

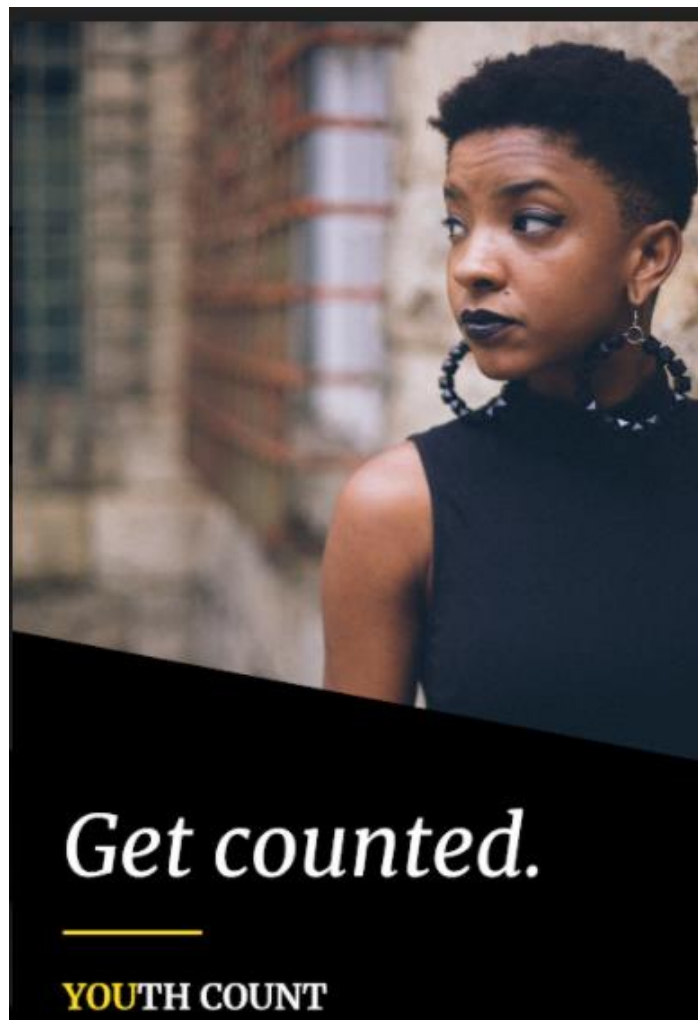
Massachusetts Youth Count

2021

A report from the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth on homelessness, housing instability, and access to services among youth and young adults under the age of 25 in the Commonwealth.

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Special focus on the impacts of COVID-19 on young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability

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¹ Note: The Massachusetts Youth Count involves extensive collaboration, including in the development of this report. Analysis and writing of this report was completed by Laurie Ross, PhD, Professor of Community Development and Planning at Clark University and Phoebe Ricker, MA, Statewide Youth Ambassador, with consultation and involvement from the network of regional youth homelessness service providers, Continuums of Care (CoCs), Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (Commission), and the Commission's Identification and Connection Working Group, which is co-chaired by Kelly Turley and Gordie Calkins. Special thanks also go to Linn Torto, Executive Director of the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness and Alice Colgrove, Ayala Livny, and Lauren Leonardis from the MA State Plan to End Youth Homelessness.

1.0 THE 2021 MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT OVERVIEW

The Massachusetts YOUTh Count is an annual survey used to learn about the demographics, scope, and needs of youth and young adults under the age of 25 who are unstably housed or experiencing homelessness². The Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (Commission) provides oversight for the Count and is responsible for annual reports on its progress to the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and the Office of the Child Advocate.

COVID-19 prevented the Commission from conducting the 2020 YOUTh Count. Not wanting another year to go by without a Count, the Commission's Identification and Connection Working Group, in conjunction with the network of the ten regional youth homelessness providers under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), engaged in intensive planning to ensure a COVID-19-safe 2021 YOUTh Count. Held from April 12 through May 24, 2021, the survey was administered almost exclusively online. The Identification and Connection Working Group secured funding to centralize the provision of incentives to young people who filled out the survey online (\$10.00 compensation for completing the survey). To ensure there would be enough incentives, eligibility to take the survey initially was narrowed to young people with current or past experience with homelessness. Half-way through the Count, however, based on the relatively low number of responses, the decision was made to revert to prior eligibility criteria being any young person under the age of 25. Even though the focus was on the online process, regions also relied on networks of service providers, Youth Ambassadors³, and trained street outreach workers to survey youth in programs and in places where young people were known to congregate⁴. In addition to the set of questions that have been asked over the past seven years of the Count, the 2021 YOUTh Count included questions about challenges young people faced due to COVID-19.

The Commission defines an unaccompanied homeless youth or young adult (UHY) as a person who:

- 1) Is 24 years of age or younger; and**
- 2) Is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian; and**
- 3) Lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.**

In 2021, a total of 471 surveys were collected. Of these surveys, 265 met the Commission's definition of an unaccompanied young person experiencing homelessness (UHY). The high percentage of surveys collected that met the Commission definition (56%) is likely a function of the eligibility criteria used for half of the Count and not solely due to trends in youth homelessness. Given the extraordinary conditions under which

² The Executive Office of Health and Human Services allocated \$150,000 from its FY'21 administrative line item (4000-0300) to continue the state's commitment to understand the scope of homelessness among unaccompanied youth. This report is submitted as part of those efforts.

³ Youth Ambassadors are young people who have experienced homelessness or housing vulnerability and who are trained to partner with the regional agencies administering the Count. Youth Ambassadors contribute their knowledge about homelessness and their communities so that the results of the Youth Count reflect the full breadth and depth of youth in diverse communities across the Commonwealth.

⁴ See Attachment One for the Youth Count methodology.

these surveys were collected, we recommend exercising caution when including this year's findings in analyses of trends from prior years.

This report provides an important opportunity to see how some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable youth and young adults managed through the pandemic. In the 2021 Count, there were higher percentages of young people who identified as LGBTQ+, who had foster care involvement, who left home before age 18, who were doubled up, and who had ever exchanged sex to meet their needs (ESN) who were experiencing homelessness than in prior years. There was a much lower number of young people who were parenting or pregnant. In the 2021 Count, we see evidence that housing instability disrupts educational attainment. Respondents with no diploma and not currently enrolled in school reported leaving home for good on average at 17.1 years old, which is almost a year earlier than UHY respondents overall. Parental substance use and a respondent's pregnancy were reasons reported at higher rates for this group of young people than UHY as a whole.

In terms of COVID-19 impacts, young people reported struggling the most with not having money for food or having a place to stay. Of the 157 respondents who reported that they had been working prior to COVID-19, 62% had lost their job due to the pandemic. Another 15% reported that their hours had been reduced. Young people who were not in school and did not have a high school diploma were the least likely to have been working prior to the pandemic (15.5%) and most likely to have lost their jobs (79%). Forty-four percent of young people who were doubled up and 30% who were unsheltered reported losing a job due to COVID-19.

Based on the characteristics of young people who were in the precarious situation of being doubled-up or unsheltered, an important theme that emerged from the 2021 Count is the importance of making housing resources and support services much more visible and accessible to young people. Significant areas of unmet need appear to be access to substance use and recovery resources, as well as support for young people who have lost a parent or caregiver to death. These were paths to homelessness experienced at higher rates by young people with vulnerabilities such as justice system involvement, those who exchange sex to meet their needs (ESN), and those who were unsheltered.

In the face of a global pandemic, it is more important than ever that the right resources are in place to support young people when and where they need them. The "YOU" in "youth" is emphasized because we want to make it clear that the YOUth Count is not just about the data. It is an opportunity to connect with vulnerable youth to share resources with them and hear their voices.

"If the Youth shelter I stay at wasn't closing that would be nice not only for me but for other young people that don't have a safe and or comfortable place to sleep, as there are other shelters but filled with people much older people that are registered sex offenders, drug abusers, and have criminal records."

--18-year-old female from Lynn

2.0 THE 2021 YOUTH COUNT RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In 2021, a total of 265 survey respondents met the Commission’s definition out of the 471 surveys collected. Table One presents the total number of included surveys and the total number meeting the Commission’s definition. All numbers below “Total # Commission definition” are in relation to the 265 youth and young adults who met the Commission definition, also referred to throughout the report as “UHY” or Unaccompanied Homeless Youth.

In addition to UHY, 41 respondents were experiencing homelessness and living with a parent or guardian. Of the housed youth, 89 of them reported experiencing homelessness at some

point in the past. Five housed, unaccompanied respondents reported not having a safe place to stay for the next 14 days. These additional data points suggest a higher degree of homelessness and housing vulnerability than revealed by the numbers of youth and young adults meeting the Commission’s definition at the time of the Count. In total, 400 respondents (84.9%) reported a current experience of homelessness, had experienced it in the past, or were currently facing housing instability. Ninety-two youth (92) or 34.7% had left home permanently before the age of 18; and the average age that these respondents left home permanently as minors was 15.9 years old. Table Two provides an overview of how the 2021 respondents compare with prior years. Again, we provide this information for context, but given the conditions surrounding this year’s Count, not to suggest trends in youth homelessness.

Table One: YOUTH Count Overview	2021 State
Total # surveys	471
Total # Commission definition	265
# under 18	10
# BIPOC	169
# LGBTQ	96
# foster care	96
# juvenile/criminal justice ⁵	83
# parenting with custody/pregnant	37
# not in school/no diploma	41

“Having more affordable housing. I am trying to look for a home but they all ask for documents I can’t necessarily provide and it is giving me a really hard time to finally be able to call a place home. To add on, rent prices are so expensive and knowing I have 2 dogs makes it even worse. I don’t have any family but my boyfriend and my 2 dogs mean everything to me. And no one wishes to open the doors to me and my small family I have created. It feels like I will never have a stable home when this is the case and everywhere they allow dogs it is like \$200 more for my dogs.”

—22-year-old from Lynn

⁵ We ask two questions on the survey to determine juvenile and criminal justice system involvement, “Have you ever stayed overnight or longer in juvenile detention -- a secure facility or residential program for young people -- as a result of criminal behavior or police involvement?” and “Have you ever stayed overnight or longer in an adult jail or prison?”

Table Two: Annual Results of YOUth Count	2021	2019	2018	2017
Total # Surveys	471	1957	2150	2711
Total % (#) UHY/Commission Definition	56% (265)	27.0% (529)	34.3% (738)	18.5% (501)
Under 18	3.7% (10)	5.9%	5.0%	5.6%
LGBTQ+	36.2% (96)	24.7%	23.5%	22.7%
BIPOC	63.7% (169)	69.5%	71.0%	68.4%
Foster care	36.2% (96)	31.2%	26.4%	29.9%
Juvenile/Criminal justice	31.3% (83)	25.1%	33.6%	26.4%
Parenting with custody/Pregnant	13.9% (37)	24.0%	26.2%	17%
Not in school & no diploma	15.5% (41)	19.0%	22.4%	23.8%
Left home before 18	34.7% (92)	30.2%	30.4%	N/A
Sheltered (shelter, transitional housing or hotel)	55.5% (147)	56.7%	55%	56%
Doubled-up (friend, relative, partner)	35.8% (95)	31%	27%	29%
Unsheltered (outside, car or vehicle)	8.6% (23)	12.3%	18%	15%
Ever exchanged sex for needs (ESN)⁶	16.9% (45)	11.9%	14.4%	13.5%

2.1 HOUSING STATUS AND REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

WHERE RESPONDENTS SLEPT THE NIGHT BEFORE TAKING THE SURVEY

In 2021, 147 out of the 265 (55.4%) UHY respondents had stayed at a shelter, transitional housing, or a hotel/motel on the night before the Count. Throughout the report we refer to this group as “Sheltered”. As in the two prior Counts (2018 and 2019), the next most common response was staying with family, a partner, or a friend, with 95 or 35.8% of UHY respondents. Throughout the report we refer to this group as “couch surfing” or “doubled-up”. Thirty of the respondents who were couch surfing or doubled-up either knew that they did not have a safe place to stay for the next 14 days or were unsure whether they did. Twenty-three or 8.6% of the respondents reported being “unsheltered”, meaning they stayed outside or in another place not meant for human habitation. Chart One provides a six-year picture of the percentages of where respondents stayed the night before the survey in terms of being sheltered, couch surfing/doubled up or unsheltered.

⁶To determine the number of young people who had ever exchanged sex to meet their needs (ESN), we included the following question, “Have you ever exchanged sex (including sexual intercourse, oral sex, or any sexual interaction including phone calls, photographs, or video uploads) for food, a place to stay, money or other necessities?”

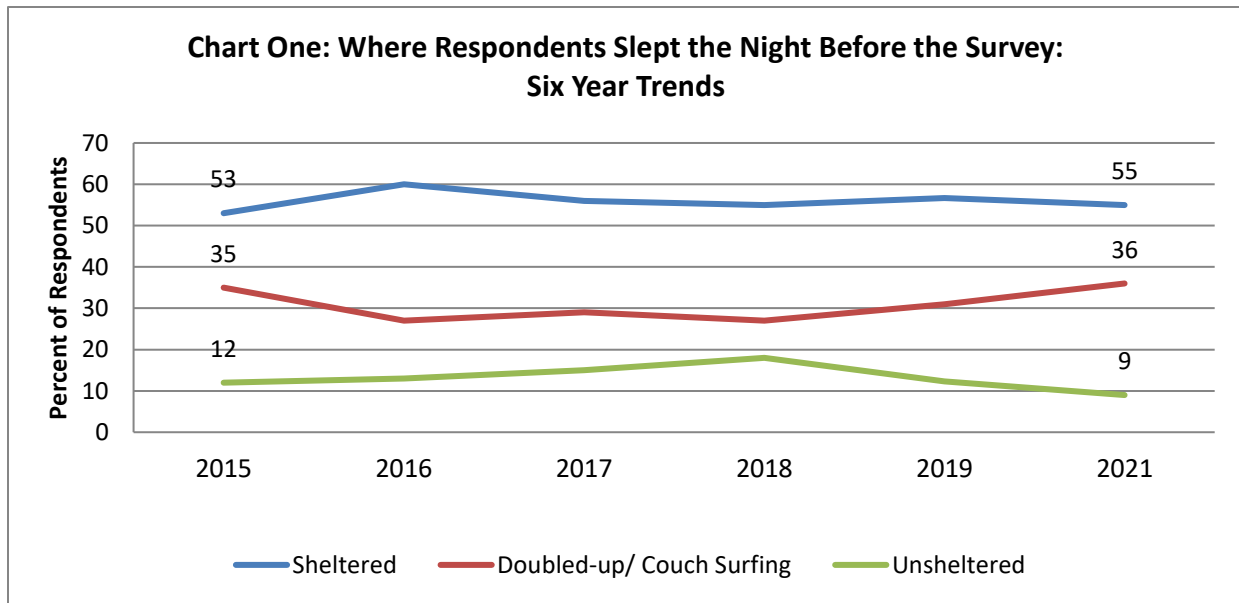
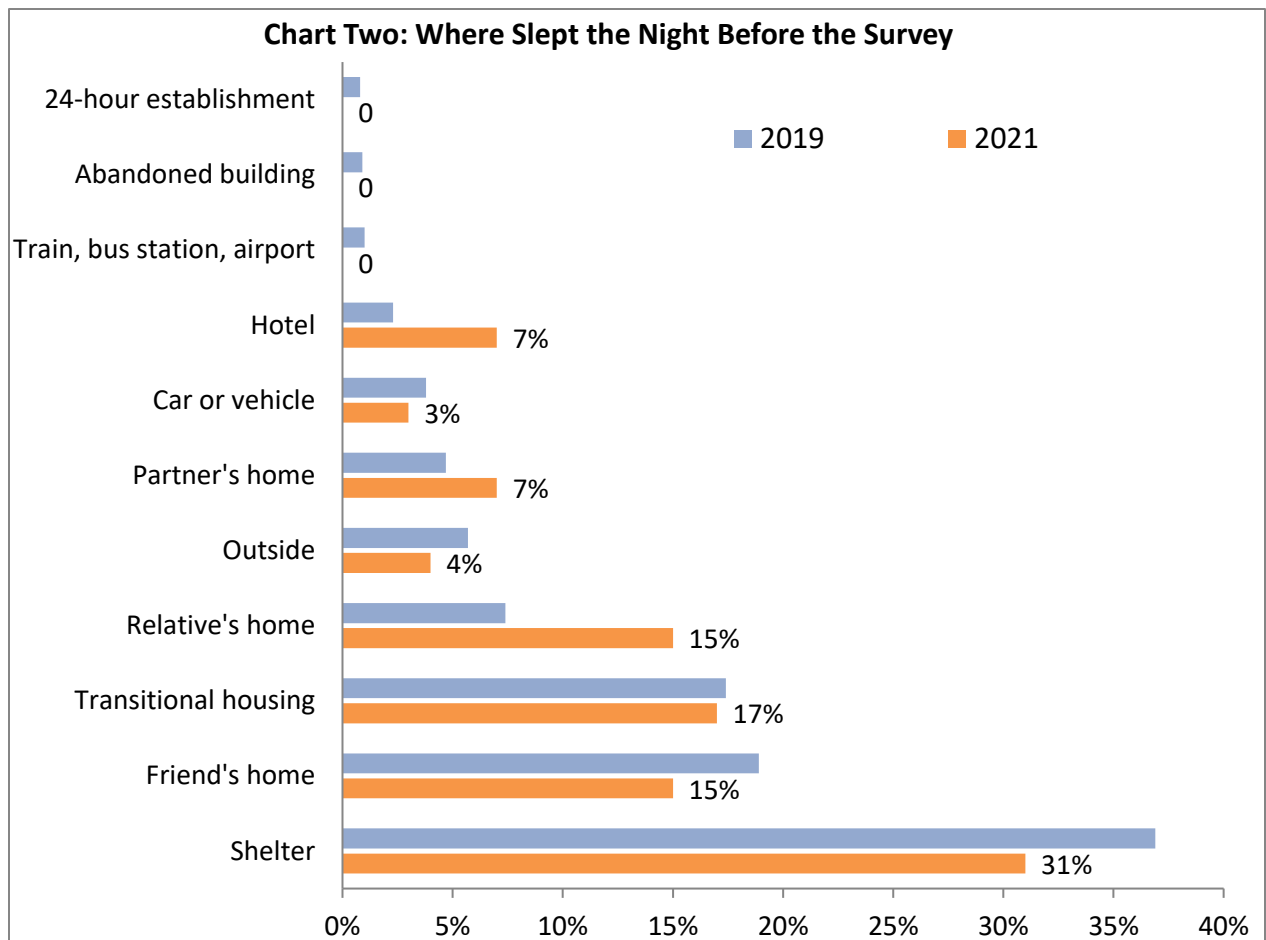


Chart Two provides more detailed information on where the respondents from 2021 slept the night before taking the survey as compared to 2019.



There are three potential COVID-19 related impacts that can be seen in Chart Two. One, no young people reported staying in a 24-hour establishment or a train, bus station, or airport. A possible explanation for this is that the State of Emergency restrictions that were in place during the Count period could have limited youth access to these spaces. The second COVID-19 related trend we saw were the increases in young people staying with a relative or partner and the decrease in the number staying with friends. Again, COVID-19 stay-in-place guidelines may have prevented young people from being able to stay with friends. The third trend was the decrease in respondents staying in a shelter, coupled with the increase in respondents staying in a hotel, which could be in response to the increased access to motels and the need to de-densify shelters during the State of Emergency.

Pregnant and parenting UHY were most likely to be sheltered (62.0%). Of the ten youth under 18, three were in shelter and seven were couch surfing/doubled up. Those most likely to be unsheltered were respondents with justice system involvement (14%). In 2021, the percentage of sheltered LGBTQ youth significantly increased. See Table Three for more details on where each subpopulation slept the night before the survey.

Table Three: Where Subpopulations Slept the Night Before the Survey								
	UHY	Average Age	Pregnant/ Parenting	Foster system	Justice system	LGBTQ	Under 18	BIPOC
Sheltered (147)	55%	20.7	62.0%	53%	45%	57.0%	30.0%	60.9%
Couch surfing/ doubled-up (96)	36%	20.0	35%	35%	39.0%	30.0%	70.0%	31.3%
Unsheltered (23)	9%	21.5	0%	10%	14.0%	9.0%	0%	5.3%
All UHY respondents (265)	NA	20.5	37	96	83	96	10	169

Table Four presents findings from the seven regions with at least 10 respondents. This Table shows the regional variations in housing and homelessness patterns.

Table Four: Regional Variations in Homelessness Patterns							
	Sheltered		Doubled-up		Unsheltered		Regional Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Three-County	13	48.2%	10	37.4%	4	14.8%	27
Worcester	28	54.9%	16	31.4%	7	13.7%	51
Bristol	5	25.0%	14	70.0%	1	5.0%	20
Plymouth & East Norfolk	23	51.1%	21	46.7%	1	2.2%	45
Essex	11	45.8%	10	41.6%	3	12.5%	24
North Middlesex	19	79.3%	5	20.8%		0.0%	24
Metro Boston	39	72.2%	11	20.4%	4	7.4%	54
Total for 10 regions	147	55.5%	95	35.8%	23	8.7%	265

Young people in North Middlesex and Metro Boston were much more likely than all respondents to be in shelter, transitional housing, or a hotel/motel. Of the 20 young people experiencing homelessness in Bristol County, 70% of them were doubled-up. In Plymouth County, 46.7% of the 45 young people were doubled-up. There were higher percentages of young people in Three-County (15%), Worcester County (14%), and Essex County (13%) who stayed in a car or outside as compared to all youth.

“I feel like there should a lot more help with shelters for young adults 17-24, because in my area, there’s only 1.”

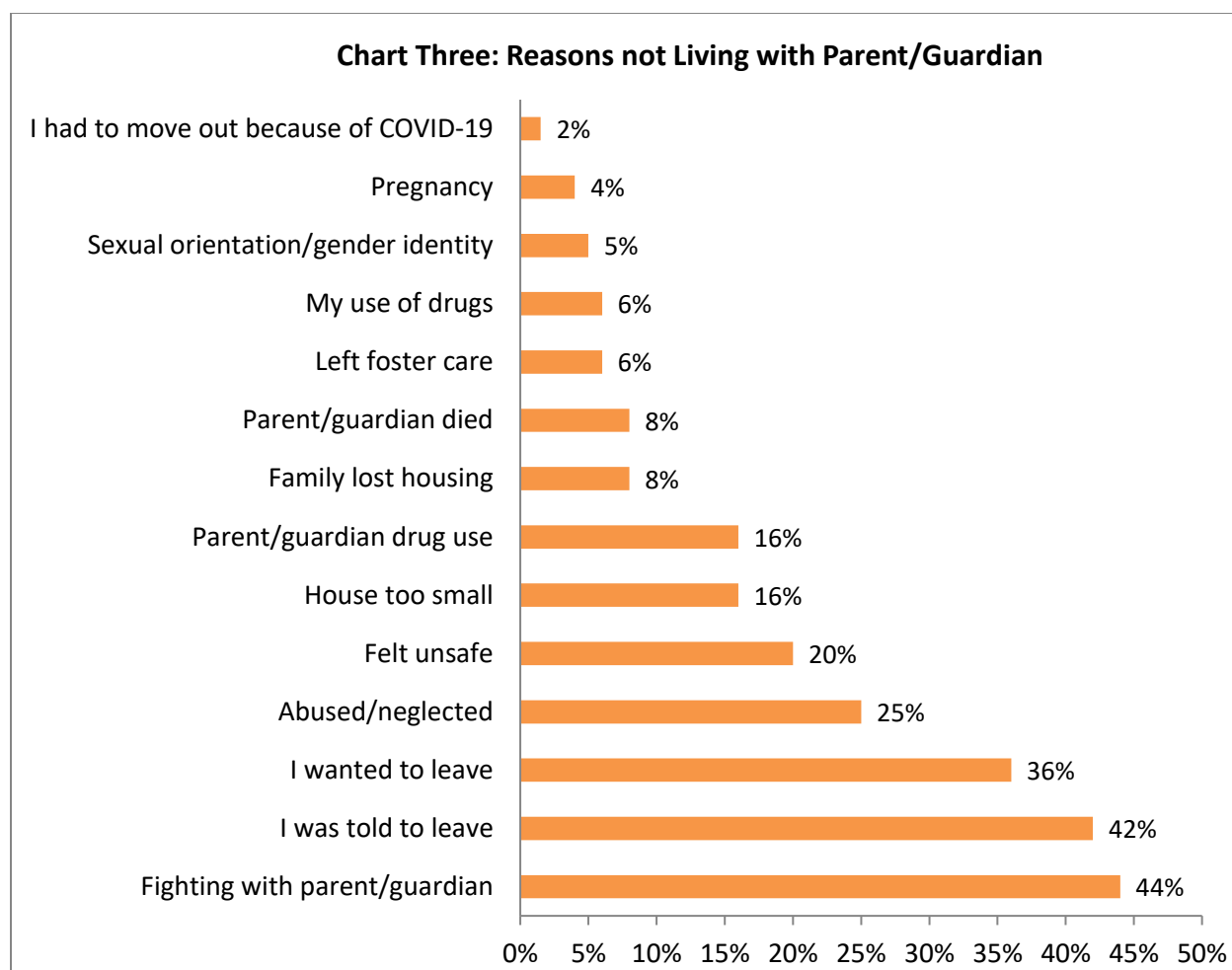
--19-year-old female from Wakefield

WHY RESPONDENTS WERE NO LONGER WITH PARENT OR GUARDIAN

In order to gain insight into young people’s paths to homelessness, the survey included a question about why the respondent was no longer with their parent or guardian. As presented in Chart Three, the survey provided 14 options and respondents could choose as many as were relevant to their situation. Having to move out because of COVID-19 was added to the 2021 survey. Like in the past years, the top reasons UHY were not living with their families were related to family conflict. Fighting with a parent or guardian, being told to leave, and wanting to leave were among the top reasons young people were not with family. Twenty-six respondents gave fighting with parents as the only reason they were no longer living with them.

“Make a camp for homeless kids that pass a background check, it’s not our fault our families hate us.”

—19-year-old male from Worcester, sleeping in their car



While Chart Three presents the frequency each reason was selected as a reason the respondents were no longer living with their families, most respondents selected more than one reason. We were interested in understanding if there were common clusters of reasons young people were no longer living with family. Table Five shows the most common clusters of reasons respondents gave for no longer living with their parents or guardians (i.e. selected by three or more respondents). It is difficult to provide a definitive interpretation of the clustered results; however, Table Five is organized by four themes that emerged:

1. Fighting with caregiver with no additional factors given (26 respondents).
2. Fighting with caregiver in conjunction with abuse or neglect and not feeling safe (21 respondents); for some this category also included additional stressors of the house being too small and parental substance use.
3. The house being too small and wanting to leave was a cluster for 6 respondents.
4. A final cluster that was selected by at least 3 respondents was fighting in conjunction with the respondents' drug use.

Table Five Clusters of reported reasons for no longer living with family		# of respondents	%
Cluster 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent I was told to leave 	10	3.9%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent I was told to leave I wanted to leave 	7	2.7%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was told to leave I wanted to leave 	6	2.3%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent I wanted to leave 	3	1.2%
Cluster 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) I was told to leave I wanted to leave 	5	1.9%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) I did not feel safe due to violence or unsafe activities in my house I was told to leave 	4	1.6%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent, My parent/guardian/foster parent abused drugs or alcohol 	3	1.2%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent My house was too small for everyone to live there I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) I wanted to leave 	3	1.2%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent My parent/guardian/foster parent abused drugs or alcohol I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) I did not feel safe due to violence or unsafe activities in my house I was told to leave 	3	1.2%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) I was told to leave 	3	1.2%
Cluster 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My house was too small for everyone to live there I was told to leave I wanted to leave 	3	1.2%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My house was too small for everyone to live there I wanted to leave 	3	1.2%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent My use of drugs or alcohol I wanted to leave 	3	1.2%

COVID-19 did not emerge as a stand-alone reason young people left their families, but rather something that exacerbated existing stressors as can be seen by the following clusters—each selected by one respondent:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent • I wanted to leave • I had to move out because of COVID-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) • I did not feel safe due to violence or unsafe activities in my house • I was told to leave • I had to move out because of COVID-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My parent/guardian/foster parent abused drugs or alcohol • I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) • I had to move out because of COVID-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent • My parent/guardian/foster parent died • I left foster care • I was released from jail or detention facility • I was/am pregnant or got someone else pregnant • I had to move out because of COVID

Given the role family conflict plays in young peoples’ path to housing instability and homelessness, we explored this topic at a focus group with young people from across the state who have experienced homelessness. Participants of the focus group were shown the data in Chart Three. They were then asked guiding questions to prompt discussion about how fighting with caretakers combines with other factors to lead to unaccompanied homelessness. These questions were: 1) *What are causes of youth homelessness?; What are some reasons youth might want to leave or be told to leave their family/guardians?; Why do young people fight with their families/guardians?; Why do young people leave after fighting with their family?; Are the reasons in the Chart 3 in line with your experiences?; If you feel comfortable, what are the reasons that you left or had to leave your family?*

Participants explained that fighting was not the sole reason why they were no longer with their family, but rather an event that spurred their decision to leave. Underneath explosive family conflict was a chronic lack of physical and emotional support, safety, and freedom at home-- stemming from poverty, oppression, and unhealed generational trauma. Participants cited issues such as emotional abuse, major disagreements with guardians without a foreseeable solution, not feeling safe at home, lack of acceptance of their sexual and/or gender identity, death of a parent/guardian, and foster care age-out in addition to the simple answer of “fighting with their family”. One participant shared: “My father was going through a lot... he wasn’t himself and I didn’t feel safe, so I left.” A young mother delved into her experience with family conflict around childcare and autonomy:

“Youth might want to leave or be told to leave because they have a disagreement with their parents where neither party can see eye to eye. That leads them to being uncomfortable or being told to leave. When I was 18, I had an argument with my mom about my own daughter. I

told her I needed to leave and she wouldn't let me, and she was withholding my daughter against me. So DCF got involved after I left, and she never let me go back. So that's part of my reason for leaving."

Another participant spoke about feeling stifled and disrespected in her home life, and how being in quarantine with family worsened already unhealthy dynamics:

"My mom projected a lot of her insecurities onto me, and it was just toxic. It was very mentally draining to be home... I didn't really have the ability to leave either because I don't have a car so I can't even have an outlet at home, especially during the pandemic... I took it upon myself after our last argument; I was like: 'I think this is it, this has put me over the edge, and I don't want to be mentally drained all the time.'"

Youth and young adult participants emphasized that the insecurity and trauma of being unaccompanied and homeless/housing insecure felt like less of a strain on their personhood than remaining with their caretakers. As one participant stated:

"I think a lot of youth want to leave because they need room to grow, and they don't have room to grow when they have toxic and manipulative parents. They leave because they don't want that kind of environment anymore. It takes a lot of guts to leave, especially for youth that have controlling parents."

These responses add nuance to the survey findings, in which being told to leave, wanting to leave, abuse/neglect, and feeling unsafe are some of the most prominent reasons youth and young adults are no longer with their families or caretakers. Participants' responses also added context to some of the less prominent reasons, such as death of a family, sexual orientation/gender identity, and COVID-19.

SUBPOPULATIONS' VULNERABILITIES TO HOMELESSNESS

The YOUTH Count offers a point-in-time glimpse into understanding young people's situations; yet, there are several findings that help us identify factors that may be associated with some groups' increased vulnerability to homelessness and housing insecurity. Here we look at the reasons the following subpopulations were no longer living with family: respondents who ever exchanged sex to meet their needs (ESN), who were doubled-up or unsheltered at the time of the Count, who had justice system involvement, and who had foster care system involvement. We compared the frequency these groups identified each reason with UHY respondents as a whole.

For youth who reported exchanging sex to meet their needs (ESN), they were...

3.8x more likely (not to be living with family) due to their sexual orientation or gender identity

2.8x more likely due to their use of alcohol or drugs

2.4x more likely due to the death of a parent or guardian

For youth who were doubled-up at the time of the Count, they were...

1.4x more likely (not to be living with family) due to their family's loss of housing

1.4x more likely due to the death of a parent or guardian

For youth who were unsheltered at the time of the Count, they were...

3x more likely (not to be living with family) due to their use of alcohol or drugs

2x more likely due to the death of a parent or guardian

For youth who had had justice system involvement, they were...

2.5x more likely (not to be living with family) due to their use of alcohol or drugs

1.4x more likely due to leaving foster care

For youth who had had foster care system involvement, they were...

2.4x more likely (not to be living with family) due leaving foster care

1.3x more likely due to their use of alcohol or drugs

Sexual orientation and gender identity, the respondents' use of alcohol or drugs, exiting foster care, and the death of a parent or guardian emerged as factors that increased homelessness and housing insecurity. Taken as a whole, the survey and focus group responses reflect the generational and cyclical nature of poverty and trauma, and point to preventative measures that would be most helpful. Financial assistance, mental health resources, and other wrap-around services for families would increase caretakers' ability to provide stable and supportive environments for youth and decrease the rate of unaccompanied youth homelessness in the future.

2.2 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND OTHER INCOME SOURCES

The survey included questions regarding school enrollment, educational attainment, employment, and income sources. These questions provide insight into challenges UHY may experience in achieving housing and economic stability in the future.

EDUCATION

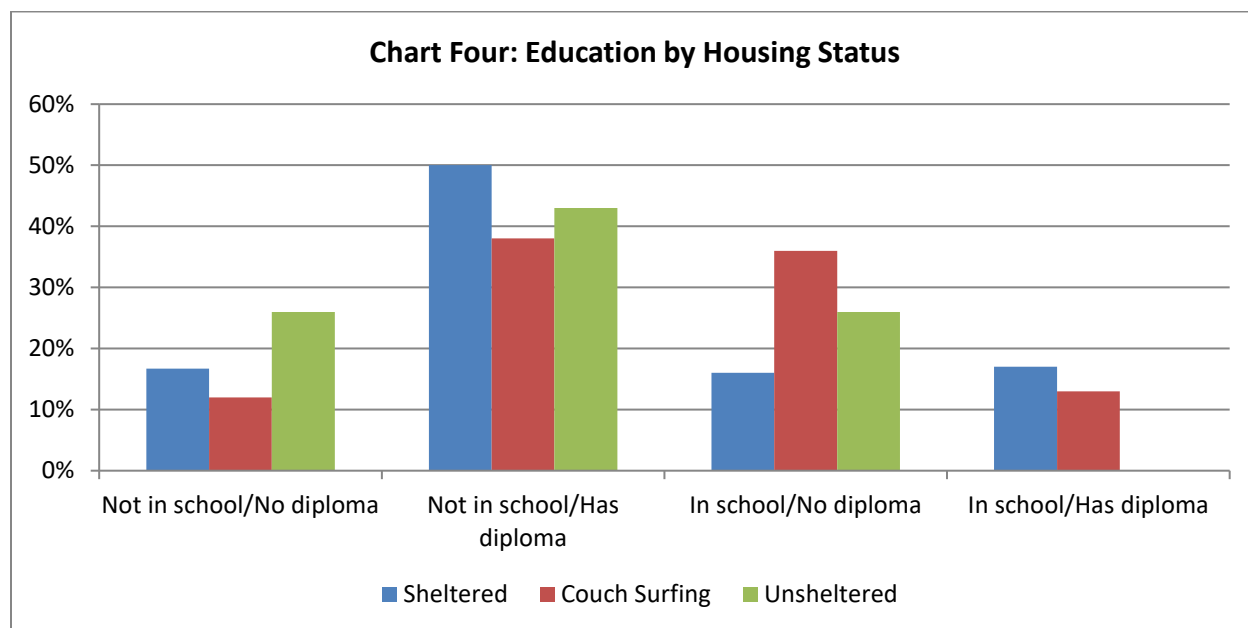
Table Six presents the education status of UHY respondents.

Table Six: Education Status	UHY (265)	Average age (20.8)	Average age left home for good (18.0)
High school diploma and currently in school	37 (14.5%)	21.2	19.2
High school diploma, not currently in school	114 (44.8%)	21.1	18.4
No diploma and currently in school	62 (24.4%)	19.7	17.3
No diploma, not currently in school	41 (16.1%)	20.9	17.1
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- 99 (37.3%) respondents were in school (i.e. either high school or post-secondary); indicating that in spite of housing instability, these young people were engaging in education.
- 151 (59.4%) had a high school diploma or equivalent.
 - Thirty-seven (37) of these young people were enrolled in some form of post-secondary education program at the time of the survey. These respondents tended to be older with an average age of 21.2. Twenty-one of these young people were in a 2- or 4-year college and 10 were pursuing some other sort of credential (e.g. barber school, CDL or CNA).
- 62 (24.4%) of UHY did not have a diploma, but were in school.
 - These respondents tended to be younger; their average age was 19.7 and not surprisingly, over half of them were enrolled in high school. GED programs, YouthBuild, and Job Corps were three other common responses for this group.

These data also suggest that housing instability disrupts educational attainment. While the average current age of respondents with no diploma and not currently enrolled in school is 20.9, their average age of leaving home for good was 17.1 years old; on average almost a year earlier than all UHY respondents and likely while the young person was still in high school. Being told to leave and fighting with parents were the most frequent reasons this group gave for no longer living with parents or care givers; however, parental substance use and the respondents' pregnancy were reasons reported at higher rates for this group of young people than UHY as a whole.

Looking at educational level by type of homelessness young people were experiencing is also informative. Chart Four shows that unsheltered respondents were least likely to be in school and have a diploma; however 6 young people who were unsheltered without a diploma did report being in school. Doubled-up respondents were more likely to not be in school and have their diploma. Sheltered youth were more likely to have a diploma than doubled-up and unsheltered youth.



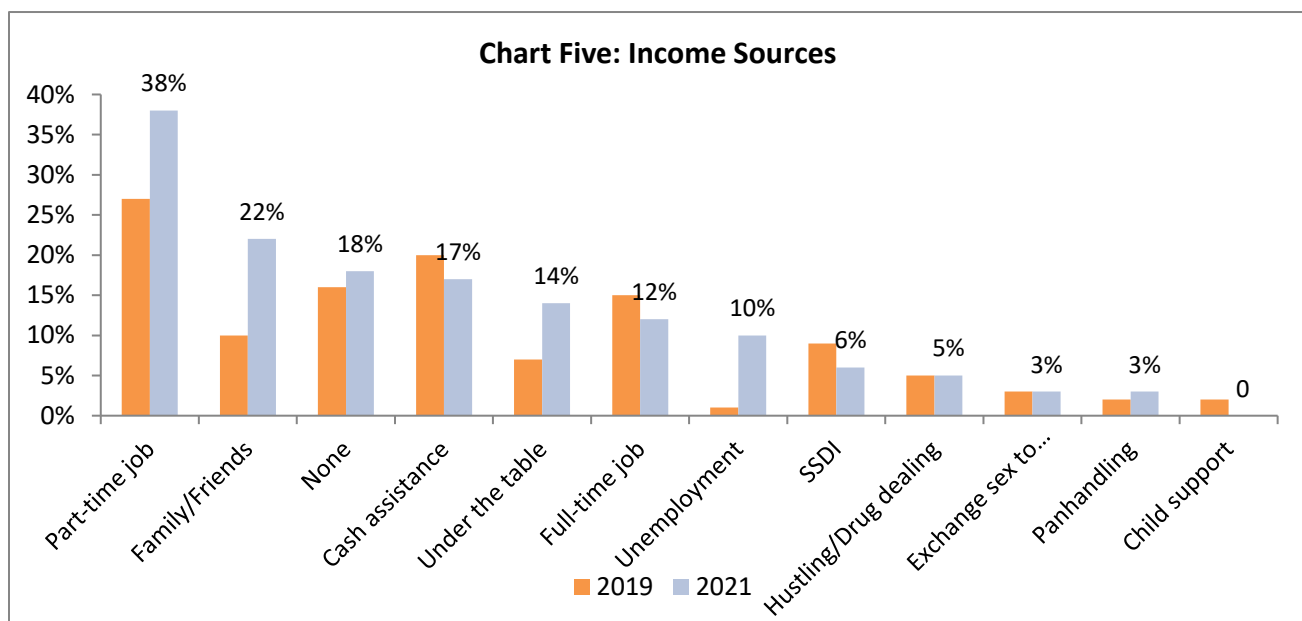
"I am a single mother of 2 babies under the age of 1. I am 23 years old and I'm currently homeless. I have been trying to get help for years and I'm still stuck. Getting out of high school no one helps us get apartments and ready for the real world. Once we graduate we're left to figure it out and we should be taught more life skills. We need more support groups and help when it comes to young parents needing guidance and assistance."

--23-year-old female from Roxbury

INCOME SOURCES

In 2021, respondents were asked about their current sources of income. They could choose as many as were relevant to them. Chart Five provides details about the number of respondents who reported receiving income from each source.

Over one-third of the respondents reported working at a part-time job. This represented the largest source of income for unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and an 11 percentage point increase from last year. Young people who left home permanently in the past year—the time frame associated with COVID-19—had an even higher rate of relying on a part-time job for income. Help from family and friends was the next most common response for all respondents and increased by 12 percentage points. Again, looking at young people who left home in the past year, they were less likely to rely on family for income, reinforcing the theme of family conflict being an immediate driver of youth homelessness.



No income source was the third most common response at 18%. Cash assistance from the Department of Transitional Assistance or Department of Children and Families was the fourth most common response, at 17% of respondents; the three percentage point decline may be associated with the smaller number of respondents who were pregnant or parenting. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that no respondent claimed receiving child support in 2021. However, it is also important to point out that of the 153

Of the 153 respondents who tried to get cash assistance in the past 12 months, only 27% reported getting all the help they needed, 35% said they got none of the help they needed.

respondents who tried to get cash assistance, only 27% reported getting all the help they needed, 35% said they got none of the help they needed. Under-the-table work was the 5th highest and increased by 7 percentage points from 2019.

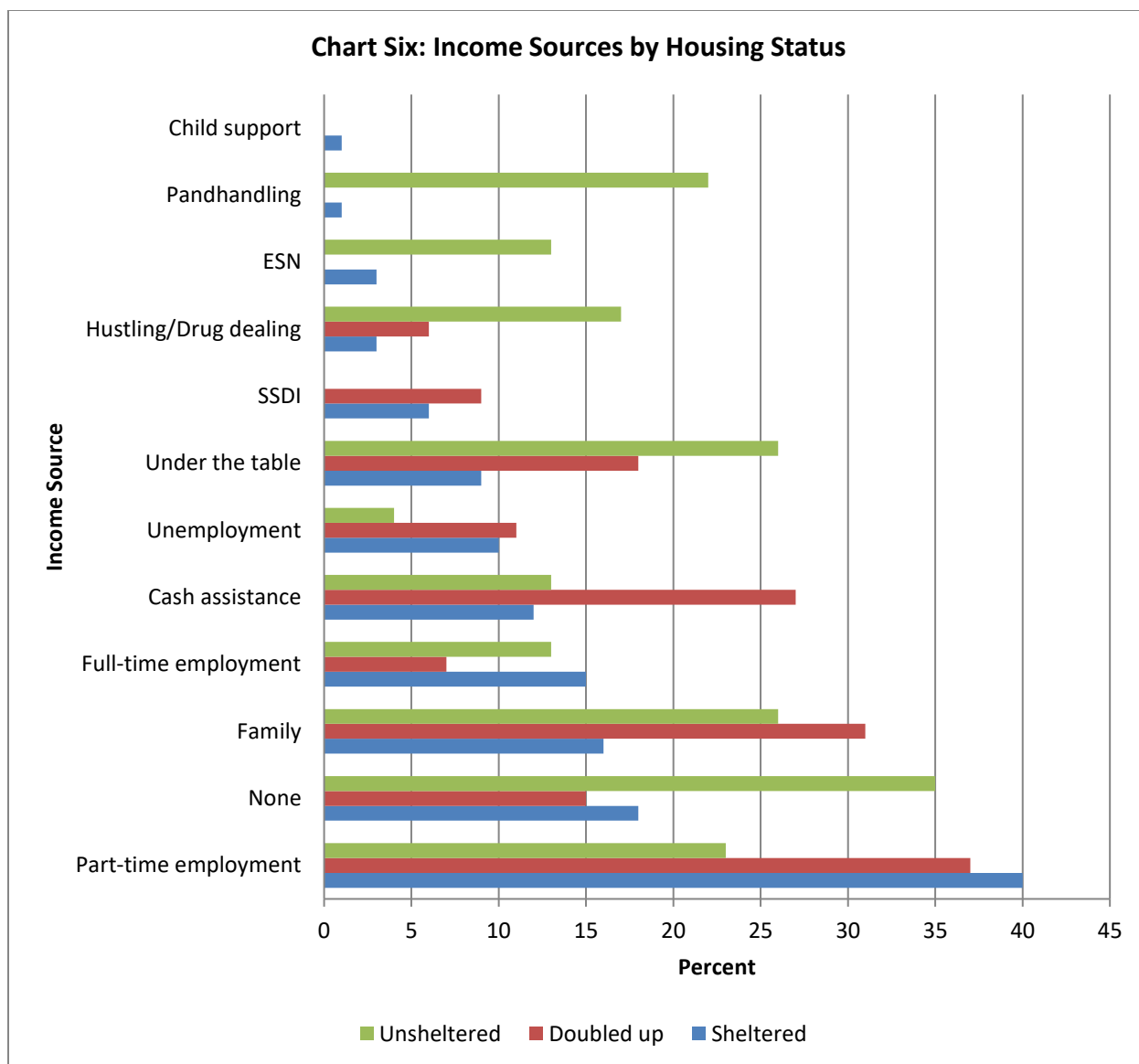
Full time employment dropped from the fourth most common response in 2019 to the sixth most common response in 2021. This finding should be coupled with the 90% increase in respondents relying on unemployment as an income source; 69% of respondents who received unemployment over the past year reported that they lost their job due to COVID-19. Hustling or drug dealing represented 5% of reported income sources, youth who exchanged sex to meet their needs represented 3%, and panhandling represented 3%; all similar to rates in 2019.

Chart Six breaks down income source by housing status (i.e. sheltered, couch surfing, or unsheltered). Doubled-up respondents were more likely to be receiving disability income, cash assistance, and support from family or friends. Sheltered youth were most likely to be working at a full- or part-time job. Unsheltered youth were more likely to be panhandling, exchanging sex to meet their needs (ESN), hustling/drug dealing, working under the table, and having no income source than young people who were doubled-up or sheltered. Yet, young people who were unsheltered were working: three had full-time jobs and five had part-time jobs. These young people also reported under-the-table work, panhandling, and getting money from family or friends. These young people's experiences in particular show that working does not guarantee the ability to afford housing and avoid homelessness. The patterns in these findings suggest that specific strategies are needed to engage disconnected and unconnected youth and connect them to shelter and other housing resources so that they are in a more stable position to access employment and other income sources.

The experiences of young people who were unsheltered at the time of the Count show that working does not guarantee the ability to afford housing and avoid homelessness. These young people had full and part-time jobs, were working under-the-table, and engaging in other activities to secure money.

"I just started a my full time job because I was laid off the last one. I don't have money to get my own place. I'm currently couch surfing and I stay in my car at times too. I have a car bill and phone bill to pay as well which makes it hard for me to save for a place. I just need support getting a place please."

--19-year old female from Lawrence



Respondents were asked whether they had ever exchanged sex for money, housing, or other necessities. Forty-five UHY (18%) responded yes to this question. This is five percentage points higher than in 2019. The average age that young people who reported having ever ESN left home permanently was 17.4, as compared to closer to 17.9 for the respondents as a whole.

The following groups were more likely to have ever exchanged sex for needs than respondents as a whole:

- LGBTQ+ youth (30%)
- Youth who were unsheltered at the time of the survey (27%)
- Youth with justice system Involvement (25%)
- Youth with foster care system involvement (24%)
- Youth born outside of MA (23%)

Table Seven shows this from a regional perspective; several regions had higher rates of young people who reported having ever exchanged sex for needs. In Essex County the rate was 29%; in Three-County it was 28%; and in Metro Boston the rate was 23.5%.

Table Seven: Regional variation of youth who reported having ever exchanged sex to meet their needs (ESN)		
Region	Ever ESN (45)	Total respondents
Essex	29.2%	24
Three-County	28.0%	27
Metro Boston	23.5%	54
North Middlesex	17.4%	24
Worcester	16.7%	51
Cape Cod/Islands	14.3%	7
Plymouth/East Norfolk	11.4%	45
Bristol	5.0%	20
Hampden	0.0%	3
Metrowest	0.0%	8
Percent of all UHY	17.8%	265

Money. Homeless youths need trust, food, and cash in hand to survive in this economy...

--24-year-old from Arlington who had reported having ESN

2.3 SERVICE UTILIZATION

A major goal of the Massachusetts YOUTH Count is to gain a better understanding of the kinds of services UHY need and the challenges they face accessing them. The survey tool included two questions related to service utilization:

- In the last year, have you gotten help from any of the following services/programs and indicate if you got all, some or none of the help you needed, or you didn't try to get that type of help.
- If you did not receive all of the help you needed, why was that? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

The first question represents a slight departure from prior years. For the 2021 Count, in order to understand the amount of help received for each of the 13 service types listed, we combined what had been two questions into one. While this change provides more precise information about whether young people got some or all of the help they needed for specific service types, it created less certainty about how to interpret not getting any help or not trying to get that type of help. For that reason, most of the analysis focuses on young people who got all or some of the help they needed. The second question was not specific to service types, but rather an opportunity for the respondents to indicate general barriers they faced getting the help they need.

Starting with service types, respondents could indicate services they had sought in the past year from a list of 13 service types. Table Eight shows that the four top most sought-out services in 2021 were nutrition assistance, shelter/transitional housing, health care, and job training.

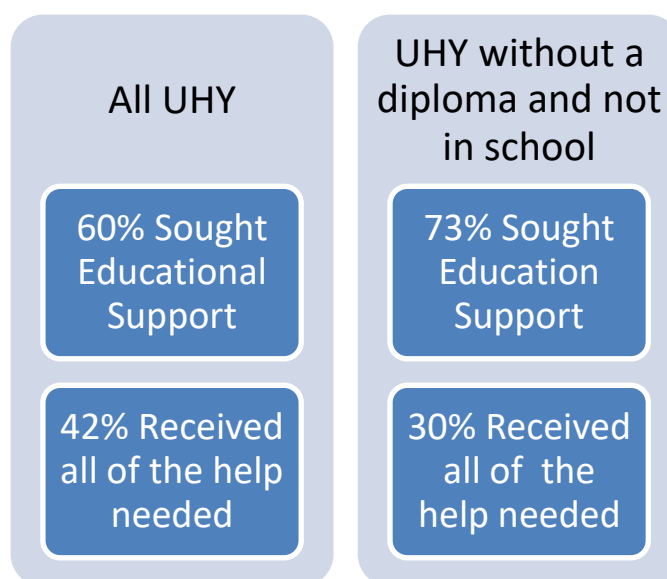
Table Eight: Type of help sought	Number that tried to access each type of help
Nutrition assistance	206
Shelter/Transitional housing	201
Health care	193
Job training	191
Long term housing	174
Family support	161
Educational support	158
Cash assistance	153
Other Counseling	136
Substance use treatment	97
Domestic Violence Counseling	92
Childcare	91
Sexual assault counseling	87

Table Nine removes respondents that said they didn't try to access each type of service, leaving those who said they received all, some, or none of the help they needed. Respondents were most likely to get some or all of the help they needed when it came to accessing shelter/transitional housing, nutrition assistance, health care, job training and educational support. They were least likely to say they got all or

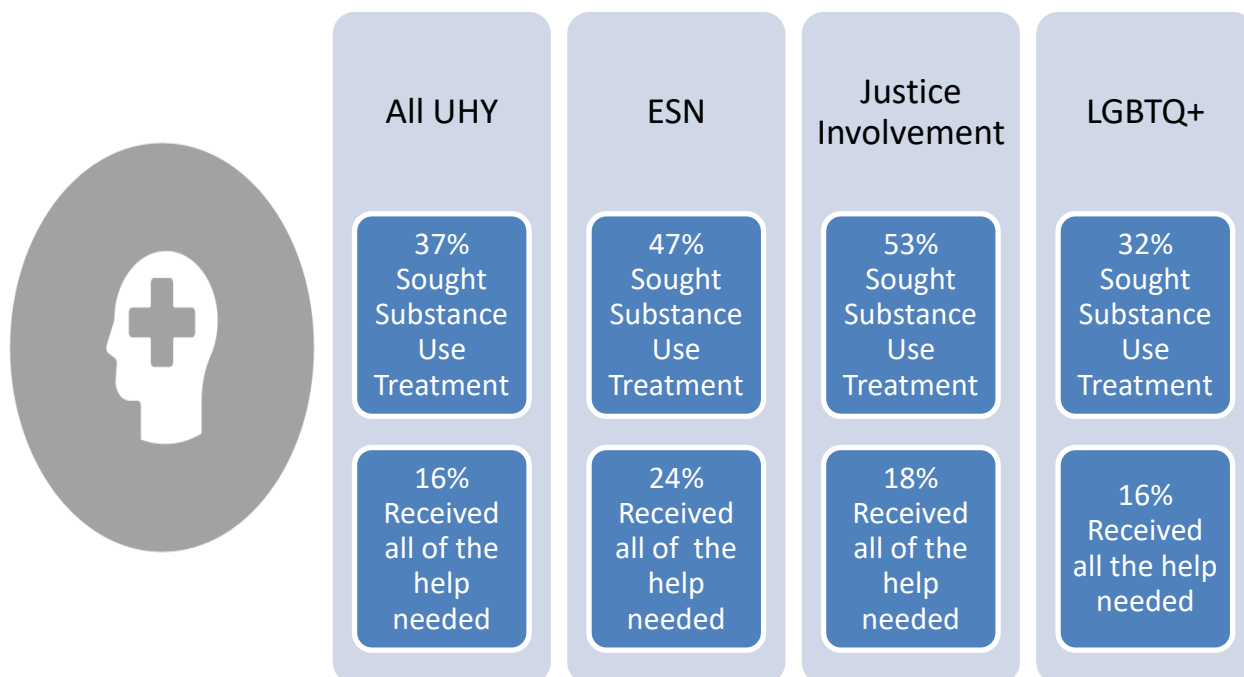
some of the help they needed for sexual assault counseling, domestic violence counseling, substance use treatment, and childcare.

Table Nine: Amount of help received	All	Some	None	% that tried to get each type of help
Nutrition assistance	45.1%	37.3%	17.4%	77.7%
Job training	43.9%	34.5%	21.4%	72.1%
Educational support	41.7%	34.1%	24.0%	59.6%
Shelter/Transitional housing	39.3%	44.7%	15.9%	75.8%
Health care	31.0%	50.2%	18.6%	72.8%
Cash assistance	26.7%	38.5%	34.6%	57.7%
Family support	26.7%	35.4%	37.8%	60.8%
Other Counseling	26.4%	38.2%	35.2%	51.3%
Long term housing	23.0%	38.5%	38.5%	65.7%
Childcare	18.6%	31.8%	49.4%	34.3%
Substance use treatment	16.4%	34.0%	49.4%	36.6%
Domestic Violence Counseling	11.9%	33.6%	54.3%	34.7%
Sexual assault counseling	11.4%	26.4%	62.0%	32.8%

Services that tended to be most helpful addressed logistical/tangible needs (e.g. food, money, shelter, employment, physical health) as compared to services that provide emotional and social support like family support, counseling, and substance abuse treatment. There was also evidence that young people who needed a service the most were least likely to receive it. For example, young people without a diploma and who were not in school were highly likely to seek educational services (73% compared to 59.6% of UHY respondents overall), yet, they were less likely to receive all the help they needed at 30%, compared to 41.7% for UHY overall.



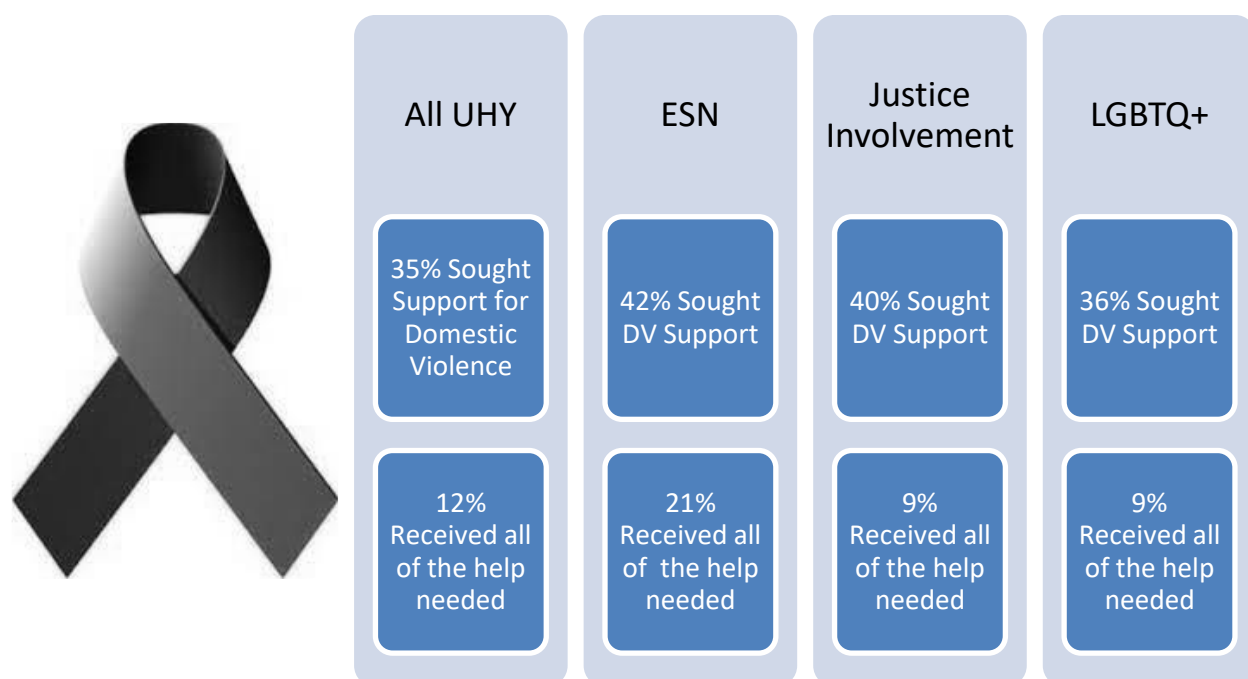
As was previously mentioned, alcohol and drug use appear to contribute to young people’s vulnerability to homelessness. While we cannot assume young people who left home due to their own substance use were still struggling with drugs or alcohol at the time of the Count, Table Nine shows the low percentage of UHY who received all the support they needed for substance use. Overall, 36.6% percent of the respondents sought substance use treatment; 50.4% of those who sought help received some or all of the help they needed. Similarly, family conflict was identified as a prominent cause of youth homelessness and the low utilization of counseling and family support to address this trauma is troubling and requires additional research.



Rates of receiving the help young people needed varied both by subpopulation and region. For example, 47% percent of respondents who reported ever exchanging sex to meet their needs sought substance use treatment. Fortunately, they were slightly more likely to report receiving some or all the help they needed at 56% as compared to UHY overall. Fifty-three percent of respondents with juvenile or criminal justice involvement sought help for substance use; yet, they were slightly less likely to report receiving all or some of the help they needed, at 50%. In terms of regional differences, young people in Plymouth and Essex Counties were less likely to get some or all the help they needed as compared to all UHY who sought services.

Given the trauma that many of these young people have faced, it is also concerning to see the low rates of young people receiving counseling for sexual assault or domestic violence. Forty percent of young people who ever exchanged sex to meet their needs sought help for sexual assault, as compared to 33% of UHY respondents overall. They were slightly more likely to report getting all they help they needed at 17%. LGBTQ+ identifying youth sought help at the same rate as other UHY respondents, but were less likely to report receiving all the help they needed at 9.6%.

Overall 34.7% of UHY respondents sought domestic violence support services and 11.9% reported receiving all the help they needed. Roughly 42.2% of young people who reported having ever ESN sought support for domestic violence and 21% of them reported receiving all the help they need. Roughly 40% of young people with justice system involvement reported seeking help for domestic violence; 9% reported receiving all the help they needed. Thirty-six percent of young people with foster care involvement reported seeking domestic violence support; 14.2% reported receiving all the help they needed. Thirty-three percent of young people who identify as LGBTQ+ reported seeking support for domestic violence; only 9% reported receiving all the help they need.



Overall, the variations we see in subpopulations experiences getting the help they need suggest the need for agencies to assess the cultural relevance of their services, outreach strategies, and service delivery systems.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HELP

Table Ten provides reasons respondents reported that they did not get the help they needed. This table includes responses from all youth meeting the Commission definition, as well as by several subpopulations experiencing particular vulnerabilities. The top barriers for all respondents included transportation, waiting lists, not hearing back, and not having money.

Table Ten: Service Barriers	All	ESN	Justice system	Doubled up	Unsheltered
Transportation	43%	53%	55%	55%	39%
Put on waiting list	39%	58%	45%	39%	39%
Didn't hear back	37%	44%	41%	37%	43%
Didn't have money	36%	42%	47%	38%	52%
Didn't know where to go	35%	47%	37%	43%	52%
Lack of I.D./documents	28%	33%	40%	38%	35%
COVID-19 restrictions	26%	38%	33%	27%	26%
Didn't qualify for help	25%	31%	28%	28%	39%
Didn't ask for help	23%	22%	29%	30%	17%
Paperwork	20%	36%	29%	28%	17%
Didn't follow through or return for services	18%	24%	30%	25%	17%
Didn't feel comfortable/safe	18%	36%	20%	25%	26%
Didn't have regular access to a phone or email	16%	33%	27%	19%	13%
Program closure due to COVID-19	12%	31%	19%	9%	9%
Sent somewhere else	11%	27%	20%	10%	17%
Didn't have health insurance	11%	13%	20%	20%	17%
Language barrier	3%	4%	2%	1%	0%

Some subpopulations of UHY experienced barriers differently than others. Young people who have ever exchanged sex for needs faced almost every barrier at much higher rate than the respondents as a whole. COVID-19 restrictions and closures appeared to impact these young people more than others. Justice system involved youth also faced many barriers, with transportation, lack of identification, and not following through for services being some of the most significant. Youth who were doubled up, struggled with transportation more than others. Youth who were unsheltered reported not knowing where to go for help, not having money for help, and not being eligible for services at rates higher than others.

Table Eleven shows regional differences in barriers young people report to receiving services. Data are only presented here for the seven regions with at least 10 respondents that met the Commission definition of homelessness.

Table Eleven: Regional Variations in Barriers	All	Three-County	Worcester	Bristol	Plymouth/ East Norfolk	Essex	North Middlesex	Metro Boston
Transportation	43%	19%	45%	55%	51%	33%	58%	43%
Put on waiting list	39%	15%	49%	40%	42%	50%	29%	41%
Didn't hear back	37%	7%	43%	30%	42%	42%	38%	41%
Didn't have money	36%	19%	35%	15%	56%	33%	25%	39%
Didn't know where to go	36%	26%	37%	10%	56%	46%	33%	28%
Lack of I.D./documents	28%	30%	14%	25%	53%	33%	17%	30%
COVID-19 restrictions	26%	15%	27%	20%	36%	21%	21%	28%
Didn't qualify for help	25%	11%	29%	5%	29%	33%	38%	22%
Didn't ask for help	23%	19%	18%	20%	51%	17%	17%	15%
Paperwork	20%	11%	20%	10%	47%	21%	13%	17%
Didn't feel comfortable/ safe	18%	4%	14%	5%	33%	25%	13%	24%
Didn't follow through or return for services	18%	15%	8%	10%	40%	13%	13%	19%
Program closure due to COVID-19	12%	7%	22%	5%	7%	13%	4%	17%
Sent somewhere else	11%	4%	12%	5%	11%	13%	17%	17%
Didn't have regular access to a phone or email	11%	4%	12%	10%	33%	21%	17%	13%
Didn't have health insurance	11%	7%	6%	5%	27%	8%	21%	6%
Language barrier	3%	0%	0%	5%	2%	4%	4%	4%

Transportation appeared to be particularly problematic in Bristol and North Middlesex Counties. Waitlists were a challenge in Worcester and Essex Counties. Not qualifying for help was a problem in Essex and North Middlesex Counties. Not feeling safe were larger barriers in Plymouth/East Norfolk, Essex, and Metro Boston. Program closures were a problem for young people in Worcester County. Being sent somewhere else tended to be a barrier in Metro Boston and North Middlesex. Not having access to phone or email were problematic for young people in Plymouth/East Norfolk and Essex Counties. Several barriers seemed to converge in Plymouth/East Norfolk County, including not having money, not knowing where to go, not having needed identification and documents, COVID-19 restrictions, paperwork, and young people not asking for help/not following through for services.

It is surprising that transportation was not listed as a top barrier in Three-County given the size of the region; it is important to note that being sent somewhere else, not meeting eligibility criteria, waitlists and not hearing back from providers were relatively low barriers in Three-County, suggesting that young people who accessed services appeared to experience a coordinated system.

Respondents were asked to provide additional comments on services sought and barriers faced.

- One respondent in Leominster reported, “I tried to get mental health help but was never called back.”
- A twenty-two year old transgender youth from Amherst said, “Healthcare and mental health services have been inconsistent, like my therapist not being a good fit for me personally and my current PCP not understanding my needs as a patient.”
- A twenty-three year old respondent in Bolton with foster care, criminal and juvenile justice involvement said, “Definitely struggled with lack of services.”
- A twenty-year old parent in Worcester studying to be a phlebotomist stated, “I lived in a TPP program for a year-and-a-half. Finally got housing, moving out soon. That was not easy to get housing, I had to constantly harass them for attention and learned that emailing was the best way to get fast information and calling consistently for them to hear my story to put me as emergency.”
- A 21-year-old transgender youth from Boston said, “I need help with getting my license and learning to drive and to change my name legally.”
- An 18-year old young person from Beverly with foster care system involvement and who was doubled-up said, “I had a therapist back in 2020 but then COVID-19 hit and I lost touch with my therapist so we ended up closing.”

From the following statements, there is the sense that young people were actively seeking help, but not getting all the help they needed, “I am still actively seeking resources and support”; “Pretty much just seeking help to get a roof over my head”; “Wish I had cash assistance,”; “I’ve tried as many outreach resources as I could.” This twenty-two year old young person from Brockton summarized his feelings and experiences as a young person navigating housing instability, “We don’t have a voice until we are no longer living, then everyone plays superhero.”

We explored this issue with the focus group of young adults with relevant situated knowledge from across the state about their experience reaching out for various forms of help. We asked the following questions to guide the conversation: *What services did you need this year? Which services did you try to access? Did you get none, some, or all of the help you needed when you did reach out for help? What were some barriers to receiving the help you needed? If you did not try to access services that you needed, why?*

Focus group participants’ needs included transportation cost assistance, rent and utility support, and holistic wrap-around services. Overwhelmingly, the most commonly unfulfilled need was mental health support. Three out of the eight respondents reported therapy as an ongoing need, and none of the participants knew of affordable, timely, and accessible options for mental health support. Young adults in the focus group had the following to say on the subject of barriers to accessing mental healthcare:

“Paying for your car and paying for your apartment and going to school and working—it’s all too much. With the [agency], I definitely feel like there needs to be more support when it comes to talking to a therapist.”

“I need more cheap mental health support, like options for therapy that are available for people whose insurance won’t pay for it. It’s backwards—I’m not saying that people with

enough wealth to go to therapy don't have problems... but that when you have so much other structural stuff on top of it and when you're facing the stress of housing insecurity and not having enough money to be able to take care of your mental health, of course you would need mental health support. And there's just no options out there."

"People say go seek out a therapist, go get help, or go talk to someone. I'll do it; I'll reach out. And when I do it'll take months or weeks before I can even communicate with them. And it'll be too late-- I'll already be in my depression, or too deep in things that I'm going through that there's no point in talking about it because it already happened. Right then and there in that moment when I needed someone to talk to, there's no one there... your mental health matters more than anything in the world"

We also sought to understand why so many youth and young adults did not reach out to different types of services. It was unclear from survey data whether all UHY who did not seek out specific services did not need them in the first place, or if some faced barriers that prevented them from reaching out. In the case of some services (such as childcare) it is obvious that not all UHY need assistance, as they are not all facing parenthood. However, based on responses in the focus group, it is evident that at least some UHY are not reaching out to services because of stigma, lack of time and energy, and knowledge of services' low and slow success rate in helping them fulfill their needs. It is not because they don't need help.

One young adult pointed out that internalized shame prevented them from reaching out:

"During the pandemic I struggled a lot. I didn't start getting help until now... because for so long there was a youth group trying to help me and I wasn't taking the help. I have a problem taking help and it was hard for me. I finally took the help and now things are successful, and the services were very beneficial."

Young adults in the focus group also indicated that existing services need to be accessible to more people. One young person reached out for help but did not get what they needed because their income was slightly too high, they had recently secured housing, and were seeking resources as a family unit rather than an individual:

"I was struggling financially-- I had DTA-- and I had finally gotten an apartment, but they threatened to close my case because I had too much money in my savings, and I was moving in with my daughter's father. I feel like that's really messed up... because I was homeless and so was he but there were no programs or anything that would help both of us as a family. DTA made me put him on child support even though he was struggling as well, like couch surfing and everything. And then when we finally got to be together they were like 'okay bye, you don't really need us.' He was working, but he wasn't making that much money. What I needed this year was a support system that doesn't just help one person."

Multiple participants cited the effort it takes to get in contact with services as a barrier:

“I think the problem is finding transportation, filling out all this paperwork, and then nothing happens.”

“I feel like I did get all the service I needed. However, I needed to be very persistent and annoy them every day in order to get help. And if you don’t do that you’re not going to get anywhere.”

“We basically kind of get a burnout from reaching out over and over again... At some point you get tired and you just let things be because it’s more work to get the help than to just let things be the way they are.”

Young people were already over-extending themselves trying to make money, survive, and reach stability. Many could not afford to put time and energy into reaching out to services again and again, especially when coupled with the high probability that services would not provide useful help, as Table 9, Table 10, and focus group participants’ shared stories demonstrated. For many of the UHY, the risk of fruitless unpaid labor outweighed the benefit of potentially receiving assistance.

3.0 COVID-19 IMPACTS

Two questions were added to the 2021 MA YOUth Count survey to gain a better understanding of the effects of COVID-19 on young people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in Massachusetts. As has been highlighted throughout this report, COVID-19 related response options were also added to several questions we ask each year.

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON ABILITY TO PAY FOR EVERYDAY EXPENSES AND ACCESS TO AMENITIES

The first COVID-19 question was, “Thinking just about the past year, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, have you experienced any of the following as a result of COVID-19? This could be because you got ill, or your employment situation was affected, or any other issue related to COVID-19.” Table Twelve summarizes how COVID-19 affected their ability to pay for everyday expenses and their level of access to shelter, spaces, and basic amenities. Overall, young people who met the Commission definition for homelessness reported more issues with expenses than accessing services and spaces as a result of COVID-19.

Table Twelve COVID-19 Challenges	Number	Percent
Not enough money to pay for food	168	63%
Did not have a regular place to sleep or stay	156	59%
Not enough money to pay for rent	147	55%
Not enough money to pay for utilities	142	54%
Could not access Wi-Fi	143	54%
Could not access physical/mental healthcare	122	46%
Not enough money to pay for gas for your car	118	45%
Could not access public places such as parks	109	41%

Table Thirteen examines how the challenges presented in Table Twelve were experienced by different groups of young people. We acknowledge that many of the identities below intersect in ways that increase individual youths' vulnerabilities.

Table Thirteen: COVID-19 Challenges by Subpopulation	\$ Food	Place Sleep	\$ Rent	\$ Utilities	WiFi	Health care	\$ Gas Car	Public Spaces
Total (265)	63%	59%	55%	54%	54%	46%	44%	41%
Ever ESN (45)	82%	73%	62%	58%	71%	58%	47%	62%
Doubled up (89)	75%	71%	65%	71%	56%	54%	63%	34%
Justice system (83)	73%	65%	60%	61%	64%	55%	54%	45%
Foster care (96)	72%	58%	60%	52%	63%	52%	48%	46%
LGBTQ (96)	65%	64%	53%	50%	55%	53%	38%	51%
Unsheltered (23)	65%	78%	65%	52%	61%	48%	57%	52%
BIPOC (169)	64%	59%	50%	50%	53%	37%	41%	41%
Sheltered (147)	55%	48%	48%	42%	50%	41%	32%	44%
Pregnant/Parenting (37)	49%	54%	46%	54%	46%	41%	38%	41%
Born outside US (20)	55%	45%	40%	40%	50%	35%	25%	40%

Looking at having enough money to pay for food as an example, youth who had ever reported ESN, youth who were doubled up, and youth with system involvement (foster care or justice system) were all more likely to have struggled with having enough money for food than UHY respondents as a whole. Youth who were sheltered, pregnant or parenting, or born outside of the United States were less likely to have struggled with having enough money for food. These patterns persisted across the items, with youth with system involvement, doubled up, unsheltered, and ever having ESN experiencing the most challenges and youth who were sheltered, pregnant or parenting, and who were born outside the United States were less likely to report experiencing these challenges.

“Having direct places to go for help for age group and similar situations. maybe a website full of information or links to help. And a number to call with questions. Because sometimes you can search and feel like you've hit a brick wall especially during the pandemic since most places are closed to in person meetings.”

--21-year-old female from Boston

We assumed young people likely experienced more than one of the challenges presented in Table Twelve. Table Fourteen shows that 15% of UHY reported not being affected by any of these challenges and 14% (37) UHY had experienced all 8 challenges.

Table Fourteen: Respondents experiencing multiple challenges		
# of COVID-19 Challenges	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
0	41	15%
1	16	6%
2	21	8%
3	22	8%
4	35	13%
5	40	15%
6	26	10%
7	27	10%
8	37	14%

Table Fifteen examines the relationship between the number of challenges young people experienced and aspects of their identities.

Table Fifteen	0 challenges (15%)	1-3 challenges (22%)	4-7 challenges (48%)	8 challenges (14%)
ESN	0%	24%	55%	20%
Unsheltered	13%	13%	53%	22%
Doubled up	8%	20%	55%	17%
Justice system	11%	18%	51%	20%
Foster care	10%	23%	49%	18%
LGTBQ	11%	23%	54%	11%
BIPOC	14%	26%	48%	12%
Sheltered	21%	26%	41%	17%
Born outside US	25%	25%	45%	5%
Pregnant/Parenting	19%	32%	32%	16%

Similar patterns emerged as did in Table Thirteen. All of the young people who reported having ever ESN had at least one challenge, and 75% of them had four or more. Of the young people who were unsheltered at the time of the Count, 75% of them also experienced four or more of the challenges in the past year. Of the youth with justice system involvement, 71% experienced four or more challenges. Respondents who were pregnant or parenting experienced the lowest number of challenges, with 19% of them experiencing no challenges, and 48% experiencing more than four.

Tables Sixteen and Seventeen show regional differences in COVID-19 related challenges young people face for the seven regions with at least 10 respondents that met the Commission definition.

Table Sixteen COVID-19 Challenges	Number	Percent of all UHY	Three- County	Worcester	Bristol	Plymouth	Essex	N Middlesex	Metro Boston
Not enough money to pay for food	168	63%	52%	55%	85%	67%	71%	50%	70%
Did not have a regular place to sleep or stay	156	59%	56%	43%	70%	71%	75%	50%	63%
Not enough money to pay for rent	147	55%	41%	55%	70%	58%	67%	54%	48%
Not enough money to pay for utilities	142	54%	44%	45%	70%	56%	67%	42%	56%
Could not access Wi-Fi	143	54%	48%	51%	50%	62%	58%	33%	61%
Could not access physical/mental healthcare	122	46%	37%	33%	20%	69%	54%	46%	46%
Not enough money to pay for gas for your car	118	45%	37%	35%	65%	51%	54%	29%	39%
Could not access public places such as parks	109	41%	37%	41%	35%	33%	42%	29%	54%

Young people in Bristol County experienced particular hardship with having money to pay for necessities, as well as having a regular place to stay; eighty-five percent of young people in Bristol County experienced four or more challenges and only 5% experienced none of the COVID-19 related challenges. Youth in Plymouth County had challenges accessing health care. Young people in Essex struggled with having a place to stay. Young people in Essex and Plymouth Counties also tended to experience 4 or more challenges (71% & 67% respectively).

Table Seventeen Region	0	1-3	4-7	8
Bristol	5.0%	10.0%	75.0%	10.0%
Essex	12.5%	16.7%	45.8%	25.0%
Metro Boston	12.9%	22.2%	48.2%	16.7%
Worcester	15.7%	39.2%	31.4%	13.7%
Plymouth/East Norfolk	17.8%	15.6%	51.1%	15.6%
Three-County	22.2%	22.2%	48.2%	7.4%
North Middlesex	29.2%	16.7%	45.8%	8.3%
Percent of all Regions	15.47%	22.3%	48.0%	13.9%

COVID-19 EFFECTS ON EMPLOYMENT

Respondents were asked about their employment status before and after the start of the pandemic, as well as about how COVID-19 affected their employment status and hours offered. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of respondents reported that they were employed prior to COVID-19. Of the 157 respondents who reported that they had been working prior to COVID-19, 62% reported that they lost their job as a result of the pandemic. Another 15% reported that their hours had been reduced. Just 14% reported that they

were still employed at the same number or for an increased number of hours. Table Eighteen provides information about the characteristics of young people who lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

Table Eighteen: Respondents who had been employed before the pandemic and lost their job	Total	% employed before COVID-19	% lost their job due to the pandemic
Total % (#) Commission Definition	56% (265)	59% (157)	62% (98)
LGBTQ	36.2% (96)	58%	62%
BIPOC	63.7% (169)	61%	56%
Foster care	36.2% (96)	59%	61%
Juvenile/ Criminal justice	31.3% (83)	59%	65%
Parenting with custody/Pregnant	13.9% (37)	70%	57%
Not in school/No diploma	15.5% (41)	46%	79%
Sheltered	55% (147)	57%	57%
Doubled-up	33% (89)	62%	69%
Unsheltered	9% (23)	52%	50%
Exchanged Sex for Needs (ESN) (ever)	17% (45)	69%	71%

Young people who were pregnant or parenting were most likely to be employed at the time of the pandemic and were also least likely to have lost their job. Young people without a high school diploma were least likely to have been working before the pandemic and also most likely to have lost their job. While young people who reported having ever ESN had been working at high rates before the pandemic, they were also among those most likely to have lost their jobs. Youth who were doubled up lost their jobs at high rates as well.

“I think all the same information and resources should be known throughout all the programs that connect to each other and all the knowledge should be the same amount. I think a lot of case management is important to get what you need. Without it you’re stuck with no one advocating but yourself which isn’t a problem if your good at that. There should also be programs (not shelters with long waiting list) for families that include mother and father and not force the family apart as well as getting assistance for all of them.”

--20-year-old female from Worcester

4.0 DEMOGRAPHICS

The Commission included several questions to understand demographic characteristics of UHY. In this section, information about the age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and place of birth are provided.

AGE

The majority of survey respondents meeting the Commission's definition of unaccompanied homeless youth were between the ages of 18 and 24. Roughly 4.0% of responses from those meeting the state's definition for homelessness came from youth under the age of 18; 43.0% were between 18 and 20; and 53.2% were between 21 and 24. The average age at which unaccompanied homeless youth left home the first time was 17.1 and the average age these young people left home permanently was 17.9. Ninety-two young people or 34.7% of UHY left home permanently before age 18.

RACE/ETHNICITY

Respondents were able to select multiple options for race and ethnicity on the survey tool. Cumulatively, Black, Latinx, Asian, and Multiracial respondents constituted 63.7% of the respondents who met the Commission definition but were 58.9% of all young people surveyed. White respondents made up 30% of all young people surveyed and 28% of those that met the Commission definition. It is also important to point out that BIPOC youth's experiences vary tremendously, with young people who are American Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander tending to experience barriers and challenges at the highest rates within the BIPOC subpopulation.

GENDER

Fifty-one percent of the respondents were cis-female. Roughly 40% of respondents were cis-male. Of the remaining respondents, 5% were non-binary, gender fluid, or gender queer. Four percent were transgender.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sixty-two percent of the UHY identified as straight or heterosexual; 17.3% identified as bisexual; 5% identified as pansexual; 4.2% identified as gay; 3.8% identified as lesbian; the remaining young people identified as asexual, queer, questioning. 3% of respondents preferred not to answer this question.

PLACE OF BIRTH

Of the 265 respondents meeting the Commission's definition, 77% were born in Massachusetts. Breaking this down further, 44% of respondents were born in the same city or town in which they took the survey. Roughly 14% were born in the United States but outside of Massachusetts and 8% were born outside of the United States.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Conducting the YOUth Count during a pandemic presented many challenges. One challenge was asking an already overtaxed service sector to support the outreach required for a successful YOUth Count. Another was rethinking outreach strategies in ways that were COVID-19 safe as well as recognizing that the State of Emergency limited the places young people could congregate. These two sets of challenges—one facing providers and the other centered in the experiences of young people—led to a smaller number of completed surveys overall, and in some regions more so than others. For these reasons, we recommend exercising caution in using this year's findings as part of an analysis of overall trends in youth homelessness but rather to gain understanding of how the pandemic impacted some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents. In spite of the limitations, **the 2021 YOUth Count Survey results bring to light the resilience, resourcefulness, and hope of the state's UHY population.** Despite a year full of increased challenges and insecurity, young people are still surviving. They are attending school, working, seeking help, and working towards long-term goals.

We found troubling differences in experiences and needs between sheltered and unsheltered/doubled up young people. Unsheltered youth were more likely to be panhandling, exchanging sex to meet their needs (ESN), hustling/drug dealing, working under the table, and having no income source than young people who were doubled-up or sheltered. Yet, young people who were unsheltered were also working: three had full-time jobs and five had part-time jobs. These young people also reported under-the-table work, panhandling, and getting money from family or friends. **Unsheltered young peoples' experiences in particular point out the painful reality that working or even securing multiple income sources does not guarantee the ability to afford housing and avoid homelessness.**

In 2021, we learned about the experiences of young people who reported having ever exchanged sex to meet their needs (ESN). The following groups were more likely to have reported ESN than respondents as a whole: young people who identify as LGBTQ+; youth who were unsheltered at the time of the survey; youth with justice system involvement; youth with foster care system involvement; and youth born outside of MA. **Young people who had ever exchanged sex to meet their needs were most likely to have faced multiple challenges due to the pandemic and faced barriers to accessing services at higher rates than the UHY respondents as a whole.**

Another troubling finding is that in many instances young people who needed services the most were least likely to receive them. Youth who were unsheltered reported not knowing where to go for help, not having money for help, and not being eligible for services at rates higher than others. Young people without a diploma and who were not in school were highly likely to seek educational services but were the least likely to receive all the help they needed. There were significant regional variations in young people's experiences accessing housing and other services. In some places in the state, it appears young people enter a coordinated system and in others there appear to be many gaps and barriers to getting the help they need.

Based on characteristics of young people who were in the precarious situation of being doubled-up or unsheltered, an important theme that emerged from the Count is the importance of making housing

resources and support services much more visible and accessible to young people. Evidence from the 2021 Count suggests that increasing the amount of affordable housing options and connecting youth to transitional housing resources and other wrap-around services would increase their access to education, employment, and other needed supports and resources. Yet, according to young people, there are not enough accessible pathways to secure housing.

Other significant areas of unmet need appear to be mental health and counseling services, substance use and recovery services, and support for young people who have lost a parent or caregiver. These were paths to homelessness experienced at higher rates by young people with vulnerabilities such as justice system involvement, those who exchange sex to meet their needs (ESN), and those who were unsheltered. Given the fact that so many in this population have experienced chronic familial abuse and abandonment, domestic violence, incarceration, addiction, and sexual assault, the lack of comprehensive mental health services available is of utmost concern.

Recently, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless created a statewide campaign to increase awareness of services for UHY and educate the public on the hidden nature of youth homelessness. While this campaign addresses the awareness gap about what youth homelessness looks like and existing services, we know that awareness of resources alone will not eradicate youth homelessness.

Indeed, this year's findings suggest that significant portions of youth that reach out to services are not receiving the help they need. On average, only 27.9% of youth received all the help they needed across all service types. Variations in subpopulations experiences getting the help they need suggest the need for agencies to assess the cultural appropriateness of their services, outreach strategies, and service delivery systems. Young people prioritize where to put their energy. They are not pursuing resources that are too hard to obtain with little certainty that their needs will actually be met. Instead, young people spend time and energy securing income to survive day-to-day.

Doubled-up respondents were more likely to be receiving disability income, cash assistance, and support from family or friends. Sheltered youth were most likely to be working at a full- or part-time job. Yet, these young people are still struggling to reach stability. Some young people who sought out help expressed frustration about services being inaccessible. Since many forms of assistance reduce or stop entirely once an individual's income reaches a certain level or they secure "permanent" housing, young people are left to support themselves before they are actually stable. The sudden influx of expenses leaves young people vulnerable once again. Those experiencing housing insecurity had trouble finding preventative resources to avoid homelessness.

Services therefore must increase their capacity to respond and effectively serve a greater number of young people in a timely and trauma-informed fashion. Youth need holistic wrap-around support to help them heal trauma, reach stability, and achieve their goals. The state's network of service providers and government officials must increase service responsiveness and quality, address the lack of affordable housing, and effectively interrupt paths to homelessness in order to meet its goal of eradicating youth homelessness and leaving young people with a better chance for success in an increasingly insecure world.

6.0 ATTACHMENTS

- 1) Methodology
- 2) Final 2021 Uniform Survey Tool (English Version)
- 3) Open-ended responses
- 4) State-level data table
- 5) Members of the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (to be updated)
- 6) Cities and towns where surveys were and were not collected

ATTACHMENT ONE: METHODOLOGY

The 2021 Count builds on progress started with the groundbreaking 2014 Count, the first statewide effort of its kind in the United States, and the subsequent annual Counts. The 2014 Count established a baseline against which progress in addressing unaccompanied youth homelessness could be measured. The importance of having this baseline became even more significant when the Commission released the “Massachusetts State Plan to End Youth Homelessness” in 2018. The Massachusetts Plan responds to youth and young adult housing vulnerability and identifies needed program, policy, and system changes. The Massachusetts Plan also requires regions to undertake community needs assessments to analyze the drivers of youth homelessness. Youth Count data are an important component of the regional assessments. The 2021 YOUTH Count also allows policy makers and service providers an opportunity to learn how young people fared during the pandemic and service gaps that require urgent attention.

STRUCTURE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT

Three organizing entities support the Massachusetts Youth Count: the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (the Commission), the Identification and Connection Working Group (the Working Group) of the Commission, and a network of ten regional providers often with the support of the local Continuums of Care (CoCs).⁷

The **Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth** provides oversight for the Count and is responsible for reporting on its progress annually to the Governor’s Office, the Legislature, and the Office of the Child Advocate. The Executive Office of Health and Human Services chairs the Commission, and at the time of the 2021 Count, the Commission included 29 members, representing youth, state government, service providers, and advocates (see Attachment Two for members of the Commission).

The **Identification and Connection Working Group** of the Commission organized and facilitated the Massachusetts Youth Count on behalf of the Commission. For the 2021 Count, its primary responsibilities were to convene interested stakeholders to prepare for the Count, update the Count methodology, make needed modifications to the uniform survey tool, ensure COVID-19 safety protocols were in place, develop print and social media materials for stakeholders to prepare for the Count all accessible in a Google Drive, develop a centralized mechanism to distribute incentives, and implement the Count in partnership with Regional Providers. The Working Group is chaired by Gordie Calkins of the Department of Housing Community Development and Kelly Turley of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless.

The Regional Providers, supported by Senior Consultant to the MA Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission, implemented and coordinated the Youth Count at the local and regional level. Each Regional Provider had a unique geographic area to cover, a mix of resources and providers, and high demand for homeless services. The Senior Consultant ensured that the Statewide Youth Ambassadors

⁷ A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.

had decision-making responsibility in the Count, and assisted bringing youth voice to the Count process through focus groups and direct review of all Count materials.

YOUTH COUNT METHODOLOGY

The Commission, through the Working Group, provided technical assistance via Zoom to the network of regional providers that executed the Youth Count survey in 2021. The Count’s uniform survey tool was administered during a 6-week period from April 12 through May 24, 2021. The Working Group developed guidelines for regional partners to work with diverse partners to identify young people who may or may not be connected to schools, employment or social services and to engage youth volunteers, also known as “Youth Ambassadors,” to assist with implementation. Statewide youth ambassadors also assisted with creating and administering a focus group with 6 young people from across the state with lived experience of homelessness. The aim of the focus group was to analyze some of the quantitative YOUTH Count findings.

The Youth Count is aligned with lessons learned through Chapin Hall’s Voices of Youth Count process⁸. The Working Group formulated a set of guidelines based on best practices to conduct a youth count (See Pergamit et al., 2013). Recommended practices included forming a local planning committee, providing stipends to youth volunteers, conducting focused youth outreach and marketing of the count, training all volunteers, engaging diverse partners, providing day-of coordination and quality control, and seeking creative ways to engage youth under 18 years old.

REFINEMENT OF THE UNIFORM SURVEY TOOL

To develop the 2021 uniform survey tool, the Working Group started with the 2019 survey tool and worked to further address limitations, reduce confusion, and encourage completion of each question by survey participants. Several COVID-19 questions were added to the tool and COVID-19 response options were added to existing questions. In 2021, we continued to use the Google Form to capture responses. The survey was also administered through a paper version. The paper survey was available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, and Brazilian Portuguese. The electronic Google Form was available in English and Spanish. See Attachment Three for the final English version of the 2021 Uniform Survey Tool.

REGIONAL PROVIDER ENGAGEMENT

Once the methodology and updated survey tool were complete, the Working Group worked with the Regional Providers to develop the outreach strategies to promote the online tool. Engagement with the

⁸ Dworsky, A., Horwitz, B., (2018). Missed opportunities: Counting Youth Experiencing Homelessness in America. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

Regional Providers during this phase included email and telephone conversations providing basic information about what the Working Group was hoping to accomplish, grant information, and several Zoom webinars and drop in sessions. Communication was maintained with Regional Providers throughout the Count with progress updates and new social media materials.

LIMITATIONS

Conducting the YOUTh Count during a pandemic presented many challenges. One challenge was asking an already overtaxed service sector to support the outreach required for a successful YOUTh Count. Another was rethinking outreach strategies in ways that were COVID-19 safe as well as recognizing that the State of Emergency limited the places young people could congregate. These two sets of challenges—one facing providers and the other centered in the experiences of young people—led to a smaller number of completed surveys overall, and in some regions more so than others. For these reasons, we recommend exercising caution in using this years’ findings as part of an analysis of overall trends in youth homelessness and rather to gain understanding of how the pandemic impacted some of the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable residents.

ATTACHMENT TWO: FINAL 2021 UNIFORM SURVEY TOOL

2021 Massachusetts YOUTH Count Survey

This survey is being administered by the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, in partnership with youth and young adults, the ten regional youth organizations funded by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), and many community groups. This survey has been designed so that the state, regional, and local providers can better understand the housing and service needs of youth and young adults under the age of 25 in Massachusetts. Over the past several years, the results of similar surveys have helped to push the Legislature to invest a total of \$20 million in housing and services for young people who are experiencing housing instability.

There are 38 questions. It should take 10-15 minutes to complete. **Your answers will remain confidential. Please respond to all of the questions you feel comfortable answering.** We greatly appreciate your participation!

1. Have you already taken this survey in the past five weeks (or since April 12th)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. What are your initials—the first letter of each of your names? ____/____/____(first/middle/last)
3. What is your age? _____
4. What is your date of birth? ____/____/____(month/day/year)
5. What is your primary language? _____
6. If your primary language is one other than English, are you taking this survey in your primary language?
☐ Yes, someone is reading the questions to me in my primary language
☐ Yes, this paper or electronic version has been translated into my primary language
☐ No, I am taking this survey in a language that is not my primary language

We are asking the following set of questions to better understand your housing situation.

7. Are you currently experiencing homelessness or housing instability? (This can include couch surfing, sleeping outside, being in and out of a parent or guardian's house, staying in a shelter, sleeping in your car, etc.)
☐ Yes ☐ No, but I have experienced homelessness in the past ☐ No and I never have experienced homelessness
☐ Unsure Comments _____
8. Where did you sleep last night? (**CIRCLE THE ONE OPTION THAT BEST MATCHES YOUR SITUATION**)

<input type="checkbox"/> Shelter (emergency/temporary)	<input type="checkbox"/> Car or other vehicle
<input type="checkbox"/> Transitional housing	<input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned building, vacant unit, or squat
<input type="checkbox"/> Hotel or motel	<input type="checkbox"/> On a train/bus or in train/bus station
<input type="checkbox"/> Apartment or home where I pay the rent or mortgage and I am up to date on rent	<input type="checkbox"/> 24-hour restaurant, laundromat, or other business/retail establishment
<input type="checkbox"/> Apartment or home where I pay the rent or mortgage but I am behind on rent	<input type="checkbox"/> Anywhere outside (street, park, viaduct)
<input type="checkbox"/> Parent or guardian's home	<input type="checkbox"/> Hospital or emergency room
<input type="checkbox"/> Other relative's home without paying rent	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental health residential treatment facility
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster family's home	<input type="checkbox"/> Substance use residential treatment facility/detox center
<input type="checkbox"/> Home of friend or friend's family without paying rent	<input type="checkbox"/> Juvenile detention center or jail
<input type="checkbox"/> Home of boyfriend/girlfriend/partner without paying rent	

☐ Other:

9. How long have you stayed/lived in the place you slept last night?
☐ Fewer than 6 months ☐ 6-12 months ☐ More than 12 months
10. Do you have a safe place where you can stay on a regular basis for at least the next 14 days?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

We are asking the following set of questions to learn if you are “accompanied”, that is living with your parent or guardian, and your history of being out on your own.

11. Are you currently living with a parent, guardian, or foster parent? ☐ Yes ☐ No
12. How old were you the **first** time you left home to be out on your own? _____ (NA if you never left to be on your own)
13. How old were you when you left home for good? _____ (NA if you have never left home to be on your own)
14. If you are not living with your parent/guardian/foster parent now, what are the reasons? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent | <input type="checkbox"/> I was/am pregnant or got someone else pregnant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My parent/guardian/foster parent abused drugs or alcohol) | <input type="checkbox"/> My sexual orientation and/or gender identity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My parent/guardian died | <input type="checkbox"/> My use of alcohol or drugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My house was too small for everyone to live there | <input type="checkbox"/> I was told to leave |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually) | <input type="checkbox"/> I wanted to leave |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I did not feel safe due to violence or unsafe activities in my house | <input type="checkbox"/> I had to move out because of COVID-19 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My family lost our housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I left foster care | _____ |

We are asking the following set of questions to better understand your demographics (place of birth, education, income, etc.) as well as your experiences trying to access needed resources

15. Where were you born? ☐ In this city /town ☐ Another place in MA ☐ Outside MA but in the U.S.
☐ Outside U.S ☐ Don't know
16. Which city/town are you in right now, taking this survey? _____
17. Have you been staying overnight in the city/town where you are taking this survey?
☐ Yes ☐ No, I'm staying in _____
18. Do you have a high school diploma, HiSET degree, or GED? ☐ Yes ☐ No
19. Are you currently attending school or another education program? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If yes, please describe) _____

20. Have you ever served in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard? ☐ Yes ☐ No
21. Have you ever been in foster care? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

22. Have you ever stayed overnight or longer in juvenile detention (a secure facility or residential program for young people as a result of police involvement)? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure
23. Have you ever stayed overnight or longer in an adult jail or prison? ☐ Yes ☐ No
24. Are you pregnant and/or parenting? ☐ Yes, pregnant only ☐ Yes, parenting only ☐ Yes, both pregnant and parenting
☐ No ☐ Unsure
25. If you are a parent, do you have custody of your child(ren)? In other words, are you responsible for caring for your child(ren) on a day-to-day basis on at least some days of the week? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
26. Were you working for pay before COVID-19? ☐ Yes ☐ No
27. If yes, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your employment? (circle one)
☐ I lost my job ☐ My hours increased ☐ I am still employed the same amount as before
☐ I am still employed, but my hours have been reduced ☐ I am still employed, but not getting any hours
28. What are the ways that you currently make money? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time job | <input type="checkbox"/> Exchanging sex/sexual content including Only Fans or other phone or video platforms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time job and/or temporary job | <input type="checkbox"/> Panhandling/spanging |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Money from “under the table” work | <input type="checkbox"/> Child support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cash assistance from DTA/Welfare or DCF | <input type="checkbox"/> Money from family members or friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Security/Disability payments | <input type="checkbox"/> None |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment benefits | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hustling/selling drugs | |
29. Have you ever exchanged sex (including sexual intercourse, oral sex, or any sexual interaction including phone calls, photographs, or video uploads) for food, a place to stay, money or other necessities?
☐ Yes ☐ No
30. Thinking just about the past year, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, have you experienced the following **as a result of COVID-19**? This could be because you got ill, or your employment situation was affected, or any other issue related to COVID-19.

Not enough money to pay rent	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Not enough money to pay for gas for your car	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Not enough money to pay for utilities	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Not enough money to pay for food	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did not have a regular place to sleep or stay	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Could not access physical or mental health care	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Could not access public places such as parks	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Could not access wi-fi	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

31. In the last year, have you gotten help from any of the following services/programs and indicate if you got all, some or none of the help you needed.

Shelter or short-term housing/transitional housing	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	Didn't try to get this type of help
Long-term housing (through programs such as Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, Section 8, or public housing)	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Educational support (such as enrolling in school or GED/HISET)	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Job training, life skills training, or career placement	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Health care services	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Family support (such as conflict mediation or parenting support)	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Child care	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Nutritional assistance (such as Food Stamps/SNAP, Pandemic EBT)	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Food from a soup kitchen or food pantry	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Cash assistance (such as DTA/welfare benefits, or Social Security Disability benefits)	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Domestic violence counseling	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Sexual assault counseling	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Substance use/alcohol treatment program	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help
Other	All the help	Some of the help	None of the help	I didn't try to get this type of help

32. If you did not receive all of the help you needed, why was that? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't qualify for help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sent somewhere else | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't feel comfortable/safe |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language barrier | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't follow through or return for services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Put on a waiting list | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't ask for help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paperwork | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have money |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have identification or required personal documents | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have a phone to follow up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't hear back | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have health insurance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't know where to go | <input type="checkbox"/> COVID-19 restrictions |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Program closures due to COVID-19 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

33. What is your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply:

- ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Hispanic/Latinx

- ☐ Middle eastern/North African
- ☐ Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Write your own response _____

34. What is your gender?

- ☐ Girl/Woman
- ☐ Boy/Man
- ☐ Non-Binary
- ☐ Genderqueer

- ☐ Two-spirit
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Write your own response _____

35. Are you transgender?

- ☐ No, I am not transgender.
- ☐ No, I identify as non-binary, genderqueer, or another term
- ☐ Yes, I am a transgender girl/woman
- ☐ Yes, I am a transgender boy/man

- ☐ Yes, I identify as non-binary, genderqueer, or another term
- ☐ Not sure whether I am transgender
- ☐ Not sure what this question means
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Write your own response _____

36. What is your sexual orientation? (sexual orientation means who you are romantically and physically attracted to)

- ☐ Heterosexual/straight
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Queer

- ☐ Questioning
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Two-spirit
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Write your own response _____

37. Do you have any other comments or insights you would like to share with the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?

38. Which would best describe how you were recruited to take this survey?

- ☐ At a shelter
- ☐ At a social service agency
- ☐ Through a Youth Ambassador
- ☐ Through a street outreach worker/street count
- ☐ At an event
- ☐ At a school/educational program
- ☐ Social media/website
- ☐ An email from a friend or acquaintance

Thank you!

As noted above, **all of your answers will remain confidential.** Your participation is deeply appreciated and a key contribution in helping Massachusetts better understand housing instability among youth and young adults.

For more information about this survey and the work to expand housing and resources for youth and young adults experiencing housing instability, please contact the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth: massachusettsyouthcount@gmail.com

For official use only: Survey date _____ Survey site _____

Administering organization/Youth Count Ambassador _____

ATTACHMENT THREE: OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES ON 2021 YOUTH COUNT SURVEY

The following themes emerged from an analysis of the open-ended response to the final question on the 2021 Youth Count Survey, **“Do you have any comments or insights you would like to share with the MA Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth?”** Quotations follow each theme.

Quotations were also integrated throughout the report.

Takes too long to get transitional or permanent Housing

- A quicker process to getting your own apartment.
- Access to housing
- Getting into LUK program would help my situation or anything similar especially any type of housing
- Having more affordable housing. I am trying to look for a home but they all ask for documents I can't necessarily provide and it is giving me a really hard time to finally be able to call a place home. To add on, rent prices are so expensive and knowing I have 2 dogs makes it even worse. I don't have any family but my boyfriend and my 2 dogs mean everything to me. And no one wishes to open the doors to me and my small family I have created. It feels like I will never have a stable home when this is the case and everywhere they allow dogs it is like \$200 more for my dogs.
- Having more Apt units to place people
- Honestly....more housing vouchers. Legit nothing else helps now. It's cold, people are sick, and folks are dying. We need housing NOW
- I just started a my full time job because I was laid off the last one. I don't have money to get my own place I'm currently couch surfing and I stay in my car at times too. I have a car bill and phone bill to pay as well which makes it hard for me to save for a place I just need support getting a place please.
- I need an actual place to stay it's been taking a long time
- More ADA compliant units within housing programs because 1 per building is not nearly enough; more construction of affordable units per year & requiring new apartment buildings to have a higher percentage of affordable units; shorter waiting lists for affordable housing programs because there's a two year long wait for affordable complexes, such as the ones Wayfinders manages. Additionally, an increase in the maximum rent that a mobile subsidy will cover for private housing is necessary so that Section 8 holders aren't priced out of most towns in Western MA.
- My own housing with my husband through transitional housing / rapid rehousing program.
- Section 8
- The wait list for section 8 is unbelievably long and unrealistic to wait for. There needs to be more affordable housing and less of these bougee condos for Boston commuters that do nothing except gentrify our home and displace the ones in need.

Emergency Shelter

- I feel like there should a lot more help with shelters for young adults 17-24, because in my area, there's only 1.
- If the Youth shelter I stay at wasn't closing that would be nice not only for me but for other young people that don't have a safe and or comfortable place to sleep, as there are other shelters but filled with people much older people that are registered sex offenders, drug abusers, and have criminal record's
- Make a camp for homeless kids that pass a background check, it's not our fault our families hate us
- More shelters
- The shelter I'm in I'm receiving help like I requested

Housing support services

- Housing counselors
- I am a single mother of 2 babies under the age of 1 , I am 23 years old and I'm currently homeless. I have been trying to get help for years and I'm still stuck. Getting out of highschool no one helps us get

apartments and ready for the real world once we graduate we're left to figure it out and we should be taught more life skills. We need more support groups and help when it comes to young parents needing guidance and assistance.

- I think all the same information and resources should be known throughout all the programs that connect to each other and all the knowledge should be the same amount. I think a lot of case management is important to get what you need without it your stuck with no one advocating but yourself which isn't a problem if your good at that. There should also be programs(not shelters with long waiting list) for families that include mother and father and not force the family apart as well as getting assistance for all of them and forcing them to be apart as well.
- I think offering housing supplies for those who are staying somewhere but do not have necessities like a broom, mop, vacuum. Stuff like that would help a lot.
- If I was able to get help applying for housing

Broader eligibility criteria for housing and other resources

- Every youth should have a room at the HACC building, no questions asked
- Financial stability, more approval for certain resources, either subsidized or section 8 housing
- For anyone experiencing homelessness or who are at risk, have housing that prioritizes this population. Financial assistance with rental applications. Have housing options that do not rely solely on credit scores.
- Social security could help homeless youth a lot better if they did not require addresses for their proof of residency in Massachusetts.

Mental health resources and care coordination

- Better mental-healthcare resources
- Case workers to maintain people are on track
- Do what your asked

Support services

- Safety and well-being in youth centers.
- Youth activities and programs to meet other youth who may be homeless

System navigation support

- For those are young and struggling they need more help when it comes to knowing what to do for help and how to do so. So many are baffled when they have to think and do things on their own.
- Getting a mass ID
- Having direct places to go for help for age group and similar situations. maybe a website full of information or links to help. and a number to call with questions. because sometimes you can search and feel like you've hit a brick wall especially during the pandemic since most places are closed to in person meetings.

Employment

- Being able to get a job
- Better jobs
- I hope to have more stable job opportunities, so that I can have a stable source of housing and food
- Income
- Maybe implementing classes on job skills and training help for LGBTQ FOR YOUTHS

Financial support

- Financial support
- Money. Homeless youths need trust, food, and cash in hand to survive in this economy... (I recently became stably housed through the Somerville Homeless Coalition I am not speaking for myself but for those still in the struggle)

- More rent assistance programs rent is really high In MASSACHUSETTS so it's hard to afford a place even when you do have a job
- Stable small income , a good transportation service

ATTACHMENT FOUR: STATE-LEVEL DATA TABLE

Individual Characteristics	Total number	% Total	# 2021 Commission Definition	% 2021 Commission Definition
Total	471		265	56%
Under 18 Years Old	62	13%	10	4%
Average age (current)	20.1		20.5	
BIPOC	277	59%	169	64%
White	179	38%	89	34%
Girl/Woman	227	48%	136	51%
Boy/Man	201	43%	107	40%
Agender	1	0%	1	0%
Genderqueer/Gender fluid/Non-binary	25	5%	13	5%
Transgender	25	5%	11	4%
Straight	303	64%	165	62%
Gay / Lesbian	32	7%	22	8%
Queer	7	1%	3	1%
Bisexual	68	14%	46	17%
Asexual	1	0%	1	0%
Pansexual	28	6%	13	5%
Questioning / Don't Know /Other	33	7%	12	5%
Pregnant/Parenting <i>has custody</i>	63	13%	37	14%
Foster care involvement	138	29%	96	36%
Juvenile or criminal justice involvement	124	26%	83	31%
Not in school, no diploma or equivalent	61	13%	41	15%
Ever exchanged sex for money, housing	63	13%	45	17%
Average age left home first time			17.1	
Average age left for good			17.9	
# ever in military	6	1%	2	1%

ATTACHMENT FIVE: MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION ON UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

Role	Name
House Minority Leader Representative	Kate Campanale
Senate Minority Leader	Maureen Flatley
Member of the House	Representative James O'Day
Member of the Senate	Senator Harriette Chandler
Member of the Senate	Senator Katherine Clark
Boston Alliance of GLBT Youth	Grace Sterling-Stowell
Department of Children and Families	Amy Mullen
Department of Children and Families	Linda Spears
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	Jeffery Wulfson, Sarah Slautterback
Department of Housing and Community Development	Chrystal Kornegay, Gordie Calkins
Department of Mental Health	Joan Mikula
Department of Public Health	Dr. Monica Bharel
Department of Transitional Assistance	Jeffrey McCue
Department of Youth Services	Rebecca Moore
Direct Service Provider, Appointed by the Governor	Lisa Goldblatt-Grace, My Life My Choice
Direct Service Provider, Appointed by the Governor	Lisa Goldsmith, DIAL/SELF
Direct Service Provider, Appointed by the Governor	Kevin Lilly, Samaritan Steps
House Chair, Committee on Children, Families Persons with Disabilities	Representative Kay Khan
ICHH (staff)	Linn Torto
MA Appleseed Center for Law and Justice	Joan Meschino
MA Coalition for the Homeless	Kelly Turley
MA Housing and Shelter Alliance	Caitlin Golden
MA Task Force on Youth Aging Out of DCF	Danielle Ferrier
MA Transgender Political Coalition	Gunner Scott
MassEquality.Org	Carly Button
Office of Medicaid	Lauren Almquist
Secretary of Health and Human Services	Secretary Marylou Sudders, (Chair)
Youth	Jamila Bradley
Youth	Lauren Leonardis
Youth	Kitty Zen

ATTACHMENT SIX: WHERE SURVEYS WERE AND WERE NOT COLLECTED

In 2019, surveys were collected in 107 out of the 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts (30%). Respondents who met the Commission definition were surveyed in 51 of these cities and towns. The following table is organized by Regions and provides a list of all cities and towns where surveys were collected, the number of surveys collected in each, and the number that met the Commission definition. Total numbers of surveys collected and meeting the Commission definition do not add up to 1,957 and 529 respectively due to missing information about where the young person was staying.

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 1 -Three-County	49	27
Adams	1	1
Alford	1	
Amherst	4	3
Ashfield		
Becket		
Belchertown	1	1
Bernardston		
Buckland		
Charlemont		
Cheshire		
Chesterfield		
Clarksburg		
Colrain		
Conway		
Cummington		
Dalton		
Deerfield		
Easthampton	1	
Egremont		
Erving		
Florida		
Gill		
Goshen		
Granby		
Great Barrington	1	
Greenfield	28	12
Hadley		
Hancock		

Hatfield		
Hawley		
Heath		
Hinsdale		
Huntington		
Lanesborough		
Lee		
Lenox		
Leverett		
Leyden		
Middlefield		
Monroe		
Montague	5	5
Monterey		
Mount Washington		
New Ashford		
New Marlborough		
New Salem		
North Adams	2	2
Northampton	2	1
Northfield		
Orange	2	2
Otis		
Pelham		
Peru		
Pittsfield		
Plainfield		
Richmond		
Rowe		
Sandisfield		
Savoy		
Sheffield		
Shelburne		
Shutesbury		
South Hadley		
Southampton		
Stockbridge		
Sunderland		

Tyringham		
Ware	1	
Warwick		
Washington		
Wendell		
West Stockbridge		
Westhampton		
Whately		
Williamsburg		
Williamstown		
Windsor		
Worthington		

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 2 - Hampden County	4	3
Agawam	1	
Blandford		
Brimfield		
Chester		
Chicopee		
East Longmeadow		
Granville		
Hampden		
Holland		
Holyoke	1	1
Longmeadow		
Ludlow		
Monson		
Montgomery		
Palmer		
Russell		
Southwick		
Springfield	1	1
Tolland		
Wales		
West Springfield	1	1
Westfield		
Wilbraham		

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 3 - Worcester County	104	51
Ashburnham		
Athol	3	1
Auburn	1	1
Barre		
Berlin	1	
Blackstone		
Bolton	1	
Boylston		
Brookfield		
Charlton		
Clinton	1	1
Douglas	1	1
Dudley	2	1
East Brookfield		
Fitchburg	4	4
Gardner	1	
Grafton		
Hardwick		
Harvard		
Holden		
Hopedale		
Hubbardston		
Lancaster		
Leicester	1	1
Leominster	5	5
Lunenburg		
Mendon		
Milford		
Millbury		
Millville		
New Braintree		
North Brookfield		
Northborough		
Northbridge		
Oakham		
Oxford		

Paxton		
Petersham		
Phillipston		
Princeton		
Royalston		
Rutland		
Shrewsbury		
Southborough		
Southbridge		
Spencer		
Sterling		
Sturbridge		
Sutton		
Templeton	1	
Upton		
Uxbridge		
Warren		
Webster	1	1
West Boylston		
West Brookfield		
Westborough		
Westminster		
Winchendon	31	5
Worcester	50	29

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 4 - Bristol County	49	20
Acushnet	1	
Attleboro		
Berkley		
Dartmouth		
Dighton		
Easton		
Fairhaven		
Fall River	3	1
Freetown		
Mansfield		
New Bedford	44	18
North Attleborough		
Norton		
Raynham		
Rehoboth		
Seekonk		
Somerset		
Swansea		
Taunton	1	1
Westport		

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 5 - Cape Cod & Islands (Barnstable, Dukes & Nantucket counties)	12	7
Aquinnah		
Barnstable	5	3
Bourne	1	1
Brewster		
Chatham		
Chilmark		
Dennis	2	1
Eastham		
Edgartown		
Falmouth	1	1
Gosnold		
Harwich	2	1
Mashpee	1	
Nantucket		
Oak Bluffs		
Orleans		
Provincetown		
Sandwich		
Tisbury		
Truro		
Wellfleet		
West Tisbury		
Yarmouth		

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 6 - Plymouth & East Norfolk counties	73	45
Abington	2	
Braintree	2	2
Bridgewater		
Brockton	19	12
Carver		
Cohasset		
Duxbury		
East Bridgewater	1	1
Halifax		
Hanover		
Hanson		
Hingham		
Holbrook		
Hull		
Kingston	1	1
Lakeville		
Marion		
Marshfield	1	
Mattapoisett		
Middleborough	1	1
Norwell		
Pembroke		
Plymouth	32	18
Plympton		
Quincy	13	10
Rochester		
Rockland		
Scituate		
Wareham		
West Bridgewater		
Weymouth	1	
Whitman		

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 7 - Essex County	40	24
Amesbury		
Andover	2	1
Beverly	4	2
Boxford		
Danvers	1	1
Essex		
Georgetown		
Gloucester	2	2
Groveland		
Hamilton		
Haverhill	1	
Ipswich		
Lawrence	4	1
Lynn	16	10
Lynnfield		
Manchester		
Marblehead		
Merrimac		
Methuen		
Middleton		
Nahant		
Newbury		
Newburyport		
North Andover		
Peabody	1	
Rockport		
Rowley		
Salem	9	7
Salisbury		
Saugus		
Swampscott		
Topsfield		
Wenham		
West Newbury		

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 8 - North Middlesex County	42	24
Acton	1	1
Ashby		
Ayer		
Bedford		
Billerica		
Boxborough		
Burlington		
Carlisle		
Chelmsford		
Concord	1	
Dracut		
Dunstable		
Groton		
Hudson		
Lexington		
Lincoln		
Littleton		
Lowell	36	19
Marlborough		
Maynard		
North Reading		
Pepperell		
Reading	1	1
Shirley		
Stoneham		
Stow		
Sudbury		
Tewksbury	1	1
Townsend		
Tyngsborough		
Wakefield	1	1
Wayland		
Westford		
Weston		
Wilmington		
Winchester	1	1
Woburn		

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 9 - Metro West (South Middlesex & West Norfolk counties)	21	8
Ashland		
Avon		
Bellingham	1	1
Canton		
Dedham		
Dover		
Foxborough		
Framingham	15	4
Franklin	1	1
Holliston		
Hopkinton		
Medfield		
Medway		
Millis		
Natick		
Needham		
Norfolk		
Norwood		
Plainville		
Randolph	1	1
Sharon		
Sherborn		
Stoughton		
Walpole	2	1
Wellesley	1	
Westwood		
Wrentham		

Region/Cities & Towns	Sum of Total	Sum of Commission
Region 10 - Metro Boston	74	54
Arlington	1	1
Belmont	1	
Boston	57	40
Brookline	1	
Cambridge	7	7
Chelsea	2	2
Everett	1	1
Malden	1	1
Medford		
Melrose		
Milton	1	1
Newton	1	1
Revere	1	
Somerville		
Waltham		
Watertown		
Winthrop		