

# Beyond Barriers: A Harm Reduction Approach to Housing

Beyond Housing: A National Conversation on Child Homelessness and Poverty  
January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012



YOUTH SERVICES

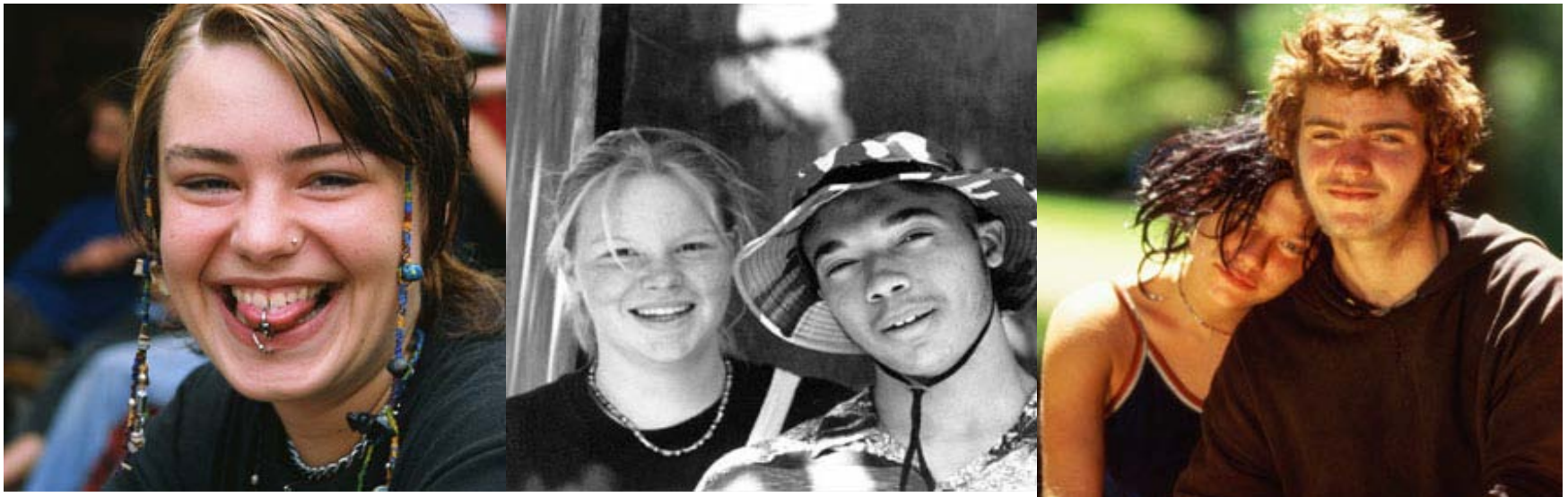
# Agenda

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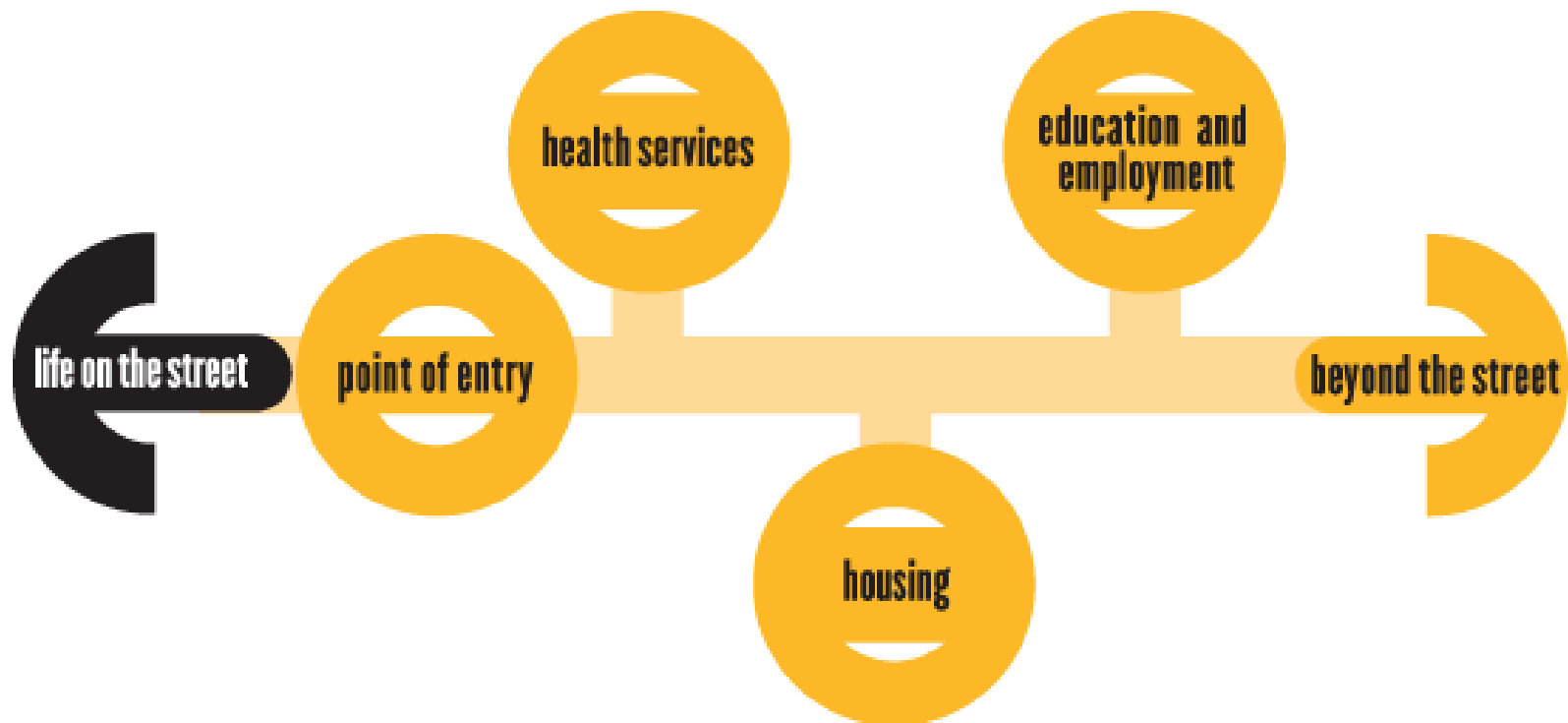
- Overview of Larkin Street Youth Services
- Substance use among Homeless Youth
- Harm Reduction philosophy at Larkin Street
- Harm Reduction in Housing Programs
- Things to Consider

# Larkin Street Mission Statement

The mission of Larkin Street Youth Services is to create a continuum of services that inspires youth to move beyond the street. We will nurture potential, promote dignity, and support bold steps by all.



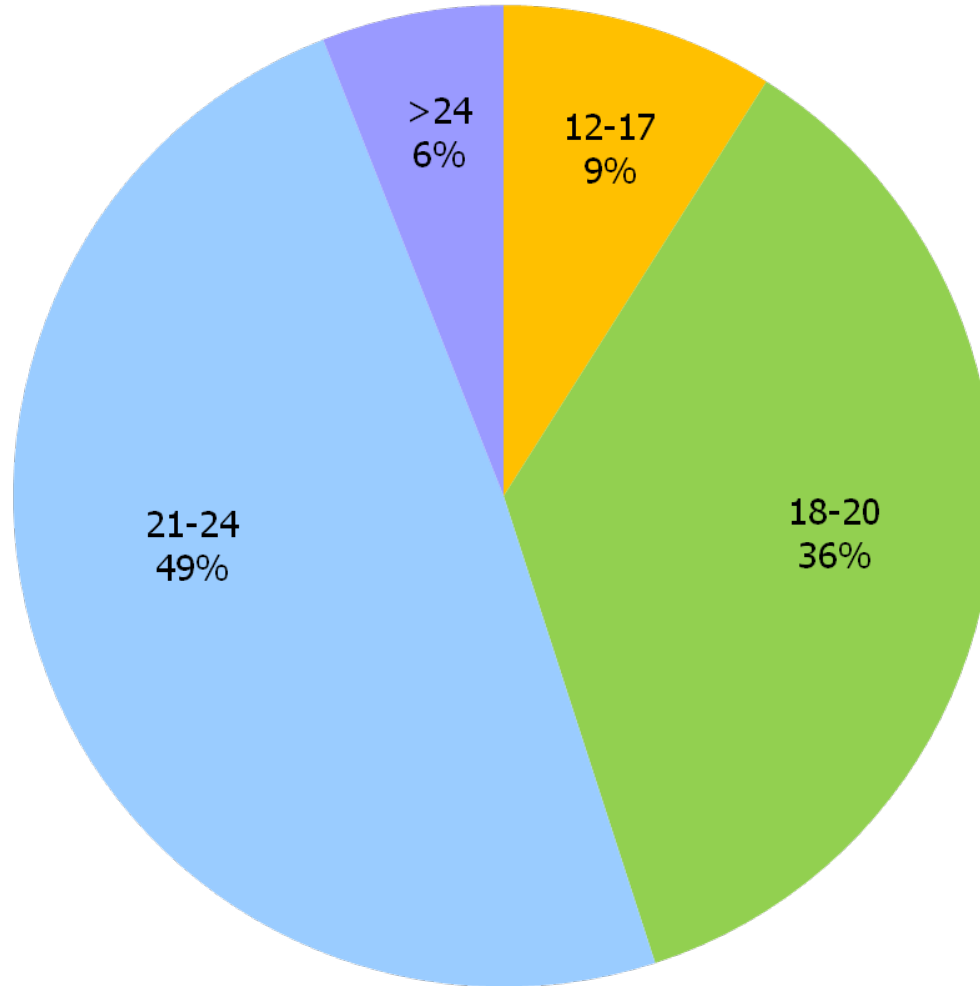
# Continuum of Support



# Larkin Street Philosophy

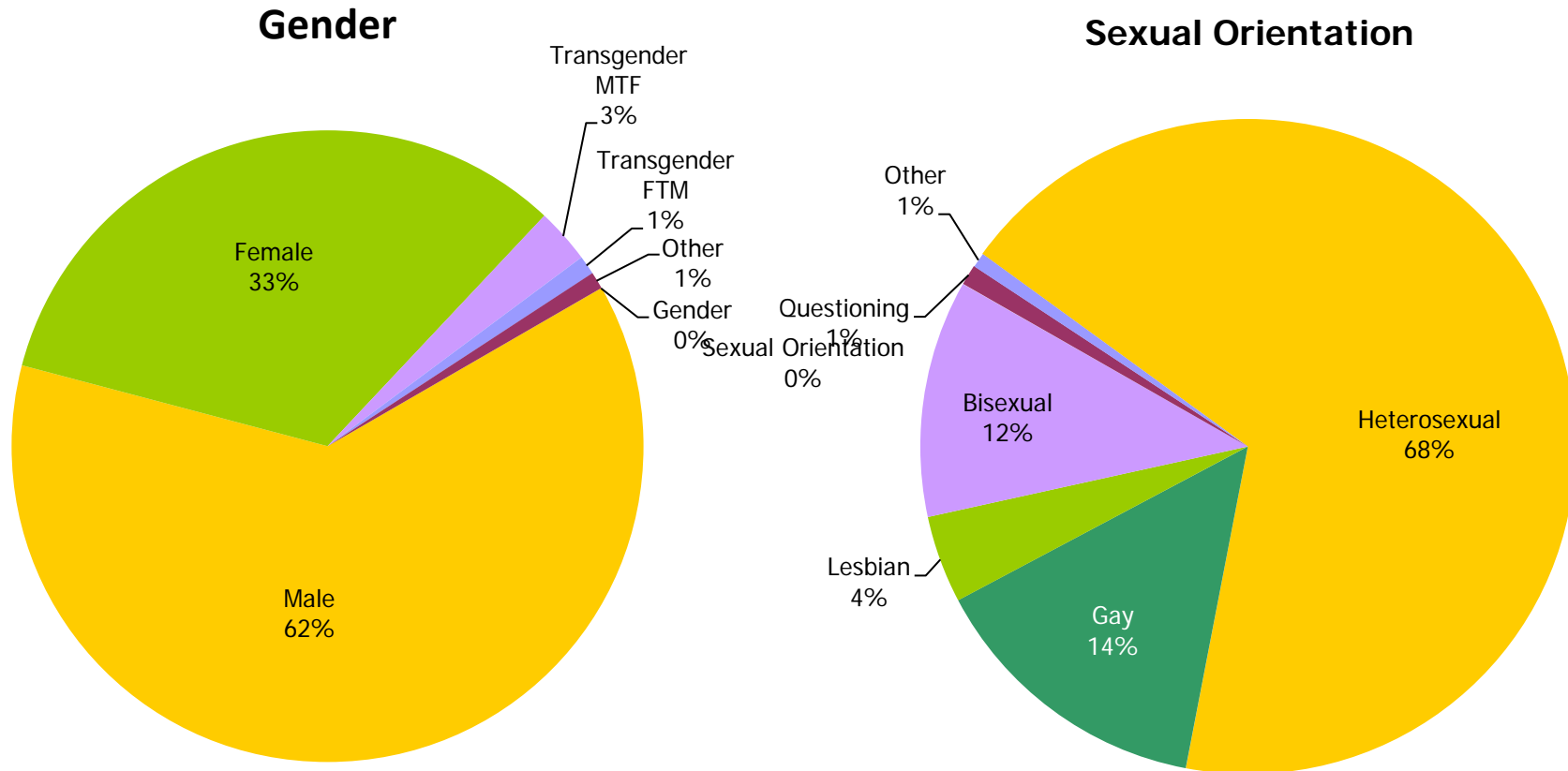
- Individualized, youth centered services
  - Client-centered individual planning
  - Grounded in youth development theory
- Housing as a Treatment Modality
  - Crucial for youth stabilization
  - Increases their ability to participate in support services
- Focus on Life Skills
  - Individual and group life skills interventions
  - Focus on providing skills needed to live independently
- Harm Reduction
  - Focus on youth readiness in terms of desire to change risk behaviors
  - Staff members work with youth to minimize the harmful effects of behaviors
- Youth Voice
- Continuum of care/Integrated service delivery
- Real life consequences

# Age at First Service



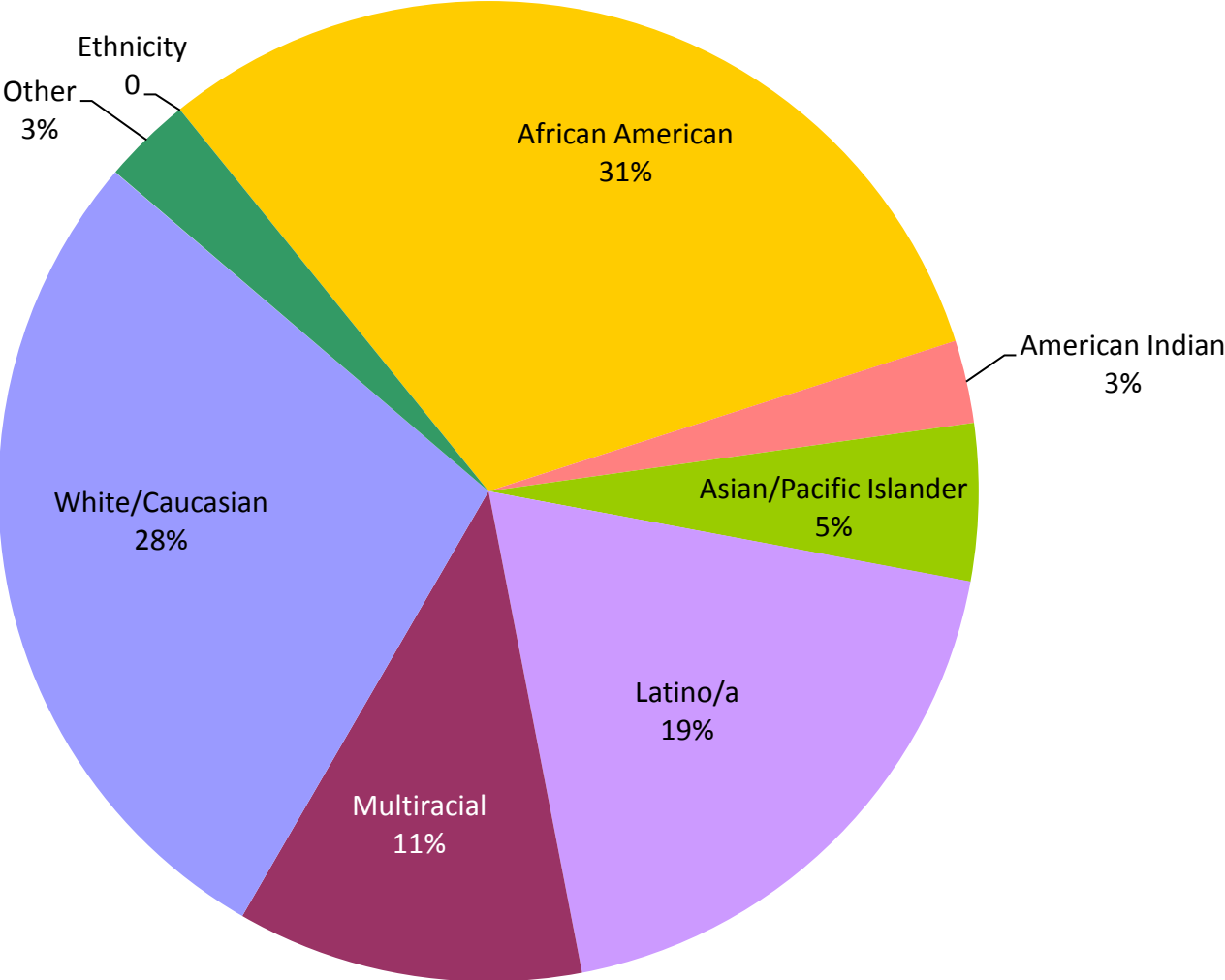
Among 3,175 youth served in FY10-11

# Gender and Sexual Orientation



Among youth with completed Intakes

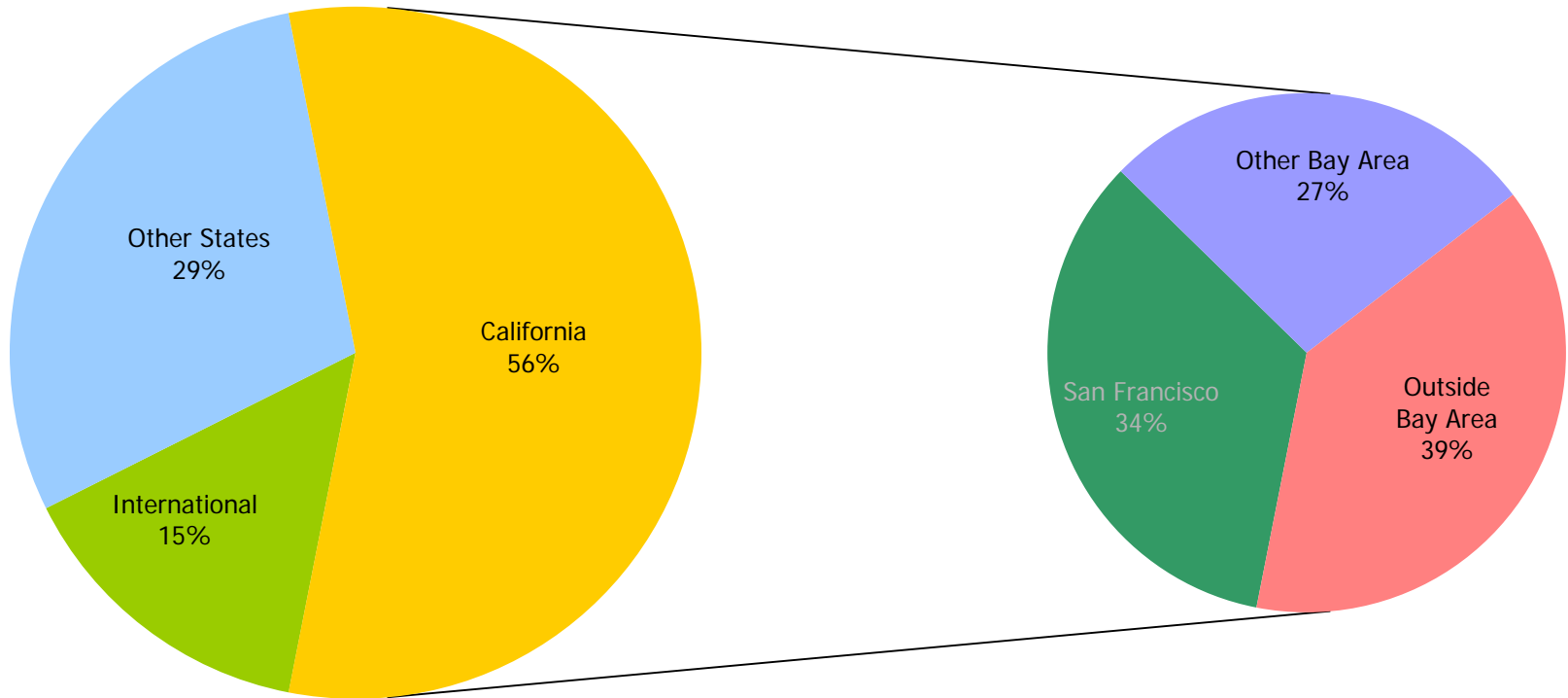
# Ethnicity



Among youth with completed Intakes

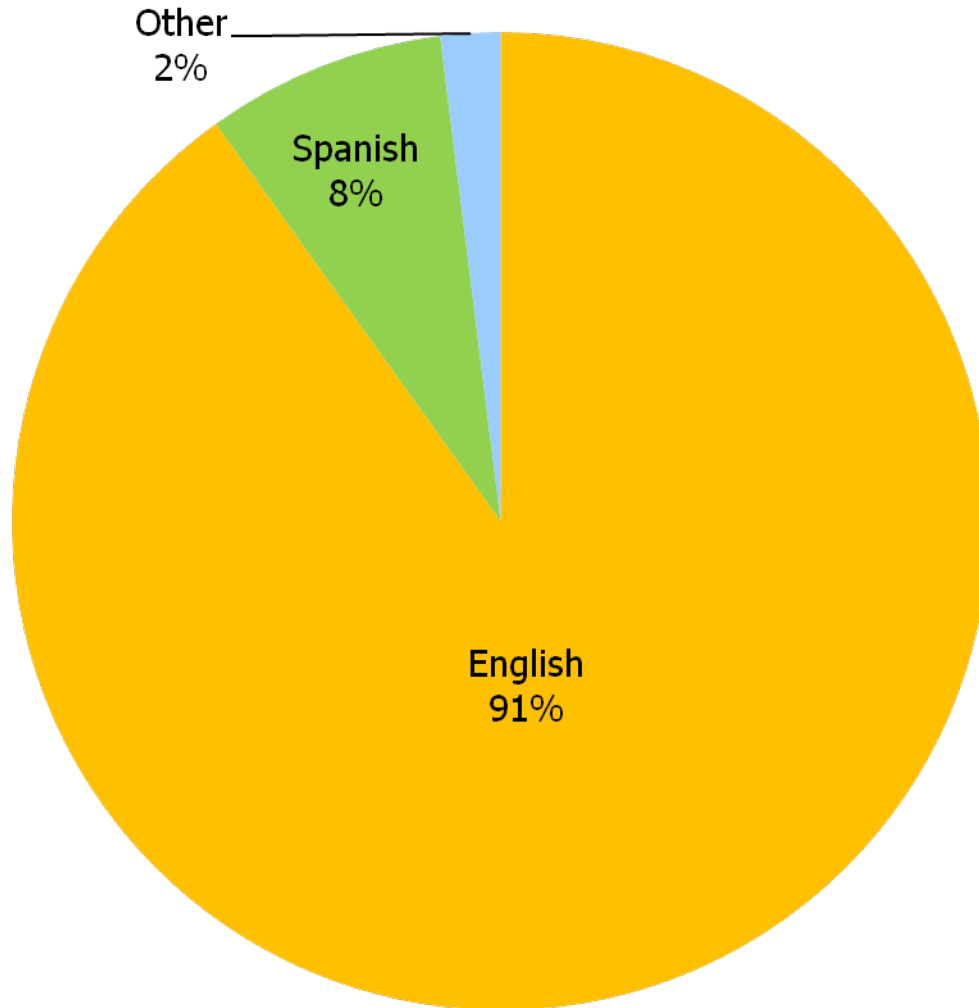


# Place of Origin



Among youth with completed Intakes

# Primary Language



Among youth with completed Intakes

# Youth Profile: Mental Health & Substance Use

## Mental health issues at intake:

- 72% have been in counseling
- 44% have seen a psychiatrist
- 42% have been prescribed psychiatric medications
- 28% have been hospitalized for psychiatric reasons
- 48% of youth report having felt seriously depressed in the previous 30 days

## Level of substance use is high:

- 83% have used drugs
- 29% have used cocaine
- 11% have used crack
- 24% have used speed
- 51% have used pot in the last month
- 12% have injected drugs
- 40% have tried to stop using drugs
- 21% have been in substance use treatment

# Why House Active Users?

- Central to Larkin Street's philosophy of service provision is that housing is in itself an intervention, and is crucial to stabilizing the lives of homeless youth.
- Housing reduces the need to engage in risky behaviors and provides youth the opportunity to reflect on the impact of these behaviors on their lives.
- Providing stable housing increases the opportunity for youth to engage in support services including education and employment, which is crucial to self-sufficiency.
- A range of housing options with varying levels of support and expectations will ensure that each youth can find a suitable housing option that aligns with readiness to transition from the streets. This is not a linear process.

**Providing housing now will prevent youth from cycling through emergency services and becoming the next generation of chronically homeless adults.**

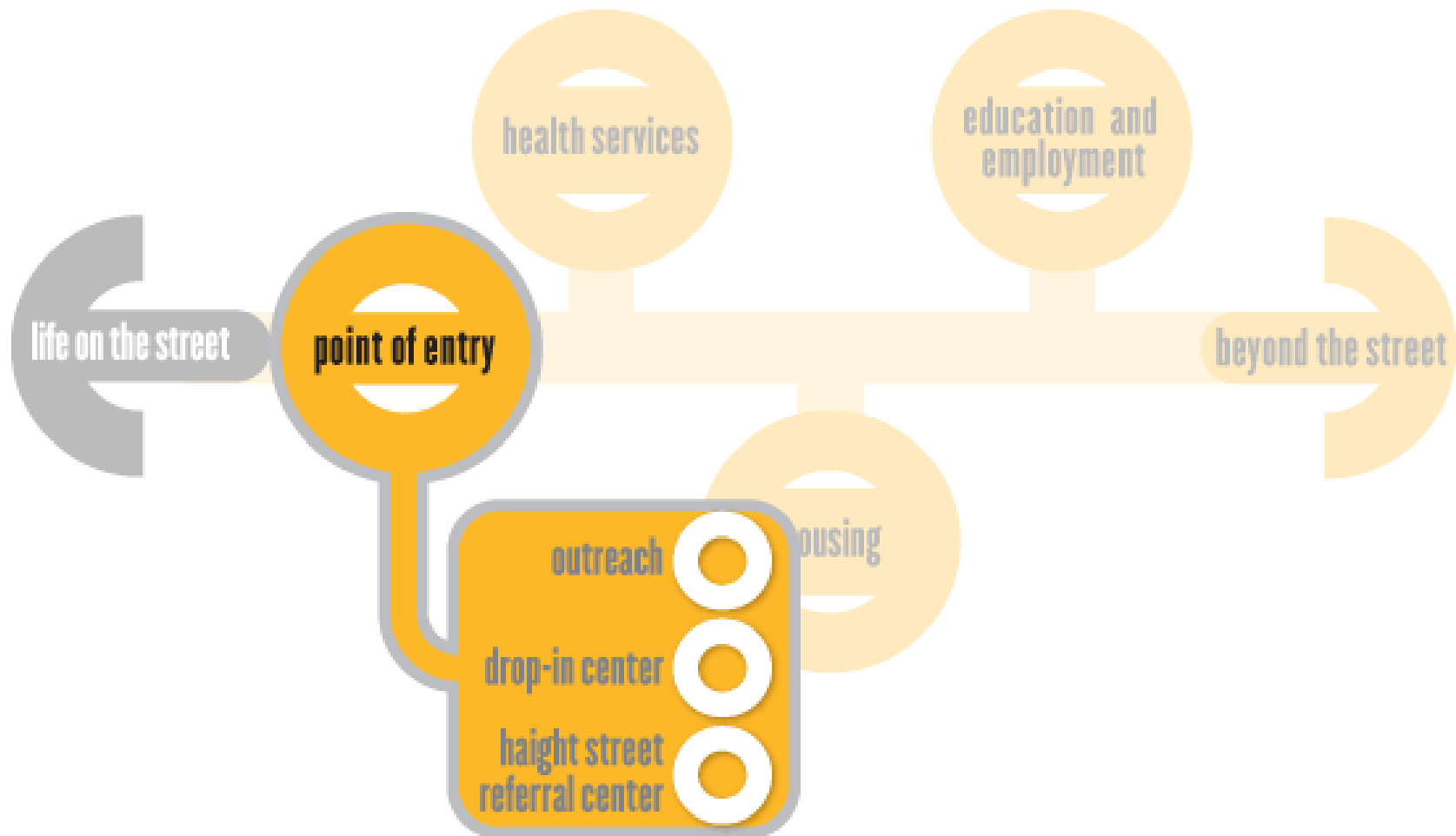
# Harm Reduction Approach

- Meets youth “where they’re at”
- Non-judgmental and strengths based
- Provides practical strategies that reduce negative consequences
- Removes barrier to housing
- Harm reduction applies for multiple behaviors
- Focus on impact of behaviors
- Harm reduction with youth vs. adults
- Harm reduction is youth development

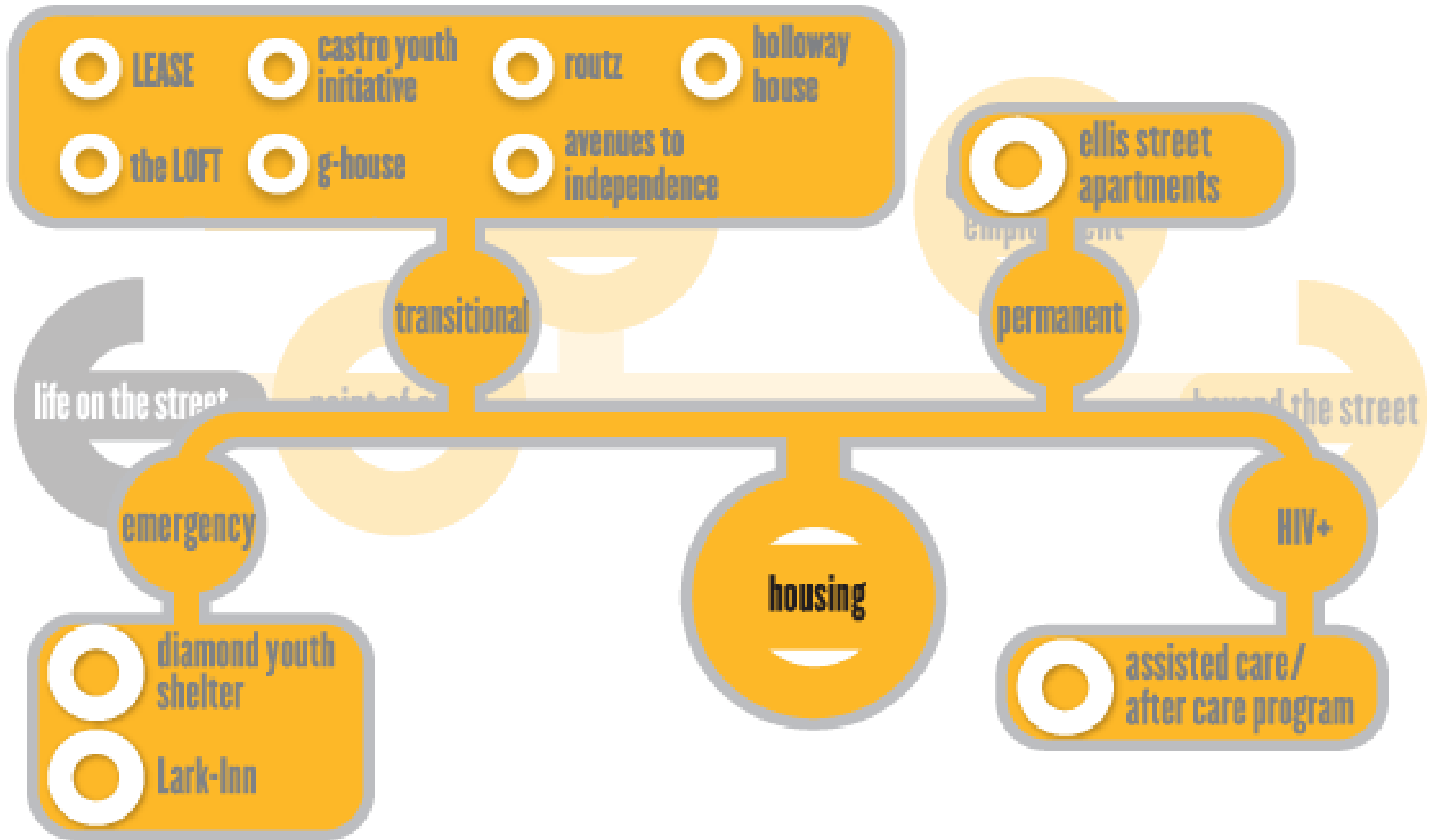
# What Does Harm Reduction Look like at Larkin Street

- Agency Wide expectations
- Point of entry services
- With underage clients in housing programs
- With overage in housing programs
  - With HIV positive clients
  - With clients with severe mental health needs

# Point of Entry



# Housing Programs





# Things to Consider - Harm Reduction Model in Housing

- **Safety**

- Clients – conflict b/t clients trying to reduce use and clients not trying to reduce use who share living space
- Behavioral challenges/volatility

- **Staff**

- Training and Support

- Existing staff and new staff
- External training and internal training (motivational interviewing, youth development, crisis intervention, boundaries)
- Supervision – counter transference

- Staff retention

- feelings of ineffectiveness
- requires on going training and support in Harm Reduction philosophy

# Things to Consider - continued

- **Program Design** - Harm reduction will mean something different in every program
  - Harm Reduction means thinking about what the youth needs vs. what the program needs
  - Gray Areas are inherent in an individualized client centered approach
  - Developing an agency model
  - Deciding which aspects are agency-wide and which are program-specific
- **Access to treatment** if/when requested  
need links to treatment service providers
- **Need to educate funders and/or regulatory bodies**

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