

Housing Models for Serving Youth Experiencing Homelessness:

Learning from HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

Issue Brief



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Issue Brief

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Prepared by

Debra J. Rog, PhD
Ariana Gilbert-Mongelli
Kathryn A. Henderson, PhD
Ethan Jorge

Westat

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Introduction

Youth homelessness and the need for effective models of housing and services for this vulnerable population are a serious concern in the United States. According to recent estimates, more than 35,000 unaccompanied youth experience homelessness on any given night, and more than half a million (approximately 550,000) unaccompanied youth between the ages of 14 and 24 experienced an episode of homelessness of longer than a week (HUD, 2020; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019). About one-half of those youth were unsheltered, meaning that they slept somewhere not meant for human habitation, such as in a car, an encampment, or on the street.

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP), granting funds to selected Continuums of Care (CoCs) to plan, develop, and implement coordinated community responses aimed at preventing and ending youth homelessness. Demonstration CoCs have put into place a range of approaches with the input of Youth Action Boards, the collaboration of community agencies and other partners, and the support of technical assistance providers. Approaches include identifying and reaching out to youth in need of assistance, providing resources to prevent homelessness for at-risk youth, offering services to support the broad array of needs that youth may have while homeless, and providing a variety of housing options for those individuals who need them.

Westat, an independent research firm, was contracted by HUD to conduct a cross-site evaluation of the first round of YHDP grantees.¹ The evaluation aimed to describe the role of YHDP in shaping communities' efforts and the resulting effects on the size and composition of the population of youth experiencing homelessness. The evaluation found that YHDP led to a number of key system changes that are not experienced to the same degree or as consistently by the three peer sites and other non-YHDP CoCs nationally. These include—

- The development of youth-specific governance and strategic planning.
- Engagement of youth in decisionmaking.
- Increased coordination with other systems.
- A notable increase and expansion in the portfolio of housing available to youth.
- Increased receipt by youth of specific services, including navigation and rapid rehousing.

Exhibit 1. Westat Evaluation

- Multiple comparative case study design.
- Compared 10 Round 1 YHDP CoCs to three “matched” peer sites and all CoCs nationally.
- Data sources.
 - Three rounds of “sites” visits, including key informant interviews and youth focus group.
 - HMIS data from 2017 and 2020.
 - Two waves of a web-based survey of all CoCs nationally.

CoC = Continuum of Care. HMIS = Homeless Management Information System. YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

¹ To date, HUD has funded 76 CoCs through five rounds of funding totaling nearly \$300 million to implement a variety of interventions to prevent and end youth homelessness. The Round 6 Notice of Funding Availability was released March 24, 2022.

- Decreases over time in the use of crisis housing and increases in the receipt of permanent housing.

The effects of those changes on the size and nature of the population served and their ability to exit to permanent housing are less clear. The lack of clear outcomes across sites is likely due to the considerable variability across the sites in the size of their baseline youth homeless populations, the number and type of housing and services available for youth at baseline, and the use of YHDP funds. Also, the 3-year timeframe may be too short to realize changes in outcomes, especially during the pandemic. More details on those findings are available in the reports noted in the box to the right.

The purpose of this brief is to describe five key housing models implemented in the YHDP CoCs, including—

- Host homes.
- Crisis transitional housing.
- Rapid rehousing.
- Joint transitional housing and rapid rehousing.
- Permanent supportive housing.

Exhibit 4 indicates the housing models in place in each site, either implemented or expanded with YHDP funds or already in place prior to YHDP.

For each model, the authors highlight key features, discuss what is known about the effectiveness of the models, share implementation lessons learned across the different community contexts, and provide youth perspectives on the model. In addition, COVID-19 emerged in the middle of the demonstration and, not surprisingly, posed a significant challenge to the sites. Where relevant, the authors discuss how the pandemic affected implementation of the models. The implementation experiences of the 10 diverse YHDP sites build upon and add to the guidance offered by HUD in its 2016 *Promising Program Models Guidebook*.

Exhibit 2. Westat Evaluation Reports and Briefs

Reports:

- Early Implementation Report
- Understanding the Status of Homeless and Housing Services for Youth (Results of Initial CoC Survey)
- Youth Perspectives on Homeless Housing and Services
- Final Evaluation Report

Briefs:

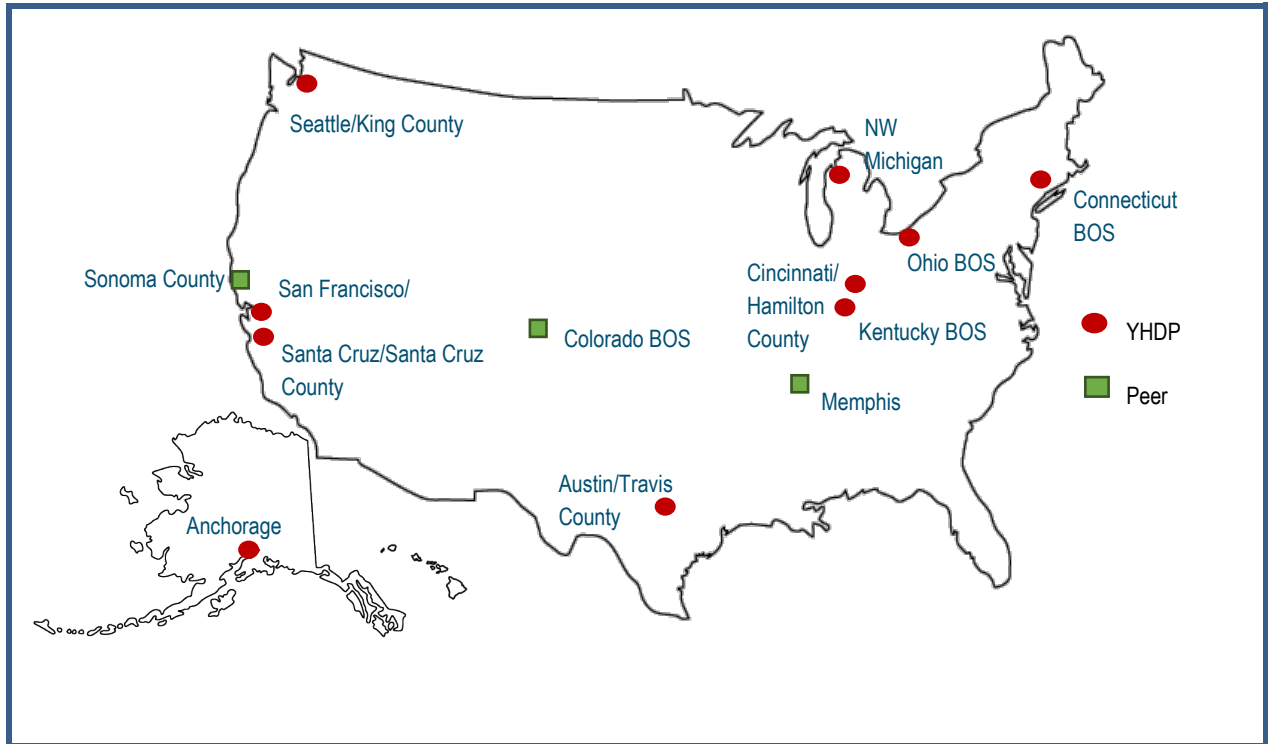
- Understanding Racial Inequities in Youth Homelessness
- Changes in Youth Homeless Housing and Service Systems: A National Picture

The full set of evaluation reports and briefs is available here:

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/Youth-Homelessness-Demonstration-Program.html>.

CoC = Continuum of Care.

Exhibit 3. Map of the YHDP and Peer Sites



BOS = Balance of State. YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Source: YHDP Evaluation

Exhibit 4. Housing Models Across the Round 1 YHDP CoCs (as of the end of the demonstration)

CoC	Host Homes	Crisis Transitional Housing	Rapid Rehousing	Joint Housing	Permanent Supportive Housing
Anchorage	■	○	■		■
Austin/Travis County		○	■	■	●
Cincinnati/Hamilton County	● ¹	○	■		●
Connecticut BOS		■	■		●
Kentucky BOS	■	■	■		
NW Michigan	■	○	■		
Ohio BOS	● ¹	■	■		●
San Francisco	■	○	■		■
Santa Cruz	■	○	■		■
Seattle/King County	●	○	■	■	●

BOS = Balance of State. CoC = Continuum of Care.

○ Traditional transitional housing or transitional living program in place, not crisis transitional housing.

● Model in place.

■ Implemented or enhanced with YHDP funding.

¹Discontinued during the demonstration.

Source: YHDP Evaluation site visit data and Housing Inventory Charts

Host Homes

Definition and Overview

Host homes offer youth a place to live in an unrelated adult’s home for a temporary period of time (HUD, n.d.). They are increasingly promoted as a promising intervention model for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness, though as of 2021, fewer than a third of CoCs nationally have implemented the model. Limited research is available on the effectiveness of the model at helping youth connect to permanent housing; however, some studies have found youth report satisfaction with the assistance and improvements to their health and well-being (Ecker et al., 2018; McTeague, 2015).

In host homes, youth are provided with stable, short-term housing (usually for 1–6 months) and wraparound case management services in a home setting rooted in the community. The goal of host homes is to provide a safe home setting where youth can be supported by a case manager and adult mentor (the host) while they gradually become more stable and able to make decisions about longer-term housing options and other important issues. Hosts are expected to serve as role models, filling in the gaps in skills that are typically taught by parents. Unlike foster care placements, host homes are centered on youth choice; youth choose to participate in the model and participate in the process of being matched to hosts. In many communities, youth are encouraged to nominate trusted adults to the program to serve as hosts.

Host homes are one of the few models available for minors who are not typically eligible for many types of assistance, especially assistance requiring them to sign a lease.² Those homes also may be well-suited to youth who have more difficulty in congregate settings models or prefer a family-like situation. Host homes may be especially well-suited for certain vulnerable populations such as youth exiting foster care or the juvenile justice system; pregnant and parenting teens; or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth because youth play a critical role in helping to be matched to a host, with whom they are comfortable.

Hosts are recruited by a community-based youth service provider, informal community networks (for example, faith based, LGBTQ+), or advisory councils. Once recruited, hosts are extensively screened, including receiving background and reference checks and two to three interviews.

Exhibit 5. Host Homes

Provide housing assistance, free of charge, through temporary stays in homes of unrelated adults.

Serve youth ages 24 and younger; one of few models available to minors.

Goal is to gradually become more stable and decide about longer-term housing.

Stays are typically 1–6 months, with support by a case manager and adult mentor.

Youth opt in; never placed in a home.

² Minor youth are eligible to receive assistance from Runaway and Homeless Youth services, including Basic Center Programs, which provide emergency shelter up to 21 days for youth less than 18, and Transitional Living Programs, which provide long-term residential services for 18 months for youth 16–22 years at entry.

Training and ongoing support are provided to hosts, such as boundary setting and managing expectations, conflict mediation, positive youth development, trauma-informed care, and cultural competency.

Hosts are not paid a rental fee for rooms provided but are provided with a stipend to offset the cost of an additional family member, typically ranging from \$200 to \$350 per month depending on whether the youth is alone or with a child or partner and the local area's cost of living.

Hosts often participate in monthly calls or meetings with program staff and support groups with other hosts.

Implementation Experiences in YHDP Sites

Prior to the demonstration, host homes were in place in only three YHDP sites. Host homes are one of the more innovative temporary housing approaches that have increasingly been promoted as a promising intervention model for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness (HUD, n.d.). Prior to the demonstration, host homes were in place in three YHDP sites. In Cincinnati/Hamilton County, the program served LGBTQ youth; in Ohio Balance of State (BOS), host homes were available to child-welfare-involved youth. In Seattle/King County, a pilot host homes program, serving a general population of youth experiencing homelessness, was implemented with philanthropic support.

Over the course of the demonstration, five additional YHDP CoCs included host homes in their portfolios. A number of sites embraced host homes as a possible strategy for serving minors who often were not eligible for other types of assistance in addition to other youth. Sites funding host homes with YHDP support included Anchorage, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, NW Michigan, and Kentucky BOS. Projects in Anchorage and San Francisco were targeted, but not limited to, LGBTQ youth. Santa Cruz's host homes were targeted to LGBTQ youth, pregnant and parenting, and youth of color. Kentucky BOS targeted host homes specifically to school-aged minors not able to live at home with their parents or guardians but did not need to be in the care of the state child welfare system. In early 2020, NW Michigan launched a host homes program using unspent YHDP funding from its coordinated entry program. In each of those sites, host homes programs tended to be small, aiming to serve about 10 youth per year. As noted in the following section, however, COVID-19 proved to be an obstacle in operating host homes.

Host homes can be especially useful in rural settings with few housing options. They can provide safe, temporary assistance to youth experiencing homelessness that allows them to remain in their own communities. In rural CoCs, in particular, other types of crisis housing, such as emergency shelter, tend to be located only in larger cities and are either inaccessible to youth without transportation or require youth to leave communities where they may have jobs, schooling, or social support. However, recruiting hosts can be more difficult in those settings. In low-income communities, households are often already crowded or doubled up, and it therefore may be difficult to find hosts with a spare room to host an unrelated youth.

Sites faced challenges in implementing the host homes program, exacerbated by the pandemic. During the first year of program implementation, most YHDP-funded host home programs were able to hire and train staff; develop program policies and procedures, including

processes for recruiting hosts and matching them to youth; and develop onboarding materials for hosts and youth about how to live together. However, three of the five sites (Kentucky BOS, NW Michigan, and Santa Cruz) were slow to enroll youth, in part, because it was difficult to identify and engage potential hosts. COVID-19 exacerbated that challenge, with people reluctant to open their homes to anyone, let alone youth they did not know. Therefore, some programs temporarily paused recruitment of hosts and placement of youth. Both Ohio BOS and Cincinnati/Hamilton County discontinued their host homes programs during the course of the demonstration for reasons unrelated to the pandemic. As a result, few youth across sites participated in the program during the evaluation, and the authors have limited data on their experiences.

Exhibit 6. Snapshot of Host Homes, Anchorage

Choosing Our Roots Host Homes

Choosing Our Roots, an LGBTQ+ provider in Anchorage, Alaska, planned and implemented a host homes program through a combination of YHDP and philanthropic funding. The program had met its goal of serving about five homeless and marginally housed youth ages 14–24 per year and had additional youth on a waiting list for appropriate matches.

Youth already served through Choosing Our Roots were able to refer themselves to the program. Other providers in the community referred youth, including the Office of Children’s Services, the Division of Juvenile Justice, schools, and doctors. Choosing Our Roots conducted outreach efforts in the community to identify both potential youth and hosts. Although the program was targeted to LGBTQ+ youth, it was available to any eligible youth who expressed interest.

During the evaluation’s timeframe, the program recruited and trained about 15 hosts. Provider staff reported that the recruitment, training, and matching processes were labor intensive and relied on volunteer staff.

Hosts were provided a monthly stipend up to \$350 for groceries, utilities, and other expenses. Youth were provided case management from the program and mentorship from the host.

The program had longer stays than other host homes, with 6–12 months expected, as provider staff found that most youth needed a few months of stability before they were ready to focus on their next housing situation. Youth remained eligible for other types of housing assistance while living in the host homes.

The site experienced some challenges in placing youth, especially those individuals with higher needs (such as a youth in a wheelchair). In addition, at times hosts were available, and youth were on a waiting list, but there were not appropriate matches between the lists.

LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning. YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Youth Perspectives

Host homes, while not frequently used by youth in focus groups, were well-received by youth who did live in them. The few focus group participants who had lived in host homes appreciated forming relationships with the hosts with whom they lived. They spoke positively of the experience, valuing the individualized and familial nature of the arrangement.

*“I'd say overall that it's pretty just relaxed, and we have weekly check-ins after dinner, but also I do usually have dinner with [the host family] pretty much nightly and spend a lot of time with the [host family] kids. And it's been pretty comfortable.” —
San Francisco*

Crisis Transitional Housing

Definition and Overview

Crisis transitional housing provides youth experiencing homelessness a temporary place to stay while they work toward becoming more stable and securing permanent housing. Youth-specific crisis housing is particularly important because youth often report feeling unsafe in adult shelters and crisis settings. This short-term “Housing First” intervention has a particular focus on safety and harm reduction³ and individual case management and supportive services. All 10 YHDP CoCs implemented transitional housing or transitional living programs for youth, typically with stays of 7 or more months; between 2017 and 2020, five CoCs implemented crisis transitional housing. Crisis transitional housing, compared with other transitional housing approaches, is aimed at providing short stays (less than 3 months) and a quicker transition to permanent housing. The effectiveness of crisis transitional housing for youth has not yet been examined (Morton et al., 2020).

Implementation Experiences in YHDP Sites

YHDP sites implementing crisis transitional housing typically served between 25 to 30 youth at a time.

In Ohio BOS and Kentucky BOS, providers rented houses located throughout the various counties included in the demonstration regions. In Connecticut BOS, the CoC worked with existing providers of crisis housing throughout the state to create youth-specific shared housing units with single and double occupancy bedrooms and shared bathrooms. In some regions, those youth-specific units were adjacent to but separate from adult or family shelters. Two of the sites, Austin/Travis County and Seattle/King County, implemented joint crisis transitional housing/rapid rehousing programs, described in the next section. In both of those CoCs, existing youth-specific crisis housing programs were repurposed to become crisis transitional housing.

CoCs wrestled with the right model of crisis housing to provide to youth and made adaptations as needed. Austin/Travis County initially implemented a congregate dormitory-style setting in which all youth slept in the same room. During the demonstration, Austin/Travis County also

Exhibit 7. Crisis Transitional Housing

Provides immediate, temporary, safe place to stay with case management.

Typically serves youth ages 18–24 experiencing homelessness.

Low/no barriers for easy, quick access.

Youth do not pay for the housing.

Focuses on helping youth transitioning into stable, permanent housing.

Can be up to 24-month stays, but goal is for much shorter stays (60–120 days).

Can be congregate settings, shared housing, or individual apartments.

³ Harm reduction is an approach intended to reduce the adverse consequences and unsafe behaviors of substance abuse among persons who continue to use substances by emphasizing a practical focus on the harm associated with substance use rather than an idealized goal of abstinence.

began offering crisis housing in the form of individual apartments to accommodate youth who wanted more privacy than a dormitory setting allowed, such as LGBTQ youth and couples.

In Seattle/King County, one provider operated crisis transitional housing as individual apartments, and a second provider operated it with housing arrangements in which youth shared bedrooms and communal living spaces. Providers felt that the model with individual apartments decreased the motivation for youth to leave. Youth appreciated staying in crisis transitional housing where their expenses were covered, as opposed to other programs where they would be required to contribute to household expenses.

The remaining three CoCs (Connecticut BOS, Ohio BOS, and Kentucky BOS) each implemented shared housing models with single and double occupancy bedrooms and shared bathrooms and other living spaces. For some youth, the communal living space offered the comfort of being surrounded by other youth who were going through similar experiences, whereas others appreciated the privacy individual apartments offered. Therefore, the apartment and shared housing models for crisis transitional housing each offered youth advantages; dormitory-style crisis housing, however, appeared to be less desired by youth.

Exhibit 8. Snapshot of Crisis Transitional Housing, Ohio BOS

In October 2018, with YHDP funding, Ohio BOS implemented crisis transitional housing to provide a safe place for youth who were staying in unsafe settings in its absence. Prior to the demonstration, the five-county demonstration region included only six units of youth-specific emergency shelter located in Athens County.

With the demonstration, the CoC sought to have at least one crisis transitional housing facility in each of its five counties, implementing crisis transitional housing in an existing facility in Athens and in the remaining four counties renting homes to house five to six youth in single and double occupancy rooms. Houses were rented in three of the counties, but NIMBYism⁴ thwarted the ability to locate a facility in the fourth county.

The program served youth 18–24 years old, including single youth, couples, and pregnant and parenting youth. To support youth’s connection to their communities, youth were able to select the county in which they wanted to be placed. If their selected facility was full, they were offered a unit in another facility until their preferred location was available.

Each facility had a dedicated case manager who assisted youth in accessing needed services, finding jobs, and planning for permanent housing.

Initially, a case manager was on site at each facility for only 8 hours per day; using funding from the Ohio State Department of Health, staffing was increased to 16 hours per day to provide additional supervision. Problems with onsite drug use among youth shaped the

⁴ *NIMBY* is used to describe people, the opposition by existing residents to new housing or shelter developments near their homes.

provider's preference for 24-hour supervision; however, a sustainable source of funding was not available.

Case managers reported that most youth exited crisis transitional housing for rapid rehousing, though it took longer than the 30-day goal. They reported that many youth stayed 45–60 days due to difficulties in finding suitable housing for rapid rehousing. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated that challenge when the eviction moratorium limited the number of available rental units.

BOS = Balance of State. CoC = Continuum of Care. NIMBY = not in my back yard. YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Crisis housing providers struggled to determine the right level of staffing. In locations where crisis housing facilities did not include 24-hour staffing, providers indicated a preference for it. They reported that full-time staffing would be beneficial to youth as during unstaffed hours, they were more likely to break facility rules, including using illegal substances such as methamphetamines. As noted in exhibit 8, Ohio BOS did not have a sustainable source of funding to pay staff to be present 24 hours but was able to expand staff coverage from 8 hours to 16 hours per day through a grant from the Ohio Department of Health.

Stays in crisis transitional housing were considerably shorter than stays in traditional transitional housing programs. Prior to the demonstration, youth's average length of stay in transitional housing in those five CoCs was 217 days. Following the implementation of crisis transitional housing, with an increased emphasis on rapidly moving youth to stable, permanent housing, the average length of stay across sites decreased to 160 days. In other sites that did not implement crisis transitional housing models, average lengths of stay in transitional housing tended to be between 240 and 290 days or longer.⁵ In addition, a larger share of youth across sites exited transitional housing to permanent housing in 2020 than in 2017, a pattern that was true in sites that implemented crisis transitional housing and other models of transitional housing.

Youth Perspectives

Youth were typically grateful to have youth-specific crisis housing and voiced the need for more. Youth appreciated crisis housing as providing a safe place to stay where they could get case management assistance and access to other services. In contrast to adult settings, where youth reported feeling unsafe or vulnerable, including being fearful of bullying, assault, robbery, and pressure to use drugs, youth in youth-specific crisis housing reported feeling safer and receiving more assistance. They spoke of case managers helping them get jobs, find housing, and access needed services, and teach them life skills, such as laundry and cooking. In about half of the YHDP sites, youth indicated that there was not enough crisis housing in their communities, a challenge exacerbated during the pandemic when many crisis housing programs were deconcentrating their facilities.

⁵ Lengths of stay were calculated using Homeless Management Information Systems data for 2017 and 2020 and were limited to youth who exited during the year under examination but may have entered in a prior year.

“[It] is meeting my needs; it has housing, food, helps you get on your feet, helps you get a job and housing.” —Kentucky BOS

Youth commented that sometimes the rules of crisis housing were too restrictive and deterred youth from staying in those settings. For example, curfews or rules that required youth to leave during the day were challenging, especially for those individuals who worked late hours. Youth in multiple sites mentioned they did not get much sleep because they got back to the facility following an evening shift and then had to leave early and find a place to spend their time. Others noted they felt unsafe not having any place to be during the day.

“I don’t get much sleep and then have to get up early to leave [crisis transitional housing] and find a place to hang out all day, even when it’s cold and raining. It kind of takes a toll on you.” —Connecticut BOS

Rapid Rehousing

Definition and Overview

Rapid rehousing is an innovative, systemic response, promoted by HUD since 2014, to provide financial assistance and services to house homeless individuals and families. To be eligible for rapid rehousing provided by CoCs, youth must be literally homeless, at imminent risk of becoming homeless (for example, once they leave crisis housing), or fleeing domestic violence. To be eligible to sign a lease, youth typically must be 18 years old or older.⁶

Rapid rehousing is a “Housing First” intervention, increasingly used in recent years to rapidly move youth experiencing homelessness into their own housing. One of the features of rapid rehousing is that it is flexible, allowing providers to tailor the amount of assistance to the unique needs of each youth. Housing location services are designed to take a month or less; rental assistance is temporary; and voluntary age-appropriate and individualized case management services are provided to help youth access community resources and services to achieve stability. HUD defines rapid rehousing as permanent housing with either short term (up to 3 months) or medium term (4–24 months) tenant-based rental assistance and supportive services. Even if the rental assistance that youth receive is less than 12 months, they must still hold a 1-year lease. To be able to place youth in tenant-based housing, CoCs need to cultivate a landlord base that is willing to enter into a lease with the youth they are serving. CoCs continue to work with youth once they are housed so that they can achieve long-term stability. Research on the effectiveness of rapid rehousing for youth is limited, yet rigorous evaluations show the model has been successful in helping families and veterans exit homeless shelters to permanent housing faster than they would on their own and for lower cost (Cunningham and Batko, 2018).

Implementation Experiences in YHDP Sites

Prior to the demonstration, only three CoCs had more than a few units of rapid rehousing specifically for youth; half of the CoCs had none. Cincinnati/Hamilton County, Connecticut BOS, and Seattle/King County already had rapid rehousing programs ranging from 55 units to more than 80 units. Anchorage and Ohio BOS each had only three units of youth-specific rapid rehousing, and the remaining five sites (Austin/Travis County, San Francisco, Kentucky BOS, NW

Exhibit 9. Rapid Rehousing

Provides housing location, stabilization services, and flexible, time-limited rental assistance for market-rate housing.

Limited to youth 18 and older.

Typically limited to 24 months but waivers extended to 36 months.

Financial support includes application fees, moving costs, security deposit, first and last months’ rent, and time-limited assistance (variable).

Supportive services include case management and can also include housing search mediation, credit repair, assistance with education, employment, behavioral health services, and others.

⁶ Some states make exceptions for minors who are emancipated, married, or members of the U.S. military or minors who have a cosigner who is 18 or older.

Michigan, and Santa Cruz) did not have in place any rapid rehousing programs for youth. All 10 CoCs either developed new youth-specific rapid rehousing programs or expanded existing programs with the addition of new units. In fact, rapid rehousing saw more growth than any other housing model in the first few years of YHDP and the most growth of any model nationally. Between 2019 and 2021, the percentage of CoCs having rapid rehousing grew from less than half (48 percent) to more than 80 percent (83 percent). In most CoCs, that assistance was aimed at all youth populations; however, a few sites implemented programs that specifically targeted pregnant and parenting youth (NW Michigan, Santa Cruz) or underserved populations, such as youth of color (San Francisco).

YHDP sites served youth for longer periods of time in rapid rehousing. Between 2017 and 2020, lengths of stay in rapid rehousing increased in seven of the eight YHDP sites, with statistically significant increases in five sites. Longer stays may have resulted from HUD's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, extending the amount of time youth could be served in time-limited programs, such as rapid rehousing.

The demonstration provided CoCs an opportunity to develop innovative rapid rehousing models. In most sites, the rapid rehousing programs included housing identification assistance, rent and move-in assistance, and case management services for up to 24 months. However, four CoCs implemented innovative approaches to rapid rehousing. As discussed in the next section, two CoCs (Austin/Travis County and Seattle/King County) implemented joint transitional housing/rapid rehousing models, in which youth experiencing homelessness were immediately placed in crisis transitional housing and matched with a housing case manager who worked with them to secure permanent housing with rapid rehousing financial assistance as quickly as possible. In addition, three YHDP CoCs (San Francisco, Cincinnati/Hamilton County, and Seattle/King County) requested and received waivers of HUD requirements, allowing them to be more flexible with rapid rehousing assistance and tailoring the services offered to the individual needs of the youth they served. Such waivers allowed the CoCs the ability to extend the period of time youth received assistance from 24 to 36 months to serve youth in leases for less than 12 months, to house youth in master-leased buildings, and to allow youth to periodically stop participating in the program without losing eligibility for additional assistance.

In 2020, HUD granted all CoCs nationally a number of waivers to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic. Among those waivers was a suspension of time limits on rapid rehousing.

Despite having rapid rehousing assistance, youth still struggled to find stable housing. All sites reported a lack of affordable housing as a challenge—including sites with high rents and low vacancies and sites that had more affordable rents but lacked sufficient housing stock. The COVID-19 eviction moratorium further exacerbated that challenge as fewer units became available. Across sites, providers reported that it could sometimes take several weeks to find a suitable unit and schedule the necessary inspections. Providers indicated they often struggled to find landlords willing to rent to youth, especially those individuals who were unemployed, had limited rental histories, or had criminal records or histories of property damage or eviction. In addition, not all landlords were willing to accept HUD subsidies as a form of payment. Providers

argued that the difficulty in finding housing for youth in rapid rehousing often extended youth's stays in crisis housing and limited the availability of crisis housing units for additional youth.

Sites also reported experiencing higher than anticipated rates of rehousing that occurred among youth in the program due to conflict with roommates or partners, neighbors, and landlords among other reasons. Providers noted that relocation expenses often were not factored into program budgets.

YHDP CoCs relied on additional public and private funding to supplement expenses related to rapid rehousing that were not allowable by HUD. In 9 of 10 sites, stakeholders spoke of using other funding sources to cover housing-related expenses, such as overdue utility bills, moving expenses, household supplies, and furniture. In most sites, funding from philanthropic or state or city sources covered those expenses. For example, in Ohio BOS, providers noted that much of the available rental housing stock did not include appliances, such as refrigerators and ovens, and thus did not pass inspection for HUD-subsidized housing. The CoC secured a grant from the Ohio Department of Health for flexible funds to purchase necessary appliances to bring units up to code.

Finally, providers noted challenges in serving youth with multiple barriers in rapid rehousing. Across sites, providers indicated many of the youth they served had more serious barriers than anticipated, especially mental health and substance abuse challenges. Moreover, case managers reported difficulties engaging those youth in behavioral health services. Providers noted that youth with those barriers may be better suited for permanent supportive housing than rapid rehousing programs but were often provided rapid rehousing due to limited other housing assistance for youth in the community. As a result, lengths of stay in rapid rehousing could be longer than expected and, for some youth, rapid rehousing was used as a bridge for more permanent subsidies.

In addition, providers reported that many youth had never lived independently before the program and often lacked basic life skills, such as how to do laundry or clean an apartment.

Exhibit 10. Snapshot of Rapid Rehousing, Northwest Michigan

Prior to the demonstration, the NW Michigan CoC did not have any youth-specific rapid rehousing assistance, and few youth received rapid rehousing through family or adult programs. With YHDP funding, the CoC implemented two rapid rehousing programs, one for youth without children and one for pregnant and parenting youth. Together, the programs served about 30 youth, ages 18–24, per year.

Youth received housing navigation (if needed), up to 24 months of rental assistance (until the pandemic when the upper limit was increased to 36 months), and ongoing case management.

CoC = Continuum of Care. YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Youth Perspectives

Youth appreciated receiving housing search and rental assistance, yet they also faced difficulty finding affordable housing. Youth in sites with a high cost of living, such as San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Seattle/King County, and Austin/Travis County, discussed the lack of affordable housing and expressed concerns about their ability to “make it” in housing even with assistance and the steep requirements for moving in (for example, having an income that is three times the cost of one month’s rent) that were out of reach of a young person with an entry-level job. Concerns about securing and maintaining housing were not limited to urban areas. In sites where rents were more attainable for those youth with limited incomes, such as Cincinnati/Hamilton County and Connecticut BOS, youth noted landlords were reluctant to rent to young people without rental or credit histories. In Ohio BOS and Kentucky BOS, youth also commented on a lack of housing stock, making it difficult to find housing.

Across sites, youth noted the poor quality of the units they were able to find. Some youth in focus groups reported living in run-down apartments or units in locations they considered unsafe. In addition, youth spoke of difficulties in getting their landlords to respond to repair requests. Youth mentioned going months without needed repairs to air-conditioning units and light fuses, for example. Some youth reached out to case managers for assistance dealing with their landlords, but case managers encouraged them to advocate for themselves. One youth receiving rapid rehousing assistance indicated that the landlord did not listen to her requests because she was not paying rent; she felt that the provider would have more influence with the landlord because they paid rent.

“I’m grateful that I got the help with the program that helped me find a place to live. But right now, I’m dealing with a lot of cockroaches in the apartment, so it’s hard.” —Santa Cruz

Youth emphasized the importance of navigation assistance and housing location. Most youth across the YHDP sites reported receiving assistance finding housing from case managers. However, the amount of assistance youth received varied across sites. In some sites, youth reported their case managers provided them with a list of landlords to contact, went with them to look at apartments, talked with landlords, or found apartments for them. In San Francisco, where finding affordable housing can be very challenging, the YHDP rapid rehousing program benefited from another youth rapid rehousing program in which housing locators were contracted to identify three potential apartments from which youth could choose. In other sites, youth were largely on their own. Across sites, youth largely spoke of appreciating assistance finding apartments and needing guidance on what to look for, such as being close to public transportation or rent that included utilities.

“My first time looking for apartments, it’s like I don’t know exactly what to look for. I never had an apartment before. If my case worker takes the time to actually teach me that, maybe I’ll have more sense of, ‘Okay, I know what I want, and if I have everything included it’ll be cheaper and stuff like that.’” —Austin/Travis County

Joint Transitional Housing/Rapid Rehousing

Definition and Overview

Joint transitional housing/rapid rehousing combines crisis transitional housing with rapid rehousing to help youth secure permanent housing as rapidly as possible with time-limited rental assistance. Referred to as joint housing, the model’s goal is to provide a seamless transition into permanent housing as quickly as possible. With additional wraparound voluntary services, the model is considered particularly suitable for youth who generally need more time and support to gain the stability and skills needed to remain stably housed (HUD, n.d.), especially in communities with large numbers of unsheltered youth; a lack of crisis housing capacity, including for those youth fleeing domestic violence; and a shortage of readily available permanent housing options (HUD, 2017). The joint transition/rapid rehousing model is considered a “Housing First” approach, rather than a replacement for transitional housing; its primary aim is to place youth in permanent housing. While in the program, youth receive access to case management and a range of supportive services; however, they are not required to use those services as a precondition of their enrollment. Stays in crisis transitional housing are expected to be less than 120 days, after which youth are eligible for rapid rehousing rental assistance and ongoing case management for up to 24 months following placement in permanent housing.⁷ Lengths of stay in crisis transitional housing and rapid rehousing are independent of one another. Services are coordinated across the two programs, but youth are independently enrolled in each.

Exhibit 11. Joint Transitional Housing/Rapid Rehousing

Newer hybrid model tested in two sites.

Served youth ages 18–24.

Intentional bridge between crisis transitional housing and rapid rehousing.

Youth matched with a case manager in crisis transitional housing to work on securing rapid rehousing as soon as possible.

Aimed at providing youth extra time to prepare to live on their own.

Offers opportunities to build relationships with peers.

Implementation Experiences in YHDP Sites

⁷ As discussed in the following section, YHDP allowed CoCs to request waivers to serve youth in rapid rehousing for longer than 24 months. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all CoCs were granted such waivers by HUD.

Providers in Seattle/King County and Austin/Travis County implemented joint transitional housing/rapid rehousing models. In those sites, youth experiencing homelessness were placed in crisis transitional housing and matched with a housing case manager who worked with them to secure permanent housing with rapid rehousing financial assistance as quickly as possible. In both sites, the CoCs repurposed existing crisis housing resources for the new model. Austin/Travis County converted an existing youth-specific congregate emergency shelter to crisis transitional housing, and Seattle/King County converted two existing youth-specific transitional housing programs to crisis transitional housing models coupled with rapid rehousing assistance.

Joint transitional housing/rapid rehousing provides a safe place to stay for youth looking for permanent housing and can be especially important for youth with significant housing barriers. A primary motivation for that joint model was the knowledge that youth often stay in unsafe locations while looking for permanent housing. The model provides a safe place to stay during the search process. It also offers voluntary services for youth to prepare for the housing, such as tenant education and help to find jobs, learn budgeting, and sort out past evictions or criminal histories in order to negotiate with prospective landlords. Landlords are often reluctant to rent to youth, so there is a need for joint programs to work closely to develop a pool of landlords willing to rent to them.

Some providers hoped the joint model would encourage shared housing arrangements for rapid rehousing. Providers expressed the hope that time spent together in crisis transitional housing would offer youth the opportunity to get to know each other and identify opportunities for sharing permanent housing. However, they noted that in their experience, most youth prefer the security and privacy of living alone, especially in more permanent housing situations.

Exhibit 12. Snapshot of Joint Crisis Transitional Housing/Rapid Rehousing, Austin/Travis County

Permanency through Outreach and Rapid Transitions

Austin/Travis County implemented its PORT program through LifeWorks, the leading youth homelessness provider, with YHDP funding. LifeWorks converted an existing 15-unit dormitory-style transitional living program into a crisis transitional housing program for youth 18–24 years of age who were experiencing literal homelessness (that is, HUD categories 1 and 4). Some youth were deterred from the congregate model, especially youth who had a partner or youth who wanted more privacy, including transgender youth. The provider expanded the program to include four master-leased apartments to accommodate a wider spectrum of youth.

The PORT program served approximately 20 youth in crisis transitional housing at one time. Fewer youth were placed in the congregate setting during COVID-19 to keep both youth and staff safe.

Staff reported that youth stayed in crisis transitional housing an average of about 45 days, during which time they received case management and housing navigation services. Once in rapid rehousing, youth were eligible to receive up to 36 months of rental assistance and 42

months of case management. (By the end of the data collection period, the earliest enrolled youth were approaching the 24-month mark in housing.)

PORT = Permanency through Outreach and Rapid Transitions. YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Youth Perspectives

Youth in focus groups were not always aware that they were in joint transitional housing/rapid rehousing programs but seemed to report more consistent and intensive assistance aimed at accessing and moving into permanent housing than youth in other programs. Youth in joint programs reported receiving assistance with finding apartments, communicating with landlords, and accessing furniture and household items once they moved in, whereas in other programs and sites, youth reported receiving varying levels of assistance with the transition to permanent housing.

“I don’t know where I’d be without [agency]; they gave me furniture when I moved in, and they gave me a blowup bed for the one night before I had furniture.” —Austin/Travis County

Some youth in joint programs felt pressure to find employment and housing before they were ready. In both sites implementing joint models, youth spoke positively about the assistance they received finding employment and housing while in crisis housing. However, some youth also spoke about the trauma involved with experiencing homelessness and wanting to have some time to heal before they were required to live independently.

I’d like to see more long-term stable housing ... so that the youth could heal before we start merging into 40 plus hours a week.” —Seattle/King County

Permanent Supportive Housing

Definition and Overview

Permanent supportive housing is a form of community-based housing in which rental assistance and supportive services are provided indefinitely to allow formerly homeless youth with long-term disabilities to live as independently and stably as possible. Youth are offered a wide variety of supportive services the entire period they reside in permanent supportive housing. To receive that type of permanent housing, youth experiencing homelessness are typically assessed during the CoC's coordinated entry process, found to have a long-term disability, and then referred to a housing provider who determines if they qualify. Qualifying youth receive market-based rental assistance and case management.

Generally, youth are expected to contribute 30 percent of their income toward housing expenses. Youth with no income have their rent fully subsidized. That form of housing provides the greatest stability for youth facing long-term disabilities, but because it is costly to provide, fewer youth can be served than in other models, such as rapid rehousing.

As youth approach age 25, their case managers are expected to work with them to assess if the assistance still meets their needs, and if so, connect them to either a permanent supportive housing project that serves adults or other assistance that might meet their needs.

Youth-specific permanent supportive housing is an important addition to a CoC's portfolio as youth often do not qualify for other forms of permanent supportive housing because they do not meet chronically homeless criteria. Quasi-experimental studies of supportive housing for youth provide evidence that the model leads to housing stability (Morton et al., 2020).

Implementation Experiences in the YHDP Sites

YHDP led to increases in the number of units of permanent supportive and other permanent housing offered. Many sites increased their stock during the demonstration, despite all but one of the sites having some units of permanent supportive housing prior to YHDP. Three sites implemented YHDP-funded permanent supportive housing programs for specific populations of youth (for example, youth with mental health problems, justice-involved youth, youth with disabilities); the number of units ranged from 4 to 10, marking the first time that type of housing became available in both Anchorage and Santa Cruz. Two other sites—Cincinnati/Hamilton County and Ohio BOS—increased the number of permanent supportive housing units for youth through non-YHDP-funded sources. Nationally, the percentage of CoCs having permanent supportive housing for youth also grew, from 35 percent in 2019 to 59 percent in 2021.

The percentage of youth receiving permanent supportive housing increased in three YHDP sites, and the percentage of youth receiving other permanent housing increased in Austin/Travis

Exhibit 13. Permanent Supportive Housing

Provides youth with non-time-limited housing assistance with wraparound services.

Youth typically expected to pay 30 percent of their income toward rent.

Appears best suited for youth with long-term disabilities.

County. In Ohio BOS, the percentage of youth receiving permanent supportive housing decreased despite the fact that the site increased the number of permanent supportive housing units for youth.⁸

Exhibit 14. Snapshot of Permanent Supportive Housing, San Francisco Young Adult Court

San Francisco has a long history of providing youth-specific crisis and permanent housing, with more than 120 units of permanent supportive housing for youth in place prior to the demonstration. The CoC used demonstration resources to address gaps in its system, namely, providing 10 units of scattered-site, non-time-limited permanent supportive housing for justice-involved youth, ages 18–24.

Through a memorandum of understanding between Larkin Street, a youth homelessness provider, and the San Francisco Superior Court’s YAC, the CoC sought to fill the housing with young adults experiencing homelessness who had been adjudicated through YAC and were participating in San Francisco’s collaborative court, a conviction expungement program. In that program, youth received mental health services, assistance from the court, and housing case management that connected them to a wide range of supportive services in the community. In particular, the program aimed to provide youth with non-time-limited housing so that criminal justice-involved youth could achieve long-term stability as they worked to reduce employment barriers exacerbated by their criminal records.

Enrollment in the program occurred quickly, although providers indicated that the program was somewhat challenging to implement through coordinated entry due to the narrow target population. Most youth were first identified by YAC and then referred to coordinated entry for eligibility screening into the housing program. As of the end of data collection, few participants left the program, with lengths of stay of about 18 months.

CoC = Continuum of Care. YAC = Youth Adult Court.

Across sites, few youth exited permanent supportive housing or other permanent housing during each of the two time periods. Because the numbers are low, it is difficult to draw conclusions about changes in the length of stay in permanent supportive housing and other permanent housing. Youth in Seattle/King County experienced a significant increase in the length of stay in other permanent housing between 2020 and 2017; youth in Kentucky BOS stayed, on average, fewer days in permanent supportive housing in 2020 than in 2017.

Youth Perspectives

Due to the small sizes of the programs, few youth in focus groups received permanent supportive housing. Those youth who did receive it indicated feeling supported by their case managers both in the housing search process and after they moved into housing.

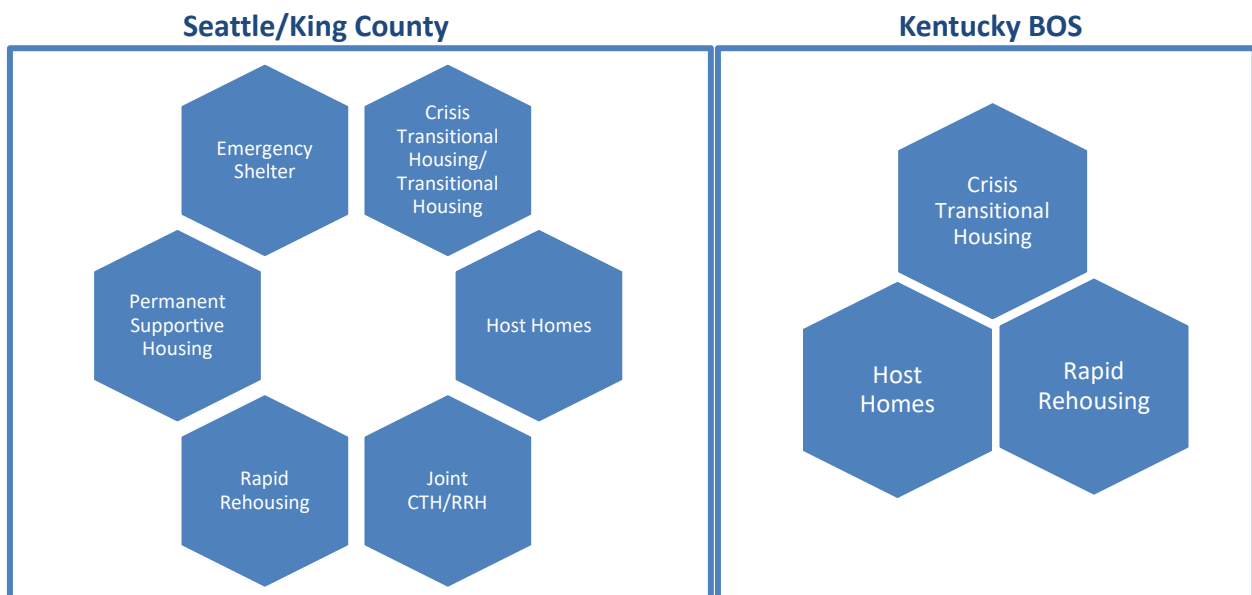
⁸ Part of the possible explanation for that seemingly conflicting finding is that the new units were available in counties outside of the demonstration region and represented a fraction of the new 145 new units of rapid rehousing during the same time period.

“She [case manager] comes every week to my house, so that we can meet and go over what needs to maybe be done or what I need help with, or how is my apartment doing, is there any problems in here? And the cool thing [is she will] figure out if your landlord is keeping up with the apartment's upkeep. — Anchorage

Housing Portfolios

YHDP provided an opportunity for sites to develop or expand their housing portfolios. At the end of the demonstration, all sites were offering multiple housing options. Sites that were highly developed at the start of YHDP, generally urban settings such as Seattle/King County, often had all models reflected in their portfolios (see exhibit 15). More rural settings new to providing housing for youth, such as Kentucky BOS, typically had at least two to three options by the end of the demonstration.

Exhibit 15. Shelter and Housing Models Available in Two Communities Following the Demonstration



BOS = Balance of State. CTH = crisis transitional housing. RRH = rapid rehousing.

Source: YHDP Evaluation site visit data and Housing Inventory Charts

Implication of the Findings

Youth at risk or experiencing homelessness have a range of needs, requiring a portfolio of housing options. Moreover, providers strongly suggest that the options need to be tailored to youth's specific needs and not reflect implementation of adult models.

Through YHDP, each of the sites was able to implement a range of new housing programs, either introducing the model for the first time or building upon services that already existed. Rapid rehousing is the most commonly developed model through the demonstration. As a "Housing First" approach, it seeks to lower barriers to entering stable housing by quickly providing temporary housing assistance in the broader housing market to homeless youth. Two sites developed joint transitional housing/rapid rehousing models to provide a place for youth to stay while searching for housing with the time-limited rental assistance.

Host homes are viewed as being a useful housing model for some youth, especially minors, LGBTQ+ youth, and those individuals exiting foster care. Finally, a few sites sought to increase permanent supportive housing for youth, a model that provides non-time-limited housing support for youth with serious barriers to stability.

Each housing model provides youth with case management services to help them access a wide range of community-based services—such as education and employment assistance, health and behavioral health services, and income supports and benefits, among others—with the goal of accessing and maintaining permanent housing.

The portfolio of approaches that a site has is not intended to operate as a continuum; some youth, however, may need multiple housing interventions before reaching stability. Youth also need and want assistance in finding housing and ongoing support from adults and peers. Finding housing in those tight and often sparse housing markets is a challenge for adults with extensive housing histories, let alone youth venturing into the housing market for the first time.

The pandemic created unanticipated challenges across sites, frequently necessitating longer stays in crisis housing due to limited turnover in the housing market. Also, fewer youth could be served in congregate settings as sites were required to deconcentrate facilities due to COVID-19 restrictions. Recruitment of host families was another challenge during the pandemic, as hosts were less willing to take people unknown to them into their homes.

This report outlined five models that provide crisis and long-term housing. Although that is an increase in the range of options across CoCs, more options are needed to address the variety of needs that youth have, coupled with the challenges they experience. For example, some youth may need additional support than is typically provided through rapid rehousing, particularly in building their independent living skills, before they move into housing on their own. Minors, especially those individuals identified through the school and juvenile justice systems, also need more housing options. Finally, the options that are available, especially rapid rehousing, require not only housing that is affordable but provides for safe and healthy living. Housing available to youth in tight housing markets too often suffer from disrepair and lack of adequate maintenance.

In addition, more research is needed to better understand which housing models are most successful at keeping diverse populations of youth stably housed. Local considerations and diverse needs of those youth being served must be considered. To achieve the goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness, sites will continually need to adapt their plans as they develop and implement a coordinated community response to serving that vulnerable population. Listening to youth and incorporating their lived expertise in the design and evaluation of new options may lead to creative, new approaches that are attractive to youth, address their specific circumstances, and fit the contexts in which they are living.

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