



Summary of VOICES Cohort Project to Reduce Youth Homelessness

BACKGROUND

VOICES convened a group of seven youth ages 18–25 all with current or past experience being homeless in Napa. The group was facilitated by a current VOICES staff and a VOICES volunteer. The objective of this convening was to gather the youth's input on the existing service gaps within the homeless youth services structure in Napa County.

The following describes the effort by the youth cohort team to arrive at a proposal for ending/reducing youth homelessness in Napa County:

RESEARCH METHODS

The youth cohort participated in various research methods including the following:

Published material on youth homelessness was gathered and analyzed.

- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness: Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness (Version 2, February 2018)
- California Coalition for Youth: A Call to Action: Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in California (January 2018)

- California Homeless Youth Project: Youth Homelessness in California: A Quick Overview <http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/a-quickoverview-of-hy-inca.pdf>
- HUD Exchange: Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program: Coordinated Community Plans <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/yhdp/community-resources/#resources>

The youth researched existing conditions and services in the following Counties:

- San Francisco
- Santa Cruz
- Seattle/King County

Questionnaires were distributed to youth at VOICES, PLACES, and through the Abode Outreach team. The youth cohort discussed in great depth responses to the questionnaire.

The youth cohort worked with facilitators to tell their personal stories of homelessness and examine the barriers and gaps that they encountered.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings from the research methods included the following:

- The following have been identified as primary reasons that youth originally became homeless:
 - Upon exit of foster care and/or juvenile detention, limited resources were dedicated to reunification between youth and local family members
 - Time limited programs that require youth to exit supportive housing programs regardless of youth readiness
 - While housed, limited systems to assist youth in accessing available mental health services leading to lack to readiness to exit housing programs.
 - Lack of supportive housing for youth working to address drug and/or alcohol use – existing services are not supportive of recovery efforts
 - Lack of adequate family support housing leading to separation of family and parents
 - Napa County currently does not offer enough beds dedicated to youth to meet the total need.
 - The needs of homeless youth are not universal and current services do not offer enough variety/tailored services to address specific needs of youth.
- The majority of homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness have some past involvement with existing systems of care including:
 - Child Welfare
 - Juvenile Probation
 - Adult Probation
 - County jail
 - Traditional Schools

- Alternative Schools
- LBGTQ+ programs
- Housing/Shelter Programs
- Providers of special TAY programs

- There is currently no system for collecting information across all community partners that interact with homeless youth.
- There are limited opportunities for youth to actively participate in the design, implementation and training of youth-serving systems and policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following comprises the recommendations developed and put forth by the youth cohort:

1. Develop a system to capture information related to youth experiencing homeless across all systems/entities in Napa that interact with homeless youth

- a. Existing coordinated processes entry should be revamped to widen the scope of identifying homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness to included entities such as schools, community-based agencies not involved with the Napa Continuum of Care and other such partners.
- b. Compile and track data with focus on various subgroups of homeless youth: parents; under 18 years of age; LBGTQ; youth of color

2. Develop housing options that allow for flexibility based on individual needs of homeless youth as well-as low barrier entry into available housing

- a. Create youth set aside beds to ensure homeless youth have more immediate access to shelter and housing programs.

- b. Create separate space for youth beds separate from area where adults are housed.
- c. Use coordinated entry process to effectively link all youth experiencing homelessness to housing and service solutions that are tailored to their needs
- d. Ensure housing options are available across the continuum of a youth's journey through homelessness including opportunities to remain housed until youth has identified permanent housing.
- e. Focus resources on family reunification for youth exiting the foster care system and justice systems.
- f. Ensure adequate and supportive discharge and exit planning exist within systems to prevent reentry into homelessness.

3. Ensure youth are informed of resources and options that support success and permanent housing

- a. Develop youth friendly materials that clearly explain benefits available to youth
- b. Develop a youth-focused outreach team dedicated to identifying, connecting and sharing resources with homeless youth.
- c. Ensure youth are made aware of Resource Map prepared by Continuum of Care

4. Increase capacity of existing service providers to ensure adequate, youth-friendly community resources exist:

- a. Ensure necessary resources are available to support both the prevention of homelessness as well as the needs of youth transitioning from homelessness including:
 - Support for employment training and job placement

- Support systems for social and emotional well being
- Resources to support and help youth maintain housing prior to homelessness
- Connection to education and trade opportunities
- b. Develop a youth-designed, youth-led training curriculum to be conducted with services providers to ensure the delivery of genuinely youth friendly services.

5. Ensure systems exist to engage and include homeless youth in decision making related to homeless services

- a. Develop a Homeless Youth Task Force as part of the Napa Continuum of Care that oversees the development of criteria used in developing new systems and housing options.
- b. Work with existing youth-serving organizations to collect feedback from homeless youth on additional interventions and/or necessary modification to improve homeless youth delivery services.