

# Best practices: serving youth & young adults experiencing homelessness

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Washington State  
Department of  
**Commerce**

# Office of Homeless Youth (OHY)

## Guiding Vision

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*Every family and youth in Washington State has the individualized support they need so that no young person has to spend a single night without a safe and stable home. Every community has services that are equitable, accessible, effective, responsive, and coordinated.*

# Who we serve

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Young people ages 12 through 24 who are living on their own, without a parent or guardian, and are without a safe, stable living arrangement.

Also referred to as “unaccompanied” youth

# Shelter, Outreach, Housing Programs

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- Short-term shelter for youth under age 18 through **HOPE Centers** and **Crisis Residential Centers**
- **Young Adult Shelter**
- **Street outreach** services for youth and young adults
- Housing for young adults through **Young Adult Housing Program** and **Independent Youth Housing Program**
- **Transitional Housing** for youth ages 16-17

# Reflection

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What were you like as a teenager or young adult?



# Adolescent development

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- Key developmental window
- Peers become more important than parents
- Identity formation
- Need to practice independence, have agency
- Creative exploration

# A unique period that demands a tailored approach

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## Young people who experience homelessness often:

- Lack work experience
- Have not completed their education
- Do not have experience living independently
- Have never been on their own lease before
- Don't have established credit
- Are at greater risk of victimization

# Myth-busting: Majority of youth do not choose to be homeless

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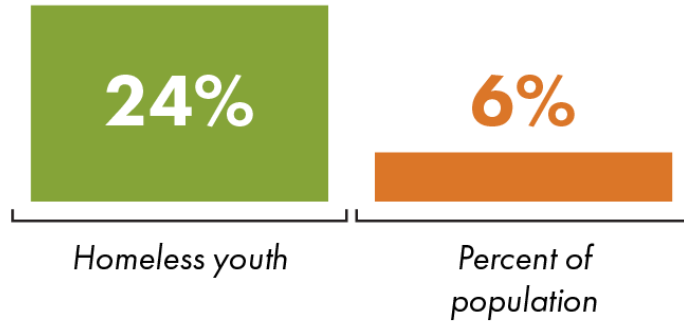
- **Relational factors:** family conflict or dysfunction, rejection due to sexual orientation or gender identity
- **System failures:** foster care, justice system, physical and mental health care
- **Structural factors:** economic instability, underemployment, generational poverty, institutional racism

Source: AWH Canada

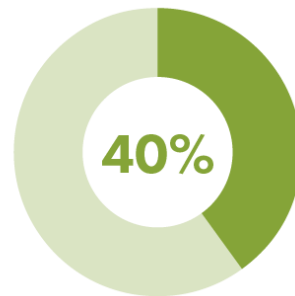


# BIPOC and LGBTQ youth at highest risk

## BLACK YOUTH



In Yakima County, **American Indian youth** represent **10%** of youth accessing services, but only make up **5%** of the population



**UP TO 40% OF HOMELESS YOUTH IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ**

# Anti-racist approach

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- Use data and measure performance to ensure racial equity
- Shift power
- Practice being anti-racist in our approach, process, environment and culture.



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