



# 2015 Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment Final Report

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

---

In early 2015, researchers, community advocates, service providers, and students from across metro Atlanta joined together to plan and conduct the Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment (AYCNA). The goals of the project were to: 1) provide metro-Atlanta service providers, policymakers, and youth advocates practical information on the size, nature, and needs of the homeless, precariously housed, and runaway youth in our community; 2) collect information that can be used to develop and refine policies, programs, and interventions to help these youth in our community; and 3) encourage a community-wide dialogue about the needs and social determinants of youth homelessness.

Data were collected from May-July of 2015. Teams of outreach workers and service providers worked together with students, youth, and other trained volunteers to conduct sweeps of the metro area shelters and other street and community locations where homeless youth spend time and live. The study utilized sophisticated systematic capture-recapture field sampling methods to locate homeless youth in order to ensure that the sample accurately describes the current population of homeless youth in metro Atlanta. All homeless and runaway youth ages 14-25, who did not have a permanent stable residence of their own, and who were living independently without consistent parental or family support were eligible and encouraged to participate.

Every homeless youth encountered was invited to complete a brief 15-minute survey about their current and past experiences with homelessness, including factors that led to their becoming homeless. They also were asked about their personal and social background, health status, and contact with various health and social service systems. In order to make the youth feel comfortable and to protect them from potential harm, the data were collected anonymously. *No information was collected that could be used to identify or trace participants.* Youth received a \$10 gift card as a thank you for participating. This study was reviewed and overseen by the Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University (Study Number H15427). All of the data collected were aggregated and analyzed by the local university-based, interdisciplinary team of researchers and advanced undergraduate and graduate students.

This document is the official public report and provides an overview of the study methodology and key findings, including the research team's official estimates of the number of homeless youth in metro Atlanta as well as a description of key characteristics of the population derived from the survey data collected. Members of the research team are continuing to analyze and use the data to improve public and policymakers' understanding of youth homelessness and to guide community-efforts to improve services for these young people. Additional in-depth reports and public issue briefs will be made available to the public via our project website, ([www.atlantayouthcount.weebly.com](http://www.atlantayouthcount.weebly.com)), social media ([www.facebook.com/atlantayouthcount/](https://www.facebook.com/atlantayouthcount/)), and in the professional, scientific literature.

## KEY FINDINGS

---

- In a typical summer month in the Atlanta metro, we estimate that there are approximately 3,374 homeless and runaway youth living on the streets, in shelters, or in other precarious housing situations. This estimate is derived from several different statistical calculations, ranging from 1,516 to 3,833 and based on field research that included portions of Fulton, Cobb, Clayton, DeKalb, and Gwinnett counties and multiple municipalities.
- The vast majority of homeless youth surveyed were Black or African-American (71%), cisgender men (60.5%) between the ages of 20-25 (70.9%).
- Approximately half (52.2%) of homeless youth surveyed in Atlanta were born in the State of Georgia.
- Nearly one-third (31.5%) of homeless youth interviewed reported being in school.
- Overall, 28.2% of the homeless youth surveyed self-identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender (LGBT).
- The most common reasons youth found themselves homeless were financial problems (46.1%), job problems (32.3%), family violence/problems (28.2%), being kicked out of the home (24.2%), and housing problems (23.7%).
- Approximately 28% of Atlanta's homeless youth surveyed reported symptoms indicating the possibility of having a serious mental illness.
- The majority of the homeless youth in the survey use alcohol (58%) and/or marijuana or hashish (64%), and nearly two-thirds (62.5%) of those who use have a high likelihood of having a substance use disorder.
- Many homeless youth in the survey reported experiencing significant life traumas, including: exposure to neighborhood violence (78.4%), being robbed or having something stolen (60.5%), witnessing a parent going to jail or prison (50.7%), experiencing abuse as a child (42.2%), or been involved with the foster care (26.8%) or child welfare systems (19.2%).
- Only one-quarter (25.4%) of the homeless youth surveyed have a regular doctor or medical facility that they go to for health care, but more than half (59.8%) had gone to a hospital emergency room in the past year.
- The majority (88.5%) of homeless youth surveyed report having been tested for HIV infection.
- Nearly half (49.2%) of homeless youth surveyed indicated they had been sexually abused or been involved in paid sex activities either on their own or facilitated by someone.
- Homeless youth surveyed were most likely to turn to same age friends (65%), followed closely by adult friends (62%) when they want to talk to about important matters or seek help with a problem.
- Two-thirds (66.7%) of homeless youth surveyed were "dreamers" who demonstrated remarkable resilience and hope for the future, including big careers and independent success.

---

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

---

Eric R. Wright, PhD, Project Director, Professor of Sociology and Public Health, Georgia State University, Department of Sociology, P.O. Box 5020, 38 Peachtree Center Ave., Langdale Hall 1041, Atlanta, GA 30302-5020; Email: [ewright28@gsu.edu](mailto:ewright28@gsu.edu); Phone: (404-413-6527).