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- HOST youth showed high rates of engagement in risky sexual behavior and are at risk of school failure.
- HOST youth experience serious mental and emotional health issues.
- HOST sites have succeeded in targeting high-need children and youth.

HOST Youth: The Challenges of Growing up in Low-Income Housing

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Children growing up in chronically distressed communities with high rates of poverty, crime, and violence are more likely to experience developmental and cognitive delays; poor physical and mental health; and increased involvement in delinquent and criminal activities (Ellen and Turner 1997; Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997; Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011; Sampson 2012). Public housing communities, which have concentrations of extremely low-income households and disproportionate numbers of children and youth, are among the most distressed communities in the nation (Hunt 2012). The Urban Institute's Chicago Family Case Management Demonstration, which ran from 2007 to 2010, provided intensive, wraparound services to vulnerable public housing families and found encouraging results for adult participants, with increased employment rates, stabilized physical health, and decreased anxiety rates (Popkin et al. 2013). However, while parents benefited, their children did not. Youth showed high rates of engagement in risky and delinquent behavior and disengagement from school. In interviews, these young people spoke of struggling with constant violence, both in their communities and at school (Hailey and Gallagher 2013).

The long-term findings from the Chicago Demonstration highlight the need for innovative strategies that target whole families. The HOST Demonstration is testing the feasibility and effectiveness of two generation intensive service models that combine intensive case management and employment services for adults with targeted services for children and youth, including clinical groups, afterschool and tutoring support, and goal setting (see page 8). Tailored services include the Chicago HOST site's Pathways to Rewards program, an incentive-based, goal-

setting curriculum for youth, and individualized action plans for Portland HOST youth to meet his or her goals (Scott et al. 2013).

The HOST framework (Popkin and McDaniel 2013) hypothesizes that targeting the most vulnerable families with services will help address their individual challenges, reduce disorder for the larger community, and lower management costs for the housing authority. This concept is analogous to the model of targeting the "frequent fliers" in the health care systems, because they incur the most costs overall. In this brief, we draw on

Addressing trauma and mental health problems is critical to preparing youth to overcome the challenges associated with extreme poverty.

findings from the 2012 survey of parents and youth living in the first two HOST sites, Chicago's Altgeld Gardens and Portland's New Columbia and Humboldt Gardens, to illustrate how these children were faring at the start of the HOST intervention (see page 7). We find that the HOST sites have succeeded in targeting high-need children and youth. Youth are already showing high rates of school failure, poor mental health, and engagement in risky sexual behavior. Over the next 2 years, we will be tracking these families to see if HOST's intensive services succeed in changing the trajectory of these youths.

Children at Risk of School Failure

A successful whole-family service model that seeks to improve outcomes for the next generation hinges on providing the support and services youth need to succeed in school. The HOST survey measured youth school performance, asking questions meant to gauge a child or youth's effort in school and motivation to succeed and to detect early behavior warning signs. Our findings show troubling indications that HOST youths, particularly in Chicago, are at high risk of (or already are) falling behind their peers, disconnecting from the school system, or dropping out—the end result of school failure.

One key indicator of academic problems is chronic absenteeism and low attendance rates. Attendance strongly affects test scores, graduation rates, and dropout rates (Balfanz and Byrnes 2012). In 2012, HOST parents reported that younger children (age 6 to 11) missed only two and a half days of school on average in the previous year due to illness or injury. Older youths, however, who are more likely to skip school, self-reported high rates of absenteeism: 24 percent of youth age 12 to 16 in Chicago and 38 percent in Portland reported being absent from school three or more days in the previous month. When extrapolated by 9 months, this amounts to 27

days missed in a school year, well above the national threshold for chronic absenteeism.¹

Many HOST children and youths are also failing to engage in school. Maintaining a child's interest, commitment, and willingness to do his or her school work, or *school engagement*, is important to prevent decline of academic achievement and motivation (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004). According to parent reports, about half of Chicago children age 6 to 11 and youths 12 to 16 are not highly engaged in school.² In Portland, the figures are even higher with nearly 60 percent of children age 6 to 11 and 41 percent of youths 12 to 16 are not highly engaged in school.³

Even more alarming than the low level of school engagement among HOST youth, are the high levels of in-school behavior problems that younger children are already exhibiting, including difficulty getting along with teachers, disobedience at school, bullying other

children, and hyperactivity and restlessness. According to the parents of youth age 6 to 11, about 40 percent in Chicago and half in Portland exhibited two or more of these problem behaviors.⁴ The high prevalence of reported problem behaviors is particularly worrying because these behaviors serve as an early warning indicator of both poor mental health and engagement in risky behavior.⁵

The survey also shows that, while younger HOST children are at risk for possible future school failure, older HOST youth already show troubling signs of *current* school failure. About 40 percent of Chicago youth and 25 percent of Portland youth age 12 to 16 have had teachers contact their parents about the youth's behavior in school or problems with school work. Grade repetition in Chicago is of particular concern. One in five Chicago youth age 12 to 16 repeated a grade at least once compared with only 2 percent in the same age group in Portland.

Figure 1. Significant Out-of-School Suspension for 9th to 12th Graders

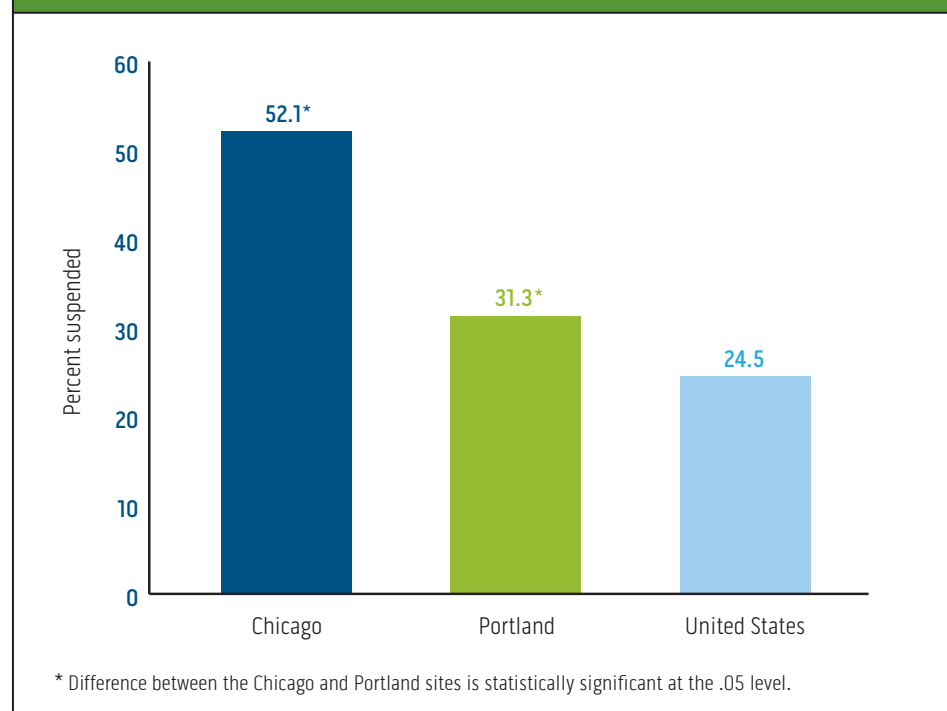
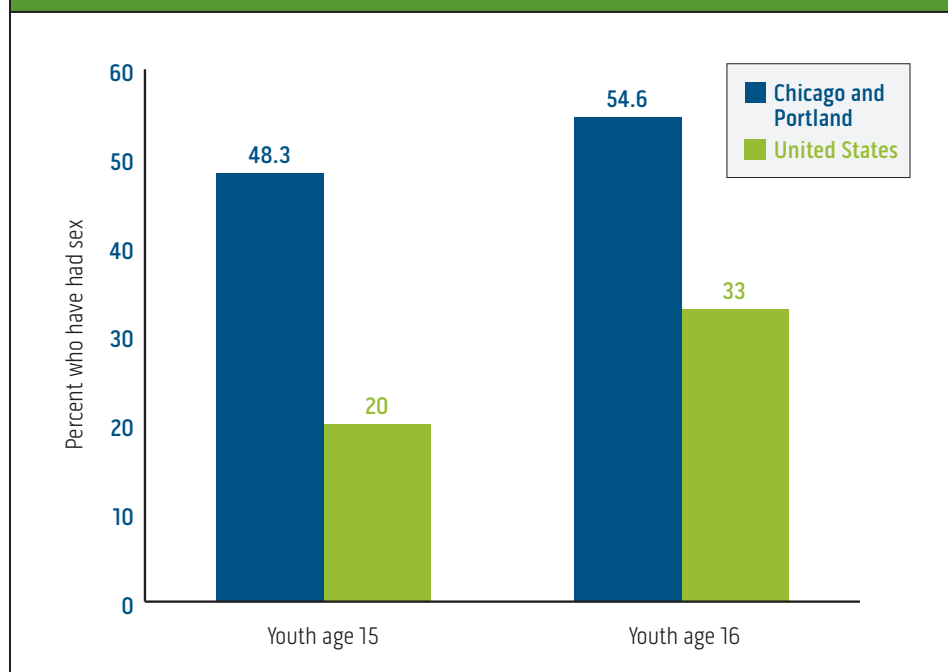


Figure 2. High Rates of Sexual Activity among Youth Age 15 and 16

High rates of out-of-school suspension are the clearest indicator of older HOST youth struggling academically and at risk of or already experiencing failure. As shown in figure 1, 52 percent of the high schoolers in the 12 to 16 age group in Chicago have received out-of-school suspensions compared with about 31 percent in Portland and nearly 25 percent of youth nationally.⁶ Youth living in Chicago's Altgeld Gardens are at high risk, but even those in Portland, where the rates of suspension are lower, are showing worrying indications of problems in school.

HOST Youth Report Worrying Levels of Risky Behavior

Growing up in chronic disadvantage puts children at risk for engaging in delinquent and risky behavior (Popkin and McDaniel 2013). Our research shows that Chicago's Altgeld Gardens is a more distressed community with higher rates of crime and disorder and lower collective efficacy—a measure of community health—than Portland's New Columbia and

Humboldt Gardens (Hailey and Saxena 2013). Given this difference, it is not surprising that our 2012 survey shows that Chicago youth appear to be engaging in risky behavior at higher rates than those in Portland.

According to their self-reports, 20 percent of youth age 12 to 16 in Chicago reported having attacked someone or been in a serious fight, compared with only 6.3 percent in Portland. Likewise, 6 percent report having been arrested in Chicago compared with 3 percent in Portland. However, almost no HOST parents or youth reported drug use or sales, or gang involvement. It is difficult to know whether these low figures reflect reality or the challenge of getting accurate measurement of these sensitive issues—issues that could put these respondents at risk of losing their public housing.

Our 2012 survey also found disturbing indications that HOST youth are already engaging in risky sexual behavior. Youth who initiate sexual activity early are at higher risk of negative health outcomes, such as multiple

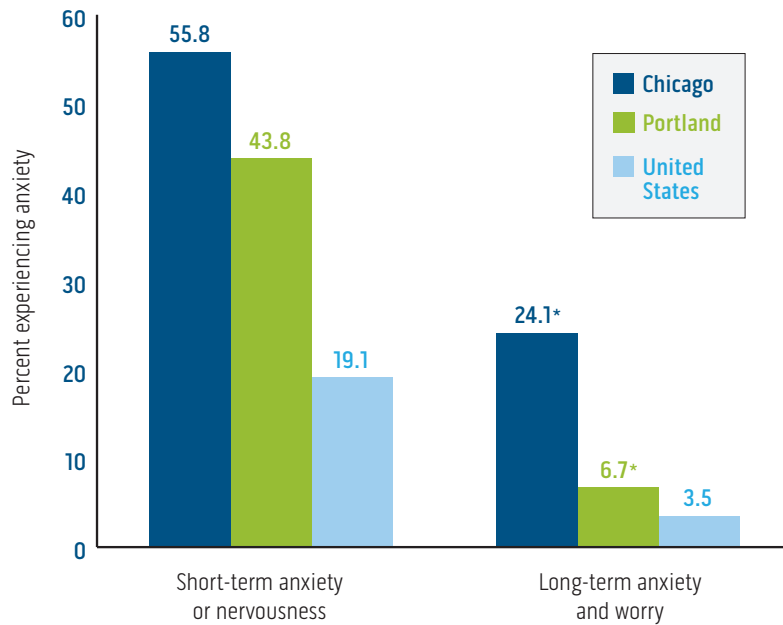
sexual partners, less consistent condom use, and increased likelihood of pregnancy (O'Donnell, O'Donnell, and Stueve 2001). Nearly one-third of youth age 12 to 16 in HOST reported being sexual active; the average age of sexual initiation is about 13.7. The alarming rates of sexual activity become apparent when looking at sexual activity among the oldest HOST youth. Figure 2 shows almost 50 percent of 15 year olds and 55 percent of 16 year olds have had sex, compared with 20 and 33 percent of youth nation-wide, respectively (Lawrence and Philbin 2013).

Ten percent of sexually active youth reported not using a condom the last time they had sex and about 10 percent of youth reported having been tested for HIV, slightly less than the national average of 13 percent.⁷ Although it is encouraging that HOST youth receive HIV testing at roughly the same rate as youth nationally, testing is arguably more important for HOST youth because they are more sexually active than youth nationwide and they live in distressed neighborhoods. Youth living in distressed, high-poverty neighborhoods face far more sexual risk—such as high HIV prevalence in low-income African-American neighborhoods—especially girls who may experience coercive sexual environments in which harassment, dating and sexual violence, pressure for early sexual initiation, and coerced sex are part of their daily lives (Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann 2010).

The Toll of Distressed Neighborhoods on Childhood Mental Health

Youth in chronically disadvantaged public housing communities face physical and social isolation, witness and experience crime, violence, and neglect, and often attend inferior schools. Frequent childhood exposure to such trauma causes high rates of mental and emotional health issues such as depression and anxiety (Hooven et al. 2012) and can lead to children becoming the victims or perpetrators of violence themselves (Popkin et al. 2010).

Figure 3. HOST Youth Experience Serious Anxiety and Worry



* Difference between the Chicago and Portland sites is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Compounding these consequences of childhood trauma is the lack of adequate physical and mental health services in many public housing communities. Addressing trauma and mental health problems is critical to preparing youth to overcome the challenges associated with extreme poverty and, as such, is an integral component of the HOST intervention.

Although our 2012 survey shows that HOST youth do not appear to be in poor physical health,⁸ the mental and emotional toll from living in disadvantaged public housing and witnessing and experiencing trauma and violence is evident. According to the self-reports of youth age 12 to 16, almost 56 percent in Chicago and 44 percent in Portland report being anxious or nervous compared with 19 percent of youth nationwide. The need for intensive, long-term interventions for youth is further evidenced by the high-rates of sustained anxiety and worry amongst HOST youth in Chicago. Figure 3 shows 24

percent youth age 12 to 16 in Chicago report experiencing long-term, *sustained* anxiety and worry, nearly 7 times the national average of 3.5 percent.⁹ Portland youth also reported higher levels of long-term anxiety (6.7 percent) than the national average.

The mental health disparities between sites is unsurprising given Chicago youth and adult report living in higher stress environments with increased levels of gang activity, open-air drug selling, and violence (Hailey and Saxena 2013). Indeed, a significantly higher number of Chicago youth age 12 to 16 (38 percent) do not feel safe in their neighborhood compared with Portland youth (12.5 percent).¹⁰ The mental health findings suggest that the need for clinical-mental health services is strong in both sites, but particularly acute among Chicago youth.

Despite their extremely high-levels of anxiety and worry from experiencing trauma and violence in their distressed neighborhoods,

HOST youth may have the resiliency they need to overcome their circumstances. Older HOST youth, age 12 to 16, exhibit grit and resilience as measured by their self-reported scores on the grit scale, an indicator of an individual's perseverance and passion for long-term goals. The grit scale uses 8 questions to gauge a youth's ability to work toward challenges and maintain effort despite significant obstacles, failure, or adversity. The maximum score on the scale is 5 (extremely gritty) and the lowest score is 1 (not at all gritty). The average score for youth age 12 to 16 was 3.45 and 3.42 in Chicago and Portland, respectively, which are comparable to national scores.¹¹

Looking Ahead: Serving the Most Vulnerable Youth

Our 2012 HOST survey results demonstrate the high levels of neighborhood distress, thus putting HOST youth at serious risk of experiencing school failure, engaging in risky sexual activity, and feeling high levels of anxiety and worry. Still, in documenting the strengths and challenges of youth, HOST families have the unique opportunity to benefit from targeted individual and group services. Over the next few years, HOST youth will continue to receive properly targeted services and participate in programming intended to reduce their high-levels of anxiety and stabilize their mental health, improve their engagement in school, and reduce occurrences of risky behavior. Such outcomes equip youth with the tools to overcome the challenges and community violence that perpetuate disadvantage among youth and their families living in the most distressed public and assisted housing. The youth's progress will help inform federal housing policy and policy makers who are interested more broadly in ending multi-generational poverty, on whole-family approaches to achieving self-sufficiency. ■

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Notes

1. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days. Since the average school year in the United States is 180 days, we use missing more than 18 days of school as the benchmark for chronic absenteeism (Comey et al. 2013).
2. The school engagement index, developed in 1996 by Jim Connell and Lisa J. Bridges, at the Institute for Research and Reform in Education in California, attempts to assess the level of a child's interest and willingness to do their school work. In our surveys, each head of household was asked about their children, one each from the age groups 6 to 11 and 12 to 16, whether he or she: cares about doing well in school; only works on homework when forced to; does just enough homework to get by; or always does his or her homework. The answers were scored on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means none of the time and 4 means all the time (answers to the negative items were scored in reverse). We measured the proportion of children with a high level of school engagement, which is equivalent to a scale score of 15 or more.
3. The figures for youths in the Chicago Demonstration were slightly worse, but the average age of the children in that study was higher.
4. Items for the problem behavior scale were taken from the Behavior Problem Index. The heads of households were asked to indicate how often the children exhibited any one of seven specific negative behaviors: having trouble getting along with teachers; being disobedient at school; being disobedient at home; spending time with peers who get in trouble; bullying or being cruel or mean; feeling restless or overly active; and being unhappy or depressed. The answers ranged from often and sometimes true to not true. We measure the portion of children who were reported to have demonstrated two or more of these behaviors often or sometimes over the previous three months.
5. These figures are comparable to findings on youth living in similarly distressed public and assisted housing from the HOPE VI Panel Study in Chicago and the Chicago Family Case Management Demonstration. The HOPE VI Panel Study found 50 percent of young child age 0 to 12 exhibited two or more problem behaviors in 2001 and 59 percent in 2011. The Case Management Demonstration found 47 percent and 48 percent of young children age 0 to 12 had two or more problems behaviors in 2007 and 2011, respectively, and 51 percent and 49 percent in 2007, and 2011, respectively, for teenagers age 13 to 16.
6. National data from the 2007 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES). National figures cover public school students in 9th through 12th grade.
7. National data from "Trends in the Prevalence of Sexual Behaviors and HIV Testing, National YRBS: 1991–2011," accessed September 24, 2013, http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/pdf/us_sexual_trend_yrbs.pdf.
8. Youth in Chicago and Portland report being in good physical health (95 percent and 97 percent, respectively), and over 95 percent of youth in both cities are covered by some type of health care. A physical health area of concern is elevated asthma rates at about 26% and 19% of older youth age 12 to 16 in Chicago and Portland reporting having asthma, respectively, compared with about 16% nationally. National data are from the National Health Interview Survey, 2011.
9. National comparisons on worry, anxiety, and nervousness are from the 2004 National Comorbidity Survey Replication Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A).
10. Other indicators of stressful neighborhood environments include seeing gang activity (50.4% and 21.9% of Chicago and Portland youth age 12 to 16, respectively); seeing multiple drug sales in the previous year (42.5 percent and 12.5 percent of Chicago and Portland youth age 12 to 16, respectively); and parents reporting people being attacked or robbed is a big problem (35.4 percent and 11.2 percent, in Chicago and Portland, respectively).
11. The grit scale was developed by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and University of Michigan. Originally created as a 12-item scale to determine how passion and perseverance for long-term goals effects professional achievement in adult, the scale has since been modified to include an 8-item version that can be given to children. This 8-item version was used in the HOST baseline survey. In 5 studies, Duckworth et al. (2007) found average grit scale among adults age 25 and older to be 3.65 (n = 1,545), Ivy League undergraduates to be 3.46 (n = 138), West Point Cadets in Class of 2010 to be 3.75 (n=1,308), and National Spelling Bee finalists to be 3.5 (n=175).

Baseline Survey

During this first year, the Urban Institute fielded two surveys—an adult survey and a youth survey—to capture baseline outcomes for HOST families and their communities. The adult survey asked respondents about themselves and up to two focal children—one between the age of 6 and 11, and another between the age of 12 and 16. Parents with a child in the older age range could then consent for that child to participate in a separate youth survey. Overall, response rate exceeded 80 percent among adults and 90 percent among eligible youth in both sites. The survey table describes the basic characteristics of adults, focal children, and youth respondents.

Survey Response Rates and Respondent Characteristics.

	TOTAL	CHICAGO	PORTLAND
Total HOST families	366	230	136
Adult Survey			
Number of adult respondents	299.0	192.0	107.0
Percent female	93.3	95.3	89.5
Mean age	36.7	36.5	37.2
Number of focal children 6–11	165.0	98.0	67.0
Percent female	54.7	57.9	50.0
Mean age	9.3	9.1	9.5
Number of focal children 12–16	175.0	130.0	45.0
Percent female	53.3	53.8	51.5
Mean age	14.6	14.5	14.8
Youth Survey			
Number of youth respondents 12–16	145.0	113.0	32.0
Percent female	55.9	54.9	59.4
Mean age	14.0	13.9	14.2

Upcoming Research Tasks

A follow up survey will be fielded in Chicago and Portland late in 2014. Before the survey, the Urban Institute will conduct focus groups, interviews staff and program observations, as well as gather program data on HOST participants. The additional data will provide valuable feedback to the sites to continually refine their HOST model, contribute to a robust outcomes evaluation, and provide context for the larger evaluation findings.

HOST Demonstration Program and Funding Overview

Housing Opportunities and Services Together (HOST), launched by the Urban Institute with support of the Open Society Foundations in December 2010, is an innovative approach to coordinating services and programs for adults and youth in public and mixed-income housing. HOST's core case management component helps parents in low-income neighborhoods confront key barrier to self-sufficiency—poor physical and mental health, addictions, low literacy and education attainment, and historically weak connections to the labor force—while simultaneously integrating services for children and youth. The results of the multisite research project will influence how federal agencies such as the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, local housing authorities, and private developers create place-based, multigenerational programs and supportive environments for their residents.

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Housing Opportunity and Services Together Demonstration

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