

A blue and yellow train is stopped at a station platform. The platform has a dark, reflective floor and overhead lights. On the left side of the image, there is a large white graphic consisting of several rounded, vertical shapes of varying heights, resembling a stylized cloud or a series of arches. The background is a dark, textured wall.

Community Solutions

From Research to Action: *Strategies to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness*

November 2024

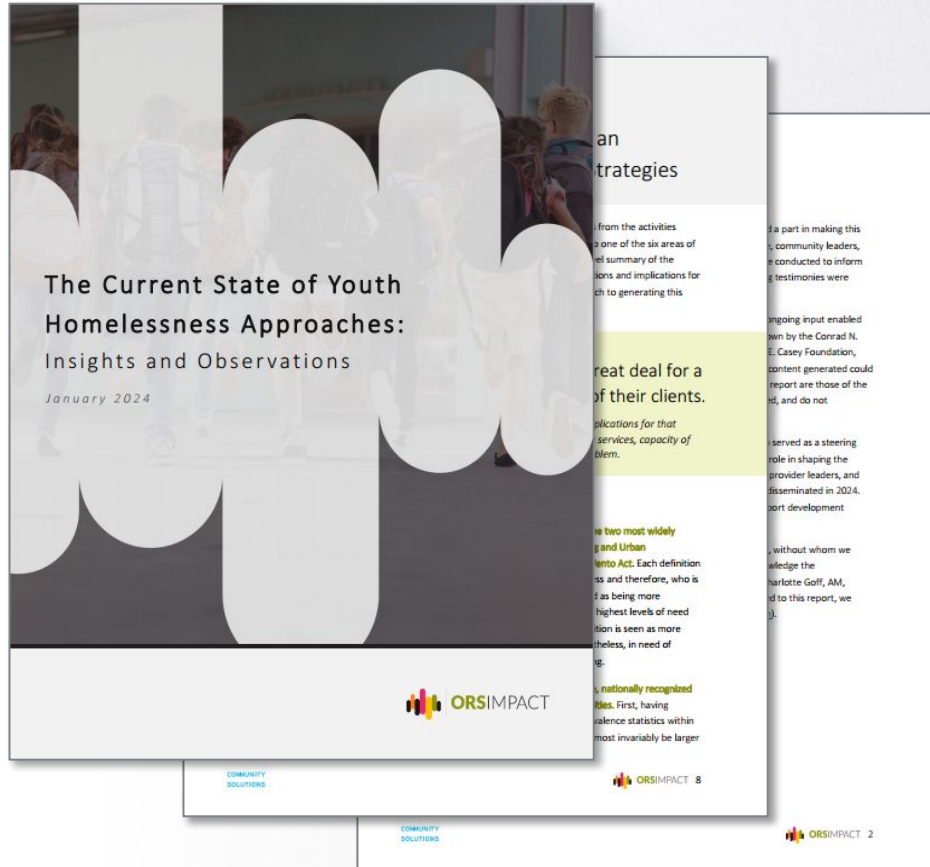


The Vision for Our Recent Research

The purpose of this research was to help Community Solutions understand what approaches have proven to be effective in preventing and ending youth homelessness at scale.

Our landscape scan and current state assessment surfaced learnings and observations on existing evidence, field-leading approaches, and community practices related to youth homelessness, providing Community Solutions and the homeless response sector as a whole with recommendations and guidance for equitably and sustainably preventing and ending youth homelessness.

Today's Agenda



The Current State of Youth Homelessness Approaches

- 1 Findings from Our Recent Research
- 2 Open Discussion/Q&A
- 3 Sharing Collective Wisdom

***Download
the report
here!***



Six Areas of Inquiry Guiding this Research

#1

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS DEFINITIONS

How does the **field** define **youth homelessness**? What are the age parameters and criteria for inclusion in this population?

#2

COMMON AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

What types of **approaches across the field** have proven to be effective for reducing, ending, and preventing youth homelessness?

#3

THE IMPORTANCE OF COORDINATION

How do homeless response systems **partner across sectors** such as foster care, youth justice, social services, and education?

#4

THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF SUBPOPULATIONS

How do youth homelessness interventions vary by different **subpopulations** in terms of their importance, implementation, and impact?

#5

IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFORTS WITH ADULTS

What **learnings from youth homeless efforts can be applied** to the design of a homeless response system for adult populations?

#6

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER FIELD

What **implications exist for the sector as a whole**, including providers, system leaders, intermediaries, and funders supporting youth homeless efforts?

Six Areas of Inquiry Guiding this Research

*The Focus for Our Time
Today*

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THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF SUBPOPULATIONS

How do youth homelessness interventions vary by **race, sexual orientation, youth age range, geography, or other important subpopulations**?

#5

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What **learnings from youth homeless efforts can be applied** to the design of a homeless response system for adult populations?

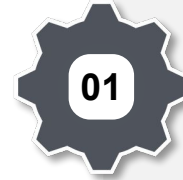
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IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER FIELD

What **implications exist for the sector as a whole**, including providers, system leaders, intermediaries, and funders supporting youth homeless efforts?

Definitions Matter

The definition of youth homelessness used by providers or across a community has direct implications for that community's active homelessness counts, their clients' eligibility for services, the ability of providers to respond, and the public narratives around the magnitude of the problem.



Two definitions of youth homelessness, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Education's McKinney-Vento Act, have different criteria for who is considered homeless.



The lack of a single, nationally recognized, inclusive definition of youth homelessness creates challenges related to conflicting prevalence statistics, misinformation in public narratives, and securing funding for youth homelessness services.



Many young people do not meet HUD's criteria for homelessness, limiting their access to services and pushing them to "hoop jump" to get around red tape and restrictions, which delays service and risks retraumatizing youth as they work toward housing stability.



That said, there may be times where more narrow definitions are more appropriate, such as in targeted outreach programs for unsheltered young people, or cases where limited resources require prioritizing young people with the most urgent and critical needs.

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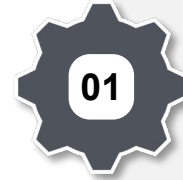


Sharing Collective Wisdom

- ? **What resonated with you most and what questions remain** from the findings on the youth homelessness definitions?
- ? **What has your experience been in balancing the pressures** to use these different definitions for youth homelessness?
- ? **What would it look like to have a definition of youth homeless** (and system for measuring it) that maximized inclusion AND allowed for prioritizing those with the most pressing needs?
- ? **What guidance, insights, or wisdom would you add or offer** about youth homelessness definitions based on your experience?

Common Interventions

Communities rely on a broad range of interventions like coordinated entry, case management, various housing solutions, diversion programs, drop-in centers, transportation supports, community networks, family engagement programs, counseling and mental health support, and employment assistance programs.



Coordinated entry is a “ticket to play” that requires a system that (a) leverages a prioritization process informed by lived experience, (b) aligns well to the definitions used by providers, and (c) allows for data sharing between providers and partners.



Case managers are vital for helping youth meet basic needs and offering wraparound support. Personalized care, trust-building, and consistency in case management staff are crucial factors.



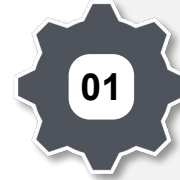
Diversion programs can prevent youth from entering the system “at the door”. These programs empower youth to influence decisions about services, enable quicker responses with flexible funding for providers, and support community capacity building through those flexible funds.



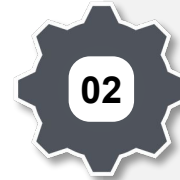
Cash transfer programs show early promise for reducing homelessness duration and poverty. Moreover, in contrast to public concerns over the misuse of cash transfer funds for “temptation goods”, research suggests the opposite – that these programs may actually reduce illicit activity.

Common Interventions

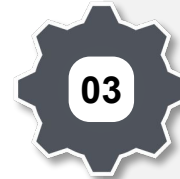
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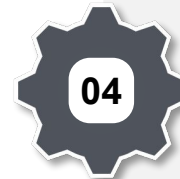
Housing solutions must match individual needs. The range of youth housing solutions vary in type, quality, and availability; wraparound support services and an increase in housing supply are crucial for effectively addressing youth homelessness.



Youth need support to meet basic daily needs, such as drop-in centers and transportation services. Addressing transportation challenges may require innovative programs, while drop-in centers can offer safety and resources, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ youth.



Counseling programs help youth recover AND proactively plan for the future. Youth benefit from counseling and treatment services that address clinical concerns while also offering skill-building and planning support from trauma-informed, culturally competent staff.



While it is essential to not prioritize building employment skills over addressing clinical, mental, and physical health concerns first, **employability programs increase the likelihood of financial stability** through job training, skill development, and work experience opportunities.

Common Interventions

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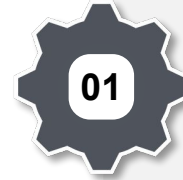


Sharing Collective Wisdom

- ? **What resonated with you most and what questions remain** from the findings on different youth homelessness interventions?
- ? **Which of these interventions have you seen or implemented** in working toward addressing youth homelessness? **Which are you most interested in learning more about?**
- ? **What would it take to implement** any of the interventions described here that you are most interested in exploring for your community?
- ? **What guidance, insights, or wisdom would you add or offer** about youth homelessness strategies or interventions?

The Importance of Coordination

Cross-system coordination with adjacent systems of care (e.g., education, youth justice, healthcare) is challenging but critical for data sharing, information and resource sharing, identifying youth at-risk of homelessness, exit planning, and coordinating a service response that prevents inflow and returns to homelessness.



Coordination and collaboration between adjacent systems is crucial for helping youth navigate systems of care and preventing potential exits from those systems into homelessness. This requires a shift toward shared responsibility for youth exiting adjacent systems of care.



Many systems can and should play a role. While foster care, education, and youth justice are most commonly engaged in this work, communities are also exploring nontraditional partners (e.g., Planned Parenthood, job centers) to support system-wide prevention efforts.



Coordination can be challenging for a number of reasons, such as data sharing limitations, poor accountability mechanisms, and pervasive siloes across system partners. Addressing these challenges requires trust and high-quality engagement within partnerships.



The lack of formalized partnerships is an Achilles heel of the system. While personal relationships allow for deeper connections, these relationships are less resilient to staff turnover compared to more formal/structural partnerships, resulting in knowledge and resource loss when staff leave.

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Sharing Collective Wisdom

- ? What resonated with you most and what questions remain from the findings on cross-sector coordination for youth homelessness?
- ? What examples or types of cross-sector coordinated efforts have you seen working most effectively in youth homelessness efforts?
- ? What would it take to identify and create formal cross-sector partnerships for addressing youth homelessness in your community?
- ? What guidance, insights, or wisdom would you add or offer about cross-sector coordination in youth homelessness efforts?

Other Reflections and Insights



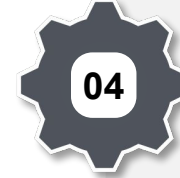
Communities need to shift from general to tailored supports. Youth face challenges across multiple domains, making one-size-fits-all approaches often insufficient. Communities must continue to work to connect youth with supports that are optimally suited for their unique needs.



It's time for providers to step out of "their youth" and into their clients'. Youth commonly experience adultism from providers simply because of their age. To combat this, providers should focus on building trust, leveraging strengths, and empowering their clients.



Meaningfully engaging youth is crucial but must avoid re-traumatization. This involves empowering youth in decision-making, respecting how youth want to engage, building trust, valuing their input, and closing feedback loops after implementing changes.



Providers need cultural humility and competency to ensure support is accessible and inclusive for youth. This involves self-awareness, an inclusive attitude, and cross-cultural skills to meet youth where they are and offer culturally appropriate assistance.



You simply can't have enough trauma-informed care. Early trauma is especially common for homeless youth, necessitating a community response that is trauma-informed, emphasizing supportive, trusting relationships and intentional efforts to avoid re-traumatization.



Clients value staff with lived experience. Hiring staff with lived experience can build trust with youth through more empathetic relationships, but communities must commit to supporting staff well-being, valuing their expertise, and involving them in shaping programs and policies.

Other questions?

Reach out – we want to hear from you!
scampanario@orsimpact.com





Appendix: Additional Summary Findings



Safe and affirming spaces are essential for LGBTQIA+ youth, who are often dissuaded from pursuing services out of a fear for their safety in shelter environments. Targeted outreach coupled with culturally competent and safe housing solutions for these youth are crucial.



BIPOC youth face challenges that necessitate trauma-informed and culturally competent services. Despite disproportionate rates of homelessness, discrimination, and violence-based trauma, there remains a scarcity of culturally competent resources for BIPOC youth.



Pregnant and parenting youth face additional burdens that require specific services, such as childcare, safer housing, and support groups. Some communities are prioritizing them in coordinated entry and providing specialized assistance from experienced staff.



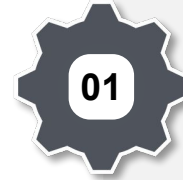
Youth services must be developmentally appropriate for the unique challenges, needs, and priorities of youth at different age ranges, which should inform a community's coordinated entry process as well as focused efforts to build partnerships with age-specific providers.

The Unique Needs of Subpopulations

An equitable, youth-centered approach requires programs and services that meet the unique needs of underrepresented and highly vulnerable, intersectional identities of youth, rather than a one-size-fits-all model. This necessitates culturally competent services for specific youth subpopulations.

Implications for Efforts with Adults

While youth and adults navigating the homeless response system have different needs, challenges, and experiences, there are a number of implications from this work that could help leaders working with adult homeless populations.



Adult and youth providers alike share a common need for investment in foundational capacity, whether through hiring, upskilling with education and training, or improved access to flexible funding that allows for timely and adaptable responses to the needs of their clients.



Prevention requires a cross-sector approach across populations, with resources and strategies aimed at fostering coordination with adjacent systems of care, identifying at-risk individuals within those systems, and supporting transitional or preventative planning.



For both adult and youth populations, putting clients in the driver seat for determining the solutions that best meet their needs is a powerful way to cultivate a sense of empowerment and ownership for clients, while further building trust between them and direct service providers.



Coordinated entry requires active engagement and participation from providers and adjacent sectors to support the development of shared policies, outcomes, accountability measures, and data, while offering a diverse suite of interconnected programs and services.



Communities need to shift from general to tailored supports. Youth face challenges across multiple domains, making one-size-fits-all approaches often insufficient. Communities must continue to work to connect youth with supports that are optimally suited for their unique needs.



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Implications for the Field

Conversations with communities, adjacent system partners, intermediaries, and the youth they serve lifted up a number of broader implications for the field. These cut across mindset shifts, ways of engaging lived experience, training and education, ways of working, system alignment efforts, and the roles of funders.



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Communities are exploring innovative outreach ideas (e.g., radio, TikTok, other social media) to expand reach beyond current practices and improve service connection for actively homeless youth, given that many youth are often not fully aware of the services available to them.



Funders play a crucial role in advancing the field toward a collective response. In addition to offering funding, they can promote coordination across sectors, incentivize aligned strategies, and support continuous improvements and shared learning through network building.

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