



# **2007 INDEPENDENT LIVING SURVEY PROJECT**

## **Identifying and Understanding the Needs of Homeless Youth In Tompkins County, New York**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**  
**September 24, 2007**

***"We are not hopeless, do not give up."***

### **A Collaboration Among:**

**Family Life Development Center,  
Cornell University**

**Tompkins County Youth Services Department**

**The Learning Web**

**Young Adult Participants in the Learning Web's  
Youth Outreach Program**

*This project was undertaken for the Tompkins County Continuum of Care Committee and the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County. It was made possible with support from Cornell University's Faculty Fellows-In-Service program and the Family Life Development Center*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In conjunction with the Tompkins County Continuum of Care Committee (CoC), the county's planning entity for homeless services, and in response to a community need to document the number of homeless youth, the 2007 Independent Living Survey (ILS) Project was conducted. The 2007 ILS, a community-based participatory research project, was a follow up to the initial, similar survey completed in 2003, the results of which have had a significant impact on the community. The CoC asked us to repeat this effort in order to update the findings and assess change over time.

Young people approach the issue of shelter differently than adults, often preferring the uncertainties of their housing situations over the perceived loss of control associated with shelters and residential programs. As such, they are rarely captured by traditional measures used to assess the prevalence of homelessness, such as point-in-time counts and shelter statistics. Thus, efforts to count or otherwise describe homeless youth that rely primarily upon these data sources vastly underestimate the true extent of the problem.

Both the 2003 and 2007 ILS projects used an innovative approach which engaged a group of currently and formerly homeless youth as research partners who were able to reach those individuals not connected to programs or services, the invisible and underserved sector of the homeless youth population. Once again, the project was enormously successful: we reached 204 young people during a six week period of the winter (we estimate that this is almost one-third of the homeless youth population in the county).

The Independent Living Survey Project has been the catalyst for a rich public discussion about this sizeable population of youth in the community and has generated the public will to prioritize articulating a "continuum of care" that is focused exclusively on the needs of homeless youth.

## **PROJECT PARTNERSHIP**

This Community-University partnership began in 2003 when the first survey was developed. In the fall of 2006, a study team was formed and began planning the 2007 follow up project. The team engaged 21 youth researchers, all of whom were current participants in the Learning Web's Youth Outreach Program. These young people revised the survey questions, completed Cornell University Human Subjects Training, learned to administer the survey and identify the sample. They administered surveys to the target group of community youth between February 13 and March 21, 2007. Youth who agreed to be interviewed were given a coupon for a free sandwich from a local deli. Youth Researchers earned an hourly stipend for all planning meetings, a flat rate per survey completed, and a sandwich coupon per survey completed.

The goal of gathering 100 surveys was surpassed with 204 youth surveys completed. Cornell undergraduate research assistants compiled the data and generated reports. The youth researchers along with the Study Team met on several occasions to discuss and interpret the findings. In addition, they presented survey findings to key community stakeholders and decision makers. The results are being used to guide community and school efforts to prevent youth homelessness and to fill the gaps in services which unattended youth face daily. We value the time and effort spent by the youth researchers and those they interviewed and thank them for their willingness to share their insights and life experiences.

## POPULATION SURVEYED

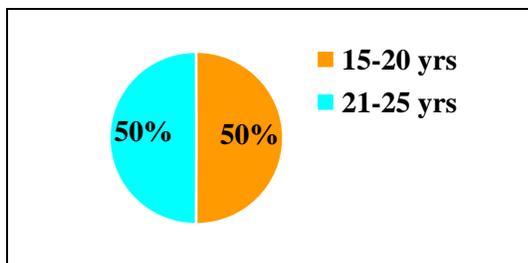
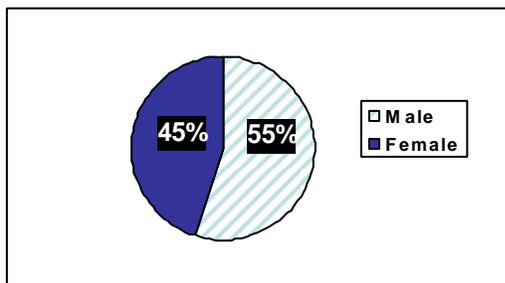
In order to be included in the study, young people had to meet the following criteria:

1. They have “no parental, substitute, foster or institutional home to which they can safely go.”  
(*McKinney Act 1987*);
2. They are age 25 or younger;
3. They are not a Cornell or Ithaca College student;
4. They did not already complete a 2007 survey.

Interviews were conducted with youth primarily in their natural network settings, e.g., in their homes, on the street, and in the community.

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

There was a fairly even distribution regarding the gender and age of the 204 survey respondents. Slightly over half of the sample is male, while exactly half of the sample is under 21 years of age.



### Parenting Status

More young people reported having children in the 2007 survey compared to the 2003 survey. These young people are struggling to provide adequate shelter, food, and education for themselves, let alone for a child and require additional support.

- **31%** of younger youth (less than 21) have children or are pregnant compared to **23%** in 2003.
- **50%** of older youth (21 or older) have children or are pregnant compared to **40%** in 2003.

ETHNICITY	Percentage
White	45%
Black	28%
Hispanic	11%
Bi-Racial	14%
Other	5%

Youth respondents were from diverse racial backgrounds mirroring the local community.

## **SHELTERED, PERHAPS, BUT STILL HOMELESS**

Stable, safe, adequate housing is a necessity for all individuals. When young people do not have a safe place to go that they consider home, they may be able to piece together a patchwork of more or less temporary housing situations, but they are homeless. Although youths' flexibility and resiliency are key to their survival, the lack of basics that has defined so much of their lives has given them a mean standard to assess their own situations. Instability and inadequacy have become the norm regarding many facets of their lives, especially housing.

When designing the ILS survey, we never used the word "homeless" or asked youth to identify themselves as such. Information on housing was collected by providing youth with a list of places and asking them to identify: 1) where they were currently living, and 2) all of the places in which they had stayed during the previous year.

When we asked young people where they were living currently:

- **Almost one in five youth (20%) said they were staying at more than one place.** The number of places that youth said that they were staying ranged from 2 to 8 places.

Though the majority of youth indicate they are currently living in one place, a closer look uncovers both the instability of their housing and the poor conditions in which they live. Like their counterparts in communities across the country, homeless youth in our county piece together their housing using every possible resource and network. Short periods of adequate housing are intertwined with periods of inadequate, unsafe housing, and no housing at all.

The following are quotes from young people describing their current living situations.

***"I live where there's a lot of drug trafficking. Not safe for my kids to play outside on the playground or just outside in general. Landlord takes a long time to fix anything. Too expensive."***

***"Need my own space, not enough space, not enough food."***

***"I hate living downtown, family members are constantly stopping by, lots of yelling late at night from addicts and dealers."***

***"Need a stable environment."***

***"Got three couples staying with me, splitting the rent. I'm the only one with name on lease. We have only one car to get back and forth to work."***

The level of housing instability increases dramatically when looking at youths' housing over the past year:

- **81% of the youth reported staying at multiple places; 55% have lived in 2-5 places in one year, while over 25% have lived in 6-11 places in one year.**

Number of Places You Have Stayed in the Past 12 Months		
Number	15-20 years	21-25 years
1	13%	25.5%
2-3	49%	37.8%
4-5	25.5%	19.4%
6-7	5.8%	10.2%
8-11	6.0%	7.1%

**Homeless youth in Tompkins County are often invisible— staying at multiple places with friends and acquaintances, never knowing where they would be sleeping that night.**

The following chart illustrates where young people were currently living at the time of the survey as well as the places they had lived during the previous year.

CURRENTLY LIVING	15-20 Yr olds	21-25 Yr olds	LIVED WITHIN LAST 12 MONTHS	15-20 Yr olds	21-25 Yr olds
With Parents	12.7%	3.0%	With Parents	37.3%	29.7%
With Guardian/Other relatives	17.7%	7.9%	With relatives/guardian	84.3%	40.6%
Own house, apartment, or room	40.2%	48.5%	Own house apt, or room	44.1%	54.5%
Someone else's house, apartment, or room	31.4%	28.7%	Someone else's house, apartment or room	52.0%	55.4%
Several friends' houses, apartments, or rooms	17.6%	17.8%	Several friend's houses, apartments or rooms	48.0%	47.5%
An abandoned building, anywhere outside	4.0%	3.0%	An abandoned building, anywhere outside	14.7%	13.8%
Van or other vehicle	2.0%	0.0%	Van or other vehicle	7.8%	7.9%
Institution, e.g. CARS or hospital	1.0%	1.0%	Institution, CARS or hospital	3.3%	7.9%
Emergency shelter	6.9%	10.9%	Emergency Shelter	16.7%	20.8%
Community College dormitory/dorm squat	2.9%	1.0%	College dormitory	3.9%	2.0%
Hotel/motel room paid for by self	0%	0%	Hotel /motel room paid for by self	7.8%	19.8%

Approximately one third of all youth surveyed have stayed “with parents” for some period within the last 12 months, but were not able to make this a permanent home. 19% of youth stayed at the Emergency Shelter over the course of the year. Youth who do not use the shelters cite the structure, rules, and lack of privacy as deterrents to their use of these services.

There has been a tendency to see homeless youth as synonymous with runaway youth. However, our findings support the more recent acknowledgement that runaway behavior is not the “unilateral decision of a youngster to leave his or her parental home” (Van der Ploeg, 1997). When asked why they were not currently living with a parent or guardian, reasons of conflict and abuse were cited most often.

REASON FOR LEAVING HOME	Number	Percent
Conflict w/ parents	66	32
Thrown out	52	25
Just left	45	22
Left age 18	42	21
Abuse by parents	31	15
Substance abuse by parents	28	14
Ran away	25	12
Never lived w/ parents	9	4
Parents deceased	6	3
Parents in jail	6	3
Parents homeless	2	1
Had a child	4	2

***“I got thrown out because I was going to have a baby at a young age.”***

***“I was a troubled teen, always in trouble, didn’t have my father and my mom was on drugs bad.”***

Homeless youth who want to improve their lives have told us they need safe and stable housing. Housing was the top need identified by youth -- again and again young people spoke about the need for safe, affordable housing and relief from the daily struggles they face trying to gather the resources needed to secure housing in this county.

### **MANY YOUTH ARE NOT STRANGERS TO SERVICES DESIGNED TO HELP THEM**

Our findings suggest that a significant percentage of youth whom we interviewed have a history of involvement with institutional systems. Just as the families of these young people either failed them or were too dysfunctional to support youth in their development, so, too, did social systems fail these youth.

**Over half of the sample (52%) reported having some system experience** – foster care, jail, detention or psychiatric hospitalization. Almost 1 in 3 (30%) reported experience in 2 to 5 of these systems. The table below illustrates the types of systems experienced by the sample.

PREVIOUS SYSTEMS EXPERIENCE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Prison/jail	28%
Juvenile detention	24%
Foster care	23%
Psychiatric Hospital/Rehab	20%
Group home	17%
Other	2%

## VULNERABLE AND VICTIMIZED: DANGEROUS AND RISKY BEHAVIORS

Through this study, we attempted to learn more about the particular lifestyles of independent youth. Our findings suggest a high level of unhealthy, high-risk behaviors as well as a high degree of vulnerability and victimization in these youths' lives.

It is notable that violence and the threat of violence is a constant reality on the street: **44%** of the respondents reported being threatened or injured in the past year.

- **34%** of younger youth said they carried a weapon (22% all of the time and 12% sometimes).
- **43%** of older youth said they carried a weapon (20% all of the time and 23% sometimes).

It is difficult to gauge the number or type of weapons that youth actually carry on the street. Perhaps more important than the actual number, is the apparent sense of vulnerability these young people experience. Programs designed to work with these young people need to keep this in mind.

### Substance Use

Survey respondents identified a wide range of drugs available in the local community. Substances they reported using over the past six months included:

SUBSTANCE USED	Younger	Older
Cigarettes	84.3%	72.3%
Marijuana	82.4%	59.4%
Alcohol	62.7%	53.5%
Cocaine	24.5%	22.8%
Ecstasy	22.5%	18.8%
Crack	18.6%	13.9%
Hash	20.6%	10.9%
Magic Mushrooms	16.7%	13.9%
Other Prescription Drugs	18.6%	8.9%
Speed/Meth	8.8%	10.9%
Acid/LSD	8.8%	7.9%
Morphine	6.9%	5.9%
Heroin	8.8%	4.0%
Inhalants	6.9%	4.0%
Valium (non-prescribed)	7.8%	2.0%
Ritalin (non-prescribed)	4.9%	1.0%
Special K	4.9%	1.0%
Angel Dust	3.9%	1.0%
Ruffies/Rope/R-2/Rohypno	2.9%	1.0%
Other	2.0%	2.0%

*“Drugs are easy to get and kids are starting to use them at an early age. Then when they want to stop it’s hard because people doubt them. They sometimes are having problems they are dealing with to stay clean.”*

## Frequency of Use

Youth researchers felt that the study respondents underestimated their frequency of drug use. Even so, the results listed in the table below are disturbing. It is significant that while a higher percentage of older youth (43%) report using abusive substances "practically every day" more than 26% of this group also reported they did not use any drugs in the last month. In contrast, 36% of the younger youth reported using abusive substances "practically every day" while almost 20% reported no use in the last month.

Frequency of Drug Use	Younger	Older
Practically every day	36.1%	42.5%
2-3 times per week	21.6%	18.8%
Once a week	13.4%	8.8%
Once a month or less	9.3%	3.8%
None in the last month	19.6%	26.3%

The connection between boredom and drug use was frequently observed by our survey respondents. They repeatedly told us that young people need more things to do to keep them off the streets.

***"Help teens with their lives, help them stay out of the streets."***

***"More things for teens to do so they're not in the streets."***

***". . . that we need more activities for young children."***

***"Need more things to help young people. Stay out of trouble, stay away from drugs."***

***"We don't always enjoy doing what we have to do in order to survive"***

***"Not enough jobs, community centers for after school programs so the youth could be more constructive in a positive way other than money, sex, and drugs and violence....."***

## EMOTIONAL HEALTH

For the first time we collected data about emotional health using the Kessler Mental Health Scale. The respondents were asked to assess how often during the past 30 days that they had felt: nervous, hopeless, so depressed that nothing could cheer them up, that they did not have the energy to do anything, worthless, and so restless they couldn't focus on anything.

Given their instability, we expected to find that a majority of the youth experienced depression at least part of the time. We were very surprised to see that most young people interviewed did **not** report a high number of symptoms of depression. In examining the extreme ends of the data, about 25% reported experiencing depressive symptoms (i.e., feeling nervous, hopeless, depressed, low on energy, worthless, and restless) “none of the time” while only 5% responded they experienced them “most of the time.”

Youth members of the study team were asked about possible reasons why the young people in the sample were not reporting high levels of depression despite the stresses of living on their own. Based on their own experience they felt that youth experience depression **before** leaving home; that which young people encounter afterwards is better than what they left behind. Other reasons could include:

- Youth don't experience depression because they are so acclimated to their living conditions;
- Youth under-report depression: they feel guilty about reporting symptoms when they are surrounded by peers who have to deal with similar problems, or they are ashamed to admit depression and appear weak or vulnerable.

## SOCIAL SUPPORT

The question of who these young people turn to for support is a crucial one, given how important “being connected” is to the health and well being of adolescents. In our last study, as in this one, we have a substantial number of individuals who do not have anyone to whom they can turn for support --- and few can go to their families.

The majority of respondents turn to peers for support, other young people with similar backgrounds living on their own with little positive and healthy experience or skills to share with a friend in need. It is therefore very important that youth involved in relationships find the kind of support necessary to keep these connections mentally and physically healthy ones.

Who do you turn to for support?	Younger N=102	Older N=102
Friends	61.8%	44.6%
Family member	28.4%	33.7%
No one	<b>30.4%</b>	<b>27.7%</b>
Girlfriend/boyfriend	29.4%	26.7%
Other	4.9%	8.9%

The importance of having someone to talk to appears to be a major issue especially for the younger respondents, 40% of whom identified this as one of their top five needs (see below). These data are important for service providers since they indicate a strong desire to be heard. Including authentic youth voice in service delivery models will likely attract this population of youth and keep them engaged in programs.

**MAKING ENDS MEET---WORK, EDUCATION, AND A FUTURE**

**Work**

Most of the young people whom we surveyed want to work. They repeatedly told us:

***“ [there are] not enough job opportunities out there.”***  
***“We’re not afraid to work for what we want.”***  
***“There should be more help out there with schooling and finding jobs for young people who want to do something with themselves.”***  
***“. . . employers need to be more willing to take on entry-level applicants and pay a living wage.”***

The challenges that these young people face trying to secure and maintain employment are great. They are attempting to be self-sufficient adults without having had the benefit of a supported adolescence in which they could complete their education, develop their capacities and talents, acquire basic employability skills, and develop the critical reasoning and moral judgment required to live satisfying, self-sufficient adult lives. Even once they secure work; it is often difficult for them to maintain a job given their transient lifestyle. Those youth who are able to maintain a job for any length of time quickly discover themselves in a low-wage limbo with its own Catch-22: as soon as they begin earning a wage, even a minimum wage, any public subsidies that they may be receiving are reduced often leaving them further behind, unable to pursue longer-term goals.

**Education**

Many of the young people whom we surveyed recognize the need to complete their education, pursue additional schooling, or earn a professional credential. Many spoke about how difficult it is to support themselves and attend school.

<b>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</b>	<b>15-20 yrs percent</b>	<b>21-25 yrs percent</b>
<b>Yes, graduated from high school or got my GED</b>	42.2%	66.3%
<b>No, still in high school</b>	22.5%	2.0%
<b>No</b>	35.3%	31.7%

Tompkins County has the lowest percentage of residents who have not completed high school and the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest percentage of residents who have a college degree in New York State. This combination spells disaster for homeless youth, most of whom have dropped out of high school or who at most have completed their high school studies. Employment opportunities for these youth occur mostly in low wage, low skilled service sector jobs. Youth must compete with Cornell and Ithaca College students and graduates for these positions.

Tompkins County's major employment sectors are education, health and human services. 74% of the job growth in the county from 1994-2003 occurred in these sectors and comprises 40% of the county's economic base. Manufacturing is the other major area comprising 30% of the county's economic base. High tech industry, agriculture and tourism are also significant employment sectors in the county.<sup>1</sup> County and city economic plans are encouraging the development of cyber commerce and the high technology sector. While good news for the overall economy, few of the homeless young people will find employment in these high-wage sectors. These new companies tend to have fewer than 20 employees and require high levels of education and technical skills.

Many young people spoke about their short and long range educational goals. These goals are very reasonable and not unlike the goals of other community youth: respondents said that they wanted to return to school, complete a GED, get more education, attend college, or earn a professional certificate (i.e., to become an accountant, registered nurse, real estate agent, or computer programmer).

Youth also told us—once again—about the painful reality of trying to achieve goals when combined with adult responsibilities such as maintaining housing, working, possibly caring for children, and meeting the commitments to service providers such as DSS and Probation. They are quick to point out how difficult it is to get ahead when the very systems designed to help them seem to penalize them whenever they achieve a milestone. Youth may secure a job and work hard, but low wages barely enable them to cover the basics, especially once their food stamp or housing allowances are reduced as a result of their earnings. They know that the path to a more fulfilling and better paying job is to finish school, earn a professional certificate, or get a college degree but it is hard, if not impossible, to do this while working full-time and attending to other responsibilities.

***“We need help to secure our future. I go to school and work full time. I am a single parent and I need help once I finish my education. I am trying to be independent.”***

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<sup>1</sup> Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan, Planning for Our Future. Tompkins County Planning Dept. 2004.

**THE TOP FIVE NEEDS**

Youth were also asked to identify their top five needs. There was not much difference between how younger and older youth answered this question except in regards to having someone to talk to— 40% of younger youth expressed a strong need for someone that they could talk to and turn to for support.

Need	Younger (15-20 yrs)	Older (21-25 yrs)
Housing	63%	55%
Education	57%	49%
Finding a Job	49%	41%
Transportation	46%	49%
Someone to talk to	40%	16%

**VISIONING THEIR FUTURE**

We also asked about plans and goals for the future. These data confirmed what we found four years ago: respondents’ goals are very reasonable, not outlandish in any way shape or form; not unlike the goals of other community youth; these young people want a normal life – to go to school, start a career, and develop relationships. The study team was struck by how reasonable the expressed plans and goals for the future sounded. Almost half want to pursue a "Career/Job" and 41% plan to "Pursue education". Yet it is also interesting to note that "Personal Fulfillment" was reported more often than "Financial security" (these are primarily adolescents after all).

***“People do want to change lifestyles. It is just hard when people are used to you messing up and not really trusting you want to change.”***

The respondents repeatedly spoke about how difficult it is to pursue their goals with the limited resources available to them.

This is our challenge. Our community must find ways to build support --- through better, affordable housing, job training and placement, and access to education. It remains the responsibility of everyone who works with these youth to help them find the resources and amass the skills necessary to meet their educational, career and life goals. This may mean having to modify the systems that provide these supports to better meet the needs of these unattended youth.

## HEARING THEIR VOICES

And finally--- we asked if there was anything that they wanted people in power to know about young people such as themselves. This question provoked some very powerful commentary. Some respondents reiterated the kinds of programs or assistance that youth need and many spoke again about the need for more activities and programs. They also spoke about the need for community members to look beyond appearances and stereotypes to understand and respect youth. For a group of young adults often described as alienated from adults and the greater community, their responses reflect a deep desire to be accepted and heard.

- ☞ *“There are good qualities to be found in the younger generation.”*
- ☞ *“Drugs are easy to get and kids are starting to use them at an early age. Then when they want to stop it’s hard because people doubt them. They sometimes are having problems they are dealing with to stay clean.”*
- ☞ *“Single parenthood is hard when you try to go to school, work, and take care of your child.”*
- ☞ *“Deserve second chances after they mess up. Some troubled kids do want to better but get dragged back into the street life cause only way they know how to survive; can’t get real job because of rap sheet (record).”*
- ☞ *“Hard being a single parent who wants more for her life and child. Hard because get turned down for assistance because I make too much money. I can’t work more hours because the bus only runs until 6:30PM and daycare is hard to find after 6PM.”*
- ☞ *“It takes too long to get help with housing and it is not affordable. It takes too long and is too difficult to get on DSS programs and to get Section 8.”*
- ☞ *“Quality, affordable housing is in short supply. Employers need to be more willing to take on entry-level applicants and pay a living wage. Health/dental coverage needs to be expanded and more readily available through employers.”*
- ☞ *“More help for single parents who are facing difficulty with transportation, safe housing, education, who want to do something with themselves. There is some help but it’s like you have to have some kind of guidelines to get that help which is hard.”*
- ☞ *“Some young people who aren’t trying to better themselves give a bad name to the ones who are. There are many young people who want to do something with their lives and have hopes and dreams.”*
- ☞ *“That even though we may make bad choices, we still need help.”*
- ☞ ***“That we are not hopeless, do not give up.”***

## NEXT STEPS FOR THE COMMUNITY-AT LARGE

Youth respondents have been very clear about their needs and concerns. Now it is up to our community to work with them to break through barriers and design better ways to support these young people. Key issues to address include:

**Housing:** Youth need affordable housing, appropriate to their age, and support to build the skills to maintain their housing. The Tompkins County Continuum of Care Youth Sub-committee has been meeting to design a range of youth housing that would meet the needs of independent youth. Toward this end, The Learning Web as lead agency along with the Continuum of Care Committee including the Tompkins County Youth Services Dept. and the Human Services Coalition submitted an application for a federal transitional housing grant to provide scattered site housing and independent living skills to 17 homeless youth each year. As part of the grant process the group held conversations with a number of local landlords who already rent to young people. These landlords have been made aware of the services such as The Learning Web's that can work in tandem with landlords and youth who seek to rent apartments in the community. Landlords have expressed a willingness to partner with The Learning Web to provide transitional housing to youth. Though there has been an increase in rental housing for those with low to moderate incomes such as Overlook and the housing complexes related to Linderman Creek, not enough units are set aside for Section 8. In addition, the Red Cross is working with a contractor to develop 6 Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units in the building that houses the Friendship Center, half of which will be dedicated to young people.

**Daycare support:** A significant proportion of our 2007 sample are parents. This means that these young people are not just responsible for their own survival, but also for another generation who are growing up under conditions of tremendous instability. Youth spoke eloquently about the difficulty returning to school or working when trying to care for a child. Finding quality daycare and affording daycare are significant barriers for these young people. There is a solid correlation between youth living in low income families and youth being at risk for a range of negative outcomes including academic failure, teen parenting, and youth homelessness. These young parents need to achieve self-sufficiency in order to break the cycle of poverty for their children.

**Transportation:** Echoing comments from 4 years ago, several youth cited the difficulty of using TCAT to get them around the county during the course of a single day when trying to combine work, taking classes at the community college, and, in some cases, getting a child to day care. They also pointed out how frequently the Cornell buses run in comparison to the buses to TC3. Housing rents within the city are so high that youth are pushed into housing in the rural areas, not accessible to transportation but more affordable. They soon find that they are in a catch-22 because though they can better afford rent, they are not able to get to jobs or school. There have been improvements made to the transportation system as a result of the 2003 ILS project but the county geography makes it difficult to cover all areas adequately and there is more room for improvement.

**Financial support:** Young people who grow up in functional, supportive families need financial support into their twenties in order to finish their education and embark on the road to independence. Respondents spoke about the difficulties balancing the need to have food and shelter with the need to spend the time to finish their education and get a decent job. Though financial supports are available through DSS and education programs, the regulations can be overwhelming to youth. Ongoing financial support would allow youth to focus their energies on setting goals, working on education and employment, and moving towards self-sufficiency.