



KEYS TO A FUTURE WITHOUT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

KEYS Plan Overview

Background

In January 2017, Cincinnati/Hamilton County was one of ten communities in the country selected by the U.S. Department of HUD to participate in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP), with a goal of developing and implementing an innovative plan to end youth homelessness by 2020. The plan, KEYS to a Future without Youth Homelessness, was written by Strategies to End Homelessness, Lighthouse Youth & Family Services, and partners from across the community. Central to the plan's creation is a focus on equity through the empowerment of youth with lived experience as well as dismantling oppression by addressing policies and rules that negatively impact people of color, women and LGBTQ individuals.

Youth Workgroup

The Youth Workgroup was established as an official Continuum of Care (CoC) workgroup to oversee the implementation of the KEYS plan by generating input from youth with lived experience, service providers, and community partners. The workgroup also utilizes several specialized teams to guide and complete implementation. The Youth Workgroup Chair is a voting member of the CoC Board, locally named the Homeless Clearinghouse, who the ultimate decision is making body of the CoC, thus voting into action plans developed by the Youth Workgroup..

Projects

To accomplish the goal of ending youth homelessness in our community, the KEYS plan includes several initiatives and systemic improvements, including:

- A team of highly qualified care professionals, known as the **Youth Dedicated Service Team (YDST)**, that provide one point of contact for homeless youth as they move from homelessness into a variety of client-selected housing options under a **progressive engagement model**. This team will be available 24/7 to assist youth as they navigate through all the necessary systems to address their needs and help them remain in housing through **aftercare** services for up to 2 years after entering housing. The team will also include **housing navigators** to connect youth to landlords willing to rent to youth experiencing homelessness as well as serve as a point of contact to mediate any potential conflicts between landlords and youth.
- Identification of youth experiencing homelessness and their progress through the system via tracking on a **by-name list**. This will be achieved through consistent data collection and collaboration with multiple youth-serving systems across Hamilton County.
- Expansion of **homeless prevention** services to include innovative approaches to reconnection with natural support systems. The plan also calls for consistent **shelter diversion** resources for young people who are at imminent risk of homelessness but are able to identify a safe and appropriate, temporary housing option while working with a case manager to define an action plan to achieve stable housing.
- Broader services for specific **sub-populations** more at risk for homelessness including expanding host homes as part of the Safe and Supported Program for LGBTQ youth, site-based housing program access for pregnant and parenting youth, and the potential partnership opportunity to create a housing campus for victims of human trafficking.

Other Focus Areas

KEYS also calls for increased **cultural competency and trauma-informed care** training for all youth serving systems, introduction of the **Purple Umbrella Campaign** which connects local businesses to JFS emancipated youth, improved data sharing capabilities between agencies and the development of a mobile app for homeless youth to assist in system navigation, and other partnership opportunities to improve outcomes in employment, education, and transportation.

Goals for the Plan

Inspired by the vision that youth homelessness should be brief, rare, and non-recurring, the YHDP was designed to achieve the following goals and system level changes:

1. Prevent homelessness before it occurs.
2. Provide safe and appropriate shelter to all willing youth who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
3. Reduce the length of homeless episodes experienced by youth.
4. Ensure that youth exiting the homeless system have the supports they need to remain housed.
5. Encourage innovation, system change and sustainability within COC.

