POLICY BRIEF 2021:

A FOCUS ON PREVENTION

LARKIN
STREET
YOUTH SERVICES

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

One in ten young people ages 18 to 25 will experience homelessness this year. Most of them will be Black, Brown, and/or LGBTQ+. This year, the pathway to ending homelessness has been further complicated by the economic, emotional, and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, **youth homelessness is a problem that can be solved with bold actions taken at the national, state, and local levels.**

Ending youth homelessness requires that we make it **RARE, brief, and one time.**

In the first of three policy briefs to explore the pathway to ending youth homelessness, this document focuses on what it takes to prevent it.

For over 30 years Larkin Street Youth Services has created an environment where young people can take control of their lives and reach their potential, yet no one organization can create impact alone. Young people require a wider ecosystem of stakeholders committed to making bold and necessary changes.

We know that coordinated, sector-wide efforts make a difference when fueled by sound policies and strategic investment. Since 2013 in San Francisco, there has been a steady **reduction in the number of youth experiencing homelessness. This shift corresponds with the collective action of young people, policymakers, advocates, service providers, and other stakeholders** working together to sustain and expand housing opportunities for youth.

Now, we must apply that same **strategy and focus to the work of prevention.**

Any effort to end youth homelessness must start with the young people themselves. In the development of this policy brief, and in the work we do every day, Larkin Street listens to our youth and partners with them in our local, state, and national advocacy agendas. **Together, and led by youth, we know that ending homelessness for all young people is possible.**

THE SCOPE

The scale, prevalence, and nature of youth homelessness is observable at the national, state, and local levels. Local Point in Time Youth Homeless Counts and Surveys provide one window into the issue. Here in San Francisco, we can show significant and celebratory gains in reducing youth homelessness in the semi-annual Point in Time counts: **between 2013 and 2019, the estimated number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness fell 39% or approximately 750 young people.** [1] The road to reach functional zero, however, requires that we move beyond what is needed once a young person becomes homeless by focusing equal energy on what it takes to prevent homelessness in the first place.

THE NATIONAL CHALLENGE

+ 35,000 young people experienced homelessness on a given night according to data collected in the 2019 Point in Time count. [2]
+ Across the U.S., one in ten youth aged 18 to 25 will experience homelessness each year. [3]
+ Across the U.S., one in thirty youth aged 13 to 17 will experience homelessness each year. [3]

THE STATE CHALLENGE

+ 12,000 or 1 out of 3 youth experiencing homelessness in the U.S. resides in California. [3]
+ 1 in 4 youth that have emancipated from the foster care system in California experiences homelessness. [4]
+ 1 in 5 California community college students experiences homelessness each year. [4]

THE LOCAL CHALLENGE

+ Half of homeless people in San Francisco first experienced homelessness before the age of 25. [1]
+ 5,000 unsheltered homeless youth live in the Bay Area on a given night, nearly 1,200 of whom are in San Francisco. [2]

PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS

To Larkin Street and our partners, the evidence is clear: youth of color and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ are disproportionately impacted by homelessness. The data shows us that youth homelessness is rooted in racism, homophobia, and transphobia.[5] Once we examine how systems fail certain young people, we can identify ways to change those systems and prevent youth from becoming homeless in the first place.

THESE FACTORS IMPACT A YOUNG PERSON'S LIKELIHOOD OF EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS:

1. SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY
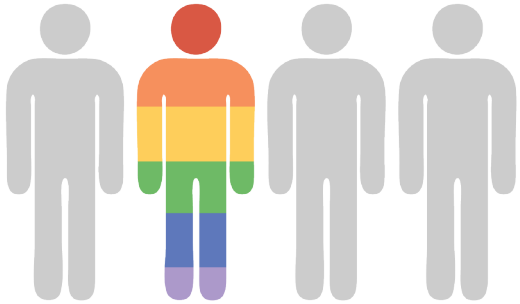
+ LGBTQ+ youth are at more than double the risk of homelessness compared to non-LGBTQ+ peers. [6]
+ LGBTQ+ youth experience over twice the rate of early death among youth experiencing homelessness. [6]
+ Youth who identify as both LGBTQ+, Black, or multiracial experience some of the highest rates of homelessness. [6]
+ Among youth experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+ young people reported higher rates of trauma and adversity. [6]
+ Transgender youth often face unique and more severe types of discrimination and trauma. [6]

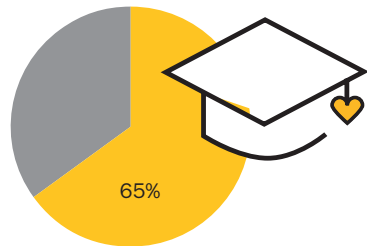*Over a five-year period, over 25% of Larkin Street clients self-identify as LGTBQ+.*

2. RACE AND ETHNICITY

+ Black youth are 83% more likely to experience homelessness than their non-Black peers. Intergenerational poverty disproportionately impacts Black families because of historical and contemporary policies and practices, like segregation, redlining, and mass incarceration. 40 percent of Black people experience homelessness as part of a family unit compared to 22 percent of white people. [3]
+ Over-policing of Black and Brown young people results in their disproportionate representation in the criminal justice system, often for numerous minor infractions. Criminal records are used to deny employment and housing. [3]
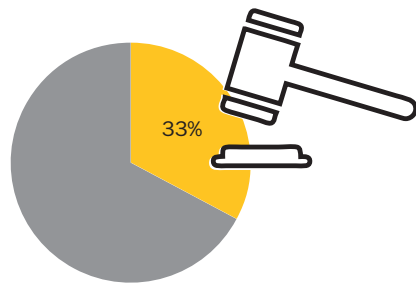
Over a five-year period, 70% of Larkin Street clients are young people of color.
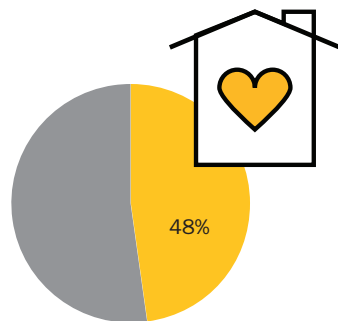
3. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

65%

Over a five-year period, 65% of youth accessing Larkin Street's shelters do not have a high school diploma or GED credential at in-take.

+ Youth who do not have a high school diploma or a GED face a greater risk of experiencing homelessness. [7]
+ Youth who experience homelessness are less likely to attend college. Even when they do attend college, many still struggle with homelessness. [7]
+ Access to education and economic opportunities for young people depend on local community resources. [7]
+ The risk factors for homelessness overlap with the risk factors for school dropout. [7]

4. INVOLVEMENT IN FOSTER CARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS

33%

Over a five-year period, more than 33% of Larkin Street clients accessing our residential programs have experience within the justice system or foster care system.

+ Between 31% and 46% of youth exiting foster care experience homelessness by age 26. [8]
+ 25% of youth exiting juvenile detention, group homes, or foster care stayed on the street or in a shelter their first night out of the system. [9]
+ In the Bay Area, 3 out of 4 youth experiencing homelessness have juvenile justice system involvement. [10]
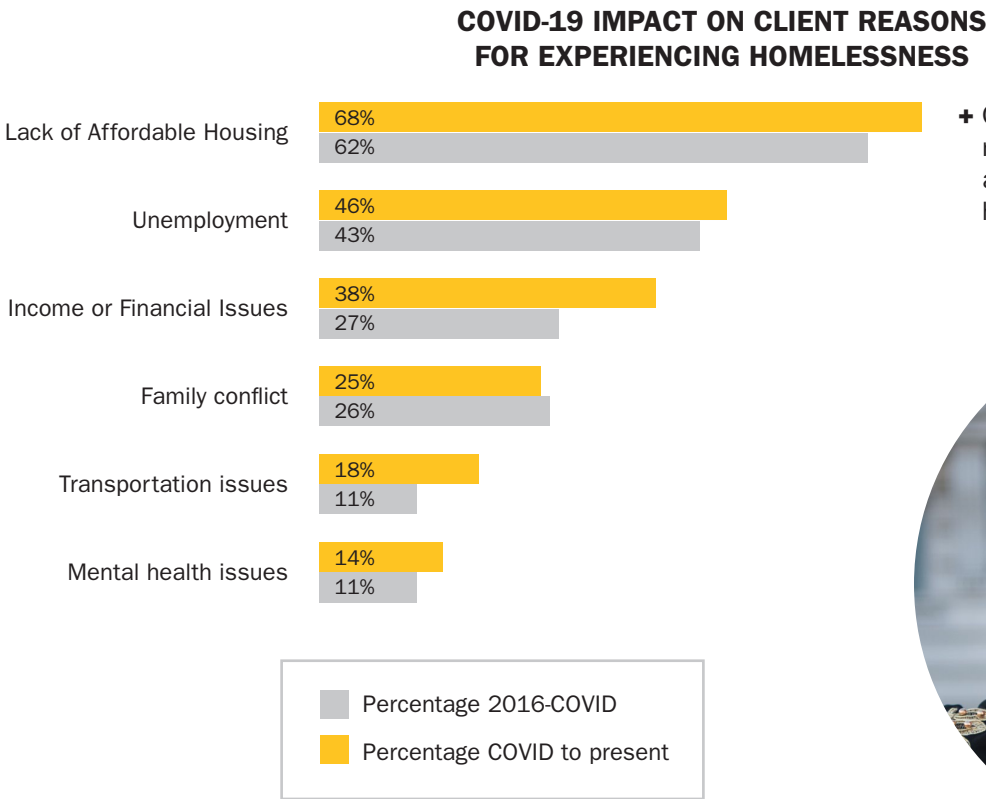
5. ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

48%

+ 48% of youth experiencing homelessness in San Francisco became homeless while living here, while another 48% indicated that they were unable to obtain housing due to the costs of establishing a residence. [1]
+ According to estimates, rent in San Francisco is the highest in the country and 20% higher than New York City, the second most expensive city in America. [11]
+ The 2020 area median income level for a single individual living in San Francisco is $89,650. [12]
+ The current average cost of a 1-bedroom apartment is annually $34,800 at $2,901 per month, or 36% of the Area Median Income (AMI) for San Francisco and 98% of a full-time job at San Francisco's current minimum wage of $17.05/hour. [13]
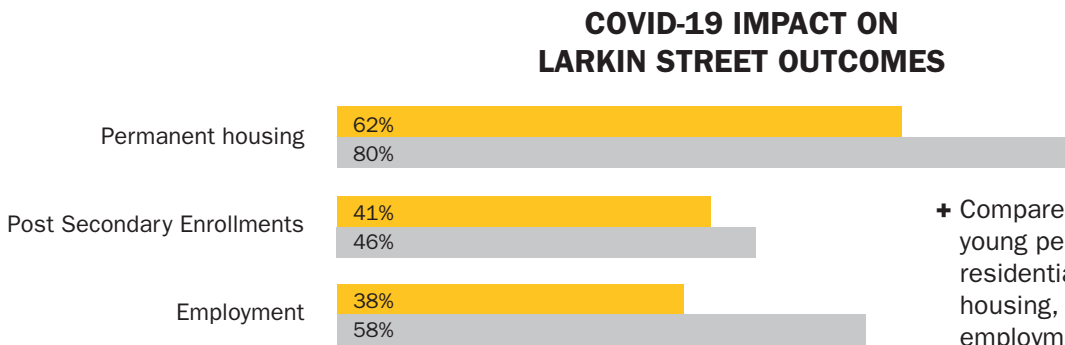
6. COVID-19 PANDEMIC

3 million youth in the U.S. have had their developmental needs unmet due to COVID-19 [14]

+ Educational effects of the pandemic will be compounded by the impact of increased job loss, housing instability, and adverse health consequences of COVID-19, all of which fall harder on low-income families and young people. The sum of this disruption will echo through generations and communities. [14]

COVID-19 IMPACT ON CLIENT REASONS FOR EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Lack of Affordable Housing — 68% / 62%
Unemployment — 46% / 43%
Income or Financial Issues — 38% / 27%
Family conflict — 25% / 26%
Transportation issues — 18% / 11%
Mental health issues — 14% / 11%

Percentage 2016-COVID
Percentage COVID to present

+ Compared to prior years, youth reported affordability, unemployment, and income as greater drivers into homelessness during the pandemic.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON LARKIN STREET OUTCOMES

Permanent housing — 62% / 80%
Post Secondary Enrollments — 41% / 46%
Employment — 38% / 58%

+ Compared to prior years, the ability for young people exiting Larkin Street's residential programs to secure permanent housing, enroll in school, or sustain employment declined during the pandemic.

Larkin Street was a source of support and stability during a disruptive and challenging year which impacted education, employment, and housing goals for those we served throughout the year. Our doors remained open throughout the pandemic to ensure continuous access to critical services. The long-term toll of this unprecedented year is unknown, and providers like Larkin Street are preparing to serve more young people with deeper needs in the year ahead.

LARKIN STREET YOUTH SERVICES' VISION:

To end youth homelessness by making it rare, brief, and one time.

At Larkin Street, we believe that every young person can reach their full potential. **Our model offers this opportunity by removing barriers, providing stability, promoting health and wellness practices, nurturing social connection, and offering education and employment support to sustain transitions into independent adulthood.** We center young people as the experts of their own lives, so our services are relevant and effective.

Making youth homelessness **RARE** means that we must prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place. This means we must take actions to address the root causes of homelessness, such as family fragmentation, childhood trauma, poverty, racial inequity, and LGBTQ discrimination. [15] Here are steps we can take to support policies and practices to prevent it.

NATIONAL POLICY

+ Work toward **more complete national data** to better understand the successful interventions that can end youth homelessness as well as the drivers into homelessness for youth subpopulations, including immigrants, rural youth, youth with disabilities, pregnant and parenting youth, and young people who have experienced abuse, neglect, and/or trafficking.

+ **Commit to addressing and understanding racial and LGBTQ+ inequities** in all federal data, plans, and funding announcements to prevent and end homelessness. [7] **Examine youth homelessness data through the lens of racial and LGBTQ+ equity** to determine if youth of color and youth who are LGBTQ+ have access and outcomes on par with their white, cis, and straight peers. [7]

+ Promote **innovation through federal demonstration projects, human-centered design pilots, and developmental evaluations** of federal programs preventing youth homelessness. [16]

STATE POLICY

+ **Create opportunities for youth as state level decision-makers** through California state bill AB46, the California Youth Empowerment Act, that would establish the California Youth Empowerment Commission consisting of 25 voting commissioners between 14 and 25 years of age to engage with policymakers.

+ **Improve Re-Entry Planning:** Require robust transition planning for youth exiting the juvenile and adult justice system, including housing, education, employment, and family-focused services to help youth reunify with their families in a safe and healthy way. [9]

+ Enact a plan to **end homelessness among youth of color and youth who are LGBTQ+** as an amendment of the California statewide plan to end homelessness.

+ **Train and fund local education agencies** to identify and support access to resources for youth and families at-risk of homelessness, so schools serve as an access point to prevention services. [17]

+ Appropriately **staff the California Department of Education (CA DOE) and identify needed resources** to support Homelessness Education programming within California public schools and colleges. [17]

+ **Improve CA DOE's measurements and collection of data** so that it can lead organizations in the identification of students at risk of homelessness and their connection to critical resources. [4]

+ **Expand the options of safe-placement for foster care youth** and enhance the offerings of kinship supports with equal access to supportive resources, services, and benefits. [20]

LOCAL POLICY

+ **Pilot a direct cash transfer/minimum basic income** for families and youth most impacted by poverty. [18]

+ "Internationally, cash transfer programs have become one of the most evidence-based and scalable interventions to help address a range of outcomes for vulnerable populations. Previous research has also found little evidence to support common perceptions that cash assistance would be spent irresponsibly by vulnerable populations or would deter productive employment." [19]

+ **Decriminalize quality of life offenses** like the Sit-Lie law, tent and camping bans, and other minor offenses in the City and County of San Francisco.

+ **Embed homeless prevention services** in San Francisco's juvenile justice, probation, child welfare, family court, and public-school systems (secondary and post-secondary).

+ **Provide and require training for first responders, direct service providers, and others outside of the homeless response system** to identify, assess, and intervene in housing instability.

+ **Expand funding and supports for families in crisis**, targeting communities of color and families with LGBTQ+-identified children.

+ **Expand housing options for young people exiting from residential treatment programs** and include young people in the design of new programs.

+ **Center and uplift youth voices**, so experts in homelessness are leading efforts to prevent it through paid youth advisory boards to policymakers and City departments.

+ **Develop affordable housing** in neighborhoods most profoundly impacted by income inequality and poverty.

+ **Increase pathways for youth at-risk of or already disengaged from high school** into GED, high school diploma, vocational training, and post-secondary opportunities using an Earn and Learn model that ensures basic needs are met while pursuing education.

+ **Increase career-track, paid internship opportunities** for youth at-risk of homelessness to build skills and professional networks in high-growth industries, including tech and health care.

ADVOCACY & PARTNERSHIPS

Larkin Street would like to thank the service providers, advocacy partners, and public officials committed to making youth homelessness **RARE, brief, and one-time**.

Special thanks to the following for offering data and insight to inform this policy brief:

A WAY HOME AMERICA

California Coalition for Youth

NIS National Innovation Service

CHAPIN HALL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

TRUE COLORS UNITED.

HSH DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

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HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE GET OFF THE STREET FOR GOOD

MISSION

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.

VISION

To **end youth homelessness** by making it **rare, brief, and one-time.**

WHAT WE DO

HOUSING

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

EMPLOYMENT

EDUCATION