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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY
Expected at 10:30 a.m.
Wednesday, May 5, 1982

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

THE RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAM

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MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

We are pleased to be here today to discuss the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program authorized by title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended. Last October, that is seven months ago, you requested GAO to observe the program's local operations and delivery of services in order to answer the following questions:

--Who participates in the program?

--What are the services it offers?

--What is the center environment?

--What do participants, service providers, and community people think about its services and operations?

Having reviewed 17 of the 169 runaway and homeless youth centers funded by the program, our intention today is to give you answers to these questions for the sites we visited.

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## THE PROBLEM OF RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH

Running away from home, is, of course, a family problem with venerable roots in American traditions. For generations now, young people have been running away from their families for a variety of reasons: perhaps because general conditions in the home seemed to be or actually were intolerable, extending in some cases to pervasive neglect or abuse; or because specific family arguments, school-related troubles, or peer group problems triggered immediate, overwhelming, adolescent crises; or because dreams of adventure and escape suddenly became irresistible. On the other hand, running away has sometimes been part of a larger pattern of delinquent behavior or the result of mental or emotional disorders. Running away, therefore, may reflect a number of very different situations. Depending on its cause and on other behavior associated with it, running away can be "a cry of pain, or a sign of health seeking surface" 1/; a one-time thing, or part of a pattern of repeated acts; a point in a normal development process, or a signal of delinquent (or pre-delinquent) behavior.

In addition to being a family problem, running away has now also become a societal problem because of the increase in the number of runaway youths, and the likelihood both of their victimization and of their delinquent activity. According to the director of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, recent estimates of the the number of runaway and homeless youth nationwide range between 733,000 and 1,300,000. Alone and without resources, often emotionally

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1/Lillian Ambrosino, Runaways (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971)

perturbed, they risk being victimized or becoming involved in prostitution and in forms of delinquency which involve major costs to the youths themselves, to their futures, to their families, and to society.

Runaways are not the only youth at risk on the streets, however. A second group, often called "pushouts" or "throwaways", is comprised of youth who have been forced out by their families. Having no place to return to, these youth are indeed homeless. Like the runaways, this group includes those who have been neglected or abused, and who risk being victimized and drawn into delinquent behavior.

These youth present a different situation from that of many runaways. Reuniting them with their families may be neither possible nor desirable. It may be much more difficult to find permanent solutions to their problems given that the very fact of their homelessness may indicate a troubled family, and that, as a consequence, their families may not want to take part in efforts to improve the youths' situation.

The present numbers of runaway and homeless youth must be considered in the context of current rates of juvenile crime which increased prodigiously between 1960 and 1976 and have not yet abated. Insofar, then, that running away and homelessness can be both manifestations and immediate causes of delinquency and/or an indication of a troubled family, many people who think that "the family is of great importance in the healthy development

of children," 1/ also believe that this is an area of choice for intervening, both to prevent vicitimization and delinquency, and to increase family stability.

The fact that the problem is as ambiguous as it is, however, argues for certain criteria to be used in specifying an intervention or a program to cope with it. For example, since running away can be a symptom of either normalcy or deviance, a program would need to have flexibility to recognize the spectrum of possibilities involved, to identify the particular problems presented by each case, and to take appropriate action in the best interests of youth, family, and society. For another example, both the high costs of involving the criminal justice system and the number of non-delinquent motives for running away, point up the logic of locating a program outside the justice system, but making it capable of triggering judicial, mental health and social service processes in case of need. Finally, the fact that some homeless youth have been forced out by their families implies that placements outside the home need to be available, and that it may not always be possible to serve them adequately in the same short period of time as runaways.

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1/National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, Report of the Task Force on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, USGPO, 1977

## THE NATIONAL RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAM

The Congress considered these and other criteria when it established the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program under the Runaway Youth Act of 1974. As amended in 1980, the Act, Public Law 96-509, authorizes grants to public and private nonprofit agencies or networks of agencies for new and existing community-based programs that address the immediate needs of runaway and homeless youth and their families, including a national communication system along with technical assistance and short-term training for staff. The progam is operated outside the juvenile justice system by the Youth Development Bureau, which is part of the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The current authorization level of the amended act is $25 million. Centers are located throughout the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. For fiscal years 1978 through 1981, Federal appropriations were $11 million annually, the number of funded centers varied from 158 to 169, and the number of youth temporarily sheltered or served by these centers (according to HHS figures) rose from 32,000 in fiscal year 1978 to 45,000 in fiscal year 1981. The number of one-time drop-in clients increased from 119,000 to 133,000 over roughly the same period. The national 24-hour toll-free hotline assisted approximately 200,000 youths and their families in fiscal year 1981.

The program is thus a small effort, involving only a tiny fraction of the Nation's youth and only 3 to 6 percent of the

Nation's runaways. Given the low level of program funding, given the likelihood that program funding will not be increased, and given the gravity of the societal problem addressed, it seemed extremely important to know whether the program is in fact serving that youth population intented by Congress to receive services under the Act, and who are, by definition, the most likely to benefit from the prescribed activities and environment of the centers specified by the Congress.

## The program participants

Reviewing the legislation shows that the Congress is particularly concerned about juveniles who, without resources or shelter, face the dangers of living on the streets. This includes youths who are away from home without parental permission and youths who have been pushed out or who are running from physical or sexual abuse. The Congress has also recognized that many of these youths stay within their own communities rather than running across the country.

## The program's services

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is based on the belief that runaway and homeless youths urgently need temporary shelter and counseling because of their age and situation. These services are therefore specified under the Act. It also specifies that deciding to return youths to their parents or relatives must be made according to the best interests of the child and that, therefore, alternative living arrangements must sometimes be made. The legislation places emphasis on contacting a child's parents or

relatives if this is required by State law, reuniting children with their families, and encouraging the resolution of intra-family problems through counseling and other services. Finally, the Act also prescribes aftercare counseling, although it does not specify the mix of service offerings during and after the shelter period.

The program's environment

The Congress specifically required that the system of temporary care it envisaged be developed outside the law enforcement and juvenile justice systems in order that the problems of runaway and homeless youth not swell the caseloads of police and judicial authorities overburdened with other tasks. In addition, by authorizing the funding of locally controlled, community-based facilities outside the juvenile justice system, the Congress provided that informal cooling-off periods for youths and their families might help strong feelings to subside with the least possible stigma, and the smallest possible hiatus in their lives.

Under the Act runaway and homeless youth centers are to be located in areas youths can easily reach. They are to have a capacity of 20 beds. The ratio of staff to clients must insure adequate supervision and treatment. Staff are to develop relationships with law enforcement and other social service and welfare personnel. Referral services to community agencies are an allowable cost. The Act specifies no control by the Federal Government with regard to the staffing decisions of the facilities that receive funds.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF GAO'S FINDINGS

GAO's review of 17 runaway and homeless youth programs is based on two sources of information. The first is statistical data from 16 sites in operation during program year 1980 (July 1, 1980 through June 30, 1981); the second is interview and observation data collected during January and February 1982 at these 16 centers and one newly established site. The centers we visited included 11 programs with their own center-run shelters, 3 programs in which clients resided with host home families in the local area, and 3 programs with a combination of both.

Highlights of our findings include the following:

- A majority of the youths were: (a) first-time clients who had not been previously sheltered by the center, (b) from the immediate geographical area in which the center is located, (c) referred to the center by professional service providers, that is social service agencies, juvenile justice authorities, police, and school personnel, and (d) accompanied to the center by service providers, parents and relatives.
- Center staff and others in the community reported that the three most pressing client needs were shelter, counseling and family involvement. These needs were met by all centers.
- The number of youths sheltered at each center we visited varied greatly. The 3 host home programs sheltered 19, 29, and 259 youths during program year 1980. The 13 center-run shelter programs sheltered from 52 to 617 youths, with an average of 259 clients per center.

- Fifty percent of the youths sheltered by the centers last year returned to their immediate family or other relatives.
- In 12 of the sites only 50 percent or fewer of the centers' clients received aftercare services.
- The majority of centers seemed to be well-kept, clean and adequately (but not luxuriously) furnished.
- Program strengths identified by youth, parents of former clients, community members and center staff included:
  - the existence of a shelter program,
  - counseling and crisis intervention services,
  - family involvement,
  - the positive characteristics of center staff.
- Program weaknesses identified by community people and center staff included:
  - limited shelter capacity,
  - not enough staff,
  - limited professional experience and training of some staff members
- Most parents of former clients believed that their family problems would not have been resolved if the centers had not been there to help them.

METHODOLOGY

We produced these findings using a methodology called the Program Operations and Delivery of Services Examination (PODSE). This approach is designed to provide descriptive information rapidly to the Congress on federally-funded service delivery programs. We have used it to find out how the program operates at various local sites. Having been developed from HHS' Service Delivery Assessment concept, this GAO methodology involves:

(1) selecting a small judgement sample of local sites, but one which is large enough to contain examples of the diversity which exists; as a result, the sample contains a mix of large programs and small programs, urban programs and rural programs, sites with different facilities, etc;

(2) obtaining information from a variety of people directly involved in providing and receiving services;

(3) developing a fairly intensive description of the program operations, services and clients within a site as well as allowing contrasts across sites;

(4) employing methods of data collection and analysis that allow both the study and its findings to be replicated at the same sites by other evaluators.

The 17 runaway and homeless youth centers we examined are located in 12 states -- we have listed them in an appendix to this statement -- and differ in many ways, including their residential facilities (whether center-run shelters or host home programs or some combination of both), years of operation, and changes in Federal funding level. We excluded New York and Los Angeles because of re-

lated work we are doing teenage prostitution in these cities.

We collected our information systematically from structured interviews of youths, parents of former clients, center directors, counselors, volunteers, board members, police and school personnel, and social service, juvenile justice, and other agency personnel associated with each of the centers. Some of the statistical information we collected came from a questionnaire we mailed in advance of our visits. Two-member teams of GAO evaluators conducted interviews and observations in two-day visits to each center. In all, we interviewed a total of 353 people. The names of parents, police, school, and referral agency personnel were given to us by center staff. Although we cannot generalize to the program as a whole using PODSE, we are able to describe how the program operates at a set of local sites chosen carefully to reflect the diversity of the program.

## OUR FINDINGS

Findings from our review of the 17 runaway and homeless youth centers are organized under the four topical areas derived from the Subcommittee's questions. These are: participant characteristics, services, center environment and perceptions of participants, service providers, and community members regarding program services and operations.

### Participant characteristics

#### Who were the clients?

As Congress recognized in 1980, many runaway and homeless youth stay within their immediate geographic area. Last year,

72 percent of the 3673 clients sheltered by the centers we visited were from the immediate geographic areas served by the centers. Although the centers we visited in Miami and San Francisco had the greatest percent of out-of-state participants, only one-fifth of their clients came from outside their State borders. Thus, even in Miami and San Francisco which have the reputation of drawing runaways from afar, 80 percent of the youths served by these centers were from the immediate geographic area.

### What were the centers' admission criteria?

All 17 centers we visited reported that they immediately admitted youths if the youths' age and situation were considered appropriate by center staff. All the centers accepted youths up to the age of 18 although centers differed as to the minimum age of youths they admitted. Twelve centers served youths under the age of 13; one had 14 as its minimum age. The 71 clients in our interview sample ranged from 12 to 18, with the majority being 15 or 16 years old. Of the three 18-year-old clients, one was a current client and the two others were former clients.

Directors at all sites reported that there were various types of youths whom they typically excluded from shelter. The three most common categories of excluded youths were those with severe emotional problems (e.g., psychotic), drug addicts, and those dangerous to themselves and others (i.e., violent and suicidal). Center staff reported that these youths were then referred to other agencies.

### How many clients had been sheltered before?

At the centers we visited, only 20 percent of the clients had

been sheltered by the program before. Estimates of the percent of repeat clients at each of the sites ranged from a low of 1 percent to a high of 40 percent. Of the 71 clients we interviewed, 72 percent were being served by the centers for the first time.

### What was the incidence of physical or sexual abuse and neglect?

As noted in the legislation, many of the runaways may be running from physical or sexual abuse. Staff estimates of the percent of clients who were physically abused varied widely across all centers. At the majority of sites, however, the estimates of physical abuse ranged from 20 percent to 40 percent. Staff estimates of the percent of clients who were sexually abused were lower than estimates for those believed to be physically abused. Staff estimates of youth believed to be sexually abused again varied widely across all sites. At a majority of centers, the percent was estimated at 5 percent or less. In addition to physical and sexual abuse, clients may also be victims of parental neglect. Center staff at approximately two-thirds of the sites we visited estimated the percent of neglected youths to range from 14 percent to 35 percent. Estimates for the remaining sites ranged from 50 percent to 100 percent.

### How had clients learned about the center?

Staff at almost all the centers we visited reported a change in the pattern of client referrals over the past few years. Major changes noted were fewer self-referrals and more referrals from both social service agencies and school personnel.

According to staff, clients who were self-referred or referred by family and friends accounted for a majority of the sheltered youths at only 2 of the centers we visited. (Across sites, these referrals ranged from 10 percent to 75 percent.) In contrast, referrals by professional service providers (e.g., social service agencies, juvenile justice authorities), police and school personnel accounted for a majority of the clients at 12 centers. (Across sites, these referrals ranged from 25 percent to 85 percent.)

From interviews with clients we learned how they first found out about the center and who, if anyone, accompanied them there. Of the clients we interviewed, 51 percent had learned about the center from professional service providers, police, and school personnel. The remaining 49 percent had heard about the center on radio or television, from a hotline, or from parents or friends. About 33 percent of the clients in our sample had actually been brought to the center by professional service providers, police and school personnel, 28 percent arrived by themselves, and 21 percent had been accompanied by parents or relatives.

The clients referred by professional service providers included both their own clients and youths or parents who called in asking for assistance. All the providers referred youths for shelter but only 33 percent referred youths for drop-in counseling as well. In the event the shelter was full, professional service providers, police, and school personnel at the majority of the sites most frequently said they would refer runaway and homeless youths to social service agencies, local emergency shelters, juvenile detention, or return them to their parents.

Summary of participant characteristics

Our findings with regard to program participants are that:

- The majority were from the immediate geographical area surrounding the centers.
- Most centers excluded psychotic and violent youths, along with drug addicts.
- Participants tended not to be repeaters; they were first-time clients who had not previously been sheltered by each of the centers.
- At the majority of sites, staff estimates of abused and neglected clients were: physically abused, 20 percent to 40 percent; sexually abused, less than 5 percent; neglected, 14 percent to 35 percent.
- At a majority of centers, 50 percent or more of the clients had been referred by professional service providers -- that is, by social service agencies or juvenile justice authorities -- or by police and school personnel.

Services Offered

Center staff and others in the community -- that is, personnel from social service agencies, the juvenile justice system, police departments and the school system -- reported that the centers met the most pressing needs of clients by providing shelter, counseling and family involvement. Most of the centers also provided directly or by referral, youth advocacy, medical assistance, legal counseling, vocational counseling, drop-in counseling, clothing, transportation, followup and aftercare, placement, a

24-hour hotline, and a variety of outreach activities including speeches, school contacts, and advertising. Staff at 9 centers conducted outreach activities on the streets where runaway and homeless youth were likely to be located.

All centers provided meals for clients as part of the shelter services. The sheltered clients we interviewed at 14 of the 17 centers reported receiving at least three meals per day. Youths at two sites said they received two meals a day. Only drop-in clients were interviewed at the remaining site; they did not receive any meals.

Last year, 14 centers served 2,435 drop-in clients who were not sheltered and 10,104 phone clients. The numbers of drop-ins at each of these centers ranged from 10 to 742, with an average of 174 clients per center. Phone clients at these centers ranged from 62 to 4066, with an average of 722 per center.

Last year, the centers in our sample sheltered 3,673 youths, with the number varying greatly across centers. Eight percent of these clients were sheltered by the 3 host home programs included in the sample. The host home programs sheltered 19, 29, and 259 youths. The remaining centers sheltered from 52 to 617 clients, with an average of 259 clients per center.

### What was the average length of stay?

Runaways and homeless youth were sheltered for varying lengths of time. Runaways stayed an average of 15 days or less; at 8 sites they stayed an average of one week or less. Homeless youth, however, presented a different picture, largely because of the

different problem they represented. Almost all the centers served homeless clients. At 11 centers, the average length of stay among homeless youth was 15 days or less, with 4 centers reporting an average of one week or less. Four other sites, however, reported an average length of stay in the range of 25-32 days. These latter four sites were located in a mix of urban and suburban cities of varying size.

### How did the centers involve the family?

As stated in the legislation, Congress places particular emphasis on the ability of the centers to reunite children with their families and encourage the resolution of intrafamily problems through counseling and other services. In fact, the centers attempted to involve families in crisis resolution in a variety of ways, as reflected in a statement by the center director who said, "A kid in trouble is a family in trouble. We do everything in our power to involve the family."

Family involvement began with the centers' initial contact. Almost all centers reported they attempted to obtain parental permission to shelter a young person. The policy at all centers was to contact a parent or guardian within 24 hours of a youth's arrival. Nine centers had a policy of calling within 3 hours. When we interviewed parents of former clients, 44 of 51 parents recalled the timeframe in which they had been contacted by the center. Forty-three of the 44 said they were aware of their child's arrival at the shelter within 24 hours.

Although the initial call had no set format, several topics were common across centers. A majority of centers attempted to set up an appointment with the family during the initial call. At this time, many centers also told the parents their child was safe, explained the program, and began exploring the problem from the parent's point view.

Centers varied greatly in the percent of clients whose parents participated in family counseling. The percent of participating parents ranged from 6 percent to 98 percent. At 13 of the sites, the range was 29 percent to 75 percent. Of the 51 parents of former clients we interviewed, 92 percent had met with center staff; 55 percent had met with center staff at least four times. (The high rates of participation among our sample of parents may reflect the inherent bias in the selection process. As noted earlier, parents' names were given to us by center staff.)

Family counseling obviously depends upon the participation of both clients and parents. In fact, one center director commented that the client's willingness to participate in family counseling was a prerequisite for shelter. Staff at a majority of centers reported that during the shelter period, clients were basically interested in resolving their family difficulties, with one head counselor noting that most youths "have a hunger to resolve family problems." For abused and homeless youths, however, the interest in resolving family problems was more varied.

### What were the components of family counseling during the shelter period?

At the centers we visited, family counseling during the shelter period had several components, including crisis intervention (e.g., getting the problem under control and reducing the tension in an emotionally charged situation), problem identification, efforts to improve family communication, and provision of referral sources for extended family counseling. Specific areas addressed in family counseling included drawing up goals and contracts, getting all parties to talk with one another, and reuniting the family.

Fifteen of the 17 centers reported that staff typically met with participating families at least twice during the shelter period. Six of the 15 centers typically met with families four or more times during the shelter period.

At the centers we visited, youths and family members also had access to one another during the shelter period. At all centers in our sample, parents were able to call or visit their children. At the 6 sites where the shelter or host home location was unknown to parents, they were able to make arrangements to visit their children at a "neutral" site or at home. At all centers except for one host home program, clients were able to call their parents at any time or with permission

### What counseling services did participants receive during the shelter period?

According to staff, counseling had two main goals -- improving

participants' coping and living skills and reuniting the family whenever possible. The three types of counseling available during the shelter period were individual, group, and family. The mix of counseling services received by each client was dependent upon a number of factors: the severity of the client's problem, length of stay, the number of clients in residence, and the family's willingness to participate. Center staff at the 17 sites we visited reported that clients typically received at least three individual counseling sessions per week. At 11 sites, staff reported that some clients may have received as many as seven or more individual counseling sessions per week.

Almost all the clients we interviewed reported receiving individual counseling during the shelter period. A majority had already participated in at least 3 counseling sessions at the time we interviewed them. Clients at 10 sites said individual counseling was available as often as they needed it. Six clients at 2 centers, however, said they had not been counseled individually.

Group counseling was typically available at all but two sites. The number of group counseling sessions in a typical week varied greatly across centers. Some conducted one to four group sessions per week; others, five or more. Family counseling was available at all sites. Staff reported that in a typical week they held at least one or two family counseling sessions for each client whose family was willing to participate.

### What happened to clients after they left the shelter?

At all sites we visited, center staff reported that

all involved parties -- the client, the family, center staff, and agency personnel -- typically participated in placement decisions. At a majority of sites, between 52 and 97 percent of the clients were placed with their immediate family or other relatives last year. At four centers, placements with immediate family or other relatives ranged from 21 percent to 46 percent of the clients. Overall, 50 percent of the clients were placed with their immediate family or other relatives. The most frequently used alternative placements included foster homes, group homes, and independent living.

At 11 of the 17 sites we visited, directors and head counselors stated that placement options were insufficient in their geographical areas. They mentioned gaps in long-term placement options slightly more often than gaps in interim placement. Other specific gaps they mentioned included foster homes, group homes, and specialized facilities such as homes for emotionally disturbed youth. Most centers that reported long periods of residence for homeless youth especially noted the insufficiency of placement options for their clients.

When clients who had been sheltered left the center, a varied number received follow-up and aftercare services from the centers. Follow-up included safe arrival checks and phone calls to determine the youth's progress and condition. Half the centers estimated that at least 75 percent of their clients received follow-up services. A third of the centers estimated that 50 percent or fewer of their clients received these services.

Center staff also estimated the receipt of aftercare services. As defined in the regulations, aftercare services are designed to

alleviate the problems that contributed to a youth's running away or being homeless. Center staff at three-quarters of the sites we visited estimated that 50 percent or fewer of their clients received these services. Staff at three sites, however estimated that 75 percent of their clients received aftercare services from the center staff.

Similarly, the rate of family participation in aftercare counseling was quite varied. Eight centers typically met with participating families 2 or more times following the shelter period, but nine centers estimated that their meetings with families were limited to at most one session. Centers also may have referred clients to other agencies for aftercare services. We do not have information on the percent who availed themselves of these services, however.

Although center staff believed that the most pressing need of the client following the shelter period was for counseling, they reported that numerous problems existed in providing it. The problems most frequently reported were lack of staff, family refusals to participate, and clients' and/or families' leaving the local area.

Staff at all centers reported instances in which clients had run from the center. These instances included clients' leaving overnight and then returning or leaving without returning at all. Eleven centers estimated an average of one or fewer instances of "running" per month. The remaining six centers estimated 2 or more instances per month. The highest estimate of running was 12 per month from the center that sheltered 617 youths last year, the highest number among the sites we visted. The director

of this site, located in a large urban commnity, noted that most of these clients did not stay on the streets but lived with friends in the local area. According to staff, reasons for running included restrictive house rules, arguments with parents, and dissatisfaction with anticipated placement.

When a client runs from the center, all sites said they notified the parents or guardian. Staff at 15 sites said they also notified the police. The majority of sites said they also contacted others such as social workers and probation officers.

At 14 of the 17 centers we visited, police or center directors reported an average of one or fewer instances per year of clients' being arrested for offenses committed while in residence at the shelter. At 7 of these centers, no instances of arrests were reported. At each of the remaining three sites, the police and center directors differed in their estimates. The estimates at these latter sites ranged from 1 to 6 arrests per year. Client offenses included trespass, assault, shoplifting, car theft, and breaking and entering.

Summary of Program Services

Our findings with regard to services offered are that:

- Centers met the three most pressing needs of clients by ensuring shelter, counseling and family involvement.
- The number of youths sheltered at each center last year varied greatly with the 3 host homes programs sheltering 19, 29 and 259 youth and the remaining centers averaging 259 clients each.

- On the average runaways stayed 15 days or less in all sites, but homeless youths stayed 15 days or less only in 11 sites. At four sites, homeless youths averaged 25 to 32 days in their length of stay.
- All centers had a policy of contacting a parent or guardian within 24 hours of a youth's arrival and interviews with parents of former clients indicated that in almost all cases this policy was implemented.
- Individual and family counseling was available to clients at all centers, and group counseling was available at most sites.
- Fifty percent of the youths sheltered by the centers returned to their immediate family or other relatives.
- At the majority of sites, center staff stated that placement options, particularly long term placement services, were insufficient in their geographical area. Most of the sites that reported long periods of residence for homeless youth especially noted this problem.
- At the majority of sites, only 50 percent or fewer of the centers' clients received aftercare services; yet aftercare is considered of major importance as defined in the program regulations.
- Staff estimates of the frequency of clients running from the center varied from one or fewer instances of running per month at 11 centers, to two or more instances of running at the remaining 6 centers. Reasons for running included restrictive house rules, arguments with parents, and dissatisfaction and anticipated placement.

- At 14 centers police or center directors reported an average of one or fewer instances per year of clients' being arrested for offenses committed while in residence at the shelter.

## Center Environment

For our review, we examined three components of the center environment -- physical characteristics of the center, house rules and procedures, and the staff.

### What were the physical characteristics of the centers?

The majority of center facilities visited seemed to be well-kept, clean, and adequately (but not luxuriously) furnished. Three centers were considered to be rundown but habitable. All center-run shelters but one met the required capacity of 20 children. Five center-run shelters held 6 to 8 beds and eight held 10 to 14 beds. One had 24 beds. Boys and girls had separate sleeping rooms in all shelters and host homes we visited.

Centers also varied in the number of beds per room. Ten centers had 2 to 8 beds in each sleeping room; three had a maximum of 2 beds in each room; one center had one bedroom with 8 beds and another with 16. All centers had limited space for clients' personal belongings, varying from one or two bureau drawers for each client to whole bureaus and shared closets for each client.

Local public transportation to the centers was available for 15 of the 17 centers. The two other centers were in rural areas without local public transportation.

What were the centers' rules and procedures?

With one exception, all centers we visited had written rules governing the client's behavior while in residence. The exception was a host home program that developed individual rules in consultation with the host home parents.

Center rules covered a variety of topics. Sexual contact was prohibited in all centers that housed boys and girls in the same facility. Other basic prohibitions included those against violence, drugs, alcohol, possession of weapons, and stealing. At a majority of centers, written rules also specified procedures for leaving the shelter, using the phone, receiving visitors, and maintaining personal belongings. At all sites but one, resident clients had to perform daily chores. The remaining site was a host home program that did not permit a youth to remain in any host home for more than one night. Clients at a majority of sites were also required to abide by a daily schedule for waking, eating, attending counseling sessions, returning to the center by a certain hour and going to bed. Although the required activities stretched throughout the day, some staff volunteered that their clients had too much time with nothing particular to do during the period of residence. In effect, the required activities combined with the limited staff available at various times of the week allow for much unstructured client time.

All centers had specific procedures to be followed if a client wanted to leave the shelter for a few hours. All centers required clients to obtain permission from the staff or be ac-

companied by an adult in order to leave the shelter. Fourteen centers reported using one or more of the following methods to monitor clients while they were away from the shelter -- verification of whereabouts during the absence (calling the school, for example), adult supervision, and verification of whereabouts upon client's return (requiring clients to produce ticket stubs, for example).

Rules were presented to clients at intake in the 16 centers with written rules. Of these centers, 14 required clients to sign an agreement that they would abide by the rules while in residence. Almost all sites reported imposing extra chores or restrictions (e.g., early bedtime, loss of phone privileges) for rule violations. At 8 centers, staff volunteered that clients were told to leave for serious or continued rule violations. Of the 65 sheltered clients we interviewed, 82 percent said shelter rules were strictly enforced.

Some clients attended local schools while in residence, but attendance rates reported by the centers varied considerably. At three sites, 5 percent to 15 percent attended school; at seven sites, 40 percent to 75 percent attended school; at seven other sites, 80 percent to 100 percent attended school. All sites used public schools, but one site also maintained a campus school.

### What were the staff characteristics?

The staff at a typical center included a director, head counselor, counselors, house parents, volunteers, and support personnel.

Although the number of paid counselors at each center varied from 2 to 11, the majority of centers had from 4 to 7. Of the fifteen centers that used volunteer counselors, the majority had 1 to 6. One of these centers was unusual in that all its counseling -- both individual and family -- was performed by at least 35-40 volunteers working in teams of one peer and one adult counselor for each client.

At the 17 sites we visited, all 105 paid counselors except one had at least a high school diploma or its equivalent. The exception was a high school student serving as a paid peer counselor. Beyond this, 78 percent of the paid counseling staff had at least a bachelor's degree and 26 percent had completed a graduate degree. Of the 52 volunteer counselors identified as most frequently interacting with clients, 52 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. Except for one high school student, all other volunteers had at least a high school degree.

Salaries for paid counselors ranged from $7,400 to $15,300. At the majority of sites, counselors earned $7,400 (less than the Civil Service GS-1 starting salary) to $12,500 (comparable to mid-GS-4 salary). At 3 centers, counselors earned $13,500 (GS-5) to $15,300 (mid-GS-6). The majority of these counselors had at least 3 years of relevant experience.

We keyed our review of staffing patterns at the centers to three times of the day -- daytime, evenings, and late night. Center-run shelters had a minimum of 2 or 3 staff on duty during the day and a majority had 6 to 9 on duty during weekdays. During evenings, all but one of the center-run shelters had at least 2 staff members

on duty. Half of the center-run shelters had at least 2 staff on duty late at night; half had only one.

During the week, the staffing patterns for host home centers was similar to those at center-run shelters, but coverage during weekends and late at night was less. Two host home centers had 1 staff member each on duty at these times, but one center only had staff on call during late night hours or weekends. It should be noted, of course, that even if staff were not on duty at host home centers, the host home parents were responsible for supervising the clients in their care.

All host home parents whom we interviewed reported that their main responsibilities were to provide clients with a good home, a place to sleep, food, and clean clothes. Host home parents were required to go through a licensing or screening process. Four centers paid host home parents a per diem of $7 to $13. Host parents at the remaining two centers did not receive compensation at one of these centers, clients were given money daily directly from the program to buy their meals.

In addition to relying on salaried staff and host home parents, all centers also relied on volunteer help. The majority of sites had 1 to 4 volunteers each week; most of the remaining sites had from 5 to 12. As we noted earlier, though, one site relied on 35 to 40 volunteers to perform individual and family counseling. At most sites, volunteers performed some counseling functions -- answering the hotline, crisis intervention, and co-counseling under supervision. Other duties frequently mentioned by directors

and volunteers included recreational activities, tutoring, and other non-counseling functions such as house maintenance, cooking, and providing transportation.

Summary of Center Environment

Our findings with regard to the center environment are as follows:

- The majority of centers seemed to be well-kept, clean and adequately (but not luxuriously) furnished.
- All center-run shelters but one met the required capacity of 20 children.
- Except for two centers in rural areas, centers could be reached by local public transportation.
- Except for one host home program, centers had written rules governing the client's behavior while in residence, including prohibitions against sexual contact, violence, drugs, alcohol, and possession of weapons and stealing.
- All centers required clients to obtain permission from the staff or be accompanied by an adult to leave the shelter.
- At the majority of centers, the number of paid counselors varied from 4 to 7, and the number of volunteer counselors varied from 1 to 6.
- Among paid counseling staff, 78 percent had at least a bachelor's degree and 26 percent had completed a graduate degree; Among volunteer counselors, 52 percent had at least a bachelor's degree; except for peer coun-

selors all counselors had at least a high school diploma or its equivalent.

- Salaries for paid counselors ranged from $7,400 to $15,300.
- All centers also relied on volunteer help, the majority with 1 to 4 volunteers each week, and most of the remaining having from 5 to 12.

## Perceptions of participants, service providers, and community members regarding program services and operations

### What were the perceptions of program strengths?

Strengths of the program were identified by respondents in our sample, and their perceptions naturally reflected the nature of their involvement with the centers. Several strengths were mentioned frequently and included (1) the existence of a shelter program, identified by youths and community members such as professional service providers, police and school personnel; (2) counseling and crisis intervention services, noted by youths, staff, and community members; (3) family involvement, reported by youths, parents, and staff; and (4) the positive characteristics of center staff, identified by youths and staff. Two other perceived strengths were that centers were accessible, mentioned by community members, and that the centers provided a cooling-off period, noted as useful by youth.

We examined perceptions of staff competence in more detail, finding that almost all the clients (96 percent) and all the

parents of former clients (96 percent) whom we interviewed said the staff were doing a good job. Parents noted in particular the positive efforts of the staff in helping their children and the ability of staff to communicate well with both youths and parents. The clients felt that their counselors were good listeners and helped them talk about their problems. Similarly 88 percent of the sources of referrals to the centers (professional providers, school personnel, and police) described the center staff as competent. (The remaining 12 percent did not feel they knew the staff well enough to judge.)

Almost all center directors and counselors (94 percent) believed that centers were attracting "the right kind" of staff. These people, along with host home parents and members of the boards of directors, most frequently mentioned the staff's interest in youth as the greatest asset of the staff. In particular, they cited the dedication, commitment, and caring attitude of the staff. Skills in crisis intervention and counseling were the second most frequently mentioned assets of the staff.

In order to provide more details regarding the views of service recipients, we also asked clients and parents of former clients what they would have done if the centers had not existed. Clients most frequently reported that they would have remained on the streets or possibly stayed with friends or relatives. The parents also believed their children would most likely have remained on the streets. The two other alternatives mentioned most frequently were that the youths would have become involved in the state social service or juvenile justice systems, and/or faced more drastic

possibilities such as suicide, drug involvement, or victimization on the streets. In fact, if the centers did not exist, only 7 percent of the clients and 2 percent of the parents of former clients believed that their family problems might have been resolved.

### What were the perceptions of program weaknesses?

Program weaknesses were also identified by some of our respondents. Inadequate funding was frequently mentioned as a weakness by professional service providers, school personnel, and center staff. Youths most frequently named the centers' rules and restrictions as the major weakness of the program. Other weaknesses mentioned included limited shelter capacity and not enough staff. In identifying weaknesses among the staff, center directors and counselors most frequently named the limited profesional experience and training of some staff members.

### What improvements were perceived as being needed?

We asked all 353 respondents to suggest ways in which the center in their area could be improved. Although 35 percent had no suggestions, the others frequently mentioned the following needed improvements: 1) expansion of outreach and prevention services, 2) more networking with other agencies, 3) physical improvements to the shelter, and 4) increased activities and training for clients during their stay at the center.

## Summary of Perceptions

Our findings with regard to client, staff and community percep-

tions about the program are generally favorable. We found that:

- Strengths identified by youths, parents of former clients, community members such as professional service providers, police and school personnel, and center staff included the existence of a shelter program, counseling and crisis intervention services, family involvement, and the positive characteristics of center staff.
- Weaknesses frequently mentioned by professional service providers, school personnel and center staff included inadequate funding, limited shelter capacity, not enough staff, and limited professional experience and training of some staff members.
- Youths most frequently reported that they would have remained on the streets or possibly stayed with friends or relatives if the centers had not existed.
- Only 7 percent of the clients, and 2 percent of the parents of former clients we interviewed believed that their family problems might have been resolved if the centers did not exist.
- Frequently mentioned suggestions for improving the centers were expansion of outreach and prevention services, more networking with other agencies, physical improvements to the shelter, and increased activities and training for clients during their stay at the center.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

From our review of 17 centers funded by the National Runaway

and Homeless Youth Program, we have generally favorable findings in the topic areas posed by this Subcommittee:

Who participates in the program?

In our view, the population served by the 17 centers we reviewed matched that targeted by the statute. That is, the centers served runaway and homeless youth, including those who had been neglected and/or physically and sexually abused, with psychotic, violent, drug-addicted, and recidivist youth referred elsewhere.

What are the services offered?

Program services appeared also to be those anticipated by the statute -- shelter, counseling, and family involvement, which, in particular, was well emphasized. However, aftercare was being performed in a more limited way.

What is the center environment?

We believe the staff, facilities, and procedures characterizing the center environment facilitated the achievement of program goals. As mandated, the centers we visited operated outside the law enforcement and juvenile justice system. Furthermore, center staff seemed to have developed the relationship with community service personnel (in law enforcement, social services, and juvenile justice) desired by the Congress.

What are the perceptions of participants, service providers, and community people?

Our examination of the perceptions of the 353 people interviewed indicated a favorable view of the importance of the Runaway and Homeless

Youth Program and the usefulness of the service delivery it performs.

General Findings

Overall findings related to these questions are that:

- The participant population appeared to be changing, with fewer self-referrals and more referrals by community service providers.
- There is some incidence of running away from the centers and arrests of clients in residence.
- Across the sites we visited, 50 percent of sheltered youth were reunited with their family or other relatives.
- The 15 day limit for shelter required by the program regulations was met, on the average, for all runaway clients and for most homeless clients, although at four sites the average length of stay for the homeless ranged from 25 to 32 days.
- Shelter periods extending beyond 15 days often reflected insufficient interim and long term placement facilities in the center's geographic area.

Finally, we believe that several areas of concern may warrant additional Congressional consideration. First, we found that the direct provision of aftercare services is still more the exception than the rule, despite the Congressional mandate. It is not clear, however, whether the limited aftercare is due to the need for more funds and staff, for example, or is the result of the lack of interest in continued participation by parents and youth.

Second, we believe more guidance is required from the Congress

regarding the relative emphasis to be placed on different types of outreach activities. Center staff engaged in a variety of outreach activities at the sites we visited (including speeches, school contacts, advertising and going out to the "streets" where runaway and homeless youths are likely to congregate.) We raise the following resource allocation questions:

- Should the centers' outreach efforts be directed toward obtaining referrals from social service agencies, juvenile justice authorities, schools and parents?
- Should the centers be concentrating more of their outreach efforts on contacting directly youths who are "at risk" living on the streets?

Third, the nature of youth activities while in residence at the center is an area of concern. Most days, youths engage in counseling, eat meals, work on placement, perform chores, and, in some instances, go to school. Unstructured time, however, especially on weekends, seemed to be a feature of life in the shelters. We believe that further consideration should be given to how much of this time should be left open for watching television and generally "hanging around" the shelters and how much of this time should be devoted to developing youths' coping and living skills and providing structured recreational activities.

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Mr. Chairman, this concludes our statement. We will be pleased to answer any questions that you or the other Subcommittee members may have.

## RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH CENTERS WE VISITED FOR THIS REVIEW

Janus House
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Newton-Wellesley-Weston-Needham
Multi Service Center, Inc.
Newton Centre, MA

Stepping Stone
Concord, NH

Child & Family Services
of New Hampshire
Manchester, NH

Voyage House, Inc.
Philadelphia, PA

Time Out
Huntington, W.VA

Sojourn
Mobile, AL

Miami Bridge
Miami, FL

Crosswinds
Merritt Island, FL

Crossroads
North Charleston, SC

Macoupin County Youth
Service Bureau
Carlinville, IL

Connecting Point
Toledo, OH

Family Connection
Houston, TX

Youth Shelter of Galveston
Galveston, TX

Youth Emergency Services, Inc.
University City, MO

Huckleberry House
San Francisco, CA

Tahoe Runaway and Youth
Services Project
So. Lake Tahoe, CA