
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in Illinois: 2005



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◆◆◆ CONTENTS

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgments.....	viii
Executive Summary	x
Introduction and Overview.....	1
Estimating the Number of Homeless Youth in Illinois	2
Research Questions	2
Previous Research on Counting Homeless Youth	2
Study Design	3
Provider Survey	4
Methods	4
Questionnaire Development.....	4
Primary Mailing Database Development	4
Data Collection	6
Data Reduction	6
Data Processing	6
Response Rates.....	6
Results of Enumeration	7
Point-in-Time Estimates	7
Children of Homeless Youth.....	11
Twelve-Month Estimates.....	12
Characteristics of Service Providers	13
Program Type	13
Referral Sources.....	13
Services Provided.....	14
Populations Targeted for Assistance	14
Service Requirements	14
Services Offered to UHY	15
Sources and Destinations of Residential Service Users	16
Provider Survey Limitations.....	17
Coverage Error.....	18
Nonresponse Error	19
Measurement Error	19
Information from Other Sources	20
Illinois Department of Corrections.....	20
Law Enforcement/CCBYS.....	21
Illinois Job Corps	22
Illinois State Board of Education.....	22
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services	23

Homeless Youth Needs Assessment	24
Research Questions	24
Study Design	24
Different Approaches.....	25
Eligibility Criteria	25
Methods	26
Instrument Construction.....	26
Site Identification Process	27
Site Screening	27
Data Collection	28
Staffing.....	28
Interview Administration and Confidentiality	29
Interviewing Dates and Cooperation.....	31
Data Reduction and Processing.....	31
Results	32
Demographics.....	32
Reasons for Homelessness	32
Educational Experiences	33
Other Lifetime Experiences	34
Homeless Experiences.....	34
Family Experiences.....	35
Service Needs and Sources of Assistance	37
Patterns of Service Utilization	39
Unmet Service Needs	40
Personal Resources.....	41
Income Sources.....	42
Victimization Experiences	44
Health Status and Behaviors	44
Sexuality and Sexual Behavior.....	46
Children of Homeless Youth.....	46
Youth Survey Limitations	47
Sampling Error	47
Coverage Error.....	47
Nonresponse Error	48
Measurement Error	48
References.....	49

Appendix. Illinois Counties, by Department of Human Services Regions

◆◆◆ TABLES

1.	Disposition of Sample	7
2.	Estimated Numbers of Homeless Youth in Illinois on April 26, 2005, by Service Region	10
3.	Estimated Numbers of Homeless Youth in Illinois Receiving Services on April 26, 2005, by Age	10
4.	Estimated Numbers of Homeless Youth Receiving Services in Illinois on April 26, 2005, by Gender, Age Group, and Accompaniment of Children	11
5.	Estimated Numbers of Children of Homeless Youth Receiving Services in Illinois on April 26, 2005, by Service Region	11
6.	Estimated Unduplicated Numbers of Homeless Youth in Illinois in 2005, by Service Region	12
7.	Proportions of Providers Identifying Specific Referral Sources for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth	13
8.	Populations Specifically Targeted for Assistance	14
9.	Providers with Types of Service Requirements	14
10.	Providers Identifying Criteria that Require Referral of UHY Elsewhere	15
11.	Types of Services Offered to UHY	16
12.	Types of Services Offered to UHY, by Region	16
13.	Homeless Experiences of Youth Entering Juvenile Correctional Facilities in Illinois, 2000	20
14.	Results of 2004 Law Enforcement Survey	21
15.	Illinois Job Corps Capacity	22
16.	Public Schools Reporting Unduplicated Numbers of Homeless Youth in Illinois in 2004/2005, by DHS Service Region	22
17.	Disposition of Homeless Youth Sample, by Region	31
18.	Characteristics of UHY Sample	32
19.	Characteristics of UHY Sample, by Region	33
20.	Types of Places at Which Homeless Youth Spent at Least One Night During the Past Year and the Past 30 Days and Where They Currently Stay	34
21.	Percent of UHY Experiencing Certain Negative Family Experiences	36
22.	Percent of UHY Reporting Parental Substance/Guardian Substance Use Behaviors	36
23.	Self-Reported Service Needs and Utilization of Homeless Youth During the Past 12 Months	38

24.	Self-Reported Service Needs of Homeless Youth During the Past 12 Months, by Region.....	39
25.	Percent of UHY Reporting Service Use During the Past 30 Days, by Service Type and Region.....	40
26.	Percent of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth with Unmet Service Needs, by Region.....	41
27.	Percent of UHY Receiving Government Assistance During the Past 30 Days, by Program	43
28.	Percent of UHY Receiving Money, Clothing, or Other Necessities During the Past 30 Days, by Source.....	43
29.	Percent of UHY Having Selected Victimization Experiences in Past 12 Months	44
30.	Percent of UHY Reporting Depressive Symptoms	45
31.	Percent of UHY Reporting Lifetime Substance Use, by Race/Ethnicity	45

◆ ◆ ◆ **FIGURES**

1. Illinois Counties and DHS Regions 5

2. Geographic Distribution of Mailed and Completed Provider Questionnaires and Completed Youth Interviews 8

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◆◆◆ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This document reports the findings from a study designed to (1) assess the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) in Illinois and (2) provide statewide estimates of the number of these youth in Illinois. For the purposes of this project, an unaccompanied homeless youth was defined as an individual age 21 or younger who, at the time of data collection, was not primarily in the care of a parent or legal guardian and who lacked a safe or stable living arrangement. Wards of the state or youth who had formed stable private living arrangements did not fit our definition.

This study included two main data collection efforts: (1) a representative survey of service providers in Illinois who provide assistance to unaccompanied homeless youth and (2) a representative survey of UHY currently receiving services in Illinois.

Statewide Estimates of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in Illinois

A total of 215 Illinois providers of services to youth responded to a survey seeking information regarding the numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth using services at a specific point in time (April 26, 2005) and over the course of a full year. This information was weighted to also represent nonresponding providers in order to estimate the total number of UHY receiving services in the state. Using information from another statewide survey of the general population, estimates of the proportions of homeless youth who do and do not use available services were constructed, and this information was employed to estimate the total numbers of UHY. Key findings include the following:

- ◆ The total number of unaccompanied homeless youth who received services in Illinois on April 26, 2005, was estimated to be 1,411.
- ◆ It also was estimated that approximately one-third of all UHY access services, and two-thirds spend their time while homeless doubled-up with friends or relatives or living in motels, single-room occupancy hotels, with strangers, or on the streets.
- ◆ The total number of children of unaccompanied homeless youth estimated to be receiving services on April 26, 2005, was 651. The total number of children of UHY estimated to be in Illinois on this date was 1,891.
- ◆ The total number of UHY estimated to be in Illinois on April 26, 2005, was 4,102.
- ◆ The within-facility unduplicated number of UHY in Illinois who received services during 2004 was estimated to be 8,589. The total number of UHY in Illinois in 2004 was estimated to be 24,968. It is likely, however, that some youth might have been included in the counts reported by more than one service provider. Hence, we believe there is some unknown amount of duplication of youth in these annual estimates.
- ◆ The total number of nights spent in residential facilities by UHY in 2004 was estimated to be 37,890. Of these, approximately 11,818 nights of shelter were provided to youth under the age of 18, while an estimated 26,072 nights of shelter were provided to youth age 18–21.

Service Needs of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in Illinois

The service needs of unaccompanied homeless youth in Illinois were assessed using a questionnaire that was administered to a sample of UHY who were interviewed at 32 service sites across the state. A total of 169 interviews were completed between June and October 2005. Key findings include the following:

Homeless Youth Characteristics

- ◆ About two-thirds were currently staying in a shelter or similar facility at the time they were interviewed.
- ◆ The youth ranged in age from 12–21; the average age 18.8 years old.
- ◆ Sixty-five percent were female, and 55% were African American.
- ◆ The average number of years of education completed was 11.5 years.
- ◆ Approximately 40% had one or more children of their own.
- ◆ Roughly one-third of UHY cited family conflicts as a reason why they first became homeless (29%). Other common reasons included running away from home (14%) and physical or sexual abuse by a parent or family member (10%).

Homeless Youth Service Needs

- ◆ The most commonly cited basic service needs were finding a stable place to live (78.0%), finding a job (75.7%), getting regular transportation (64.5%), finding an apartment (62.1%), and getting food on a regular basis (44.6%).
- ◆ Educational and other service needs included learning how to budget money, pay rent, and deal with a landlord (51.5%); going back to school (48.5%);

and help getting an ID or Social Security card (34.3%).

- ◆ Commonly mentioned health and safety needs were finding someone to talk to about problems or things that worried them (41.4%) and getting personal medical care (40.2%) and dental care (34.9%).
- ◆ Service needs of the children of unaccompanied homeless youth included getting day care (55.2%), medical care (22.4%) Head Start/early Head Start services (8.1%) and protection of children from violence (7.5%).

Unmet Service Needs

- ◆ Basic unmet service needs during the past year included needing help finding an apartment (reported by 29.6% of all UHY), finding a job (28.4%), getting regular transportation (18.9%), and finding a stable place to live (14.8%).
- ◆ Unmet health and safety needs included getting personal medical care (15.4%) and dental care (14.8%).
- ◆ Unmet needs for education and other services included going back to school (17.2%) and learning how to budget, pay rent and deal with a landlord (14.8%).
- ◆ Among those UHY with children of their own, 14.9% reported needing help getting day care or someone to watch their children.

Other Experiences of Homeless Youth

- ◆ Three in five reported being the victim of violence, such as theft, burglary, and physical or sexual assault, during the past 12 months.
- ◆ Half reported ever carrying a weapon for protection.

◆◆◆ INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Nationally, it has been estimated that 7.6% of all youth age 12–17 are homeless for at least one night over a one-year period (Ringwalt, Greene, Robertson, & McPheeters, 1998). Considerably less is known about the numbers and needs of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults (UHY) locally and statewide. The guiding purpose of the project was to assess the number of unaccompanied youth in Illinois by regional boundaries established by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and to determine service needs of that population. The study was sponsored by the IDHS Bureau of Youth Services and Delinquency Prevention and coordinated by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH). The University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Laboratory (SRL) oversaw data collection and data analysis activities.

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless first convened the Homeless Youth Research Group (HYRG) in November of 2004. This group consisted of representatives from across the state, including service providers. SRL worked with HYRG to develop a study design appropriate for conducting a statewide enumeration and assessment and met regularly with this group throughout the conduct of the study. This report describes our research questions, methods, and findings.

◆◆◆ METHODOLOGY SUMMARY ◆◆◆

This report presents primary analyses from two surveys: (1) a statewide survey of service providers that was conducted in the spring of 2005 and (2) a statewide survey of unaccompanied homeless youth age 12–21 who were interviewed at service provider sites.

The database for the provider survey was constructed based on lists compiled by the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Continuum of Care, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, and the Human Care Services Directory. A total of 215 mail questionnaires were completed by service providers. The response rate for the survey was 58.3%. The list was stratified in order to produce estimates for each of five geographic areas. The regional boundaries of each area are provided in the Appendix and summarized in Figure 1. Responses by geographic area are summarized in Figure 2.

The survey of unaccompanied homeless youth included 169 face-to-face interviews that were conducted at service sites across the state. The sites selected for the youth survey were based on whether the program provided services on-site to eligible youth age 21 and younger. Interviews were conducted between June and October 2005. These interviews averaged 29.8 minutes in length and covered a variety of topics. This survey's cooperation rate was 90.9%.

Details of the sample design, response rate calculations, and sample weighting are provided in this report. All surveys are subject to important limitations. Those relevant to this study also are reviewed. This study was reviewed, approved, and monitored by the University of Illinois at Chicago Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The first section of this report describes the process of designing the enumeration, including a discussion of previous research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The goal of this component of the project was to answer two key questions:

1. How many unaccompanied homeless youth are in the State of Illinois?
2. What kinds of services are currently being provided to these youth across the state?

The HYRG defined unaccompanied homeless youth as “any homeless young adult age 18 through 21 or any homeless youth under age 18 who was unaccompanied by an adult parent or guardian and who was not a ward of the state.” For the purposes of this study, “homeless” was defined as an individual without a safe and stable place to sleep at night, living in a shelter or temporary housing, or in a facility that is not permanent housing.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON COUNTING HOMELESS YOUTH

Several strategies have been employed to count or estimate the numbers of homeless persons within defined geographic areas (Burt, Aron, & Lee, 2001; Koegel, Burnam, & Morton, 1996; Link et al., 1994; Wright & Devine, 1992; Rossi, 1989). Some of the common approaches that have been used include one-night “blitz” population counts, strict probability sampling study designs, service-based enumeration strategies, and statistical extrapolations from available databases. Each of these approaches have serious limitations that range from high expense to poor population coverage.

Estimating numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth may be even more challenging, given that they are generally believed to be only infrequent service users (James, 1991; Kidd & Scrimenti, 2004). To compensate for this fact, past efforts at counting homeless youth have assumed that service-based enumeration strategies are by themselves inadequate for approximating counts of homeless youth. Previous studies conducted in Illinois are instructive. In 1985, an Illinois Governor’s Task Force on Homeless Youth estimated that there were approximately 21,500 homeless youth, defined as “persons age 20 and under who cannot be reunified with their parents and lack housing and the skills to legitimately support themselves” in Illinois. This estimate was based on a survey of youth agencies in Illinois and projections of the proportions of homeless youth who avoid contact with the service system. The study estimated that only 20% of all homeless youth sought help from service providers. In 2001, a statistical extrapolation methodology was employed by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless to provide updated estimates of homeless youth in Illinois that also worked under the assumption that only a small proportion (~25%) of all homeless youth actually come into contact with the social service system. That study estimated that approximately 26,400 youth experience homelessness in Illinois over the course of a year.

STUDY DESIGN

When deciding how to enumerate UHY in Illinois, we considered a variety of different options. We elected to combine data from a point-in-time estimate via a mail survey of providers of services to UHY with statewide data on Illinois homelessness from a telephone survey conducted in 2003. This survey asked respondents about their experiences with homelessness and could be used to refine the estimates provided by service providers.

Combining the data from the telephone survey with the mail survey of social service providers provides a convenient mechanism for collecting a point-in-time estimate. Social service provision, as we have defined it, is fairly broad, but generally these organizations provide services to clients such as food, clothing, housing, and/or shelter. The benefit of using the provider-based data collection model is that social service providers are a known entity statewide, are fairly uniform in terms of the kinds of supports that they deliver, and would allow us a standardized approach to data collection (recognizing that they will vary slightly). Other recent studies also have demonstrated the feasibility of surveying providers regarding both the service needs and numbers of homeless persons served (Smith, 2002).

◆◆◆ PROVIDER SURVEY

METHODS

Questionnaire Development

The survey questionnaire was developed collaboratively by representatives from the HYRG and was loosely adapted from a survey of homeless adults conducted in Illinois in 2001. It was designed to collect data from service providers about the number of unduplicated eligible youth served on April 26, 2005.

SRL's Questionnaire Review Committee (QRC) reviewed and approved the instrument. The QRC is composed of SRL staff members appointed by the Director to ensure that all questionnaires administered by SRL follow ethical practices and basic principles of questionnaire construction. No instrument is administered to respondents before approval is obtained from the QRC.

The questionnaire contained a variety of different items, including referral sources, populations served, types of services provided to UHY, average length of stay, and reasons for turning away potential clients.

The final questionnaire was approved by DHS on April 10, 2005.

Primary Mailing Database Development

The provider database was constructed by combining a number of lists of programs and facilities available to serve youth and homeless young adults in the state of Illinois. Governmental and private sources provided the lists. During study development, project staff working with the HYRG agreed that other kinds of service providers besides those serving only homeless youth would be included in order to capture a large number of individuals using services across the spectrum of age and need. These lists were combined, checked for duplication, and then reviewed for completeness and accuracy by the HYRG as well as by the Regional Roundtable representatives across the state.

Data collected for the provider database included

- ◆ Program name
- ◆ Mailing address
- ◆ Telephone number
- ◆ Contact name (if available)
- ◆ Program type/population served (if available)

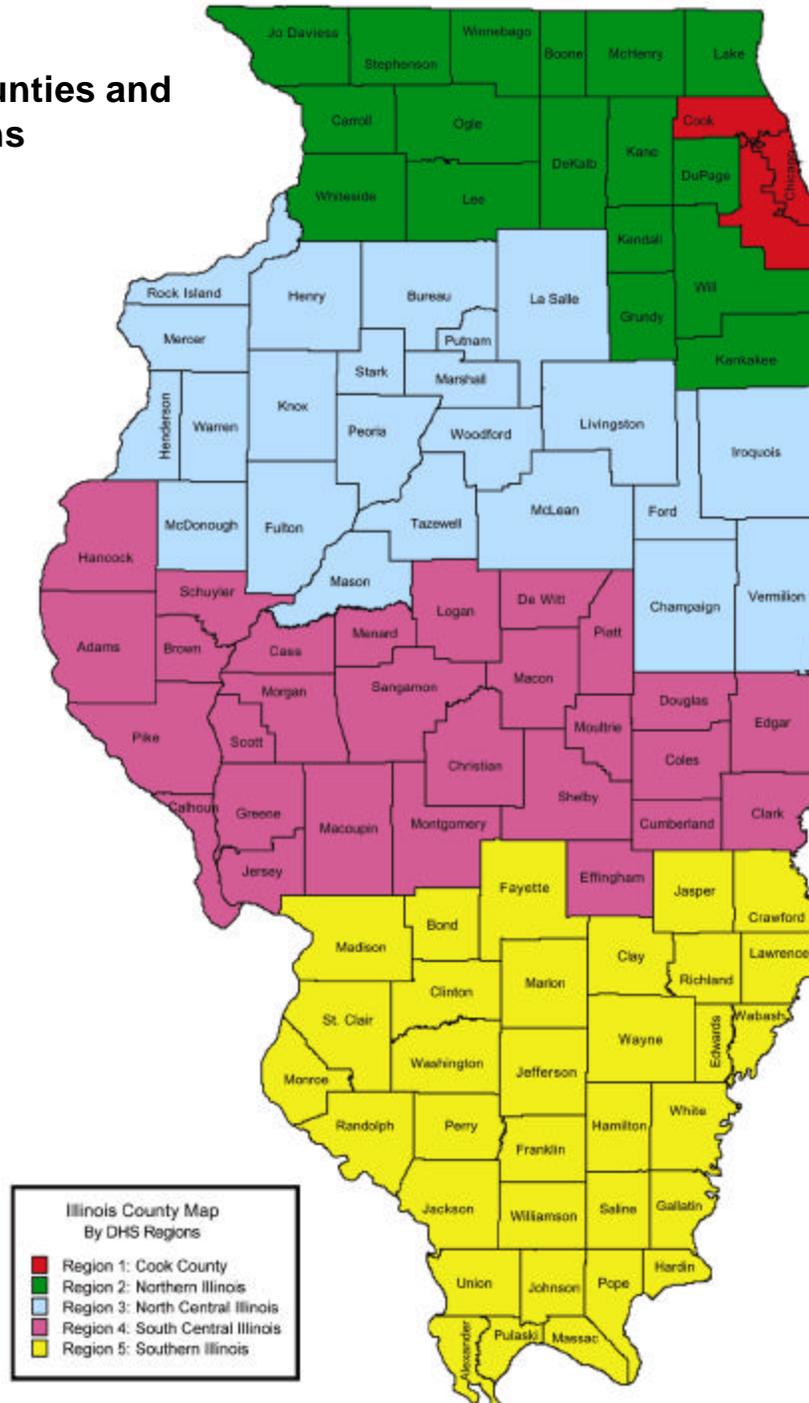
The Illinois Department of Human Services divides its service areas into five unique regions. Each identified program was linked to its DHS region based on the address of record. Figure 1 presents a graphic representation of these service areas.

The SRL sampling team assigned each provider on the list with a unique six-digit case identification number that allowed us to identify it by region.

The database initially consisted of 735 social service programs and agencies. Thirty programs had incomplete information and were removed from the file; six records were identified as duplicates and also were removed. Thus, the starting list contained 699 providers. Following the first mailing on April 18th, 2005, an additional 42 cases were added to the sample, consisting of a combination of the

**Illinois Department of Human Services
Division of Community Health and Prevention**

Figure 1. Illinois Counties and DHS Regions



cases that previously had missing information and some new cases added with input from the HYRG. During the study, four additional agencies were identified, and copies of the survey materials were distributed and completed. Thus, the population for this portion of the project ultimately contained 745 agencies and programs.

Data Collection

Potential respondents were given an initial phone call by SRL to identify the person at the agency best suited to receive the questionnaire mailing, and to alert the agency about the study. The first mailing included a cover letter from SRL explaining the study's purpose, a cover letter from DHS endorsing the study, a 10-page questionnaire booklet, and a postage-paid return envelope. This packet was mailed to 699 respondents on April 18, 2005. Materials for the additional 42 cases were sent out on April 22, 2005. The SRL cover letter asked agencies to respond with information about their individual programs, along with a phone number to call for assistance in completing the questionnaire.¹

On April 27, a thank-you/reminder postcard was sent to the entire list. A second mailing consisting of another copy of the questionnaire and letter requesting participation was mailed to all nonrespondents on May 11, 2005. Each nonrespondent also received a telephone reminder call. The cut-off date for processing returned questionnaires was June 10th.

Data Reduction

The SRL Data Reduction (DR) section conducted all of the questionnaire mailings. This department also entered the data from returned mail questionnaires using the CASES data entry system developed by the University of California at Berkeley. This system minimizes data entry errors by limiting allowable information. Further, DR conducts a 20% validity check on all data entry work, which involves comparing the entered data to the actual paper questionnaire data. Twenty percent of the entered questionnaires are pulled at random and checked by supervisory staff. Further, if any data entry clerk's work is found to have errors, additional checks of the clerk's work are conducted.

DR also produced an edited text file of all open-ended responses. The editing process involved regularizing spelling and capitalization and filling out abbreviations. The editing eliminated back-coded text answers from the file.

Data Processing

The SRL Office of Survey Systems checked and cleaned the data to ensure that any illogical answers were caught and corrected. A final data set and SPSS setup file were then created for the study and sent to the researchers for analysis.

RESPONSE RATES

Table 1 shows the final disposition of the sample for the total sample and for each of the regions. Figure 2 provides a graphical summary of the geographic distribution of mailed questionnaires and returned questionnaires as well as completed interviews.

The American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) *Standard Definitions* includes six different methods for calculating response rates (2000, pp. 36–37). This report uses response rate 3. Response rate 3 is the number of completed questionnaires divided by all known eligible programs *plus* a portion of the programs for which eligibility is unknown. For the overall sample, the numerator is the number of completes (215). The denominator includes the 216 cases known to be eligible (dispositions 1 and 41) *plus* a portion of the cases for which eligibility is unknown (disposition 57

¹ Copies of all study materials are available from the authors.

along with the number of unreturned questionnaires). This portion is calculated as follows: of the 436 cases for which eligibility status was known (dispositions 1, 41, 71, and 89), 220 were not eligible, resulting in an eligibility rate of 49.5% $((436-220)/436)$. Therefore, we assume that 49.5% of the 309 respondents whom we could not locate or who did not respond also are eligible. The total eligible sample is $369 (.495*309) + (436-220)$. The resulting response rate is 58.3% $(215/369)$.

Table 1. Disposition of Sample

Code	Disposition	TOTAL		Cook County		Northern Illinois		North Central Illinois		South Central Illinois		Southern Illinois	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
(01)	Complete	215	28.9	64	22.9	54	29.2	35	33.0	32	38.1	30	33.0
(41)	Final refusal	1	0.1	1	0.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(57)	Unable to locate	67	9.0	31	11.1	17	9.2	7	6.6	8	9.5	4	4.4
(71)	Ineligible	213	28.6	56	20.1	69	37.3	30	28.3	27	32.1	31	34.1
(89)	Final duplicate	7	0.9	1	0.4	1	0.5	—	—	2	2.4	3	3.3
	Not Returned-Unknown Eligibility	242	32.5	126	45.2	44	23.8	34	32.1	15	17.9	23	25.3
	TOTAL	745	100.0	279	100.0	185	100.0	106	100.1*	84	100.0	91	100.0
	Response rate 3		58.3%		43.1%		67.0%		61.3%		72.6%		70.3%

*Does not total 100.0% due to rounding.

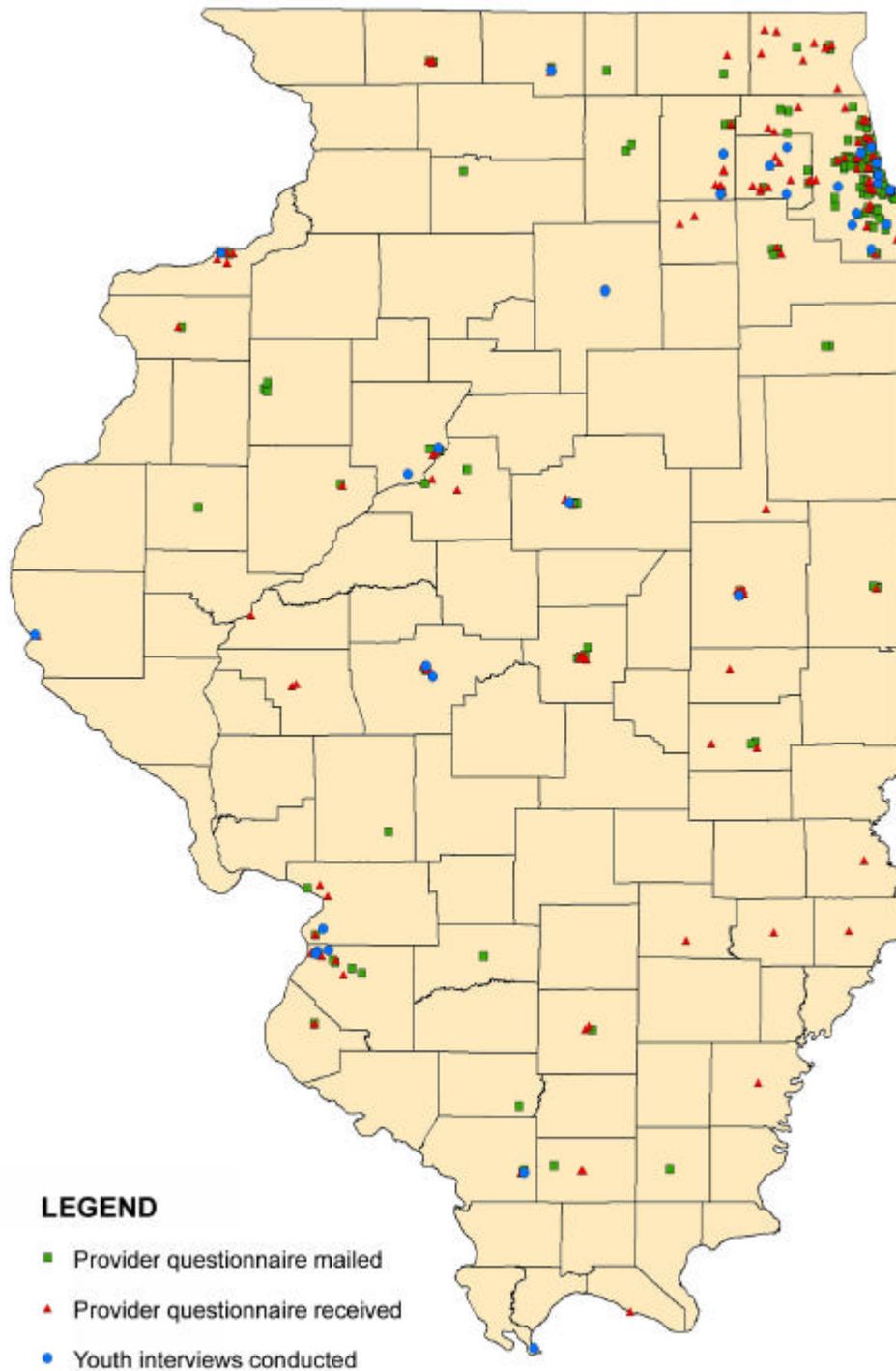
RESULTS OF ENUMERATION

Several estimates of the numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth in Illinois were constructed using information collected as part of the survey of service providers. In this section, we report the process used to develop these estimates, along with the estimates themselves. This is a difficult population to identify and to estimate. Numerous assumptions had to be made in order to construct these estimates. These assumptions, which are described later in this document, should be considered when evaluating the estimates presented.

Point-in-Time Estimates

As part of the provider survey, respondents were asked to report “How many unaccompanied homeless youth/young adults aged 21 or younger were served by this program on April 26, 2005?” The mean number of homeless youth served on this date was 3.91 per provider. The standard deviation associated with this mean was 8.03, which reflected considerable variability in the numbers served by each provider. The number of homeless youth reported to have been served on this date ranged from 0 to 58 homeless youth across the 206 providers who answered this question. The median number of homeless youth served was 1. Using responses to this question, point-in-time estimates of homeless youth in Illinois were developed.

Figure 2. Geographic Distribution of Mailed and Completed Provider Questionnaires and Completed Youth Interviews



We developed an estimate of the total number of homeless youth receiving services on April 26, 2005, using nonresponse weights (Korn & Graubard, 1999). Nonresponse weights employ available information regarding the true composition of a sample frame in order to adjust results to compensate for survey nonrespondents. The purpose of doing so is to adjust survey results so that they more closely represent the population of interest. In this case, that population is the set of all providers who

give services to UHY in Illinois. Weights specific to each service region were constructed using the following formula:

$$wt_{nr} = (spr_e / spr_c) \quad \text{where: } wt_{nr} = \text{nonresponse weight.}$$

$$spr_e = \text{estimated number of service providers in region.}$$

$$spr_c = \text{number of completed service provider surveys from region.}$$

The estimated number of service providers per region (spr_e) was derived from the results of the provider survey by estimating the number of eligible nonresponding organizations within each region that were likely to offer services to homeless youth and/or young adults and then combining these estimates with the number of known eligible service providers within each region:

$$spr_e = (spr_c + spr_{enr}) \quad \text{where: } spr_e = \text{estimated number of service providers in region.}$$

$$spr_c = \text{number of completed service provider surveys from region.}$$

$$spr_{enr} = \text{estimated number of eligible nonresponding service providers in region.}$$

The estimated number of eligible nonresponding service providers within each region (spr_{enr}) was developed by multiplying the number of nonresponding cases within each region by the total fraction eligible (i.e., 49.5%) among service providers who did respond to the survey:

$$spr_{enr} = (spr_{nr} * 0.495) \quad \text{where: } spr_{enr} = \text{estimated number of eligible nonresponding service providers in region.}$$

$$spr_{nr} = \text{number of nonresponding service providers in region.}$$

Using the nonresponse weights, the estimated total number of UHY receiving services on April 26, 2005, is estimated as the total sum of the weighted count obtained from the provider survey:

$$X_s = \sum (x_s * wt_{nr}) \quad \text{where: } X_s = \text{total number of youth served in Illinois on 4/26/05.}$$

$$x_s = \text{reported number of youth served at each facility on 4/26/05.}$$

$$wt_{nr} = \text{nonresponse weight.}$$

The total number of unaccompanied homeless youth who received services in Illinois on April 26, 2005, was estimated to be 1,411.

The estimated total number of UHY in Illinois on April 26 (X_t) was next developed by adjusting the estimated number of youth receiving services on that date (X_s) using a non-service user multiplier (x_m). Multipliers are a common method of adjusting homeless estimates for subgroups that might not be covered by an enumeration (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, 2001; Governor's Task Force on Homeless Youth, 1985). In this case, the multiplier was specifically designed to adjust the estimate of homeless youth for those not using services. This multiplier was developed using data collected as part of a random statewide household survey conducted in 2003 (Johnson, Cho, Lerner, Pickup, & Cohen, 2004; for additional details regarding that survey and the homeless definition used to construct the multiplier, see Box A). In the survey, 80 persons reported having been homeless at some time when they were age 21 or younger. Of these, 34.3% ($n = 27$) indicated that they had spent time in a shelter while they were homeless, and 65.6% ($n = 52$) indicated that they had not done so. Non-service users included persons having spent their time homeless living on the streets and/or doubled-up with friends or relatives. Using this information, a simple multiplier was constructed by dividing the proportion of this sample reporting non-service use, divided by the proportion reporting service use:

◆ ◆ ◆ **BOX A. DATA SOURCE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF** ◆ ◆ ◆
A NON-SERVICE USING MULTIPLIER

In 2003, a statewide random-digit-dialed telephone survey was conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Laboratory for the Illinois Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (Johnson, Cho, Lerner, Pickup, & Cohen, 2004). A total of 4,155 persons 16 and older were interviewed between January 15 and August 15, 2003. As part of that survey, respondents were asked about personal experiences with homelessness. Individuals were defined as having ever been homeless if they responded “yes” to the question: “Have you ever had a time in your life when you considered yourself homeless?” Those indicating having ever been homeless also were asked “While you were homeless, did you ever sleep in a shelter for homeless people or in another temporary residence because you did not have a place to stay?” Those reporting that they had never spent time in a homeless shelter were classified as non-service users.

$x_m = (1 / x_{su})$ where: x_m = non-service-user multiplier.
 x_{su} = proportion service users.

$X_t = (X_s * x_m)$ where: X_t = total number of homeless youth 4/26/05.
 X_s = total number of youth served 4/26/05.
 x_m = non-service-user multiplier.

Using this information, the non-service-user multiplier was estimated to be $x_m = 2.90698$ (i.e., $100/34.3$), and the total number of UHY estimated to be in Illinois on April 26, 2005, was estimated to be $X_t = 4,102$ (i.e., $1,411 * 2.90698$).

Making an additional assumption that the ratio of UHY who are and are not service users are similar across service regions, it is possible to produce estimates of the numbers of homeless youth on April 26 within each region. The estimated numbers of UHY receiving services on April 26, the estimated total number of homeless youth on that date are presented in Table 2.

Using additional information obtained from the provider survey, the estimated number of UHY receiving services on April 26 also can be disaggregated by several demographic characteristics. Breakdowns of the estimated numbers of UHY in each of three age groups are provided in Table 3.

Estimated UHY service users by gender, age group, and whether they were accompanied by their own children are presented in Table 4.

Table 2. Estimated Numbers of Homeless Youth in Illinois on April 26, 2005, by Service Region

REGION	Homeless Youth Receiving Services on April 26	Total Homeless Youth on April 26
#1: Chicago/Cook County	630	1,832
#2: Northern Illinois	269	782
#3: North Central Illinois	190	553
#4: South Central Illinois	147	428
#5: Southern Illinois	175	507
TOTAL	1,411	4,102

Table 3. Estimated Numbers of Homeless Youth Receiving Services in Illinois on April 26, 2005, by Age

AGE	N
15 and younger	107
16–17	304
18–21	1,000
TOTAL	1,411

Table 4. Estimated Numbers of Homeless Youth Receiving Services in Illinois on April 26, 2005, by Gender, Age Group, and Accompaniment of Children

	UNACCOMPANIED BY OWN CHILDREN		ACCOMPANIED BY OWN CHILDREN	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
17 and younger	165	177	13	122
18–21	307	254	27	346
TOTAL	472	431	40	468

Children of Homeless Youth

It also was possible to make some estimates of the number of children of UHY who received services on April 26, 2005. Providers were asked to “Please count or estimate the total number of **children of homeless youth/young adults** present/served at this program on April 26, 2005.” A total of 121 service providers answered this question, reporting an average of 3.23 children being served on that date (standard deviation = 6.45). The median number of children of homeless youth served was 1. The number served on April 26 ranged from 0 to 42.

The total number of children of UHY receiving services in Illinois on April 26 (Y_s) was estimated by summing the weighted count of the reported number served across the 121 service providers responding to this question:

$$Y_s = \sum (y_s * wt_{nr}) \quad \text{where: } Y_s = \text{total number of children of UHY served in Illinois on 4/26/05.}$$

$$y_s = \text{reported number of children of UHY served at each facility on 4/26/05.}$$

$$wt_{nr} = \text{nonresponse weight.}$$

The total number of children of UHY in Illinois on April 26 was also estimated using the same non-service using multiplier (x_m) that was developed and applied to statewide estimates of UHY:

$$Y_t = (Y_s * x_m) \quad \text{where: } Y_t = \text{total number of children of UHY served 4/26/05.}$$

$$Y_s = \text{total number of children of UHY served in Illinois on 4/26/05.}$$

$$x_m = \text{non-service-user multiplier.}$$

The estimated total number of children of UHY receiving services statewide was estimated to be $Y_s = 651$. Using the non-service multiplier, the total number of children of homeless youth estimated to be in Illinois on April 26, 2005 was 1,891.

Estimates of children of UHY by service region also were constructed and are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Estimated Numbers of Children of Homeless Youth in Illinois on April 26, 2005, by Service Region

REGION	Children of Homeless Youth Receiving Services on April 26, 2005	Total Children of Homeless Youth on April 26
#1: Chicago/Cook County	182	529
#2: Northern Illinois	170	493
#3: North Central Illinois	156	452
#4: South Central Illinois	70	204
#5: Southern Illinois	73	213
TOTAL	651	1,891

Twelve-Month Estimates

Another question asked as part of the Provider Survey was to “Please estimate how many different (unduplicated) unaccompanied homeless youth/young adults age 21 or younger received assistance or services from this program during the year 2004.” The mean number reported by the 194 service providers who provided responses to this question was 26.0 per provider (standard deviation = 43.5). The unduplicated count of the number of homeless youth served in 2004 by each provider ranged from 0 to 350. The median number served was 12. Responses to this item were used to develop estimates of the annual numbers of homeless youth in Illinois.

First, a within-provider unduplicated count of UHY in Illinois who were served during the 2004 calendar year (Z_s) was estimated. This was accomplished using a nonresponse weighting strategy identical to that employed in constructing the point-in-time estimate of homeless youth served (X_s) that was described above. Using the same nonresponse weights (wt_{nr}), an estimate of the total number of youth receiving services during 2004 (Z_s) was calculated by summing weighted responses to this question across all providers who responded to the Provider Survey:

$$Z_s = \sum (z_s * wt_{nr}) \quad \text{where: } Z_s = \text{total unduplicated number of youth served in 2004.}$$

$$z_s = \text{reported unduplicated number of youth served at each facility in 2004.}$$

$$wt_{nr} = \text{nonresponse weight.}$$

Using this formula, the estimated within-provider total unduplicated number of UHY served in 2004 was $Z_s = 8,589$.

A count of the total number of UHY in 2004 (Z_t) was subsequently estimated by adjusting the estimate of youth served during 2004 (Z_s) with the same non-service user multiplier ($x_m = 2.90698$) described above.

$$Z_t = (Z_s * x_m) \quad \text{where: } Z_t = \text{total homeless youth in 2004.}$$

$$Z_s = \text{total unduplicated number of youth served in 2004.}$$

$$x_m = \text{non-service user multiplier.}$$

Using this multiplier, it was estimated that the total number of UHY found in Illinois in 2004 was $Z_t = 24,968$ (i.e., $8,589 * 2.90698$).

Regional estimates of the within-provider unduplicated numbers of UHY receiving services in 2004 and the total number of UHY in Illinois in 2004 are presented in Table 6.

An important caveat should be considered in evaluating these twelve-month estimates. Although the *within*-provider counts of UHY reflect unduplicated totals, it is difficult to adjust these counts for duplication *across* providers. Consequently, the twelve-month estimates presented here might best be

Table 6. Estimated Within-Provider Unduplicated Numbers of Homeless Youth in Illinois Receiving Services in 2004, and Total Homeless Youth in Illinois, by Service Region

Region	Homeless Youth Receiving Services in 2004	Total Homeless Youth in 2004
#1: Chicago/Cook County	3,092	8,991
#2: Northern Illinois	2,186	6,353
#3: North Central Illinois	1,351	3,929
#4: South Central Illinois	1,040	3,022
#5: Southern Illinois	920	2,673
TOTAL	8,589	24,968

interpreted as upper-bound estimates of the total numbers of homeless youth in Illinois during 2004. Information to be presented later in this report, however, suggests that UHY who utilize residential service facilities remain at those locations, for extended periods of time. Given the wide geographic coverage of the provider survey (i.e., statewide) and the average length of time that UHY remain with some service providers, we believe that the duplication rate may be low, although there is no way to be certain. The risk that UHY were counted by more than one service provider responding to the survey is probably greater in more service-rich environments, such as Cook County, than in the other regions of the state. Again, however, there is no clear method available for estimating possible service duplication.

In general, each of the estimates presented rely on a number of important assumptions, including the following:

1. The assumption that the ratio of service using to non-service using UHY is the same for both point-in-time and annual estimates.
2. The assumption that the ratio of service using to non-service using UHY is the same for urban vs. rural areas and for each service region.
3. The assumption that the ratio of service-using to non-service-using UHY is the same for those who are and are not parents.

There is little information available with which to validate these assumptions. We have tried to describe the methods used in sufficient detail so that readers can judge for themselves the degree to which each assumption is credible.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

The provider survey also afforded the opportunity to collect additional information regarding the characteristics of service providers across Illinois. This information is presented in the following section.

Program Type

Of the providers responding to the survey, most (87.3%) indicated that their program could be best described as nonprofit 501(c)(3). Smaller proportions of programs described themselves as religious/church-based (1.9%), a government agency (3.8%), a for-profit service provider (0.5%), or as something else (6.5%).

Referral Sources

Table 7 summarizes the referral sources identified by providers. The most common referral source for unaccompanied homeless youth was word of mouth (79.1%). Additional referral sources reported by a majority of service providers included other providers (67.0%), self-referrals (63.7%), schools (53.5%), and law enforcement agencies (53.5%).

Table 7. Providers Identifying Specific Referral Sources for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (n=215 providers)

REFERRAL SOURCE	%
Word of mouth	79.1
Other providers	67.0
Self-referral	63.7
Schools	53.5
Law enforcement	53.5
Other youth	47.4
Referral by DCFS	43.3
Family shelters	32.6
Juvenile justice	32.1
Street outreach	26.0
National Runaway Switchboard	15.8
Other referral sources	7.9

Analyses by service region (not shown) revealed only one significant difference. Referrals from the National Runaway Switchboard were more commonly reported by providers in Cook County (31.3%), compared to those in northern Illinois (13.0%), north central Illinois (11.4%), south central Illinois (9.4%), and southern Illinois (0.0%).

Services Provided

Populations Targeted for Assistance

Table 8 identifies populations specifically targeted by providers for assistance. The specific population most commonly targeted was youth age 18–21, identified by half of all providers (50.2%). Youth under age 18 (43.3%), adults over age 18 without children (40.0%), and female pregnant or parenting youth (34.9%) were cited by more than a third of all providers as specific populations targeted for assistance. The only significant difference across regions in the targeted populations involved the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population subgroup, which was more likely to be targeted for assistance in Cook County (34.4% of all service providers), compared to north central (20.0%), northern (14.8%), southern (13.3%), and south central (12.5%) Illinois.

Table 8. Populations Specifically Targeted for Assistance (n=215 providers)

TARGETED POPULATION	%
Youth 18–21	50.2
Youth under 18	43.3
Adults over 18 without children	40.0
Female parenting youth	34.9
Pregnant youth	32.6
Persons with mental illness	32.1
Persons with substance abuse problems	31.2
Domestic violence victims	27.9
Persons who have dual/multiple diagnoses	27.4
Male parenting youth	24.7
Other	24.7
Formerly incarcerated individuals	23.7
Two-parent families	23.3
Sexual assault/incest survivors	22.3
Former wards	20.9
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender	20.9
Persons with HIV/AIDS	17.2
Persons engaged in prostitution	16.3
Persons with developmental disabilities	16.3

Service Requirements

Providers identified a variety of youth characteristics that were deemed necessary in order to receive program services (Table 9). The most commonly cited requirement was being homeless. Specifically, two-thirds of the provider respondents required that youth be homeless in order to receive services (67.9%). Other service requirements identified by more than a third of providers included being in the program’s geographic area, jurisdiction, or service area (46.5%), and belonging to one or more of the target population subgroups identified above (45.1%).

Comparisons across service regions (not shown) revealed several differences in service requirements. The requirement of being within the geographic jurisdiction or service area was most common outside Cook County: it was a

Table 9. Providers with Types of Service Requirements (n=215 providers)

SERVICE REQUIREMENT	%
Homeless	67.9
In geographic, jurisdiction or service area	46.5
In one or more target population subgroups	45.1
Medically stable	27.4
Sober	25.6
Ambulatory/able to move around on own	22.8
Substance-free	16.3
Does not have children with them	13.0
Has children with them	10.7
Other requirement	10.7
U.S. citizen	9.8
Able to speak English	9.8
Of a specific income level	9.3
Currently employed/working	8.4
Able to pay program fee	3.7
None of these requirements	3.3
A member of a particular religious or ethnic group	1.4

service requirement among 57.1% of the providers in north central Illinois, 56.3% in south central Illinois, and among 53.3% and 50.0% of the providers in southern and northern Illinois, respectively. In contrast, 29.7% of Cook County respondents had a similar requirement.

There also were differences across service regions in the requirement that persons receiving services were not accompanied by children. The requirement was more common in Cook County (21.9%) and northern Illinois (16.7%), compared to south central (9.4%), north central (5.7%), and southern (0.0%) Illinois.

In addition, providers were asked to identify criteria that might require them to refer UHY elsewhere rather than serving them directly (Table 10). Most commonly cited was the need to refer homeless youth and young adults based on developmental and/or physical criteria, cited by approximately one-third of all provider respondents. Thirty percent of the sample also indicated that criminal offenses would necessitate a referral. Being pregnant or accompanied by one’s own child was cited by about one-fifth of providers. Other referral criteria volunteered by providers included being under age 18 (5.6%), severe mental illness (4.7%) and drug and/or alcohol use (2.8%).

Providers in Cook County were most likely to report referring UHY who were accompanied by their own children (37.5%). Just over 22% of providers responding from northern Illinois also indicated the need to refer those who were accompanied by their own child. In central and southern Illinois, 13.4% and 6.7%, respectively, had a similar referral requirement.

Table 10. Providers Identifying Criteria that Require Referral of UHY Elsewhere (n=215 providers)

CRITERIA	%
Developmental/physical criteria	34.4
Specific criminal offense	30.2
Pregnant	23.3
Accompanied by own child	21.9
Other	14.9

Services Offered to UHY

Providers were asked to identify from a list of 35 possible services those that their program offered to UHY (see Table 11). Referrals for mental health services (80.5%) and substance abuse services (78.1%) were most commonly identified. Life skills training (68.4%), crisis intervention (66.5%), physical health referrals (65.6%), emergency assistance (56.3%), transportation (54.9%), and child abuse assessment/services/referrals (54.0%) also were offered by more than half of all providers.

The types of services offered varied somewhat across service regions. Table 12 presents breakdowns of the proportion of providers offering five types of services that were found to vary statistically by region. Physical health referrals were most commonly offered by providers in Cook County, northern Illinois, and south central Illinois, and least commonly offered among providers in southern Illinois. Mental health referrals were offered most often by providers in south central Illinois and offered least often by southern Illinois providers. Substance abuse services and counseling services offered to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth were most commonly offered by providers in Cook County and least commonly available among south central Illinois providers. Youth prostitution assessment, services, and referrals were most commonly offered by providers in Cook County and south central Illinois and least commonly offered by providers in southern Illinois.

Table 11. Types of Services Offered to UHY (n=215 providers)

SERVICE	%	SERVICE	%	SERVICE	%
Mental health referrals	80.5	Employment services	44.7	Psychiatric (MD) consult	19.5
Substance abuse referrals	78.1	Meals/soup kitchen	41.4	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender counseling	19.1
Life skills training	68.4	Hygiene kits	39.5	Some other services	19.1
Crisis intervention	66.5	Parenting classes	39.1	Child care	16.7
Physical health referrals	65.6	Family reunification	35.3	Physical health care	15.8
Emergency assistance	56.3	Drop-in	29.8	Family planning services	11.2
Transportation	54.9	Recreation/arts programs	28.4	Prenatal care	9.3
Child abuse assessment/services/referrals	54.0	Substance abuse services	24.2	Gang intervention	8.8
Housing services	49.8	Street outreach	23.3	Head Start/Early Head Start	8.8
Financial education/management	48.8	Legal advocacy	20.9	Pediatric/children's treatment	7.0
Mental health care/counseling	47.9	Partner abuse/domestic violence services	19.5	Dental services	7.0
Educational services	47.0	Youth prostitution assessment/services/referrals	19.5		

Table 12. Types of Services Offered to UHY, by Region (n=215 providers)

	Cook County	Northern Illinois	North Central Illinois	South Central Illinois	Southern Illinois
Physical health referrals	73.4%	70.4%	60.0%	68.8%	43.3%
Mental health referrals	82.8	85.2	71.4	93.8	63.3
Substance abuse services	34.4	27.8	17.1	6.3	23.3
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender counseling	34.4	26.7	11.4	9.4	10.0
Youth prostitution assessment/services/referrals	29.7	16.7	2.9	31.3	10.0

The mean number of services offered by providers was 12.1 (standard deviation = 6.4); the median number of services was 12. The number of specific types of services offered by providers ranged from 0 to 28. The number of services offered varied only slightly across regions, ranging from a mean of 13.5 service types among Cook County providers to 10.2 types of services among providers in southern Illinois. The mean numbers of services offered in northern Illinois, north central Illinois, and south central Illinois were 12.0, 11.6 and 11.8, respectively.

Sources and Destinations of Residential Service Users

A total of 79 survey respondents indicated that they had provided residential services to UHY on April 26, 2005. Of the total UHY staying in these programs that evening, 42.1% had been staying with their families prior to their stay at the reporting program. Another quarter (24.7%) had been doubled-up, or staying temporarily with friends or relatives.² About 10% had been living on the street or outdoors, another 8.2% came from another shelter or housing program, and 6.1% came from their own apartment or living arrangement. Smaller proportions had arrived at the program from jail/detention or prison (2.7%), a substance abuse treatment center (2.2%), a medical facility (0.7%), a

² This is sometimes referred to as "couch-surfing."

psychiatric facility (0.5%), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) housing or placement (0.5%), or someplace else or unknown (2.4%).

These residential service providers also reported estimates of the average length of time that UHY stayed at their programs. The average length of stay for youth under age 18 was 135.4 days (standard deviation = 185.4; range = 1–720 days), and the median was 30 days. Among youth age 18–21, the average length of stay was 159.5 days (standard deviation = 182.1; range = 1–720 days); the median value was 90 days. Using the same nonresponse weighting adjustment (wt_{nr}) described earlier in this report, the total number nights homeless youth spent in residential facilities in Illinois in 2004 was estimated using the following formula:

$$N_t = \sum [(n_1 + n_2) * wt_{nr}] \text{ where: } N_t = \text{total number of nights spent in residential facilities by UHY in 2004.}$$

$n_1 =$ reported number of nights spent in residential facilities by UHY age 17 and younger in 2004.

$n_2 =$ reported number of nights spent in residential facilities by UHY age 18–21 in 2004.

$wt_{nr} =$ nonresponse weight.

Overall, it was estimated that 37,890 total nights were spent in residential facilities by unaccompanied homeless youth in Illinois during 2004. Of these nights, approximately 11,818 were spent by youth under the age of 18 and 26,072 were spent by youth age 18–21.

Of the 79 facilities providing residential services on April 26, 13 (16.5%) reported that they had been forced to refer UHY elsewhere solely because they lacked bed space to serve them that evening. Of those UHY who were referred because of space problems, 27.5% were age 17 or younger, and 72.5% were age 18–21.

Of these 79 facilities, 9 (11.4%) reporting turning away UHY on April 26 for reasons other than lack of bed space, for example due to eligibility criteria. Just over half (53.8%) of the youth turned away were age 18–21, and 46.2% were age 17 or younger.

These providers also were asked to estimate, of the UHY leaving the program during the last 12 months, what their destinations were immediately after leaving. This information suggests that the most common destinations were returning to parents, guardians, or other relatives (29.0%) and going to their own apartment or house (27.6%). Other destinations including those that were unknown (16.4%), to transitional housing (7.0%), to other emergency shelters (5.5%), to the streets or other outside locations (4.8%), or to jail or prison (2.6%). Smaller numbers were reported to have gone to the Job Corps, the military, other group homes, hospitals, and drug treatment and to stay with friends.

PROVIDER SURVEY LIMITATIONS

Three potential sources of error must be considered in this survey, including coverage, nonresponse, and measurement error. Each of these is briefly discussed. A fourth potential source of error, sampling error, need not be considered for the Provider Survey. Because this survey was sent to all potential providers of services of UHY in Illinois, it can be considered a Census, rather than a sample. Consequently, sampling error, which is associated with potential variability due to the random nature of sample selection, is not a likely source of error for this survey.

Coverage Error

Coverage error can occur when members of the population of interest are not included in the sampling frame. When this omission is random and those included are no different from those who are excluded, coverage error is not a problem. When those who are omitted differ in ways related to the primary variables of interest, coverage error leads to bias. Although every effort was made to include all service agencies involved in working with homeless youth in Illinois, it is possible that some were excluded. To the extent that any omitted agencies differ with respect to the variables included in our questionnaire, the results could be biased.

In addition to this, we recognize the absence of reporting information from several important sectors discussed below.

Dissolved domestic partnerships. Many UHY in our needs assessment reported residing for at least some point of the year with a romantic partner.³ Some decided to leave the home of their family specifically for that purpose. To the extent that these domestic partnerships are dissolved and no resources are available for a subsequent independent living situation, young adults may end up temporarily homeless. Further research needs to be done in this area.

Hotels, motels, SROs. Key informants across the state reported that that at-risk youth sometimes find housing doubled up in motels or single-room occupancy buildings (SROs). Because these businesses do not collect demographic data on their customers, it is impossible to estimate at any given time the amount of unaccompanied homeless or unstably housed youth staying in these kinds of facilities.

Privately funded faith-based organizations. In this study, every attempt was made to obtain data from privately funded faith-based residential programs that might provide shelter services to UHY. Because some of these programs that serve the most vulnerable populations may receive referrals by word of mouth, we may not have adequately captured those who are providing housing to UHY.

Public institutions. Individuals sometimes are discharged from institutions, such as hospitals, jails, and mental health centers, into homelessness. We were unable to obtain statewide data on the number of UHY for whom this is a concern; however, a 2005 study of homelessness in DuPage County, Illinois, reported UHY being held “longer than necessary” at the Juvenile Detention Center due to lack of a suitable placement or aftercare plan (DuPage Federation on Human Services Reform, 2005). This is particularly noted as a concern for youth age 16 and 17 who have been “locked out” by their parents and for whom no placement is available.

Undocumented immigrants. While some providers reported providing services to undocumented immigrants, we believe that the vast majority of undocumented immigrants do not come in contact with the general social service provider network and thus were unavoidably excluded from our research. While studies have been conducted on the Illinois undocumented immigrant population in general (Mehta, 2002), such data does not focus on age and unaccompanied status. Interviews with key informants suggest that there are such youth in Illinois,⁴ possibly as young as 16 (in Chicago, primarily from Mexico, Ireland, and Eastern Europe). Our study also may not have adequately represented UHY in Illinois with refugee status.

³ See Table 20, page 34.

⁴ Interview conducted 11/2/05, 10/23/05, 10/21/05

Nonresponse Error

Survey nonresponse is a problem when the respondents differ from nonrespondents in ways related to the dependent variables of interest. The overall response rate for this study is 58.3%. If the 41.7% of the agencies that did not respond are substantially different with regard to the questions asked, findings from the survey could be biased in either direction.

Measurement Error

In addition to coverage and nonresponse error, numerous sources of measurement error may also influence results. In particular, question wording, the ordering of questions within the instrument, and the mode of data collection may each affect data quality and should be considered when interpreting survey results. Respondent misinterpretation of questions, inability to recall information, and/or unwillingness to report accurately are additional sources of measurement error. None of these forms of potential measurement error can be definitively eliminated. However, we have attempted to minimize error associated with the design of the survey instrument through careful instrument review by our Questionnaire Review Committee.

◆◆◆ INFORMATION FROM OTHER SOURCES

When possible, it is useful to use administrative data maintained by state or federal agencies to round out the picture of the presence of a population. The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, for example, uses data from a variety of agencies to report on the status of youth in Illinois. We were faced with some limitations in this area, as many agencies and programs track aggregate data annually or do not collect data on UHY in such a way as to allow them to provide specific estimates for the point-in-time survey. However, we have attempted to provide information obtained from several agencies or programs providing services to at-risk youth that are likely to encounter the unaccompanied homeless youth population.

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The Juvenile Division of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) houses youth who have been committed by the court based on the youth's offense or previous delinquency history and need; a youth's period of incarceration may be extended depending on his or her progress.

Table 13 reports data on experiences of homelessness from a 2000 census of all youth age 13–18 entering the Illinois Youth Centers (IYC) central intake facilities between May and August 2000 (Johnson et al., 2004). A total of 401 youth age 13–17 were interviewed within 24 hours of their entry into IYC.

The purpose of the study was to characterize the nature and extent of illegal substance use and its consequences among serious juvenile offenders in Illinois. The study focused specifically on youth entering IDOC for the first time. Most of these youth previously had many encounters with the juvenile court system prior to IDOC commitment.

Interviews were conducted at the two central intake facilities in Illinois: IYC St. Charles and IYC Warrenville.

Table 13. Homeless Experiences of Youth Entering Juvenile Correctional Facilities in Illinois, 2000

	Unweighted <i>n</i>	Spent 30+ days in a shelter	Spent 30+ days on the streets	Spent 30+ days in either location
TOTAL	401	5.5%	5.0%	12.8%
Gender				
Male	349	5.5	4.3	12.6
Female	52	5.8	9.6	15.4
Race/Ethnicity				
White	176	4.0	10.2	15.9
African American	181	7.7	1.1	11.0
All other groups	43	4.7	0.0	9.3
Age (in years)				
13–14	71	7.0	7.0	16.9
15–16	260	5.8	4.6	11.6
17–18	70	4.3	4.3	12.9

⁵ This list was obtained from the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board with the assistance of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Because males and females were sampled separately, the number of completed interviews with each was not proportionate to their percentage of the total population of youth entering IDOC for the first time. In addition, the interviewing periods for males and females differed, so each individual's chance of selection differed between males and females. To adjust for these two factors, post-stratification weights were applied.

Of youth entering IYC, the majority (70%) reported residing with a parent or guardian just before entering custody. Ten percent reported residing in the home of a relative (not parents). Slightly more than 7% reported having resided in a friend's home just prior to entering custody, 5% reported coming from a residential placement, 2% reported coming from foster care, and 1% reported that they had no stable place to live at the time they entered IDOC.

Two items asked youth about their history of homelessness. Slightly less than 6% reported ever having resided in a shelter for 30 days or more, and 5% reported having spent a month or more on the street. Of particular concern was that 7% of those reporting spending time on the street were age 13–14.⁶

LAW ENFORCEMENT/CCBYS

The Illinois Department of Human Services funds a statewide program called Comprehensive Community-Based Youth Services (CCBYS). This program is meant to provide at-risk youth age 10–17 with community-based services to assess the need for family reunification, preservation, or independence. An interaction with local law enforcement as the result of a “lock out” or other family conflict situation is often the entry point of CCBYS service provision. Examples of populations served by the CCBYS program include

- ◆ Youth absent from home without parental consent
- ◆ Youth “beyond the control” of their parents or guardian
- ◆ Homeless youth under age 18

The Illinois Collaboration on Youth (ICOY) estimates that of approximately 16,000 CCBYS contacts per year, about 100 (3%) result in a temporary residential placement outside of the youth's home.⁷

On April 20, 2005, SRL mailed a brief questionnaire to every police department in Illinois asking for data on the number of UHY detained overnight at their facility. Table 14 describes the results of the police department questionnaire.

Table 14. Results of 2004 Law Enforcement Survey

DISPOSITION	TOTAL	
	<i>n</i>	%
Total without overnight facilities	256	25.5%
No UHY encounters in 2004	50	5.0
At least one UHY encounter in 2004	7	0.7
Don't know/Don't track this statistic	23	2.3
Questionnaire not returned	667	66.5
TOTAL	1,004	100.0%

We believe the low number of UHY reported could reflect the fact that these departments were not including CCBYS cases in their estimates or do not consider CCBYS youth to be “detained.”

⁶ This question did not ask if the youth was accompanied by a parent or guardian at the time of homelessness.

⁷ This data was not available by region.

⁸ This list was obtained from the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board with the assistance of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

ILLINOIS JOB CORPS

Much of the literature surrounding homeless youth and young adults discusses the importance of these youth receiving job training and training for preparedness for adult life. The Illinois Job Corps is a residential career development program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. Job Corps provides vocational services and training to low-income youth age 17–24. Youth in the program receive free room and board and a small monthly stipend, along with a variety of supportive services.

The three Job Corps sites in the state of Illinois are in Chicago, Joliet, and Golconda. The number of beds for each site is listed in Table 15.

Table 15. Illinois Job Corps Capacity⁹

Site	BEDS	
	Male	Female
Golconda	175	55
Chicago	164	164
Joliet	120	120
TOTAL	459	339

Admissions representatives from the Illinois Job Corps were unable to provide us with the actual number of homeless youth admitted to the program each year; however, they did report that they admit youth and young adults who are homeless, who are residing in unstable housing situations, from IDOC, and from DCFS. Youth can stay in the Job Corps program up to three years.

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Schools in Illinois are required to provide education through the 17th birthday, and they have a mandate to ensure that youth are attending school. Youth can remain in the public school system until they graduate or turn 21.

The Federal McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program requests that the Illinois State Board of Education collect data annually on the number of unaccompanied homeless youth enrolled in school. Table 16 illustrates the number of UHY reported by Illinois Educational Public School System for school year 2004/2005 broken down by region. **This table does not reflect full reporting of data from the Chicago public schools.**

While the schools do not report specific information on the kind of situations in which these students are living (e.g., shelters, “couch-surfing”) it is possible that some youth reflected in this data were not counted in our point-in-time estimate, as they may not have been linked up with the providers we surveyed exclusively and may be residing temporarily with family or friends. The schools also do not break down this data by age, but the age criteria for receiving educational services in Illinois corresponds with the age eligibility criteria for our study (age 21 and younger.)

Table 16. Public Schools Reporting Unduplicated Numbers of Homeless Youth in Illinois in 2004/2005, by DHS Service Region¹⁰

REGION	<i>n</i>	%
#1: Cook County	285	34.5%
#2: Northern Illinois	158	29.5
#3: North Central Illinois	49	9.1
#4: South Central Illinois	70	13.1
#5: Southern Illinois	74	13.8
TOTAL	536	100.0%

⁹ Source, U.S. Department of Labor.

¹⁰ Source, Illinois State Board of Education.

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provides residential and foster care placements for youth who are wards of the state. A substantial amount of research has been conducted around the status of youth emancipating or aging out of the Illinois foster care system, specifically their preparedness for independent living. Courtney et al. (2005) report that of 321 young adults surveyed who had recently been discharged from state care, 14% reported that they had experienced homelessness at least one time since leaving care.¹¹

¹¹ A majority of youth surveyed were from Illinois.

◆◆◆ HOMELESS YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This section describes the design of the research, data collection methods, and provides descriptive tables and statistics from the results of our interviews with 169 UHY across the state of Illinois. Data for the needs assessment were drawn from questions asked of UHY about their background and experiences. We visited 32 different programs across Illinois. To capture a wide spectrum of experiences across the continuum of care, the type of services provided by these programs intentionally was kept broad.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for the needs assessment were drawn from a variety of different sources but primarily came from issues raised by UHY themselves as well as members of HYRG, which was composed of service providers and youth from around the state. Partnering with community-based service providers has been shown to be helpful in improving research quality as well as ensuring that the resulting data is useful (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998).

During a series of summit meetings beginning in November 2004, key areas of interest emerged among the members:

- ◆ Who are the homeless youth of Illinois?
- ◆ What kinds of needs do they have?
- ◆ How do their needs vary across Illinois?

The group then discussed different approaches to collect this information and decided upon a face-to-face standardized interview as the most appropriate data collection method. Conducting in-person interviews directly with UHY as opposed to collecting information from service provider staff would allow us to get feedback directly from them on the issues they are facing on a daily basis. At the same time, using a standardized survey instrument would ensure that data collection would be methodical and rigorous. The group also felt strongly that letting UHY speak out about the challenges they face in their lives as well as their successes and hopes for the future would increase the likelihood of obtaining useful and candid information.

We planned to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative information is defined as information that asks about numbers, frequency, or asking respondents a question in such a way that their response can be coded. Quantitative information allows for the statistical analysis of aggregate data and the opportunity to test for statistical significance. Qualitative data refers to answers in the form of open-ended questions. This data can be coded or can be used on its own to provide additional anecdotal information.

STUDY DESIGN

Sudman et al. (1988) discusses the many challenges inherent in collecting primary data from populations such as the homeless. The next section outlines the study design for the in-person youth surveys and discusses some of the practical challenges.

Different Approaches

Literature briefly reviewed earlier in this report suggests that a variety of methods have been used to survey and enumerate homeless persons; less common are standardized surveys with homeless youth, and even less common are *statewide* surveys of homeless youth. Thus, we were faced with making decisions regarding a design that would be regional—that is, would allow us to reflect regional differences—and that could be applied in as uniform a manner as possible across the state. We decided to conduct personal interviews with UHY receiving services from social service programs around the state. There were two primary concerns that this provider-based design attempted to address. The first was the regional challenge, and the second was to ensure, to the best of our ability, that the respondents interviewed met the eligibility criteria determined by the HYRG.

We attempted to include a broad spectrum of known providers of services to youth. We approached a wide variety of kinds of programs, including those providing shelter, outreach, and educational services. We recognized that if we limited the data collection to known providers of services to UHY we would not adequately reflect the experiences of all older youth present in the homeless population. A 2001 study of homeless adults conducted by SRL in the Chicago six-county region using a random sample found that approximately 4.8% of clients using adult homeless services were between the ages of 18–21 (Smith, 2002). Thus, we decided to go with a hybrid approach, using the database established for the provider survey that included adult homeless providers. The limitation to this approach is that we may have missed “hidden” UHY doubled up with friends or family members or on the streets who were not currently receiving services from a program or agency and who have a higher level of unmet needs.

We relied heavily on our social service program partners to assist us in identifying youth eligible for the study. This was necessary as some of those youth who met our eligibility criteria were receiving the same kinds of services from these community-based programs as non-eligible youth (for example, DCFS wards). We attempted to conduct in-person interviews with every potentially eligible youth unless the number of potentially eligible clients (two or less, for example) was small enough to make a long trip inefficient.

We originally intended to employ a two-stage cluster sampling method (Sudman, 1976) for this study: we would select *a sample of facilities* in the first stage, and in the second stage, we would select *a sample of individuals found at each facility*. Thus, the initial sampling strategy was to attempt to interview at every site in the initial group of known eligible providers and to randomly select sites from the second group. However, it became clear after we began to contact the first list of programs that fewer programs were eligible to participate in the project than anticipated. Further, at each site we *did* visit, there were fewer eligible youth present than expected. Ultimately, the decision was made to attempt to contact all of the sites across the state and to interview all eligible youth present at each of those sites (with the exception noted above).

Eligibility Criteria

For the purposes of this survey, providers were asked to identify eligible respondents, defined as *individuals age 21 or younger and unaccompanied by a parent or legal guardian*. If a potential respondent was residing in a shelter or transitional living program at the time of the data collection, he or she was automatically considered eligible. If appropriately aged individuals were receiving

outreach or other kinds of services from a social service program and were identified by the program as lacking a safe or stable living arrangement, they also were invited to participate.

METHODS

Instrument Construction

The UHY needs assessment instrument was developed by the HYRG during the spring of 2005. The instrument was constructed in order to collect background data on UHY, to capture needs for different kinds of services, and to identify background and situational characteristics that might prove as barriers to achieving independence. In general, we attempted to collect

- ◆ Background and situational characteristics of the youth
- ◆ Reported needs of the youth by region
- ◆ Risk factors associated with barriers to self-sufficiency and independence

For demographic characteristics, we included items on gender, age, race/ethnicity, family composition, pregnancy, parenthood, and marital status.

Self-sufficiency may be determined by capacity for independent living and adequate personal income. Independent living is defined as a living situation in which a youth resides in a dwelling of his or her own choosing and can entail living alone, with family members or with unrelated individuals. Adequate personal income is defined as sufficient income to avoid dependence on social services, public assistance, or other income subsidies to meet basic needs.

Primary evidence of self-sufficiency includes the attainment of basic living skills, education, training, and employment. Secondary objectives include improvements in family relations and physical and mental health, as well as cessation of physical or sexual abuse, victimization, and substance abuse.

Situational characteristics sometimes serve as barriers to self-sufficiency, such as living arrangements, family relationships, educational status, employment, public assistance, substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, and physical and mental health.

Risk factors are those that increase the likelihood that a person will become or remain homeless. Examples of risk factors we examined in this study included abuse/neglect in family of origin, depression, substance abuse, school risk factors, environmental risk factors, and age of first pregnancy.

The youth instrument consisted of several modules, examples of which included

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| ◆ Background characteristics | ◆ Physical health |
| ◆ Housing | ◆ Mental health |
| ◆ Service needs | ◆ Interaction with child welfare system |
| ◆ Educational status | ◆ Substance abuse |

The needs assessment questions used in the survey instrument were adapted from a questionnaire designed by the Survey Research Laboratory and Dr. Janet Smith for a study of homeless adults for the 2001 Regional Roundtable needs assessment. Previous surveys of homeless youth in Chicago conducted in 1992 and 2005 were also reviewed (Levin, Bax, McKean, & Schoggen, 2005; Chicago

Coalition for the Homeless, 1992). The HYRG modified the instrument, which was then reviewed by SRL's Questionnaire Review Committee and the Institutional Review Board.

SRL Field Coordinators also reviewed questions to address potential issues related to fielding instruments with target respondents; some items were modified based on this testing.

The instrument was designed to be administered in no more than 30 minutes, both to decrease the time burden on each respondent and to ensure that as many individuals as possible could be interviewed within the finite amount of time often allowed to interviewers working in each program. Of course, the length of the actual administration varied according to the individual's answers.

Feedback from UHY was solicited at each step of the design process. UHY participated in meetings of the HYRG, and the youth survey instrument was pretested with two groups of youth in spring 2005. The first group was comprised of youth residing at a transitional living program on the south side of Chicago, and the meeting lasted approximately two hours. The second group was tested at a youth drop-in on the north side of Chicago; this meeting lasted approximately one hour. Youth were asked to provide feedback on specific questions, wording, and interview length. All participants received a \$10.00 gift certificate to a local restaurant for their participation. Several modifications were made to the youth instrument based upon the comments from the feedback group participants.

Site Identification Process

In preparation for interviewing UHY on site, we first needed to identify from our initial list of providers those providing direct services to individuals meeting our eligibility criteria. We strongly encouraged all providers identified as providing direct services to UHY to allow us to interview youth receiving services through their program although this at times was precluded due to program requirements, space limitations or legal issues.

Examples of providers to homeless youth included Basic Centers and Transitional Living Programs. *Basic Centers* are youth shelters that provide emergency shelter, food, clothing, outreach services, and crisis intervention for runaway and homeless youth. *Transitional Living Programs* for homeless youth provide long-term shelter, skill development, and resources for older youth for whom family reunification is not an option, and independence is the goal.

The list of potential programs intended for the youth survey included both all programs identifying themselves as eligible from the provider survey as well as all programs for which we could not determine eligibility. Once known providers had been identified, SRL site scheduling staff conducted a comprehensive telephone screening of the remaining sites to get general information about their services and the potential for conducting interviews at the sites.

Setting up interviewing sessions at community-based programs often requires a series of contact attempts, as first the person at the program authorized to consent to the research must be identified and determination must be made as to whether program participants are eligible to participate. If we believed there was any possibility that the program might be a potential interviewing site containing eligible clients, the program was retained in the list for telephone screening for the client interviews.

Site Screening

A site-scheduling group consisting of SRL research assistants made the initial telephone contacts with program staff each site. The primary purpose of the screening interview was to establish a sense

of the site's population and to assess interviewing conditions. Information for each site was recorded on the site information sheet.¹² Information obtained by the site-scheduling group included

- ◆ Hours and days of service provision
- ◆ Average number of eligible clients to be expected
- ◆ Number of interviewers to send
- ◆ Interviewing procedures and guidelines
- ◆ Availability of space for interviewing
- ◆ Name of contact person present day of interviewing
- ◆ Site protocol information

The preliminary telephone interview sometimes was supplemented with a site visit, particularly when additional information was needed or when the agency presented specific logistical challenges.

During this period, program staff often requested that additional information be mailed or faxed. In these instances, follow-up telephone contact was made to confirm receipt and to answer any additional questions.

In order to participate, the sites needed to allow us to interview clients either on-site at the agency or at another location arranged by the agency. SRL also requires that interviews be conducted out of earshot of others.

Because some sites took multiple attempts to set up/schedule interviews, it is possible that some eligible providers that were released late in the data collection period could not be included in the face-to-face portion due to the time constraints; however, all potential sites received at least five contacts, and some had more than ten.

Upon scheduling a site for interviewing, site staff at SRL transferred the information to the field interviewer, who often would make a reminder call the day prior to the day of interviewing.

Every attempt was made to obtain an accurate estimate of the number of clients we would encounter at the sites in order to ensure that we would assign the correct amount of staff to complete the interviewing in the time allotted. This careful screening process meant that no potential interviews were missed at the sites. Conversely, we often were given the most generous estimate of clients we could anticipate at the site and found far fewer there on the day of interviewing. Whenever possible, interviewing staff would arrange to return to conduct interviews with the clients not present that day.

Interviewers completed a site sampling form for each site at the conclusion of the interviewing period. This form collected information from program staff on the total number of eligible youth enrolled in the program, the number of eligible youth present, and the number of interviews completed. We also collected information on the number of youth refusing to complete the interview.

Data Collection

Staffing

SRL places a strong emphasis on the integrity of its field staff and procedures. This emphasis extends from the recruitment and training of interviewers through data collection, quality control, refusal conversion, and security.

¹² Available from the authors by request.

Two experienced SRL field coordinators were assigned to the study. As noted, field coordinators have overall responsibility for general training and supervision of all interviewers during the data collection process.

SRL hired and trained 12 interviewers across the state to conduct the in-person interviews. Preferences were given to those who had an interest in youth or social services or who had previous experience working with at-risk youth and young adults. Efforts were made to ensure that the average interviewer age, ethnicity, and gender would be similar to those of the respondents. Interviews for Regions 1 and 2 were conducted by staff from SRL's Chicago office, and Regions 3 and 4 out of SRL's Urbana-Champaign office. For the Region 5 interviews, we relied upon an experienced SRL interviewer who resides in southern Illinois.

Potential interviewers were required to conduct several mock interviews with SRL supervisory staff and were tested prior to being certified to work on this project. The interviewing staff was supported by a research assistant assigned to the study, as well as the project coordinator.

All SRL interviewers received 16 hours of general training on personal interviewing practices and technique and were provided with a detailed training manual.¹³ Examples of topics covered include practice on specific techniques for establishing professional rapport, answering potential questions, and maintaining cooperation of respondents and confidentiality. To ensure uniformity of data, interviewers on SRL studies are trained to read each question verbatim and never to deviate from the scripted interview.

Interviewers also received a five-hour training specific to this project that was conducted by the SRL project coordinator and field coordinators.¹⁴ Each interviewer received an *Interviewer Instruction Manual* providing (a) an overview of the questionnaire, (b) descriptions of the interviewing materials and how each was to be used, (c) the data collection schedule and expected productivity level, (d) instructions for contacting respondents and determining respondent eligibility, and (e) how to answer common respondent queries about the study. The manual also contained detailed information on how to administer individual questionnaire items. Training on the questionnaire included instructions on the way to ask each question, recording responses, and probing. During this training, interviewers conducted mock interviews in small groups.

Once training and mock interviews were completed, each interviewer participated in a "sign-off" mock interview with the project coordinator or a field supervisor. When field coordination staff determined that each interviewer was sufficiently prepared to begin the study, SRL provided that interviewer with a University of Illinois identification card. At this point, interviewers signed a statement of confidentiality and ethics.

Interview Administration and Confidentiality

Research at the University of Illinois may only be carried out with the highest ethical standards. In accordance with this, maintenance of respondent and data confidentiality is our highest concern. Because this study involved data collection from a special population, SRL submitted a detailed protocol describing the study procedures and materials to the University of Illinois at Chicago

¹³ Copies of the SRL general training manual for face-to-face interviewers are available upon request.

¹⁴ Three study-specific training sessions were conducted over the course of this project.

Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is overseen by the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

A “minor” is defined as an individual younger than age 18. Any research protocol that includes minor participants is subject to special review by the IRB. The IRB waived the requirement for a parental consent for a youth under the age of 18. The IRB also required that an independent children’s advocate be appointed in the event study participants had questions about the research. The Board reviewed and approved the protocol in May 2005.

Due to the sensitive nature of the interview questions, every possible attempt was made to achieve a confidential interview session. Any SRL staff with access to respondent information sign an agreement of confidentiality as a condition of employment. This concern for confidentiality extends to the interview session. Achieving confidentiality during the actual administration could sometimes be challenging amidst conditions that were significantly space- and staff-limited.

As noted earlier, the SRL site scheduling staff was instructed to inform agency staff that the interview must be conducted in as private a place as possible, out of the earshot of other youth and staff members. Not only is this out of concern for confidentiality but also to ensure that the interview process is free from distraction and that respondents’ answers are not influenced by the presence of another party. Interviewers are instructed not to pursue an interview if they feel that a confidential interview session cannot be ensured. Fortunately, the times when youth were most available to be interviewed tended to occur on evenings and weekends when case management staff were not present, and our interviewers were sometimes able to conduct interviews in private offices.

Interviewers informed respondents at the beginning of the interview that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were not required to participate in the interview or to answer any questions that might make them uncomfortable. For this project in particular, interviewing staff stressed to respondents that no one from the program would know how they answered a particular question and that they did not have to participate in the interview as a requirement of being in the program.

The interviewer allocated time to answer any questions the respondents may have had prior to beginning the interview. Interviewers also were instructed to ask respondents if they required the assistance of a staff person in the event they became excessively upset or uncomfortable during the interview session.

The informed consent document used for this project followed the UIC OPRS standard template and was approved by the IRB. Each respondent was asked to read the form and indicate that he or she understood what it meant. In the event the respondent was unable to read the consent form due to disability or literacy issues, the interviewer read the form to the respondent in its entirety. The interviewers were also instructed to leave a copy of the form with the respondent.¹⁵ Further, interviewing staff were provided with lists of community resources to provide to respondents.

Each completed interview form was tagged with an anonymous SRL case identification number to facilitate data entry. Upon completion of interview at a site, the field coordinator collected the forms from the field staff then edited them for clarity. The completed questionnaires were transmitted securely to the SRL Data Reduction section for data entry.

¹⁵ Available from the authors by request.

Interviewing Dates and Cooperation

Interviewing at the sites commenced in June 2005 and concluded in October. We visited 32 different programs across the state and completed 168 interviews.

The study's cooperation rate, defined as the proportion of all respondents interviewed of all respondents ever contacted, was 90.9%. Refusals to participate in the interview occur in every survey research project. Interviewers are always instructed to explain, in their own words, the importance and purpose of the study to respondents. They also are provided with examples of questions respondents might ask, and the answers to these questions are reviewed during their training. These alone are not enough to encourage participation. Respondents give a variety of explanations for why they might not wish to participate. Some of the more common examples include lack of time, not wanting to give out personal information, or not caring about the importance of the study or the use of the data.

To minimize refusals, a \$10.00 gift certificate was offered to respondents to thank them for their time spent answering the questions. Provision of an incentive has been found to increase participation among hard-to reach-populations (Kulka, 1994). In studies of youth, it often is preferred that they are provided with a gift certificate rather than cash to ensure that they will use it for a needed good or service.

When respondents indicated a reluctance to provide personal information, interviewers reassured them that all information provided would be confidential and that there would be no way to attach the data to answers of any one person. Any further concerns were referred to the project coordinator.

Table 17 shows the breakdown of sites visited and interviews conducted by region. Given the small number of completed interviews in the north central Illinois service region, the north central and south central Illinois regions were combined for purposes of reporting analyses from the youth survey.

Table 17. Disposition of Homeless Youth Sample, by Region

	TOTAL	Cook County	Northern Illinois	North Central Illinois	South Central Illinois	Southern Illinois
Sites visited	32	10	6	6	4	6
Respondents reported present at sites	186	72	25	23	26	40
Completed interviews	169	67	24	18	26	34
Cooperation rate	90.9%	93.1%	96.0%	78.3%	100.0%	85.0%

Data Reduction and Processing

All interview forms were entered by the SRL Data Reduction (DR) section using SRL's standard data entry procedures, and data was processed the same manner.

Reconciliation occurs on every study for which any sort of data entry is completed. Its purpose is to ensure the accuracy of all data entered. As a first step in reconciliation, a 100% check was conducted of the questionnaires and site sampling forms to ensure that every documented interview had been data entered. In the event that discrepancies were identified, DR initiated additional steps to reconcile them until 100% accuracy is attained.

Once all the data were entered, the SRL Office of Survey Systems checks and cleans the data to ensure that any missing or illegal answers were corrected. The data is then processed and finalized

and transformed into an SPSS setup file that is used for analysis. Unless otherwise specified, only those subgroup differences that achieved statistical significance ($p < .05$) are discussed.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the youth survey portion of the study. We begin by providing a basic profile of the UHY interviewed, followed by a detailed assessment of the service needs and experiences of this group.

Demographics

The unaccompanied homeless youth interviewed for this study were primarily female (65.7%) and African American (55.0%). Their average age was 18.8 years (standard deviation = 1.6; range = 12–21 years old), and their median age was 19 years. On average, these UHY had completed 11.0 years of school (standard deviation = 1.8; range = 1–14 years of school). The median number of years of schooling was also 11. Almost 40% reported having one or more biological children of their own. A summary of these demographic measures is provided in Table 18, which also summarizes the geographic distribution of the sample. In Table 19, the demographic composition of the sample is profiled by service region. Note that the Cook County sample is furthered disaggregated to provide separate estimates for Chicago.

Reasons for Homelessness

Youth were asked to report the reason they had left the home of their parent or guardian the first time. Roughly one-third reported their leaving as a result of a family conflict or argument (29%). Smaller proportions reported that they had decided to leave or run away from home, sometimes to move in with a boyfriend, girlfriend, or other friend (14%) or due to suffering physical or sexual abuse from a parent, stepparent, or family member (10%). Other reasons reported were that they had to leave home due to their own pregnancy; had nowhere to live because their parent or guardian died or was incapable of providing care due to illness; their parent or family did not have a place to live or room for them to stay;

Table 18. Characteristics of UHY Sample (n=169)

CHARACTERISTIC	%	n
Gender		
Female	65.7%	111
Male	34.3	58
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	55.0	93
White	19.5	33
Mixed	15.4	26
Other race group	10.1	17
<i>American Indian or Alaskan Native</i>	3.6	6
<i>Hispanic</i>	3.0	5
<i>Asian or Pacific Islander</i>	1.2	2
<i>Other</i>	2.4	4
Gender by Race/Ethnicity		
Female		
African American	37.3	63
White	11.8	20
Mixed	10.7	18
Other race group*	5.9	10
Male		
African American	17.8	30
White	7.7	13
Mixed	4.7	8
Other race group*	4.1	7
Age (in years)		
12–17	14.8	25
18–19	50.9	86
20–21	34.3	58
Education Completed		
1–9 years	14.4	24
10–11 years	38.3	64
12 years/GED	39.5	66
13–14 years	7.8	13
Have 1+ Children		
Yes	39.6	67
No	60.4	102
Service Region		
Cook County (Chicago)**	39.6 (30.8)	67 (52)
Northern Illinois	14.2	24
Central Illinois	26.0	44
Southern Illinois	20.1	34

* includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic, and Asian or Pacific Islander.

**The Chicago sample is a subset of the Cook County sample.

their “DCFS contract ended;” or they had been “kicked out” due to their own behavior, such as drug or alcohol abuse or not obeying household rules.

Educational Experiences

Just under half of the UHY reported having been in school during the spring 2005 semester (46.2%). The average year of school these youth reported being in during this most recent semester was grade 11 (mean = 11.5; standard deviation = 1.6; range = 5–14 years), and the median grade level was grade 12. Of those not in school during the spring 2005 semester, a large majority (91.2%) indicated that they planned to go back to school sometime in the future.

The youth also reported on a variety of related educational experiences. Sixty-eight percent indicated that they had, at some point during their educational career, been suspended from school. Smaller proportions indicated they ever had been expelled from school (21.3%) or held back a grade (29.0%). One-third of the sample reported ever having been placed in a special education program or a class where “you were given special assistance while in school” (33.1%). Of those who were in a special education program, 73.2% indicated they had received services for a learning disability. Two in five of these youth indicated they had received services for a behavior disorder (44.6%). None reported having received services for a physical problem.

Table 19. Characteristics of UHY Sample by Region (Percentages)

	Cook County (Chicago)** [n=67(52)]	Northern Illinois [n=24]	Central Illinois [n=44]	Southern Illinois [n=34]
Gender				
Female	62.7 (53.8)	62.5	77.3	58.8
Male	37.3 (46.2)	37.5	22.7	41.2
Age (in years)				
12–17	7.5 (9.6)	0.0	11.4	44.1
18–19	49.3(44.2)	41.7	65.9	41.2
20–21	43.3(46.2)	58.3	22.7	14.7
Race/Ethnicity				
African American	73.1 (69.2)	25.0	36.4	64.7
White	7.5 (9.6)	41.7	29.5	14.7
Mixed	10.4 (11.5)	8.3	25.0	17.6
Other race group*	9.0 (9.6)	25.0	9.1	2.9
Education completed				
1–9 years	10.4 (9.6)	8.7	9.3	32.4
10–11 years	40.3 (50.0)	30.4	39.5	38.2
12 years/GED	37.3 (32.7)	56.5	44.2	26.5
13–14 years	11.9 (7.7)	4.3	7.0	2.9
Have one or more children				
Yes	32.8 (30.8)	45.8	52.3	32.4
No	67.2 (69.2)	54.2	47.7	67.6

* includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic, and Asian or Pacific Islander.

**The Chicago sample is a subset of the Cook County sample.

Other Lifetime Experiences

Unaccompanied homeless youth also were asked about types of institutional placements they might have previously experienced. About 22% had ever been kept in juvenile detention. The proportion having ever been admitted to a treatment program for drugs or alcohol was 13.6%, and just over 20% had ever been admitted to a hospital for mental health treatment or care.

Homeless Experiences

Youth indicated having spent nights in a wide variety of locations during the past year. These experiences are summarized in the first column of Table 20. The most commonly reported place to have spent time during the past year was in a shelter, mission, or transitional housing program/agency, reported by three-quarters of the youth (76.3%). Two-thirds indicated having spent time with a parent or guardian in their home during the past year (66.9%). A majority reported having spent time with other family members in their home during that time (59.8%). Most of the youth interviewed (83.4%) reported having spent time during the past year in the home of *either* a parent or another family member. Additionally, more than half spent at least one night with friends because they had nowhere else to stay (55.0%). More than a quarter reported spending nights alone or with roommates in a rented room or apartment (40.8%), in the home of a romantic partner (37.3%), in a hotel or motel because they had nowhere else to stay (26.0%), and in a jail or lockup (26.0%).

Table 20. Types of Places at Which Homeless Youth Spent at Least One Night During the Past Year and the Past 30 Days and Where They Currently Stay (*n*=169)

TYPE OF LOCATION	Spent at Least One Night During the Past Year	Spent at Least One Night During the Past 30 Days	Currently Staying at this Location
In a shelter, mission, or transitional housing program or agency	76.3%	64.5%	64.5%
With a parent or guardian in their home	66.9	33.1	10.1*
With family members in their home	59.8	18.3	3.0
With friends because you had nowhere else to stay	55.0	18.9	3.0
Alone or with roommates in a rented room or apartment	40.8	17.8	10.7**
In the home of a romantic partner	37.3	14.2	3.0
In a hotel or motel because you had nowhere else to stay	26.0	7.7	0.6
In jail or lockup	26.0	3.6	0.0
In the place of a stranger or people you don't know well because you had nowhere else to stay	20.1	6.5	0.0
Someplace outdoors, such as on the street, or in a park, alley, car or barn	14.8	3.6	0.0
In a space arranged for by an employer or volunteer organization like a church group	6.5	0.6	0.0
Someplace else outdoors, such as in a bus or train station, or at an airport	5.3	1.8	0.0
In detox or drug rehab	5.9	2.4	2.4
In an abandoned building or "squats"	3.6	3.6	0.0
Some other kind of place	11.2	4.7	3.0
TOTAL			100.0%

*Includes some youth receiving CCBYS services

**Includes youth placed in scattered site or subsidized apartments as part of Transitional Living Programs

Table 20's second column reports where youth reported spending time during the 30 days prior to the interview. The most commonly reported location was again in a shelter, mission, or transitional housing program or agency (64.5%). Thirty-three percent had spent time with a parent or guardian during the past month, and 18.3% had spent time with another family member. When examined together, 43.2% had spent at least one night with parents or other family during the past month.

At the time of the interview, most youth were staying in a shelter, mission, or transitional housing program (64.5%). About 10% reported that they were staying the home of a parent or guardian. While this did not meet our eligibility criteria, we believe that these youth were referred because they were receiving services through the CCBYS programs and thus were unstably housed or considered this arrangement to be temporary. An additional 10.7% reported residing alone or with roommates in a rented room or apartment. Smaller proportions reported that they were staying with family members (3.0%), with friends because they had nowhere else to say (3.0%), in the home of a romantic partner (3.0%), in a detox or drug rehab program (2.4%), or some other kind of place (3.0%).

Youth also reported the age when they first needed a place to stay other than with a parent or guardian. The average age was 15.7 years (standard deviation = 2.9; range = age 2–20). The median age was 16. They also were asked how old they were the last time they had lived with an adult responsible for raising them (such as a parent, grandparent, relative, or foster parent). The average age reported was 17.0 years (standard deviation = 2.0; range = 9–21). The median age last time they had lived with a parent or guardian was also 17. When comparing the current age of each youth interviewed with the age when they reported first needing a place to stay, it was estimated that these youth had had their first homeless experience, on average, approximately 3.1 years previously (standard deviation = 2.8; median = 3 years previously).

The mean number of times that youth reported needing a place to stay other than with parents or a guardian was 9.1 (standard deviation = 18.1). The median number of times was 3.

Family Experiences

Most of the youth interviewed indicated that they had been *mostly* raised by their natural parent or parents (62.7%). Smaller proportions reported having been raised primarily by other relatives (10.7%); a combination of natural, adopted, and/or foster parents (8.9%); adoptive parents (7.7%); grandparents (7.1%); foster parents (2.4%); and somebody else (0.6%). Four of every five youth reported that they have contact with family members once a week or more (79.9%). Most others had contact at least once a month (13.6%). Smaller proportions had contact with their family every 2–6 months (3.0%) or once a year or less (3.6%).

Over a third (37.9%) of all UHY interviewed indicated that they felt they had been neglected or physically abused by their parents or other adults who were raising them at some point during their lives. These youth also were asked about four specific negative experiences they may have had with their parents or the adults who raised them. This information is reported in Table 21. Approximately half of all youth reported at least one of these four experiences (51.5%). The most commonly reported experiences were having been left for extended periods with relatives, friends, or strangers (32.5%); having had a time when the family did not have a place to live (29.6%); and ever not having enough food or clothes (27.2%). A much smaller proportion of the UHY reported that they had ever been punished by going a full day without access to essential items, including food, water, clothing, or a toilet.

These youth also reported on the substance use patterns of their parents or the persons who were primarily responsible for raising them. Table 22 indicates the proportions of UHY who reported that each of their parents or guardians had drunk heavily and/or used illegal drugs. Approximately one-third of male and one-quarter of female parents/guardians were reported to have at least one of these substance abuse indicators. Overall, 61.5% of all UHY reported that at least one of their parents/guardians had at least one of these indicators.

Table 21. Percent of UHY Reporting Certain Negative Family Experiences (n=169)

EXPERIENCE	%
Were you ever left for extended periods of time with relatives, friends or strangers?	32.5%
Ever a time when family did not have a house or apartment to live in?	29.6
Ever a time when did not have enough food or clothes?	27.2
Were you ever punished by going a full day without food, water, clothing, or a toilet?	4.1
Any of these	51.5

Table 22. Percent of UHY Reporting Parental Substance/Guardian Substance Use Behaviors (n=169)

	%
Father/male guardian used illegal drugs	34.9%
Father/male guardian drank heavily or had problems because of his own alcohol use	33.1
Mother/female guardian used illegal drugs	24.3
Mother/female guardian drank heavily or had problems because of her own alcohol use	22.5
Any of these	61.5

Approximately two of every five youth had run away from home at least once for at least two nights (43.2%). The average age when they had first run away from home was 14.0 years (standard deviation = 2.3; range = 7–19). The median age was 15. Youth had run away from home (for at least 2 nights) an average of 6.0 times (standard deviation = 8.6; range = 1–50 times). The median reported number of times having run away from home was 3 times.

A third of the youth interviewed (34.3%) indicated that they had ever been a ward of the state (i.e., had been placed by DCFS or a private agency, even if it was with a relative). The average age when they first became involved with DCFS was 8.3 years old (standard deviation = 5.2; range = less than age 1–17). The median reported age for first DCFS involvement was 6.5 years.

The mean age at which youth reported that their DCFS case was closed was 13.8 (standard deviation = 4.5; range = 1–19). The median age at which cases were closed was 14. About three-quarters of all UHY reported that their DCFS case had been closed due to decisions made by persons other than themselves (74.1%). One in five reported that they had left DCFS of their own accord (20.7%).

A majority reported that their immediate family was from the local area where they were interviewed (72.8%). Almost all youth (95.9%) indicated that they had been born in the United States.

When asked if they could go back to live with their family if they wanted to, 48.5% indicated that they could; 46.7% felt that they could not. Another 4.7% were uncertain or declined to say.

Of the youth who reported that they could not return to their family, reasons were varied. Youth primarily attributed the reason to ongoing family conflict or unresolved issues in the family of origin (25%). The next most frequent reason provided was that there was no room for them (20%). Youth

also reported that they could not return to their family of origin because their mother, father, or guardian “hates me” or “does not want me” (10%); other reasons reported were that they had no family to return to due to death or that they had been in foster care; that something about their own behavior prevented them from returning (e.g., drug use, criminal activity); or that they did not wish to return due to dysfunction or unlawful behavior in their family of origin.

Service Needs and Sources of Assistance

The service needs of unaccompanied homeless youth were assessed via an inventory of 27 specific services. For each, youth were asked if they needed help with this type of support service during the past 12 months. Most commonly cited were assistance with basic needs (see Table 23, column 1), including finding a stable place to live (77.5%), finding a job (75.7%), getting regular transportation (64.5%), finding their own apartment (62.1%), and getting food on a regular basis (44.4%). The educational and other needs most commonly identified were obtaining help learning how to budget money, pay rent, or deal with a landlord (51.5%); going back to school (48.5%); and help getting an ID or Social Security card (34.3%). The most commonly mentioned health and safety needs were finding someone to talk to about problems or worrisome things (41.4%) and getting personal medical care (40.2%) and personal dental care (34.9%). The most commonly cited service needs of the children of UHY were getting day care (55.2%) and medical care (22.4%). Females with children were more likely to indicate needing help getting day care services (57.6%), compared to males with children (20.0%). Table 23 also reports the proportion of those in need of each type of assistance who actually received it (see column 2) and the sources of the assistance received (columns 3–5).

Differences in past 12-month service needs by region are provided in Table 24. The proportion of youth citing specific service needs varied by region. UHY in Cook County were most likely to report needing help finding employment, finding a stable place to live, getting regular transportation, and getting access to a computer or e-mail. Youth in northern Illinois were most likely to report needing help getting personal medical care in general, prenatal care in particular, dental care, an HIV/AIDS test, and drug or alcohol treatment. UHY in northern Illinois with children of their own were also most likely to report needing help getting medical care for their children. Further, northern Illinois respondents were most likely to indicate that they needed help going back to school and learning how to budget their money, pay rent, or deal with a landlord.

Table 23. Self-Reported Service Needs and Utilization of Homeless Youth During the Past 12 Months (n=169)

	Needed help	OF THOSE NEEDING HELP: Was able to get help	OF THOSE ABLE TO GET HELP: Help obtained was from...		
			Family/ Friends	Agency	Other
BASIC NEEDS					
Finding a stable place to live	78.0%	80.2%	23.8%	77.1%	27.6%
Finding a job	75.7	62.5	25.0	72.5	37.5
Getting regular transportation	64.5	70.4	40.8	63.2	26.3
Finding your own apartment	62.1	51.0	15.4	84.6	23.1
Getting food on a regular basis	44.4	100.0	22.7	87.9	28.8
Finding somewhere to shower or clean up	11.8	100.0	50.0	55.0	25.0
HEALTH & SAFETY NEEDS					
Finding someone you can talk to about problems or things that worry you	41.4	74.3	44.2	69.2	32.7
Getting medical care for yourself	40.2	59.4	15.8	84.2	28.9
Getting dental care for yourself	34.9	54.5	23.3	63.3	30.0
Getting an eye exam or glasses	29.0	53.2	24.0	68.0	40.0
Getting needed medication	26.6	77.8	20.0	71.4	34.3
Getting birth control/contraceptives/condoms	14.8	76.0	0.0	78.9	36.8
Getting an HIV/AIDS test	13.6	86.4	0.0	73.7	57.9
Protecting yourself from intimate partner abuse or domestic violence	13.0	63.6	35.7	71.4	21.4
Help protecting yourself from violence	12.4	63.2	50.0	58.3	25.0
Getting prenatal care	9.6	92.9	23.1	84.6	23.1
Getting drug or alcohol treatment	8.3	92.9	15.4	76.9	53.8
NEEDS OF YOUTH'S CHILDREN (n=67 UHY with children)					
Getting day care or someone to watch your children	55.2	70.3	30.8	61.5	26.9
Getting medical care for your children	22.4	85.7	0.0	100.0	8.3
Getting Head Start/early Head Start services	8.1	40.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
Help protecting your children from violence	7.5	60.0	33.3	66.7	33.3
EDUCATIONAL & OTHER NEEDS					
Help learning how to budget money, pay rent, or deal with a landlord	51.5	70.6	25.0	76.7	21.7
Going back to school	48.5	64.6	18.9	71.7	32.1
Help getting an ID card or Social Security card	34.3	71.4	42.5	55.0	22.5
Someone like a caseworker or counselor to help you manage your business	29.0	87.5	2.4	92.9	28.6
Getting access to a computer/email	24.3	56.1	26.1	65.2	52.2
Reconnecting with family	11.2	63.2	25.0	58.3	41.7

Table 24. Self-Reported Service Needs of Homeless Youth During the Past 12 Months, by Region

	Cook County (Chicago)* [n=67 (n=52)]		Northern Illinois [n=24]	Central Illinois [n=44]	Southern Illinois [n=34]
BASIC NEEDS					
Finding a job	91.0%	(88.5%)	87.5%	63.6%	52.9%
Finding a stable place to live	88.1	(86.5)	75.0	79.1	58.8
Getting regular transportation	76.1	(73.1)	66.7	63.6	41.2
Finding your own apartment	64.2	(61.5)	66.7	68.2	47.1
Getting food on a regular basis	44.8	(40.4)	50.0	48.8	35.3
Finding somewhere to shower or clean up	14.9	(17.3)	16.7	9.1	5.9
HEALTH & SAFETY NEEDS					
Getting medical care for yourself	44.8	(44.2)	54.2	40.9	20.6
Finding someone you can talk to about problems or things that worry you	43.3	(44.2)	54.2	27.3	47.1
Getting dental care for yourself	32.8	(30.8)	58.3	34.1	23.5
Getting an eye exam or glasses	29.9	(28.8)	20.8	36.4	23.5
Getting needed medication	22.4	(25.0)	45.8	29.5	17.6
Getting an HIV/AIDS test	16.4	(17.3)	33.3	9.1	0.0
Protecting yourself from intimate partner abuse or domestic violence	13.4	(9.6)	16.7	18.2	2.9
Getting birth control/contraceptives/condoms	11.9	(15.4)	20.8	13.6	17.6
Help protecting yourself from violence	9.0	(5.8)	16.7	15.9	11.8
Getting prenatal care	4.6	(3.9)	25.0	14.0	2.9
Getting drug or alcohol treatment	3.0	(3.8)	29.2	7.0	5.9
NEEDS OF YOUTH'S CHILDREN (n=67 UHY with children)					
Getting day care or someone to watch your children	68.2	(75.0)	81.8	43.5	27.3
Getting medical care for your children	18.2	(18.8)	63.6	13.0	9.1
Getting Head Start/early Head Start services	9.1	(9.1)	9.1	4.3	9.1
Help protecting your children from violence	0.0	0.0	18.2	8.7	9.1
EDUCATIONAL & OTHER NEEDS					
Going back to school	61.2	(63.5)	75.0	36.4	20.6
Help learning how to budget money, pay rent, or deal with a landlord	52.2	(55.8)	79.2	50.0	32.4
Help getting an ID card or Social Security card	40.3	(38.5)	45.8	27.3	23.5
Getting access to a computer/email	35.8	(28.8)	20.8	11.4	20.6
Someone like a caseworker or counselor to help you manage your business	23.9	(21.2)	37.5	34.1	26.5
Reconnecting with family	10.4	(11.5)	12.5	15.9	5.9

*The Chicago sample is a subset of the Cook County sample.

Patterns of Service Utilization

Youth were asked to report whether they had used several types of services during the previous 30 days (Table 25). As reported earlier, approximately two-thirds indicated they had stayed in a shelter, mission, or transitional housing program/agency during the past 30 days. About one-third indicated they had used a youth drop-in center or counseling program (36.9%). Smaller proportions reported accessing a provider of free medical or dental services (23.2%), a free meal program or soup kitchen (18.3%), and a provider of free clothes (17.8%) during the past 30 days. Utilization rates of several of

these services varied by region. UHY in central Illinois were most likely to have accessed free medical/dental services. Shelter, mission, and transitional housing programs were most likely to have been used during the past 30 days by UHY in northern Illinois and Cook County. Youth in the northern and southern Illinois service regions were most likely to have used a free meal program or soup kitchen. UHY in northern Illinois were also most likely to have used services offered by a provider of free clothes, and those in Cook County and central Illinois were most likely to report having used other types of service sites.

Table 25. Percent of UHY Reporting Service Use During the Past 30 Days, by Service Type and Region (n=169)

	TOTAL	Cook County (Chicago)*	Northern Illinois	Central Illinois	Southern Illinois
A shelter, mission, or transitional housing program or agency	64.5%	83.6% (78.8%)	87.5%	40.9%	41.2%
A youth drop-in center or counseling program	36.9	36.4 (40.4)	37.5	27.3	50.0
A provider of free medical/dental services	23.2	21.2 (25.0)	29.2	36.4	5.9
A free meal program or a soup kitchen	18.3	14.9 (17.3)	33.3	6.8	29.4
A provider of free clothes	17.8	20.9 (26.9)	37.5	6.8	11.8
Any other place	11.5	16.7 (13.7)	4.3	16.7	0.0
Mean Number of Types of Services Used	1.7	1.9 (2.0)	2.3	1.3	1.4

*The Chicago sample is a subset of the Cook County sample.

Unmet Service Needs

UHY who reported needing help with a specific problem during the past 12 months who also indicated they were unable to get the help they needed were classified as having an unmet service need. Estimates of the proportion of the total population of unaccompanied homeless youth with unmet service needs are presented in Table 26, along with breakdowns by region. The unmet needs affecting the greatest proportion of these youth were help finding an apartment (29.6%), finding a job (28.4), getting regular transportation (18.9%), getting personal medical care (15.4%), and help finding a stable place to live (14.8%). Among those with children of their own, help getting daycare or someone to watch their children was the most common unmet need for the children, cited by 14.9% of all parents. The only notable difference in unmet needs by service region was for help going back to school, which was more commonly identified in northern Illinois (37.5%) and Cook County (20.9%), compared to central (9.1%) and southern (5.9%) Illinois.

Table 26. Percent of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth with Unmet Service Needs by Region (n=169)

SERVICE NEED	TOTAL	Cook County (Chicago)*	Northern Illinois	Central Illinois	Southern Illinois
BASIC NEEDS					
Finding your own apartment	29.6%	32.8 (28.8)%	41.7%	25.0%	20.6%
Finding a job	28.4	34.3 (28.8)	33.3	13.6	32.4
Getting regular transportation	18.9	19.4 (15.4)	16.7	18.2	20.6
Finding a stable place to live	14.8	19.4 (23.1)	8.3	11.4	14.7
Getting food on a regular basis	4.7	4.5 (3.8)	4.2	2.3	8.8
Finding somewhere to shower or clean up	0.0	0.0 (0.0)	0.0	0.0	0.0
HEALTH & SAFETY NEEDS					
Getting medical care for yourself	15.4	22.4 (23.1)	12.5	9.1	11.8
Getting dental care for yourself	14.8	16.4 (13.5)	25.0	11.4	8.8
Getting an eye exam or glasses	13.0	16.4 (11.5)	12.5	13.6	5.9
Finding someone who you can talk to about problems or things that worry you	10.7	10.4 (11.5)	20.8	6.8	8.8
Getting needed medication	5.9	4.5 (5.8)	8.3	11.4	0.0
Protecting yourself from intimate partner abuse or domestic violence	4.7	7.5 (3.8)	4.2	4.5	0.0
Help protecting yourself from violence	4.1	4.5 (3.8)	0.0	6.8	2.9
Getting birth control/contraceptives/condoms	3.6	6.0 (7.7)	8.3	0.0	0.0
Getting an HIV/AIDS test	1.8	1.5 (0.0)	4.2	2.3	0.0
Getting prenatal care	0.6	0.0 (0.0)	4.2	0.0	0.0
Getting drug or alcohol treatment	0.6	0.0 (0.0)	0.0	0.0	2.9
NEEDS OF YOUTH'S CHILDREN (n=67 UHY with children)					
Getting day care or someone to watch your children	14.9	22.7 (25.0)	9.1	13.0	9.1
Getting Head Start/early Head Start services	4.5	9.1 (6.3)	0.0	0.0	9.1
Getting medical care for your children	3.0	4.5 (0.0)	9.1	0.0	0.0
Help protecting your children from violence	3.0	0.0 (0.0)	9.1	4.3	0.0
EDUCATIONAL & OTHER NEEDS					
Going back to school	17.2	20.9 (17.3)	37.5	9.1	5.9
Help learning how to budget money, pay rent, or deal with a landlord	14.8	17.9 (17.3)	25.0	9.1	8.8
Getting access to a computer/email	10.7	14.9 (5.8)	12.5	2.3	11.8
Help getting an ID or Social Security card	9.5	10.4 (9.6)	16.7	6.8	5.9
Reconnecting with family	4.1	3.0 (1.9)	4.2	9.1	0.0
Someone like a caseworker or counselor to help you manage your business	3.6	4.5 (1.9)	4.2	2.3	2.9

*The Chicago sample is a subset of the Cook County sample.

Personal Resources

Youth were also asked about the availability of personal resources, such as possession of an identification card, medical insurance, and employment. Most indicated they had an identification card (82.8%). However, there were two subgroups less likely to have this resource available. Persons with 1–9 completed years of education (54.2%) and with 10–11 years completed (82.8%) were less likely to have an identification card, compared to those with a high school degree (92.4%) and those with some college work completed (92.3%). Age also was associated with the likelihood of having an

identification card. Of those age 12–17, 60% reported having a card. In contrast, 86.0% and 87.9% of those aged 18–19 and 20–21, respectively, had identification. Of those without an identification card, more than half (58.6%) said this had been a problem for them.

Approximately two-thirds reported that they currently possessed medical insurance or a medical card (64.5%). Several demographic subgroups were more likely to have access to this resource. Females were more likely to have medical insurance or a medical card: 75.5% vs. 45.6% of males. Those with children of their own also were more likely to have medical insurance: 84.4% vs. 54.0% of those who did not have children. Age also was associated with likelihood of having medical insurance. Seventy-five percent of those age 12–17 had health insurance, compared to 71.8% of those age 18–19 and 51.7% of those age 20–21.

Two of every five UHY interviewed were currently employed (40.2%). Roughly equal proportions of this group were employed full-time, defined as 35 or more hours per week (45.6%), and part-time (48.5%). A small proportion (4.4%) indicated that they worked as a day laborer or by doing odd jobs. More than a third of all UHY reported being unemployed and looking for work (37.9%). Smaller proportions reported being full-time students (11.8%), unemployed and not looking for work (5.3%), being too young to work (2.4%), or something else (2.4%).

Employment rates varied by region. The highest proportions reporting any employment were in central Illinois (56.8%) and northern Illinois (50.0%). In Cook County, 35.8% were employed, and 20.6% were reported being employed in southern Illinois. Not surprisingly, employment was associated with age, with 8.0% of those age 12–17 being employed, compared to 48.8% of those age 18–19 and 41.4% of those age 20–21. Employment also varied by education. One-fifth of those with 1–9 years of education were employed (20.8%), compared to 32.8% of those with 10–11 years of education, 56.1% of those with 12 years, and 38.5% of those with more than 12 years of education. There were no differences in employment rates by gender, with 42.6% of males and 40.9% of females reporting current employment.

Income Sources

About 60% of youth interviewed reported having received income or benefits from the government during the past 30 days (59.2%). Receipt of government benefits varied by service region. UHY in central Illinois were most likely to indicate the recent receipt of benefits (81.8%), compared to 54.2% in northern Illinois, 53.7% in Cook County, and 45.5% in southern Illinois. In the city of Chicago, 48.1% indicated that they had received government benefits within the past 30 days. Females also were more likely to have received benefits (75.5%) than males (28.1%). Those with less education were more likely to be receiving benefits: about two-thirds of youth with 1–9 completed years of education were receiving benefits (65.2%), compared to 45.3% of those with 10–11 years of completed education, 34.8% of those with a high school degree (or GED equivalent), and 7.7% of those youth with 13–14 years of education. Similarly, age was associated with receipt of benefits. Youth age 12–17 were most likely to be receiving benefits (66.7%), compared to 37.2% of those age 18–19 and 34.5% of those age 20–21.

Table 27 reports the proportion of the unaccompanied homeless youth interviewed who reported receipt of each type of government assistance during the past 30 days. Other forms of public assistance that included Food Stamps and the Link card were most commonly being accessed (52.1%). Receipt of WIC benefits was reported by 29.6% of the sample. KidCare for self or child was reported as

a source of benefits by 14.8%, TANF by 12.4%, and SSI for either self or child by 6.5%. Several gender differences in the receipt of these benefits were noted. Females were more likely to report receipt of TANF (18.9% vs. 0.0% of males), WIC (44.1% vs. 1.8% of males), KidCare (21.8% vs. 1.8% of males), and other forms of public assistance, including food stamps and the Link card (67.6% vs. 22.8% of males).

About one in five of UHY reported they had an application denied for a governmental program or had stopped receiving benefits from a governmental program during the past 12 months (22.5%). The likelihood of having been denied or of losing benefits varied by service region. The proportion reporting having been denied or having lost benefits was 15.2% in both Cook County and southern Illinois, compared to 37.5% in northern Illinois and 31.8% in central Illinois. In Chicago, 11.5% indicated they had been denied or lost benefits. Females were more likely to have been denied benefits (30.0%) than males (8.8%). It is possible, of course, that females were more likely to be denied benefits because they were more likely to have applied for benefits. Unfortunately, the survey did not collect information on application rates for government benefits. Of those UHY with their own children (who were mostly female), 40.5% reported having an application denied, compared to 7.0% of those without children. No person age 12–17 reported being denied benefits. Among those age 18–19, 29.4% were denied benefits. Of the UHY age 20–21, 22.4% had been denied benefits in the last year.

Another questionnaire item asked about other potential sources of income. The proportion reporting each as a source of money, clothing, or other necessities during the past 30 days are summarized in Table 28. The most commonly reported source of income and other necessities was family and friends (59.2%). Considerably smaller proportions cited a church or mission (13.6%), shoplifting/hustling (10.1%), selling drugs (5.9%), asking strangers for money in public places (3.0%), and trading sex (3.0%). Males were more likely to report having some of their needs met by a church or mission (22.4% vs. 9.0% for females).

Table 27. Percent of UHY Receiving Government Assistance During the Past 30 Days, by Program (n=169)

PROGRAM	%
Other forms of public assistance, including Food Stamps and Link card	52.1%
WIC	29.6
KidCare for self or child	14.8
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	12.4
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for which qualified because of a disability	5.9
Unemployment compensation because of a layoff, or worker's compensation because of injuries at work	0.6
SSI for which the UHY's <u>child</u> qualifies because of a disability	0.6
DCFS	0.0
Some other program	7.7

Table 28. Percent of UHY Receiving Money, Clothing, or Other Necessities During the Past 30 Days by Source (n=169)

SOURCE OF NECESSITIES	%
From family, friends, or a spouse or partner, including alimony or child support	59.2%
From a church or mission	13.6
By shoplifting or hustling	10.1
By selling drugs	5.9
By asking for money from strangers in public places	3.0
By sexual favors or trading sex	3.0
From any other sources	12.4

Victimization Experiences

During the past 12 months, UHY reported a variety of victimization experiences (see Table 29). Most common were being assaulted or physically attacked (28.4%) and harassed by the police (26.6%). Property crimes were slightly less common. About 20% reported having been burglarized, and 16.6% had been robbed during the past year. Overall, 61.5% of all unaccompanied homeless youth reported being victimized in at least one of these manners. Males were more likely to report having been the victim of a burglary (31.0% vs. 13.5% of females) and to report having been harassed by police or other law enforcement officials during the past year (48.3% vs. 15.3% of females).

Table 29. Percent of UHY Having Selected Victimization Experiences in Past 12 Months (n=169)

EXPERIENCE	%
Assaulted or physically attacked	28.4%
Harassed by the police or law enforcement	26.6
Burglarized (having someone break into room or apartment and taking property)	19.5
Robbed (having something taken by someone who threatened violence)	16.6
Victim of any other crime	10.1
Any of these	61.5

Respondents were asked about several precautions they ever might have taken to keep themselves from being harmed. About half reported that they had ever carried a weapon (49.7%). Smaller proportions indicated that they had stayed with a partner for protection (23.1%) and had stayed in the home of a stranger or someone they did not know (12.4%).

Another questionnaire item asked respondents if they ever had been forced to have sexual activity they “really did not want.” Almost a quarter (23.7%) of the youth interviewed indicated they had previously had this experience. Forced sexual activity was more commonly reported by females (30.3%) than by males (12.1%). UHY indicated that unwanted sexual activity was most commonly forced by a stranger (42.5%), a family member (37.5%), or a steady date, romantic partner, or spouse (32.5%). Less commonly, unwanted sexual activity was forced by someone in a position of influence, such as a teacher or counselor (2.5%).

Finally, it was estimated that about 7.1% of all UHY were currently affiliated with a gang. Males were much more likely to report a gang affiliation (14.0% vs. 3.6% of all females). Younger youth were also more likely to have a gang involvement (20.0% of persons age 12–17 vs. 4.7% of persons age 18–19 vs. 5.2% of persons age 20–21). Gang involvement ranged from 11.8% in southern Illinois and 9.0% in Cook County (and 9.6% in Chicago), to 2.3% in central Illinois and 4.2% in northern Illinois.

Health Status and Behaviors

Youth were asked to rate their present health status. Most rated their health as “good” (34.3%), followed by “very good” (26.0%). Smaller proportions rated their health as “excellent” (18.3%), “only fair” (19.5%), and “poor” (1.8%).

A rough assessment of mental health status was conducted by asking UHY if they had “ever been told by a doctor, nurse, or other health professional” that they had “an emotional or mental health condition such as depression, anxiety, or schizophrenia.” Slightly more than a third of the sample (36.1%) indicated that they had been so informed. When combined with responses to an earlier question regarding having ever been admitted to a hospital for mental health treatment or care, 40.8% of all UHY were found to have reported one of these indicators of a potential mental health condition.

Table 30. Percent of UHY Reporting Depressive Symptoms (n=169)

During the past 30 days, how often did you:	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	A little of the time	None of the time	Total
Feel so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?	4.1%	12.4%	27.2%	24.9%	31.4%	100.0%
Feel hopeless?	4.1	8.3	16.6	24.9	46.2	100.0
Feel restless or fidgety?	14.2	12.4	25.4	18.3	29.6	100.0
Feel everything was an effort?	24.0	13.8	27.5	10.2	24.6	100.0
Feel worthless?	5.9	6.5	15.4	13.6	58.6	100.0
Feel nervous?	11.3	11.3	27.4	20.8	29.2	100.0

Table 31. Percent of UHY Reporting Lifetime Substance Use, by Race/Ethnicity (n=169)

	RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP				
	TOTAL	African American	White	Mixed	Other*
Drank alcohol	87.6%	83.9%	90.9%	96.2%	88.2%
Smoked marijuana, hash, or hash oil	76.3	72.0	78.8	88.5	76.5
Smoked cigarettes	74.6	65.6	84.8	92.3	81.3
Used any hallucinogenic drugs	18.9	8.6	45.5	19.2	23.5
Used cocaine in any form	15.4	3.2	45.5	15.4	23.5
Sniffed or inhaled any substances	11.2	3.2	21.2	19.2	23.5
Used methamphetamines or meth	6.5	0.0	18.2	11.5	11.8
Used any other drug for nonmedical reasons	14.2	2.2	39.4	19.2	23.5

* includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic, and Asian or Pacific Islander.

Several indicators of depression, derived from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D) scale (Radloff, 1977), were included in the youth survey questionnaire (see Table 30). One in ten of these youth reported that they felt hopeless or worthless most or all of the time (12.4% reported each symptom). Overall, more than a third of all UHY interviewed (37.8%) felt that “everything was an effort” all or most of the time. More than a quarter reported feeling “restless or fidgety” all or most of the time (26.6%), and more than a fifth felt nervous most or all of the time (22.6%).

Unaccompanied homeless youth reported on their lifetime use of several licit and illicit substances. Use of these substances is summarized in the first column of Table 31. Most youth had at some time consumed alcohol (87.6%). Interestingly, as many reported ever having smoked marijuana (76.3%) as indicated they had ever smoked cigarettes (74.6%). Smaller proportions reported ever having used hallucinogens, such as LSD, mescaline, PCP, ecstasy, or mushrooms (18.9%); cocaine in any form, including “crack” and “rock” cocaine (15.4%); inhalants, such as nitrous oxide, “whip-its” or amyl nitrate, cleaning fluids, fingernail polish remover, or glue (11.2%); and methamphetamines (6.5%). The use of any other drug for nonmedical purposes was reported by 14.2% of the UHY interviewed. These included heroin and both prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

Table 31 also provides breakdowns of lifetime substance use patterns by race/ethnicity. This characteristic is examined here because, of the several sociodemographic characteristics reported in Table 1, race/ethnicity was by far most strongly associated with substance use behavior. As Table 31 indicates, African-American UHY were far less likely to report use of cigarettes, cocaine, hallucinogenic drugs, inhalants, methamphetamines, and any other nonmedical drug use. White youth were most likely to report use of cocaine, hallucinogens, methamphetamines, and the nonmedical use of any other drugs.

Sexuality and Sexual Behavior

Most youth interviewed indicated that they had a heterosexual orientation (85.2%). About 5% considered themselves gay or lesbian (5.3%), and 4.7% considered themselves to be bisexual. The proportion who were currently questioning their sexuality was 3.0%, and 1.8% identified their sexuality as “something else.” There were fewer proportions of heterosexuals among the youth interviewed in Cook County (77.6%) and the City of Chicago (76.9%), compared to the southern Illinois (94.1%), central Illinois (90.9%), and northern Illinois (83.3%) regions.

Most of the unaccompanied homeless youth interviewed reported having had consensual sex (91.7%). The proportion having had consensual sex did not vary much by age, ranging from 84.0% of those age 12–17 to 94.2% of those age 18–19 and 91.4% of the 20–21 year-old age group. The average age of first consensual sex was 14.9 years old (standard deviation = 1.9; range = 6–20 years of age), and the median age was 15 years.

Youth reported an average of 3.3 different sexual partners during the past year (standard deviation = 3.7; range = 0–23 sexual partners). The median was 2 partners during the past year. These youth also were asked about specific types of sexual partners they might have ever had. About 4% indicated ever having sex with a drug user “who shoots up.” Just over 1% had ever had sex with someone who worked as a prostitute (1.2%). None reported ever having sex with someone who had HIV or AIDS.

When asked about safe sex behaviors, a plurality said that they or their partner “always” uses a condom or rubber or dental dam to protect them from catching something (41.9%). About a third indicated they “sometimes” used one of these forms of protection (35.5%), and 21.9% said they “never” used protection. When asked if they had used one of these forms of protection the last time that they had sex, 56.1% indicated they had.

A little less than one-third of all youth reported ever having a sexually transmitted disease (STD; 29.0%). The proportion ever having an STD varied by gender, with females being much more likely than males to report ever having one (38.0% vs. 8.5%).

Three-quarters of the sample had ever been tested for HIV or AIDS (75.5%). Ever having been tested for HIV/AIDS did not vary between genders. One youth in the sample reported being HIV-positive (0.9%), and two indicated they did not know the results of their tests (1.7%).

Of the males in the sample, 20.4% reported they had ever gotten a girl pregnant. Among females, 67.9% indicated having ever been pregnant. Of those females who had ever been pregnant, 43.3% reported having been pregnant more than once. The average number of pregnancies reported by all females who had ever been pregnant was 1.65 (standard deviation = 0.9; range=1–6); the median was one pregnancy. The average age at first pregnancy was 16.7 years (standard deviation = 1.7; range = 13–20), and the median age was 17. The mean age of the sexual partner reported by these females (at the time of their first pregnancy) was 20.5 years old (standard deviation = 4.2; range = 16–35) and the median age was 20). Of the females who had ever been pregnant, 49.4% said they had first become pregnant before leaving home, and 45.8% said they first became pregnant after leaving home (4.8% declined to answer this question).

Children of Homeless Youth

As reported earlier, 39.6% of the UHY had one or more biological children. Female UHY were far more likely to report having children of their own (55.9% vs. 8.6% of males). Three-quarters of those with children reported having only one child (76.1%). Most also indicated that their child(ren) were

currently living with them (85.1%). When asked if their child(ren) had ever been denied access to school or social services because the respondent was on his or her own, virtually all indicated this had never happened (98.5%). A small percentage of those with children reported that their child(ren) had ever been placed in the care of someone else, such as a foster home, shelter, or with relatives (6.0%).

As reported in Table 25, 22.5% of the youth with children reported needing help getting day care, followed by getting medical care for their children (8.9%), head start or early head start services (3.6), and help protecting their children from violence (3.0%).

YOUTH SURVEY LIMITATIONS

Several potential sources of error must also be considered for the youth survey, including sampling, coverage, nonresponse, and measurement error. Each of these is briefly discussed.

Sampling Error

Sampling error is the amount of error that is associated with the fact that a sample of homeless youth are examined, rather than the complete population of homeless youth in Illinois. In general, smaller sample sizes are associated with greater amounts of sampling error. Using the estimated total number of unaccompanied homeless youth receiving services on April 26, 2005, derived from the provider survey described earlier in this report, an approximation of the sampling error associated with the youth survey can be constructed. For the sample as a whole, estimated population characteristics have approximate confidence intervals of +/- 7.1 percentage points. The sampling error for regional estimates will be greater, and these estimates, hence, will be more subject to sampling errors. It also should be noted that these estimated confidence intervals are not adjusted for the survey's clustered sample design and that the confidence intervals may thus be underestimated.

Coverage Error

Coverage error refers to the exclusion of eligible cases and the inclusion of ineligible cases from a sample frame. At this first stage, we included all service providers that were in the sample frame; we did not randomly select service providers from the sampling frame. Coverage error is of concern for this study to the extent that eligible service providers within any of the five regions were not identified and therefore not included in the sampling frame used for this survey. If an eligible service provider was excluded, the survey's findings are less representative of homeless youth in Illinois to the degree that the excluded providers serve unique segments of the UHY population. Coverage error may consequently account for the relatively low numbers of some population subgroups, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender and Latino youth, who were interviewed as part of this survey.

In addition to this, we are aware that some providers' eligibility criteria preclude them from providing residential services to UHY age 16 and 17 due to legal and guardianship concerns.¹⁶ These youth may come to the attention of authorities due to a family conflict or a "lock out." As DCFS does not routinely take custody of these youth, to the extent that they must find alternate living arrangements not linked with the provider network, it is likely that youth this age were underrepresented.

¹⁶ Note that a change in Illinois legislation is currently pending that will allow providers to serve UHY age 16 and 17.

Perhaps most important, however, is the potential coverage error associated with the fact that non-service using youth may have different characteristics and different service needs from those of youth who were available to be interviewed at the service sites. This is potentially a very important limitation, as previous research has documented some important differences between those who do and do not use available services. Greene et al. (1999), for example, found that youth interviewed on the streets in urban areas were more than twice as likely to report having engaged in survival sex, compared to youth interviewed in shelter settings. Even less is known about the service needs of “hidden” UHY doubled up with friends and family members.

Nonresponse Error

Similarly, nonresponse is only a problem when the respondents are different from nonrespondents in ways related to the dependent variables of interest. In this survey, we note that more than 90% of the youth contacted agreed to participate, a level of cooperation that does afford some confidence that these findings are representative of service-using UHY.

Measurement Error

Numerous sources of measurement error may also influence results. For example, question wording, the ordering of questions within the instrument, and the mode of data collection may each affect data quality and should be considered when interpreting survey results. Respondent inability or unwillingness to report accurate information is another source of measurement error. None of these forms of potential measurement error can be definitively eliminated. However, we have attempted to minimize error associated with the design of the survey instrument through pretesting and instrument reviews by our Questionnaire Review Committee. Also, although face-to-face interviews generally are considered the most valid form of survey data collection, it is known that self-administered surveys sometimes are more appropriate for the collection of highly sensitive information (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). Consequently, need for services that may be viewed as more stigmatizing may be underestimated in this study.

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APPENDIX
Illinois Counties, by Department of Human Services Regions

Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5
Cook	Boone	Bureau	Adams	Alexander
	Carroll	Champaign	Brown	Bond
	DeKalb	Ford	Calhoun	Clay
	DuPage	Fulton	Cass	Clinton
	Grundy	Henderson	Christian	Crawford
	Jo Davies	Henry	Clark	Edwards
	Kane	Iroquois	Coles	Fayette
	Kankakee	Knox	Cumberland	Franklin
	Kendall	LaSalle	DeWitt	Gallatin
	Lake	Livingston	Douglas	Hamilton
	Lee	Marshall	Edgar	Hardin
	McHenry	Mason	Effingham	Jackson
	Ogle	McDonough	Greene	Jasper
	Stephenson	McLean	Hancock	Jefferson
	Whiteside	Mercer	Jersey	Johnson
	Will	Peoria	Logan	Lawrence
	Winnebago	Putnam	Macon	Madison
		Rock Island	Macoupin	Marion
		Stark	Menard	Massac
		Tazewell	Montgomery	Monroe
		Vermillion	Morgan	Perry
		Warren	Moultrie	Pope
		Woodford	Piatt	Pulaski
			Pike	Randolph
			Sangamon	Richland
			Schuyler	Saline
			Scott	St. Clair
			Shelby	Union
				Wabash
				Washington
				Wayne
				White
				Williamson