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An Assessment of Youth and
Young Adult Homelessness in
Hampden County, Massachusetts

August 2019

Prepared by Matthew Aronson Consulting for Springfield-Hampden County Continuum of Care

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Acknowledgments

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The report was prepared by Matthew Aronson Consulting and its authors are Matthew Aronson, Jeff Olivet, and Jamila Bradley. The report was designed by Yerri Portillo.

We are grateful to all those who contributed to the Needs Assessment process through their involvement in focus groups, interviews, and community meetings. We are especially grateful to the amazing youth and young adults who contributed to this work.

Finally, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Gerry McCafferty from the City of Springfield for her leadership on this project and on so much great work to end homelessness in Hampden County.





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Executive Summary

From February through June 2019, Matthew Aronson Consulting partnered with the City of Springfield, Massachusetts to conduct a needs assessment on youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness in Hampden County.

The aims of the project were to

- 1.** Understand the scope and nature of YYA homelessness in the county
- 2.** Engage YYAs in designing services and systems
- 3.** Develop recommendations for improving the response to YYA homelessness
- 4.** Lay groundwork for cross-system collaboration

YYAs with lived experience of homelessness were engaged throughout the process through focus groups and the development of a Youth Action Board (YAB).

We collected quantitative and qualitative data from

- Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
- 2018 Point-in-Time (PIT) count
- 2018 Housing Inventory Chart (HIC)
- 2018 Massachusetts statewide youth count
- Other statewide data sets on children, youth, and families
- 2 focus groups with YYAs experiencing homelessness
- 2 focus groups with providers and community partners
- 9 stakeholder interviews with leaders and direct service staff from across the region

Based on these data sets,
the Needs Assessment documented the following

at least **120 YYAs**
experience homelessness in Hampden County on a given night

- The vast majority of YYAs accessing services each year are between 18 and 24 years old (only 24 individuals were under 18).
- Based on national prevalence data, there could be as many as 6,700 YYAs experiencing some form of homelessness in the county each year.



▪ **68% identify as Latinx compared 24% of the general population**

- As many as 80% of YYAs experiencing homelessness are female.
- Between 48% and 78% of YYAs experiencing homelessness are pregnant or parenting.
- 13% of the total population of YYAs experiencing homelessness identifies as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning).

17.4 years
is the average age of YYAs first homelessness episode

- Hampden County YYAs report lower than national rates of involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system—17%, compared to 50% of YYAs in national research.

Over the course of a year
at least **509 YYAs**
are served by homelessness programs, as well as 359 children in YYA-headed households

-
- Young people of color are significantly overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness compared to their general population numbers in Hampden County

▪ **18% identify as African American compared 9% of the general population**

The current inventory of housing resources dedicated to serving YYAs experiencing homelessness in the county includes

6 shelter beds

26 units of rapid rehousing

5 units of transitional housing

9 units of permanent supportive housing (for families)

6 host homes

10 other permanent housing units

15 3-year housing choice vouchers

In addition to these stark numbers, key themes emerged from the interviews and focus groups:

- Lack of access to safe, age-appropriate affordable housing options
- Lack of access to good jobs
- Not enough information about existing services
- Long waiting lists for housing and services
- Need for trauma-informed behavioral health services
- Need for collaboration across systems, including health, education, housing, social services and state agencies like DCF and DYS
- Importance of YYA partnership in designing policy and programs

Based on these quantitative and qualitative findings, a broad-based response to YYA homelessness should focus on:

- 1.** YYA partnership
- 2.** Racial and LGBTQ equity
- 3.** Access to available services and supports
- 4.** Housing options for YYA
- 5.** Employment and education
- 6.** Behavioral health and other supports
- 7.** Improving outcomes for system-involved YYAs

An important next step will be for partners from across Hampden County to come together in a community-wide planning process to develop a concrete Plan to End YYA Homelessness

Approach

Definitions

This report uses the following definition of YYA homelessness established by the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth >

A person 24 years of age or younger who is not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian, and who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. “Fixed” refers to a residence that is stationary, permanent and not subject to change. “Regular” means a dwelling at which a person resides on a regular basis (i.e. nightly). “Adequate” means that the dwelling provides safe shelter, meeting both physical and psychological needs of the youth. All three components of this definition- age, connection to a parent or guardian, and housing status- must be met in order for a person to be considered an unaccompanied homeless youth. (Mass.gov, 2013)

Methodology

This report summarizes the best available data concerning the prevalence and characteristics of YYA experiencing homelessness in Hampden County, the official coverage area for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-designed “Springfield-Hampden County Continuum of Care” (Springfield CoC). We obtained quantitative data from the following sources: 2018 Springfield CoC Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)¹ for persons under 24 years old; HUD 2018 Point In Time (PIT)² count; 2018 Housing Inventory Chart (HIC);

2018 Massachusetts statewide youth count (Hampden dataset); SY17-18 Consolidated dataset for Hampden County elementary and secondary schools; MA Department of Public Health FY18 (BSAS data set); MA Department of Children and Families FY18 data for children and youth served through the Hampden County regional offices; Census estimates from the ACS 2017 dataset; CY 2018 DYS report; and other existing reports. This report does not reflect new quantitative data collection.

In addition to these datasets, our team conducted focus groups with

- Homeless service providers
- YYAs experiencing homelessness
- Pregnant and parenting YYAs
- McKinney-Vento liaisons working with YYAs experiencing or at-risk of homelessness

¹HMIS: Homeless Management Information System. – Computerized data collection tool designed to capture client-level information over time on the characteristics and service needs of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness.

²PIT: Point in Time counts are conducted annually on a single night during the last week of January and serve as a longitudinally-tracked baseline estimate for the number of people sleeping on the streets, in places not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelters, and in transitional housing programs. Chapin Hall has produced a useful toolkit that provides more information on the count and why it is generally considered by the field to be a minimum count, specifically for youth and young adults: <http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Voices-of-Youth-Count-Toolkit-2018-FINAL.pdf>

We also conducted 9 interviews with key stakeholders from health care, housing, law enforcement, social services, and other sectors. Interviewees are listed in the table below.

Name	Title/Organization
Marlene Corales	Admissions Counselor Westover Job Corps Center
Brian Elliott	Sergeant Springfield Police Department
Rosemary Fiedler	THRIVE Coordinator Holyoke Community College
Leslie Fisher-Katz	Executive Director The Children's Study Home
Ann Lentini	Executive Director Domus, Inc.
Carolyn Meuse	Emergency Room Complex Care Coordinator Mercy Medical Center
Holly Richardson	Community Organizer and Director Out Now
Frank Robinson	Vice President for Public Health Baystate Health System
Anne Teschner	Executive Director Care Center Holyoke

We supplemented findings from the interviews and focus groups with information from multiple public meetings held between March and June 2019.

Youth and Young Adult Partnership

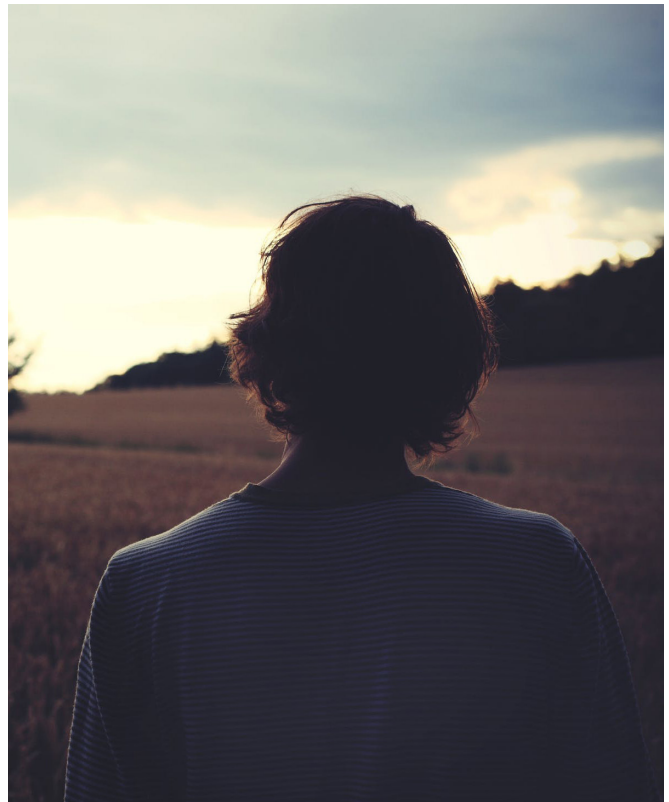
The Needs Assessment was grounded in a commitment to YYA partnership. YYAs participated in focus groups, convened to form a YAB, and led a discussion of challenges and barriers and a community meeting on June 26, 2019. Initial YYA engagement strategies focused on the identification of YYA programming and coordination of outreach and facilitation capacity. We identified the Impact Center in Springfield as the ideal space to hold meetings. Youth Voices, an existing group of young people working in a program advisory capacity, offered a natural group to begin with as focus group participants and YAB members. YYAs were paid cash stipends for their participation in all activities.



Following an initial convening, the Needs Assessment team coordinated with Youth Voices staff through check in calls, email correspondence and technical assistance, specifically focused on YAB meeting development, material sharing, and facilitator support. We held four meetings with young people at the Impact Center. Though membership and attendance from meeting to meeting were inconsistent, young people articulated their needs in terms of adult partnership. Additionally, YYAs in Springfield cited affordability, racism, prior charges impacting employment, lack of access to good jobs, mental health supports, stigma, transportation and unsafe neighborhoods as key concerns. They also identified fear of police, lack of motivation due to exhaustion, and frustration with abandoned housing in the city as key issues to address.

Challenges and Next Steps

Among the important elements of authentic and sustainable YYA partnership are facilitation capacity, mentoring, and consistency. YYA partnership requires structure and commitment so that YAB members are able to engage and feel true ownership in the process. While the Impact Center is an ideal location, facilitators need to be identified, then trained and supported to perform this role effectively. Additional effort should focus on creating consistency of attendance among YAB members through outreach, relationship building, training, and cash stipends. Such consistency among YAB members and mentors/facilitators are critical to build trust, engage participants over time, and create a group that can develop its own identity and culture. Through this process, the YAB will solidify and become a strong partner with the City of Springfield, the Continuum of Care, and housing/ service agencies as they work together to design a more comprehensive youth homelessness response.



Prevalence and Characteristics

Around 120 YYA experience homelessness in Hampden County each night according to our most conservative estimates (PIT, 2018). They find themselves without a stable place to live because home wasn't safe, home wasn't supportive, or home didn't exist. This section of the report provides the best available data concerning the prevalence and characteristics of YYAs experiencing homelessness in Hampden County.

Prevalence of YYA Homelessness

Prevalence estimates describe the size and scope of homelessness. They are often based on PIT methods which count the number of individuals experiencing homelessness at a given point in time, or on a typical day.

In the January 2018 PIT count, the Springfield Continuum of Care (CoC) identified **120 YYAs on the streets, in emergency shelters, or in transitional housing (TH)**. If we include the young children of YYA parents, the number is 216 individuals. This number provides the clearest minimum baseline for YYA homelessness in Hampden County on given night. However, current PIT counting methods capture only a portion of the total number of YYAs experiencing homelessness. PIT data do not include YYAs fleeing dangerous living arrangements, those who are sleeping night to night between different homes and apartments (i.e., couch-surfing), those sleeping consistently in spaces too small or inappropriately configured to meet basic needs (i.e., doubled up), and those who do not want to be, or cannot be, identified by volunteers during the CoC's annual count.

Annual estimates are more likely than PIT estimates to include individuals experiencing episodic homelessness, which research shows is common among YYAs (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). In 2018, the Springfield Continuum of Care HMIS included **509 households headed by YYA** who were counted in emergency shelter, TH, and Safe Haven (SH) programs, or contacted by a street outreach team (HMIS, 2018). HMIS included **359 children** in YYA-headed households during the same period. (HMIS, 2018).

Annual estimates are also limited: they only capture YYAs who interact with our homelessness resources and are therefore constrained by the current system's limitations. For example, homelessness systems are generally designed to target older individuals, so our PIT and HMIS numbers may be biased towards older YYA. Springfield CoC's HMIS for 2018 includes only **24 unaccompanied YYA under 18**, while Hampden County school districts identified **103 students experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian**, out of 3,271 total students experiencing homelessness. The schools' methods for identification are themselves imperfect, generally requiring that young people self-report to a homelessness liaison or counselor, which may significantly suppress the number of YYAs identified as experiencing homelessness.

Using the national average of 1 in 10 YYAs who are 18-24-years-old and 1 in 30 YYAs who are under 18 (Morton, 2017), we would expect an upward limit of YYAs experiencing some kind of homelessness in Hampden County over the course of a year to be **6,700** (Census, 2017). That represents a significantly higher estimate than the 509 YYA that we see, and national data should also be viewed as a guide and not an answer. It does, however, invite us to question whether we are identifying all of the YYAs experiencing homelessness in our region. YYA homelessness in all its forms is an urgent challenge. At the same time, the number of YYAs who experience homelessness in Hampden County is on a small enough scale that we should feel empowered to do something about it.

Characteristics of YYA Experiencing Homelessness

Understanding the characteristics of YYA experiencing homelessness can help policymakers and programs understand why YYAs experience a housing crisis in the first place; how certain populations experience homelessness differently than others; where to target specific resources; and how to better communicate and raise awareness with a variety of community stakeholders.

Age

According to YYAs, the average age of their first experience with homelessness is **17.4 years old** (Mass.gov, 2018), but only 2 to 5% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in our homelessness systems are under the age of 18 (HUD, 2018; HMIS, 2018; Mass.gov, 2018). This suggests that homelessness begins, on average, when YYA are still minors, although our systems might not identify them until after they turn 18.



Race and Ethnicity

78% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in Hampden County identify as Hispanic or Latinx (Mass.gov, 2018; HMIS, 2018), compared to only 24% of the total Hampden County population and 40% of those below poverty level (Census 2017). **12% to 18%** of the total YYA population experiencing homelessness in Hampden County **identify as Black** (Mass.gov, 2018; HMIS, 2018), compared to only 9% of the total Hampden County population but 22% of those below poverty level (Census, 2017). An additional 8.3% to 14% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in Hampden County identify as multiracial (Mass.gov, 2018; HMIS, 2018) and only 13% identify as white (Mass.gov, 2018), reinforcing the fact that preventing and ending **YYA homelessness must intentionally target solutions to young people of color**. Disparities may even be more pronounced among parenting YYAs, where by one estimate, **87% of pregnant or parenting YYA between 18-24 identify as Latinx** (HMIS, 2018).

The CoC has begun to use its By Name List (BNL) to track the interactions with and outcomes for YYA experiencing homelessness. In the fall of 2018, data from the BNL for 18- to-24-year-olds corroborates the racial and ethnic disparities described above. However, the data also shows no significant differences between the total percentage of the population for each tracked group (White, Black, Latino, American Indian, and Hawaiian) and the percentage “Assessed,” “Housed PSH/RRH” or “Inactive/Unknown” (White YYAs are slightly underrepresented among those “Assessed” and those “Housed PSH/RRH”). Hispanic YYAs are significantly underrepresented among those who “Returned to Family”—33% compared to 52% of all YYAs on the BNL. Although the number of YYAs on the BNL for whom we have assessment data is currently small—40 YYAs or 24% of all BNL participants—this represents a powerful way to actively track system racial and ethnic disparities.

- Over the course of a year at least 509 YYAs **are served by homelessness programs, as well as 359 children in YYA-headed households.**

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Data sources report significant variability in gender among YYAs experiencing homelessness, although in all cases the vast majority of YYAs identified as female: **67% to 80% of YYA experiencing homelessness identified as female**, 20% to 33% identified as male, and fewer than 1% of YYAs identified as either transgender, intersex, genderqueer, or other genders (Mass.gov 2018; HMIS, 2018). **13% of YYAs experiencing homelessness identified as LGBTQ** (Mass.gov, 2017), which is well below state and national averages. For comparison, 12.5% of Massachusetts high school students identify as LGBTQ, 15.5% of 18- to 24-year-olds in Massachusetts identify as LGBTQ

(Cahill, 2018), and communities across the country consistently find that between 20% and 40% of YYAs experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ. Percentages of YYA who identify as non-cisgender (anything other than male or female as assigned at birth) have been estimated by studies at between 0.5% and 3%. Research consistently finds that LGBTQ YYAs are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness, that their reasons for leaving home are significantly different, on average, from their cisgender-straight peers, and that they experience homelessness more severely, with higher rates of sexual exploitation, violence, and suicidality (MA Coalition, 2019).

Pregnant and Parenting YYA

73 YYA (78%) of identified YYAs experiencing homelessness in Hampden County on the night of the 2018 PIT were pregnant or parenting and between 18 and 24 (HUD, 2018). 58% of YYA who accessed shelter, SH, and TH during the year were pregnant or parenting (HMIS, 2018). 48% of YYAs identified in the MA State Youth Count Survey were pregnant or parenting. (Mass.gov, 2018). These data

may indicate a greater number of programs targeting and bed availability for households with children than for households without children, considering that Massachusetts is a right to shelter state for families and all 73 identified parents during the PIT were sheltered (HUD, 2018). The national average for pregnant and parenting among all YYAs experiencing homelessness is 40% (Morton, 2017)

Homelessness System Experience

Nearly 80% of YYA parents engaging with the homelessness system in 2018 did so for the first time, while only 20% had experienced homelessness more than once. Permanent Housing for this population appeared to be very successful with 96% remaining in PH, but less than 50% of parenting YYAs who leave shelter, SH, or TH are known to exit to PH. Unfortunately, a failure to capture destination data at program exit limits our understanding of whether YYAs make positive housing transitions after leaving homeless programs (HMIS 2018).

Nearly 82% of unaccompanied YYAs without children engaging with the homelessness system in 2018 did so for the first time, while only 18% had experienced homelessness more than once.

Permanent Housing for this population was not quite as successful as with parents, with 71% remaining in PH and a startling 15% exiting shelter, SH, or TH to PH. This last figure is mitigated by the fact that 66% exited without completing an interview.

3% of all unaccompanied YYAs in HMIS are long-term stayers (90 days or longer), and 2% (3 YYAs) are identified as chronically homeless. Because of long average stays in the Massachusetts family shelter system, parenting YYAs are more likely to be long-stayers and chronically homeless. Among parenting YYAs, 78% are long-stayers and 7% (19 YYAs) are chronically homeless. Among all YYAs, the numbers are 50% and 5% (HMIS, 2018).

Mental Health

17% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts reported a mental health service need (Mass.gov, 2018), a number that may be regarded as a significant undercount. In Hampden County, 32% of YYAs in HMIS report mental health as a disabling condition, including 24% of parenting YYAs (HMIS,

2018). 69% of YYAs participating in the national VoYC study indicated having mental health difficulties (Morton, 2017).

Over 38% of unaccompanied YYAs in HMIS report at least one disabling condition (HMIS, 2018).

Substance Use

2% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts reported a substance use service need (Mass.gov, 2018), a number that may also be regarded as a significant undercount. 7% of YYA in HMIS report substance use as a disabling condition, including 4 parenting YYAs (HMIS, 2018). In FY18, the MA DPH

Bureau of Substance Addiction Services identified 203 Hampden County YYAs ages 14-24 in their treatment system who self-identified as "homeless," comprising 25% of identifiable enrollments. BSAS lists 344 additional YYA entries as either "missing" or "unable to determine" (BSAS, 2018).

Education

74% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in Hampden County reported being in school or having a high school diploma or equivalent (Mass.gov, 2018). Nationally, the lack of a high school diploma or GED equivalent is associated with a 346% higher risk of homelessness (Morton, 2017).

Two local community colleges, Springfield Technical and Holyoke Community College, participated in the 2018 Hope Labs survey that assessed for homelessness, housing insecurity, and food insecurity. The report combined data from those two schools with three other schools from the three-county geography as "Western Massachusetts." For 2-year community colleges, the survey identified 13% of students

experiencing homelessness, 47% experiencing housing insecurity, and 43% experiencing food insecurity. For 4-year institutions, the survey identified 8% of students experiencing homelessness, 34% experiencing housing insecurity, and 37% experiencing food insecurity. The data specific to Holyoke Community College indicates that 7.3% of the 386 students surveyed experienced homelessness during the month of the survey, and 16% experienced homelessness at some point during the previous year. 46% of respondents indicated they were housing insecure, indicating frequent moves, overcrowding, being unable to afford rent or utility payments, or moving in with others due to financial problems (Wisconsin Hope Lab, 2018).

Employment

31% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in Hampden County surveyed during the Mass Youth Count reported active employment, which is significantly below the 54% of all 16- to 24-year-olds in Hampden County who report active employment (Census, 2017). In the formal economy, 17% report part time work and 15% report full-time work. 43% receive cash assistance,

14% receive SSDI, 6% receive income from family, and 4% work "under the table" (Mass.gov, 2018). In HMIS, 69% of YYAs reported income when entering the formal homelessness system. 22% reported earned income (HMIS, 2018). Nationally, incomes below \$24,000 are associated with a 162% higher risk of homelessness (Morton, 2017).

Systems Involvement

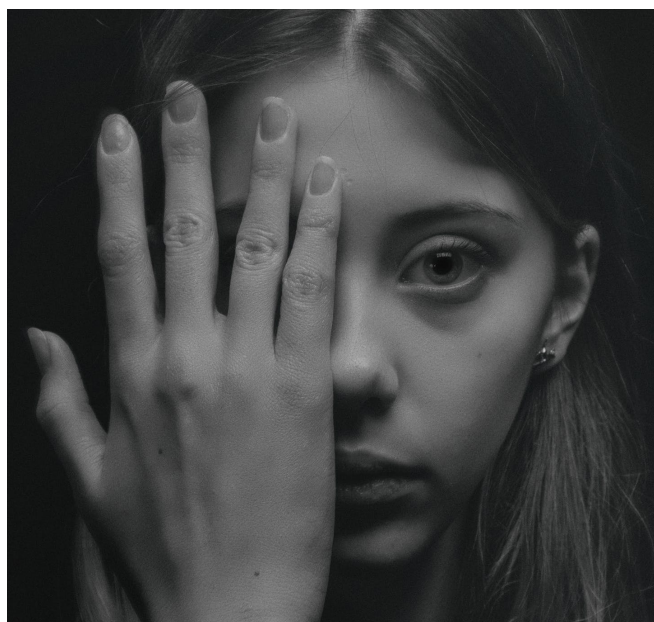
31% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in Hampden County reported foster care experience, which is consistent with national estimates. Hampden County YYAs report lower than national rates of involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system—**17%, compared to the approximately 50% of YYAs identified in national research. (Morton, 2017)**

We believe our data undercounts YYAs with juvenile or criminal justice involvement, indicating to us that our systems of identification and support may not be effectively targeting this population (Mass.gov, 2018).



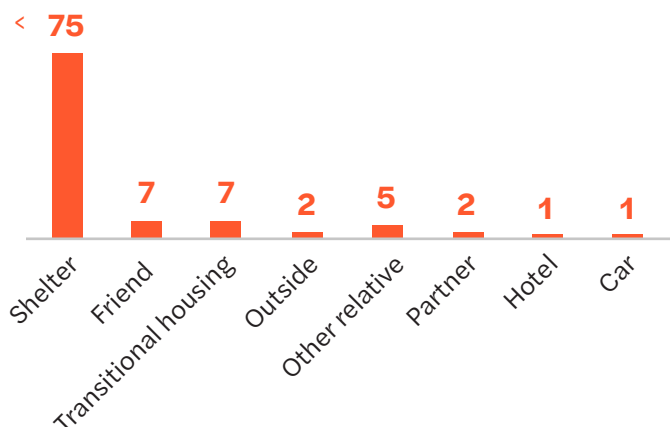
Commercial and Sexual Exploitation

We know little to nothing about the connections between sex trafficking and YYA homelessness in Hampden County. No one interviewed during the 2018 MA Youth Count self-reported “sex work”³ as a source of income, and only 4% indicated having ever exchanged sex for money or housing (Mass.gov, 2018). 26% of YYAs in HMIS report being survivors of domestic violence, a larger category of violence that may include sexual trafficking and exploitation, but that more often refers to intimate partner or family violence (HMIS, 2018). According to one national estimate, 15% of YYAs experiencing homelessness had been trafficked for sex and 32% had been involved in the sex trade (Wolfe, 2017).



Where they sleep at night

88% of the YYAs engaged during the 2018 PIT count were in emergency shelter (HUD, 2018). 10 individuals were either in TH or SH and 2 were engaged in unsheltered situations. A similar pattern emerges from the state count, with 75 YYAs in shelter, 14 in some form of a doubled-up or couch-surfing situation with friends or relatives, 7 in TH, 2 sleeping outside, 1 in a hotel, and 1 in a car (Mass.gov, 2018). 9% of YYAs entered the homelessness services system from the street in FY 2018 (HMIS, 2018).



³“Sex work” is the term used in the survey—the authors are clear that any transactional sex for YYA is a form of commercial sexual exploitation

At-risk for homelessness

Hampden County has a considerably higher rate of poverty (17.2%) than the national average (12.3%) (Census, 2017). The numbers are even more stark when you consider that the poverty rate is over 28% for the two largest population centers in the county, Springfield and Holyoke. The county poverty rate is 23% for YYAs between the ages of 12 and 24, and roughly 18,180 young adults 18-24 live in poverty.

An analysis by Glynn, Byrne, and Culhane in 2018 regarded Hampden County as a cluster 3 community, characterized by the highest homelessness rates (0.60% average), the least affordable housing (38.44% average), and the highest rate of extreme poverty (7.47% average). Most importantly, they noted a significant inflection point that identifies a spike in homelessness above 32% rent as a percentage of median income. The rate for Hampden County is 34.6% (Glynn, 2018+).

Wealth and race are also important factors when considering poverty and housing costs. For example, Springfield had the largest disparity in

unemployment in 2016 between Hispanic and White community members among 72 medium and large metropolitan areas (a rate of 21.5% for Hispanic residents compared to 6.3% for White residents). Springfield again ranked last when it came to income equality in the same report (\$23,911 compared to \$60,105). Unfortunately, when it comes to income inequality, several neighboring communities fared just as poorly, with Greater Boston, Providence, Bridgeport-Stamford, Hartford, and Worcester ranking 67 to 71 respectively (NUL, 2016).

Fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Hampden County is \$1,061 (HUD.gov, 2019), yet renters earning an estimated average wage of \$11.18 per hour can only afford a unit up to \$581 per month (NLIHC, 2019). It would take two full-time incomes per household at the estimated average wage to afford the fair market rent. It is likely that the actual rent varies across the county between urban centers like Springfield and Holyoke, wealthy suburbs like Longmeadow and East Longmeadow, and rural areas like Tolland and Blandford.

Exits from institutions and systems of care

While many young people experiencing homelessness have had past experiences with institutions and systems of care, young people also frequently leave institutions and systems of care and subsequently experience homelessness. At the end of 2018 in Hampden County, roughly 2,595 young people between the ages of 12 and 24 were actively engaged with the child welfare system. 2,381 are between the ages of 12 and 17, and 214 are over 18. DCF identifies 23% as “in placement” and 77% as “out of placement.” DCF indicated the permanency plan associated with many YYAs “in placement” as “Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement” (APPLA), including 70% for those over 18 and 2% as “Unspecified.” For those YYAs “out of placement,” 37% of those over 18 have an APPLA permanency plan and 23% of all YYAs

have an “unspecified” permanency plan. Hispanic YYAs are vastly overrepresented among all YYAs in foster care at slightly lower rates than our homelessness data (~48%). The same is true for Black YYAs (~11%).

DYS reported that they discharged 7 youth to unstable housing in 2018. Six were connected to the Springfield office and one to the Holyoke office. We do not currently have data on the number of 18- to 24-year-olds from Hampden County who are incarcerated, re-enter in a given year, or are currently on probation. These young people are at high risk of continued adverse outcomes. Because we know who and where they are and have regular service interaction with them, there is an opportunity to target our prevention efforts and prevent their future homelessness.

⁴The Children’s League has identified simply that, “When a child receives APPLA as a service plan goal, the goal of finding a permanent placement is abandoned.” <http://www.childrensleague.org/2017-2018-priority-legislation/> DCF maintains responsibility for the young person, and an assigned social worker must continue “to seek a permanent connection with a competent adult,” and help the young person maintain, “a stable living environment” and work on “life skills training.” <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/07/qk/permanency-planning-policy.pdf>

Housing Inventory

Data presented below came from the Springfield CoC's Housing Inventory Chart (HIC) and were verified directly through outreach to City and State partner agencies.

Out of the County's 59 programs and 3,369 beds dedicated to serving community members experiencing homelessness (78% of which are crisis residential), there are currently 5 programs and 67 beds dedicated to YYAs experiencing homelessness. These programs have special capacity to serve YYAs and meet their needs, including creating a space that specifically designed for their safety. Most of these units are for permanent housing (84%), with 26 beds for RRH, 20 beds for PSH, and 10 beds for other forms of permanent housing. The community has 1 transitional housing program with 5 beds and has 1 traditional YYA shelter with 6 beds opening in July 2019. The county also has a host home program with up to six active host sites at any given time.

More than half of current YYA beds are scattered site (55%), which theoretically provides flexibility to serve the entire county outside of the more populous urban centers. A permanent supportive housing program for families is in Holyoke and another permanent housing program is in Westfield. There is no permanent supportive housing for YYAs in Springfield.

Some housing resources target specific populations. For example, the Host Home model serves minors between the ages of 14 and 18. The transitional housing program serves YYAs between 17 and 22; the permanent supportive housing program in Holyoke serves YYA-led families with disabilities; the RRH program is for unaccompanied YYAs; and the permanent housing program in Westfield serves YYAs between 18 and 24.



Other Resources

The Springfield CoC has a number of non-housing resources available to YYAs experiencing homelessness, some dedicated to them and others serving a broader population. For example, there are two YYA street outreach programs (CHD Safety Zone and Gandara). There is also a dedicated medical and dental service for YYAs who are doubled up or experiencing homelessness (Health Services for the Homeless Adolescent Health Center). There are 12 other homelessness programs that YYAs can access, including additional outreach, healthcare, basic needs support, benefits enrollment, and case management, but they do not have special capacity to serve YYAs.

The community identified over 185 programs with which YYAs experiencing homelessness might engage. Among those, 82 are specifically dedicated to YYAs. There are 28 positive outlet or hobby programs that can facilitate social and emotional wellbeing as well as help YYAs develop long lasting positive social relationships: 9 provide mental health services; 8 involved employment and training services; and 7 offer pregnancy and parenting services. There are several notable gaps, including basic needs programs; childcare services; human trafficking and commercial sex work support programs; immigration services; benefits enrollment; disability services; domestic violence supports; early childhood education resources; documentation and ID support; and legal services. While all of these gaps are addressed by programs that serve a general population, there may be barriers to access for YYAs.

Geographically, most YYA resources are located near the CoC's urban center. 64 out of the 82 YYA resources are located in either Springfield or Holyoke, and an additional 3 are located in neighboring West Springfield and Chicopee. 12 are described as covering all of Hampden County, although may have an urban core bias, leaving just 3 located exclusively outside of greater Springfield (2 in Westfield and 1 in Palmer). With a large geographical area and a challenging public transportation environment, this may impact the ability of suburban and rural YYAs to access the services that they need.



Qualitative Themes

The focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and community meetings provided context for interpreting the quantitative data, identifying needs and gaps, and generating potential solutions. This section of the report presents the qualitative data around the following key areas:

- 1) Perceptions of YYA homelessness and the current system
- 2) Needs and Gaps
- 3) Potential Solutions

Perceptions of YYA Homelessness and the Current System

At one community meeting, we asked participants for words and phrases to describe the current state of youth homelessness in Hampden County. The words and phrases highlighted below show many of the descriptors they used.

How would you describe the current state of youth homelessness in the county?

Changing	Upsetting	Disconnected	Multiple Definitions	Misunderstood
Poor	Critical	Underserved	Difficult to address	Complicated
Hidden	Under-identified	Concerning	Overwhelming	

There was a clear consensus in this discussion that while homelessness among YYAs is a crisis that needs to be addressed urgently, there is often confusion.

Next, we asked participants to generate words and phrases to describe the current system of housing and services.

How would you describe the current state of the youth homelessness system?

Forward-thinking	Evolving	Lack of resources	Uncoordinated	Broken
Underfunded	Judgemental	Inadequate	Talented	Developing
Dedicated	Sensitive	Difficult to navigate	Disconnected	Confusing
Unknown	Antagonistic	Unsafe	Well-intentioned	Willing to help
Data savvy	Curious	Concerned	Emerging	Exclusive
Ready	Disconnect between system and youth perceptions			

Participants articulated ambivalence about the current response as they described the many strengths and limitations of the existing system. Their observations point to the need for a comprehensive and comprehensible response. Through the focus groups and interviews, numerous observations began to paint a picture of YYA homelessness in Hampden County. Many participants talked about the “invisible” nature of YYA homelessness.

“Young people experiencing homelessness fly under the radar.”

Stakeholder Interviewee

Major themes included:

- Many YYAs couch-surfing and not accessing services
- Largely black and brown YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability in the area, an observation borne out by the quantitative data
- Long waiting lists for housing and services
- Systems not well-coordinated (including health, education, and DCF/DYS)
- High rates of mental health and substance use issues
- Sexual exploitation of young people
- Trauma as a pervasive experience before and during homelessness
- Unsupportive families, particularly for LGBTQ+ people
- Homophobia and transphobia in families, communities, and services
- Homelessness among college students
- Current assessment process (i.e., VI-SPDAT assessment tool) underplays severity for YYAs

In addition to these themes, participants identified other important issues.

Difficulty knowing what services exist was a prominent theme.

“They don’t get enough information out there. Libraries and coffee shops could have papers put up explaining how to get state aid.”

YYA focus group participant

Even when information is available, supports are not always available when they are needed.

“Have resources in the moment instead of being like ‘Oh, you need to be out in a week and here are some places you can call.’”

YYA focus group participant

Even when resources are available, long waiting lists create barriers to exiting homelessness.

“We have a list, but all the lists have waiting lists.”

Stakeholder Interviewee

Needs and Gaps

In the face of these challenges, the interviews and focus groups identified various needs and gaps:

- A range of age appropriate housing options
- Ability to work with YYAs over a longer period of time
- Mental health/substance use treatment
- Lack of shelter for YYAs, or adult shelters not safe (According to one interviewee, “Young people steer far away from adult services. They don’t want to be in a wet shelter where everyone is drunk and selling drugs.”)
- Lack of safe affordable housing
- Transportation
- “Wicked waitlists for therapy”
- Restrictive eligibility requirements
- Limited geographic dispersal of housing and services
- Access to good paying jobs
- Basic needs (food, clothing, shower, laundry, hygiene products)

Potential Solutions: More Than a Band-Aid

Respondents made important connections between homelessness and other related issues:

“Homelessness is a symptom of other fundamental issues: school drop-out, substance use, unemployment, depression. There is a range of issues they face...all these interlocking problems.”

“[YYAs] who have been in the system...are often not well supported to get back to something that would be safe, secure, and loving. They often have to make a choice between staying in an uncaring and unsupportive system, or wait out your time until you’re 18, then you sign out and you’re on your own. These kids are at tremendous risk for couch surfing, sexual exploitation, and abject homelessness.”

When asked what should be done to prevent and end YYA homelessness, one respondent put it well: “The collective response has to be more than a band-aid.” Others described the importance of YYA partnership in designing policy and programs: “If you want a sustained and deep [partnership with YYAs], you have to take it seriously and pay people as

consultants.”

The YYAs who participated in focus groups brought tremendous expertise and wisdom to the discussion, generating many creative ideas that are reflected in the following section of this report. One in particular brought together the need for safe shelter, housing, jobs, and community connections:

“There’s a lot of abandoned buildings, factory buildings sitting there. Why not get funding and rebuild them into shelters for youth or apartments for people like us? Maybe have a resource center there or a workforce thing so they can work at the building and pay for their rent.”

It is clear from the qualitative data that emergency solutions—while certainly important—cannot alone prevent and end youth homelessness.

Next Steps

Many ideas and observations emerged from the Needs Assessment process. An important next step will be for partners from across Hampden County to come together in a community-wide planning process to develop a concrete Plan to End YYA Homelessness. Such a process should include:

- Youth and young adults with lived experience of homelessness
- Homeless service providers
- LGBTQ services and supports
- Immigrant-serving organizations
- Government leaders
- Faith community
- Health systems
- Schools and colleges
- State agency staff (e.g., DCF, DYS, DMH, DDS, and DHCD)
- Housing developers and landlords
- Behavioral health care providers

A thoughtful planning process should include multiple strategy sessions to address the geographical diversity of Hampden County, and it should focus on identifying and prioritizing measurable outcomes and specific actions to achieve them. The process and resulting plan will need to address many important areas:

1. Youth and Young Adult Partnership

A centerpiece to any planning around YYA homelessness must include YYAs themselves. Building upon the foundation laid during this Needs Assessment process, the YAB can play a pivotal role in setting policy, shaping program design, and driving funding priorities. Hampden County can learn from the work of YABs across Massachusetts and nationally.

2. Equity

Because YYAs of color and those who identify as LGBTQ experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates, it is critical that any response to YYA homelessness must be deeply grounded in a commitment to equity. A strong planning process can center equity and result in specific strategies to prevent and end homelessness among LGBTQ YYAs and YYAs of color. These constituents must also have a seat at the table in the planning process.

3. Access

The Needs Assessment made clear the ongoing need for better communication about what services and supports exist currently and how YYAs can navigate the system. This will require improved dissemination of information in the community; partnerships with schools, colleges, healthcare providers, and all other referral entities; expanded outreach services; and streamlined coordinated entry. A community planning process should address all of these challenges.

4. Housing

Hampden County should use a simple housing model to begin to identify the array of new subsidized YYA-housing resources needed to end YYA homelessness. The model will first focus attention on YYAs who interact with the homelessness system and who we estimate will not leave homelessness without independent housing (see Appendix A). The community then needs to look at two additional groups: 1) YYAs identified by the model who interact with the homelessness system but who we estimate will leave homelessness without independent housing, and 2) YYAs who are not identified by the model, but who are currently experiencing a housing crisis. We can quantify the size of the former group because they are already interacting with the system. Though many of these YYA “self-resolve,” preventing their homelessness in the first place or resolving it quickly should be a priority. This might require a short-term housing-based intervention and a means of better tracking their progress after the initial engagement.

Addressing the latter group will first require better identification methods including collaborations with the schools, cultural awareness campaigns, and low barrier access points, both virtual and physical. Data regarding housing insecurity and homelessness of community college students points to the need for a housing strategy that is specific to this population. The community can also begin to leverage the data in this report, and the impact of the affordable housing crisis on homelessness, to advocate for broader housing policy changes that make it less likely for these families and YYA to lose their homes.

5. Employment and Education

School and work are critical issues that are important to many YYAs experiencing homelessness. As part of a Plan to End Youth Homelessness, Hampden County must strive for improved communication and coordination with schools, colleges, and employers. These entities should be at the table in planning and implementation.

6. Behavioral Health and Other Supports

An important aspect of helping YYAs stabilize and succeed is to address issues related to mental health, substance use, and trauma. Additional detox and out-patient substance abuse treatment, as well as improved access to mental health counseling and medications, are critical strategies. Additionally, mentoring and life skills training are important strategies to support YYAs as they transition from homelessness to housing. While many programs and services already exist but are not yet targeting YYAs experiencing (or at risk of) homelessness, others will need to be developed or expanded to meet the need.

7. Improving Outcomes for System-Involved YYA

Beginning with improved collaboration with DCF and DYS, the community’s response to YYA homelessness should also strive to engage other state agencies, including DMH, DDS, and DHCD (particularly around family shelter for pregnant and parenting YYAs). Working together, state agencies and community partners can improve outcomes for YYA involved with these systems. At the same time, the community can draw from its experience to advocate for state-level structural and programmatic policy changes within these agencies.

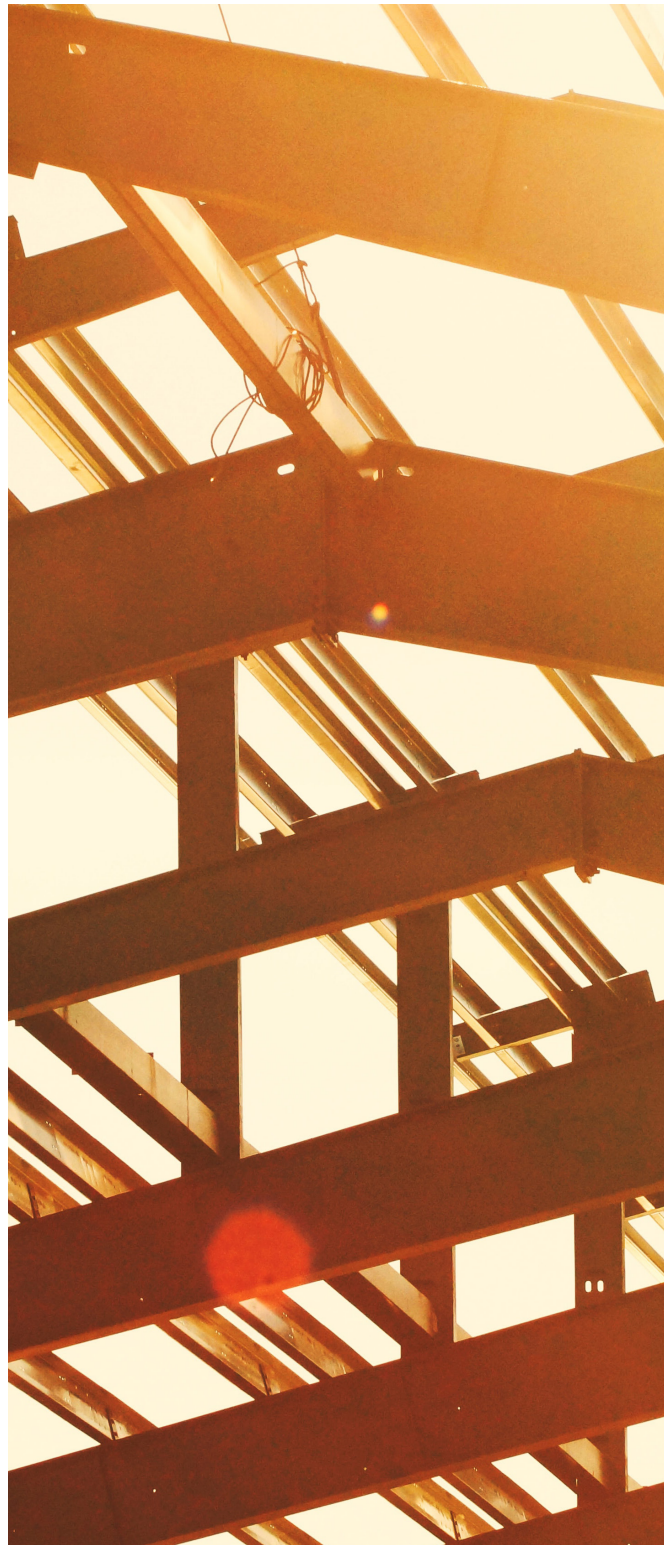
While these broad strategy areas are not yet mapped to an action plan with measurable outcomes and timeframes, they can serve as a starting point for community planning, prioritization, funding, and implementation.

Conclusion

Hampden County is at a critical juncture in its work to prevent and end YYA homelessness. Hundreds—even thousands—of YYAs spend each night on the streets, in vehicles or shelters, couch-surfing, trading their bodies for a place to stay, or living in unsafe, exploitive, or unstable housing situations. Many are people of color and those who identify as LGBTQ+. We are failing these young people.

YYA homelessness too often goes unseen, unacknowledged, and unaddressed. In order to create a comprehensive response, partners from across the county—public and private; government, business, and faith community; service providers and YYAs with lived experience—must come together to design a better way. To solve YYA homelessness, it is critical not just to create band-aid solutions or to end homelessness for those currently being served by our systems, but instead to focus on prevention, crisis response, and long-term solutions.

YYA homelessness will then become a thing of the past, and a generation of young people will grow, thrive, and help create the fabric of a more just and equitable community.



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- Additional MA state agency reports were prepared specially for this project by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and include administrative data from the Departments of Children and Families, Youth Services, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Public Health through its Bureau of Substance Addiction Services.

Appendix:

A Simple Housing Model to End YYA Homelessness

This housing model estimates the number of new units that Hampden County will need to end homelessness among unaccompanied YYA. The model is highly simplified and targeted towards a specific subset of young people and resources. It does not address the housing needs of parenting YYA. It makes the following general assumptions:

- There are no other changes to the YYA homelessness system – i.e., no effect from increased collaboration, prevention, or efforts to improve the other four outcomes
- All new units are designed to serve YYAs with staff and resource capacity to serve them well
- The only YYAs currently included are those who are currently interacting with HMIS
- The impact of the model depends on the type and number of each resource the community expects to develop and when they become operational
- New resources are operational for the entire year they are added and are geography neutral.

The model can accommodate additional or refined variables as they become relevant and available, but it is at first designed to provide simple guideposts. It should be used together with other data and the input of community members.

We used the following data for the first model iteration projecting to 2023. Our goal was to reduce the number of YYAs who need a subsidized housing solution to 0 as quickly as possible:

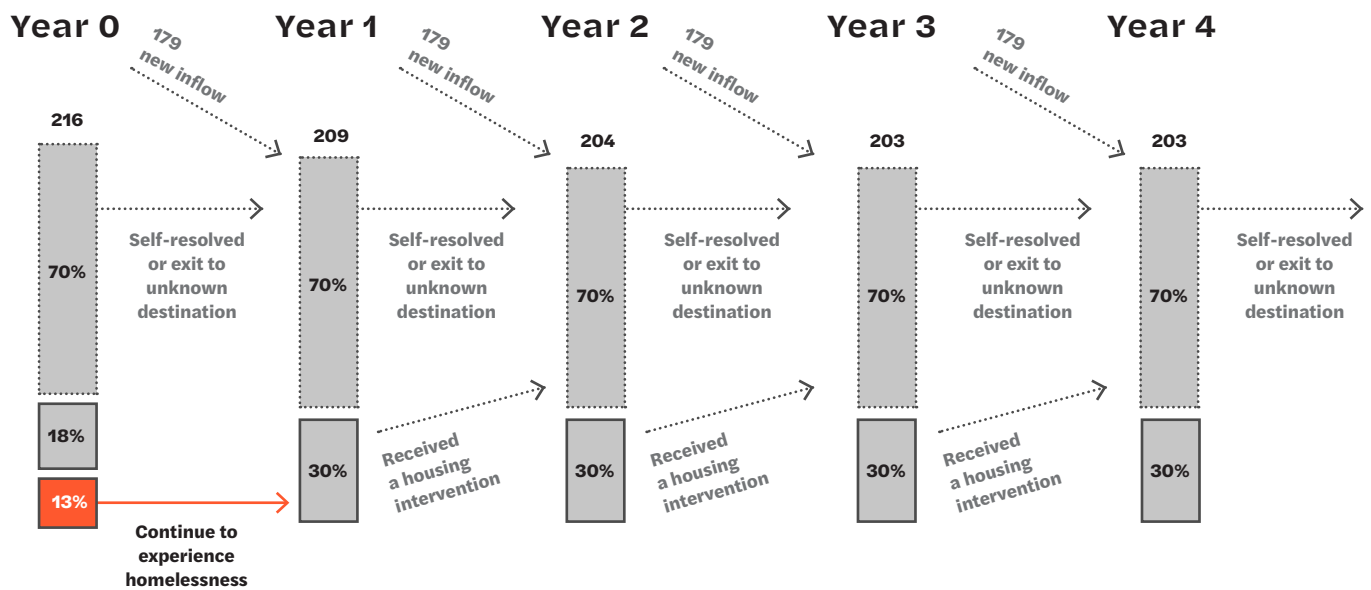
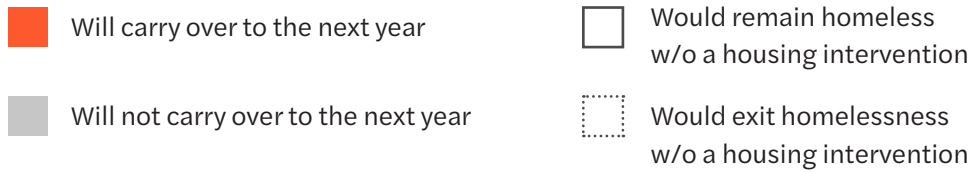
Characteristics of Current YYA Population in HMIS	
YYAs who experienced homelessness in 2018	216
% of YYAs who did not get a housing resource, self-resolve, or disappear in 2018	17%
YYAs entering homelessness in 2018	179
% of YYAs who may need a housing intervention	30%

Existing Housing Resources		
	Inventory	Annual Turnover
PSH	30	15%
RRH	26	75%
TH (incl. host homes)	12	75%
Shelter	0	600%

New Housing Recommendations					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
New shelter beds	6	0	0	0	0
New host home units	0	10	5	0	0
New RRH units	0	8	5	1	0
New PSH units	0	5	0	0	0
New RRH Plus units⁵	0	7	5	1	0
New TH-RRH	0	0	0	0	0

⁵RRH Plus, also known as RRH+ and TAY-RA, is an adaptation of the traditional Rapid Rehousing model designed to meet the needs of transition-age youth and young adults. Though communities have implemented a variety of flexible program requirements, RRH Plus generally incorporates longer subsidy periods for YYA (beyond 24 months) and more flexible eligibility requirements (e.g., YYA only need to qualify once and then retain eligibility regardless of changes in circumstances, YYA can qualify under paragraph 3 of the HUD definition, etc.). Some implementations have also incorporated new eligible cost arrangements including combining operating and rental assistance expenses and master leasing units rather requiring individual tenant-landlord agreements.

A Simple Housing Model to End YYA Homelessness



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