FYSB Family & Youth Services Bureau | **Runaway and Homeless Youth Training & Technical Assistance Center**

RHY-HMIS STREET OUTREACH PROGRAM (SOP)
DATA COLLECTION TIP SHEET

We recognize that street outreach is a challenging balancing act between providing service and collecting data. Good data will help us all provide better service as we learn more about the homeless population.

Partial data is better than no data! There are no penalties for partial data.

1 Identify a point person to be the champion for HMIS data collection. That point person should:

- Be in ongoing contact with the HMIS lead.
- Be aware of new data fields that are occasionally added.
- Try to catch data errors on a regular basis.
- Meet frequently with the rest of the team to continuously improve processes.

2 Make sure the whole team is aware of the data fields.

- If the team knows what information needs to be captured, they will have an easier time getting that information during outreach.

3 Get the homeless person to tell you their story.

- Start with an open-ended question that prompts the person to tell you their story (e.g., can you tell us your experience of being homeless over the last year?)
- Avoid asking direct questions that can turn people off and stop the conversation.
- As the person is telling you their story, gently probe and redirect the conversation in order to obtain answers to your questions.

4 Frequently check your data quality.

- Checking frequently can reveal gaps and inform appropriate adjustments to your data collection strategies.

- Work with the HMIS lead to ensure the correct data is being pulled. Data quality is not just a collection issue, but sometimes it's about the data you are getting from your HMIS.
- Don't wait until just before the upload period to check data quality. Resolving these data quality issues can take time. Waiting until the upload period can cause last minute headaches.

5 Think of creative ways to do outreach.

- Increasing numbers of homeless youth now have smartphones. Can you use social media or other apps technology to strengthen your working relationship with clients and facilitate data collection?

6 Write down notes right after your conversation.

- Some SOPs use a van that staff go back to after each conversation to record their notes.
- Writing down notes as soon as possible after each conversation will help to keep information fresh, just don't do it right in front of the person.

7 Use a tool to capture your information that mirrors your HMIS system.

- If you are using a spreadsheet to capture the data, design it so that it mirrors the HMIS system as much as possible to streamline the data transfer process. For example, use the same wording to ask questions, offer the same response options as in the HMIS dropdowns, ask questions in the same order as in the HMIS, and use the same