

EVIDENCE MATTERS

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Transforming Knowledge Into Housing
and Community Development Policy



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INTERSECTIONALITY OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

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PD&R





Message From PD&R Leadership

The 29th edition of *Evidence Matters* focuses on the intersectionality of youth homelessness. It sheds light on the prevalence of youth homelessness in the United States and draws attention to the experience of homelessness by youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and the range of other ways people choose to identify (LGBTQ+) and black, indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC).

Counts of homeless youth can vary substantially based on both the method of data collection and the definition of youth homelessness. This edition of *Evidence Matters* presents research illustrating this variation in definitions of homelessness and their effects on the resulting counts. For example, the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) showed 15,763 youth sheltered on a single night in 2021. However, a broader definition of homelessness used in a 2017 research study by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago that included experiences of sleeping on the streets, couch surfing, and doubling up in addition to living in shelters counted as many as 4.2 million homeless youth in a single year.

No matter how one counts youth homelessness, however, LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately more likely than others to face homelessness, as are pregnant and parenting youth, BIPOC youth, and youth aging out of foster care.

Addressing the daunting challenge of reducing youth homelessness requires us to better understand the experiences of the youth. The recently completed HUD-sponsored study “Evaluation of the HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program: Youth Perspectives on Homeless Housing and Services” draws on the perspectives of youth who have lived experience with homelessness to inform policy changes to support better services.

We also can learn from the interventions undertaken in response to the coronavirus epidemic. The pattern of sheltered youth changed between 2020 and 2021, possibly because more non-congregate sheltering options became available. Although overall rates of sheltered youth homelessness declined between 2020 and 2021, the AHAR showed that sheltered homelessness increased by nearly 30 percent among transgender youth and by 26 percent for non-gender-conforming youth.

The coronavirus epidemic has also provided new resources for addressing homelessness. Through the American Rescue Plan, HUD provided communities with historic levels of assistance, including nearly 70,000 vouchers through the Emergency Housing Voucher program and \$5 billion in grants through the HOME–American Rescue Plan program.

Along with these resources, the Biden-Harris administration, using evidence-based policies for addressing homelessness as guideposts to support a well-coordinated use of American Rescue Plan and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act resources, launched the *House America* initiative in 2021. *House America* is a national call to action to mayors, county leaders, governors, and Tribal Leaders to set and achieve two specific goals by the end of 2022: place a significant number of people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing and develop thousands of new units of permanent rental housing to address homelessness. As of this writing, 87 state and local leaders nationwide — from California to Maine and from Port Angeles, Washington, to Puerto Rico — have answered this call. Collectively, these communities contain 45 percent of the nation’s homeless population. *House America* communities are demonstrating the leadership and ingenuity needed to address homelessness: rehousing an unprecedented number of people, acquiring and converting hotels into housing, resolving homeless encampments using the Housing First approach, and expanding inventories of permanent supportive housing.

These resources, local innovation, and continuing to listen to the needs of homeless youth are important parts of reducing the number of homeless youth and the length of time they are homeless.

— Todd M. Richardson, *General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research*

Editor's Note

This issue of *Evidence Matters* discusses the intersectional aspects of youth homelessness. In this issue, you will learn about the prevalence of youth homelessness in the United States and its impact on youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and the range of other ways people choose to identify (LGBTQ+) and black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).

The lead article, "Youth Homelessness: The Sum of Our Parts," reviews youth homelessness in the United States, including a definition of youth homelessness, its prevalence and demographics, its causes and consequences, and its intersectional nature. The article also discusses policies aimed at preventing and alleviating youth homelessness.

The Research Spotlight article, "Current Findings from the Round One Evaluation of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program," summarizes recent HUD-sponsored research in youth homelessness and previews forthcoming research on the topic.

The In Practice article, "Programs Addressing Youth Homelessness," highlights several organizations across the United States that are addressing youth homelessness in their communities. This article offers insight into program operations, types of services provided, and the outcomes of participants in these programs.

We hope that the articles in this issue of *Evidence Matters* will offer readers greater insight into the intersectionality of youth homelessness in the United States. We welcome feedback at www.huduser.gov/forums.

— Sean Martin, *Editor*

FEATURE Youth Homelessness: The Sum of Our Parts

According to the groundbreaking Voices of Youth Count survey by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, as many as 4.2 million U.S. youth — 1 in 10 young adults aged 18 to 25 and at least 1 in 30 adolescent minors aged 13 to 17 — experience some degree of homelessness or deep housing insecurity each year, including spending time on the streets or in shelters, couch surfing, and doubling up.¹ The causes, consequences, and experiences of homelessness among youth vary widely based on a number of factors, including their characteristics and identities as well as their intersections. Although no two experiences of homelessness are exactly the same, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and the range of other ways people choose to identify (LGBTQ+); youth who are pregnant or parenting; African-American youth;

and youth aging out of the foster care system are disproportionately likely to face certain challenges.² Youth experiencing homelessness who identify with one or more subpopulations experience a distinct combination of barriers, challenges, and risks that service providers need to acknowledge to best address their homelessness. This article reviews youth homelessness in the United States and explores how an intersectional framework that acknowledges the complex interplay of social categories of identity, discrimination, and systems of oppression that shape the experiences of homeless youth can inform more effective responses.

Defining Youth Homelessness

Different organizations — and even different federal agencies — define and categorize youth homelessness

HIGHLIGHTS

- According to research by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, as many as 4.2 million U.S. youth aged 13 to 25 experience homelessness each year.
- Causes, experiences, and consequences of youth homelessness are varied and can be better understood through a lens of intersectionality — examining how these factors are shaped by different and intersecting identities.
- Incorporating an intersectional framework into policy design and practice can lead to programs and interventions for youth experiencing homelessness that meet the full complexity and nuances of their needs.

differently. For the sake of consistency and clarity, unless otherwise noted, this article will use the definitions outlined in HUD's Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR). AHAR defines the experience of homelessness as "lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate



Photo courtesy of The Night Ministry

HUD's Foster Youth to Independence program provides vouchers to youth exiting foster care, a population at high risk of experiencing homelessness.

nighttime residence.”³ The report categorizes individuals who stay in emergency shelters (facilities designated as temporary shelter for people experiencing homelessness) or safe havens (projects that provide temporary shelter and services for hard-to-serve individuals) or who are in transitional housing programs as experiencing sheltered homelessness. The report classifies people as experiencing unsheltered homelessness if their primary nighttime location is “a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for people,” such as a vehicle, park, or street.⁴

AHAR divides youth into two categories: those under age 18 and those aged 18 to 24. Using these definitions of homelessness and youth, AHAR defines “unaccompanied homeless youth (under 18)” as “people in households with only children who are not part of a family with children or accompanied

by their parent or guardian during their episode of homelessness, and who are under the age of 18,” and “unaccompanied homeless youth (18–24)” as “people in households without children who are not part of a family with children or accompanied by their parent or guardian during their episode of homelessness, and who are between the ages of 18 and 24.” A special category of youth experiencing homelessness is parenting youth — people under age 25 who are parents or guardians of one or more children who are sleeping in the same place as that parent or guardian.⁵

Although these definitions delineate meaningful distinctions and correspond with the prevalence counts cited below, they cannot capture the entire spectrum of experiences. Other forms of housing instability, such as couch surfing, are not included in AHAR’s definitions of homelessness, although they are classified as homelessness

according to others’ definitions. The shelters or emergency housing where youth experiencing homelessness may stay can range from large congregate areas to smaller rooms to hotels (with the help of vouchers).

Prevalence and Demographics

There are many challenges to accurately counting the size and demographics of the population experiencing homelessness, including youth. Point-in-Time (PIT) counts — estimates conducted by local Continuums of Care on one night in the last week of January each year — provide a useful, if imperfect, measure of the prevalence of homelessness. PIT counts can miss less visible forms of homelessness, contributing to a lack of credible and reliable data for tracking unsheltered youth experiencing homelessness.⁶ This article will cite information on the prevalence and demographics of youth experiencing homelessness in the categories designated in the AHAR PIT

counts as well as Chapin Hall's Voices of Youth Count survey and other studies.

The 2020 PIT count estimated that the total population of unaccompanied youth in the United States was 34,210, slightly more than 6 percent of the total number of people experiencing homelessness. The number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness has declined 11 percent nationally since 2017, the first year that this population was enumerated in the PIT count; this figure includes a 7 percent decline in the number of those sheltered and a 14 percent decline in the number of those unsheltered. Nine out of 10 unaccompanied homeless youth identified in January 2020, or 30,821 people, were between the ages of 18 and 24, and 3,389 were under age 18. Slightly more than half of unaccompanied homeless youth were unsheltered, and 7,335 youth were experiencing homelessness as parents, with at least one child under the age of 18.⁷ Many communities did not conduct an unsheltered count in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 PIT count found 15,763 sheltered unaccompanied youth, down from 17,271 in 2020. Ninety-two percent of sheltered unaccompanied youth were between the ages of 18 and 24.⁸

In 2018, instead of conducting the annual PIT count, HUD used a different methodology to estimate youth homelessness: the Longitudinal Systems Analysis, which uses data that communities report to HUD through their Homeless Management Information Systems. This method found that an estimated 113,330 unaccompanied youth aged 25 and younger used a shelter, transitional housing program, or safe haven at some point between September 30, 2017, and September 30, 2018.⁹ The 2018 AHAR also reported data from state educational agencies whose definition of homelessness includes those sheltered, unsheltered, in a hotel or motel, or doubled up because of financial hardship. During the 2017–2018 academic year, 1,117,144 students

between age 3 and 12th grade were doubled up at some point; 105,574 were in hotels or motels; 102,527 were unsheltered; and 182,659 were in shelters, transitional housing, or awaiting foster care placement.¹⁰

Using a similarly broad definition of homelessness, including couch surfing and doubling up, Chapin Hall researchers found that over a 12-month period, 4.3 percent of households with 13- to 17-year-olds and 12.5 percent of households with 18- to 25-year-olds reported experiencing homelessness.¹¹ Nationally, these figures suggest that at least 700,000 13- to 17-year-olds and more than 3.5 million 18- to 25-year-olds experienced homelessness in the year before the survey.¹²

Various studies have found that youth and children in families experience a range of durations of homelessness, from bridged runs (in which a youth leaves out-of-home foster care for 7 or fewer days before returning) to stretches of homelessness of a year or longer. A small-sample 2009 survey found an average of 26 months of homelessness for youth living on the streets; another survey with a larger but still modest sample size found that youth aged 18 to 21 had been homeless for a cumulative average of 16.4 months.¹³

Some researchers suspect that youth homelessness increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, which likely left youth experiencing homelessness undercounted as well as separated from the supports and services that they would normally receive at school.¹⁴

Unaccompanied youth present differently than the general homeless population does; unaccompanied homeless youth are less likely to be White and more likely to be female than members of the general homeless population. Ninety percent of unaccompanied youth are between the ages of 18 and 24, 52 percent are nonwhite, and 57 percent are male. Unaccompanied youth were more likely than the overall population

experiencing homelessness to identify as a race other than White or African-American (17% and 12%, respectively). Thirty-nine percent of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness were women or girls. Although rural and nonrural areas show similar rates of youth homelessness, youth experiences in each context differ. (See “Rural Youth Homelessness,” p. 9.)¹⁵

Causes of Youth Homelessness

The causes of youth homelessness include those common for many other households — a lack of affordable housing, eviction, income loss or instability, poverty, and unexpected or significant economic shocks. Systemic discrimination and disparate impacts in each of these areas based on race, sexual orientation, gender, or other status contribute to disparities in the incidence of homelessness. For example, African-American and Latino renters (especially women) and families with children are at greater risk of eviction than their peers, which, in turn, can lead to homelessness.¹⁶ According to a national survey, 23 percent of transgender individuals experience some type of housing discrimination, and 5 percent experienced eviction because of their gender identity or expression, contributing to housing insecurity. These systemic disparities result in a high risk of homelessness among this population; nearly one out of three transgender individuals surveyed had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.¹⁷

Additional common causes of homelessness among unaccompanied youth include intrafamily conflict, domestic violence, unsafe or unstable home environments, substance abuse, mental illness, family financial difficulties, rejection because of their LGBTQ+ identity, and rejection because of pregnancy.¹⁸ Research suggests that approximately one in five youth who have left their homes are LGBTQ+ youth whose families have rejected them because of their identity. Some LGBTQ+ youth leave home before

coming out for fear that they will be rejected.¹⁹ Violence within or outside of the home is another contributor to homelessness among LGBTQ+ youth, who may need to flee dangerous situations. One study found that nearly one-third of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness have also experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse in their homes.²⁰

Some researchers, however, caution against the oversimplified notion that these youth were ejected from their homes immediately after coming out. The family tensions that drive these youth from their homes may concern issues other than gender identity or sexual orientation and may have simmered over time rather than be a sudden reaction to coming out.²¹ Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals whose families reject them are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness than those whose families accepted them.²² Transgender individuals who had been mistreated in school or lost employment were also more likely to experience homelessness than those who had not.²³ Domestic violence perpetrated against transgender individuals increases the likelihood of homelessness among survivors by a factor of four.²⁴ Youth also may become homeless when fleeing shelters or

Indepth interviews by Chapin Hall with 215 youth experiencing homelessness found that many have experienced trauma, including one in three having experienced the loss of a parent or caregiver before the age of 25. Nearly half of the interviewees had spent time in juvenile detention, jail, or prison; nearly 30 percent had been in foster care; and 17 percent had spent time in both the justice and child welfare systems.²⁷ The 100,000 youth exiting the juvenile justice and 25,000 youth aging out of the foster care system each year are at high risk of experiencing homelessness. Research suggests that more than a quarter of former foster children become homeless within 2 to 4 years of leaving the system, and half of youth leaving the foster care and juvenile justice systems experience homelessness within 6 months because of a lack of support. Most youth exiting the juvenile justice system have had no discharge planning for stable housing and no services to address the trauma associated with detention. Involvement with the juvenile justice system can also entail financial costs for families and endanger a family's public housing.²⁸

LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color are overrepresented in child welfare systems compared with their non-LGBTQ+ and White peers, respectively.²⁹ An

away.³⁰ In addition, negative experiences in congregate or foster care settings can contribute to exits that result in homelessness. For example, transgender youth may be forced to use facilities, clothing, or hygiene products counter to their gender identity despite federal antidiscrimination protections.³¹ LGBTQ+ youth are more likely than their peers to experience the instability of moving from one foster care placement to another, often at the request of the host family, and are more likely to run away from a placement.³²

Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals who seek shelter continue to face barriers and challenges that exacerbate housing insecurity. Although not exclusive to youth, a national survey of transgender individuals who had experienced homelessness in the past year found that 6 percent were denied access to a shelter, 9 percent were thrown out of a shelter, 44 percent decided to leave in response to poor treatment or unsafe conditions, 25 percent presented as the wrong gender to feel safer, 14 percent said they were forced to dress as the wrong gender to stay, 49 percent reported verbal harassment, 19 percent reported physical abuse, and 17 percent reported being sexually assaulted. In all, 70 percent of respondents who were experiencing homelessness reported having a negative experience at a shelter, and 26 percent said that they did not seek shelter to avoid such experiences.³³

Whatever the precise cause, several characteristics, including identification with subpopulations that are marginalized, are associated with an increased risk of homelessness. Parenting youth; youth who identify as African-American, Latino, and/or LGBTQ+; and youth who have not completed high school have a disproportionately higher risk of homelessness. Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are slightly more likely than those in the general homeless population to identify as African-American (35% and 34%,

Research suggests that more than a quarter of former foster children become homeless within 2 to 4 years of leaving the system.

congregate care settings that feel too restrictive, unsafe, or unsanitary, or when they are aging out of the foster care system or exiting the juvenile justice system without securing stable housing.²⁵ Immigration status could also prevent youth from accessing public services needed to prevent homelessness.²⁶

analysis of data from 21 state child welfare systems found that 13 percent of youth aged 13 to 17 exited their first stay in out-of-home care by running away, resulting in various spans of homelessness. African-American and Hispanic youth were more likely than White youth to exit by running



Photo courtesy of Valley Youth House

HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program awards funding to communities to support rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and other housing supports.

respectively). One-quarter of unaccompanied homeless youth were Hispanic or Latino compared with 20 percent of all homeless individuals. Multiracial youth accounted for 11 percent of unaccompanied homeless youth compared with 6 percent of all homeless individuals. Transgender youth or youth who do not identify as male, female, or transgender accounted for 4 percent of the unaccompanied youth population compared with 1 percent of the general homeless population.³⁴

LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented among youth experiencing homelessness (they make up approximately 5 to 10 percent of the general population but 20 to 40 percent of the population of youth experiencing homelessness) even as some researchers suggest that LGBTQ+ youth are undercounted among the population experiencing homelessness.³⁵ A 2019 study found that

LGBTQ+ youth were 2.2 times more likely to experience homelessness than their straight and cisgendered peers.³⁶ A Chapin Hall study found that youth who are both LGBTQ+ and African-American or multiracial reported the highest rates of homelessness.³⁷

In a national survey, 0.53 percent of transgender respondents reported that they were homeless — a rate three times that of the overall U.S. population. Transgender women of color were disproportionately represented among those who had experienced homelessness in the past year. Nearly one in three transgender individuals had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, but among those with intersecting marginalized identities, the rates were higher: 59 percent for American Indian transgender women, 51 percent for African-American

transgender women, 35 percent for Latina transgender women, 51 percent for multiracial transgender women, and 49 percent for Middle Eastern transgender women.³⁸

Consequences

The experience of homelessness has far-reaching effects on youth. Some of the proximate causes of homelessness, such as substance use, sexual abuse, mental health disorders, and poverty, may also be consequences of (or worsened by) the experience of homelessness itself. Youth homelessness can also cause food insecurity, negatively affect one's education, and increase the risk of becoming a victim of violence, among other outcomes.³⁹

Research suggests that youth experiencing homelessness, even those in shelters, are likely to experience food insecurity and not meet daily

recommended dietary levels of iron, magnesium, zinc, or vitamins. Limited research also suggests that food consumption associated with homelessness can lead to obesity.⁴⁰

Studies indicate that unaccompanied youth are more likely than their peers to contract sexually transmitted diseases and are at high risk of pregnancy.⁴¹ Youth experiencing homelessness may engage in selling or trading drugs or sex, which also exposes them to the risk of violence and arrest.⁴² Thirty percent of LGBTQ+ youth come in contact with the juvenile justice system, a rate higher than that of their non-LGBTQ+ peers.⁴³ Fighting in school — often related to bullying — and running away or skipping school are common reasons for LGBTQ+ youth to be referred to the justice system.⁴⁴

Youth experiencing homelessness have a higher incidence of mental health disorders than their housed peers. These disorders include disruptive behavior, social phobia, and depression. Homelessness also contributes to educational challenges such as absenteeism, disruptive school mobility, and a lack of access to special education evaluations and services, which, in turn, result in lower math and reading scores and high school graduation rates than those of their housed peers. Compared with their housed peers, transgender individuals (including adults) who experienced homelessness were four times more likely to engage in sex work, two and a half times more likely to be incarcerated, and more likely to be HIV positive and to have attempted suicide.⁴⁵ Youth experiencing homelessness are also at heightened risk of violence: a 2011 study reported that 22 percent of transgender individuals experiencing homelessness were assaulted in shelters.⁴⁶

Intersectionality and Youth Homelessness

Originating in the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality refers to the interconnection or intersection of two or more social categories

that create overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage.⁴⁷ The dynamic interplay of identities, characteristics, and oppression and exclusion produce distinctive experiences of marginalization that cannot be reduced to that of any single identity or a simple aggregation of identities. Crenshaw coined the term “intersectional equity,” which emphasizes the need to understand the complexity of intersectional inequity and address it accordingly with tailored responses.⁴⁸ As Fraser et al. put it, “Intersectionality encourages us to consider how upstream social determinants (such as racism, sexism, classism, transphobia, and queerphobia) form interlocking systems of oppression which shape the experience of people with multidimensional identities.”⁴⁹

The concept of intersectionality can be applied to all HUD program participants, including youth experiencing homelessness. Intersecting identities, categories, and oppressions lead to differing experiences of marginalization and disempowerment.⁵⁰ In a study of adult populations, Verissimo et al. found that “individuals who experience discrimination based on multiple minority statuses are also more likely to report experiencing homelessness, consistent with an intersectional approach to understanding multiple forms of discrimination.”⁵¹ Although few statistical studies document the percentage of youth experiencing homelessness who are both LGBTQ+ and a member of a racial minority group, LGBTQ+ youth of color, like their adult counterparts, face racial discrimination, higher rates of prostitution, and a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and mental illness. In certain contexts, they may experience emotional isolation and depression related to conflicts among their intersecting identities.⁵²

Another subpopulation of youth experiencing homelessness that faces unique risks and challenges is pregnant and parenting youth. Being unable to provide a safe place for one’s children to live can be stressful, even traumatic. The

homeless services infrastructure may not be designed to meet the special needs of pregnant and parenting youth. Among other challenges, parents may struggle to maintain relationships with each another while one or both are receiving services.⁵³ Homelessness itself can become an imputed identity and a basis for stigmatization and discrimination, possibly intersecting with other identities and compounding challenges.⁵⁴

University of California, Riverside professor Brandon Robinson explained that minority stress — prejudice and discrimination against minority groups that induces stress — contributes to mental health challenges among LGBTQ+ youth with intersecting minority identities and can even lead to pathways into homelessness. These stresses can come from both inside and outside the home, particularly at youth-serving institutions such as schools. Youth may respond to these stresses by escaping to the streets, but these stresses are likely to continue as these youth navigate the streets, services, and shelters.⁵⁵ Robinson argued that familiar explanations of causes of homelessness that focus on coming out and family rejection miss the reality of larger structural factors. A 2019 report from True Colors United and the National LGBTQ Task Force similarly advocated for greater nuance in understanding the challenges that contribute to and shape youth homelessness, including immigration, forced migration, and systemic racism, among others. Jama Shelton wrote that LGBTQ+ youth narratives that focus narrowly on family rejection or victimization can lead stakeholders to emphasize solutions (such as family reunification) that do not adequately meet the needs of young people.⁵⁶

In a 2018 study of the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in seven cities, Shelton et al. found differences within groups based on intersecting identities. In this study, White and Latino LGBTQ+ youth were more likely than their

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Rural Youth Homelessness

Some estimates show that youth homelessness is as prevalent — at the same rate although fewer in absolute numbers — in rural communities (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau) as it is in nonrural communities, but the experience of homelessness in rural areas is different. Homelessness in rural areas tends to be less visible than in nonrural areas, with youth in rural areas being half as likely as those in nonrural areas to stay in a shelter or transitional housing and more likely to be couch surfing, staying with others, or sleeping in cars or outside. Because of this relative lack of visibility, youth experiencing homelessness in rural areas may be undercounted. Most youth experiencing homelessness in rural areas are White, but rural African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian youth experience homelessness at disproportionate rates.¹

Rural communities may offer fewer opportunities for young people to earn an income to pay for housing than do urban areas. In addition, rural economies might be heavily tied to relatively few industries or employers, meaning that an economic downturn in one sector can have widespread impacts. Substance abuse, particularly opioid abuse, in rural areas also contributes to eroding financial security and resources, leading to homelessness.²

Services in rural areas, if available at all, tend to be few and far between because of “limited service infrastructure, greater remoteness, widely dispersed populations, and the unique economic, political, and social realities of rural communities.”³ Youth in rural areas tend to be more disconnected from education and employment than are youth experiencing homelessness in nonrural areas.⁴ The lack of services in many rural areas extends to housing resources such as permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and emergency shelters. Lack of services can cause outmigration, but perhaps less than researchers previously thought, because some people adapt to the lack of formal services and rely on other supports.⁵ Transportation and technology barriers keep youth from accessing the supports they need, and they are more likely to rely on informal supports through their social networks.⁶

HUD’s Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program requires that some amount of grants go to rural communities that can support dispersed drop-in centers, roving outreach, service navigators, and cross-agency partnerships (including schools). Youth-serving organizations with a broad focus often end up being the only place of service for youth experiencing homelessness.⁷ Brott et al. suggested that training for counselors and social workers “be intentionally disseminated within rural communities, thereby providing rural practitioners with a professional network (often available to urban practitioners) to access information, support, best-practices, and resources.”⁸

Taking an intersectional approach to rural youth homelessness, specific subpopulations will have differing experiences and need differing supports. American Indian and Alaska Native youth are twice as likely as other youth to experience homelessness, and although most American Indian and Alaska Native youth experiencing homelessness are not in rural counties, those who are face challenges unique to rural areas.⁹ Rural youth participating in focus groups reported experiencing racism when interacting with law enforcement, education, and child welfare systems, and LGBTQ+ youth struggled to find welcoming and affirming service providers.¹⁰ Culturally responsive policies and practices are needed to meet the needs of American Indian and Alaska Native youth, youth of color, and LGBTQ+ youth.¹¹

¹ Matthew Morton, Amy Dworsky, Gina Miranda Samuels, and Sonali Patel. 2018. “Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in Rural America,” Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 1; 7; 8.

² Ibid., 9.

³ Morton et al., 3.

⁴ Ibid.; Erin D. Carreon, Jonathan Brodie, and Matthew H. Morton. 2020. “Challenges & Opportunities in Addressing Rural Youth Homelessness: Stakeholder Focus Group Findings,” Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, vi.

⁵ Andrew Sullivan and Kotomi Yokokura. 2022. “Exploring Unsheltered Homelessness, Migration, and Shelter Access in Kentucky,” *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* 24:1.

⁶ Carreon et al.

⁷ Morton et al., 8; 12.

⁸ Holly Brott, Mariah Kornbluh, Gary Incaudo, Lindsay Banks, and Jessica Reece. 2019. “Placing a Spotlight on Rural Homelessness: Identifying the Barriers and Facilitators to Successfully Supporting Homeless Families within Rural Communities,” *Journal of Poverty* 23:3, 196–7.

⁹ Morton et al., 13–4.

¹⁰ Carreon et al., vii.

¹¹ Morton et al., 13–4.



Photo courtesy of Valley Youth House

The Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program includes Youth Action Boards to ensure that youth have a voice in the programs and policies that affect them.

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African-American peers to become homeless because they were unable to pay rent. Bisexual Latino youth experiencing homelessness were more likely to report having been homeless for more than 2 years, and bisexual African-American youth were more likely to report being homeless for less than 6 months compared to other bisexual youth. African-American LGBTQ+ youth reported higher incidences of couch surfing than did their White and Latino peers, and White LGBTQ+ youth reported higher incidences of staying outside or sleeping on public transportation than did their African-American and Latino peers. African-American and Latino youth reported a higher incidence of racial discrimination than did their White peers. White transgender youth were more likely than their African-American or Latino peers to report discrimination because of their sexual orientation.⁵⁷

An Intersectional Approach to Policy and Practice

An analysis focused on racial identity or gender identity or sexuality alone would fail to identify these disparate experiences based on the intersections of identities. Incorporating an intersectional framework provides the insights necessary to design programs and interventions for youth experiencing homelessness that meet the full complexity and nuance of their needs.

Many existing programs may not have services appropriately targeted to, or personnel specifically trained for, the unique circumstances and challenges that youth face in their intersecting identities.⁵⁸ Casey Trupin, director of youth homelessness strategy at the Raikes Foundation, pointed out that, for many youth who are nonwhite or not heterosexual, engaging with systems that were designed from a White,

heteronormative perspective is often traumatizing and alienating.⁵⁹

Intersectional equity calls for targeted and tailored approaches to serve those whose experience of homelessness is affected by interconnected sources of oppression. Adopting such approaches requires changes to programming, staff training, and, Page argued, existing laws such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.⁶⁰ “If we truly want to offer comprehensive services, there needs to be honest recognition that discrimination and oppression are underlying causes of homelessness,” said Angie Verissimo, professor at California State University, San Bernardino. “This will put us on a path that will allow services to also address these underlying causes.”⁶¹ Robinson suggested creating culturally specific programming for different subpopulations,

such as LGBTQ+ youth of color, that responds to their stated needs.⁶²

Training might especially be needed for staff serving LGBTQ+ youth. Kroehle outlined some of the essential steps involved in creating inclusive programs that provide “safe and affirming care” for LGBTQ+ youth, including self-awareness and education for providers and respect for youth voices, names, pronouns, and confidentiality. Providers need to offer a range of support groups that bridge various differences and gather those with shared experiences and intersectional identities. Because of the high rates of trauma among youth experiencing homelessness, incorporating trauma-informed care can help service providers meet the unique needs of the youth they serve. Trauma, which often is repeated or chronic, can lead to serious mental health conditions, including posttraumatic stress disorder. Service providers will be better able to engage youth if they are trained to address trauma-related symptoms and challenges. Trauma-informed care may, for example, emphasize respect and create safe spaces to overcome distrust from youth.⁶³ At the administrative level, forms, policies, personnel, spaces, and referrals to partners should reflect a commitment to inclusivity; for example, spaces such as bathrooms should not be unnecessarily gendered, and the organizations to which youth are referred should be inclusive in every aspect.⁶⁴

HUD’s Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) could be a resource for communities across the United States seeking to integrate an intersectional framework in their programmatic approach to preventing homelessness. YHDP awards funding to communities to support housing programs such as rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, and other models. Significantly, YHDP incorporates Youth Action Boards as advisory groups to ensure that youth have direct input in creating programs that are responsive

to their needs.⁶⁵ Some YHDP awardees have host homes for youth that are designated specifically for LGBTQ+ youth, and others have identified the lack of housing options for specific subpopulations, including LGBTQ+ youth, pregnant and parenting youth, youth aging out of foster care, and youth exiting the juvenile justice system, as service gaps that need to be filled.⁶⁶

Efforts to incorporate youth voices, says Trupin, must not tokenize youth input, and youth should be paid for their time.⁶⁷ Engagement that empowers youth and pays attention to intersections of identity and experiences can help.⁶⁸ Samuels et al. observe that when staff support and nurture the identity development of LGBTQ+ youth and

Because of the high rates of trauma among youth experiencing homelessness, incorporating trauma-informed care can help service providers meet the unique needs of the youth they serve.

youth of color who are navigating forms of discrimination on multiple bases, the youth tend to engage more deeply.⁶⁹

Other promising points of application for an intersectional approach to reducing the risk of homelessness among youth aging out of foster care include HUD’s Family Unification Program (FUP), FUP Youth and Family Self-Sufficiency Program Demonstration, and Foster

Youth to Independence (FYI) initiative. Youth leaving foster care who are at risk of homelessness (as well as families engaged with the child welfare system) are eligible to receive vouchers through FUP. However, only 13 percent of public housing agencies (PHAs) participate in FUP, and only 5 percent of FUP participants are former foster youth. More than 50 PHAs were approved to participate in the FUP Youth and Family Self-Sufficiency Program Demonstration, which pairs FUP vouchers with HUD’s Family Self-Sufficiency program. Beginning in 2019, the FYI program became available to PHAs that do not have FUP vouchers. Initially targeted to residents who were being displaced from other HUD-assisted housing, FYI provides youth aged 18 to 25 who have aged out of the foster care system with housing choice vouchers for up to 36 months coupled with supportive services to promote self-sufficiency. PHAs partner with public child welfare agencies to implement the program.⁷⁰ The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act, enacted in December 2020, will make FUP vouchers available to PHAs by request rather than through competition, extend their terms past 36 months in certain circumstances, and require PHAs to make participants aware of available programs and services.⁷¹ An understanding of the population exiting the system as well as subpopulations with intersecting identities can help target youth in need of vouchers as well as additional supports.⁷²

Programs that target vouchers to populations at high risk of homelessness help make efficient use of limited resources, but expanding available resources, along with increasing the supply of affordable housing generally, promises to reduce homelessness further. The key insight from an intersectional lens is that any action to expand available resources must also ensure that youth can access those resources without facing discrimination or other barriers.

Ultimately, Kroehle, Robinson, Verissimo, and others argued, the recognition of the

role of discrimination in contributing to homelessness points to addressing systems of oppression. According to Verissimo et al., “Strategies to prevent and address homelessness can be strengthened by addressing discrimination that is embedded in multiple social systems, including housing, educational, employment, criminal justice, and health systems.”⁷³ The Biden administration’s emphasis on achieving equity for those “who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality” takes these systems head on, calling through an executive order for the federal government to “recognize and work to redress inequities in their policies and programs that serve as barriers to equal opportunity.”⁷⁴ An additional executive order expressly directs all federal agencies to enforce prohibitions of discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation, including housing discrimination.⁷⁵ Together, these executive orders represent

a commitment to the dismantling of the systems that contribute to and shape the experience of youth homelessness.

According to Robinson, attention to intersectionality in research on youth homelessness is growing, particularly through qualitative research. Quantitative methods might not reach the depth of multiple factors contributing to homelessness — for example, if surveys ask a respondent to check a single box on why they perceived they were experiencing homelessness.⁷⁶ Researchers could adapt quantitative methods to permit more nuance and report intersecting identities. With a few exceptions, most research on LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness does not break down subgroups by race or other identities. A recent review of homelessness intervention evaluations noted specifically that “evaluative evidence is further lacking on how the effects of interventions vary by subpopulations disproportionately impacted

by homelessness” and that no evaluations of interventions that implement an intersectional framework exist.⁷⁷ As practitioners adopt explicitly intersectional approaches, opportunities to research and evaluate will expand as well.

Conclusion

Youth homelessness remains an urgent issue in the United States, with millions of youth experiencing some type of homelessness and instability each year. Using an intersectional framework to understand the complex and dynamic ways that multiple identities shape the experiences, obstacles, and systems of oppression encountered by different youth can help policymakers and practitioners tailor appropriate services to individual clients and identify and address large-scale structures that cause or worsen youth homelessness. **EM**

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Photo courtesy of Valley Youth House

When program staff support and nurture identity development and incorporate youth voices, youth tend to engage more deeply.

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Current Findings From the Round One Evaluation of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

In 2012, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness released the Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness, an updated roadmap of strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness.¹ A key goal included the development of coordinated local efforts and systems tailored to the needs of youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This goal included developing more efficient methods for identifying and engaging youth and strategically aligning their needs with the most appropriate and effective resources available in their community. HUD responded by launching the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP), which provides resources for communities to create or improve coordinated planning and services for this population of youth aged 14 to 24. This article summarizes published findings to date from the evaluation of the first round of YHDP.

The Demonstration

In early 2017, during the first round of YHDP, HUD awarded \$33 million to 10 Continuums of Care (CoCs).² Using YHDP funds to implement coordinated planning efforts, CoCs identified and collaborated with various local stakeholders, including housing providers, child welfare agencies, school districts, workforce development organizations, and juvenile justice systems. These CoCs also developed Youth Action Boards (YABs) composed of youth with lived experience with homelessness that were tasked with leading the planning and implementation of YHDP. HUD asked selected CoCs to use these collaborations to assess the local needs and characteristics of youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness and create a coordinated community plan to improve the accessibility and targeting of resources. In addition, HUD offered YHDP CoCs technical assistance to help them

HIGHLIGHTS

- Family conflict and tumultuous home environments were the most common causes of homelessness identified by youth across all 10 Round One Continuums of Care (CoCs) in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP).
- Results from a national survey of CoCs show that key barriers to serving youth include a lack of affordable housing, limited educational and employment opportunities, and difficulty in serving minor youth under age 18 because of restrictions with signing leases and consenting to data sharing as well as the need for parental consent to access services such as shelters or health care.
- By mid-implementation, youth in YHDP CoCs reported increasing awareness of and access to services such as coordinated entry systems, case management, and youth-specific shelters and permanent housing assistance.

navigate the coordinating and planning process, including developing and engaging YABs and governance structures, establishing new youth-focused projects and services, collaborating with local

Continuums of Care Receiving Round One YHDP Awards	YHDP Funding
Anchorage, Alaska	\$1.5 million
Austin/Travis County, Texas	\$5.2 million
Cincinnati/Hamilton County, Ohio	\$3.8 million
Connecticut Balance of State, Connecticut	\$6.6 million
Kentucky Balance of State, Kentucky	\$1.9 million
Northwest Michigan, Michigan	\$1.3 million
Ohio Balance of State, Ohio	\$2.2 million
San Francisco, California	\$2.9 million
Seattle/King County, Washington	\$5.4 million
Watsonville/Santa Cruz, California	\$2.2 million

partners, and navigating HUD regulations and policies.

The Evaluation

After selecting the first round of YHDP CoCs, HUD contracted with Westat, an independent research firm, to lead a 4-year evaluation of the demonstration. The evaluation focused on three key areas: the baseline status of the systems in place within each selected community that served targeted youth, the changes to systems that improved access to housing and services for targeted youth over time, and how noted changes affected the number and composition of targeted youth. To achieve these goals, the evaluation addressed the following research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences among the YHDP CoCs, and how does their baseline status compare with that of non-YHDP CoCs in their services for youth experiencing homelessness?
- How are the CoCs planning and implementing coordinated community responses to youth homelessness?
- What has been the role of technical assistance in shaping the coordinated community plan and its implementation?
- How are YHDP communities engaging youth in the planning process and in the execution of those plans?
- What strategies do youth and other stakeholders think worked?
- How have services and supports for youth experiencing homelessness changed over the course of the demonstration, and how do those changes compare with communities not selected for YHDP?
- How have the number and composition of youth experiencing homelessness who were in need of services — and who have received services — changed in the demonstration communities that did not receive YHDP funding?

Westat used a longitudinal, multiple comparative case study design of the first 10 CoCs selected as part of YHDP's Round One sites and selected



The gender of youth served across all 10 Round One YHDP sites was predominantly female.

3 CoCs that did not receive YHDP funding to serve as comparison sites.³ The evaluation included two rounds of qualitative interviews to gather direct perspectives from local stakeholders (such as advocacy groups and philanthropic organizations) and youth serving on the YABs. Westat conducted focus groups to gather perspectives from youth experiencing homelessness. To create another basis for comparison, Westat distributed two waves of web surveys to CoCs nationally.⁴ The first wave of surveys was administered in early 2019, during the launch of the Round One YHDP projects, and

the second wave was administered in mid-2020, near the end of the Round One demonstration. Westat analyzed Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) data reported by YHDP CoCs and the 3 comparison CoCs to understand the services that the youth received and the size of the youth populations served in the 10 YHDP sites and the 3 comparison sites.⁵ A document review that included grant applications, community plans, and other CoC documents helped to illuminate the YHDP planning process and provided historical context for each of the selected CoCs.

Published Reports and Findings

To date, HUD has published three reports about the YHDP evaluation: the Early Implementation Report, published in March 2021; the Initial Continuums of Care Survey, published in July 2021; and Youth Perspectives on Homeless Housing and Services, published in April 2022. A final comprehensive report integrating all data and analysis from the study will be published by the end of 2022. All HUD-published reports from this study have been uploaded to the YHDP evaluation page on HUD User, HUD's research portal.⁶

The Early Implementation Report assesses planning efforts across all sites that took place during the first year of the demonstration and the sites' baseline status in the size and composition of studied youth, services, housing, and system development (such as how the

CoCs developed their coordinated community response, collaborations, and implementation of YHDP projects). The report also analyzes data collected from the first round of interviews and focus groups, a document review, HMIS, and the first wave of web surveys. Key findings from this report include the following:

- Development of a coordinated community response:
 - The strongest coordination across sites was with child welfare, education, and behavioral health agencies; collaborations with the juvenile justice and healthcare systems were the least common.
 - Noted challenges included delays in receiving HUD funding and guidelines; establishing governance structures; identifying partners; and obtaining buy-in from stakeholders, which was particularly challenging within the large, multicounty CoCs.

- HUD technical assistance improved sites' ability to develop coordinated plans, establish and involve YABs with planning, and improve sites' ability to collect data and use it in local strategic planning.

- Status of youth homelessness service systems:
 - The baseline level of development of each site shaped the early efforts of each site. CoCs with highly developed youth homelessness systems and resources in place tended to use YHDP resources to refine their fully implemented systems, such as through improved navigation or diversion assistance. CoCs with less developed systems tended to focus on a more extensive range of projects, including improvements to their coordinated entry systems, drop-in centers, and outreach.⁷



Inclusion of youth with lived experiences of homelessness in the planning and implementation processes through Youth Action Boards was a critical component of YHDP.

- Of the YHDP-funded sites, all planned to expand or create new rapid rehousing projects, half planned to implement host home projects, and two planned projects that allowed youth to move from transitional housing to rapid rehousing. Only a few sites planned to increase access to mainstream services, and no sites planned to increase employment projects.

- Perspectives of youth:

- Family conflict and tumultuous home environments were the most common causes of homelessness identified by youth. Some were rejected by family because of pregnancy or because they identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and the range of other ways people choose to identify (LGBTQ+).
- Many of the youth participants in YHDP were unaware of the availability of local resources or how to connect to these resources. Youth who were familiar with their community's coordinated entry system indicated that the process was too slow and burdensome.
- The lack of affordable housing and the high cost of housing were noted as problems across sites, especially in urban areas, where youth could not find jobs that paid enough to support themselves or rent housing.
- Youth recommendations included increasing availability of and access to youth-specific shelters and housing, improving outreach and communication, and assistance with employment. Youth also recommended that CoCs solicit input from youth themselves to improve youth-tailored services.

- Population size and composition of youth:

- The average age of youth served across sites was 21. Youth under age 18 represented only 10 percent of youth across sites but were most common in Northwest

African-American, multiracial, and Native American youth typically were overrepresented in each site, with rates ranging from three to eight times those observed in the general population.

Michigan, San Francisco, and Anchorage.

- The youth served were predominantly female. The rate of youth who identified as transgender or gender nonconforming across all sites ranged from 0.1 to 3 percent, higher than most national averages.
- African-American, multiracial, and Native American youth typically were overrepresented in each site, with rates ranging from three to eight times those observed in the general population. Latino youth make up approximately 15 percent of the general population but represented nearly half of the population served in Santa Cruz and one-third of the population in Austin/Travis County.

The Initial Continuums of Care Survey report summarizes data collected from the first national survey of CoCs, conducted in early 2019 during the launch of Round One YHDP projects. This report establishes a baseline understanding of the services and housing available for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness in CoCs nationwide. Key findings from this report included the following:

- The fully implemented system component that was most common across surveyed CoCs was a youth-targeted coordinated entry system. Other common services for youth considered to be partially or fully implemented across the surveyed CoCs were outreach, case management, family and natural support services, and education and employment services.

Services least likely to be implemented specifically for youth included homelessness prevention and emergency shelter.

- More than half of surveyed CoCs indicated that they have a coordinated entry system in place that offered multiple points of entry, used known assessment tools, and served youth who were considered homeless and fleeing domestic violence.
- Most surveyed CoCs reported coordinating with entities that included child welfare, education, and mental health and substance abuse service providers. Coordination typically involved representatives from these entities serving as members of the CoC and participating in youth homelessness planning. Less common coordination activities included the blending of funding from multiple programs and providing services and housing.
- Coordination challenges identified across surveyed CoCs included varying definitions of homelessness, restrictions on how funding could be spent, and the sharing of confidential data.
- More than half of surveyed CoCs have a strategic plan for addressing youth homelessness. Fewer than half of the surveyed CoCs, however, indicated that they have conducted youth-specific needs assessments as part of their communities' planning efforts. Even fewer surveyed CoCs included youth with lived experience with homelessness in their governing and policymaking or have a committee that focuses specifically on youth housing and services. Surveyed CoCs

noted that the lack of accurate and complete data for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness created planning challenges.

- CoCs identified several key barriers to serving youth, including a lack of affordable housing, limited educational and employment opportunities, and difficulty in serving youth under age 18 because of restrictions with signing leases and consenting to data sharing as well as the need for parental consent to access services such as shelters or health care.

Finally, the Youth Perspectives Report provides a qualitative summary of interviews with youth from all 10 of the Round One YHDP CoCs and from the 3 comparison CoCs. The report is based on two rounds of interviews conducted at baseline and at mid-implementation — about 2 years after the start of YHDP. The two rounds of interviews illustrate how the demonstration evolved over the first 2 years of implementation and further document the experiences of youth members of YABs and the perspectives of youth receiving services in these communities.⁸ Key findings from this report include the following:

- Although YAB members across all sites reported being active in YHDP planning and early implementation, YAB involvement by mid-implementation varied across sites, with fewer sites maintaining active YABs.
- By mid-implementation, awareness of coordinated entry by youth increased compared with baseline. Youth in some sites voiced discomfort when responding to questions asked during the coordinated entry process, because they felt that either their responses were not believed or the questions induced trauma

because they concerned sensitive topics such as past abuse.

- Youth across sites during baseline and mid-implementation reported unfamiliarity with homelessness resources in their community. Although youth-centered outreach was available in most communities by mid-implementation, some youth continued to rely on friends, family, or non-homeless service providers (such as clinics, job centers, or schools) to learn about local homelessness resources.
- Youth in the mid-implementation focus groups expressed fewer concerns about accessing permanent housing, likely in part because of the increased resources that were available at that point. Difficulties in locating affordable apartments, however, forced some youth to select apartments with maintenance issues or in areas considered unsafe.
- By mid-implementation, youth in YHDP CoCs reported increasing awareness of and access to services such as coordinated entry, case management, and youth-specific shelters and permanent housing assistance. Youth in the comparison CoCs reported little change in their systems over time, and services mostly remained the same.

Conclusion

A critical component of YHDP was the inclusion of youth with lived experience with homelessness in developing local governance structures and influencing local policymaking. The evaluation took the inclusion of youth a step further, using their direct perspectives to understand how the demonstration may have changed their lives and how local services, planning, and coordination efforts could better serve them. Collectively, the demonstration and its evaluation efforts serve as a model for

carrying out HUD's Evaluation Policy, which calls for the "deliberate and intentional inclusion of the thoughts and perspectives of studied groups."⁹

YHDP has greatly expanded since its initial launch in 2017. Through 5 rounds, HUD has awarded nearly \$300 million to a total of 77 CoCs. In March 2022, HUD announced its sixth round of awards, offering an additional \$72 million to up to 25 CoCs.¹⁰ As HUD increases its coordinated efforts and services for youth while critically assessing the results and learning directly from youth themselves, it further demonstrates its commitment to achieving the early goals established by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. **EM**

— Justin Brock
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- ¹ U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. 2013. "Framework to End Youth Homelessness: A Resource Text for Dialogue and Action."
 - ² CoCs are designated communities, such as a city, county, or region, that function as a local network of stakeholders and providers to serve populations who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness.
 - ³ The three comparison CoCs selected for the study were Sonoma County, Colorado Balance of State, and Memphis.
 - ⁴ A total of 305 out of 380 CoCs nationally responded to the web survey — a response rate of 80 percent. The Round One YHDP CoCs and the three comparison CoCs were excluded from the survey.
 - ⁵ HMIS collects and reports client-level data of people accessing homelessness services within each CoC. More information can be found at www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/.
 - ⁶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program" (www.huduser.gov/portal/Youth-Homelessness-Demonstration-Program.html). Accessed 22 April 2022.
 - ⁷ Coordinated entry is a centralized and streamlined method for accessing homeless services within the community. More information about coordinated entry can be found at www.hudexchange.info/resource/4427/coordinated-entry-policy-brief/.
 - ⁸ The Youth Perspectives Report includes 25 interviews with YAB members and more than 60 focus groups with youth experiencing homelessness.
 - ⁹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2021. "HUD Program Evaluation Policy-Policy Statement," *Federal Register* 86: 154.
 - ¹⁰ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2022. "Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program," Notice of Funding Opportunity, FR-6500-N-35.

Programs Addressing Youth Homelessness

The diverse racial, gender, and social circumstances of youth experiencing homelessness require approaches tailored to their unique and often complex needs. Several organizations across the country are addressing these needs by implementing evidence-based solutions to improve the long-term housing stability and emotional well-being of youth.¹ The Night Ministry is a Chicago-based nonprofit that operates several housing programs providing outreach, shelter, health care, and social supports to youth in a safe and inclusive environment, with a focus on the needs of parenting and expectant youth; racial minorities; and youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and the range of other ways people choose to identify (LGBTQ+). New Avenues for Youth, a nonprofit based in Portland, Oregon, works to prevent and mitigate youth homelessness through programs that offer basic needs, housing, counseling, education, skills development, and employment for youth who are aging out of foster care, LGBTQ+,

or experiencing sex trafficking. The programs offered at these nonprofit organizations have generated positive outcomes for young people, many of whom have achieved vocational and educational goals and developed the life skills needed for independent living.

The Night Ministry

The Night Ministry began in 1976 through a coalition of Chicago-based congregations and a local minister who supported individuals experiencing homelessness.² Today, The Night Ministry serves neighborhoods throughout the city, providing homelessness programs and services that include transitional housing and supportive services for youth and young adults whose experience of homelessness is compounded by their gender identity, social background, and race.³

Estimates on the number of young people who are experiencing homelessness vary based on survey method and agencies' definition of homelessness.⁴ The hidden and transitory nature of

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Night Ministry's housing programs address the complex needs of LGBTQ+, parenting, expectant, foster, and minority youth in a safe and inclusive atmosphere.
- New Avenues for Youth enables young people to access employment training and academic supports in a flexible, comfortable format that is uniquely tailored for youth representing several intersecting identities.
- The Night Ministry and New Avenues for Youth require staff training in cultural competency, harm reduction, and trauma-informed care to meet the needs of youth and establish rapport.

youth homelessness makes counting youth difficult because they often are not in shelter locations where traditional Point-in-Time (PIT) counts take place.⁵ The January 2021 PIT count tallied 213 unaccompanied youth in Chicago; of these, approximately 89 percent were living in shelters and the remaining 11 percent were unsheltered outdoors.⁶ Using the Chicago Homeless



The transitional housing and supportive services offered at The Night Ministry help youth develop the life skills needed to live independently.

Photo courtesy of The Night Ministry



Photo courtesy of The Night Ministry

Establishing rapport is a vital component of engaging youth during meetings with case managers and program staff.

Management Information System and the American Community Survey, researchers at the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless incorporated data on youth who are staying with others temporarily and determined that 13,966 unaccompanied youth aged 14 to 24 were in the city, 91 percent of whom stayed with others temporarily.⁷

Youth who are in shelters are referred to The Night Ministry through Chicago's coordinated entry system.⁸ Others connect to The Night Ministry through its youth outreach van and Youth Outreach Team (YOT) members, who visit libraries, courthouses, and drop-in centers where young people who are experiencing homelessness may spend time.⁹ From July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021, The Night Ministry served 451 youth, 312 of whom were African-American. One hundred of these African-American youth also identified as LGBTQ+. Overall, 166 youth identified as LGBTQ+, and 92 of them also identified as other people of color. A total of 235 youth identified as other people of color. Among parenting or pregnant youth, 26 were African-American,

4 identified as LGBTQ+, and 3 were foster system alumni.¹⁰

Addressing Complex Needs

Betsy Carlson, director of youth programs at The Night Ministry, noted that, for young people, seeing staff who look like them in leadership positions is critical to their growth, and The Night Ministry reflects this conviction through its own staff, who are predominantly African-American and Latino. Carlson added that The Night Ministry is striving to examine “the ways that we can really be an antiracist organization [and make] sure that we have more opportunities for advancement ... for people of color in the organization.”¹¹ Recognizing the link between racial disparities and homelessness, Paul Hamann, president and chief executive officer of The Night Ministry, stated that the organization and its leaders have a “moral obligation” to examine how their own positions of privilege have implicitly or explicitly contributed to the racial climate. Staff actively discuss how the organization can adapt its language and work culture to more equitably serve people of color. The Night Ministry sought to improve

accommodations for the LGBTQ+ community by allowing youth more flexibility to disclose their gender on intake forms and introducing gender neutral bathrooms to be inclusive of transgender youth.¹² In addition, all youth receive a copy of the resident handbook, which explains The Night Ministry's expectations for respect and tolerance toward youth and staff. Through focus groups and surveys, The Night Ministry involves youth in the design of its programs, which, said Carlson, “forces us to include a fair amount of racial equity because so many of the young people that we serve are people of color.”¹³

Young people coming to The Night Ministry may identify various issues linked to their experience of homelessness. Staff members must be dedicated to engaging youth. “We make a point of trying to support cultural competency with our staff, [and] we have trainings that are on quite a number of different issues that are a part of youth facing homelessness,” said Carlson. As part of their foundational training, staff members learn the basics of trauma-informed care, harm reduction,

motivational interviewing, restorative justice, and cultural competency for working with LGBTQ+ and minority youth. If young people experience homelessness because of their sexuality or family conflict, the staff work to establish rapport and address their needs.¹⁴ Recognizing the prevalence of mental health challenges among youth experiencing homelessness, The Night Ministry partners with Rush University Medical Center to offer clients free behavioral health counseling and psychiatric care.¹⁵ Staff must also attend first aid training in mental health and learn skills to promote positive youth development.¹⁶

Housing and Services

YOT case managers typically are the first point of contact for young people experiencing homelessness, connecting them to safe housing, education, employment, and resources. In 2020, 114 young adults received case management services through YOT. Other forms of engagement include social media posts as well as phone calls, text messages, and in-person meetings with young people. Peer outreach professionals assist YOT by sharing

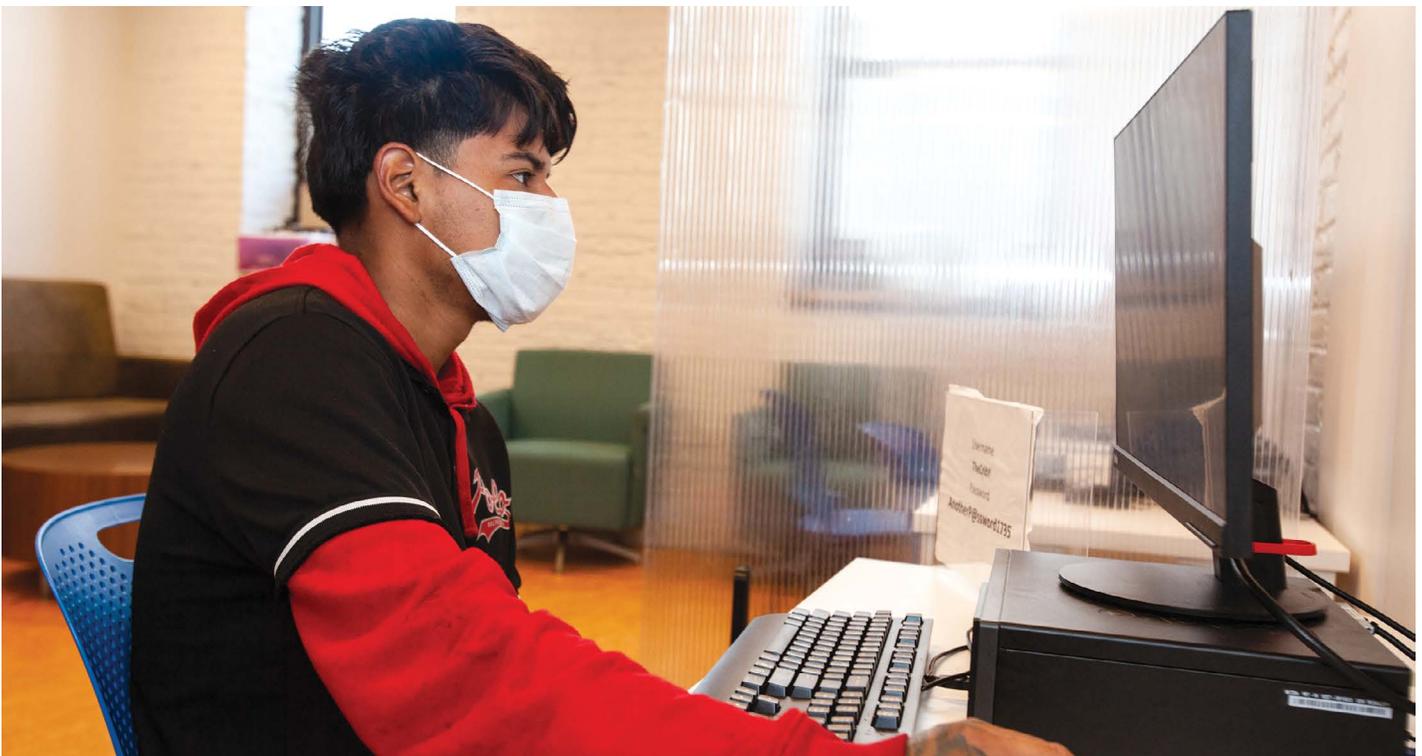
their personal experiences with other youth.¹⁷

The Night Ministry operates an overnight emergency shelter for 21 young adults aged 18 to 24 called The Crib, which opened in 2011 in Boystown, a predominantly LGBTQ+ community in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood.¹⁸ Now located on the ground floor of The Night Ministry's new administrative headquarters in Bucktown, The Crib features a multipurpose room for dining, group activities, and recreation as well as a dormitory with beds, gender nonconforming bathrooms, a large kitchen, and a laundry room. The computer lounge, which youth residents named The Vibe, enables them to apply to jobs and access resources.¹⁹ In keeping with The Crib's emphasis on ensuring representation of the LGBTQ+ community, some staff members are transgender, creating a welcoming and inclusive space for LGBTQ+ youth.²⁰ The Crib also participates in a shelter bed reservation system through a smartphone app called StreetLight Chicago, which allows youth experiencing homelessness to reserve a bed. In 2020, The Crib served 246 young adults with a total stay of 5,357 nights.²¹

The Response-Ability Pregnant and Parenting Program (RAPPP) began in 2007 as the only shelter program in Chicago that reserved beds for expectant and parenting mothers as young as age 14. The program aimed to improve the physical and emotional health of clients and their children and develop self-sufficiency through education, access to public benefits, life skills, and onsite support groups. RAPPP received funding from the Basic Center Program administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which meant minors could stay in the program for up to 21 days. Additional funding from general operating funds allowed RAPPP to serve young adults over age 18, many of whom already lived in the building.²² In fiscal year 2020, RAPPP served 60 pregnant and parenting youth and 35 of their children. Among clients exiting RAPPP in 2020, 74 percent transitioned to safer and more stable housing.²³

Over time, according to Carlson, the age of RAPPP clients began to shift from younger to older teens.²⁴ In response to this change, The Night

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Located at The Crib, The Vibe has computers and internet access so that youth can find employment and pursue education.

Photo courtesy of The Night Ministry

Supporting Vulnerable Youth Through Philanthropy

Philanthropic organizations and foundations provide vital resources when gaps in public funding exist or nonprofits need additional support to fulfill program goals. Launched in 2002 in Seattle, the Raikes Foundation works to prevent and end homelessness among youth and young adults through grant support to entities such as public schools, child welfare organizations, and juvenile justice systems.¹ Casey Trupin, director of youth homelessness strategy at the Raikes Foundation, noted that philanthropies can fund a robust advocacy infrastructure that can help government officials pursue their agendas.²

According to the Raikes Foundation, prevention is the “most equitable, economic, and efficient” approach to ending youth homelessness. Prevention, along with examining student homelessness, crisis response, and advocacy, forms the Raikes Foundation’s four-pillar strategy for ending youth homelessness.³ In 2011 and 2013, the Raikes Foundation engaged service providers, local government officials, current and former youth experiencing homelessness, and private philanthropic organizations to prioritize preventing and ending youth homelessness in King County.⁴ The team’s discussions led to the formation of Washington’s Office of Homeless Youth (OHY), which is charged with leading state initiatives to prevent youth homelessness; assisting providers in establishing best practices; and funding programs to stop discharging youth from the foster care, behavioral health, and juvenile justice systems into homelessness.⁵ The number of youth in Washington State exiting public systems of care into homelessness decreased 15 percent between 2013 and 2017.⁶

The foundation supports initiatives that are part of a coordinated system in which the community and public systems address homelessness through a joint effort rather than operating within silos. Organizations supporting juvenile justice reform, for example, also play a role in preventing youth homelessness. Critical to reducing recidivism is screening young people for housing instability and providing financial and social service supports to enable them to return home rather than enter the shelter system. “If we can at least come together and start having that conversation around the gaps, we actually think this is an absolutely solvable problem if we focus first on equity and we think about it as something that multiple agencies and partners have to own,” said Trupin.⁷

The Raikes Foundation also supports youth voices in policy decisions by funding grants to organizations such as the Mockingbird Society, a Washington nonprofit organization that helps youth develop public speaking and advocacy skills while furthering systems change.⁸ During the Mockingbird Society’s 2021 virtual youth leadership summit, young advocates addressed OHY and the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care and presented recommendations such as developing safe and affirming placements for LGBTQ+ youth, expunging criminal records, and increasing access to financial literacy.⁹

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Raikes Foundation partnered with Building Changes to create the Washington State Student and Youth Homelessness COVID-19 Response Fund to boost public funds to support students, youth, and young adults experiencing homelessness. Working in concert with OHY, young people with lived experience of homelessness, and a network of school administrators and housing providers, Building Changes and the Raikes Foundation prioritized funding organizations that directly serve youth representing several marginalized subgroups.¹⁰ From April 24, 2020, to March 30, 2021, the fund awarded \$4.1 million in grants to 199 community-based organizations, service providers, schools, and tribes serving 25 counties across Washington.¹¹

¹ Raikes Foundation. “About Jeff and Tricia Raikes” (raikesfoundation.org/about-jeff-and-tricia-raikes). Accessed 26 October 2021; Raikes Foundation. “Progress” (raikesfoundation.org/youth-homelessness-progress). Accessed 26 October 2021; Raikes Foundation. n.d. “Youth and Young Adult Homeless Strategy,” Document provided by Casey Trupin, 1 December 2021.

² Interview with Casey Trupin, 30 November 2021.

³ Raikes Foundation, “Youth and Young Adult Homeless Strategy.”

⁴ Raikes Foundation. n.d. “Preventing and Ending Youth and Young Adult Homelessness,” 3; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. 2014. “The Secretary’s Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships - Housing and Community Development in Action.”

⁵ A Way Home Washington. n.d. “Frequently Asked Questions,” 2; Interview with Casey Trupin; Raikes Foundation, “Progress.”

⁶ Raikes Foundation, “Youth and Young Adult Homeless Strategy.”

⁷ Interview with Casey Trupin.

⁸ Ibid; Raikes Foundation. “Progress”; The Mockingbird Society. “Youth Programs” (mockingbirdsociety.org/youth-programs). Accessed 1 December 2021.

⁹ The Mockingbird Society. “Youth Leadership Summit” (mockingbirdsociety.org/annual-events/youth-leadership-summit). Accessed 2 February 2022.

¹⁰ Building Changes. “Washington State Student and Youth Homelessness COVID-19 Response Fund” (buildingchanges.org/our-work/covid-19-response/).

Accessed 6 December 2021; Building Changes. “Fund FAQ” (buildingchanges.org/our-work/covid-19-response/faq/). Accessed 2 February 2022; Subgroups include: black, indigenous, people of color, LGBTQ+, those with disabilities, parenting, expectant, immigrants, non-English speakers, and those who have experienced incarceration, sex trafficking, or domestic violence.

¹¹ Building Changes. 2021. “Supporting K-12 Students and Young People Experiencing Homelessness through the Pandemic: Needs and Opportunities for Systems Change.”

Ministry received \$250,000 in Maternity Group Homes for Pregnant and Parenting Youth funding from HHS in fiscal year 2021.²⁵ Eligible clients for this funding are at least age 16, and participating teens can stay in the shelter for up to 21 months and transition to permanent housing once they exit. As Carlson explained, “[A] lot of times, people would move from [the Basic Center Program] into a transitional housing program ... with another agency,” so the updated model for RAPP allows teens more continuity of care and better long-term stability as they transition to permanent housing. In fall 2021, staff solicited ideas from program alumni and current clients, who voted for a new name for the program: Parenting with Purpose.²⁶

Parenting with Purpose remains an eight-bed program, and, as of December 2021, plans are underway within another facility to create individual bedrooms to provide private space for family units. Because program surveys revealed that respondents prefer more privacy, converting the shelter’s design from communal to more independent space will become increasingly important as clients stay for longer periods.²⁷

Expectant and parenting youth under 16 do not qualify for Parenting with Purpose, so The Night Ministry serves this group through its Interim Housing Program, which is a short-term housing program for youth aged 14 through 21 and their children. Although the Interim Housing Program does not focus on pregnant and parenting youth, it can accommodate their needs and is designed to help youth return to their families or find safe housing. A total of \$85,808 in HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) grants and \$199,350 in HHS Basic Center Program funds supported the Interim Housing Program in fiscal year 2021.²⁸

Launched in 2006 at The Night Ministry’s Open Door Shelter in Chicago’s West Town neighborhood, the Successful Transitions Effectively Preparing

for Self-Sufficiency (STEPS) program provided up to 2 years of transitional housing and life skills coaching for eight young adults aged 18 to 22. Designed as a stepping-stone toward independent living, the program was also open to expectant mothers or parenting youth with infants or toddlers. In fiscal year 2020, a total of 19 young adults and 3 of their children participated in STEPS and stayed a total of 2,586 nights. All residents who transitioned to permanent housing remained housed 90 days after leaving the program. In fiscal year 2020, nearly 90 percent of STEPS participants indicated that they met someone in the program they could rely on for support after exiting.²⁹ Although STEPS was only an eight-bed program, Carlson noted that its impact was significant for those who were housed.³⁰ In December 2021, The Night Ministry merged STEPS with Phoenix Hall — a year-round residence in Chicago’s North Lawndale neighborhood for local high school students experiencing homelessness or housing instability — to form a hybrid housing program called Pathways.³¹ This merger was a response to the changing demographics and needs of youth enrolled in both programs. Some people referred to STEPS through the city of Chicago’s coordinated entry system would decline to participate because they did not want to live in a congregate setting.³² The Night Ministry created Phoenix Hall in 2017 based on feedback from staff at North Lawndale College Prep High School, who indicated that some students needed housing services; yet, as Carlson noted, The Night Ministry could not fill all beds in the program because fewer clients than anticipated who needed assistance were still enrolled in high school.³³ By removing the educational requirement, Pathways lowers barriers to entry and opens services to more young people in need. Pathways now uses the former Phoenix Hall as the main house for residents, which has dormitory-like elements with bedrooms and communal living, dining, and study space for up to eight people, four of whom must be referred

through the city’s coordinated entry system; the other four receive HHS funding, and resident referrals can come from several sources. Four additional beds in two nearby apartment units also receive coordinated entry referrals. These apartments are ideal for those who desire more independence but want the option to return to the main house for group activities. The Night Ministry made these changes in response to youth input collected during quarterly surveys and house meetings. As with STEPS, Pathways provides housing and supportive services for up to 2 years. The program received a \$148,133 HUD CoC grant in fiscal year 2021, and the city of Chicago’s coordinated entry system refers young people to the program. The Pathways program’s hybrid living arrangements help young people access services that adapt to their needs at their current stage in life.³⁴

The teenage years and young adulthood are a critical time for developing independence and self-awareness, and The Night Ministry’s programs honor youth voices. Encouraging youth to be confident public speakers is one aspect of the Youth 4 Truth leadership development program.³⁵ Young people who are current or former participants in The Night Ministry programs can apply to participate in a 10-week cohort that collectively decides on a goal or issue to tackle, such as career advancement, youth advocacy, voting rights, or food insecurity.³⁶ Mia Sostrin, a Youth 4 Truth participant, said that the program has boosted their confidence in public speaking, especially when conducting group meetings.³⁷ Program participants relate their experiences at public events with other community organizations, and some have even testified before the state legislature on their concerns about finding employment, the effects of eviction, and the need for mobile mental health services for youth experiencing homelessness.³⁸ Youth 4 Truth participants also engage in community service projects such as preparing meals to distribute to clients who visit the health outreach bus.



Photo courtesy of New Avenues for Youth

Robinswood is a safe haven where hard-to-house foster youth can receive clinical case management and shelter.

Sostrin explained that Youth 4 Truth has helped them improve their interview skills and gave them both a voice in business meetings at The Night Ministry and the opportunity to learn from outside organizations.³⁹ This program gives young people a space to be heard, and their input informs programs and policymaking.

Overcoming Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic forced staff to modify program operations without sacrificing vital services. With the issuance of Illinois' shelter in place order, The Crib began 24-hour operations to shelter more than 160 youth over several months. Case management and behavioral health services shifted to phone and virtual platforms, and youth took part in socially distant recreational activities. Staff regularly checked in with youth to assess their needs, especially those who had exited the program and needed help accessing stimulus payments and unemployment benefits. Staff delivered groceries to program alumni and their

families who had lost their jobs or were unable to leave home because of health or transportation challenges.⁴⁰

Carlson acknowledged that balancing the needs of youth within the constraints of different funding streams can be complicated. For example, a client enrolled in the Interim Housing Program would not necessarily be able to move into the more independent community apartments at Pathways since the units are HUD funded and require a referral from the city's coordinated entry system. Participants enrolled in Parenting with Purpose do not need a referral from Chicago's coordinated entry system because HHS funds the program; however, if walk-ins have not filled the beds in the Parenting with Purpose program, staff members can contact the city's coordinated entry system to identify young people who are parenting or pregnant. Furthermore, although there tends to be more permanent supportive housing units than transitional housing beds, few

youth qualify for permanent supportive housing unless they have a disabling condition. Articulating these concerns to policymakers within the context of a much larger system, Carlson suggested, is vital to ensuring that youth have access to adequate housing options.⁴¹

Addressing Youth Homelessness in Portland, Oregon

New Avenues for Youth emerged in 1997 to serve young people experiencing homelessness in Portland and Multnomah County in Oregon. Since its launch, the organization has supported more than 30,000 youth who disproportionately are people of color and who identify as LGBTQ+.⁴² Although the January 2019 PIT count for Multnomah County, including the city of Portland, only tallied seven unaccompanied minors, the actual number likely is considerably higher because many youth are hesitant to participate and because PIT counts reflect only a single night rather than a longer period.⁴³ The homeless youth system in Multnomah

County serves roughly 1,000 youth per year; 2021 data indicate that 30 percent of those served identify as LGBTQ+, 46 percent of whom are also black, indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC). Multnomah County officials estimate that approximately 2,000 county youth are experiencing homelessness, but this number increases when including youth who are unsafely housed, such as those involved in sex trafficking or who are couch surfing or doubled up.⁴⁴

New Avenues for Youth is one of four agencies participating in the Multnomah County Homeless Youth Continuum (HYC), a unified system offering support and services to youth through an integrated network and streamlined screening process. Through HYC, New Avenues for Youth conducts street outreach and receives referrals from the child welfare, juvenile justice, school, and other community systems.⁴⁵ New Avenues for Youth serves approximately 1,200 to 1,400 youth annually across its programs. Currently, 61 percent of New Avenues for Youth clients are BIPOC, and 42 percent of the organization's African-American clients also identify as LGBTQ+.⁴⁶

Serving Intersectional Identities

The nonprofit runs several onsite and community-based programs that offer short-term housing to specific populations along with evidence-based approaches such as trauma-informed care, harm reduction, and positive youth development. The larger transitional housing program is based in a 26-bed congregate care program, but New Avenues for Youth also operates smaller-scale transitional housing programs such as New Meadows, which targets youth aging out of foster care, including parenting youth.⁴⁷ The New Meadows program at the Dorothy Lemelson House serves youth aged 17 to 24 who are transitioning out of foster care; it provides 10 studio apartments for residents without children and 4 one-bedroom apartments for residents

with children. New Avenues for Youth operates the facility in partnership with local nonprofit Bridge Meadows, which develops intergenerational living communities for foster care alumni, adoptive parents, and seniors.⁴⁸ To help youth increase their self-sufficiency, New Meadows residents pay a small fee toward their rent. Although this payment increases marginally over time, it remains considerably below the market rate for rent in the area. “[The modest fee] is mostly token [and] designed to get youth acclimated to budgeting and paying bills,” noted Sean Suib, executive director of New Avenues for Youth. To ensure that no one loses housing because of an inability to pay, New Avenues for Youth uses private funds to finance program fees for youth who may not have an income or qualify for a housing subsidy.⁴⁹

Another New Avenues for Youth transitional housing program, Unity House, launched in 2015 as Oregon's first housing program for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness. Unity House builds on the LGBTQ+ services offered through New Avenues for Youth's Sexual & Gender Minority Youth Resource Center (SMYRC). Within its first year, Unity House became home to 5 residents and had 15 youth on its waiting list.⁵⁰ New Avenues for Youth strives to keep youth voices at the center of its work and benefited from bringing SMYRC into the fold in 2015.⁵¹ Suib noted that SMYRC has a long-standing practice of engaging a youth steering committee when implementing different services.⁵² SMYRC offers social gatherings, support groups, case management, education, and behavioral health counseling with a mental health specialist for LGBTQ+ youth aged 13 to 23. In addition, SMYRC provides a food pantry, clothing closet, and personal hygiene products to youth in need.⁵³ In the 2020–2021 program year, 138 youth accessed services at SMYRC.⁵⁴

In the 2020–2021 program year, New Avenues for Youth housed 170 youth

across all of its housing programs, with 96 percent of residents who exited its onsite transitional housing program during the year moving to stable housing.⁵⁵ According to Suib, New Avenues for Youth considers these programs as “transition to launch” with a focus on preparing young people for greater self-sufficiency.⁵⁶

Youth who are welcomed by staff who share their gender and racial identities feel safe, understood, and heard, which is particularly helpful for those working with hard-to-place foster youth. Faced with full psychiatric beds and a state child welfare system so overwhelmed that it was diverting children to hotels, New Avenues for Youth opened Robinswood in September 2017 as a shelter offering supportive services for hard-to-place foster youth aged 9 to 20. Approximately 45 percent of staff members identify as people of color and 24 percent are LGBTQ+, making them particularly suited for establishing rapport.⁵⁷ Youth are assigned to a clinical case manager who uses a trauma-informed approach to guide them toward their educational, vocational, and independent living goals.⁵⁸ From 2017 to 2019, Robinswood stabilized and placed more than 250 youth in trauma-informed foster homes or reunited them with families.⁵⁹

New Avenues for Youth also connects young people to various subsidized housing options, including permanent supportive housing for those with disabilities or those who meet the criteria for chronic homelessness; rapid rehousing; and housing choice vouchers allocated under HUD's Foster Youth to Independence program for youth alumni of the foster care system.⁶⁰ From 2019 to 2020, New Avenues for Youth made 217 housing placements and interventions across its programs.⁶¹ Suib emphasized that “it really is about trying to braid these different funding [sources] together, so it's not just [about] what we have available for a young person, but what is the best fit for a young person's need.”⁶²

Meeting Youth Where They Are

New Avenues for Youth’s combination of housing services, case management, and career development programs helped Nitara Brown, a former New Avenues for Youth participant, become more self-sufficient. Brown learned time management, financial literacy, and life skills such as “managing a home and keeping a home tid[y].” She diligently used her time in the programs to identify different avenues for success and learned how to make that success a reality. As case managers and program staff worked with Brown, she began to take the initiative and seize available opportunities to achieve her goals — qualities that should prove useful in her

current career at a customer service and business technology company. Brown earned a certificate in small business management and public relations, and she is currently working toward a certificate in business law. Brown said that a critical component of her success was maintaining an “insightful, reliable plan,” which does not need to be detailed but should be something that “a person can stick to and not compromise on that is realistic and easy enough to be followed through [to] completion.” The team at New Avenues for Youth supported Brown as she navigated challenges and helped her keep her goals — developing independence, finishing school, and finding employment — in perspective.⁶³

New Avenues for Youth determined that the number of hours devoted to case management — an indicator of youth engagement — is a significant predictor of a positive outcome. To eliminate barriers to engagement, the organization tailors its programs to the individual needs of youth. According to Suib, “[F]or some youth, employment services may best be accessed through our career training center, [while] for a youth who’s experienced sexual exploitation or trafficking, it may look like a specialized cohort, a job readiness class provided in a confidential setting. Some youth may opt to come to our alternative education center, [while other] youth may need mobile education support that can be brought directly to

Non-Time-Limited Housing for LGBTQ+ Young Adults

Unlike transitional housing, which provides youth with shelter for a predetermined duration, non-time-limited housing allows young people to develop the life skills and stability needed to live independently without the concern of losing support prematurely. Homeward NYC, launched in 1989, is a New York City nonprofit doing business as West End Intergenerational Residence. Because transitional housing typically lasts a maximum of 2 years, Homeward NYC decided to create housing that gives young people more time to process the trauma of homelessness.¹ In response to the growing need to assist LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness because of family rejection and gender-based abuse, Homeward NYC created New York City’s first non-time-limited housing site for LGBTQ+ young adults in 2011 in West Harlem. The organization’s second non-time-limited housing location opened in the Bronx in 2015.² Although residents must be aged 18 to 24 to be eligible for housing, they can continue to stay in their units beyond age 25.³ Homeward NYC chief executive officer Jeannette Ruffins explained that even though these sites are permanent supportive housing, the agency prefers the term “non-time-limited housing” because it connotes the expectation that young people will ultimately move on.⁴

Young adults seeking housing must apply through the city’s Human Resources Administration and meet the eligibility criteria for permanent supportive housing under the 2005 NY/NY III agreement — the third and final agreement between New York City and New York State to collectively create approximately 15,000 units of supportive housing.⁵ Homeward NYC staff also contact the city’s Department of Youth and Community Development and other LGBTQ+ service agencies when they have an opening.⁶ Funded through the city’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, each of Homeward NYC’s non-time-limited housing sites offer furnished efficiency apartments for 30 LGBTQ+ residents.⁷ Homeward Bronx reserves 22 of its 30 units for NY/NY III population A (single adults suffering from serious mental illness and/or chemical addiction), and Homeward West Harlem reserves 18 of its 30 units for population E (single adults dealing with substance abuse). Across the 2 sites, 7 units are reserved for those who are disabled, and 13 general population units are available to young people without a medical or disabling condition.⁸ To reduce the extensive waiting lists for these units, a third non-time-limited housing site, Homeward Central Harlem, is slated to open in fall 2023 and will house 50 LGBTQ+ young adults.⁹

Staff instill the concept of “moving on” in stable residents to help them transition to independent living in an apartment in the community. Staff encourage residents who push back against the rules to think about their future, Ruffins explained. For example, if residents invite their partners to live with them full time, staff encourage them to consider a larger apartment in the community. As young people in the program begin creating long-term plans, they develop an understanding of how to budget for an apartment, develop and maintain good credit, and accrue savings. Residents stay in Homeward

them in [the] community. By braiding our programming, we try to allow for this kind of flexibility.”⁶⁴

New Avenues for Youth offers its clients a continuum of options that form the backbone of its work.⁶⁵ The organization owns and operates two social purpose enterprises that offer youth paid, hands-on work experience and mentorship. Young people gain customer service and business skills working at the Ben and Jerry’s PartnerShop in downtown Portland. Opened in 2013, New Avenues INK teaches youth screen printing while also building their marketing, business, and graphic design skills.⁶⁶ These social purpose enterprises provided 78 jobs and internships in the

2019–2020 program year and generated more than \$374,000 in revenue for the organization.⁶⁷

New Avenues for Youth also offers an Independent Living Program (ILP) for youth transitioning out of the foster care system. In addition to connecting youth to job training and placement services, New Avenues for Youth’s ILP, the largest of its kind in the state, provides mental health, bilingual, and culturally specific LGBTQ+ supports for youth as well as services to help youth access postsecondary education.⁶⁸ As an immigrant and a war refugee, Zahra Malikshah, an ILP participant, entered the foster care system at 15 and never thought that they would

have an opportunity to attend college. Zahra connected with New Avenues for Youth as a high school student and received support from ILP life skills coaches, who helped them develop basic real-world skills, apply to college, and finance college tuition and books. As an ILP participant, Zahra established a supportive community composed of mentors, coaches, and other foster youth. “Nobody ever taught me how to take care of myself,” said Zahra. “I took a money management class with New Avenues as well and have had great job opportunities, help finding housing and resources during COVID, and ...free legal help.” Zahra credits New Avenues for Youth with creating a “sense of belonging” for youth, which made them

NYC’s housing for an average of 4 years. In 2021, Homeward NYC served roughly 60 LGBTQ+ young adults at its non-time-limited housing sites, and 12 residents moved to independent housing.¹⁰

Staff encourage youth to work at their own pace and use the voluntary onsite services such as behavioral health counseling, benefits advocacy, a medical van, job readiness training, and life skills programs.¹¹ Each site has a clinical care coordinator who uses a harm reduction model to help clients understand how their substance use has interfered with their ability to pay their bills and maintain a job. The sites also have a life skills manager who helps clients develop healthy relationships and set educational and vocational goals. The life skills manager also coordinates with nutritionists and healthcare providers to lead workshops on diet and wellness. Once clients move in and stabilize, they typically increase their income through steady employment; however, pandemic-related job losses among part-time and seasonal workers in the retail and hospitality sectors stymied some of this progress.¹²

Young people ready to move on from Homeward NYC’s housing can receive a housing voucher and community resources to facilitate their stability.¹³ Ruffins indicated that case managers strive to maintain their connection with young people who have moved on, especially within the first 6 months of exiting. This connection is currently informal, but Homeward NYC is examining the feasibility of creating a formal aftercare component and evaluating how effectively its services maintain clients’ long-term stability.¹⁴

¹ Interview with Jeannette Ruffins, 14 January 2022; Homeward NYC. “History” (homeward.nyc/we-are/history/). Accessed 30 December 2021; Homeward NYC. “Annual Reports” (homeward.nyc/annual-reports/). Accessed 10 January 2022.

² Homeward NYC. 2021. “Homeward News: Live Life Forward.” *Summer, Fall Newsletter*; Corporation for Supportive Housing. 2016. “No Strings Attached: Helping Vulnerable Youth with Non-Time-Limited Supportive Housing,” 2.

³ Homeward NYC. “We serve LGBTQ young adults healing from rejection and trauma” (homeward.nyc/we-serve/lgbtq-young-adults/). Accessed 6 January 2022.

⁴ Interview with Jeannette Ruffins.

⁵ Homeward NYC, “We serve LGBTQ young adults healing from rejection and trauma”; Supportive Housing Network of New York. “NY/NY Agreements.” (shnny.org/what-we-do/advocacy-policy/ny-ny/#:~:text=NY%20FNY%20III,housing%20in%20the%20nation%20s%20history). Accessed 9 February 2022; Center for Urban Community Services Housing Resource Center. 2019. “The NY/NY Agreements to House Homeless Mentally Ill Individuals.”

⁶ Interview with Jeannette Ruffins.

⁷ Ibid; Homeward NYC. “Our Locations” (homeward.nyc/we-are/locations/). Accessed 14 January 2022.

⁸ Homeward NYC, “We serve LGBTQ young adults healing from rejection and trauma”; Center for Urban Community Services Housing Resource Center 2019.

⁹ Interview with Jeannette Ruffins; Homeward NYC. “Our Locations.”

¹⁰ Interview with Jeannette Ruffins.

¹¹ Colleen K. Jackson. 2012. “True Colors Residence: Permanent Supportive Housing for LGBT youth in New York City,” 9.

¹² Interview with Jeannette Ruffins.

¹³ Corporation for Supportive Housing 2016, 3.

¹⁴ Interview with Jeannette Ruffins.

feel as though they were never alone despite being the only member of their family living in the United States. Now a first-generation college student, Zahra said that, ultimately, New Avenues for Youth “taught me how to advocate for myself when I need to and to authentically be myself.”⁶⁹

Continuity of Service Delivery

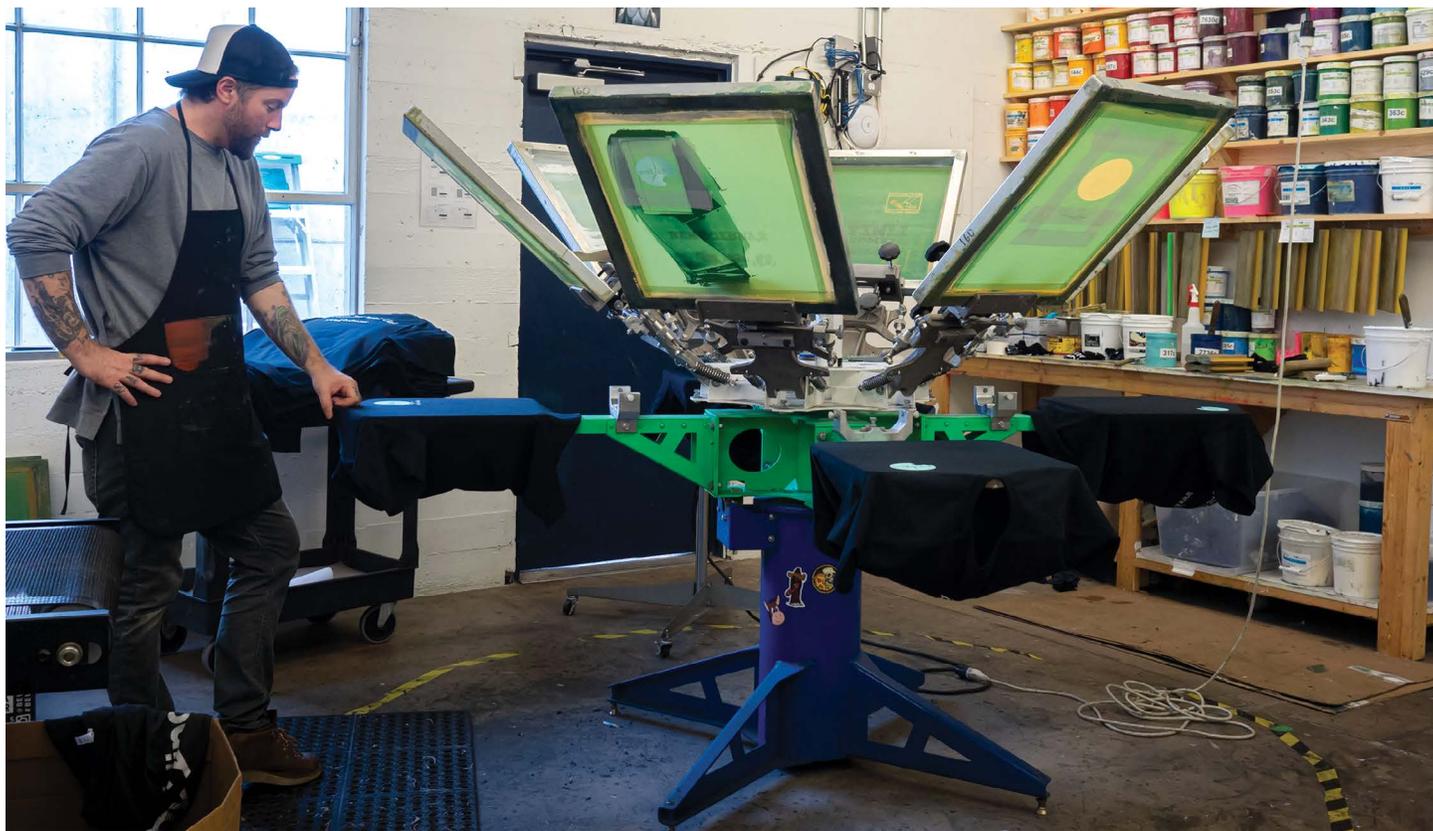
Suib noted that when a service does not exist in the community, New Avenues for Youth devises creative ways to fill those gaps.⁷⁰ One example of the organization’s flexibility and responsiveness to community needs is its plan to develop a culturally responsive transitional housing model as part of the New Day program, which offers safety planning, wraparound case management, mentorship, and skill-building services for youth aged 12 to 25 who have experienced or are at risk of sex trafficking.⁷¹ New Day operates in partnership with Call to Safety, Raphael House, and Self Enhancement, Inc. — local nonprofit service providers offering shelter, medical

care, counseling, 24/7 crisis support, and academic resources to victims of domestic violence, children, and youth.⁷² Along with several other agencies, Call to Safety, Raphael House, and New Avenues for Youth are part of the Multnomah County Sex Trafficking Collaborative, which allows individuals and service providers to share information and fill gaps to better assist victims and at-risk individuals.⁷³ New Avenues for Youth refers clients needing support to Call to Safety’s 24/7 crisis hotline.⁷⁴ In the 2020–2021 program year, 71 percent of young people in New Day were BIPOC, and 61 percent identified as LGBTQ+.⁷⁵ More than 200 youth used New Day’s services from 2020 to 2021.⁷⁶

In response to recent social movements to raise Americans’ consciousness of the nation’s long history of systemic racism, New Avenues for Youth has created an agency equity plan and activities to create more inclusive environments for youth and staff. Equity-based values are embedded in the organization’s

hiring practices, program design, and operations. Managers participate in training and leadership development sessions led by the director of equity and inclusion that focus on racial consciousness. In addition, the organization has implemented a resiliency fund to advance the professional development of its BIPOC staff. Youth often are invited to attend board meetings to offer insights and hear updates.⁷⁷

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic required New Avenues for Youth staff to adjust operations to continue to meet clients’ needs. Among these adjustments has been the increased use of a mobile outreach van with private meeting space where young people can receive mental health counseling, harm reduction resources, and other services.⁷⁸ While the organization’s Drop-In Day Services Center in downtown Portland traditionally serves meals inside, social distancing guidelines limited the number of people who could be inside so the Center provided food to go from its kitchen. The Drop-In Center also



Youth gain paid work experience at the New Avenues INK screen printing shop, where they also learn how to advertise the items they make.

Photo courtesy of New Avenues for Youth



Photo courtesy of New Avenues for Youth

New Avenues for Youth operates a Ben and Jerry's shop where young people gain customer service skills in addition to paid work experience.

extended its hours and referred youth for COVID-19 testing. New Avenues for Youth programs pivoted to small, socially distanced meetings and check-ins by phone or online video for case management and career coaching. The transitional housing programs hired onsite bilingual staff to support students who were learning remotely. Case managers and career coaches delivered food, supplies, work clothes, bus passes, and laptops to ensure that youth could continue to meet their vocational and educational goals.⁷⁹ Suib noted that the organization had to maintain these operations while paying close attention to the needs of staff, who experienced burnout and risked coronavirus exposure while delivering services.⁸⁰

Beyond the challenges of the pandemic, New Avenues for Youth is grappling with broader livability challenges in a city that is increasingly unaffordable, which is contributing to housing instability among young people. “We’re

trying to [keep] people from becoming homeless and [help them] exit homelessness in a city that’s becoming ... harder and harder to afford,” said Suib. The organization has had to pool resources and advocate for additional public funding so that staff can receive fair wages that keep up with the cost of living. Often, the need to remain compliant with complex regulations to receive public funding detracts from the organization’s central focus of helping young people. “It’s very hard to build a systemic response when every few years the ground could be pulled out or the resources could be [revoked],” Suib said. Critical to building a long-term, sustainable response, Suib said, is finding the ideal “mix of public-private dollars to scale impact but not lose innovation and flexibility.”⁸¹

Conclusion

The various housing and service programs offered at The Night Ministry and New Avenues for Youth can be

tailored to meet the distinct needs of youth with intersecting identities and experiences. Case managers at The Night Ministry, Carlson said, address “the issues that a young person identifies for themselves,” and New Avenues for Youth ensures that its services are flexible and creative to account for each client’s individual needs.⁸² Both organizations consider participation in intensive case management services while enrolled in housing programs vital to success. Because their clients have varying needs, the agencies evaluate their impact at the individual level. One participant may need legal services to prevent an eviction, while another may need behavioral health support to instill lifelong coping skills, yet both services positively influence participants’ long-term outcomes.⁸³ Providers that are receptive to youth input can adjust services based on feedback — flexibility that is critical to addressing youth homelessness. Along with youth input, staff training sessions help ensure that

programs and policies remain racially equitable and inclusive. The programs offered at these organizations help youth experiencing homelessness realize their voice in decisionmaking and ultimately serve as springboards to self-sufficiency. **EM**

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Additional Resources

- “Where Am I Going To Go? Intersectional Approaches To Ending LGBTQ2S Youth Homelessness in Canada & the U.S.” (2017), edited by Alex Abramovich and Jama Shelton, examines pathways into and out of homelessness through an intersectional framework and features several local approaches to youth homelessness. www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Where_Am_I_Going_To_Go.pdf.
- “Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth” (2022), by the Trevor Project, examines the prevalence of homelessness and housing instability among LGBTQ youth and recommends strategies for addressing youth homelessness. thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Trevor-Project-Homelessness-Report.pdf.
- “Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience: Improving Federal Research, Policy, and Practice” (2021), by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, shares guidance and lessons learned for engaging with people about their lived experience in ways that are trauma- and survivor-informed as well as equitable. aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1bb6cd68f81e1bb74e3bf30e1085a354/lived-experience-brief.pdf.
- “Improving Stability for Youth Exiting Systems of Care” (2020), by the Washington State Department of Commerce, presents findings from codesign sessions among youth and stakeholders in child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health to understand why young people exit systems into housing instability. commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Youth-Exiting-Systems-of-Care.pdf.
- “Learning from The Field: Programs Serving Youth Who Are LGBTQI2-S and Experiencing Homelessness” (2011), by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, presents lessons from listening tours with service providers who work with LGBTQI2-S youth. samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/homelessness_programs_resources/learning-field-programs-serving-youth-lgbtqi2s-experiencing-homelessness.pdf.
- “The mental and physical health of homeless youth: a literature review” (2012), by Jennifer Edidin, Zoe Ganim, Scott Hunter, and Niranjana Karnik, examines the adverse effects of homelessness and contributing factors on the neurocognitive development of youth. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22120422/.
- “Risk Factors for Homelessness Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths: A Developmental Milestone Approach” (2012), by Margaret Rosario, Eric Schrimshaw, and Joyce Hunter, discusses sexual orientation development, sexual abuse, and substance use as potential risk factors for homelessness among LGBTQ youth compared with non-LGBTQ youth. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3279927/.

For additional resources archive, go to www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/additional_resources_2022.html.

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