Erie and Niagara County Coordinated Community Plan for Ending Youth Homelessness

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

In August of 2019, Erie and Niagara Counties in Western New York were chosen by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to receive $3,592,570 in Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) Funds.

Our community partners undertook an eight month long youth-centric strategic planning process to develop this Coordinated Community Plan. Through deliberate discussions with our community partners, which includes the Youth Action Board, Youth Task Force, Community Stakeholders, and YHDP Technical Assistance providers, we developed the needs assessment, guiding principles, goals, and prioritized projects.

Snapshot of our Coordinated Community Plan
Needs ● Estimated about 1,600 at-risk unaccompanied and parenting youth annually ● Approx. 750 unaccompanied and parenting youth experienced homelessness annually
Guiding Principles ● Trauma Informed Care and Positive Youth Development ● Youth Choice, Individualized supports, Progressive Engagement ● Immediate Access to Housing without Preconditions and Coordinated Entry ● Family Engagement and Social/Community Integration
Goals ● Identification ● Prevention and Diversion ● Coordinated Entry ● Stable Housing ● Sustainability
Prioritized Projects ● Joint Transitional and Rapid Rehousing (TH-RRH) ● Family Engagement Team with Diversion Fund ● Overnight Drop-in Center

A Letter From Youth Action Board Representatives

For the past several years, the Homeless Alliance of WNY and Youth Task Force have been working hard to secure the YHDP grant to help unaccompanied and parenting youth experiencing homelessness to get off the street and into a home. Now that we have been awarded the grant, the Youth Task Force and Youth Action Board have been working together to come up with ways to help these youth to escape homelessness. As Youth Action Board Members, we feel that our voices were heard and that the Youth Task Force and community partners listened to what the Youth Action Board had to say from the start.

As a community, we share a vision, a vision that will be seen, heard and that will be successful. Why? You may ask and the answer is very simple. If you believed something and you saw the need for change, would you make that change? We as a community see a need for improvement and change so that is why our vision will be successful; we will end youth homelessness one step at a time creating change in each moment.

"All youth and young adults in our community are valuable, resilient, and deserving of resources, safety, and a sense of empowerment. Our goal is to end youth homelessness in collaboration with youth and young adults and create an environment where our youth can thrive and become healthy adults "

To figure out who our target population of youth would be, and how to best help them, we looked at the characteristics of the youth in our community who are at-risk of or actually experiencing homelessness. Though we are trying to design programs to help all youth, we also look at each youth as an individual with individual preference, needs, and self-determination, so it is important that YHDP-funded providers incorporate youth choice into their services. The needs of youth range from housing, education and employment, social and emotional well-being, and the need for permanent connections.

As a community we prioritized funding an overnight drop-in center, joint transitional-rapid rehousing, and a family engagement team. These programs will help both youth who are at risk of homelessness and youth currently experiencing homelessness. We hope these new programs can help youth meet their goals, prevent future homelessness, and reach their full potential.

In our Coordinated Community Plan, we talk about special populations who experience homelessness. "Special populations" refer to smaller groups of homeless youth who share circumstances that require specialized assistance and services. These are pregnant or parenting youth, LBGTQ+ youth, minor youth (those who are under age 18), youth who have involvement with foster care, youth who are involved in the justice system, survivors of human trafficking, and youth who are living with disabilities. We have found that youth in those circumstances are especially at-risk of experiencing homelessness.

Our community agreed to use evidence-based frameworks to guide the creation and delivery of services. We plan to integrate trauma informed care in all aspects of services. In line with Positive Youth Development, we've incorporated leadership and community organizing training into our Youth Action Board curriculum. We also will incorporate family engagement strategies, ensure access to housing without barriers, and service delivery that prioritizes youth choice. These principles will help our youth and service providers create a safe and secure community with positive opportunities.

We'd like to thank the Youth Action Board, Youth Task Force, Homeless Alliance, Continuum of Care (CoC) Board and CoC Members, the Project Selection Committee, our local Government Officials, and our technical assistance providers from Technical Assistance Collaborative, the National Center for Homeless Education, and the True Colors Fund. Without all of these passionate partners lending their hard work, experience, and expertise, this Coordinated Community Plan would not have been possible.

- *Corey and Teneva*

Introduction

On August 29th, 2019, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) selected Buffalo/Erie County and Niagara Falls/Niagara County to receive the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) funding. The initial two-year $3,592,570 grant was awarded to the Homeless Alliance of Western New York (HAWNY) and it may be renewable annually after the initial two-year period through the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program, an annual funding competition funded by HUD.

In order to demonstrate how a strategic approach to planning and continuous quality improvement will guide the process of ending youth homelessness in our community, we developed this Coordinated Community Plan (CCP). This document outlines a comprehensive, community-wide approach for identifying, engaging, empowering, and serving unaccompanied youth age 24 and under. These youth are experiencing homelessness or housing instability alone or with other youth or are pregnant or parenting.

This Coordinated Community Plan builds on the dedicated planning and advocacy work done by the community's Youth Task Force and Youth Action Board over the past several years. Our CoC has always prioritized collaboration and innovation to end homelessness in our communities. For example, our CoC received the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness' designation of effectively ending Veteran's homelessness in 2016, and we strive to do the same for all populations experiencing homelessness.

Since receiving YHDP funds, our community partners enthusiastically developed this plan to end youth homelessness, agreed on common goals and objectives, and developed new partnerships to ensure youth homelessness in our community is rare, brief, and nonrecurring. Our CCP was youth-led and data-driven. We analyzed local data from multiple sources, held focus groups with both youth and youth service providers, and recorded the ideas expressed in Youth Task Force, community stakeholder, and Youth Action Board meetings.

Community Partners and Governance Structure

Community Partners

The Homeless Alliance of Western New York and the Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC) facilitated many meetings of the Youth Task Force, community stakeholders, and Youth Action Board throughout the planning process. In order to do this, HAWNY built upon existing relationships and built new partnerships across Erie and Niagara Counties. For a full list of our partners, stakeholders, and YAB members, see **Appendix B**.

Governance Structure
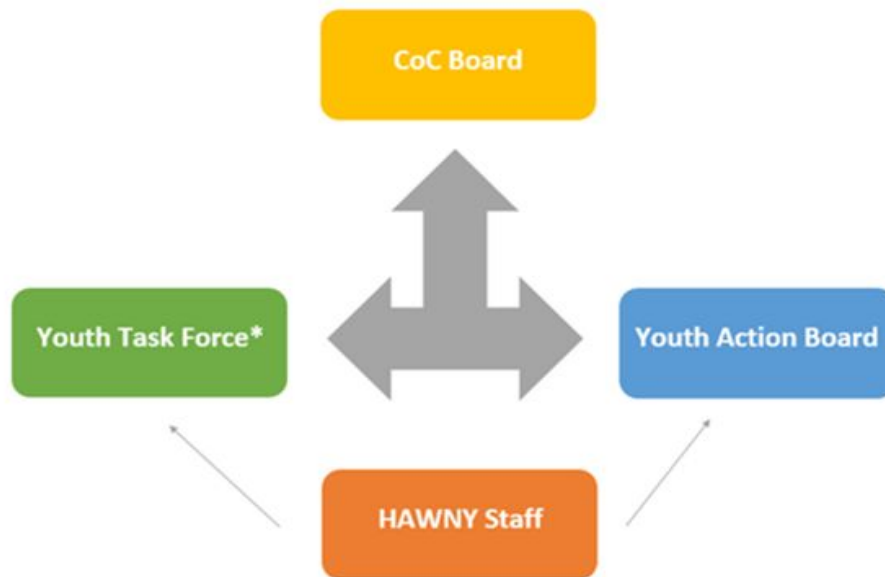
* Youth Action Board members will also sit on Youth Task Force

The CoC Board, Erie and Niagara County Youth Task Forces (YTF) (these task forces, among many service providers, also included youth and CoC Board members), and the Youth Action Board (YAB) are the governance body of the YHDP process. Homeless Alliance of Western New York staff assist in facilitating the YTF and YAB.

The Youth Task Force, Youth Action Board, and Homeless Alliance of WNY worked together to create this Coordinated Community Plan. The planning process for the YHDP funding included monthly YTF meetings and weekly YAB meetings, from September 2019 to April 2020, facilitated by the Technical Assistance Collaborative and Homeless Alliance of WNY.

The governing bodies for the purposes of the YHDP planning process are as follows:

Youth Action Board (YAB)

The Youth Action Board (YAB) is a youth-led committee made of youth and young adults ages 15 - 24 with lived experience of homelessness and/or housing instability. It is facilitated by adult allies and YAB member representatives. The YAB works as a team to strategically share their expertise, to identify gaps in services and areas of need for youth experiencing homelessness, to evaluate current and new services, and initiate a change in the status quo. The Youth Action Board has two tiers - a representative committee and the general committee. Prior to any decision making by the Representative Committee, the whole YAB has had a chance to discuss the issues at hand. Within YAB meetings, decisions are made through consensus. If consensus is achieved, it means that 100 percent of YAB members in attendance are each at least 75 percent comfortable with the decision being made. The Representative Committee is made up of 2 YAB members who can commit to at least 6 meetings or 7 hours per month. They solicit feedback from the whole YAB, represent and make decisions representing the YAB at Youth Task Force and community meetings.

The YAB, in collaboration with the Youth Task Force and CoC Board leads the creation and selection, evaluation, and implementation of new YHDP projects.

Youth Task Force (YTF)

The Youth Task Force (YTF) was developed several years ago within our CoC to help advocate for youth and organize youth specific point-in-time counts. Upon receiving YHDP, the YTF was expanded to include all community stakeholders. Public Child Welfare Agencies, Departments of Social Services, Juvenile Justice, local libraries, corporate sponsors, homelessness service providers, and many

others participated in Youth Task Force meetings (*see a full list of partners in Appendix B*). The YTF led the development of the Coordinated Community plan in concert with the Youth Action Board and with the help from our designated TA providers (Technical Assistance Collaborative and True Colors United). Several subcommittees of the Youth Task Force in development and existing committees, such as Raise the Age committee and the Homeless Awareness committee, will be tasked with specific action steps.

Homeless Alliance of Western New York (HAWNY)

The Homeless Alliance of Western New York (HAWNY) is the lead agency for both the Continuum of Care (CoC) and the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Erie, Niagara, Genesee, Wyoming and Orleans Counties, and is the YHDP Lead. HAWNY does not offer direct services, rather it works to foster collaboration in the community to implement best-practice models ensuring everyone has a home. HAWNY offers technical assistance and a bird's eye view of homelessness and homelessness services in the Western New York Community.

CoC Board

The CoC Board, made up of 17 members, oversees the efficiency of HAWNY operations and the community's goals to end homelessness. For the YHDP process, the CoC Board will approve the coordinated community plan along with any CoC policy changes that impact the CCP.

Project Selection Process

Through planning meetings which discussed the needs assessment and potential project types, the YTF and YAB developed plans for new projects that include target outcomes, essential elements (what each project needs to offer), award amounts, and project capacity. HAWNY and the YAB then developed the Request for Proposals including project application and project threshold/scoring criteria that will be approved by the YAB and the CoC board.

Project Selection Committee (PSC)

The Project Selection Committee (PSC) is an independent committee including YAB representatives and members from the YTF who are not directly associated

with any applicants. For the project selection process, the PSC will approve projects that meet community needs, are YAB approved, and embrace our guiding principles.

These guiding principles include
- Positive youth development
- Celebration of LGBTQ+ identify
- Trauma-informed care
- Cultural awareness

The Youth Action Board will assist with determining the scoring criteria for Project Selection Committee membership. The Project Selection Committee will score and vote on all applications. It has the ability to make adjustments to proposals to better meet community needs. Highest scored proposals will move forward to receive YHDP funds.

YHDP Leadership Team

The YHDP Leadership Team is responsible for the Continuous Quality Improvement efforts and annually reviewing and updating the Coordinated Community Plan. This team will be solidified in the coming weeks and will include representatives from the YHDP planning process. The YHDP Leadership Team will include representatives from the Erie and Niagara County government, Department of Social Services, Child Welfare, Homeless Alliance of WNY, the Youth Action Board, Youth Task Force, and YHDP funded agencies. The Team will meet with community stakeholders, the Youth Task Force, and the Youth Action Board on a quarterly basis to share challenges, barriers, opportunities and adopt new ideas or solutions and create new strategies to ensure our success in ending youth homelessness.

Statement of Need

After several months of intentional discussions with community stakeholders, youth providers, our Youth Action Board, and youth with lived experience, we developed this Statement of Need detailing the unique qualities and needs of youth in our community. We used information gathered through many different methods and systems including: Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), Point-in-Time Count, Be Counted! End Youth Homelessness Campaign, Child Welfare, Public Assistance information from the Department of Social Services, the juvenile justice system, local holding center (jail) and the education system.

Youth living in poverty

Looking at poverty rates for youth in Erie and Niagara County can help us gain a general idea of the number of youth who may be at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Poverty in Erie County: Almost 15 percent (14.9%) of the population for whom poverty status is determined in Erie County, NY (134k out of 898k people) live below the poverty line, a number that is higher than the national average of 13.1%. Females 18 - 24 are the 2nd largest demographic and then Males 18 - 24.

Poverty in Niagara County: Around 13 percent (13.4%) of the population for whom poverty status is determined in Niagara County, NY (28.1k out of 209k people) live below the poverty line, a number that is higher than the national average of 13.1%. Females 18 - 24 are the 2nd largest demographic.

People Living in Poverty	Erie	Niagara
16-17 Males	2,052	273
16-17 Females	2,398	252
18-24 Males	8,416	1,650
18-24 Females	10,204	2,043
Total	23,070(85%)	4,218 (15%)

Source: American community Survey 2012-2017 five year data(estimated number with margin of error) https://datausa.io

Definitions

Youth Experiencing Homelessness:

Youth and young adults aged 11 to 24 years-old, who are unaccompanied or pregnant/parenting, and who are experiencing literal homelessness, meaning they are staying in a shelter or on the street or places not meant for human habitation (cars, public parks, etc.)

Youth at-risk of homelessness:

Youth who are residing in unsafe situations as defined by the youth or youth who are at imminent risk of losing their primary nighttime residence.

Minor Youth: Youth aged 11 to 17 years of age.

Transition Aged Youth: Youth aged 18 to 24 years of age.

Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Demographics

Demographics describe the characteristics of a population of people. We looked at several characteristics of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in Erie and Niagara County, such as income level, race, sexual orientation and gender identity, etc.

There are 6 types of homelessness alleviation services which utilize the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) that serve youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

1. Two emergency shelters designed for youth who are under 18, funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth program (RHY) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.
2. Emergency shelters designed for adults aged 18 and over
3. Transitional housing that generally serves clients between 16-21.
4. Drop-in resource centers (One youth specific and one for adults with mental health conditions)

5. Street outreach programs that serve the entire community regardless of age

6. Coordinated Entry process which determine access to HUD-funded voucher programs

Basic demographics of unaccompanied youth utilizing the homelessness crisis response system in Erie and Niagara County, 2018:

Age Group	Erie	Niagara	Total
Under 18	218	78	296
18-24	427	22	449
Grand Total	**645 (87%)**	**100(13%)**	**745**

Gender Identity	Erie	Niagara	Total
Female	55.0%	66.0%	56.5%
Male	44.0%	33.0%	42.6%
Data not collected	0.5%	0.0%	0.4%
Trans Female (MTF or Male to Female)	0.3%	1.0%	0.4%
Trans Male (FTM or Female to Male)	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Race	Erie	Niagara	Total
Black	57.2%	45.0%	55.6%
White	30.4%	23.0%	29.4%
Multiracial	8.5%	25.0%	10.7%
Missing	1.7%	1.0%	1.6%
Native American	0.9%	4.0%	1.3%
Asian	0.9%	0.0%	0.8%
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	0.3%	2.0%	0.5%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Ethnicity	Erie	Niagara	Total
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	80.6%	93.0%	82.3%
Hispanic/Latino	17.1%	5.0%	15.4%
Data not collected/client doesn't know	2.3%	2.0%	2.0%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: CoC NY-508 HMIS Calendar Year 2018 data, including shelter, outreach and transitional housing

Drop-in Center Utilization:

- Harbor House is an overnight drop-in center funded by the Department of Mental Health. This program served 65 young adults in calendar year 2018, and utilized 377 bed-nights (the number of beds multiplied by the number of nights each bed is being utilized).
- Compass House is a youth resource center, open during the day, which served 145 youth ages 18 - 24 in the calendar year 2018. Forty-two were also using shelter/Transitional Housing, 21 identified living on the street, and 68 were staying with friends/family. Ninety-seven (66%) out of 145 had resided in an institution in the past, such as group home, foster home, detention, correctional facility or psychiatric institution.

Despite the reach of our HMIS coverage in our Continuum of Care's region, providers felt these were undercounts relative to what they are actually seeing of all youth experiencing homelessness. They felt that the community does not have enough services to meet the need (e.g. outreach and youth focused shelters), and therefore the opportunity to collect data is missed. This is particularly noteworthy in Niagara County, which has reduced service offerings relative to Erie. The street outreach in Niagara Falls are largely volunteer and non-HMIS participating, there are fewer emergency shelters, and while Niagara Falls has a RHY-funded shelter, there are no transitional housing programs or rapid rehousing programs exclusively serving homeless youth and young adults. Niagara County providers will send youth to Erie County for those programs.

Almost 57 percent of youth experiencing homelessness recorded in HMIS data identified as female, and about 43 percent male. This is a reverse from the trend in adult homelessness where males are more common[1]. Based on interviews with youth and youth providers, we think female youth are more likely to seek help or to stay connected to services as compared to males. Male youth also expressed difficulty in accessing services and said they sensed an expectation to "just deal with it" or "find a job".

Black youth are overrepresented in youth experiencing homelessness, as in the general population, even though their total proportion of population in Erie and Niagara County is much smaller than that of whites (11% Black vs 84% White[2]).

---

[1] Homeless Alliance of WNY, 2018. "2018 Homeless Summary Brief: Erie County"
https://wnyhomeless.org/app/uploads/2018-Erie-Homelessness-Brief-Update.pdf
Homeless Alliance of WNY, 2018. "2018 Homeless Summary Brief: Niagara County"
https://wnyhomeless.org/app/uploads/2018-Niagara-Homelessness-Brief-Update.pdf
[2] U.S. Census Bureau 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) for Erie and Niagara County

Providers and youth believe that all services must provide an inclusive and accepting culture and staffing that reflects the demographics of youth being served.

Point-in-Time Data

2017-2019 Point in Time
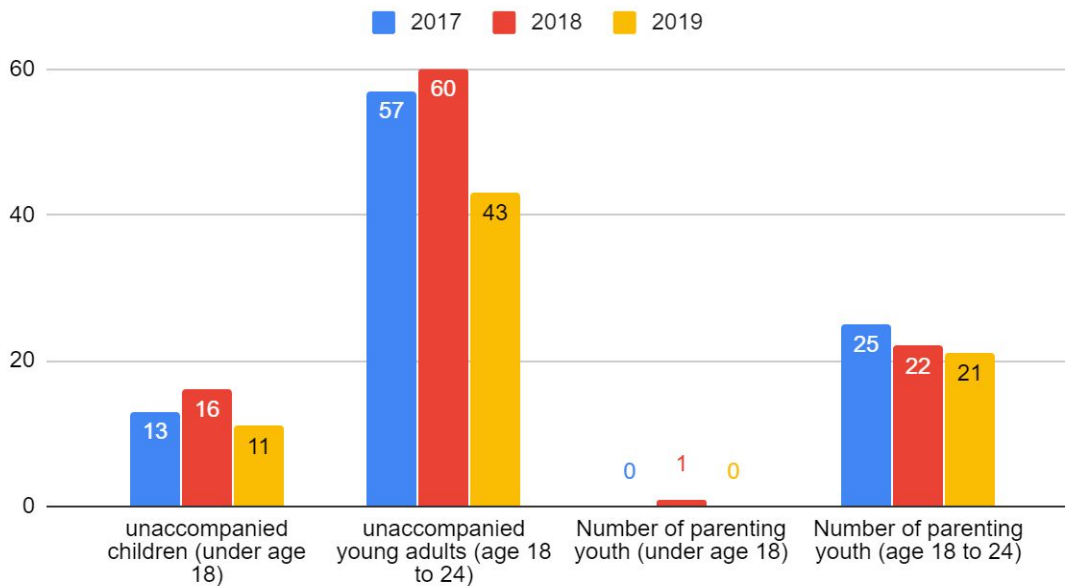
Source: Unaccompanied and parenting youth found in Point-in-Time from 2017-2019

The Point-in-Time Count is a one-night snapshot of homelessness in Western New York. On a single night in January, outreach workers and volunteers (including young adults volunteers) search the streets and shelters to list every person experiencing literal homelessness. We did not find any unsheltered youth in 2017-18, and there were two unsheltered youth identified in 2019. It is common for the count of unsheltered youth to be low. We believe Western New York's cold weather in January leads most youth to couch-surfing rather than staying outdoors. Because New York is a right to shelter state, those presenting at the Department of Social Service experiencing literal homelessness are placed in a shelter or hotel. During the winter months, when the night temperature and wind chill drop below 32 degree Fahrenheit, the cold weather "Code Blue" shelters open. These operate as low demand shelters, with no questions asked at admission.

Intensity of Service Needs and Disability Statuses

When accessing Coordinated Entry, if the youth consent, they are screened with the Transition Aged Youth Vulnerability Index Service Prioritization Decision

Assistance Tool (TAY-VI-SPDAT). This screening tool includes questions about mental health, substance use, parenting status, and homeless history in order to prioritize youth quickly for assistance. The goal is that youth who are identified as being most at risk will be a priority to receive services first.

Thirty percent of young adults who completed the TAY-VI-SPDAT indicated they had trouble maintaining housing because of mental health issues. Twenty seven percent of young adults who experienced homelessness indicated, during HMIS intake, they have a disabling condition: 36.5% of 18-24 year olds and 12.5% of youth under age 18.

Out of the 449 young adults aged 18-24 who utilized the homeless system last year, 173 (38.5%) were assessed using either the VI-SPDAT, VI-F-SPDAT, or the VI-TAY-SPDAT. We understand that most people are not being screened for housing because our coordinated entry process does not screen those who have been homeless for two weeks or less. Forty-three percent of youth and young adults left the homeless system in that timeframe without further assistance; we describe this circumstance as "self-resolve". Of those who we assessed, 61% scored high enough to be prioritized for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) or for long term housing with high service intensity. Thirty three percent scored high enough to be prioritized for Rapid Rehousing(RRH) or for time limited support with moderate intensity and 5% scored low enough for no moderate or high intensity services.

Currently, our CoC only has youth-dedicated Rapid Rehousing but no youth-dedicated PSH. Youth often do not have enough homeless history to be prioritized in PSH and referred in a timely manner. We find that in taking a progressive engagement approach, many youth, even those who score relatively high on the TAY-VI-SPDAT, are quite resilient and successful in RRH.

A common theme among Youth Task Force and Youth Action Board members was that the presence of disability may be underreported. Since HMIS data is self-reported, youth may not disclose a mental health or substance use disorder, or may not be aware they meet criteria for a disability. The YTF and YAB suggested that more thorough assessments during the referral process may be able to determine more accurately if a youth has a qualifying disability.

Reasons for Homelessness and Exit Destinations

Although each young person has their own unique story, HMIS, RHY, and survey data show that there are commonalities in circumstances that trigger

homelessness and how youth navigate the homelessness services system. Our HMIS assessment questions ask about immediately preceding events to homelessness. The data shows that the most frequently cited event prior to homelessness for minor youth and transition aged youth is interpersonal and family conflict.

Reasons of homelessness and prior living situations of minor youth:

Is your current lack of stable housing…	
a) Because you ran away from your family home, a group home or a foster home?	17%
b) Because of a difference in religious or cultural beliefs from your parents, guardians or caregivers?	13%
c) Because your family or friends caused you to become homeless?	78%
d) Because of conflicts around gender identity or sexual orientation?	10%
e) Because of violence at home between family members?	55%
f) Because of an unhealthy or abusive relationship, either at home or elsewhere?	61%

Source: HMIS TAY-VI-SPDAT assessment

Looking at responses to the TAY-VI-SPDAT, which permits a more nuanced look at one's housing circumstances, we find that most of these youth experienced homelessness after having conflict with family or friends that they were staying with. Shelters sometimes become places of "respite" from an unhealthy environment.

National research suggests that there are several predictors of homelessness. These are prior child welfare involvement, juvenile justice involvement, mental illness, and family homelessness. Our data shows that 97% of young adults indicated in their TAY-VI-SPDATs that in the last three years prior to their most recent episode of homelessness, their family had experienced homelessness/housing instability. This indicates the need for early intervention and wrap-around services for families as a prevention strategy.

Exit destinations

Seventy percent of youth under 18 years-old exited shelter to return to their family's residence. This may reflect the strategies of service providers, as for minor youth, the best practice and focus of service providers is reuniting youth with their family or kin. This is in contrast to young adults aged 18-24, for whom only 13% exited homeless services to stay with family. Thirty-one percent exited without a known destination. Many transition aged youth exit shelter without a

known destination but because they did not return, it is assumed they have self-resolved their housing situation or are couch-surfing.

🙋 **Needs for All Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

Housing

- Focus on case management, mediation, or short-term crisis "respite" shelters, with a focus on conflict resolution
- Address intergenerational (several generations of the same family) homelessness with wrap-around services for the entire family

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:
- Transition Age Youth expressed the need for longer term Rapid Rehousing or Permanent Supportive Housing with more intensive services and lower caseloads while they get used to to living independently
- Youth would like immediate access to crisis housing that is intended for their specific age group with an environment that is safe. One youth in our study stated, "shelters will give you a place to stay...but it's not an environment you will want to be in because people might steal your things."
- More support is needed for college students who may not have a place to stay over holiday breaks or summers

Education and Employment

- In order to obtain and retain jobs, youth and young adults need soft skill training, opportunities for paid training/education programs and employment opportunities that are low barrier (i.e. no drug tests, background checks, etc.)
- Partnerships between the CoC and local colleges and universities should be developed to better identify youth experiencing homelessness and connect them with services

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

- Transportation and child care are identified as two of the barriers to obtaining employment. The current system often only provides these

supports after a person gains employment; however many people have indicated that assistance is also needed when seeking employment.
- Transition age youth have difficulty applying for colleges and for financial aid (ex. filling out the FAFSA) - a navigator knowledgeable in financial assistance policy should be readily available for these youth.

Social and Emotional Well-being

- 36% of young adults who completed a VI-SPDAT indicated that they have trouble maintaining housing because of a mental health issue, a past head injury, or a developmental disability. This highlights a need for services tailored to youth who have these conditions
- 36% of the young adults have either threatened or tried to harm themselves in the past year. This demonstrates the urgency for mental health treatment and support
- The need for continuity of care and partnerships among healthcare providers serving youth

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified The Following Needs:

- Mentoring
- Accessible counseling for mental health issues such as anxiety and depression
- Independence and respect from adult helpers
- Creative outlets to process and express difficult emotions

Unaccompanied Youth At Risk of Homelessness

Through YHDP, funded projects will have the unique ability to serve those whose housing circumstances are beyond current funding limitation --which limits to only serve HUD defined literally homelessless population (sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation or a designated emergency shelter) to include youth who are at-risk of homelessness and those who are couch-surfing at imminent risk of losing their primary nighttime residence. The following section describes the characteristics of youth at-risk of homelessness and potential risk-factors.

Couch-Surfing; A Common Experience Among Youth

Youth in our community often report couch-surfing in between shelter stays. Sometimes these youth never access services at all. In 2017 our Be Counted! Youth Homelessness Campaign did a one-day point-in-time style survey in the community focusing on middle school and high school students and found 112 youth who identified as "couch-surfers".

Youth couch-surf because they can leverage their social networks, often alternating between friends and family's houses from week to week. One youth stated, "If you ask people, especially around Buffalo, there is a big community of people that are very supportive and willing to help out." This cultural inclination to help in Buffalo (it is the purported "City of Good Neighbors") may indicate an opportunity for utilizing both crisis host homes and our proposed Family Engagement Team with Diversion Fund as interventions. Host homes would create extra safe places for youth and young adults to be, while the Family Engagement Team and Diversion funds would allow service providers in the community to stabilize the housing situation of youth who are residing with friends or relatives.

However, some youth also reported on the TAY-VI-SPDAT that they found themselves in dangerous situations when strangers allowed them to stay in their homes as shown in data below.

Do you ever do things that may be risky, like exchange sex for money, food, drugs, or a place to stay, run drugs for someone, have unprotected sex with someone you don't know, share a needle, etc?	19%

Souce: HMIS TAY-SPDAT assessment

Be Counted! End Youth Homelessness Campaign

Several years ago, our community partners launched the "BeCounted! End Youth Homelessness" campaign to better identify youth experiencing homelessness and/or housing instability. This effort focused on finding youth and young adults who may not be accessing services, who may be couch-surfing, as well as school-aged youth who are unaccompanied. BeCounted! raised awareness in the community through marketing and also developed more effective ways to collect data on at-risk and couch-surfing youth. Through partnering with school districts and other community groups, BeCounted! was

able to find those who are often difficult to identify because they are not utilizing services or presenting as homeless.

As part of this campaign, BeCounted! launched a youth-specific count every two years to coincide with the Buffalo Public Schools and Niagara Falls City School District implementation of the "Youth Risk Behavior Survey" (YRBS). In 2017, the combination of school surveys and magnet site survey events counted 305 unaccompanied youth who were literally homeless or couch-surfing (approximately 112 out of those 305 were couch-surfing).

School-Age Students Experiencing Homelessness

McKinney-Vento is a law saying students experiencing homelessness will receive assistance so they can get the same education as youth not experiencing homelessness. The law also says the school needs to keep data on the number of students experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Unaccompanied youth are a small proportion of the total students identified by the local school districts in the McKinney-Vento process. Nearly eighty-two percent of the unaccompanied homeless youth are doubled up.

Local Education Agency (LEA)	Total Homeless Enrolled students School Year 17-18	Unsheltered School Year 17-18	Unaccompanied Homeless Youth School Year 17-18
Total Erie LEAs	2,807	3	**317**
Total Niagara LEAs	467	0	**57**
Total Erie & Niagara	3,274	3	**374**

School Year 2017-18	Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in Shelter	Unaccompanied Homeless Youth who are unsheltered	Unaccompanied Homeless Youth in Hotel-Motel	Unaccompanied Homeless Youth who are doubled up
Erie Niagara CoC Percent	16.40%	0.00%	1.80%	81.80%
Erie Niagara CoC Count	61	0	7	306

Source: McKinney Vento Data: School Year 2017-2018

There is a discrepancy between the number identified as homeless under HUD's definition by the schools and how many are documented in our HMIS (Our HMIS data shows there were 283 unaccompanied homeless youth under 18 that had at least one emergency shelter entrance). This may be because youth are

hesitant to identify themselves to their school as experiencing homelessness - couch-surfing youth had indicated in focus groups that they are hesitant to identify themselves to McKinney-Vento liaisons. These liaisons are school staff members who help to identify and provide assistance to homeless youth and families. McKinney-Vento assistance is focused on transportation supports to facilitate educational continuity. If older students do not require a change in bussing because they are walking or taking city transportation to school, they might not see the utility in reporting their circumstances to the district. One urban district showed an extremely low unaccompanied youth number (3 students) which may also indicate a need for better identification of McKinney-Vento eligible students.

Youth and Young Adults Receiving Public Assistance

Our data shows that youth receiving public assistance may be at-risk of homelessness or housing instability due to frequent moves and lacking a high school diploma. We noted several other characteristics of youth receiving public assistance.

A total of 3,645 young adults who are 18-24 received public assistance in CY2018. Of this total:

- 29% (747) young adults receiving public assistance moved 3 times or more in the past year, indicating unstable housing.
- 42% indicated that they do not have a high school diploma or equivalent
- 83% of the recipients are female and 17% are male.
- 68 % of young adults (2,484 youth) aged 18-24 were pregnant or parenting
- Race: 52% Black, 38% White, 5% multi-racial, 3% Asian, 2% unknown.
- Ethnicity: 75% non-Hispanic, and 25% Hispanic

🙋 **Needs for At Risk Youth**

Housing

- Better identification of youth and young adults who experience housing instability in an effort to prevent their homelessness

- Cross-system case conferencing among service providers aiding homeless youth and young adults including representatives from education, juvenile justice, and child welfare to ensure continuity of care
- Better discharge planning from systems of care to ensure youth have the supports that they need and do not enter into homeleness upon discharge

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

- A need for emergency rental assistance if a youth is facing eviction
- Youth often do not know where to go for assistance or what kind of assistance they are eligible for. They need to be able to access a centralized list of resources

Education and Employment:

- Youth and young adults need integration among social programs and school/employment programs to ensure that they achieve their education goals, find meaningful employment, and sustain it.

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

- Youth expressed needs for supplemental education support such as tutoring, transportation, and basic living necessities in order to succeed academically

Social and Emotional Well-being

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified Needs for:

- Mentoring from peers and adults
- Accessible counseling for mental health issues such as anxiety and depression
- Independence and respect from adult helpers
- Creative outlets to process difficult emotions

Impact and Strategies for Special Populations

In the following section, we explore the characteristics of several distinct groups (subpopulations) of youth at-risk of, and experiencing, homelessness. First we discuss the needs of each population derived from national estimates, our HMIS data, and survey data. We then compare that to cross referenced data from the child welfare and juvenile justice system. We compare that information to qualitative data (data that describes people's experiences rather than numerical data that is collected through methods of observations, one-on-one interviews, conducting focus groups, and other methods) from the Youth Task Force, Youth Action Board, and focus group discussions. Finally we put all this information together into an actionable strategy designed to end youth homelessness for all youth.

The decision of what our community's needs are was agreed upon and approved by the Youth Task Force and Youth Action Board and follows the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness four core outcomes for youth: Stable Housing, Permanent Connections, Education/Employment, and Social-Emotional Well-Being.

Pregnant and Parenting Youth

Pregnant and parenting youth face many different challenges including needing access to prenatal (before birth) and perinatal (after birth) care, parenting education, health care, and child care support.

Of the number of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in CY18, 140, or 18.8%, were pregnant or parenting. However, 42% who completed VI-F said they let their children stay with family or friends due to homelessness; therefore, we believe that the number of youth who have children might be higher than what our data currently reflects.

	Under 18	18-24	Grand Total
Pregnant/Parenting	11	129	140
Parenting	3	121	124
Pregnant	8	8	16

Source: HMIS CY18 data

Youth with children may be at a higher risk of homelessness. Sixty-eight percent of young adults (2,484 youth) aged 18-24 who received public assistance in CY18 were pregnant or parenting. Forty seven percent of those youth who are pregnant or parenting and on public assistance have children between the ages of 1 - 5 years old. Youth and young adults are required to work in order to retain public benefits, so they may need child care and other supportive service in order to maintain employment.

🙍 Needs

Housing

- Designing services specifically for this population, ensuring they have access to crisis housing that is suitable for them.

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:
- Youth said they personally knew more people than recorded in the chart, meaning many of them might be couch-surfing and we need to be able to identify them
- A need for better housing conditions or bigger housing arrangements if they have a family or are planning a family

Permanent Connections
- Youth need to be able to build a strong and available network of family, friends, and community that can assist with child care and emotional support

Education and Employment

- Schools could collaborate with parenting services to provide parenting classes

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:
- Quality child care provided outside of regular business hours
- Help with finding a high quality job to be able to support a family and afford fair market rent

Social and Emotional Well-being
Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

- Access to prenatal and postnatal services.
- Support from family and friends

<div align="center">🔑 **Strategies**</div>

Pregnant and parenting youth experiencing homelessness need services specific to prenatal and perinatal health, child care, and parenting education. Parenting youth stated that they wished they had a larger support network to help with caring for a child. Since a large portion of pregnant/parenting youth stated they receive help from their family and friends caring for their child, our strategies may focus on wrap-around services for the youth's social network, as well as safe crisis housing for youth with children.

- Free or low cost child care or assistance for kin who help to take care of the children
- Focusing on employment and educational opportunities for parents to acquire the skills they need to obtain high quality employment
- More parenting education and planning services should be available for all youth and young adults
- Normalizing conversations about safe sexual practices, relationships, and family planning by the agencies interacting with youth - youth sometimes felt uncomfortable having these conversations with adults in their life

Minor

There were 296 unaccompanied youth under 18 experiencing homelessness in calendar year 2018 and on average they stayed at a shelter for 23 days. After youth exit the shelter, their rate of returning to the shelter is 30 percent. This recidivism, or return to homelessness rate is higher than the adult population in our community. This may be the result of unresolved family conflict. Minor youth, who tend to experience homelessness for the first time around 15 years old, typically come into contact with the homelessness services system after running

away from home or being forced out of the home due to family conflict. This reflects a need to address the family unit as a whole, while providing safe crisis housing when a youth desires a break from their home life to work on resolving the crisis.

<div style="background-color:#f5cba7; padding:10px; text-align:center;">

🙍 **Needs**

</div>

Housing
- A need for resolving family conflict through evidence-based family interventions
- The need for a focus on family reunification, if possible, and short-term crisis housing to serve as a "respite" while children and families are resolving disputes
- Better ways to identify and diagnose mental health and trauma at an early age to minimize its contribution to family conflict

Permanent Connections

- Youth need strong role models and mentors to act as a guide and emotional support
- Strengthen connections with family members and community through family conflict resolution and finding positive opportunities for youth to connect with their larger community

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

- Youth expressed a need for mentoring and activities that could provide positive impact in their life

Education and Employment

- Better identification and referral of students experiencing homelessness or at-risk so they can be linked with the proper supports

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

- Youth expressed a desire for teachers to be more compassionate and flexible because homelessness can cause the youth stress and difficulty with completing work on time

- The need to partner with schools to keep them updated on available resources for youth

Social-Emotional Well Being

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

- Choice and autonomy in everyday life at school and when using services
- More creative outlets to express themselves
- Minor youth expressed the need for choice in their everyday lives, including the ability to self-determine how they cope with their struggles. They felt as though adults often insisted they talk about their troubles before they were ready to do so, and wished they'd have more creative outlets to express themselves

🔑 **Strategies**

Our YAB agreed that minor youth (those who have not yet attained the legal age of majority) often have differing needs than older youth. For the minor population, strategies should focus on family engagement, providing respite and crisis housing, and developmentally appropriate services. Our community reflects national research in that our data shows that the first time for many minor youth experiencing homelessness is around 15 years old. This is also an age at which adolescents are experiencing many changes in their identity, body image, and thought processes. Therefore it's important to have developmentally appropriate services for minor youth that increase protective factors and decrease risk factors such as unsafe sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, and human trafficking. This approach respects both the age and the individual needs of each child.

- Family engagement and connection is important. The community should adopt evidence- based interventions such as Functional Family Therapy, family-based prevention and intervention model for high-risk youth that addresses complex and multidimensional problems through clinical practice and is flexibly structured and culturally sensitive to re-connect minors to family or other caregivers

- Create a referral system in partnership with school staff in order to identify school-age youth who are at-risk or experiencing homelessness
- Services that address the unique challenges adolescents face as their body and mind rapidly develop
- Service providers should hire mentors with lived experience who can serve as a role model
- Encourage providers, direct service staff, and schools to recognize that adolescents desire to make their own choices and have autonomy, with the guidance of a trusted adult, and modify policies and procedures accordingly to incorporate youth leadership opportunities

LGBTQ+ Youth

It is well documented that youth who experience themselves in nonheterosexual or noncisgendered ways, identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and more (LBGTQ+), have a higher risk for negative health outcomes and housing instability. These youth report family conflict, being asked to leave their home, and discrimination when seeking some services as a consequence of their sexual orientation or/and gender identity. In addition to our HMIS and survey data, we also analyzed data from local school districts and conducted focus groups at an LGBTQ+ specific drop-in center.

Based on our needs assessments and RHY data, we estimate that between 25 and 40% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+. Based on data from the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey from Buffalo Public Schools, a significant number of minor youth who experienced homelessness also identified as LGBTQ+ (approx. 40%). The national estimate of minor and transition aged youth experiencing homelessness who identify as LGBTQ+ is between 20 and 40 percent.

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

Stable Housing
- Youth need housing options available to them that come with supportive services such as counseling and academic services readily available
- Provide tools for shelters to implement inclusive shelter policies such as the True Colors Fund Inclusion Manual

Permanent Connections
- Youth want peers and adult role models that will be supportive and accepting, and willing to stand up to the microaggressions of others pointed at the LGBTQ+ community

Education / Employment
- Youth need to feel like their educational and employment environment is safe and accepting of their identity, and want allies to assist them with applying to higher education, jobs, and volunteer opportunities

Social-Emotional Well-being
- Providers should hold space for youth to feel comfortable reaching out for support
- Youth may need time to build rapport with staff before revealing that they identify as LGBTQ+

🔑 **Strategies**

Research suggests that transgender youth have much poorer mental health outcomes than their cisgender (someone whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth, e.g., a heterosexual, biological female identifying with the feminine gender) peers if they are not in a gender-affirming environment. Therefore in order to best serve transgender youth experiencing homelessness, providers should adopt a trauma-informed and gender affirming culture to successfully engage and stably house these youth. Youth and young adults who identify broadly as LGBTQ+ youth were adamant that one of the most important things to them was having a pro-LGBTQ+ environment they could feel safe in.

Strategies for serving these youth should focus on eliminating the microaggressions, such as misgendering, that cause these youth to feel emotionally unsafe and unable to trust.

- Planning and services should focus on cultural competency, race and power dynamics, and inclusivity
- All shelters and housing providers should understand and implement HUD's Equal Access Rule, forbidding discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation
- Providers should hire peers as staff who can build rapport with the youth from a common identity
- Include programming supports positive mental and physical health and provides linkages for these services for youth identifying as LGBTQ+, who may have health concerns because of family conflict, discrimination, or bullying

Foster Care Involvement

We conducted a system cross reference data analysis between child welfare data and homelessness data. Out of 1,748 from 2011-2018 who were discharged from the child welfare system, 36% or 629 of them had indicators they have previously experienced homelessness or may be at-risk of experiencing homelessness. These indicators are a prior stay in a shelter and having received public assistance but have no permanent address. In 2018, a total of 746 youth were discharged from foster care.

The Cross Reference Data Analysis also confirmed some of the risk factors stated in the Analysis of Data on Youth with Child Welfare Involvement at Risk of Homelessness (YARH Aug 2017) study that homelessness and foster care placement is often part of a larger pattern of instability. The higher the number of placements, the higher the chance youth ended up experiencing homelessness. Twelve percent of the foster care youth we examined experienced six or more placements, and these youth have a 50% or greater chance of becoming homeless after transitioning out of foster care. This may highlight a need to engage and support families who are providing a placement in order to prevent the youth from being removed or running away from that placement.

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

Stable Housing
- There is a need for affordable housing for youth transitioning out of foster care, and collaboration among public housing agencies, the CoC, and the child welfare system
- In need of shelter or crisis housing for older youth ages 18 - 21 who are in foster care but have left or run away from their foster homes. Respite beds are currently being developed for Erie County.

Permanent Connections
- Youth indicated they need role models and peers in their life who can act as both an emotional support as well as someone who can help them learn independent living skills
- Staff need to help guide youth when choosing which relatives or friends can act as a support network

Education / Employment
- Youth need time to learn jobs skills and assistance with obtaining employment or education, with the help of a peer or mentor to help guide them

Social-Emotional Well-being
- Youth want to make connections with trusted adults so they have people they can count on when things get tough

🔑 **Strategy**

Many things contribute to placement in foster care and risk of homelessness. Family homelessness may contribute to a young person's placement in foster care and may also make efforts at family reunification difficult. Family Reunification is the process of helping a youth to resolve family conflict and return to live with their legal guardians or parents. A focus on wrap-around

services for the youth's family of origin will be necessary for the goal of family reunification.

There is an important correlation between foster care involvement and future homelessness, in that the rate of homelessness was highest among youth who had more placements in foster care. This indicates a need to continuously engage families with foster youth in order to ensure the youth are able to stay in that placement for a longer amount of time.

For youth in foster care, our strategy should focus on preventing youth from entering the homelessness response system through family engagement, developing permanent connections for the youth, and teaching self-sufficiency. For youth who exit foster care into homelessness, our strategy should focus on providing crisis and permanent housing and have staff trained to address the unique developmental and emotional needs of foster care involved youth.

- Service providers should better prepare youth who are still in foster care and assist them to achieve education and employment goals in order to transition youth to live independently
- Providers suggested developing an assessment to screen youth in foster care to help develop a plan for them to exit foster care to stable housing, including proactively coming up with a plan for family reunification.
- Youth currently in foster care and transitioning out of foster care spoke of the importance of having mentors and role models who can help them navigate challenges in life and to help them to develop a strong network of support
- Provide support in rental assistance and case management after they exit foster care
- Partner with public housing and child welfare entities to ensure Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers are accessible to all youth

Juvenile Justice Involvement

The relationship between juvenile justice involvement and homelessness for youth is bi-directional, meaning each has been found to increase the likelihood

of the other. Both national data and our local data suggests that youth who have justice involvement may be at a higher risk for later homelessness, and youth who experience homelessness are at a greater risk of later involvement in the justice system.

Racial disparities exist within our justice and homelessness system. Nearly 77 percent of youth who experienced both homelessness and justice involvement were Black. In addition, these young adults were often male. This highlights a need to address systematic and institutionalized racial and gender disparities within our community.

Transition Age Youth and the Justice System

When Buffalo or Niagara Falls police arrest someone aged 18 and over, they are held at the Erie County Holding Center in downtown Buffalo. Thus, we examined the homelessness history of 18-24 year olds who presented at the Erie County Holding Center over calendar year 2018 against the previous five years of HMIS data to see if people at the Holding Center had prior experiences of homelessness. We found that 72 young adults experienced homelessness within the 3 years before jail and 82 of them experienced homelessness within 2 years after their release. A total of 154 young adults who have justice involvement had experienced homelessness within 5 years based on this cross reference analysis.

Gender	Count
Female	41
Male	113

Race	Count
Black	118
White	36

Mental Health Issue	Count
No	65
Yes	89

Above Tables: Demographics of young adults ages 18-24 at Erie County Holding Center who experienced homelessness in the past 5 years

In addition, 24 percent of youth who experienced homelessness and took the TAY-VI-SPDAT that they'd stayed at the holding center in the previous year.

Minor Youth and Juvenile Justice

In New York State, youth under the age of 18 are tried as juveniles, youthful offenders, adolescent offenders, or juvenile delinquents. In our community we found that 9.7 percent of youth who'd had juvenile justice involvement had also experienced homelessness. Youth under the age of 18 are not held at the local holding center. These youth are typically given an appearance ticket and are able to return to their residence, or are successfully diverted from detention utilizing the court system.

Each County has a Family Services Team which assists families in stabilizing their home environments to prevent youth from becoming involved, or more deeply involved, in the Justice System. Youth under the age of 18 who show a pattern of ungovernable behavior, such as running away, curfew violations, alcohol and/or drug abuse, violent or destructive behavior, or severe school truancy are placed in a program called People in Need of Supervision (PINS). This program can assist with successful re-entry and linkage to appropriate housing resources.

🙋 **Needs**

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

Stable Housing
- Youth need access to crisis and permanent housing where they can receive case management assistance to help them navigate obtaining employment, education, and public assistance

Permanent Connections
- Youth who are disconnected from their support network as a result of juvenile justice involvement need effective discharge planning and follow up to ensure they remain stably housed or reunite with their family

Education / Employment
- Jobs need to be available to youth who may have a criminal record or who may need on the job training and access to education

- Service providers could build relationships with employers and landlords to facilitate youth overcoming the barriers to obtaining and sustaining jobs that can arise with a criminal record

Social-Emotional Well-being

- Youth involved in the criminal justice system need to be able to learn self-sufficiency through life and job skills training and education

🔑 Strategies

Youth with juvenile justice involvement are disproportionately Black and male within the CoC. Strategies should focus on reducing these racial and gender disparities through targeted outreach and re-entry programs for at-risk youth.

Ongoing discussions have centered around new legislation in New York called "Raise the Age", which ensures 16 and 17 year-olds are not prosecuted as adults, but rather adolescent offenders. In addition, adolescent offenders will no longer be placed in a detention facility for non-violent crimes. Therefore, our community partners should work together to ensure these youth have the appropriate housing and other resources to succeed.

- The community should target outreach and data driven prevention programming
- Service providers and youth assistance systems should collaborate to ensure effective discharge planning and prevent any youth from being discharged into an unstable living situation
- The community should embark on a systemic approach to address racial and gender disparities in youth involved in the juvenile justice system

Youth Survivors of Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking is defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 as "sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion...," or "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion...." In a study by Covenant House[3], a nationwide organization providing housing and supportive services to youth experiencing homelessness, nearly 14 percent of the youth they interviewed fit the US definition of human trafficking.

The Erie County Department of Social Services(DSS) has partnered with the International Institute of Buffalo (IIB) through a New York State Office of Children and Family Services initiative called the Safe Harbor Plan. The initiative is designed to build a localized response to child trafficking under the state-wide "Safe Harbor for Exploited Children Act" that was passed by the NYS Legislature in 2008 to redirect exploited children from the criminal or juvenile justice systems to the family courts. Once in the family courts, the children and their families can receive support and services from the child welfare system. Niagara County offers these services through Children's services in the Department of Social Services.

In 2018, there were 115 youth that were connected with human trafficking, and 67 percent of those were going through our child welfare system in Erie County. Ninety nine percent of them are US citizens. The International Institute of Buffalo trained 1314 people including 90 DSS employees, along with judges, foster care workers, youth probation officers, teachers, medical, substance and mental health care provider etc. who worked directly with youth last year to identify a potential trafficking situation or youth at risk of being trafficked. They also started a small pilot Rapid Rehousing project funded by the Department of Justice to address the housing needs of youth survivors.

---

[3] Covenant House, 2017. "Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth"
https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-issues/human-trafficking-study

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

Stable Housing
- Provide safe and immediate crisis housing that is trauma-informed for youth who are identified as survivors
- Currently the child welfare and juvenile justice system are utilizing a standardized tool to identify trafficking survivors. More programs could be utilizing such standardized screening tools to better identify survivors.

Permanent Connections
- Ensure youth identified as survivors have a support network who have knowledge of human trafficking and understand trauma-informed care

Education / Employment
- Identify any legal and housing barriers that prevent youth from finishing their education or obtaining and sustaining employment. Service providers and the community should work to overcome them.

Social-Emotional Well-being

- Encourage cultural competency in providers and hire bilingual staff to overcome any language barriers
- Provide trauma-specific treatments and interventions for survivors

🔑 **Strategies**

Individuals experiencing poverty and homelessness are vulnerable to exploitation through human trafficking. Providers should focus on offering trauma-specific treatment and trauma-informed services, and ensuring that survivors can access permanent housing solutions. However, these trauma-informed and trauma-specific services should be offered to all youth at-risk and experiencing homelessness.

- Youth are hesitant to disclose occurrences of sexual exploitation, either from a desire for privacy, sense of shame, or because they do not understand how to identify a human trafficking situation. To ensure youth who have been trafficked receive appropriate services, service providers should educate themselves about human trafficking and adopt a standardized assessment tool which includes questions about trafficking. This would allow service providers and more community partners, including businesses, to better identify and serve victims who are trafficked.
- Our strategy should focus on ensuring all of our providers are trauma-informed and equipped to deal with survivors of trafficking, especially crisis housing providers in the community.
- There is a pilot rapid rehousing program focusing only on serving survivors of trafficking. It is funded by the Department of Justice and is administered by the International Institute of Buffalo. The program is only in its first year.

Youth with Disabilities

Twenty-seven percent of youth experiencing homelessness disclosed that they had a disability upon intake into HMIS (36.5 percent of 18-24 year olds and 12.5 percent under age 18). This includes a mental health concern, substance use concern, developmental disability, or physical disability.

A common theme among Youth Task Force and Youth Action Board members was that the presence of disability may be underreported. Since HMIS data is self-report, undercounts may reflect that the youth may not have chosen to disclose a mental health or substance use disorder. They also may not have been diagnosed by a mental health clinician. The YTF and YAB suggested that more thorough assessments during the referral process may be able to tell more accurately if a youth has a qualifying disability.

	Under 18	18-24	Total Clients
Alcohol Use	0	10	10
Both Alcohol and Drug Use	0	19	19
Chronic Health Condition	7	17	24
Developmental	12	37	49
Drug Abuse	2	48	50
HIV/AIDS	0	1	1
Mental Health Condition	28	140	168
Physical	2	27	29
Grand Total	**51**	**299**	**350**

Souce: Self-reported disabilities at intake into HMIS

🙋 Needs

Youth Action Board and Youth Focus Groups Identified:

Stable Housing
- Youth discussed the need for permanent housing that has an appropriate intensity of services and longer term financial assistance for eligible youth

Permanent Connections
- Youth expressed a need for a support network that understands their disability and unique needs

Education / Employment
- The community needs internship programs and extra assistance with acquiring a diploma, higher education, and jobs
- Youth need guidance and assistance filling out paperwork for public assistance, employment, education, identification, etc.

Social-Emotional Well-being

- Program design should include more time to build rapport with staff before disclosing a disability

- Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific interventions delivered in an environment that supports some youth's needs for an alternate structure
- Programs should seek to improve identification of those who might not have a diagnosis

<div style="background-color:#F5C89B">

🔑 **Strategies**

</div>

In order to address the needs of youth with disabilities, providers will need to practice appropriate referral and service linkages to youth-friendly mental and physical health services. We will continue to develop our partnerships with local mental health and substance use treatment agencies in order to have effective connections for youth to these services.

- Service providers should build stronger partnerships with mental health and substance use treatment providers in order to create an effective referral and linkage process for youth
- The Youth Task Force should educate providers and case managers on effective strategies to acquire disability benefits (SSI) for youth
- Service providers should improve data quality by ensuring youth's disability status is recorded and updated in HMIS
- Service providers should practice progressive engagement in order to tailor permanent housing assistance to the youth's unique needs and abilities
- Service providers should integrate trauma-specific evidence-based practices into a young person's permanent housing plan to address different mental or substance use condition

---

Conclusion of the Needs Assessment

Our community partners identified diversion, self-resolution, crisis housing, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing as pathways youth currently use in our homelessness response system. Through discussion with the Youth Task Force and Youth Action Board, we determined the ideal service pathways for transition aged youth to exit homelessness. The pathways and percentages of youth who are expected to use each pathway are identified in the chart below.

Pathways Identified	YAB/YTF estimates
Diversion	30%
Self-Resolve	10%
CE-->Crisis Housing-->RRH--> PSH	15%
CE-->Crisis Housing--> PSH	10%
CE-->RRH	15%
CE-->Crisis Housing (including TH)--> RRH	20%

Youth and provider identified pathways

System Capacity and Gaps

Using data from HMIS, child welfare agencies, school, the holding center and the youth-specific point-in-time count mentioned in the previous section, we mapped the current utilization of the homelessness crisis response system. We estimated the need for each system pathway.

Estimated Usage for Each Pathway
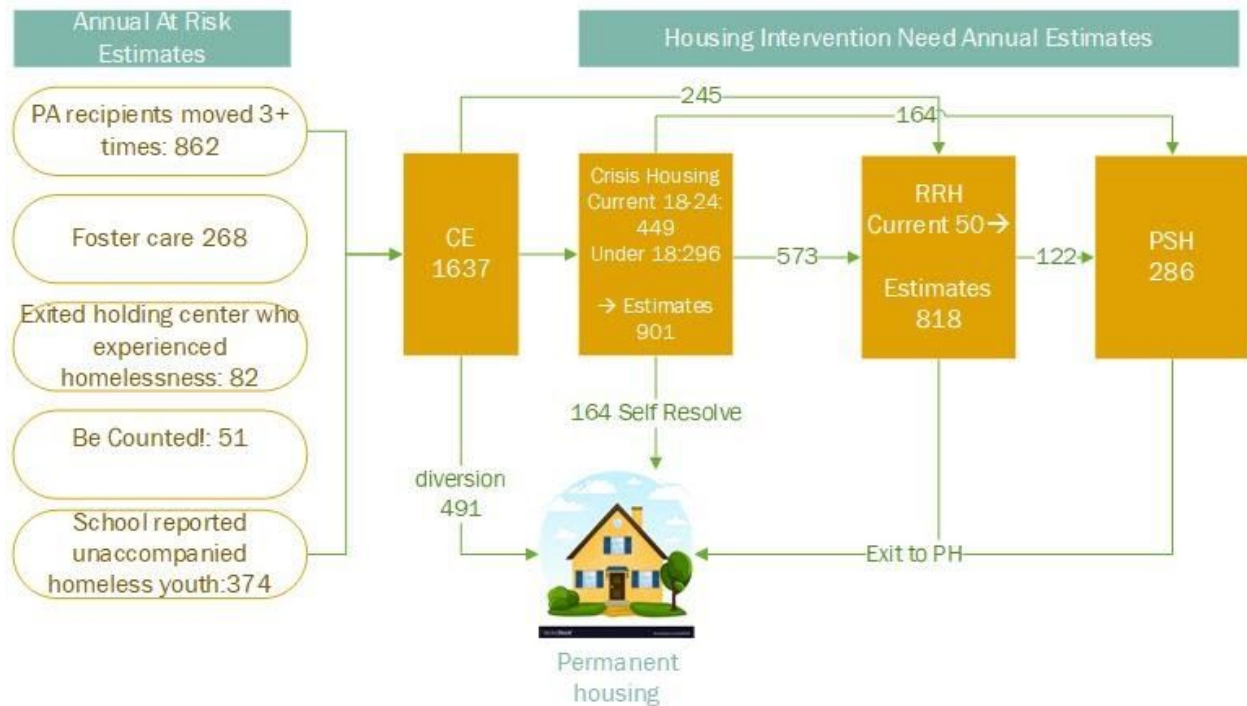
* Crisis housing current capacity includes 65 youth served in transitional housing
* Compass House resource center (day drop in) annually served 145 clients

Estimated Financial Need for Each Pathway

Program Type	Estimated cost per person	Estimated need	Existing resources	Unmet Need	$ Need
PSH	$ 15,000	286	0	286	$4,290,000
TH-RRH	$ 12,000	327	95	232	$2,784,000
RRH(short to medium term)	$ 1,000-10,000 (avg. $5,000)	818	15	803	$4,015,000
Diversion	$ 1,000	491	145	346	$346,000
Crisis Housing	$ 3,000	901	745	156	$468,000
Total					$11,903,000

Gaps in Our Current Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Alleviation System

1. Low barrier transitional housing that allows youth to access crisis housing and stabilize in TH without precondition.
2. Additional supportive services in order to build the life skills youth need to be successful independently.
3. Short-term rental assistance capacity is insufficient to address the unmet needs for supportive housing.
4. Longer term rapid rehousing is needed to address the need for permanent housing, due to concerns that an inability to document a disability will disqualify youth who need the services.
5. The community needs to decrease the high return rate for youth who exited the shelter to their family.
6. The community needs to cultivate other housing options for minor youth besides youth's parents as their safe options
7. Additional supportive services to high risk youth who are in Persons In Need of Supervision (PINS). Diversion services are needed
8. Service providers need to follow up with high risk youth in foster care who have exited the foster care system and maintain stable housing to measure protective and risk factors.
9. Provide support to the at-risk population, where other funding might not be able to assist, to prevent youth from experiencing homelessness and find safe housing options.
10. The community needs shelters specific to the 18-24 year-old age group. The community is in need of a safe and low barrier location for youth to stay.
11. Although our unsheltered youth population is low, we believe that providing a low barrier overnight drop in center will provide an opportunity for us to engage with youth who might be otherwise hidden.

Guiding Principles

We developed community wide goals by following youth-centric principles and evidence-based frameworks. The Youth Action Board (YAB) and the Youth Task Force (YTF) came up with strategies to implement these principles in YHDP-funded projects. All YHDP-funded projects will be required to implement strategies and interventions that incorporate these principles, which will be reflected in their performance review. The guiding principles below encourage youth service agencies to incorporate each young person's unique risk and protective factors as agencies collaborate with youth experiencing homelessness to develop a plan that will help them succeed.

Trauma-Informed Care Practices

Findings from the CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study show that harmful, potentially traumatic experiences during childhood often lead to negative outcomes for individuals later in life.

Trauma-Informed Care (TIC), a product of the ACE study, provides a strengths-based framework for practitioners and researchers of social services, healthcare providers, and other human service agencies to integrate TIC into their practice and field of study. TIC recognizes the complex nature of trauma experienced by individuals while promoting resilience and healing.

Adoption of TIC practices will be met through educating CoC providers, educating stakeholders on why it is important to meet our collective goals and how to incorporate TIC within each organization, committee, and group that make up our CoC.

Strategies to Adopt Trauma-Informed Care Practices in our Community:

- Integrate knowledge about trauma and its effects into policies, procedures, and practices
- YHDP agencies will develop and implement a referral process to appropriate trauma-specific treatments if the youth chooses
- Practicing the principle of TIC - Safely, Trust, Choice, Collaboration, and Empowerment - in provided trainings and in project monitoring
- Create more in-house professional mental health assistance services

- Deliver respite placement options in culturally competent ways, including the "family first" initiatives. Culturally competent practices require service providers to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.
- Ensure that norms of aftercare practices includes consulting both youth and their guardians in the discharge processes, development plans, and ensure that these plans prioritize client choice when youth are reunited with their families
- Create a process that includes a timeframe that facilitates trust-building and rapport-building prior to Coordinated Entry intake assessment

Positive Youth Development

The Department of Health and Human Services developed a framework to empower youth to become self-sufficient and healthy adults. This framework, called Positive Youth Development (PYD), utilizes four basic principles to guide work with young people. These principles are competence, usefulness, belonging, and power. For youth to develop healthy social and emotional skills, they need to feel like they are good at something. Youth must feel that they can contribute to society, that they have friends and family, and that they are confident in themselves. PYD is now advocated as a best-practice. PYD is designed to guide the way that staff and organizations interact with youth. PYD ensures the development of healthy social and emotional skills and coping mechanisms of serviced youth.

We utilize the PYD approach with our Youth Action Board. Our goal is to empower our YAB members with the skills they need to be successful both on the YAB and in their personal and professional lives. In addition to our YHDP work, we've incorporated leadership and community organizing training within our curriculum.

Strategies to Promote Positive Youth Development (PYD):

- Encourage PYD as a best-practice for youth-focused housing providers
- Providing PYD trainings and workshops for our Continuum of Care
- Connect youth to mentors with lived experience who can act as role models
- Include strategies in case management to help youth build social and emotional skills and wellness

- Include PYD as a project performance indicator and in the continuous quality improvement plan
- Project staff will provide youth with options during case management, such as allowing the youth to decide if and when they want to discuss personal issues
- Train youth and young adults on peer outreach teams to better identify youth experiencing homelessness
- Hire peers to conduct coordinated entry assessments and service navigation activities
- Develop age appropriate assessments for minors
- Include a mentoring component for youth in assistance programs. Mentors would be required to have lived experience and would assist by building life skills and resilience in youth experiencing homelessness

Family Engagement

Our community partners concluded that family engagement is a priority when it comes to the prevention of youth homelessness. This is especially important for youth under the age of 18, who cannot yet obtain a lease for housing.

The community prioritized a Family Engagement Team with Diversion - Supportive Services Only project for YHDP funding. This project will focus on providing wrap-around case management for youth and their families. These services will be provided to the youth no matter where the youth chooses to reside (e.g., family of origin, relatives, or friends). This project is meant to divert youth from utilizing crisis housing by keeping them in their homes and engaging them early on before they become unstably housed or immediately afterward to stabilize them. See **Family Engagement Team with Diversion on page 79.**

Strategies to Promote Family Engagement:

- Focus on the family unit as a whole when addressing youth homelessness, making sure to engage the family at every step of the way, if the youth chooses they want to reunite with family
- Provide mediation and relationship building techniques between youth and family to resolve conflict
- Provide supports and linkages to not only youth but their family to build family resiliency

Immediate Access to Housing with No Preconditions

This guiding principle, also known as Housing First, recognizes that the key to ending homelessness is a home. The Housing First principle calls for anyone experiencing homelessness to have access to housing without preconditions. If a youth experiencing homelessness has a mental health condition, a substance use disorder, low-income, etc., that youth will still be placed into permanent housing as soon as possible. Once the youth that experiences homelessness is stabilized in housing, they will receive the appropriate referrals and linkages to wrap-around services to address the challenges they may be facing. By implementing Housing First for youth, we recognize that youth will have immediate access to housing with no preconditions.

Strategies to Promote Quick Access without Preconditions in our Community:

- Establish Housing First as a best-practice in our community
- Provide trainings and workshops on Housing First practices for youth
- Implement Housing First as a requirement for all YHDP projects
- Continue to develop relationships with landlords and affordable housing developers in the community to quickly house youth experiencing homelessness
- Recognize that substance use and mental health is not a barrier to crisis housing or obtaining housing
- Provide youth experiencing homelessness with necessary and age-appropriate support services that focus on health, well-being, life skills, engagement in education and employment and social network building

Youth Choice

As a primary tenant of both Trauma-Informed Care and Positive Youth Development, youth choice came up as a central theme in focus groups and YAB conversations. Young people expressed a need to be able to direct their own goals and path with guidance from a trustworthy mentor.

Strategies to Promote Youth Choice in Our Community:

- Provide individualized supports based on consultation with the youth experiencing homelessness
- Allow youth and young adults to choose the intensity, duration, and types of services that are available to meet their unique needs
- Provide choice where youth experiencing homelessness are housed through rental assistance programs
- Ask for and incorporate feedback from youth clients and the YAB for project performance review

Individualized and Client-Driven Supports

Each young person has distinct histories and strengths. Through YHDP, agencies will provide services and support that match the needs of each young person. Flexibility in case management allows for youth to work on their unique goals at a pace that will allow them to be successful in the program.

Strategies to Promote Individualized and Client Driven Supports:

- Determine specific goals are and timeframes for achieving goals
- Create flexible funding options that help ensure each youth can furnish their homes as needed
- Utilize mental health, substance use, and social-emotional wellness assessments to determine the specific treatment needs of each youth

Social and Community Integration

Youth expressed that they need to feel safe and welcomed in their community in order to be successful and secure. Social and Community Integration is imperative for a young person to develop the social skills and connections they need to achieve their goals. Social and Community Integration is encouraged through all of our guiding principles, especially Trauma-Informed Care, Positive Youth Development, and Youth Choice.

Our Youth Action Board determined that youth need to explore their community and make connections with community members. This will help youth feel safer

as they will be able to live somewhere they choose and where they feel like they belong.

Currently in our community there are many vocational, volunteer, and recreational opportunities for youth that they can be linked to. Some of these include:

- Buffalo Urban League
- YouthBuild
- Service Collaborative of WNY
- PUSH Buffalo
- Boys and Girls Club of WNY
- City of Buffalo Office of Community Services and Recreational Programming - Youth Services
- City of Niagara Falls Office of Public Works - Youth Services
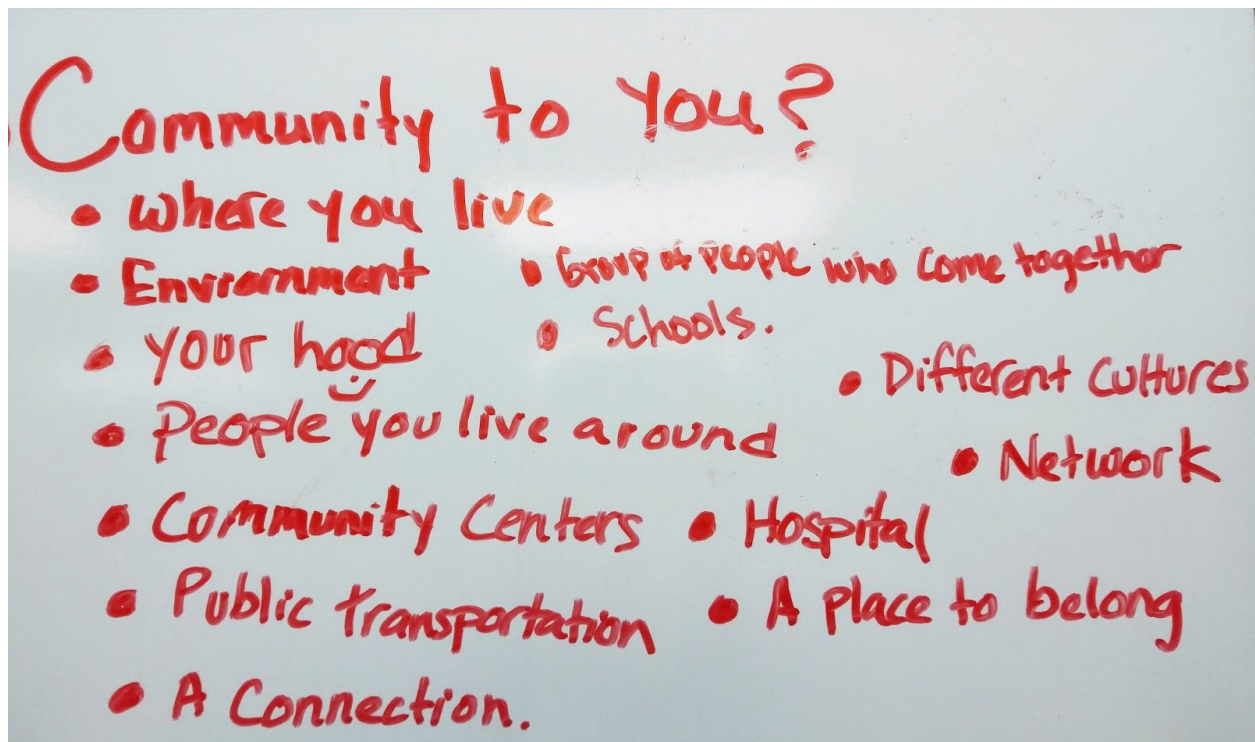
Youth Action Board Session on Social and Community Integration

Strategies to Promote Social and Community Integration in our Community:
- Direct service staff should encourage and promote attendance at free, youth friendly community events
- Promote healthy communities by advocating for a clean environment, affordable housing, and advocating for decreased violence

- Work with youth to build relationships with family, friends, and community organizations to develop permanent connections

Progressive Engagement

Progressive engagement is a technique that seeks to maximize the number of individuals who can be served in permanent housing, while taking into account each individual's unique risk and protective factors. Initially, through Housing First, enough assistance is provided to stabilize the youth in permanent housing. After the initial housing crisis is stabilized, a case manager will work with the youth to determine if a lesser amount of financial assistance is enough to stabilize them, or if they will need more assistance for a longer amount of time. Many youth in our community may require only a small amount of financial assistance to stabilize, to successfully exit to a permanent housing destination. By providing youth in crisis enough financial assistance to alleviate their immediate crisis and then re-assessing the youth's needs, we are able to both assist those in crisis and provide more resources to those youth who may need more intensive services.

Strategies to Promote Progressive Engagement in Our Community:

- Ensure service providers are assisting youth with the least amount of resources needed to get back on their feet, then re-assessing the youth to determine what their unique needs and strengths are and how long they may need financial assistance

Coordinated Entry

Coordinated Entry creates a standardized process of ensuring the most vulnerable youth are prioritized for housing interventions. Our community currently has two Coordinated Entry access points that are youth specific. Youth are also able to use the general adult system. Coordinated Entry for youth should be easily accessible and reflect an accurate prioritization system. Youth stated they can feel pressured or uncomfortable if asked to disclose too much personal information to someone they don't already know. In addition, there is no VI-SPDAT for youth under the age of 18.

All YHDP-funded projects will be required to participate in Coordinated Entry. Currently, youth specific housing providers and outreach participate in regular youth by-name list meetings and case conferences. These meetings will grow to include our new youth providers. Youth will be prioritized based on the TAY-VI-SPDAT and their homeless history, and referred during these meetings to YHDP funded projects.

Youth told us they want to work with someone they can trust, who genuinely cares about their well-being. They want to have access to low barrier crisis housing with the ability to get support services and assistance finding permanent housing based on what their unique needs are.

> *"I want to be able to choose how I talk about problems...sometimes I'd rather draw or write than just talk. It makes me feel more comfortable."*
>
> *"Sometimes you can't trust people...I just want to know I can trust someone before I'm going to let them help me."*
>
> *"I just want to be around positive energy!"*
>
> *-   Youth Action Board Members*

Strategies to Promote a Youth-Centric Coordinated Entry System:

To successfully implement a youth-centric Coordinated Entry (CE) system for YHDP projects, our community partners will:

- Comply with current Coordinated Entry Policies and Procedures[4] and review/update/approve prioritization guidelines for new YHDP projects
- The YAB and YHDP Leadership Team will review quarterly the effectiveness and efficiency of CE for YHDP projects
- Ensure that all unaccompanied youth have access to a standardized CE process and CE access points are publicized
- Ensure all CoC case managers are trained in conducting the TAY-VI-SPDAT and are using standardized methods to screen youth under age 18

---

[4] Homeless Alliance of WNY, 2019. "Coordinated Entry Policy and Procedure"
https://wnyhomeless.org/app/uploads/CE-policy-and-procedure-V2019.3.pdf

- Ensure CoC case managers are trained in assessing domestic violence situations and safety planning
- Maintain a by-name list, updated weekly, that is reviewed in bi-weekly case conferencing
- Provide timely referrals to YHDP programs or other resources in the community for youth on the by-name list
- Allow for an intake and screening process that goes at the young person's pace
- Develop a screening tool that youth can self-administer
- Ensure that schools, Department of Social Services and other youth serving agencies have a thorough understanding of the Coordinated Entry process and can refer youth to an access point
- Develop a way to prioritize youth under the age of 18 for referral to crisis and permanent housing

Equity

Erie and Niagara Counties
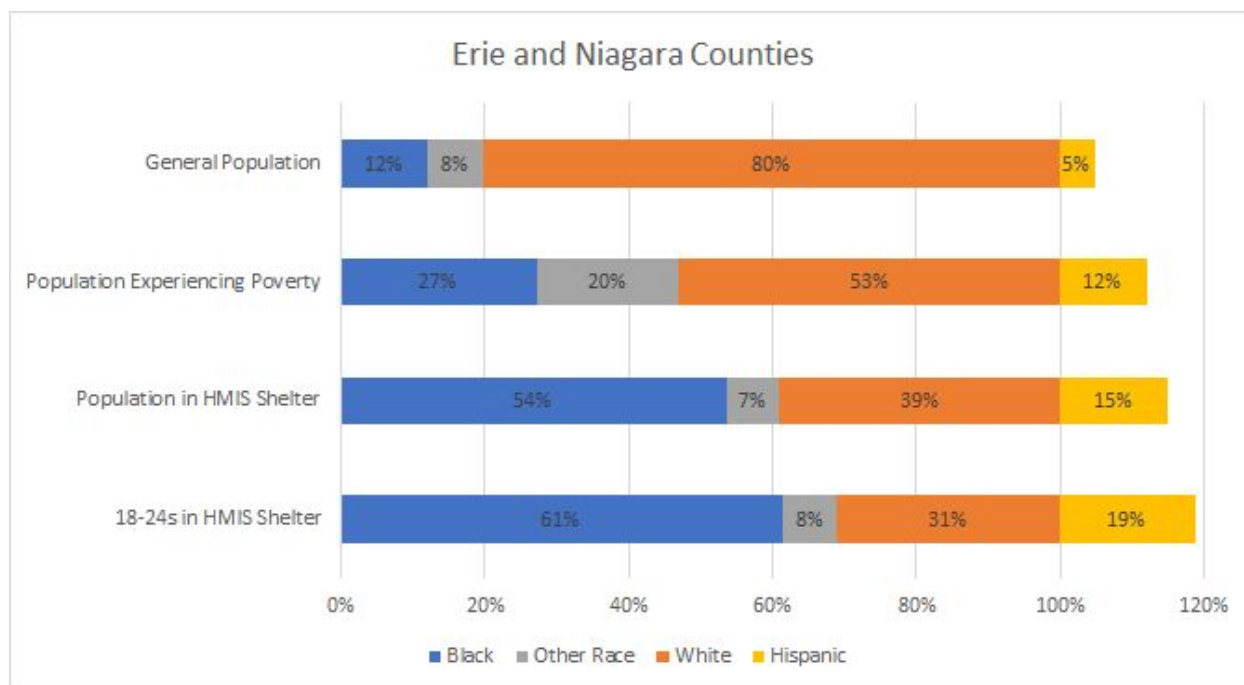
Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey data and HMIS data

Racial equity is a priority of our Continuum of Care. We recognize that structural and interpersonal racism contributes to higher rates of homelessness among racial and ethnic minorities and also how people in those groups are able to access assistance[5]. The data shows a disparity between racial group representation among the population experiencing homelessness and the racial group representation among the general population. If the loss of access to housing were only a matter of poverty, the demographics of people experiencing homelessness would mirror those experiencing poverty. However, that is not the case. By comparing the racial and ethnic composition among the general population, people of color are significantly overrepresented in people experiencing poverty and people who are homeless, especially those who are 18-24.

New York State is a Right-to-Shelter State, which means that the Department of Social Services is obligated to place everyone who has nowhere to sleep into shelters regardless of their race, sexual orientation, age, religion, or marriage status. Different incidence of homelessness among demographic groups relative

---

[5] Homeless Alliance of WNY, 2018. "Racial Disparities in Homelessness in Western New York"https://wnyhomeless.org/app/uploads/WNY-Racial-Disparities-2018.pdf

to the general population doesn't reflect a bias of service provision because the legal requirement is that we serve everyone. The above chart shows there are a disproportion of people of color experiencing homelessness.

The community began to capture data on the sexual orientation of people experiencing homelessness; however, there is no community wide baseline to compare. As previously noted, we have found LGBTQ+ rates among youth experiencing homelessness to be between 25% and 40%, significantly higher than most estimates of the general population. This demonstrates the need for culturally competent service provision that is aware of the different experiences and needs of those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and so forth.

New York State recently issued an Administrative Directive Memorandum to all districts to ensure all shelters comply with Equal Access rules by providing culturally competent services to LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness, and as a CoC lead we offer annual Equal Access Rule training to all CoC members. Youth shelters in our community have made LGBTQ+ cultural competence a priority.

261 Client TAY Score Ranges (2018-19)
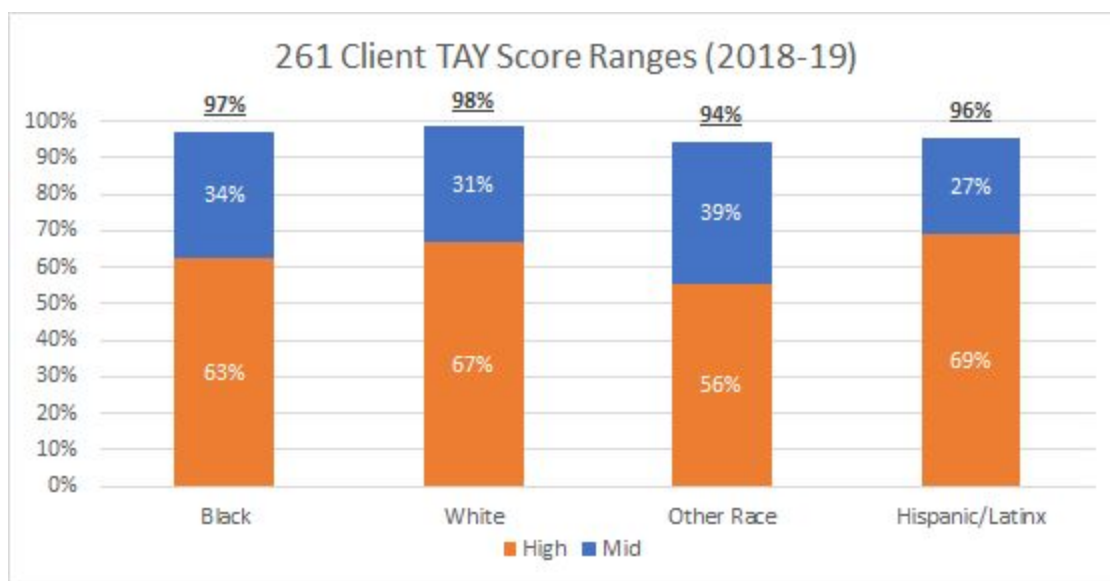
Source: TAY-VI-SPDAT Scores for Youth Ages 18 - 24 recorded in HMIS

297 Client VI/VI-F Score Ranges (2018-19)
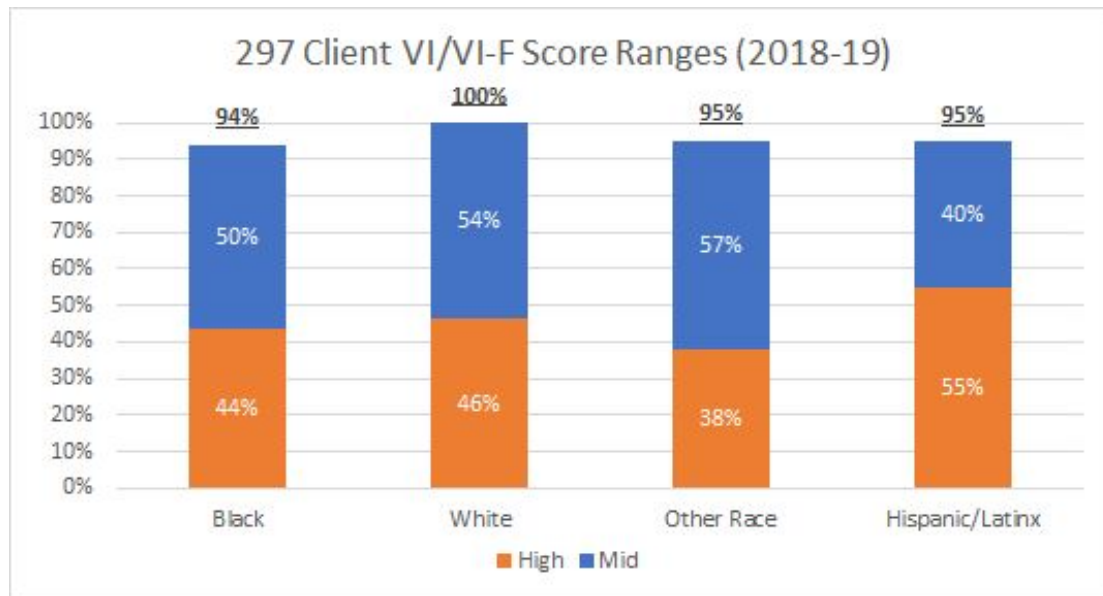
Source: VI-SPDAT / VI-F-SPDAT Scores for Youth Ages 18 - 24 recorded in HMIS

Homelessness itself is a trauma. However, youth experiencing homelessness often have other traumas or difficult circumstances in addition to the trauma of homelessness. Our community partners seek to prioritize people who are, as we define, more vulnerable to further harm as a consequence of their social, emotional, medical, and financial statuses. E.g., those with disabilities may need more assistance than those who do not have disabilities. To ensure that we are serving based on needs, our community partners use a standardized triage tool-the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) and the Transition-Aged Youth - Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (TAY-VI-SPDAT). The TAY-VI-SPDAT includes questions that are more specific to the experiences of young adults.

Homeless shelters and street outreach providers often use the VI-SPDAT screening tool instead of the TAY-VI-SPDAT version. Overall, it doesn't show significant differences in the degree of vulnerability among different racial groups, or in the percentages of those who qualify for rapid rehousing or permanent supportive housing. However, our community partners have found that people who are screened with the TAY-VI-SPDAT are more likely to score higher than those who are screened by the VI-SPDAT. This means they may be prioritized for these services first based on the tool used.

Moving forward, our community partners will be offering training and support to homeless service providers so they are always utilizing the TAY-VI-SPDAT when

screening single transition aged youth. This is important to ensure standardization and equal access to permanent housing. In addition, we will use YHDP funds to create more youth specific services that prioritize equity at all levels of an organization.

Where Racial/Ethnic Groups are Being Served
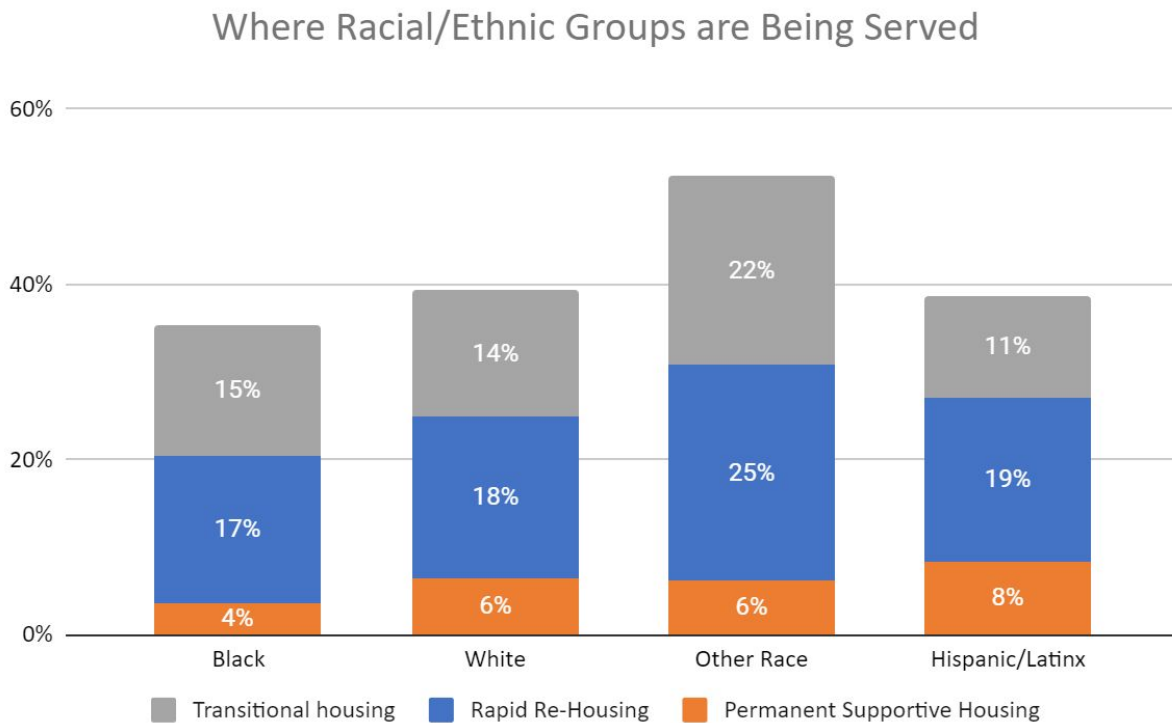
Source: HMIS CY18 data

We analyzed the percentages by race and ethnicity of transition aged youth accessing transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing to ascertain whether different groups were being served at different rates in these programs. The underlying assumption is that the score on the triage tool should be the determining factor and we would see rates of racial representation that reflect how they were scored by this tool. The result of this analysis is different from what we see in the overall system. This serves as our baseline and we will pay more attention in practice as well as reviewing this information annually to ensure all youth are being served fairly.

The Continuum of Care has formed a racial equity committee. This committee has been reviewing our racial disparities research, surveyed clients, identified other systems that contributed to the disparities, and educated the CoC and community on outcomes we found. We will be including racial disparities information for the youth population in our HMIS dashboard and encourage

YAB, YTF and the racial equity committee to work together to address the racial inequity in our community.

...

"I believe that our system needs to be reconstructed in a way where we are willing to help those in need. No matter what you may look like. Safety should look and feel the same."

"Everyone should be treated the same way, don't matter what color you are." -

Youth Action Board Members

...

Community Shared Vision

The Youth Action Board and Youth Task Force created a vision statement that reflects the strengths based and youth-centric approach our community partners have taken to ensuring the end of youth homelessness in Buffalo and Niagara.

"All youth and young adults in our community are valuable, resilient, and deserving of resources, safety, and a sense of empowerment. Our goal is to end youth homelessness in collaboration with youth and young adults and create an environment where our youth can thrive and become healthy adults."

Community Identified Goals, Objectives, and Actions Steps

The Youth Task Forces of Erie and Niagara Counties and the Youth Action Board agreed on five goals in the course of the development of this Coordinated Community Plan. These goals are:

1. **Identification:** The community will provide a safe and supportive environment to identify all youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness by connecting with a wide range of community partners.

2. **Prevention and Diversion:** The community uses outreach, engagement, prevention, and diversion strategies whenever possible, and otherwise provides immediate access to no or low barrier crisis housing and supportive services to any youth, regardless of their circumstances, who needs or wants it.

3. **Coordinated Entry:** The community uses youth focused coordinated entry processes to effectively link all youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness to eligible and appropriate housing and services solutions that are safe, secure, and tailored to youth needs.

4. **Stable Housing:** The community acts with urgency to swiftly and consistently engage and support all youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness to move into permanent housing options, with the location guided by youth choice, with appropriate supportive services meant to maintain youth engagement.

5. **Sustainability:** All youth and young adults in our community are valuable, resilient, and deserving of resources, safety, and a sense of empowerment. Our goal is to end youth homelessness in collaboration with youth and young adults and create an environment where our youth can thrive and become healthy adults.

As part of the process in creating the Coordinated Community Plan, the community developed these goals further, dividing them into objectives and action steps that create a to-do list moving forward. This section shall go into further detail with the objectives and and action steps behind these goals and how the community plans to address them.

These goals and action steps are in service of our overarching plans to facilitate particular well-being goals to facilitate the achievement of the four United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) identified outcomes to end youth homelessness. We've indicated this through the following symbols:

- ❤️Social and emotional well-being
- 👨‍👩‍👧Permanent connections
- 📚Education and Employment
- 🏡Stable housing

The Youth Action Board and Youth Task Force determined the length of time it would take to achieve each action step. The action steps below are divided by steps that can be completed in the short term, medium term, and long term. We define the below timeframe to achieve each objective as: Short term: 1-2 years, Medium term: 3-5 years, Long term: within 5-7 years. Highlighted Action Steps (in orange) are ones the community prioritized for YHDP funding.

Goal 1: Identification

The community will provide a safe and supportive environment to identify all youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness by connecting with a wide range of community partners.

In order for young people to be willing to identify themselves and their circumstances to service providers and members of the community who wish to help, we need to ensure that there exists a safe, supportive environment where youth and young adults recognize that coming forward will lead to assistance. It needs to be equally as effective as it is welcoming.

Objective A: Increasing identification points for the homeless assistance system to ensure all youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness are identified and connected to services.

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core outcome achieved
Develop a 24-hour hotline where youth could call in and access crisis resources. Such services would have peer-led staffing. This would be an anonymous call/hotline to help young people navigate the youth homelessness assistance system and create a standardized referral or linkage system.	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏠
Train youth and young adults on peer outreach teams to better identify youth experiencing homelessness	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏠
Increase community education so community members can self-identify or refer other people to	Short Term	Youth Task Force/ Homeless	🏠

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
services. This includes training non-social service entities, such as law enforcement or 24-hour businesses on how to identify and respond to youth experiencing homelessness.		Alliance	
Develop a 24-hour drop-in center for youth	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏠

Objective B: Increasing data from community partners through community opportunities - networking, meetings, survey and list servers as well as government entities (New York State Office of Mental Health, counties Department of Social Services, New York State Office of Persons with Disabilities, and other entities).

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Facilitate the creation of a common language and definition for all data sources such that agencies can effectively identify the youth that are homeless or at risk	Short Term	Homeless Alliance (in its role as HMIS lead)	🏠
Identify single points of contact within each department to act as the liaison to the homeless system for the purposes of case conferencing.	Medium Term	Department of Social Services	🏠
Identify or create an assessment tool that points to predictors or factors that might suggest homelessness or at risk populations	Medium Term	Youth Task Force and DSS	🏠
Ensure that the community utilizes a standardized by-name list of all	Medium Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏠

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
youth and young adults experiencing homelessness			
Create a platform or forum for systems of assistance that serve youth to communicate about high risk cases. This includes facilitating the creation of informed consent processes that would facilitate the continuity of care and mutual awareness of barriers to assistance.	Medium Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏠

Objective C: Partner with schools, particularly those in geographies of higher need, to identify students at risk of homelessness.

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
In partnership with schools, the Youth Task Force will ensure that there are standardized presentations about the services offered, and how to access them, given on a regular basis.	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏠

Goal 2: Prevention and Diversion

The community uses outreach, engagement, prevention, and diversion strategies whenever possible, and otherwise provides immediate access to no or low barrier crisis housing and supportive services to any youth who needs or wants it, regardless of their circumstances.

The community believes that youth homelessness starts with family dynamics and there are opportunities at different stages with different interventions to prevent youth experiencing homelessness.

Objective A: Improve discharge processes from other systems of care

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Establish earlier time frames for discharge planning (e.g., from foster care or the juvenile justice system) in collaboration with youth and their families, such that planning begins significantly before discharge is anticipated to occur	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏡❤️👬
Ensure that when youth are reunited with their families, norms of aftercare practices includes consulting both youth and their guardians in the discharge processes, development plans, and also ensuring that these plans prioritize client choice	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏡👬
Ensure that when one system is revising its discharge procedures, other collaborative systems are consulted to ensure the discharge procedures are standardized	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏡👬
Include the relevant adult systems of care in early discharge planning from foster care or children's single point of access, including creating case conferences across systems using the Single Point of Access model to facilitate warm handoffs when needed	Medium Term	Youth Task Force Subcommittee	🏡❤️

| Develop discharge planning standards in light of "Raise the age" legislation (as discussed on page 38) | Short term | Raise the age committee | 🏡👧👦 |

Objective B: Increase youth-focused crisis shelter beds, safe shelter, respite, and housing options for youth who may be at risk of being asked to leave home by their families

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Increase collaboration among agencies to identify and increase respite options. Respite locations should be a low-barrier place to pause for youth who are at risk of greater crisis.	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡❤️
Develiver respite placement options in culturally appropriate ways, including the "family first" initiatives.	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡❤️👧👦
Increase mediation/conflict resolution services available to youth and young adults who are at risk	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡👧👦
Increase the number of low barrier crisis beds suitable for PINS (Persons In Need of Supervision) youth in need of respite.	Short Term	Department of Social Services and HAWNY	🏡❤️
Increase low barrier medium term crisis housing beds, ensuring that they are created with an identified pathway to permanent housing.	Short Term	Dept. of Social Services And HAWNY	🏡

Explore other options for nighttime respite including models such as host homes	Short Term	Subcommittee of the Youth Task Force	🏡
Ensure that best practices such as trauma-informed care, low barrier service provision are the norm with service provisions for these beds with youth-centered social activities to ensure positive engagement in case management	Medium Term	Dept. of Social Services and a Subcommittee of the Youth Task Force	🏡❤️
Create crisis beds for 18-24 year-olds	Medium Term	Dept. of Social Services and Youth Task Force	🏡
Access to prenatal and perinatal resources for pregnant and parenting youth	Short Term	Subcommittee of the Youth Task Force	🏡 ❤️

Objective C: Increase low barrier access to mental health services to facilitate the stability of housing

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Create easily accessible, low barrier mental health services and ensure they are marketed well in the community such youth and young adults are familiar with the services	Medium to Long Term	Youth Task Force	❤️
Create more in-house professional mental health assistance services	Medium to Long Term	Youth Task Force	❤️
Closer collaboration between children's Single Point of Access and the homeless system, including	Long Term	Youth Task Force collaborating with the Office	❤️

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
additional avenues of assistance for youth and young adults seeking help with homelessness accessing the services in the children's Single Point of Access(SPOA) system		of Mental Health	

Objective D: Increase diversion activities for youth who are at imminent risk of homelessness

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Train the community, both lay people and service providers, on diversion practices so youth do not enter the homeless system	Medium Term	A subcommittee of the Youth Task Force and Youth Action Board	🏡
Procure fiscal resources for security deposits, or rental arrears	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏡
Increase diversion activities for youth with lower assessment scores or who might be at imminent risk of homelessness	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏡
Increase shared housing options	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡
Increase respite and short term crisis housing for youth under age 18	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡
Increase family engagement strategies to stabilize youth, using a family-centered approach, through a diversity of service providers so families and individuals feel represented.	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡 👪

Goal 3: Coordinated Entry

The community uses youth focused coordinated entry processes to effectively link all youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness to eligible and appropriate housing and services solutions that are safe, secure, and tailored to youth needs.

The community recognizes that assisting youth and young adults experiencing homelessness requires more than just services being available. The community requires that the process by which young people can access services be efficient, equitable, and skillful in matching young people to the services that can assist them most effectively.

Objective A: Expand Coordinated Entry System to include designated services and locations for youth and to be more youth friendly.

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Standardize the coordinated entry process in both Erie and Niagara County to ensure that the location of a youth or young adult is not a barrier to accessing services	Medium Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏠
Hire peers to conduct coordinated entry assessments and service navigation activities.	Short Term	Youth Action Board	🏠
Ensure that the coordinated entry sites are at the community's "hot-spots" for youth, and that some have the capacity to be mobile to meet youth where they are at	Short Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏠

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Ensure free transportation to coordinated entry Hubs for youth experiencing homelessness	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡
Ensure that the community is using HMIS as the backbone of coordinated entry	Short Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏡

Objective B: Ensure all touchpoints of coordinated entry are operated in accordance with best practices, such as trauma-informed care, positive youth development, de-escalation (a technique in which staff can help youth immediately to reduce the severity of a conflict or decrease the likelihood of violence in a crisis situation), and are able to service youth whose first language is not English.

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Ensure that all people facilitating coordinated entry are trained in best practices, like trauma-informed care, positive youth development, etc.	Medium Term	Youth Task Force in partnership with the Youth Action Board	🏡 ❤️
Create a process that includes a timeframe that facilitates trust-building and rapport-building prior to CE assessment.	Short Term	Youth Action Board	🏡 💓
Develop age appropriate assessments for minors	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏡 ❤️

Goal 4: Stable Housing

The Community acts with urgency to swiftly and consistently engage and support all youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness to move into permanent housing options, with the location guided by youth choice, with appropriate supportive services to maintain youth engagement.

The only solution to homelessness is a home. Ending youth homelessness in any way will need to be housing focused and focused on the strategies to facilitate the stability of housing.

Objective A: Increase the number of permanent housing beds designated for youth.

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Increase the number of permanent supportive housing beds designated for youth	Long Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY and the Continuum of Care	🏡
Increase the number of rapid rehousing beds designated for youth	Long Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY/ Continuum of Care	🏡

Objective B: Ensure that permanent housing options are coupled with the appropriate level of services, as determined by the young person

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Ensure that supportive needs are continuously assessed throughout youth enrollment in assistance programs	Short Term	Youth Task Force	🏡 ❤️
Include a mentoring component for youth in assistance programs. Mentors would have lived experience and would assist by building life skills and resilience in youth experiencing homelessness	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	👫

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Ensure that the services to aid youth and young adults conform to Office of Children and Family Services(OCFS) regulations requiring different sites for the under-18 and 18 and over populations.	Medium Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	❤️
Increase links and referrals to mental health and substance abuse services	Short Term	Youth Task Force	❤️

Objective C: Expand affordable housing opportunities outside of the homelessness alleviation system

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Increase youth designated units within the community's affordable housing portfolio	Long Term	Youth Task Force	🏡
Establish and maintain strong relationships with landlords willing to house youth	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡
Advocate for more affordable housing	Medium Term	Continuum of Care/ Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏡

Objective D: Increase workforce development options for youth and young adults

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Develop partnerships with local employers to hire youth	Medium Term	Youth Task Force Subcommittee/	📚

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
		coalition of workforce development agencies	
Provide tangible assistance to overcome barriers to employment such as interview clothing, work clothing, child care assistance, transportation, and other necessities.	Medium Term	Coalition of workforce development agencies	

Goal 5: Sustainability

All youth and young adults in our community are valuable, resilient, and deserving of resources, safety, and a sense of empowerment. Our goal is to end youth homelessness in collaboration with youth and young adults and create an environment where our youth can thrive and become healthy adults.

It is important that the systems we build to assist youth and young adults experiencing homelessness endure after this planning process, and are maintained with a commitment to continual betterment.

Objective A: Increase staff retention activities for front-line staff at youth serving organizations.

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Increase salaries for case managers	Long Term	Youth Task Force	
Ensure that all youth-serving agencies have staff members with lived experience	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	
Ensure that staff roles and responsibilities are structured in such a way to guard against burnout	Short Term	Youth Task Force	

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved

with clear boundaries around what is and what is not a staff-member's responsibility			

Objective B: Track performance data through utilization of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and through monitoring by the Collaborative Applicant (Homeless Alliance of WNY)

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Increase utilization of HMIS by non-HUD-funded youth homelessness providers	Long Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏡
Identify and standardize performance measures to track progress with existing youth service provider	Medium Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏠
Create a virtual open portal that uses HMIS data to demonstrate which aggregate service pathways are most effective in successfully leading youth and young adults out of homelessness.	Medium Term	Homeless Alliance of WNY	🏠
Establish a sustainability/continuous quality improvement committee which would monitor continuous quality improvement using data and performance outcomes. Youth Action Board plays a key role in it	Short Term	Youth Task Force / Youth Homelessness Demonstration Leadership Committee/YAB	🏠

Objective C: Ensure continuous collaboration of all community partners to ensure eligibility, service delivery, and successful outcomes.

Action Steps	Timeframe	Responsible Partner	Core Outcome Achieved
Increase awareness of homeless services through engagement of families starting in kindergarten with parent mentors, employment assistance, substance use, nutrition, etc	Short Term	School systems	👫📓
Design peer support programs to share success stories, encouragement, mentoring, etc	Medium Term	Youth Action Board	👫
Ensuring retention of the information communicated the community through education efforts, as well as using social media, podcasts, or broadcast advertisements to ensure that the awareness of homelessness among youth and young adults is sustained	Medium Term	Youth Task Force	🏡

YHDP New Projects

Upon recommendation from the Youth Action Board and Youth Task Force, the CoC board approved the following projects and allocation of Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program funding for FY 2020-2021.

Program Type	2 years budget	Match	Total	Expected households served annually
Joint TH-RRH	$2,400,000	$600,000	$3,000,000	100
Family Engagement	$600,000	$150,000	$750,000	300
Overnight drop in	$592,570	$148,143	$740,713	150
Total	$3,592,570	$898,143	$4,490,713	

YHDP Project Selection

A competitive request for proposals (RFP) for an initial two years of YHDP funding for youth-serving projects was issued by the Homeless Alliance of WNY on behalf of the CoC and Youth Action Board on March 16th, 2020. Applications are due by May 8th, 2020. Qualified applicants will be interviewed by a Project Selection Committee consisting of YAB members, Child Welfare agencies, Youth Task Force members who did not submit an application, CoC Board and interested community members. Project Selection Committee members were selected to ensure there is no actual or perceived conflict of interest. The Project Selection Committee will select the highest rated eligible applicants in June 2020.

1. **Joint Transitional Housing (TH) and Permanent Housing-Rapid Rehousing (PH-RRH)**

Joint Transitional - Rapid Rehousing is a program that includes both transitional housing and Rapid Rehousing. Youth might only use transitional, only use RRH, or use both. The transitional part of the project is meant to be a short-term stay while a youth is facing a housing crisis. Rapid Rehousing places youth in their

own apartment in the community and assists with rental costs and provides case management.

Maximum request: $2,400,000 over a two-year period (Final approved budget may be subject to change based on quality, quantity, geographic coverage and services provided in this project type)

Program Description	Timeframe for Participants	Population Served	Desired outcomes
- Provide both transitional housing and rapid rehousing assistance. Clients can choose to receive either TH, RRH or both. - Application must demonstrate that there is enough financial assistance and supportive services for program participants who choose to enroll in Rapid rehousing. They must ensure the transition from TH or other crisis housing to Rapid rehousing is as smooth as possible. - Provide life skills development, service linkage and referral, individual and group counseling/activities, connections including access to public benefits that are offered by DSS, connections to education, vocational training and employment(e.g. ACCES-VR, YouthBuild), connections to mentors, and promote social and community integration. - Provide youth and young adult (YYA) in their own apartment in RRH (could be shared with other participants or non-participants) or their own bedroom in TH - RRH will provide intense case management with a caseload 1:10 and be able to check in with clients at least once a week for the first 3 months.	Clients could stay maximum 2 years in TH and 2 years in RRH. Project must use the progressive engagement model, connect youth to permanent housing as soon as possible, and follow up with the clients.	Unaccompanied youth and young adults ages 16-24 who meet category 1,2 or 4 in HUD homeless definition.	Increase successful access to crisis housing (TH). Increase YYA housing stability. For RRH, decrease the length of time youth spend literally homeless. Reduce recidivism Support youth in education, life skill development, employment, income, health and well-being.

● If TH chose to be a single site, preferably to be centrally located with easy access to public transportation and other services nearby ● TH serving youth under 18 are required to be OCFS certified (Could be certified afterward)			

2. **Family Engagement Team with Diversion**

This is intended to be a supportive services project with a small amount of rental assistance funding for diversion. Supportive service could include case management, transportation, mental health counseling, linkage and referral, grocery, transportation etc. Diversion funds could be made available though rental assistance to prevent youth from utilizing shelter or sleeping on the street. Maximum request: $600,000 over a two-year period. Final approved budget may be subject to change based on quality, quantity, geographic coverage, and services provided in this project type.

Program Description	Timeframe for Participants	Population Served	Desired outcomes
● Provide case management that connects and mediate between YYA and their chosen family, continue follow up with the family/friend to create permanent connections for YYA. ● Short term rental assistance can be provided if needed. Including Security Deposit, first/last month rent, and no more than 3 months of rent that assist a YYA to remain in permanent housing. Units that receive any rental assistance will have to meet all CoC requirements for rental assistance (Housing Quality Standards(HQS), rent reasonableness, 1-year lease	Based on the client's need; can provide up to 6 months services.	Unaccompanied youth and young adults ages 12-24 who meet category 1,2 or 4 in HUD homeless definition.	Reduce YYA recidivism rate Reduce first time homeless youth Assist youth to build permanent connections

	Timeframe for Participants	Population Served	Desired outcomes
requirement). ● Provide linkage to mental health counseling, substance use treatment and medical need ● Maximum request on rental assistance no more than 15% of total request ● Collaborate with School, Department of social services,justice system, child welfare and other community organization to identify and prevent youth who are in high risk of experiencing homelessness			

3. Supportive Service Only -- Overnight Drop in Center Staff

Supportive Service Only Projects can only apply for administrative cost, supportive service cost, and the operating costs would get charged as supportive services in the budget.

Maximum request: $592,570 over a two-year period. Final approved budget may be subject to change based on quality, quantity, geographic coverage and services provided in this project type.

Program Description	Timeframe for Participants	Population Served	Desired outcomes
● Provide overnight access to a safe place for YYA to stay. Basic needs should be provided on site, e.g. showers, laundry, food. ● Act as one of the access points for coordinated entry for youth. Provide connections to community resources. Prefer to utilize peer navigators. ● Assist with housing search, linkage to mental health and substance use counseling and connect with family. ● Preferably to be centrally located with easy access to public transportation and	As needed.	Unaccompanied youth and young adults ages 16-24 who meet category 1,2 or 4 in HUD homeless definition.	Increase # of youth identified as homeless or at risk. Support youth in achieving education, employment, income, health and well-being goals through linkage to other program/ services Provide immediate safe access for YYA

other services nearby			

Continuous Quality Improvement Plan

As our community partners effort shift from planning to implementation, we will establish a Continuous Quality Improvement Process to track our progress in achieving the system and program outcomes. We are committed to adjusting local programs and funding based on what we learn. We are determined to continually improve our programs to better serve youth and young adults to achieve the goal of ending youth homelessness in our community.

Our community partners understand that the expected outcomes, recommended projects, and action steps might change over time. The YHDP Leadership Team will be responsible to create opportunities for community stakeholders to share challenges, barriers, opportunities, and to adopt new ideas or solutions and create new strategies to ensure our success in ending youth homelessness. All responsible parties listed in the Objective and Action Plan section will lead the effort in achieving the objectives and actions. Community-wide stakeholder meetings will be held quarterly to report on progress, lessons learned and discuss any adjustments to be made accordingly. The YHDP Leadership Team will review this Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) annually and make changes as needed.

We will also commit to reviewing measurements used for continuous improvement and results-based accountability, an outcome focus model to improve service quality, for the youth homeless system. These measurements were developed to align with the activities and desired results proposed by the Youth Task Force and YAB. The measures selected for the evaluation framework align with the five goals outlined in this Coordinated Community Plan, USICH Core Outcomes to End Youth Homelessness, HUD's System Performance Measures, and the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) model. We believe that this approach to the development of a Collective Impact Measurement Framework ensures measures are verifiable, achievable, and meaningful to all system partners.

Data Quality Improvement Plan

As the Continuum of Care and HMIS Lead, the Homeless Alliance of WNY will ensure that the YHDP project data quality is continuously monitored to ensure accuracy and reliability of outcome tracking. Currently, we have full HMIS coverage of current youth-specific beds. In order to accurately track the YHDP program outcomes, the Homeless Alliance of WNY will train and provide ongoing technical assistance to new and current staff members of agencies in our community serving youth. The Homeless Alliance will also regularly monitor the timeliness and accuracy of the data collected by YHDP projects.

System level outcomes

How much did we do?	How well did we implement services as intended?
# of youth access safe crisis housing (reduce unsheltered population)	Increase % of case managers trained in all guiding principles according to the CCP
# of youth on the By-name list	Length of Services provided
Increase #of youth served by Family Engagement Team	Increase % of youth reporting services were delivered in a culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate manner
Increase # of youth assessed through Coordinated Entry	Staff retention
Are youth better off?	
# of youth Improved social emotional outcome	% of youth Improved social emotional outcome
#of youth exit to permanent housing	% of youth exit to permanent housing
# of youth return to homelessness	% of recidivism rate
# of youth achieve their education/vacation goal	% of youth have employment or attending school
# of first time homeless youth	% of first time homeless youth
# of filing PINS petition as well as other juvenile justice involvement by reducing	

family conflict	
# of youth connect to their family	

The measures in the table above will be prepared by HAWNY staff and reviewed quarterly by the YHDP Leadership Team. HAWNY will be responsible to use HMIS data to track system performance (e.g. recidivism, total number of youth experiencing homelessness) and program performance (percent of youth exiting to safe housing successfully) and all projects funded through YHDP shall keep track of individual outcomes utilizing standardized social-emotional assessment tools (e.g. Improving life skills).

Project /participant level outcomes

TH-RRH:

Program outcomes:

1. 85% of participants remain or exit to stable housing

2. 35% of youth 18-24 are employed

3. Maintain stable housing at 3, 6, and 12 months after the rental assistance ends

4. Improve the social, emotional, and physical health, as well as improve independent living skills (monthly assessment) of those served in the program

5. Enrollment of clients in school/vocational program if appropriate

Family Engagement Team with Diversion

1. Build multiple permanent social connections for youth experiencing homelessness

2. Prevent youth from becoming homeless or returning to homelessness

3. Linkage to other supportive services

Overnight Drop in Center

1. Provide a safe place for youth to stay
2. Linkage to other supportive services in order to facilitate youth and young adult's education, employment, income, health, and well-being goals

Acknowledgements

This Coordinated Community Plan would not have been possible without our Youth Action Board, Youth Task Force, community stakeholders, and the CoC Lead Homeless Alliance of WNY. Many partners, old and new, came to the table with passion and expertise and a shared goal of ending youth homelessness in Erie and Niagara Counties. For a full list of our partners and their roles in the YHDP process, please see Appendix B.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the youth who gave their time and expertise to guide us to solutions and educate us on the needs of youth in the community. This includes our Youth Action Board, who met weekly to lead the CCP and project development, and who will continue to meet to approve and monitor new projects. Thank you!

Appendix A- Glossary

Code Blue	"Code Blue 32" is a lifesaving operation that provides shelter, food and supportive services to approximately 100-150 individuals living on the streets of Buffalo each night that the temperatures reach 32 degrees or below.
Continuum of Care (CoC)	The Continuum of Care (CoC) Program is designed to promote community wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, and State and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness; promote access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families; and optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness. HAWNY, is the Continuum of Care Lead Agency. The CoC lead agency is responsible for the coordination and oversight of the CoC planning efforts, and has the authority to certify and submit the CoC homeless assistance funding application.
Coordinated Community Plan (CCP)	A central requirement of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) is that each selected community develops a CCP to prevent and end youth homelessness. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) designed YHDP to allow for up to 6 months of initial planning together with a significant level of direct HUD technical assistance followed by up to 6 months of additional time for HUD feedback and plan edits by the community.
Coordinated Entry (CE)	Evaluates and connects those most in need in the community with the most appropriate available resources for their situation as swiftly as possible–the process should be low barrier,

	housing first oriented, person-centered, and inclusive.
Emergency Shelter (ES)	Any facility, the primary purpose of which is to provide a temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements.
Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)	A combination of well-researched interventions with clinical experience and ethics, and client preferences and culture to guide and inform the delivery of treatments and services. The practitioner, researcher and client must work together in order to identify what works, for whom and under what conditions. This approach ensures that the treatments and services, when used as intended, will have the most effective outcomes as demonstrated by the research. It will also ensure that programs with proven success will be more widely disseminated and will benefit a greater number of people.
FUP Vouchers	Family Unification Program (FUP) is a program under which Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) are provided to two different populations. In this plan, it refers to the particular population/program that meets the following criteria: For a period not to exceed 36 months, otherwise eligible youths who have attained at least 18 years and not more than 24 years of age and who have left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, in accordance with a transition plan described in section 475(5)(H) of the Social Security Act, and is homeless or is at risk of becoming homeless at age 16 or older.
HMIS (Homeless Management Information System)	Allows housing and service providers to enter client and services information into a secure web-based database. This system currently covers Erie, Niagara, Orleans, Genesee, Wyoming, and Cattaraugus Counties. It also includes data from the regional 211 referral service. HMIS is

	an important tool to capture the extent of homelessness as well as the demographic characteristics of persons who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
Housing First	A homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues.
HUD	The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is the Federal agency responsible for national policy and programs that address America's housing needs that improve and develop the Nation's communities, and enforce fair housing laws.
McKinney-Vento	The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that ensures the right of students to go to school even when they are homeless or don't have a permanent address. The Act aims to reduce barriers that have prevented many homeless youth from enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school, including: transportation, residency requirements, documentation requirements such as birth certificate and medical records.
Minor Youth	Youth aged 11 to 17 years of age.
Permanent Housing (PH)	Community-based housing without a designated length of stay in which formerly homeless individuals and families live as independently as possible.
Permanent Supportive Housing	An intervention that combines affordable housing assistance with voluntary support services to address the needs of chronically homeless people.

	The services are designed to build independent living, tenancy skills, connect people with community-based health care, and treatment and employment services.
Point-in-Time (PIT)	An unduplicated count on a single night of the people in a community who are experiencing homelessness that includes both sheltered and unsheltered populations. During these point-in-time counts, communities are required to identify whether a person is an individual, a member of a family unit, or an unaccompanied youth under the age of 18 or age 18 to 24. In addition, communities must identify if a person is chronically homeless, indicating long-time or repeated homelessness and the presence of a disability. Point-in-time counts are important because they establish the dimensions of the problem of homelessness and help policymakers and program administrators track progress toward the goal of ending homelessness. On the local level, point-in-time counts help communities plan services and programs to appropriately address local needs, measure progress in decreasing homelessness, and identify strengths and gaps in a community's current homelessness assistance system.
Rapid Rehousing (RRH)	A HUD best-practice model for alleviating homelessness. It is designed to help families and individuals quickly exit homelessness with both housing identification and financial assistance and to help them achieve long-term housing stability. The core components of a rapid rehousing program are housing identification, move-in and rental assistance, and rapid rehousing case management and services.
Runaway and homeless youth program (RHY)	Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHY) is a program funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These programs include street outreach, emergency shelters, transitional living

	programs, and maternity group homes for pregnant and parenting youth.
Transition Aged Youth	Youth aged 18 to 24 years of age.
Transitional Housing (TH)	Transitional housing refers to a supportive – yet temporary – type of accommodation that is meant to bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing by offering structure, supervision, support (for addictions and mental health, for instance), life skills, and in some cases, education and training.
Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)	A strengths-based framework for practitioners and researchers of social services, healthcare, and beyond to integrate into their practice and field of study. TIC recognizes the complex nature of trauma experienced by individuals while promoting resilience and healing
VI-SPDAT	Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Prescreen Tool is created by OrgCode to help communities identify who should be priority for different housing and support intervention. There are three different tools for different populations, VI-SPDAT for single, VI-F-SPDAT for family, TAY-VI-SPDAT for youth.
Youth Experiencing Homelessness	Youth and young adults aged 11 to 24 years-old, who are unaccompanied or pregnant/parenting, and who are experiencing literal homelessness, meaning they are staying in a shelter or on the street or places not meant for human habitation (cars, public parks, etc.)
Youth at-risk of homelessness	Youth who are residing in unsafe situations as defined by the youth or youth who are at imminent risk of losing their primary nighttime residence.

Appendix B: Community Partners and YAB members

Partners	Organizations	Description of Involvement
CoC Board	HAWNY Board	Participate in discussion, review, and approve CCP 6 of 17 Board members have been regular participants in the YTF meetings for 3 years. 1 Board member is the Chair of the YTF. 4 Board members sit on the Independent Project Selection Committee. 2 Board members represent Youth TH programs. Board members whose programs are not applying for YHDP will be represented on the Project Selection Committee for the YHDP and participate in the CQI
Youth Action Board	See Appendix A-7 for a list of YAB members	Participated in discussions for 3 years and have, created, reviewed and will need to approve CCP. They will have representation on the Project Selection Committee for the YHDP and participate in the CQI.

Local and State Government	City of Buffalo, City of Niagara Falls	Participate in the CCP development. Representatives of the City of Buffalo, County of Erie and Niagara County have been regular participants in the CCP development and members of the YTF. Buffalo and Erie County have participated for 3 years. The New York State Office of Child and Family Services has been a member of the YTF since late 2019. The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance has also pledged support for our efforts. They will have representation on the Project Selection Committee for the YHDP and participate in the CQI
Public Child Welfare Agencies	Erie County Department of Social Services; Niagara County Department of Social Services, NYS Office of Children and Family Services	Participate in the CCP development, provide data, conduct data analysis. The local Departments of Social Services and the NYS Office of Child and Family Services are the Public Welfare agencies and have assisted with the collection and analysis of data outside of HMIS for

		the past two years. They are participating in the YTF and will have representation on the Project Selection Committee for the YHDP and participate in the CQI
ESG Program Recipients	City of Buffalo, Erie County, City of Niagara Falls	Participate in the CCP development. City of Buffalo, County of Erie and City of Niagara Falls have been regular members of the YTF for 3 years. All three entities have representatives on the Project Selection Committee, Performance Review Committee and will be part of the CQI.
Local and State Law Enforcement and Judges	Buffalo Police Department	Participate in the CCP development. They have provided some input but have not been regular participants in the YTF.
Early Childhood Development and Child Care Providers	NA	
Local and State Educational Agencies	Buffalo School Districts, Niagara Fall School Districts	Participates in CCP development. The large city schools districts have cooperated with the YTF in the collection of data and we are working with them on developing a referral system into whatever programs are funded under YHDP. NYTEACHS has come to Buffalo to

		offer guidance and has provided data for the statement of needs. Focus groups with McKinney Vento liaisons have been conducted with the smaller school districts.
Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Providers	Compass House, Pinnacle Community Services	Participates in CCP development They have been members of the YTF for 3 years and have been instrumental in the development of the CCP
Non-Profit Youth Organizations	Plymouth CrossRoads, Teaching and Restoring Youth	Participates in CCP development . Both programs offer TH for youth and have given us guidance on the needs of youth utilizing their services. Some of their clients have participated in the YAB and focus groups have been conducted at both facilities to gain further input from clients. Both organizations have participated in the YTF for 3 years.
Juvenile and Adult Corrections and Probation	Erie County Department of Social Services, Niagara County Department of Social Services, NYS Office of Child and Family Services, Erie County Dept. of Mental Health	Participates in CCP development, provide additional data. Our Departments of Social Services and NYS Office of Child and Family Services are responsible for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice so there is a lot of crossover in their participation and continued

		participation going forward. The ECDMH is creating a one stop shop for those coming out of local jails to access services and they have assisted in the CCP and connecting the 24 and under population with services. They will participate in project selection and CQI.
Health, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse agencies	Erie County Department of Mental Health, BestSelf, DePaul, Cazenovia Recovery	Participates in CCP development, provide additional data. All four have representation of the CoC Board and have been regular participants in the YTF. The representative from BestSelf chairs the YTF and has been a driving force behind it. They may have representatives on the selection committee and CQI if they do not apply for funding.
WIOA Boards and Employment Agencies	YouthBuild, Buffalo Urban League, Catholic Charities	Participates in CCP development. All agencies have pledges support for the YHDP and will work with successful applicants on receiving and making referrals for assistance.
Landlords	NA	
Public Housing Authorities (PHA)	Rental Assistance Corp.	Participates in CCP development. One of our Board members

		represents a HCV PHA and has regularly attended the YTF meetings. He will be asked to serve on the selection and CQI committees.
Institutions of Higher Education	University of Buffalo, Buffalo State, Niagara County Community College, Daemen College	Participates in CCP development, 1 CoC Board member is from a local college and serves on the Project Selection Committee. A professor at the University at Buffalo concluded a published research study in 2016 on 18-24 year old homeless young adults which served as an impetus for our CoC to focus on youth homelessness regardless of whether or not we received YHDP funding. Discussions have been held with Buffalo State and Niagara CC on YHDP but both have had limited participation.
Community Development Corporations	NA	
Affordable Housing Developers	NA	
Local Advocacy, Research, and Philanthropic Organizations	University at Buffalo, Western New York Coalition for the Homeless.	See the comments on institutes of higher learning above. One of our Board members is the co-chair of The WNY Coalition for the

		Homeless who does advocacy for clients and related issues. They have helped communicate the YTF meetings and helped recruit YAB members and have been regular participants in the YTF
Privately Funded Homeless Organizations	Buffalo City Mission/Cornerstone Manor	Participates in CCP development. This is our largest emergency shelter that is privately funded but is an extremely valuable partner in our CoC. They have a representative on the CoC board and a representative on the Project Selection Committee, Coordinated Entry Oversight Committee and Performance Review Committee. They are opening a new facility this spring and cannot be part of the youth project selection committee or Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)at this time.
Other non-for profit organization	International Institute of Buffalo, Matt Urban Center, Community Missions, Northpointe Council, DePaul, Catholic Charities, Legal Aid Bureau, Blue Cross Blue Shield, AmeriGroup, Cazenovia Recovery, Restoration Society, Homespace, Say Yes	Participates in CCP development. We have consulted with several other entities during the CCP process. International Institute has given us guidance on victims of human trafficking Legal Aid offeres legal services for youth and families who need assistance on

		McKinney Vento legal questions. Restoration Society is our CE entity, Homespace provides housing to parenting and pregnant youth, Say Yes provides case management in Buffalo Schools for families in need and has participated in the CCP process. AmeriGroup is a Health Home provider affiliated with Blue Cross/Blue Sheild. Northpointe is a substance abuse treatment program and has participated in the development of the CCP. The Matt Urban Center provides street outreach, emergency shelter and PSH in our CoC and they have participated in the development of the CCP

Youth Action Board members

Teneva Dennis *(YAB Representative)*

Corey McCarty*(YAB Representative)*

Alyssa Palmer

Christian Jones

Dashawn Pickett

Diamond Young

Justin Griesbaum

Joe Debiew

Ma'kala Walker

Maliq Howell

Taikia Harris

Tanisha Riley

Dylan Williams

Janaya White

March 16, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

On March 16, 2020, the Board of Directors of Homeless Alliance of Western New York which is the representative body for the NY-508 Continuum of Care for Erie, Niagara, Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming Counties, enthusiastically and unanimously voted to support the Youth Homeless Demonstration Coordinated Community Plan that has been submitted to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Continuum of Care staff has worked diligently over the past six months with numerous stakeholders in Erie and Niagara Counties and the Youth Action Board to lay out a united plan for the use of these funds to help address youth homelessness in our area.

We strongly encourage HUD to approve our plan so we may access these funds and begin to serve the youth of Erie and Niagara Counties.

Sincerely,

Ken Gholston
Board Chair

COUNTY OF ERIE

MARK C. POLONCARZ
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

March 17, 2020

Dale Zuchlewski
Homeless Alliance of WNY
960 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Mr. Zuchlewski

As the local Public Child Welfare Agency, the Erie County Department of Social Services has been an active participant in the Youth Task Force for the past three years. Several members of executive and middle management staff have assisted in the development of the Youth Homeless Demonstration Program Coordinated Community Plan by participating in meetings and contributing data.

We fully support the Coordinated Community Plan for Erie and Niagara Counties and look forward to continuing to work with the Homeless Alliance of Western New York and Youth Task Force towards the implementation of the goals outlined in the plan.

Sincerely,

Karen Rybicki, First Deputy Commissioner
Erie County Department of Social Services

CC: Marie A. Cannon, Commissioner ECDSS

**NIAGARA COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**
P.O. BOX 506
LOCKPORT, NEW YORK   14095-0506

"We Help Families"

March 17, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

As the designated representative of the Niagara County Department of Social Services, the Public Child Welfare Agency (PCWA) for Niagara County, I am signing this to show the agency's enthusiastic support for the Youth Homeless Demonstration Coordinated Community Plan that has been submitted to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Continuum of Care staff has worked diligently over the past six months with numerous stakeholders in Erie and Niagara Counties and the Youth Action Board to lay out a united plan for the use of these funds to help address youth homelessness in our area.

We strongly encourage HUD to approve our plan so we may access these funds and begin to serve the youth of Erie and Niagara Counties.

Sincerely,

Bridget Janese, Case B Supervisor
Children's Services

March 30, 2020

Mr. Dale Zuchlewski
Executive Director
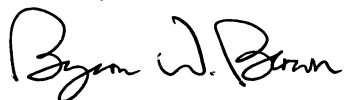Homeless Alliance of WNY
960 Main St.
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Mr. Zuchlewski:

It is with great pleasure that I write to you today in full support of Erie and Niagara Counties Coordinated Community Plan for ending Early Youth Homelessness. As we continue to build a diverse, inclusive and equitable City of opportunity, where no one is left out and no one is left behind, our commitment to preventing and ending early youth homelessness in the Buffalo region is stronger than ever, just as it was in 2016 when, after coming together as a community with a strategic plan, we announced that homelessness among Veterans in our community had effectively ended.

The City of Buffalo is deeply committed to preventing and ending early youth homelessness. In 2017, I assigned members of the City of Buffalo Office of Community Services and Recreational Programming to serve on the Youth Task Force and assist the Homeless Alliance of Western New York on our shared goal, reviewing how our community could better support the housing, health, education and employment services available to our young people. In August of 2019, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded Erie and Niagara Counties nearly $3.6 million in Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) Funds. Since then, the City, in partnership with our community partners, including the Youth Action Board, Youth Task Force, YHDP technical assistance providers, a wide array of government agencies, service providers, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholder groups, developed a comprehensive and strategic Coordinated Community plan, which I fully support.

With a well-coordinated plan in place, we recognize that ending early youth homelessness is within our reach. We look forward to getting started and working with the Homeless Alliance of Western New York on the successful implementation of the Youth Homeless Demonstration Grant Program. We want all young people in our City to be safe, supported, and healthy - and that means we must provide them with the services and resources they need to succeed. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (716) 851-4841.

Sincerely,

Byron W. Brown
Mayor, City of Buffalo

City of Niagara Falls, New York

Robert M. Restaino
Mayor

March 17, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

As mayor of the City of Niagara Falls, I am signing this to show the city's enthusiastic support for the Youth Homeless Demonstration Coordinated Community Plan that has been submitted to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Continuum of Care, service providers in the City of Niagara Falls, and the city itself has worked diligently over the past six months with numerous stakeholders in Erie and Niagara Counties and the Youth Action Board to lay out a united plan for the use of these funds to help address youth homelessness in our area.

We strongly encourage HUD to approve our plan so our community may access these funds and begin to serve the youth of Erie and Niagara Counties.

Sincerely,

Robert Restaino
Mayor, City of Niagara Falls

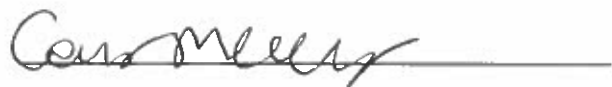March 23rd, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

On March 23rd, 2020, the Youth Action Board of Western New York unanimously approved Erie and Niagara County's Coordinated Community Plan to End Youth Homelessness.

The Youth Action Board fully supports this Coordinated Community Plan. We worked together with the Youth Task Force, community partners, and Homeless Alliance of WNY to put together this plan and prioritize projects for YHDP funding. We felt like the voice of the whole Youth Action Board was heard and we were an important part of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program process.

We are looking forward to implementing this plan and starting new programs to help youth. Thank you.

Sincerely,

The Youth Action Board

Corey McCarty

Corey A McCarty, YAB Representative

Teneva Dennis

Teneva Dennis, YAB Representative