

Report on Challenges and Recommendations for Addressing Youth Homelessness within Coordinated Entry System

Introduction

This report aims to consolidate the challenges faced by youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and the feedback received from those who have interacted with housing programs and support services. It covers the causes of homelessness, barriers to finding and maintaining housing, experiences with virtual assistance, comfort with initial agency interactions, feedback on housing programs, and suggestions for systemic improvements.

Causes of Homelessness

Youth and young adults identified several primary causes for experiencing homelessness:

- **Family Dynamics:** Abuse, substance use, incarceration, generational poverty, and violence, including the loss of a loved one.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** Persistent mental health issues leading to instability.
- **Health Challenges:** Physical health issues impacting stability.
- **Childbirth:** The financial and personal impact of having a child.
- **Shelter Conditions:** Difficult living conditions in shelters, including noise, social influences, and distractions.
- **Unlivable Conditions:** Housing situations that were untenable.
- **Self-Sabotage:** Personal decisions contributing to homelessness.
- **Additional Factors:** Family conflict, history of family homelessness, substance use disorder, loss of a parent, history of incarceration, and restrictions that impede employment.

Barriers to Housing

Challenges in securing and maintaining housing included:

- **Lack of Information:** Insufficient knowledge about housing programs and resources.
- **Neighborhood Safety:** Available housing often located in unsafe areas with gang violence. (Youth and young adults often affected by being placed in areas where they have a history of experiencing challenges)
- **Structural Barriers:** Long waiting lists, lack of income, insufficient case management, and lack of mentorship.
- **Documentation Issues:** Difficulty obtaining necessary identification.
- **Credit and Rental History:** Poor credit scores and lack of rental history.

- **Income Verification:** Inability to provide verifiable income.
- **Evictions and Employment:** History of evictions and unstable employment.
- **Personal Choices:** Poor decisions and lack of discipline.
- **Social Factors:** Inviting non-contributing guests into their homes.

Virtual Connection Preferences

When asked about virtual assistance preferences, responses included:

- **Text Messaging:** A quick and accessible way to seek help.
- **Mobile Apps:** Convenient and user-friendly platforms for support.
- **Face-to-Face:** Some youth and young adults still prefer in-person interactions.
- **Zoom:** Video conferencing as an effective tool.
- **Phone Calls:** Direct and immediate communication.
- **NOTED: Immediate Response:** Need for prompt assistance without additional referrals.

Comfort with Initial Agency Interactions

Feedback on initial interactions with agencies highlighted several areas:

- **Negative Experiences:**
 - **Fear of Judgment:** Reluctance to disclose substance use issues.
 - **Perception of Indifference:** Feeling that case workers did not care.
 - **Trust Issues:** Dishonesty due to lack of established trust.
 - **Resource Access:** Feeling the need to present as a “good kid” to receive help.
 - **Abandonment:** Experiences of being abandoned by case managers.
 - **Overwhelming Questions:** Feeling overwhelmed by too many personal questions without a relationship context.
 - **Inappropriate Questions:** Questions triggering trauma or bias.
- **Positive Experiences:**
 - **Compassionate Approach:** Welcoming, non-judgmental, compassionate staff with lived experience.
 - **Respectful Treatment:** Being treated with respect and kindness.
 - **Specific Positive Mentions:** Notable positive interactions with certain staff members (e.g., NPHY, Mr. Eli, Ms. Kim,).

Housing Program Experiences

Experiences with housing programs varied:

- **Challenges:**
 - Compliance Burdens: Difficulty keeping up with program requirements.
 - Long Waitlists: Extended waiting periods for housing.
 - Incompatible Roommates: Anxiety over being paired with unsuitable roommates.
 - Lack of Privacy: Rules and lack of personal space.
 - Frequent Check-ins: Burdensome requirement for regular check-ins.
 - Multi-location Visits: Needing to visit multiple locations for assistance.
 - Inaccessible Providers: Difficulty reaching case managers and providers.
- **Positive Aspects:**
 - Securing Housing: Relief and joy at obtaining housing.
 - Community Support: Sense of community and stability provided by housing.
 - Stress Reduction: Relief from financial and safety concerns.
 - Empathetic Case Workers: Appreciation for case workers with lived experience who provide genuine care and transparency.

Suggestions for Improvement

To improve support for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, the following suggestions were made:

- **Employment Support:** Programs advocating for employment and providing assistance through the process.
- **Driver's License:** Assistance in obtaining a driver's license, including driver's education and behind the wheel training.
- **Life Skills Training:** Education on navigating life and quality mentorship programs. (hands on activities)
- **Transportation:** Improved access to transportation services.
- **Documentation Assistance:** Help obtaining ID, birth certificates, and social security cards.
- **Mental Health Alternatives:** Access to alternative mental health treatments beyond therapy and medication. (Art Therapy, EMDR, CBT)

- **Healthcare Access:** Facilitating healthcare appointments.
- **Recreational Support:** Providing free gym memberships.
- **Self-empowerment:** Encouraging self-care, recognizing accomplishments, and making positive choices.

Systemic Changes

Broader social changes suggested to address homelessness and improve conditions include:

- **Eliminating Homelessness:** Using funds effectively to create opportunities and reduce homelessness.
- **Employment Process:** Simplifying the employment process by reducing requirements. Making it easier to secure jobs.
- **Human-Centered and Equitable Society:** Fostering a more compassionate, equitable, and non-judgmental society.
- **Free Essentials:** Providing free education, housing, and necessities to those in need.
- **Cost of Living:** Reducing the cost of living to make it more affordable.
- **Unemployment Rights:** Strengthening rights and support for the unemployed.

Conclusion

This report outlines the multifaceted challenges faced by youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and provides insights into their interactions with housing programs and support services. By addressing these barriers and implementing the suggested improvements, it is possible to create a more effective and compassionate support system for those in need.