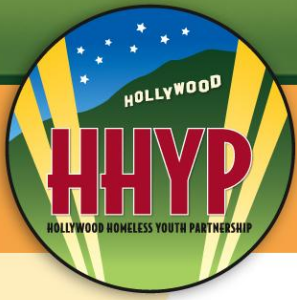


# Significance of Trauma for Homeless Youth



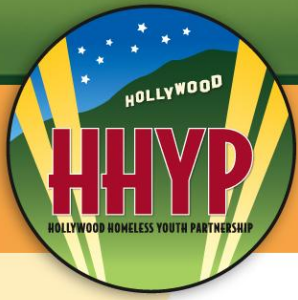
# The Literature

- It is estimated that between 1 million to 1.6 million youth experience homelessness each year (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006).
- A large body of research developed over the past two decades documents the high levels of exposure homeless youth have to potentially traumatizing events.



## Pathway to the Street – System Involvement

Johanna is 17 ½ years of age. She was involved in the foster care system for most of her life. She was removed from her home at age five due to physical abuse and neglect. From age 5-9 she was in 5 different foster homes, and in one instance “almost adopted.” She was reunified with her mother for a short time but was removed again at age 11 because her mother started using drugs. Following this, Johanna lived with an aunt, uncle, 3 more foster placements, and most recently group homes and shelters. She has “AWOL’d” numerous times and ended up on the street.



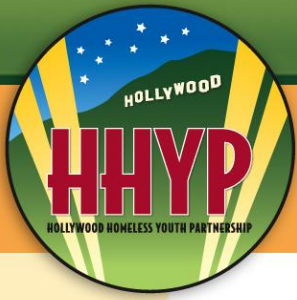
## Pathway to the Street - Immigration

Francisco is a 16-year-old from Honduras who just arrived to Los Angeles after a 3-month journey from his homeland. He came to the United States in order to “help his family out”. On his way to the US, he witnessed the murder of another young person who was pushed off a train he was traveling on.



## Pathway to the Street – Community Violence

Fernando grew in a neighborhood notorious for gang activity. He joined the gang at the age of 14 because he knew that was the only way to survive in his neighborhood. Recently (at age 16), he became very worried about his safety in his neighborhood and he ran away. He is concerned that members of his old gang (or their rivals) will find him.



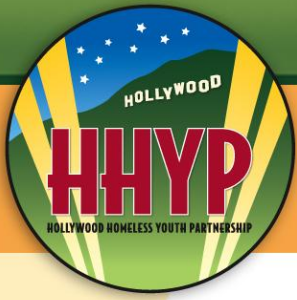
## Pathway to the Street- Abuse

Jessica, age 14, recently ran away from home because she felt threatened by her stepfather. Jessica was residing with her mother, and younger sister, Stephanie, age 11 prior to her stepfather moving in. Her stepfather initially seemed “pretty cool” when her mother was dating him but then he started looking at the girls in a “creepy” way shortly after the couple married. Jessica ran away after her stepfather came into her room in the early morning and “tried to touch her.”



## Pathway to the Street- Rejection by Family

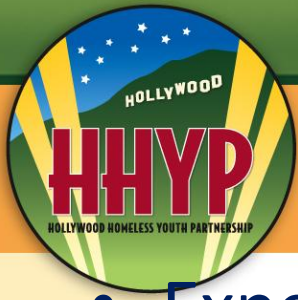
John knew he was gay from the time he was young, even before he knew the word. His family is very religious so he worked hard to hide this part of himself. When he was 17, a friend asked if he was gay and John told him the truth. His family found out almost immediately and they kicked John out of the house. They told him he was going to hell for being homosexual.



## Pathway to the Street – Grandparent Caretaker

Martha was raised by her maternal grandmother in Mexico since age 3 when her mother went to the US to find work. She is now 15 and just recently moved to the US to be with her mother and her mother's new family. Since she arrived in the US, there has been intense conflict because Martha feels that her mother "tries to tell me what to do all the time, but she barely knows me." After a particularly intense verbal altercation, Martha's biological mom slapped her in front of everyone in the home. Martha left home and ended up in a shelter.





## Homeless Youth and Trauma

- Experience potentially traumatic events at home (sexual and physical abuse and neglect, family conflict, and witnessing family violence)
- Experience potentially traumatic events in the community (gang violence)
- Experience potentially traumatic events in at-of-home placements (foster care system, juvenile justice system)
- Experience potentially traumatic events on the street (assault, hate crimes, partner abuse, prostitution)



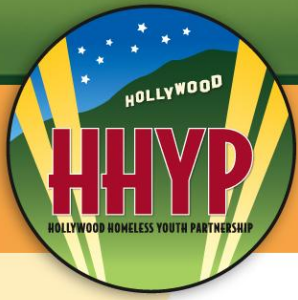
# Prevalence of Trauma

- 40% - 60% of homeless youth report physical abuse
- 17% - 50% of homeless youth report sexual abuse
- 21% - 53% of homeless youth have been former foster care youth



# Consequences of Trauma

- Substance use and abuse
- Survival sex
- Parenthood
- Lack of independent living and pro-social interpersonal skills
- Low educational attainment
- Depression, PTSD, and other mental health issues



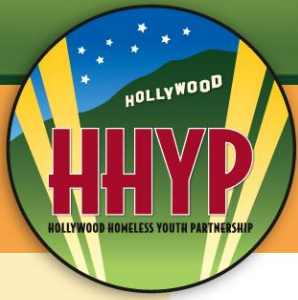
## Early Trauma and Consequences

- 19% -50% of traumatized homeless youth have been diagnosed with a serious mental health disorder
- Childhood sexual abuse and assault are related to higher suicide rates and self injurious behavior
- Homeless youth with histories of early physical and sexual abuse present with the most severe psychopathology and are predisposed to re-victimization
- A large portion of homeless youth “self-medicate” their symptoms with multiple drugs



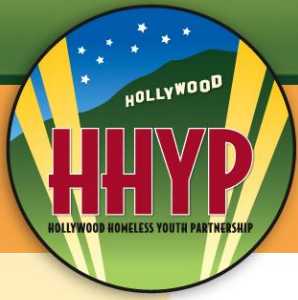
## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Youth

- 86.2% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed at school in the last year
- three-fifths (60.8%) felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation
- 73.6% heard derogatory remarks such as "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often at school
- 44.1% reported being physically harassed
- 22.1% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- More than half (60.8%) of students reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and more than a third (38.4%) felt unsafe because of their gender expression.
- Only 11 states and the District of Columbia protect students from bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation, and only seven states and DC protect students on the basis of gender identity/expression.



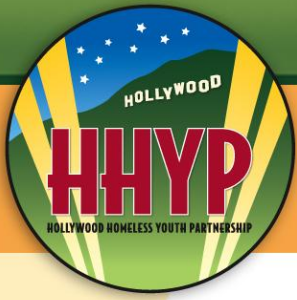
## Homeless LGBT Youth-8 City Comparison

- LGB Youth more likely to be in the custody of social services
- More likely to have attempted suicide
- More likely to have engaged in survival sex
- More likely to have families with substance use histories
- More likely to have more than 5 drinks in one sitting in last 2 weeks
- More likely to have used injection drugs



## Early Trauma and Consequences

- Coexisting disorders are more likely in homeless traumatized youth
- Many youth re-experience abuse once on the street
- There are higher rates of HIV infection in homeless youth
- There is lower literacy rates among homeless youth
- Homeless youth tend to have higher drop-out rates, repeat grades, and score lower on school tests than non-homeless youth



# Economic Impact

- 24.4 BILLION \$\$\$\$ of direct cost (hospitalization, MH treatment, child welfare, law enforcement, judicial system expenses)
- 69.7 BILLION \$\$\$\$ indirect cost (Special Ed., juvenile delinquency, adult MH, lost productivity, adult criminality)

van der Kolk 2005





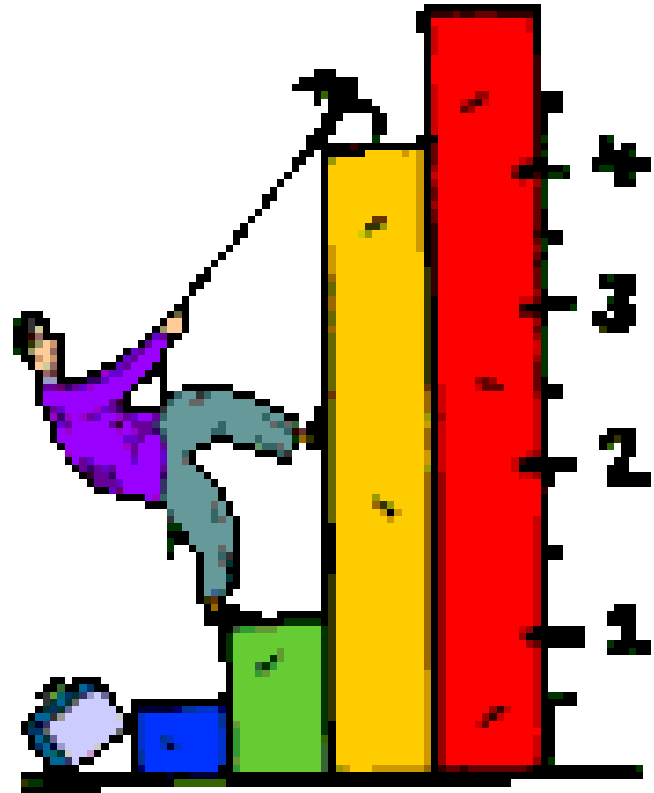
# Homeless Adolescents - Trauma and Stress

- Most of the youth on the street have experienced potentially traumatizing events before they became homeless
- Enormous trauma and stress associated with survival on the street
- Few resources to manage stress
- Alcohol and drugs readily available
- General resistance to mental health services due to past experiences.



## The Challenge

- How do we meet the needs of a highly traumatized group of youth that aren't seeking trauma treatment and have had poor experiences with mental health services?





# References

- Hyde, J. From home to street: Understanding young people's transition into homelessness. *Journal of Adolescence*, 2005 28(2), 171-183.
- Kosciw, J. G., Diaz, E. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2008). 2007 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN
- Murphy A, Poon C., & Weigel M. No Place to Call Home: A profile of street youth in British Columbia. The McCreary Centre Society. Burnaby, BC, Canada, 2001.
- Ray, N. (2006). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: An epidemic of homelessness. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless.
- Thompson, S. J., & PALLAI, V. K. Determinants of Runaway Episodes Among Adolescents Using Crisis Shelter Services. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 2006 15(2), 142-149.
- van der Kolk , B.A. Editorial Introduction: Child Abuse & Victimization. *Child abuse & victimization, Psychiatric Annals*, (2005) pp. 374-378.