

LUBBOCK YOUTH COUNT REPORT

COUNT ME IN

JUNE 2026

Count Me In Initiative

The "Count Me In" initiative, spearheaded by ECHO West Texas, is a collaborative effort designed to quantify the population of unstably housed youth aged 12–24. By moving beyond traditional street or shelter counts, the initiative aims to identify and reach youth who are often invisible to standard reporting systems like the annual Point In Time (PIT) Count.

- **Goal**: To bridge critical data gaps in order to secure federal funding and develop targeted, outcomes-based support programs that move beyond mere counting to establishing a comprehensive safety net.
- **Collaboration**: Leverages a broad coalition—including school districts, the YWCA, Saved to Serve, After Amen, Communities in Schools, StarCare, Reclaimed 43, McHur Care, The Salvation Army, and faith-based organizations like Monterey Church of Christ—to pool resources, logistics, and referral networks.
- **Methodology**: Utilizes trauma-informed, incentivized survey administration at strategic locations, including the Juvenile Justice Center, the YWCA, and community celebrations by FOCUS Rehabilitation and Ministry Center, to actively validate the voices and experiences of the youth.

Unstably Housed Youth Context

Unstably housed youth in Lubbock face a complex landscape where traditional definitions of homelessness often fail to capture the full scope of the crisis. While McKinney-Vento data from schools provides a crucial baseline by identifying students experiencing housing instability highlighting significant needs across the region with Lubbock ISD reporting 609 enrolled unstably housed youth and additional counts in districts like Levelland (24), Plainview (20), and Frenship (19). This school-based reporting frequently overlooks an even more "hidden" population.

The "Count Me In" initiative reveals that many youth outside the immediate educational scope are deeply entangled in juvenile justice and foster care systems, frequently navigating transient, "doubled-up" living arrangements that remain invisible to standard metrics. Together, these data points illustrate that youth homelessness in our region is a systemic challenge, requiring interventions that bridge the gap between academic support and justice-involved outreach to effectively reach the most vulnerable youth.

This report qualifies unstably housed youth according to three separate criteria: living situation (on the streets, in emergency or transitional shelters, in hotels/motels, or in a vehicle), having moved 3 or more times in the last year, or having been without water, electricity, or other utilities over the past year.

Implementation Considerations

As the inaugural "Count Me In" initiative, the first youth-focused count of its kind in Lubbock, this report serves as a foundational pilot. Challenges included reaching youth outside formal systems, leading to lower attendance at events like the YWCA outreach. Because the Juvenile Justice Center (LCJJC) ended up serving as a primary survey site, findings are skewed toward justice-involved youth, potentially underrepresenting the "hidden" demographic not engaged with the justice system.

To ensure clarity, analysis is provided both including and excluding LCJJC respondents.

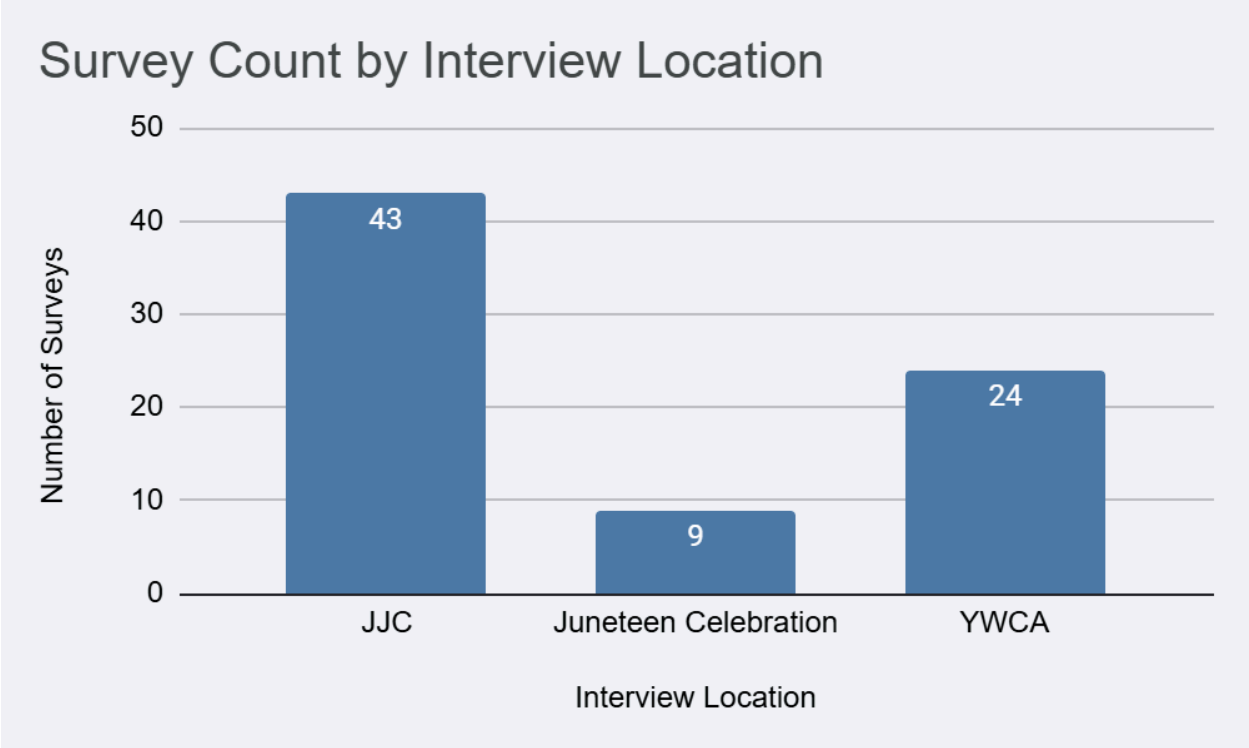
Partnerships

- **Lead Organization**: ECHO West Texas.
- **Educational Partners**: Local school districts (crucial for maintaining referral networks).
- **Community and Youth Service Providers**:
    - YWCA
    - The Spot
    - Communities in Schools
    - StarCare
    - Reclaimed 43
    - McHur Care
    - The Salvation Army
    - Saved to Serve
    - After Amen
    - Lubbock County Juvenile Justice Center (LCJJC)
- **Faith-Based Organizations**: Monterey Church of Christ.
- **Support & Outreach**: FOCUS Rehabilitation and Ministry Center (specifically for survey administration and community events).

Respondent Overview

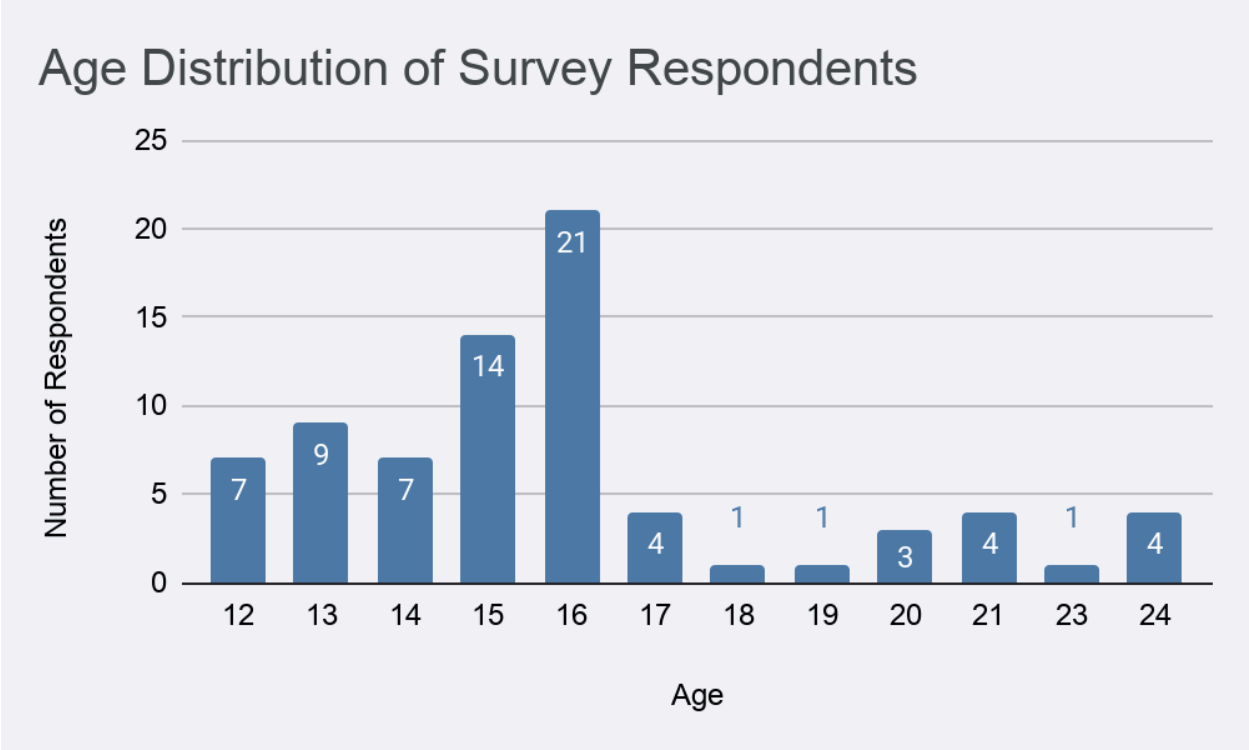
In June 2026, 77 youth participated in the survey. Data collection occurred across three distinct outreach sites:

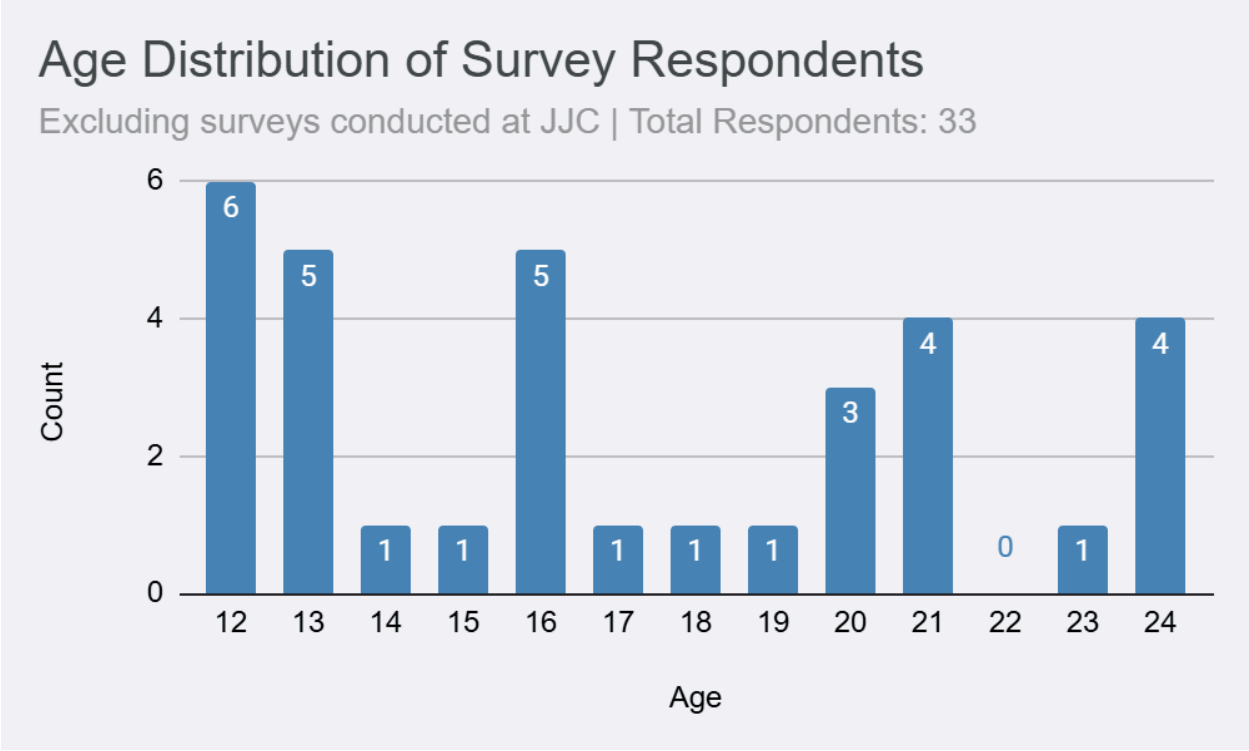
- LCJJC: 43 respondents (56% of total)
- YWCA Sun ‘n Fun: 24 respondents
- Juneteenth Celebration: 9 respondents



(above) Survey count by location, LCJJC refers to the juvenile justice center with surveys occurring through 6/22/26 - 6/26-26, Juneteenth Celebration refers to Juneteenth Celebrations with surveys occurring 6/19/26 - 6/21/26, YWCA refers to the YWCA Sun 'n Fun location where surveys were conducted on 6/26/26

The surveyed population is significantly younger than the 12–24 target range, with a heavy concentration (66%) aged 16 or younger partially due to the large involvement of the LCJJC whose residents are 16 years of age and under. The largest groups were 16-year-olds (21), 15-year-olds (14), and 13-year-olds (9). Older youth (20–24) comprised 9 respondents.

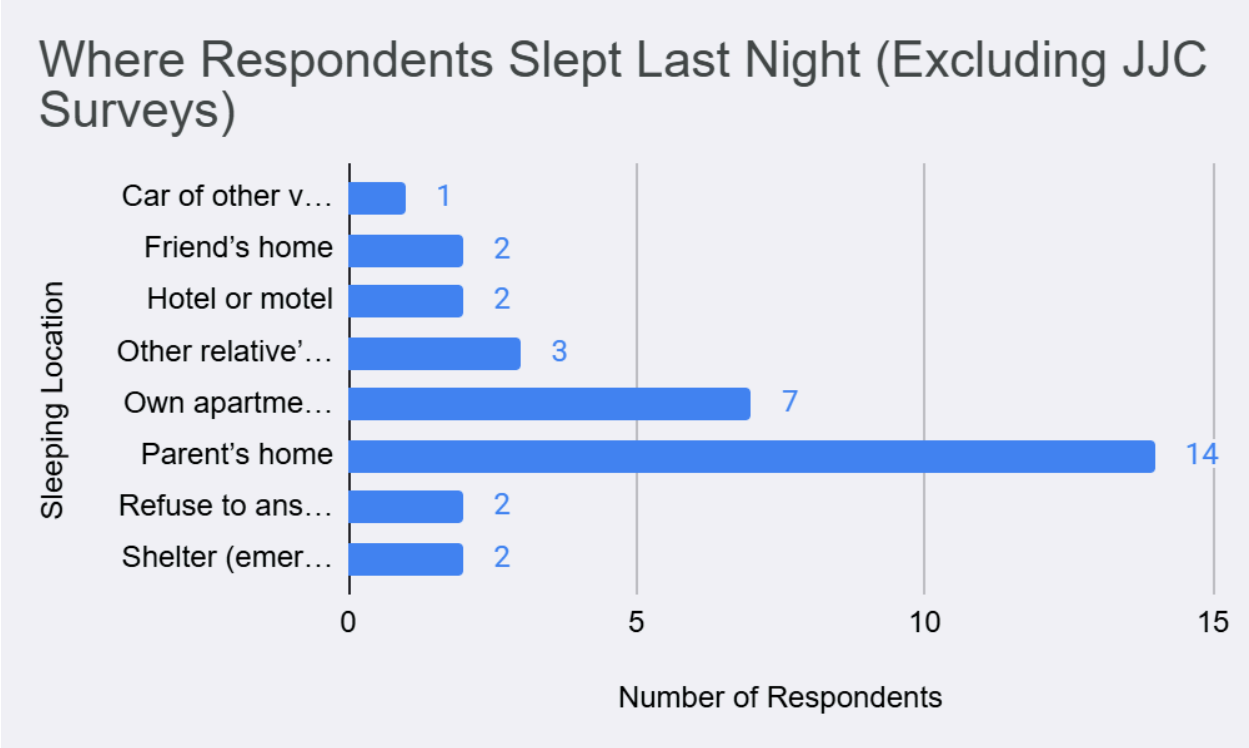

Age Distribution of Survey Respondents
Number of Respondents
25
20
15
10
5
0
7
9
7
14
21
4
1
1
3
4
1
4
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
23
24
Age


Age Distribution of Survey Respondents
Excluding surveys conducted at JJC | Total Respondents: 33
Count
6
4
2
0
6
5
1
1
5
1
1
1
3
4
0
1
4
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
Age

Broader Vulnerabilities & Systemic Factors

Across the entire respondent group, several systemic vulnerabilities intersect:

- **Foster Care**: 21% (16) reported foster care history, with 13 of those interviewed at the LCJJC.
- **Parenting**: 12 respondents are pregnant or parenting, creating additional barriers to stability.
- **Education & Employment**: 61 respondents are unemployed and 63 lack diplomas; however, 67 remain enrolled in school. Since the majority are 16 or younger, the priority should be school retention and educational stability to ensure long-term independence.



Housing Instability: Justice-Involved Cohort

Of the 77 respondents, 21 were identified as unstably housed. This cohort is heavily skewed toward system-involved youth, with 17 of the 21 (81%) surveyed at the LCJJC. This indicates a strong correlation between housing instability and justice involvement in the region.

Demographics: This group is primarily adolescent: 16-year-olds (10), 14–15 year olds (7), and 17–24 year olds (4). The group is predominantly male (14) with a significant female presence (7). The cohort is racially diverse, mirroring regional demographics and justice-system involvement.

Vulnerabilities: Over a third (8 respondents) reported a history of foster care, reinforcing the "foster-to-prison" pipeline. Parenting status adds further complexity, requiring trauma-informed discharge planning to ensure secure housing after detention.

Housing Instability: Community-Based Cohort

Isolating the 33 community-based respondents (YWCA/Juneteenth) reveals a different distribution. For these youth, instability often manifests within family or independent arrangements rather than institutional settings.

Living Situations: 42% (14) reside in a parent's home, often facing utility hardships. 21% (7) have their own apartments but struggle with financial obligations. Ten youth are in high-risk "doubled-up" or crisis settings, including friends' homes (2), relatives (3), hotels (2), shelters (2), or cars (1).

Age Contrast: Unlike the LCJJC cohort, this group shows a bimodal distribution: 11 early adolescents (12–13) and 8 young adults (20–24). The "missing middle" (14–15) suggests that outreach for that specific age range may be more effective through school channels.

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

Key Takeaways

- **Systemic Intersection**: The data confirms a strong correlation between housing instability and systems of care, particularly juvenile justice and foster care. Addressing these systemic points of entry is essential for prevention.
- **Early Intervention Priority**: With 66% of respondents aged 16 or younger, strategies must focus on school retention and educational stability to prevent the transition into chronic homelessness.
- **Collaborative Data Success**: The coalition—comprising schools, NGOs, and faith-based partners—successfully captured a demographic previously invisible to standard reporting, providing a viable blueprint for future counts.
- **Geographic & Demographic Nuance**: The bimodal distribution of the community-based cohort highlights a "missing middle" (14–15-year-olds), indicating that while school-based outreach is effective for younger youth, specific strategies are needed for older adolescents.

Next Steps

- **Targeted Youth Outreach**: Refine recruitment strategies to capture the 14–15-year-old demographic, leveraging existing school-based referral networks identified during this pilot.
- **Develop Targeted Programming**: Translate findings into outcomes-based programs, prioritizing utility assistance for families and trauma-informed discharge planning for youth transitioning out of justice-involved settings.
- **Enhance Data Methodology**: Utilize this pilot to scale future counts, aiming for more balanced representation between justice-involved and community-based cohorts to ensure a holistic view of regional instability.

- **Policy & Funding Advocacy**: Leverage the finalized dataset to secure federal funding and advocate for policy shifts that integrate housing support into juvenile justice and foster care exit protocols.
- **Future Youth Counts:** The 2026 "Count Me In" initiative served as a foundational pilot, establishing the first robust, youth-centered data collection effort of its kind in Lubbock. While this inaugural count successfully bridged critical data gaps and demonstrated the efficacy of a coalition-driven approach, it also provided valuable insights into the complexities of regional youth homelessness. Future iterations will build upon the methodology refined here, incorporating lessons learned regarding outreach balancing, age-specific recruitment, and systematic data integration. By scaling this pilot into a recurring effort, the initiative aims to provide an increasingly accurate, longitudinal view of housing instability, ultimately informing the advocacy, policy shifts, and funding necessary to secure a stable future for all local youth.