In 2016, the American Bar Association launched its Homeless Youth Legal Network (HYLN) in order to increase the capacity and connectivity of attorneys and other advocates to address the legal issues that contribute to youth homelessness and prevent youth who experience homelessness from achieving success as adults. The early work of this initiative included surveying hundreds of providers, in partnership with the federal Family and Youth Services Bureau, to determine the legal needs and services currently available for youth experiencing homelessness across the country. This report outlines our findings, as well as the work that the HYLN and its Model Programs have completed since 2016.

The HYLN’s initial survey identified common legal needs and issues facing youth experiencing homelessness, which has guided all of the initiative’s work to date. It also allowed HYLN to develop a directory of legal services providers throughout the United States serving youth experiencing homelessness, available at https://bit.ly/2z2clw6. Although the directory continues to grow as the HYLN expands its reach, it currently consists of only 30 programs in 20 states—underscoring the lack of legal services for this vulnerable population. The dearth of legal services specific to this population in many states has also informed the HYLN’s past and future efforts, as the initiative has remained committed to working with communities, state and local bar associations, and funders to support the development of new programs and expand existing services. In its first year the HYLN also selected and supported the work of 12 model programs, launched a legal services hotline, and authored a new ABA policy.

HYLN also supports attorneys (and the youth they serve) through training and technical assistance, and by fostering peer-to-peer learning opportunities. HYLN staff and advisory committee members present on the legal needs of youth experiencing homelessness at state and local convenings, publish resources, and help attorneys and jurisdictions overcome specific challenges through one-on-one support. The initiative also maintains a listserv where more than 400 attorneys and other advocates for youth share information with, and seek guidance from, their colleagues across the country and a digital resource library.

Model Programs

The HYLN Model Programs chosen and supported for 2017 were:

- Arizona Legal Women and Youth Services (ALWAYS), Arizona
- Bay Area Legal Aid, Youth Justice Project (BayLegal), California
- Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA), Connecticut
- Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS), Pennsylvania
- Family & Youth Law Center at Capital University School of Law (FYLAW), Ohio
- Homeless Persons Representation Project, Homeless Youth Initiative (HPRP), Maryland
- Homeless Youth Legal Clinic (HYLC) Utah
- Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC), Washington
- Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, Youth Law Project (MMLA), Minnesota
- Pegasus Legal Services for Children, New Mexico
- Peter Cicchino Youth Project, Urban Justice Center (PCYP), New York
- Legal Services Center, The Door, New York
Note that the service delivery data shared from the Model Programs reflects approximately one year of data collection. Each program collects different information from and about their clients; in order to avoid overly burdening programs, HYLN staff asked them to share the data they collect, and then used that disparate data to make some broad observations. Given the limitations of the data, these insights are not intended to be definitive, but rather to provide a general sense of who the programs served, and in what ways.

Youth Served

Collectively, HYLN model programs served nearly 2,500 youth experiencing homelessness in one year. Across the country, homelessness impacts youth of every age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, including youth living in urban, suburban, and rural areas; the youth served by HYLN Model Programs reflected this diversity.

![Youth Served: Race and Ethnicity](image1)

![Youth Served: Gender Identity](image2)

Based on 10 Model Programs’ data, the majority of youth served were Latino (44%) or Black (35%). (These results differ from national estimates, which may be partially due to the fact that the model program that served the largest number of youth over the year (BayLegal) reported that 69% of their clients were Latino.)

Among the 6 model programs that reported gender data, 46% of youth served were female, 37% were male, 14% were transgender, transfemale, transmale, or transmasculine, and 3% were gender nonconforming, gender queer, gender fluid, non-binary, agender, or other/unidentified. For the 5

**IMPACT EXAMPLE:**

“ILANA”

“Ilana” came to PCYP through a free legal clinic at an LGBTQQ homeless youth drop-in center because she had just started her gender transition and wanted help with a legal name change and updating her identity documents, which had a male gender marker. Ilana was a lawful permanent resident who was born in a former Soviet republic where she did not feel safe because of her sexual orientation and gender identity. PCYP helped Ilana obtain the name change, and new Social Security card and state ID. Ilana used her new documents to apply for and secure supportive housing. She is thrilled to be out of the homeless shelter and in an apartment.
programs that reported data on sexual orientation of youth served, the percentage of youth who were LGBTQ varied from 21% to 32%. Past histories of child welfare and/or juvenile justice involvement were also common among the youth served (in programs that asked about those issues).

**Legal Needs and Barriers**

Across all youth served by all model programs, the most common issues addressed were immigration (15%), benefits (14%), name/gender-marker changes (12%), justice involvement (11%), and DV/protective orders (9%). These cases were not distributed evenly among programs, however: 65% of all immigration cases were handled by two programs (PCYP and ALWAYS), while PCYP handled 86% of all name/gender marker changes, and BayLegal handled 50% of the benefits cases and 77% of the DV/protective order cases.

Some of these trends are driven by individual programs’ missions and population served, for example PCYP specializes in working with youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning, and BayLegal has well-established domestic violence prevention and public benefits teams, both of which provide substantial technical assistance to youth attorneys and expand their capacity to take on those types of cases.

The findings were generally consistent with the results of HYLN’s initial survey (which included responses from more than 200 advocates across the country), except that the Model Programs dealt with a smaller number of education cases than might have been expected. This may be due to

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**IMPACT EXAMPLE:**

**“NESTOR”**

As a result of support from the ABA Homeless Youth Legal Network, HPRP’s Homeless Youth Initiative (HYI) began recruiting and training pro bono attorneys to represent unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults in Baltimore. HYI’s in-house staff and pro bono attorneys worked together to provide legal assistance to 17-year-old “Nestor.” A volunteer attorney with experience in child welfare law advised Nestor about legal rights and procedures related to accessing independent living supports through the foster care system. Another volunteer attorney successfully represented Nestor in accessing Social Security Survivor’s benefits. At the same time, HYI staff helped Nestor access Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and advised him of his education rights. Nestor appreciated this team approach and called the HYI staff and volunteer attorneys “the Justice League.”
the fact that most Model Programs served more young adults (age 18-24), than minors, or youth could have been receiving educational advocacy through other means (e.g., education-focused legal organizations, or non-legal education advocates).

Conclusion

In the two years since it was launched, the American Bar Association’s Homeless Youth Legal Network has supported the work of hundreds of attorneys and through them, helped thousands of youth experiencing homelessness receive the high quality advocacy they need to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. Our work, and the work of the programs and lawyers discussed here, shows that although there are many legal barriers that can contribute to homelessness, or create lasting negative impacts for those who’ve experienced homelessness, effective advocacy can truly make a difference in the lives of youth who’ve faced some of life’s toughest challenges.

|MANSOUR|

“Mansour” was brought to this country from Senegal at age 15 or 16 on a promise that he would receive an opportunity to attend school, train to play basketball for a club and eventually get recruited by the NBA. After a few months, he became homeless when his "coach" threw him out of her home because he became ill and needed medical treatment; his biological family, who had abused him, would not take him back. He tried to make it on his own, continued going to school, and got a job, which didn’t leave much time for basketball. Eventually, he found his way to ALWAYS where attorneys helped him obtain a guardianship and helped him apply for a green card. He now lives with a family that loves him and attends school. He shared his experiences at a recent ALWAYS event, concluding "now I have a mom and a dad and a lawyer!"

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i The term "youth experiencing homelessness" is used throughout this report, but in some cases also includes youth who are currently housed but still experiencing the impacts of past homelessness, or at high risk of homelessness as each program determines its own parameters for serving youth.

ii Pegasus did not report race/ethnicity data. HPRP reported this data in a way that could not be combined with the other programs, but 100% of their client under age 18 were Black, and for their clients aged 18-24 approximately 96% were black, 2% were Latino, and 4% were White.


iv PCYP, CLS, FYLAW, CCA, BayLegal, and ALWAYS (terms used are as reported by Model Programs).

v PCYP, The Door, HYLC, LCYC and HPRP. Note that HPRP recorded their data differently than the other programs, reporting that about 10-17% of youth were lesbian, bisexual or gay.