County entered and analyzed the data. Preliminary results were shared with all participating agencies at the CUI debriefing meeting on January 29, 2013, and an initial report was released on February 20, 2013. Count planners intend to release another report that presents findings from a more in-depth analysis after the publication of the national evaluation of the

Youth Count! pilot. Reports are shared with all participating agencies, though a count planner notes that they are still working on a larger dissemination strategy.

SITE-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge cited by key informants is messaging about the count. CUI and the PIT are two distinctly separate counts, so having them within the same 24-hour span created challenges for explaining the count to providers, participating youth and young adults, and the community. Some youth assumed that because they participated in CUI that they did not need to go to a slumber party site to be counted for the PIT count. Further, having CUI and the PIT slumber party events back to back tested the limits of the participating providers' capacity to staff all activities.

Planners attempted to engage schools in the survey effort as well and noted that they would like to see the partnership with schools strengthened for future counts. They asked schools to post CUI posters in middle and high schools with the name of the location of the nearest library branch participating in CUI written on the poster and submit the number of students they know to be homeless so that the number could be included as a supplementary count of homeless youth in the Count Us In report. Fifteen of 19 schools submitted a count of homeless youth. Friends of Youth, which serves the eastern part of King County, worked more closely with counselors in the districts it serves to have the counselors either call youth they know to be homeless and conduct the survey or refer them to the location of a Friends of Youth outreach team conducting the survey. While they would have liked to have conducted the survey at schools, a key informant cited the time-consuming process of getting approval as a primary barrier.

In past years, King County has conducted its CUI effort in May because planners there believed that youth and young adults were easier to engage during the day when they were out. Conducting the count in the spring allowed service providers without a drop-in center to host barbecues and other outdoor events at which youth and young adults could come together. This was a particularly useful strategy in the rural areas of King County outside Seattle. Conducting the count in January precluded these sorts of events for the 2013 Count Us In effort.

King County also includes a tribal reservation. Anecdotally, planners heard that there were many homeless youth and young adults living on the reservation, but they had not yet found ways to successfully target those youth and young adults for the 2013 count. Further, a key informant notes that Count Us In had trouble reaching young people in immigrant and refugee communities and other young people who do not speak English. To help remedy this, King County plans to have the survey and outreach materials available in multiple languages for the next count.

LESSONS LEARNED

In prior Count Us In efforts, King County found that youth and young adults were very willing to participate in the survey. This could be due to the length of the survey. The survey took about two to three minutes to complete. Providers also appreciate the short length of the survey. At the debriefing meeting, they said that because of this the survey is easy to complete with youth.

A key marker of success for CUI has been the level of provider involvement. When asked about the success of the count and drivers of the increase in numbers, key informants cited the number of providers involved in the count. When asked how the count could be more accurate, key informants

cited involving more community partners. Count planners note the importance of including a wide range of service providers beyond those organizations that specifically service homeless youth and young adults in order to capture those who may not engage in homeless services. Particularly, they noted the importance of engaging the local library systems in CUI, since libraries are common places that homeless youth and young adults frequent. Further, having the local libraries participate in this year's CUI meant that staff and volunteers from other agencies, who would otherwise have had to include libraries in their street outreach efforts, could spend their time frequenting other youth hot spots. Count planners also noted the importance of allowing participating providers the flexibility to determine what strategies work best to attract the youth that they serve (e.g., type of incentive, activities, meal options, etc.).

When thinking about count timing, providers at the debriefing meeting noted that conducting the count on a Thursday was beneficial because staff and volunteers regularly see youth during the week and could remind them about the count during the days leading up to the count.

A count planner notes that the best location for slumber party sites are those that either are existing shelters or are near shelters, so that they either are or are nearby places youth and young adults would naturally go to seek a place to sleep rather than try to draw them into some place completely new.

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (lead agency)
There were also 22 other youth service providing organizations from eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs) across Los Angeles County.

SPA 1 Antelope Valley
Penny Lane

SPA 2 San Fernando/SC Valley
Pacific Lodge Youth Services
Women's Care Cottage
Penny Lane

SPA 3 San Gabriel Valley
CA Hispanic Commission, Inc.
David & Margaret Youth and Family Services
San Gabriel Valley Consortium on Homelessness
Asian Youth Center

SPA 4 Metro Los Angeles
Los Angeles Youth Network
LA Gay and Lesbian Center
CHRCL, Inc./Casa Libre
Covenant House
My Friend's Place
Jovenes

SPA 5 West Los Angeles
OPCC
Safe Place for Youth
Common Ground
Daniel's Place/Step Up On Second

SPA 6 South Los Angeles
Coalition for Responsible Community Development
SHIELDS

SPA 7 East LA County
Jovenes

SPA 8 South Bay/Harbor
1736 Family Crisis Centers

Each organization was responsible for coordinating the youth count in its respective service area but was guided by LAHSA.

DATE OF COUNT

Los Angeles County held its unsheltered count for youth during the day of January 22. Los Angeles County conducted its general PIT count separate from the youth count. The PIT occurred from January 29 through 31. The numbers from the unsheltered youth count are included with the general PIT count numbers in the final report submitted to HUD.

Unlike the general unsheltered PIT count, the youth count was not weighted, which is a departure from practice with the general PIT unsheltered practice. This was to prevent oversampling.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

This was the fifth unsheltered youth count in LA County. Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA) conducted a youth homeless count in 2011 in LA County, following its PIT count, on the last day of January. This year LAHSA changed the timing of the count to occur before the dates of the PIT. It had

more complete coverage from each SPA this year. Unlike past years, this year's count had complete coverage across all SPAs.

LAHSA is leveraging its experience counting homeless youth in LA County to create toolkits to help other California counties get broader participation in counting homeless youth.

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

During the unsheltered youth count on January 22, LA County and its eight SPAs targeted unaccompanied unsheltered youth/street kids. The sheltered youth count was conducted separately and counted homeless youth seeking services from youth service providers during the normal PIT count.

For Youth Count!, LA County defined homeless youth as those who are age 24 and under and unaccompanied (not staying with a legal guardian or parent). Homeless youth were further categorized into two groups: age 18–24 and under age 18. The site restricted the count to youth meeting the HUD definition of homelessness.

COUNT METHODS

In planning meetings with youth service providers, LASHA found that most service providers didn't believe that unsheltered street counts during the night were effective at capturing an accurate count of homeless youth. This was the basis for conducting an unsheltered count during the day. LAHSA believed it would have greater coverage of this population if it conducted a day count for homeless youth.

LA County conducted separate sheltered and unsheltered counts on different days to count its homeless youth population. LAHSA suggested that according to a recent examination of its practices, youth that seek shelter and services in Los Angeles and those that don't represent two separate populations; therefore, there would be little duplication in the sample. In order to count both populations, LAHSA conducted a sheltered and unsheltered count. The sheltered count was held during the time of the PIT.

Sheltered Count
The shelter count was part of the PIT count conducted the week following the unsheltered day count for homeless youth. During the shelter count, service providers counted youth seeking services that they knew to be homeless.

Los Angeles also worked with schools to get data on homeless youth in the school system, but noted that there were numerous barriers. Confidentiality posed the greatest barrier to coordinating with the schools. The second issue noted by the county was the data itself. Since the schools count homeless students at the point of enrollment and does not have data on which students were homeless on the night of the youth count. Despite these issues, staff at LAHSA believed that the school data would be useful but noted that it would use it to supplement data collected during the PIT.

Unsheltered Count
The unsheltered count took place during the day on January 22. It relied on a tally of homeless youth with no survey information collected. Counters used a set of predetermined tactics to identify youth exhibiting characteristics of homelessness or youth known to be homeless. Team coordinators would approach the youth if there was information that could not be attained through simple observation. No

identifying information was collected, just the age, sex, and the cross-streets where homeless youth were identified.

Most of the SPAs counted youth in pre-identified "hot spots." In Hollywood, due to the significant population of homeless youth, a grid system was used to ensure 100 percent coverage of the SPA. The Hollywood SPA also used hot spots that were checked as a part of each team's assigned grid location. Each team was provided specific instructions to stay within its designated location to prevent duplication in the count. Where a hot spot-only approach was used, there was most often only one team identifying homeless youth, in which case there would be a reduced risk of duplication

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

For the unsheltered day count of homeless youth, Los Angeles did not use a survey. The information collected during the count was strictly limited to age, sex, and geographic location where the homeless youth was counted. Information was recorded on tally sheets. During the training counters were instructed to use their best judgment, but also were instructed that the team leader should ask youth if they were homeless if teams were uncertain. The Urban team did not witness any direct interaction between counters and homeless youth during the youth count. Counters determined whether youth were homeless based on observations, which included staff and youth knowledge of an identified youth's current involvement in homeless services.

The lead agency cited potential IRB issues as the main reason that surveys were not conducted during the unsheltered day count. Agency staff were concerned that a survey would not pass through IRB because it was likely that the surveyed would be under age 18 and the survey for the adult homeless population asked questions on sensitive topics.

As a part of the PIT count LA County conducted a separate survey of homeless adults (individuals over age 18). They expected to get some of the necessary information on the youth population of 18- to 24-year-olds through this survey. Additionally, this year two new questions were added to the survey in an attempt to gather more information on the youth population. One question was on sexual orientation and the second was on foster care involvement. The county plans to compare responses to these questions for the subpopulation age 18 to 24 and the rest of the population.

Because there was no planned interaction between counters and the homeless youth, there were no incentives provided to those being counted. Homeless youth participating as counters did receive incentives. The incentives for youth counters are described below.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

Youth were involved in the count as youth counters: they were placed on teams with youth-serving agencies and helped identify homeless youth during the unsheltered youth count.

Youth counters involved in the count received $50 gift cards to Target or Ross, compensating them for their expertise and time. Each participating service provider was responsible for bringing homeless youth from its respective program. The teams relied on the expertise of both the service providers and the youth to identify homeless youth.

DE-DUPLICATION METHODS

The primary method of de-duplicating the count used by LAHSA was to include homeless youth seeking services as volunteer counters; because information was collected from the youth serving as volunteers, LAHSA could de-duplicate them from the sheltered count. This way agency staff captured a large portion of the population and could de-duplicate youth who were staying in shelter with the information ~~staff~~ gathered through volunteer sign-ins. A 2007 Applied Services Research consultant's field test in LA found there was low risk of duplication in doing a day count and a night count.

In Hollywood, where there is a significant number of homeless youth and a significant number of service providers participating in the count, each team was assigned a specific geographic area on a grid to ensure complete coverage of the SPA. This helped prevent duplication on the day of the count. In SPAs other than Hollywood, where organizers relied more heavily on locating homeless youth based on hot spots rather than labor intensive canvasing, hot spots were divided among a small number of teams (often times one or two teams). The planners noted that, where there were few teams, it was likely that a team would recognize someone they counted before and would not count them a second time, preventing duplication as the count was happening. The teams also recorded the geographic location of where they saw the youth, further helping in future counts and in efforts to prevent duplication.

SITE-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

Geography
Los Angeles represents a large, incredibly dense geographic area. The lead agency noted that in the past, it was difficult to cover the entire area without participation from all the SPAs. This year, the agency had participation from each SPA and was optimistic that the youth count had greater coverage and was more representative of actual numbers of homeless youth. LAHSA suggested that the large number of youth-serving agencies in LA County will be a huge asset going forward and that it had not previously tapped these resources.

LESSONS LEARNED

Training
The planning team identified training as one area where improvements could be made for future counts. Recognizing that there are several deployment sites, it would like to engage each SPA earlier in the process to determine capacity for training. The planning team would like to thoroughly cover trainings to attempt to make them as uniform as possible across each SPA.

LAHSA would like to expand the training to include a comprehensive process to approaching homeless youth. The assumption that was made in this year's training was that service providers would have the greatest experience approaching homeless youth since many of them do outreach. However, through conversations with service providers following the count, it was found that some service providers were more comfortable and had more experience with outreach and approaching homeless youth than others. In fact in some cases, workers did not approach youth because they were uncertain how to engage them. LAHSA would like to put together a more comprehensive training on identifying and approaching youth who may be homeless so that it can strengthen the youth count in the future. LAHSA is considering developing a script for engaging youth and would seek input from the youth service providers and outreach workers on best practices and what has worked best in the past.

Surveying
LAHSA is considering including a survey for future youth counts. It believes that the information it gathers may be helpful in the de-duplication process. There are still significant IRB concerns about conducting a youth survey, and LAHSA recognized that it would need more direction around conducting a youth-specific survey during the unaccompanied homeless youth count.

Youth Participation in Planning
LAHSA would like to expand youth involvement in the planning phases of the count. It hopes to capture the feedback from youth on hot spots and help to continue to strengthen its youth count going forward.

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Six main organizations:
1. NYC Continuum of Care (CoC): This is a coalition of housing and homeless service providers, consumers, advocacy organizations, government agencies, and other members of the homelessness community. It has a 27-member steering committee that helps play the role of the convener in McKinney-Vento funding and was the lead partner in planning and executing the NYC CoC's youth count. The CoC organized and ran each of the 14 drop-in shelters (throughout all five boroughs) the night of the youth count.
2. NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD): This is the primary administrator of Runaway and Homeless Youth funding for NYC; it is also connected to the Department of Education and its homeless coordinators. DYCD also operates all youth centers (for homeless youth up to 21 years old). DCYD was part of the youth count planning and implementation process because it manages all runaway and homeless contracts and the majority of youth shelter beds. There are 587 youth-specific beds throughout the city.
3. NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS): This is the lead agency for the CoC and was actively involved with the CoC's planning committee for the youth count. DHS's primary role with the CoC count was to coordinate it with the citywide point-in-time (PIT) count.
4. NYC Association of Youth Providers: This city and state coalition represents the runaway and homeless youth provider community, and it was one of the main partners in the youth count planning.
5. Supportive Housing Network of New York (the Network): The Network, a statewide advocacy organization representing nonprofit supportive housing providers, played the lead role in organizing the CoC's supplemental youth count.
6. Ali Forney Center: Ali Forney was the lead youth organization, provided financial assistance, and was the fiscal conduit for the CoC's fundraising efforts.

Note: The Department of Education (DOE), NYC public schools, and faith-based organizations were not part of the planning and implementation of the youth count. The CoC made several attempts to involve the DOE, but it ultimately did not participate in any CoC efforts.

DATE OF COUNT

New York City's Youth Count! was held the night of Monday, January 28, from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. The CoC's supplemental count was done in conjunction with the citywide PIT count to ensure that as many homeless youth as possible would be counted that night. The CoC count focused on an inside strategy, attempting to coax homeless youth who otherwise wouldn't be counted that night in to the safe spaces of the youth drop-in centers and supportive housing residences, while DHS counted youth in public spaces that night (streets and subway). Both counts were then added to the youth shelter census that night.

Note: While the count ended at 4 a.m., several youth drop-in centers throughout the city stayed open until 8 a.m. so that youth could get something to eat and have a safe place to stay for the night.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

The Department of Homeless Services has been conducting its HOPE Survey throughout New York City since 2005. The NYC Association of Youth Providers and Ali Forney conducted a youth count in 2007. Their experience helped inform this count.

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

The youth count covered all youth under the age of 25. The CoC used survey questions to account for homeless or unstably housed youth (couch surfers) or other youth who would fall under HHS and DOE definitions.

The CoC did not target a specific population or subgroup within the larger population of runaway and homeless youth. However, survey questions will allow data analysts to tease out whether the youth respondent fits under the HUD definition of homelessness.

DHS asked questions about the participants' ages but did not ask questions beyond basic demographic information. DHS volunteers filled out a survey that put the youth into different age brackets. DHS was unable to administer an expanded youth survey during the HOPE count due to IRB issues.

COUNT METHODS

As mentioned above, there were three aspects to the youth count: the CoC supplemental youth count, the PIT street count (known as the HOPE Count), and the census count for the city's shelter beds. The following is a description of the three counts:

CoC Supplemental Youth Count
The CoC organized and executed a system of 14 late-night drop-in centers and five supportive housing residences, which were open in all five boroughs of New York City. There was at least one drop-in center per borough, and several (at least six) in Manhattan. The Continuum created a 27-question "expanded" survey that all youth who participated in the count completed. Since the youth count received no federal funding, the CoC made extensive private fundraising efforts and was able to raise the majority of the funds needed. The drop-in centers that remained open for the count were all funded through DYCD, the Palette Fund, and the Ali Forney Center, which provided funding for the incentives and the Metrocards. CoC steering committee members expected to see the highest number of homeless youth gathering in the drop-in centers in Manhattan and the Bronx.

The night of the count, homeless youth were welcomed into drop-in centers. Most youth heard about the count through runaway and homeless youth providers at the centers they frequent during the day as well as through youth-specific outreach teams. Each drop-in center served food and had various activities to occupy youth while both providers and CoC volunteers helped youth fill out the 27-question survey created by the CoC. Covenant House in midtown Manhattan, one of the sites observed by the Urban Institute, gave gloves, hats, and jackets to youth. Five of the 14 shelters remained open until 8 a.m.

PIT Unsheltered Count (DHS's HOPE Count)

On the night of the adult count, DHS had 3,000 volunteers administer its short survey. The survey asked basic questions, and was administered over all five boroughs from 12 a.m. to 4 a.m. The count started after the municipal shelters' curfew (12 a.m.) to avoid duplication. Volunteers were directed to all high-density areas as well as a random sample of low-density areas. If HOPE Survey volunteers encountered homeless youth, they could inform them of the ongoing youth count, but volunteers were not mandated to bring them to the closest youth drop-in center.

There was also a shelter census conducted of all occupied youth shelter beds funded by DYCD as well as privately funded youth beds, which are regulated by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. DHS also conducted a census of both its single adult and family shelters and identified all individuals between age 18 and 24.

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

The CoC's survey asked youth where they slept the previous night and how long they slept at that location; if they've ever run away from home and reasons for doing so; how many times they moved in the past 60 days; if they ever stayed at an adult shelter; if they pay rent; if they have family moving with them; and questions about income level, education level, involvement in the foster care and juvenile/criminal justice systems, gender, sex, and sexual orientation.

The HOPE survey asked participants their housing status ("Tonight, do you have some place that you consider home or a place where you live?"), whether they served in the armed forces, and general age.

Youth who participated in the CoC survey at drop-in centers received a $10 gift card, as well as a Metrocard worth one round trip (bus or subway) to cover the transportation expenses for coming to a center that night. Before beginning the survey, a volunteer would walk the youth through verbal consent. If the youth did not want to participate in the survey, he or she was still given incentives and was allowed to spend the night in the drop-in center.

HOPE Survey Incentives: None

Drop-In Center IRB Issues: N/A

HOPE Survey IRB Issues: DHS did not receive IRB approval for its HOPE Survey.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

CoC did not involve youth in the planning of count. However, in initially identifying locations, a couple of youth providers did get feedback from their youth clients to solicit their feedback on the most likely places homeless youth congregate.

DE-DEDUPLICATION METHODS

DHS and CoC administered their surveys independently and therefore had no joint de-duplication methods other than beginning their surveys at different times.

The CoC did include a screening question asking if a youth had already participated in the HOPE street count. It also added a unique identifier to each survey to minimize duplication of youth who came to the drop in centers. The data for youth who fall under the HUD homeless youth definition will be added to the DHS data.

DHS volunteers were mandated to record the cross streets of the homeless youth's location as well as their age to avoid duplicate counts. The teams using iPads had their data uploaded in real time in order to avoid duplicate data.

SITE-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

One of the CoC's main challenges was the extremely short timeline provided by the federal government, which meant planning the count and organizing a system for drop-in shelters in three months. NYC also experienced Hurricane Sandy in the interim, shortly after the Youth Count! initiative was announced, which drastically hindered the CoC's progress. In addition to scheduling issues, the CoC experienced a lack of funding and resources. The CoC also would have preferred to have more lead time to advertise and publicize the count to the youth who regularly attend the youth drop-in centers.

Like with the CoC, the DHS's planning process was hindered by Hurricane Sandy (the department's main office was closed for one month). Additionally, and more programmatically, DHS was challenged by introducing new components to its unsheltered count. Third, DHS tried and failed to create an expanded survey for unsheltered youth. Its IRB denied its request, due to the sensitivity of the questions and lack of training for volunteers who would conduct the survey.

The size of New York City is a large factor in planning the youth count. The CoC and DHS had planned to go to private spaces (24-hour spaces like laundromats, churches, foreclosed homes) but decided against this because it involved too much time, money, and resources, and (in the cases of abandoned and foreclosed homes) came with some safety concerns.

LESSONS LEARNED

For future counts, in addition to fundraising and having more time to prepare, New York City's youth count organizers will engage in a more thorough outreach strategy. This year, most youth who participated in their survey knew about the count because they frequently visited a drop-in center participating in the count. While this did draw in a good number of youth, it did not extend to homeless youth who are more likely to remain under the radar. The locations chosen to conduct the counts are also crucial. It is important to work with youth providers and the youth outreach teams to identify locations where youth most frequent. It would have also been helpful to involve youth more in the planning and outreach process. Many youth who came to the count learned of it through other young people. There also needs to be more planning time to raise sufficient funds for the count.

Overall, New York City's planners were pleased with the survey instrument, less a few questions that will need to be revised. Given the positive response by the survey respondents, planners will also consider adding a few additional questions.

The planners look forward to having more time to explore different methods of counting homeless youth next year, such as starting the count earlier in the day, possibly having it over several days, or, if allowed by HUD, having it during a different time of the year.

WASHINGTON STATE, WITH FOCUS ON WHATCOM COUNTY

Whatcom County was one of four counties in the Washington Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC) that participated in the January 2013 youth count. The Washington State Department of Commerce acted as a facilitator for Clallam, Skagit, Thurston, and Whatcom Counties by bringing the four counties together to develop a common survey instrument and to share preparation and outreach methods. Each site modified the survey instrument, developed and executed their own outreach and survey methods, and hosted its own magnet events.

In Whatcom County, the youth count leads felt that the count went well. Peer street outreach and the addition of the new drop-in center contributed to the success of the county. Especially helpful was the receipt of a street outreach grant which allowed Northwest Youth Services, the lead for the youth count, to hire two peer outreach workers.

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Washington State Department of Commerce (organizing agency for four counties conducting Youth Count)
Whatcom County Health Department (lead PIT agency for Whatcom County)
Northwest Youth Services (lead youth count agency)
Community Resource Center—East County
Ferndale Resource Center –North County
Whatcom Homeless Service Center/Opportunity Council
The Lighthouse Mission (shelter)
Amy's Place (youth drop-in center)

DATE OF COUNT

Whatcom County's youth count took place from January 24 through February 6, with the main focus on an unsheltered, targeted street youth count on January 24. From January 24 through January 31, Northwest Youth Services (NWYS) case managers conducted interviews with walk-in clients, individuals on their waitlist for housing services, and current program participants. From January 24 through February 6, the Community Resource Center—East County staff conducted interviews with walk-in clients. There were no street sweeps, but rather outreach to targeted areas including local parks, the bus depot, and known youth camps. NWYS outreach workers went to youth camps during evening hours on January 24.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

Whatcom County has counted youth in the past, though not with an in-depth survey nor with a youth-specific count.

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

In Whatcom County, NWYS targeted youth living in and near Bellingham along with some outreach efforts in the eastern part of the county by the Community Resource Center—East County. The outreach workers at NWYS are familiar with several of the area youth camps and, along with input from two formerly homeless peer outreach workers, led the youth counts at these sites.

Whatcom County defined homeless youth as those who are age 24 and under and unaccompanied. The site used both the HUD and ED definitions of homeless youth; counting youth living on the streets or in shelters as well as youth who were doubled up or couch surfing. They designated their survey a housing status survey to try to capture doubled-up and couch-surfing youth who might not consider themselves homeless, but whom NWYS believes to be an important subpopulation of homeless youth.

Prior to the youth count, NWYS planned on targeting LGTBQ youth at the Bellingham Alternative Library, a known hangout for LGTBQ youth. On the day of the unsheltered youth count, however, no teams were dispatched to this site, and no additional activities or outreach targeted this population.

COUNT METHODS

Much of Whatcom County's youth count was youth-led. Paid peer outreach workers helped the NWYS staff determine locations that they should canvas for youth, including the targeted hot spots and the locations of youth camps. NWYS believes that youth are more receptive to other youth, so for this effort organizers asked the volunteer to stay back and have the peer enumerator conduct the survey.

Most of Whatcom County's youth count efforts were focused in Bellingham. Here, NWYS took the lead in the youth count.

Sheltered Count
All shelters in Whatcom County have been instructed to administer the youth survey for any unaccompanied youth staying at the shelter on the night of January 24. In Bellingham, this includes the Lighthouse Mission, the main walk-in shelter in town. Through its permanent housing program, NWYS knows that several youth were located in the county (outside Bellingham), including the Maple Falls area, but they did not survey in these areas.

On Thursday, January 24, and Friday, January 25, staff of NWYS called all youth on their waitlist for housing services to see if they had completed the housing status survey. If they had not completed a survey, the staff administered it over the phone. In the past, this has yielded few responses.

In addition, local shelters and warm-meal programs administered the youth survey to youth that were at their programs on January 24.

On January 24, NWYS hosted a magnet event at its drop-in center. The magnet event took place from midnight to 11:59 p.m. on January 24. This event invited youth age 13–24 to come to the center to take naps (they are not a licensed shelter, so overnight sleeping was not permitted), eat food, do laundry, and enjoy the facilities. In addition to at least one staff outreach worker, a volunteer was present to survey youth.

Unsheltered Count
The unsheltered youth count took place on January 24 during the day and evening hours. Outreach workers and volunteers canvassed and administered the survey to youth in previously determined, targeted areas during the day, including the bus depot and a local park. NWYS chose these sites to visit based on their knowledge of spots where youth are known to congregate and input from the formerly homeless peer outreach workers. These predetermined sites included the bus depot, the food bank and

distribution center, and youth camps. At night, a team consisting of a NWYS outreach staff member and at least one peer outreach worker visited multiple youth camps.

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

The survey was developed by the four participating counties (Clallam, Skagit, Thurston, and Whatcom) in collaboration with the Washington Department of Commerce. Each county was allowed to modify the common survey instrument to best fit its needs.

The survey was piloted in Skagit, Thurston, and Whatcom counties, and the feedback from the youth was incorporated into the final survey. Much of the initial feedback from youth indicated that the questions were too invasive, made them uncomfortable, and they worried that they would get in trouble for their responses. The youth were also curious how all of the information would be used.

The survey collects many CDEs and some additional CDEs could be obtained through indirect questions. For example, rather than asking directly if the youth has been in foster care, the youth were asked if any of 20-plus situations caused them to leave home. Among those were foster care, sexual orientation and gender identity, and juvenile/criminal justice involvement. The youth were explicitly asked for their date of birth; their gender (M, F, transgendered, etc.); which race/ethnicity they identified with, including Hispanic; where they stayed last night and if they thought they would be able to stay there for the next month; how long they have been at the current location; and if it had been more than a year since they've had a regular place to stay. The survey asked the respondent about all of the various places he/she has stayed in the past three years, including couch surfing.

The site used incentives including food, socks, and water bottles. NWYS did not use gift cards or other monetary incentives.

Cross-site survey development was led by the Washington State Department of Commerce, which complies with two state laws that deal with the confidentiality of Washington's homeless census and HMIS; thus, the survey did not require IRB approval. The site used Washington Department of Commerce HMIS consent. The youth must consent by signing the last page of the form under the line that says, "I agree to the inclusion of my household's information for count purposes described above." Without the signature, only non-identifying information is entered into HMIS. Any identifying information provided may not be entered into HMIS, but still may be used by the local organization for outreach and building knowledge of the local youth homeless population.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

Northwest Youth Services received a street outreach grant prior to the Youth Count, which enabled the organization to hire two formerly homeless youth in their precount process and day-of youth count activities. This additional funding proved extremely helpful to NWYS. Formerly homeless youth were invited to apply for a paid position at NWYS as a peer outreach worker. Prior to the day of the youth count, NWYS hired two formerly homeless youth. On the day of the youth count, the peer workers joined the paid outreach workers to conduct the survey. They worked as part of a two-person team including a paid outreach worker, so that no peer outreach worker or paid outreach work was on his own.

Prior to the youth count, two NWYS housing participants took the survey as testers and provided the team with feedback on the survey. The revised survey incorporated this feedback.

DE-DUPLICATION METHODS

As a first step for limiting the number of duplicate surveys, enumerators asked the youth if he had already taken the survey. Northwest Youth Services believed it was unlikely for most youth to want to take the survey more than once.

The second step to help eliminate duplicates was to obtain the full name and date of birth for the respondent. The site entered all forms with full name and full date of birth. For any forms with partial names or birthdate information, the site searched the county housing system and HMIS for a match through the county's data-sharing agreement. If no record of a youth with the same name and birthdate was found, then the survey would be assigned a new ID number and entered anonymously. Additionally, for any partial name and date of birth surveys, the site could search HMIS to look at birthday and gender to see if there was a current HMIS entry with the exact same birthday and gender. For example, if the survey said "Jon Smith" and there is an HMIS record for a "Jonathon Smith" with the same gender and birthdate, then the site considered these to be the same record and a duplicate.

SITE-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

The two biggest challenges Whatcom County faced when conducting the youth count were the size and terrain of the county and the inability to collaborate with the school districts. Additionally, counting youth at adult-oriented shelters and collaboration with the Native American population proved difficult.

First, the county covers a large geographic area and has mountainous terrain. With a limited number of staff and volunteers, the Whatcom County Health Department (the lead agency for the PIT count) decided to concentrate the youth count efforts in the Bellingham area. Northwest Youth Services led the youth count in Bellingham and the immediate surrounding area. Youth count efforts also took place at the Community Resource Center—East County and the Ferndale Resource Center, though few unaccompanied youth were counted in Ferndale, Blaine, or the eastern portion of the county.

Second, there were hurdles to reaching homeless youth in schools. Per the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), school liaisons are not permitted to share individual-level information about homeless youth with homeless services providers.

A third challenge was counting unaccompanied youth who showed up at general population homeless sites, such as the Lighthouse Mission. Though these general population homeless sites were informed of and given the youth-specific surveys, often the youth was given the adult survey instead of the youth survey. This meant that youth-specific questions were questions were missed, including different reasons for homelessness, pregnancy, and education.

A fourth challenge was reaching the Native American population in order to invite them to participate in the count. Many of the native tribes offer their own housing and social services and do not participate in state housing and social service programs.

According to NWYS staff, the street outreach grant they received prior to the count, enabling them to hire two formerly homeless peer outreach workers, was key in the success of the youth count. While Whatcom County staff felt that their youth count went well, there are several things that they would do differently for future youth counts.

First, Whatcom County would start advertising and building partnerships sooner. Outreach workers were told that homeless youth were living in outlying areas of the county, such as Ferndale, Lynden, and Blaine, but were unable to indemnify them. Workers would like to work with the Readiness to Learn staff to reach these youth, but that would require earlier collaboration. Additionally, one of NWYS's goals through the street outreach program is to build new relationships with resource centers in communities in outlying areas.

This year, Whatcom County was not able to successfully collaborate with schools, but found this out only weeks before the youth count. For future youth counts, county staff would be more willing to work with state-level school personnel and build relationships with the schools.

Second, NWYS would modify its drop-in center magnet event hours. This year, youth had to leave the drop-in center when it closed at 8 p.m. and return when the event started at midnight. Next year, NWYS would like to keep the drop-in center open from 8 p.m. on January 24, 2014, through noon the following day. In addition, some volunteers suggested that a winter count is under-representative of the actual number of homeless youth because more are likely to stay with friends or relatives during the cold weather, which means that the count is not capturing doubled-up homeless youth. A summertime count, however, might reach more of these youth—and more homeless youth in general, since youth might be more likely to sleep outside or access homeless services such as the drop-in center.

Third, Whatcom County would modify its youth survey in several ways. The two separate forms for the adult count and the youth count created problems. If a youth responded to an adult survey instead of youth survey, he or she received different questions and a different set of response options. For future counts, the county is considering having the PIT and the youth count on two separate nights, so that only one form was needed for each count. Next, the youth form first asked where you stayed in the past three years and later where you stayed last night, but it might be better to switch the order of those two questions. Additionally, having open-ended questions wasn't helpful. Instead, having categorical responses would work better. For example, having response categories for education level and categories for number of hours worked in a week. NWYS would also add an inquiry about the person's needs. Finally, Whatcom County would engage youth in the process of creating the surveys sooner.

FORSYTH COUNTY AND WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN COUNT

Lead Agencies
United Way of Forsyth County
The City of Winston-Salem
Forsyth County Council on Services to the Homeless

Participating Agencies
Forsyth Futures
Youth Focus (a residential program funded by HHS)
Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Public Schools
Goodwill Industries of Northwest North Carolina
Casey Initiative
Youth Board (group of formerly homeless and/or foster kids who are now young adults)
University of Greensboro Serve Center
Catholic Social Services
The Children's Home (private foster care center)
Youth Detention Center of Forsyth County
Forsyth County Department of Social Services (Child Protective Services Division)
A local church network (helped by providing incentives/goodie bags)
Other local youth-serving providers and homeless-serving organizations
Youth in Transition (program serving youth aging out of foster care)

DATE OF COUNT

The PIT count consisted of a shelter count during the day and evening of January 30, 2013, a street count from 9 p.m. on January 30 to 4 a.m. on January 31, and a youth-targeted magnet event called YouthSpot scheduled from 7 p.m. on January 30 to 7 a.m. January 31. YouthSpot ended at 2 a.m., earlier than scheduled, because all attendees had left by around 1 a.m. and the organizers felt it was extremely unlikely that more youth would show up after that point. There was also a service based count on January 31, 2013 at the local soup kitchen at Samaritan Ministries.

EXPERIENCE WITH PRIOR COUNTS

The collaborating Continuum of Care agencies have 18 years of experience completing the point-in-time shelter and street counts, including six years in which United Way has lead the street and service-based counts. However, this was the first year the count focused on attracting youth with the YouthSpot event, and the first time it has developed a separate survey instrument for homeless youth.

TARGET POPULATION AND DEFINITION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

The primary means of counting youth, as mentioned before, was the YouthSpot magnet event, so most of the following relates to the planning of that event. The shelter and street counts had no separate focus on youth, other than a youth survey that was to be administered to anyone age 24 and under.

The target population and definition of homeless youth was intentionally broad for the purposes of the count. Organizers aimed to survey anyone age 24 and under who was experiencing housing problems of any kind, including couch surfers, temporary runaways, and any doubled-up youth, as well as the chronically homeless. They teased out housing status and which definition of homelessness each youth fit into with their survey instrument. The purpose of this approach of a broadly inclusive definition of the target population was that the organizers felt that their area had a very large number of unstably housed youth who may not be technically homeless by the HUD or ED definitions but are still in need of services. They also faced the problem of North Carolina's mandatory reporting law, which compels any adult to report known homeless youth (under age 18) to the Department of Social Services, who may either detain the youth and bring them into foster care or return them to their parents' home. This makes it very difficult for homeless youth to obtain needed support or services, which is why the count sought to target this population. There was no additional focus on targeting a specific demographic of homeless youth, but the organizers did their best to create a comfortable space at the YouthSpot event so that all would be interested in attending.

COUNT METHODS

Training and Monitoring
The training and monitoring that occurred was to prepare volunteer participants for the street count, which did not, in the end, identify or survey anybody age 24 and under. The only youth who completed the youth survey were those who attended the YouthSpot event, which was relatively small. The surveying there was administered by the lead count organizer and a researcher from a local data organization that developed the youth survey, so no training/supervision was necessary other than the staff members settling on their approach as a group. Because the survey designer was present, it was easy to ensure that all staff members were familiar with the survey procedures, items, skip patterns, etc.

For the street count, there was a one-hour volunteer training session immediately before the count began. In the session, the trainers did not go over the survey instruments—they assumed they were self-explanatory. The only training given for the surveying was that the first question asked is the person's age, and if they are age 24 or under, they should be given the youth-specific survey. Each team of volunteers for the street count was accompanied by one shelter resident or formerly homeless person, who was the designated guide for that team. There was a heavy emphasis on safety that the lead count organizers believe may have primed volunteers to be overly concerned and hesitant to approach youth on the street for fear of their own safety.

Magnet Events
The main focus of the youth count was the magnet event, YouthSpot, which occurred in a large open room in the downtown headquarters of The Urban League's Winston-Salem branch from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. (though it ended considerably earlier because all youth had left by 1 a.m.). It was a fairly convenient location to reach as a major bus terminal/station is situated nearby. There were around 10–15 attendees at this event, most of whom came from a single local shelter. All attendees were ages 18 to 24. The advertising for this event included extensive posting of flyers in known youth homeless hot spots, word-of-mouth information that reached a limited number of local shelters, and some limited coordination with Project HOPE (the homeless youth service of the public school system) and other service providers. At the event were trained staff who helped refer youth to a range of services (job training, health services, food security benefits, etc.) and administered the youth survey. There was a

large amount of food and snacks, games, and movies. The kids seemed to enjoy the event and were at ease. Notably, this event was not a sleepover: there were no beds or sleeping bags, and the lights remained on throughout. Youth Spot was not set up as a shelter because state building code prohibits the operation of shelters accepting minors if they do not have a sprinkler system.

The main issue with the event was that the advertising was not effective in drawing a large number of attendees, and even some shelters with young adults age 24 and under were not aware of the event.

Street Search
The street count did not identify any homeless youth. For the planning of this count the city was divided into seven regions. A team of 4–5 volunteer counters was assigned to each region. Teams were told not to wake up anyone during the count, but to record estimated age, gender, physical description, and location of any sleeping persons. They were to first ask each person on the street their age, and based on that response, continue with either the adult (age 25 and up) or youth (age 24 and under) survey. Despite the system of dividing the city into different sectors, it did not appear that the count was comprehensive in covering every block of the city. The sectors focused on urban areas of the city, and each team was provided maps of their sections which identified locations where law enforcement or homeless outreach workers had suspicions that people may be staying. Furthermore, it was unclear what boundaries they used in the count: there was talk of reaching areas in Forsyth county outside the city limits, but it was unclear if volunteers searched those areas or not. While there were plans to expand the street count to other incorporated areas of the county this year, these areas were not included in the actual count because of the low volunteer turn out from the adverse weather.

Shelter Counts
Surveys were administered to all persons in shelters, but many shelters either were not aware of the youth count focus or did not receive or administer youth surveys. Some shelters provided transportation to the YouthSpot event, but many shelters were not aware of this event either. The lead organizers believe this was because the two-months of planning for the count did not give them the time to reach out systematically to Winston-Salem's many shelters. Another complication was that the rules and details of the survey procedure seems to change every year (e.g., this was the first year with a separate youth survey), which was confusing for the shelter staff.

School Counts
Project HOPE, a support service for youth in public schools with housing problems, provided a small number of youth to the YouthSpot event. While the lead organizers wanted to have significant coordination with the Project HOPE networks to draw more youth to the YouthSpot event, the key contact at Project HOPE fell seriously ill in the month before the count, limiting their contribution.

PIT Count

The PIT count is a combination of the above, though, as described above, the street count and shelter count did not draw many youth.

SURVEY TOPICS, ADMINISTRATION, INCENTIVES, CONSENT, IRB ISSUES

The youth survey was framed as a housing status survey rather than a homelessness survey. It did not screen based on HUD or ED definitions, instead using original items developed by a local data

organization, Forsyth Futures, to determine housing status. It contained the CDEs in addition to an array of other topics. It took some youth up to 30 minutes to complete the survey.

Youth-specific surveys were delivered to some street count volunteers and to some shelters, but not comprehensively. In the end, the only completed youth surveys were those administered in person by staff members at the YouthSpot magnet event. Those administering the survey read through each item verbatim and explained the possible responses when necessary. Some items were found to be confusing, particularly how housing status was determined. Some participants offered conflicting responses to how long they had been without a stable place to stay, and how long they had stayed in each of a variety of different housing situations. Other than that, youth were generally reported to be very open and responsive in taking the surveys.

The incentives at the YouthSpot event included a lot of food and snacks, games, and movies, as well as a backpack filled with various supplies and goodies for each youth. Street counters also provided goodie bags and small gift cards to participants, but there were no youth identified on the street count.

There were no formal consent forms, but youth were told before taking the survey that they were not compelled to participate, that they could refuse to answer any question, and that they would still get their goodie bag if they did not want to complete the survey. The survey did not ask for any personally identifying information.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE COUNT

The main involvement of youth in the count was via a "youth board" of formerly homeless or foster care youth, assembled by a local organization providing case management and other supportive services to youth transitioning out of foster care. These youth advised on the survey design, outreach and advertising strategies, and magnet event planning. The count organizers repeatedly emphasized how helpful their contributions were in thinking through how the count and the magnet event would be catered to the target population.

DE-DUPLICATION METHODS

Because so few youth completed the youth survey, de-duplication was not a major concern. The surveys asked for a specific combination of letters of the first and last name and date of birth that was used as an ID. The local data organization, Forsyth Futures, was responsible for analyzing the data and de-duplicating if necessary.

SITE-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

The greatest challenge reported by the count organizers was North Carolina's mandated reporting law, which requires all adults to report known unaccompanied homeless youth to the Department of Social Services. The law prevents shelters from serving unaccompanied youth under the age of 18, and may make youth less likely to seek support services or resources. It also creates complications for anonymously surveying this population while upholding the legal mandate. There was no gathering place of homeless teens to go advertise the YouthSpot event to, or to target during the street count. Even if teens did receive information about the event, organizers feared they would be much less likely to attend due to the threat of being reported.

There were some concerns that the politically and socially conservative culture of the town might make volunteers and youth alike more hesitant to interact openly with one another, especially given the sensitive nature of some items on the youth survey. It is unclear whether this had an effect on the street count, which did not identify any youth. At the magnet event, youth were very open and responsive in completing the survey, and survey administrators did not report any discomfort with answering the questions honestly.

While its impact on the count outcomes remains unclear, there was a terrible thunderstorm including tornado warnings on the night of the count. It may have kept youth from coming out to the magnet event, or it may have made them more likely to flock to shelters or the magnet event to seek cover. The count organizers did not have a consensus on the effects of the storm or the extent to which youth were more likely to have been couch surfing with friends or friendly adults.

LESSONS LEARNED

Organizers plan to simplify the survey procedure to integrate with the regular non-youth PIT count and to facilitate broader shelter participation. It was too complicated for many of the shelters, and probably for the street counters, to administer the youth survey properly and comprehensively. In many cases, youth age 18–24 staying in shelters were administered adult surveys. While they will be counted as youth, no data will be available for them for the youth-specific items. Rather than including the youth survey as a separate instrument, it may be better to integrate it into the regular PIT survey with skip patterns for questions that would not be asked of adults. Several shelters, including at least one overflow shelter at First Baptist Church , were not aware that a youth survey existed. Winston-Salem has a large number of shelters of varying scales, and it was not a reasonable task to reach out to all of them with detailed instructions about a new survey instrument for youth in such a short time frame.

North Carolina staff will also begin planning the youth count earlier, especially the YouthSpot event. The count organizers had to balance organizing the Youth Count with their other responsibilities at United Way Forsyth County and the city. They had two months to plan the youth event, which wasn't enough time for them to engage the sometimes-hidden youth population of their area. With more time, they would have advertised to a few additional places, such as housing units in neighborhoods and buildings known as common places for doubled-up and couch-surfing youth. They also would have made their outreach to some places more intense, such as recreational centers with lots of youth participants. While these sites were aware of the count, the count organizers believe that they could have gotten more youth to YouthSpot if they had provided transportation directly from the recreational centers, or had more aggressively informed youth at the recreational centers about the event.