

Memorandum

To: Regional Steering Committee on Housing and Homelessness

From: HomeBase

Date: April 16, 2010

Re: What's Up With Homeless and Transition-Aged Youth: the Federal Strategic Plan, the Status of California Research, New Data from Oregon and a Conference Here at Home

Background

The RSC has an established history of discussing issues related to homeless youth, former foster youth, and transition-aged youth (TAY; homeless and former foster youth ages 18-24). In July 2005, the RSC discussed discharge planning for former foster youth twice. In March, we covered the formation of The Campaign for Safe Transitions: Housing for Former Foster Youth, created to ensure that youth aging out of foster care do not end up homeless. In July of the same year, the RSC examined practical strategies for ensuring that foster youth are not discharged into homelessness, including preparing youth for exit, important elements of successful TAY housing, significant system changes, and available funding sources. Most recently, in October 2007, the RSC discussed the impact new legislation regarding discharge of juvenile offenders.

The RSC has also participated in a number of events focused on homeless youth. In 2002 and 2003, the RSC sponsored the Bay Area Regional Initiative's Homeless Youth 101, developing a program for the education of homeless children and youth. In 2003 and 2004, with input from RSC members, HomeBase, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, and ICF Consulting collaborated with the Department of Housing and Urban Development to orchestrate two foster youth housing events. These events focused on the development of housing for this vulnerable population by creating partnerships between landlords, funders, service providers, and developers.

Today, we'll discuss the latest developments in the homeless youth field, including progress on the Federal Strategic Plan; the status of homeless youth research in California; and the results of a new study examining programs for homeless youth in Oregon. Finally, we're pleased to announce and solicit input on an upcoming conference, designed with and for TAY, here in the Bay Area in July.

TAY and the Federal Strategic Plan

HomeBase and RSC Participation in the Federal Strategic Plan

In February 2010, HomeBase staff were invited to attend a briefing in Washington, D.C. about TAY issues held by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to help develop the Federal Strategic Plan to end homelessness. At that session, HomeBase submitted a brief, which USICH has asked to publish, detailing best practices in serving TAY in the San Francisco Bay Area. The brief highlights innovative TAY service providers and identifies key federal initiatives for serving youth. Strategies and best practices highlighted include:

- Improving discharge practices from foster care by building youth-focused housing. HomeBase highlighted the Transitional Housing Placement Plus (THP-Plus) program, which provides affordable housing and support services for up to 24 months. One of this program’s particular successes has been to encourage developers who do not traditionally serve TAY to integrate TAY into affordable housing developments.
- Expanding the definition of TAY and/or integrating housing for TAY into the larger community to prevent otherwise stable youth from becoming homeless when aging out of a program. Cited as an example is Madison Street Apartments, a mixed-use, mixed-income program in Oakland that continues to provide affordable housing for TAY who have reached the end of their youth subsidy. Many participants at the briefing communicated a desire to expand the definition of TAY to allow providers to serve a wider range of youth.
- Supporting parenting TAY by funding housing where parents and children can live together supported by services such as child care, as the Bill Wilson Center’s Transitional Housing Program in Santa Clara County does.
- Create a federal TAY-focused initiative including HUD, DOL, DOE, DOJ, and other relevant federal agencies, so that local providers can more easily access the myriad services necessary to serve TAY. This recommendation echoes the key request, expressed by many at the briefing, that the federal government facilitate “braiding” many of these services, either through a single application or by funneling all TAY funding through the Continuums of Care.
- Create a flexible source of income without age-out requirements, including funding for prevention, housing, and services, modeling the federal Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program.

Top-Ten Strategies for Serving Homeless Youth

USICH requested public feedback through its website, where people could register their votes for the most important strategies for serving homeless youth. The top-ten strategies upon the close of the public comment period are:

1. Offer housing via a “housing first” and harm reduction model for homeless young adults (411 votes)
2. Better and more careful transition for children in state custody upon turning 18 (269 votes)
3. Increase funding for McKinney Vento programs at schools/districts (249 votes)
4. Increase maximum length of stay to three years for youth/young adult transitional housing (239 votes)
5. Prepare youth for successful adulthood by providing independent living skills training (212 votes)
6. Create a shelter system for 18-24-year-olds to keep this age group out of adult shelters (178 votes)
7. Provide better foster care systems where children have access to additional services (176 votes)
8. Create a flexible system to provide age-appropriate emergency shelter services for those under 18. (166 votes)
9. Build more affordable housing (160 votes)

10. HUD and DHHS should offer joint funding for housing and support services for young adults. (145 votes)

What you can do with this information:

Program operators: Are there best practices highlighted above that you can adopt? What of the above-mentioned solutions would you support? What else are you doing to serve TAY?

Continuum leaders: Show your support for key solutions and best practices for serving TAY. What are the gaps in TAY services you see in your own community?

Community representatives: Please share this information with others in your community! For more details, please see:

www.homebaseccc.org

<http://www.usich.gov/>

The Status of Homeless Youth Research in California

In 2007, the California Research Bureau released a report about the status of education and homeless youth in California, called *The Educational Success of Homeless Youth in California.*” The report found that in 2005-2006, there were 196,722 homeless children and youth enrolled in school in California, though they noted that this number is likely low. The California Research Bureau identified the following barriers to successful education of homeless youth:

- It is difficult or impossible for youth to both attend school and provide their own food, shelter, clothing, and healthcare, particularly since homeless youth are at increased risk of physical illness and mental health problems. Many traditional homeless services programs will not or cannot serve youth.
- Youth who are not comfortable in a school setting are unlikely to attend; therefore, the report emphasized the importance of programs and support groups designed for youth who differ from their peers, particularly because non-conforming youth (LGBTQ and parenting youth, in particular) tend to be over-represented among the homeless youth population.
- Youth are unlikely to initiate contact with service providers; therefore, dropout recovery programs must include hands-on outreach by staff trained in youth services.
- Gaps in child welfare services are a primary cause of youth homelessness; many homeless youth have experienced abuse and neglect both at home and in foster care.

In 2009, the John Burton Foundation released a policy agenda called *To Big to Ignore: Youth Homelessness in California*, addressing the broader barriers to serving youth in California. These barriers include the underfunding of the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act; the disproportionately low share of Runaway and Homeless Youth Act funding that California receives; the fact that California’s investment in youth homelessness has remained static since 1988; that

many homeless youth service providers do not have the organizational capacity to successfully apply for HUD funding; limited collaboration between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems; licensing regulations that create barriers to youth accessing shelters; and fragmented funding sources for homeless youth.

To Big to Ignore proposes the following strategies to address these problems:

- Build the capacity of homeless youth providers to apply for a wider range of funding, especially HUD funding
- Increase SSI access for homeless youth with disabilities
- Use the State Interagency Team for Children and Youth to address youth homelessness at the state level
- Consider and include the needs of TAY in funding for housing development
- Extend the age limit for foster care to 21
- Advocate for increased funding to California under the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
- Expand efforts to prevent youth homelessness

What you can do with this information:

Program operators: What funding are you currently applying for? What do you need to expand your capacity to successfully apply for more funding?

Continuum leaders: Begin creating partnerships between child welfare services and the juvenile justice system; advocate for increased funding for our communities under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

Community representatives: Please share this information with others in your community!

For more details, please see:

<http://www.calyouth.org/advocacy-and-public-policy/advocacy-initiatives/homeless-youth/>

New Data from Oregon: One State’s Examination of Funding for Runaway and Homeless Youth and Best Practices

In their recently released report, *Stronger Youth and Smarter Communities: An Analysis of Oregon’s Investment in Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs*, researchers in Oregon discussed the difficulties associated with serving homeless youth. This study focused on runaway and homeless youth, and therefore includes data on a wide range of ages (pre-teen through age 24).

Difficulties in Identifying and Serving Homeless and Transition-Aged Youth

One of the primary difficulties that the authors recognized was identifying the population to be served, since different pieces of federal legislation, various governmental agencies, and different funding streams vary their definitions of transition-aged or runaway homeless youth. In some cases,

providers offer services for teens and youth up to 21 or even 24; in others, there is a stark line between programs for “youth” (up to 18), and “adults” (those over 18). As the authors noted, “While essentially every Federal Department [sic] has some type of program that *could* provide assistance to [runaway and homeless youth], the varying definitions and department missions result in a disjointed system, often split between *adult services* and *youth services* (that often compete for funding to serve 18-24 year olds)” [original emphasis].

Many incidents of running/throwing away are not reported to authorities, and many youth are often reluctant to identify themselves as runaways, which makes it more difficult to obtain accurate information about the number of homeless youth and for providers to serve this population. Most sources estimate that there are at least 1 million and as many as 1.7 million runaway and homeless youth each year; these youth are at significantly higher risk for a wide variety of health and safety problems than housed youth.

Discussion Questions

- Have you encountered similar problems in serving TAY?
- What are some solutions to the difficulties in identifying homeless youth?

Needs of Homeless Youth

Another Oregon study, which used forums to solicit feedback from homeless youth, found that the services and service elements considered most important among homeless youth included (in no particular order): mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, life skills training wraparound services, food programs, case management, job-skill development, family mediation, affordable housing, non-judgmental service providers, and consistent rules and structure. Additionally, two of the most common needs mentioned by youth “centered on *the importance of having one relationship with an adult role model* for the provision of advocacy, mentoring, and guidance,” [original emphasis] and “supports that are interlinked and easily accessible.” Housing youth with adults proved to be a major barrier to serving youth successfully.

Discussion Questions

- What are the best ways to provide interlinked services to TAY?

The Value of Prevention and Intervention

Stronger Youth and Smarter Communities extensively examines the costs to society associated with allowing youth to become homeless; these costs include increased expenses based on incomplete education (approximately \$600,000 to \$960,000); incarceration (\$1.9 million to \$2.3 million); and substance abuse (\$622,000 to 1.6 million).

The chronically homeless are among the most difficult and expensive populations to serve, but there are little data examining the connection between adolescent runaways and chronic homelessness. The authors of *Stronger Youth and Smarter Communities* cite one of the only studies to look at this association, which found that among those experiencing homelessness 51% of 18- and 19-year-olds, 38% of 20- to 24-year-olds, and 32% of those aged 25 or older had run away from home. This finding indicates that serving the homeless youth population will have wide-ranging impacts, including among those who end up chronically homeless.

Prevention and intervention, however, the study found to be very cost effective. At one program, every prevention dollar spent saved the community an estimated \$5.04, and every dollar spent to bring youth off the street saved an estimated \$7.45.

Best Practices

Outreach

Stronger Youth and Smarter Communities found that outreach is essential to homeless youth successfully accessing services. The programs involved in the Oregon study used a variety of tools to engage homeless youth, including:

- Sending outreach teams to youth-centered areas, such as skate parks and malls
- Starting or expanding drop-in centers
- Working with school staff and expanding existing presence in local schools
- Creating websites and using social networking tools (e.g. MySpace) to advertise available services
- Placing staff in rural communities
- Bringing services including case management, mental health and substance use/abuse treatment, medical and dental services, and crisis counseling to the youth, instead of waiting for youth to find services on their own

Housing

Examples of successful youth housing strategies employed in Oregon include:

- Host Home Model, through which youth are temporarily housed with families in the community, until the youth can return home or until long-term housing can be found.
- Agencies serving youth partnered with community emergency shelters, Departments of Human Services, and nonprofits like the Boys and Girls Club.

Safe Exit

Since *Stronger Youth and Smarter Communities* focused primarily on runaway youth, safe exit strategies from participating providers centered upon reunifying youth with their families. These practices included:

- Developing “realistic transition plans” with youth

- Providing education to families on adolescent issues
- Providing family mediation to overcome the family conflict resulting in the runaway incident
- Developing contracts between youth and their families and facilitating weekly meetings to improve family communication and reduce the likelihood of future crises

Connecting Youth to Resources

In addition to traditional case management, programs developed the following strategies to increase accessibility of resources:

- Performing intake via phone to allow youth to access services without travelling long distances
- Partnering with the local Department of Human Services to allow youth to fax applications
- Developing relationships between case managers and McKinney-Vento Homeless School Liaisons

Increasing Partner Diversity

The authors of *Stronger Youth and Smarter Communities* found that partnerships with diverse entities were essential to successful youth services programs. Other innovative partnerships included:

- Military recruiters
- Law enforcement
- Business community
- GLBTQ groups (including PFLAG)
- Ethnicity-based community groups
- Faith community (opportunities to speak at local churches were cited as particularly helpful)
- Medical and dental providers
- **Hiring homeless youth to assist in outreach** to other homeless youth was cited as a key improvement

Participant Recommendations

Programs participating in the Oregon study offered a number of recommendations to programs and communities seeking to improve services to homeless youth, including:

- Community support of program objectives
- Client-driven programs
- Healthy collaborations between consumers and community leaders

Discussion Questions

- Which of the above practices are we using in our community?
- What barriers do we encounter to implementing these and other best practices for serving TAY?
- Are there practices in use in the Bay Area not mentioned in the Oregon study?

Save the Date!

The Federal Youth Partners,* in collaboration with HomeBase, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, and ACF's National Resource Center for Youth Development, would like to invite you to attend a conference concerning transition age youth (TAY; i.e., former foster youth and/or homeless youth age 18-24), to be held in the San Francisco Bay Area on **July 8, 2010!**

The conference will focus on effective ways to use the federal resources available to serve transition age youth. Core themes include:

- Parenting youth
- Employment and education
- Mental health and substance abuse
- Mentoring
- Outreach
- Shelter
- Housing.

The conference will be planned in partnership with both transition age youth (through an advisory committee of homeless and former foster youth) and our community partners, to ensure that the information presented meets the needs of all interested groups. Please let us know if you are interested in attending this conference, and if there are other issues you'd like to address!

Look for invitations and further information in the coming months.

*The Federal Youth Partners (FYP) is a regional alliance among federal departments that fund youth programs and is comprised of staff from the U.S. Departments of Education (DoE); Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF); HHS, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS); Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration (ETA); Housing and Urban Development (HUD); Justice (DoJ); Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services (USDA); and the Social Security Administration (SSA). The FYP's mission is to promote collaboration among federally-funded youth-serving programs to enhance emancipated foster and homeless youths' efforts toward leading self-sufficient, healthy, productive lives.

If you have questions, please contact Ashley Hart, Staff Lawyer, at 415 788 7961 x 306 or ashley@homebaseccc.org.