Rudy Owens   **Learning Objective**: Describe
Case No. 6, Day 1   community approaches to youth
Date Due: 101115   homelessness in other parts of the US
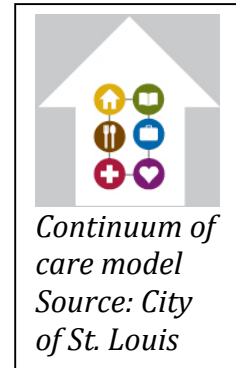
Community Responses to Youth Homelessness in St. Louis and Portland Provide Similar Models of Service Delivery That Are Grounded in Different Traditions.

Abstract: Homelessness among adolescents and young adults is a national problem experienced in major U.S. cities. Support for services addressing this at-risk community comes from all levels of government and private donors, and those services are delivered by a large local network of agencies, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations. A survey of two major U.S. metropolitan areas, Portland, Ore., and St. Louis, Mo., finds both cities have developed 10-year plans, with dozens of agencies collaborating on short- and long-term solutions to address homelessness. Portland has more service providers for a larger population of homeless youth, while St. Louis has fewer youth-focused agencies, with a network of predominantly church-run and faith-based providers. Both cities embrace a "continuum of care" delivery model encouraged by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

In the words of one leader working to get homeless young people off the streets in St. Louis, "We're trying to prevent our youth from becoming the next homeless adults."[1] That challenge, in St. Louis, in the University District in Seattle, and in all U.S. cities, is daunting. The number of runaways and homeless youth has been estimated to be between 500,000 to 2.8 million, according a 2009 study by Slesnick et al.[2] An earlier 2007 examination of the problem by Toro et al. reports that nearly 1.7 million youth have experienced a "runaway or throwaway episode."[3] Toro and his colleagues say homeless youth, as a population distinct from single adults or families, include runaways (those who left home without permission), throwaways (those forced from homes), and systems youth (those who left the foster care or detention systems). Given the scope of the national problem, the issue of youth homeless in the University District cannot be viewed in isolation. Similar webs of church, nonprofit, and government providers that serve the homeless youth in the district can be found in large U.S. cities. Given the size of the national issue, this paper will instead examine how two very different urban centers, Portland and St. Louis, are responding to local needs.

St. Louis: Continuum of Care through Faith-Based Providers: As our group's first papers on the University District revealed, a network of providers shares resources and collaborates on initiatives, such as the University Churches Emergency Fund. In St. Louis, all homelessness programs, including for youth homelessness, are organized in what is called the St. Louis Continuum of Care, involving 50 nonprofit agencies working to end homelessness by encouraging best practices, sharing resources, and engaging all stakeholders.[4] This model is

encouraged by HUD under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which awards funds to local governments competitively to serve the needs of homeless. The goal is to have communities respond to homelessness in a coordinated way locally by first identifying needs and then building a system to address those needs.[5] (King County, Washington also secures funding under the act, most recently receiving $20 million disbursed to 70 providers.)[6]

Disjointed delivery of homeless care model Source: City of St. Louis

Continuum of care model Source: City of St. Louis

However, youth homeless services are not prominent recipients of funding in St. Louis. In 2005, the City of St. Louis provided $16 million in local, state, and federal funds to homeless services, of which only $350,000 went to three programs serving youth: Almost Home and Haven of Grace shelters for pregnant teens and Covenant House Missouri.

The Homeless Services Network Board Program of St. Louis coordinates the city's overall response to the homeless population, including to individuals and families. The city provides no details how it is servicing the needs of youth on its web materials. The goal is to coordinate, rather than duplicate, social services with the nearly 50 groups serving the city. Health and human service professional and nonprofits collaborate with the network.[7] The city and county's 10-year strategy document prioritizes identifying needs and funding opportunities and ensuring that services are seamless from the first contacts to the location of permanent housing. However, there is no mention or focus on youth homelessness.

Estimates of the number of homeless youth in St. Louis vary. The city, excluding St. Louis County, counted 1,306 homeless in 2009.[8] A survey of the chronically homeless by the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County counted fewer than 3 percent of the total homeless population under 20 in 2004, the last official account published I could locate.[8] A scan of media sources, including media retrieval services and media outlets based in St. Louis, found practically no coverage of youth homelessness. One press account provided an estimate of 1,845 runaways/teens for the much larger surrounding area of suburban St. Louis County, but that was not substantiated in any published census such as a one-night count.[9] Tammie Belk, director of operations for Covenant House Missouri, pegged the metro St. Louis youth homeless population at 1,500-2,000—a number that appeared high relative to the total homeless population.[1]

In St. Louis, faith- and church-based service providers play a disproportionately large role serving the homeless population, including homeless youth. For instance, the Archdiocese of St. Louis—a major stakeholder for more a century—runs the largest homeless service, called the St. Patrick Center. It serves 9,000 persons annually with shelter, employment training, counseling, and social services for adults and families.[10] Two entities that serve homeless teenage mothers and children, Almost Home and Haven of Grace, are faith-based. Almost Home was founded by a Catholic order, and has served more than 1,500 woman and their children since opening in 1993. It operates as a transitional home, providing employment and life skills, and can accommodate 15 young mothers and up to 25 children.

Founded in 1998, Covenant House Missouri (CHM), a faith-based provider that is part of the Covenant House International organization, is one of four youth shelters in the city and the largest care provider to homeless youth in St. Louis who are not in state-funded institutional care or detention. Less than a quarter of its annual budget ($2.4 million in expenditures, 2009) comes from government sources; the rest comes from the parent organization and private sources. It serves young people ages 16-21 at its midtown facility. It provides 20 crisis beds, 18 transitional housing beds, and an array of social support, education, and employment readiness services. In 2009, it reached 3,000 at-risk or homeless youth.

Belk, its director of operations, said CHM has a strong voice in the St. Louis Continuum of Care umbrella, which meets monthly to discuss local efforts to address homelessness among all groups. Substance abuse and mental health issues—bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, PTSD— were the largest problems Belk identified with the population served by CHM, and she said both needed to be addressed, in addition to moving the population to permanent housing. A CHM report on youth entering its facility found that 47% reported physical abuse and 31% reported sexual abuse.[11]

Portland: Continuum of Care from Nonprofits: For decades, Portland has been a haven for homeless youth moving through the West Coast, and it continues to draw homeless youth nationally. "For some reason there's word throughout the country that Portland is the hot place to be right now," is how one former street youth described the phenomenon. [12] However, this cohort is part of a larger citywide problem. In 2009, 16,000 people in the Portland area were served by one or more service providers, and on any given night, 2,500 persons of all ages slept on the streets or in shelters.[13] (See Table 1 below.) The city has responded by developing a 10-

year plan, which calls for solutions targeting chronic homelessness, supporting the care-delivery system, and streamlining services. The community's more than 60 providers, who form the Coordinating Committee to End Homeless (CCEH), meet regularly and are responding like St. Louis through a continuum of care model. A 2009 state law also is requiring collaboration on the issue between local housing and homeless agencies.

In response to the youth homelessness that emerged in Portland in the early 1970s, a number of local sectarian nonprofits formed to address aspects of the problem, including Janus Youth Programs. Today it is among the largest nonprofits in the Northwest. Its 20 programs serve runaway and homeless youth, provide transitional housing, and offer education and employment counseling. The demand is huge. With expenses totaling $9 million, Janus reports serving 6,000 children, youth and families annually and 30,000 direct contacts with runaways and homeless youth a year.[14] However, it was overlapping with other providers offering transitional housing and counseling, such as Outside In and New Avenues for Youth. As a result, about 10 years ago, Multnomah County and the network of providers agreed to better coordinate services.[15] That framework, called the Homeless Youth Continuum, facilitates screenings for those seeking services, to ensure they find housing, education, and employment services.[16] The continuum now meets twice monthly.

Dennis Lundberg, associate director of homeless youth programs with Janus Youth Programs, said services are now well coordinated to let youth who enter the system get immediate assistance, which he called "no wrong door."[15] These include the Access Center for youth 13-25 and mobile outreach targeting the downtown area. Youth who contact any of the facilities are interviewed with a 3-4 page intake form that identifies the client's age, status (runaway or homeless), and needs. Those over 18 are screened for warrants to determine if they pose risks to others. For instance, runaways under 18 may be referred to a shelter for that population called Harry's Mother, which may help to reunite the client with his/her family. If sexual exploitation is suspected, the FBI can be contacted to investigate for criminal activity. Lundberg emphasized Janus has a seat at the table as an advocate for youth homelessness with city hall to ensure available public funding can be directed to the appropriate agency.

Table 1: Comparing Homelessness/Youth Homelessness in St. Louis, Mo., and Portland, Ore.

Metrics	Portland, Ore.	St. Louis, Mo.
Estimated number of homeless (2009)	3,376[17] (Multnomah County, including Portland, 2010)	1,949[18] (St. Louis & St. Louis County, 2009)

Estimated homeless youth (not homeless children with families)	507[17] (Ages 12-23, Multnomah County)	Not published by the City of St. Louis or State of Missouri
Strategy by providers/city	-Updated 10-year plan to end homelessness (2009) -Using continuum of care service delivery model	-Initiated 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness (2004) -Using continuum of care service delivery model
Homeless funding, annual (all, not just focused on youth)	-$30 million (city, state, federal, private, 2004)[19] -$7.3 million, one-time federal stimulus funding 2009[13]	-$16 million (city, state, federal, 2004)[8] -$8.1 million, one-time federal stimulus funding 2009[4]
Total population (U.S. Census Bureau)	740,000 (Portland and Multnomah County—not counting Washington or Clackamas counties)	990,000 (St. Louis and St. Louis County—not counting St. Charles County, Mo., or St. Claire County, Ill.)

Back to the Case: Researchers have found that evaluations of methods to help homeless youth are relatively new.[2] However, the demand for services is great given the size of the population nationally. Seattle, like St. Louis and Portland, has a 10-year strategy and works to harmonize service delivery, identifying homeless youth as a target audience.[6] Policy proposals were identified to mitigate the problem.[20] Six years have passed, and demand for services serving the homeless youth population in the University District appears to be growing amid the economic downtown. Cities like Portland and St. Louis are attempting to provide immediate assistance to remove youth safely from the streets, but also to increase permanent housing opportunities—in other words, upstream and downstream strategies. Data collected by Covenant House Missouri indicate its client population reports being victims of abuse and having drug and mental health problems. But, Slesnick et al. conclude servicing those problems at shelters may not work long-term.[2] Though models and best practices exist for a clearly identified problem impacting the University District and most large cities, researchers such as Toro et al., who have surveyed the literature on interventions, conclude "we know relatively little about what works."[3] The studies reviewed for this case all suggest the need for additional research.[2,3] However, coordinated service delivery appears to be a strategy that will continue.

Questions:
1. Has any researcher attempted to assess the value of the 10-year action plans that states and cities have developed to encourage better planning to address homelessness and youth homelessness? Do these just sit on shelves having accomplished a benchmark only?
2. In two cities, I counted more than 110 service providers addressing homelessness and offering social services. Absent the principles of a marketplace, what system is at play to determine which one works and which does not, and who decides?

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