



KEEPING KIDS OFF THE STREET: SNAPSHOT OF COVENANT HOUSE ALASKA

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In 1988, Covenant House Alaska became the first shelter for homeless teenagers in Anchorage—and it is still the only such shelter in the city and in the entire state of Alaska.

More than 18,000 young people (ages 13 to 20) have walked into Covenant House's Crisis Center so far. Some come just for a bed for the night, but many also receive medical care, help getting back into school, counseling with their families, or other services.

About 1,300 young people stayed at Covenant House for at least one night in 2008, and 600 stayed longer and received more help getting back on their feet or reuniting with their families.

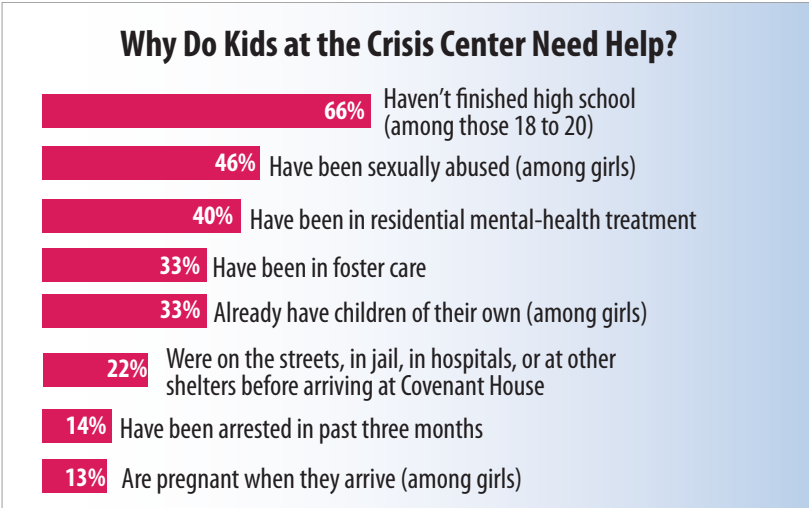
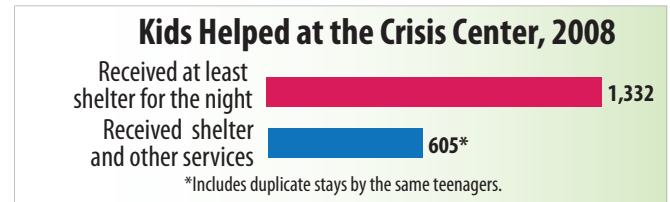
But many Alaskans know little about Covenant House, which today operates not only the crisis center but three other facilities for young people (see box on back page). This is a broad profile of what Covenant House's Crisis Center does, who it helps, and why so many need help.

Stephanie Martin and Alejandra Villalobos Meléndez of the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) prepared this profile for Covenant House Alaska. Nationwide, Covenant House is trying to form collaborative relationships with academic partners in all the cities where it has sites, to help Americans better understand the characteristics and needs of homeless young people and provide better information for its program development.

WHO COMES TO THE CRISIS CENTER?

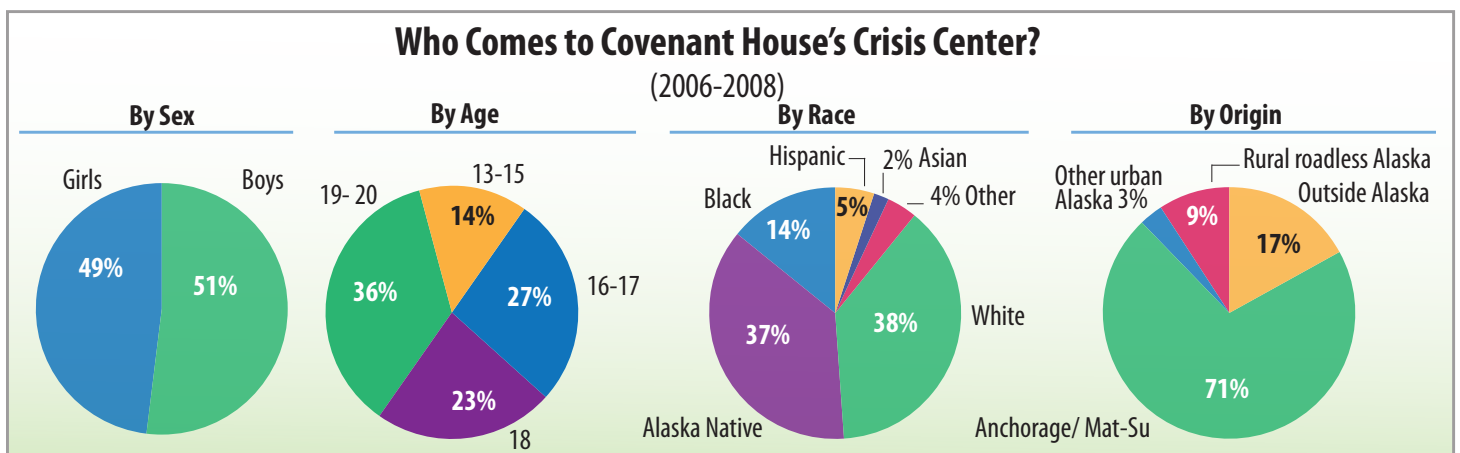
The figure below shows characteristics of young people who came to the Crisis Center in recent years. They were:

- Almost evenly divided between boys and girls
- Mostly older teenagers
- Primarily White and Alaska Native
- Mostly from Anchorage, but with significant numbers from remote rural areas of Alaska and from outside the state.

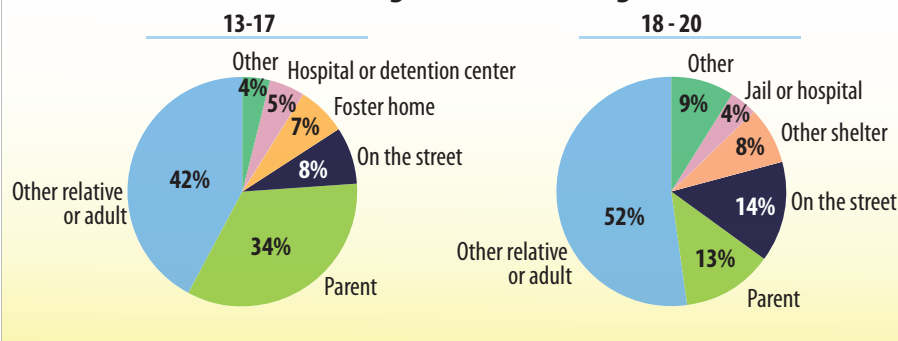


WHY DO THEY NEED HELP?

Teenagers who come to Covenant House typically have very serious problems, as the figure above shows. Those include living on the streets before arriving at Covenant House; having been treated for mental health problems; having been sexually assaulted; failing to graduate from high school; and being pregnant or already having children.



Where Were Kids the Night Before Coming to the Crisis Center?



WHERE WERE KIDS BEFORE?

Kids who turn to Covenant House's Crisis Center come from various living situations, as the figure above shows. There are also differences in living situations of the younger and the older teenagers.

- Only about a third of the younger teenagers and 13% of the older ones live with their parents before coming to Covenant House.
- Close to half of the younger and the older teenagers live with some other relative or an unrelated adult before arriving at Covenant House.
- Nearly one in ten of the younger teenagers and about one in seven of the older ones come from the streets. Some also come directly from juvenile detention centers, jails, or hospitals.
- Some of the younger teenagers leave foster homes for Covenant House, and some of the older ones come from shelters that are for adults.

WHAT'S CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

Covenant House Alaska began as essentially a place where homeless teenagers could find shelter. Today it offers a range of services to help them reunite with their families or become self-sufficient.

The profile of teenagers coming to Covenant House's Crisis Center has also changed in recent years, as the adjacent figure shows.

- The average time teenagers spend at the Crisis Center increased from **10 days in 2001 to 13 days in 2008**. Those longer average stays put more stress on the center's capacity.
- Substantially more boys than girls came to the Crisis Center as recently as 2003, **but in 2008 girls actually outnumbered boys**. That change also has implications for Covenant House's capacity, because girls require a different mix of services than boys.
- Ten years ago, almost all those coming to the Crisis Center were from Anchorage and the adjacent Mat-Su Borough. **But in 2008 nearly a third came from other areas**, with 17% from outside Alaska and 8% from remote rural places.

Covenant House reports that about 25% of the teenagers from outside the state had originally been from Alaska and are returning after receiving mental-health treatment in other states—and then finding themselves homeless. Most of those from places off the road system are Alaska Native, which reflects a broader trend that's been documented in Alaska recently: thousands of Alaska Natives are moving from rural to urban Alaska. We also know, from recent ISER research, that some of the Alaska Native teenagers moving to Anchorage are coming without their parents and plan to live with other relatives.*

*New Students in the Anchorage School District: Where Are they Coming From? By Marie Lowe. Available at: www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/Publications/LoweMigrationReportFinal.pdf

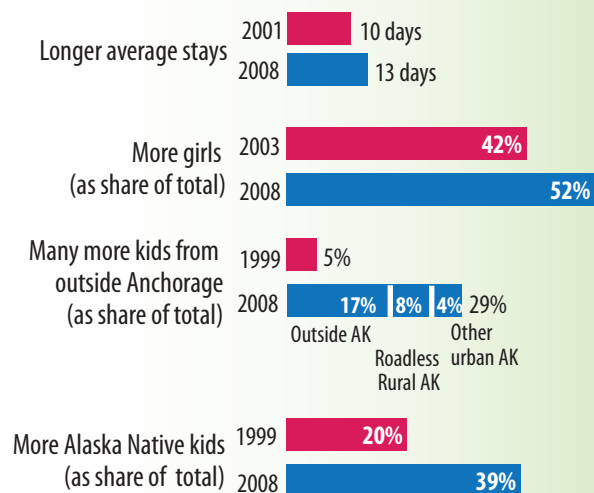
• Alaska Native teenagers make up a growing share of those coming to Covenant House, **up from about 20% in 1999 to 39% in 2008**. That probably reflects the growing number of Alaska Native residents of Anchorage, as well as the increasing numbers arriving from rural Alaska.

WHERE IS COVENANT HOUSE HEADED?

Covenant House foresees growing needs at its Crisis Center, as Anchorage grows and as the center increasingly helps teenagers from many places besides Anchorage. It also provides different services and accommodations not only for boys and a growing number of girls, but also for young people of different ages—from those who are barely into their teens to those on the verge of being adults.

Because the young people turning to the Crisis Center need such a broad range of help, Covenant House reports that it has reached its functional capacity—and in early 2010 it is trying to raise money to pay for construction of a new, larger facility.

Trends at the Crisis Center



www.covenanthouseak.org

Covenant House Alaska is one of 21 sites of Covenant House International in North America and Central America. This summary describes just Covenant House Alaska's Crisis Center, which provides short-term shelter and other services for homeless teenagers. Covenant House also operates several other facilities in Anchorage:

- *Community Services Center* provides young people (13 to 20) with tutoring, health care, referrals for treatment of substance abuse, help getting jobs, and other services.
- *Rights of Passage* is a residential care program to help homeless young people (18 to 20) become self-sufficient and get ready to live on their own.
- *Passage House* is a residential program for girls 17 to 20 who are pregnant or have children.

The authors thank Deirdre Cronin, Daniel Lemaire, Alison Kear, and Carlette Mack of Covenant House Alaska and Miranda Yates of the Covenant House Institute for providing data and other help.

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