

There's No Place Like Home: A Transformative Coordinated Community Plan to Eradicate Homelessness Among Youth and Young Adults in Rhode Island



**Executive Summary with
YHDP Project Descriptions**

October 2022

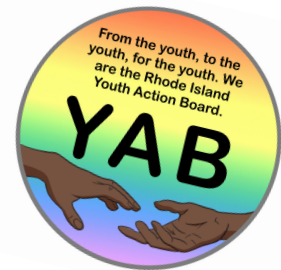
Call To Action

A message from the Youth Action Board

We are involved in work that most shy away from because we have experienced homelessness, struggle with inconsistent living situations, and have friends and loved ones who have been homeless. We raise our voices, share our vision, and are part of making policy, program and funding decisions to prevent and end youth homelessness because we know how important and necessary real change is. We're part of this movement so youth who are struggling with housing now can have their voices heard and know they're not alone, and to make sure others no longer have to go through what we've experienced.

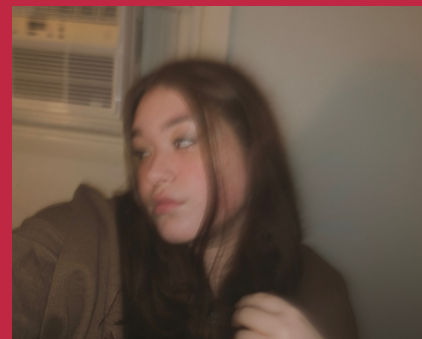
We all know that having a place to call home is one of the most important things that gives us the freedom to be happy, healthy and to be our best selves. Having so many youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in our community with so few resources is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. We must do better. Youth homelessness is complex AND it is a solvable problem. We're excited to be working with others who see us as full partners in creating solutions, have the courage to think boldly, and know that ending youth homelessness is a matter of justice. There is a lot of momentum--energy and commitment to confront hard truths and make real change--to prevent and end youth homelessness in Rhode Island. Combined with this \$3.5M YHDP award, our movement has a rare opportunity to begin building an equitable system that works for all youth. We hope you'll join us in building a stronger community and a better future.

With love, hope and urgency,
Andrea, Benji, Ella, Favour, Gloria, Johan, Sofia, and Suzan
Rhode Island Youth Action Board



Title Page Image Description:

The YAB worked with Victoria Matthews, Providence native and artist, to illustrate our vision of growth and change that the CCP, and the process to create it, represents. The greenhouse symbolizes a caring space--warm, nurturing, and affirming with the conditions necessary to thrive. Grounded in love, equity, partnership and celebration, the tree grows within the greenhouse and ultimately beyond it. The leaves tell the story of multiple perspectives, roles, and kinds of expertise our community has and needs to ensure the tree continues to remain strong and vibrant as we evolve. For us, this image evokes strength, connection, diversity, growth, and joy.



From left to right: YAB Members Suzan, Ella, Benji, and Andrea Missing: Johan. Gloria, and Favour

Mission: By 2030 youth homelessness in Rhode Island will be a rare, brief and nonrecurring experience.



DESIGNED BY AND FOR RHODE ISLAND YOUTH

Vision: Our vision is that unaccompanied homelessness among youth and young adults is rare in Rhode Island, with disparities related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity eliminated.

To do this, we will reorient our systems and services towards justice by redistributing the resources and power young people need to thrive. Ending homelessness for youth (individuals and families in which every member is under the age of 25) does not mean that a young person will never experience housing instability or homelessness. Rather, it means that our community will have a system in place to prevent homelessness for youth whenever possible and, if homelessness cannot be prevented, to ensure that the young person’s homelessness is brief and non-recurring. Young people experiencing homelessness or housing instability deserve access to low/no barrier safe and stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, social-emotional well-being, and access to healthcare.

In September 2021, Rhode Island's Continuum of Care (RiCoC) was selected for the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) competitive Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). Upon Rhode Island’s designation as a YHDP community the RiCoC received an investment of \$3.5 million to, following the leadership of the YAB, design and then build a system to eradicate homelessness among unaccompanied youth and young adults in Rhode Island.

Gentrification, wildly inadequate stock and investment in affordable housing, the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism, and a host of other socio-political realities impact youth and families and their ability to become and remain stably housed in Rhode Island, so our approach to tackling homelessness among YYA must be dynamic and flexible, and always driven by youth voice, vision, and leadership. We hope this Coordinated Community Plan will serve as a living document, inspiring ideas, connections, and transformative action that will eradicate homelessness and housing instability among youth and young adults in RI.

The Hope Initiative offers the following perspectives on health equity in the Ocean State compared to other states across various factors that influence health and wellbeing. Ranking is out of 50 states; lower is better. Domain scores are out of 100, and higher scores are better.

Health Outcomes	Social & Economic Factors	Community & Safety Factors	Physical Environment	Access to Healthcare
16th Domain Score: 68	45th Domain Score: 45	14th Domain Score: 68	50th Domain Score: 40	6th Domain Score: 80

Factors such as the quality of healthcare and health equity, access to education, built environment, social and community stability, economic stability, and exposure to the incarceration system all foster environments that affect the community makeup of the population of homeless youth in Rhode Island. Systemic and institutional oppression increase the likelihood of residential instability, economic difficulties, family conflict, mental health challenges, and substance use.

(Some of) What We Know About Youth Homelessness

The plan has identified significant needs, particularly for prioritized populations: LGBTQIA+, youth of color, minors, foster care involved, justice involved, youth and young adults (YYA) with disabilities, pregnant/parenting, human trafficking/exploitation, and immigrants/refugees. While a great number of realities and needs of YYA with marginalized identities are shared, many are specific to their identities and/or lived experiences.

It is essential to provide affirming, culturally relevant support for youth to obtain and maintain housing, surrounding them with services and supports designed to meet their unique needs before, during, and after their engagement with housing programs.

- 1 in 30 youth ages 13-17 and 1 in 10 young adults ages 18-24 experience homelessness over a 12 month period, That could mean as many as 13,000 housing unstable youth in Rhode Island.
- Black or African American youth have an 83% higher risk and Latino youth have a 33% higher risk for housing instability
- LGBTQ+ youth have a 120% higher risk of becoming homeless
- Unmarried parenting youth have a 200% higher risk for housing instability .
- One out of five people who identify as transgender will experience homelessness. Discrimination in housing, employment, and daily life are barriers for LGBTQ+ youth.
- Young women experiencing homelessness are almost five times more likely to become pregnant and far more likely to experience multiple pregnancies than young women who are housed.
- The greatest single risk factor for young adult homelessness is lacking a high school diploma or GED, while the second risk factor is being a single parent.
- People with disabilities are at an increased risk of becoming homeless and socially excluded due to the prevalence of institutionalization, discrimination in access to services, inadequate housing and social supports, a lack of accessible and affordable housing stock and unaffordable rents.



Key RI Facts

In 2020, there were 416 youth under 24 in shelters, and 96 youth or youth-headed families unsheltered. There has been a steady increase in the number of youth, sheltered and unsheltered.

Over 55% of the youth population being served identifies as a person of color (only 20.7% of the youth population are youth of color).

Over 40% of homeless youth lived without their parents before the age of 18.

84% of homeless youth reported couch surfing.

A lack of safe, youth-specific, accessible crisis resources for youth is an extraordinary gap in Rhode Island

One in five runaway and homeless youth are a victim of human trafficking

59.6% of homeless youth reported being kicked out of their homes

20% of homeless youth had a history in foster care, versus 0.8 of the RI youth population

The graduation rate in Rhode Island in 2020 was 84% for students with homes and 54% for those experiencing homelessness.

Commitment to Principles for Effective Practice

All YHDP projects are required to integrate these core principles for effective practices. These approaches align with and reflect our communities values and commitment to inclusion, equity, and just practices with and for youth, their families, and our communities.



Racial Equity & Justice | Values & Core Principles

Youth homelessness exists today largely due to America's long history of structural racism and systemic inequities. In order to end youth homelessness, we will work to ensure our system works for all youth. YHDP partner organizations are committed to centering the importance of racial equity and justice in all of our work. The YHDP Steering Committee, Youth Action Board, and Unaccompanied Youth Committee will strengthen our knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal competency to address inequity and injustice through continual practice of these core principles.

We see equity as providing opportunities and resources based on need, realizing not everyone starts in the same place. Justice takes this concept a step further by removing the barriers that impede equal rights and self determination; it seeks to overturn oppression at its roots. As a community, we endeavor to consistently, with love and in solidarity:

- **Recognize and Center Intersectionality**
- **Name and Challenge White Supremacy**
- **Engage In Principled Struggle**
- **Practice Targeted Universalism**
- **Generate Transformative Visions Toward Liberation**

These principles were based largely on those developed by A Way Home America's leadership team.



Key Strategies

Designed in collaboration with local stakeholders and through a planning process that prioritized youth voice, agency, and leadership, three key strategies are identified in the Coordinated Community Plan (CCP), with goals and activities to deliver on these strategies are outlined. Our CCP, and each of its components, integrates our racial equity and justice values and core principles, and embeds strategies for effective practice that focus on the needs of prioritized populations who disproportionately experience homelessness and housing insecurity.



RHODE ISLAND'S KEY STRATEGIES TO ERADICATE HOMELESSNESS AMONG YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS :

1

Build and maintain capacity to provide community-based prevention, diversion, early identification and intervention, support, and stabilization services. We will implement solutions that enable us to identify as many YYA who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness as possible and to connect them with robust systems of support. These efforts will help us ensure youth homelessness is a rare experience.

2

Develop and ensure rapid access to a spectrum of youth-centric, affirming, safe, supported housing solutions and robust cross-system services. We will invest in a comprehensive array of new resources that responds to our housing and service needs, tests new and innovative models, and better serves priority populations to ensure youth homelessness is a brief, one-time occurrence

3

Develop, improve, and sustain the resources and capacity to prevent and end unaccompanied youth homelessness through cross-sector planning, coordination, advocacy, and oversight. We will organize the way that we work and make decisions to form a clear, comprehensive, equity and community centric, system to sustain system capacity at scale and eradicate youth homelessness



YHDP Project Descriptions

The Youth Action Board is thrilled to share descriptions of the programs funded through the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project.



Transitional Housing-Rapid Rehousing Joint Programs

Joint Transitional Housing & Rapid Rehousing (TH-RRH) combines Transitional Housing (TH), a service-intensive, frequently congregate-care component, with Rapid Re-Housing (RRH), a scattered site independent living component.

Foster Forward will focus on providing housing to both those who have foster care experience, while expanding services to those who have no history in foster care. TH-participants will have a private room in an apartment that Foster Forward owns or leases. This project will provide a total of 3 TH beds in individual, semi-private spaces with shared living spaces, kitchens, and bathrooms and 5 1 bedroom apartments for RRH.

Haus of Codec currently operates a 6 transitional housing (TH) facility with 2 crisis beds, and will provide a total of 19 TH beds in individual, semi-private spaces with shared living spaces, kitchens, and bathrooms and 1 bedroom apartments. In addition to housing, they will operate a drop-in center 3 days a week. **Population of Focus: LGBTQ+**

Sojourner House will provide 6 new beds of Transitional Housing (configuration based on availability) and 9 new individual and shared living spaces of Rapid Rehousing (five 1-bedroom and four 2-bedroom apartments).

Population of Focus: Youth fleeing violence (domestic violence and/or human trafficking)

Host Homes

Adoption RI will replicate a successful family search and engagement model used by child welfare providers, Extreme Family Finding, with youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability. The goal is to identify and support kinship caregivers that can provide safe, temporary, welcoming space for up to 6 months where young people have time to repair their relationships with self-identified and chosen family and/or identify and pursue other housing options.

Family Service of RI will expand their host home model Basic Center Program to include youth and young adults ages 18-24, providing temporary shelter and case management for 8 youth at a time. FSRI will identify host homes and services that are culturally relevant, convenient, and responsive to the needs of young people.



Diversion Services & Drop-In Centers

Youth Pride Inc. will work with youth ages 18-25 at our drop-in center who are homeless, unsheltered, unstably housed, in immediate danger of eviction or losing current housing, in emergency or transitional shelter and/or are working towards/have been placed in long-term housing. Services provided will include rental assistance, case management, and clinical support that address individual needs of each youth to assure their success in attaining, keeping and maintaining housing. **Population of Focus: LGBTQ+**

Foster Forward will expand youth support specialist, peer support specialist, and clinician hours at their Drop-In Center, as well as provide some diversion funds (such as application fees, utility and rental assistance, etc.) to youth and young adults to help them remain housed or quickly find new housing.

Sojourner House will launch a Youth Navigation and Diversion program to serve youth and young adults who are about to be homeless due to abuse and those who are already homeless. Sojourner navigators will connect youth with a range of services and resources so that they can avoid entering the homeless system or exit it quickly to safe housing. **Population of Focus: Youth with histories that include relationship violence.**

Street Outreach

House Of Hope-HYPE Youth Outreach will expand its service delivery through YHDP funding for a specialist Street Outreach Worker to work with the growing number of youth presenting with co-occurring disorders or other highly complex behavioral health needs. **Population of Focus: Youth with behavioral health needs.**

Youth SOAR!

Rhode Island Coalition To End Homelessness--SOAR will focus on expanding engagement with youth and young adults. A Youth Liaison will engage and support youth in completing SSI/SSDI applications using the SOAR model. **Population of Focus: Youth with disabilities including behavioral health needs.**

System Support

Rhode Island Coalition To End Homelessness-Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) This project will expand the HMIS Lead operations to engage our youth in all aspects of HMIS lead work including developing policies and procedures, system administration for new YHDP projects, training and technical support for youth projects, data analysis, data entry, monitoring and evaluation as well as supporting Coordinated Entry. This will also fund a position for a youth with lived experience to be trained and work within the HMIS lead team to integrate youth voice into all HMIS work.



This Executive Summary was written with assistance from Emilie Lum and the RI Youth Action Board