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The Community Services Division's mission is to align services in order to create systems of support that impact poverty by creating opportunities for economic prosperity and achieving racial justice. The Division's work is organized into three focus areas: **Energy** – bill payment assistance and weatherization; **Homelessness and Housing** – homeless youth, homeless families, homeless domestic violence survivors, and some affordable housing development; and **Economic Opportunity** – anti-poverty supports, educational equity, employment support, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), and juvenile justice prevention.

Introduction

Multnomah County has taken significant steps towards implementing a more comprehensive and coordinated response to youth homelessness, known as the Multnomah County Homeless Youth Continuum (HYC). This brief summarizes what this coordinated response encompasses, shares lessons learned, and identifies where Federal agencies can provide support.

The Multnomah County Homeless Youth Continuum: Background

For more than 15 years, the HYC has operated a single, integrated, and coordinated enterprise that provides 24/7 shelter and crisis services and promotes developmental outcomes in order to achieve a long-term impact for youth experiencing homelessness. Through the strategic investment of both public and private community resources, the HYC shares risk, outcomes, investment, and decision making among all partners, local government included.

The HYC is organized to build developmental assets as a means by which lasting housing stability, educational attainment, and employment are achieved. Culturally specific and responsive practices are foundational. The HYC has built a system of care that provides safety, stability, and permanency services to interrupt current youth homelessness but does not prevent youth homelessness. By achieving developmental outcomes that lead to the achievement of socio-economic outcomes, including housing, education, and employment, the HYC also aims to prevent adult homelessness.

System success is measured by the achievement of developmental outcomes under a Positive Youth Development framework. This includes:

- 1) A relationship with at least one competent, caring adult;
- 2) Consistent high expectations for the capacity to achieve; and
- 3) Opportunities to make decisions that are meaningful to one's own life (beyond socio-economic measures).

Strategic Approach

In order to maintain oversight and accountability for the HYC, the Homeless Youth Oversight Committee (HYOC) was developed and formally charged. The oversight body is comprised of representatives from business, law enforcement, juvenile justice, child welfare, the faith community, advocates, and youth. The HYOC is an identified subcommittee of the *A Home for Everyone Coordinating Board* – the local Continuum of Care governing body.

Multnomah County uses a Human Services Partnership Agreement to define the relationship and provide funding to four non-profit organizations that participate in the HYC system: Janus Youth Programs, Native American Youth and Family Center, New Avenues for Youth, and Outside In. The agreement requires unique practices related to investment, decision making, procurement, and contracting between the County and these partners.

Because resources are managed collectively, a variety of funding sources come both through the County and through individual providers on behalf of the entire Continuum. Flexible funding through local general funds are used to fill gaps created by funding with restrictive eligibility and service delivery requirements. Funding contracted through the County includes County General Funds, City of Portland General Funds, and HUD Continuum of Care resources, totaling approximately \$3.8 million. Other funding comes from:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- RHY Transitional Living Program
- RHY Basic Center Program
- RHY Street Outreach Program
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- Local school districts
- Agency-raised funds

Each partner is expected to provide a cash or in-kind match of no less than 25 percent. This totals approximately \$3.5 million of the approximately \$7.5 million that was received in FY 2014.

Assertive Engagement Model

The continuum practices Assertive Engagement, which asserts that how staff engage and build relationships with youth is more important than the specific services offered to youth. Assertive Engagement:

- Believes that relationships with youth require compassion, support of the youths’ capacity to act in accordance with their hopes and dreams, and the knowledge and experience to effectively offer and provide assistance where needed;
- Supports hope as a research proven factor, building motivation for change;
- Understands that hierarchy plays a key role in the relationship – the youth is in charge; and
- Believes that youth are experts in their lives, and action for change and success must come from them, not from staff or the HYC.

Eligibility Criteria

Because the HYC is a late-stage intervention system, every attempt is made to ensure that youth with any other viable alternatives for safe, stable housing do not enter the Continuum. Eligibility for HYC programs is based on two factors: age and living/housing status. Below is a breakdown of the enrollment criteria for the HYC:

Age	Housing Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 15-23 (80% of those served) ▪ 13-14 or 24-25th birthday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No current safe, stable or viable living situation; AND ▪ No possibility of or options for securing a safe, stable living situation; AND ▪ Under 18: Reunification is not likely with a parent, guardian or other appropriate adult ▪ Over 18: Youth has spent less than one day in a safe, viable living situation <u>in the last 30 days</u>

A typical path into Continuum services starts through contact with the HYC Outreach Team, Portland Police Bureau HYC Liaison Officers, access into Day Services sites, or through youth self-referral. At the point a youth expresses interest in taking the next step of engagement, the eligibility screening is

performed. Based on the eligibility determination (which may change over time, and staff have the ability to exercise their own judgment), the following actions occur:

<u>Not HYC Eligible</u>	<u>HYC Eligible</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff work to determine the best referral available to meet the need of the youth – child welfare, runaway, family, juvenile justice, homeless single adult program ▪ Warm handoff to identified referral ▪ 48 hour follow up with the youth and referral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth is assigned to partner, based on capacity and fit to the youth need ▪ Immediate engagement with the youth or within 48 hours ▪ Assessment, eco-mapping, developmental asset inquiry, Assertive Engagement, and action plan

Select FY 2014 Data

Through their strategic approach to engagement and service provision, the HYC saw positive outcomes for youth served in FY 2014. More than 1,220 youth experiencing homelessness were served. Of those served, 60 percent were over 21 years of age, 50 percent were youth of color, and 36 percent identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning. Services received included safety off the streets, recovery oriented support, wrap around supports, and housing. The average length of service was approximately 12 months.

Developmental outcomes achieved in FY 2014 include: 82 percent of youth had at least one relationship with an adult outside of the HYC, 94 percent of youth experienced consistent high expectations, and 85 percent of youth had opportunities to make decisions that were meaningful to their own life. Housing outcomes were also excellent. Eighty-eight percent of youth exited services to safe and stable housing. Eighty-nine percent were still housed 6 months after exit and 84 percent were housed 12 months after exit.

Safe, stable housing is defined as any living situation that meets minimum health and safety standards and protects the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of youth with the assumption of permanency – without a time limit for length of stay.

Lessons Learned

Through their experience serving youth, HYC and its partners have identified lessons and challenges relevant for other communities:

- 1) When systems of care are designed around youth choice and decision making, youth will have better outcomes and lasting resilience.
- 2) Current housing process and practice need to be redesigned to decouple the type of living situation from the level of service/support offered so that housing can be better aligned with what a youth needs. An example would be the provision of place-based, congregate housing with less intensive, unrequired services (where traditionally participation in intensive services is required).
- 3) More flexibility should be offered in contractual relationships, allowing for shared power and decision making, a willingness to accept failure as a part of achieving success, the adoption of a fidelity scale with third-party evaluation, the utilization of an external citizen oversight body, and resourcing of culturally specific and responsive services.

Opportunities for Increased Federal Partnership

In order to achieve the goal of ending youth homelessness in 2020, better integration between and among many different Federal funding sources (not solely HHS and HUD), initiatives, data collection, and reporting efforts (definitions and requirements) would be helpful. In the short term, the following actions would make a significant difference for homeless youth providers at the local level:

- 1) Funding that supports single, integrated systems of care across multiple agencies, rather than funding for stand-alone programs or projects;
- 2) Positive exits able to be defined in HMIS as safe and stable, rather than by current transitional or permanent definitions;
- 3) Maximum possible financial and program flexibility at the local level, including removing restrictive eligibility requirements for housing and eliminating time limits for service delivery and eligibility;
- 4) Adjusting programmatic measures that respond to the differences between late stage intervention and prevention;
- 5) Funding developmental outcomes in addition to socio-economic outcomes;
- 6) Defining positive exits to include youth who leave for higher education opportunities; and
- 7) Funding for culturally specific and responsive systems of care and services.