

5 THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS CRISIS AND A PATH TO END IT: INTERVENTIONS TO BETTER SERVE LGBTQ2S YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

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Introduction

In the United States (U.S.), services for youth experiencing homelessness tend to operate on an emergency basis, providing food, shelter and other basic needs to young people who require them immediately. This is important work; however, we need additional solutions and an increased capacity to meet the additional needs, especially permanent housing, of youth experiencing homelessness. Moving from a shelter to permanent housing for these youth is often an insurmountable task without additional supports. For LGBTQ2S youth, it is more difficult, with even fewer having access to services that are tailored to their needs. The LGBTQ2S Homeless Youth Provider Survey found that while 94% of service providers surveyed have worked with LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness and youth who have run away, only 24% of programs reported having services designed specifically for LGBTQ2S youth (Durso & Gates, 2012).

To be truly effective, any program to address youth homelessness must explicitly address homophobia, transphobia and the particular needs of LGBTQ2S youth (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). We recognize that a one-size-fits-all strategy often does not accommodate the various needs of all youth experiencing homelessness, or the changing intensity of needs that youth experience, including how structural racism creates institutional barriers to both a program's success and the systems a youth must successfully navigate (Fulbright-Anderson, Lawrence, Sutton, Susi, & Kubisch, 2005). Drawing on our research and experience developing the Point Source Youth (PSY) Pilot in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis–St. Paul, MN), New York City, NY, and Baltimore, MD, this chapter defines the challenges facing LGBTQ2S youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, and the organizations that wish to serve them; identifies interventions that, particularly when integrated into existing systems of care or used together, have strong initial support to address the LGBTQ2S youth homelessness crisis; and explores how PSY is working to implement these interventions effectively in Minneapolis, Baltimore and New York City, as well as in other cities.

Challenges Facing LGBTQ2S Youth Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness and the Organizations that Wish to Serve Them

It is likely that anyone reading this book is well acquainted with the profound harms youth experiencing homelessness struggle with each day. All youth experiencing homelessness face a higher risk of physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health difficulties, substance use issues and death; they are also more likely to contract infectious diseases like HIV, and approximately 5,000 American youth experiencing homelessness die each year because of assault, illness or suicide (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013). These risks are compounded by the severe challenges youth experiencing homelessness often face in gaining access to education and employment. When youth are on the streets and not engaged in education or employment, the economy suffers. It has been estimated that it costs the U.S. economy almost \$600,000 per youth in lost productivity and increased costs over their lifetime. Youth who cannot access stable housing are at risk of sliding down a continuum of increasing disconnection from family and public services, sometimes resulting in long-term homelessness as adults. An Australian study found that 35% of adults experiencing homelessness who were interviewed had first experienced homelessness when they were 18 years old or younger (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011).

In addition to making up a disproportionate number of youth experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ2S youth face additional disadvantages compared with cisgender and heterosexual youth. Leaving home due to family rejection is the greatest predictor of future involvement with the juvenile justice system for LGBTQ2S youth (Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009). Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth were also more likely to report engaging in survival sex and to have a higher HIV risk than their heterosexual peers (Gangamma, Slesnick, Toviessi, & Serovich, 2008). Gay and lesbian youth experiencing homelessness were more likely to report having been diagnosed with HIV than their bisexual and heterosexual counterparts, and LGBTQ2S youth reported higher incidences of sexually transmitted infections (Rew, Whittaker, Taylor-Seehafer, & Smith, 2005). Youth experiencing homelessness, and LGBTQ2S youth in particular, often turn to alcohol and drugs as a way to cope (Ray et al., 2006) and experience a significantly increased risk for mental illness and suicide (Van Leeuwen et al., 2006).

Trans youth experience even higher levels of vulnerability, with one in five trans people facing homelessness during their lifetime, due to pervasive discrimination and family rejection (Grant et al., 2011). Unfortunately, trans people experiencing homelessness frequently encounter discrimination from agencies that should be helping them, with 29% turned away from shelters (Grant et al., 2011), due in part to structural barriers they encountered (Shelton, 2015).

Unstably housed LGBTQ2S youth report family violence as the second most common form of violence they experience (Marsiglia, Nieri, Valdez, Gurrola, & Marrs, 2009), with 48% of trans individuals with a history of homelessness experiencing some form of domestic violence (Grant et al., 2011).

Not only are LGBTQ2S youth at heightened risk of experiencing homelessness and all the vulnerabilities it entails, they are also often not well served by homelessness services available in their communities. Services in the U.S. for people experiencing homelessness are dominated by an emergency mentality, focused on providing food, shelter and other basic needs to people who require them immediately. This is important work; however, it does a poor job of meeting many of the specific needs of young people, especially in accessing long-term stable housing.

LGBTQ2S youth often experience homophobic and transphobic harassment, discrimination and physical violence within the child welfare and foster care systems, at emergency and short- and long-term shelters, and from health care providers, social services, law enforcement and other government institutions (NYC Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Runaway and Homeless Youth, 2010). Youth service providers report that LGBTQ2S youth would rather engage in survival sex, which involves sex in exchange for a place to sleep, than risk experiencing the abuse and potential violence they sometimes face in youth shelters or foster care (NYC Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Runaway and Homeless Youth, 2010).

The crisis of youth homelessness can be daunting in both its size and complexity. PSY aims to fill the gaps left by existing systems: gaps that—because of existing missions, limited funding and a lack of person-power—those systems simply cannot fill, a problem exacerbated by institutionalized racism, homophobia and classism, and the barriers they create for both youth and providers (Fulbright-Anderson et al., 2005). Where possible,

PSY supplements the work of existing advocacy organizations and funders, supporting the work of local organizations by providing cost-effective models of homelessness prevention and, where feasible, the tools, resources and expertise to fully implement these solutions, while acknowledging that significant additional work is often needed locally to successfully maintain these interventions. PSY builds on existing foundations by identifying models that work, and infusing on-the-ground efforts with research infrastructure, technical oversight, and a significant evaluation and research component to document and demonstrate existing successes.

The Point Source Youth Pilot

PSY launched a pilot in March 2016 in Minneapolis. PSY works to implement three scaleable interventions:

1. Family and kin strengthening;
2. Shelter diversion using short-term host homes; and
3. Rapid rehousing.

These interventions are all aimed at preventing or intervening early in the cycle of homelessness. One of PSY's goals is to increase local capacity, so communities gain increased resources to work at an early stage with both youth experiencing homelessness and precariously housed youth, as well as the ongoing capacity to assist youth as they develop independent living skills and strengthen their support networks to help them achieve stability and well-being over the long term. Those youth served by the three PSY interventions in Minneapolis, New York City and Baltimore are predominantly youth of colour. It is critical that PSY and our on-the-ground partners address the effects of structural racism on youth, to ensure youth can successfully navigate systems that may be racially biased. This includes working closely with the agencies to which youth are referred, to address barriers to make sure youths' needs are met.

To support these goals, PSY initiated a pilot project in Minneapolis. Our partners' diligent groundwork in Minneapolis made the city a uniquely fertile location in which to initiate the pilot. We have chosen additional cities for program expansion in 2017, including New York and Baltimore, with more participating cities to be announced shortly, where the interventions will continue to be implemented, refined and valued. The work in these additional cities will also incorporate *job training* and *systems strengthening*, which will

be added to as core interventions to the current three core interventions. Each of these program components is explained in greater detail below. Through collaboration, PSY's partners can offer youth a comprehensive, systems-based and tailored holistic approach to prevent and resolve homelessness. By integrating the expertise and infrastructure of these partners into its work, PSY aims to:

- Provide stable housing through family and kin strengthening, shelter diversion using short-term host homes and rapid rehousing;
- Help create permanent and supportive familial relationships—broadly defined to be judgement-free and inclusive—through family and kin strengthening and ongoing counselling to help develop sustainable and meaningful connections with extended family, peers and community;
- Provide stable housing as needed in an affirming, safe, inclusive short-term host home, providing space, privacy and affirming mentorship to youth;
- Provide longer-term permanent housing as needed through youth-centred, scattered-site, market-rate housing that provides youth with a lease in their own name, along with services they need that are tailored to and often led by them;
- Improve education and employment statuses through job training, intensive case management, counselling and advocacy for services for youth experiencing homelessness, with program components tailored to meet the specific needs of LGBTQ2S youth, including youth to youth peer mentoring;
- Provide job training that is tailored to youths' interests and needs, and meets them where they are, while providing a path to employment that pays significantly above the minimum wage;
- Enhance social well-being through lasting family reconciliation, teaching life skills and creating ongoing emotional support systems; and
- Improve service delivery through systems strengthening.

The following section explores each of these interventions in turn, explaining each intervention's role and implementation in assisting LGBTQ2S youth experiencing or at-risk for homelessness.

Family and Kin Strengthening

We use the concept of family and kin strengthening instead of the concepts of family reunification or family reconnection. Research and direct experience with queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness demonstrates that traditional family structures are not always conducive to successful outcomes (i.e., ongoing emotional, physical and housing stability). Recognizing the longstanding importance of ‘families of choice’ in LGBTQ2S communities (Walls & Bell, 2011), family and kin strengthening commits to supporting healthy development by nurturing the diversity of relationships queer and trans youth currently have and are developing, not just those based on blood or legal ties. Although family rejection and conflict are major contributing factors to homelessness among LGBTQ2S youth, there is a considerable lack of services aimed at reuniting families and building support and acceptance. More than 40% of agencies responding to the LGBTQ2S Homeless Youth Provider Survey did not offer programming that addresses family conflict (Durso & Gates, 2012).

This lack of family-centred solutions may result from a widespread but mistaken belief that all or most youth experiencing homelessness leave home because of irreparable ‘bad families’ from which they need to be rescued. Some youth do run away because of abuse at home, but this is not the norm (N. Abrams, personal communication, May 26, 2014). In fact, for most young people experiencing homelessness, a relationship breakdown, almost always with parents or stepparents, is the most common cause. Among British youth aged 16 to 17 experiencing homelessness, 70% reported being displaced due to a relationship breakdown, with 41% reporting that violence had been involved (Quilgars, Johnsen, & Preece, 2008). Distinguishing between ‘bad families’ and relationship breakdown is critical, primarily because doing so allows family members to possibly take on roles in a system of support for the youth. Family and kin strengthening capitalizes on this distinction by focusing on repairing family systems that are not bad, but broken, and can be repaired to become safe environments for vulnerable youth.

PSY and our partners in Minneapolis, New York and Baltimore acknowledge and honour the many definitions of family that youth use to acknowledge sources of love, support and empowerment that have served LGBTQ2S communities for decades. Family and kin strengthening engages youth and those they identify as family—by biological, legal or chosen bonds—with respect and care. Our family strengthening work is modeled on the successful work being done by Eva’s Initiatives Family Reconnect Program in Toronto, ON, as well as work being done by Reclaim in Minneapolis. Reclaim has a long history of

providing mental health services to LGBTQ2S youth and, where appropriate, also works with their given or chosen families, providing individual counselling, group therapy and mediation for youth, as well as family counselling.

Family and kin strengthening uses mediation, family and individual counselling, and case management to strengthen family relationships, including relationships in a chosen family. Family and kin strengthening also supports family bonds that continue to exist even when the youth has left the home. The data bear this out: a framework developed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Toro, Lesperance, & Braciszewski, 2011), shows a majority of youth experiencing homelessness fall into the categories of temporarily disconnected and unstably connected, rather than chronically disconnected. For most youth, a level of connectedness persists with at least some family members, despite conflict or displacement.

Family and kin strengthening works. Indeed, the Family and Kin Strengthening Program at the DePaul University campus in the United Kingdom (U.K.) prevented homelessness in 82% of clients who were referred in 2009; in many of those cases mediation sessions alone repaired family relationships (Insley, 2011). Leading policy researchers have championed family and kin strengthening as a critically important measure for preventing youth homelessness, particularly for the large population of youth experiencing homelessness who identify as LGBTQ (Insley, 2011; NYC Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Runaway and Homeless Youth, 2010). Assuming an average three-month shelter stay at a cost of \$1,779.40 per month, Eva's Place in working with 32 young people saved Toronto's shelter system a total of \$619,231.20 in one year. In addition to cost savings, family and kin strengthening has been shown to result in positive outcomes in educational attainment, employment, self-esteem, avoidance of criminal behaviour and family relationships (Thompson, Pollio, & Bitner, 2000).

We have adopted other successful programs' crucial strategy of meeting youth where they are, rather than requiring them to come to an office or centre. Youth and their family members—such as parents who may be struggling with mental health issues or disabilities—are referred to additional services as appropriate. PSY and our local partners strive to work with extended family members, chosen family, and other trusted adults when it is appropriate and youth-directed to do so. PSY and our partners also work to provide short-term host homes for youth who need temporary housing; when it is possible and appropriate in such situations, family conflict is mediated. Otherwise, rapid rehousing is employed for those who need access to permanent housing.

Short-Term Host Homes

The achievable goal of short-term host homes is to provide a temporary welcoming space for 1 to 3 months, during which the youth may stay in the home of a well-screened and well-matched volunteer host. Once safely removed from the physical location and often highly-charged emotional environment of conflict—the home or the streets—the youth receives counselling for themselves and their parents or caregivers. This short-term intervention provides the family with space and time to reach a resolution, make decisions about what to do next and have the necessary breathing room to repair their relationship. Successful implementations of shelter diversion with short-term host homes have generally been volunteer-based host home programs. By preventing youth from entering the shelter system or living on the streets, we can improve their chances for successful independent or family living, while reducing their risks of harm.

DePaul Nightstop UK is the preeminent international example of successful shelter diversion with Short-term host homes. Nightstop is a U.K.-wide time-out housing program in which volunteer hosts agree to provide a youth in need with a bed, laundry facilities and a meal, for a flexible period based on the host's availability, ranging from one night to 3 weeks. Hosts in the program can feel good about giving back to their communities by accommodating a youth in an extra bedroom, often after the hosts' grown children have moved out. Nightstop's success has been growing, with more than 2,000 hosts providing more than 14,000 beds per year and covering 30% of U.K. communities in 2014 (M. Houghton-Brown, personal communication, October, 31 2014).

Avenues for Homeless Youth offers a short-term host homes program to youth, called the ConneQT Host Home Program. Building on Avenues for Homeless Youth's long-running and successful community-led GLBT host home program, the Avenues for Homeless Youth ConneQT Host Home Program has recruited a group of volunteer hosts to house youth for 1 to 3 months. After being screened and provided with a 2-day community-led host training session, volunteer hosts provide a place to sleep, a listening ear and youth mentorship. A key focus for PSY is to evaluate how shelter diversion with short-term host home programs can best be expanded to other cities, and what other housing formats, in addition to volunteer-based host homes, are best suited for short-term shelter diversion in the U.S.

Rapid Rehousing

Rapid rehousing, an intervention proven to end homelessness among adults, youth, and families who participate in it, places the highest priority on providing stable permanent housing, ideally within 30 days of housing loss or instability. Because of low vacancy rates, issues with credit history and other barriers, including racism, classism, homophobia and transphobia, this timeline often extends past the ideal 30-day goal. While host homes provide shelter to youth at-risk of homelessness who are in need of short-term support, rapid rehousing provides a long-term permanent housing option for youth. Rapid rehousing has three core components: housing identification, rent and move-in assistance; intensive case management; and services.¹ These three components are combined with an overall housing first orientation, in which stable permanent housing is provided to people experiencing homelessness first, before addressing other issues a client may be experiencing that require long-term support, such as problems related to substance use, trauma, criminal histories and mental illness. With a Housing First orientation, engagement in services is also primarily voluntary and client-directed. The receipt and continuation of housing assistance is not dependent on service engagement; instead, the burden is shifted to the provider to make services engaging, rather than on the client to engage in services to avoid losing assistance. Data suggest that stable housing allows an individual to develop and sustain healthier behaviours and to more effectively participate in the services and treatment they need (Einbinder & Tull, 2007).

Rapid rehousing, as it is currently promoted in national performance benchmarks and program standards developed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, places a priority on obtaining housing within 30 days of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Rapid rehousing includes up to 24 months of tailored rental assistance and supportive services. Programs across the country have demonstrated that rapid rehousing works: examples include Northwest Youth Services in Bellingham, WA, Pathfinders in Milwaukee, WI, The Salvation Army in Central Ohio, Valley Youth House in Philadelphia, PA and The Link in Minneapolis, MN.

¹ A good resource that detail rapid rehousing's core components can be found here: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/rapid-re-housing2>

Results from the largest study ever conducted on homelessness in the U.S. have recently revealed the most cost-effective way to reduce homelessness is, quite simply, to provide homes (Flaming, Toros, & Burn, 2015). Destination: Home in Santa Clara, CA, used a rapid rehousing strategy to house 400 of the people tracked in the study. Before being housed, each person experiencing homelessness accrued public costs of \$62,500 a year, compared with the annual price tag of less than \$20,000 to house a person experiencing homelessness. Destination: Home's efforts showed a savings of public funds of more than \$40,000 per person each year (Baer, 2015). The study describes similar successes in Washington, Colorado, Massachusetts and Utah, where rapid rehousing is credited with achieving the state's goal to end chronic homelessness (Flaming et al., 2015).

Not only are the results of rapid rehousing for families, individual adults, veterans, and those experiencing chronic homelessness encouraging, there is a growing body of evidence to support the value of rapid rehousing for youth experiencing homelessness. Many experienced providers of rapid rehousing for youth have consistently reported that, on average, 85% of youth they have supported are still stably housed one year after exiting their rapid rehousing programs (NAEH, 2016). A best practice PSY has seen is progressive engagement, where youth's employment and income plans are tailored to each youth and reviewed quarterly with them. The amount of the rental subsidy is also tailored to each youth based on their income plans. The rental assistance is provided for 8–14 months on average, with some youth needing a shorter subsidy and others needing a rental subsidy for a long period of time.

In the Twin Cities, The Link provides four rapid rehousing programs with a total of 90 units. One of these programs is specifically for young families, one is for youth experiencing homelessness in Minneapolis/Hennepin County, one is in the suburbs of Minneapolis, and one is specifically for LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness, called Project Live Out Loud. This project is lead by eight LGBTQ2S youth, who are also co-founders of the program, and who have lived experience of homelessness. Through The Link's rapid rehousing programs, youth receive support to locate housing in scattered-site independent housing, as well as ongoing case management and youth-directed services. Effective landlord engagement is a critical component to a successful rapid rehousing program, as youth may have issues with credit or job stability that may pose challenges to signing a lease. The Link's rapid rehousing programs identify appropriate housing and provides move-in assistance, a rent subsidy, ongoing case

management and life skills support to youth. The Project Live Out Loud Program also provides culturally specific case management, leadership and career development opportunities, life skills, support groups such as the Gender Identity Group and Queer Sobriety Groups, art opportunities, such as a Photovoice Group, and culturally specific activities within the community.

Rapid rehousing programs, such as PSY's New York City rapid rehousing partner, Bailey House, and our Baltimore partner, Youth Empowered Society as well as the Project Live Out Loud Program, place emphasis on skill-building by providing training that addresses the daily challenges of living on one's own, including self-care, relationships, housing, personal finance, educational support and career planning. All skills training occurs using a rubric of intensive case management and a positive youth development model (R.M. Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). A key component of the rapid rehousing model is creating the necessary support systems for youth to live, not only on their own, but sustainably and with an ever-increasing quality of life. For this reason, even after youth have been rapidly rehoused, the case managers continue to work with participants on critical life skills.

Job Training

Model programs, such as Northwest Youth Services in Bellingham, WA, have found that providing vocational training, educational and employment services ensures youth can achieve sustainable self-sufficiency and maintain housing for the long term. Though some youth experiencing homelessness have held jobs in the past, possibly having lost them due to the cascading consequences associated with experiencing homelessness (e.g., being unable to maintain hygiene or get enough sleep to perform to employers' expectations), many have not; many also have not completed either high school or an equivalency diploma, which greatly limits their employment options. There are specific employment concerns experienced by LGBTQ2S youth that need to be considered and addressed by providers. For example, trans youth often need assistance updating legal identification to match their gender identity and name.²

² A helpful resource on the employment and training barriers experienced by trans youth can be found on The 519 (Toronto's LGBTQ2S centre) website: <http://www.the519.org/education-training/lgbtq2s-youth-homelessness-in-canada/lgbtq2s-barriers-to-employment-and-training>

Youth often become trapped in a cycle of being unable to pay for housing without income, but find it extremely difficult to maintain employment or enter training or educational programs without housing. Though older adults experiencing homelessness face similar barriers, youth are less likely to have the educational qualifications, work history, professional skills and other resources that allow them to change their situation, and therefore require even more support.

Case managers and program staff working with youth must also work closely with job training providers, employers, case managers and other staff to ensure that programs are inclusive of LGBTQ2S youths' needs, and that youth have a supportive channel through which they can express those needs. For example, trans competency training may prevent staff from misgendering youth, and help staff to understand the additional support youth may need if local employment laws do not offer protection against discrimination. Specifically, a youth advisory board is needed to hear, support and advocate for youths' needs, while executive sponsorship from job training providers and employers is needed to ensure a direct avenue for communicating and effectively addressing concerns. Youth must also receive the necessary support and job training to secure employment that provides them with a well-paid path out of homelessness; for example, jobs in computer programming, construction, or culinary arts. It is also important to offer training for paid arts-oriented jobs, such as graphic design or decorative arts.

In November 2015, The Way Home in Houston, TX implemented the Income Now program to integrate the efforts of more than 100 partner agencies to enroll all individuals receiving rapid rehousing—projected to include more than 1,000 participants—in employment services. Though Income Now does not focus primarily on youth, we believe its coordinated and intensive response to the barriers individuals face in achieving employment, even after they are housed, serves as a model for meeting the specific needs of youth. Income Now relies on specialized employment counsellors and system navigators available to clients through coordinated access hubs. With a focus on flexibility and tailored solutions (both also effective in case management with youth experiencing homelessness) these specialists provide any and all activities that support participants in securing and maintaining income on an ongoing basis, including supportive services, such as coordinating transportation, enrolling clients in job training, coaching them on interview skills, and helping them secure essential supplies and clothing for work (The Way Home, 2015).

Building on the prior work of our partners, PSY will implement job training and allied services at our future site in New York, so that rapid rehousing can serve as the launch pad for each youth's ongoing financial and personal stability. This will include working with those training programs to ensure they meet the specific needs of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness, and matching youth with training programs that provide the necessary wages they need to pay for a rapid rehousing apartment. Examples of training include culinary training for line chefs, accounting training for entry-level bookkeepers, training for trades such as plumbers, carpenters and electricians, and training specific to higher-wage union jobs, such as medical technicians and unionized custodial work.

Systems Strengthening

Systems strengthening refers to the ecosystem of organizations providing services, rather than a specific intervention provided to youth. For example, the particular goal of PSY's future work in cities to which it plans to expand (and for its other collaborations around the country) is to implement new practices across organizations that will allow those organizations to provide a coordinated response to each youth's needs, with services provided as a complementary, holistic and comprehensive package, rather than being laboriously pieced together through interactions with many points of contact with different organizations and sites. Ideally, if systems strengthening succeeds in creating a coordinated community response, it may not even be evident to the youth that they are receiving services from multiple organizations. Systems strengthening work must also address how the housing system and support services often discriminate against youth of colour.

Creating an Effective Infrastructure

During the pilot period, we leveraged and learned from the existing infrastructure in Minneapolis, and built and then expanded new partnerships with Bailey House and Callen Lorde in New York City, and the Youth Empowered Society, the University of Maryland and St. Ambrose Housing Aid in Baltimore. Through a Memorandum of Understanding with each partner organization in each city, the infrastructure includes hiring LGBTQ2S, mental health, and family and kin strengthening counsellors, case managers and program managers; recruiting and training hosts; engaging with landlords and community organizations to provide additional rapid rehousing sites; establishing trusting relationships

with community partners, local community organizations and schools to help facilitate trusted referrals; identifying youth experiencing homelessness for program candidacy; implementing and refining all three interventions; evaluating and conducting follow-up; and determining recommendations for expansion to additional U.S. cities.

In the first nine months of the work in the Twin Cities by Avenues for Homeless Youth, Reclaim, and The Link, host homes were identified and trained, youth had successful stays with newly identified and trained hosts, LGBTQ2S youth were placed in their own scattered-site rapid rehousing apartments with a lease in their own name, and youth participated in youth-driven mental health supports, with all these activities supported by case managers, program managers, and staff with considerable experience addressing the needs of LGBTQ2S youth.

The work in each city is driven by the expressed needs of each youth. The services are designed to be respectful and inclusive of all youth experiencing homelessness, and LGBTQ2S youth provide input on service implementation. As previously described, services include counselling, mediation, life skills support, tailored youth-driven family and kin strengthening, shelter diversion with short-term host homes and rapid rehousing for LGBTQ2S youth. Additionally, the collaborations include a critical health and safety component as part of the case management.

The counselling, case management and mediation services take a comprehensive, systems-based approach in each city. Youths' family conflicts and difficulty in securing housing are often exacerbated by poor access to education, physical and mental health care, addiction counselling, and other services. An important component of the program is, therefore, to help youth and their family members, when appropriate, to navigate these systems, accompanying them and advocating for them whenever necessary, to ensure their needs are met.

In Practice: How the Work Occurs in Each City

In Minneapolis, the three participating service providers serve LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness who are aged 18 to 24 years. In New York City, the program will also be LGBTQ2S-specific, while in Baltimore, it will serve all youth, but ensure the specific needs of LGBTQ2S youth are met. All program partners typically serve as the access points to the interventions. Referrals are made to one of the three access points

from other service providers, youth drop-in centres, youth shelters, and other programs and systems serving youth, as well as by self-referral; in Minneapolis, referrals are made through a central coordinated entry system. Once a young person is referred, a program partner conducts an initial screening. The intake consists of helping the youth fill out an application form. The same form is used by all partners, and it identifies youth housing status, age and service needs. During intake, youth are also administered the Transition Age Youth - Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (TAY-VI-SPDAT). The TAY-VI-SPDAT helps programs identify whether youth need a low level of service intervention, rapid rehousing, or more intensive interventions. There is no way to predict at an individual level who will succeed in which housing model, which is why having a scalable intervention that allows for progressive engagement like rapid rehousing is key to a successful systemic response. The expertise of local service providers and case managers provides guidance in using the assessment and intake tool.

In most cities, program partners typically hold case conferences to discuss any youth who was recently referred, and to jointly decide the combination of assistance that will be offered, taking into consideration all options for which the youth is eligible, those services of interest to the youth, and the type and level of need identified through the assessment process.

Most youth will receive a combination of services, all determined in large part through youth choice. For example, a young person might be provided with a host home placement, and then move on to rapid rehousing once they have had some time in a safe place with a mentor.

Tracking Outcomes and Progress

The outcomes of the pilot in each city are being tracked through a research study comprising a descriptive youth study and an implementation analysis carried out in collaboration with prominent youth homelessness researchers. The longitudinal study will examine the outcomes of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness who are being served across six domains: housing stability; education or employment; health; psychosocial well-being; self-acceptance and positive social relationships; and family relationships. The implementation analysis will describe the design and implementation processes for each city. The implementation analysis and formative evaluation will help us learn how the collaboration is being implemented, focusing on program components that are critical to successful implementation and thus important for replication elsewhere.

Conclusion

Though the LGBTQ2S youth homelessness crisis continues, our knowledge of effective interventions is expanding. We hope this chapter has provided readers with a sense of the extraordinary opportunities available to front-line service staff, practitioners, community members, youth and others, to work together, through a coordinated response, in building effective solutions to support LGBTQ2S youth who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness to attain permanent housing and long-term well-being.

Putting youth in the centre of their own lives, treating them with the respect they deserve, and embracing their own personal agency provide a critical foundation for effectively serving youth. If you or a loved one were experiencing homelessness, where would you want yourselves to be? Perhaps in a well-screened volunteer and mentor's home? In your own apartment with your own key, but with the supports you need? Or, with the support of mental health and case management services, living with a member of your extended family, chosen family or kin? By asking youth what they need, we often find these are the solutions appearing at the top of their lists.

Through careful evaluation, ongoing research, and the sharing of best practices, we will continue to demonstrate and work with local communities to scale up interventions to effectively address youth homelessness. Point Source Youth, and our partner organizations in Minneapolis, New York City and Baltimore, are only a few among the growing number of organizations across North America prioritizing solutions to ensure, in the words of one young man served by one of our partners in Baltimore, that: "Youth experiencing homelessness have the chance to become adults."

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