

Defining the Spectrum of Youth Housing

Housing is a Solution to Ending Youth Homelessness

Housing and service models vary in design, scope, and operations. This factsheet offers an introductory review of various youth housing models. Youth Housing Models target unaccompanied homeless youth with rental assistance and services focused on life skills and positive youth development. Community organizations establishing youth housing may target particular subgroups, including youth aging out of foster care, youth transitioning from the juvenile system or children's mental health system, young parents, or youth who are not able to return home due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

STRUCTURAL VARIATIONS OF YOUTH HOUSING MODELS

Host Homes

A youth lives in a single-family home with an adult or family owner. The youth resident receives his/her own bedroom and shares the rest of the home with the owner. Housing may be an apartment, condominium, or individual house in rural, suburban, or urban environments.

Community-Based Group homes

Typically, single family housing is specifically licensed to offer residential care to several children or youth. Many community-based group homes serve young people that cannot be reunited with their families and are often associated with foster care, juvenile justice, and child mental health. These community-based group homes are non-secure residential programs emphasizing family-style living in a home-like atmosphere that provide an open community experience. There is continuous presence of staff members who work different shifts but who do not live in the home. Staff members provide services such as cleaning and meals, case management services, tutoring, transportation, etc.

Shared Housing

A single-family home is shared between several youth and an adult counselor or advocate. It is typically not subject to zoning regulations concerning group congregate care because of the small number of youth participants who share the facilities. Youth residents share a communal kitchen and living area and shared housing is designed for one or two roommates per bedroom. The residents are offered life skills training on site aimed at building self-sufficiency. Residents prepare their own meals and do their own housekeeping, while the live-in counselor helps to enforce house rules.

Supervised Apartments (Also Called Single-Site Housing or Cluster Homes)

Supervised apartments are located in an agency-owned or -rented apartment building (sometimes called "cluster homes") with a live-in supervisor who occupies one of the units. Youth housing units make up the entire structure or are established on one floor or one wing of a housing development. The supervised apartment serves youth ages 17-24 who have varying levels of service needs and independent living skills. In addition to guidance and immediate access to assistance, this model provides the option of engaging in programs such as mental and physical health services, group meetings, life skills, and other various activities. Peer-to-peer interactions can encourage or hinder residents.

Scattered-Site Housing

Agencies, and even the youth themselves, rent privately-owned apartments in various geographic locations. Youth are offered rental assistance, basic move-in supplies, moving assistance, and case management support. They may live independently or with a roommate. This option is not recommended for youth requiring intense supervision or those whose mental health may deteriorate with isolation. Scattered-site programs require experienced case managers who conduct weekly meetings and proactively assist youth participants in navigating public mainstream services, providing constructive feedback, being an advocate for them, while also holding them accountable for inappropriate behavior.

Dormitories

Dormitories are large buildings that contain cluster bedrooms providing individuals with a temporary housing while attending colleges and vocational schools. Rooms are often furnished and services are delivered on site including counseling, meals, and housekeeping.

PROGRAMMATIC SERVICE DELIVERY VARIATIONS IN YOUTH HOUSING MODELS

Foyer Employment-Focused Housing

Typically, a supervised apartment program (single-site) for youth that offers subsidized rental assistance and on-site supportive services is specifically focused on employment training and vocational support. Most foyers have work opportunities located onsite through a business venture (coffee shop, café, dry cleaner, small engine shop, etc.). All services focused on increasing vocational and employment skills toward self-sufficiency allow youth to transition to private housing options.

Transitional Housing

Under this variation, provision of rental assistance and services and eligible length of stay is time limited to typically 18, 21, or 24 months. Transitional housing offers rental assistance, moving assistance, and ongoing supportive services through case management. Youth case managers focus on life skills, employment, education, and health needs of the youth, often offering assistance in navigating public systems. Housing may either be in supervised apartments or scattered-site apartments. Youth may be able to 'transition-in-place' by taking over the lease once the rental assistance benefit sunsets.*

Permanent Supportive Housing

Either scattered-site or single-site housing models of permanent supportive housing offer rental assistance and supportive services without a time limit. Services usually include front desk assistance for 24 hours each day, case management services, life skills training, and referrals to health care appointments. Permanent supportive housing is typically reserved for youth who present with severe mental health or physical disabilities requiring long-term support to maintain a residence in the community.

Host Homes

Youth are offered residential accommodations for a limited time period ranging from 6 to 24 months. Youth participants are mandated to cooperate with a case manager. Host family may receive rental assistance or financial assistance or may open their homes without any required financial assistance. This program allows youth to build trusting relationships with an adult mentor, learn independent living skills in a home environment, and develop social confidence and a sense of family support. Youth in a host home also receive optional services such as crisis intervention and family counseling. Assistance to the youth participant (meals, laundry, transportation, and participation in household chores) can be tailored to meet the needs or demands of the youth and owner.

* Most transitional and permanent supportive housing programs for youth require cooperation with a case manager.