

Ending Youth Homelessness- Connecting Youth to Housing and Opportunities

Overview: Riverside County is making notable progress in combatting youth homelessness. This intricate issue, involving young individuals lacking stable housing, has prompted a comprehensive approach. The county recognizes the urgency and has taken steps to grasp the causes, barriers, and innovative solutions for lasting change. **Challenge** – During our 2023 Homeless Point-in-Time Count we found the following contributing to youth homelessness. There is a lack of affordable housing units making it tough for youth to find stable homes due to high costs as well as a lack of transitional housing to support foster youth exiting care and non- foster youth between the ages of 18-21. Family disruption was the dominant response as the primary reason for youth experiencing homelessness (32%) followed by mental illness and running away (both at 10%), strained family relationships push many youths into homelessness, leaving them unsupported and isolated. Homeless youth struggle with education and employment access, hindering their growth and perpetuating homelessness. LGBTQ+ youth face higher homelessness risks due to discrimination, necessitating specialized support. **Solution** – Riverside County has implemented a range of strategic solutions aimed at not only providing immediate assistance but also fostering long-term change. Holistic Leadership and Expertise: Recognizing the importance of lived experience, the County's Continuum of Care (CoC) appointed a Homeless Youth Coordinator with a background in foster care and homelessness. This coordinator has worked closely with the Coordinated Entry System, placing a spotlight on youth and their distinct needs. Empowerment through lived experience by involving individuals who have personally faced homelessness, the coordinator has pushed for the integration of youth perspectives in resource allocation. A 2022 youth needs assessment identified a demand for Rapid Rehousing (RRH) services. Consequently, funds from the HHAP Round 3 Youth Set Aside are being allocated to two new youth agencies to administer RRH services. Youth involvement in decision-making by expanding the Youth Action Board, the County now has over 15 members with lived experience who actively shape policy within the CoC. This involvement ensures that the strategies developed are grounded in the realities faced by young individuals dealing with homelessness. Focusing on engagement and awareness by having a dedicated Youth PITC and events to engage directly with youth and identify their needs, Riverside County has introduced "Come and Be Connected" events tailored for homeless or at-risk Transition Age Youth (18-24). These events serve as resource fairs, connecting youth with representatives from nonprofits, housing, county departments, and rapid rehousing services. This approach not only addresses immediate

needs but also contributes to raising awareness about youth homelessness across all five County of Riverside districts. A vital aspect of the solution is the seamless collaboration between various stakeholders. Riverside County's CoC, in partnership with the City of Riverside and the Mayor, is spearheading an initiative to end youth homelessness. Through regular case conferencing and close collaboration with the Youth Advisory Committee, the Youth Action Board, the Homeless Youth Coordinator, and the Coordinated Entry System, youth are connected to housing and resources efficiently. **Innovation** – Our unique feature is involving homeless youth in resource decisions and empowering lived experience youth to shape policy. Innovative "Come and Be Connected" events highlight our proactive stance. Riverside County's creative mix of lived experience, data-driven choices, youth involvement, engagement events, and collaborative leadership makes us a pioneer in tackling youth homelessness. **Results** – The impact of our programs on individuals within youth households has been significant, demonstrated by the consistent growth in numbers over the past three years. Starting at 685 individuals in the 2020/2021 fiscal year, we saw a notable increase to 927 individuals in 2021/2022, representing a 35% growth. The latest data from the 2022/2023 fiscal year shows a remarkable rise to 1101 individuals, marking a 19% increase. These upward trends highlight the effectiveness of our initiatives and the growing impact our programs we're making in the lives of youth and their households. Our data reveals a significant positive outcome in our mission to end youth homelessness. According to the 2023 Point-in-Time Count, there has been a notable reduction of 27%, equivalent to 83 individuals, in the homeless youth population compared to 2022 PITC. Moreover, this represents a remarkable 30% decrease compared to the 2020 PITC. **Replicability** - Other counties can leverage lived experience, empower youth in resource decisions, use data for tailored strategies, involve youth in policy, adopt engagement events, and collaborate effectively. Counties can appoint Homeless Youth Coordinator, involve youth in resource decisions for relevance, use local needs assessment for tailored solutions, expand involvement for impactful changes, adopt "Come and Be Connected" events, partner for efficient efforts. **Project or Program Contact** – Tanya Torno, Deputy Director for the Department of Housing, Homelessness Prevention, and Workforce Solutions (HHPWS) may be reached at ttorno@rivco.org , (442) 315-0264, or by mail at 3403 Tenth St, Riverside, CA 92501. **Additional Materials** –[Homeless Youth Point-in-Time Count](#) , [YAB Youth Collaboration Video 2023](#) , [Youth Data Summary, 2023 Point-in-Time Count Infographic](#)