

# 2015 NYC Youth Count Report

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## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR INNOVATION THROUGH DATA INTELLIGENCE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Stability in youths' lives is critical for youth to thrive and successfully transition to adulthood. Unfortunately, many youth experience homelessness and housing instability at some point during their young adulthood, but they can be difficult to locate or identify. Therefore, estimates of this population vary widely. Increasing attention is being given to identifying methods to better estimate this population, including enhancing existing count methodologies to be more sensitive to the characteristics of homeless youth.

Each year, New York City conducts a point-in-time (PIT) count of homeless adults, families, and youth based on the guidelines put forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Prior to 2015, this count has comprised two parts: 1) the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) which is designed to count unsheltered individuals and 2) a compilation of the censuses of transitional housing and emergency shelters across New York City which is designed to count individuals who are sheltered by City agencies or other organizations.

Numerous stakeholders recognized that unsheltered youth may not be captured completely in the HOPE count because they have different characteristics and behaviors than older adults experiencing homelessness. Therefore, New York City agencies, runaway and homeless youth service providers, and advocates planned and implemented a supplemental youth count that focused specifically on counting unsheltered youth to be included in the annual PIT count in NYC. The collaboration among these agencies, providers, and advocates resulted in an improved methodology for the PIT count.

The youth count took place from Tuesday, February 10 to Friday, February 13, 2015. During this time, staff at the 33 participating programs, which included runaway and homeless youth drop-in centers, outreach teams, shelters, and supportive housing sites asked every client who came into the program or were encountered during outreach to complete a short survey, which included a question about where they spent the night on Monday, February 9, the same date as HOPE and the shelter census.

Overall, 857 surveys from the count were analyzed. Of these, 68 were considered unsheltered under HUD's definition, while the remaining 789 were in a variety of other living situations, including living in a parent's or relative's apartment, couch surfing, or staying at a shelter or drop-in center.

In conjunction with the existing HOPE count, the data suggest an overall point-in-time estimate of 188 unsheltered youth under age 25, according to HUD definitions. An additional 1,518 unaccompanied youth were counted via the shelter census tabulations for a total of 1,706 unaccompanied homeless youth on the night of the point-in-time count. Youth in parenting households were also counted via the shelter census tabulations, resulting in an

## ..... EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....

additional 2,114 youth parents and 2,539 children with parenting youth. Taken together, 6,359 youth under the age of 25 years were counted on the night of the point-in-time count (not including children under the age of 25 in shelters with their adult parents).

The 2015 youth count laid a solid foundation for future youth counts to build upon. The spirit of collaboration and participation among City agencies, providers, and advocates resulted in a methodology that improved upon prior PIT counts and can continue to be enhanced to further understand homeless and unstably housed youth. Challenges remain in counting homeless and unstably housed youth, but this initiative represents the most comprehensive and collaborative effort to date to expand the youth point-in-time estimate. Several areas of improvement and recommendations for future NYC counts and other localities emerged throughout the count implementation:

1. Collaborate with youth, providers, and advocates in the planning, implementation, and dissemination process.
2. Define the populations of youth to be counted.
3. Develop a budget proposal with anticipated funding needs.
4. Begin coordinating count sites early.
5. Conduct a pilot survey and use the data to anticipate needed analyses.
6. Require count site staff to attend a comprehensive training.
7. Expand and adapt locations based on conversations with youth and providers.
8. Explore the use of technology for data collection.
9. Supplement PIT count data with additional research studies and administrative data from City agencies.

# INTRODUCTION

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Stability in youths' lives is critical for youth to thrive and successfully transition to adulthood. Unfortunately, many youth experience homelessness and housing instability at some point during their young adulthood, stemming from a variety of causes, but often due to family conflict in the context of financial poverty, overcrowding, homophobia and transphobia (Karabanow, 2004; Heinze, Hernandez Jozefowicz, Toro, & Blue, 2012; Edidin, Ganim, Hunter & Karnik, 2011; Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002). Youth may experience homelessness and housing instability in a variety of ways: youth may become completely unsheltered and stay on the streets at certain points, but may enter an emergency shelter or find friends or relatives to stay with at other times. Understanding the scope of youth homelessness is essential to improving programs and policies for this population and addressing their specific needs.

Youth who are homeless or unstably housed can be difficult to locate or identify due to their resourcefulness, ability to blend into their environment, and efforts to remain hidden in order to avoid interactions with the police (Gibson, 2011; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). Therefore, estimates of this population vary widely. Increasing attention is being given to identifying methods to better estimate this population, including enhancing existing count methodologies to be more sensitive to the specific characteristics of homeless youth.

Each year, New York City conducts a point-in-time (PIT) count of homeless adults, families, and youth based on the guidelines put forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Prior to 2015, this count has comprised two parts: 1) the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) which is designed to count unsheltered individuals and 2) a compilation of the censuses of transitional housing and emergency shelters across New York City which is designed to count individuals and families who are sheltered by City agencies or other organizations.

Numerous stakeholders, including HUD, recognized that unsheltered youth may not be captured completely in the HOPE count because they have different characteristics and behaviors than older adults experiencing homelessness. For example, homeless youth may congregate in different places than older adults, may try to

remain out of sight during count hours, or may have different methods of survival than older adults.

Beginning in March of 2014, New York City agencies, runaway and homeless youth service providers, and advocates planned a supplemental youth count that focused specifically on counting unsheltered youth to be included in the annual PIT count in NYC. The collaboration among these agencies, providers, and advocates resulted in an improved methodology for the PIT count and a foundation to advance future efforts to count homeless youth. The results of this supplemental count found a point-in-time estimate of 68 unsheltered youth. In conjunction with the existing HOPE count, the data suggest an overall point-in-time estimate of 188 unsheltered youth under age 25, according to HUD definitions. An additional 1,518 unaccompanied youth were counted via the shelter census tabulations for a total of 1,706 unaccompanied homeless youth on the night of the point-in-time count. Youth in parenting households were also counted via the shelter census tabulations, resulting in an additional 2,114 youth parents and 2,539 children with parenting youth. Taken together, 6,359 youth under the age of 25 years were counted on the night of the point-in-time count (not including children under the age of 25 in shelters with their adult parents).

# BACKGROUND

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## Importance of Counting Homeless and Unstably Housed Youth

Estimates of homeless and unstably housed youth vary widely at the national, state, and local levels and the accuracy of available count data is unknown (Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007; U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012). However, accurate estimates of the population of homeless and unstably housed youth and its characteristics are important to program planning and developing appropriate policies to address its needs. Knowing the size of the population is critical for allocating the appropriate amount and type of resources. Additionally, establishing baseline data through a sound and consistent methodology allows trends in the data to be analyzed year to year. This trend analysis is essential to tracking the impact of new programming and policies and assessing our progress in decreasing the number of youth who are homeless and unstably housed.

Understanding the characteristics of homeless and unstably housed youth is also important to tailor services to meet the specific needs of youth. Even basic demographics, such as gender, age, and sexual orientation can have important implications for the types of additional programming that should be developed or policies that should be implemented or redesigned. Information about a youth's history of homelessness, including the types of places stayed and the length of time homeless, can also be enormously helpful in establishing methods of prevention and intervention points for services.

It is widely acknowledged that youth who are homeless or unstably housed differ in important ways from older homeless adults. Youth may have different reasons for becoming homeless, stay in different and more locations than adults, have different experiences with service systems, and have different mechanisms for survival (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). Because of these differences, collecting youth-specific data, rather than extrapolating information about youth from older adult populations, is critical to understanding this population.

## Point-in-Time Count

Many methods exist to count homeless populations and how the final tally is interpreted greatly depends on the chosen method. For example, point-in-time counts provide a snapshot of a particular day,

while annual estimates provide information about how many people have an experience such as homelessness, at any time over the duration of a year. The supplemental 2015 NYC Youth Count followed HUD's PIT count guidelines so that the unsheltered youth who were counted could be added to the number of unsheltered youth who are counted via the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE). The primary purpose of the supplemental youth count was to expand the unsheltered PIT count; a secondary goal was to gain more information about the spectrum of living situations for youth. Therefore, information about all living situations was recorded and analyzed, in addition to the information about the unsheltered youth population.

The PIT count guidelines set by HUD specify that "the sheltered and unsheltered PIT counts must be conducted during the last 10 days in January and represent all homeless persons who were sheltered and unsheltered on a single night during that period" (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). Although the count tabulations must represent a single night, the count process can occur over the seven days following the night of the count as long as appropriate mechanisms are in place to collect data about the night of the count and to de-duplicate data.

For the PIT count, HUD defines unsheltered youth as: "An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular



sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground” (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). This means that youth who are couch surfing, exchanging sex for shelter, in institutions such as jail or hospitals or in shelters/drop-in centers do not count toward the unsheltered totals submitted to HUD, although information about these youth were collected in the supplemental youth count.

The unsheltered youth who were counted during the supplemental youth count represent a portion of the youth who were submitted to HUD for the PIT count. Sheltered and unsheltered youth were also counted via HOPE and the shelter census data. Established citywide in 2005, HOPE is NYC’s annual street count. On the night of the PIT count, thousands of volunteers canvas public streets, subway stations, and parks to enumerate individuals who are homeless, including youth. The youth estimates from HOPE will be used to contextualize the data collected in the youth count; however, characteristics of youth who were counted in HOPE or in the shelter census will not be discussed here.

### Challenges of Counting Youth

Counting homeless and unstably housed youth presents unique challenges. First, there is a broad spectrum of definitions of homeless youth that vary across government agencies, service providers, advocates, and youth experiencing housing instability. Decisions on which definition to use and therefore, which data to collect, has important implications for the types of questions that are asked during the count and the interpretation of the count findings. Additionally, the definition will impact which sub-populations of youth are focused on for the count and the locations that are targeted for inclusion in the count. Youth may not consider themselves homeless, even if they qualify under the definition being used in the count. Therefore, when designing questions and communication strategies about the youth count, count teams should be sensitive to youths’ definitions of their living situations and design the count accordingly.

Youth are also often a more hidden population than adults who are experiencing homelessness. They may want to remain hidden because of stigma, or

fear and uncertainty about being placed in foster care or other facilities. They may be running away from abusive situations at home or other unsafe conditions (MacLean, Embry, & Cauce, 1999; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). Youth who are homeless or unstably housed are often highly transient and change locations frequently. Some youth may cycle in and out of homelessness, returning to their families intermittently, or have a brief episode of homelessness before returning to their prior living situation (Toro, Lesperance, & Braciszewski, 2011; Milburn, et al., 2007; Milburn, et al., 2009). These situations can be a challenge for point-in-time methodologies.

### Youth Counts Across the US

Localities have increasingly conducted separate youth counts or incorporated specialized procedures for youth counts within their PIT counts, particularly after HUD began to require a separate tabulation of unsheltered homeless youth beginning with the 2013 PIT counts. Among these, the Youth Count! Initiative, which was a pilot study of youth counts in nine sites (including NYC) commissioned by four federal agencies summarized recommendations for best practices across the multiple counts (Pergamit, et al., 2013a; Pergamit, et al., 2013b). These recommendations, in conjunction with the expertise of our local workgroup, comprising NYC agency partners, youth service providers, and advocates, helped to guide the development of the 2015 youth count.

The Youth Count! Initiative described the following promising practices and areas for improvement:

1. Engage youth service providers, LGBTQ partners, and youth in planning and conducting the count.
2. Use social media, magnet events, and partnerships with schools to increase awareness and participation in the count among youth.
3. Use broader definitions of homelessness to measure the spectrum of housing instability.
4. Expand the street count locations that are included in the count and survey everyone or a representative sample of youth who are present.

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5. Develop surveys that are consistent among localities to estimate a national figure. Pre-test surveys prior to the count to test wording, length, and create appropriate training protocols.
6. Include mechanisms to prevent duplicate counts of youth.
7. Improve training for individuals who are conducting the counts, and include procedures for quality control and de-briefing throughout and after the count.

Other reports of youth counts, including those conducted in California and summarized by the California Homeless Youth Project, were also reviewed to inform our youth count (Applied Survey Research, 2009; Arista, et al., 2011; Astone, Pologe, & Lyn, 2009; Auerswald, Lin, Petry, & Hyatt, 2013; Riden & Jones, 2011). Several experts on homeless count methodologies were also consulted during the planning process.

### Previous Counts in NYC

Several groups in NYC have conducted youth counts, including one conducted in 2007 by the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services and one conducted in 2013 by NYC Continuum of Care as part of the Youth Count! Initiative (Freeman & Hamilton, 2008; Freeman & Hamilton, 2013). Notably, the methodologies of these two counts and the one discussed here vary greatly in terms of timing, structure, and definition, and therefore, the estimates derived from these counts are not comparable.

# METHODOLOGY

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## Workgroup

Beginning in March of 2014, a workgroup met monthly to bi-monthly to plan for the youth count. This workgroup consisted of representatives from the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI), the interagency analytics and policy team for the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services; the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD); the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS); the Coalition for Homeless Youth/Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services; Safe Horizon; Good Shepherd Services; Covenant House; the Supportive Housing Network of New York; Girls Educational & Mentoring Services (GEMS); and the Door.

Through these meetings, the workgroup collaborated to decide on the definition of unsheltered and unstably housed youth to be used in the count, design the structure for the count, and develop the survey instrument.

## Definition

Because this count had several purposes, data were collected from every youth, age 24 years and younger, who came to a program or were encountered during outreach. The survey responses were then used to categorize youth into the appropriate housing status category. Youth were categorized as unsheltered for the purposes of the HUD PIT tabulations if they spent Monday night: on the streets, subway, walking around, or in a park; in a 24-hour store, restaurant or internet café, bank, or other private establishment; or in an abandoned building, stairwell, lobby, yard, squat, car, or similar place. Several categories of housing status were also examined on a case-by-case basis to determine if they met the criteria

for being unsheltered. These included: being at a bar, club, or other party; working; and being in some other private place not meant for sleeping. Determinations for these categories were made based on where the youth went to sleep the next day, if available, and other additional information collected by the surveyor.

Other categories of housing instability, such as couch surfing<sup>1</sup>, exchanging sex for shelter<sup>2</sup>, or being in an institution such as a hospital or jail, are not categorized by HUD as unsheltered, but are reported here to better capture a broader spectrum of unstably housed youth. Additionally, youth who were in shelters, drop-in centers, or transitional living on Monday night are considered sheltered by HUD and are captured through the shelter census that is conducted separately from the youth count. Totals and characteristics of this population compiled as part of the youth count are also reported here, but were not included in the PIT tabulations because of concerns about duplication.

## Count Structure

The youth count took place from Tuesday, February 10 to Friday, February 13, 2015. In accordance with the HUD regulation that the PIT count must ask about one specific day, youth who participated were asked where they spent the night on Monday, February 9, the same date as HOPE and the shelter census. The count was originally scheduled for the last Monday in January, but was rescheduled due to inclement weather.

Between Tuesday and Friday, program staff at the 33 participating programs, which included runaway and homeless youth (RHY) drop-in centers, outreach teams, shelters, and supportive housing sites (full list in Appendix B) asked every client who

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1. The category of couch surfing encompasses a variety of living situations. Broadly, it means that youth are “sharing housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason” (as stated in Section 725 of Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act). However, the stability and safety of these arrangements can vary across experiences.

2. Guidance from HUD was sought to determine if youth who are exchanging sex for shelter should be included in the PIT totals. HUD’s response indicated that these youth are “housed but in a dangerous situation” and would not be considered homeless per the PIT definition. HUD’s guidance can be found here: <https://www.hudexchange.info/get-assistance/my-question/?askaquestionaction=public:main.answer&key=0507A017-06B8-00AC-5C34E5FF6E7C8C09>.

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came into the program or were encountered during outreach to complete a short survey. Several large programs, including a community center that serves both RHY and non-RHY youth (the Door), had volunteers who conducted the survey as needed. The Door also had several youth assist with administration of the count. Program staff were best equipped to conduct the survey (where possible) based on their familiarity with the RHY population and with their clients specifically.

Incentives were not offered systematically across sites to youth who participated in the survey. Individual sites chose to offer small incentives, such as Metrocards and snacks; however, due to concerns about possible duplication of surveys, sites were asked not to offer larger incentives. Individual sites developed campaigns prior to the beginning of the youth count to increase awareness about the count among their clients and increase participation. Flyers and posters were given to sites to hang up and distribute during the days of the count.

### Pilots

Prior to the dates of the count, pilots were conducted at three drop-in centers and with one outreach team to test the structure and questions of the survey instrument and determine the best ways to set up the count sites to interact with youth and encourage them to participate in the count.

### Survey Instrument

The final survey instrument was completed via pen-and-paper and consisted of 16 questions: 13 were asked aloud to youth and three questions were filled out based on observations (see Appendix C for the survey). The survey was purposely kept short so that it was not a burden for program staff and youth. The questions on the survey included: 1) verbal consent; 2) questions used to avoid duplication of surveys; 3) demographic information; and 4) information about housing status on Monday night, as well as over the past month. The survey also provided several points for the person administering the survey to address before beginning, including introducing the purpose of the survey, stating that answers are anonymous and services will not be affected by participation, and stating that if the respondent has already taken the survey, it should

not be taken again.

Several approaches were used to avoid duplication of surveys. First, the survey asked clients if they had participated in the survey during the week at any program or if someone asked about their housing status on the street on Monday night (to de-duplicate with HOPE). The survey also asked for a unique identifier from individuals that consisted of their first and last initials and the day of their birth (not the full birthday). This identifier was not identifying enough to be able to link individuals back to their records, but provided enough information to identify potential duplicate surveys when used in combination with demographic information. Count sites were also asked to internally track their clients if possible to avoid conducting duplicate surveys; this information was not included in the data collection for the youth count to maintain the confidentiality of clients.

For demographic information, the survey asked about age, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The survey also asked the person administering the survey to record if clients had any of their own children with them to appropriately categorize family status in the PIT tabulations. Information about housing status included a question about the youth's location on Monday night (the night of the PIT count), which had 16 options for housing status, as well as additional space to describe the location in more detail. For surveys that took place Wednesday through Friday, the survey also asked about where they spent the night Tuesday night, Wednesday night, and Thursday night (as appropriate), to help youth remember their locations on Monday night and to better capture the transient nature of youth homelessness. The survey also asked how many different places youth had spent the night in the past month and what kinds of places these were.

The survey also asked if the client was responding to the survey in-person or over the phone. Although only in-person surveys were used for the PIT tabulations and the analyses below, several sites collected pilot data via phone that could be used to inform future counts.

### Quality Assurance

Surveys were color-coded by day and labeled with the date and codes to identify the survey location

and each unique survey. This helped to identify surveys upon their return and ensure all surveys were collected.

In December (a month prior to the original PIT count date), an information session was held for RHY providers to describe the structure and purpose of the youth count, gain additional feedback, and encourage participation among as many sites as possible. The week before the original PIT count date, a training session was held with representatives from the count sites. Sites also received a training manual with more detailed information and sample completed surveys.

Throughout the duration of the youth count, DYCD staff and volunteers conducted visits to the count sites to make sure that sites had all the materials that they needed and to ensure that the surveys were being completed correctly. They also collected completed surveys at this time to allow for continuous data entry throughout the duration of the count. At each site visit, a checklist was completed, to maintain consistency among site visits.

After the youth count was completed, an electronic feedback survey was sent to count site staff and volunteers who conducted the surveys at large sites. The survey asked questions about the adequacy of training, materials, and resources for the count, overall satisfaction with the count, and allowed for additional comments to help improve future counts.

As surveys were collected, they were returned to CIDI and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Once all surveys were entered, they were imported into SAS for analysis.

# FINDINGS

## Survey Summary

Overall, 910 surveys were completed during the youth count. Of those, 53 were removed from analysis because they did not provide verbal consent (n=7), had already taken the youth count survey (n=24), were counted by HOPE (n=6), were 25 years and older (n=9), on the phone (n=6), or were incomplete (n=1).

This left 857 to be analyzed. Of these, 68 were considered unsheltered under HUD’s definition, while the remaining 789 were in other living situations. Of the 68 unsheltered youth, over 75% were staying in the streets, subway, walking around, or in a park (see Table 1 for all categories included in the unsheltered tabulation). Of the surveys included in the other living situations

**Table 1. Unsheltered Estimate - HUD definition (n=68)**

Category	n	%
Streets/Subway/Walked around/Park	52	76.5%
Abandoned Building/Stairwell/Lobby/Yard/Car/Squat	11	16.2%
Fast food restaurant/24-hour store/Bank/Internet Cafe/Apple Store	3	4.4%
Other private place not meant for sleeping	1	1.5%
Bar/Club/Other Party	1	1.5%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 2. Living Situations Other than Unsheltered (n=789)**

Category	n	%
Apartment/Own room/House/Dorm/Parent’s apartment	532	67.4%
Shelter/Drop-in Center/Transitional Living/Church bed	153	19.4%
Friend’s place/Couch surfing	81	10.3%
Hospital/Jail/Juvenile Detention/Mental Health Facility/Group Home	7	0.9%
Don’t know/Don’t remember	5	0.6%
Hotel	4	0.5%
Outside NYC	3	0.4%
Sex for shelter	3	0.4%
Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked	1	0.1%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

category, over two-thirds were living in their own apartment, a parent's apartment, or a relative's apartment<sup>3</sup> (see Table 2). The category of relative's apartment was not listed in the options on the survey, but most were included under the own apartment/parent's apartment category; some were also coded in the friend's place/couch surfing category. However, since there was no systematic way to determine which surveys should have been categorized as a relative's apartment, these were left in the original categories they were recorded in.

The distribution of surveys over the course of the youth count was also analyzed. This was important to consider because as the number of days increased, the resources needed to conduct the count and concerns about duplication also increased. Therefore, Tables 3 and 4 disaggregate the surveys by each day of the count. Although

for both the total surveys conducted and the unsheltered surveys, the majority of surveys were conducted on Tuesday, a significant amount (about 60% of the total surveys and about 40% of the unsheltered surveys) were conducted during the other three days of the count. This serves as evidence that a post-night count for youth that consists of multiple days allows for more youth to be counted during their day-to-day interactions with providers. Additionally, the combination of providers' internal tracking of clients who participated in the survey and the questions that were asked to avoid duplication of surveys seemed to be sufficient to de-duplicate surveys and avoid an overestimate of youth.

In order to improve the count for future years, it was also of interest to disaggregate where surveys were being conducted. This has implications for where future efforts may be expanded or

**Table 3. All Surveys by Day (n=857)**

Day of Survey	n	%
Tuesday	353	41.2%
Wednesday	226	26.4%
Thursday	168	19.6%
Friday	110	12.8%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 4. Unsheltered Surveys by Day (n=68)**

Day of Survey	n	%
Tuesday	39	57.4%
Wednesday	7	10.3%
Thursday	15	22.1%
Friday	7	10.3%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

3. Approximately two-thirds (355 of the 532) of surveys of youth who were staying in their own, a parent's, or a relative's apartment were completed at a large multi-service community center that has some RHY programming, but also has a variety of other community programming (the Door).

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reduced and where outreach may need to be improved. The primary focus of the youth count was to improve the unsheltered HUD tabulations; therefore, the total number of surveys and the number of surveys from unsheltered youth are reported here. However, future counts and data collection may also focus on refining the counts of unstably housed youth in other categories.

The majority of both the total surveys and the unsheltered surveys were conducted at drop-in centers: about 84% of the total surveys and 76% of the unsheltered surveys (see Tables 5 and 6). Over half of the total surveys came from the Door; however, only about 2% of their surveys were by unsheltered, homeless youth. Therefore, the Door's surveys made up about 15% of the unsheltered surveys. On the other hand, the

Streetwork Project LES only conducted about 4% of the total surveys, but 66% of these were with unsheltered youth. Therefore, the Streetwork Project LES contributed the most unsheltered surveys, comprising 37% (see Table 7). The count sites that were shelters and supportive housing programs contributed fewer surveys – both total and unsheltered – as they were only conducting the survey with youth who were new intakes over the course of the count and, for supportive housing sites, youth who were not on the lease of the supportive housing unit, but were staying with a friend. The youth staying with a friend would then be categorized as couch surfing, but not as unsheltered.

**Table 5. All Surveys by Program Type (n=857)**

Program Type*	n	%
Drop-in	716	83.5%
Outreach	105	12.3%
Shelter	28	3.3%
Housing	8	0.9%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 6. Unsheltered Surveys by Program Type (n=68)**

Program Type*	n	%
Drop-in	52	76.4%
Outreach	15	22.1%
Shelter	1	1.5%
Housing	0	0.0%

\*Some agencies had both outreach and drop-in programs and may have used surveys for these programs interchangeably.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.



**Table 7. Surveys by Program**

Program	Number of Surveys	% of Total Surveys (n=857)	Number of Unsheltered Surveys	% of Unsheltered Surveys (n=68)	% of Program's Surveys that were Unsheltered
The Door (Drop-in)	438	51.1	10	14.7	2.3
Streetwork Project (Drop-in)	70	8.2	13	19.1	18.6
Hetrick-Martin Institute (Outreach)	69	8.1	7	10.3	10.1
Safe Space (Drop-in)	45	5.3	0	0	0
Streetwork Project LES (Drop-in)	38	4.4	25	36.8	65.8
Hetrick-Martin Institute (Drop-in)	37	4.3	0	0	0
Ali Forney (Drop-in)	31	3.6	2	2.9	6.5
GEMS (Drop-in)	23	2.7	2	2.9	8.7
Covenant House - Under 21 (Shelter)	21	2.5	1	1.5	4.8
Good Shepherd Services (Outreach)	16	1.9	4	5.9	25
Cardinal McCloskey Services (Drop-in)	15	1.8	0	0	0
Project Hospitality (Drop-in)	14	1.6	0	0	0
The Door (Outreach)	11	1.3	1	1.5	9.1
Streetwork Project (Outreach)	9	1.1	3	4.4	33.3
East 9th Street (Supportive Housing)	4	0.5	0	0	0
GEMS (TIL)	4	0.5	0	0	0
SCO Family Services (Drop-in)	4	0.5	0	0	0
Inwood House (Shelter)	3	0.4	0	0	0
Streetwork Project (Shelter)	2	0.2	0	0	0
Ali Forney - Taaffe (Shelter)	1	0.1	0	0	0
Covenant House - Mother and Child (Shelter)	1	0.1	0	0	0
MCCNY - Sylvia's Place (Drop-in)	1	0.1	0	0	0

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## FINDINGS

### Demographics

The demographics from all the surveys, as well as broken down by housing status category, are shown in Tables 8 through 11. It should be noted that although the demographics for youth staying in institutional facilities (Hospital/Jail/Juvenile Detention/Mental Health Facility/Group Home), hotels, and exchanging sex for shelter are shown in these tables, there are very few youth in each of these categories and therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution and are not discussed in detail. Several categories were also aggregated to create an Unstably Housed category. This category comprises the following categories: Unsheltered, Shelter/Drop-in Center/Transitional Living/Church bed, Friend's place/Couch surfing, Hospital/Jail/Juvenile Detention/Mental Health Facility/Group Home, Hotel, and Sex for shelter/Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked.

For age, the distribution for all the surveys is relatively evenly split among the three categories (under 18, 18-20, and 21-24). However, almost all of the surveys (230 of 243) for youth under 18 were from youth who lived in their own apartments or parent's/relative's apartments, while only 13 surveys for youth under 18 were from unstably housed youth (approximately 4% of that group). A little over 1% of youth who were unsheltered were under 18, while 71% were 21-24 and the remaining 28% were 18-20. Youth who were in the shelter/drop-in category and youth who were in the couch surfing category had similar distributions of age: 5% and 4% of youth were under 18, 50% and 46% were 18-20 and 44% and 51% were 21-24 respectively. No youth who were staying in a hotel or exchanging sex for shelter was under 18.

Among all surveys, approximately equal numbers of youth identified as male and female; 49% of youth surveyed identified as male and 46% identified as female. Two percent of the youth surveyed identified as transgender male to female, 1% identified as transgender female to male, and 2% identified as a different gender. When disaggregated by housing status category, most categories had a distribution similar to the overall distribution. However, youth who were unsheltered identified primarily as male (72%) and only 18% identified as female. An additional 6% identified as a different gender, a little over 1% identified as transgender male to female and 3% identified as transgender female to male. Overall,

a little over half of the unstably housed youth identified as male, while about 38% identified as female. Almost 9% of the unstably housed youth identified as transgender or a different gender.

The survey did not include separate questions about race and ethnicity, so if youth identified as both Black and Hispanic, for example, this was categorized as two or more races. Overall, 44% of the youth surveyed identified as Black, 24% identified as Hispanic, 17% identified as two or more races, 8% identified as a different race, 4% identified as White, and 2% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. Again, most housing status categories had similar distributions to the overall distribution. Unsheltered youth, however, had a different distribution with lower proportions of Black and Hispanic youth (35% and 16% respectively) and a higher proportion of White youth at almost 18%.

Overall, 61% of the youth surveyed identified as heterosexual, 17% identified as bisexual, 9% identified as gay, 6% identified as a lesbian, 4% identified as a different sexual orientation, 2% identified as queer, and 1% identified as questioning. Among housing status categories, several differences emerged in the distribution of sexual orientation. Compared to the distribution of surveys overall, a lower percentage of the unstably housed youth identified as heterosexual (51%). However, higher percentages of unsheltered youth (71%) and youth who were in their own apartments or parent's/relative's apartments (67%) identified as heterosexual when compared to the overall distribution. On the other hand, lower percentages of youth staying in a shelter, drop-in, or similar place (42%) and youth who were couch surfing (51%) identified as heterosexual.

### Number of Places Stayed in a Month

The number of places that youth have spent the night over the past month was tabulated based on the responses to Question 8 on the survey ("How many different places have you spent the night in the past month?"). The results for all the surveys, as well as by housing status category are shown in Table 12. Overall, 46% of the youth surveyed had stayed in the same place every night, while 23% had stay in two places, 14% had stayed in three places, 5% had stayed in four places, 3% had stayed in five places, 2% had stayed in six

places, 2% had stayed in seven, eight, or nine places, and 4% had stayed in ten or more places.

The distribution of these responses varied greatly among the different housing status categories. Overall, 26% of unstably housed youth had stayed in the same place every night, while 8% had stayed in 10 or more places. Among unsheltered youth, 9% had stayed in the same place the entire month, while 24% had stayed in three different places, and 16% had stayed in ten or more places. Among youth staying in their own apartment or parent's/relative's apartment, 59% had stayed in the same place the entire month, 24% had stayed in two places, and only 2% had stayed in five or more places. Among youth in shelters, drop-in centers, or similar places, 42% had stayed in the same place the entire month and 28% had stayed in two places. However, 4% had stayed in ten or more places. Among youth who were couch surfing, 11% stayed in one place the entire month, 26% stayed in two places, and 25% stayed in three places. Seven percent of youth who were couch surfing stayed in ten or more places.

**Table 8. Age by Housing Status Category**

	Total*		Unstably Housed Total**		Unsheltered		Apartment/ Own room/ House Dorm/ Parent's apartment		Shelter/ Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/ Church bed		Friend's place/ Couch surfing		Hospital/ Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/ Group Home		Hotel		Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/ Trafficked	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	(n=857)		(n=317)		(n=68)		(n=532)		(n=153)		(n=81)		(n=7)		(n=4)		(n=4)	
<b>Under 18</b>	243	28.4%	13	4.1%	1	1.5%	230	43.2%	8	5.2%	3	3.7%	1	14.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>18-20</b>	333	38.9%	138	43.5%	19	27.9%	193	36.3%	77	50.3%	37	45.7%	2	28.6%	1	25.0%	2	50.0%
<b>21-24</b>	281	32.8%	166	52.4%	48	70.6%	109	20.5%	68	44.4%	41	50.6%	4	57.1%	3	75.0%	2	50.0%

\*Total includes 2 additional categories of "Don't know/Don't remember" (n=5) and "Outside NYC" (n=3). There were no missing values for age.

\*\*Unstably Housed Total is the sum of the following categories: Unsheltered, Shelter/Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/Church bed, Friend's place/Couch surfing, Hospital/Jail/Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/Group Home, Hotel, and Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 9. Gender by Housing Status Category**

	Total*		Unstably Housed Total**		Unsheltered		Apartment/ Own room/ House/Dorm/ Parent's apartment		Shelter/ Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/ Church bed		Friend's place/ Couch surfing		Hospital/ Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/ Group Home		Hotel		Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/ Trafficked	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Male</b>	417	48.7%	169	53.3%	49	72.1%	243	45.7%	71	46.4%	43	53.1%	4	57.1%	1	25.0%	1	25.0%
<b>Female</b>	390	45.5%	120	37.9%	12	17.6%	267	50.2%	68	44.4%	32	39.5%	3	42.9%	2	50.0%	3	75.0%
<b>Transgender: Male to Female</b>	17	2.0%	4	1.3%	1	1.5%	13	2.4%	2	1.3%	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Transgender: Female to Male</b>	6	0.7%	5	1.6%	2	2.9%	1	0.2%	3	2.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Other</b>	20	2.3%	18	5.7%	4	5.9%	2	0.4%	8	5.2%	5	6.2%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Missing</b>	7	0.8%	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	6	1.1%	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

\*Total includes 2 additional categories of "Don't know/Don't remember" (n=5) and "Outside NYC" (n=3)

\*\*Unstably Housed Total is the sum of the following categories: Unsheltered, Shelter/Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/Church bed, Friend's place/Couch surfing, Hospital/Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/Group Home, Hotel, and Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 10. Race/Ethnicity by Housing Status Category**

	Total*		Unstably Housed Total**		Unsheltered		Apartment/ Own room/ House/Dorm/ Parent's apartment		Shelter/ Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/ Church bed		Friend's place/ Couch surfing		Hospital/ Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/ Group Home		Hotel		Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/ Trafficked	
	(n=857)		(n=317)		(n=68)		(n=532)		(n=153)		(n=81)		(n=7)		(n=4)		(n=4)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Black</b>	380	44.3%	119	37.5%	24	35.3%	257	48.3%	57	37.3%	32	39.5%	2	28.6%	2	50.0%	2	50.0%
<b>Hispanic</b>	205	23.9%	78	24.6%	11	16.2%	125	23.5%	44	28.8%	20	24.7%	1	14.3%	2	50.0%	0	0.0%
<b>White</b>	35	4.1%	25	7.9%	12	17.6%	9	1.7%	7	4.6%	5	6.2%	1	14.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	18	2.1%	4	1.3%	1	1.5%	14	2.6%	1	0.7%	2	2.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Two or more races</b>	146	17.0%	65	20.5%	13	19.1%	81	15.2%	32	20.9%	16	19.8%	3	42.9%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%
<b>Other</b>	66	7.7%	25	7.9%	6	8.8%	40	7.5%	12	7.8%	6	7.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%
<b>Missing</b>	7	0.8%	1	0.3%	1	1.5%	6	1.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

\*Total includes 2 additional categories of "Don't know/Don't remember" (n=5) and "Outside NYC" (n=3)

\*\*Unstably Housed Total is the sum of the following categories: Unsheltered, Shelter/Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/Church bed, Friend's place/Couch surfing, Hospital/Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/Group Home, Hotel, and Sex for shelter/Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**FINDINGS**

Table 11. Sexual Orientation by Housing Status Category

	Total*		Unstably Housed Total**		Unsheltered		Apartment/ Own room/ House/Dorm/ Parent's apartment		Shelter/ Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/ Church bed		Friend's place/ Couch surfing		Hospital/ Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/ Group Home		Hotel		Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/ Trafficked	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Straight</b>	524	61.1%	160	50.5%	48	70.6%	356	66.9%	64	41.8%	41	50.6%	5	71.4%	1	25.0%	1	25.0%
<b>Gay</b>	75	8.8%	33	10.4%	6	8.8%	42	7.9%	18	11.8%	9	11.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Lesbian</b>	48	5.6%	20	6.3%	0	0.0%	28	5.3%	12	7.8%	5	6.2%	0	0.0%	2	50.0%	1	25.0%
<b>Bisexual</b>	143	16.7%	74	23.3%	7	10.3%	69	13.0%	45	29.4%	17	21.0%	2	28.6%	1	25.0%	2	50.0%
<b>Queer</b>	20	2.3%	11	3.5%	3	4.4%	9	1.7%	5	3.3%	3	3.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Questioning</b>	9	1.1%	2	0.6%	0	0.0%	7	1.3%	1	0.7%	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Other</b>	30	3.5%	16	5.0%	3	4.4%	14	2.6%	8	5.2%	5	6.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Missing</b>	8	0.9%	1	0.3%	1	1.5%	7	1.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

\*Total includes 2 additional categories of "Don't know/Don't remember" (n=5) and "Outside NYC" (n=3)

\*\*Unstably Housed Total is the sum of the following categories: Unsheltered, Shelter/Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/Church bed, Friend's place/Couch surfing, Hospital/Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/Group Home, Hotel, and Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 12. Number of Places Stayed in the Past Month**

	Total*		Unstably Housed Total**		Unsheltered		Apartment/ Own room/ House/Dorm/ Parents' apartment		Shelter/ Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/ Church bed		Friend's place/ Couch surfing		Hospital/ Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/ Group Home		Hotel		Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/ Trafficked	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	(n=857)		(n=317)		(n=68)		(n=532)		(n=153)		(n=81)		(n=7)		(n=4)		(n=4)	
1	394	46.0%	82	25.9%	6	8.8%	312	58.6%	64	41.8%	9	11.1%	2	28.6%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%
2	199	23.2%	74	23.3%	7	10.3%	125	23.5%	43	28.1%	21	25.9%	2	28.6%	1	25.0%	0	0.0%
3	117	13.7%	58	18.3%	16	23.5%	55	10.3%	19	12.4%	20	24.7%	0	0.0%	2	50.0%	1	25.0%
4	39	4.6%	28	8.8%	8	11.8%	11	2.1%	10	6.5%	9	11.1%	1	14.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
5	22	2.6%	20	6.3%	7	10.3%	1	0.2%	6	3.9%	7	8.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
6	15	1.8%	12	3.8%	3	4.4%	2	0.4%	1	0.7%	6	7.4%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%	1	25.0%
7	7	0.8%	6	1.9%	4	5.9%	1	0.2%	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	1	14.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
8	6	0.7%	4	1.3%	3	4.4%	2	0.4%	0	0.0%	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
9	4	0.5%	4	1.3%	3	4.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
10 or more	31	3.6%	25	7.9%	11	16.2%	4	0.8%	6	3.9%	6	7.4%	1	14.3%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%
Missing	23	2.7%	4	1.3%	0	0.0%	19	3.6%	3	2.0%	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

\*Total includes 2 additional categories of "Don't know/Don't remember" (n=5) and "Outside NYC" (n=3)

\*\*Unstably Housed Total is the sum of the following categories: Unsheltered, Shelter/Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/Church bed, Friend's place/Couch surfing, Hospital/Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/Group Home, Hotel, and Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**FINDINGS**



# DISCUSSION

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## Context of Youth Count Findings

The numbers from the youth count were only a part of the larger point-in-time count conducted by NYC. Once the numbers from the youth count were tabulated, the number of unsheltered youth (68) was added to the number of unsheltered youth counted during the HOPE count (120). These 188 youth comprised the total number of unsheltered youth submitted for the HUD PIT tabulations. In addition to an unsheltered number, the PIT tabulations also include the number of unaccompanied youth who are sheltered in an emergency, transitional, or safe haven facility; in 2015, there were 1518 youth in this category, resulting in 1706 unaccompanied youth (1518 sheltered and 188 unsheltered) total. Youth in parenting youth households who were staying in a shelter facility were also counted, resulting in an additional 2,114 youth parents and 2,539 children with parenting youth. Taken together, 6,359 youth under the age of 25 years were counted on the night of Monday, February 9 (not including children under the age of 25 in shelters with their adult parents).

## Limitations

The collaboration involved in planning and implementing the 2015 youth count led to a successful structure and methodology for counting homeless and unstably housed youth; however, this structure and methodology had limitations in its inaugural year and should continue to be improved.

First, although the count included many homeless youth-specific programs as count sites, it did not include other services that youth may access, including broader youth programming, such as community centers; public benefit application centers; or services that serve a wider age range of clients. There may also be additional homeless youth-specific programs that were not included as count sites or could not participate. Many of the count sites this year were located in Manhattan. Additional sites in the other boroughs may help engage youth who are not in the most central parts of NYC. Engaging partners at other City agencies,

such as the Department of Education, the Department of Correction, and the Administration for Children's Services, to help collect additional information about homeless and unstably housed youth would also help to understand a broader spectrum of this population.

Second, and probably most importantly, designing the count to be primarily conducted at service centers means that youth who are not connected to any services may not be captured. To mitigate this, youth outreach teams participated as count sites and the count was conducted in conjunction with the HOPE count which captures homeless youth who are unsheltered and visible on the night of the PIT count. However, there are likely still some portion of youth who remained completely hidden to both outreach and services.

This year, youth were not involved in the planning process; their insight into structuring the count, including locations to visit, questions to ask, and outreach to disconnected youth is important for further developing the count methodology in a sensitive and relevant way.

The count was also limited in flexibility because it was primarily meant to improve the PIT tabulations for unsheltered youth. This meant that it was not specifically designed to capture other unstably housed youth (such as those couch surfing), who may also need resources. This design also dictated that the count take place in winter and over the course of one 24-hour period. It does not then take into account seasonal fluctuations that may occur and is not meant to measure other statistics related to homeless youth, such as the number of youth who may experience homelessness over the course of a year.

Unfortunately, the dates of the youth count also had to change due to inclement weather. Several programs had difficulties implementing the count as comprehensively as they would have liked due to different staffing during the rescheduled dates and confusion about the new dates for both staff and youth who wanted to participate.

There were limitations in several of the survey questions that should be redesigned for future counts to gain more nuanced information, such

## DISCUSSION

as breaking out the categories of housing status further and including more information about experiences with homelessness.

Lastly, it is possible that some youth interviewed for the survey reported their locations inaccurately because they wish to remain hidden or to avoid the stigma associated with being homeless or in precarious housing situations.

### Conclusion

The 2015 youth count laid a solid foundation for future youth counts to build upon. The spirit of collaboration and participation among City agencies, providers, and advocates resulted in a methodology that improved upon prior PIT counts and can continue to be enhanced to further understand homeless and unstably housed youth. Challenges remain in counting homeless and unstably housed youth, but this initiative represents the most comprehensive and collaborative effort to date to expand the youth point-in-time estimate. The estimate of 68 unsheltered youth presented here likely represents homeless youth who are more connected to services and are more visible.

The workgroup that helped plan the 2015 youth count continues to meet and has expanded in the months after the count. Planning for the 2016 count will include deciding on ways to reach a greater number of homeless and unstably housed youth, such as including youth in the planning process, conducting a larger communication campaign about the count, and expanding count sites.

## LESSONS LEARNED

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The 2015 NYC youth count had many strengths that may be helpful to other localities planning youth counts. In addition, several areas of improvement and recommendations for future NYC counts emerged throughout the count implementation:

### ***Collaborate with youth, providers, and advocates in the planning, implementation, and dissemination process.***

The youth count was the result of partnerships and collaborative planning among City agencies, service providers, and advocates. The knowledge and insight that providers contributed proved invaluable to creating a comprehensive methodology. This year, it was more challenging than anticipated to recruit youth to participate in the planning process. The addition of youth participants in the planning and implementation will further expand understanding of homeless and unstably housed youth populations and help enhance the current methodology.

### ***Define the populations of youth to be counted.***

Several definitions of homeless youth exist across government agencies, as well as in different program settings. It is important to define the categories of youth that the count is intended to capture so that surveys are designed accordingly. This includes disaggregating and clarifying terms that have multiple meanings or can be difficult to classify without more details. Specifically, the category of couch surfing should be disaggregated to gain more details about different experiences that may fall within this category. Stakeholders may have different views on which definitions to use and discussing these tensions before the count helps in the dissemination process.

### ***Develop a budget proposal with anticipated funding needs.***

The 2015 count was not funded and was conducted through in-kind donations of time of program staff and volunteers. Specific funding for this initiative would allow for programs to be reimbursed for their staff's time, for stipends for youth who participate in the planning process, for additional personnel to coordinate more sites, and for a centralized communication campaign to better outreach to youth.

### ***Begin coordinating count sites early.***

The planning workgroup for this count began meeting approximately a year prior to the count dates. Providers who were engaged in this process were very familiar with the count and its structure. However, coordinating additional providers to participate as count sites required time to disseminate information about the purpose and structure of the count, obtain their logistical information (contact people, hours, daily attendance), and conduct training.

### ***Conduct a pilot survey and use the data to anticipate needed analyses.***

The youth count included a pilot survey at several sites that aided in finalizing the survey instrument and developing recommendations for setting up the count at different sites. Additional improvements to the survey could have been made by analyzing the pilot data and discussing what additional questions may stem from initial analyses. In this count, this may have led to a redesign of several questions to be more categorical in nature, rather than free-form.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### ***Require count site staff to attend a comprehensive training.***

Training for the count site staff and volunteers was relatively short and not every site was able to attend. This may have led to some inconsistencies in the data collected and different comfort levels in administering the survey among sites.

### ***Expand and adapt locations based on conversations with youth and providers.***

Expanding the count sites may help count youth who do not participate in homeless youth-specific services. New locations and programs should be added based on information from this year's count, as well as on the knowledge of youth and providers. Additionally, this year, only homeless youth outreach teams conducted surveys with youth who did not participate in programming at one of the count sites. Debriefing with these teams and obtaining feedback about the best ways to engage youth during outreach will help improve future counts. Because there are only a limited number of youth outreach teams, it is important to coordinate among them during the count to ensure that the areas where youth are most likely to congregate are covered and to potentially supplement these teams with volunteers who can expand coverage.

### ***Explore the use of technology for data collection.***

This year data was collected on pen-and-paper and then entered into a spreadsheet. With over 900 surveys to input, the data entry was a lengthy process that can be improved by exploring other options for data collection.

### ***Supplement PIT count data with additional research studies and administrative data from City agencies.***

Many homeless and unstably housed youth interact with City services, including foster care, education, and homeless shelters and drop-ins. Using data that are already being collected by programs and agencies can lead to more detailed information about the characteristics and service needs of this population. Additionally, populations of homeless and unstably housed youth fluctuate throughout the year; therefore, more information is needed to study the temporal trends of different types of living situations to prepare resources during different seasons.

## REFERENCES

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# APPENDIX A: TYPES OF PLACES STAYED DURING A MONTH

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The youth count survey had a limited number of questions and therefore, was only able to provide direct information about two major areas: demographics and where the youth had stayed on the night of the PIT count. However, a free-form question was also asked about the kinds of places youth had stayed over the past month. This question was not specifically designed to be analyzed in a quantitative way, but because it could help inform future counts and glean more comprehensive, though imperfect, information about the youth surveyed, an attempt was made to analyze it. This is an exploratory analysis due to the limitations in the structure of the question and therefore, the findings presented here should be interpreted with caution.

The responses to Question 9 on the survey (“What kinds of places were they?”) were combined with the responses to Question 6 (“On the night of this past Monday, February 9, where did you spend the night?”) to categorize the multiple places that youth may have stayed during the month in order to capture the transient nature of their housing statuses (Supplemental Table 1). Therefore, all youth were at least categorized in the housing status that they experienced on Monday night, but could also have other housing statuses throughout the month. Therefore, the percentages within each housing status category do not add up to 100% because youth are represented in multiple categories.

Unfortunately, Question 9 only required surveyors to write in responses as free text and did not provide straightforward categories to analyze. In order to analyze these responses in a quantitative way, the text was coded according to key words in the response. For example, a response that said “friend’s house” would be coded in the couch surfing category, while a response that said “street” would be categorized as unsheltered. This method has several implications for the interpretation of the categorized data. First, several categories can have multiple meanings depending on the context that a youth is living in. For example, staying at “a friend’s house” over the past month in some situations could mean a couch surfing situation

where the youth does not have another place to stay; on the other hand, it could also mean that a youth had a sleepover with a friend as a social event, but returned to a family home the next day. Based on the data provided, it was not possible to disaggregate these contexts further.

Youth who stayed at a relative’s home over the past month were categorized in the “Apartment/Own room/House/Dorm/Parent’s apartment” category for the purposes of this analysis. Although this may represent a different population of youth, because these two groups were categorized together in Question 6, the two different groups were not able to be fully separated and therefore, were kept together for consistency.

Over the past month, 14% of the youth surveyed had been unsheltered, 22% had stayed in a shelter, drop-in center, or similar place, 28% had stayed at a friend’s place or couch surfed, about 3% had stayed in an institutional setting, 2% had stayed in a hotel, and less than 1% had exchanged sex for shelter. Sixty-eight percent had stayed at their own apartment or a parent’s/relative’s apartment. Of the youth who were unstably housed on Monday night, 35% had been unsheltered over the past month, 16% had stayed at a parent’s/relative’s apartment, 56% had stayed in a shelter or drop-in, and 48% had couch surfed over the past month.

Only about 9% of the unsheltered youth and the youth who stayed in a shelter or drop-in center on Monday night and about 35% of the youth who couch surfed on Monday night stayed in their own apartment or a parent’s/relative’s apartment during the month. Thirteen percent of unsheltered youth had stayed in a shelter or drop-in, as had about 14% of youth who couch surfed on Monday night. On the other hand, 32% of unsheltered youth had couch surfed during the month, as had 27% of youth who stayed in a shelter or drop-in center on Monday night.

**Supplemental Table 1. Kinds of Places Stayed in the Past Month**

	Total* (n=857)	Unstably Housed Total** (n=317)	Unsheltered (n=68)	Apartment/ Own room/ House/ Dorm/ Parent's apartment (n=532)	Shelter/ Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/ Church bed (n=153)	Friend's place/ Couch surfing (n=81)	Hospital/ Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/ Group Home (n=7)	Hotel (n=4)	Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/ Trafficked (n=4)
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Unsheltered	120 14.0%	110 34.7%	68 100.0%	6 1.1%	20 13.1%	18 22.2%	2 28.6%	0 0.0%	2 50.0%
Apartment/Own room/ House/ Dorm/ Parent's apartment	583 68.0%	49 15.5%	6 8.8%	532 100.0%	14 9.2%	28 34.6%	0 0.0%	1 25.0%	0 0.0%
Shelter/Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/ Church bed	188 21.9%	177 55.8%	9 13.2%	8 1.5%	153 100.0%	11 13.6%	2 28.6%	2 50.0%	0 0.0%
Friend's place/ Couch surfing	240 28.0%	153 48.3%	22 32.4%	83 15.6%	41 26.8%	81 100.0%	3 42.9%	3 75.0%	3 75.0%
Hospital/Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/ Group Home	21 2.5%	15 4.7%	5 7.4%	6 1.1%	1 0.7%	2 2.5%	7 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Hotel	19 2.2%	12 3.8%	2 2.9%	5 0.9%	3 2.0%	2 2.5%	1 14.3%	4 100.0%	0 0.0%
Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked	5 0.6%	4 1.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	4 100.0%

\*Total includes 2 additional categories of "Don't know/Don't remember" (n=5) and "Outside NYC" (n=3)

\*\*Unstably Housed Total is the sum of the following categories: Unsheltered, Shelter/Drop-in Center/ Transitional Living/Church bed, Friend's place/Couch surfing, Hospital/Jail/ Juvenile Detention/ Mental Health Facility/Group Home, Hotel, and Sex for shelter/ Forced sex for shelter/Trafficked.

Note: Youth can stay in multiple places over the course of the month. Therefore, percentages add up to over 100%.



## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATING PROGRAMS

Program	Organization	Program Type
Ali Forney	Ali Forney	Drop-in
Cardinal McCloskey Services	Cardinal McCloskey Services	Drop-in
GEMS	GEMS	Drop-in
Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI)	Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI)	Drop-in
MCCNY (Sylvia's Place)	MCCNY	Drop-In
Project Hospitality	Project Hospitality	Drop-in
Safe Space	Safe Space	Drop-in
SCO Family Services	SCO Family Services	Drop-in
Streetwork Project	Safe Horizon	Drop-in
Streetwork Project LES	Safe Horizon	Drop-in
The Door	The Door	Drop-in
Ali Forney	Ali Forney	Outreach
Good Shepherd Services	Good Shepherd Services	Outreach
Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI)	Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI)	Outreach
Project Hospitality	Project Hospitality	Outreach
Streetwork Project	Safe Horizon	Outreach
Streetwork Project LES	Safe Horizon	Outreach
The Door	The Door	Outreach
GEMS	GEMS	Scattered Site
Ali Forney (Park Slope)	Ali Forney	Shelter
Ali Forney (Sunset)	Ali Forney	Shelter
Ali Forney (Taaffe)	Ali Forney	Shelter
Covenant House (Mother and Child)	Covenant House	Shelter
Covenant House (Under 21)	Covenant House	Shelter
Inwood House	Inwood House	Shelter
MCCNY (Sylvia's Place)	MCCNY	Shelter
Streetwork Project	Safe Horizon	Shelter
East 9th Street	The Door	Supportive Housing
Jasper Hall	Lantern Community Services	Supportive Housing
Schafer Hall	Lantern Community Services	Supportive Housing
The Lee	The Door	Supportive Housing
Vicinitas Hall	Lantern Community Services	Supportive Housing
GEMS	GEMS	TIL

Time of Survey: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Conducting Survey: \_\_\_\_\_

### NYC YOUTH COUNT SURVEY (FRIDAY)

#### Survey Instructions

Please read only the **bolded text** aloud. Please do not read the responses aloud.

Please see follow-up questions and other helpful documents in the materials in your site packet.

To fill in the survey:

1. Write the actual response on lines provided (where applicable) **AND**
2. Fill in the circle next to the appropriate response.

Please introduce the survey by addressing the following points:

- Introduce yourself and where you are from (if not already known to the individual)
- Introduce the purpose of the survey: "We are asking everyone a few questions about their housing situation this week. Your answers will help advocate for services for young adults in New York City."
- Answers are anonymous; respondent can refuse to answer any question; and services will not be affected by participation.
- If respondent has already participated in the survey this week, he/she should not participate again.

**1. May I ask you a few questions?**

- (a) Yes  (b) No (skip to end)

**2. Did you participate in this survey this week? This may have happened here, at a shelter, drop-in center, or on the street. If your site piloted the study in December/early January, please distinguish these instances if necessary.**

- (a) Yes (skip to end)  (b) No

**3. Did someone approach you on the street or on the subway to ask you questions about your housing situation on Monday night (between 12AM and 4AM)?**

- (a) Yes  (b) No

**4. How old are you?**

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

- (a) Under 14  (c) 15  (e) 17  (g) 19  (i) 21  (k) 23  (m) 25 and over (skip to end)  
 (b) 14  (d) 16  (f) 18  (h) 20  (j) 22  (l) 24

**5. Where did you spend the night:**

Last night? \_\_\_\_\_

On Wednesday night? \_\_\_\_\_

On Tuesday night? \_\_\_\_\_

**6. On the night of this past Monday, January 26, where did you spend the night?**

You may ask follow up questions based on initial response. Please see additional follow-up questions in your site packet.

Response:

\_\_\_\_\_

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> (a) Apartment/Own room/House/<br>Dorm/Parent's apartment                     | <input type="radio"/> (f) Sex for shelter  | <input type="radio"/> (k) Streets/Subway/Walked<br>around/Park          |
| <input type="radio"/> (b) Shelter/Drop-in Center/<br>Transitional Living/ Church                   | <input type="radio"/> (g) Forced sex for<br>shelter/trafficked                                     | <input type="radio"/> (l) Working                                       |
| <input type="radio"/> (c) Hospital/Jail/Juvenile<br>Detention/Mental Health<br>Facility/Group home | <input type="radio"/> (h) Fast food restaurant/24-hour<br>Store/Bank/internet café/<br>Apple Store | <input type="radio"/> (m) Other private place not meant<br>for sleeping |
| <input type="radio"/> (d) Hotel  | <input type="radio"/> (i) Abandoned Building/Stairwell/<br>Lobby/Yard/Car/Squat                    | <input type="radio"/> (n) Outside NYC                                   |
| <input type="radio"/> (e) Friend's place/Couch surfing   | <input type="radio"/> (j) Bar/Club/Other party   | <input type="radio"/> (o) Other   |
|  |  | <input type="radio"/> (p) Don't know/Don't remember                     |

Survey Number:  
Location Code:

7. Describe the location in more detail. Do not read aloud, but ask follow up questions as needed. If the respondent slept on the street or subway Monday night, please specify the subway line, borough, neighborhood, and/or street/avenue if possible.

Borough: \_\_\_\_\_ Neighborhood: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/Avenue: \_\_\_\_\_ Subway Line: \_\_\_\_\_

8. How many different places have you spent the night in the past month?

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

- a 1                       c 3                       e 5                       g 7                       i 9  
 b 2                       d 4                       f 6                       h 8                       j 10 or more

9. What kinds of places were they?

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

10. What gender do you prefer to be identified as?

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

- a Male                       c Transgender: Male to Female                       e Other  
 b Female                       d Transgender: Female to Male

11. What race and ethnicity do you prefer to be identified as?

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

- a White                       c Hispanic                       e Two or more races  
 b Black                       d Asian/Pacific Islander                       f Other

12. What sexual orientation do you prefer to be identified as?

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

- a Straight                       d Bisexual                       g Other  
 b Gay                       e Queer  
 c Lesbian                       f Questioning

13. What are your initials (first and last only) and what is the day of your birthday?

Example: For Jane Doe with a date of birth of 1/9/1994, the response would be JD09.

Record the response as FLDD here: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your participation.**  
(End of questions that are asked to respondent.)

14. Did the youth have his/her own child(ren) with him/her? If so, how many?

- a Yes                      Number of Children: \_\_\_\_\_  
 b No

15. Was this survey conducted in-person or on the phone? Please note if it was conducted on the phone, it will not be included in the totals sent to HUD this year, but will be used to inform future counts.

- a In-person  
 b On the phone

16. Additional Comments/Feedback

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_