In June, thirty community organizations spread out across Cuyahoga County to count the number of unaccompanied youth (without a parent or guardian) who are currently homeless or unstably housed. The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development worked with community partners to design the survey used to find out who these homeless youth are. Center staff then trained community workers in how to collect the data in a methodologically-sound and respectful way.

This annual count helps agencies measure progress in preventing and ending homelessness and by knowing who is more likely to become homeless, organizations can better tailor their services to these populations’ specific needs.

584 surveys were filled out and, of those, 186 youth reported being homeless at least once during the previous month; 129 were homeless and without a parent or guardian the night before they took the survey. Who are these young people? Most of them are in their early twenties, male and African American. Compared to the survey takers who were not homeless, homeless youth were 1.5 times more likely to have been in foster care. They were less likely to be enrolled in school, more likely unemployed, and more likely to be pregnant or parenting. These young people also reported higher rates of issues such as alcohol/drug use, HIV/AIDS, mental health concerns and previous domestic abuse.

While a narrow majority of these youth were able to sleep in a shelter when homeless, more than 25% slept in an unsheltered location: outside, in a tent, car or RV, in a hotel/motel or in an abandoned/foreclosed building. Those in unsheltered locations felt far less safe than those in housing or shelters.

Next year the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development hopes that the count can include surveying youth late at night and on the weekend which should lead to a more accurate number of homeless youth in the county.

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