

# **2011 INDEPENDENT LIVING SURVEY PROJECT**

## **Identifying and Understanding the Needs of Homeless Youth In Tompkins County, New York**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

**October 2011**

***"Please don't give up on us, most of us in this situation have already  
been given up on by those who should have believed in us."***

#### **A Collaboration Among:**

**Family Life Development Center,  
Cornell University**

**Tompkins County Youth Services Department**

**The Learning Web**

**Young Adult Participants in the Learning Web's  
Youth Outreach Program**

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Continuum of Care Committee and the Human Services  
Coalition of Tompkins County. It was made possible  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

In conjunction with the Tompkins County Continuum of Care Committee (CoC), the county's planning entity for homeless services, and in response to a community need to document the number of homeless youth, the 2011 Independent Living Survey 3 (ILS3) Project was conducted. ILS3, a community-based participatory research project, was a follow up to two similar surveys completed in 2004 (ILS1) and 2007 (ILS2). The results of these previous surveys have had a significant impact on the community and services for independent youth. The CoC asked us to repeat this effort in order to update the findings and assess change over time.

Young people approach the issue of shelter differently than adults, often preferring the uncertainties of their housing situations over the perceived loss of control associated with shelters and residential programs. As such, they are rarely captured by traditional measures used to assess the prevalence of homelessness, such as point-in-time counts and shelter utilization statistics. Thus, efforts to count or otherwise describe homeless youth that rely primarily upon these data sources vastly underestimate the true extent of the problem.

The previous ILS projects and the 2011 project used an innovative approach which engaged a group of currently and formerly homeless youth as research partners who were able to reach those individuals not connected to programs or services, the invisible and underserved sector of the homeless youth population. Once again, the project was enormously successful: we reached 225 young people during an eight week period of the winter (we estimate that this represents almost one-third of the homeless youth population in the county).

The Independent Living Survey Project has been the catalyst for a rich public discussion about this sizeable population of vulnerable youth in the community and has generated the public will to prioritize articulating a "continuum of care" that is focused exclusively on the needs of homeless youth.

## **PROJECT PARTNERSHIP**

This Community-University partnership began in 2003 when the first survey (ILS1) and project methodology were developed. The overall research approach has been followed for both ILS2 and the current ILS3. In the fall of 2010, a study team was formed and began planning the 2011 follow up project. The team engaged 17 youth researchers, all of whom were current participants in the Learning Web's Youth Outreach Program. These young people revised the survey questions, completed Cornell University Human Subjects Training, learned to administer the survey and identify the sample. They administered surveys to the target group of community youth during an 8 week period in the winter of 2011. Youth who agreed to be interviewed were given a coupon for a free sandwich from a local deli. Youth Researchers earned an hourly stipend for all planning meetings, a flat rate per survey completed, and a sandwich coupon per survey completed.

The goal of gathering 204 surveys was surpassed: 225 youth completed surveys. Cornell undergraduate research assistants compiled the data and generated reports. The youth researchers

along with the study team met on several occasions to discuss and interpret the findings. In addition, they presented survey findings to key community stakeholders and decision makers. The results are being used to guide community and school efforts to prevent youth homelessness and to fill the gaps in services which unattended youth face daily. We value the time and effort spent by the youth researchers and those they interviewed and thank them for their willingness to share their insights and life experiences.

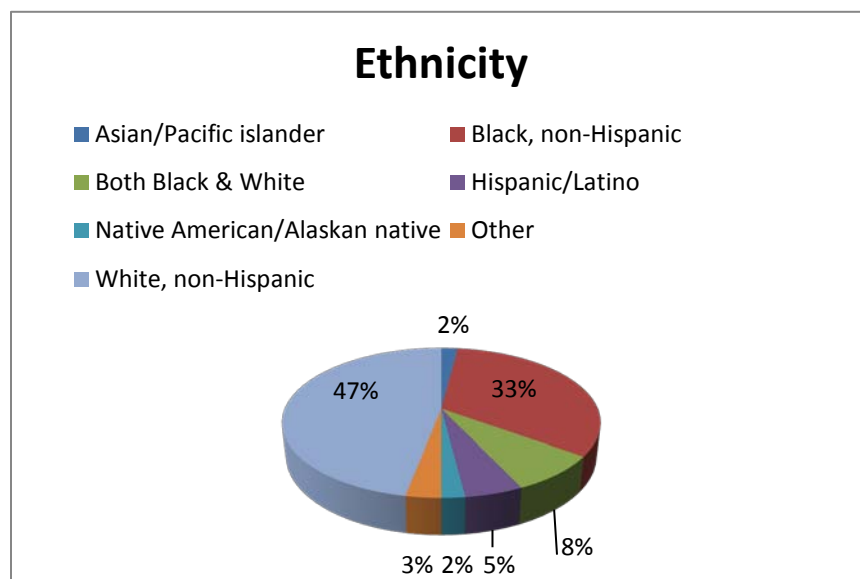
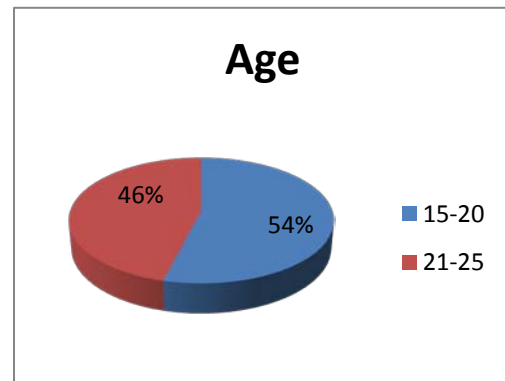
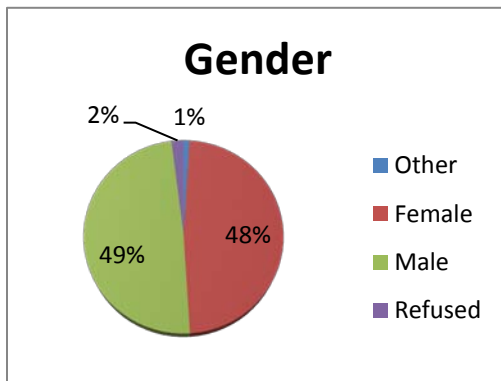
## POPULATION SURVEYED

In order to be included in the study, young people had to meet the following criteria:

1. They have “no parental, substitute, foster or institutional home to which they can safely go.” (*McKinney Act 1987*);
2. They are age 25 or younger;
3. They are not a Cornell or Ithaca College student;
4. They did not already complete a 2011 survey.

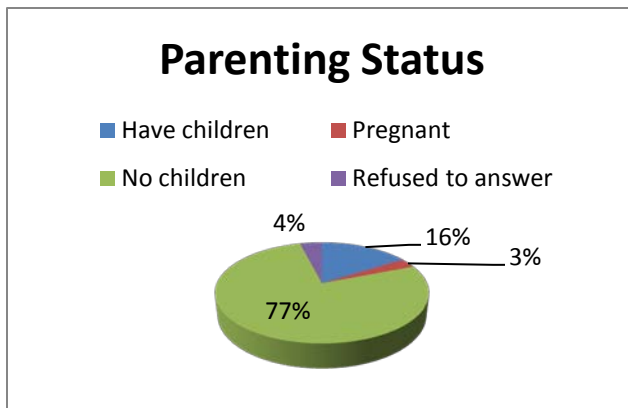
Interviews were conducted with youth primarily in their natural network settings in the community as well as in the Youth Outreach office.

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



The demographic charts reveal a fairly even distribution regarding the gender and age of the 225 survey respondents.

- One percent of the sample listed their gender as other and 2% refused to answer the question.
- Slightly over half of the sample is under 21 years of age.
- Youth respondents were from diverse racial backgrounds with more than half of respondents being young people of color.



19% of all respondents surveyed have children or are pregnant.

- **11% of the younger youth** (under age 21) have children or are pregnant.
- **29% of the older youth** (age 21-25) have children or are pregnant.

Data on pregnant and parenting homeless youth respondents have varied widely each year the survey has been administered. The 2011 parenting/pregnancy figure of 19% is down from the 2007 parenting/pregnancy figure of 40%. This decrease may reflect statewide trends on teen pregnancy/parenting rates which have decreased over the past decade (although not in high need communities). It is unclear whether this decrease in our sample reflects an actual decrease in pregnancy or is due to our research approach which draws on the natural networks of the youth researchers. It is possible that our ILS2 research assistants had more parenting/pregnant friends than the ILS3 research assistants).

Parenting is a difficult task even with a stable home and financial and emotional support. These young people are struggling to provide adequate shelter, food, and education for themselves, let alone for a child. If the cycle of poverty is to be interrupted, these young parents require additional support.

## **SHELTERED, PERHAPS, BUT STILL HOMELESS**

Stable, safe, adequate housing is a necessity for all individuals. When young people do not have a safe place to go that they consider home, they may be able to piece together a patchwork of more or less temporary housing situations, but they are homeless. Although youths' flexibility and resiliency are key to their survival, the lack of basics that has defined so much of their lives has given them a mean standard to assess their own situations. Instability and inadequacy have become the norm regarding many facets of their lives, especially housing.

When designing the ILS survey, we never used the word "homeless" or asked youth to identify themselves as such. Information on housing was collected by providing youth with a list of places and asking them to identify: 1) where they were currently living, and 2) all of the places in which they had stayed during the previous year.

When we asked young people where they were living currently:

- **More than one in four youth (28%) said they were currently staying at more than one place.** The number of places that youth said that they were staying ranged from 2 to 5 places.

Though the majority of youth indicate they are currently living in one place, a closer look uncovers both the instability of their housing and the poor conditions in which they live. Even those who checked "living at parent's house" also checked that they were staying at other places. These youth are staying with a parent one night and getting kicked out the next. Just because they are living with a parent, it does not mean that their housing is stable. Like their counterparts in communities across the country, homeless youth in our county piece together their housing using every possible resource and network. Short periods of adequate housing are intertwined with periods of inadequate, unsafe housing, and no housing at all.

### ***Comments on current living situations:***

***"I stay with my friend in his parent's house and I sleep on his floor in his bathroom."***

***"I don't like having [to] go different places to stay. I don't mind couch-surfing. It's hard at times but I'm okay where I'm at now. I feel like I may be getting on my roommates nerves and he wants me to get my own place soon."***

**Comments on current living situations cont'd:**

*"I have all of my belongings in my car but once in awhile I crash at a friend's place."*

*"I just feel strange sleeping on some boys couch and using their shower because I think they want something more."*

*"I sleep outside most of the time and I'm not dressed well."*

*"I can get kicked out at any time, it's not my house."*

**The level of housing instability increases dramatically when looking at youths' housing over the past year:**

- **83% of the respondents reported staying at multiple places;** 73% have lived in 2-5 places in one year, while over 10% have lived in 6-9 places in one year.

<b>Number of Places Youth have Stayed in the Past 12 Months</b>		
<b>Number</b>	<b>Age 15-20</b>	<b>Age 21-25</b>
1 place	16%	17%
2-3 places	43%	58%
4-5 places	30%	16%
6-7 places	7%	9%
8-9 places	4%	0%

**Homeless youth in Tompkins County are often invisible— staying at multiple places with friends, acquaintances, and even strangers, never knowing where they will be sleeping that night.**

The following chart illustrates where young people were currently living at the time of the survey as well as the places they had lived during the previous year.

<b>CURRENTLY LIVING</b>	<b>15-20 Yr olds</b>	<b>21-25 Yr olds</b>	<b>LIVED WITHIN LAST 12 MONTHS</b>	<b>15-20 Yr olds</b>	<b>21-25 Yr olds</b>
With Parents	9.8%	2.9%	With Parents	57.4%	28.4%
With Guardian	4.1%	0%	With Guardian	11.5%	1%
With Relative	13.1%	7.8%	With Relative	47.5%	33.3%
Own house, apt, or room	9.8%	34.3%	Own house apt, or room	21.3%	34.3%
Someone else's house, apartment, or room	41%	44.1%	Someone else's house, apartment or room	61.5%	64.7%
Several friends' houses, apartments, or rooms	37.7%	30.4%	Several friend's houses, apartments or rooms	60.7%	64.7%
An abandoned building	2.5%	2%	An abandoned building	8.2%	4.9%
Anywhere outside	3.3%	1%	Anywhere outside	11.5%	6.9%
Van or other vehicle	2.5%	1%	Van or other vehicle	12.3%	1%
Institution, e.g. CARS or hospital	0%	0%	Institution, CARS or hospital	3.3%	2%
Emergency shelter	4.9%	5.9%	Emergency Shelter	11.5%	13.7%
Community College dormitory/dorm squat	.8%	0%	College dormitory	4.1%	1%
Hotel/motel room paid for by self	3.3%	0%	Hotel /motel room paid for by self	12.3%	11.8%
A room paid for with a voucher	2.5%	2%	A room paid for with a voucher	4.1%	2%
A place of business	2.5%	0%	A place of business	3.3%	0%
A transportation site	2.5%	0%	A transportation site	4.9%	2%
Other place we haven't listed	3.3%	1%	Other place we haven't listed	.8%	2.9%

The majority of respondents indicated living in “someone else’s house”(63%), in “multiple people’s houses”(63%), and “with other relatives”(41%). Places not meant for human habitation were also chosen, including 10% outside, and 7% in both vehicles and abandoned buildings.

12% of youth stayed at the Emergency Shelter over the course of the year. The numbers of youth using the shelter have historically been low as some youth do not want to use the shelter citing the structure, rules, and lack of privacy as deterrents to their use of these services.

However, the percentage of youth using the shelter has declined even further since the 2007 survey when the figure was 19%. We believe that this decline may be due to new protocols used to determine eligibility for shelter usage. For all youth under 21 who apply for admittance to the shelter, DSS contacts the parent to verify whether or not the youth can return home. If the parent says that a child cannot return home, DSS will require a parent to pay DSS for the cost of the



shelter. This protocol usually results in a parent claiming that the child can return even when that is not the case, or the youth refusing to give DSS contact information because they don't want DSS to call their parents. In both cases, the youth is denied access to the shelter.

Feeling safe where you sleep is something most people take for granted. This is not the case for 41% of the respondents who reporting feeling safe either “some of the time” or “none of the time” in their current living situation. These findings suggest that independent youth lack safe stable housing options.

Approximately half of all respondents surveyed have stayed “with parents” for some period within the last 12 months, but were not able to make this a permanent home. There has been a tendency to see homeless youth as synonymous with runaway youth. However, our findings support the more recent acknowledgement that runaway behavior is not a clear cut “event” or the unilateral decision of a youngster to leave his or her parental home. Rather, it is a series of events where the youth leaves home or the parent ejects the child from the home. These departures are unplanned and can last a day or weeks. Given this erratic pattern, by the time the youth leaves home for good, the reason for leaving is often unclear to the youth.

### No Surprises— A Portrait of Long-standing Conflict and Dysfunction

When asked why they were not currently living with a parent or guardian, reasons of conflict were cited most often. Again and again, respondents described years of conflict with their parents. Stressors such as parental abuse, parental substance abuse, clashes with step parents or partners of a parent, and non-compliance with parental rules contributed to a disintegration of the parent-child relationship.

Reason for Leaving Home-respondents could check more than one	Age 15-20	Age 21-25
Conflict with parents	55%	33%
Thrown out	25%	26%
Left home after the age of 18	20%	38%
Ran away	12%	5%
Abuse by parent/guardian	12%	6%
Substance abuse of parent/guardian	7%	7%
Parents deceased	6%	2%
Never lived with parents	4%	1%
Parents in jail	3%	5%
Parents moved	2%	7%
Parents homeless	1%	4%
*Other	14%	15%

#### *Comments on reasons for leaving home:*

*“My parents and me fought every day for two years straight, when I was 17 and 6 months or so I left.”*

*“When I was 17 I got pregnant and was kicked out of my father’s house.”*

*“Mother did not want to take care of me anymore. I had to help take care of my brothers and sisters cause my mom didn’t work.”*

*“I was an #@% to my parents and I didn’t want to fight my father anymore and mess up my family more than I already was.”*

*“They smoke crack.”*

The youth research assistants reported that some respondents were not forthcoming about why they left home. They sensed ‘People are embarrassed. They don’t want to talk about it. They’ll choose “other” or ‘Left home after the age of 18’ because of their discomfort with this question.”

The research team was interested in identifying possible antecedents to a youth’s break with their family in order to determine if interventions could prevent a child’s departure from the home. A new question in the ILS 3 survey asked “when did things at home begin getting rough?” and “How old were you when you first needed to find other places to stay because you couldn’t or didn’t want to go home?” Though there were a few youth who indicated a rough home life as early as elementary school age, the numbers began rising at ages 12-14 with a steep rise between the ages of 15 to 18. The average number of years between life becoming rough at home and a youth’s need to find someplace else to stay was 2 years. The problems these youth and their parents face are complex and deep-seated. It is hard to discern from the survey results whether there is a significant time period where intervention could occur. Offering opportunities for parents and youth to get help in addressing parent-child communication, addiction issues, etc. could repair the parent-child relationship and avoid a youth’s premature departure from home.

**What would have helped you stay at home?**

*“If the fighting stopped.”*

*“Mom not doing drugs, mom not having an abusive boyfriend.”*

*My parents not always on my back.”*

*“Me not doing drugs.”*

*“Mom paid more attention to me, didn’t put her boyfriend before her kids.”*

### Many Youth are Not Strangers to Services Designed to Help Them

Our findings suggest that a significant percentage of youth whom we interviewed have a history of involvement with institutional systems. Just as the families of these young people either failed them or were too dysfunctional to support youth in their development, so, too, did social systems fail these youth.

**Over half of the sample (57%) reported having some system experience** – foster care, jail, detention or group home.

Almost 1 in 5 (20%) reported experience in 2 to 5 of these systems. The percentage of youth in the older group (age 21-25) with histories of prison/jail is double that of the younger group (age 15-20). The table at right illustrates the types of systems experienced by the sample.

SYSTEM	Age15-20	Age21-25
NONE	43%	43%
Foster care	20%	16%
Group Home	10%	5%
Juvenile detention	12%	16%
Rehab (drug and alcohol)	12%	13%
Prison/Jail	16%	31%
*Other institution	1%	0%

## **The Struggle to Make Ends Meet— Covering the Basics while Trying to Get Ahead**

Tompkins County unemployment data, median income data, and educational attainment data all paint a bright picture of the county. However, anyone who has tried to find housing or a well-paying job with a future can paint a very different picture—one of struggle and stress. This is particularly true for homeless young people.

The combination of a rural community with two prestigious colleges as major employers creates a unique set of challenges within the community. Specifically, while the unemployment rate is low, the high numbers of workers with Bachelor's degrees or higher (49% for Tompkins County) flood the job market with over qualified workers. These workers, not able to secure a high skilled job, turn to the basic skilled jobs, becoming underemployed and underpaid. The domino continues to fall with the basic skilled workers being pushed out of the job market. Homeless youth are among the latter and generally have lower education levels and weak employment histories. 30% of the younger respondents (age 15-20) and 20% of the older group (21-25) indicated that they did not have a high school diploma or GED. Those who have graduated from high school spoke of huge barriers to gaining further education including money, housing, transportation, and the lack of time as they need to work to support themselves. Tompkins housing data supports these respondents' comments, painting a very grim scene. The excessively high rents and the low rental vacancy rates make it impossible for low income residents to compete for housing. They are forced to rent outside of the city center where transportation is poor, thus restricting their ability to get to a job, access services, or continue their education so that they can better compete in the job market. The picture in reality is a vicious cycle where homeless youth lose.

### **WORK**

Most of the young people whom we surveyed want to work. The challenges that these young people face trying to secure and maintain employment are great. They are attempting to be self-sufficient adults without having had the benefit of a supported adolescence in which they could complete their education, develop their capacities and talents, acquire basic employability skills, and develop the critical reasoning and moral judgment required to live satisfying, self-sufficient adult lives. Even once they secure work; it is often difficult for them to maintain a job given their transient lifestyle. Those youth who are able to maintain a job for any length of time quickly discover themselves in a low-wage limbo with its own Catch-22: as soon as they begin earning a wage, even a minimum wage, any public subsidies that they may be receiving are reduced often leaving them further behind, unable to pursue longer-term goals.

- **60% of the respondents reported that they were unemployed.** Of the 40% who were working, less than half were working more than 30 hours per week. 60% of those who were employed said they did not get enough hours of work. ( The August 2011 unemployment rate was 5.6% for Tompkins County; 7.7% for NY state; and 9.1% for the US)

- **80% of unemployed respondents were looking for a job.** Of those, 20% had been searching for a job for a year or more, 40% for 6 months, and 24% for 1 month.

## PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Over half of the respondents reported using food stamps and slightly under half reported using Medicaid assistance from the Department of Social Services. Less than 10% had received cash assistance, WIC, or Section 8 or public housing assistance. Despite this assistance, respondents reported having a very difficult time covering their basic needs.

## HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

Eating three meals per day is as routine as sleeping for most of us. And most of us also snack in between meals. Hunger due to a lack of money is not a part of our experience. Hunger is an ongoing reality for many of the survey respondents.

- **40% of youth reported skipping a meal because they couldn't afford food.** Almost half of these youth skipped a meal on a weekly basis.
- **27% reported not eating for a whole day due to lack of money for food.** Of this group, 43% skipped eating for a whole day on a weekly basis.

*"Money runs low, I don't eat."*

*ILS respondent*

These figures are likely conservative because many youth are ashamed to admit that they do not have to money to feed themselves. As one of the youth research assistants said, "It should be higher. Like a lot of people just won't say they can't afford to eat. It was embarrassing to them." Many youth use the food pantries and Loaves & Fishes meals to supplement the food they can afford but even with these supports, high percentages of young people go hungry.

Despite the fact that over half of respondents received food stamps, hunger is still prevalent.

- **32% of youth receiving food stamps reported skipping a meal because they couldn't afford food.**
- **19% of youth receiving food stamps reported not eating for a whole day due to lack of money for food.**

During our data review discussions, youth researchers commented on this inconsistency by pointing out how difficult it is to shop and cook economically while you are homeless, moving from place to place. It is impossible to store food safely and very difficult to depend on using cooking facilities. This situation leads to most young people buying cold prepared foods (hot foods are not allowed to be purchased with food stamps). It is impossible to shop the sales since there is no place to store the food. Unstable housing leads to high food expenses. Many young people run out of their food stamps towards the latter half of the months—resulting in skipping meals.

## HEALTH CARE

Alienated from family, most respondents do not access the family doctor and their family's health insurance, even if the family had health insurance. Only 16% of respondents indicated that they saw a private physician when they were sick.

- **The majority of young people indicated that they go to the Emergency Room (62%) or Convenient Care (32.9%) when they are sick.** Other medical facilities used are The Free Clinic (17%), and Planned Parenthood (12%).
- **24% of young people do not seek any type of medical help when they are sick.**

## SOCIAL SUPPORT

Amidst the typical issues faced during the transition to adulthood, homeless youth must also deal with crisis connected to their family of origin, the uncertainties and dangers of living without a home, and the responsibilities of supporting oneself. More so than most young adults, a source of sage counsel would be critical in learning how to grow into a healthy adult. Unfortunately, this is not the case. When asked “who do you turn to when you need emotional support or need someone to talk to:

- **19% of respondents indicated that they had no one to turn to. 11% of young people checked only this option--- indicating that they never had anyone that they could turn to for support.**
- **70% cited friends and 40% cited girlfriends or boyfriends that they turned to for support.**
- **Only 30% said that they turned to a family member (and the choice did not indicate whether or not the family member was an adult), while only 6% said they turned to an adult counselor, teacher, coach etc.**

The question of who these young people turn to for support is a crucial one, given how important “being connected” is to the health and well being of adolescents and young adults. In our last study, as in this one, we have a substantial number of individuals who do not have anyone to whom they can turn for support --- and few feel that they can go to their families.

The majority of respondents turn to peers for support, other young people with similar backgrounds living on their own with little positive and healthy experience or skills to share with a friend in need. It is therefore very important that youth involved in relationships find the kind of support necessary to keep these connections emotionally and physically healthy ones.

The importance of having someone to talk to appears to be a significant issue especially for the younger respondents, almost 30% of whom identified this as one of their top needs. The desire to be heard is an important message for service providers. Including authentic youth voice in service delivery models will likely attract this population of youth and keep them engaged in programs.

**SUBSTANCE USE**

Survey respondents identified a wide range of drugs available in the local community. The results indicate that the majority of respondents use drugs and alcohol regularly which is consistent with the previous surveys as well as national data sources

- **Almost 80% of all respondents indicated using marijuana and alcohol.**

Other drug use was less prevalent though still reported at disturbing levels.

- **16% of all respondents indicated using cocaine, 13% used ecstasy, 11% used other’s prescription drugs, 10% used hashish.** A full list of substances follows in this section.
- **The younger group (age 15-20) use substances in addition to marijuana and alcohol at a higher rate than their older counterparts (age21-25).** Younger youth also used a higher number of substances-- with 24% using 3-4 substances, 20% using 5-10 substances while 18% of the older group used 3-4 substances and 10% used 5-10 substances.

Substances they reported using over the past six months included:

SUBSTANCE USED	Age 15-20	Age 21-25
Marijuana	78%	78%
Alcohol	75%	83%
Cigarettes	66%	72%
Legal marijuana	27%	15%
Cocaine	18%	14%
Ecstasy	16%	8%
Other Prescription Drugs	16%	5%
Magic Mushrooms	15%	3%
Hash	16%	8%
Salvia	16%	4%
Valium (non-prescribed)	6%	4%
Crack	4%	4%
Heroin	3%	4%
Inhalants	7%	1%
Speed/Meth	2%	2%
Acid/LSD	10%	3%
Ritalin (non-prescribed)	3%	1%
Angel Dust	2%	1%
Ruffies/Rope/R-2/Rohypnol	1%	0%
Morphine	0%	0%
Special K	0%	0%
Other	3%	2%

**Comments on Drugs:**

*“Drugs. They are so accessible. People are not educated enough about them.”*

*“It’s really easy to get alcohol now.”*

*“It’s definitely a survival thing [for people dealing drugs], it’s hard to make it with a minimum wage job.”*

- The older group had a higher frequency of substance usage with 42% using daily as opposed to 31% of the younger group using daily.
- Only 9% of the older group and 11% of the younger group reported no usage in the last month.

Frequency of use	Age 15-20	Age21-25
Practically every day	31%	42%
2 to 3 times per week	22%	24%
Once a week	19%	14%
Once per month or less	15%	11%
None in the last month	11%	9%

The connection between boredom and drug use was frequently observed by our survey respondents. They repeatedly told us that young people need more things to do to keep them off the streets.

***Biggest Issues facing Youth— Comments on Boredom and Drug Use:***

*“Being bored with nothing to do, access to too many substances.”*

*“Drugs amongst young people and no places to do recreational things.”*

*“No place to go after school, no one to care what they do all day. Drugs, crime, and violence.”*

*“Nothing positive to do.”*

*“There's not a lot of places for teens to go & hang out, we're also forced to grow up way to fast...”*

*“Weed, no jobs, nowhere to go, nothing to do.”*

**COMMUNITY SAFETY**

Through this study, we attempted to learn more about the particular lifestyles of independent youth. Our findings suggest a high level of unhealthy, high-risk behaviors as well as a high degree of vulnerability and victimization in these youths’ lives.

It is notable that violence and the threat of violence is a constant reality on the street:

- 57% of the respondents reported being threatened or injured with a weapon in the past year. 38% were threatened or injured from 2-5 times in the past year.
- 37% of younger youth said they carried a weapon.
- 29% of older youth said they carried a weapon.

It is difficult to gauge the number or type of weapons that youth actually carry on the street. Perhaps more important than the actual number, is the apparent sense of vulnerability these young people experience. As noted previously, 41% of respondents reported that there are times when they do not feel safe in their current living situation. For the majority of people in our county, indeed, in our nation, where we lay our heads at night is a safe place. For these young people, neither the streets nor their homes provide a safe haven. Programs designed to work with these young people need to keep this in mind.

**TOP NEEDS**

Youth were also asked to identify their top current needs. There was not much difference between how younger and older youth answered this question except for “help finding a job” where more of the younger group rated the item as a need than the older group. Securing a job is more difficult for the younger group due to their age and inexperience.

<b>Current Need</b>	<b>Age 15-20</b>	<b>Age21-25</b>
Help finding Housing	67%	67%
Transportation	61%	67%
Help finding a job	61%	45%
Help with my education	52%	55%
Help affording personal living supplies	30%	29%
Someone to talk to	29%	21%
Help affording food	29%	21%
Better access to healthcare	24%	23%
Maintaining health relationships	21%	18%
Help with legal issues	16%	20%

**VISIONING THEIR FUTURE**

We also asked about plans and goals for the future. These data confirmed what we found in both ILS1 and ILS2: respondents’ goals are very reasonable, not outlandish in any way shape or form; not unlike the goals of other community youth; these young people want a normal life – to go to school, start a career, and develop relationships. The study team was struck by how reasonable the expressed plans and goals for the future sounded. Almost half want to pursue a "Career/Job" and 40% plan to "Pursue education".

***Comments on Goals for the Future—Jobs and Careers***

*Lawyer - nurse - hair stylist - corrections officer - day care provider - moving company - BA in communications - writer -photographer - social worker - diesel mechanic - fashion design - massage therapist - sports management - doctor - barbershop - start a business - own a bakery - own a fast-food restaurant - farming - building contractor - hotel management - culinary arts*



Yet it is also interesting to note that "Personal Fulfillment" (such as having a good relationship, having a family, and being a good parent) was reported more often than "Financial security."

***Comments on Goals for the Future— Personal Fulfillment***

***"Eventually attend college, get promoted at work, save enough money to get a car, also talk to my mom to make things better."***

***"To get off drugs and live a happy and stable life."***

***"Be the best that I can, better than my father."***

***"Get a place, have a room for my baby and be a good dad."***

***"Be happy with myself."***

The respondents repeatedly spoke about how difficult it is to pursue their goals with the limited resources available to them. The difficulties of trying to pursue an education while holding down a job or trying to pursue any goal when you don't know where you will sleep at night were commonly heard themes.

This is our challenge. Our community must find ways to build support --- through better, affordable housing, job training and placement, and access to education. It remains the responsibility of everyone who works with these youth to help them find the resources and amass the skills necessary to meet their educational, career and life goals. This may mean having to modify the systems that provide these supports to better meet the needs of these unattended youth.

**HEARING THEIR VOICES**

And finally— we asked if there was anything that they would like people in power to know about young people like themselves. This is a question that has been asked in the two previous surveys and the responses in all three surveys have been remarkably consistent, provoking some powerful commentary.

Young people were vocal about the lack of support and guidance they feel. These are young people who would invite the help of adults. A need for jobs that pay a livable wage so that young people can support themselves was a dominant theme. The lack of opportunity and the high level of boredom that young people experience were cited in this question and in many other survey questions.

***What respondents want people in power to know:***

***"We're forced to grow up too fast and we're exposed to too much."***

***"Parents are giving up on their children instead of helping them through thick and thin, drugs."***

***"No one believes in the young youth today and if their own parents don't, how are they gonna believe in themselves?"***

***"No place to go afterschool, no one to care what they do all day. Drugs, crime, and violence."***

***"Not enough resources available to teens under 21."***

***"No jobs, no money, no love from loved ones. We are just out here alone basically."***

***"The economy affects education and employment, if you can't afford education it's hard to find an adequate job."***

***"No one listens to their needs, they just assume they know what they need. Sometimes it's better to listen than to assume you know the answer to everything."***

**NEXT STEPS FOR THE COMMUNITY-AT LARGE**

Youth respondents have been very clear about their needs and concerns. The community has begun to respond to the issues raised in the previous ILS surveys. The creation of The Learning Web's Housing Scholarship and Tompkins Community Action Transitional Living Programs are a solid start to providing supportive housing for homeless youth in our county. The bus system in the county has been expanded in some areas. But more needs to be done. It is up to our community to work with these young people to break through barriers and design better ways to support these independent youth. Key issues to address include:

**Housing:** The difficulties for young people living independently were clear from the survey data.

- Affordable housing is still a major barrier to stability. Independent youths' lack of financial resources leaves the Tompkins County housing market out of reach for them. Section 8 vouchers are in scant supply and usually available only to young people with children. Additional Section 8 vouchers for independent youth are needed. Though there has been an increase in rental housing for those with low to moderate incomes such as Overlook and the housing complexes related to Linderman Creek, not enough units are set aside for Section 8.
- Additional supportive group housing models are needed. Some young people are not yet ready to live on their own and are willing to live in a supervised situation. There are currently no group supported housing options available in our community.

**Transportation:** Echoing comments from the two previous surveys, several youth cited the difficulty of using TCAT to get them around the county during the course of a single day when trying to combine work, taking classes at the community college, and, in some cases, getting a child to day care. They also pointed out how frequently the Cornell buses run in comparison to the buses to TC3. Housing rents within the city are so high that youth are pushed into housing in the rural areas, not accessible to transportation but more affordable. They soon find that they are in a catch-22 because though they can better afford rent, they are not able to get to jobs or school. There have been improvements made to the transportation system as a result of the previous ILS surveys but the county geography makes it difficult to cover all areas adequately and there is more room for improvement.

**Jobs and Education:** The County's highly educated populace presents significant challenges for local homeless population in regards to employment. Lucrative jobs are available locally in highly skilled technological and educational sectors for those applicants with high levels of educational and technical skills. This is even more challenging for homeless youth, most of whom have dropped out of high school or who at most have completed their high school studies. The connection between education and employment is clear. To compete in the job market, an advanced degree is essential. Opportunities for developing employment skills and opportunities to return to school are critical to making these youth competitive in our job market.

**Financial support:** Young people who grow up in functional, supportive families need and receive financial support into their twenties in order to finish their education and embark on the road to independence. Respondents spoke about the difficulties balancing the need to have food and shelter with the need to spend the time to finish their education and get a decent job. Though financial supports are available through DSS and education programs, the regulations can be overwhelming to youth and youth under age 20 are almost entirely shut out of the system. Ongoing financial support would allow youth to focus their energies on setting goals, working on education and employment, and moving towards self-sufficiency.

***"No one listens to their needs, they just assume they know what they need. Sometimes it's better to listen than to assume you know the answer to everything.***

***ILS Respondent***