



YHDP:

Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

PARTNER REPORT
July 2019



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OVERVIEW

In 2017, leaders from **Covenant House Alaska** and other agencies in Anchorage saw an opportunity they knew would be a game changer in helping young people to avoid the experience of homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released an opportunity called the **Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP)**, which called on communities to develop innovative, outside-the-box solutions to tackle homelessness. The Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness represented our city and applied for this two-year pilot program grant. In 2018 we learned that out of 130 applicants, Anchorage was one of ten communities in the nation selected for the YHDP award. With Covenant House Alaska as the Lead Agency, our community went through a six-month process, led by the **Youth Task Force**, to create our Community Plan to End Youth Homelessness.



THE VISION

What does “ending youth homelessness” look like? Our Community Plan centers around the bold goal of making the experience of youth homelessness **rare, brief and non-recurring**. To accomplish this we target our efforts towards helping youth make progress in four core outcome areas: stable housing, education & employment, well-being and permanent connections.



PROJECTS PARTNERS

The Youth Task Force led a large group of providers in brainstorming and identifying and identify four projects that would close the gaping cracks through which we were losing young people, despite our best efforts. These projects utilize some key strategies that young people told us would be effective: more affordable, flexible housing options and relentless engagement by caring adults. Three agencies in Anchorage are implementing these projects: **Covenant House Alaska**, **VOA Alaska** and **Choosing Our Roots**.



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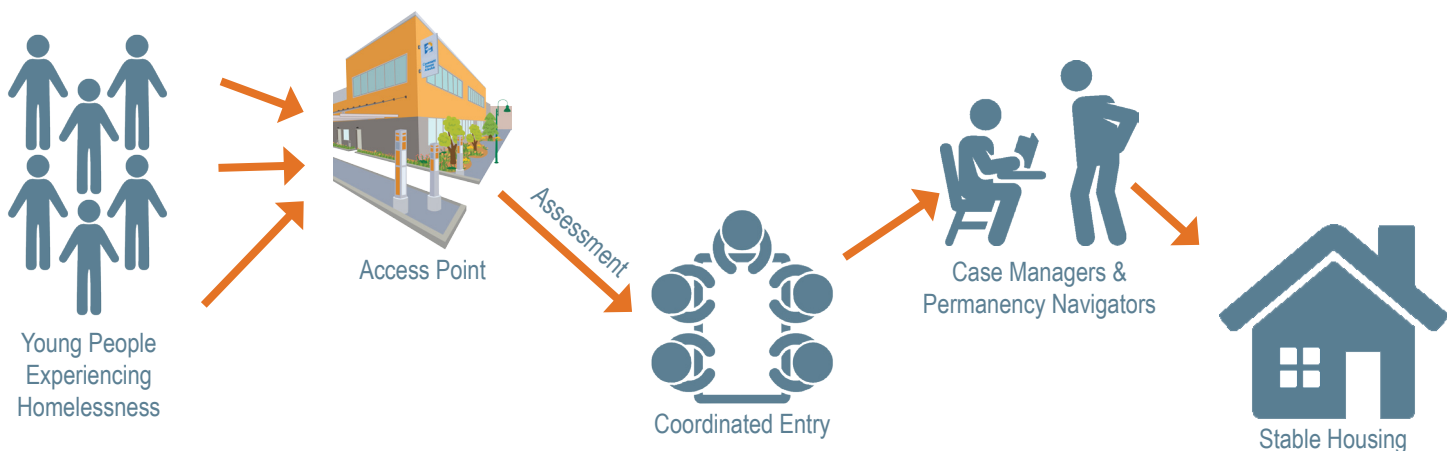
THE PROJECTS

Rapid Re-Housing (Covenant House Alaska): This approach quickly houses youth in actual home settings instead of in shelters, while helping them build support networks and resiliency. Step-down rental assistance is offered over 12 months as youth gain stability.

Permanency Navigator Team (Covenant House Alaska): One of the things young people repeatedly expressed was the frustration and trauma of being shuffled between case managers when they move from one system, organization or program to another. The loss of an established positive relationship hinders progress for vulnerable young people. Permanency Navigators provide long-term support as they **relentlessly engage** youth to find housing and navigate community resources. They can help the youth access behavioral health, substance abuse or disability services, find the right place to live, link to other YHDP projects, and pursue education and employment opportunities. Youth can seek help from their Navigator for as long as they need up to the age of 24.

Host Homes (Choosing Our Roots): This is a less formal arrangement than foster homes, which also differ in that the youth actively participates in the decision about which host family is best for them. This project is specifically for LGBTQ youth, a population disproportionately likely to experience homelessness. Youth are able to select hosts according to their unique needs, priorities, and values. According to one member of our Youth Task Force, “Good people don’t come around too often, so if you ever find that family you’ve been praying for, you want to be able to stay.” Hosts receive a small stipend for opening up their homes to young people.

Permanent Supportive Housing (VOA Alaska): For youth with more serious needs, such as mental health issues or substance abuse, housing assistance is provided without unrealistic time limits, and with intensive case management support. Since these young people are at the highest risk of chronic homelessness, this program can put the housing and supports in place to provide long-term stability.



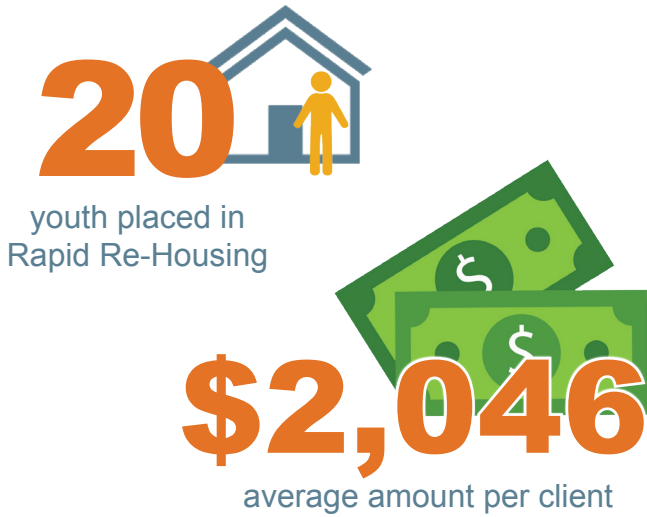
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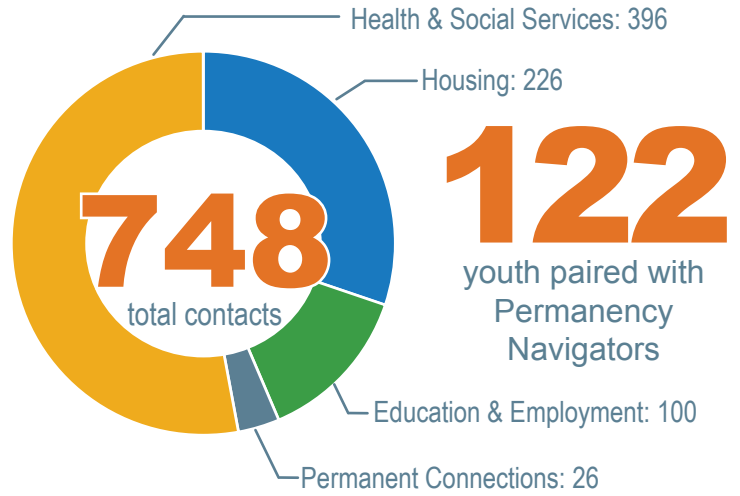
RESULTS

October 2018 through July 2019

RAPID RE-HOUSING



PERMANENCY NAVIGATORS



HOST HOMES



PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING



LEVERAGE

YHDP brings \$750,000 annual new HUD dollars to our community. However, it was never structured to be the catch-all solution to ending youth homelessness. The key to our success will be leveraging existing programs and bringing in new resources needed to bring these projects to scale.

One example of successful leverage is our partnership with **Path to Independence (P2I)**, a joint project between **Cook Inlet Housing Authority, Catholic Social Services, and Weidner Apartments**. P2I provides rental assistance and case management to quickly move people out of homelessness and into housing while engaging landlords in a new, collaborative way. By using landlord liaisons and good case management, we can help develop a “win-win” situation between all young people and their landlords.

Between October 2018 and March 2019, **32% of the 22 households** placed into housing were in the 18-24 year old range, the highest of any population age range. Permanency Navigators have helped youth access the P2I program with great success.

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TIMELINE

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INVESTMENT PARTNERS

New investors in our community have stepped up to provide the level of financial support needed to truly help end the youth homeless experience. These partners are instrumental in providing funds for things that HUD cannot cover but are essential for stable housing: moving costs, furniture, clothes for job interviews, bus passes and case management support. Some of our community investors include:



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STRATEGIES

Traditional homeless services have often operated in silos. Different agencies utilize different funding sources and models in order to serve their target population. YHDP is challenging the status quo about how our community approaches homelessness. Partners are working together to serve youth in new, better ways:



Coordinated Entry

This process, facilitated by the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness, ensures that all young people who experience homelessness are quickly identified, assessed for their strengths and vulnerabilities, and are seamlessly referred to the right housing intervention at the right time. A team of providers sit at a table in weekly meeting to go through a “by-name” list to ensure that no young person slips through the cracks.



Child Welfare and Systems Engagement

Young people who have been involved in the foster care or juvenile justice systems have a much higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Approximately 50% of the youth who enter Covenant House Alaska’s shelter have been involved in child welfare. A core strategy of YHDP is engaging and supporting our local Office of Children’s Services (OCS) to prevent youth from exiting foster care into homelessness. Covenant House Alaska recently hired a Systems Navigator to help in-custody youth and work in a team approach with OCS, because no young person should have to navigate the child welfare system alone or face homelessness when they turn 18.

A wide variety of other partners have been actively involved in YHDP activities to continue to identify the cracks in the system and define what changes we need to see. Representatives from the Anchorage School District, Department of Juvenile Justice, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Southcentral Foundation, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Nine Star Education & Employment Services, the Pride Foundation, and others have been actively involved in connecting our youth with the right resources as needed.



Collective Data and Quality Improvement

Only through robust data and evaluation can we ensure that our efforts are meeting the intended outcomes. Key to our success is tracking defined indicators so that we have our eyes on a dashboard going forward. YHDP is part of a national evaluation effort that will help ensure we are meeting our goals and improving processes as needed. We want to create a model for ending youth homelessness that is replicable and sustainable - vital elements of a Demonstration Program.

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YOUTH VOICE

“Nothing about us without us.” Authentic youth leadership is at the heart of all YHDP activities. Anchorage’s Youth Task Force (YTF) formed during the YHDP community planning process and their level of engagement and impact has grown every month. Not only did the Youth Task Force have to approve the final YHDP Application and our Community Plan (per HUD’s requirement), they have elevated the voice of young people with “lived experience” to a level we have never seen in our community. One of the original founders of the Task Force, Dash, is giving a year of service to the AmeriCorp VISTA program in a role created just for YHDP in order to increase client voice in homelessness program planning, evaluation and partnerships. Dash has brought local and national attention to YTF, and serves on the national Youth Catalyst Team at the Youth Collaboratory, and was recently a featured speaker at a large community rally attended by thousands.

Today there are ten active members of the YTF, and over 20 youth have been involved since its inception. In the last six months, the Youth Task Force has:

- Planned and convened the first Youth Voice Summit
- Received a grant from the **Anchorage Youth Development Coalition** to put on a Youth Talent Show
- Partnered with **Alaska Teen Media Institute** to create a podcast
- Have been actively involved with our community partners; one youth became a Board Member with Choosing Our Roots



active members of
the Youth Task Force



Dash, Youth Task Force

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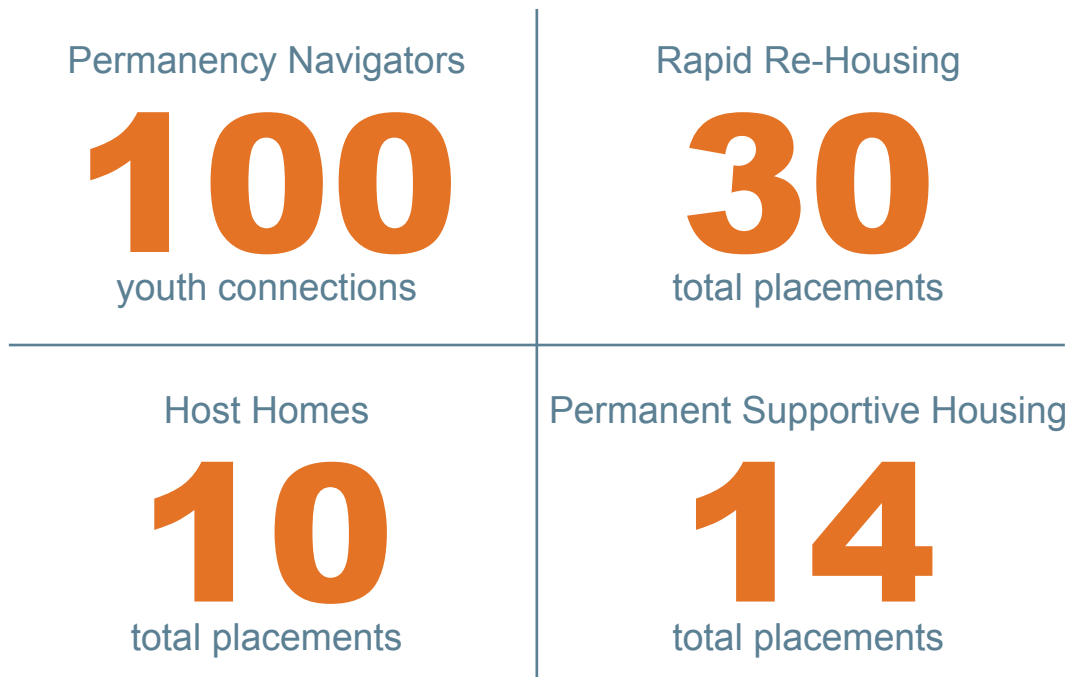
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WHAT'S NEXT

Since officially starting projects in October 2018, all YHDP partners have recruited, hired and trained staff and have successfully helped youth gain housing and stability. As projects refine procedures and improve coordination, our collective impact will begin to scale up. Over the next six months, we have the following goals:

- Create shared Landlord Liaison positions between project partners
- Increase the amount of housing placement options for young people
- Integrate Systems Navigator within child welfare
- Begin a National Evaluation Study with Westat
- Increase capacity of Youth Task Force to develop opportunities for young people

YEARLY GOALS:



FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- Continue to improve our Coordinated Entry System to ensure homeless youth are identified and housed quickly without barriers.
- Identify or develop more options for highly vulnerable youth, including intensive mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- Create more on-the-job training opportunities for young people.
- More landlord connections
- Increase funds for move-in costs such as furniture and household supplies.

CASE STUDY

“When I was a little kid, I was playing in the river in South Sudan and I was bitten by a snake. My leg had to be amputated below the knee.” Thus began the journey of Chuol, who, after this incident moved to a boarding school in Nairobi, Kenya to receive a better education. When he finished high school in 2016, Chuol could not return to South Sudan because of the ongoing conflict, and with the help of a teacher he emigrated to a land far away: Alaska.

Chuol came to Anchorage through Catholic Social Service’s refugee program and got employment help through Nine Star Education and Employment Servicers. After being accepted into Covenant House Alaska’s Rights of Passage transitional living program, Chuol was soon working two jobs - Walmart and Fire Island Bakery, and was peddling between them on a donated bike. He diligently saved every penny and when it came time to graduate from the program and move on into an apartment, he and his case manager made a discovery. Chuol had saved enough money to buy a house! A Permanency Navigator worked with Chuol, helping him access a Cook Inlet Housing Authority matching program, taking him to appointments and to the signing during the loan process.

With the help of a YHDP program, Chuol made an incredible journey in just a few years - from a boarding school in Nairobi to being a new home owner in Alaska. “I like living by myself, though it is a big change, I want to plant a garden, and grow sunflowers by my front door. I love Alaska! I love the snow and I’ve made myself a family here. Also, there are very few bugs, and no snakes!”

