

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Access to SNAP

Extensive Policy Clarification Needed

POLICY
BRIEF

APRIL 2014

SURVEY SAYS

While over half of surveyed homeless youth workers are aware that UHY are eligible for SNAP, 64% have not received information or training clarifying eligibility policies, and only 8% rate themselves as "very familiar" with eligibility rules.

Barriers to UHY SNAP Access:

- › *Lack of awareness of youth eligibility rules and familiarity with SNAP regulations*
- › *Eligible applicants are turned away due to misconceptions about youth SNAP eligibility*
- › *Lack of available assistance to help youth with the application process*
- › *Hesitancy or lack of motivation on the part of the youth to apply*

INTRODUCTION

Unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY), homeless individuals under the age of 18 who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, often find themselves at an intersection of hunger and homelessness. The lack of a parent or guardian to act on their behalf places limitations on their legal rights, creating a burden and a struggle for UHY in accessing services, which ultimately impacts their ability to be successful and survive on their own.

This brief addresses some of the barriers UHY and homeless youth workers experience in accessing youth SNAP benefits. It draws from existing literature, as well as the results of a SNAP access survey, to gain insight into these barriers, and proposes recommendations to address them.



Putting Healthy Food
Within Reach

APPROACH AND RESULTS

In March 2014, an online survey was created and distributed throughout the state of Texas via the Texas Homeless Network, to gather insight from individuals working with homeless youth about their familiarity with youth SNAP eligibility, as well as if they had received information or training on the topic, referred youth to apply for SNAP, and what barriers for youth SNAP access they had identified.

The survey of 161 participants revealed that while 63% of participants were aware that youth under 18 are potentially eligible to apply for SNAP, 64% had never received information or training clarifying policies around youth SNAP eligibility, and only 8% would rate their familiarity with youth SNAP eligibility at "very familiar." 11% had assisted one or more unaccompanied youth in completing the online SNAP application. Additional survey information can be found on the back of this page.

RECOMMENDATION

Engage in widespread, strategic outreach to disseminate information about youth SNAP eligibility policy and regulations among individuals and organizations working with the homeless youth population

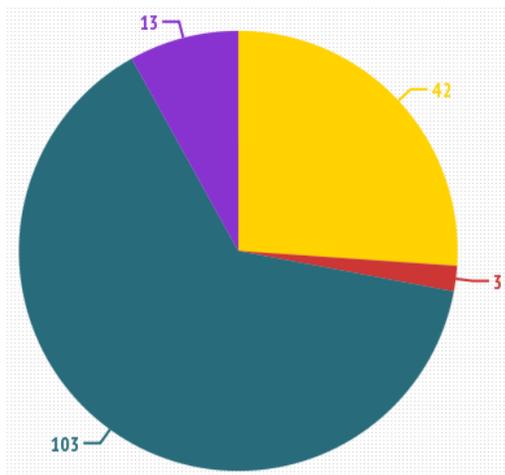




Unaccompanied youth find themselves at an intersection of homelessness and hunger



SURVEY RESULTS

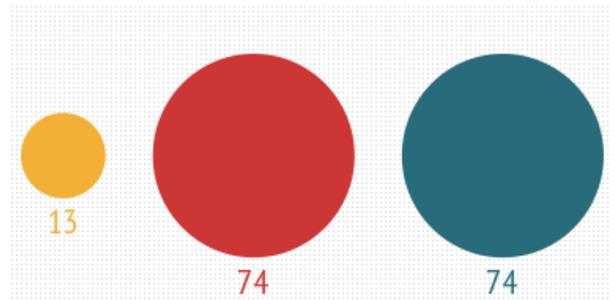


Have you received information or training that clarifies the policies around UHY SNAP eligibility?

Information 26 %
 Training 2 %
 None 64 %
 Both 8 %

How would you rate your familiarity with UHY SNAP eligibility?

Very Familiar 8 %
 Somewhat Familiar 46 %
 Not at all Familiar 46 %



RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

While the USDA issued a memorandum to regional SNAP offices in May 2013, clarifying misconceptions about youth SNAP eligibility, it is doubtful that this information was widely disseminated to the point of reaching many of the individual workers and organizations that serve unaccompanied homeless youth. It is essential that this information be widely known among the individuals and organizations working to serve homeless youth, so that they can most effectively assist this population. Recommendations and next steps to address the access barriers include:

- › Encourage and advocate for the state to issue guidance regarding the SNAP regulations and eligibility of unaccompanied homeless youth
- › Clarify the SNAP application process for youth via the www.yourtexasbenefits.com website, hosted by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- › Assess communication channels between federal government entities, state offices, and local organizations
- › Identify key gatekeepers at local SNAP offices- individuals who are very knowledgeable about youth SNAP eligibility, and able to serve as the go-to contact for unaccompanied youth seeking SNAP services
- › Assist youth in budgeting, meal planning, and nutrition education, so that they can most effectively use their SNAP benefits

