



Additional Participant Questions and Presenter Responses
Webinar: Non-Time-Limited Housing for Youth
August 13, 2015

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
Program First Place with Preble Street, Portland, Maine
West End Residences, New York, New York

Questions for USICH:

- 1. What is USICH doing to ensure homeless youth meaningfully participate in planning & policy making? Are they able to make recommendations and be taken seriously?**

USICH: The voices of homeless and formerly homeless youth play a big role in our interagency planning and policy making. Most recently, USICH partnered with the White House, True Colors Fund, and Federal partners to facilitate a policy briefing on youth homelessness at the White House that included a panel of formerly homeless youth who shared their stories with Federal policymakers and provided insight and guidance as part of small group discussions and workshops. The information gathered during that event and through follow-up discussions has been integral in providing context and concrete policy recommendations for our interagency efforts around defining a pathway to end youth homelessness.

Additionally, the USICH team includes five regional coordinators who work full-time with community providers and who gather information and case studies that inform our work at the Federal level. These coordinators often work with local providers to highlight youth voices – including in the form of USICH blogs or other published materials. We welcome input from providers serving youth and youth themselves. Please reach out and contact us!

Questions for Preble Street:

- 1. What is your typical caseload per staff?**

PREBLE STREET: For all the Teen Services there is a shared responsibility for the youth we serve and a primary case manager. The caseloads generally work out to 1 to 10 to 15 youth. However it is important to note that all staff also spend a lot of time staffing the Drop-in and/or outreach to keep at least 3 or 4 staff monitoring the space at a time. In addition, all of the staff organize activities and many do groups. The staff of Project First Place shares a caseload that has been building as the program is less than 1.5

years in operation. At this moment they are about 1 staff for 3 youth in the program, but they also are staffing the enhanced services and doing program intakes for all who enroll in the enhanced services including those in the rapid re-housing model and working to arrange the evaluation staff interviews. That said, the project is quite staff intensive so that we can be available as needed and even daily initially. As more youth graduate and we continue aftercare for at least a year, the numbers will grow substantially.

2. When a youth turns 25, what are their housing options? Do they stay within Preble Street, move onto an adult focused agency or "graduate" and need to support themselves in housing?

PREBLE STREET: The vouchers that the youth receive are either Shelter Plus Care which are permanent vouchers so that the youth can stay forever in the unit (unlikely) or take the voucher to a new place as long as he/she qualifies. For youth in rapid re-housing, the premise is that the vouchers are available for up to a year while the youth works on building capacity to take over the rent based on income. In both, workers are trying to create permanency in age and time limits not becoming factors in youth stable housing. Youth make decisions to move. If youth leave our program planning is done to ensure that Preble Street and others in the community provide needed housing and support options. This is an advantage of having both youth and adult services.

3. How long has Preble Street been operating? How many can be served at one time?

PREBLE STREET: The project started operations in June 2014 and added a full evaluation plan in January. There have been 8 youth in First Place apartments with several identified for the next slots. We do anticipate openings soon. All youth continue to be offered support as needed after they take over the lease or leave for any reason so the size will grow fairly quickly as we add more units and youth. There are also a number of youth in the rapid re-housing component who are getting case management from an identified worker at the Teen Center, but participating in the many groups and activities.

4. When you list the personal goals that are a "must," does that mean if someone doesn't meet those goals, they get exited back into homelessness? Can the participants talk more about being housing first and still having "musts" for clients?

PREBLE STREET: Excellent question. We are trying to adapt what we have learned in our housing first programs to working with youth. The populations, needs, and expectations are naturally different. So the answer is that we have learned that youth do not need to be in recovery or follow our rules to maintain an apartment and that when it comes to any rules, including our musts, all is negotiation and relationship based and, most importantly driven by the youth. All the youth who enter this project self-select, that is, tell us they are ready to work on getting off the street. Many are not ready (until they are). As the goal for as many as possible is to work and become independent, the goals are quite different than the long term chronically homeless adults, most of whom are disabled and needing income support even if they work toward some employment or volunteering. Finally, in the end, all is flexible with the youth and the relationships and youth desire to stay housed and work on their futures, is what makes it work.

5. Can you walk me through a typical process for a youth who just became homeless and do you have an average time frame until they become housed? Our CoC struggles with the chronic homelessness definition requirements for S+C for this population in particular.

PREBLE STREET: Youth's stories vary greatly in Teen Services so it is difficult to make a clear single process. If a youth shows up at the shelter or the drop-in or comes to either after outreach, we begin to offer services and to assess their need. The shelter must get some basic information although youth coming to

drop-in are able to get basic needs met without an intake and they can use any name they wish. If they are younger, we intervene more quickly and will make referrals and plans with family, other providers, or the state as quickly as possible to move them to safety. Most of our youth are 17 to 20 and some getting specific services are older. After an assessment they are offered the range of services we have on site and usually introduced to other providers at lunch or in the drop-in at some point. Service plans are developed with them as quickly as they are ready to tell us their goals and interests.

For the youth we have known to be homeless for months and years we maintain a relationship, use a harm reduction approach (meaning we want them safe and in our space if possible) and continue to offer services (although most interest in services and activities comes through peers). With daily planning and service meetings there is an effort to make connections and offers whenever a youth expresses interest.

Shelter Plus care in Maine has recently become focused on individuals who have been long term in shelters or homeless so that we could take advantage of the opportunity to work with the population of youth that qualify. The State funded rapid re-housing funding has been funded through shelters and we have been able to take advantage of that. I think the fact that Preble Street has been active in the CoC and state Planning process from its inception (as chair or co-chair) and that Maine is relatively small and youth providers could organize has assured some focus on youth issues (although it has not been without issues). Without the number of youth who fit chronic criteria we would not be able to get Shelter Plus Care. But participate and advocate in the CoC. Use the USICH and HUD priorities to push recognition of the unique pathways and needs of youth.

- 6. In your permanent housing program, how many youth are able to take over the lease fully on their own? Do you have youth who have to get a co-signer after being in the program?**

***PREBLE STREET:** Our program has not been in existence long enough to have much meaningful data on this although we have one graduate who decided to leave the apartment for one he liked better and found himself. We anticipate that youth who do decide to take over the lease will not need a co-signer having established themselves as good tenants and having an income.*

- 7. Do you find that youth that spend time in shelters with adults have a harder time adjusting? We are a men's shelter that are seeing an increasing number of younger men.**

***PREBLE STREET:** As we said in our presentation, the youth we are targeting have been in shelters and the streets for a while and that does have a negative impact and can create additional challenges. When we did a tracking study of about 250 youth over time a few years ago, it was clear that those homeless more than 6 months were more difficult to engage, less likely to accept supports, and less likely to get off the street in the 2 years we followed them. The exceptions were youth who were provided intensive team supports and consistent availability by a team. We have tried to keep youth out of adult shelter and changed our youth shelter age to up to 21 for that purpose.*

- 8. I am interested in ideas how to partner with organizations under this framework. The goal is to provide humanities programs as a tool for engaging and empowering youth experiencing instability. Have you or anyone else, developed partnerships like this**

***PREBLE STREET:** We work with many partners in the arts world and many volunteers ranging from music to writing. The challenge is screening and making sure that potential partners or volunteers have the patience and understanding to commit to make the ongoing commitment of time as they will face the relationship and trust hurdle in getting things going. Reaching out from a humanities program directly to*

youth or homeless programs makes sense. The offer of a range of possibilities and creative options is important for one never knows what will be the motivator or provides hope.

Questions for Preble Street and West End Residences:

1. Have any of these housing models utilized youth peers once housed?

PREBLE STREET: *We do rely on the youth to participate in setting agendas and policies in this new program and to meet together monthly. As part of community involvement, we have gotten participating youth involved in a Statewide Youth leadership program. Strictly speaking we do not have peers on staff as part of the program but, for example, each takes a turn at leading the monthly community meeting.*

WEST END: *No.*

2. How far out are the programs tracking (evaluating) the housing "success" of youth participants? Many programs never seem to get great longitudinal data.

PREBLE STREET: *Our commitment is tracking youth for at least a year in aftercare if they agree. This will give us a little information about stability but is not really as long as is needed to understand longitudinal success.*

WEST END: *True Colors Residence is approaching the end of its 4th year of operation so we have only been able to follow residents who have moved on for a short period of time. We hope to initiate more formal research at the end of our 5th year and would like to develop a tool to evaluate the housing stability of all tenants who have relocated.*

3. What are some effective strategies to help youth find and maintain jobs?

PREBLE STREET: *First, working with a collaborative that is investing in work force issues has helped a little. The Learn to Earn Project supported with some state funds has worked for us to give youth some help with work expectations and a stipend experience with a lot of support to try out an area of interest. It only takes youth who are motivated but has been able to place youth and help youth identify career interests and the need for education. With a tight market and mostly entry jobs like fast food, it is difficult to create real employment options for youth and to know it will result in a living wage.*

WEST END: *Our life skills training manager collaborates with employers and has held job fairs at the residence. She helps residents determine their interests and assists them whenever possible in obtaining employment in their fields of interest. All staff work with residents on appropriate behavior at the job and how to maintain their employment.*

4. Please comment on fair housing regulations limiting housing programs by age, gender/gender identity, school enrollment sexual orientation, or specific disability.

PREBLE STREET: *I am not clear that this impacts our project but we have had to be careful in publically funded projects to not eliminate by gender or age. For example an all-women subsidized housing site is a problem.*

WEST END: *Our support services are geared toward our target population. While anyone can apply for this housing, as a provider of supportive housing, we are able to show preference to those who will benefit from our services.*

5. Does shared housing play a role in the approach to ending youth homelessness for either program?

PREBLE STREET: *We have not introduced shared housing into our current model but have certainly considered it as we expand. It does add additional challenges as well as rewards.*

WEST END: *No. Also please note we do not consider our residents homeless. They are rent paying tenants.*

6. We are looking to project base vouchers for agencies to serve youth, but this would not come with funding for services. Any suggestions as to how to fund services to serve youth who transition from their COC programs to a voucher program?

PREBLE STREET: *I am not sure we have an answer except that the CoC could provide services for permanent supportive housing mixing site based vouchers with case management. Other than that it would be state or local funding or perhaps Medicaid based services depending on the state and the youth's needs and eligibility. There is also the private funding or foundation route.*

WEST END: *For True Colors Residence as well as the soon to open True Colors Bronx, social services funding comes from the NYC Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene. Outside of NYC or NYS, it may be best to seek funding from the local or State government social services agency.*

7. What are the vacancy rates for Preble Street and True Colors? What factors are behind vacancies and how to do maintain occupancy?

PREBLE STREET: *As we are not site based, we do not have vacancies. We do have a number of youth who have expressed interest in the program and as soon as we have openings we work with them on finding an apartment.*

WEST END: *We budget a 5% vacancy rate. An apartment becomes vacant when a tenant moves out. New prospective tenants must qualify for Section 8. The Section 8 approval process is lengthy and can take up to 8 weeks to obtain approval and a lease signing date. Section 8 applications are completed and submitted as soon as a move out date for the outgoing resident is confirmed.*

8. What definition do you use for homelessness? The HUD definition or the McKinney Vento Homeless Education definition (which includes students who are doubled up or couch surfing)? What is the age limit for the youth?

PREBLE STREET: *Our services in general do not utilize a single definition nor ask although we keep counts of individuals who meet the definitions of specific funding sources and that includes HUD. For our First Place Project, we are targeting youth who do meet HUD definitions either chronically homeless or homeless for a shorter time.*

WEST END: *HUD. Tenants are 18-24 when they move in but remain until they are ready and able to move on.*

9. Do any of the agencies work with families who may have had parents who were in the military?

PREBLE STREET: *Not sure as it is not something we track. Perhaps. We have an SSVF program that would use resources of the Teen Services if needed.*

WEST END: *No.*

10. Can providers comment on how youth were referred and did they prioritize the most disconnected youth (high risk/low protective or chronic)?

PREBLE STREET: We take our referrals to the First Place program from case management and outreach staff with Preble Street (or by and with our on-site partners). We know the youth and also have tracked their status and issues over time. By defining our target as chronically homeless youth, it narrows the population to youth who have been homeless and struggle with mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Within referrals we look for additional safety, vulnerability concerns. As the only drop-in youth shelter in the community, this has made sense and puts emphasis on existing relationships.

WEST END: Referrals come to True Colors Residence from nonprofits that contract with NYC agencies, usually the Division for Youth and Community Development. These providers determine which of their clients could be a candidate for our supportive housing.

11. With youth specific apartment buildings, how do you balance non-time limited housing while maintaining youth-aged housing?

PREBLE STREET: our effort to provide the transitional support while giving youth the options of a long term lease is how we have tried to do this. I think the answer to the question about housing first (#4 for us) applies here as well.

WEST END: While we are just completing our 4th year of operation, half of the original tenants have moved on and their replacements are in the 18-24 year range. The majority of those original tenants who remain at True Colors Residence are still quite young, averaging 25 or 26 years of age. Some are still under 25.

12. If there is no "end point" or time limit, how long is the wait list for you programs?

PREBLE STREET: Our program does have a waiting list as we can only take a small number at a time and have to continue to seek apartments. If we expanded staffing and housing options (more availability of affordable housing) we could move things faster. So far we have had youth work with us on the enhanced services component while awaiting the availability of a unit or have worked with them on finding a unit while waiting. Only a few youth at a time express readiness to take this plunge but the interest has grown.

WEST END: The list is significant. This indicates the need for more similar housing, not a limited length of stay that can increase the risk of homelessness recidivism for those young adults still in need of, and benefitting from their current supportive housing.