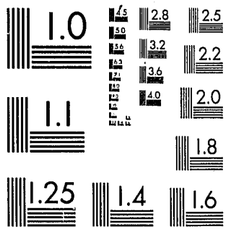

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Office of Human Development Services
Administration for Children, Youth and Families
Youth Development Bureau

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
National Evaluation of the Runaway Youth Program

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NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE RUNAWAY YOUTH PROGRAM
October 1977 to May 1979

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most difficult transition in human development occurs as one passes from childhood into adulthood. It is a time when the old rules one has lived by seem unacceptable and awkward, yet new rules have not yet had time to develop. While it is true that most children successfully cross the bridge into adult life, few do so without experiencing some period of great uncertainty about their own worth and bewilderment over exactly how and where they will assume new roles in society. The awkwardness of youth has many sources both within the individual as well as within the general society. By definition, a youth is locked into a life stage in which he or she is neither totally dependent nor totally free. Adolescents are expected to begin making their own decisions regarding their choice of friends, hobbies, interests, and mobility patterns. At the same time, they are expected to obey their parents, obey school officials, and above all "stay out of trouble." They are their own persons, yet are still subject to a wide range of external controls. They are told to be responsible and independent, while they are also being told they cannot work and, in fact, see little of the productive side of society. Given all the conflicting signals, it is not surprising that teenagers have problems; it is amazing that most are able to overcome them.

Beginning in the 1960s, the problems of youth took on new dimensions. Adolescents and young people having difficulty adjusting to the new responsibilities of adult life were no longer simply problems for their parents. Society as a whole began wondering how to control the upcoming generation. Beyond the political manifestations of the youth movement, youth in general, and in greater numbers, were acting in ways requiring larger degrees of social control. From 1950 to 1972, the number of actual delinquency cases brought into the juvenile courts throughout the country increased from 280,000 to 1,112,500, and the ratio of cases to the youth population (11-18 years of age) rose from 1.6% to 3.4%.[1] Truancy and dropout rates in high schools climbed dramatically. Although there has been little talk of dropouts in the past few years, urban school districts estimate that as much as 10% of their enrollment[2] attend school only sporadically. Running away

[1] Juvenile Court Statistics, Office of Youth Development, 1972, p. 415.

[2] Children's Defense Fund, Children Out of School in America, October 1974, pp. 2-3.

became a common response to family and social pressures, reaching what a Senate committee in 1973 called "epidemic proportions." Based on the findings of the National Statistical Survey on Runaway Youth, it is estimated that 733,000 young persons annually leave home at least overnight without the permission of their parents or legal guardians.

Although the problem of youth running away from home was not new to the 1960s, the dimensions of the problem and the reactions of the general public were unique to this period. Church groups and other community-based private service agencies, such as settlement houses, YMCAs, and existing youth service agencies, were the first to recognize the specific service needs of this particular youth subpopulation. Several of these agencies began providing temporary shelter and counseling to youth on the run, locating their shelter facilities in church basements, abandoned store fronts, and, in some cases, the private homes of volunteers. These early runaway shelters made every attempt to put youth in touch with their parents and to help youth return home. Their primary objective, however, was to keep youth off the streets and thereby reduce the likelihood that they would fall victims to acts of violence. While counseling and general support services were available if the youth requested such assistance, the early shelter facilities were largely informal and served as places of refuge for the thousands of youth who found themselves a long distance from home with little, or no, money and few, if any, friends.

By the spring of 1972, the issue of runaway youth grew from being a collective concern of residents in certain communities to being a collective concern of federal policy makers. The swelling number of runaway youth began to overwhelm the volunteer staff and limited operating budgets of the early shelters. In response to this growing demand for services, Congress began holding public hearings, first in the Senate and then in the House, to define the nature of the runaway youth problem in the United States and to develop a legislative program that would alleviate these difficulties. The National Runaway Youth Program, initiated under the authorization of Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, was designed to address this "epidemic" of running away.

Since passage of the Act, the organizational form of these projects as well as their staffing patterns and service delivery systems have undergone substantial changes, with the majority becoming more complex, multi-dimensional youth service agencies. Despite this pattern of organizational growth, the service philosophy of these projects has remained constant. The early runaway shelters developed from a humanistic value base which regarded immediate accessibility, trust, non-judgmental and supportive interaction, and the rights of youth as the tenets of quality service delivery. Although much of the informality of the earlier system has given way to more formal operating procedures, the value system inherent in the initial runaway shelters has been successfully retained by the more established projects and has been successfully transmitted to many of the newer programs. This value system has, in effect, become a system-wide ethic which ensures that, regardless of the specific project from which youth seek assistance, they can be assured of having their needs met and their problems addressed in the manner most supportive and comfortable to them as opposed to the manner most convenient to the service provider.

The Youth Development Bureau (YDB)[1] has administered the Runaway Youth Act since its passage. This Act authorizes the provision of grants, technical assistance, and short-term training to public and private non-profit agencies, located outside of the law enforcement structure and the juvenile justice system, for the development and/or strengthening of community-based programs of service which provide temporary shelter, counseling, and after-care services to runaway or otherwise homeless youth and their families.[2] These services are provided both directly by the projects and through linkages established with other service providers in the community. The goals of the Runaway Youth Act, as mandated by Section 315 of the legislation, are as follows:

(1) to alleviate the needs of youth during the runaway episode;

(2) to reunite youth with their families and to encourage the resolution of intrafamily problems;

(3) to strengthen family relationships and to encourage stable living conditions for youth; and

(4) to help youth decide upon a future course of action.[3]

To date, YDB has supported a number of initiatives -- both programmatic and research -- designed to enhance the planning and delivery of services to runaway or otherwise homeless youth and their families. Since June 1977, YDB has been receiving uniform data through the Intake and Service Summary Form on each youth who is provided ongoing services from the Runaway Youth Act-funded projects. The data compiled through these Forms are used by both YDB and the projects to profile the types of clients being served and their

[1]The Youth Development Bureau is located within the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Office of Human Development Services, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. *

[2]During FY 1977, when the contract for the National Evaluation of the Runaway Youth Program was awarded, 127 projects nationwide were being supported under the provisions of the Runaway Youth Act. Currently, 166 projects are receiving support. In addition to these project grants, support is also being provided to the National Toll-Free Communication System, designed to serve as a neutral channel of communication between runaway youth and their families and to refer them to needed services within their communities.

[3]These goals, as well as the target populations to be served by the funded projects, have undergone a series of modifications and refinements since the passage of the Act in 1974. Most notable have been amendments approved by Congress in 1977 that included "otherwise homeless youth" in the Act's target population and YDB's modification of the second goal, requiring projects to reunite youth with their families only "if this [unification] is determined to be in the youth's best interests."

*Now the Department of Health and Human Services

service requirements, including changes in both over time.[1] Additionally, YDB has undertaken several research initiatives designed to examine the needs, problems, and service requirements of specific subpopulations of runaway youth and to provide the knowledge base required to further strengthen the provision of services to these youth.

Combined, the client and research data provide YDB with an information base on runaway youth and on programmatic strategies for addressing their needs. These data, however, are not sufficient to answer the more qualitative questions regarding the effectiveness of the Runaway Youth Act-funded projects in meeting the needs of the youth and families served. In order to obtain these data, YDB contracted with Berkeley Planning Associates to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the National Runaway Youth Program. This study, which was conducted over a 19-month period, was designed to obtain evaluative data along two separate, but parallel, dimensions: a determination of the extent to which a representative sample of the projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act have operationalized the four legislative goals (the organizational goal assessment study phase); and a determination of the impact of the services provided on the clients served as measured against these same goals (the client impact study phase). Additionally, BPA also conducted a cost analysis designed to profile the projects' costs and expenditures, including the allocation of these resources to specific services and activities.

I. SUMMARY OF EVALUATION PROCESS AND COMPONENTS

Throughout the evaluation effort, several interrelated objectives were pursued simultaneously. While we were principally concerned with the "outcome" or effectiveness of the runaway youth projects funded by YDB in terms of their legislative mandate, we were also interested in furthering the total body of knowledge available in the area of youth services. The study was designed not only to look at the aggregate impact of the National Runaway Youth Program but also to explore the unique aspects of projects' functioning, highlighting the different approaches to service delivery employed by individual projects. More specifically, the study sought to provide evaluative information for answering the following key policy questions:

[1]The data compiled through the Intake and Service Summary Form include the demographic characteristics of the youth; their family settings/living situations prior to receiving project services; the specific reasons they sought/were referred to services; their sources of referral to the projects; their previous runaway episodes and involvement with the juvenile justice system, as applicable; the services they received both directly from the project and through referrals to other service providers in the community; and their living arrangements at the termination of project services, including, as applicable, the reason(s) they did not return home.

- Have the projects operationalized the four goals of the program as legislatively specified?
- What project, client, or community factors have facilitated or hindered goal operationalization?
- What additional, local goals have been developed and operationalized by the projects to impact positively on their clients?
- Have the projects had an impact (in terms of the four legislative goals) on the clients they serve?
- What services, methods of service provision, or client factors have the greatest influence on a project's capacity to have positive impact on the clients served?
- What are the costs or providing various services to these clients?
- In what way is the degree of operationalization of the legislative goals related to client impact?
- What project, client and community factors account for the congruence or lack of it between goal operationalization and client impact?

In order to provide a thorough assessment of the runaway youth projects and to provide assistance to the Youth Development Bureau in identifying the most useful evaluative data to be collected on an ongoing basis, the study was subdivided into three distinct functional areas:

- the organizational goal assessment;
- the client impact assessment; and
- the cost analysis of project functioning.

Prior to initiating these activities, a series of additional data gathering procedures were undertaken. A comprehensive review of the literature and other documentation relating to runaway youth programming was initiated, including a detailed review of the proposals submitted by all of the projects funded by YDB during 1978. Second, informational site visits were conducted to ten projects to familiarize BPA staff with the similarities and differences in the actual operations of runaway youth projects and to ensure that the evaluation design and instruments subsequently developed were relevant to project functioning and were administratively feasible. The findings from both of these initial reviews served as the backdrop against which the three essential evaluation components were designed and implemented.

One of the first tasks in the conduct of the evaluation was to select a sample of projects for inclusion in the study. It was considered important that the resulting sample represent the full range of projects funded by YDB and capture the "most common" type of project, as opposed to the most unusual

projects. In selecting the sites, we first identified key project factors that (1) were policy relevant, (2) could discriminate among the funded projects, and (3) for which there was an adequate number of projects to permit a comparative analysis. Based on the findings of the proposal review process and discussions with the YDB Project Officer, three variables emerged as capturing the key differences among the funded projects. These variables -- location, affiliated or free-standing status, and length of time in operation -- were used to identify different clusters of YDB-funded projects. In addition to capturing variation on these factors, the sample was also designed to include representation from:

- projects that are located in private as well as public agencies;
- projects from all ten of the HEW regions; and
- projects that operate their own temporary shelter and those that provide temporary shelter through a system of volunteer foster homes.

The 20 evaluation sites provided the testing ground for the evaluation's three major elements. These projects provided the basic unit of analysis for the organizational goal assessment component, while the youth and parents who received services from these projects constituted our sample for the client impact assessment component. Seventeen of the 20 evaluation sites participated in the cost analysis.

A. Organizational Goal Assessment

The organizational goal assessment was designed to determine the extent to which the projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act have successfully operationalized, or implemented, the program's four legislative goals. Our determination of the extent to which projects have operationalized these goals proceeded from two different perspectives: first, the project's capacity to operationalize the specific services and service procedures considered essential for each legislative goal (the goal-specific guidelines); and, second, the project's capacity to achieve an overall well-functioning system (the generic guidelines). In the first instance, we began with the four legislative goals, asking such questions as:

- What services need to be in place for this particular goal to be realized?
- What procedures should the project be following in order to attain this particular goal?
- What community linkages are necessary to successfully realize this goal?

A list of guidelines and indicators that related to the services, procedures, and linkages considered essential for each goal was developed. Factors used in determining whether a project had an adequate capacity to

provide a particular service included the hours during which the service was available; the qualifications of the staff providing the service; the physical requirements necessary to provide the service; and a set of operating procedures that allow for the smooth delivery of the service. These elements constituted the basic requirements for goal operationalization.

In the second phase, we began with the project itself, listing 12 guidelines that were identified as constituting the essential elements of a well-functioning runaway youth project. These generic guidelines, which covered aspects of a project's organizational structure, management system, staff characteristics, community context, and youth participation program, measured each project's capacity to operationalize all of its goals. In developing this list of 12 guidelines, we asked such questions as the following:

- What types of management practices are necessary for smooth and efficient project functioning?
- Are there any specific organizational factors that increase the capacity of a runaway youth project to more effectively meet the needs of its clients?
- Are there any specific ways in which a project can best utilize the resources or overcome the service barriers in its particular community?

These 12 guidelines, while not related to a specific goal, constitute the thrust by which projects are able to advance any goal of their program, including not only the goals of the Runaway Youth Act, but also the wide range of local goals that each project has developed.

While individual elements can be rated as being effective or non-effective, the overall strength of a program is more appropriately captured by examining the relationships among its various functional aspects. In assessing the internal consistency of a project, we asked such questions as the following:

- Are all of the elements consistent in terms of the project's goals and objectives?
- Do some of the elements appear to work at cross purposes or to address divergent needs?
- Does the project claim one operating method, yet operationalize another?

In this stage of the analysis, we addressed these types of questions by first reviewing the ratings given projects on both the goal-specific and the generic guidelines in terms of each project's philosophy and its perception of its most essential goals. We then reviewed this information in light of a project's community context and the specific needs of its

client population. This analysis was useful in pinpointing those service areas in which projects have limited capacity or those organizational areas which, if left unattended, might develop into serious operational difficulties. The analysis also identified key organizational, client, and community factors that influence the extent to and the manner in which the projects have operationalized their goals.

Data used to answer the questions posed by the organizational goal assessment were gathered by BPA field staff during week-long site visits to each of the 20 projects in our evaluation sample. During each of these visits, BPA field staff conducted intensive interviews with individuals carrying out the functions of project director, counseling supervisor, and community liaison, and distributed self-administered questionnaires to the projects' staff. Also, at least three representatives from community agencies with which the project maintained its most important coordination and referral linkages were interviewed. In addition, interviews were conducted with at least one member of the project's advisory board or board of directors, as well as with a representative of the project's affiliate or parent organization, if such an organization existed.

B. Client Impact Assessment

In contrast to the organizational goal assessment, the client impact assessment component examined project performance in terms of the four legislative goals by examining what impact these same 20 projects had on a sample of youth and families they served. Thus, for most of the variables utilized in the client impact analysis, the unit of observation was the individual client; that is, the youth and families served by the runaway project. The evaluation criteria for the client impact study phase were designed to measure whether or not a project had successfully accomplished each of the four goals of the Runaway Youth Act with each individual youth who received project services.

The data collected during the client impact study phase addressed the following key questions:

- What types of youth are being served by the runaway youth projects supported by the Youth Development Bureau, and what types of services are being provided to these youth?
- How successful has the Runaway Youth Program been nationally in accomplishing the four legislative goals?
- How are the different aspects of project success related to each other?
- What factors are associated with observed variation in client impact?

In order to answer the key study questions regarding the impact of the runaway youth projects on the youth and families they serve, Berkeley Planning Associates collected data on a sample of clients served at each of the 20 evaluation sites. Within each project, the client sample selected for inclusion in the study consisted of all youth who received temporary shelter and left the shelter system during a five-week period from June 26 through July 30, 1978.

To generate data about the impact of project services on these clients, interviews were conducted by local interviewers hired by BPA with three respondents for each case: the youth, the parent figure with whom the youth had had most contact during the three months prior to arrival at the runaway project, and the counselor or other staff member at the project who had the most contact with the youth. An attempt was made to interview each of these respondents at two different times: first, within 24 hours of the time the youth left temporary shelter; and, again, five weeks after the youth left the project.[1]

The foundation of the client impact findings was a structured set of client impact standards, criteria and indicators. The standards constitute the general principles against which judgments were made to determine whether each of the four legislative goals had been achieved. The criteria represented specific dimensions or aspects of each standard and were designed to more precisely define the outcomes sought by the standards. Each criterion was sufficiently discrete so as to be empirically verifiable. The indicators represented the specific data that documented the extent to which specific aspects of each standard or each criterion had been met. A total of 26 separate criteria and 98 indicators relevant to assessing client impact on the four legislative goals were developed. In addition, it was found that there were several important measures of overall program performance that did not relate clearly to any individual goal. Therefore, a fifth category was developed which we called "overall program performance." The goal or evaluation standard addressed by this category can be thought of as: "to assist youth in addressing their major problems." Thus, if a youth's most pressing problem was family-related, the indicators under this goal tested whether that problem had been adequately resolved, whereas if the youth's major problem was a legal one, the rating on this goal would be based on whether the legal problem was successfully dealt with.

C. Cost Analysis

A cost analysis provides a profile of each project's costs and expenditures in terms of its payroll expenses; non-payroll (or "fixed") expenses such as the costs of rent, mortgage, utilities, and durable equipment; and the imputed expenses of donated resources such as volunteer labor and other items or services which were provided to the project at no cost by the

[1]Our client impact sample consisted of 278 youth. On these youth, we collected 275 counselor at termination interviews, 185 youth at termination interviews, 105 parent at termination interviews, 271 counselor at follow-up interviews, 101 youth at follow-up interviews, and 88 parent at follow-up interviews.

community. Within these large groupings, the cost analysis examined the allocation of resources to specific project activities, such as counseling, shelter coverage, various support services, case management, and general administrative activities. By exploring the costs of providing services at several projects within an overall service program, the cost analysis was able to identify the major activities of the National Runaway Youth Program and then to determine the relative costs of providing these services within each individual project. The analysis also determined comparable costs across all projects for those activities that were provided in common, by adjusting for regional differences in wage and price levels. The "costs" of providing services to runaway youth and their families were examined from essentially three different perspectives:

- actual payroll costs;
- the "dollar value" of all labor resources, including donated labor; and
- total costs, including fixed, or non-payroll, expenditures and donations.

The implementation of the cost analysis consisted of the following elements:

- the identification of the project's distinct activities;
- the identification of the project's resources;
- the identification of the project's donated resources;
- the allocation of paid human resources (payroll) by individual project activities;
- the distribution of indirect labor costs across all services; and
- the valuation of the project's donated human resources (volunteers).

II. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The present evaluation has reviewed the National Runaway Youth Program from a number of perspectives. We explored the performance of the projects studied from the various viewpoints of organizational structure and functioning, costs, and client impact. Each of these individual perspectives suggested a number of findings that have implications for the future development not only of the National Runaway Youth Program but also of the individual projects. These findings are summarized below.

- The National Runaway Youth Program has successfully operationalized the goals of the Runaway Youth Act.

Overall, the YDB-funded projects have successfully operationalized the four goals of the Runaway Youth Act and have implemented those services and service procedures identified as being essential to meeting the immediate

needs of youth, resolving family problems, securing stable living arrangements for youth, and helping youth decide upon a future course of action. With the exception of outreach, aftercare, and follow-up services, the projects did not demonstrate any significant limitations in providing the full range of services most commonly required by the youth and families served. These services include individual counseling, family counseling, group counseling, legal assistance, medical assistance, placement services, and general advocacy and support services. In addition to providing services directly to their clients, the projects also demonstrated solid working relationships with a number of key service providers in their local communities, including welfare departments, juvenile justice agencies, schools, and police.

To operationalize the goals of the Runaway Youth Act involved not only the provision of the services cited above, but also the establishment of a host of other organizational and management policies. The majority of the projects in the evaluation sample were found to have developed a set of written policy procedures; to have conducted formal staff performance reviews; to have implemented careful and thorough case management practices; to have established an open communication system among all staff members; and to have provided opportunities for youth to be involved in the development of their own service plans. In addition, staff at the sample projects generally demonstrated a high level of morale, with the projects experiencing limited degrees of unplanned staff turnover.

- In addition to addressing the legislative goals, the projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act have developed a number of additional goals.

All but one of the 20 evaluation sites have developed local goals to better define the intent and purpose of their programs. Generally, these goals are perceived as being complementary to the goals mandated in the Runaway Youth Act and have been developed by the projects in order to more adequately mold their service thrusts to the needs of their particular communities. While the local goals identified by the project directors and staff varied across the 20 projects, the most frequently cited local goals include youth advocacy, prevention and outreach, and community resource building and network participation. In addition to these three categories, the projects also cited as local goals such issues as education (in terms of sex and health issues and youth rights); youth employment; youth participation; aftercare; drug prevention; diverting status offenders from the juvenile justice system; helping youth develop a positive role model; and directing seriously disturbed families into longer-term counseling.

- The projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act are extremely diverse both in terms of their structures and their client populations.

Despite their common funding source and the implementation of a common set of legislative goals, the projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act demonstrated considerable diversity and range from being solely runaway youth shelter projects to being multi-purpose youth service agencies. Although all projects shared some common understanding of the intention of the Runaway Youth Act, they were not in agreement either as to the

relative importance placed upon the four goals or as to the specific activities necessary to achieve these goals with their clients. Rather than serving as a firm framework within which the individual projects develop their own service programs, the four legislative goals seem only to loosely influence a project's development. For example, when the projects were asked to list the most essential goals of their service program, 60% of these goals were local goals developed at the individual project level, while 40% related to one of the legislative goals. The projects, through the flexible application of the legislative goals as well as the addition of specific local project goals, have developed an overall service effort that is designed to respond to the needs of the local youth population and to their communities.

In addition to the diversity noted among the projects through the organizational goal assessment, the projects also demonstrated considerable diversity in terms of the age range of their client populations, the length of time youth were provided shelter, the extent to which follow-up and aftercare services were being provided, and the extent to which additional services other than individual counseling were being provided. The cost analysis similarly found that project staff were spending the majority of their time on very different forms of activities and on very different types of clients. While most of the projects spent well over half their staff time providing services to housed clients, five of the projects spent at least one-quarter of their staff resources serving non-housed youth.

- A growing "professionalism" was found among the projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act.

In contrast to the initial runaway youth shelters, which operated largely as informal volunteer "counter-culture" service programs, the current YDB-funded projects are professional, well-functioning, alternative youth service centers which are becoming increasingly integrated into their local youth service networks. The organizational goal assessment found the staff at the majority of projects studied to be well-educated, with most having a BA and a substantial minority having MSWs or other graduate-level degrees. Moreover, the majority of the staff had previous experience in youth services both within and outside the public service system. In addition to operating with a more formally trained and educated staff, the current runaway youth projects have also adopted a number of case management practices which have formalized their service delivery system. These include formal case reviews, ongoing counseling supervision, and regular "staffings" with other service providers working with the youth and the parents.

- The most serious service limitations within the National Runaway Youth Program are the provision of follow-up and aftercare services.

While the majority of projects were found to have implemented all or most of the generic and goal-specific guidelines, all but one project demonstrated problems in achieving at least one of these elements. Many of the problems identified during the organizational goal assessment were substantiated by the descriptions of services provided to the youth and families in the client impact sample. When we look at the service data collected during the client impact study phase, we find that only 50% of the clients

had any contact with the project between the termination of temporary shelter and the follow-up interview five weeks later. In addition, only 17% of the clients received any individual counseling on an aftercare basis, and only 6% received family counseling following the termination of temporary shelter. While in a few instances the projects indicated that their service philosophy limits the emphasis they place on the provision of aftercare services, most of the projects do not provide this service simply because they do not have the resources to establish and maintain an active aftercare service component. The current staff resources as well as the general service structure at many of the projects (i.e., the maintenance of a temporary shelter facility) are principally geared toward addressing the immediate needs of youth and to resolving those problems that can be addressed within one or two weeks of service.

While the projects are making a serious attempt to address the longer-term needs of their client populations, current realities suggest that this will be a far more difficult service objective to achieve than might be anticipated. According to our cost analysis, those projects that operate a temporary shelter facility have committed over 25% of their staff resources to simply maintaining and operating the shelter. When one adds the time projects spend providing individual counseling, family counseling, and group activities, a full 42% of all paid staff hours have been covered. Considering that the projects spend, on average, 40% of their staff time on administrative and non-client-specific functions, such as community education programs and general youth advocacy, roughly 18% of the staff's working hours remain to provide the additional services that the projects want to offer to their clients. The cost analysis found that projects currently spend very little time providing such services as follow-up (1%), placement (1%), and support and client-specific advocacy (2%).

- The National Runaway Youth Program is serving a widely diversified client population.

The client impact sample for this evaluation included a sizable number of "pushouts," homeless youth, and youth seeking assistance for non-family-related problems. While the most common type of client served by the projects continues to be runaways (44%), 16% of the client sample reported that they had been "pushed out" of their homes, 20% were away from home with the mutual agreement of their parents, and another 19% were either contemplating running away or were at the project awaiting other long-term residential placements. The client population also differed on a number of other dimensions. While 60% of the client sample had been living with either one or both of their parents or step-parents prior to seeking assistance from the projects, 12% had been living in foster homes or with other relatives, 15% had been living in group homes, and 13% had either been living on their own, with friends, or in some other type of independent living situation. Although the counseling staff reported that the major problem experienced by 53% of the client impact sample was family-related, the remaining 47% of the clients sought services for major problems that were non-family related, ranging from difficulties in school to behavioral or psychological problems. Finally, the projects are accepting a large percentage of their caseloads as referrals from other local public and private service providers. The

national sample showed only 30% of the youth receiving shelter come to the projects on their own. While several of the projects continue to receive a substantial percentage of their clients through self-referrals, that percentage seems to be dwindling in favor of formal public or private agency referrals. As the projects continue to increase their service linkages with public and private agencies, this agency referral rate can be expected to increase.

- The National Runaway Youth Program is achieving substantial positive client impact levels.

In general, the projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act are successfully addressing the immediate needs of the youth they serve. The projects we studied were successful in providing virtually all youth (over 90%) requiring food, shelter, and counseling with these services within the first few hours of the youth's arrival at the project. While the projects showed a slightly less uniform rate of success in immediately addressing a youth's needs for medical and legal assistance, these needs were usually met by the project during the youth's stay in temporary shelter. In contrast to this almost uniformly high performance level in terms of Goal 1, the projects had a far more varied performance rating in terms of the remaining three legislative goals. For example, the projects are perceived by almost two-thirds of the youth and almost half of the parents they serve as being helpful in resolving family problems. This performance level may well be a substantial accomplishment in light of the fact that the projects often face family conflicts that have developed over years of miscommunication which cannot be thoroughly resolved through the limited number of family counseling sessions that most projects are able to provide their clients. The projects were also fairly successful in placing youth in a context that the majority of counselors, youth and parents (72%-79%) perceived as being the "best place" for the youth, an indication that the projects attempt to locate those placements which are most acceptable to all parties involved. Almost half of the youth, however, indicated that they would still consider running away again if the problems they faced got "too bad" for them in the future. While continued runaway behavior may be viewed as a "positive" action and as an indication that the youth recognizes he or she needs assistance, such action within the context of Goal 3 questions the stability of the youth's placement following termination.

In terms of Goal 4, the projects had a fairly consistent rate of success in helping youth become better able to make decisions about the future. For example, 73% of the youth in the client sample indicated at termination that, overall, they had had a say in what happened to them while they were at the project; that they felt they were better able to make decisions about the future; and that they had learned how to use other service resources in their communities. However, the projects demonstrated a wide range of success in resolving a number of their clients' non-family-related problems, such as difficulties with school (48% success), problems with the law (78% success), problems in obtaining a job (30% success), and problems about deciding where to live (88% success).[1]

[1]All of these percentages reflect the percent of youth interviewed at termination who felt that their problems in these areas had been resolved or somewhat resolved as a result of project services.

The level of success that the projects exhibited on certain of the impact indicators may represent exceptional achievements or may merely be average performance ratings for projects which serve youth and families in crisis. In the absence of related previous client impact research, it is not possible to either praise or to be highly critical of the observed performance. The varied success rates among the four legislative goals may be reflective of the types of difficulties cited in previous discussions relating to the problems that projects encounter in attempting to accomplish too much, given their limited resources. Considering the wide range of impacts covered by the legislative goals, it is not at all surprising to find that the projects cannot resolve all of the problems of all of the youth they serve.

- In general, the projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act achieve similar success with a wide variety of clients.

Client characteristics such as age, prior runaway history, family composition or referral source did not dramatically influence the extent to which the projects achieved positive client impact. The analysis found that the projects did equally well with all types of clients, including those youth experiencing such complicated and serious problems as abuse or neglect and repeated contact with the juvenile justice system. The only two factors that demonstrated a significant relationship to the extent to which positive client impact was achieved were the motivation of the youth to resolve his or her problems and family contact with the project. For example, the family problems of those youth identified by project staff as being more motivated than other clients were resolved or somewhat resolved in 72% of the cases, while only 49% of those youth identified as being less motivated achieved a positive rating on this indicator. Similarly, 61% of the more motivated youth said they did not feel they would need to run away again if things "got bad" in the future, while only 36% of the less motivated youth shared this opinion. While the counselors felt that 84% of the more motivated youth were better able to make decisions about their future, they attributed this specific skill to only 40% of the less motivated youth.

In those cases where a youth's family had participated in project services, 85% of the youth felt that the project had helped them understand and work out their problems, whereas 70% of the youth whose parents had not had contact with the project felt this way. Similarly, while 66% of the youth whose parents had had contact with the project felt their family problems had been resolved or somewhat resolved, 51% of the youth whose parents had not had contact with the project shared this opinion. Finally, while 80% of the youth whose parents had had contact with the project felt that they were going to the "best place" following the termination of temporary shelter, only 68% of the youth whose parents had not had contact felt that the living situation to which they were going was the "best place."

- The National Evaluation found that a positive relationship exists between goal operationalization and positive client impact.

The comparative analysis conducted between the organizational goal assessment and the client impact assessment data found the two components to have a positive relationship. In general, this relationship was strongest on those indicators identified under Goal 4 -- to help youth decide upon a future course of action. For example, 62% of the youth served by those projects that had

achieved all of the generic guidelines felt the project had been generally helpful; only 52% of the youth served by the projects failing to achieve a number of the generic guidelines shared this opinion. Although relatively few of the client impact indicators varied significantly according to project performance on either the goal-specific or generic guidelines, those instances where a statistically significant relationship was found almost always showed that those projects that had achieved these guidelines outperformed those projects that had not achieved the guidelines.

- The projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act are expanding their fiscal capacities by generating new funding sources and developing volunteer programs.

With rare exceptions, the projects funded under the Runaway Youth Act are operating far more complex and diverse service programs than would be possible if they relied solely upon their YDB funding. While the average YDB grant for the sample of projects participating in the cost analysis was $67,000, the average operating budget for these projects was $146,000. The most common other funding sources utilized by the projects include categorical grants or fee-for-service contracts obtained through LEAA, NIMH, Title XX, and local, state, and county agencies. The projects also draw heavily upon funds from both local and national private foundations. In addition to obtaining other direct funding, the projects also have been successful in expanding their total pool of available resources through the careful cultivation of volunteer staff time and other forms of donated resources. The cost analysis found that the projects, on average, generate an additional $3,000 worth of resources per month through the use of volunteer labor and other donated resources.

- A variety of service, client, and fiscal concerns are giving way to emerging new service models within the area of runaway youth services.

The free-standing, non-affiliated runaway youth shelter project, which served as the primary service model for the Runaway Youth Act, may be a model that projects will find increasingly difficult to maintain. First, continued inflation is constantly increasing the costs of maintaining a shelter facility. The cost analysis found that those projects that operate a temporary shelter facility have almost three times the fixed costs (i.e., rent, utilities, etc.) as those projects not maintaining a shelter, and these projects have to devote at least 25% of their payroll resources to maintaining and supervising the facility. Second, the client impact analysis suggests that large numbers of youth are being provided shelter by the projects for longer than one or two weeks. This expansion in the average length of stay stems partly from the various characteristics of the clients, such as the high percentage of youth requiring out-of-home placements. However, the client impact analysis suggests that the length of stay in shelter facilities does, in fact, correspond in a positive manner to the level of success that the projects achieve with clients on certain indicators. For example, 90% of those youth who received temporary shelter for more than 14 days were described by project staff as being better able to make decisions about the future, while only 43% of the youth who received a single night of shelter and 56% of the youth who stayed two to seven nights at the project were viewed in this manner. Similarly, 72% of the youth who had stayed at a

project over two weeks reported that the project had helped resolve their major problem while only 50% of the youth who stayed one night and 42% of the youth who stayed two to seven nights shared this opinion.

Both the rising costs of maintaining shelter facilities and the increased average length of stay for clients are factors which might well influence the future structure of runaway youth programs. For example, several projects have already adopted another, less costly, method of providing temporary shelter to clients, namely the use of a volunteer network of foster homes. While this model is certainly attractive from a cost perspective, the client impact data found that those projects that provide shelter in this manner house far fewer youth than those projects that operate their own temporary shelter facilities. Other projects have sought to resolve the cost dilemma by expanding into multi-purpose youth service centers or by formalizing a series of service linkages with other local service providers. It is not yet clear how these shifts in organizational form or service delivery will affect the long-run future of the temporary shelter model. It is clear, however, that the free-standing, non-affiliated runaway youth project is becoming a rarer sight in the area of youth services.

III. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it would appear that, on average, the YDB-funded projects are effectively addressing the intent and goals of the Runaway Youth Act. They have been able to do so, however, only by expanding their total resources with substantial volunteer staff time as well as additional federal, state, and local funding. Even with these additional resources, however, the projects in our evaluation sample demonstrated clear difficulties in providing the wide range of services required to fully achieve all aspects of the Runaway Youth Act. In an attempt to overcome these shortcomings, the projects have expanded their organizational base, often forming coalitions or service networks with other small community-based youth service agencies or evolving into multi-faceted youth service agencies. This growth has moved a large percentage of the projects away from the free-standing, temporary shelter service model that dominated the alternative youth services movement in the late 1960s. While projects still consider the provision of temporary shelter to be one of their primary services, projects have also found it increasingly necessary to expand their services to address those issues beyond the immediate crisis period. Several projects are focusing their energies on preventing a runaway episode by encouraging youth and parents to seek assistance before a situation becomes explosive; other projects are shifting away from a "temporary" shelter model and have begun to provide shelter to youth for longer periods of time and to encourage families to enter into long-term counseling arrangements.

The implications of this expanded service focus and new organizational form has been that projects have, on balance, become more professional and mainstream in their working relationships with other service providers, and have formalized their management structures and internal service delivery systems. This new "professionalism," however, has not detracted from the

ability of projects to provide viable service alternatives for youth and parents. It is quite likely that youth receiving assistance from the projects are youth who would not, for a variety of reasons, seek assistance from the traditional public service sector. The hallmarks of the alternative approach to youth services -- namely, 24-hour availability, strong feelings regarding client confidentiality, services offered free of charge, and a respect for the rights of youth to determine the services they will receive -- remain very much in place at these projects.

END