

# Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

Anchorage, Alaska

Final Partner Report 2018 - 2022



# Project Beginnings

The **Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP)** was a funding initiative created by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2017 with an ambitious goal: find innovative solutions that would end youth homelessness. In Anchorage, a **Youth Task Force** spearheaded a collaborative community effort to identify and implement projects that could close the gaps causing youth homelessness. With a vision to make youth homelessness “rare, brief, and non-recurring,” four new projects were created by the following partners:



**Covenant House Alaska (CHA)** are experts in outreach and engagement, connecting with vulnerable youth on the street, in shelters, or other unstable housing situations. CHA provides transitional living, permanent housing services, education and employment services, and anti-trafficking services. As part of YHDP, they brought on two new innovative projects: **Permanency Navigators** and **Rapid Re-Housing**.



**Choosing Our Roots (COR)** collaborates with community partners to provide comprehensive services and establish a support network for LGBTQ+ youth in Alaska. Their YHDP project, **Host Homes**, matches youth with LGBTQ-friendly housing and mentoring for stays up to six months.



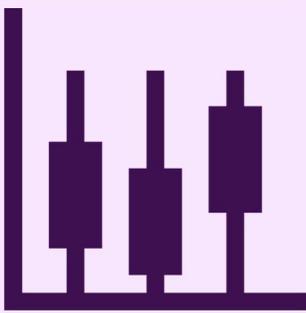
**Volunteers of America Alaska (VOA Alaska)** offers supportive housing, rapid rehousing, peer support, mental health and substance abuse counseling to youth. Their YHDP project, **Permanent Supportive Housing for Youth**, is the first long-term housing program in Anchorage that combines housing with wraparound support to ensure the success of each youth.

## Effective Coordination as the Key to Success

YHDP maximizes impact through specialization and leveraging partner strengths. Anchorage's "Coordinated Entry" process adds homeless youth to a by-name list, and service providers review it regularly to make housing referrals based on unique needs. Permanency Navigators support nearly all youth, while different partners offer specialized services based on individual needs. For example, VOA provides additional support for youth with mental health or substance use challenges. Permanency Navigators assist in navigating between programs, ensuring comprehensive support.



## Evolution & Scaling



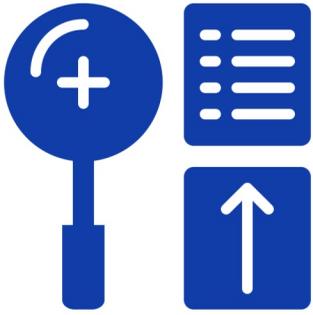
Increased capacity through the investment of HUD and other partners has enabled each organization to extend their services beyond the original scope of the program. **VOA Alaska** expanded its Supportive Housing team from one clinician and one case manager to multiple staff members, including Peer Support Specialists and a Housing Coordinator. Now a greater number of young people are able to secure stable housing.

**Covenant House Alaska** transitioned from a shelter-focused model to a community-based approach with a strong emphasis on housing. Their team of Permanency Navigators and Rapid Rehousing Case Managers has grown from four to 16. This increased capacity has allowed them to be more responsive, mobile, and youth-centered in their work.

Recognizing the limitations of their host-home model, **Choosing Our Roots** acquired a multiplex apartment to provide a bridge home for Anchorage youth. Additionally, they established longer-term host homes, expanded staff capacity to support hosts and youth, and extended their services statewide.

# Measuring Impact

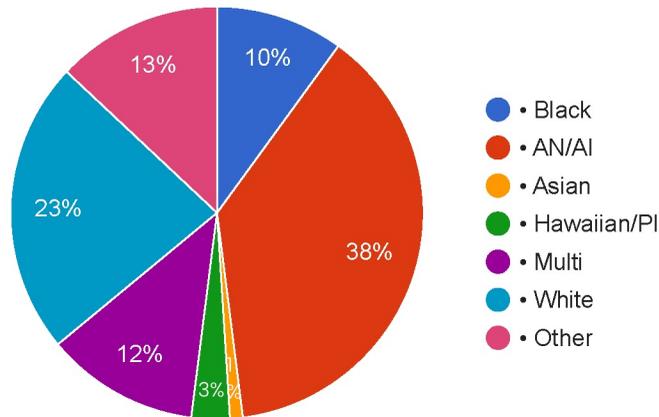
## Systemwide Results:



- **Over 1,000 youth** experiencing homelessness were served per year.
- **Increase in collaboration:** 34% of homeless youth received Coordinated Entry services in 2020, up from 19% in 2017.
- **Increased community-based support:** The percent of youth receiving outreach and navigation services increased from 2% to 46% from 2017 to 2020.
- **Decreased reliance on emergency shelter:** The percent of youth using shelter dropped from 86% to 51% during the same time period.
- **Decreased homelessness:** The number of homeless youth who obtained permanent housing went from less than 10 in 2017 to almost 100 in 2020.

## Demographics (2020)

• Black-	10%
• Alaska Native/ American Indian-	38%
• Asian-	1%
• Hawaiian/PI-	3%
• Multi-racial	12%
• White-	23%
• Other-	13%

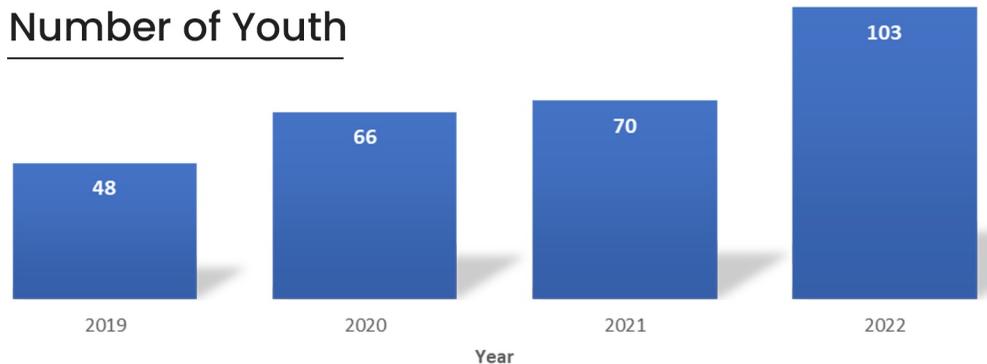


## Partners Impact

### VOA Alaska

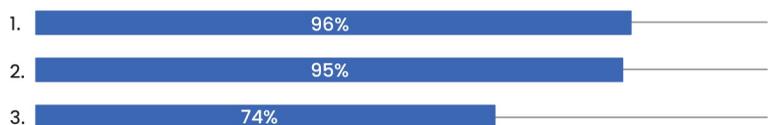
- 142 clients served (122 households)
- 8,835 service contacts
- 71 maintained permanent housing for at least 6 months

### Number of Youth



## Youth in the program reported:

- 96% Quality of life improved
- 95% Feel better at handling daily life
- 74% Decreased mental health symptoms



# Choosing Our Roots



- 72 LGBTQ+ participants
- Trained 30 host homes
- 15 youth were paired with hosts
- 81 additional community volunteers were trained to support youth
- 54 youth and families served with Alaska Stabilization and Rent Relief funds

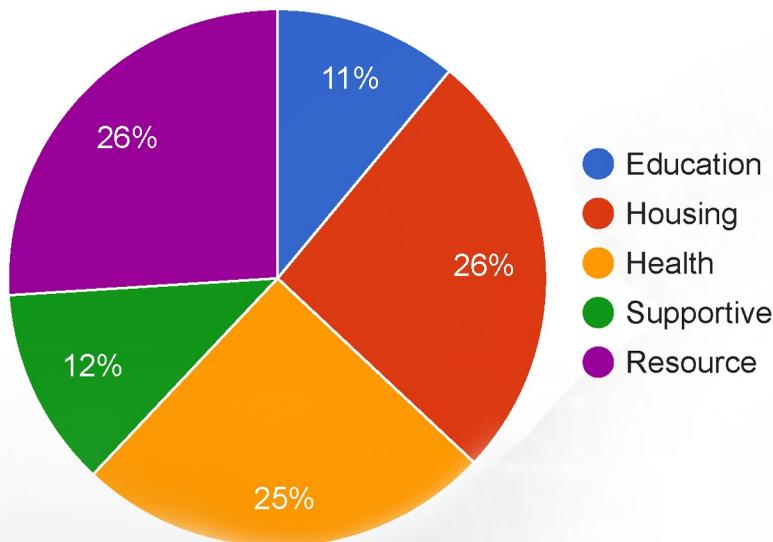
## Covenant House Alaska

- 742 clients served
- 296 stably advanced out of program
- 192 went into stable housing, with 80% retaining housing



### What Navigators helped with:

- Education + Employment: 11%
- Housing: 26%
- Health + Wellbeing 25%
- Supportive relationship building 12%
- Resource navigation/other 26%



### 2022 Snapshot

- 418 youth received Navigator Support (including almost 100% of youth on Coordinated Entry receiving services)
  - 9,654 total instances of service
  - 3 services per contact on average (education, employment, housing, basic needs, life skills, etc)
  - 80 obtained stable housing





## A Story of Collective Impact

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Courtney's journey exemplifies the transformative power of close collaboration. When Courtney found herself fleeing domestic violence caused by her father's disapproval of her being transgender, she sought refuge at **Covenant House Alaska**. Over the years, she intermittently relied on their shelter, depending on the state of her fragile relationship with her family. However, as Courtney's needs evolved, she discovered **Choosing Our Roots**, an organization that could provide her with welcoming housing, healthcare, and additional services beyond what Covenant House offered.

While Courtney faced challenges in finding suitable housing through Choosing Our Roots due to challenges in identifying a Host Home, her determination, coupled with the support of her Permanency Navigator, opened new doors. Through their collaborative efforts, Courtney was connected with **Volunteers of America**, who provided mental health counseling and welcomed her into their Permanent Supportive Housing program. Courtney firmly believes that without the invaluable support she received from Covenant House, Choosing Our Roots, and Volunteers of America, she would not have achieved the stability she enjoys today. Courtney's story underscores the lasting impact that unified support networks can have on the lives of young people in need.



# Overcoming Challenges & New Best Practices

## COVID-19

- All partners increased mental health support to quarantined and isolated youth.
- The **Youth Task Force** led the development of a vaccination and testing campaign at Covenant House Alaska.
- All partners had to be more mobile, flexible, and creative. Everyone adjusted services to ensure that clients safely continued to receive support. Examples of new strategies:
  - Food deliveries to quarantining youth
  - Zoom walkthroughs and virtual lease signings with landlords

## Landlord engagement & education

- Good relationships with landlords result in more youth getting accepted, and makes it easier to work through rental issues that arise.
- Partners have educated landlords on the principles of trauma-informed care.
- It is important to educate landlords about our mission, keep them engaged, and incentivize them.

## Lessons on serving youth better

- When staff have the freedom to be creative, they can help youth solve diverse challenges.
- Staff with “lived experience” of being homeless have unique expertise on becoming stable.
- Considering the high levels of trauma homeless youth have experienced, it can take for several years to help youth build the proper support networks. Patience is key.

## Evaluation

An independent research firm, Westat, was contracted by HUD to conduct an implementation evaluation of the ten Round One demonstration sites. Westat highlighted the significant impact of rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing as a “critical addition” to Anchorage’s efforts. Anchorage stood out as one of the only communities implementing Permanent Supportive Housing for Youth for the first time. The report emphasized that Permanency Navigators were key to bridging communication gaps between systems, as well as in helping prevent youth from “bouncing between systems.”



Stakeholders reported that the program was “wildly successful in engaging and placing youth in stable housing.” Anchorage’s YHDP was also credited with making space for youth voices within program development, as well as giving other smaller providers like Choosing Our Roots “a permanent seat at the table” within the homelessness system. Due to increased collaborative support, the average length of stay in rapid rehousing went from **106 days to 254 days** between 2017 and 2020. And finally, Anchorage was the only community that blended YHDP funding with other private resources, reinforcing the program’s strength and sustainability. Find the full report [here](#).

# What do we still need?

## Scaling and improving the model

- Most HUD funds can only pay for rent and security deposits. However, successful housing may require help with utilities, food, move-in costs, furniture, transportation, etc. **Flexible renter's assistance** will leverage federal dollars and address these needs.
- CHA utilized their HUD rental assistance funds 4 months early, with **more rapid rehousing funding**, we can house more youth.
- Permanency Navigators have a caseload of 35 clients, making it challenging to help all youth experiencing homelessness. **More Navigators** will ensure all youth in need are connected to resources.
- Youth who are successfully housed are often only a major life event away from homelessness. **New prevention funding** could immediately prevent homelessness as young tenants regain stability.
- The **addition of Peer Support** positions will give youth with lived experience the ability to help their peers.
- **New research** is needed to identify gaps that still exist, particularly for youth that are coming from foster care and juvenile justice.



*Thank You*

## These partners have brought vital new resources to young people in need:

- **Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness:** leadership, data, resource sharing, collaboration
- **Nine Star Education and Employment Services:** internships and vocational training
- **Identity, Inc:** healthcare services for LGBTQ+ youth
- **Food Bank of Alaska:** food
- **Safe Harbor:** low-income transitional housing
- **Alaska Housing Finance Corporation:** housing vouchers for youth experiencing homelessness
- **Office of Children's Services:** coordinated care and housing vouchers for youth exiting foster care
- **Cook Inlet Tribal Council:** culturally-relevant education and employment services
- **Southcentral Foundation:** healthcare and behavioral health support
- **Anchorage School District:** tailored support for at-risk and homeless students



**The following funders  
significantly invested in the  
Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program  
to make it successful:**



**Richard L. & Diane M. Block Foundation**