



**Statement for the Record
of
Sue Krahe-Eggleston**

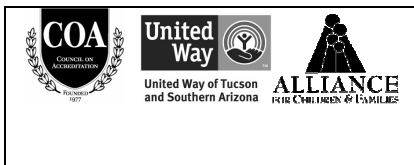
**Executive Director
Our Family
Tucson, Arizona**

and

**Member, Board of Directors
National Network for Youth**

**before the
Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives**

**July 24, 2007 Hearing on
*Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children:
Perspectives on Helping the Nation's Youth***



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Statement Summary

PART I – About our Family

Sue Krahe-Eggleston is the Executive Director of **Our Family**, a community-based organization in **Tucson**, Pima County Arizona which offers services in four main areas, including youth services. Youth programs include street outreach, youth center, shelter, and transitional living for runaway and homeless youth.

PART II – Unaccompanied Youth Primer

Runaway and homeless youth are the most vulnerable of our nation's disconnected youth. Between one million and three million U.S. youth experience an unaccompanied situation annually. Unaccompanied youth become detached from parents, guardians and other caring adults due to a combination of family and community stressors. Data specific to Pima County also point to large numbers of homeless, at-risk youth in the region, with the same causal factors and risk factors as their peers nationally.

Part III – Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Reauthorization

The federal **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act** (RHYA) has established funding streams to support outreach, family reunification, shelter, and transitional living programs targeted to unaccompanied youth, all in an effort to provide a basic level of support for these vulnerable young people regardless of the state in which they are living.

Federal RHYA programs are a substantial and reliable funding stream to Our Family and other RHYA grantees. For organizations in many states, RHYA funds are the only resources available explicitly to serve unaccompanied youth. RHYA is the sole federal law targeted solely to unaccompanied youth. Without RHYA, many unaccompanied youth in communities across the nation would go completely without support.

Our Family urges Congress to reauthorize and strengthen the programs and authorities of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. We offer 18 recommendations for RHYA reauthorization. These recommendations were identified after an intensive consultation process with the RHYA grantee community convened by the National Network for Youth, the membership association of RHYA agencies.

Part IV – Beyond RHYA

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, while a critical federal law that must be continued and fully funded, is no substitute for the aggressive interventions necessary to eliminate the very factors causing unaccompanied situations among millions of the nation's youth, or to respond to the resources and services needs of currently unaccompanied youth that surpass the scope and purpose of the Act. **We call for action in juvenile justice, elementary and secondary education, postsecondary education, workforce investment, and other areas. We support the Place to Call Home Act.**

PART I – About Our Family

Our Family makes Southern Arizona a better place to live, to grow up, and to grow older with a continuum of services to people in every stage of life.

Last year, more than 29,000 at-risk children, youth, families, seniors and disabled adults used our services, which include counseling, education and mediation, housing, mediation and help for people in crisis.

Our Family provides services in four main areas -- counseling, education and prevention, youth services, and services to older and disabled adults.

Our youth services include:

- **Teens in Transition** helps homeless and near-homeless youth 13-21 stay in school and gain the skills to succeed, through **case management, counseling, education and career planning, housing, and help with basic needs.**
- **Reunion House** offers **brief-stay shelter**, respite and family reunification services to youth ages 12-17, including systems youth who are awaiting placement and homeless youth who want to come off the street.
- **CommonUnity** is a complex of safe, **supervised apartments and a community of support for homeless young mothers** ages 18-21 with up to two children. Life-skills classes and case management help residents break cycles of poverty and crisis and create a support network among themselves.
- **Skrappy's** is a drug- and alcohol-free **youth center**. Young people from all backgrounds participate in youth-led media arts and theater projects, dance classes, health fairs, volunteer projects and community activism, as well as concerts.
- **Street Outreach** goes where homeless, runaway and street youth gather and helps them come off the streets.

Of the more than 29,000 individuals who used Our Family's services last year, six percent were age 12 or under, 54 percent were 13-17, 16 percent were 18-21, 18 percent were 22-59, and 6 percent were 60 or older.

Our Family is a \$4.2 million organization with 100 employees, as well as an active corps of volunteers. It is accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children Inc. and licensed as a behavioral healthcare institution by the Arizona Department of Health Services. Services are available in English and Spanish.

Our Family, created in October 2005 by the merger of Family Counseling Agency and OUR TOWN, has a combined history of more than 75 years of service to the greater Tucson community.

Our Family invites Members of Congress and Congressional staff in Arizona or visiting the Tucson area to visit our agency. For more information, please visit www.ourfamilyservices.org or call (520) 323-1708.

Part II – Unaccompanied Youth Primer

Unaccompanied Youth Basics

Runaway and homeless youth are the most vulnerable of our nation’s “disconnected” youth. We refer to these two populations collectively as “unaccompanied youth.” Like other disconnected youth, unaccompanied youth experience separation from one or more of the key societal institutions of family, school, community, and the workplace. Their disconnection is accentuated by their lack of a permanent place to live, which is not only disruptive in and of itself, but also indicative of the larger socioeconomic instability they are experiencing.

Between one million and three million of our nation’s youth experience an unaccompanied situation annually, according to various estimates derived from government studies and data sets. Some of these estimates do not include young adults ages 18 and older within their scope.

Unaccompanied youth become detached from parents, guardians and other caring adults – legally, economically, and emotionally – due to a combination of family and community stressors.

Family Stressors – Many of our nation's unaccompanied youth are compelled to leave their home environments prematurely due to severe family conflict, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse by an adult in the home, parental neglect, parental substance abuse, or parental mental illness. For other youth, the values and traditions with which their families operate prescribe that the young person separate economically from the family unit upon reaching the legal age of majority or after graduation, in some cases regardless of whether the youth is actually prepared for independent adulthood. Others are expelled from the home due to parental inability to accept the sexual orientation, parenting status, mental or addictive disability, or normal adolescent behavior of their child. For still other young people, their families are simply too poor to continue to bear the financial burden of providing for the youth's basic needs. Others are abandoned as their parents are incarcerated. Youth in families that are experiencing homelessness may be separated from the family unit—and become homeless on their own—so that emergency shelter or domestic violence services can be secured for the remaining family members, or to squeeze most of the family into means of habitation that are too small for all of its members.

Community Stressors – State custodial systems – including child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, addiction treatment, and developmental disabilities—which have responsibility for ensuring the safety and protection of children and youth who

are not properly cared for by parents and guardians – are failing in general to accept older youth into their custody due to financial limitations and policy disincentives. Many of the young people who do come in contact with public custodial systems are not adequately prepared for independence and residential stability during their period of custody nor provided an aftercare arrangement to support them after the custodial relationship has ended. Many of these young people have no home environment to which to return. Youth with mental illness, addiction, and other disabilities face discrimination when searching for an independent living arrangement.

Many unaccompanied youth who are psychosocially prepared for independent adulthood are not economically ready for self-sufficiency. Inadequate educational preparation, lack of employment skills, short or non-existent work histories, language barriers, and undocumented immigration status all contribute to the relegation of many youth to unemployment or to low-wage jobs—neither of which generate income sufficient for acquiring affordable housing.

Policy barriers also stand in the way of permanency for unaccompanied youth. In some jurisdictions, youth below the age of majority are prohibited from entering into leases or other contracts on their own behalf. "One strike" laws prohibit individuals with criminal histories from residency in public and assisted housing and prohibit juvenile ex-offenders from returning to their families. And, federal, state, and local public and assisted housing programs rank young people low, if at all, among their priority populations for assistance.

Regardless of the causal factor, unaccompanied youth, when left to fend for themselves without support, experience poor health, educational, and workforce outcomes which imperil their prospects for positive adulthood. This results in their long-term dependency on or involvement in public health, social service, emergency assistance, and corrections systems.

Youth Homelessness in Arizona and in Pima County

Youth Homelessness in Arizona

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Extranet Optimized Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (NEO-RHYMIS), **943 youth were involved with Runaway and Homeless Youth Act emergency (BCP) and transitional (TLP) programs in Arizona in the 2004-2005 federal fiscal year.** Of this population, 67 percent were white, 6 percent were American Indian, 0.42 percent were Asian, 10 percent were African American, 0.32 percent were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 16 percent did not report racial information. Within the population of those reporting ethnicity (804), 14 percent were Hispanic. 42 percent were male and 58 percent were female. Girls are more prevalent in every age group of youth except for youth under the age of 12, where there are more boys than girls. The vast majority (81 percent) of Arizona youth who receive services through a BCP or TLP in that same time period entered

the program from a private residence; more than half of these youth came from the home of a parent or legal guardian. Two percent of youth came from correctional institutions, two percent came from residential programs, four percent came from other shelters, two percent came from other living situations, less than one percent came from the military, and 10 percent came from the streets. 53 percent were attending school regularly, and 3 percent had already graduated or obtained a GED. The rest were not regularly attending school. 24 youth seeking BCP or TLP services in Arizona were turned away during this time period.

Youth Homelessness in Pima County

Data specific to Pima County also point to the large numbers of homeless, at-risk youth in our region. Pima County demonstrates a number of factors that indicate significant need for the proposed services. First, there is a high number of runaways in our county. **In 2003, 3,036 runaways were reported in Pima County, accounting for 20 percent of all juvenile crime reported.** This number amounts to two percent of Pima County's total juvenile population. Second, runaways face a pervasive drug economy in our region. The county lies 70 miles from the Mexican border in a high impact drug corridor. Drugs flow across the border and are distributed nationwide. Runaway and homeless youth, always at risk for involvement in drug use and drug sales, are at an especially high risk in Pima County.

Tucson's need for Runaway and Homeless Youth services is further demonstrated by a **Homeless Youth Survey administered in the spring of 2005 by the Tucson Planning Council for the Homeless Youth Committee and Arizona State University's School of Social Work.** Information was gathered through 30 minute in-person and telephone interviews using an 18 page questionnaire that covered the following domains: demographics; housing and living situations; education; employment and income sources; sexual orientation, practices and risk behaviors and abuse; physical health, mental health, and substance abuse; use of, access to, and knowledge about community services, modes of transportation, social networks and personal issues; and personal/familial legal concerns. **In total 458 surveys were completed.** The information obtained indicates, from the youth themselves, what are the most pressing issues for Tucson's runaway and homeless youth. (Homeless in Tucson by LeCroy and Milligan, 2005.)

Homeless youth interviewed ranged from 13-18 years old and were predominantly Hispanic/Latino/a or white, heterosexual, non-married and female. The majority of youth (76 percent) lived in Tucson before becoming homeless. Over 60 percent of the youth had been homeless at least twice during their young lives, with an average 3.5 times in 2005, up from 1.92 times in 2002. Over half of the youth had spent at least one year of their life homeless and, at the time of the survey, half had been homeless for more than 180 days. The average age at which youth first became homeless was 14. Nine percent self-reported homosexuality and 7 percent reported bisexuality. The main reasons cited for leaving home the first time included running away because of problems (24 percent), being removed by Child

Protective Services (21 percent), and being kicked out or told to leave the home (20 percent). Over 75 percent of the youth said they would not continue to be homeless if they had a choice.

Forty percent of the youth spent the night prior to the interview at a friend's house, 14 percent spent the night in an unstable environment (e.g., park, wash, car, street, backyard), and 13 percent spent the night at a family member's house. Notably, 10 percent of the youth did not know where they would be sleeping the night of the interview. Half of the youth (50 percent) were currently enrolled in school or some other type of educational/training program, down slightly from 2002 when 56 percent of youth surveyed were enrolled in school and/or an educational program. Of those not currently attending school, the main reasons reported were lack of a permanent address and/or difficulties with transportation.

Many of the youth had experienced significant trauma before age 18, and were still suffering its effects. 63 percent reported experiencing verbal/emotional abuse, 52 percent said they had witnessed domestic violence occur in their household, 50 percent reported witnessing drug/alcohol abuse, 44 percent reported experiencing physical abuse, 42 percent experienced neglect, and 25 percent reported being sexually abused (19 percent of females, 6 percent of males) before the age of 18. When asked whether abuse/neglect was ever a factor in their leaving home, 60 percent of the youth said yes. Alarming, 28 percent said that they had attempted suicide in the past, up from 19.5 percent in 2002. These statistics substantiate the tenuous, high-risk situation that faces RHY in Tucson, the risk factors they face for having unsuccessful adulthoods, and the critical nature of getting services to them.

Our Family's Homeless Youth Profile

Data collected on homeless clients who received case management services at Our Family between 7/1/05 and 6/30/06 (n=82) reflect similar patterns to the County and the State. The average number of runaway episodes was four. The current status of youth entering the program included: 35 percent at home; 35 percent runaway; 17 percent homeless; 9 percent throwaway, 8 percent other/street. Substance use was a prevalent problem indicated at intake: 35 percent smoke cigarettes; 55 percent use beer, wine or wine coolers; 45 percent use hard liquor; 35 percent had 5 or more servings of alcohol on the same occasion; 40 percent use marijuana; 10 percent use cocaine; 10 percent use methamphetamines, 5 percent use over the counter drugs above recommended dosage; 2 percent use inhalants; 40 percent use alcohol and marijuana on the same occasion; 5 percent used two or more drugs (excluding alcohol and tobacco) on the same occasion; 30 percent have been asked to sell drugs and 12 percent have sold drugs. Approximately 30 percent of the youth said they had been physically abused by a parent or guardian. 5 percent reported being sexually abused by parents and another 12 percent reported being sexually abused by a parent's partner. Almost all of them listed emotional abuse, and 30 percent said that a household member abused alcohol or drugs. In addition 30 percent had poor

grades in school, 60 percent had been charged with a misdemeanor, 5 percent with a felony, and 26 percent were depressed.

Trends in Homeless Youth Population Observed by Our Family

Our Family's Reunion House Basic Center Program (RH) has seen **double the number of youth 12-17 who are school dropouts at intake**. These young people have been absent from educational services often for a semester or more and as such are a grade or two behind their peers. A number of these youth profess to have no desire to continue their education, seeing school as a useless and stressful environment.

Our Family's Teens In Transition TLP (TNT) has noted a continuing **high demand from couples coming in for services where the female is significantly younger than the male**. Because of the male partner's age these couples are unable to access housing options and homeless couples services targeted to underage youth. There appears to be no defined reason for this shift but it is noteworthy and provides a considerable challenge when attempting to provide housing for these individuals and their children.

Our Family's CommonUnity TLP (CUP) has continued to see **increasing numbers of 22-24 year old mothers and their infant children on street who are coming in to seek services**. CUP must turn these mothers away, as they are too old for the program. They are referred out to other providers who often have considerable waiting lists or are limited in their effectiveness with younger adults. Domestic and Relationship Violence issues remain prevalent, with approximately 92 percent of the young parents coming into CUP dealing with the effects of relationship and domestic violence in their lives.

The Street Outreach Program (SO) continued to see an **increase in the number of youth dealing with death or loss of a parent or guardian in their lives due to substance abuse**. In many cases these issues directly relate to the initial destabilization of the youth with their families.

The Homeless Youth Services at Our Family continued to see a **steady increase in the numbers of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) youth requesting services**. This is due in part to increased awareness through outreach to LGBT organizations as well as establishing a positive rapport and reputation among LGBT youth. This also highlights the number of LGBT youth who run away, are kicked out, or who otherwise become homeless and need the services we offer.

CommonUnity and Teens in Transition Programs have seen **increases in the number of parenting youth that have inquired about transitional/independent living services**.

Tucson youth service providers also report an **explosion of methamphetamine use**—a trend mirrored nationally.

Barriers Facing Pima County Homeless Youth

The Homeless Youth Committee of the Pima County, Arizona Plan to End Homelessness has identified the following major barriers that impede homeless youth in their transition back to permanent housing and to successful adulthoods. (Plan to End Homelessness, Pima County, Arizona, Spring 2006.)

- While Tucson’s youth services are extensive, they are not enough to meet these needs. **Homeless youth ages 18 through 24 have few, if any, emergency and transitional housing options.** Whether they are “legally” adults (i.e. over 18) or not, Pima County homeless youth are at best uncomfortable, and at worst subject to victimization, in adult shelters or service environments.
- Youth of all ages have **almost no affordable addiction treatment options:** in part because there is little funding to serve them, in part because agencies which do offer youth treatment are oversubscribed, and in part because youth simply do not feel comfortable engaging in therapeutic environments with older adults.
- **LGBT youth, many of whom have already been victimized, have no dedicated, safe emergency or transitional housing alternatives.**
- And all youth making a transition to independence need serious—and now **seriously underfunded—life and job skills training, adequate housing, and often counseling.**

Our Family has identified the following additional barriers, based on our observation of the daily struggles of our residents and program participants:

- **Some homeless youth and young adults are unable to access HUD-funded homeless assistance services because their homeless living arrangement, usually “couch surfing,” does not qualify as “homeless” under the HUD definition.**
- Many of our participants are **unable to pursue the postsecondary education and training they desire** – and that is imperative to move them to high-wage employment in high-growth sectors – because they must forego education in order to maintain employment, which is their sole source of income.
- **Homeless young families expend considerable resources on childcare;** subsidized child care slots are precious in our community.
- **Permanent housing to which our youth may transition is in short supply.** Youth and young adults are low on priority lists, or even the community’s radar screen as a subpopulation in need of housing assistance.

- **Youth access to mental health services is a major challenge**; there is simply insufficient publicly funded mental health treatment and support options for adolescents and for adults.
- **Reentry of youth offenders into the community is uneven, and certainly far behind in program development compared to the system of support for transitioning foster youth.**

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Program Basics

The federal government, through the **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act** (RHYA) has established funding streams to support outreach, family reunification, shelter, and transitional living programs targeted to unaccompanied youth, all in an effort to provide a basic level of support for these vulnerable young people regardless of the state in which they are living. **RHYA programs have the purposes of preventing victimization and ensuring basic safety of unaccompanied youth and ensuring their access to family reunification, housing, education, employment training, health care, and other social services.**

The RHYA **Basic Center Program** (BCP) provides grants to community-based, faith-based, and public organizations to support **family strengthening** efforts, including counseling, home-based services for families with children at risk of separation from the family, and **emergency and respite shelter** (no greater than 15 days) for youth under the age of 18.

The RHYA **Transitional Living Program** (TLP) provides competitive grants to community-based, faith-based, and public organizations to support **longer-term residential services** (up to 18 months) and **life skill supports** to youth ages 16 through 21 who are unable to return home safely. TLPs assist youth in successfully transitioning into responsible adulthood and self-sufficiency and connecting them to education, workforce, and other supports. This program includes **maternity group homes**, which are residential arrangements for pregnant and parenting youth who are fleeing from abusive homes. Maternity group homes assist these youth in accessing housing, prenatal care, parenting classes, child care, and educational services.

The RHYA **Street Outreach Program** (SOP) provides competitive grants to community-based and faith-based organizations to support **street-based outreach and education** to homeless children and youth who have been sexually abused or who are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation.

RHYA basic centers and transitional living projects serve nearly 50,000 youth in all 50 states. RHYA street outreach projects make over 2.3 million contacts with youth annually.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act also authorizes funds for the National Runaway Switchboard, a national communications system for runaway youth and

their families; regional training and technical assistance for grantees; an information clearinghouse; a management information system; research and evaluation; and peer monitoring of grantees.

Congress first enacted the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in 1974 as Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. It was most recently reauthorized in 2003. RHYA programs are administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Part III -- Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Reauthorization

Need for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

Federal RHYA programs are a substantial and reliable funding stream to Our Family and other RHYA grantees. For organizations in many states, RHYA funds are the only resources available to serve unaccompanied youth explicitly. More important, they are the sole federal programs targeted to unaccompanied youth. Without RHYA, many unaccompanied youth in communities across the nation would go completely without support.

More RHYA Capacity is Needed across the Nation. The basic living needs of too many of our nation's unaccompanied youth are not being met through state and local child welfare systems or permanent housing and homeless assistance programs. Furthermore, few states have established funding streams targeted to unaccompanied youth. RHYA basic center and transitional living projects served approximately 55,000 youth in FY 2005, yet estimates of the U.S. unaccompanied youth population are one million at minimum, suggesting that at least approximately 950,000 of the nation's unaccompanied youth are not able to access RHYA services.

Effectiveness of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

RHYA Projects are Cost Effective Alternatives to Custodial Care and Arrest.

The **average cost of serving a youth in a transitional living project** of \$11,877 is **less than half the minimum cost of serving youth through the child welfare or juvenile justice systems**, with annual costs ranging from \$25,000 - \$55,000 per youth depending on the state. Law enforcement officials are the referral source for 20 percent of youth entering basic centers.

RHYA Projects Use Federal Funds to Leverage Community Resources.

RHYA projects succeed due to partnerships created among families, schools, community-based organizations, faith communities, law enforcement agencies, businesses and volunteers.

RHYA Projects Raise the Achievement Level of Unaccompanied Youth. The last federally-funded evaluations of the Basic Center Program and the Transitional

Living Program found that they produced **positive outcomes for participating youth** in the following areas:

Family Strengthening

- Basic center youth reported lessened rates of family conflict and parental physical abuse.
- Transitional living youth reported that the program helped them better manage communication and maintain positive relationships with their families.

Education

- School participation among basic center youth doubled after basic center services commenced, compared to the participation rate 30 days prior to accessing a basic center.
- The proportion of youth in transitional living projects attending college was three times that of homeless youth who were not in a TLP.

Employment

- Employment rates of youth in basic centers increased by 24 percent.
- 60 percent of transitional living youth were employed part-time or full-time, compared to 41 percent of homeless youth not participating in a TLP.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Reauthorization Recommendations

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is scheduled to sunset in 2008 and merits extension. In addition, new issues affecting unaccompanied youth and unaccompanied youth service providers have emerged that require a Congressional response. **Our Family urges Congress to reauthorize and strengthen the programs and authorities of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in a timely manner.** We offer the following recommendations for RHYA reauthorization. These recommendations were identified after an intensive consultation process with the RHYA grantee community.

Funding

1. Reauthorize and increase authorization levels for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs. The runaway and homeless youth consolidated account should be authorized at the \$200 million level in FY 2009 and “such sums as may be necessary” in each of FY 2010 through FY 2013. The runaway prevention account should be authorized at the \$30 million level in FY 2009 and “such sums as may be necessary” in each of FY 2010 through FY 2013.

Funding levels for RHYA programs are inadequate for meeting the need for such services. With estimates of unaccompanied youth at the low-end of one million, and the RHYA basic center and transitional living programs reaching only 55,000 youth annual, at least 900,000 of the nation’s unaccompanied youth do not have access to the supports and services that RHYA programs offer. For these unserved youth, their unaccompanied episodes are prolonged; they are at heightened risk of victimization, poor health, school failure, and unemployment; and they are thwarted from attaining safe, productive, and healthy adulthoods.

2. Increase the RHYA Basic Center Program allotments for small states and for territories. The minimum BCP allotment for states with small youth populations should be increased to \$200,000. The maximum BCP allotment for U.S. territories should be increased to at least \$100,000.

BCP formula allotments to states with small youth populations are limited to \$100,000. This amount makes it difficult for HHS to fund more than one basic center in each such state, even though the geographic swath of many such states tends to be wide. BCP allotments to territories are limited to \$40,000. This amount is hardly enough to act even as seed money for basic centers in territories to leverage non-RHYA funds.

3. Permit HHS to redistribute unexpended BCP funds to other BCP applicants for a one-year grant period, after which time the amount should be returned to the BCP general pool for re-allocation. RHYA grantees and applicants would benefit from greater transparency and standardization in the manner in which HHS reallocates “unrequested” BCP allotments from states lacking applicants to “excess” BCP applicants from states with qualified applicants requesting a total of funds that exceed the state’s allotment.

RHYA Project Admission and Length of Stay Criteria

4. Limit basic centers to providing shelter services to individuals who are less than 18 years of age, with an exception that basic centers located in states with child-caring facility licensure laws that permit a higher age may serve up to the age permitted by the state law. RHYA grantees and applicants would benefit from clarification on the maximum age of youth permitted to receive emergency shelter through a basic center. The current RHYA permits basic centers to provide emergency shelter to youth “not more than 18 years of age,” which some interpret to mean ages 17 and under and others interpret to mean through age 18. To resolve confusion in the field, we recommend that the maximum age for emergency shelter services through a BCP be extended to youth “who are less than 18 years of age,” which is in alignment with the maximum age used in the formula for allocating BCP funds. However, grantees should be given the discretion to serve youth over age 17 if the child-caring facility licensure law in which the basic center is located permits a higher age.

5. Allow extensions in length of stay in basic centers from 14 days to up to 30 days and in transitional living projects from 18 months through 24 months, on a case-by-case basis, provided that the state child-caring facility licensure law applicable to the basic center permits a longer length of stay. RHYA grantees report difficulty in ensuring safe exists for some of their program participants within the timeframes required by current law. The grantees then find themselves in the situation of either keeping the participant at the basic center or transitional living project with other than federal funds, or triggering an unsafe exit by the youth. Providing grantees limited flexibility to keep some of their

participants in service beyond the target exit period would allow a greater level of individualized support for those unaccompanied youth at greatest risk of unsafe program exits.

RHYA Applicant Eligibility, Use of Funds, and Funding Conditions

6. Add public entities as eligible applicants for Street Outreach Program funds. Eligibility for the Street Outreach Program (SOP) is limited to private nonprofit organizations, whereas public organizations as well as private nonprofit organizations may apply for BCP and TLP funds. Extending SOP eligibility to public organizations would provide public entities receiving either BCP and/or TLP funds the opportunity to build a longer continuum of RHYA services by also competing for SOP funds.

7. Clarify that RHYA funds are to be distributed to organizations and not directly to program participants. The President's FY 2007 budget request included a proposal to reserve a portion of Transitional Living Program (TLP) funds for vouchers directly to participants to purchase maternity group home services on their own. Appropriations Committees in both chambers the 109th Congress, in consultation with their authorization committee counterparts, concluded that a voucher arrangement was neither contemplated by the statute nor in the best interest of either the pregnant and parenting youth or unaccompanied youth service providers. Accordingly, the committees rejected the proposal in report language to accompany the FY 2007 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bills. Current law should be amended to clarify that RHYA funds are to be made available for distribution to organizations and not directly to program participants.

8. Allow transitional living projects to use RHYA funds for facility renovation. Renovation costs should not exceed 15 percent of the total first-year award. The current RHYA permits use of BCP funds for facility renovation, but does not permit TLP funds to be used for facility renovation. A parallel use of funds for renovation should be extended to TLP grantees.

9. Require basic centers and transitional living projects to have in place written emergency management and crisis response plans as a condition for receiving federal RHYA awards. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita focused national attention on the need to ensure more effective responses to emergencies and crises, including by congregate care providers. The 109th Congress recently amended the Older Americans Act and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act to ensure that federally-funded congregate care providers funded through these programs have emergency management and crisis plans in place. A parallel requirement should be established for RHYA basic centers and transitional living projects.

Federal Program Management

10. Require HHS to develop performance standards for RHYA direct service grantees. The HHS Secretary shall provide an opportunity for public comment on the performance standards. At one time, HHS had developed program performance standards for basic centers, and was in process of developing program performance standards for TLP and SOP grantees. These standards provided guidance to grantees on the minimum expectations of program performance. HHS has suspended standards development or activation lacking clear instruction in the RHYA statute to support them.

11. Require HHS to develop a process for accepting and considering appeals for reconsideration from unsuccessful RHYA applicants. The HHS Secretary shall provide an opportunity for public comment on the appeals process. The RHYA statute does not prescribe, and HHS has not established, an orderly process for accepting or considering appeals for reconsideration from unsuccessful RHYA applicants. Lack of a formal process has led to lack of transparency whether or how reconsiderations are made.

12. Add a finding on the applicability of positive youth development to the organization and delivery of services to unaccompanied youth. Inclusion of a finding on positive youth development in the RHYA statute is important for encouraging grantees to apply youth development principles to the development and implementation of their projects.

13. Add a statutory definition of “runaway youth” identical to the definition of such term in the Code of Federal Regulations. The RHYA statute does not include a definition of “runaway youth.” However that term is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 1351.1) as “a person under 18 years of age who absents himself or herself from home or place of legal residence without the permission of his or her family.” For the convenience of policymakers, RHYA grantees, and the general public, the current regulatory definition of “runaway youth” should be inserted into statute.

National Activities

14. Require HHS to develop each fifth year, directly or via contract, a national estimate of the prevalence of unaccompanied situations among youth and young adults. The nation lacks a single, reliable source of data on the prevalence of unaccompanied situations among youth. The dearth of data impairs federal, state, and local public policy decision-making, community needs assessment, service organization and delivery, and performance measurement.

15. Require HHS to establish research, evaluation, and demonstration priorities each two years and to provide an opportunity for public comment on such priorities. The RHYA grants HHS authority to make grants for research, evaluation, demonstration and service projects. RHYA grantees, youth, advocates,

and other stakeholders have limited to no input into the identification or prioritization of issues to be studied or evaluated.

16. Require HHS to conduct, directly or via contract, a study demonstrating the economic and social benefit of providing emergency housing, transitional housing, permanent housing and supportive services to unaccompanied youth, and the extent to which that housing and services offsets the costs of allowing such conditions to persist for young people.

While it is intuitive that interventions which resolve unaccompanied situations among youth are more cost-effective to the public in the long-term than ignoring the problem, there is yet to be conducted an authoritative cost-benefit analysis to “prove” this assertion. A cost-benefit study would be instructive to policymakers about the type and level of investments in health and human needs programs for children, youth, and families.

17. Authorize HHS to conduct, directly or via contract, a public information campaign to raise awareness of the unaccompanied youth population and their service and support needs. Unaccompanied youth are a largely invisible or misunderstood population. Lack of public awareness of this group of young people, their life circumstances, and the interventions available to support them and end their homeless situations, allows homelessness to persist among the nation’s youth.

18. Amend the Higher Education Act to authorize forgiveness of educational loans for workers in RHYA grantees with at least five consecutive years of service. Nonprofit and public organizations supporting unaccompanied youth face a number of workforce challenges, including difficulty recruiting and retaining employees for long terms of service, compensating employees at competitive wages, and attracting employees with postsecondary education. Student loan forgiveness is a strategy that has been deployed with success in other sectors to recruit and retain workers in shortage occupations and should be extended to the unaccompanied youth service sector.

PART IV – Beyond RHYA

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, while a critical federal law that must be continued and fully funded, is no substitute for the aggressive health and human needs interventions necessary to eliminate the very factors causing unaccompanied situations among millions of the nation’s youth, or to respond to the resources and services needs of currently unaccompanied youth that surpass the scope and purpose of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. A comprehensive response to the causal factors of and ultimate solutions to unaccompanied situations among youth is required. We call the Education and Labor Committee’s attention to a number of opportunities beyond RHYA reauthorization within its jurisdiction where decisive impact could be made for unaccompanied youth.

Juvenile Justice

There is a clear intersection between the juvenile justice system and youth homelessness, in terms of both youth entry into the system due to their homeless and youth exit from the system into homelessness. We urge the Committee to use the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act to break the connection between juvenile justice and youth homelessness. **We call for repeal of the valid court order exception to the JJDP Act deinstitutionalization of status offenders requirement. We also call for the establishment of a youth offender reentry grants program.**

Elementary and Secondary Education

Youth experiencing homelessness encounter difficulties enrolling in and attending School. These barriers include legal guardianship requirements, residency requirements, lack of necessary immunization, academic, or other records, and inadequate transportation to their schools of origin from their temporary living arrangements. As a result, many homeless young people struggle in obtaining education, or fall out of the educational system altogether. Congress has responded to the educational needs of homeless children and youth by establishing laws and a grant program (the EHCY program) which ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness shall have a right to enroll, attend, and succeed in school. **We urge Congress to reauthorize and strengthen the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program during No Child Left Behind reauthorization.**

Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education offers students experiencing homelessness and others hope for escaping poverty as adults. The Higher Education Act has the potential to assist disconnected youth to graduate from high school, apply for and access postsecondary education, and complete their degrees – if they can access the network of HEA programs and services. The most basic access barrier facing homeless students is the very ability to apply for student financial assistance. **We Urge Congress to approve the FAFSA Fix for Homeless Kids Act** (H.R. 601, Biggert), legislation that would allow youth to be considered independent students for purposes of applying for financial aid (the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid) if they have been verified as an unaccompanied homeless youth by a school district homeless liaison, shelter director, or financial aid administrator.

We also encourage the establishment of a supportive services program for disconnected postsecondary students and the establishment of a grant program to colleges and universities so that they may assist homeless students in retaining campus or off-site housing during periods when the institutions are closed.

Workforce Investment

Income is a necessary tool which unaccompanied youth must possess in order for them to pay for housing and thus exit homelessness. Workforce services for youth entail far more than job readiness training and job placement. Because of their developmental stage, youth require comprehensive, intensive employment and training programs that involve the following: job skill training, including classroom training, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships; training in life skills and work-related values; exploration of life options, including career paths that are non-traditional for a youth's gender, race, culture and/or social class; meaningful connections between youth and their peers, adults, and communities; opportunities for youth to assume leadership roles and develop responsibility, self-reliance, initiative and the desire and ability to participate in decisions affecting their lives; opportunities that take into account the life circumstances of youth, such as housing, health, and transportation; and connections to postsecondary education and training opportunities. Like other systems, unaccompanied youth are experiencing difficulty accessing workforce services in their communities. We urge the Committee to use the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act to help connect unaccompanied youth to the workforce. **We ask that runaway and homeless youth organizations be added as members of local Youth Councils. We also call for an assurance that Youth Councils permit unaccompanied youth to participate in workforce services without parental consent.**

Place to Call Home Act

In February 2007, the National Network for Youth announced a long-term campaign to end youth homelessness. ***A Place to Call Home: The National Network for Youth's Permanency Plan for Unaccompanied Youth***. Our Family supports the Place to Call Home Campaign.

The signature public policy component of the campaign is the **Place to Call Home Act**, comprehensive legislation to prevent, respond to, and end runaway and homeless situations among youth. The bill includes provisions in the homeless assistance, housing, child welfare, juvenile justice, public health, education, workforce investment, teen parenting, and immigration areas. Representative Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX) will introduce the bill imminently. **We encourage Members of Congress to join as original co-sponsors to the Place to Call Home Act.**

Witness Biography

Sue Krahe-Eggleston

Executive Director since 1991

Our Family (formerly OUR TOWN), Tucson, Arizona

Sue Krahe-Eggleston pours her heart into the Pima County community, where for the past 16 years as Executive Director of Our Family she has helped at-risk children, youth and families become healthy, self-sufficient and productive members of society. Krahe-Eggleston in 2005 completed the complex merger of OUR TOWN and Family Counseling Agency, two long-standing social services agencies, to form Our Family. Last year, the new organization served more than 29,000 at-risk children, youth, families, seniors and disabled adults through counseling, education, housing, mediation and crisis assistance.

Leadership

Krahe-Eggleston is a nationally recognized advocate for children and family social services. She actively solicits ideas and feedback from her staff, board, donors and clients, based on her conviction that transparency, long-term planning and stakeholder engagement are critical to success. Her strategic planning, financial management and staff recruitment skills have built Our Family into a streamlined, re-energized and efficient organization with about 100 staff members and an active corps of volunteers. Krahe-Eggleston is now determined to increase the agency's visibility and scope of services, centralize its operations and expand its private funding sources.

Affiliations

Board of Directors member of National Network For Youth

Served as Chair of the Child Welfare League of America's National Committee on Youth

HHS grant reviewer and peer reviewer

Served as board member of Western States Youth Network

Served in Tucson on mayor's task force on violent youth

Served on Tucson police chief's advisory council

Serves on city and county substance-abuse commission

Active Rotarian, football mom and grandmother