



YHDP

Youth Homeless Demonstration Program



Partner Report — Project to Date, October 2020

**Addressing Youth Homelessness:
It's About Relationships**

Project Overview

In 2017, a community that cares about youth homelessness came together to create our Community Plan to End Youth Homelessness, and received funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project. The Youth Task Force led a large group of providers in brainstorming and identifying four projects that would close the gaps we were losing young people to. These projects use effective key strategies informed by young people: affordable and flexible housing options, and relentless engagement by caring adults. Three agencies in Anchorage are implementing these projects: Covenant House Alaska, VOA Alaska, and Choosing our Roots.



Leverage

YHDP brings \$750,000 annual new HUD dollars to our community. However, it was never structured to be the catch-all solution to ending youth homelessness. The key to our success will be leveraging existing programs and bringing in new resources needed to build these projects to scale.

\$750,000

To Our Community from HUD Annually

4-6x

 Leveraged Funding Support

The Vision

What does “ending youth homelessness look like?”

Our Community Plan centers around the bold goal of making the experience of youth homelessness **rare, brief and non-recurring**. To accomplish this, we target our efforts towards helping youth make progress in four core outcome areas:



Well-Being



Education & Employment



Stable Housing



Permanent Connections

Project Overview

Rapid Re-Housing // Covenant House Alaska

This approach quickly houses youth in actual home settings instead of in shelters, while helping them build support networks and resiliency. Step down rental assistance is offered over 12 months as youth gain stability.

Permanency Navigator Team // Covenant House Alaska

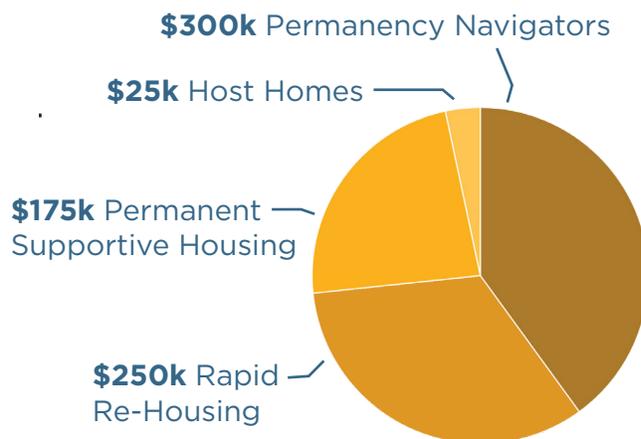
One of the things young people repeatedly expressed was the frustration and trauma of being shuffled between case managers when they move from one system, organization or program to another. The loss of an established positive relationship hinders progress for vulnerable young people. Permanency Navigators provide long-term support as they relentlessly engage youth to find housing and navigate community resources. They can help the youth access behavioral health, substance abuse or disability services, find the right place to live, link to other YHDP projects, and pursue education and employment opportunities. Youth can seek help from their Navigator for as long as they need up to the age of 24.

Host Homes // Choosing Our Roots

Host Home programming builds on the strengths of community care, matching volunteer host mentors with houseless young people to stabilize housing and create an affirming environment. Youth actively lead the decision about which host match is best for them. This project is specifically for LGBTQ+ youth, a population disproportionately likely to experience homelessness. Hosts and participants receive a small stipend to offset living expenses.

Permanent Supportive Housing // VOA Alaska

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) serves the most vulnerable youth who are experiencing homelessness in Anchorage. Targeting transition-aged youth (18-24), PSH pairs affordable housing with comprehensive support services to address homelessness, economic stability, and poor health outcomes. PSH is a proven and cost-effective solution for those identified as homeless and assessed as highest vulnerability in the community. Services are designed to build independent living, tenancy skills, and increase health outcomes.



Stories of Impact

“Being matched with my host is the best thing that’s ever happened to me.

— COR Participant

“I don’t feel like I’m being controlled or too much is expected of me. However, I still get a push that is needed and it’s appreciated.

— VOA Alaska Participant

“You guys made it clear that I’m an equal, and that’s not something I’ve felt in a long time.



— COR Youth Leader

“I like that you guys are very supportive despite where a person is at in their journey.

— VOA Alaska Participant



“I leaned in, pressed my forehead to hers, locked my arms with her, and together we breathed as Keegan gave birth to a healthy baby boy,” described Amanda Valenzuela, Covenant House Alaska Permanency Navigator. Sixteen years ago, Amanda walked through our doors searching for support. Today, she provides immeasurable acts of service for at-risk youth; not only

in their moments of deep despair, but also their moments of absolute triumph.

Before Sadie’s first visit with the VOA Alaska team, she struggled with substance use and coping with a traumatic childhood. Life became more difficult for her after a severe car accident put her in the hospital for weeks. Sadie was living in a local shelter when she entered VOA Alaska’s PSH program. A year later, Sadie is feeling healthier and is happily living in her own apartment and has her driver’s license. She’s working in an internship and is enrolled with additional community services to support her continued success.

Luke first became homeless at age 15. Like many COR youth, Luke is transgender with a family that doesn’t accept his identity. Focused on daily survival, he could never save enough to pay first and last month’s rent. When he made contact with COR, Luke was 22 years old, working full-time and living in a tent.

Over the past year and a half, Luke has worked closely with his case manager and his host, who he describes as the best roommate ever, to maintain employment, address long standing financial and legal barriers, plan for independent housing and develop a consistent relationship with healthcare providers. It hasn’t all been easy—there have been moments when difficult things have happened that may have previously set him back to square one. The difference? He has people to reach out to that he trusts and a community that supports his whole authentic self. He is connecting with his Indigenous community and feels valued and respected.

Measuring Impacts

Rapid Re-Housing // Covenant House Alaska

Through September 2020, 60 youth were served through RRH program, with 22 remaining in the program through the end of September.

Of the total 38 discharges: 16 retained their housing and/or completed the program, 6 returned to family, 2 moved out of state, 5 left due to criminal activity/violence, 1 to jail, 4 reached mutual termination with their landlord on their leases, and 4 left the project voluntarily.



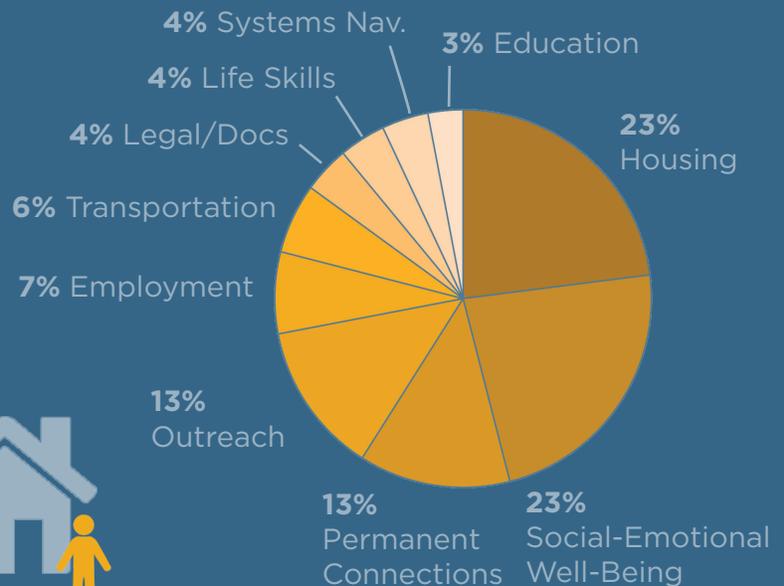
\$3,660 Average Rental Assistance per Client

Permanency Navigators // Covenant House Alaska

Permanency Navigators do whatever it takes, for however long, to end a client's experience of homelessness. Using a mobile model of program delivery, PNs work with clients, wherever they're at, to secure long-term housing placement, making measurable progress in 92% of attempts.

Data showed that the more a client engaged with their PN, the more likely they were to achieve stable housing placement—an average client met with PNs 13 times, but those who achieved placement met an average of 25 times. Furthermore, the data showed the value of PNs' "relentless engagement", with clients often needing nearly two placement attempts before being able to maintain their housing."

PNs visited 424 unique clients 5,735 times, delivering 9,489 total services. PNs made 245 placement attempts for 143 total clients, resulting in 3,510 visits, and 5,127 total services delivered.



245 Successful Housing Placements

Measuring Impacts

Host Homes // Choosing Our Roots

Since starting their YHDP project, COR has contacted and provided case management support to 54 unique LGBTQ+ participants statewide, 34 of them in Anchorage.

Twelve young people have now been paired with hosts in Anchorage. Another nine are receiving LGBTQ-centered supports to help maintain their tenuous housing or are waiting to transition to a host home.

COR trained 25 host homes, 14 of which are in Anchorage. Of those 14, 5 are currently active, 3 are acting as respite hosts, and 6 are currently supporting programming in other ways due to a life circumstance change or COVID impact. 40 additional community volunteers have

received training and support youth as young adult support people and host home liaisons. As a community grassroots support system, COR hosts multigenerational spaces, youth driven arts and outreach activities. Young people have taken leadership roles in COR, including as board members.

In this model, participants choose host homes based on their beliefs, values, habits, and lifestyles. Youth participants are engaged in each step of the process to identify and address their needs so that youth participants can grow into confident, competent young adults on their own terms.

54 LGBTQ+ Participants Statewide



12 Youth Paired With Hosts



Gender Identification



Race/Ethnicity Identification



25

Trained Host Homes



14 Host Homes Located in Anchorage.

Demographics are approximate, as many participants identify as multiracial.

Measuring Impacts

Permanent Supportive Housing // VOA Alaska

Since housing our first client in March 2019, VOA Alaska's PSH team has made over 1,300 service contacts, excluding outreach attempts and no shows. The team works with each client to develop the skills necessary to: secure and maintain housing, access treatment for mental health and substance misuse, access primary care to address other health needs, engage in job training, and establish links to relevant community resources.

VOA Alaska has helped clients secure housing, attend mental health and substance abuse treatment, access primary care and address other health needs, access job training supports, link to community resources, and set goals. A major focus of care includes tenancy support skills, such as maintaining an apartment, being a good neighbor, and how to remain in stable housing. Another focus is teaching basic life skills, like grocery shopping within a set budget and preparing healthy meals.

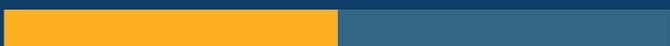
Improving Quality of Life


54% report better coping skills when things go wrong.


92% report feeling better at handling daily life.


100% report increase of feeling treated with respect.


75% report decreased mental health symptoms.


50% report reduced substance use.


85% report their quality of life has improved.

1,300 

Total Service Contacts

25 Households Served
With **18 Housed**
(29 Individuals)



9 

Have Maintained Housing
For Six Months

6 

Currently Employed

Holistic Care Through Partnerships

As essential partners in creating an efficient, non-duplicative, holistic response to youth homelessness, we understand that relationship is the necessary intervention—one which has led to a richer assessment of participant needs. Our distinctive and specialized viewpoints allow us to meet intersections of populations and support allocation of resources, keeping in mind individual needs. We have built a system of mutual aid and responsibility, valuing emergency and individualized services along with their unique roles; these are necessary as long as we are in this work of solving a social issue permanently.

Culture of Learning

This collective of diverse partners fosters a dynamic culture of learning. We are called to continuously improve our systems, rooting out systemic barriers and committing to humility in our quest for inclusive best practice. Whether we are learning in the course of daily direct service work while improving data robustness and honing our coordinated entry process, or participating in national projects like the Grand Challenge, we push one another to be better every day. These multidisciplinary spaces also create opportunities for transformation with funders and policy makers, community supporters and neighbors.

What Makes YHDP Unique?

Youth at the Front

We cannot underscore enough the vital importance of youth leadership and voice in the success of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project. The Anchorage Youth Task Force has shaped the services we provide and amplified the experiences of young people navigating homelessness. Leveraging the skills they have learned as independent, autonomous survivors, YTF youth leaders envision a future where peer to peer programming empowers youth to lead their best life. Their insight and direction in broader Coalition work ensures that all services for people experiencing homelessness will be grounded in dignity and respect.

Systems Changes

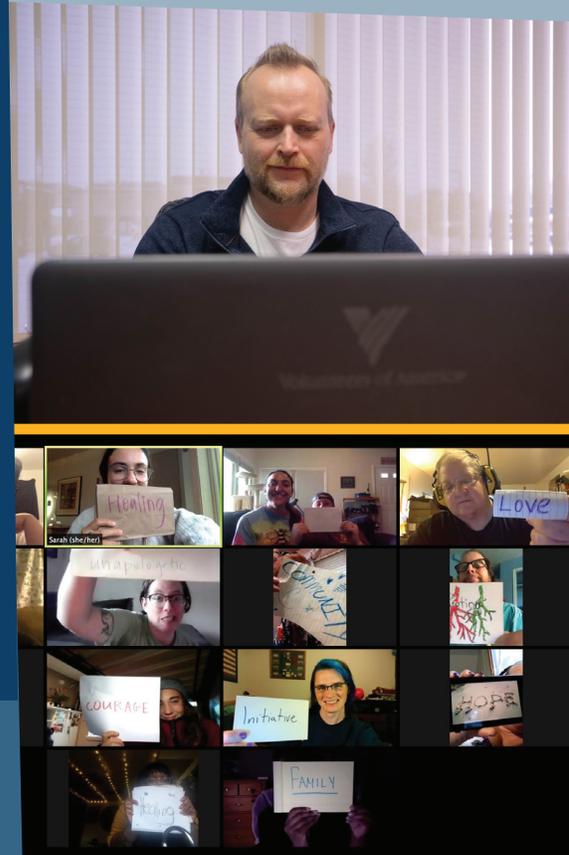
We have forged a path of change within our systems. Shifting to a practice which values early relationship-based interventions and matching youth with the level of support they need to thrive has yielded outstanding results. Our culture of accountability propels us forward, creating layers of support which divert youth and young adults toward stability. We are invested in addressing systemic inequities within our agencies and the community, as each change to the existing system reveals work to be done. Already, we see that these evolutions have resulted in life saving outcomes.

COVID: How We've Pivoted

The behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected youth. The silverlining of the pandemic is the increased focus on addressing visible homelessness and adjusting the existing system to address immediate safety for houseless residents.

Throughout the pandemic, we have never stopped; we saw this new challenge and rose to meet it. From basic needs to virtual pro-social spaces and wellness supports, each agency pivoted to meet client health and safety needs during COVID.

Even during increased isolation, less access to employment, education declines—holistically, participants are doing much better than we might have expected given the state of the world. We feel this is due to our cohesive response.



What's Next?

Since launching this project in October of 2018, project partners have leveraged youth homelessness service funds to house vulnerable youth and avert the trajectory into adult homelessness. This innovative and collaborative project continues to scale up to meet rising need and end youth homelessness. While continuing to provide basic needs, the following are continued collaborative goals:

- Address project sustainability and financial support for capacity to meet need
- Continue shifting, growing, and changing to provide deeper work on equity and systems that perpetuate inequity
- Continue to expand network of community support in homelessness prevention
- Prepare for the new landscape of post-COVID work to support youth
- Address increased behavioral health needs of youth
- Shifting models from emergency shelter to housing interventions
- Address ongoing systemic barriers
- Share lessons learned with HUD and other YHDP projects



Investment Partners

New investors in our community have stepped up to provide the level of financial support needed to truly help end the youth homeless experience. These partners are instrumental in providing funds for things that HUD cannot cover but are essential for stable housing: moving costs, furniture, clothes for job interviews, bus passes, and case management support.

Some of our community investors include:

