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ABSTRACT

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act authorizes funds under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 for community-based centers that serve the shelter needs of runaway or homeless youths. To examine the effectiveness of the programs and the characteristics of program participants, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) visited 17 runaway and homeless youth centers in 13 states to observe program operations, gather statistical information from the administrators, and to interview 353 persons associated with the centers including residents, parents of former residents, staff members, and community service personnel. The GAO's findings were generally favorable and indicated that the programs were operating as intended by the statute. The majority of the youths sheltered were from the immediate geographic area and were not psychotic, violent, or substance-abusers. Staff members estimated that 20 to 40 percent had been physically abused and 14 to 35 percent were victims of parental neglect. Services offered included family and individual counseling, and outreach activities. Less than 50 percent of the youths were counseled after leaving the center. The majority of the centers were clean, well-kept, and adequately furnished, and had written rules of behavior. The very fact of the program's existence was cited as its greatest strength. Inadequate funding was cited as the major weakness. Participants' suggestions for improvement included expansion of the outreach and prevention services, increased networking with other agencies, expansion of activities and training for youths, and enhancement of the physical condition of the shelters. The GAO suggested that more attention should be given to aftercare, outreach to high-risk youths on the street, and activities that develop coping and living skills. (JAC)

BY THE U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Report To The Chairman, Subcommittee On Human Resources Committee On Education And Labor House Of Representatives

Federally Supported Centers Provide Needed Services For Runaways And Homeless Youths

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act authorizes funds for centers that give temporary shelter to youths who have run away from home, left their homes permanently, or been definitively expelled by their families. Centers are to provide counseling and aftercare for youths and their families as well as to find appropriate living situations for the youths.

GAO's review of the operations and services of 17 of these centers across the country found that the youths who were served, the centers' environments, and the services that were provided were generally those that had been anticipated in the statute. Youths, parents, staff members, and community service personnel were in agreement that the program is important and that its services are useful.

GAO believes, however, that more guidance is required from the Secretary of Health and Human Services regarding the priorities that centers should give to aftercare services versus crisis intervention, to outreach efforts to youths who are at risk on the streets versus youths who are referred, and to activities that develop coping and living skills versus those that provide unstructured free time.

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

INSTITUTE FOR PROGRAM
EVALUATION

B-207593

The Honorable Ike Andrews
Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report summarizes the results of our review of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program authorized under title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended. As you requested, we examined the services offered by centers for runaways and homeless youths, the characteristics of the youths served, the environment of the centers, and perceptions of service and operations from youths, parents, staff, and community service people. As requested, we testified on our findings for your Subcommittee on May 5, 1982.

We sought comments on the report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The response concurs with our observations and is included in the report as appendix IV. As we discussed with your office, we are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, and the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Chelimsky
Director

GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
REPORT TO THE CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEDERALLY SUPPORTED CENTERS PROVIDE NEEDED SERVICES FOR RUNAWAYS AND HOMELESS YOUTHS

D I G E S T

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act authorizes funds under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 for community-based centers that serve the immediate shelter needs of youths who have run away from home or are homeless because they have permanently left home or have been definitively expelled from home by their families. Centers are to provide counseling and aftercare to youths and their families as well as to arrange appropriate living situations for the youths following the shelter period. Estimates of the number of runaways and homeless youths nationwide range from 733,000 to 1,300,000. The number of these youths has increased in recent years, and the likelihood that they will be victimized or become delinquent is a societal concern.

At the request of the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Committee on Education and Labor, GAO examined some of the local operations and delivery of services under the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program in order to answer the following questions:

--Who participates in the Program?

--What services does it offer?

--What is the environment of the centers?

--What do the youths and their families, the staff at the centers, and other service personnel in the communities think about the centers' services and operations?

To answer these questions, GAO visited 17 runaway and homeless youth centers in 13 states. GAO observed their program operations and collected statistical information from the administrators. GAO interviewed 353 persons who were associated with the centers, including youths who had resided or were then residing there, parents of former

residents, administrative and counseling staff members, and community service personnel--that is, people in the social service agencies, the juvenile justice system, the police departments, and the schools.

WHO WERE THE YOUTHS THE CENTERS SERVED?

The majority of the youths who were given shelter at the 17 centers had come from the immediate geographic area. They had been referred to a center by social service agencies, juvenile justice authorities, police, or school personnel and had been brought there by them or by parents or other relatives. They had not resided at that center before. (pp. 6-8)

Most of the centers did not admit psychotic, violent, and drug-addicted youths. At the majority of the centers, staff members' estimates of the percentage of their clients who had been physically abused were in the range of 20 to 40 percent. Their estimates of sexual abuse were in the range of 8 percent or less, and their estimates of those who had been victims of parental neglect were in the range of 14 to 35 percent. (pp. 6-7)

WHAT WERE THE SERVICES THE CENTERS OFFERED?

Center staff and community service personnel believed that the centers met the youths' most pressing needs by providing them with shelter and counseling and by helping their families get involved in solving their problems. All the centers engaged in a variety of outreach activities, including advertising and making speeches and school contacts, but only three conducted outreach activities on the streets where the runaways and homeless youths congregated. (pp. 9-11)

Centers are intended to be short-term residential facilities. Program regulations establish the maximum number of days of temporary shelter at 15. Runaways stayed an average of 15 days or less at all centers; homeless youths stayed an average of 15 days or less at all but 4 centers. These 4 reported an average length of stay for homeless youths ranging from 25 to 32 days. Most centers that reported long periods of residence for homeless youths especially noted the insuf-

ficiency of placement options for these youths. (pp. 9-13)

At all the centers, the youths typically participated weekly in at least three individual counseling sessions, one to four group counseling sessions, and one or two family counseling sessions, where their families were willing to participate. All the centers tried to make contact with parents or guardians within 24 hours of a youth's arrival, and the parents that GAO interviewed indicated that this policy was almost always carried out. (pp. 10-12)

Fifty percent of the youths who were given shelter at the centers in 1980 returned to their parents or other relatives. Although the staff members believed that counseling was the most pressing need that the youths had after the shelter period, no more than 50 percent were counseled after they left the centers. The problems in providing aftercare that were most frequently noted by staff were a lack of staff, families' refusing to participate, and youths' or families' leaving the area. (pp. 12-14)

WHAT WAS THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CENTERS?

The majority of the centers seemed to be well-kept, clean, and adequately furnished. All but one met the required capacity of 20 youths. All but one had written rules of behavior. Youths were required at all centers to obtain permission from the staff or be accompanied by an adult in order to leave the shelter for a few hours. At the majority of centers, they were required to abide by a daily schedule for waking, eating, attending counseling sessions, returning after being away, and going to bed. At the majority of the centers, youths had 3 to 4 hours of unstructured supervised time each day. Staff reported that the unstructured time facilitated a cooling-off period for the youths. They also believed that some of this time could have been better spent if staff and money were available for educating the youths, developing their skills, and taking them on outings. (pp. 15-16)

The majority of the centers had 4 to 7 paid and 1 to 6 volunteer counselors. Of the paid counselors, 78 percent had at least a bachelor's degree and 26 percent had completed graduate degrees. (pp. 17-18)

HOW DID THE PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVE THE CENTERS' SERVICES AND OPERATIONS?

The community service personnel whom GAO interviewed said that the very fact of the shelter program's existence was its greatest strength. The youths agreed. Other strengths mentioned were the centers' counseling and intervention services, family involvement, and dedicated and well-qualified staff. (pp. 19-20)

Community service staff and the staff at the centers identified inadequate funding as an important weakness in the program. (p. 20)

Participants' suggestions for improvement included the expansion of outreach and prevention services, of networking with other agencies, and of activities and training for youths and the enhancement of the physical condition of the shelters. (p. 20)

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

GAO's findings are generally favorable. The youths who were served by the centers that GAO reviewed appeared to be those who had been anticipated in the statute, and so did the services that the centers offered. The environment of the centers was consistent with the statute's goals. The 353 youths, parents, staff members, and community service personnel whom GAO interviewed seemed to have a favorable view of the importance of the program and the usefulness of its services. (p. 22)

GAO believes, however, that more guidance is required from the Secretary of Health and Human Services regarding the priorities that centers should give to aftercare services versus crisis intervention, to outreach efforts to youths who are at risk on the streets versus youths who are referred, and to activities that develop coping and living skills versus those that provide unstructured free time. (pp. 22-23)

HHS concurred with GAO's assessment of the Program and with GAO's concluding observations. (pp. 31-33)

Contents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended) authorizes funds for community-based programs that primarily serve the immediate needs of youths who have run away from home and their families, as well as youths who are homeless--that is, youths who have no home to which they can return. The regulations for the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program include, under "immediate needs," temporary shelter and counseling and aftercare services. The regulations define "runaway youths" as persons younger than 18 who absent themselves from their homes or legal residences without the permission of parents or legal guardians. "Homeless youths" are defined in the regulations as persons younger than 18 who need services because they are without shelter, supervision, and care.

According to the legislation, the Congress enacted the Program because it was particularly concerned about young people who, without resources or shelter, face the dangers of living on the street and create substantial law enforcement problems for the communities they live in and run to. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act authorizes grants to public and nonprofit private agencies and to coordinated networks of such agencies for the purpose of establishing locally controlled facilities and a national communications system. Funds are also authorized for the provision of technical assistance and short-term training to the members of the staff of State and local governments and nonprofit private agencies who are involved with the Program.

THE PROBLEM OF RUNAWAYS AND HOMELESS YOUTHS

While running away from home is a family problem that has venerable roots in American traditions, youths have many possible motivations for this behavior. For generations, young people have run away from their families because general conditions at home were intolerable, extending in some cases to pervasive neglect or abuse, or because specific family arguments, school-related troubles, or peer group problems triggered adolescent crises or because dreams of adventure suddenly became irresistible. More recently, for certain youths, running away has been part of a pattern of delinquent behavior or of mental or emotional disorder or both. Running away, therefore, reflects 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] It can be a one-time

[1]Lillian Ambrosino, Runaways (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. v.

thing or part of a pattern of repeated acts, a point in a normal development process or a signal of delinquent behavior.

In addition to being a family problem, running away has become a societal problem because of the increase in the number of runaway youths and the likelihood of their victimization and delinquent activity. Alone and without resources, often emotionally perturbed, runaways risk being victimized, becoming involved in prostitution, and being drawn into forms of delinquency that entail major costs to themselves, their families, their communities, and society.

Runaways are not the only youths who are at risk on the streets. "Pushouts" or "throwaways," youths who have been forced out by their families, have no place to return to and are indeed homeless. Like the runaways, some of them have been neglected or abused. Homeless youths, however, are in a circumstance that is different from that of many runaways. Reuniting the homeless with their families may be neither possible nor desirable. It may be much more difficult to find satisfactory solutions to their problems. The very fact of their homelessness may indicate a troubled family that does not want to take part in efforts to improve a youth's situation.

According to the national director of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, estimates of the number of runaways and homeless youths nationwide range between 733,000 and 1,300,000. These numbers must be considered in the context of current rates of reported juvenile crime, which continually increased between 1960 and 1976 and remain at a very high level. Insofar as running away and homelessness can be an immediate cause or a manifestation of delinquency and are likely to indicate a troubled family, many people believe that it is desirable to intervene, both to prevent the victimization and delinquency of youths and to help increase the stability of families.

The fact that the runaway and homeless youth problem is as ambiguous as it is argues for the use of certain criteria in specifying an intervention. For example, since running away can be a symptom of either normalcy or deviance, a program to cope with it should be flexible enough to encompass the spectrum of possible, greatly differing, appropriate activities, should be able to insure that the particular problems presented by each youth are carefully identified, and should be able to promote the best interests of not only the youths but also their families and society.

Both the high costs of involving the criminal justice system and the number of nondelinquent motives for running away point up the logic of locating a program outside the justice system while making it capable of triggering judicial, mental health, and other social service processes. Finally, the fact that some youths have been forced out of their homes by their families implies that places outside their homes must be made available for them and

that it may take longer to help them than it takes to help runaways. The legislation and its history indicate that the Congress considered these and other criteria when it passed the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

THE NATIONAL RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAM

In the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, the Congress specifically required that the system of temporary care it envisaged be developed outside the law enforcement and juvenile justice systems. It did this so that the problems of runaways and homeless youths would not swell the caseloads of police and judicial authorities, already overburdened with other tasks. By authorizing the funding of locally controlled, community-based facilities outside the juvenile justice system, the Congress also provided for informal cooling-off periods for youths and their families, so that strong feelings might subside with the least possible stigma and the smallest possible hiatus in their lives. Therefore, the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program 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 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The current authorization for the Program is $25 million, and, for fiscal years 1978 through 1981, Federal appropriations were $11 million annually. The National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program is thus a small effort involving only 3 to 6 percent of the Nation's estimated runaways and homeless youths and a much tinier percentage of the Nation's young people. Centers are, however, located throughout the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, so that the Program covers a great deal of territory. Further, although Program funding remained stationary between 1978 and 1981, the number of funded centers varied from 158 to 169, and the number of youths temporarily sheltered or served in some other way 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 youths increased from 119,000 to 133,000 in roughly the same period. The national 24-hour toll-free hotline assisted approximately 200,000 youths and their families in fiscal year 1981.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

We undertook our review at the request of the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Education and Labor Committee, who asked us to review local program operations and services of the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. (We have reprinted the original request in appendix I.) The Chairman asked us in particular to provide information on the following questions:

--Who participates in the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program?

--What services does it offer?

--What is the environment at the centers that the Program offers for sheltering youths and providing them with other services?

--What do the youths and their families, the staff at the centers, and the community service personnel think about the centers' services and operations?

To answer these questions, we conducted what we call a "program operations and delivery of services examination," or PODSE. This is a method of systematically collecting information from a planned sample of sites and different types of people associated with a public program with the purpose of quickly answering descriptive questions posed by the Congress. During January and February 1982, two-member teams of evaluators made 2-day visits to each of 17 runaway and homeless youth centers and conducted interviews with staff, youths, parents, and community service personnel associated with each center. We also collected statistical information on operations for program year 1980 (July 1, 1980, through June 30, 1981) from administrators at 16 of these centers. The one we omitted had been newly established.

In deciding which variables to use for choosing the sample of sites, we examined the literature on runaways and homeless youths, especially documents on the national evaluation of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program conducted by Berkeley Associates in 1977. We consulted with the congressional Subcommittee staff, interviewed HHS Program staff, and visited 3 runaway and homeless youth centers in the Washington, D.C., area. We then analyzed the applications for funds under the Program as our primary source of information on the centers that were funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

We selected the 17 sites in our review to exemplify the diversity in the Program. The differences in their characteristics could potentially affect local program operations. Among these characteristics were the location (the 17 sites were located in 13 States and 7 of the 10 HHS regions, and they represented a mixture of urban, rural, and suburban areas) and the residential facilities (some were center-run shelters, some were host home programs in which youths reside with local families, and some were a combination of both). Other characteristics whose differences were important were years in operation and years of Federal funding (distinguishing established from new centers), changes in and amounts of Federal funding, and major sources of non-Federal funds. Still other characteristics were organizational affiliation (whether free-standing or affiliated with a parent organization), the numbers of youths served, and the major sources of referral to centers. We excluded centers in New York City and Los Angeles because of related GAO work on teenage prostitution in those cities. (Appendix II is a list of the 17 sample sites.)

We conducted structured interviews with youths, parents of former residents, center staff, and community service personnel associated with each of the 17 centers in order to present the views of a wide spectrum of people who participated in the Program. We interviewed 71 youths who had resided or were then residing at the centers and 51 parents of former residents. The administrative and counseling staff whom we interviewed included 17 members of boards of directors, the 17 center directors and 17 head counselors, 55 counselors, 8 host home parents, and 16 volunteers. Community service personnel included 16 law enforcement officers, 26 school guidance counselors and other staff, and 59 social service, welfare, and other community workers who referred youths to the centers or provided referral services to them, including finding places for youths who did not return to their immediate families or other relatives. In all, we interviewed 353 participants in the Program, in person or by telephone. We obtained the names of the parents of the former residents and of school, police, and community service personnel from center administrators. We interviewed almost all the centers' staff and the youths residing at each center. Our review was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We began our work in October 1981, completed the analysis in 7 months, and presented our findings in May 1982. The present report documents that work.

REPORT OVERVIEW

In the five chapters that follow, we report our findings and conclusions. In chapter 2, we describe the characteristics of the youths who resided at the centers. In chapter 3, we discuss the services that the centers offered. In chapter 4, we present the environment of the centers. In chapter 5, we report the perceptions of the youths, family members, center staff, and community service personnel about the centers' services and operations. In chapter 6, we summarize the findings presented in chapters 2-5 and discuss issues that may warrant further consideration by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Four appendixes follow the text of the report. In appendix I, we reprint the congressional letter of request. In appendix II, we list the 17 runaway and homeless youth centers that we included in our review. In appendix III, we describe our procedures for selecting respondent groups, collecting information from them, and using that information to answer the study questions. In appendix IV, we reprint a letter from HHS commenting on a draft of the report.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUTHS SERVED BY THE CENTERS

In legislating the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, the Congress was particularly concerned about the young people who face the dangers of living on the street because they have run away or been expelled from their homes. In this chapter, we describe the youths who participated in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program at the 17 centers we reviewed. We discuss the criteria the centers used for admitting them, report on the distances they had run to reach the centers, and describe the incidence of abuse or neglect they had suffered. We also discuss the percentages of youths who had been sheltered at each of the centers before. Finally, we present the sources that referred youths and their families to the centers.

WHAT WERE THE CENTERS' ADMISSION CRITERIA?

All 17 centers we visited reported that they admitted youths immediately if a youth's age and situation made this decision appropriate. All accepted youths up to the age of 18. They differed on what minimum age they admitted--12 centers served youths younger than 13 while 4 set the minimum age at 13 and 1 set the minimum age at 14. The 71 youths in our interview sample ranged in age from 12 to 18, the majority being between 15 and 16 years old. Of the 2 18-year-olds, 1 was a current resident and 1 was a former resident.

Directors at all the centers reported that they did not admit various types of young people. The three most common categories of exclusion were youths with severe emotional problems (such as psychosis), drug addicts, and youths dangerous to themselves and others (because they were violent or suicidal). Staff at the centers reported that youths in these categories were referred to other agencies, but we do not have information on the services they received there.

HOW FAR DID YOUTHS RUN?

As the Congress recognized in 1980, many runaways and homeless youths stay within their immediate geographic area. In program year 1980, 72 percent of the 3,673 youths who were sheltered by the centers we visited were from the immediate geographic area of the centers. The centers we visited in Miami and San Francisco had the greatest percentages of out-of-State youths, but even there only 20 percent came from outside the State borders. Thus, even in Miami and San Francisco, which have the reputation of drawing runaways and homeless youths from far away, as many as 80 percent were from the immediate geographic area.

WHAT WAS THE INCIDENCE OF PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

Many runaways and homeless youths suffer from physical and sexual abuse. Staff estimates of the percentage of their clients who had been physically abused varied widely across the centers. At the majority of the centers, staff estimates of the incidence of physical abuse were in the range of 20 to 40 percent. Their estimates of the percentage of youths who had been sexually abused were lower but also varied widely. The majority put the estimated percentage at 8 percent or less.

In addition to suffering from physical and sexual abuse, runaways and homeless youths may be victims of neglect, not having been given adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, or the like. Staff estimates of the percentage of neglected youths at 11 of the centers were in the range of 14 to 35 percent. Estimates at the 6 others ranged from 50 to 100 percent.

HOW MANY YOUTHS HAD BEEN SHELTERED BEFORE?

Estimates of the percentage of youths who had been sheltered in 1980 and also sheltered at the same center before were as low as 1 percent at one center and as high as 40 percent at another. An estimated 20 percent of the youths at all 17 centers were repeat clients. Of the 71 youths we interviewed, 18 percent had previously been sheltered by the center in which they were then residing.

WHO REFERRED YOUTHS TO THE CENTERS?

Staff at almost all the centers we visited reported a change in the pattern of referrals over the past few years. They noted as major changes that there were fewer self-referrals and more referrals from social service agencies and school personnel. According to the professional service providers we interviewed, the youths they referred to the centers included both their own clients and other youths and parents who called to ask for assistance. All the providers referred youths for shelter, but only 33 percent said they referred youths for drop-in counseling as well. When shelters were full, professional service providers, police, and school personnel said they referred runaways and homeless youths most frequently to social service agencies, local emergency shelters, or juvenile detention facilities or else returned them to their parents.

According to staff, youths who referred themselves or were referred by family or friends accounted for the majority of the sheltered clients at only 2 of the centers we visited. (These referrals ranged from 15 to 85 percent across the sites.) In contrast, referrals by police, school personnel, and professional

service providers (social service agencies, juvenile justice authorities, and the like) accounted for the majority of the clients at 12 centers. (These referrals ranged from 25 to 85 percent across the sites.) At 2 centers no predominant pattern emerged. The other center was newly established.

When we interviewed the youths, we learned how they first found out about the centers and who, if anyone, accompanied them there. Fifty-one percent had learned about the centers from professional service providers, police, and school personnel. The remaining 49 percent had heard about them on radio or television, from a hotline, or from parents or friends. About 33 percent of the youths in our sample had actually been brought to a center by professional service providers, police, or school personnel, 28 percent had arrived by themselves, and 21 percent had been accompanied by parents or relatives. Fifteen percent had been brought by friends or staff, and the remaining 3 percent were not initially counseled at a center.

SUMMARY

All the 17 centers that we visited reported that they admitted youths immediately if a youth's age and situation made this decision appropriate, and they excluded psychotic, violent, and drug-addicted youths. Most youths sheltered at the centers were from the immediate geographic area. Estimates indicate that 20-40 percent had been physically abused, fewer than 8 percent had been sexually abused, and 14-35 percent had been victims of neglect. They tended not to have resided at the same center before, and at a majority of the centers more than half were referred by social service agencies, juvenile justice authorities, police, or school personnel.

CHAPTER 3

THE SERVICES THE CENTERS OFFERED

In this chapter, we describe the services that were provided to youths and their families at the centers we visited. We discuss in turn the basic services, the average length of time youths were sheltered, counseling services, the participation of families in the centers' activities, and what happened to clients after they left the shelters. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act emphasizes that youths' parents or relatives should be contacted if State law requires this, that children should be reunited with their families whenever possible, and that the resolution of family problems through counseling and other services should be encouraged.

WHAT SERVICES DID THE CENTERS PROVIDE?

Center staff and community service personnel believed that the centers met the most pressing needs youths had by providing them with shelter and counseling and by helping their families get involved in solving their problems whenever this was possible. Most of the centers also provided, directly or by referral, drop-in counseling, clothing, transportation, youth advocacy, medical assistance, legal counseling, vocational counseling, follow-up and aftercare services, placement services, and a 24-hour hotline. All the centers also engaged in a variety of outreach activities, including advertising and making speeches and school contacts. Staff at 3 centers reported that they conducted outreach activities on the streets where runaways and homeless youths congregated.

In 1980, the centers in our sample sheltered a total of 3,673 youths. The numbers differed greatly from center to center. Eight percent of the total were sheltered by the 3 host home programs included in the sample; the numbers of youths sheltered at these host homes were 19, 29, and 259. The remaining centers sheltered from 52 to 617 youths, the average being 259.

All centers provided meals. The sheltered youths we interviewed at 14 of the 17 centers reported receiving at least three meals a day. Youths at 2 centers said they received two meals a day. We interviewed only drop-in clients at the remaining site and they did not receive any meals.

In 1980, 14 centers served 2,435 drop-in clients who were not sheltered and 10,104 phone clients. The numbers of drop-ins at these centers ranged from 10 to 742, with an average of 174. Phone clients at these centers ranged in number from 62 to 4,066, with an average of 722.

WHAT WAS THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY?

Runaways and homeless youths were sheltered for varying lengths of time. The Program's regulations establish the maximum

number of days of temporary shelter at 15. The average length of stay for runaways ranged between 3 and 7 days at 8 of the centers we visited. At the 9 other centers, the average length of stay for runaways ranged between 8 and 15 days.

Homeless youths presented a different picture because their problems are different. Sixteen of the 17 centers served homeless youths in program year 1980. The average length of stay for the homeless youths ranged between 4 and 7 days at 4 of the centers. Eight centers reported an average length of stay in the range of 7.5 to 15 days.

The 4 other centers each reported an average length of stay for homeless youths in the range of 25 to 32 days. These 4 sites, located in urban and suburban areas of various size, did not share a common set of geographic characteristics. Staff there mentioned, as the most frequent reasons for the longer lengths of stay, few places for youths to go after the shelter period and long social-service and court-processing time.

WHAT COUNSELING SERVICES DID CLIENTS RECEIVE DURING THE SHELTER PERIOD?

According to the members of the counseling staff we interviewed, counseling had two main goals--improving youths' coping and living skills and reuniting them with their families whenever possible. Staff offered individual, group, and family counseling during the shelter period. Which services each client received depended on the severity of the problem, the length of the youth's stay, the number of other youths in residence, and the family's willingness to participate.

The staff at the 17 centers we visited reported that youths typically participated in at least three individual counseling sessions each week. At 11 centers, they reported that some participated in as many as seven or more individual counseling sessions each week.

Almost all the youths we interviewed reported receiving individual counseling during the shelter period. The majority had already participated in at least three counseling sessions when we interviewed them. Youths at 10 centers said that individual counseling was available as often as they needed it. However, six youths at 2 centers said they had not had individual counseling.

Group counseling was typically available. Only 2 centers did not offer it. The number of group counseling sessions in a typical week differed greatly, however. Eight centers conducted anywhere from one to four group sessions in a week; 7 conducted five or more.

Family counseling was available at all 17 sites. The staff reported that in a typical week they held at least one or two

family counseling sessions for every youth whose family was willing to participate.

HOW DID THE CENTERS INVOLVE FAMILIES?

In the legislation, the Congress placed particular emphasis on the centers' reuniting youths with their families and encouraging the resolution of family problems through counseling and other services. In fact, the centers attempted to involve families in a variety of ways. One center director told us that "A kid in trouble is a family in trouble. We do everything in our power to involve the family."

Family involvement began with a contact initiated by a center. The staff at almost all the centers reported that they attempted to obtain the parents' permission to shelter a young person. The policy at all the centers was to make contact with a parent or a guardian within 24 hours of a youth's arrival. Nine centers had the policy of calling within 3 hours. When we interviewed parents of former clients, 44 of the 51 parents recalled the time in which the centers had made contact with them, 43 reporting that the centers had told them within 24 hours that their children had arrived.

Although the initial call had no one format common to all the centers, we found that several topics were typical. Staff at the majority of the centers attempted to set up an appointment with families during the initial call. Many also told the parents that their children were safe, explained the program, and began exploring the problem from the parents' point of view.

Centers differed greatly in the percentage of families who participated in family counseling. The percentages ranged from 6 to 98 percent. Thirteen centers were in the range of 29 to 75 percent. Among the 51 parents whom we interviewed, 92 percent had met with center staff and 55 percent had met with center staff at least four times.

Family counseling obviously depends on both youths' and parents' or guardians' participating. One center director commented that a youth's willingness to participate in family counseling was a prerequisite to being sheltered. The staff at the majority of the centers reported that, during the shelter period, youths were basically interested in resolving their family difficulties. One head counselor noted that most youths "have a hunger to resolve family problems." About homeless youths and youths who have been abused, however, the staff reported that the interest in resolving family problems was more varied.

WHAT DID FAMILY COUNSELING CONSIST OF DURING THE SHELTER PERIOD?

At the centers we visited, family counseling during the shelter period included intervening in the crisis situation

(getting the problem under control and reducing the tension in an emotionally charged situation), identifying the problem, improving family communication, and making referrals for extended family counseling. Specific activities in family counseling included drawing up goals and contracts, getting everyone involved and talking to one another, and reuniting the family.

Fifteen of the 17 centers reported that staff typically met with families at least twice during the shelter period. Staff at 6 of these 15 centers typically met with them four or more times.

At all the centers in our sample, parents were able to call or visit their children. At the 6 sites where parents did not know the shelter or host home location, they were able to arrange a visit with their children at a "neutral" site or at home. At all the centers, except for one host home program, youths were able to call their parents at any time or with permission.

WHAT WAS THE INCIDENCE OF ARREST DURING THE SHELTER PERIOD?

We asked the directors and law enforcement personnel about whether youths were arrested, while residing at the centers, for offenses such as trespass, assault, shoplifting, car theft, and breaking and entering. At 14 of the 17 centers we visited, estimates of the average number of arrests ranged between 0 and 1 a year. At 7 of these 14 centers, no arrests were reported. At the 3 other centers, the police and directors differed in their estimates, citing as few as 1 or as many as 6 arrests a year.

WHERE WERE YOUTHS PLACED AFTER THE SHELTER PERIOD?

At all the centers we visited, staff reported that everyone--youths, families, center staff, and community service personnel--typically participated in placement decisions. At 5 centers, placements with the immediate family or other relatives ranged from 21 to 46 percent of the youths in 1980. At 8 centers, the range was 52 to 63 percent. The 4 other centers ranged from 70 to 97 percent. Fifty percent of all the youths who were sheltered at the 17 centers were placed with their immediate families or other relatives in 1980. The most frequently used alternative placements included foster homes, group homes, and independent living arrangements.

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

HOW MANY YOUTHS ACCEPTED PLACEMENT?

Not all youths waited for or accepted permanent placement. According to the staff, reasons for youths' prematurely leaving the centers included restrictive house rules, arguments with parents, and dissatisfaction with where they were to reside after leaving the centers. Staff at 11 centers reported that in 1980 10 percent or fewer of the youths left before placement could be made. At 3 other sites, this varied from 11 to 15 percent; at 2, it varied from 23 to 30 percent. One center was not in operation in 1980.

Of these figures, the highest, 30 percent, was reported by the center that sheltered 617 youths in 1980, the greatest number sheltered in all the sites we visited. The director of this center, which is located in a large urban community, noted that most of the youths who left the center before they were placed did not stay on the streets but went to live with friends in the area.

When youths left a center without permission, a parent or guardian was notified at all sites. Staff at 15 centers said they also notified the police. The majority also made contact with social workers, probation officers, and other community service personnel.

WHAT SERVICES WERE AVAILABLE AFTER THE SHELTER PERIOD?

Some youths who were reunited with their families or accepted alternative placement also received services from the centers after they left. "Follow-up" care included checking up on them to verify their safe arrival and calling them on the phone to determine their progress. Staff at 9 of the 17 centers estimated that at least 75 percent of their clients received these services. Six centers estimated that 50 percent or fewer of their clients received them.

Center staff also provided "aftercare" services, defined in the Program's regulations as being intended to alleviate the problems that contributed to youths' running away or being homeless. Staff at 12 of the centers we visited estimated that 50 percent or fewer of the youths who had resided there received these services. Staff at 3 sites, however, estimated that at least 75 percent received aftercare services from the staff.

Similarly, family participation in aftercare counseling was quite varied. Eight centers typically met with families two times or more after the shelter period, but 9 centers estimated that their meetings with families were limited to, at most, one session. Centers also referred youths to other agencies for aftercare, but we do not have information on how many availed themselves of these services.

Although center staff believed that the most pressing need youths have after the shelter period is for counseling, they reported numerous problems in providing it. The problems they reported most frequently were a lack of staff, families' refusing to participate, and youths' or families' leaving the area.

SUMMARY

The 17 centers that we visited met the three most pressing needs of the youths who came to them by giving them shelter and counseling and getting their families involved in solving their problems. The numbers of youths the centers sheltered in 1980 varied greatly, ranging from as few as 19 to as many as 617 in a total of 3,673. Excluding host home programs, the average for 14 centers was 259 youths. Average lengths of stay for runaways ranged from 3 to 15 days. Average lengths of stay for homeless youths varied from 4 to 15 days at all but 4 centers, each of which reported that homeless youths stayed 25 to 32 days on the average.

Individual and family counseling were available at all the centers; group counseling was available at most. All tried to make contact with parents or guardians within 24 hours of a youth's arrival, and interviews with parents indicated that this policy was carried out in almost all cases. Fifty percent of the youths who were sheltered by the centers in 1980 returned to their immediate families or other relatives. The average number of arrests for offenses committed by youths while in residence ranged from none to one a year at most of the centers.

In 1980, 10 percent or fewer of the youths who were sheltered at the majority of the centers left on their own before they were placed; at 2 centers, 23 to 30 percent left. According to staff, the youths' reasons for leaving included restrictive house rules, arguments with parents, and dissatisfaction with where they were to reside after leaving the centers.

Staff at the majority of the centers said there were not enough places for youths to go for the long term after the shelter period. Fewer than half of the youths received aftercare service from the centers, even though the Program's regulations set it forth as one of the immediate needs of runaways and homeless youths.

CHAPTER 4

THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CENTERS

The environment of a center that serves runaways and homeless youths is not restricted to physical characteristics such as the condition of the shelter, its capacity, and the ease of access to it by public transportation. People, patterns of behavior, and policies also contribute to a center's environment. As we discuss it here, environment includes the physical characteristics of the centers and the rules and procedures governing the behavior of the residents at them, the educational qualifications of the staff members, and staffing patterns throughout a typical week.

WHAT WERE THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CENTERS?

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

The centers also varied in the number of beds they had in a room. Ten centers had 2 to 8 beds in each sleeping room; 3 had no more than 2 beds in each room. One center had 8 beds in one bedroom and 16 in another. All the centers had limited space for youths to put their personal belongings, varying from one or two bureau drawers each to whole bureaus and shared closets.

Local public transportation was available to 15 of the 17 centers. The 2 other centers, in rural areas, were without local public transportation.

WHAT WERE THE CENTERS' RULES AND PROCEDURES?

With one exception, all the centers we visited had written rules governing the behavior of the youths while in residence. The exception had developed individual rules in consultation with host home parents. Rules were presented to youths when they arrived. Fourteen of the centers with written rules required them to sign an agreement that they would abide by the rules while they resided there.

The rules covered a variety of topics. Sexual contact was prohibited in all the centers that housed both boys and girls in the same facility. Other prohibitions included those against violence, drugs, alcohol, possession of weapons, and stealing.

At the majority of the centers, written rules also specified procedures for leaving the shelter, using the phone, receiving

visitors, and maintaining personal belongings. At all but one, resident youths had to perform daily chores; at that one, a host home program, youths were not permitted to remain with any host home family for more than one night. Youths at the majority of the centers were also required to abide by a daily schedule for waking, eating, attending counseling sessions, returning to the center after being away, and going to bed.

All the centers had specific procedures for youths who wanted to leave the shelter for a few hours. They required them to obtain permission from a staff member or be accompanied by an adult. Fourteen reported using one or more of the following methods to monitor youths while they were away from the shelter--verification of their whereabouts while they were away (calling the school, for example), adult supervision, and verification of where they had been when they returned (requiring them to produce ticket stubs, for example).

Almost all the centers reported imposing extra chores or restrictions (early bedtime, loss of phone privileges) for rules violations. At 8 centers, staff volunteered that they told youths to leave when these violations were serious or continued. Of the 65 sheltered clients we interviewed, 53 (82 percent) told us that the shelter rules were strictly enforced.

Some youths attended local schools while they resided at the shelters, but the attendance rates that the centers reported differed considerably. At 3 centers, 5 to 15 percent of the resident youths attended school; at 7 centers, 40 to 75 percent did; at 7 other centers, 80 to 100 percent did. Youths attended public schools at all the sites, but one also maintained a campus school.

In addition to requiring certain activities, staff allowed youths some free time. Staff estimates of unstructured time ranged from 2 to 8 hours a day, the differences depending on whether youths were in school. At the majority of the centers, the youths had 3 to 4 hours of unstructured but supervised time per day.

Staff reported that unstructured time had both its positive and its negative aspects. On the one hand, unstructured time enabled youths to be by themselves, to evaluate their own situations, and to feel some relief from the emotional stress in the living situations they had come from. On the other hand, staff believed that some of the unstructured time could have been better spent if staff and money were available for education, developing skills, and taking outings.

HOW WERE THE CENTERS ORGANIZED AND WHAT WERE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE STAFF MEMBERS?

The staff at a typical center included a director, a head counselor, one or more other counselors, house parents, volunteers,

and support personnel. Although the number of paid counselors varied from 2 to 11, the majority of centers had between 4 and 7. Of the 15 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 volunteers working in teams of one peer counselor and one adult counselor for each youth.

At the 17 centers we visited, 104 of the 105 paid counselors 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 graduate degrees.

Of the 52 volunteer counselors who were identified as those who interacted the most frequently with the youths, 52 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. One was a high school student. All the other volunteers had at least a high school diploma.

Counselors were paid annual salaries between $7,400 and $15,300. At the majority of the centers, counselors earned between $7,400 (less than U.S. Office of Personnel Management GS-1 starting salary) and $12,500 (comparable to a GS-4 salary). At 3 centers, counselors earned between $13,500 (GS-5) and $15,300 (mid-GS-6). The majority of the counselors had 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, evening, and late at night. Center-run shelters had at least 2 or 3 staff members on duty during the day; the majority had 6 to 9 on duty during weekdays. During the evening, 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 members on duty late at night; half had only one.

During the week, the staffing patterns for host home centers were similar to those at center-run shelters, but they differed during weekends and late at night, having fewer staff members on duty at those times. Two host home centers each had one staff member on duty on weekends and late at night, but one center had staff only on call during late night hours and on weekends. It should be noted, of course, that even when staff were not on duty at host home centers, the host home parents were responsible for supervising the youths in their care.

All host home parents whom we interviewed reported that their main responsibilities were to provide the youths with a good home, a place to sleep, food, and clean clothes. Host home parents were required to be licensed or go through a screening process. Four centers paid host home parents a per diem of $7 to $13. Host home parents at 2 other centers were not compensated, but at one of these centers youths were given money daily, directly from the program, to buy their meals.

In addition to relying on salaried staff and host home parents, all the centers relied on volunteer help. The majority of the centers had 1 to 4 volunteers each week; most of the others had from 5 to 12. As we noted earlier, though, one center relied on as many as 35 volunteer counselors to perform individual and family counseling. At most of the centers, volunteers did some counseling--answering the hotline, intervening in crisis situations, and co-counseling under supervision. Other duties that directors and volunteers mentioned frequently included recreational activities, tutoring, and the noncounseling functions of maintaining the house, cooking, and providing transportation.

SUMMARY

The majority of the centers we visited seemed to be well-kept, clean, and adequately furnished. All the center-run shelters but one met the required capacity of 20 youths. Except for 2 rural centers, all could be reached by local public transportation.

Except for one host home program, all the centers had written rules of behavior, including prohibitions against sexual contact, violence, drugs, alcohol, possession of weapons, and stealing. Youths were required at all centers to obtain permission from the staff or to be accompanied by an adult in order to leave for a few hours. At the majority, they were also required to abide by a daily schedule for waking, eating, attending counseling sessions, returning after being away, and going to bed. At the majority of the centers, youths had 3 to 4 hours of unstructured supervised time each day.

The majority of the centers had 4 to 7 paid and 1 to 6 volunteer counselors. Salaries ranged from $7,400 to $15,300. All except peer counselors had at least a high school diploma or its equivalent. Seventy-eight percent of paid counselors had at least a bachelor's degree; 26 percent had completed graduate degrees. Among volunteer counselors, 52 percent had at least a bachelor's degree.

CHAPTER 5

HOW YOUTHS, PARENTS, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE PEOPLE PERCEIVED THE CENTERS' SERVICES AND OPERATIONS

In this chapter, we describe how 353 persons who participated in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program saw the strengths and weaknesses of its operations and services and the improvements that were needed. The people we interviewed included youths who had resided before or who were then residing at the centers, parents of former residents, administrative and counseling staff, and law enforcement, social service, welfare, and school personnel who had working relationships with the centers.

WHAT WERE THE CENTERS' STRENGTHS?

The perceptions of the respondents in our sample naturally reflected the nature of their involvement with the centers. When asked, they mentioned several strengths of the centers frequently. These included the very existence of a shelter program, which the youths and community service staff such as professional service providers, police, and school personnel identified as the strongest point. Youths, staff, and community service personnel saw the counseling and crisis intervention services as a strength. Youths, parents, and staff thought that the family involvement was important, and the positive characteristics of the center staff, including their qualifications and dedication, were identified by youths and staff alike. Two other strengths that were noted were that the centers were accessible (mentioned by community service personnel) and that they allowed an emotional cooling-off period (mentioned by the youths).

We examined the perceptions of staff competence in more detail, finding that almost all the youths (96 percent) and almost all the parents of former residents (96 percent) whom we interviewed thought that 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 the staff to communicate well with both youths and adults. The youths felt that their counselors were good listeners who helped them talk about their problems. Similarly, 88 percent of the people whom we interviewed who had referred youths to the centers (that is, professional service providers, school personnel, and police) described the centers' staff members as competent. The remaining 12 percent reported that they did not know the staff well enough to judge.

Almost all the center directors and counselors (94 percent) believed that the centers were attracting "the right kind" of staff. These respondents, along with host home parents and members of the boards of directors whom we interviewed, most frequently mentioned the staff members' interest in the youths as

their greatest asset. In particular, they cited their dedication, commitment, and caring attitude. Their skills in crisis intervention and counseling were their second most frequently mentioned assets.

In order to provide more details on the views of people who received services, we asked the youths and the parents what they thought they would have done had the centers not existed. The youths most frequently said that they would have remained on the streets or possibly stayed with friends or relatives. The parents believed that their children would most likely have remained on the streets. The two other alternatives the youths and the parents mentioned frequently were that the youths would have become involved in the State social service or juvenile justice systems or faced more drastic possibilities, such as suicide, drugs, and victimization on the streets. In fact, only 7 percent of the youths and 2 percent of the parents we interviewed believed that their family problems would have been resolved without the help of the centers.

WHAT WERE THE CENTERS' WEAKNESSES?

Weaknesses of the centers were also identified by some of our respondents. Inadequate funding was mentioned frequently by the professional service providers, school personnel, and center staff. The youths most frequently named the centers' rules and restrictions as a weakness. Other weaknesses that were mentioned included the relatively small capacity of the shelters and too few staff. In identifying weaknesses among the staff themselves, the center directors and the counselors named most frequently the limited professional experience and training of some staff members.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS WERE NEEDED?

We asked all 353 respondents to suggest ways in which the centers in their areas could be improved. Although 35 percent had no suggestions, 65 percent recommended, among others things, expanding the outreach and prevention services, doing more networking with other agencies, making physical improvements to the shelters, and providing more activities and training for youths during their stay.

SUMMARY

Youths, parents of former residents, staff, and community service people such as professional service providers, police, and school personnel whom we interviewed were generally positive about the runaway and homeless youth centers in their area. Youths and community service personnel believed that the greatest strength of the centers was the fact of the shelter program's existence. Other strengths mentioned by those we interviewed were the counseling and crisis intervention services, family involvement, and dedicated and well-qualified staff.

The youths believed 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 youths and 2 percent of the parents we interviewed believed that their family problems would have been resolved without the help of the centers.

The centers' weaknesses, as mentioned frequently by professional service providers, school personnel, and center staff, included inadequate funding, limited shelter capacities, too few staff, and the limited professional experience and training of some staff members.

Suggestions for improvement included the expansion of outreach and prevention services, more networking with other agencies, physical changes to the shelters, and more activities and training for youths during their stay there.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

From our review of 17 centers funded by the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, we have generally favorable findings in the areas of inquiry posed by the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Committee on Education and Labor. Our summary of findings in the four areas is as follows.

WHO WERE THE PARTICIPANTS?

In our view, the population served by the 17 centers we reviewed matched that targeted by the statute. The centers served runaways and homeless youths. Among those they served were youths who had been neglected and physically and sexually abused. Psychotic, violent, and drug-addicted youths were referred elsewhere.

WHAT SERVICES WERE OFFERED?

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

WHAT WAS THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CENTERS?

We believe that the staff, facilities, and procedures of the centers were consistent with the statute's goals. As mandated, the centers that we visited operated outside the law enforcement and juvenile justice systems. Furthermore, the centers' staff members seemed to have developed the relationship with community service personnel (in law enforcement, social services, and juvenile justice) anticipated by the Congress.

WHAT DID THE PARTICIPANTS THINK ABOUT THE CENTERS?

The 353 people whom we interviewed generally expressed a belief in the importance of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program and in the usefulness of its services.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

We believe that several areas may warrant consideration. First, we found that the direct provision of aftercare services was still more the exception than the rule, despite the congressional mandate. It is not clear, however, whether the limited provision of aftercare resulted from the need for more funds and staff, for example, or the lack of interest in continued partici-

pation by parents and youths. The legislation requires applicants for funds to develop a plan for aftercare counseling but does not include any other requirements. In light of our findings, we believe that centers need more guidance regarding the relative importance they should place on services for residents and on aftercare services for former residents.

Second, we found that staff members engaged in a variety of outreach activities at the centers we visited. The majority of these activities included advertising and making speeches and school contacts. Although the staff at some of the centers did conduct outreach activities on the streets where the runaways and homeless youths congregated, this form of outreach was used only minimally. The legislation does not mandate specific types of outreach activities, but it does state the Congress' concern about young people who are without resources and live on the street. Perhaps centers should be concentrating more of their outreach efforts on directly reaching these youths. We believe that centers need more guidance regarding the relative emphasis they should place on the different types of outreach activities.

Third, we found that youths engaged in a variety of activities while they resided at the centers. Most days, youths participated in counseling sessions, ate meals, worked on finding places to go when they left the centers, performed chores, and in some instances went to school. However, unstructured time, especially on weekends, seemed to be a feature of life in the shelters. The youths seemed not to be spending much of their free time developing their coping and living skills and engaging in structured recreational activities. We believe that centers need more guidance regarding how much of the youths' time is to be spent on unstructured activities.

The Department of Health and Human Services read and commented on a draft of this report (the letter is reprinted as appendix IV). HHS concurs with our assessment of the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program and with the matters for consideration we have presented above.

APPENDIX I

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES
ROOM 2178, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

October 13, 1981

Honorable Charles A. Bowsher
Comptroller General of the
United States
General Accounting Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Bowsher:

The Subcommittee on Human Resources maintains a continuing interest in providing categorical funding for runaway and homeless youth through Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended. The spring reconciliation process required major efforts to maintain Runaway and Homeless Youth as a categorical program. Now that Title III has been reauthorized through 1984, it would be very helpful for us to have information in the spring of 1982 on how the program is operating at the local level.

Discussion between my Staff Director, Gordon Raley, and staff from your Institute of Program Evaluation indicated that the Institute would be able to provide us with service delivery information in time for our hearings. It would be helpful to the Subcommittee if the Institute could answer such questions as, what services are delivered? by whom? what are the perceptions of service providers, recipients, and other interested parties regarding program operations?

Our discussion with Institute staff indicated that the fast response methodology called PODSE which is currently under development would provide the information we need concerning the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. It would be most helpful to us if Institute staff would brief us on what they have learned no later than April 15, 1982 with a report to follow thereafter.

Sincerely,

Ike Andrews
Chairman

IA:slm

APPENDIX II

LIST OF SAMPLE SITES

This is a list of the 17 runaway and homeless youth centers that we visited in 7 of the 10 regions of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Janus House
Bridgeport, Conn.

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

Stepping Stone
Concord, N. H.

Child & Family Services
of New Hampshire
Manchester, N. H.

Voyage House, Inc.
Philadelphia, Pa.

Time Out
Huntington, W. Va.

Sojourn
Mobile, Ala.

Miami Bridge
Miami, Fla.

Crosswinds
Merritt Island, Fla.

Crossroads
North Charleston, S. C.

Macoupin County Youth
Service Bureau
Carlinville, Ill.

Connecting Point
Toledo, Ohio

Family Connection
Houston, Texas

Youth Shelter of
Galveston
Galveston, Texas

Youth Emergency
Services, Inc.
University City, Mo.

Huckleberry House
San Francisco, Calif.

Tahoe Runaway and
Youth Services
Project
South Lake Tahoe, Calif.

PROCEDURES WE USED FOR OBTAINING REPLICABLE FINDINGS

One of the main goals of our review was to employ methods of data collection and analysis that would allow other evaluators to study and replicate our findings at the same sites. Replicability helps establish the credibility of study findings and conclusions. In this appendix, we discuss the ways we selected respondents and gathered, analyzed, and presented data to help us achieve this goal.

RESPONDENT SELECTION

In order to answer the program operations and service delivery questions posed by the Chairman of the Subcommittee (Who participates in the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Program? What services does it offer? What is the environment of the centers? What do the youths and their families, the staff at the centers, and the community service personnel think about the centers' services and operations?), we had to collect information from a wide variety of people associated with each of the centers, recognizing that no one person would be knowledgeable about all aspects. Furthermore, to meet the goal of replicability of findings, we had to identify relatively homogeneous categories of people so that we would obtain comparable types of information from each of the centers in our sample.

In identifying the respondent groups who would have the information we needed, we went through a number of steps. We talked to congressional staff and Program officials in HHS. We made exploratory visits to several centers for runaway and homeless youths, and we reviewed the literature, particularly evaluations of the Program. In order to obtain multiple perspectives on program operations and service delivery, we identified the various types of people who were included among the administrative and counseling staff of the centers, the clients who were served, and the service people in the community who worked with the centers.

For our final respondent groups, we divided the administrative and counseling staff into six categories--members of the board of directors, center directors, head counselors, counselors, host home parents, and volunteers. We divided clients into two categories--youths who had resided or were then residing at the centers and parents of former residents. And we divided community and service personnel into four categories--law enforcers, school guidance counselors and other staff, and social service, welfare, and other community workers who referred youths to the centers and those who provided referral services to them.

In addition to identifying the respondent groups, we had to specify the number of respondents we wanted to include in each

APPENDIX III

group. Our general rule was to specify at least two respondents per group. We made exceptions where the center director and the head counselor were the only members of their groups at a center. For youths, parents, and counselors, we specified four members per group. Our use of guidelines for the type and number of respondents helped assure us that our evaluators would be able to collect comparable information at each center.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Having defined the appropriate respondent groups and the numbers of respondents within them, we developed twelve structured interview guides, one for each group. Wanting to make sure that we collected comparable data from all the centers, we developed the interview guides so that they would contain the specific questions and follow-up probes that the data collectors were to ask, and we conducted centralized staff training to teach the data collectors standard procedures to follow while collecting, recording, and analyzing the data.

We often included the same question or similar questions in several of these data collection instruments in order to obtain the perspectives of different respondent groups on a particular topic. Doing this also helped us guard against inaccurate and incomplete information by allowing us to cross-check the information we received from different respondents. The accompanying table illustrates our use of this procedure.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

In our data analysis, we identified the respondent groups who gave us the information we collected with our instruments. Identifying respondents is important for replicability. It is also necessary for interpreting the data.

Depending on the nature of the question, we summarized the frequencies of particular responses to what we asked at each center or from each respondent group. To analyze the responses at each center, we determined the prevailing viewpoints there and then summarized the information in terms of the proportion of the centers that evidenced them and the categories of respondents that had provided that kind of information. For example, we found (as we have noted in the report) that

- --directors at all the centers reported that they did not admit various types of young people;
- --at the majority of the centers, staff estimates of the incidence of physical abuse were in the range of 20 to 40 percent;
- --at 11 of the 17 centers we visited, directors and head counselors stated that placement options were insufficient within their geographic areas.

APPENDIX III

Five Examples of Questions Directed to Several Respondent Groups

Interview questions	Respondent groups* D	H	C	Y	P	L	O	S
What problems do you have in following up and providing aftercare to shelter clients?	x	x	x					
What is the most immediate need of a typical runaway? How is this need met?	x	x				x	x	x
What kinds of services do you think these adolescents and their families need? Does the center provide them?								
Suppose there were no places like this to come to, what would each of you have done?				x	x			
What do you think would happen if there were no programs like this for your child to go to?								
In a typical week, how many times will a young person be in individual counseling, group counseling, and family counseling?		x	x	x				
How often do you participate in counseling sessions that are just for you?								
How often do you have group counseling?								
What procedures do sheltered clients follow when they want to leave the shelter for a few hours?		x	x	x				
What do you do if you want to leave the house for a while?								

*D = Center director
H = Head counselor
C = Counselor
Y = Youths
P = Parents
L = Law enforcers
O = School personnel
S = Sources of referral

In analyzing our data by respondent groups, we identified common responses and then summarized the proportion of respondents who shared them. For example,

--almost all the youths we interviewed reported receiving individual counseling during the shelter period;

--among the 51 parents whom we interviewed, 92 percent had met with center staff and 55 percent had met with center staff at least four times;

--almost all the center directors and counselors (94 percent) believed that the centers were attracting "the right kind" of staff.

SUMMARY

In sum, we met our goal of producing comparable and replicable information by employing a number of methods. First, we carefully identified appropriate respondent groups. Second, we developed data collection instruments specifically tailored to them and to our data needs. Third, we trained staff in standard procedures to use for collecting, recording, and analyzing the data. Last, we analyzed and presented our information in terms of the proportion of centers or respondents evidencing particular characteristics and identified our information sources.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Office of Inspector General

Washington, D.C. 20201

JUL 29 1983

Mr. Richard L. Fogel
Director, Human Resources
Division
United States General
Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

The Secretary asked that I respond to your request for our comments on your draft of a proposed report "Federally Supported Centers Provide Needed Services for Runaways and Homeless Youths." The enclosed comments represent the tentative position of the Department and are subject to reevaluation when the final version of this report is received.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this draft report before its publication.

Sincerely yours,

Bryan Mitchell
For Richard P. Kusserow
Inspector General

Enclosure

COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ON THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE'S DRAFT REPORT, "FEDERALLY SUPPORTED CENTERS PROVIDE NEEDED SERVICES FOR RUNAWAYS AND HOMELESS YOUTHS" (GAO/IPE-83-7), DATED JUNE 15, 1983)

General Comments

The Department plans to address the three areas cited by GAO which warrant additional attention, namely: aftercare, outreach, and the management of youths' recreational-leisure time while residing at the centers. This effort will include the following:

-- Greater emphasis on fostering public awareness and forging collaboration between grantees and schools, PTAs, and other non-profit, private-sector community organizations in the areas of aftercare and outreach.

-- The use of discretionary resources for the identification and replication of exemplary models of aftercare, outreach, and the management of recreational-leisure time.

Matters for Consideration by the Secretary of Health and Human Services

o GAO believes that centers need more guidance regarding the relative importance they should place on services for residents and on aftercare services for former residents.

Department Comment

We concur in this assessment. While the provision of aftercare services is a statutory responsibility for runaway and homeless youth grantees, not all Title III grantees have been able to plan and to operate aftercare programs which meet the performance standards for Federally funded runaway and homeless youth centers.

As part of its funding of Runaway and Homeless Youth programs in FY 1983, the Department has competitively awarded, on a one-time only basis, 109 Strengthening Center grants. These grants are designed to strengthen the operations and programs of runaway and homeless youth centers in one of three principal areas: management operations, aftercare, and outreach services. Additionally, both existing and new grantees will be encouraged to emphasize aftercare service as a required and critical component of their programs.

- GAO believes that centers need more guidance regarding the relative emphasis they should place on use of the different types of outreach activities.

Department Comment

We agree with the need for centers to concentrate more effort on outreach activities directed at the runaway and homeless youth populations served. We will review the program's outreach performance standards and encourage grantees to develop more clearly defined outreach activities directed at runaway and homeless youths. The Congress in a continuing resolution passed in December, 1982 made specific reference to outreach services--and in the funding guidance for FY 1983 the program included outreach as an essential activity for Federally funded runaway and homeless youth centers.

- GAO believes that centers need more guidance regarding how much of youths' time is to be spent on unstructured activities.

Department Comment

We concur with the need for the centers to encourage more effective coping and living skills for youths during time periods which are unstructured. In this connection the program is considering the development of an additional performance standard under a general heading of recreational-leisure time. In 1983, the program will more closely examine center recreational-leisure time programs and exemplary programs will be identified for replication by other grantees.

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