

INTRODUCTION

Youth and young adults (YYA) are defined by a complex and critical stage of personal growth. Unfortunately, these young people experiencing homelessness lack safety, stability and other basic life needs. Moreover, many of these individuals are unable to access systems, services and resources designed to support healthy development. For these reasons, YYA experiencing homelessness require a combination of developmentally-appropriate housing and service options. At the systemic level, this approach depends on close collaboration between government agencies, philanthropists and community-based organizations.

Youth (minors) and young adults (18-24 years old) who experience homelessness span across many demographic groups. Each YYA and their experience is unique, meaning no two situations are exactly alike. Young parent families (both minors and those 18-24) may need help furthering their parenting skills and navigating housing systems while caring for minor children. Minors experiencing family crisis may need counseling, other supportive services and a safe place while housing options are being assessed. Because of the vast array of situations these young people experience, services and housing options in every community must be flexible and well informed.

The criteria below were developed to help communities implement the National Network for Youth's [Proposed System to End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness](#). The Proposed System was developed as a planning guide for communities to identify strengths and gaps in the services they offer to young people experiencing homelessness. Many communities in the nation have never had the benefit of having a runaway and homeless youth service provider receiving funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Family & Youth Services Bureau. However, these communities may have long-standing youth service providers or other community-based organizations with experience collaborating with local child welfare agencies, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development housing assistance programs and local education agency liaisons to develop a community response to youth and young adult homelessness.

Until recently, many systems serving homeless populations worked in isolation. Recent efforts have included the development and promotion of interagency efforts to build cohesive systems that can end homelessness for specific populations at the federal, state and local levels. Now is the time to expand our focus on community response to and prevention of homelessness among our nation's young people, and to ensure that any experience of homelessness is rare, brief and nonrecurring. This criteria below has been informed by experts including youth service providers with long records of success serving youth, advocates, and young people with lived experience. These criteria are intended to help a community that implements the Proposed System evaluate whether they have ended homelessness among young people. They represent key elements that a community must have in place in order to fully serve and support this population.

CRITERIA

1. The community has a well thought out and cohesive system in place to provide a range of housing, as well as homelessness prevention, crisis/early intervention, long-term intervention, and aftercare services for all young people experiencing homelessness using the most inclusive and broad, federally recognized definition.
 - a. The community has developed a detailed plan identifying services available and resources to fill existing gaps spanning prevention through aftercare services, including potential short and long term housing.
 - b. The community's plan is informed by best practices in positive youth development, trauma-informed care, cultural competency, client-centered care, and strengths-based services.
 - c. The community's plan includes housing and service options that are voluntary, confidential, free and easy for youth to access themselves; including no-barrier services, which have been demonstrated as an essential first step in reaching the most vulnerable young people who may be running from or avoid engagement with child welfare, criminal justice (including juvenile and adult systems), mental health or other systems.

2. The community has the capacity to provide housing and services to young people through a youth-centric and needs-based approach, that frequently utilizes developmentally appropriate assessments throughout the time a young person is in need, in order to allow that individual to access necessary services when they are ready to interact with them.
 - a. The community has multiple designated agencies that share information in order to identify where individual young people fit into their system, and increases flexibility within the systems to allow individuals to enter and exit various programs as needed.
 - b. The community has consulted with legal counsel to assess ways for their systems to communicate in compliance with varying federal, state and local confidentiality and private information standards.
 - c. The community implements systemic communication and data sharing by way of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that identify the agencies and protocols they will use to communicate regarding the most vulnerable youth and young adults, and implements coordinated efforts at the community level to oversee services for this population using an interagency approach.
 - d. The community has a Coordinated Access/Assessment site(s) that is designated for youth only. In rural areas where there are no youth agencies, the coordinated system compares youth to youth and adults to adults when determining need, vulnerability, and housing priority.

3. The community has an array of service options available to help prevent homelessness for young people when it is appropriate for them to reunify, reconnect or stay with family, or alternatively transition to independence.
 - a. The community has appropriate services available to families in conflict, which offer options the family unit can access in order to keep minors with their families when safe to do so. The services take into consideration, and are tailored to, the individual's family dynamics, and relate to any relevant subpopulation(s).
 - b. The community has appropriate supports and services that transition with youth from one program to another (for example, from a transitional living program to a more independent living model).
 - c. Systems, including, but not limited to, child welfare and criminal justice, develop transition plans for individuals exiting their care at least 6 months prior to exit date; or longer than 6 months where housing markets demand more planning.
 - i. Transition plans are developed specifically to avoid young people exiting to homelessness, and are service intensive to ensure housing stability. Transition planning shall include ensuring young people exit with valid state issued identification for the state which they will be exiting to.
 - ii. The community holds child welfare and criminal justice accountable for aftercare of young people exiting their systems for at least a year to ensure housing and other services remain in place.
 - d. Local education agencies in communities have established MOUs directly with local youth service providers so that young people are referred to appropriate services and supports.

4. The community has an adequate continuum of housing options which range from emergency to long-term for young people in need of safe, stable, age-appropriate housing, such that no young person is without access to an appropriate bed in their community.
 - a. The community works with youth service providers, shelters and local education agencies to count all young people experiencing homelessness using the most inclusive and broad, federally recognized definition.
 - b. The community has allocated resources appropriately, based on their accurate counts, to meet the housing needs of these young people moving into safe, stable, and age appropriate housing.
 - c. The community offers housing options for young people within their community in order to ensure they are not pushed away from their established support networks. These networks include the resources necessary to achieve independence.

5. The community measures the success of programs serving young people using youth appropriate core outcomes. Supportive services offered during engagement with a program focus on these outcomes as goals after an intervention is provided. These outcomes include: stable housing; permanent connections; education, training & employment; health & social/emotional well-being; and self-sufficiency.
 - a. Stable housing: safe, stable & developmentally appropriate housing with access to supportive services as necessary.
 - b. Permanent connections: healthy attachments to peers, mentors, family & other caring adults.
 - c. Education, training & employment: employability through supported academic success, development of workplace skills & connections to employers.
 - d. Health & social/emotional well-being: physical health, ability to create & maintain positive relationships with others, solve problems, experience empathy & manage emotions.
 - e. Self-sufficiency is critical for young people learning to be independent. It is the skill set that allows them to fully develop as young adults. Self-sufficiency is self-management including but not limited to finance, cooking, shopping, laundry, transportation, parenting and household management.
 - f. All program outcomes measured through performance standards should be reflective of the population they serve. Outcome measures currently being used to assess programs serving adult populations dissuade programs from serving YYA for fear of losing funding since the focus of these programs is distinct and unique.