



Little Hoover Commission

1303 J Street, Suite 270 • Sacramento, CA 95814 • (916) 445-2125

**RUNAWAY/HOMELESS YOUTHS:
CALIFORNIA'S EFFORTS TO RECYCLE
SOCIETY'S THROWAWAYS**

APRIL 1990



Little Hoover Commission

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When a runaway youth leaves home, many factors may push him out the door, some of his own making and some beyond his control. But what these runaway/homeless youths find waiting for them on the streets is a web of drugs, crime and pandering that may entangle their lives forever. Most cannot return home, even if they desire to; many never make connections that allow them to re-enter the mainstream. Instead, they remain on the streets as society's throwaways and outcasts.

In a 1987 review of a broad range of children's programs in California, the Little Hoover Commission noted that traditional social services are not oriented toward and do not reach the runaway/homeless youths. At that time, the state was just beginning to fund two two-year runaway/homeless youth pilot projects in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Based on the 1987 investigation, the Little Hoover Commission sponsored legislation in 1988 dropping the "pilot" designation and mandating the continuation of the two projects. This year, the Little Hoover Commission is following up its original report with an evaluation of the success of these two projects.

After a public hearing and extensive interviews with state and local officials, as well as runaway/homeless youth activists, the Little Hoover Commission has concluded that the projects have worked well. Not only have medical care, shelter, food and counseling been provided to youths in need, but also a significant success rate has been achieved in removing runaways from the streets permanently. In addition, these services have been provided efficiently and economically through the benefits of leveraging private funds with relatively small doses of public money.

Because of the success of these projects and evidence (which is detailed below) of a continuing unmet need for services for runaway/homeless youths, the Little Hoover Commission believes that the existing programs should be expanded, programs should be created elsewhere in the state and other steps should be taken to ensure a firm linkage between state social services and private runaway/homeless youth programs.

BACKGROUND

Four bills signed into law in 1984, 1985 and 1988 are the foundation of state services specifically keyed to runaway/homeless youths. Those bills were:

- * AB 3836 (Chapter 1612, Statutes of 1984)--Required preliminary studies of a toll-free hotline, compilation of statewide statistics and development of a statewide youth services directory.
- * AB 3075 (Chapter 1614, Statutes of 1984)--Established the California Runaway Hotline, a telephone referral service for runaways. From September 1986 through June 30, 1988, 7,000 callers to the hotline have been directed to service sources for shelter, food and other aid.
- * AB 1596 (Chapter 1445, Statutes of 1985)--The Homeless Youth Act of 1985 set up pilot projects in San Francisco and Los Angeles to develop a network of youth service agencies. In addition, the state was required to collect statistics on runaway youths from Santa Clara (San Jose) and San Diego counties.
- * SB 508 (Chapter 288, Statutes of 1988)--Extended the Homeless Youth Act permanently, deleting all references to the San Francisco and Los Angeles efforts as "pilot" programs.

Under these laws, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning (OCJP) has managed grants totalling \$1 million annually for runaway/homeless youths, tracked the results of the Los Angeles and San Francisco projects from their inception, and compiled statistics from Santa Clara and San Diego counties to assess the need for services in other urban areas.

In addition, OCJP has signaled its dedication to services for troubled youths in general by reorganizing its own structure in the past year to place nine separate program areas relating to children and youth in one branch. The Child Exploitation Branch manages 72 projects and their subcontractors, involving grants that totalled \$5,824,527 in fiscal year 1989-90. Among the projects are the runaway/homeless youth programs, the Pilot Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment Program, the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training Centers Program and the Child Abuse Treatment Program. This new branch allows OCJP staff to focus on inter-related areas and to share expertise among the various programs to achieve maximum results from each grant.

Magnitude of the Runaway Problem

As with the general population of homeless, it is difficult to get an accurate head count for runaway/homeless youths. It is a population that, by and large, tries to remain hidden from government agencies until some crisis forces an intervention, such as by a medical clinic or a police department.

A 1983 federal study estimated the nationwide runaway/homeless youth population at between 730,000 and 1.3 million. Because of a welcoming climate and its reputation as a mecca for youth, California--where one out of every nine Americans live--is believed to play host to a disproportionate share of the nation's runaways.

A 1985 UCLA study could only define a broad range for the number of runaway/homeless youths in California: 12,700 to 128,000. And a 1981 United Way Planning Council study of Los Angeles

County suggested there were 10,000 runaways in that county alone on any given day. Experts in general believe there may be between 20,000 and 25,000 homeless children in the state on any given day.

Although an accurate count of runaway/homeless youths may never be possible, an anticipated California Youth Authority study of the current need statewide for youth centers and youth shelters, as well as projected needs in 1995 and 2000, may provide the best assessment yet. Authorized under Chapter 1130 of the Statutes of 1989, the study is meant to provide guidance for the expenditure of \$25 million in Proposition 86 (1988) bond funds for youth centers and shelters. Preliminary findings are anticipated by mid-April, with the final results to be released early in 1991.

Who Are The Runaway/Homeless Youths?

It may be easy to think of runaways as incorrigible teenagers, persistent troublemakers, perhaps alcohol and drug abusers, who turn their backs on their families in search of adventure and "the good life." And this stereotype may well be true for some of the runaway/homeless population. But many of these children are actually products of abuse, neglect and extremely poor home environments.

Regardless of how an adolescent ends up on the street, the impact is almost always devastating in human terms. The Los Angeles County Task Force on Runaway and Homeless Youth concluded in its December 1988 report that of the 25 percent of runaway/homeless youths who end up as hard-core homeless street kids, three-quarters of them engage in some type of criminal activity and half in prostitution to provide themselves with a means of support. Many use drugs, are at high-risk for sexually transmitted diseases, are suicidal or mentally ill and suffer from other illnesses.

A complete picture of where these children in crisis come from is complex. The Los Angeles County Task Force began its report with thumbnail sketches of four Los Angeles area "throwaways:"

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

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

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

"Sally was 13 when she ran away from a chronically mentally ill mother and a sexually abusing father. After living on the streets for three years, she approached a local homeless shelter and stated, 'If someone doesn't help me now, I'm going to kill myself.'"

Members of the Little Hoover Commission, during the course of this investigation, walked the streets of Hollywood to see and talk to runaways. One memorable encounter was with a young frail-appearing girl who talked to Commissioners at the urging of one of the Commission's police

escorts who deals with runaways/homeless youths on his beat. Her voice quavered and her hands were shaking, clearly more from fright than cold, as she told Commissioners she was 18, she had run away from her home in Sacramento two years ago and that she wasn't going to sleep on the streets of Hollywood that night because her "fiance"--who had given her the dime-store ring that she worried around her finger--was waiting for her in his apartment.

So much of what she said was clearly mythical, as the beat patrolman pointed out after she was gone: She was about 16. Her "fiance" may have been a trick from the previous night. And her best option to avoid the December cold that night was probably another trick, if she could find one.

The only part that rang with truth and sincerity was when she said in a pleading and barely audible voice, never quite meeting anyone's eyes: Do what you can to help the kids on the street because they really need help. They need it badly.

While case histories, such as those above, flesh out dry compilations of figures, broad-based statistics are undoubtedly a much more reliable way of gauging the actual makeup of the runaway/homeless youth population--or at least that segment of the population that reaches out for help or accepts aid when it is offered. With the tracking that has been required under state law, agencies in San Francisco, Los Angeles County, San Diego County and Santa Clara County have been able to put together a picture of clients served.

The table on the following page shows demographic data, origin of the runaway/homeless youths, ethnicity and their status at intake for each of the four areas, as recorded by agencies offering emergency shelter and compiled in OCJP's 1988 annual report on the runaway/homeless programs. Definitions for the "status at intake" categories follow the table.

Runaway/Homeless Youth in Urban Areas

	<u>S.F.</u>	L.A.	<u>San Diego</u>	Santa Clara
<u>Demographics</u>				
Males	55%	42.5%	46.1%	40%
Females	45%	57.5%	53.9%	60%
9-11 years	1%	.6%	5.8%	16%
12-13 years	14%	10.3%	14.1%	23%
14-15 years	30%	38.5%	36.8%	36%
16-17 years	55%	50.6%	39.9%	25%
<u>Origin</u>				
In city/county	52%	63.4%	79.5%	94%
In state	20%	11.4%	4.7%	3%
Out-of-state	20%	22.0%	10.8%	1%
Mexico/Latin Amer.	6%	1.2%	1.7%	1%
Other	2%	2.0%	3.3%	0
<u>Ethnicity</u>				
Caucasian	40%	47.7%	55.4%	62%
Black	34%	27.7%	15.7%	7%
Hispanic	16%	17.6%	20.7%	22%
Other	10%	7.0%	8.2%	9%
<u>Status At Intake</u>				
Situational	30%	18.1%	47.4%	44%
Justifiable	8%	16.5%	6.4%	8%
Chronic	17%	10.5%	13.4%	8%
Chronic W/Abuse	5%	15.2%	1.4%	2%
Homeless	32%	22.3%	6.5%	9%
Homeless W/Abuse	3%	13.3%	2.0%	2%
Other	<u>5%</u>	4.0%	<u>22.9%</u>	27%

Definitions for status at intake are as follows:

- * Situational runaway--youths who run from issues/families that can be worked with.
- * Justifiable runaway--youths who run from unacceptable home environments due to such factors as abuse, neglect, etc.
- * Chronic runaway--youths who have run away more than three times.
- * Chronic w/abuse--same as above, but they have a history of abuse or neglect.
- * Homeless youth--single, undocumented migrant workers; or youths told to leave or induced to leave by parents or guardians; or failures of the mental health system who "drift;" or essentially emancipated youths who need to find a job/home; or youths who have been living on the streets two or more months.
- * Homeless youth w/abuse--same as above but with a history of abuse or neglect.
- * Other--pre-runaways (those who would have run away if intervention had not taken place) and undetermined.

As the table on the previous page indicates, the four areas deal with different types of runaways, with Los Angeles and San Francisco sharing certain statistical trends and San Jose and San Diego showing more traits in common.

For instance, all of the areas except San Francisco shelter a larger proportion of females (San Francisco's higher percentage of males may be due to the city's attraction, as a high-visibility area for homosexuals, for gay runaways). While the majority of runaways in San Francisco and Los Angeles are 16 and older, San Jose and San Diego see a much younger group of runaways, including a remarkable number in the 9 to 11 age ranking (16 percent and 5.8 percent, respectively).

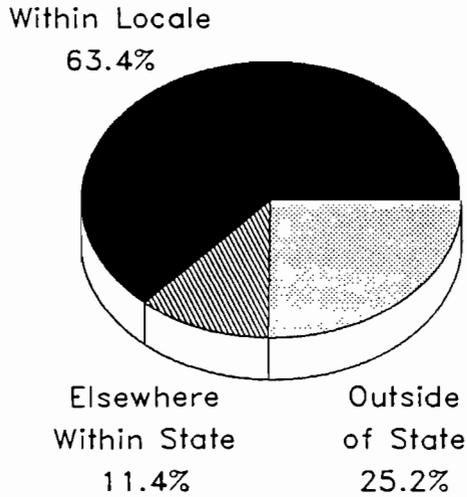
San Jose and San Diego see a largely white and Hispanic clientele, while the two larger cities deal mostly with whites and blacks. But in all four cases, the plurality of runaways are white.

One of the key differences between the large cities and the two smaller urban areas can be seen in the portion of the chart dealing with the runaways' status at intake. Both San Jose and San Diego view close to half of their clients (44 percent and 47.4 percent) as "situational:" youths who have run away from issues and families that can be worked with. San Francisco and Los Angeles, on the other hand, have a much higher proportion of children who have no situation they can be returned to (the categories of justifiable, chronic with abuse, homeless and homeless with abuse).

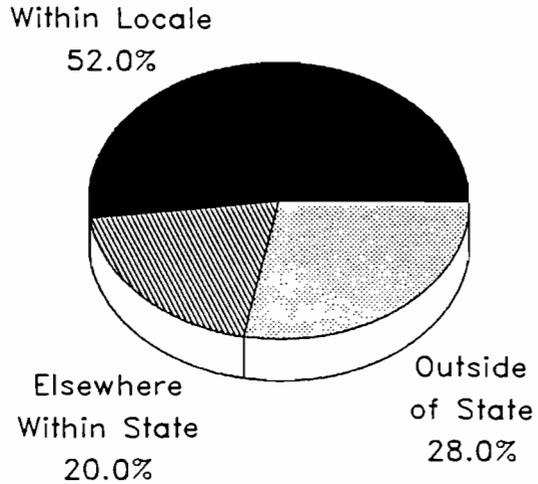
The charts on the next page demonstrate the differences in origins of the adolescents.

RUNAWAY/HOMELESS YOUTH: WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

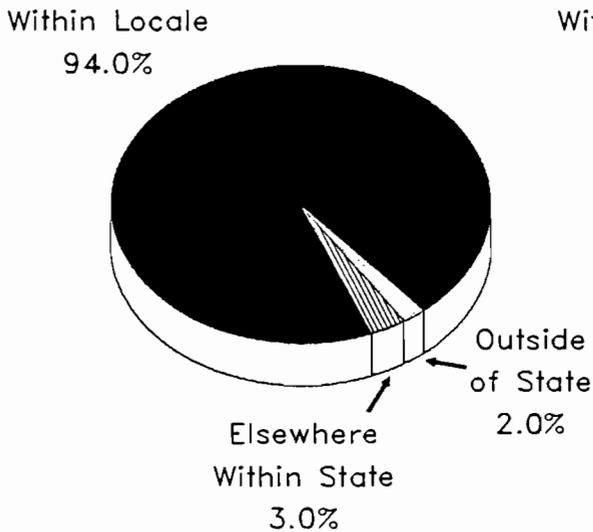
Los Angeles



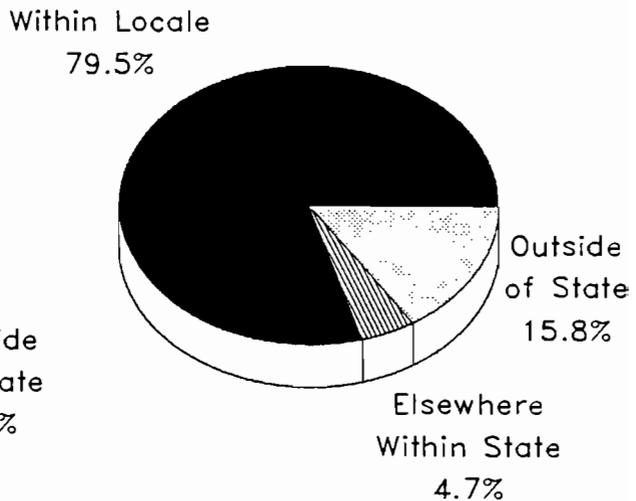
San Francisco



Santa Clara County



San Diego County



Source: Office of Criminal Justice Planning,
Homeless Youth Pilot Projects, November 1988

As the charts show, Santa Clara deals almost exclusively with adolescents who originally lived within the city or county (94 percent), and San Diego comes close to that with 79.5 percent. But while Los Angeles and San Francisco have bare majorities of their runaway/homeless youths from their own areas (50.6 percent and 55 percent), a substantial number are from out of the state or out of the country (25.2 percent and 28 percent). This is not unexpected since youths elsewhere in the nation probably don't accord San Diego and San Jose the same "California mecca" status that automatically is granted San Francisco and Los Angeles.

FINDINGS

Finding #1: THE SAN FRANCISCO AND LOS ANGELES RUNAWAY/HOMELESS YOUTH PROJECTS ARE WORKING WELL AND EFFICIENTLY, BUT DESPITE THEIR SUCCESS THE STATE'S RUNAWAY YOUTHS STILL HAVE UNMET NEEDS.

Faced with an unknown quantity of runaway/homeless youths and a vacuum of services both to meet their needs and reduce the problems they create on the streets, the state-funded projects in Los Angeles and San Francisco beginning in 1986 to see how these youth in crisis could be reached effectively and efficiently. By requiring detailed and accurate statistical monitoring by the projects, the state set up the basis for a quantitative and qualitative review.

Based on the track record compiled during the first three years of the projects, it is clear that the projects are successful in removing youths from the street and placing them in stable situations. But the same track record shows the inability of the present projects to cope with the increasing numbers of youth on the streets in Los Angeles and San Francisco. In addition, statistical evidence gathered in San Diego and Santa Clara counties and anecdotal data from other areas make it clear that other areas of the state are in need of these services.

Los Angeles and San Francisco Projects

Both the San Francisco and Los Angeles projects consist of networks of existing youth service agencies, with state funds primarily being used to enhance and interweave existing services, making them both more efficient and more effective.

The lead agency in San Francisco is Catholic Charities of San Francisco and the lead agency in Los Angeles is the Los Angeles Children's Hospital. Each year for the past three years, San Francisco has been granted \$368,000 and Los Angeles has received \$522,000 under the Office of Criminal Justice Planning grant procedures.

Both lead agencies extend the state funds through subcontracts to other organizations in their geographical areas that provide services to runaways. A key element in both programs is networking, with quarterly meetings bringing together not only the private organizations that provide services but also the local government agencies (police, social service departments) that share an interest in runaway/homeless youths.

The emphasis in both projects is on case management, with youths receiving a broad range of services (shelter, medical care, food, counseling and long-term coordination of care). Follow-up tracking allows the projects to assess results in the long term.

In its first two years of operation, San Francisco has reported placing 561 youths in long-term, stabilized situations. Their data indicates 31 percent were reunified with families, 30 percent were set up with jobs and independent living situations and another 14 percent were placed in other stable alternatives off the street, with the outcome for the other 25 percent unavailable.

Los Angeles reports placing 537 youths in permanent situations in its first 21 months. Of those, 24 percent were reunited with families, 11 percent were placed in group homes or foster care, 15 percent obtained jobs and independent living situations and 23 percent were placed in other stable environments. Overall, the Children's Hospital program says the shelter segment of their program

resulted in getting 70 percent of the youths they dealt with off the streets, while drop-in service centers succeeded with 40 percent. When Children's Hospital's High-Risk Youth Project tracked 227 of these youths for six months, 94 percent remained off the streets and in the stable situations that had been worked out for them.

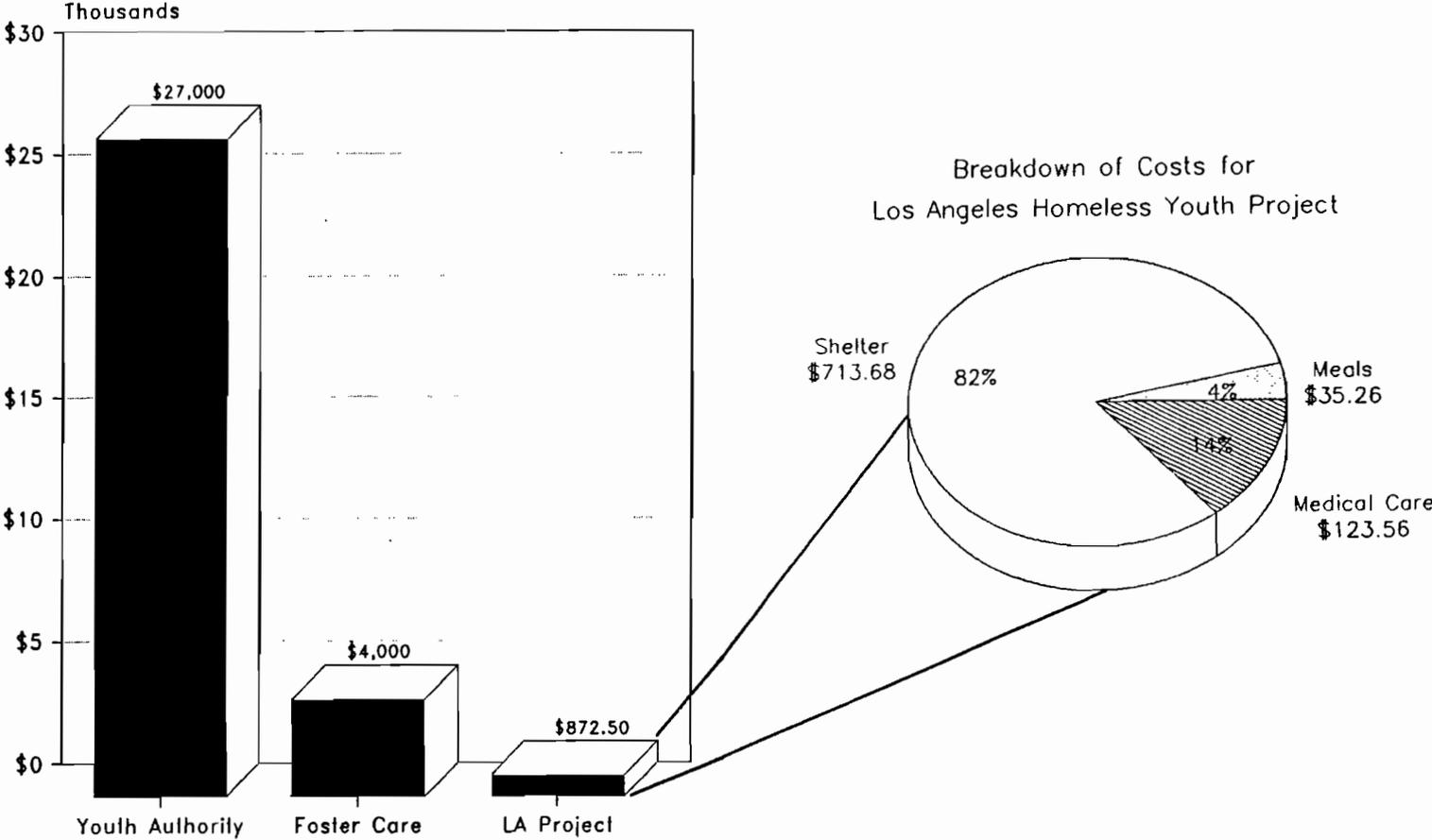
In the two years ending June 30, 1989, San Francisco and Los Angeles have compiled the following overall record:

SERVICE	SF	LA	TOTAL
Number contacted	8,798	9,730	18,528
Meals served	40,572	86,758	127,330
Number sheltered	2,262	3,164	5,426
Number medically screened	1,980	1,501	3,481
Number in long-term stabilization	561	537	1,098

The Los Angeles program reports that their \$552,000 grant was matched by \$376,200 in other funding, although no match was required. The chart on the next page details a program cost breakdown as estimated by the Los Angeles program.

MAINTAINING A RUNAWAY/HOMELESS YOUTH

1989 COSTS OF DIFFERENT PROGRAMS



Using general averages that may not actually reflect true costs on a case-by-case basis, the chart shows Los Angeles reports spending \$45.62 on each outreach contact, \$35.26 per client per year for meals, \$713.68 per client per year for shelter and \$123.56 per client per year for medical care.

Overall the Los Angeles project estimates \$872.50 in state funding provides shelter, food, counseling and medical care for one year for one runaway youth. This compares with a state cost of \$4,000 for custodial care or foster care, or \$27,000 a year for incarceration.

In addition to the quantitative results tabulated above, the Los Angeles program points out that progress in dealing with runaway/homeless youths can also be seen in other ways.

- * The Hollywood Police Department has reported a general decrease in crime and the savings of hundreds of hours of paperwork time because of their policy of delivering runaways to the project service agencies whenever possible rather than referring them to foster home placement.
- * The Los Angeles project has also been instrumental in pushing the Los Angeles County Department of Children's Services to set up the Runaway Adolescent Pilot Project (RAPP). This program has served to hook up youths with social services normally only provided to younger children in family settings, such as services for sexually abused or neglected children. San Francisco reports that similar efforts are under way in their local social service department.

In its November 1988 assessment on the overall accomplishments of the LA/SF projects, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning had the following comments:

"As shown in the profiles developed by the San Francisco and Los Angeles pilot projects, a vast majority of these homeless youths are not part of an extended family and are ineligible for most state programs that are aimed at homeless adults and families. The Homeless Youth Projects are the only state-funded programs that deal specifically with high-risk homeless youth."

"The Homeless Youth Act has been very successful in meeting the needs of homeless youth...After only two years, agencies involved in the success of the pilot projects have shown how the networking of services for homeless youths can provide an environment conducive to keeping young people involved in programs and discouraging them from returning to the streets."

The OCJP report ends with the statement that the need for services to runaway/homeless youths is continuing to increase and recommends the state continue to support Homeless Youth Projects.

Unmet Needs

As noted in the background above, there is no reliable count of the number of runaway/homeless youth. While this makes it difficult to assess the magnitude of services needed, some implications can be drawn from statistics compiled by Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Clara and San Diego. It should be kept in mind that these agencies were reporting the number of youths sheltered and served, as well as those who asked for help and had to be turned away. Therefore, the figures do not reflect those runaways who either wanted no assistance or who sought no help because of the belief it was not available.

Los Angeles: With 60 emergency shelter beds and 20 long-term stabilization beds available, 11 agencies that provide services as part of the High Risk Youth Project rendered the following services from October 1, 1986 through June 30, 1988 (a 21-month period):

Counseling and Case Management (four agencies): 15,554 served, 864 turned away.

Shelter (six agencies): 4,861 served, 5,784 turned away (80 percent of the turnaways were because shelters were full).

Medical Screening (one agency): 1,501 served, none turned away.

San Francisco: With 26 emergency shelter beds and 10 stabilization beds, four agencies that provide services as part of the San Francisco Homeless Youth Pilot Project rendered the following services from July 1, 1986 through June 30, 1988 (a two-year period):

Counseling and Case Management (one agency): 7,627 served, turnaways not available.

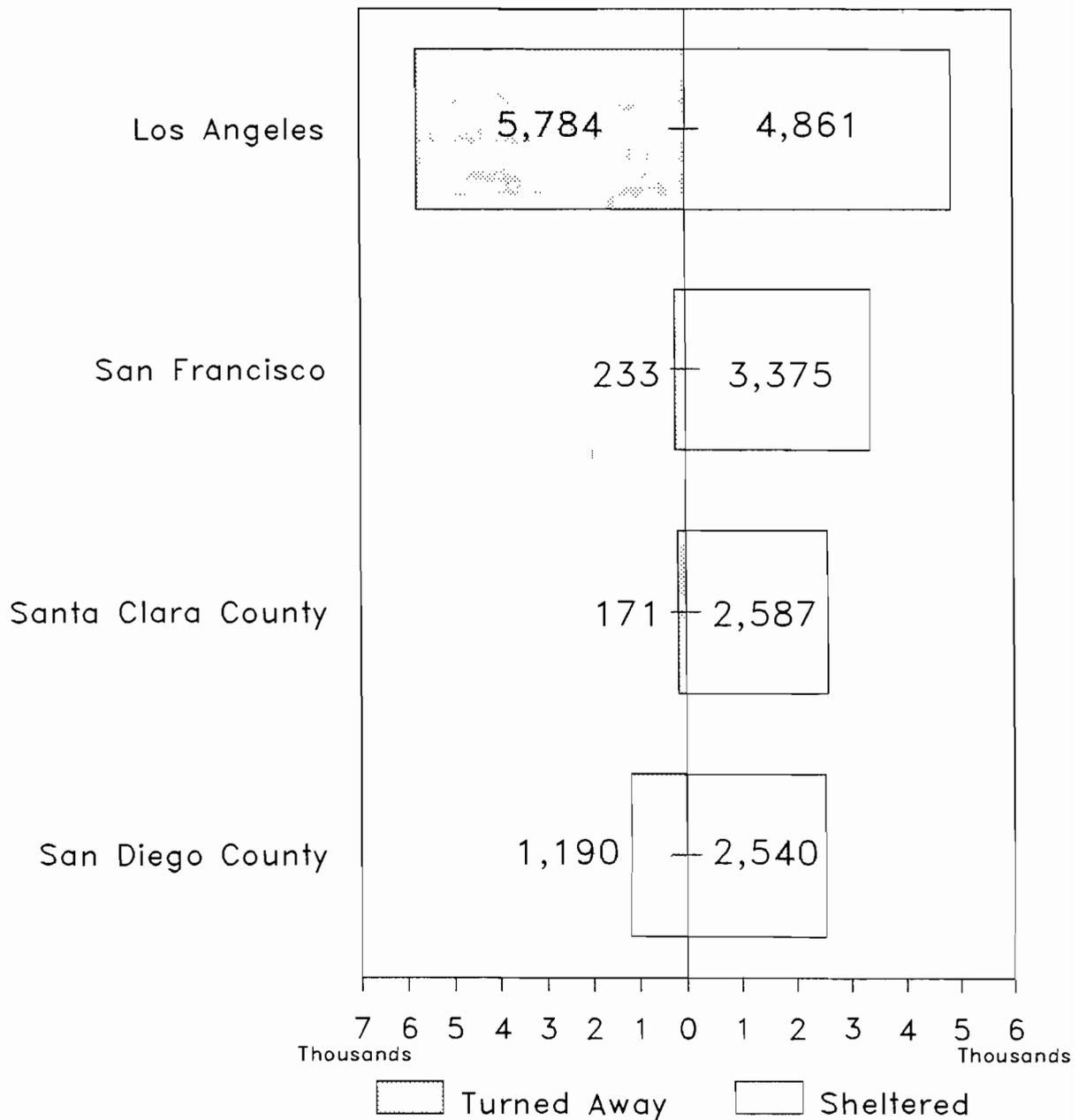
Shelter (three agencies): 3,375 served, 233 turned away (65 percent of the turnaways were because shelters were full).

Santa Clara: With 12 emergency beds and 12 long-term beds, five agencies submitted data showing they served 2,587 youths and turned away 171 from January 1, 1987 through December 31, 1987 (a one-year period).

San Diego: With 50 emergency beds and six long-term beds, six agencies submitted data showing they served 2,540 youths and turned away 1,190 from January 1, 1987 through December 31, 1987 (a one-year period).

The chart on the next page graphically shows the numbers being turned away from shelters in each area.

SHELTERING RUNAWAY/HOMELESS YOUTH: 1987-88 UNMET NEEDS



Source: Office of Criminal Justice Planning,
Homeless Youth Pilot Projects, November 1988

As the chart shows, each of these urban areas has demonstrated some level of need beyond the services they were able to provide.

The Little Hoover Commission also interviewed people and heard testimony from programs involved with runaway youths in other areas of the state. Several advocated the creation of state-coordinated and unfunded programs in each county because of the need for early intervention. Such intervention keeps the runaways closer to home where, depending on the family situation, they may have a better chance of reunification. Peter LaVallee, the director of Redwood Region Youth Service Bureau, which covers Humboldt and Trinity Counties, summed up a rural perspective at the Little Hoover Commission hearing in Los Angeles on December 13, 1989:

"When we introduced our project in Humboldt County initially, there was virtually no service for these kids and what has occurred in the last seven years is very interesting to me. We're now sheltering in a small rural area 200 to 250 youth per year. But more importantly than that we're getting a lot more kids that are calling on crisis lines just for services because there is access. In a small area, we're receiving 2,000 calls a year from kids and families. I believe that's a very significant finding in terms of numbers, but we still don't know that much about it."

LaVallee also addressed the need to develop different forms of service for rural areas that are not based on urban models:

"In the rural areas, I think we have to adopt different models that are cost-efficient. When I look at the population in Humboldt County, as an example, we need a shelter in the central populated area, but it would be cost ineffective to have shelters in the outlying areas. We need a model more adapted to foster homes, paying people a bed rate to provide immediate shelter for kids."

LaVallee said he believes the state needs to provide funding in every county to deal with at-risk youths, with models in place that are based suited for the various areas.

Those who work with youths in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas also favor the creation of programs elsewhere in the state as a means of stemming the tide of runaways who show up in their areas and place a strain on their services. As noted in the chart on page 5, a substantial portion of runaway/homeless youths in these two cities come from outside the immediate urban area.

In addition, both San Francisco and Los Angeles express a need for decentralizing services away from the core city (or in Los Angeles, the Hollywood area). They would like to avoid having small geographical areas become a mecca for these troubled adolescents simply because that's where the services are available. Police officials in both cities particularly stressed this need because of their desire to see crime reduced in areas where runaway/homeless youths now congregate.

The story told by both the statistics and the interviews is clear: Despite the success of the programs in Los Angeles and San Francisco, there are unmet needs and unserved populations of runaway/homeless youths there and elsewhere in the state.

Finding #2: IN ADDITION TO UNMET NEEDS IN VARIOUS GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, RUNAWAY YOUTHS ALSO FACE GAPS IN SERVICES THAT ARE CRITICAL IF THEY ARE TO BE WEANED FROM THE STREETS.

Although many programs (both private and public) are able to provide short-term shelter, counseling and other services for children in crisis, there are two types of services that are almost impossible to obtain for these youths: 1) alcohol and drug detoxification and 2) transitional and long-term housing.

Not one public or private-organization official who provided input to the Little Hoover Commission failed to bring up the urgent need for detoxification services. In his testimony submitted to the Commission, the OCJP director wrote the following:

In San Francisco, alcohol and marijuana use is reported by 85 percent of street youths, crack cocaine use is reported by 35 percent, and 15 percent of youth reported IV drug use. Homeless youth exchange sex, clothing, money and shelter for crack. Crack is the most serious drug problem facing these young people. It is very addictive and very available. Because of this, agencies serving the homeless youth in California express the need for treatment, intervention and prevention services for this segment of the population, which is not served by traditional programs. There is a demonstrated need for inpatient detoxification and treatment programs, long-term residential rehabilitation programs, self-help groups and outpatient treatment and counseling.

Drug treatment, intervention and prevention dollars are simply not available for homeless youth. This group of clients is predominately isolated, indigent and destitute. They also harbor a basic and profound mistrust of the service delivery systems set up to meet the needs of the adult homeless population; therefore, they do not seek out services provided to this group.

Currently, the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs is not providing treatment or intervention grants to serve homeless youth who have drug and alcohol problems. Some counties devote a portion of their treatment dollars to serving youth who are drug dependent and/or addicted; however, this funding is not specifically directed towards the homeless youth population.

The Los Angeles program reported that of those runaway/homeless youths who sought medical help for any type of problem, 52 percent were diagnosed as abusing drugs (including 35 percent engaging in intravenous drug use). The program termed inpatient treatment for homeless youth without health insurance as almost non-existent.

San Francisco officials also said the problem is acute in the Bay Area. Even if money were available to subsidize treatment, they said, programs for this segment of the population simply don't exist.

As noted by the OCJP director, the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs does not earmark funds for treatment of runaway/homeless youths. The department routinely acts as a funnel for state and federal dollars directed into county alcohol and drug programs. The department reports it has encouraged counties to consider the needs of these adolescents in drafting plans for spending program funds, but there has been no move to create mandatory or pilot programs.

Those who work with runaways and homeless youth point out that it is almost impossible to "dry out" these youths permanently in the short amount of time they may be allowed to stay in a temporary shelter. Once they return to the streets, the anesthetic effect drugs have to dull the hardships of the streets are almost irresistible. Without detoxification services, the cycle of street life is almost impossible to break.

Another gap in services revolves around the short-term nature of most available shelter, with many programs set up to handle only two-week to six-week stays. Youths with extensive problems, whether they are medical, psychological or social, rarely can be "cured" in such a short amount of time. In fact, many who work with these troubled children say it can take several months just to establish a level of trust and rapport that can begin to produce changed behavior patterns.

Through networking, programs can interconnect and see that street children move from shelter to shelter as their time limits expire. But the more productive solution, experts believe, is to have a continuum of services: short-term emergency shelters feeding into transitional programs that provide counseling and direction while housing the runaways and the homeless, which in turn would feed into long-term stabilization programs.

Those who work with this population believe there are unmet needs in all three categories of programs. But while emergency shelter space is increasing, structured transitional and long-term programs that youths can be referred to are almost non-existent.

On beyond the need for more geographical diversity of services, then, is a pressing need for expanded types of services: detoxification and transitional and long-term housing situations.

Finding #3: THE PROBATION SYSTEM DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE THE APPROPRIATE MECHANISM FOR HANDLING RUNAWAY/HOMELESS YOUTHS WHO HAVE COMMITTED NO CRIMES.

California's probation system is designed to deal with adults and juveniles involved in law violations. But since 1977, youths who have left home and who have committed no crimes have been decriminalized and deinstitutionalized. Their presence, as non-criminals, in a system designed to deal with criminals has not been productive for either the youths or the probation system, according to many observers.

In 1977, it was determined that runaway/homeless youths, truants and incorrigible minors could not be detained in juvenile halls or in California Youth Authority facilities in the absence of any crime. Instead, county probation departments, such as in Los Angeles, set up alternatives, including foster care placement programs.

The long-term goal of these programs was to combine foster care with counseling and crisis intervention. But in many counties the counseling component was never fully funded. Youths were neither compelled to stay where they were placed nor enticed to stay by services or counseling.

The result was a cycle of frustration. Police would pick up these young people, put them in foster care situations, and then find them back on the same streets within hours--sometimes faster than the police could complete required paperwork generated by the original pickup. The youths themselves learned no more than that there was one more "system" they could beat. And social service programs watched from the sidelines as the clientele they were set up to serve walked in the front door and out the back without ever connecting with available help.

The Los Angeles County Probation Department made the following comments to the Little Hoover Commission:

In response to limited funding, and in an attempt to clarify its proper role in the justice system, the Los Angeles County Probation Department has focused its activities and resources on dealing with adults and juveniles involved in law violations. In line with Probation's sanction-based orientation, we believe runaway and homeless youth who do not pose a threat to the community through illegal behavior should most appropriately be placed under the jurisdiction of Child Protective Services Agencies.

Accordingly, we have supported legislation to transfer responsibility for status offenders from probation departments to these other agencies. Simply put, the justice system is overburdened and cannot, and perhaps should not, devote resources to non-delinquent youth better served by these other organizations.

In interviews, police officials agreed that when resources are stretched thin, the natural tendency is to deal with those who are committing crimes and therefore endangering themselves and others. The unfortunate outcome of this policy, they noted, is that many youths remain on the street without help until they do commit a crime and move into the classification that probation departments were actually designed to deal with. The common opinion seemed to be that if a runaway/homeless youth spends a long enough time on the street, becoming a criminal at some level is almost inevitable.

Unfortunately, the solution to this structural problem is not clear cut. While the probation system is not particularly designed to handle non-criminals, the child protective services agencies in general are not designed to handle older adolescents who have left or been thrown out of their home environments. Most concentrate their services on young (under 12 years old) abused and neglected children, with a key goal being family reunification whenever possible. Runaways and homeless youths may have little in common with these younger children in terms of services needed and available options.

Another factor is that some state funding does flow to counties through probation departments for services to runaways. Any realignment of services for this population would also call for restructuring funding avenues, usually a touchy political task.

But in the final analysis, if the state's policy is to intervene with street children in a timely and constructive manner so that they can be brought off the streets and pushed back into the mainstream of life, then the probation system, with its emphasis on dealing with those who have committed crimes, would not appear to be the best mechanism for dealing with these youths.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings detailed above, the Little Hoover Commission makes the following recommendations:

- 1. The Governor and the Legislature should appropriate funds to support runaway/homeless youth programs based on the San Francisco/Los Angeles model in Santa Clara and San Diego Counties.**

In the 1988 legislation that gave the two urban pilot projects permanent status, the state adopted a policy of extending similar programs to other areas of the state as the need was demonstrated

and as funding became available. Both Santa Clara and San Diego Counties have compiled statistics to show the need for runaway services in their areas. (See page 5 for chart, as well as statistics cited on pages 9 and 10.) Without the advantages of state-funded networking and covering only five private agencies, Santa Clara County showed 2,587 youths served in the calendar year 1987, while 171 were turned away. Similarly, San Diego County that same year showed 2,540 youths served by six agencies, while 1,190 were turned away.

2. The Governor and the Legislature should appropriate additional funds to Los Angeles County and San Francisco for the specific purpose of developing shelters and other services outside of the Hollywood and downtown San Francisco areas.

Hollywood and downtown San Francisco now serve as meccas for runaway/homeless youths, drawing them from areas around the state as well as across the nation. While little can be done to diminish the glamour of these two areas, spreading out services and shelters would disperse these troubled adolescents locally and discourage the high crime rate that comes with the congregation of too many street youths.

3. The Governor and the Legislature should appropriate funds for runaway/homeless youth demonstration projects in a limited number of rural regions, to be determined through a Request-For-Proposal process under the Office of Criminal Justice Planning.

There is evidence that early intervention and services in rural areas would keep some runaways closer to home and relieve the burden now faced by the state's large urban areas. But these programs, covering wide-ranging geographical territories and sparse populations, would be expected to develop along different lines than the successful urban programs. Therefore, pilot projects in different regions of the state to develop rural-oriented techniques would be desirable.

4. The Governor and the Legislature should direct the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs to target runaway/homeless youths with drug abuse problems. In addition, funds should be appropriated through the Office of Criminal Justice Planning to existing runaway/homeless youth projects for detoxification program components.

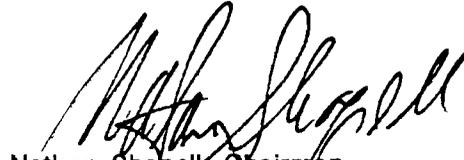
One key to weaning runaway/homeless youths from the street and placing them back in the mainstream is removing their dependence on alcohol and other drugs. Existing programs for adults either are not designed for adolescents, have no space in a timely manner or are too expensive for those who have no insurance.

5. The Governor and the Legislature should direct the Department of Social Services, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning and the California Youth Authority to institute a review of the framework under which runaway/homeless youths are handled, specifically with an eye to moving the responsibility for this population from the probation department to social service agencies.

Such a review would need to examine how state funds for runaway/homeless youths are now used by counties and the feasibility of providing the appropriate level of services through existing children's services networks, as well as the effect on the probation system.

The Little Hoover Commission urges the Governor and the Legislature to take immediate action on the problems and recommendations outlined in this report. While the Commission is pleased to see the development and monitoring of a project that has produced both efficient and effective handling of runaway/homeless youths, the fact remains that many these adolescents are left out in the cold. It is crucial that the state move ahead to replicate its successful projects wherever there is a demonstrated need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nathan Shapell", written in a cursive style.

Nathan Shapell, Chairman
Haig Mardikian, Vice Chairman
Senator Alfred Alquist
Mary Anne Chalker
Albert Gersten
Senator Milton Marks
Assemblywoman Gwen Moore
George Paras
Abraham Spiegel
Barbara Stone
Richard Terzian
Assemblyman Phillip Wyman

