

Myths & Facts About Homeless Youth

*"A roof over my head, always somewhere to get food, job skills.
Having this support allows me to see a lot more potential in myself."*

MYTH: Homeless youth want to be on the streets.

FACT: Most homeless youth leave their families because of abuse, neglect, and violence — not because they choose to, but because they must.

MYTH: Homeless youth are mostly criminals, use drugs, and are bad kids.

FACT: Most homeless youth only turn to crime and drugs when all other options have failed them. Many are victims, not perpetrators.

MYTH: Homeless youth are different than other kids.

FACT: Homeless youth are looking for the same things most kids want: a home, a stable life, and enough resources to do the things they enjoy.

MYTH: There are not that many homeless youth.

FACT: 1.8 – 2.1 million youth are homeless in the United States each year. In San Francisco, an estimated 5,700 youth ages 12–24 are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and living on the streets.

MYTH: You can't help teens and young adults. They don't want to change and it's too late.

FACT: Youth are resilient. Larkin Street provides a place where at-risk youth can feel safe as they rebuild their sense of self-respect, trust, and hope. Three out of four youth who complete Larkin Street's comprehensive programs exit street life.

In times like this, Larkin Street's work is more important than ever.

Despite the economy's rebound, our community's most vulnerable youth and families continue to struggle. As families struggle to make ends meet financially — particularly in the Bay Area's expensive housing market — they are less likely to be able to provide for the 18–21 year olds who still live at home. When older youth are forced to move out on their own because finances are stretched too thin for the rest of the family, they land too often on the street. Likewise, financial challenges put additional emotional stressors on a family, which leads to more family disruption and more runaways.

Job opportunities for those without a college degree are shrinking. The hard truth is that the world that homeless, imminently at-risk, and disconnected youth are entering today has changed dramatically in recent years. Over the past third-century, all of the net job growth in America has been generated by positions that require at least some postsecondary education. The recent recession accelerated this disparity: between 2007 and 2012, the number of jobs for Americans with no college education fell by 10%.

More homeless youth today become more homeless adults tomorrow. If we can avoid youth homelessness, we can prevent adult homelessness, a much more intractable problem. ***For every youth that exits street life, society saves more than five times the cost of long-term intervention.***

