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## **Homeless Young Parents Face Barriers to Welfare**

### **New Survey Finds Too Many Young, Vulnerable Families Not Accessing Needed Services**

(November 20)—Despite being almost universally eligible for welfare, many homeless young parents are not receiving needed services, and many haven't even been made aware that the welfare program exists, according to a new national survey released today by the National Network for Youth and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Between 1.3 million and 2.8 million youth live on U.S. streets each year, and one study has reported that five percent of runaway and homeless youth have children.

In *Families on the Edge: Homeless Young Parents and Their Welfare Experiences*, CLASP and the National Network for Youth call on Congress and states to expand their outreach efforts to such parents and to modify Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) welfare rules to make services more available to these vulnerable families. This new report, which is based on a survey of more than 100 homeless youth and 20 service providers, is being released at the Annual Conference of the National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting, and Prevention (NOAPPP) in San Diego.

"Homeless young parents live life on the edge," said Christine Grisham, CLASP Policy Analyst and co-author of the report. "Many have escaped abusive and neglectful home situations. For homeless young parents, TANF can be an important tool for achieving long-term stability and economic self-sufficiency."

"Too many homeless young parents have been left out of the welfare program," added Bob Reeg, Director of Public Policy for the National Network for Youth and co-author of the report. "States can do a lot right now to expand access to welfare services for these families. Of course, Congressional action would really ensure that homeless young parents in all parts of the country get a chance to succeed." Congress, which failed to reauthorize the 1996 welfare law this year, is expected to take up TANF again in 2003.

Additional findings from *Families on the Edge*:

- Less than 40 percent of the surveyed youth reported that they were currently receiving TANF benefits. In addition, fully one-half of homeless parenting youth who had never applied for TANF benefits *did not even know* about the welfare program.

- Even when homeless youth know about TANF, they have trouble accessing or keeping benefits. Fourteen of the 20 service providers surveyed said that the homeless parenting youth they served had problems accessing TANF. Further, 36 percent of homeless parenting youth who had received TANF reported having been sanctioned or terminated from the program, although most thought they were complying with program rules.
- The 1996 law that created TANF prohibits states from providing federal benefits to minor parents unless they live with a parent or legal guardian or in an approved arrangement with adult supervision. However, this rule may, in fact, be operating as a barrier to TANF services rather than as an opportunity to help homeless young parents find safe housing. Thirty-one percent of TANF-receiving respondents who had been subject to the living arrangement rule reported that it actually put them in an unsafe situation.

Additional recommendations for federal and state policymakers from *Families on the Edge*:

- Improve the TANF program rules for young parents by allowing for a “transitional compliance period” where minor parents are given time to come into compliance with the TANF minor parent rules.
- Strengthen the TANF minor parent living arrangement rule by ensuring states provide adequate alternative living arrangements, expand the definition of organizations that can act as alternative living arrangements, and consult with young parents regarding their housing preferences.
- Increase community outreach efforts and the availability of supportive services for young parents and their families.

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To preview the report and a related policy brief, visit CLASP’s Embargoed Materials Page at: [http://www.clasp.org/Embargoed\\_Release](http://www.clasp.org/Embargoed_Release). ***Please note that these materials are embargoed until Wednesday, November 20, 2002, at 12:01 am EST.*** To set up an interview with one of the authors or to reach organizations providing services to homeless young parents, contact John Hutchins (202/906-8013) or Bob Reeg (202/783-7949, ext. 3109).

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*A national, nonprofit organization founded in 1968, CLASP conducts research, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security of low-income families with children.*

*The National Network for Youth is a membership organization comprised of community-based youth-serving organizations, young people, youth workers, and youth advocates who seek to ensure that young people can be safe and lead healthy and productive lives.*