 More Than Housing,

Give Us Homes

A Coordinated Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Franklin County, Massachusetts

##### Franklin County YHDP CCP Update

##### March 2021

***VISION***

#### **BACKGROUND**

**Give Us Housing, but Give Us Homes** is a roadmap to prevent and end youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness in Franklin County, Massachusetts. The [full plan](https://d607b65e-0cad-4f63-aa20-535a17827430.filesusr.com/ugd/67ac38_a2055e6d668c4ed1bfaaebd78ab76420.pdf?index=true)  represents the collaborative efforts of a broad range of public and private partners, and its work was jump-started by a two-year grant of $1.96 million in federal funds from HUD’s Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) through the Three County Continuum of Care. Through this plan, we intended to experiment, innovate, and remain flexible enough to adapt and learn over time. It is requiring that we all be agents of change in our efforts to prevent and end YYA homelessness for good.

YYA homelessness is a crisis in our region. It is a tragedy for those who experience it and a collective failure that our communities allow even one young neighbor to experience homelessness for even one night. YYA who identify as Black, Latinx, or multi-racial are significantly more likely than their White peers to experience homelessness, and nearly one in three YYA experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ. Trauma, limited income and education, and involvement with child welfare and juvenile justice place YYA at particularly high risk of homelessness.

In response to this crisis, we have developed a vision, guiding principles, and clear plan to prevent and end YYA homelessness in Franklin County.

Franklin County envisions a community where all young people have equitable access to safe, quality, stable housing and the supports and opportunities they need to thrive.

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Our principles, summarized here, guided the plan’s development and will shape the work going forward:

* We recognize YYA expertise and center authentic YYA engagement and leadership.
* We strive for equity for marginalized populations and focus on partnerships, system building, and collective impact.
* We prioritize evidence-based, low-barrier practices, such as housing first, trauma-informed care, and positive youth development.
* We need solutions that address housing and education, employment, permanent connections, health, and well-being.
* We advocate for policies and resources that address root causes of inequity.

We continuously seek to improve through rigorous and transparent communication with all stakeholders

***PLANNING PROCESS***

Our guiding principles informed a governance structure for shared ownership, broad partnership, and consensus-based decision-making. Community Action Pioneer Valley (CAPV), the Collaborative Applicant for the Three County Continuum of Care (CoC), YHDP lead, and anti-poverty agency for Franklin County, convened a small **YHDP Lead Team** to drive the process supported by expert consultants. Our **YYA Action Board (YAB)**, composed of local YYA under 25 with lived experience of homelessness, participated in every meeting, provided input and expertise throughout, and held approval authority over the final plan. A 30-member **Planning Team** served as the formal YHDP decision-making body, with members representing CAPV, YAB, local YYA-serving providers, and partners from child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and local government. Finally, an **Advisory Council** provided subject matter expertise and represented stakeholders from across the CoC

#### **THE PLAN**

The plan specifically addresses challenges identified in **I’m Still a Human: An Assessment of Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in the Three County Region** and during eight months of community planning that followed. They are each addressed through five strategic goals: Identification, Prevention and Diversion, Coordinated Entry and Crisis Response, Stable Housing, and Sustainability.

**Goal 1 – Identification - Implementing a coordinated system to identify all YYA who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.**

This requires a data-informed, shared community-wide system to identify, assess, and provide support for YYA. We will expand outreach services for YYA not currently accessing services, including pregnant and parenting YYA, LGBTQ YYA, YYA of color, systems-involved YYA, minors, immigrant YYA, YYA who preference non-English languages, YYA who have been involved with trafficking, and YYA with disabilities. Finally, we will build processes to accurately count the number of YYA experiencing homelessness and connect them to services.

**Goal 2 – Prevention and Diversion - Implementing a collaborative system of prevention and diversion strategies to support YYA who are at risk of experiencing homelessness.**

This requires broader awareness and use of interventions to prevent homelessness. We will work collaboratively to help all system-involved YYA successfully transition to stable housing and integrate prevention and diversion strategies into Coordinated Entry. We will also identify flexible funding for landlord incentives, transportation, rent, and utilities to help YYA obtain and sustain housing.

**Goal 3 – Coordinated Entry & Crisis Response - Ensuring that all YYA experiencing and at risk of homelessness have access to a ‘no wrong door’ Coordinated Entry system that provides appropriate assessment, immediate crisis response, individualized support, and safe housing options.**

This requires expanding Coordinated Entry to support the unique needs of YYA experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We will also increase YYA-specific crisis response options and the capacity of our adult shelter system to support YYA.

**Goal 4 – Stable Housing - Connecting YYA who are at risk or experiencing homelessness to accessible supports and low-barrier, stable housing opportunities.**

This requires comprehensive, integrated services that support long-term housing stability. We will increase access to responsive, trauma-informed, and YYA-centered behavioral health services and the time YYA can spend with case management and services. We will develop an array of housing options to meet YYA needs and choices; increase the number of local, supportive, and responsible landlords; and increase access to transportation.

**Goal 5 – Sustainability - Developing sustainable partnerships, plans, resources, and system capacity to ensure the community’s shared vision is achieved and maintained.**

This requires a YYA Homelessness Committee and continuous quality improvement process to support plan implementation. We will launch an advocacy agenda, fully resource our YAB, and create a CoC committee structure designed to achieve our goals and prioritize equity.

# Year One

*COVID -19 Challenges*

In March of 2019 the Nation began responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many providers sent staff to work from home or closed programs, schools moved to remote learning and the country and community braced itself for what was thought to be a few weeks to a month period of lock-down. As of March, 2021, our community has been holding meetings remotely for a year; Project Implementation, though on time based on planning, has been difficult; outreach to youth and young adults experiencing homelessness has been extremely limited; schools in Franklin County have been mostly in hybrid or remote learning for an entire year; and systems development, including building partnerships and responding to some goals of the CCP, has been challenging. Our Youth and Young Adult (YAB) Board has continued to meet over discord and other remote options, but this has had it’s limitations and the opportunity to increase YAB participation during this time has proven difficult.

# **Short Term Goals** - Outcomes, Accomplishments & Needs.

**Goal 1 – Identification**

**Implementing a coordinated system to identify all YYA who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.**

**1.a Creation of a community-wide system across traditional community providers (e.g., service providers, schools) and non-traditional partners (e.g. librarians, first responders) to identify, assess, and provide support for YYA at risk of experiencing homelessness2021 Youth County is Underway, with leadership at Dialself Youth and Community Services and support from EOHHS partners – Louison House and Berkshire Regional Housing Authority, Community Action Youth Programs, and other youth serving agencies.**

* Develop a process for identifying and engaging YYA at risk of homelessness that reflects PYD, TIC, Housing First and other key principles and approaches
  + YYA specific Case Conferencing being held weekly since October!
  + YYA specific system flow mapping, prioritization, and coordination under way!
  + YYA agencies will soon be trained on the assessment process and access to HMIS!

**1.b Franklin County will become a data-informed community utilizing cross-system data sharing strategies to identify YYA at risk of homelessness**

* Identify and add YYA specific data points to HMIS that include education and employment
  + YHDP Specific Data elements have been added to data collection and reporting methods!
* Provide training and support to all projects on YYA specific data points and improved data tracking and reporting practices
  + CoC provided individualized project trainings on HMIS requirements in the fall of 2020 and ongoing!
  + CoC provided Privacy and Security, Site Administrator, and End User group trainings for YHDP projects in the fall of 2020!
  + CoC provided group training on HMIS data quality in March 2021!
* Promote trauma informed and culturally competent practices during data collection and reporting training
  + CoC provided a two part trauma informed data collection training in the Winter of 2021!
* Track and analyze HMIS and other data sources (Youth Count, etc.) for housing and service outcomes
  + CoC has performed data analysis ongoing for systems performance and CQI planning
  + YYA committee has created project demonstration evaluation plan
  + CoC will create a system level demonstration period evaluation plan
  + CoC has performed racial equity tracking and created a data specific goal as part of the broader CoC racial Equity Action Plan released in February 2021!

**1.c Expanded outreach services for YYA who are not currently accessing services, with specific focus on pregnant and parenting, LGBTQ, systems-involved YYA, minors, immigrant YYA, YYA with preference for languages other than English, YYA of color, YYA who have been involved with trafficking, and YYA with disabilities.**

* Create and disseminate information about services for YYA via flyers, ads, social media
  + Some dissemination activities have been completed, some of this has been more difficult in COVID. This should be looked at by the YYA Committee and YAB for planning.
    - CE processes
    - Youth Serving agency programs and services
* Complete outreach events in schools to reach YYA under 18 y.o.
  + This has been on hold due to COVID-19. YYA Committee planning is needed.
* Utilize YHDP funds to add Youth Navigators to the Franklin County homelessness response system, which will include outreach to all community providers, state systems, and schools
* Mental Health Association YHDP RRH & Navigation Project began in October 2020, began receiving referrals in January 2021!
* Outreach services in schools still needed, COVID has made this difficult.

**1.d Creation of a plan to ensure an accurate count and connection to services for YYA in Franklin County**

* Create a MA Youth Count Committee and Conduct Three County Youth Count
* Planning is underway with leadership from Dialself and partnership with YYA committee members - EOHHS partners – Louison House and Berkshire Regional Housing, as well as Community Action Youth Programs and other youth serving agencies!
* Utilize Youth Embassadors during Youth Count
* EOHHS and Regional Partners are working to create opportunities for Youth Embassador Payments and engagement of YABs and other YYA.
* Implement a YYA specific survey (MA Youth Count) that reflects youth voice to capture data on at-risk and unsheltered YYA in Three County and integrate it into the Continuous Quality Improvement process.
* EOHHS state wide efforts are under way to create the YYA specific survey for youth count
* YYA committee has created two YYA project participant surveys to capture experiences of youth in YHDP programs!
* Utilize materials from MA Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Identification and Connection Committee for planning/executing effective count

**2.a Increased awareness and use of interventions for families to prevent homelessness, including parenting education, support, and crisis intervention; family mediation and conflict resolution services, benefits and other financial resources**

* Integrate an exploration of natural supports and the use of family/natural support engagement into every aspect of service delivery system, reunifying families if safe, and/or connecting to other supportive adults/peers
  + YHDP Project outcome requirements include connection to family or natural supports!
* YYA committee should look to incorporate more family connection in the diversion practices for coordinated entry partner efforts.

**2.c Prevention and diversion strategies are integrated into the CE system**

* Expand YYA access to diversion resources with the addition of a YHDP funded Housing Navigators Project that will include short-term housing resources, be integrated into the CE system, and expand YYA choice
  + Mental Health Association YHDP RRH & Navigation Project began in October 2020, began receiving referrals in January 2021! Includes short term RRH funding!
* Educate CE partners on homelessness prevention resources, including MA Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) flexible funding and ESG funding.
  + EOHHS partners are participating in Coordinated Entry Case conferencing and continue to provide information on these resources for system engagement!

**2.d Creation of a flexible funding pool for landlord incentives, transportation, rent, utilities, etc. to assist YYA with obtaining/maintaining housing**

* Apply for and utilize funds from EOHHS for flexible funding to obtain/maintain housing
  + EOHHS partners expanded use of flexible funds to include access to emergency housing resources in the winter of 2021!
  + EOHHS flex funds increased in the winter of 2021 to include additional funding for transportation, rent, utility arears!
  + CoC is working to use EOHHS funds for Gandara TH programs to provide lead compliance!
  + CoC is increasing financial support for YAB oversight in the Spring of 2021!
  + CoC is increasing funding sources for landlord incentives!
  + Coordinated Entry system engaged RAFT administrators and additional funding dissemination to assist YYA in obtaining and maintaining housing in the Winter of 2021!

**3.a Expanded CE system to support the unique needs of YYA experiencing or at risk of homelessness**

* Using the Annual CE Evaluation, create & follow a plan for YYA CE system navigation that centers YYA choice, meets specific needs, is trauma-informed, and includes engagement from families, YYA providers, the state’s PATH program, state systems, and schools.
  + YYA specific CE system developed and implemented!
* Families, Schools and state systems need further development into the CE system.
* Standardize Vulnerability assessment and CoC prioritization for YYA, with a focus on trauma-informed assessment, YYA choice, and inclusion of families and other service providers in the process.
  + CoC vulnerability assessment has been updated to include racial equity, trauma informed and choice perspectives.
    - Vulnerability assessment training to be performed in April 2021!
    - Families have not yet been included in the assessment and prioritization efforts.
    - Vulnerability assessment tool trial period will unfold over the next year and the new tool will begin to be used in 2022.
* Utilize YHDP CE project, youth navigators, PATH program staff, and EOHHS flexible funds to increase support for YYA, providers, and landlords.
  + CoC full landlord engagement plan has been developed to support YHDP projects in Franklin County!
* Many activities in this process are still to move forward. YYA committee should look it over and offer feedback.

**3.b Increased YYA-specific crisis response options, which could include shelter, transitional housing, kinship homes, host homes**

* Utilize YHDP funds to create 6 transitional housing beds for YYA families (and individuals if beds available).
  + Gandara’s Joint Component Program which includes 6 TH beds began in October 2020 & began taking referrals in February 2021!
  + Gandara obtained a 4 bed site for TH in Greenfield and will begin taking youth on April 1st 2021!
* Project is still in need of 2 additional beds for TH
* Connect YYA providers and crisis systems to assess need and plan appropriate crisis responses for YYA
  + EOHHS funds expanded to support housing crisis!
    - more funding and supports needed.

**4.a Programs for YYA include integrated services (housing, case management, physical and behavioral health, workforce development, education, life skills, opportunities for social connection) in order to assist them with maintaining housing and living independently**

* YHDP funded youth navigators will be required to implement best practices in the areas of trauma informed care, positive youth development, and social integration/permanent connections.
  + Mental Health Association YHDP RRH & Navigation Project began in October 2020, began receiving referrals in January 2021! Includes short term RRH funding!
  + CQI - Demonstration Period Evaluations are developed, as well as YYA participant pre and post surveys.
* Require that all housing-related projects for YYA experiencing homelessness include a full range of YYA-specific services
  + CQI - Demonstration Period Evaluations are developed, as well as YYA participant pre and post surveys.
* Require that all housing-related projects for YYA experiencing homelessness include a formal connection **to** YYA-specific workforce development programs
* CQI - Demonstration Period Evaluations are developed, as well as YYA participant pre and post surveys.
* Require that all housing-related projects for YYA experiencing homelessness include life skills training and support
  + CQI - Demonstration Period Evaluations are developed, as well as YYA participant pre and post surveys.
* Require that all housing-related projects for YYA experiencing homelessness have processes to regularly connect YYA to available educational opportunities and support
  + CQI - Demonstration Period Evaluations are developed, as well as YYA participant pre and post surveys.
* Require that all housing-related projects for YYA experiencing homelessness include processes to effectively connect YYA to health insurance and physical and behavioral health providers to promote well-being and include a formal connection to mental health providers
  + CQI - Demonstration Period Evaluations are developed, as well as YYA participant pre and post surveys.
* Require all YHDP projects include developing and supporting permanent connections for YYA
  + CQI - Demonstration Period Evaluations are developed, as well as YYA participant pre and post surveys.

**4.c Increased amount of time YYA can work with case management and supportive services in order to fully learn independent living skills and stabilize their housing**

* Require all housing-related projects include longer-term interventions based on individual YYA need and choice (request “exceptions” in applications, if needed)
  + Waivers for longer term options in RRH were approved for one project and we also implemented a permanent supportive housing program.

**4.d The community will have a continuum of housing options to meet the range of needs of YYA in the community and allow for YYA choice. (For all of the following, additional housing resources are still needed.)**

* Develop a Navigator project that includes short-term housing resources
  + Mental Health Association YHDP RRH & Navigation Project began in October 2020, began receiving referrals in January 2021! Includes short term RRH funding!
* Develop a TH/RRH Project that prioritizes young families
  + Gandara’s Joint Component Program which includes 6 TH & up to 12 RRH beds began in October 2020 & began taking referrals in February 2021!
* Develop a RRH project that serves young families and/or individuals
  + Dialself’s 4 Bed RRH Project began in October 2020 and began taking referrals in December 2020!
* Develop PSH project for high need YYA
  + Mental Health Association’s 6 bed PSH Project began in October of 202 and began taking referrals in March of 2021!

**5.a Establishment of YYA Homelessness Committee**

* Create a CoC YYA Homelessness Committee to support implementation of the YHDP CCP and the Continuous Quality Improvement process
  + The CoC’s YYA committee began meeting monthly in October of 2020!
    - supported the creation of the CQI process
    - Discussed racial equity lens for project performance and systems outcomes.
    - determined project outcomes and measurements for the YHDP projects
    - provided feedback on YYA Project participant pre and post surveys

**5.b The Continuous Quality Improvement process is regularly completed**

* Create Continuous Quality Improvement Plan and train partners on implementation
  + CQI plan created!
    - Includes Ce evaluation, project demonstration period evaluation, site monitoring and CoC ranking structure, and YYA project participant surveys (for both system and project evaluation)
* Review system and other sources of data on a regular basis, with frequency to be determined
  + Frequency has been determined by the Project Demonstration Period evaluation development for the 2 year timeframe
    - October 2021, July 2022 (some data may be evaluated more frequently)
    - Pre and Post surveys

**5.c Creation of a robust advocacy agenda to advance local, regional and state policy and funding opportunities that support YYA that are at risk or experiencing homelessness**

* Educate/engage community around legislative priorities related to YYA
  + YYA legislative advocacy training opportunities provided by the WMNEH, EOHHS>>!
  + CoC Racial Equity action plan developed a full legislative advocacy goal
  + WMNEH disseminates information regarding legislative actions regularly
* Work with state and regional partners to address state and regional level policies that impact YYA engaged with state systems

**5.d The local YAB has the resources needed to develop YYA policy and programming and support ongoing evaluation**

* Create opportunities for the Franklin County YAB to connect with youth leadership groups in other counties/regions to expand membership.
  + YAB expansion is needed for sustainability of youth voice in the YHDP process.
* Apply for ongoing funding for the Franklin County YAB to sustain its efforts
  + Community Foundation funds have paid for YAB participation. EOHHS funding is available to help sustain staffing..more is needed.

**5.e Further develop the CoC Committees and membership to support plan goals for equity**

* Create a CoC Racial Equity Work Group (to include 2-3 YYA) to oversee training on racial equity and disparities in housing. Follow planned strategy for Racial Equity work
  + Racial Equity Workgroup has been developed, provided training series, YAB development efforts, and a Racial Equity Action plan
    - YAB participation is needed still!
* Create and oversee trainings on LGBTQ housing and disparities for YHDP Projects and other housing providers. Follow planned strategy for equity work.
  + WMNEH and CoC held this training in 2020!
  + More training in this area is needed! YYA committee to look into this.

To see the mid and long term goals of the coordinated community plan, visit the coc’s Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Page @ https://www.threecountycoc.communityaction.us/youth-young-adult-homelessness-1