

**Coconino Coalition for Children and Youth
Runaway and Homeless Youth
Report 2012**

OVERVIEW:

In response to a request from the Coconino County Board of Supervisors, Coconino Coalition for Children and Youth (CCC&Y) has compiled the following information from community members and agencies about the Runaway and/or Homeless Youth (RHY) population. CCC&Y conducted a 10 question, on-line survey to gain a better understanding of RHY in Coconino County and the resources available to support them. There were 28 individuals, representing 10 communities that responded to this survey, which was distributed to over 100 people county-wide.

It is imperative to recognize that the issue of RHY is **BROAD** and often directly correlates with other social, economic, behavioral and emotional problems. The causes and reasons for homelessness among children and youth vary in degree, culture, circumstance, and personal situation. Concluding that RHY are the result of one cause or selecting one strategy as a solution to the RHY population is not only impossible, but would be ineffective.

CCC&Y distributed the RHY survey link throughout a variety of Coconino County communities and agency networks, with particular attention directed towards social service providers, community members and those working directly with children, youth and families. The idea was to gain participation from those who have an accurate pulse on their community and who have experience or knowledge of the RHY population.

The results of the survey show overall concern for this unique population of young people and an overwhelming variety of circumstances which contribute to them being homeless, neglected and isolated.

SURVEY RESULTS:

Participants were asked to answer the following questions about CHILDREN and YOUTH, not their families. For the purposes of this survey Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) include children and youth ages 0 to 18.

- 1. What Coconino County community/communities are you most familiar with? (live and/or work, please check all that apply)**

	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Response Percent</u>
Page	9	32.14%
Tuba City	1	3.57%
Navajo Reservation	3	10.71%
Hopi Reservation	2	7.14%
Williams	4	14.29%
Leupp	2	7.14%
Fredonia	1	3.57%
Flagstaff	18	64.29%
Cameron	0	0.00%
Grand Canyon	2	7.14%
Jacob Lake	0	0.00%
Sedona	1	3.57%
Other (Please Specify)	0	0.00%
Total Answered Question		28
Skipped Question		0

2. In your opinion, what is the estimated number of RHY in your community?

	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Response Percent</u>
0-20	4	14.29%
21-75	11	39.29%
76-150	4	14.29%
150-400	4	14.29%
more than 400	5	17.86%
Total Answered Question		28
Skipped Question		0

Do you feel that this is a problem that needs to be addressed?

- (10) YES.
- Yes, specifically Navajo youth from the nearby reservation communities coming into Page for school and jobs.
- Absolutely, these children need access to services such as housing, counseling, food, clothing, job coaching, educational resources.

- Absolutely!
- We need to take care of our youth and make sure that they have what they need to have an education, food, and a roof over their head no matter the situation. They need our guidance and understanding.
- Definitely!! There are no resources. There are no emergency shelter homes.
- Yes. Our youth are neglected by parents not being able to be present due to work being out of state and/or out of town. Children end up with grandparents, aunts, cousins, in laws, etc. Many are shuffled between family members. Often times family members feel it is a burden as they stay for extended length of time.
- Yes, anywhere there is a homeless resident, I think it should be addressed.
- Yes, it's sad to see so many young people, who feel they are not wanted and have a hard time finding people who can help them.

3. In your Opinion, what are RHY running from or why are they homeless (Check All That Apply)

	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Response Percent</u>
Abuse in the Home	25	89.29%
Sexual Abuse in the Home	23	82.14%
Addiction in the Home	25	89.29%
Violence	24	85.71%
Neglect	24	85.71%
Hunger	13	46.43%
Incarcerated Parents	22	78.57%
Safety Concerns	18	64.29%
Fear	17	60.71%
Economic Strain Within the Family	21	75.00%
Asked to Leave/Kicked Out	27	96.43%
Aged Out of Foster Care	18	64.29%
Other	7	25.00%
Answered Question		28
Skipped Question		0

OTHER Responses:

- Mom picks newest boyfriend over her children and teenage sons leave as they are not welcome by the new boyfriend. Teenage daughters leave out of fear of being sexually assaulted.
- RHY come from every type of family. Not just poverty stricken homes.
- There are limited resources for families and/or agencies geared for the troubled youth in our community. Many do not have the resources, staff or facilities to help the youth from the reservation and/or those who live off the reservation. Often they are shuffled between both areas.
- The citizenship status of the youth or their parents may be pending, and if parents have been deported the children may be on their own. The entire family may be without a home as well.
- Not sure when referring to economic strain if this includes those children who are living with multiple families. Abuse also includes emotional.
- Parents are away for work reasons and leave the oldest child to raise the younger children, sometimes without any resources (money for food, water, electricity, etc.)

- All of these have affected many of the RHY.

4. In Your opinion, what are the commonalities, if any, in the RHY that you may see, encounter or work with?

- Most are asked to leave or cannot get along with other family members.
- They still have a pretty good head on their shoulders.
- Financially vulnerable, socially disconnected from society at large, insecure housing and food availability.
- Usually living with friends, family, going from one place to another.
- Economic strain, poverty leading to stress, abuse and neglect. Alcoholism and drug abuse is a common result which leads to more poverty and neglect.
- They are all scared and really don't want to be in the situation they are in. I believe that if offered in the right way, all will accept assistance in some form.
- Amazing resiliency.
- Substance abuse! Lack of behavioral health resources, or weak outreach/support.
- Substance abuse issues, difficult behaviors, trauma.
- Do not work directly with this population.
- Many have different factors contributing to their homelessness stemming from parents/self substance abuse, linked with violence, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, neglect (parents not knowing how to parent), family having tolerance for troubled youth who are in trouble with the law, etc. Many, many factors for our youth in Page.
- Basic needs are not being met.
- They receive support from friends to get by.
- Economic challenges faces by the family, which leads to instability and a lack of resources and or safety net. Typically some type of mental health, physical health, alcohol or drug related problem occurs amidst the family members.
- No income, no food, and no place to go.
- Lack of resources.
- Economic strain has been a huge, common issue.
- Lack of safe adult natural supports in their life.
- Creation of surrogate families.

5. Are there any AGENCIES or PROGRAMS in your community that SPECIFICALLY address RHY? If so, please list all that you know.

- Encompass Cuddles PRDV.

- I do know that Another Way tried to help in some cases, the school looks for resources to help. There really are not programs in our community specifically designed to address RHY. We do have a program recently started with CCPHSD that is offering classes on parenting teens.
- Yes.
- Northland Family Help Center, Open Inn.
- Catholic Social Services is the only one I know of, but not specific to RHY.
- (3) Northland Family Help Center.
- No.
- Northland Family Help and Affiliates, Coconino County Juvenile Court, Alternative Center (if still in operation).
- No, not here in Page.
- (2) Northland Family Help Center, Open Inn, Home Start at FUSD.
- Northland Family Help Center – Open Inn Inc, Runaway/Homeless Youth Program. FUSD Homeless liaisons and the Family Resource Center.
- HALO House, FUSD Home Start, Open Inn.
- Open in (Brandon is GREAT!!) and HALO House, Hope Cottage has worked with 17 and 18 year old females, a few 18 year old high school male students have stayed at Sunshine Rescue Mission and Flag Shelter Services, Royal Inn works more with families than unaccompanied youth and FUSD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program.
- Alternative Center, Guidance Center, United Way of Northern Arizona for referring agencies.
- None that I know of.
- At this moment, the PUSD tried to help locate resources for those students experiencing difficulty having a stable living environment. But they too are limited in resources. Nothing that is specific to RHY.
- Halo House Youth Shelter.
- Foster care services, Halo House, Northland Family Help Center, FUSD, Library Services (after school study areas, access to computers, etc) The Food Center, Shelter Services, The salvation Army, NARBHA, the Guidance Center, Juvenile Probation, United Way, Catholic Social Services, various churches and faith based organizations, safe have via NAIPTA Bus System. They may also be referred to programs such as Victim Witness, The Red Cross, Big Brothers-Big Sisters, North Country Health Care, The Poore Clinic, NACA and so on, once they are linked to resources.
- Not that I know of, but I know that there are places they can go to eat.
- The school does have a counselor and various people who try to help; but many of these students have trust issues.

- McKinney-Vento Program at the school district. Sometimes the County Community Services assists, but there has been a lack of funding in Williams and lack of case management.
- Alternatives Center, NFHC, TGC, CFSS, schools.

6. Where do RHY in your community obtain basic needs like food and shelter? Where do RHY in your community congregate?

- Soup Kitchen, there isn't really any place for them to go here in town.
- Their friends extended family, park, friend's homes.
- Some: Northland Family Help Center.
- Friends and acquaintances homes.
- Parks.
- With friend and friends families.
- Family Food Center, St. Mary's Food Bank, other food bank and they crash on sofas if not involved with an agency or foster care.
- Not sure.
- NFHC and Open Inn, Wheeler Park, downtown, forest.
- Cheap food from gas stations, Flagstaff Family Food Center, "couch surfing" with friends, pooling money to rent a motel, food banks, many youth sleep at party houses or camp out in the woods. RHY congregate at certain parks such as Wheeler Park, Bushmaster Park, the Skate Parks, maybe the Eastside Red. Center, shopping centers such as the older Wal-Mart parking lot.
- Many FUSD's high school age homeless youth "couch bounce" with friends' families or with relatives. FUSD's McKinney-Vento Program has a weekend food backpack program for homeless students. Brandon and James know where homeless youth, especially those not in school, congregate. [Northland Staff Members, Brandon Rawls and James Kennedy]
- Page AZ - one local church. On Navajo Reservation, NONE!
- Northland Family Help Center and congregate under bridges or in young adults apartments.
- Obtain basic needs by networking with other youth. Congregate in community parks.
- Family, clan homes. No Resources available.
- Halo House Youth Shelter.
- Friends, local agencies.
- If they are with their family, they may seek shelter at one of the shelters for women and children. They can obtain food via The Food Center, The Food Bank, Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul, FUSD free lunch programs, Food Not Bombs (free food at the park), and some of the churches/faith based organizations. The youth who are in their teens and who are RHY often gather in the parks, downtown, near and at NAU, the library (access to

computers, bathrooms, and other services), The Food Center in the forest near Buffalo park, etc.

- Churches.
- Schools, shelters.
- Usually they try to stick with friends and use their facilities without drawing attention to their homeless status.
- The Food Bank, most of our teens (HY) are couch surfing, staying with friends.
- Friends primarily, NFHC, Alternatives Center programs. Hang out in downtown/parks.
- Shelters, food banks/kitchens. Parks, rec centers, camp grounds, downtown.

7. Do RHY in your community hang out with homeless adults?

Other Responses:

- I do not know.
- I see them with their friends most of the time.
- They may.
- Many times RHY will travel from community to community to have a place to sleep and eat
- Sometimes this can occur when the RHY are with other family members, which may include a parent. It may also occur when free meals are offered to a wide group of people.
- Don't know.
- Not sure.
- Some are staying with a parent who is staying with a friend or relative.
- Sometimes.

8. What do you think are the biggest challenges facing RHY in your community

- Lack of funds.
- Not have services and people not knowing about them.
- Stereotypes, not fitting in, not able to work or continue school and parents not able to work.
- No special services.
- Programs to help reintegrate youth into the community, individual housing, employment and educational opportunities, etc.
- This is not an issue that is recognized in the community.
- Vulnerable to adult addicts, drug dealers, compromised ability to earn money legitimately.
- No services.

- Lack of a continuum of services and support. RHY are distrustful of the system therefore, there needs to be multiple ways to connect with youth that do not require full disclosure of personal information.
- Access to meaningful, long-term services and options for homelessness. There are a lot of agencies that do a little bit for homeless but major needs are not met.
- Lack of funding, information and resources.
- Safety (physical and emotional), shelter, food. Regarding accessing IDs and services, a youth under 18 cannot obtain an Arizona birth certificate which is needed to obtain a state ID which is needed to get a job. Unaccompanied youth have difficulty applying for food stamps and ACCCHS. If an RHY goes to HALO House, CPS is contacted about 23 hours if a parent does not pick up the child, so youth do not want to go to HALO as they do not want CPS involved.
- Kids start hanging out with drunks and start doing it themselves.
- RHY go unnoticed and many people do not see the problem that we have.
- Lack of outreach programs. Lack of education/knowledge of resources, community safety nets.
- Youth that age want independence and usual shelter rules serving children of all ages are very rigid.
- Resistance to be in contact with help-giving adults.
- Resources that will give them a sense of direction, i.e. mentors, a place to help become self sufficient (*as parents are not providing at the present moment), positive environment to teach healthy decision making, positive/healthy recreation places, (gym, successful teen center, community swimming pool, extensive summer/after school programming not specific to school, etc.
- Safety and meeting basic needs.
- Education, economic, assessing health care, substance abuse.
- It is often difficult for RHY to trust those who offer services and therefore, they may not access resources to ameliorate their situation. If they are trying to avoid being reunited with their family, due to abuse or other negative situation, they often actively stay “out of the system” and “on the move.” If they are facing alcohol or drug problems this naturally causes additional problem with clear thinking and healthy decisions. Resources maybe accessed by some youth, yet it may be difficult to find appropriate services and they also may need to contend with a waiting list.
- There is no focus program to help these homeless residents to help them become responsible and able to live and find a place of their own.
- Economy.
- It’s widely ignored.

- At times they do not ask for help. They are ashamed or if their parent is homeless too, they tell the children not to let anyone know about it. But, our community is small and word usually gets around.
- Safety, sustainable/lasting/comprehensive programs that could help them from under 18 till after 18. Absence of adult natural supports that are safe, health and sustainable.
- Finding appropriate housing.

9. What are the greatest gaps in RHY services in your community?

- Services for others.
- There are no services that I am aware of.
- Consistent mental health services. OR continuum of care services for mental health and sub abuse issues.
- A place to help them gain resources and self help services.
- Employment assistance and financial issues.
- Shelter for youth to attend schools here in Page.
- Health Care, long-term shelter, street-based services, bringing food and supplies to homeless youth.
- Lack of shelter.
- Laws – for a youth who wants to become stable, a minor cannot obtain an Arizona birth certificate which is needed to get a state ID which is needed to get a job. Homeless minors applying for food stamps and ACCCHS lack an address and IDs (SSN). Training programs for youth (e.g. Youth Build) are needed as homeless youth are typically behind on credits to graduate from high school and they eventually drop out.
- Do not know if there is anyone who helps drunks.
- Again, the community is unaware of the problem so unaware of resources to help.
- Cultural sensitivity, awareness, education, language/interpretation, and outreach programs that is available in the Navajo language.
- Shelter for that particular population.
- Lack of agency coordination, lack of resources for any youth in general in Page area, resources for parents and law enforcement for parents not being parents (giving them citations, penalties for not attending parent classes if child is on probation or has been detained through court system, etc.)
- Lack of connectedness.
- Identification, long-term supports – it may take years to complete HS/GED, deal with addiction issues, find job and stable home situation.
- There seems to be a gap in services for teens who are RHY. It is also difficult for organizations or programs to monitor the services for RHY, provide follow up care, or assist

with transition to additional services. This seems to be due partially because of the transient nature of this group.

- Hardly any resources in our town, no money, no jobs.
- Not knowing what services are available and how children can access them (which requires families).
- Shelters, counselors etc.
- Medical and dental assistance. Transportation. No bus service in town.
- Job placement services or live-in job programs. Resources that could allow youth to stay in their community while receiving housing, training, education, support etc. Many feel the need to move to Phx for such comprehensive services.
- No available housing for this population.

10. Other comments, concerns or questions about CHILDREN and YOUTH in your community:

- We need programs specifically geared towards prevention of RHY in working with families with pre-teens and teens.
 - It would be very nice to have some sort of resources specifically for them.
 - Children living in dysfunctional homes that don't have resources end up in detention and children whose families have some resources have access to drugs and alcohol and they use this as a means of coping.
 - The runaway/homeless youth population is vastly overlooked in this community. Just because there are not usually kids sleeping on the sidewalk doesn't mean that there aren't large numbers of youth that need help.
 - Teach/educate teens in high school or prior (6th-8th grades) about substance abuse, community resources (availability and locations), and suicide prevention programs and centers.
 - I imagine RHY are used to adults judging them as "bad" and thinking their situation is all their fault.
 - Page needs a family centered center/recreation center to provide activities year round for children and parents. A pool, fitness center, mentoring center/program, wellness center that provides holistic healing is needed!! Any kid of positive environment for families is needed.
 - Nation-wide, an increase in those who are homeless has been noted, I would encourage Coconino County and the state of AZ to look at "best practices" and solutions in order to address this situation locally, as well as collaborate with other Counties and States in addressing this issue when feasible.
 - Alcohol, drugs, and tutoring program for those students that need extra help with school. They sometimes don't have parents that support them.
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- Many youth in our community have “homes,” but because they are alone in their home, are not considered to be “homeless,” and technically are not “neglected” because there are family members around who help.
- I have worked with McKinney-Vento at school for the past 8 years. During the first two years the youth who qualified increased significantly mainly due to education of staff who were better able to identify these youth and refer them to the Homeless Liaison at the school. The numbers during the next couple of years somewhat leveled off. Then about 3 years ago, due to the economic downturn, those numbers once again increased significantly. Many people lost jobs and homes. Some parents had to move with their children from Phoenix to Williams and stay with friends and relatives because they had little or no income. This can cause a strain (economically and mentally) on both families. Then I found that those families would move again in the hopes of improving their living situation. As you can see, the economy is a huge determining factor in the living stability of families with children and youth.

CONCLUSIONS:

- There are some services available in Flagstaff- but limited to no resources in other communities.
- Responses from the community of Page show an outcry for a safe place for kids and families to congregate and hang out. Though all rural communities have this need.
- RHY are not often "on the radar," and when identified, it's usually by their choice, sometimes simply for survival. (when they are in need of basic supports, i.e. food, water, shelter)
- Many RHY are accessing their supports from friends and friend's families. It's good that they have access to this support, but it can cause additional stress on those families and the community overall.
- Substance abuse is a common theme both as a reason for a person becoming RHY (substance abuse in the home) and is often a result of being RHY (young person turns to substance abuse for coping and to self medicate).
- RHY are extremely adverse to getting identified and labeled as homeless due to stigmas and being ultimately put into the “system” - they fear being controlled, having to move, being told what to do and being restricted.
- Services in outlying areas tend to focus on basic needs, food, water etc. but provide little or no support for emotional well-being or things like staying in school etc.
- “Asked to leave or kicked out” was the number one reason for RHY. This requires further research and discussion and seems to be its own BROAD issue.
- The severity of the problem is overlooked. (Eleven selected 20-75 as the estimated number of RHY in their community. A stark contrast to the data presented from local school districts.) RHY is a far bigger problem than communities believe or perceive it to be.

NEXT STEPS:

- Increase PR/Awareness around this issue - such as social media, letters to the editor, events, etc. CCC&Y has capacity to write letters to the editor and participate/organize ongoing discussions.
- Request media support to post articles recognizing National Homeless Youth Awareness and Runaway Prevention Month (November) in the local papers of Williams, Page, Tuba City and Flagstaff. Coordination efforts can be provided by CCC&Y with support from local community advocates and local leadership in those communities.
- Can we fill the gaps of our current continuum of services cheaply, with better coordination, or using no money at all?
- Is there a way to integrate services and supports specific to RHY into existing services, as a more cost efficient alternative?
- Can/should we sketch out a project around this issue in preparation for a grant that may come available?
- Are there other agencies or stakeholders that should have a voice in this discussion?
- What is the realistic capacity of the group sitting at the table?
- What is the BOS willing to commit in support? What action steps would the BOS like to see and what are they recommendations for moving forward? The BOS's active participation in staying informed, attending RHY related events, and helping promote awareness throughout County communities would be a positive next step.