



# A Comprehensive Policy for Runaway/Homeless Youth in the State of California

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Position Paper

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A Position Paper

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Original work on this policy document was begun in a Focus Group at the ROUNDTABLE conference in May, 1990, and represents six months of collaborative interaction and discussion among representatives of more than thirty organizations and agencies. Primary collaborators include representatives of:

The California Child, Youth and Family Coalition  
The American Academy of Pediatrics  
The California Commission on Juvenile Justice, Crime & Delinquency Prevention  
The California Council on Children and Youth  
The California Probation, Parole and Correctional Association  
The Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law  
Children's Hospital of Los Angeles  
The Department of the Youth Authority  
The Irvine Foundation  
The Little Hoover Commission  
The Office of Criminal Justice Planning  
Public Counsel  
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The Society for Adolescent Medicine  
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# Executive Summary

## A Comprehensive Policy for Runaway/ Homeless Youth in the State of California

More than 100,000 young people run away from home each year in California. Most are running from a temporary crisis, and after a cooling-off period in the home of a friend or relative, or in a youth shelter, are able to return home and work out their problems. But for many, there is no question of going home. For them, the streets are more welcoming than the place they have left. They are escaping from personal danger in the form of a substance-abusing or abusive parent or guardian. Some have been abandoned or kicked out and told not to return. These multiproblem youth are frequently depressed and suicidal and often turn to drugs as an escape from their troubled lives. They are homeless and seriously at risk, and they fall through the cracks between services mandated to be provided by the major state agencies.

Runaway and homeless youth come from all races and ethnic groups, and from all parts of the state. They tend to gravitate to urban areas not only in search of something different, but because that's where most program resources are. They typically have a history of school failure and personal and family trauma. At a young age, they've experienced more of the dark side of life than most adults. Without help, they are liable to become victims or victimizers.

### Where can they turn for help?

No branch of state government is mandated to provide services for this at-risk population. Because they are "runaways", they are viewed as inappropriate for child protective services, and lack of funding as well as rigid rules of access leave them outside of the mental health system. Most homeless programs serve either adults or families with children; homeless adolescents fit neither category. Juvenile probation concentrates on law violators, and it is not against the law for a teenager to be without a home. Most "official" doors are closed.

Fortunately, there are a small number of programs specifically for this population funded by the state and federal governments:

- The California Runaway Hotline provides 24-hour toll-free assistance to youth in crisis. Since it was established in September, 1986, it has helped more than 50,000 callers.
- Runaway Shelters offer short-term (two week maximum) housing and crisis counseling for youth who have a good chance of returning home. Federal funding totalling about \$2.8 million per year supports 37 centers in California.
- State funded Homeless Youth Programs in Los Angeles and San Francisco offer a model of coordinated services for homeless adolescents for a time-limited (60 day) period.
- AB 90 (Juvenile Justice Subvention) funds have supported a variety of county-level public and private efforts to reach out to these young people. Due to recent budget cuts, many of these programs are in jeopardy.

A recent Little Hoover Commission report concluded that the limited state-funded programs for this population are successful and cost-effective, but that they are seriously underfunded and too few in number to even begin to address the problem adequately. All the state's runaway shelters combined serve only 8600 youth a year, and some have had to turn away more young people than they have been able to serve due to insufficient bed space. A 1990 study conducted for the California Youth Authority estimates that an additional 863 emergency shelter beds and 369 long term "transitional" beds are required just to meet current

needs. The projected growth of California's youth population by 22% over the next ten years means that even more beds will be needed in the near future.

## What needs to be done?

These inadequacies reflect the lack of a comprehensive policy to direct the state's response to these young people in dire need. California must develop a coordinated system of care for runaway and homeless youth. This system must minimally include a youth and family crisis center in each of the 58 counties with at least six emergency shelter beds for 12- to 17-year-olds. It must also provide a transitional living component for homeless street youth aged 16 to 21 in areas where this need is demonstrated.

The components of a coordinated system are:

**Youth and Family Crisis Centers** should provide between six and twenty beds for emergency shelter for youth in crisis along with follow-up after the initial shelter stay. Street outreach and drop-in programs are also essential to encourage potential clients to seek help.

**Transitional Living Programs** are needed to meet the needs of older homeless youth who will not be returning home. In addition to shelter, they need help in preparing for independent living. Outreach and follow-up services are important here, as well, to ensure maximum program impact.

**A Statewide Communication System** has already been initiated via the California Runaway Hotline. It should be continued, with a toll-free "800" number and appropriate multi-lingual, culturally-sensitive staffing. All the programs funded should also be linked with the Hotline and with each other via computer to allow for daily tracking of the availability of shelter beds and a constant update of resources.

**Grants for Technical Assistance and Training** should be made to help agencies establish and operate runaway and homeless youth programs in the most effective and cost efficient manner.

**Grants for Research, Demonstration and Service Projects** are essential to increase our knowledge and improve our programming for this population.

## What will it cost?

Based on a CYA estimate of an annual cost of \$33,513 per shelter bed, the system proposed will cost about \$46 million a year, as follows:

Youth and Family Crisis Shelters .....	\$29,841,719
Transitional Living Programs .....	12,366,297
Statewide Communication System .....	500,000
Technical Assistance and Training .....	500,000
Research and Demonstration Projects .....	500,000
State Agency Administration (5%) .....	2,185,400
	<hr/>
	<b>\$45,893,416</b>

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## What will it save the taxpayers of California?

A coordinated system of care for runaway and homeless youth is more than services — it is a prevention program. Its ultimate aim is to prevent the multiple costs associated with crime, victimization and wasted human potential. Given the high likelihood that runaway/homeless youth will become involved in crime, either as a means of survival or as its victims or both, any analysis of cost must consider the savings associated with diversion of youth from both crime and victimization. For instance, if current programs serving the runaway/homeless population divert as few as 100 youth annually from one year of incarceration (and the data suggest that many more than that are so diverted), they return to the taxpayers almost \$1.50 in cost avoidance for every dollar they consume.

The full report which follows provides a basis for the establishment of a comprehensive policy for runaway/homeless youth in California and a framework for the development of a coordinated system to carry out that policy. The continued absence of such a policy and system in our state is simply not an option.

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# Introduction

Each year, thousands of young people leave home, many running away from dysfunctional and abusive families, others having been thrown out or encouraged to leave homes where they are unwanted. Some youth find help at runaway shelters and other social service programs, and many of these return home or go on to live independently. Those who do not find help remain homeless, living on the streets. All of these youth, while away from home and without resources, are highly vulnerable, easily victimized, and at risk on a wide array of fronts. No branch of state or local government currently has responsibility for them—not the child welfare system, not the mental health system, not the juvenile justice system. These young people require the public and private sectors to work together to establish and make available to them a comprehensive, coordinated set of programs which will meet their needs.

While the state of California has begun to respond to the problem of runaway and homeless youth, the few services that currently exist are fragmented, isolated and underfunded. In many regions of the state there are no services at all. The passage of AB 1596, the Homeless Youth Act of 1985, and the passage of AB 3075 (1986) which created the California Runaway Hotline were important first steps toward addressing the need; but these programs combined receive state funding of only \$1.1 million annually. Moreover, the current classification system in the state's Welfare and Institutions Code does not adequately recognize the needs of runaway/homeless youth for services. As a result, many of these young people throughout the state are not receiving needed shelter, medical treatment, or counseling. Researchers and service providers have clearly documented the need for a cohesive, comprehensive, collaborative policy and system of care for runaway and homeless youth.

The problems with policy and services for runaway and homeless youth are a subset of the much larger issue of effective policy and services for all children and youth in California. This issue was dramatically documented in the October, 1987 report, *The Children's Services Delivery System in California*, by the Little Hoover Commission. Clearly, the entire ecosystem (to stretch an ecological metaphor) of child and youth services in California can properly be viewed as endangered.

Some of the difficulties confronting child and youth services are readily apparent:

## **Funding**

While government support has eroded, it has become clear that private institutional sources such as the United Way, foundations and corporations can not and will not fill the gap. Fiscal constraints such as the Gann limit (and now Proposition 98) are forcing a no longer subtle competition among the human services for their share of a shrinking government pie. At the same time, the public and private sectors in youth services have grown enmeshed and interdependent. Private agencies are mostly dependent on government support, and often must "play by the rules" to keep the money flowing. Meanwhile, public agencies need the private sector to help manage their overflowing caseloads and to handle clients they don't want to serve. An evolving wrinkle in that relationship is the development of fundraising foundations by public agencies (e.g. the L.A. County Department of Children's Services) that put them in direct competition with private agencies for private dollars.

In the game of attracting dollars from private individual donors, entrepreneurship rather than cooperation tends to be rewarded. Some organizations have been adept at attracting and keeping the media spotlight on themselves, and this has translated, virtually directly, into enhanced fundraising. Inevitably, as one program or approach is featured, other programs are either tacitly or explicitly diminished in stature.

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## **Fractionalization**

The child and youth services universe is comprised of several parallel systems, each with its own government bureaucracy, funding streams, membership organizations and lobbying efforts. Several past efforts to coordinate or reorganize these systems into something more child-focused have been defeated, unfortunately not so much by the "enemies of children" as by insiders who can visualize only losses resulting from change: loss of specialized funding, loss of power, loss of autonomy.

Currently there is renewed interest in coordination, stimulated in part by the Little Hoover Commission report and in part by the concerns of key legislators such as Senators Roberti and Presley and Assemblyman Vasconcellos, along with other political figures. What specific policy proposals might emerge is not yet clear, but this political environment presents an opportunity for dialogue among parallel systems (education, child welfare, health, mental health, child care, disabilities, substance abuse, corrections/probation, etc.) that otherwise does not occur.

## **Management**

The executive directors of most youth-serving agencies are practitioners rather than managers. The two sets of skills are by no means mutually exclusive; but it is somewhat rare to find them equally distributed in the same individual. Moreover, the size and economics of most youth agencies permit only a single administrator rather than a C.E.O. and C.O.O. arrangement. Such administrators are most often hired because of their skill in working with the target population. Once on the job they are confronted with the multiple tasks associated with managing nonprofit corporations.

Consequently, many smaller agencies lack the characteristics of strong, well-managed organizations. Boards tend to be relatively unsophisticated and are not up to the full range of functions they should perform. Planning and development activities are often incomplete, relying on an opportunistic, crisis-oriented model of growth. Internal management presents special problems, particularly with chronically overworked and underpaid staff.

## **Leadership**

Many of the current crop of leaders in the child and youth services field came of age in the 60's and committed themselves to service out of personal conviction that sometimes defies today's economic realities. Where will the next generation come from?

At the root of all the problems frustrating the improvement of the status and condition of our youth is the reality that, aside from formal education, we have no significant public policy commitment to the well-being of children and youth. As Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson noted in their book, *Broken Promises*, our rhetoric about valuing children as our "most precious resource" is not reflected in the reality that matters most: government funding priorities. Despite some recent promising signs, such as the ABC Child Care Bill and the Young Americans Act, it is clear that those concerned with services to children and youth currently lack the political power, at both the state and national levels, to significantly alter this state of affairs. That kind of power flows from the ability to deliver financial contributions and/or votes, and child advocates have generally not been able to deliver either one. Further, political power is solidified by a unified field. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), for example, is clear on its priorities and is thus able to exercise clout for its constituents. But that kind of unity, too, is missing in the child and youth service field.

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Are there points of common interest that could unite the disparate subsystems within the youth field? Could a joint agenda be developed to focus on such areas as primary prevention, child care, low-cost housing, parenting education? What other partners could be attracted to such an agenda? Is an intergenerational coalition possible in dependent care and housing? Could a statewide Runaway/Homeless Youth Act be agreed upon that would mandate services in every county? These are some starting points for a dialogue among the subsystems that comprise "the sector".

As a first step toward addressing these issues, the California Child Youth and Family Coalition, with funding from the Northern California Grant Makers, convened a focus group of interested parties from throughout the state. The group first met on May 7, 1990 in Napa, concentrating on the issue of developing a model runaway/homeless youth policy for the state of California. Participants in the focus group included representatives of the Little Hoover Commission, the Department of the Youth Authority, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning, Western State Youth Services Network, the Irvine Foundation, the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law, the California Probation, Parole and Correctional Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Society for Adolescent Medicine the California Council on Children and Youth, and several other organizations. Following these deliberations, a subcommittee was given the task of developing the following model policy. A draft was written and mailed to all focus group participants in July 1990. The subcommittee met again at the State Capitol on September 10, 1990 and, using participant feed back, produced the final version of this policy paper.

# Background

In a 1983 report entitled *Runaway and Homeless Youth*, the federal Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) estimated that between 730,000 and 1.3 million youth run away each year in the United States. About one fourth of these young people are thought to become homeless street kids, members of a drifting, uncentered population of children who have no permanent adult support and live, most of the time, by their own wits. DHHS's report cautions that these numbers represent an "extremely conservative estimate" because they are based on reports from service providers and, therefore, do not include runaways who have not been reported missing and who have not sought help. The uncounted "hidden" runaways may comprise a much larger group. In fact, the report estimates that only one in twelve runaway youth is served by federally funded shelters.<sup>1</sup>

DHHS's report further states that while a significant majority of these runaway and homeless youth come from the areas in which they receive services, some runaways may travel long distances, and many are fleeing destructive home environments. Thirty-six percent run from physical or sexual abuse and 44 percent leave home because of other severe crises, according to the report. The report concludes that only about half of these youth could return home or go into foster care and fewer than 10 percent are ready for emancipation. Of the 25 percent "hard-core" homeless street kids, three-quarters engage in some type of criminal activity and half in prostitution to provide themselves with a means of support.<sup>2</sup>

California, with its large population (more than 10 percent of the entire nation), warm weather, numerous beaches and reputation for being a "cool place", has become a popular haven for homeless street youth. Nevertheless, researchers, service providers and public agencies alike find it hard to even estimate the number of these youth in California. A report published in 1985 by the California Department of the Youth Authority estimates the annual number of runaway or homeless youth in California to range between 200,000 and 400,000<sup>3</sup> while a 1986 study suggests a range of 12,700 to 128,000 and concludes that there is no reliable basis for arriving at an accurate number.<sup>4</sup> However, there is general agreement among many social service experts that as many as 20,000 to 25,000 runaway youth are on the streets on any given day in California.<sup>5</sup>

The multiple health and medical needs of homeless street youth are clearly revealed in an analysis of one year's data from the medical clinic operated for this population by the Division of Adolescent Medicine, Children's Hospital of Los Angeles. Of the 110 homeless youth seen by the clinic in 1985, 85 percent were diagnosed as depressed, 90 percent were actively suicidal and 20 percent had previously attempted suicide. Eighteen percent were suffering from other severe mental health problems (behavioral disorders, personality disorders, thought disorders, etc.) Medical diagnoses such as cardiac arrhythmia, hepatitis, pneumonia, renal failure, and generalized adenopathy occurred significantly more often among homeless youth than among youth who were living at home.<sup>6</sup>

Increased health problems were associated with elevated rates of high-risk behaviors as well. More than half (52%) of the street youth were diagnosed as abusing drugs (with 35% engaging in intravenous drug use), while 26% admitted to involvement in prostitution. More than 36% of these youth reported histories of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse as children.<sup>7</sup> Since this information was acquired in initial interviews with physicians, it is reasonable to assume that these reports are actually underestimates of high-risk behaviors.

It may be easy to think of homeless street youth as incorrigible teenagers, persistent troublemakers, perhaps alcohol and drug abusers, who turn their backs on their families in search of adventure and "the good life"; and this stereotype may well be true for a few. But regardless of how they are stereotyped, most of these children are actually products of abuse, neglect and extremely poor home environments. Convened by the Presiding Judge of the

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Juvenile Court, the Los Angeles County Task Force on Homeless Youth began its 1988 report with thumbnail sketches of four Los Angeles area "throwaways" which serve as examples of this reality.<sup>8</sup>

*Crystal is a 17-year-old female who ran away from home at age 15 after 10 years of sexual and physical abuse at the hands of her father. Her father had also introduced her to drugs at age 7. She lives in an abandoned building, is a poly-drug (multiple types) abuser and supports herself by prostitution.*

*Shadow is a 16-year-old male who was molested by an uncle at age 10. He began to have problems in school in the seventh grade and after two semesters of chronic truancy and failing grades, his mother threw him out of the house. He continues to be seriously confused about his sexual orientation, lives with friends in a small apartment and panhandles for money.*

*Mark is a 16-year-old male who was thrown out by his family at age 14 when he told them he was gay. He survives on the streets by hustling on Santa Monica Boulevard and lives in abandoned buildings or sometimes with men who pick him up.*

*Sally was 13 when she ran away from a chronically mentally ill mother and a sexually abusing father. After living on the streets for three years, she approached a local homeless shelter and asked for help.*

In addition to these multiple problem profiles produced by dysfunctional families, a growing number of homeless street youth are recent immigrants whose difficulties with assimilation into a new culture add to the complexity of the problem. In its 1988 report to the California State Legislature, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning noted that many of the homeless youth served by agencies in Los Angeles (10.7%) and San Francisco (8.0%) were from other countries.<sup>9</sup>

These young people confront problems at every level — personal, familial and institutional. Officially referred to in the state Welfare and Institution Codes as "601s", they are not the responsibility of any branch of government. Because they are "runaways" they are viewed as inappropriate for child protective services, and lack of funding as well as rigid rules of access leave them outside the purview of the mental health system while law enforcement and probation are preoccupied with juvenile offenders and criminals. The lack of policy vis-a-vis 601s and the consequent lack of services effectively reinforce their homelessness. Jurisdictional problems are further compounded when youth are from another country; government agencies are reluctant even to acknowledge their existence, let alone serve them.

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# The Beginnings of a Response

In response to the growing concern about the problems of runaway/homeless youth, the U.S. Congress created the Runaway Homeless Youth Act in 1974. This Act empowers the Secretary of Health and Human Services to make grants to public and private entities to establish and operate runaway/homeless youth centers that provide services to meet the immediate needs of such youth and their families. Currently several hundred centers are funded nationwide along with a national hotline. In California, 37 centers are funded with grants totaling approximately \$2.8 million. More than 8,500 youth are served by these centers each year.

Four bills signed into law in 1984, 1985 and 1988 provide the foundation of state funded services specifically keyed to runaway/homeless youth in California. In brief, these bills are as follows:

- AB 3836** (Chapter 1612, Statutes of 1984)—Required preliminary studies of a toll-free hotline, compilation of statewide statistics and development of a statewide youth services directory.
- AB 3075** (Chapter 1614, Statutes of 1984)—Established the California Runaway Hotline, a telephone referral service for runaways. From September 1986 through May 31, 1990, 51,390 callers to the hotline have received crisis intervention and/or have been referred to service sources for shelter, food and other aid.
- AB 1596** (Chapter 1445, Statutes of 1985)—The Homeless Youth Act of 1985 set up pilot projects in San Francisco and Los Angeles to develop a network of youth service agencies. In addition, the state was required to collect statistics on runaway youths from Santa Clara (San Jose) and San Diego counties.
- SB 508** (Chapter 288, Statutes of 1988)—Extended the Homeless Youth Act permanently, deleting all references to the San Francisco and Los Angeles efforts as "pilot" programs.

Under these laws, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning (OCJP) has managed grants for runaway/homeless youth totalling \$1.1 million annually, tracked the results of the Los Angeles and San Francisco pilot projects, and compiled statistics from Santa Clara and San Diego counties to assess the need for services in other urban areas. OCJP has also analyzed data from the Hotline to determine the need for services throughout the state.

In December, 1989, the Little Hoover Commission conducted a public hearing and extensive interviews with state and local officials in order to evaluate the state funded projects in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The Commission concluded that the projects have worked well.<sup>10</sup> The required services (shelter, counseling, etc.) have been effectively provided to thousands of youths, resulting in many of them permanently leaving the streets.

# Gaps in Current Services

With all their effectiveness, and despite the fact that the projects have operated with efficiency and economy, the Little Hoover Commission found that the need for services was not fully met. For example, over a 21 month period, six agencies in Los Angeles sheltered 4,861 youth but were forced to turn away 5,784 other requests for shelter, most often because their beds were full. Studies of shelter programs in San Francisco, San Diego, and Santa Clara counties indicate similar problems with shelter access.

A demographic profile of the 15,500 youth served by drop-in centers in Los Angeles over the same 21 month period showed that almost half of the youth on the streets were 18 years of age or older and could therefore not use shelters whose services are limited to youth 17 and under. The 18- to 21-year-old population is hesitant to use adult shelters because of their older adult and/or family orientation and is consequently left without services.

Finally, the Commission noted that nearly half of the youth served by the San Francisco and Los Angeles projects came from outside of those counties. Testimony from service providers in rural areas at the Commission's public hearing indicated that many homeless youth end up in the state's major urban centers because local services do not exist where they come from. Data from the California Runaway Hotline corroborate this testimony. In 1989, the Hotline received calls from 47 of California's 58 counties. Hotline counselors report that many counties have no local services and, therefore, that they have nowhere to refer callers.<sup>11</sup> Based on these findings, the Little Hoover Commission has called for an expansion of the existing Homeless Youth Act projects and the creation of similar projects in other areas of the state.

Further state government action on runaway and homeless youth occurred with the passage of AB 2737 (Waters), the Youth Center and Youth Shelter Bond Act, which was passed by the voters as Proposition 86 on the November, 1988 ballot. This Act authorizes the allocation of \$25 million to public or private nonprofit agencies for the acquisition, renovation and construction of youth centers and shelters. The Department of the California Youth Authority (CYA), which is responsible for administering these funds, has recently submitted a Preliminary Report on a Statewide Needs Assessment of Youth Centers and Youth Shelters to the Legislature. This assessment was authorized by AB 479 (Waters) in 1989.<sup>12</sup>

The CYA report states that California currently has 587 emergency shelter beds and 89 long-term transitional beds for runaway/homeless youth. Based on a 1976 U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare study that estimated 1.7% of youth 10 to 17 years of age run away from home, the report estimates that more than 42,000 youth, ages 10 to 17, will need shelter and/or transitional services in 1990, and indicates that an additional 863 emergency shelter beds and 369 long-term transitional beds will be necessary to meet this need. The needs assessment also indicates that the annual cost per shelter bed is approximately \$33,513. Thus, an additional \$41,288,016 will be necessary to meet the need for shelter services in 1990. The report further points to the fact that the number of 10- to 17-year-olds in California will increase by approximately 22% by the year 2000. This increase will bring about an even greater demand for emergency shelter beds and long-term transitional beds by the turn of the century.<sup>13</sup>

The CYA report also highlights several problems with the current state system of services for runaway/homeless youth. A major difficulty concerns the current public funding policy within the State Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) which provides shelter services only to youth who are intercepted by law enforcement or who are under court order. Only four counties have self-referral shelters where youth can access services themselves without the intervention of law enforcement. Other problem areas include a lack of family preservation/reunification and placement prevention services, few treatment services for youth with substance abuse or mental health problems, limited geographic distribution of current services, no standard licensing procedures for homeless youth shelters and lack of follow-up studies to demonstrate the long term effectiveness of intervention.<sup>14</sup>

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# A State Policy

Several states have followed the 1974 federal example and developed comprehensive runaway/homeless youth policies. The State of California, however, while it has begun to respond to the problem, has not yet taken the crucial step of developing and adopting such a policy. The passage of AB 3075, which created the California Runaway Hotline, and the passage of the various other pieces of legislation mentioned above represent important first steps. However, all of the programs enabled by this legislation combined receive only \$1.1 million in state funds each year for projects specifically designed for homeless youth.

The Homeless Youth Act of 1985 provides shelter services in only two counties. Moreover, the current classification of children and youth under sections 300, 601 and 602 of the Welfare and Institutions Code does not adequately recognize the service needs of runaway/homeless youth. As a result, many runaway and homeless youth throughout the state are not receiving the services they need. Nothing short of a state policy will make it possible to address such problems adequately.

Adoption of a state policy will make it possible for California to develop a comprehensive system of care for runaway/homeless youth. Such a system must minimally include a youth and family crisis center in each of the state's 58 counties, each with a minimum of six emergency shelter beds for youth 10 to 17 years of age. The system must also provide a transitional living component for chronic homeless street youth ages 16 to 21 in areas where this need is demonstrated; a statewide communication system to assist runaway and homeless youth in accessing services and communicating with their families; a program of technical assistance and training; and a standardized system of program evaluation and independent research.

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# Components of a Comprehensive System

## Youth and Family Crisis Centers

Each of at least 58 such centers throughout the state (one in each county) should have no fewer than 6 beds and not more than 20 beds to provide emergency shelter for youth in crisis who are 12 to 17 years old. Center staff-to-youth ratios must be rich enough to ensure adequate supervision and treatment. Each center should provide a broad range of services including the following:

- (1) Food and access to overnight shelter (group home, family host home, emergency shelter, etc.)
- (2) Counseling to address immediate emotional crises or other problems
- (3) Outreach services to locate youth in crisis or homeless youth and link them with services
- (4) Drop-in facilities to make services accessible to youth in crisis and homeless youth
- (5) Screening for basic health needs and referral to public and private agencies for health care
- (6) Linkage to other services offered by public and private agencies
- (7) Long-term stabilization planning and services so that the youth may be returned to the parental home under circumstances favoring long-term reunification of the family or can be suitably placed in a situation outside the family when family reunification is not possible
- (8) Follow-up services to ensure that the return to the family or the placement outside the family is stable
- (9) Long-term evaluation of outcome that includes tracking youth for a minimum of six months to determine their stability

The state administering agency identified by the Legislature should develop a request for proposal process for awarding grants to establish and operate such centers. Grants would be awarded to private non-profit entities with demonstrated records of success in the delivery of services to high risk youth and to joint ventures involving public agencies and private nonprofit agencies with such demonstrated records. The beginning level of funding for most counties would be \$201,000 per year (a 6-bed center at approximately \$33,500 per bed). Exceptions to this rule are San Francisco and Los Angeles counties which should receive at a minimum their current levels of funding under the Homeless Youth Act of 1985 (\$368,000 and \$552,000 respectively). Once these base levels of funding have been allocated, any additional available funds should be allocated to the counties on the basis of their 12- to 17-year-old populations.

## Transitional Living Programs

According to the CYA needs assessment, a minimum of 369 transitional living beds are needed throughout the state now. These beds should be funded and located in areas which demonstrate the need for such programs (areas with large numbers of homeless older teens). Transitional living programs should provide shelter and services which promote a transition to self-sufficient living and which prevent long-term dependency on social services. Transitional

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living programs should minimally provide the following services for homeless youth ages 16-21:

- (1) Shelter, which can be provided through group homes, host family homes, and supervised apartments; and services, including information and counseling in basic life skills, interpersonal skill building, educational advancement, job attainment skills, and mental and physical health care
- (2) On-site supervision at any shelter facility that is not a family home
- (3) A written transitional living plan for each youth based on an assessment of the youth's needs and designed to facilitate the transition from supervised participation in the project to independent living or other appropriate living arrangement
- (4) An adequate plan to ensure proper referral of homeless youth to social service, law enforcement, educational, vocational, training, welfare, legal service, and health care programs and to help integrate and coordinate such services for youth
- (5) Outreach programs to attract eligible youth
- (6) Follow-up services to ensure that the return to the family or the placement outside the family is stable
- (7) Long-term evaluation of outcomes that includes tracking youth for a minimum of six months to determine their stability

In addition, long term transitional living programs should ensure that:

- (8) The shelter facility accommodates not more than 20 individuals (excluding staff)
- (9) Shelter facilities for youth ages 16 and 17 are separate from those for youth ages 18 to 21 unless the 16-/17-year-olds are legally emancipated

Eligibility to apply for funds to operate Youth and Family Crisis Centers (YFCCs) and Transitional Living Programs (TLPs) should be limited to private, nonprofit agencies with records of success in the delivery of services to high-risk youth and to joint ventures between public agencies and private nonprofit agencies with such demonstrated records. The agency or partnership selected for each project should be able to demonstrate the ability to provide each of the services described above, either directly or under subcontract with a competent provider. Selection preference should be given to agencies that demonstrate a history of coordinating multiagency youth service systems and propose to include close working relationships with law enforcement, public social service and mental health programs.

Programs funded under the YFCC and/or TLP concepts should develop adequate plans for notifying the parents or relatives of minor youth within 72 hours following admission into their programs unless there are compelling circumstances why the parent, guardian, or other adult should not or can not be notified. Homeless youth should be able to remain in the YFCC program for a maximum of 60 days and in the TLP for a maximum of 360 days.

In addition, programs funded under the YFCC and TLP concepts should:

- (1) Operate their programs in areas which are easily reachable by homeless youth
- (2) Develop adequate plans for assuring proper relations with law enforcement, social service, school system, welfare, and youth correctional personnel
- (3) Keep adequate statistical records profiling the youth and family members they serve,

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except that, in the absence of the consent of the young person and parent or legal guardian, records maintained on individual homeless youth should not be disclosed to anyone other than another agency compiling statistical records or a government agency involved in the disposition of criminal charges against an individual homeless youth; reports or other documents based on such statistical records should not disclose the identity of individual runaway and homeless youth

- (4) Prepare annual reports detailing their degree of success in meeting their stated goals and reporting statistical summaries as required by the state administrative agency

## Statewide Communication System

The state should continue to operate and expand the California Runaway Hotline as a 24-hour, toll-free, statewide crisis intervention, resource and referral line for runaway and homeless youth and their families. As mandated by AB 3075 (1984), the Hotline also provides resources and referrals to law enforcement, youth agency and state agency staff who are either working directly with youth or are working on research and data collection around high risk youth issues. The Hotline database currently tracks information on over 5200 agencies, and records gaps in service availability, numbers of runaways, caller location, age, ethnicity, etc.

The state administering agency should insure that this service continues to be operated on a toll-free "800" number, and should provide the means whereby Hotline referrals and data are made available to policy-makers and providers in an easy-to-read, easy-to-update, hard copy format. Hotline data should be frequently analyzed to identify needs and institute changes in policy and/or funding.

The state should also continue to expand the Hotline through the recruitment and retention of appropriate multi-lingual, culturally sensitive staff reflective of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the high-risk, runaway and homeless youth population. Further expansion should provide the means whereby agencies serving high risk youth could be linked through a computerized statewide interagency communication system of all programs funded under this comprehensive policy. This same system should also provide for tracking availability of shelter beds and services on a daily basis, and should be centralized at the agency responsible for operating the California Runaway Hotline.

Analysis of data available via this network, along with those collected by the Hotline, will make it possible to identify key factors, such as gaps in service and areas with high numbers of runaways, necessary to informed policy and funding decisions.

## Grants for Technical Assistance and Training

The state administrative agency should make grants to statewide and regional nonprofit organizations (and combinations of such organizations) to provide technical assistance and training to entities that are eligible to receive YFCC and TLP grants. This training would help agencies establish and operate runaway and homeless youth programs in the most effective and cost efficient manner possible.

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## Grants for Research, Demonstration, and Service Projects

The state administrative agency should also make grants to private and nonprofit entities to carry out research and demonstration/ service projects designed to increase knowledge concerning runaway and homeless youth and to lead to improvement of services to them. Priority for such grants should be given to agencies that provide direct services to runaway and homeless youth.

In reviewing applications for research and demonstration grants the state should give special consideration to proposed projects relating to:

- (1) Juveniles who repeatedly leave and remain away from their homes
- (2) Outreach services to runaway and homeless youth
- (3) The special needs of runaway and homeless youth programs in rural areas
- (4) The special needs of foster care home programs for runaway and homeless youth
- (5) Transitional living programs for runaway and homeless youth
- (6) Innovative methods of developing resources that enhance the establishment or operation of runaway and homeless youth centers
- (7) The special needs of runaway/homeless youth who are unaccompanied immigrant minors

## State Administrative Agency

Five percent of the direct cost of the proposed comprehensive system should be allocated annually to the state agency responsible for administration of the system. The state administrative agency should foster mutual cooperation and collaboration between YFCCs/ TLPs and local public agencies (child protective services, mental health, probation, etc.) while encouraging such agencies to meet state mandates for services to the runaway/homeless population and intervening at the state level, if necessary, when such mandates are not being met. The state agency should also ensure that the data collection component of the system is standardized and that all funded services and functions adhere to its standards.

Not later than 180 days after the end of each fiscal year, the state administrative agency should report to the Legislature on the status and accomplishments of the YFCC's, TLP's and Statewide Communication System. With regard to Youth and Family Crisis Centers, the report should give particular attention to:

- (1) Their effectiveness in alleviating the problems of homeless youth
- (2) Their ability to reunite children with their families
- (3) Their effectiveness in helping youth decide upon a future course of action
- (4) Their need for redistributed and/or additional funding to meet unmet needs

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With regard to Transitional Living Programs, it should give particular attention to:

- (1) The number and characteristics of homeless youth served by such projects
- (2) The types of activities carried out under such projects
- (3) The effectiveness of the projects in preparing homeless youth for self-sufficiency
- (4) The effectiveness of the projects in helping youth decide upon future education, employment, and independent living
- (5) The ability of such projects to strengthen family relationships and encourage the resolution of intra-family problems through counseling and the development of self-sufficient living skills
- (6) The need for redistributed and/or additional funding to meet unmet needs

# Funding

It is in the interest of all Californians for the state to provide sufficient funding to support a comprehensive system of services to runaway/homeless youth. Provision of the additional 1,232 beds called for in the 1990 CYA needs assessment report along with development and implementation of the other components of the proposed system would cost approximately \$45.9 million a year, broken down as follows:

Youth and Family Crisis Shelters .....	\$29,841,719
Transitional Living Programs .....	12,366,297
Statewide Communication System .....	500,000
Technical Assistance and Training .....	500,000
Research and Demonstration Projects .....	500,000
State Agency Administration (5%) .....	2,185,400
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	<b>\$45,893,416</b>

While on the surface these figures appear to represent a significant fiscal impact, it can be demonstrated that a comprehensive system of the kind proposed would represent an efficient use of California tax dollars. At the heart of such a demonstration is the fact that such a system will be as much preventive as it will be therapeutic. For instance, given the high likelihood that runaway/homeless youth will become involved in crime, either as a means of survival or as its victims or both, any analysis of cost must consider the savings associated with diversion of youth from both crime and victimization. For instance, the available data suggest that hundreds of young people are diverted from the penal system each year by the few programs for the runaway/homeless population that are currently in operation. At an average cost of \$16,000 per incarcerated youth per year, however, if the \$1.1 million the state invests in current programs results in the diversion of only as few as 100 youth annually from one year of incarceration, it results in a savings of \$1.6 million.

In other words, it is a conservative estimate that current programs for runaway/homeless youth in California return to the taxpayers almost \$1.50 in cost avoidance for every dollar they consume. The demonstrated effectiveness of these programs provides strong evidence that expanded state investment would produce similar cost savings.

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# Conclusion

Most runaway, homeless youth in the state of California are troubled teenagers who have lived tragic lives. The few projects currently funded by the state have clearly demonstrated that the majority of these children can be assisted in leaving the streets and in becoming productive, contributing members of our society. The key factor in this transition is the availability of accessible, affordable, appropriate and accountable services.

This paper proposes the development of a state policy for runaway/homeless youth and a comprehensive system of services and other functions necessary to implement that policy. The policy must be specific in its requirements and yet sufficiently flexible to allow implementation that takes into consideration the geographic and ethnic diversity of the state. Implementation of the policy must provide for a system that includes a minimum of one Youth and Family Crisis Center with at least six shelter beds in each of the state's 58 counties, Transitional Living Programs for older homeless youth in areas where the need is demonstrated, and a statewide communication system including a 24-hour toll-free hotline to provide youth with access to services and their families. The system must also provide for technical assistance and training, must facilitate research and demonstration projects through which programs and services can be refined, and must include a standardized process of data collection and program evaluation that will reveal the effectiveness of its various components.

Despite an estimated cost of more than \$45 million a year, implementation of a system such as that proposed will be cost effective. Rather than "throwing money at a social problem" such a system is designed to invest dollars in program designs that have been shown to be both effective and cost efficient. This investment will pay the very real dividend of saving far larger costs in the long term while providing safety and emergency services to youth in need. Because nonprofit, community based organizations have proven their effectiveness in dealing with the target population over time, and because underfunded public sector agencies are unable to meet their current mandates, much less assume new responsibilities, restricting grants to the nonprofit sector and joint ventures involving public agencies and nonprofits is not only appropriate but necessary. It is time for the state to meet its obligation to these troubled youth and to live up to the often stated sentiment that "children are our most precious resource". It is clear what works and it is clear what resources are needed to meet the current gap in services. To do other than adopting a meaningful state policy and implementing it via a comprehensive, adequately supported system of services is simply not an option.

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