"TO BECOME THE BEST VERSION OF MYSELF":
Youth-Supportive Transitional Housing Programs as An Essential Resource for Addressing Youth Homelessness
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year, millions of youth experience homelessness across the United States, and they need proven housing models and an array of services and supports to help them achieve stability and independence – all in an effort to ultimately prevent and end youth homelessness.[1] Covenant House International, National Network for Youth, and SchoolHouse Connection published this paper to highlight an essential, but often under-resourced, housing model for young people: transitional housing. The following is a summary of the key findings and recommendations; the full document is available here.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS AND OUTCOMES

Transitional housing for youth offers young people a stable place to live for a significant period of time and also provides case management and other supportive services (e.g., behavioral health services, educational and career development assistance). For minors or young adults—including those who are pregnant and parenting—this can be an ideal approach that serves as a bridge from homelessness to lifelong stability.

“Because of transitional housing I was able to save up to buy my own car, learned how to file my taxes and a lot more life skills. Now I am a business owner with a passion to give back to the community. Transitional housing has helped and supported me to become the best version of myself.”

Member of NN4Y’s National Youth Advisory Council

Youth who access transitional housing, particularly for longer periods, experience positive outcomes related to housing, employment, education, and access to services. An analysis by Covenant House International found that among 564 young people who exited transitional housing programs in 15 U.S. cities over a 12-month period:

- 73% exited the program into stable housing; and
- 69% were employed or enrolled in school when they left the program.

CHI’s research team also found that youth who stayed in the program longer were more likely to exit to stable housing, and to be employed when they exited the program. They also found that youth who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (“BIPOC youth”) had higher rates of stable housing exits and higher rates of employment at exit (but lower rates of school enrollment). This is an important finding for achieving equity, given that BIPOC youth are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness.[2]

Data from other programs also have demonstrated positive outcomes for young people accessing transitional housing, including for minors and for youth in rural communities.
FEDERAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is the largest funder of homelessness and housing services in the U.S., with appropriations of more than $3 billion for homelessness programs in FY21. HUD has structured its funding applications in ways that incentivize other housing models over transitional housing.[3] In contrast, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), which focuses on youth homelessness, was appropriated just $136 million in FY21 to distribute to its Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) program grantees (part of which went to transitional housing, with the remainder funding emergency shelter, street outreach, and other services).[4] As a result, HUD’s prioritizations have an outsized impact on the kind of housing models and services that are available in local communities to address youth homelessness, and who can access those services. (Additionally, HUD’s statutory definition of homelessness, and additional eligibility criteria imposed in its funding applications, can make it nearly impossible to serve youth experiencing homelessness who are “couch-surfing” (i.e., staying with others temporarily) or staying in motels.))[5]

The models HUD prioritizes can be beneficial for some individuals experiencing homelessness, but do not meet the same needs that transitional housing does. For example, Permanent Supportive Housing is designed for individuals with disabilities, which may be unnecessary for young people who only need a time-limited program, or a lower level of support because they can live more independently. Rapid Rehousing (RRH), which focuses on finding and temporarily subsidizing housing will not help minors who cannot sign a lease due to their age, and may still be in school full-time, limiting their ability to work and pay rent when the RRH assistance ends. Even young adults who are just starting out in their careers, or in school part- or full-time, may not be able to pay market-rate rent when their RRH support ends, which could lead to eviction and/or negative credit histories.

making it even harder to secure stable housing in the future. In contrast, transitional housing provides a bridge to long-term housing stability for young people by allowing them a significant period of time to complete their education, prepare for and obtain living wage jobs, and meet other needs such as life skills development and behavioral health treatment.

“If I had Transitional Housing as a minor, I could have created a much safer environment for me and my younger sister. Both of my parents were abusive and used drugs, and we lived very far away from any relatives who could take us in...There are so many minors who are in that situation right now whose future could be much brighter with this option.”

SchoolHouse Connection Scholar
RECOMMENDATIONS

Transitional housing is a valuable resource for young people who are able to access it, but it is not available (at all or to all who need it) in many communities. To ensure that all young people experiencing homelessness can access what they need to sustainably exit homelessness and avoid chronic adult homelessness, our organizations recommend the following:

CONGRESS, HHS, HUD, STATE AND LOCAL POLICYMAKERS AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCIES, AND PHILANTHROPY SHOULD:

- Ensure that every community provides service-rich transitional housing program options (in some form) for minors, young adults, and young families experiencing homelessness.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

- Deepen its investments in combatting youth homelessness through increased funding of Transitional Living and Maternity Programs and other Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programming.
- Amend HUD’s definition of homelessness so that the “definition” reflects the lived experiences of youth, young adults, and young families, and young people are not required to stay in tenuous, unstable, and often unsafe situations with other people, adult shelters, or the streets before they can access and are prioritized for appropriate services. (Future Notices of Funding Availability (NOFAs) should also reflect these changes.)[6]

HHS/FYSB SHOULD:

- Continue to support its Transitional Living and Maternity Program grantees, and expand these efforts as increased funding allows.

HUD SHOULD:

- Write future NOFAs incentivizing Transitional Housing for youth, young adults, and young families, in accordance with local needs and priorities.
- Assess youth programs for effectiveness using youth-appropriate outcome measures (through its NOFAs).

PHILANTHROPY AND STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

- Support programs that will best meet the needs of young people in their local communities, including transitional programs, rather than tying funding to federal priorities.
REFERENCES


[2] Ibid.

and#:~:text=Department%20of%20Housing%20and%20Urban%20Development%20(HUD)%E2%80%94For%20fiscal%20year%202021%20the%20President%27s%20budget%20request.&text=The%20President%27s%20budget%20request%20proposed%20eliminating%20this%20program.

