9 evidence-based, guiding principles to help youth overcome homelessness

February 2014

Developed by the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation
Technical Assistance by Michael Quinn Patton, PhD and Nora F. Murphy, PhD
Supported by the Otto Bremer Foundation

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StreetWorks

1209 W. 22nd St., Minneapolis | streetworksmn.org

Mission: To foster a diverse collaboration of youth, communities, and youth-serving agencies that coordinates street-based outreach and assures access to a broad range of resources and opportunities for homeless and at-risk youth.

Target Population: Unaccompanied homeless youth, ages 12–21, with limited support up to age 24.

Hours: Crisis phone line available 24 hours (612.354.3345). Outreach Workers available Sun – Thurs 10am-10pm, Fri – Sat 10am-Midnight.

Program Summary: StreetWorks serves homeless, runaway, and at-risk youth in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. StreetWorks conducts outreach seven days a week to a wide variety of neighborhoods and community sites in Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin and Ramsey counties. Outreach Workers establish trusting relationships, help manage short term crisis, provide intervention to reduce harmful behaviors and enhance individual health, and provide access to a broad array of shelter, transitional housing, and supportive services. StreetWorks operates eight "No Hassles" food access times for young people at existing area food shelves, five days per week.

Participating Organizations: Ain Dah Yung Center, The Bridge for Youth, Catholic Charities – Hope Street, Division of Indian Work, HOPE 4 Youth, KCQ, Inc., Lutheran Social Services, Face to Face – SafeZone, Pillsbury House – Full Cycle Program, Southeast Asian Community Council, Youth Link – Youth Opportunity Center, YMCA Youth Intervention Services.

Face to Face

1165 Arcade Street, St. Paul | face2face.org

Mission: Face to Face empowers youth to overcome barriers and strive toward healthy and self-sufficient lives.

SafeZone: Drop-in Center

Location: 308 Prince Street, St. Paul

Target Population: Youth experiencing or at risk for homelessness, ages 14–21

Hours: Monday-Friday: 1pm-8pm; Saturday: 1pm-5pm

Program Summary: SafeZone drop-in center provides youth a safe environment to get connected to basic needs, case management and support services. Services include: street outreach, clothing closet with hygiene items, a computer lab/ resource room, a food shelf, free meals, access to GED teachers, an Independent Living Skills Program, walk-in medical and mental health services and a transitional living program.

Medical and Mental Health Clinic

Location: 1165 Arcade Street, St. Paul

Target Population: Youth, ages 11–23, with or without insurance

Program Summary: Face to Face's medical and mental health clinic provides one-on-one, family, and in-home counseling, general medical care for illness, school physicals, safer sex education and supplies, STD testing and treatment, pregnancy testing, birth control support, pregnancy care and case management, MN Family Planning Program, and prenatal care.

YouthLink

41 North 12th Street, Minneapolis | youthlinkmn.org

Mission: to build healthy relationships with youth and the community to address the urgent needs of youth so that doors of opportunity are opened to futures of empowerment, connectedness, and self-reliance.

Youth Opportunity Center (YOC) at Youth Link

Target Population: Unaccompanied homeless youth, ages 16–24

Hours: Monday-Friday: 9am-8pm

Program Summary: At present, 30 partnering agencies provide services at the YOC providing a continuum of care from basic needs to education and employment, health and wellness, and housing stability. New services onsite in the past year include expanded mental health services, independent living skills classes, teenage-specific medical services, and cooking classes, among others. More than 2,200 homeless young people, ages 16-24, were served at the YOC last year, of which 70% went on to access services beyond basic, day-to-day needs.

YouthLink Drop-In Center

Hours: Monday-Friday: 9am-8pm

Program Summary: At the core of the YOC is the full service crisis drop-in center, an intervention service provided by YouthLink. The drop-in operates year-round from 9am to 8pm, Monday through Friday. Services provided at the drop-in include comprehensive basic needs assistance such as meals, showers, laundry facilities, clean clothes, lockers, computer stations, legal advice, case management, and other social support, as well as crisis intervention and counseling. In 2012, with support from the Otto Bremer Foundation, drop-in services and hours were expanded to provides services and critical resources to young people up to age 23 experiencing longer-term homelessness.

Avenues for Homeless Youth

1708 Oak Park Avenue North, Minneapolis | avenuesforyouth.org

Mission: Avenues for Homeless Youth provides emergency shelter, short-term housing and supportive services for homeless youth in a safe and nurturing environment. Through such service, Avenues seeks to help youth achieve their personal goals and make a positive transition into young adulthood.

North Minneapolis Shelter & Transitional Housing Program

Units: 20 program beds plus one emergency shelter bed

Target Population: Unaccompanied homeless youth, ages 16 to 21

Program Summary: A transitional housing program—a home—where youth can live as they stabilize, build trusting adult relationships and work toward their personal goals for independent living. Youth are provided basic needs support (bed, three meals per day, hygiene supplies, laundry, clothing, bus passes), 24 hour caring by trained staff, intensive case management support, health and wellness care and education, independent living skills training, employment and educational support, and after-care support.

GLBT Host Home Program

Units: Volunteer host homes, up to 10 youth at a time

Target Population: Homeless gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, ages 16 to 22

Program Summary: Transition-like living arrangements in safe, supportive, volunteer host homes. This community-based program is coordinated by Avenues, but supported by a vast array of individuals and other youth-serving agencies. Host homes are recruited, screened and trained by Avenues, then receive ongoing support as they host. Youth receive support by the referring agency or Avenues' case managers.

Minneapolis Host Home Program

Units: Volunteer host homes, up to 10 youth at a time

Target Population: Homeless youth from the City of Minneapolis, ages 16 to 22

Program Summary: This program is modeled after the GLBT Host Home Program, but designed to support any youth from the City of Minneapolis who is experiencing homelessness. Host homes are located in the City of Minneapolis, allowing youth to stay in or near their home community.

Suburban Host Home Program

Units: Volunteer host homes, up to 10 youth at a time

Target Population: Homeless youth from the suburbs of Hennepin County, ages 16 to 22

Program Summary: This program also was modeled after the GLBT Host Home Program, but is designed to support any youth from the suburbs of Hennepin County who is experiencing homelessness. Host homes are located throughout the suburbs, allowing youth to stay in or near their home community.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES
HOPE STREET
for Runaway & Homeless Youth

Hope Street

1121 46th Street E, Minneapolis |
cctwincities.org/HopeStreet

Mission: Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis serves those most in need. Hope Street offers a secure, supportive environment to help teens experiencing homelessness to determine their own options.

Shelter

Units: 28 beds **Length of Stay:** 30 days with possible extended stays

Target Population: Homeless youth, ages 16–20, who are escaping abusive living situations or street life

Services: The shelter meets basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and medical care. Staff assesses all housing options including re-unification with family or placement with friends. Youth have access to case management, on-site medical attention, mental health and chemical dependency counseling, crisis counseling, Independent Living Skills classes, educational assistance, and connections to other services.

Transitional Living Program

Units: 12 units **Length of Stay**: 2 years or until 22nd birthday

Target Population: Homeless males or youth that identify as being males, ages 16-21. Youth must apply before their 20th birthday.

Program Summary: Case managers provide services, including basic needs, goal setting, emotional and therapeutic assistance, independent living skills training and recreational activities. Youth in this program have access to the same services provided to shelter residents.

Permanent Supportive Housing Program

Units: 11 scattered site apartments **Length of Stay**: Services for up to 3 years

Target Population: Disabled and homeless youth, ages 18 to 24

Program Summary: The goal of this program is to help youth and young adults find and maintain stable and safe housing. This is done is by assisting youth in finding apartments in the community and offering case management services to help them maintain housing and work towards developing other independent living skills.

Hope Street Prevention

Target Population: Youth, ages 16-20

Program Summary: Hope Street collaborates with Minneapolis Public Schools to provide homelessness prevention services that identify youth at risk of homelessness and provides support services to those individuals and/or families. Workers help prevent homelessness by assisting with rent subsidies, apartment search, landlord mediation, utility payments, eviction prevention, housing application fees and case management.

Hope Street Outreach / Inreach

Target Population: Homeless youth, ages 16-24

Program Summary: Outreach Workers are based on the streets and in various community settings working to build relationships with young people in need of services. Youth are referred to programs that fit their needs, including Hope Street's shelter and housing programs.

Booth Brown House

1471 Como Ave. W., St. Paul | boothbrownhouse.org

Mission: To link vulnerable or disadvantaged young people with housing, education, employment and their community through living, learning and earning.

Shelter: Emergency Overnight — Opened: June 4, 2012

Units: 11 beds (16 beds planned for 2014) **Length of Stay:** 30 days with extensions possible

Target Population: Homeless young adults, from ages 18 to a 22nd birthday

Program Summary: A self-referral, dorm-style shelter. Guests are provided morning and evening meals, supplies for a cold lunch, hygiene items, and bus passes. Staff meet with each young person to identify needs and find resources, utilizing partnership network. Youth are encouraged to use their daytime hours to work towards their self-defined case goals. Guests also have access to onsite amenities such as shower facilities, laundry facility, access to a computer lab, and Independent Living Skills classes.

Foyer: Transitional & Permanent Supportive Housing Program

Units: 10 – transitional and 25 – permanent supportive efficiency apartments

Length of Stay: Transitional – up to 24 months; Permanent supportive – generally until their 26th birthday

Target Population: Youth and young adults, ages 16-25, who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness

Program Summary: Youth live in their own efficiency apartments, pay a portion of their rent based on income, and work with a case manager to create a personalized plan with goals in the areas of life skills, income, education, health, and community. Youth have access to Independent Life Skills courses, and amenities such as a computer lab, food deliveries, transportation assistance, disability accessible living, laundry facilities, community groups, a community garden, and more.

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*The principles begin with the perspective that youth are on a journey; all of our interactions with youth are filtered through that **journey** perspective. This means we must be **trauma-informed, non-judgmental** and work to **reduce harm**. By holding these principles, we can build a **trusting relationship** that allows us to focus on **youths' strengths** and opportunities **for positive development**. Through all of this, we approach youth as **whole beings** through a youth-focused **collaborative** system of support.*

Journey Oriented: Interact with youth to help them understand the interconnectedness of past, present, and future as they decide where they want to go and how to get there.

Trauma-Informed: Recognize that most homeless youth have experienced trauma; build relationships, responses, and services on that knowledge.

Non-Judgmental: Interact with youth without labeling or judging them on the basis of background, experiences, choices, or behaviors.

Harm Reduction: Contain the effects of risky behavior in the short-term and seek to reduce its effects in the long-term.

Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships: Build relationships by interacting with youth in an honest, dependable, authentic, caring and supportive way.

Strengths-Based: Start with and build upon the skills, strengths, and positive characteristics of each youth.

Positive Youth Development: Provide opportunities for youth to build a sense of competency, usefulness, belonging, and power.

Holistic: Engage youth in a manner that recognizes that mental, physical, spiritual, and social health are interconnected and interrelated.

Collaboration: Establish a principles-based, youth-focused system of support that integrates practices, procedures, and services within and across agencies, systems, and policies.

Principles developed by the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation and adopted on December 5, 2013 by collaboration participants:

Avenues for Homeless Youth; Catholic Charities (Hope Street); Face to Face (Safe Zone); Lutheran Social Services (StreetWorks Collaborative); The Salvation Army (Booth Brown House); and YouthLink (Youth Opportunity Center).

Effective, Evidence-Based Principles for Supporting Homeless Youth

All homeless young people have experienced serious adversity and trauma. The experience of homelessness is traumatic enough, but most also have faced poverty, abuse, neglect, or rejection. They have been forced to grow up way too early. Most have serious physical or mental health issues. Some are barely teenagers; others may be in their late teens or early twenties.

Some homeless youth have family connections, some do not; all crave connection and value family. They come from the big city, small towns and rural areas. Most are youth of color and have been failed by systems with institutionalized racism and programs that best serve the white majority. Homeless youth are straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. Some use alcohol or drugs heavily. Some have been in and out of homelessness. Others are new to the streets.

The main point here is that, while all homeless youth have faced trauma, they are all unique. Each homeless youth has unique needs, experiences, abilities, and aspirations. Each is on a personal journey through homelessness and, hopefully, to a bright future.

Because of their uniqueness, how we approach and support each homeless young person also must be unique. No recipe exists for how to engage with and support homeless youth. As homeless youth workers and advocates, we cannot apply rigid rules or standard procedures. To do so would result in failure, at best, and reinforce trauma in the young person, at worst. Rules don't work. We can't dictate to any young person what is best. The young people know what is best for their future and need the opportunity to engage in self-determination.

This is where principles come in. Organizations and individuals that successfully support homeless youth take a principles-based approach to their work, rather than a rules-based approach. Principles provide guidance and direction to those working with homeless youth. They provide a framework for how we approach and view the youth, engage and interact with them, build relationship with them and support them. The challenge for youth workers is to meet and connect with each young person where they are and build a supportive relationship from there. Principles provide the anchor for this relationship-building process.

A Collaborative and Participatory Evaluation

In 2012, six nonprofit organizations in the Twin Cities of Minnesota supporting homeless youth began collaborating around shared principles.[1] Working with the Otto Bremer Foundation and an internationally-regarded evaluation expert, Michael Q. Patton, the agencies first identified shared values and common principles. They found that their work was undergirded and informed by nine essential principles. They then began a process of designing a study to examine evidence of the effectiveness of these principles. To do that, the Foundation and the collaborative engaged an independent evaluator, Nora Murphy (then a PhD candidate), to lead the evaluation process

[1] Avenues for Homeless Youth, Catholic Charities (Hope Street), Face to Face (Safe Zone), Lutheran Social Services (StreetWorks Collaborative), The Salvation Army (Booth Brown House), YouthLink (Youth Opportunity Center).

under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Patton and her University of Minnesota doctoral committee.

Evaluation Design

Murphy conducted 14 in-depth case studies of homeless youth who had interacted with the agencies, including interviews with the youth and program staff, and review of case records. The results of the case studies were then synthesized. The collaborative participated in reviewing every case study to determine which principles were at work and their effectiveness in helping the youth meet their needs and achieve their goals.

The results showed that *all the participating organizations were adhering to the principles and that the principles were effective (even essential) in helping them make progress out of homelessness*. While staff could not necessarily give a label to every principle at the time of the evaluation interviews, they clearly talked about and followed them in practice. In the interviews with the youth, their stories showed how the staffs' principles-based approaches made a critical difference in their journey through homelessness.

In addition to the case studies, Murphy reviewed other available research as evidence of effectiveness of each principle.

Each principle is defined and discussed in this summary overview. For each principle, the summary statement explains why it matters, what key research shows, what the practice implications are, and concludes with illustrative quotes from the evaluation case studies.

Following the principles statements are excerpts from the case studies, which provide an overview of the outcomes the youth experienced through engagement with the youth-serving agencies.

Principles-Based Practice

Taken together, this set of principles provides a cohesive framework that guides practice in working with homeless youth. The principles have now been evaluated and validated, informed by the voices of homeless youth.

Full study reference:

Developing Evidence-Based Effective Principles for Working with Homeless Youth: A Developmental Evaluation of the Otto Bremer Foundation's Support for Collaboration Among Agencies Serving Homeless Youth by Nora F. Murphy.
Published doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 2014.

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Supported by
Otto Bremer Foundation

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1. Journey Oriented

Principle: ***Interact with youth to help them understand the interconnectedness of past, present, and future as they decide where they want to go and how to get there.***

Why this matters

- Young people are on a continuous life journey. We interact with them at a point in time and have the opportunity to help them sort through where they've been, understand what has influenced them, and think about where they want to go.
- Experiences (good and bad), achievements, failures, changing perspectives, maturing, external influences and resources, and self-awareness all impact the trajectory of a youth's journey.
- Intangible moments and influences can often have a greater impact on the lives of youth than external, tangible, and material gains (e.g. housing, employment, education, etc.).
- Youth need to learn how to work through their past and present as they move toward their future.
- ***Outcomes for youth***
    - Youth realize they have control and responsibility of their future.
    - Youth understand and own their story in order to move forward.
    - Youth are able to learn and grow from mistakes and achievements.

Research basis

- There is a clear distinction between changes and transitions. Change is largely external. Transition is our internal adjustment to that change. Becoming homeless might be a change a youth experiences, but understanding themselves as a "homeless youth" may result in a psychological transition.
- The "stages of change" theory is useful when understanding where a client is on their journey at a point in time. It helps youth and youth workers understand transition.
- Emerging adulthood is typically marked by uncertainty concerning future life choices and exploration of potential roles and paths. Homeless young adults experience this uncertainty without the parental and social supports that enable the general young adult population to access health care, education, employment, and stable housing.
- Research supports journey orientation as non-linear. All people, regardless of age or status, experience their journey as sometimes forward, sometimes backward, and sometimes sideways.
- Youth are sometimes resistant to change that may appear positive because: 1) the change may represent the loss of their current identity, 2) disorientation and discomfort during the transition, and 3) risk of failing in a new beginning.
- Research supports the important role that having a future orientation and hopefulness plays in sustaining perseverance, increasing impulse control, and developing other positive attributes needed to move forward on one's journey.

Practice implications

Journey oriented requires providers to:

- Understand youth based on where they are in their journey and not judge (see Non-Judgmental) youth for what they currently believe. Accept that a homeless young person probably cannot perceive a future beyond the current day or one that is safe and stable. Recognize that it will take healing and time to help a young person begin to have a positive future orientation.
- Create a platform with youth to understand the steps needed to make progress. Homeless youth do not instantly become non-homeless once they have secure housing.
- Help youth prepare for the future by understanding the skills they need to develop.
- Remember there will always be relapses along the way and that everyone's path is different. Plan to stick with the young person when they need support.
- Intentionally assess the shifts, changes and/or adaptations needed in approach, strategy and focus as youth move through transformational stages in their journey.
- Find a balance between managing current crises and navigating youth toward the future.
- Equip youth with the framework, language, and resources to support their personal journey of transformation.
- Understand that a youth's time with a youth-serving program is only a moment on the youth's journey. It is the staff's responsibility to support the youth's transition into and out of that moment.
- Acknowledge that staff are not responsible to design the journey for youth. Staff needs to accept and honor that the youth have been and will be on their own journey.

Baseline

At its most basic level, being journey-oriented is a commitment to help youth learn from each step forward and step back, while understanding these steps are equally important.

Case-study evidence

- On self-awareness

  "I had to become strong. And I became strong at a young age. But then I reached my breaking point, and I fell. And I had to build myself back from the bottom to the top…I am who I am because of my struggles and knowin' the people that I know, the community that I know, and the outreach that I have that has been lended out to me…I found the real Pearl deep down in me inside. I had to reach down deep inside. It hurt-- pain, suffered, tears, blood, sweat,--to actually find the real me." – From a youth interview

- On being future focused

  "Even though I had a lot a struggles – sometimes you have to struggle to get to a better place. It takes for you to be at your lowest place to get to your highest place. It takes time, patience. I want everybody to know there's hope. There's always hope. Don't ever give up. 'Cause life is what you make it." – From a youth interview

2. Trauma-Informed

Principle: ***Recognize that most homeless youth have experienced trauma; build relationships, responses, and services on that knowledge.***

Why this matters

- Being on the street is inherently traumatic. Homelessness is traumatic. Moreover, most homeless youth have experienced traumatic childhood events and relationships that affect their physical, mental, and emotional health.
- The effects of complex trauma are often severe and can undermine other efforts youth may be undertaking to bring stability and security to their lives.
- Common barriers to moving out of homelessness (e.g., chemical dependency, mental health issues, explosive tempers, etc.) can be linked to the effects of trauma.
- Historically, homeless service settings have provided care to traumatized people without directly acknowledging or addressing the impact of trauma. Rather, they have addressed the symptoms as mental, physical, or behavioral problems separate and distinct from the experience of trauma. When this is done, the risk of re-traumatizing is very high.
- When trauma is recognized and addressed, healing can begin and youth can move toward a healthier future.
- ***Outcomes for youth***
    - Youth understand their future does not need to be defined by past experiences.
    - Youth have an increased sense of self-determination and autonomy. They may begin to move forward.
    - Youth are not further traumatized while receiving support from service providers.

Research basis

- Trauma creates a sense of fear, hopelessness, or horror and overwhelms a person's resources for coping. This includes, but is not limited to, experiencing or witnessing verbal, physical, or sexual abuse and/or witnessing the death of a loved one.
- Linking behavior challenges to trauma histories allows new attributions to be considered and solutions sought. For example, drug use by homeless youth may be understood as a form of self-medicating in order to manage the distressing effects of trauma.
- Trauma impacts brain development. Recent research shows that early childhood trauma not only affects overall conditions in children's lives, but can alter the physical development of their brains. The impact of traumatic experiences on the brain can result in the development of neurophysiologic patterns, or brain processes and behaviors that affect an individual's emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social functioning.
- Regardless of the type of trauma or timing of the experience, researchers have begun making the case that homeless adolescents should be screened for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Both the immediate harm and the long-term effects vary in each person and can manifest in predictable and unpredictable ways in people's behaviors.
- Researchers also have found that individuals exposed to complex trauma suffer from a variety of psychological problems above and beyond PTSD, including depression, anxiety, self-hatred, dissociation, substance abuse, self-destructive and risk-taking behaviors, victimization, and problems with interpersonal and intimate relationships.

Practice implications

Trauma-informed requires providers to:

- Recognize and identify trauma.
- Be informed about and sensitive to trauma-related issues while anticipating and responding to the special needs of survivors or witnesses of traumatic experiences.
- Design and provide services that take into account youth's past (adverse) traumatic experiences.
- Seek connections between a youth's behaviors and trauma history and provide options for youth.
- Identify negative behaviors of youth as products of adverse past experiences. Provide support, rather than judge behaviors as just being "defiance" and "acting out."
- Provide the space and the opportunity for youth to heal as they move forward.
- Help youth understand that their past need not define and control their future path.
- Recognize the need for youth to have autonomy and a sense of control in their lives.
- Develop staff's competency in managing their own anxiety and expectations, so that they do not personalize youth behaviors as they help youth gain insight.

Baseline

At its most basic level, trauma-informed care is a commitment to deliver support that understands adverse past experiences and their long-term impact on each individual youth.

Case-study evidence

- On seeking connections between a youth's behavior and trauma history
  When you're with a young person, I'm not actively thinking 'How am I doing trauma-informed care?'...I have a young person who's in here, telling the most god-awful story I've ever heard and sobbing, and all this really painful stuff comes out. What are they going to act like when they walk out the door?…They're going to be loud and yelling because they feel empty and scared. They don't want to feel like that when they go out to the world. They want to feel tough and strong. So part of trauma-informed care is talking to the case managers like "Yes, when so and so comes in here, she's going to act like a jerk when she comes out." That's just kind of the way it is. It doesn't mean she gets to call you a name or be screaming, but we can have more tolerance because this is just the way this kind of work happens. We need to be a space for them to express that before we send them out to the world, and they get arrested on the bus. So being able to talk to them a little bit about why certain people are doing certain things or why their client might be lying all of the time, or why someone's going to take a whole bunch of snack bars and run out even though they know they can come and get them all the time." – From a staff interview

- On developing professional judgment that takes trauma into account
  "And I say to staff regularly, 'I know how hard this is. And I don't have to do it…When you're in the heat of the drama and the crisis, and a young person is just acting out, and you just want to tell them sit down and be quiet, and that's not a choice ... 1 know it's hard.' In these moments you need to come at it from a different perspective and that's where instinct and training are so *important. And this is the truly hard part of the work, but it's where you gain their trust. Where you gain the opportunity to take them deeper, where the youth really can start to make progress."* – From a program administrator

3. Non-Judgmental

Principle: ***Interact with youth without labeling or judging them on the basis of background, experiences, choices, or behaviors.***

Why this matters

- Youth have felt judged throughout their lives.
- Youth won't be honest if they feel like they are being judged.
- Youths' decisions regarding their health, bodies, sexual behavior, chemical or alcohol use, or engagement in gangs or prostitution have to be recognized in the context of surviving poverty, systematic barriers, and disparities in our society, as well as the individual's experiences of trauma, abuse, and exploitation.
- ***Outcomes for youth***
  - Youth engage more fully with supportive services.
  - Youth build positive relationships with trusting adults.
  - Youth show an increased ability and desire to make healthy personal decisions.

Research basis

- The fear of being judged is one commonly cited reason why youth do not seek care from organizations or institutions.
- Developing safe, supportive, and non-judgmental relationships is critical to increasing young people's engagement with services.
- Young people report being less likely to access support from staff that they perceive as judgmental or as having ulterior motives for helping them.
- Youth respond best to programs that avoid labeling them.
- When a program staff is non-judgmental, youth report they feel comfortable to make mistakes and do not feel pressured to make the decision the staff member wanted them to make. It is taken as a sign of respect and is generally discussed within the context of positive relationships with staff members.

Practice implications

Non-judgmental requires providers to:

- Build relationships with youth that are founded on openness and trust (see Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships).
- Meet each individual youth where he or she is at currently.
- Not label or judge the youth on the basis of background, experiences, choices, or behaviors.
- Accept youth who do not fit staff's personal expectations and learn to appreciate the youth's values.
- Focus on providing information, making transparent all of the young person's options, and helping him or her consider the choices while not passing judgment.
- Develop instincts about when to offer honest feedback. This can be done after trust has been developed and youth sense that the adult has their best interest at heart.
- Use goal plans to remind youth of the goals they want to work on. If their choices or behaviors don't match the plan, remind them of the goals they set for themselves.

- Allow room for youth to make mistakes. Provide opportunities for youth to learn rather than focus on consequences that lead to service termination.
- Ask questions to get youth to think about the choices they are making and what the consequences of those choices may be.

Baseline

At its most basic level, non-judgmental engagement is a commitment to fully support all youth regardless of their past or current choices.

Case-study evidence

- On serving youth regardless of their history
  "[Staff] sometimes come in and tell me things that people do that they are absolutely disgusted by, but they can't not serve them (the youth). We serve anyone who is homeless or at risk. If the young person presents that and they have just gotten out of jail for some kind of heinous crime, we're still going to try to figure out – within our means – what can we do the house that person? We know that it's a factor that's going to make it harder to live your life. If you came out of jail and you have a sexual assault on your record, it's going to be hard enough for me to find a place to house you. But our job is to find a place to house you." – From a staff interview

- A youth's perspective on receiving honest feedback in a non-judgmental way
  "That's one thing I learned here. There's no point to lie about anything or try to act like you're innocent. Everybody makes mistakes and they understand that. They work with you…. They really do work with you in your walk and what you're going through. They don't hold it over your head, but they do remind you so you don't make the same mistake… They teach you responsibility because they're not going to let you keep slacking and doing the same thing over and over. You don't learn like that." – From a youth interview

4. Harm Reduction

Principle: ***Contain the effects of risky behavior in the short-term and seek to reduce its effects in the long-term.***

Why this matters

- Homeless youth face extraordinary challenges to just getting basic needs met. They often turn to risky behaviors to survive (e.g., trading sex for food or shelter) and cope (e.g., using drugs and alcohol to numb fear and hopelessness).
- As with non-judgmental (see Non-Judgmental), youths' decisions to engage in risky behaviors must be recognized in the context of poverty, systemic barriers and disparities they face in our society, as well as their experiences of trauma, abuse, and exploitation.
- Simply requiring a youth to stop engaging in risky behaviors does not achieve any desired results and is actually likely to cause the youth to become uncooperative and even leave the program.
- Self-determination by the youth is the primary agent for lessening risk. Support that is non-judgmental and seeks to reduce harms associated with risky behavior is most likely to help a youth begin to make healthier choices.
- ***Outcomes for youth***
    - Youth will recognize and care about the harm risky behaviors may bring them.
    - Youth will reduce how frequently or intensively they engage in risky behaviors.
    - Youth will be safer.

Research basis

- Research investigating the efficacy of street-based youth found that, to engage socially-excluded young people: 1) the work must start with where the young person is, 2) not be prescriptive, and 3) deal with issues that are seen as important to the young person.
- When housing programs require abstinence as a condition for obtaining housing, persons with dual diagnoses and/or histories of substance abuse are at high risk of housing loss or continued homelessness.
- It often takes time and the assistance of mental health professionals to replace coping strategies (such as drug abuse) with more effective alternatives. In the meantime, the youth requires safe and secure shelter.
- Youth report they are more likely to use services they perceive as providing assistance tailored to young people's individual needs. These services operated with less-restrictive rules and did not require the disclosure of personal information.

Practice implications

Harm reduction requires providers to:

- Ensure a low-barrier for entry and promote a safe space.
- Use practical strategies to reduce the negative consequences of risky behavior by meeting youth "where they are at" in a non-judgmental (see Non-Judgmental) manner (e.g., offer condoms, send youth under the influence to bed rather than back to the streets).
- Offer support and offer options and resources to reduce the level of risk in real, practical ways. Give clients alternative options to consider.

- Educate youth on the pros and cons of risky behaviors within the context of trusting relationships (see Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships).
- Provide safety and learning opportunities without forcing youth to alter choices as a condition of program participation.
- Remember that youths will reduce risky behaviors when they make that choice for themselves, not when it is forced upon them.
- Hire competent staff and train them to deliver options and resources to clients in a non-judgmental and non-demanding manner.
- Practice trauma-informed care (see Trauma-Informed).

Baseline

At its most basic level, harm reduction is a commitment to accept youth with all that they present, including risky behaviors, and support them in a way that minimizes harm and helps them move toward making a choice for personal health by reducing their risks.

Case-study evidence

- On the impact of minimizing or eliminating risky behavior
  "I learned that you would never get anything accomplished if you're trying to smoke all the time. I had to get out of my comfort zone with that. I can't smoke. You have business to take care of instead of just sitting at home smoking…It's got to the point that I don't even look at drugs. There was a point in time where I really needed drugs. There was that point, but now it's like I got too much going for me." – From a youth interview

- On promoting a safe space
  "They were super supportive. It was crazy. I connected with them so much it's not even funny…They were always listening. Of course, we're all human, so we kind of have a pattern, and we kind of all do the same things. We mess up in the same ways because we're humans. We all do the same stuff. But they would listen as they've never heard this mistake before. It wasn't like 'Oh, you just do the same thing. You're just a statistic.' No. They were listening as if this was a new world problem. They were just extra supportive, like they just push it on you. Like 'Every single day I am here for support.' I heard that at least once a day. I heard that word support at least once a day. If you think about that, that's two months, that's 60 days basically. At least once a day I heard that. 'I'm here to support you.'"— From a youth interview

Prepared by Nora F. Murphy, PhD and
the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation,
Supported by the Otto Bremer Foundation

5. Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships

Principle: ***Build relationships by interacting with youth in an honest, dependable, authentic, caring, and supportive way.***

Why this matters

- Relationships are critically important. In fact, developing trusting relationships is central to successfully supporting persons who have experienced loss, abuse, neglect, and separation from critical relationships.
- Youth indicate that their experiences make it hard for them to trust others. They have a lot of reasons not to trust adults, programs, and systems that have failed them.
- Exposures to trauma during critical developmental stages of adolescence often derail emotional growth and adversely affect self-esteem. The ability of traumatized youth to relate to and trust others, as well as their ability to avoid future victimization, is substantially reduced.
- Youth need to trust the adults working for them. In order to engage with supportive services, they must establish rapport and trust in the relationship with service providers. They also must perceive that supports will lead to positive experiences.
- Youth need adults to believe in them. They need someone who sees them as good, as having potential, and as a person, not a case.
- ***Outcomes for youth***
    - Youth learn how to establish trusting relationships.
    - Youth can express themselves in safe relationships.
    - Youth believe in themselves because others believe in them.
    - Youth learn how to ask for and receive help.

Research basis

- Effective interventions are possible once rapport with homeless young people is established.
- Supportive relationships are viewed most favorably by youth when the staff are caring, consistent, and trustworthy.
- Youth feel particularly positive about staff members who are perceived as going above and beyond the basic requirements of their job description, and who actually show they care.
- Once developed, safe relationships with staff provide a context for youth to feel emotionally safe and to learn to trust others. When this occurs, youth are able to accept support and move forward.
- Youth report that trusting relationships help them learn how to ask for and accept assistance.

Practice implications

Trusting youth-adult relationships requires providers to:

- Begin each youth interaction with non-judgmental engagement (see Non-Judgmental).
- Focus on relationship building rather than programming activities.
- Demonstrate to youth that they are more than a job, a case or even "a client."

- Ensure staff members have unwavering faith in youth and their ability to make good decisions for themselves, resulting in youth ultimately having faith in themselves.
- Listen actively to the youth, since it is as valuable as any practical help.
- Ensure there is follow through and consistency in meeting youth needs.
- Create a culture that allows staff members to extend themselves to make meaningful connections with youth.
- Strive for employee retention so that there is a continuity of people in staff roles to allow relationships to unfold.

Baseline

At its most basic level, trusting youth-adult relationships are critical components for effective programming.

Case-study evidence

- The importance of relationships
  "Cause if I didn't find Monica, I don't know what I'd do." – From a youth interview

- Supportive relationships help youth succeed rather than return to negative environments
  "Pearl recalled a point in her life when she had completely severed her ties with the youth shelter to find herself. She ended up in a dark place, depressed and addicted to alcohol, and realized that she did, indeed, need her support people from the youth shelter in her life." – Summarized from a youth interview

- On non-judgmental engagement and unwavering belief in a youth's potential
  "And you be like okay, I have all this on my plate. I have to dig in and look into it to make my life more complete. And I felt that on my own, I really couldn't. Not even the strongest person on God's green earth can do it. I couldn't do it. So I ended up reaching back out to [the youth shelter]. And they opened their arms. They were like just come – just get here. And they got me back on track." – From a youth interview

6. Strengths-Based

Principle: ***Start with and build upon the skills, strengths, and positive characteristics of each youth.***

Why this matters

- All youth experiencing homelessness have strengths upon which they can build, including resiliency, resourcefulness, and the ability to interact with others.
- Youth who have been involved in public systems have typically been approached from a deficit model that focuses on "fixing" them, pointing out dysfunction, and using limiting labels. Such approaches have the effect of holding a youth down.
- All youth (regardless of homeless status) respond favorably to positive reinforcement.
- ***Outcomes for youth***
    - Youth learn to reframe the survival skills they have and turn them into skills they can use to be independent.
    - Youth experience increased self-esteem and sense of competence.
    - Youth have effective interpersonal skills and can seek out assistance and nurturance from others in both formal and informal relationships.
    - Youth develop increased awareness of what they can and cannot control in their lives.

Research basis

- Homeless young people respond better to client-centered approaches that are strength-based, flexible, and forgiving and that encourage them to strive toward positive goals despite any setbacks.
- Strengths-based programming may be intended to increase the number of strengths shown by youth, to support youth in utilizing existing strengths to address current issues, or a combination of both.
- When asked what particular strengths they have to build upon, youth experiencing homelessness note a positive attitude, intelligence, and the ability to interact with others.
- Youth experiencing homelessness state that they were caring for themselves better than anyone had previously.

Practice implications

Strengths-based requires providers to:

- Identify strengths they see in youth and support those strengths.
- Focus on each youth's many skills, strengths, and positive characteristics in order to help the youth meet the challenges and opportunities he or she faces.
- Encourage youth to build off their strengths to formulate their personal goals.
- Demonstrate a belief in a client's power to make positive change.
- Be consistent and intentional in helping youth utilize their own strengths to overcome barriers.

Baseline

At its most basic level, a strength-based approach identifies the young person's resources and strengths that will lay the basis to address the challenges the young person faces.

Case-study evidence

- On staff identifying strengths
  "She is so smart. The first time I met her, I started to do the diagnostic assessment. She actually said, "Let me do this." So she read the questions out loud and filled in her symptoms. Then we had to debate over her diagnoses. She wanted to diagnose herself (something that I didn't necessarily agree with). We looked in the DSM. We made a pro/con list, and went with a different diagnosis. She is very smart, and she has a lot of insight into why she does some of the things she does."— From a staff interview.

- On encouraging youth in their strengths
  "Like, I was so negative about myself. But the staff and stuff I met, they always could say something positive about me. I'd be like "Where do you see this at?" The more they told me, the more I started to believe it. The more I started to see it and believe it in myself." – From a youth interview

- On building off one's strengths
  "I talked to him about construction, and he told me you already basically have experience in that because he knows all the jobs I had. So he was like you should go into something that's totally different, but that pays a lot of money. Then I researched it and then just knew that I liked working with my hands. So I just put two and two together and was like, well, I want to go to school for welding. Ever since I learned how to weld it's like…I love it!" – From a youth interview

7. Positive Youth Development

Principle: ***Provide opportunities for youth to build a sense of competency, usefulness, belonging, and power.***

Why this matters

- Youth make choices based on their emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual development.
- Youth are bombarded with negative messages about who they are and who they will become.
- Homeless youth typically have had no power over their lives and no say in their daily activities. Many have had exploitive and hurtful relationships.
- Youth, like everyone, desire to belong, be valued and participate.
- To move forward positively, a young person needs to feel competent and useful, a sense of belonging and the ability to set and achieve personal goals.
- ***Outcomes for youth***
    - Youth develop a positive sense of self-worth and hope for their future.
    - Youth believe they are competent, able to make contributions, able to direct their lives positively, and appreciated and accepted.
    - Youth understand there are resources and supports regardless of what they have done, who they will become, or what they might need.

Research basis

- The field of positive youth development is based on the belief that all youth possess the latent resources for positive development. Positive youth development emerged as a field in response to deficit-reduction methods of intervention and prevention that were ineffective in reducing or ridding youth of negative and undesirable social behaviors.
- Research shows that the combination of reducing risk factors and promoting assets and strengths promote adolescent health.
- There are three key aspects to the positive development of youth: 1) caring and supportive relationships, 2) high expectations, and 3) meaningful participation (see Collaboration).
- Positive youth development is only fully realized when young people are given opportunities to genuinely participate in their own development in ways that are meaningful for them.

Practice implications

Positive youth development requires providers to:

- Focus on youth's development and protective factors rather than their negative behaviors, bad experiences, or deficits (often referred to as "risk factors").
- Remember that the culture of homelessness and the allure of the streets are enmeshed in a homeless young person's development.
- Strive to influence youth's behavior rather than expect outright change (see Harm Reduction). Recognize it takes time for a youth to change their behavior based on internal desire.

- Establish positive staff-youth relationships with clearly defined roles (see Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships).
- Develop in youth high expectations of themselves by believing in their potential, skills, and capabilities (see Strengths-Based).
- Create youth autonomy by providing opportunities for youth to play a positive and active role in their own lives. Encourage youth to engage in self-determination.
- Create opportunities for youth to learn leadership skills and engage with and contribute to their community in a positive way.
- Help youth find ways to positively influence a situation without giving in to negative relationship dynamics such as extreme loyalties to street families.

Baseline

At its basic level, positive youth development is a commitment to unconditional, patient support that demonstrates belief in the potential of youth, allows youth to experience healthy, trusting relationships, allows youth to make their own decisions, and creates opportunities that result in meaningful contributions to their community.

Case-study evidence

- On providing positive feedback
  "They were just extra supportive, like they just push it on you. Like "Every single day I'm here for support." I heard that at least once a day. I heard that word support at least once a day. If you think about that, that's two months, that's 60 days basically. At least once a day I heard that. "I'm here to support you." – From a youth interview

- The positive impact of high expectations
  "I was so proud of myself. It was the first accomplishment that I accomplished in a long time." – From a youth interview

- On meaningful participation
  "Everything I was doing [with worker] was productive. When you get that feeling like you're accomplishing something and you're doing good, it's like a feeling that you can't describe." – From a youth interview

- Youth recognizing that they can take an active role
  "We were at the [the drop-in center], in the basement. We had leadership training. We kept – I was listening to everybody describe their experience with [the drop-in center] – how some of the case managers can be disrespectful or how some rules make absolutely no sense. Think about it. Okay, there's a problem…So we decided to start making a nonprofit to go to these places to consult them on how to better improve their services. Who better to help regulate a youth homeless shelter and a youth drop-in center than the homeless youth?" – From a youth interview

8. Holistic

Principle: ***Support youth in a manner that recognizes the interconnectedness of their mental, physical, spiritual, and social health.***

Why this matters

- Each "part" of a human being is dependent on the health and functioning of the other "parts." For example, a person's mental health affects his or her social health, physical health, and spiritual health.
- The needs of youth are complex and include intersecting physical, social, economic, relational and spiritual needs that must be addressed simultaneously.
- ***Outcomes for youth***
    - Youth are able to focus on their goals (e.g., housing, employment, and education) because their mental, physical, spiritual and social health is stabilized.
    - Youth have their on-going physical health addressed through an established connection with a primary care clinic, and are no longer in a position of using emergency rooms for care, or having inconsistent care.
    - Youth understand and value the connection between various aspects of wellness, including mental and physical health, which can directly affect their ability to accomplish their goals.

Research basis

- Research suggests the importance of taking an ecological (holistic) perspective that places the young person in the middle.
- A young person's overall wellbeing can be more effectively improved by bringing together various systems of support—such as family, schools, medical services, and mental health services—than by addressing a young person's needs in isolation (see Collaboration).
- A review of Australian and international literature reveals the positive important of holistic care. The same cannot be said about the United States. The lack of cohesive policy in the US is one factor that makes it difficult for organizations to provide services in a holistic way: different policies, laws, funding streams, and reimbursement reinforce fragmentation of services.
- The World Health Organization takes a holistic approach to health, defining it as "a complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease" (2013).

Practice implications

Holistic requires providers to:

- Establish an agency philosophy that supports the holistic approach to wellbeing. Train staff to understand and support the interconnectedness of youths' mental, physical, spiritual, and social health.
- Ensure youth have access to a range of holistic services to address the many dimensions of health.
- Focus on overall wellbeing rather than individual outcomes.

- Create a "therapeutic web," connecting young people with a variety of staff members and resource partners, in different roles.
- Recognize that support related to mental health is particularly important in the holistic approach.
- Understand that this approach is in conflict with what youth have typically experienced when seeking services.
- Establish collaborative partners with various providers and systems in order to holistically support a youth's various and interconnected needs.

Baseline

At its most basic level, a holistic approach is a commitment to addressing all aspects of a youth's being, including physical, mental, social, and spiritual health.

Case-study evidence

- A holistic approach is difficult to define, yet during is intuitively understood
  "When I think of holistic, I don't know, I think of—I don't know really what I think of when I think of holistic."— From a staff interview

- On the importance of a holistic approach
  "Zi stated that she is "trying to better her life" through finding a steady job and going back to school. She feels like she's created a home for herself in her apartment at the transitional living programs. She's devoted a great deal of time and energy to forgiving her mom and reframing her important relationship with her sister. Her description of where she is in her life is a holistic perspective about her wellbeing and development, focusing on her Microsystems (family, school and work) and how these combine to create a sense of security." — Summarized from a youth interview

9. Collaboration

Principle: ***Establish a principles-based, youth-focused system of support that integrates practices, procedures, and services within and across agencies, systems, and policies.***

Why this matters

- Youth experiencing homelessness often have many and complex needs (see Holistic).
- Youth interact with multiple systems (family, education, legal, civic/community, public, corrections) on their transitional journey to adulthood.
- Navigating the many systems that interact with and impact youth is complicated and beyond the skill level of most young people or any single staff person.
- Successful solutions do not lie within individual organizations but within collaborations across systems where the youth are supported.
- A collaborative approach, both with youth participants and among agencies, provides a platform for youth to learn how to navigate systems.
- A collaborative approach to supporting young people—truly working in partnership with the young person—is a vital element to achieving positive youth development goals (see Positive Youth Development).
- ***Outcomes for youth***
    - Youth receive the support and gain skills they need to succeed.
    - Youth are able to navigate seamlessly between agencies and systems.
    - Youth experience a network of support in their journey toward adulthood, and they build trusting relationships throughout that network.

Research basis

- Youth development research emphasizes the importance of collaboration and its impact. Expressed in different forms, collaboration among various people, programs, and providers is a key component to working with young people.
- Research demonstrates that, when individuals and agencies pool their collective expertise, resources, and voice, outcomes improve for the persons served.
- Research shows that partnering with youth (as opposed to doing the work for them) promotes a positive self-perception within youth, develops life skills, and strengthens the ties between youth and the practitioner, as well as between youth and their community. This approach develops a sense of competency, self-worth, and positive orientation to the future (see Positive Youth Development).
- A framework coined "client center collaboration" was developed by Carl Rogers, which names and reinforces that collaboration must include respect of clients beliefs and values, client participation in process and decisions, and delivery of flexible and individualized services.

Practice implications

Collaboration requires providers to:

- Approach youth as partners to be supported, not as recipients of services. An individual youth provides valuable information and personal will that can only improve a provider's work with him or her.

- Build trust with the youth, from which energy and momentum toward collaboration will emerge. Trusting relationships create a space where individuals are willing to take risks, are more creative and innovative, and can produce tangible results (see Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships).
- Learn about the relationships youth have in their lives—including services, family, friends, and mentors—to gain perspective about their community and the types of collaborations that may best support the youth.
- Communicate, share, and strategize (as appropriate and authorized by the youth) with other individuals, organizations, and systems that touch the lives of a young person. This builds collective perspective, resources, and relationships that can support and impact an individual youth, holistically.
- Identify and facilitate opportunities to build trusting relationships across agencies. Formalize collaboration between agencies when it can achieve greater impact in a coordinated and efficient way (e.g., work together to cross-train staff).
- Focus on youth needs instead of program or agency needs.

Baseline

At its most basic level, collaboration is a commitment to work in partnership with the youth and the many agencies and systems that impact the youth, placing the focus on the youth's outcomes rather than on an individual organization's outcomes.

Case-study evidence

- On collaborating across agencies
  "Once again, [the youth shelter] knows me more than [the drop-in center]. They know more about me and my ups and downs, where I've come from, where I've struggled at, and where my lowest points were. They all came together and put this picture together – like this program they were gonna put me in—the GRH (Group Residential Housing)—it's worth it. So now I had all three working case managers working together to keep me on a straight and narrow path." – From a youth interview

- On building relationships with staff from other organizations
  "I don't believe in ownership of clients or outcomes or anything like that. My belief and my knowledge of the system and being a case manager myself, you've gotta know everybody in this damn town if you want anything done. So that's the way [our shelter] staff work…You just know people. And that's what you do." — From a staff interview

- On transparency between programs and organizations
  "Transparency with each other within the system—that's about me saying, "I've had this young person. This is what happened here. We want to transfer them to your facility. I want you to be aware of all those things that have happened." There are times when it would've been easier if somebody at the beginning would've said "This is what this young person presents with. If you want to take them on, great, but you have to understand the risk." We don't do that very well." – From a staff interview

Prepared by Nora F. Murphy, PhD and
the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation,
Supported by the Otto Bremer Foundation

Introduction to Outcomes Snapshots

Fourteen in-depth case stories were written about youth who were: 1) between the ages of 18 and 24 at the time of the interview, 2) were or had been homeless and unaccompanied by family, 3) utilized services provided by least two of the six organizations participating in the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation, 4) were identified by staff as being reasonably reflective and articulate, and 5) had made substantial progress toward their goals. While the case stories relied heavily on the young people's accounts of their own journeys, data were also included from interviews with one staff person, nominated by each youth, who knew him or her well and who worked at one of the six organizations participating in the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation. Additional data were collected through a review of the young people's case files.

The primary text for writing the case story was the youth interview; priority was placed on using the participants' quotations when possible and, when paraphrasing, to keep the intention of their words and story. Youth were provided the opportunity to review their story.

All fourteen cases are provided in-full in Dr. Nora F. Murphy's dissertation. One full case story has been included to provide a sense of what these cases capture. In addition to the full case story, what follows are fourteen outcomes snapshots. These are condensed versions of each case story and were created to address the question: When the principles are implemented, what are the results for youth? These snapshots present the status of each young person at the time of the interview, a bit about their journey with the agencies, and concluding thoughts about what the engagement has meant to them and their outcomes.

Full study reference:
Developing Evidence-Based Effective Principles for Working with Homeless Youth: A Developmental Evaluation of the Otto Bremer Foundation's Support for Collaboration Among Agencies Serving Homeless Youth by Nora F. Murphy.
Published doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 2014.

Outcomes Snapshot: Alexa

Alexa is a resilient 22-year old African American woman and committed mother of two: a daughter (age two) and a son (age four). She was born in Chicago and raised, along with her brother, by her single mother. Her father's presence was scarce; Alexa doesn't remember meeting him until she was nine years old. She also has a sister by her father who grew up in a different home. Alexa and her family moved to Minnesota when she was nine, and she was raised with several cousins. She remembers this as a hard time. Her mother worked long hours, was in an abusive relationship, and did not pay much attention to the kids. Alexa felt her mom didn't love them because no matter what kind of violence the family experienced, her mother would always take her boyfriend back into their home. Alexa was angry, hurt, and "running the streets and getting in to some stuff." During this period, her uncle was killed less than a block from her home, and it nearly brought Alexa to her breaking point.

Looking back, Alexa observed that homelessness came on slowly over her lifetime, but accelerated when she entered into her own abusive relationship. Domestic abuse had been a fixture in her family history. She witnessed intimate partner violence against her mom, her aunties, and her cousin. As Alexa stated, "the cycle just kept goin' on and on." Sometimes she would try to leave her boyfriend, but wouldn't find what she was looking for in other relationships and would end up returning. She became pregnant at 17 with her first child while still in an abusive relationship, and withdrew from her friends. She found it impossible to leave her boyfriend. "Every time somethin' happened to me—like he abused me—I'd try to find love somewhere else. And I end up gettin' pregnant twice with him. It made it no better—no better."

During those tumultuous years, Alexa visited a youth drop-in center regularly. She felt supported and accepted by the staff. She described that "whatever you want or need, the staff at the drop-in center can help you meet your needs and work towards your goals…You just gotta know what you want to do and move forward with it." She noted that the staff at the drop-in help young people regardless of choices they may have made in their lives.

> *If you have a past – like nobody judge you about it. So say, for instance, you used to do different drugs, other than smokin' weed, they don't judge you. They just help you – pretty much they help youth, period.*

Alexa originally visited the drop-in center to get her basic needs met such as meals, showers, a place to sleep, and computer access. Since having children, she feels she's made even greater use of the resources at the drop-in center, working with a case manager toward the goals that she set for herself—going back to school, finding a job, and finding a place to live. She recalled how hard it was trying to find an apartment when she was pregnant and had no rental history. It was scary to think about living on her own. Her case manager helped her research housing options and helped Alexa get her name onto several waiting lists. Alexa was on several waiting lists and when she was three months pregnant, her case manager told her that she had moved to the top of one of the waiting lists and took her to sign the lease. Having her own apartment was important for many reasons, primarily because having a stable home contributed to Alexa's ability to keep her daughter when she was born.

Alexa couldn't always make enough income to meet her needs. The drop-in center helped her during those months when she couldn't afford her rent, and they helped her pay for school. When she dropped out mid-semester, she would incur fines that she couldn't pay which would have prevented her from re-enrolling. The drop-in center was able to help cover the cost of the fines. This financial support helped her keep a stable home for herself and her children.

Alexa has been living in the same apartment for three years, and had a job for the last two and a half years. She has been going to school on and off, depending largely on whether her boyfriend was in jail. She recalls passing English and Reading while her boyfriend was in jail and then dropping out the following semester when he was released from jail. "I had to drop out. Couldn't go to school with two black eyes. So I just stopped going."

While Alexa was visiting the drop-in center, she was able to see a therapist there named Monica. "I see Monica a lot. So that helps me. She's a good support system to help me through a lot a things." Alexa and Monica have been able to engage intellectually, as well as therapeutically, around understanding the domestic abuse cycle. This understanding has changed Alexa's narrative about her abuse by seeing it in a systemic light rather than as a personal weakness. Alexa credits the work she has done with Monica with allowing her to see a different path for herself.

Her boyfriend was recently incarcerated, sentenced to several years for abusing Alexa. Alexa and Monica both shared that the strength and courage Alexa showed by pressing charges is one of her biggest accomplishments. Alexa feels that her ability to do this was, in part, a reflection of the progress she has made in therapy.

With Alexa's ex-boyfriend in jail, she feels that she has been able to cultivate peace in her life. Since ending her abusive relationship and entering a healthier one, she has reduced her stress and symptoms of depression, and has had fewer migraine headaches. Again, she credits these changes largely to the work she has done with Monica. Talking to Monica helped her understand some of the choices she's made and believe that she deserves to be treated well by her intimate partner.

Alexa takes pride in the changes she's made and feels optimistic about her future. She is planning to re-enroll in school for the fall and is looking for a townhome so that she and her children will have more space. Her son will be entering Kindergarten in the fall, and she feels confident about the school she has chosen for him. She credits the support of staff at the drop-in center, particularly her case manager and therapist, as being critical in helping stay in school, meet her needs, and furnish her new apartment.

> *It was meant for them to be in my life. 'Cause if I didn't find Monica, I don't know what I'd do. Tamika also done came to my house and really helped me a lot. She knows I'll be strugglin' at some point in time. But she'll find a way to help me.*
>
> *Any person would be proud of the stuff that I've been through personally. I actually almost died from bein' abused. I'm proud of makin' it to 22. I'm proud that I'm a proud mother of two beautiful children. I'm proud that I have my own place. I'm proud that I don't have to depend on a person to take care of me and my kids, because that's my responsibility and nobody else's.*

In order to get to where she is now, Alexa feels that she has had to address her relationships with abusive men and rebuild her relationships with the friends that she had shut out. The supportive, stable staff at the drop-in center helped her learn to open up and trust others. Alexa hopes other young people will take advantage of that resource.

> *I'll tell them that this actually is a great place for you to get yourself together. And if you don't choose to do it right now, make sure you do it in the long run 'cause it takes time for a person to overcome all their obstacles. I'll explain to them it's a good support system. And if you're willin' to get that help and that support, then you can move forward.*

Alexa is considering starting a non-profit for abused women. She is proud of having the strength to get to where she is in her life today and wants to devote her hard-won knowledge and resilience to helping others.

Outcomes Snapshot: Asha

Asha is a spirited, 23-year-old Caucasian women and the mother of three children ages seven, two, and seven months. Although born in Texas, she grew up in Minnesota's foster care system. She lived in several of the state's shelters and group homes, and with two different adoptive families. In these placements, she suffered multiple instances of sexual trauma. She was sexually abused by her first adoptive father, and when she reported the abuse, her claims were met with disbelief, resentment, and blame by the rest of the family. She was removed from their home, but was traumatized first by the abuse, and again by the family's refusal to believe her.

Asha was 15 and staying with a foster family when she became pregnant with her first child. She kept her pregnancy a secret for as long as she could; she knew a conflict would arise when her foster parents learned that the baby's father was the brother of her foster mother. Eventually, they learned the truth and kicked her out of their home. Asha moved into a youth shelter and stayed there until she went into labor. Rather than returning her to the youth shelter, social services brought her to the home of the second family that adopted her.

Asha and her second adoptive family never got along, and she suspects that this family only took her in so that they could keep her son. This family has since adopted her son, who is now seven years old. She left this home, graduated from high school, and began taking classes at a community college. During this time, she "couch hopped" before moving into a family shelter. At the time, her son was sometimes staying with her, and sometimes with her adoptive parents. After only six months, Asha was kicked out of the family shelter for partying and having men over. Asha then alternated between living on the streets and with a boyfriend who was also her pimp. After he beat her so severely that she feared for her life, she moved into an adult shelter.

Asha stopped prostituting after moving into the adult shelter, and started visiting a youth drop-in center. She shares some of the ways the drop-in center has supported her.

> *As far as here, they've helped me with transportation, housing resources. They helped me with job searching, social skills. I did a luncheon with them, and realized[…]how sharing what you've been through can help others. It's kind of interesting. I feel like I wouldn't be as far as I am off the streets if it wasn't for a lot of the stuff that they've done here.*

She also worked with her case manager to find housing. She was in a youth shelter for a short while, but was asked to leave after violating their drug policy by smoking marijuana. After that, she found a variety of places to stay short-term. Every time she found a place, she would tell her case manager, Sonny. She would say:

> *"Sonny, I found a new place to move into." He would say, "Really? What do you mean? Your own lease, like you're on the lease?" "No." "Really? Do you remember what happened last time you did this?" I'd say, "It's going to be different. These people are like family." He'd say, "They were like family the last time." And I'd say, "Still it's going to be different." But it was always the same thing, different person.*

Asha formed a particularly strong connection with a therapist at the drop-in-center, Tia. Tia helped with Asha's relationship issues, taking a harm reduction approach. Rather than denying Asha services while she was in an abusive relationship as some therapists do, Tia maintained the therapeutic alliance, working with Asha to find ways of reducing harm within her current context. For example, if Asha was allowing her boyfriend and his friends to sleep over—despite the fact that it's a lease violation—Tia's approach might be, "Okay, so [your boyfriend] is still going to sleep over. How about not having any of his friends sleep over?"

Another part of Tia's work with Asha was helping her get connected to other supportive community resources. Recognizing that Asha didn't only need help with domestic abuse issues, Tia assisted Asha in meeting other basic needs.

> *You can't really address trauma if somebody's hungry. You can't do it. If she's hungry, where are the food shelves, and when can you access them? Do you need diapers? Do you need formula? Where else in the community can you access these things?…Just doing a lot of collaborative work with other professionals.*

At the time of the interview, Asha was no longer able to access services at the drop-in center; she had aged out of their system. She is particularly upset about losing her connection with her therapist. "She's like the best therapist I ever had. I've had maybe like five therapists in my lifetime."

Asha feels her current life situation is better than at some points in the past, but not where she'd like it to be. She has had two more children (daughters aged two years and seven month old) and finds it hard to maintain the focus and determination it will take to keep making forward progress for herself and her daughters. She described her life as being like a see-saw, with her in the middle. She has a Section 8 subsidy and recently moved from a one-bedroom apartment to a two-bedroom duplex. The drop-in center and another organization are helping her pay the $800 deposit. However, Asha puts her eligibility for Section 8 housing in jeopardy by allowing people to stay there who aren't on her lease. She wants to help family or friends who are experiencing homelessness like she did.

Asha would also like to return to college. She knows she is smart, that she enjoys learning, and that the degree would help her find stable and rewarding employment. She also wants to go to college because she wants to set a good example for her daughters. But the lack of stability in other parts of her life has made it difficult to stay in school.

When asked about the two biggest challenges she's had to overcome to get to where she is now, Asha was only able to name one: she is proud of the fact that she is learning to ask for and accept help. Her next goal is to overcome her pattern of abusive relationships. She knows she deserves better, and she is afraid that someday her daughters will be hurt too. Asha is most proud of her kids, and proud that she's come this far without giving up.

Asha wishes that there were more youth shelters, more job opportunities, and more opportunities for youth to be involved in authentic and meaningful community engagement.

> *I think being able to get in touch or having more resources or more connections with other programs would be great. I think even if they sat there and were able to get us connected with jobs—that would be great. But if somebody was really serious about trying to get off the street with jobs and in housing programs, they would help us be more community oriented, so we can actually help the young kids in the community that they are trying to get off the streets. [We could help others] get out of poverty and move forward with their lives.*

Outcomes Snapshot: Harmony

Harmony is a 21-year old African American woman with a quick and easy smile. She was born in Minneapolis and lived with both parents until she was six years old. At the age of six, her mother became a flight attendant and her father was in prison, so she moved in with her grandmother and stayed in her home until she turned 18. She describes her relationship with her grandmother as a "constant battle." At age 18, Harmony decided to move out of her grandmother's home and in with her father. This began a series of events that led to Harmony becoming homeless. She couch-hopped for nearly a year, going from place to place, but not having a place to call home. Each stay ended badly. She engaged in sex work to make money, often dating older, wealthy men. When this life became unbearable, Harmony reached out to a non-profit dedicated to helping women and girls escape systems of prostitution and sexual exploitation. She was at this short-term shelter for a month in 2011 before becoming connected to a youth shelter at the age of 19. She entered and exited youth shelters several times before obtaining her own apartment.

At first, Harmony didn't always follow the rules at the youth shelter, but eventually she came to appreciate them and found that they helped her make better choices. Harmony came to see that having a bed was more important than spending an extra night with a man. At one point on her journey, she was asked to leave a shelter and was trying to get a bed in a different shelter. Staff from the two youth shelters worked together to help Harmony get and keep a shelter placement that worked for her, and that kept her off the streets for the short time until her 21st birthday. This was a critical moment from Harmony's perspective. Without this bed at the second youth shelter, she doubts she would be where she is now. She describes what it meant to her to have the first youth shelter help her find a placement even though she wasn't able to stay there anymore.

> *"Without them, I really don't think I would be where I'm at in my own place. I really don't. They believe in me so much that I got into [the second youth shelter]. It did work out. I'm really thankful for that. I really am. Without them being there and telling them my story and really fighting for me, I wouldn't have a place. I would still be trying to make it."*

Harmony had secured an apartment by her 21st birthday again but couldn't move into the apartment for a month. As this point she was thinking, "Where am I going to go?" But the staff at the second youth shelter got special permission for her to stay in the youth shelter for an extra month.

> *"I really thank God for everything and everybody in my life. Without them I don't even know what I would be doing right now. I really don't. I don't even know where I would be if I didn't have Mia and Miss Stella and everybody in my corner – even the people at [the second youth shelter], like Robert, Frank, everybody. They just really believed in me."*

Harmony cried tears of gratitude and relief as she relived this transformative chain of events, with staff from two youth shelters believing in her and working together on her behalf. In the past, when she would share her hopes and aspirations with her grandmother, Harmony would be told, "You can't do it. You won't do it." She recognizes her time at the youth shelters as one of the first periods in her life that caring adults believed in her.

Through these caring relationships, Harmony learned how to ask for and accept help. The staff's non-judgmental approach allowed her to open up and trust them, and helped her start seeing her own life choices in a different way.

> *"That's one thing I learned here. There's no point to lie about anything or try to act like you're innocent. Everybody makes mistakes and they understand that. They work with you…. They really do work with you in your walk and what you're going through. They don't hold it over*

your head, but they do remind you so you don't make the same mistake… They teach you responsibility because they're not going to let you keep slacking and doing the same thing over and over. You don't learn like that."

Harmony also felt that if they were going to care about her and respect her, then she should show them the same consideration in return. "If you keep making the same mistake, that's telling them that you don't really care. Who wants to be treated like that?"

Harmony had different case managers between the various organizations that she interacted with, but she had a particularly strong relationship with a woman named Mia. Mia was honest and transparent with her, and helped Harmony connect with a therapist at the youth shelter. Over the time that Mia has known Harmony, Mia has witnessed healthy changes in Harmony's relationships with men, and a deepening and repair of relationships with important women in her life. Mia and Harmony have stayed in touch throughout her various placements. This continuity was important to Harmony during her various transitions.

Harmony recently became a mother, the result of another challenging turn of events. Prior to the unexpected pregnancy, Harmony had been living in her own apartment, was back in a relationship with a boyfriend that she loved, and was excited about where her life was heading. Then she found out she was pregnant with another man's baby, and she became depressed and scared about her future. She and her boyfriend have worked through these challenges, and are living together with the baby in a studio apartment.

Harmony is pleased with her current situation. She worked hard and had the ability to visualize the future she wanted. She recognizes how important the support of the programs and staff she relied upon have been to her.

"I'm in a really good place now. I'm happy with my life. I live [in my own apartment]. I go to school. I work….I'm trying to get into the dental hygiene program at Normandale. [I'm taking] science classes and getting high grades in my science classes."

Harmony reflects on what her life has taught her.

"My journey has taught me you have to take stuff for what it is. You have to start small and work on it. Everything is a process. Nothing comes easy. Everything doesn't come fast."

Harmony is not just surviving from crisis to crisis anymore. She is taking steps to become a dental hygienist and taking a child development class in order to become the best mother she can be. She is proud that she is taking a balanced, forward-thinking approach to her new life with her family.

Outcomes Snapshot: Isiah

Isiah is a tall, laid back, 22-year-old African American man with a smile that, as a staff person described it, "lights up a room." Although he is a fun-loving young man, he also has a serious, determined streak. Isiah was born in Milwaukee and grew up in Wisconsin. He lived in foster care from his earliest memory until he was eight years old and was adopted by a large family. As a teenager, Isiah knew that his biological mother lived in Minneapolis, and he was able to meet her briefly when he was 16. When it was time to choose a college, Isiah was drawn to Minnesota. However, Isiah's adoptive parents and seven siblings surprised Isiah by moving to North Carolina just a week after he started college in Minnesota. As Isiah put it, "They moved to North Carolina, and I wasn't invited."

Isiah completed his freshman year, but the following summer he had no home to go back to, no money, and no support system. He remembers taking a bus to Minneapolis in hopes of finding his biological mom, but being unsuccessful. "When I got here, I don't know. I actually cried because I couldn't get in contact with my mom, and I had nowhere to go. It was hard. I'm just thankful it was summertime." He didn't have any other family or friends in Minneapolis, so this meant sleeping in public places or an adult shelter until a bed in a youth shelter opened up.

He didn't know much about the drop-in center when he first started going there, but remembers being told that it was "a place for people my age to hang out, get a couple stuff, like school and jobs. You're expected to make progress in your life, not just kick it." When asked what he thought about this he replied: "I didn't mind it…I wanted to actually work for something, get stable again, get an apartment, get a job, and do what I had to do to achieve that." He liked that they had high expectations for him and recalls that they supported him by providing him with dinner and helping him get food stamps, general assistance, or anything else he needed. He also took the Independent Learning Skills (ILS) classes and found that ILS was helpful for learning about "budgeting, living on your own, life skills, job searching." He described using all of these skills in his current life.

Navigating the social side of the drop-in center was more challenging—both for forming relationships with other youth and with staff. Isiah didn't open up at the drop-in center until he made a meaningful connection with one of the staff. This staff person, a case manager named Liam, came up to Isiah repeatedly during his visits there.

> *One person kind of opened me up—Liam. We actually started talking. He had this cool sense, like he was someone I could trust. He came up to me a lot of times, trying to talk to me, and I really didn't say nothing to htim. He kept on trying. I knew he actually cared.*

The times with Liam that meant the most to Isiah were when Isiah knew he was helping him because he cared, not because he was "on the clock." Isiah recalls Liam helping him prepare for a job interview, driving him to interviews, and coming to see one of his basketball games. Having Liam to talk to, and someone who checked in on him mentally and physically, meant a lot to Isiah. Isiah also connected with his counselor. "I really opened up to her during our sessions. I usually don't talk to anybody. I usually always felt better afterwards, just letting it all out instead of holding it all in." He remembers the counselor helping him get through hard times with his family.

During this time he called youth shelters every day, and after two months, was finally able to move into one. He was at the youth shelter for four months before moving into permanent supporting housing (PSH). He has now been living in the same permanent supportive housing community for more than two years. His apartment feels like home. To Isiah that means it is "a place where you can go and lock the door. You don't have to worry about being attacked or anything. You have that space just for you."

Some of Isiah's goals are to find his own place, get a job, to start paying off a student loan he had from his freshman year at Augsburg, and to build a relationship with his mom. Isiah's case managers from the drop-in center and the youth shelter helped him work toward all of these goals. And one of the most important things they helped him with was learning why his mother gave him up for adoption. While Isiah didn't want to talk about what he learned for this interview, he did express that being able to read the court files meant a lot to him.

Isiah was excited when he reached his goal of getting his own supportive housing apartment, which he has had for two years. Currently, Isiah is searching for his own apartment that's not part of a permanent supportive housing program and paying off his student loans. He works as a sales associate at a thrift store. It started as a volunteer opportunity that turned into a paid position after three months. He had been working there for two years as of April, 2013.

> *It's meant a lot to have my apartment. That's one thing that if you have that, you can focus on other things. Other things just seem to come around in a circle. Once you're stable, you can find new jobs. You can get rentals and a rental history so you can find something else to move into.*

Isiah's adoptive family doesn't know anything about the life he is leading now. Isiah has had to work through painful feelings about his birth mother and his adoptive family. Developing and maintaining his positive outlook despite everything he has gone through has been one of Isiah's greatest challenges. But his ability to do so makes him proud. Having access to a therapist was important in helping him work through these feelings and understand how to let go of some and reframe others. He credits his time working with this therapist as being important to helping him make progress toward his goals. Letting go of grudges has been freeing for him.

Isiah wishes people knew how hard it is to try to make it on your own when you are 18 years old.

> *It's hard to go through these things, especially if you've never gone through anything. It's hard to come to an adult you don't even know and ask for help. It's hard to be happy when you're going through the situation. It's hard to talk about the situation. It's scary, too. Sometimes I've been scared.*

The drop-in center has been important in helping Isiah get where he is now in his life.

> *Having [the drop-in center] means a lot. It's hard to ask for help. To have a place where you can come and ask for help and not feel bad about it is great. There are a lot of people here who care and want to help you, and it's just a safe place to be when you don't have nowhere to go.*

Isiah appreciated that the people at the drop-in center, the youth shelter, and in his permanent supportive house program have been patient with him and have believed in him.

> *They were very patient. Getting somewhere you want to go takes time. They know that. I know that. Them just being there throughout the whole process helped me out. Throwing stuff at me like apartments, transitional living places, shelters …They believed in me. They made me feel like I could do anything.*

If he was going to talk to a young person who was experiencing homelessness, he would tell them,

> *Everything is going to be alright. Just stay focused. Don't give up. There are people here who care about you and who want to see you succeed. If you put everything into it, you're eventually going to get there.*

Outcomes Snapshot: Julia

Julia is a quiet, kind, young African American and Caucasian woman from North Minneapolis. She is the youngest of six siblings – three boys and three girls. Julia was raised in a strict Jehovah's Witness home by parents who were verbally abusive and controlling. When Julia's mother first found out Julia was gay, she used shame and fear tactics in an attempt to make Julia straight. Her mother called her "disgusting" and told her she was going to contract HIV and AIDS. Julia's mother also told her that her sexuality would negatively affect her siblings, nieces, and nephews.

Julia was able to talk to her high school counselor about her hostile family environment. The counselor recommended that Julia join an LGBT support group. Julia found such a group at her school, and met an outreach worker there. When Julia eventually felt that she needed to leave home, her counselor and the outreach worker worked together to help Julia connect with community resources. Through a local drop-in center, Julia learned about an LGBT host home program. Julia pursued this option, completing an application and considering profiles of potential host homes. She met with a family who welcomed her into their home. Julia lived with them for nearly a year and enjoyed the experience of living with a healthy, supportive family. Some of the best aspects of living in the host home were having someone to talk to and knowing what a supportive family can feel like. She was also able to be open about her girlfriend, something that she never could have done in her parents' home.

She believes the high expectations of her host family are partially responsible for how successfully she's managing her transition to adulthood.

> *But they did have big expectations, which I appreciate. That's why I'm doing so well on my own because I – not only am I paying all my bills, but I'm paying them on time. I'm just being responsible and taking all their advice and stuff like that, and making sure that it's good. I'm doing good.*

And they helped her, in part, by listening.

> *To me, it's just listening could do so much to somebody. Just listening to their story and having a conversation with them. Youth – even if they don't seem like they want it – they do. I know there's youth like "I don't want to talk about." They won't talk. But deep down, they know that that's going to help them so much.*

Julia credits these trusting relationships with helping her let go of some of her feelings of hatred, resentment, and blame toward her family of origin. Julia has a girlfriend with whom she feels she can talk about anything, a positive development in Julia's life. Julia has some regrets about certain choices she made that prevented her for staying at the host home longer.

Julia applied for an apartment with a transitional living program (TLP) and was able to find an apartment there immediately after leaving her host family's house. Her TLP is somewhat unique in that some of the floors have supportive units for youth transitioning out of homelessness and some of the floors have traditional rental units. At the time of this interview, Julia was transitioning from a TLP apartment to a traditional rental unit. However, this transition came with an unwelcome surprise: Julia had not realized that her mid-month move would cost her $1,000 in fees. This amount was more than she made in an entire month at her two minimum-wage jobs, yet she was asked to produce it in two weeks.

The situation left Julia feeling uncomfortable with where she lives, angry, and taken advantage of. The staff at the drop-in center could see that she was struggling with a lot of big changes in her life.

> *I think that just was a really hard experience to—because transition is hard and even though like you're moving up, and you're moving into the fifth floor and that's more independence and it's*

still a transition and you're still leaving things behind and so we all have to recognize that and acknowledge that.

And the staff felt glad she was able to express her anger and mistrust.

When you hear about this experience and her experience, like, if that's the only snapshot you see, some people could say, "Well, that's not a very good snapshot." But I like it. And I like it because this is a safe place for her to do that. It's a safe place for her to say, "Hey, wait a minute, I don't think you're being fair to me and you're supposed to be fair to me and I need to understand this." I think that's what this is about, like if we're really doing this work, if we really are going to help young people grow up and heal, then we need to create space for them to talk about it—because that's all practice for them when they can come back and say, 'Can we talk about that conversation? How do you think it went?'"

While living in the TLP, Julia worked full time, earned her high school diploma, participated in an LGBT support group, and received mental health therapy. When Julia moved into independent housing, whe had a steady income and a plan to attend college in the fall. She is proud of the progress she has made but acknowledges that the transition to living on her own has sometimes been hard, especially financially.

Julia is proud of her accomplishments. "I came out strong. I've always stayed positive–or tried to–even at the worst times." She wants other youth who are struggling to have hope.

I would just say to be patient and be positive. It might seem like they're not helping you, but everything takes time. I learned that it gets worse before it gets better. There is hope, and it does get better. To me, I feel like I'm that example. Everything has gotten better to a degree. I got kicked out. I didn't have a job. Now I have a job. I have a place to stay. My family is still kind of assholes, but it does get better. You just have to stay positive because it does seem like it's not going to get better. But it really does get better.

Outcomes Snapshot: Kenzo

Kenzo is a tall, 22-year-old African American man with an engaging smile. He has a way of being both relaxed and in constant motion. Kenzo was born in Chicago but moved to Minneapolis with his mother when he was five years old. In both Chicago and Minneapolis, Kenzo and his siblings were in and out of foster care. His mother placed her children in foster care for the last time when Kenzo was nine, an age at which he was growing stronger and taller and beginning to fight back. When the court date came to make a judgment about her parental rights, Kenzo's mother did not attempt to regain custody of her children. Kenzo never saw her again after that day. He grew up as a ward of the state until he aged out at age eighteen, never living anywhere for more than a year.

Kenzo became independently homeless when he was 18. He was fighting with his foster mother and losing his temper more and more frequently. He decided that he wanted to be on his own. He got into trouble almost immediately upon leaving home and stayed at an adult shelter before serving 30 days in jail. After jail, he spent a month at each of two different youth shelters. Kenzo was reluctant to couch hop: he didn't like the insecurity of relying on others and never knowing if he would find himself left outside on a cold winter night.

Living in youth shelters was not like Kenzo had feared it might be. "I'm thinking you're in a room with 1,000 mats, and everybody just lays down and people smell like liquor." But he found that youth shelters were a place where he got his own room, his own clothes, and had a place to come back to at night.

> *Now when I was at the adult shelter, you kind of feel homeless. It's like everybody is there. It's kind of rough. You smell alcohol on their breath, walking around with garbage bags. I felt uncomfortable. It was my first time. It was a new world to me. That was the first time in an adult one. Then after that I went to the youth ones. I didn't even feel homeless there because people talk to you. It was different.*

The fact that he could get food anytime he was hungry was also important to him.

Kenzo stayed away from drugs and would use his time each day to work with his case manager at a drop-in center. The drop-in centers were also useful for getting bus tokens and condoms, connecting youth with resources, and helping youth pay their first month's rent deposit. He learned about a transitional living program, and his case manager assisted him in the application. Kenzo has lived in his apartment for nearly three years, longer than anywhere else he's ever lived in his life.

One of the things that Kenzo appreciated most about the drop-in center was making a connection with his case manager, Aidan. Kenzo said that it meant a lot not only to find someone that would help him meet his needs and work toward his goals, but also someone who would listen as he talked about his life. Kenzo created a similar bond with his case manager at the transitional living program. "If you need to talk to her, she'll talk to you. Try to get a job, she'll check in with you. She ain't all up on you. She lets you do your thing. I like that."

Kenzo feels that the transitional living program is a great next step after living in shelters and utilizing drop-in centers. Kenzo's apartment feels like home.

> *I just really like this program. They help you get going. Even when people – people move in here and don't be having money sometimes. They might take you to [the drop-in center]. This place gives you stuff to help you bring stuff in your apartment. They have the kitchen every Thursday. They have food deliveries that get dropped off. They bring you to the food shelf. They give you a ride to and from there in Roseville. They give you a bus card when you move in, food cards,*

resources. They put job postings, have classes here – all type of stuff. I like that because that's how it feels at [the drop-in center] as I'm living here.

He credits the drop-in center with helping him learn how to channel some of this anger into energy that he can direct in positive ways.

I have to take my bipolar-ness and stuff like that--and my unlimited amounts of energy--and just transfer it into something good. [The drop-in center] has helped me learn how to channel it. I just learned how to channel. Anything bad or good – anything that's bad, you can make it good. You have to channel it into something. It might not be a job. It might not be school. You have to figure out something. You have to put your energy toward that. I know it sounds easier than it is doing it. It took me years to develop this. If you're teaching a class on this to some people, it might go in one ear and out the other. This is years of me being at that program and being at [the drop-in center], and me being out of foster care and stuff—to learn this. It's like I finally – I finally know how to do it.

Dealing with his own anger issues and the impact that they are having on his life has helped him see his mother differently. He misses her and thinks about her a few times a week. Until recently, he thought about her every day. Confronting his feelings about this mother has been an important part of "trying to move on…trying to move forward."

Kenzo brims with internal drive and was determined to get himself out of homelessness. He's proud that he has been in his transitional living program for so long. It's the longest that he has ever lived in one place in his life. With stable housing, Kenzo can feel himself gaining control and resilience.

Outcomes Snapshot: Ladybug

Ladybug is a 19-year-old African American and Native woman who presents herself with self-assuredness and grace, describing herself as "sweet and driven." Ladybug was born in Houston, Texas, where her extended family lives, but her mother and two brothers now live in the Twin Cities. Ladybug has alternated living in Houston and the Twin Cities all her life.

Ladybug and her brothers have not lived in the same home since they were little, and she does not consider herself close to any members of her family. Home life was hard for Ladybug. Her mother was addicted to drugs, and both her mother and brother abused her. She felt herself being pulled in different directions by her mother on one hand and the grandmother who raised her for a large portion of her childhood on the other. By the time she was 15, Ladybug and her mom were fighting frequently, and her mom kicked her out of the house.

Ladybug first stayed at a youth shelter when she was fifteen years old for a brief time and couch hopped for several years after this stay. She was in and out of peoples' homes, never having anyone on whom she could rely. She would go weeks at a time not knowing where she was going to stay each night. Sometimes she stayed places where she was sexually assaulted while she tried to sleep. While couch hopping, Ladybug was able to take advantage of some opportunities offered by outreach workers to make some extra money.

> *I needed some quick cash. So [the drop-in center] referred me to an outreach program. They had this thing where you could go and do voluntary work at food shelters and do a little work there. And they'll pay you on the spot. So that's how I ended up bein' connected with them. But then while I was doin' that, I met this lady. She was really nice. She gave me all kinds of supplies on top of what they give you like hygiene products, other resources and things like that.*

When Ladybug became pregnant, she reflected on her life and found herself thinking about the future she wanted for her unborn child.

> *I'd say six and a half months [into my pregnancy], it all became real. When I actually started feeling her move and things like that – to where I thought, "I really gotta get it together." How am I gonna keep a child and raise it and take care of it if I have no job, no education, no house, no stable housing or anything like that? I don't wanna be homeless with a baby because it would just make matters worse. And I didn't want her to go through what I went through. So I decided to get myself together.*

Once she put her mind to it, things in her life came together at an amazing speed. Ladybug was able to earn her GED in just two weeks. She took all five practice tests at a drop-in center in one week and passed them all. The drop-in center gave her vouchers to take the real test, and she took the five tests the following week and passed those as well. Ladybug was also visiting the drop-in center to get meals and working with the case manager there to apply for housing.

During this time she was calling shelters to find a bed. When she was eight months pregnant, a spot opened at the same shelter she had stayed at two years earlier. She describes her second stay at the shelter as wonderful.

> *Here, [at the youth shelter], they didn't judge or anything like that. I've had a lot of bad situations in my life – almost life-taking situations. And I'm able to feel comfortable enough to tell them about the past. And they tell me what I could've done different or things like that. They help me make different choices.*

They were wonderful. They was really helpful and even pushed me to do something – as well as stay on top of myself. My case manager really helped me a lot. She gave me a lot of resources. She stayed on top of me to make sure I was doin' everything I was supposed to. We had weekly meetings to make sure I'm following the goals that I had set for myself.

This time, Ladybug was proactive about securing stable housing. She used her determination and dedication to get into a scattered-site housing program. Through this program, Ladybug is able to access case management support and save for her future.

They have a set rent maximum, which is $550.00. You only pay 30 percent of what you make. And you pay a contribution, which is saved up over time. So when you're outta the program, all the money comes back to you so you'll have somethin' to stand on just in case you lose a job right before you end the program – or things like that.

Even though Ladybug currently has case management support through her housing program, she stays in touch with her case manager, Via, from the youth shelter's aftercare program. Ladybug describes the staff at the youth shelter as her support system. Via has been critical in helping Ladybug with the transition to her apartment.

I have a relationship with pretty much everybody here [at the youth shelter]. They're my support system. When I'm sad or upset, I can come to them for advice and things like that. They're really good with that. There was a time where there was a situation with my niece and my grandfather. I was upset. I was ready to go do somethin' that was gonna land me in jail for the rest of my life. And they really helped me calm down and really understand the situation so I wouldn't do somethin' that was gonna land me in jail. Even when I didn't live here, I could still call and be like hey, I'm upset, or I need some advice, or I need some help. I'm still able to do that with them. I feel like we both have long-term relationships. It's not just like I was somebody that was here, got the resources, left, and just left it at that. I still come back. I still visit. I still keep in contact. I call as much as I can just to say "Hi, how are you? What's goin' on? Can I come and visit?" And things like that.

Ladybug was careful to distinguish between help and support.

Anybody can help you. If I need a ride, somebody could lend a ride. That's helping. It's hard to explain it. I guess it's just to me, anybody can help somebody… But to have somebody support is like "Hey, come with me." You know? It's talking to them and telling them there's something other than what you're doing right now. There's somewhere that you should be or could be so that you wouldn't have to do this.

She worked with the staff at the youth shelter to learn how to control her anger. She realized that it was holding her back and that it might someday cause her to harm her child in direct or indirect ways.

I looked at my past and seen how my anger got me into situations that I did not need to be in. It was a time where I got into it with somebody over some petty stuff. I got shot at. You never know what other people are capable of doin'. Your anger could hold you back from a lot of things.

Ladybug expressed that she's grateful that she had her case manager to help her work on the ways in which she deals with her anger.

Ladybug is happy with where she is in her life now, and she is proud of how much she has accomplished. Now that she's passed her GED, found permanent housing, and had her baby, she's set her sights on finding a job and starting college in June 2013 at a local university. She's starting by taking

her general education requirements and hopes to enter a nursing program. She credits the youth shelter with helping her get to this place in her life.

> *To be honest, without [the youth shelter], I don't know where I would be right now. I don't know. I think about that sometimes – like where would I be? Or my child be? If I hadn't came here, I wouldn't be able to support my child and take care of her – even give her a place to stay.*

Ladybug also wonders if she would have been able to keep her baby without their support.

> *I heard that if you go to the hospital, and you're homeless, and you don't have nowhere to go, they will take your child. And that probably would have happened. Because my doctor was askin' me – like, "You're homeless, right? What are you you gonna do? Where you gonna go? Where is the baby gonna live?" I told him I was in a shelter. And I was in a program. They like, okay, at least you know where you're gonna be so you just won't leave here and your baby be stayin' outside with nowhere to go.*

And she's proud of her many other accomplishments.

> *I'm so proud of myself that I actually finished school. I know I should've graduated a long time ago. I finished. And now I have a place that I call home that I feel safe and comfortable. I'm very proud of myself. And I was able to prove to people that told me that I wasn't gonna be nothin' and be nowhere and wouldn't be able to accomplish this, I proved them wrong. And it feels good – especially my mom. And I feel like I'm showin' her that there's a way. There's more to life than drugs and guys. It's more than that.*

Ladybug wants other people experiencing homelessness to know that there's hope.

> *Even though I had a lot a struggles – sometimes you have to struggle to get to a better place. It takes for you to be at your lowest place to get to your highest place. It takes time, patience. I want everybody to know there's hope. There's always hope. Don't ever give up. 'Cause life is what you make it.*

Outcomes Snapshot: Macnificent

Macnificent was raised in Mississippi, bouncing among relatives' homes, the streets, foster homes, group homes, and jail. When Macnificent and his brothers were 12, 13, and 14 years old, they spent part of the year sleeping in a car with no adults caring for them. This was when Macnificent first remembers feeling homeless. This ended abruptly one day when their mom showed up and brought them to the police station. The boys were taken into state custody for the next five years. Macnificent lived primarily in group homes or juvenile detention centers.

Macnificent moved to Minnesota with his uncle when he was 18 years old and quickly found himself homeless again. His uncle was not reliable, and with no one to whom he could turn for help, Macnificent turned to theft to meet his needs, stealing a cell phone that he was going to sell to get money for food. He was soon arrested and put in in jail. As Macnificent said, "I didn't know that the stuff that I wanted was just one phone call away… Sometimes you find stuff out the hard way." When he got out of jail, Macnificent learned about the drop-in center.

The drop-in center gave him a list of youth shelters and phone numbers to call to check availability. Nearly every place he called was full. The process of calling the numbers and asking for beds was so discouraging that he almost gave up. The last shelter he called was able to let him spend the night in an emergency bed. That one night made all the difference for Macnificent. He had lived much of this life not knowing where his next meal would come from and was in a state of disbelief when he realized that he could have all the food he wanted, whenever he wanted it. Access to clothing was also new for him and something he continues to appreciate. He shared: "I have fresh clean clothes on that I didn't even really had to do anything but say "I need some clothes." Brand new stuff, brand new socks and underwear, and t-shirts. And all I had to do was say "Look, I really need this."

Macnificent once told his case manager Aimee that "It was like God's gift, my getting into [the youth shelter]. It's like, God's taking care of me, because he brought me to you guys." Macnificent describes [the youth shelter] as a "place that helps you get a better life" and said that living there "was the best thing that ever happened to me." Getting into the youth shelter so quickly after arriving in Minnesota gave Macnificent a fresh start, enabling him to envision a life free of struggle and hustling.

One thing that Macnificent found particularly valuable at the youth shelter was the encouragement of his case manager, Aimee. She met him where he was, and she helped him set goals, apply for housing, and get his sentence reduced. She even found a therapist that he connected with, despite his original resistance to the idea of therapy. One of Macnificent's goals is to become a musician and rap artist. Aimee and the youth shelter helped him achieve his dream by helping him get a computer loaded with music production software. The only way he had ever been able to get a computer in the past to make his music was to steal it or obtain one from someone else who had stolen it.

Getting into the youth shelter was a turning point for Macnificent because little by little, he began to see a different path for himself. When Macnificent first moved to Minnesota, he knew nothing other than committing crime to get what he needed. He realized that achieving his goals would require a different strategy. Macnificent doesn't think he could have changed the course of his life without Aimee's support, encouragement, and high expectations.

My case manager will help me. She will say, "You can do this." Before I said, "I can't do it" and I would give up and quit. With her, that's not an option. "You're too strong. You can do this." And I get it accomplished every single time. That's why I love my case manager...She believes in me. [At the drop-in center] they know what you're capable of, even if you don't.

With the help of his case manager, Macnificent found a placement in a permanent supportive housing program. Macnificent has his own apartment now and is at a place in his life that he never dreamed he would be.

What I came from is not too good. It's the opposite of what's going on now. Instead of moving forward, I was always pushing back….I had that mentality when I got up here. But [the youth shelter] wouldn't let me go back. It was always a step forward. Even if I take one step back, I was always taking three more steps forward. Even though I thought I wasn't accomplishing nothing, then my case manager was like "This is what you've done." And she was right. It felt like I wasn't doing nothing, but then if I wasn't, I wouldn't be in my own apartment right to this day.

Macnificent explains that one of the greatest challenges for him was leaving his comfort zone where he would steal to meet his needs. He realized that he had to change so as not to lose everything he had gained since entering the youth shelter.

If I was staying in my Mississippi comfort zone, then [the youth shelter] wouldn't work out at all. So that's why I had to get out of that comfort zone. Why would I let go of all that? If I did, I wouldn't be here right to this day. I would be locked up.

A second hard change for Macnificent had been giving up marijuana. Again, Macnificent's case manager Aimee was instrumental in helping him make this change.

I used to do marijuana a lot…I smoked marijuana just to ease my pain. Even though it took me getting into trouble and figuring out the hard way that smoking was not what it is… I learned that you would never get anything accomplished if you're trying to smoke all the time. I had to get out of my comfort zone with that. I can't smoke. You have business to take care of instead of just sitting at home smoking…It's got to the point where I don't even look at drugs. There was a point in time when I really needed drugs. There was that point, but now it's like I have too much going for me.

Macnificent says his case manager was always there to remind him that he had accomplished too much to turn back to drugs. She is not sure whether he has completely stopped using marijuana or whether he uses it occasionally, but she is proud that it no longer appears to negatively impact his life.

Macnificent credits the collaboration between the drop-in center, the youth shelter, and other organizations as critical and believes that getting connected with them is the best thing that ever happened to him.

I thank [the youth shelter] every single day and [the drop-in center]. If it wasn't for [the drop-in center], I wouldn't have a number to call [the youth shelter]. If it wasn't for [the youth shelter], I wouldn't be in my own apartment and doing my own things, looking for a job like I'm supposed to – like youth are supposed to.

[The youth shelter] is the best thing to ever happen to me. I can't break it down no more than that. I got my own house. I can go say "Bro, I'm going to come to your house." If he ain't got nothing to eat, "Come to my house." We don't have to ask nobody for nothing. But then if we do, we got resources that we can go to. I can go to my case manager like "Look, I need this for my restroom. I need this to put in my refrigerator." It's possible. If not, they have other places that I can go to.

The work has been hard. But when he looks back at what he has accomplished, he feels that it was all worth it. He's safe in his own apartment and working toward his goals, not worrying about his safety in jail.

When you are messing around, you have to watch over your back. Life is on the line when you are in jail. But you can be in your own house, talk on your own phone, be on your own computer, do

your own music, eat your own food, be in your own house with your own stuff, put on your own clothes – not nothing orange. Why would you settle for less?

And he's learned, through working with Aimee, that he can get everything he needs through hard work.

She opened my eyes to a way like – I couldn't even explain it—like just get it done. If you don't get it done, then that's when you look at the bad. When you get it done, then the good stuff follows behind you. You can have your house and your car. That's what a lot of people don't look at. They just look at it as "All this hard work." But my case manager opened my eyes to "You can do it, and you're going to do it. You're going to make it. Don't say you can't because that's not an option."

Hard work is what Macnificent intends to do. He is motivated to get a job, save up, and buy a home so that he can get his younger siblings out of DHS custody.

I want to get my own house, and you have to start somewhere. You have to start somewhere just like I started at [the drop-in center]. They hooked me up with [the youth shelter], and then I got my own place. Next I'll get my own-own place, like my own house and car. Even though it's hard work behind that, I have to get back in school. I have to accomplish everything and just get back in school and work, work, work. No time for playing around. No time. No playing around. It's all hard work….If I do that, then I can get my brothers and sisters [out of foster care]. That's my plan in the long-term

He's proud that he has his own apartment and that he can see a future where he can own his own home, help his younger brothers and sisters, and even create his own recording studio. He's proud that he's learned from his case manager to always look on the bright side, because when he looks ahead to his future, he sees possibilities and success.

Outcomes Snapshot: Maria

Maria is an 18-year-old African American woman who has lived in both Chicago and the Twin Cities. At the time of the interview, Maria was wearing a fun, bold red wig and a shy, pretty smile. She describes herself as a funny, intelligent person who is good with kids. When Maria was younger, she grew up in several households with some of her brothers and sisters. She is the second oldest of seven siblings who currently range in age from four to 19. Her older brother lives with an aunt, her younger brother lives with a different aunt, and her three sisters are with her grandma. Her youngest brother lives with her dad; she hasn't seen them for four years. Maria's mother was young when she started having children and was often absent when they were growing up. Her dad was in jail for most of Maria's life. Maria remembers living with a lot of different family members and in many different homes.

Maria's childhood is marked by physical abuse, sexual abuse, and loss. She first remembers losing a beloved cousin when she was six years old. This tragedy tore her family apart. After her cousin died, Maria came to live with her auntie in Minneapolis and lived with her from the ages of seven to 12. During these five years, she was molested by her aunt's son almost every night. She was able to escape this home and move back in with her grandma, but she had to leave her little sister at her auntie's house, something that devastated her. She lived with her grandmother for less than a year, becoming homeless at the age of 13.

While homeless, Maria would sometimes return to her aunt's home for brief periods of time. But her aunt physically abused her, on one occasion hitting Maria in the head so hard that she was hospitalized for three days. Despite their fights, her aunt kept asking Maria to come back and live with her. This seems to be, in part, so her aunt would have access to Maria's general assistance money and food stamps. In total, Maria was homeless for four years, couch hopping, bouncing between family members' homes, and living on the streets before she spent her first night at a shelter. These were four incredibly hard years. Maria describes what it took to keep going.

> *It was hard, scary…I didn't know if I was gonna live. Sometimes I just thought about killing myself. I have this one cousin, she would give me clothes to get up and go to school. Sometimes she'd have to sneak me in her house. And that's how I was living my life – like sneakin' in and wearin' other people's clothes – have nowhere to go – I didn't know what I'm gonna eat... When I was young, I even sold my body to keep clothes on my back and eat. I didn't wanna go through that life no more.*

Maria's first entry into the services for homeless youth was when she connected with an outreach worker from a shelter that visited her school. The outreach worker was there twice a week and she and Maria developed a relationship. During this time, the cousin who had molested her throughout her older childhood had returned to Minneapolis, so Maria needed a safe place to stay. At the encouragement of the outreach worker, she started calling the youth shelter. After just a few days of calling, she was able to get a bed.

Maria started at the youth shelter in the fall of 2012. She remembers being nervous her first night but quickly came to feel comfortable. Maria found it easy to connect with all of the adults in the shelter but became particularly connected to her case manager, Izzy. Over the months that Maria lived at the shelter, her case manager helped her work toward her goals. This included scheduling appointments (including long-overdue health care appointments) and helping her make it to the appointments on time. Izzy made sure she was at school every day, helped her find jobs, and assisted her in securing essential hygiene and clothing items.

Prepared by Nora F. Murphy, PhD as part of
the Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation,
Supported by the Otto Bremer Foundation

Maria reflects that Izzy kept her focused and accountable on her goals, even when things were hard. It was important to Maria that her case manager knew her so well and would take the time to listen without judgment. Maria is also thankful for a staff person at the shelter who helped Maria get her food stamps and general assistance sent to her, instead of to her aunt. She also remembers the desk staff fondly. "The staff that sit at the desk – they pretty cool – you can reach out to them and talk to them. They're always there to help me with jobs or anything."

Maria was in several schools before finding one that worked for her. She has both family and friends who are involved with gangs and this impacted Maria's schooling. Even though she was not personally involved in a gang, she was involved in the intense drama of friends getting jumped or threatened with guns. Izzy helped connect Maria with appropriate resources, developed safety plans, and worked with her to transfer schools. But even without the gang-related aspect of school, school was challenging. Maria struggled with getting up early, getting to school, and following a daily routine. She also felt that she had to make up for the months of schooling she missed each year during her childhood.

With Izzy's encouragement, Maria found a school that worked for her and started attending regularly. Maria earned straight A's on her most recent report card, and got a certificate for being a leader at school. This was the first certificate for an achievement that she's ever gotten, and she feels proud of her accomplishments at school. Another one of Maria's goals was to obtain her vital documents and get assistance, which she did pretty quickly. She now has her Social Security card, state ID, birth certificate, and is on medical assistance. Gaining employment has been harder. Despite filling out many applications and attending interviews, she hasn't found a job yet.

When asked to reflect on Maria's journey, Izzy felt that Maria came to the shelter at an opportune moment in her life because of her age, her estrangement from her family, and her intrinsic motivation to change things in her life. Izzy'observed that the more Maria trusted Izzy, the more she opened up and shared her story. It was through this open communication that Izzy was able to reconnect Maria with a therapist that she had seen in the past. Maria described this therapist as an important person in her life. She felt that the therapist had a perspective about life that was different and beneficial for Maria. Together, they worked on the depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress related to the significant abuse, neglect, and loss she has experienced.

Maria moved into permanent supportive housing just a few months ago. When deciding where she wanted to live after leaving the shelter, she was able to take a tour of some transitional and supportive living programs with her case manager from school. She recalls visiting the place she lives now. "I just thought this is where I wanna be." Before she moved, she and Izzy spent a lot of time talking about the transition. With the move came the addition of another case manager and Maria now has three: one from school, one who is the aftercare case manager from her shelter, and one from her current permanent supportive living program. She feels that they all collaborate well and give her consistent messaging and support.

Growing up, Maria always felt different from other people. Being in the shelter has helped her realize that there are other young people who have had similar challenges. Maria feels proud of where she is in her life right now. "I have a place called home. I'm in school every day. And I'm learning new things. I've been taught somethin' that I should've learned in grammar school." She has advice to offer other young people who might be experiencing homelessness.

She encourages young people experiencing homelessness to seek the help of case managers. She sees staff helping others like her by "encouraging them to do better, complimenting them on what they're doing good and talking to them about what they need to accomplish the goals they wanna accomplish." Izzy and all of the other staff that Maria has connected with have helped her find herself

and become someone who wants to live and fully experience life. She still has goals she wants to achieve, but she's taking it one step at a time. "They help me with finding who I am and not being that person where I wake up and feel like I don't wanna be here." Today, she woke up happy and glad that she's alive.

Outcomes Snapshot: Minna

Minna is a strong, determined, and ambitious 22 year old African American woman who was born and raised in the Twin Cities. Minna spent most of her childhood living with her mother, and brief periods living with her father. She has two older siblings with whom she lived until she was 13, and a younger, adopted sister with whom she's never lived. Minna says that she grew up in a house that was not a *home*, and her parents did not provide the care she believes they should have provided. Minna's father was in jail for most of her life, and when he wasn't in jail, he was often an abusive and frightening person to be around. Minna thought about running away many times in her childhood.

When she first became homeless, Minna was only a sophomore in high school. Her father was in jail, and she and her mother often fought. Minna felt that her mom had given up on her, and that she was distracted by personal issues that took her attention away from parenting. Minna couch-hopped and didn't have anyone in her life giving her guidance. She was skipping school for weeks at a time. When she felt that she wanted more in her life, she reached out to a short-term emergency shelter that had a focus on family reunification. Things didn't work out at this shelter, so as Minna described, "I just started hopping from place to place to place." She stayed at more places than she can remember—with her sister, cousins, and friends—but none of these arrangements lasted long.

When Minna tired of staying with relatives and friends, she started calling shelters and eventually, got a bed at a youth shelter. She was there for six months all the while visiting drop-in centers. She found the staff at the drop-in centers to be a great source of support and found that she benefited from visiting more than one drop-in center. As a result of the hard work she put in at the drop-in centers, she was able to find a job at a retail store. But after six months, she had an opportunity to find housing and employment in the same place when she was invited by her cousin to be a live-in babysitter. This arrangement allowed her to make more money than she had been making in her retail job. But soon after moving in, her cousin lost her job. Minna turned to making money by doing hair, babysitting for friends, and going on welfare. "It was like, I just fell all the way back down to the bottom, and I got really depressed."

Minna once again reached out to the people she had made relationships with in the drop-in centers and shelters and was able to find a place to live through an LGBT host home program. She was with her host family for seven months. Her time with this family started well, but ended when Minna became depressed again and started pulling away from them. She returned to couch hopping and started using marijuana heavily. During this time, she met a street outreach worker who connected her with another youth shelter. She recalls this as a point when her journey took a turn for the better. Minna gives credit to the street outreach worker for finding her, believing in her, and helping her get back into youth shelter housing.

From that point on, things started to change for Minna, and she moved into her second youth shelter. Minna was eager for interactions with staff at this shelter. They were careful to let her have choice over her space and to not pressure her to have relationships with staff members with whom she might not feel comfortable. Minna felt that the staff at this shelter not only supported her, but that they also truly cared about her. It became the first place she had lived in years that felt like home.

Minna was also able to secure two jobs while she was staying at the shelter. One of the jobs, with an organization in South Minneapolis, is particularly meaningful to her. She was required to go through a training component of the job, and she was the only one of her peers that graduated from the training. "I was so proud of myself. It was the first accomplishment that I accomplished in a long time." Minna still holds this position today.

While staying at the youth shelter and working, she was also applying for apartments with a transitional living program or permanent supportive housing program. After two months of living in this shelter, she was able to move in to a permanent supportive housing program (PSH). Although the youth shelter had a 30-day limit, the staff allowed her to extend her stay in order to create a seamless transition from the shelter to her new apartment. This made Minna feel that the people at the shelter really did believe in her, and cared enough to provide her with an alternative to moving back in with her family.

As with many youth, Minna's transition to having her own apartment wasn't easy. But she was determined, focused, and allowed the staff to offer her support. With their support and encouragement she decided to try JobCorps for a second time, a no-cost residential education and career technical training program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. Minna feels it's the perfect program for her at this stage in her life. Minna lives at JobCorps and is working as a Residential Leader for the other young women in her dorm, allowing her to develop skills important to her career and life that can't be learned in a classroom.

Minna believes her life would have gone differently if she had had a loving and supportive home. But she has also decided for herself to focus less on what could have been and more on whom she wants to be and how she wants to be in the world. Letting go of the past while focusing on the control that she does have in her life has helped Minna develop an optimistic outlook.

> *I feel good. I feel like a college student. The only stress I have is college stress. School is stress, which is good. Everybody goes through this stuff. When I get really stressed out, it's better. I just think about where I came from. It's better than having no-food stress or no-money stress. I do what I have to do, and I'm really determined.*

Minna is grateful to all of the organizations she has worked with since becoming homeless for providing her with resources and encouraging her to sieze new opportunities. She also found therapy to be helpful, particularly because she was able to see a therapist with whom she had made a connection years earlier. She feels the biggest challenges she had to overcome were stopping smoking and addressing her depression, and she is proud of herself for overcoming these obstacles and setting her life on a new course. Minna is very future oriented, always thinking about what she wants to do next and how she will to build a secure and happy life.

Minna is reflective about the support she's received and what it has meant to her. She wants people to know that people are on their own journey and that supporting them requires patience and non-judgmental understanding, as well as a focus on their strengths. Providing this kind of support has helped Minna believe in herself. As she says, "There's no stopping me now!"

Outcomes Snapshot: Pearl

Pearl is an energetic, articulate 23-year-old African American woman who loves to keep the people around her laughing. She was born biologically male and was raised as a boy in Minnesota, living sometimes with her mother in North Minneapolis but more often in a small town with her father. The state had removed Pearl from her mother's home due to previous sexual abuse she experienced by people her mother brought into the home. Pearl was also physically abused by her grandmother.

When Pearl was twelve, her grandmother called child protection and lied, telling them that Pearl had physically assaulted her. Pearl ran away and was eventually charged with running away and second-degree assault. She was returned to the home, but her time with her father ended abruptly when she was 13 years old and she decided to come out to him as gay. She has stayed many places over the years—friends couches, public spaces, youth shelters, and supportive housing, while intermittently using the serives offered at a drop-in center.

Pearl has a long and varied history with one particular youth shelter, having entered and left the shelter three times over a span of several years. This where she first met Sonia, a woman who ultimately became Pearl's case manager and who has played a large and important role in Pearl's life. When Pearl (then Jeremiah) decided that she wanted to change her gender, she reached out to Sonia, who ended up being a powerful advocate and support for Pearl.

> *One day, I'd put on women clothes. The next day, I would have on some boy clothes. So I took that step. And that was a battle right there. And I reached back out to [the youth shelter]. And Sonia always was there. She had my back. She said that we can go ahead and get you hooked up with the services for transgenders. So she got me hooked up with a doctor who provided my hormones. She got me outfits. She made sure I was A-OK.*

Before going to the clinic, Pearl had been taking hormones that she had obtained through a friend rather than a doctor. Sonia accompanied Pearl to doctor appointments and took her shopping for bras and women's clothing. All of these things would have been terrifying for Pearl to do on her own, worrying about what people might say or do to her.

By the time Pearl was seventee, she had spent four years of living between the shelter and the streets, Pearl was anxious to get her own apartment. She was utilizing the support of both the shelter and the drop-in center. Her case managers from both agencies worked together to secure Pearl a spot in a transitional living program (TLP). She moved in to her first apartment just a few months before her 18th birthday. But by that time, Pearl was developing an alcohol addiction and had to leave her apartment because it was sober housing.

After being asked to leave the TLP, Pearl worked with her case manager at the drop-in center to get into a Group Residential Housing (GRH) demo program. Through this program, Pearl was able to secure her own apartment and receive financial support for living expenses. Living in the GRH meant that Pearl had a third case manager. She thinks that maybe she needed all three at the time.

> *Once again, [the youth shelter] knows me more than [the drop-in center]. They know more about me and my ups and downs, where I've come from, where I've struggled at, and where my lowest points were. They all came together and put this picture together – like this program they were gonna put me in—the GRH—it's worth it. So now I had all three working case managers working together to keep me on a straight and narrow path.*

Once in her housing program, Pearl felt that she needed to shut out the people with whom she had had relationships at the youth shelter. It felt to her at the time that she needed to go deep in to herself to find herself and her path—and that she needed to do this alone. However, she spent most of this time

immersed in her alcohol addiction. She didn't want the people who cared about her to worry. But Pearl ended up in a dark place, and at one terrifying point, was almost raped and killed. Pearl realized that she did, indeed, need her support people from the youth shelter in her life.

> *I called [the youth shelter] and I said, "Sonia." She said, "Yeah?" I said, "I need help with my life." And she can hear it in my voice that I really needed it. And she said, "Okay."*

Pearl credits the support of Sonia and others at the youth shelter with her ability to transition out of her downward spiral and into an upward positive trajectory. To get back to a healthier place, she needed permanent housing and "the love and support" of people at the youth shelter. Even though she had shut them out repeatedly over the years, they were always there for her when she came back for support. These relationships helped her feel wanted and happy—a happiness that she realized is different than the happiness she found when she was drunk and high. Pearl feels that Sonia supports her as she would a family member, not a client.

It's been a long journey and full of struggles. Pearl's greatest challenges have been working through her sexual orientation and gender and overcoming her addiction. She's proud that she's where she is in life "because I haven't failed yet." As Pearl describes it,

> *I had to become strong. And I became strong at a young age. But then I reached my breaking point, and I fell. And I had to build myself back from the bottom to the top. I am who I am because of my struggles and knowin' the people that I know, the community that I know, and the outreach that I have that has been lended out to me…I found the real Pearl deep down in me inside. I had to reach down deep inside. It hurt-- pain, suffered, tears, blood, sweat,--to actually find the real me."*

Pearl encourages all youth that she meets who are experiencing homelessness to call the youth shelter.

> *Because it's a very good place – very – I think this is one of the best shelters out there. And I think it's 'cause I have a physical tie to this place. I think it's one of the best shelters because of the staff, because of the environment, because [of its location], there's a doctor's office on-site. You have a lunchroom. You have bathrooms. You have your own kitchen. You have your own room. You have this. You have that. You have everything you'd want.*

The shelter is proactively LGBT-supportive. If a resident makes a derogatory remark, the staff can be counted upon to take it seriously and handle it quickly. Pearl feels that the staff at the shelter she stayed at can be considered part of the backbone of the LGBT homeless youth community. She wants funders and policy makers to know how much young people need safe places such as the drop-in center and the youth shelter.

Outcomes Snapshot: Thmaris

Thmaris was born in Chicago, IL in 1990. He has an older and a younger brother and was raised by his mother. His family moved to Minnesota in 1996 but didn't have housing when they moved here. As a result, they moved around a lot between extended family members' homes and family shelters, never staying anywhere for more than a year. His mother was addicted to alcohol and drugs, so it often fell to Thmaris and his older brother to take care of their younger brother. Consequently, Thmaris has been earning money for the family since he turned 12. Sometimes this was through a job—like the construction apprenticeship he had at age 12—and sometimes this was through stealing or dealing marijuana.

When Thmaris was 13, his mother entered an alcohol treatment program, and he and his brothers went to stay with his uncle. Thmaris remembers this as one of the lowest points in his life. There were six kids in a three-bedroom house with people coming and going. There was never enough food or clothing, and the environment didn't feel safe. When his mother returned from the treatment center to get them from the uncle's home, Thmaris thought things would get better, but they got much worse. His mother accused Thmaris's older brother of molesting Thmaris and their little brother. These accusations tore his family apart. To this day, Thmaris doesn't understand why she did this. Not only was it painful to watch his mother accuse their brother of something he didn't do, but as a result they lost their older brother, their protector, and the closest thing to a father figure that they had. Once again, Thmaris found himself having to grow up quickly. He became homeless as an unaccompanied youth at the age of 16.

During his first few years utilizing the drop-in center, Thmaris was in a gang and was frequently in and out of jail. Being a gang member was his primary source of income, and he was loyal to his fellow gang members even when it got him into trouble. He recalls getting out of jail time for auto theft and turning to his case manager Rahim for guidance, someone who had become an increasingly important person in his life. Without the support of Rahim and the resources at the drop-in center, Thmaris is sure he would still be in a gang, dealing weed, and would have eventually ended up in jail again.

> *I just feel that ever since I turned 20, I realized that I'm an adult and that I have to make better choices, not just for me but the people around me. Didn't nobody help me with that but Rahim [case manager]….I remember days that I'd come down to [the drop-in center] and I'd be like, 'Rahim, I haven't eaten in two days' or, 'Rahim, I haven't changed my underwear in like a week' or whatever. He would give me bus cards to get to and from interviews. He would give me Target cards to go take care of my personal hygiene. He would give me Cub cards to go eat. It was like every problem or every obstacle I threw in front of him, he made sure that I would overcome it with him. He was like the greatest mentor I ever had. I've never had nobody like that.*
>
> *Out of all the other caseworkers I had, nobody ever really sat me down and tried to work out a resolution for my problems. They always just gave me pamphlets like, "Well, go call these people and see if they can do something for you." Or, "You should go to this building because this building has that, what you want." It was like every time I come to him I don't have to worry about anything. He's not going to send me to the next man, put me onto the next person's caseload. He just always took care of me. If I would have never met Rahim, I would have been in a totally different situation. I would have went a totally different route.*

Thmaris recalls:

> *Everything I was doing [with Rahim] was productive. When you get that feeling like you're accomplishing something and you're doing good, it's like a feeling that you can't describe…I just feel like I'm bettering myself. I've learned a lot over these past seven years. I've matured a great*

deal. I honestly feel that I'm bettering myself. I don't feel like I'm taking any steps back, regardless or not if I have employment or if I have my own house. I just feel like each day I live more and I learn more and I just feel…I'm just grateful to be alive, grateful to even go through the things I'm going through.

Thmaris credits having someone believe in him as critically important in helping him learn how to believe in himself. With the help of Rahim, he identified welding as a career that he might enjoy and be good at. He enrolled in a program at the community college and graduated with high grades despite challenges presented by unstable housing and lack of transportation. Without Rahim, Thmaris feels he never would have believed that he could accomplish something like a welding certificate.

He just saw more in me. I didn't even see it at the time. He saw great potential, and he told me that all the time. "Man, I see great potential in you. I see that. You can just be way much more than what you are." Just to keep coming down here and having somebody have that much faith in you and believe in you that much, it's a life changer.

My mom always used to tell me that I wasn't shit, you know what I'm saying? She was a super alcoholic, and when she gets drunk she always say that. "You ain't shit, your daddy ain't shit, you ain't going to be shit." She was just always down on me. Just to hear somebody really have an interest in you or want you to better yourself, it just changed my life.

I honestly feel like if I didn't have Rahim in my corner, I would have been doing a whole bunch of dumb shit. I would have been right back at square one. I probably would have spent more time in jail than I did.

Currently, Thmaris is not stably housed. He has a young son and spends some nights at his baby's mother's house, some nights with friends, other nights outside, and some nights at a hotel room. But despite this, he feels very positive and hopeful about his life.

The fact that I have my certificate for welding,…that just blows me away. I would have never thought in a million years that I would have that. Even though I've still got to look for a job and I still got a long ways to go, I just feel proud of myself…I know a lot of people that don't even have high school diplomas or a GED and they're struggling to get into college and people going to college just to go get a loan and stuff like that.

He's proud that he's been able to overcome the challenges in his life in order to get a high school diploma and graduate from his welding program. Feeling successful has just fueled Thmaris's ambition to experience more success.

You don't know how it felt when I graduated high school. I was like, "Wow, I did this on my own?" And it just felt so good. I'm thirsty again to get another certificate or diploma or whatever just because it's just the best feeling in the world. It's better than any drug. It's like, man, I don't even know how to explain it. It just felt like you just climbed up to the top of the mountain and just like you made it.

Thmaris hopes to open his own shop someday doing car modifications. He wants to make his son proud, and despite their difficult history and relationship, he wants to make his mother proud. He knows it will take a lot of work to do this, but feels motivated and determined to do so.

That's what I basically learned from being at [the drop-in center]. I understand now the value of doing what you need to do versus what you want. A lot of people say, "Men do what they want and boys do what they can." But that's not it. It's "Men do what they need to do and boys do what they want." I'm so glad I learned that, for real. Because I was always just doing what I wanted to do.

Outcomes Snapshot: Unique

Unique is a resourceful, intelligent, and engaging 18 year old African American man. He was born in Minnesota and was raised in both New York City and the Twin Cities area. He grew up alone with his mother, but his mother was not home often. She tended to prioritize whatever man she was in a relationship with, leaving Unique to become independent from a very young age. Sometimes he was left with babysitters, and Unique suffered sexual abuse by at least two of them. Unique knew that it wasn't right for him to grow up like this and desperately wanted to be in a home where he was properly parented and given caring attention. He remembers calling child protective services when he was seven years old. However, his mother portrayed their situation in the best possible light when child protective services came, and he remained in her custody. Looking back he recalls a childhood full of disappointment. He wishes he could tell her, "Don't get me wrong, you tried your best to raise me. You were a single mother. You know you had me young, I understand. But those do or die moments? You were not there."

Unique left home in 2011 when his mother's boyfriend physically assaulted him, and his mother failed to protect or defend him. He has never returned to that home. Although he does not regret leaving, he misses many of the things he left behind: "I miss my house. I miss my mom. I miss my bed, my room. I'm never going to have those things back. I'm not. But it's okay for me to miss these things, those are important things."

Unique learned about the youth shelters from an outreach worker at school who gave him a list of shelters to call. Unique called a number of places, and one of the shelters had a bed. But he didn't have money to get there, and the friend he was staying with wouldn't give him a ride. He lost that bed, and it was weeks before there was another opening, this time at a different shelter. He describes entering shelter life and becoming "born again"—as someone who was, as he calls it, "professionally homeless."

Unique has been homeless for two years and in that time, has lived in a variety of settings: with friends and family, on the streets, in two youth shelters, in a transitional living program, and in a host home. In all of these places, Unique had trouble abiding by the rules. He explains that he was raised to be independent, essentially parenting himself, and that he doesn't like others having control over any aspect of his life. It wasn't until a stay at his second youth shelter that he met a staff person, Shiloh, with whom he felt he truly connected. Shiloh is in a unique role in that she is an outreach worker, and is not as tied to a specific location or program as some other case managers. The first words he said to her were, "Who's this White bitch?" She knew right away that she was going to need to create clear boundaries and expectations, and that their relationship would have to develop slowly. She created a lot of opportunities for them to talk, from being present in the common space or sitting with him while he did laundry, and eventually Unique started to open up.

At one point, Unique was asked to leave a transitional living program (TLP) under what he considered unfair circumstances. He wanted to walk into the program administrator's office cursing, but Shiloh redirected his energies and helped him file a grievance and create a transition plan. She recalls his reaction.

> *He was like, "Wow, I feel so empowered," and he's like, "Thanks, most staff members wouldn't do that because it's where they work and they don't want to..." I'm like, "Well, I think your voice needs to be heard. If you feel like this was unfair to you, you should be able to speak your mind in a safe, healthy way."*

Unique spent time on the streets again after leaving the TLP and before getting a placement in the host home program. He wasn't going to school, was heavily drinking and smoking weed, and engaging in survival sex. Shiloh stayed connected with him during this time—checking in with him at least weekly. During this time, he came to open up to her more and more about his challenges.

Shiloh recalls a night when Unique was having a meltdown about people telling him to stop drinking and smoking. She told him, "It's your body, it's your decision" and, "If you ever want to talk about other healthy coping skills, we can talk about those." He agreed that he wanted to have those talks and they addressed questions such as: 'Why are you using? What's behind this? Why do you feel like self-medication is going to help you right now? What are some things that you like to do that help you relax besides getting high?' These consistent conversations over the years between Unique and Shiloh have created opportunities to work on important issues related to Unique's physical and mental health, his education, and his safety. This open channel of communication was particularly critical at this time, because Unique had turned to sex work to get money.

> *There wasn't always a safe place for me to put my head. Sometimes I needed to work hard, and that's what I ended up having to do. I was lucky. I didn't have a pimp. I met up with a bunch of different youth who are like me. We were good. All of us were making money. We were all putting in. All of us were prostituting. We were all escorts, to put it a nice way. But it was balanced. All of us had a place to stay. If you each put in $20, we have a room.*

He stopped doing this when his friend went out for a job and never came back. Unique hasn't seen her or heard from her since the night she disappeared.

Over the past two years, Unique has visited multiple drop-in centers and youth shelters and has strong and conflicting feelings about the support they offer. He describes all case managers as "useless," while also describing his case manager, Shiloh, as critical to getting where his is now in his life—stably housed and not engaging in sex work. As for the organizations themselves, Unique credits them with giving people a safe place to be, but criticizes them for not doing more to get youth out of homelessness. When he was asked specifically if there were ways in which the organizations helped him, he cites access to small jobs, such as working at a food pantry or giving presentation and workshops. It's piecing together those small jobs, he states, that "put money in the pocket and food in the belly."

Unique recalls a turning point when he was living at the transitional living program and attending a leadership meeting at the drop-in center. He recalls realizing that he did not want to be permanently homeless and that he needed to empower himself to do more if he was going to change his life. He's since organized a group of friends to start a non-profit.

> *We were at the [the drop-in center], in the basement. We had leadership training. We kept – I was listening to everybody describe their experience with [the drop-in center] – how some of the case managers can be disrespectful or how some rules make absolutely no sense. Think about it. Okay, there's a problem…So we decided to start making a nonprofit to go to these places to consult them on how to better improve their services. Who better to help regulate a youth homeless shelter and a youth drop-in center than the homeless youth?*
>
> *I feel empowered. I want other people to feel empowered. You can take charge of your life. You just need to say, "Here's my life." Start doing it.*

Unique is hoping to go to college in the fall on a two-year scholarship and study theater. He'd eventually like to study acting in London. "You're going to see me on TV one day. Just watch. Wait for me. I'm going to be on there. It's my goal."

Outcomes Snapshot: Zi

Zi is a 22-year-old African American and Caucasian woman who was born in Minneapolis. She has an older sister, who is one year older than Zi, and a brother and sister who are six and seven years younger. Zi has a quiet grace that emanates from her, a stark contrast to the hurt and chaos she has experienced in her life. Zi's mother was addicted to heroin, and her dad was an alcoholic. When Zi was seven years old, she and her siblings lived with her father for a year—a year marked by frequent and severe beatings.

Zi's mother and father both lost their parental rights, and Zi and her siblings became wards of the state when she was ten years old. At that point, her maternal step-grandparents took custody of Zi, and she moved to Reno, Nevada. She was there for five years, and her grandparents planned to adopt her. But just before the adoption was finalized, her grandpa died; after that, Zi and her step-grandma never got along. One of the main sources of friction in their relationship was her step-grandma's refusal to allow Zi to communicate with her family in Minnesota.

When that relationship soured, Zi returned to Minnesota where she was placed in a group home. Her sister came to see her at the group home, the first time they had seen each other in five years. Zi's desire to be with her sister and mother was strong, and she ran away from this group home on the first day she was there. This began a three-year span in which Zi would run away from her social service placements and spend most of her nights couch-hopping. Because Zi was a ward of the state, a warrant for her arrest would be put out when she ran away. She would be picked up and brought to a juvenile detention center.

During these years, Zi frequently visited a drop-in center. Zi came to trust the drop-in center because it was one place she could go and feel safe and feel relatively confident that she wouldn't be arrested. But it took years before she started using the resources they were offering her. This was in part because she needed time to build her trust with staff at the drop-in center and in part because being engaged with the outside world put her at risk of being put back in juvenile detention. Even going to school was dangerous because it might end in her arrest.

Zi has experienced a lot of death in her life, having lost her grandpa and several cousins. But the hardest loss came in 2009, when Zi's mother died. The connections she made with people at the drop-in center helped her get through this hard time. She called them and said, "My mom just died. She's at the hospital." Two staff people she was close to, Lily and Jacky, went to the hospital with her. Zi remembers being touched that Lily cried real tears and was truly sad. Jacky made a cake for the funeral. Zi explained that even though she had liked Lily and Jacky before, this profoundly deepened her connection to them.

Zi's turning point came when she was 17. She decided that she was tired of "doing the same stuff" and submitted an application to the transitional living program. She also started to appreciate not only the resources that the drop-in center had to help her meet her basic needs, but also the activities related to art, culture, and holiday celebrations. She appreciated the support she found from adults at the drop-in center, forming relationships that changed and deepened over time. Zi shared that this journey has involved forgiving her mother and her sister, overcoming her fears, and learning to believe in herself. She has made great strides and feels like a changed person.

She's proud that she has her own place, a job, and her GED. She's proud that her depression doesn't get the best of her as often as it used to. Now that she has her GED, stable housing, and the support of caring people in her life, she has turned her attention to other goals she hopes to achieve in her near and distant future.

I'm trying to better my life… I just took my placement tests and passed, so I'm about to start school for medical assisting. Next I'm going to school for criminal justice, because I want to be a parole officer. Right now, I'm just working, just trying to take care of business. I planted my butt for so many years, finally growing up basically, just trying to get things done.

She feels like she has created a home for herself in her apartment at the transitional living program (TLP). And she's happy that she's had a secure and stable place to live in while she's worked on other areas of her life, like getting her GED and finding a job.

I've been here almost four years. It's home. I'll be happy when I move, but I don't want to move unless I know I'm ready. I don't want to struggle again. I'm scared to become homeless again, especially being grown, and feeling like I don't have as much resources as I did when I was younger. People don't want no grown people living with them. That's what made me keep this housing for so long. I just don't want to see myself back out in the streets.

I always think for this place – even though I don't like it because of the rules and stuff, if it weren't for this place, I don't know where I'd be. It's not like I could stay with my mom still or just run back to her. If I never got into this place, I don't know where I'd be.

She appreciates that the staff at her TLP know her and watch out for her.

I have my days where I feel depressed, and I feel down, and I don't want to talk to nobody. I got really close with Cherise that works here. She knows when something's wrong. I never knew that until a couple weeks ago. We were talking, she was like "You may not know, but staff that you choose to talk to or choose to let get to know you, we know when something's wrong." If I walk in here and I'm like "Hi," and keep going, that's not like me. Whenever Cherise is here, I'll come in and sit and talk to her for maybe five minutes or a couple hours. I sat down and cried to her about situations with my sister and just life situations. She knows when something's wrong. So does my case manager. If I don't talk to her or I just walk by her office, she'll text me like "Are you alright?" She knows – "Have you seen your therapist or psychiatrist? Do you need to talk to somebody at [the drop-in center]?"

She's ready to move forward with her education, and she credits the support she's gotten at the drop-in center and the TLP as crucial to her success.

They helped me by realizing my worth and just them really wanting me to better myself and get my education and find housing and just be secured and just be okay. They helped me with that. The staff – even though this is [the TLP], but they're through [the drop-in center]. Even the staff being on me about "Go to your tutoring and go to this and do this. You can do it, Zi." They helped a lot in that role as far as me completing it and getting it done – having people by my side, really bothering me about doing it and getting it done. They helped me with that. I think if they weren't there to help, I'd probably still be trying to finish doing my GED, still trying to accomplish that. That's cool that they helped me with that.

Isiah's Story

Isiah is a laidback, tall, 22-year-old African American. A staff person describes him as someone who "has a smile that lights up a room." He likes to have fun, but he can also be serious and has a very determined streak. Isiah was born in Milwaukee and grew up in Wisconsin. He has early memories of being in foster care, until he was 8 years old and was adopted by a large family. As a teenager, Isiah was aware that his biological mother resided in Minneapolis, and he met with her briefly when he was 16. It was for this reason that he was drawn to Minnesota when it came time to choose a college; he enrolled at Augsburg College at the age of 18. Isiah's adoptive parents and seven siblings moved to North Carolina just a week after Isiah left for college, and they did not forewarn him that they were moving. As Isiah put it, "They moved to North Carolina, and I wasn't invited."

Becoming homeless. Isiah completed his freshman year, but the following summer, when classes ended, he had no home to go back to, no money, and no support system. He remembers his merge into homelessness being a very terrifying moment in his life.

> *I tried to get in contact with my adopt[ive] parents, and they basically said I was on my own because I was 18. They actually moved to North Carolina…so I went to live with my real grandma in Madison, but she was sick. I came out to live with my mom, but she lived in transitional living, so I couldn't… I basically hopped on a bus to Minneapolis from Madison, and I didn't know what to think or where I was going. That's how I got homeless. When I got here [to Minneapolis]… I don't know. I actually cried because I couldn't get in contact with my mom, and I had nowhere to go. It was hard. I'm just thankful it was summertime.*

Since Isiah's mother resided in a transitional living program, he could only stay with her a few nights a week. On other nights, he had to find elsewhere to sleep. He had no friends or other relatives in Minneapolis, so he was forced to sleep in public places or stay at the adult shelter until a bed in a youth shelter opened up. His mother suggested that the adult shelter might be a good place for him to stay.

> *When I checked into the [adult shelter], that's when I knew I was by myself. It was scary. I stayed there for two months. I didn't get no sleep… I'd never been through nothing like that. I couldn't trust anybody. It was weird. I slept right next to somebody I didn't know. Then things got stolen from me. It became very hard to sleep… It was hard to find things to do during the day. It was hard to get a job because I didn't have an ID or my certificate. It was frustrating. I was actually waiting to get into [a youth shelter]. I kept calling and calling, but there was never an opening. I tried to stay there for two months.*

Finding support. While he was homeless, Isiah visited several drop-in centers, although he preferred one over the others and spent more time there. He did not know much about the drop-in center when he first started going there, but he remembers being told, it was "a place for people my age to hang out, get stuff, like school and jobs. You're expected to make progress in your life, not just kick it." When asked what he thought about this, he replied:

I didn't mind it. Progress was what I wanted. I'd never gone through this. I'd always had it easy. I wanted to actually work for something, get stable again, get an apartment, get a job, and do what I had to do to achieve that.

He liked that they had high expectations of him and wanted him to do well. He recalls that the staff also supported him by providing him with dinner and helping him get food stamps, general assistance, or anything else he needed. He also took Independent Learning Skills (ILS) classes. He found ILS helpful for learning about "budgeting, living on your own, life skills, job-searching," and he described how he uses what he learned in ILS in his current life.

Right now, I budget, and I do job-searching. I have a professional résumé, so I'm looking for a new job. They help me with interview skills. Just living on my own, I prepare my own meals and all that stuff. That really helps you out.

Being in the adult shelter without money inspired Isiah to work tirelessly to find a job:

I was really focused on getting a job. They woke us up. We had to leave at, like, six or something. I'd go to the library until ten, and I'd be there all day, looking for jobs. Or I'd do side things… Craigslist…you go on there and look…. I helped people move and stuff like that. There were events or studies that you can do for somebody. There was a food test I did. I made some money [even without] a job. I took advantage of the opportunities that were there.

Navigating the social side of the drop-in center was more challenging, when it came to forming relationships with other youth as well as staff.

It was awkward. I didn't know nobody. All the kids had their little groups they hung out with. I just sat by myself for a while. I'd come for dinner [and] go to the class. I probably did that for a couple weeks until I started meeting some people through sports and stuff like that. [Meeting staff] was awkward, because they ask a lot of questions. I didn't really know them, so I didn't know how much to share [or] how much not to.

Isiah did not open up at the drop-in center until he made a meaningful connection with one of the staff. This staff person, a case manager named Liam, spoke to Isiah repeatedly during his visits there.

One person kind of opened me up, Liam. We actually started talking. He had this cool sense, like he was someone I could trust. He came up to me a lot of times, trying to talk to me, and I really didn't say nothing to him. He kept on trying. I knew he actually cared.

Isiah is most impressed when staff helps him because they care, not just because he or she is on the clock. Liam was a very supportive, positive influence in Isiah's life in many ways:

I had a job interview downtown. I had to work that day, so [Liam] offered to give me a ride to the interview, and he actually stuck around, waiting… It took, like, thirty minutes, and he gave me a ride back. He actually helped me prepare for the interview. He wasn't even on the clock. That's what I really appreciated.

Prepared by Nora F. Murphy, PhD
Supported by the Otto Bremer Foundation

He would actually come to some of my basketball games. I actually liked that, because that was one of our connections. We were both sports fans. I appreciated that he [came]. It was a great feeling.

He actually worked in my apartment complex for a while… It was good to have him there because he actually knew stuff about me. I didn't have to explain everything. He knew what made me mad. He just got me, so it was easy to talk to him about stuff. If I needed to talk to him about something, then I could just pull him aside and tell him, "I have something important to talk to you about." He would just be there for me, in the best way he could… He would help me with my budget and give me a ride sometimes. He would help me with my job search, make sure everything is okay with me mentally and physically, take me to appointments when I need them, and help me get to job interviews.

Isiah also connected with his counselor. There was a period of time when his biological mom was using drugs, and it strained their emerging relationship. The drug use put a wedge between them, and that was difficult for Isiah to deal with. His counselor was someone he could really talk to: "I really opened up to her during our sessions. I usually don't talk to anybody. I usually always felt better afterward, just letting it all out instead of holding it all in."

For Isiah, sports were one way he could make connections with other young people. As a staff person described, "Basketball is Isiah's passion and joy, and sports are his interests. He's a dynamic basketball player. He has amazing skill." Isiah made many friends on the basketball court at the drop-in center, some of whom he still has today.

They have a smoke break [at the drop-in center]. I don't smoke, so I'd go outside and shoot hoops and play two-on-two with some people who came out there. That's how I really got to know people. A lot of people I met here, I still talk to. They're very close. There are some people who actually live in my apartment complex. Our relationship has really grown. I try to stay in contact with people… I'm not from here, so I don't have a lot of friends. I try to meet new people.

Some of the friends he made at the drop-in center live in the same permanent supportive housing program where he now resides. They hang out in the community room, watch TV, and play videogames. Even surrounded by these friends, however, he does not feel he truly has anyone to talk to:

I like to keep that to myself or with someone that I've known for a really long time. My best friends back home, I can [talk to]. Since I've only been here four years, there's really no one I've known long enough to trust.

He has been living in permanent supportive housing for more than two years, and his apartment feels like home. To Isiah, it is "a place where [I] can go and lock the door. [I] don't have to worry about being attacked or anything. [I] have that space just for [me]."

Turning point. When Isiah was first homeless and living in the adult shelter, he was very depressed:

The bottom was very hard, just living. It was very hard to just try to stay happy. I had contact with friends, but I was living at Catholic Charities. It was hard to hold conversations with them or be happy, because I knew my situation. I've always been a happy person. I'd never gone through adversity like [that] before. It was very hard to be down that low. I'd never even imagined I could.

At "the bottom," though, he found a new source of internal strength, drive, and motivation. He reflects that although he was always focused, he has become even more focused and driven since becoming homeless:

When I first became homeless, I was down in the dumps, like, "Why me? What am I going to do? How am I going to get through this?" I never had to face anything like [that] before. Then one day, I was thinking, "I'm down here, and the only way is up. Why not keep on going?"

Basically one day I was sitting in the [adult] shelter, just looking at the people there, like, 40 or 50 years old. I decided I don't want to be like that when I'm that old. I'm going to straighten up now and be stable. That's been my push. I hate depending on people for things. I just want to get back to where I used to be.

Being in the situation, if you give up on yourself and you don't have no drive for yourself, no one else going to push you if you don't want to be pushed.

A staff person who has known him for a long time remembers seeing this motivation when he started coming to the drop-in center:

I remember seeing his case manager coming over with him frequently and getting him connected, making sure he's going to get connected with other staff. He has more follow-through, generally speaking. A lot of youth come in, and they're in that pre-contemplation. They're not clear on what they want. They may be like, "I just want to get into housing," but they aren't ready to take the steps. Isiah, fortunately, was at a higher level and was ready to move into action and do the legwork that needed to be done and the follow-through. [He] kind of had that diligence.

Youth and adult shelters. Isiah had very different experiences at youth and adult shelters:

At the adult shelters, it's more…throw a mat on the floor. There are, like, 100 people in there. The food is ridiculous. The place is really dirty to me. When I got to [the youth shelter], it was actually like a house. I had my own room. The staff cooked dinner, breakfast, [and] lunch. It felt like home, in a way. There [were] also classes, like [Independent Living Skills]. It felt safer. I didn't have to worry about anything.

As a result of these experiences, Isiah feels young people should be able to access services separate from adults until they are 25 or 30 years old.

After spending two months in the adult shelter, visiting drop-in centers, and calling youth shelters every day, he was finally able to move into a youth shelter. He was at the youth shelter

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for four months before moving into permanent supporting housing (PSH). Isiah recalls his first night at the youth shelter:

> *I was happy, but I was nervous because I didn't know how that was going to be, how it was run… I had my duffle bag with my clothes and a garbage bag full of personal items. Then I hopped on the 19 bus, and they took me right there. When I got in, I had to do a long intake. They asked me a lot of questions. Then I got to eat some food and do my laundry. Right after that, I went to my room and got it all situated. Then I watched some TV; I hadn't seen TV in two months. That was a warm feeling. I liked it. There were other people there my age, and I was much more comfortable.*

The intake questions were difficult for Isiah to answer though. "I had to tell somebody I didn't know a lot of stuff. They did ask some personal questions. It was hard to tell them and be open." Still, he understands why the questions had to be asked. As he sees it, "You want to make sure you have a good fit of people in one place. If you don't know somebody so well, you don't know what to expect."

Isiah described what a typical day was like in the youth shelter:

> *They woke us up at eight or nine a.m., and I'd shower and eat breakfast. Then I would just watch a little TV, and then you either had to leave from one to four p.m. to job-search or do something, or you could stay there and do some class. They gave us that option. Then I'd usually leave and look around and job-search. Then, once I got back around four, I'd just sit around on the computer or something. I'd wait for dinner. Some of the people who lived there… We'd play games or something—board games or card games. Then we had chores we had to do every day. I'd get that done. We had to go to sleep, I think, on weekdays at eleven and weekends, like, one or something.*
>
> *Basically, the rules were that there was no fighting. Each person had a goal plan. You have to make steps to your goal plan if you're going to stay there. If one of your goals [is] to get in school, you have to show that you're trying to get in school or get a job. You always had to do your chores. No contact with other people, like relationships or anything like that. Yeah, that's really it. It was basically just your goal plan. If you weren't doing your goal plan, they had a problem with that.*

Sports. As previously mentioned, athletics have always been central to Isiah's life. In high school, he ran track and played football and basketball, and he continued basketball and track while in college. He currently plays in an indoor football league and a basketball league at the Target Center. He likes playing in these leagues because it keeps him busy when he is not at work and adds some fun to his life. This outlet has been of great physical and social benefit for Isiah. Because he is shy and often quiet, sports are essential, as they allow him to make connections with people—both youth and adults—that he might not be able to make otherwise, at least not as deeply.

Goals for his future. Some of Isiah's goal plans were to find his own place, get a job, and to start paying off his student loan. Another was to build a relationship with his mother. At

the youth shelter, his case manager helped him work toward all of these goals, and one of the most important aspects of that was to help him realize why his mother gave him up for adoption.

> *I got good support. They had basically anything I needed. When I moved there, I didn't have ID or a birth certificate. They got those for me. They also helped me answer a question I always had, why my mom gave me up. They actually…sent a letter to the court system [and] got the court files for me to see what happened.*

While Isiah did not discuss what he learned, he did express that access to those court records revealed truths and answered questions he'd long held, and that meant a lot to him.

Isiah was excited when he finally achieved another goal, securing his own apartment.

> *It felt great because I've lived on my own in the dorm, but this is an apartment. It was exciting to get the opportunity to live by myself in a new apartment complex that was just built. It was very exciting. I didn't have regrets [about leaving the youth shelter], but I missed it. When I found out I got it, I didn't want to go because I felt comfortable right where I was. I felt at home. Then I was like, "I have to do this," and I decided to go.*

The expectations for Isiah at the housing program are similar to those he experienced at the drop-in center and the youth shelter:

> *It was like [the youth shelter] again. You have your goal plan. You're expected to pay your rent on time. You're supposed to meet with your case manager to set up a budget. You're expected to have a job. If you don't, they'll help you out. They want you to progress, not take a step back. It's different here, the rules about relationships. They don't care. It is an apartment. But fighting? They take that seriously, so there's none of that.*

The transition was made even smoother by the fact that the person he connected with at the drop-in center, Liam, was now working at the apartment complex and became his case manager; however, Liam has since left, so once again, Isiah feels he has no one to talk to.

Where he is now. Currently, Isiah is searching for his own apartment outside the permanent supportive housing program. He is also working toward paying off his student loans and looking for a new job. He does work as a sales associate at a thrift store, a volunteer position that became a paid one after three months of work; he reached his two-year anniversary of employment with the thrift store in April of 2013.

> *I want to find a better job, so I've been actively looking. I try to fill out five job applications a day. It's time-consuming, and it's hard—especially knowing you're [probably] not going to hear from all of them or maybe not even one… I'm looking for something retail, like, customer service. I've applied to Marshalls, Macy's, Target, [and] Walmart.*

In spite of his longing for a new and better job, it has meant a lot to Isiah to have stable housing for two years:

> *It's meant a lot to have my apartment… If you have that, you can focus on other things. Other things just seem to come around in a circle. Once you're stable, you can find new*

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jobs. You can get rentals and a rental history so you can find something else to move into.

A typical day for Isiah involves working from ten a.m. to four p.m., Monday through Friday. He plays basketball and football in the evenings and on weekends. After work, when he is not playing sports, he heads back to the apartment complex to hang out with friends, play videogames, relax, and watch movies.

It's good, but it's not good enough. Just having my own place? That is good. Working is good. But I think I could do better. Having my own-own apartment [would be better]. My job isn't the worst job in the world, but finding something [that pays] more and [is fun would be] better—just being able to be financially stable and not having to worry, "Should I pay for this, or should I pay for that?" That would be better. I like to look at the big picture. Things are good now, but I'm trying to make them better and get where I want to go.

Developing and maintaining this positive outlook, despite everything he has gone through, has been one of Isiah's greatest challenges.

Being homeless, there's nothing positive. Being able to wake up every day and go on with my business. Even though I know I don't have a place, not knowing what to expect was really hard. Probably the second thing was just knowing if I was going to get out of it. Here, they gave me courage. I was optimistic, but it was hard to be. Once you're homeless, it's very hard to find something: an apartment, a job. That's the hardest thing.

I'm most proud that I didn't give up, and I asked for help, which is something I rarely do. I don't like asking for things. I don't like depending on people, but this is a situation where I had to. I gave in and looked for help. I'm very proud of that, because that's very hard for me to do.

The situation has been new to me, but I wouldn't change it. I tell people [that] all the time… Going through this could be what I needed to get through life. Life isn't easy. You have your bumps through the road. But if you go through adversity, you're going to be ready for it.

Feelings about his family. Isiah's adoptive family knows nothing about the life he is leading now. Isiah has four brothers and three sisters, all of whom were also adopted. Other than one brother whom he occasionally talks to on Facebook, he has not had any interactions with his family in nearly four years.

The last time I talked to them, I was in college. It was over Christmas. They don't know what I've gone through in the past four years. I kind of have a grudge against them, but not really. I kind of let it go. I haven't made any effort to make contact with them.

Just the situation that they put me in… I thought it was a setup. I was going to college in August of 2009, and they moved. I left August 22, and they moved August 25, to North Carolina. I didn't find out until halfway through college. That's always been my thing. I

paid my own way to college. When I was younger, I saved [up] all my money, but going to college…just drained me. If I knew that situation was going to happen, I would have been more prepared. It was, like, a curveball.

Isiah has faced a lot of emotional trauma and has had to work through hard feelings about his birth mom and his adoptive family:

My birth mom… I had to let that go, because she helped me a lot in this whole situation… She sat me down and explained some things, so that made it easier to let go. I started fresh and just… She has been helping me out, looking out. With my adoptive parents, that's going to be motivation, to be honest. I believe they did me wrong. I'm not going to let that break me or anything. I'm going to continue living my life and reach the goals I set.

Access to a therapist was important in helping him work through these feelings, helping him understand how to let go of some and reframe others. He credits his time with his therapist as integral to his progress toward achieving his goals. Letting go of grudges has been freeing for Isiah, and his therapist was a key factor in that success.

What he wants others to know. Isiah wants people to know just how hard it is to try to make it on your own when you are 18 years old:

It's hard to go through these things, especially if you've never gone through anything. It's hard to become an adult [when] you don't even know how to ask for help. It's hard to be happy when you're going through the situation. It's hard to talk about the situation. It's scary too. Sometimes I've been scared.

The drop-in center has played a crucial role in helping Isiah get where he is now:

Having [the drop-in center] means a lot. It's hard to ask for help. To have a place where you can come and ask for help and not feel bad about it is great. There are a lot of people here who care and want to help you, and it's just a ***safe*** *place to be when you don't have nowhere to go.*

Isiah appreciates that the people at the drop-in center, the youth shelter, and in his permanent supportive house program have been patient with him and have believed in him.

They were very patient. Getting somewhere you want to go takes time. They know that. I know that. Them just being there throughout the whole process helped me out. Throwing stuff at me like apartments, transitional living places, shelters… They believed in me. They made me feel like I could do anything.

If he was going to talk to a young person who was experiencing homelessness, Isiah would encourage them to have hope. "Everything is going to be all right. Just stay focused. Don't give up. There are people here who care about you and who want to see you succeed. If you put everything into it, you're eventually going to get there."

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