Beyond the Silos:

Designing Interconnected Systems for Youth and Families

Built For Zero.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

Make Homelessness Rare and Brief

Built For Zero.

Grab what speaks to you from the Affirmation WALl!

PRESENTERS

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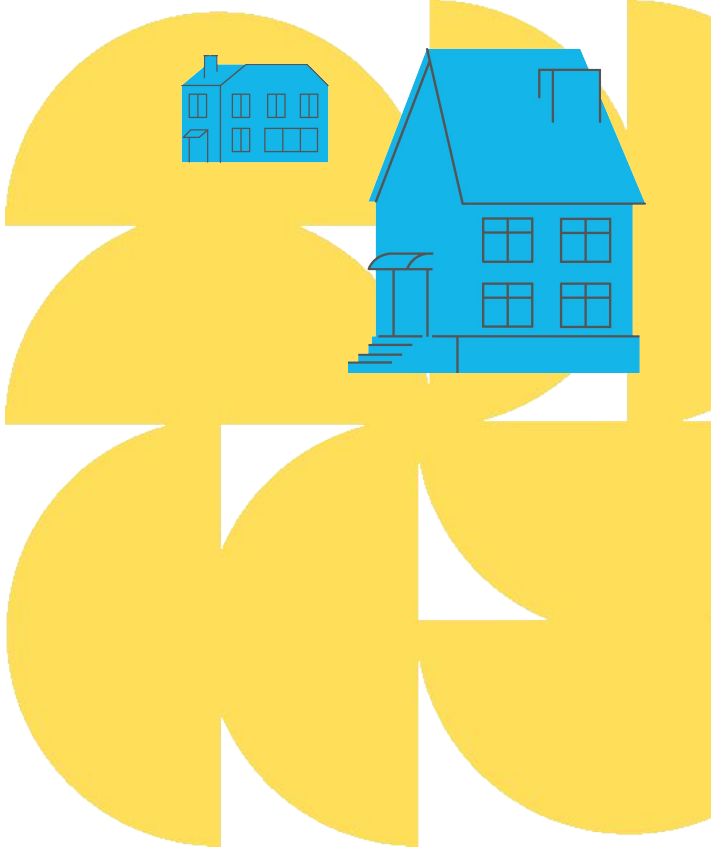
Data Coaching & Performance Advisor

Visualizing the reach



Mentimeter

Agenda

Welcome & Introductions	1:30 pm
Family System Overview & Insights	2:05 pm
Youth & Young Adult System Overview & Insights	2:15 pm
Journey Mapping Activity	2:25 pm
Break (15 min)	3:00 pm
Successful Cross-sector Collaboration & Activity	3:15 pm
Wrap-up and Shoutouts!	3:45 pm

Whole systems must include youth and families

Table Introductions

Share with your table:

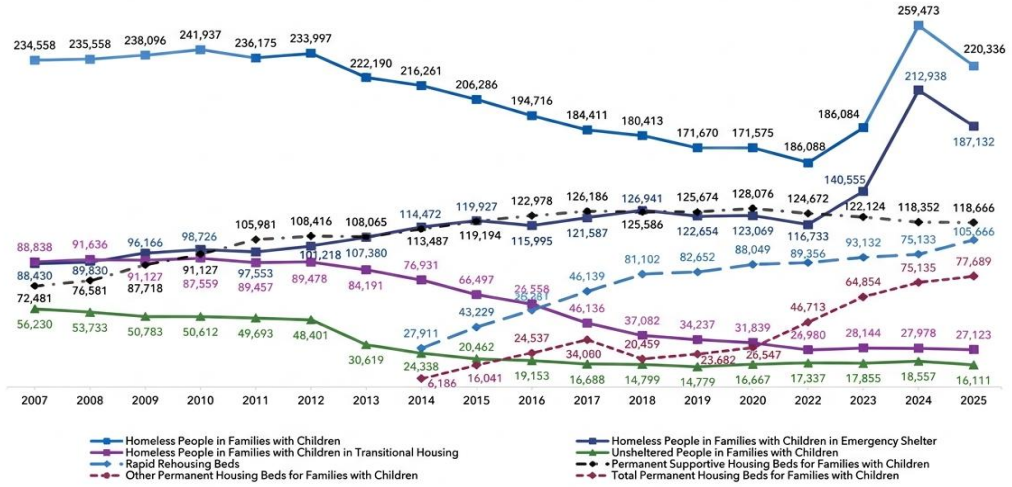
- Name & pronouns
- Community
- One sentence answer to:
  - What is one lesson a client taught you about what happens when a system treats them as a “case type” rather than a whole person?

Family Homelessness System Overview & Insights

Family Homelessness: What a national landscape analysis told us

February - May 2026

EXHIBIT 4.1: PIT Estimates of Homeless Families with Children and the Number of Beds in Permanent Housing Programs for People Transitioning Out of Homelessness*, By Sheltered Status, 2007-2024



Note: The exhibit does not display the count of people in homeless families with children in 2021 because of pandemic-related disruptions to PIT counts.

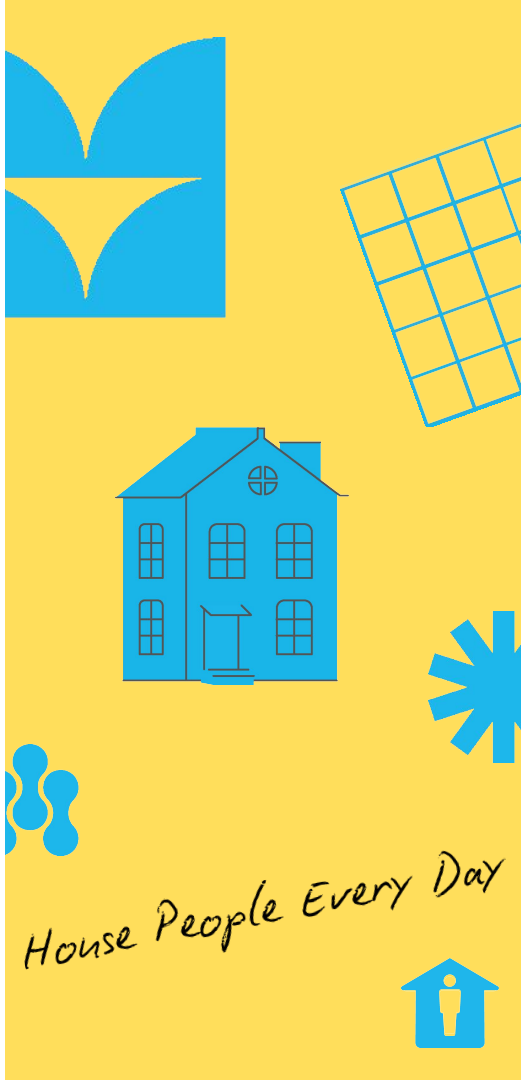
House People Every Day

Where We Are Now

HUD 2025 data shows that more families are experiencing homelessness today than at any point since 2013 (2024 spike excluded).

1.55 million students experiencing housing instability, 2023-24 school year *[Department of Education]*

Not a temporary anomaly. A sustained, structural crisis.



Landscape Scan Research

National analysis of 4 core pillars:

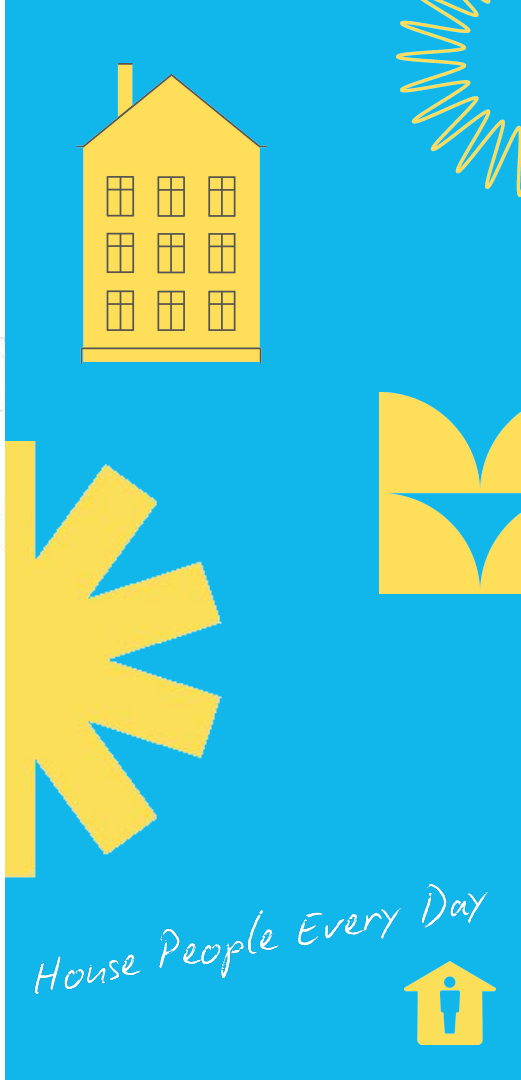
1. Literature and federal administrative data review
2. National survey – 33 provider voices across 22 Continuums of Care
3. 16 qualitative interviews across 15 jurisdictions
4. Parallel interviews with experts with lived experience

What's driving it?

Macro-economic reality and policy barriers, not individual failure

35 affordable, available units per 100 extremely low-income households *(National Low Income Housing Coalition)*

- Primary population entering family systems: single mothers with multiple children
- No financial redundancy. No flexible childcare. **Some evictions filed over back-rent balances under $100**
- Family homelessness is largely invisible:
  - Fear of child welfare intervention, legal consequences, or family separation
- Families aren't fully represented in the system:
  - Traditional outreach focuses on adult-only visible encampments
  - HMIS tracking are static. Data entry primarily centers the Head of Household and dependent children are often not fully accounted for



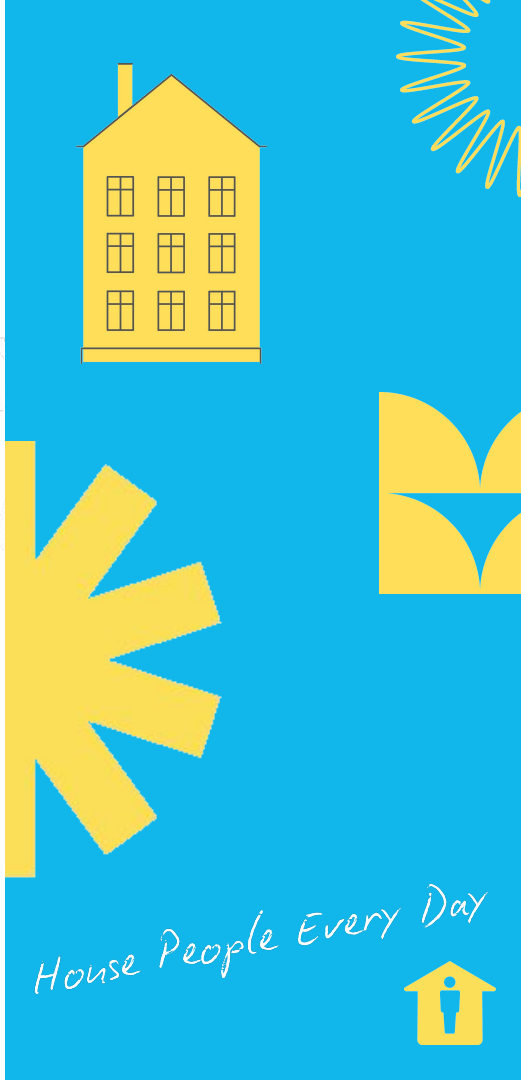
Family Homelessness is largely invisible

Families avoid the system because they fear child welfare involvement, legal consequences, and separation.

They couch-surf. They are doubled up. They sleep in cars.

Two ways our systems miss them:

- Street outreach primarily focus on visible adult encampments
- HMIS tracking isn't dynamic and data entry centers the adult Head of Household (HoH), so children are not fully accounted for

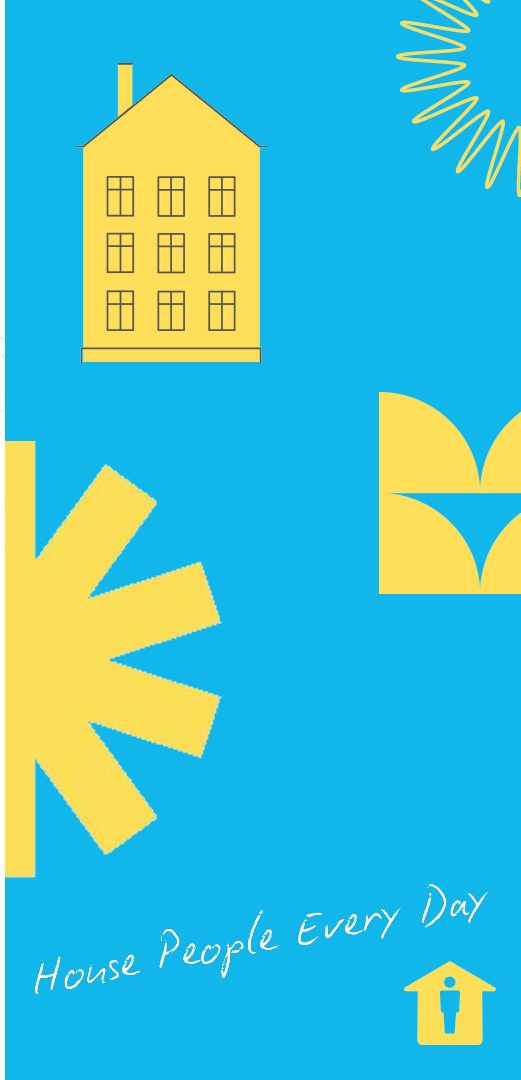


What happens when families do reach out

Housing: Heavy reliance on short-term Rapid Re-Housing. Long-term options for families remain severely underfunded

Shelter: Rigid policies still exclude adult men, and in some jurisdictions boys over 13. Families split up to get a roof.

Assessment: Scoring tools built for single-adult vulnerability under-score family risk, screening families out of the matches they need.



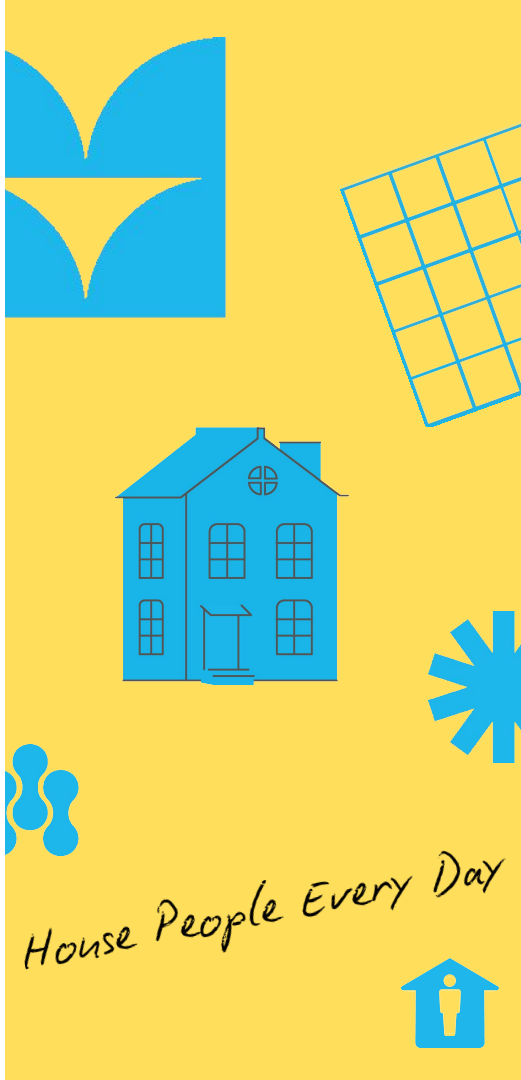
Providers and families see this differently

Providers expressed confidence in how they support children and youth.

Experts by experience challenged that.

Systems may operate on a false baseline: a child is fine if they have food and a roof over their head

What gets missed is the developmental trauma of housing loss, and children absorbing adult responsibility with no voice in the process



Proof points

What distinguishes communities who are further along?

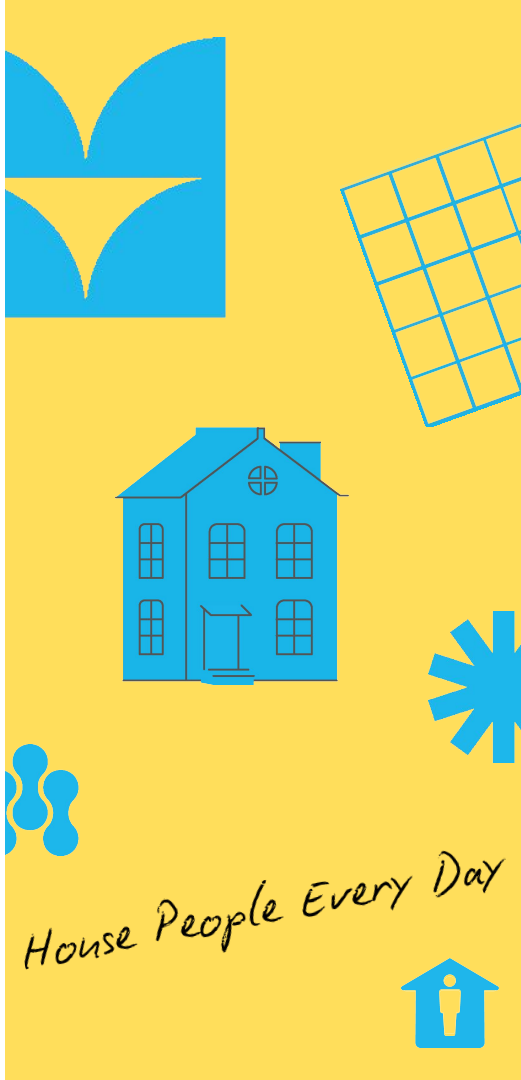
It isn't the volume of services offered. It is system infrastructure:

- Centralized data
- A dedicated lead strategy organization
- Clear policy expectations

Bright Spots - Formal, cross-sector networks:

- **Legal aid embedded into eviction courts** – intercepting families before the filing becomes a loss
- **Pet-inclusive shelter** – removing pet surrender as a barrier to entry
- **Extended aftercare** – up to 18 months of post-move-in support, with recidivism rates as low as 5%

Progress happens when we break down silos

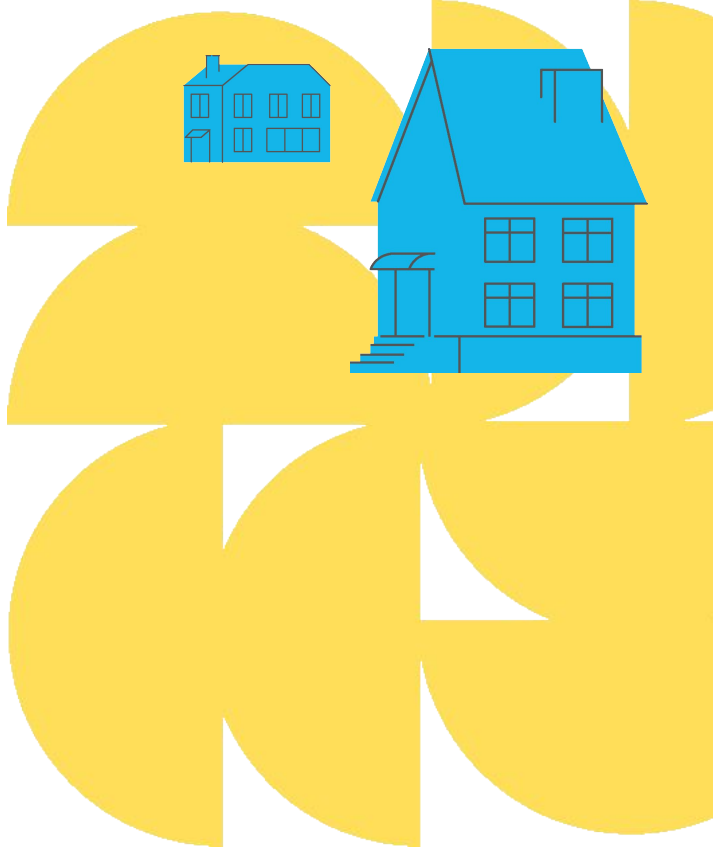


A framework for action: 4 levels

Community Level shift the narrative towards *solvability*; publicize entry points in schools, clinics, and faith centers to reduce stigma and fear	**Provider Level** protect family unity, never separating fathers or teenage boys; update HMIS workflows to ensure every child is enrolled individually
System Level designate a lead backbone organization; recalibrate coordinated entry for family dynamics; braid non-traditional funding	**National Policy Level** expand pathways for doubled-up families; mandate deeply affordable multi-bedroom units at 0-30% AMI; build a national body of knowledge

Ending family homelessness is not a matter of technical capability. It is a matter of systemic alignment and collective will.

The numbers are finite. They are solvable.



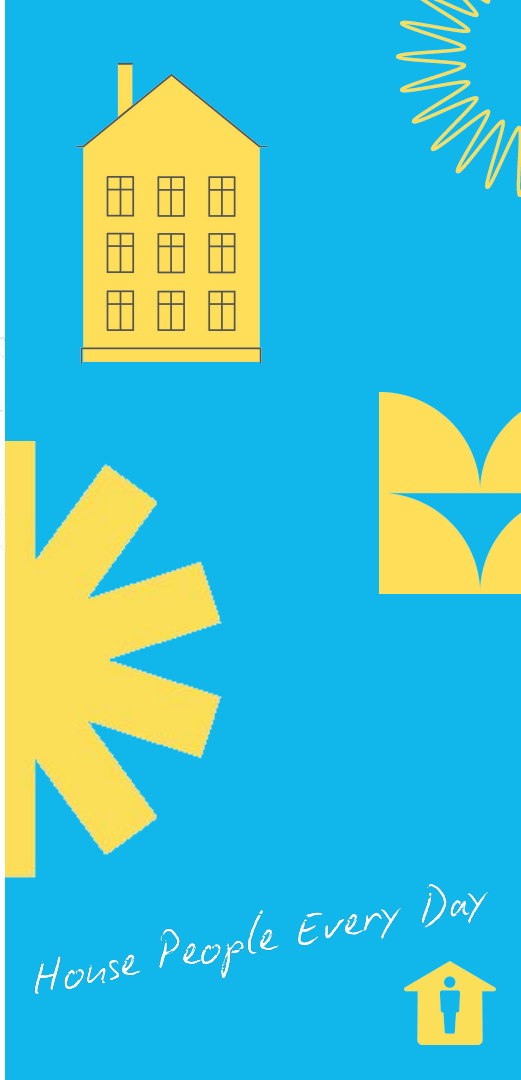
Youth & Young Adult Homelessness System Overview & Insights

Youth & Young Adult Population

Unaccompanied Young People = Young people under 25 without a parent or guardian

- Youth are defined as legal minors aged 17 or younger
- Young adults are those aged 18-24
- Includes pregnant and parenting young people

Terms we use: Unaccompanied young people, youth and young adults (YYA), youth



NATIONAL CONTEXT

Youth homelessness is widespread

1 in 10

young adults ages 18 to 25

1 in 30

adolescents ages 13 to 17

Experienced some form of homelessness over a 12-month period, including couch surfing.

Source: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, Voices of Youth Count, 2017

DISPROPORTIONALITY

Risk is concentrated

NATIONAL: HIGHER RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

+120% LGBTQ young people

+83% Black young people

Chapin Hall, Voices of Youth Count, 2017

WASHINGTON: VS. WHITE PEERS

7x Black young people more likely to access the homeless system

9x Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander young people

Rates per 100 young people ages 10–24, 2022. Half of young people in the system were BIPOC. (WA Landscape Scan 2024)

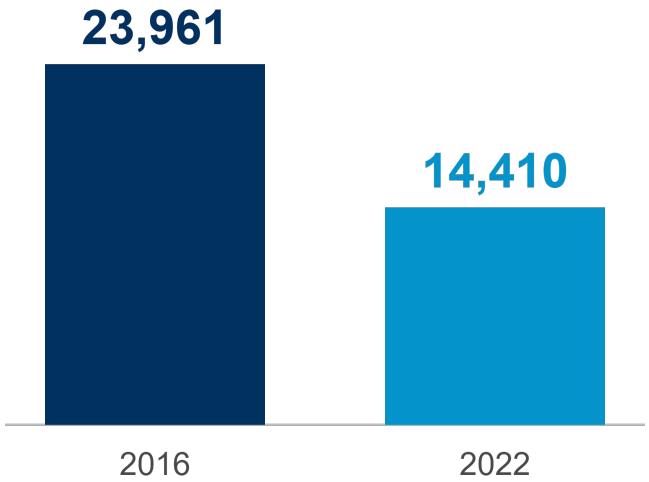
You cannot end youth homelessness without ending disproportionality

WASHINGTON STATE

A national leader on youth homelessness

40%

reduction in unaccompanied youth and young adult homelessness, 2016 to 2022



Source: "Yes to Yes" Washington State Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Landscape Scan, Office of Homeless Youth and A Way Home Washington, 2024, Dept of Commerce Snapshot of homelessness reports

From WA's work to the Built for Zero Network

Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) & WA Communities for Functional Zero (WA C4f0)

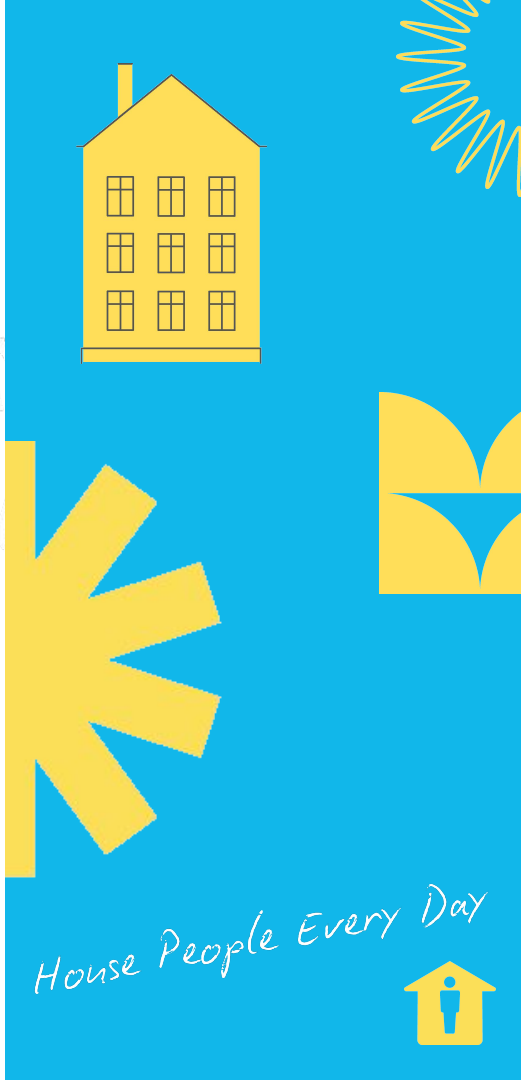
OHY has not only significantly closed the geographical service gap across WA, it now serves as a backbone partner building statewide infrastructure, alignment, and resources around the statewide movement to end youth and young adult homelessness

The network continues to grow

Seattle/King County joined the Built for Zero network and statewide movement to reduce and end youth and young adult homelessness

Shaping the youth cohort

Washington's learnings, strategies, and paved path towards quality data for unaccompanied young people informed the Built for Zero Youth Quality Data Cohort design

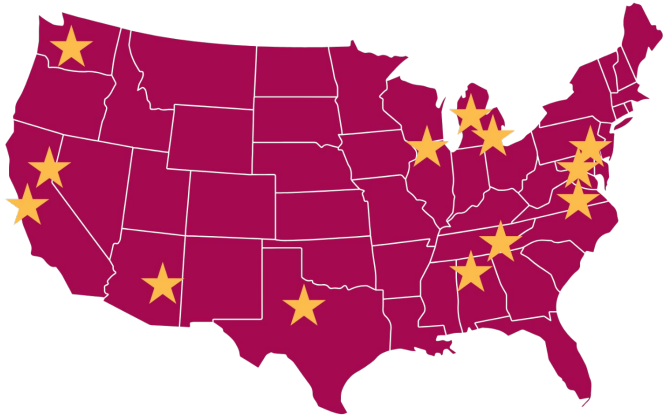


Youth Quality Data Cohort | 2025

May - December 2025 (8 months)

Cohort composition:

- 13 communities: spanning rural, urban, and balance-of-state
- Partnered with System Change Partners and Point Source Youth



How it ran:

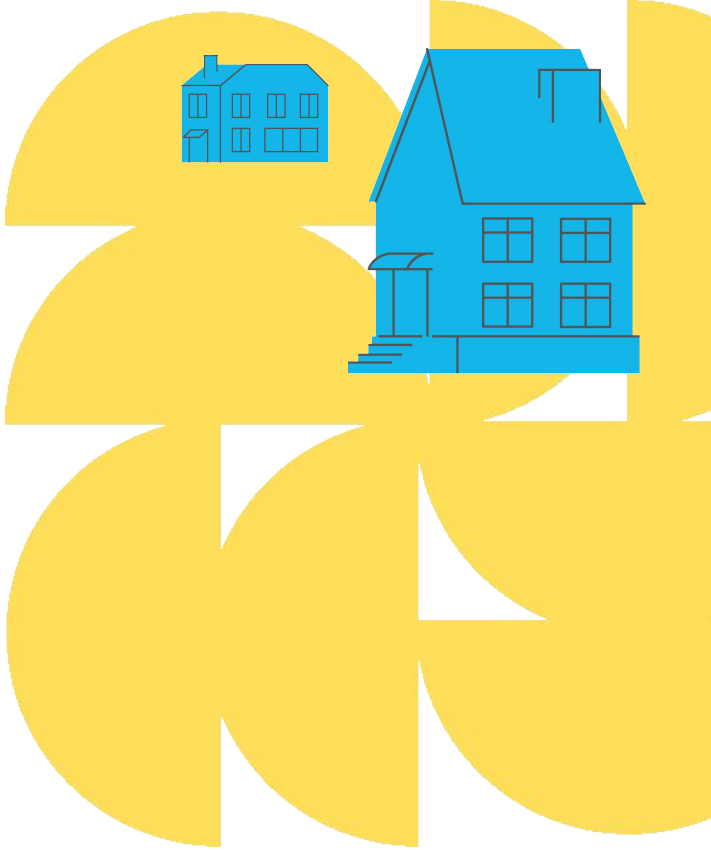
- Monthly all-cohort calls
- Twice-monthly small group coaching hours
- Scorecard walkthroughs
- One-on-one data support

Measured against four domains:

- Scorecard threshold
- Data infrastructure and reporting
- Documented policies and procedures
- Youth engagement

Result: 70% made significant progress. Kent County reached Youth Quality Data with several close behind

Learnings & Takeaways from the Youth Quality Data Cohort



The system has a seam at 18

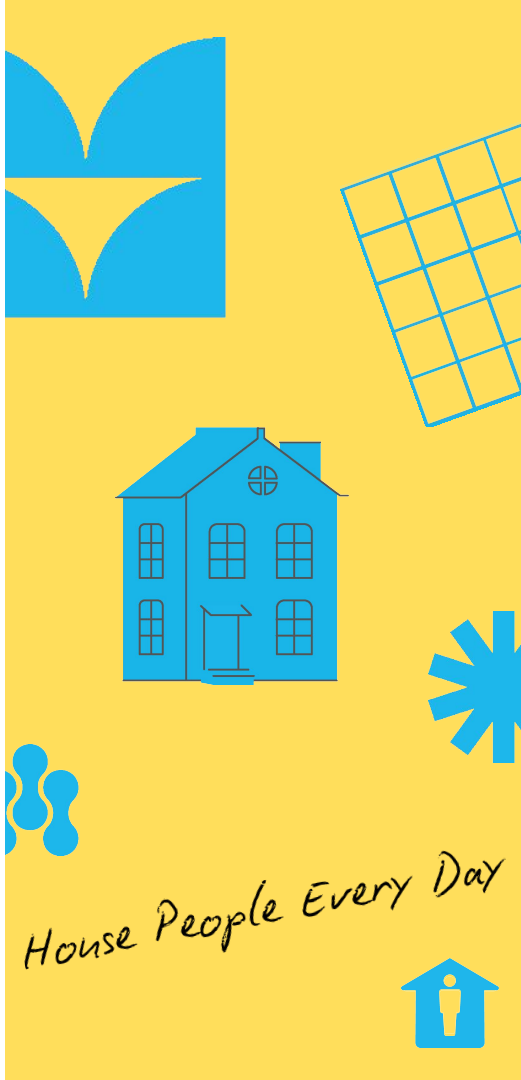
Most communities have youth infrastructure for ages 18-24 (transitional age)

Very few have it for unaccompanied minors under 18

Under 18, almost every step raises a legal question:

- Can they consent to shelter? To services? To being entered into your data system? To a lease?

The answers vary by state, it isn't a straightforward process, and rarely is it written down.



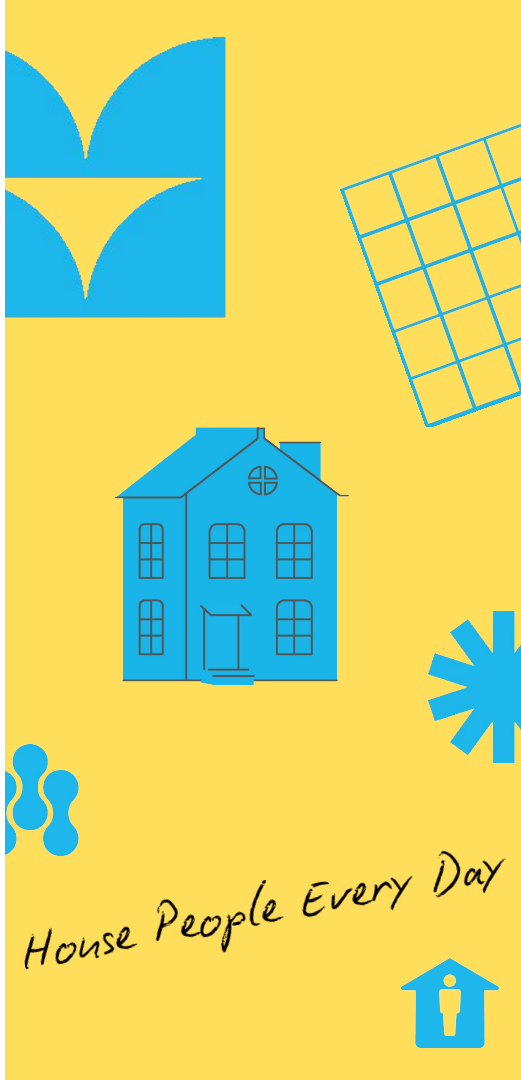
Young people aren't where you're already looking

Most communities reported no youth-specific outreach or in-reach.

Where it exists, it doesn't look like adult outreach:

- Young people rarely self-identify as homeless, and often avoid the places adult outreach covers
- The access points are different – schools, drop-in centers, social media, by-and-for organizations
- Reaching them depends on trust and relationship, which takes longer than a canvass
- Young people are the ones who find other young people. The approach must fit the population

Communities built their own versions of this from scratch. There was no shared standard to build from.



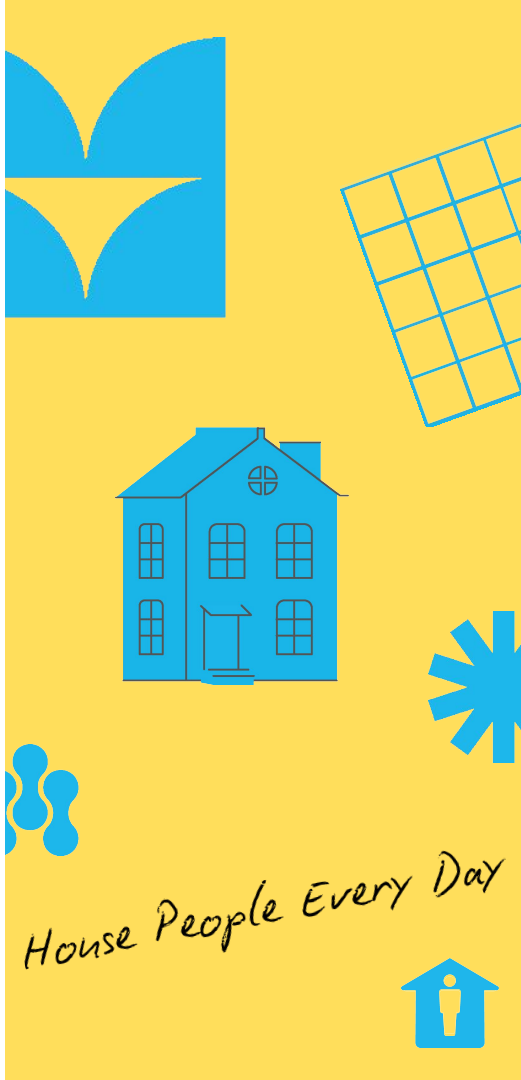
What's actually there for young people

Communities consistently reported:

- No youth-appropriate coordinated entry process or youth assessment
- Little or no youth-specific shelter, for either age group
- Few housing pathways or funding streams designed for young people

Young people are routed into an adult system that was not built for them – and under 18, often cannot legally serve them.

Adult vulnerability tools under-score young people, the same way it under-scores families

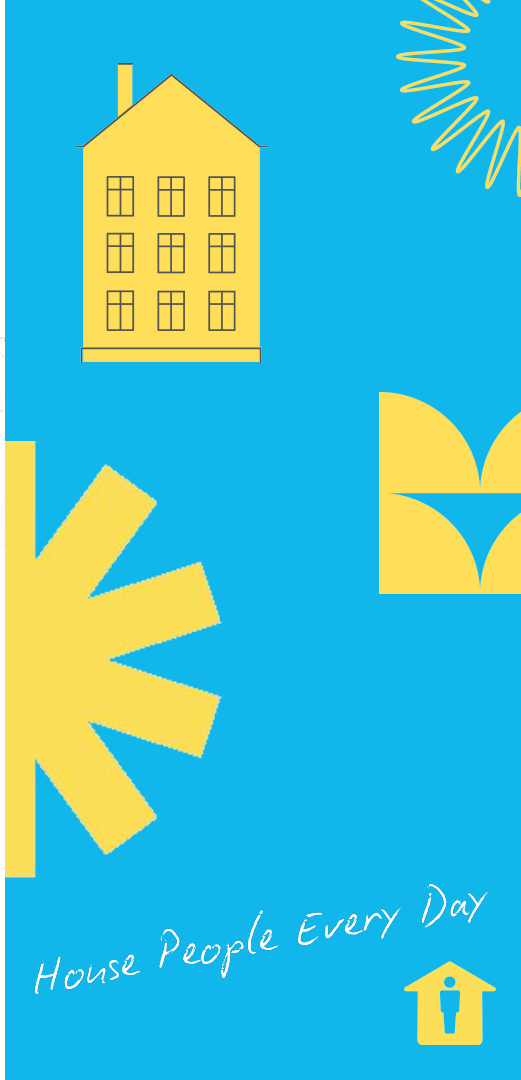


Assumptions that “the other system has them”

Across the cohort, several systems assumed a different one was serving unaccompanied minors under 18. Often, no one was.

Young people fall into the space between systems, not through any one system’s failure.

- Relationships with child welfare, youth legal system, and schools take time to build – and they were the slowest scorecard items to move
- Adjacent systems saw the most improvement across the cohort



What young people see that we don't

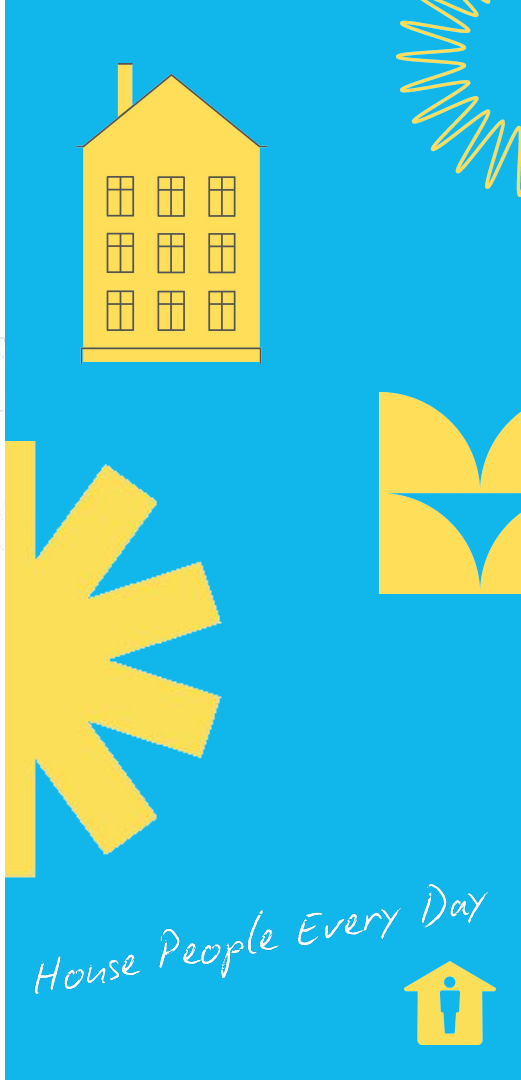
Communities consistently ranked youth engagement as a priority. The cohort itself had a track specifically dedicated to authentic youth engagement and partnership.

Young people involved in design notice gaps adults miss.

The barrier is not willingness. It is sustainability.

Many communities paused their Youth Action Board after losing funding to properly compensate young people for their time.

"Nothing about us without us" requires a budget line



What works

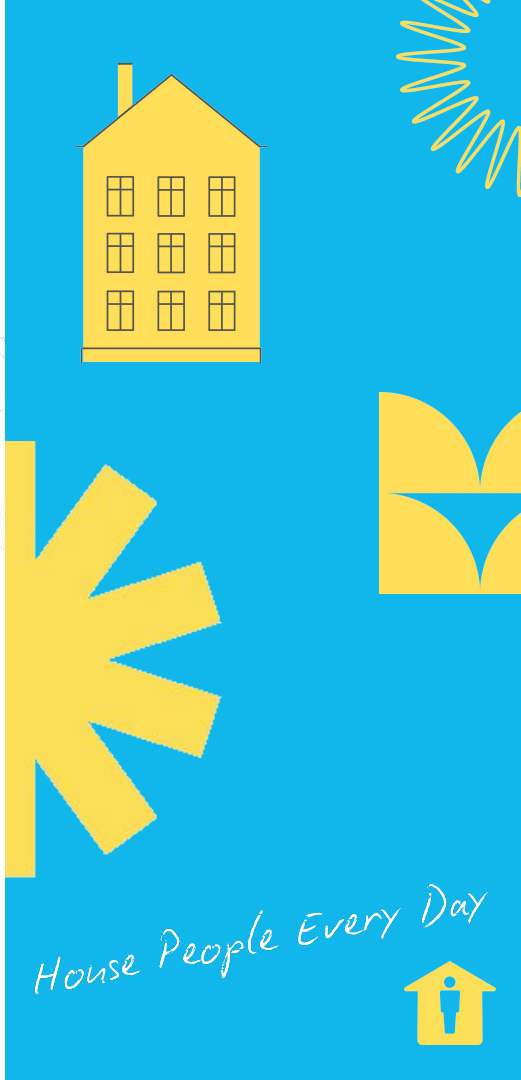
Flexible funding/Targeted housing assistance – one-time flexible payment paired with diversion to prevent an entry into the homeless response system

Host Homes – Community-based, youth-chosen environment living with volunteer hosts for either short or long-term stable housing

Direct Cash Transfers – recurring payments to young people with optional financial coaching and case management

Civil Legal Support – partnership with legal attorneys to address unaccompanied minor consent and other legal issues

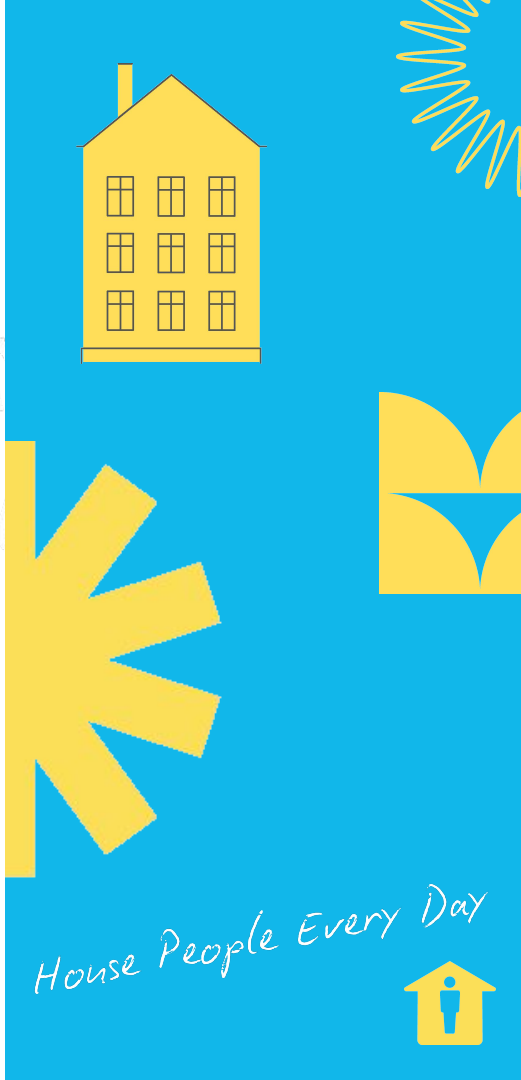
HOPE Centers – Voluntary, short-term residential placements for youth on the street, offering stays up to 90 days *(based on WA state HOPE act)*



What this means for design

The youth system is not a smaller version of the adult system

- Legal capacity is a live constraint, not a footnote
- Self-identification cannot be the only front door
- Household composition changes fast – a young person can move through several systems within months
- Trust is the access point – relationships with young people and across systems is what moves the needle
- Creativity is key when it comes to housing interventions
- Young people belong in the forefront of design with shared power



Journey Mapping

The Scenario:

Candace, her partner, and their three kids face living out of their vehicle after a $100 rent increase makes their unit unaffordable – despite both adults earning income.

Candace secures a shelter spot for herself and the kids. The shelter cannot serve adult men.

Maya, 17, is starting her senior year. The family decides she should stay with a friend's family rather than enter shelter.

Two months in, Maya is pregnant. The family she is staying with asks her to leave.

Your Task:

15 minutes · 5 minutes per phase

- Document all your thoughts using post-it notes
- Journey Map:
  - Entry points (5 min)
  - Friction points (5 min)
  - Silos and cross-system connections (5 min)

We are not asking you to design the "ideal" system. We want you to map what actually happens in your community

Solution Visioning

Brainstorm bridges and solution steps!

(5 minutes)

Jot down one concrete idea in each column that you could take back to your community

[BREAK]

Come back @ 3:15 pm

Cross-sector Collaboration

What does success in cross-sector collaboration look like?

Walla Walla County Youth Engagement Team (YET)

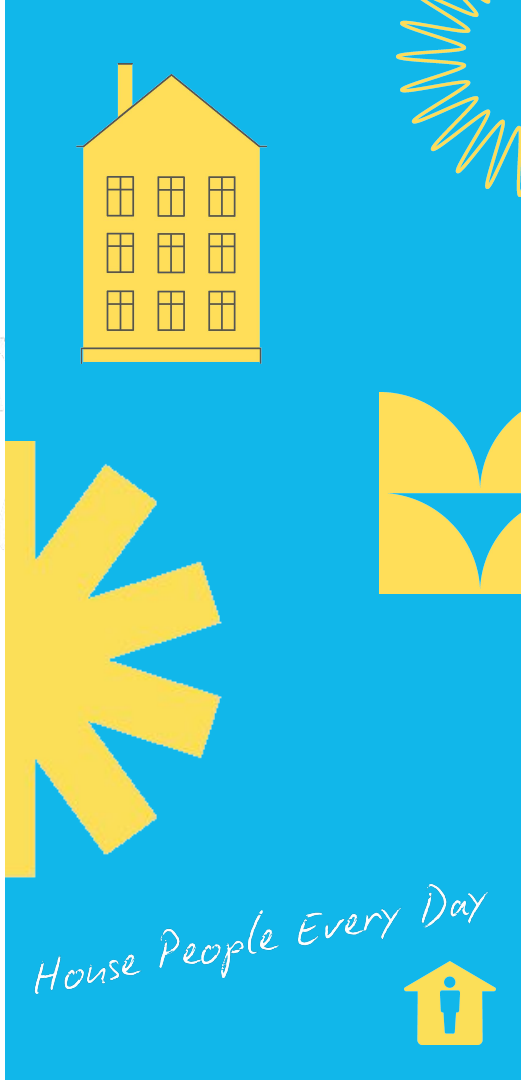
- **Multi-disciplinary team:** Youth Outreach & Housing Navigators + Civil Legal Attorney
- **Streamlined support:** Ability to address legal needs (particularly for youth under 18) alongside housing navigation
- **Wrap-around services:** Reduces the number of referrals a young person experiences within the system
- **Intentional relationship-building with key systems:** McKinney Vento Liaisons, Juvenile Detention Officers, Child Welfare Case Managers, and Behavioral Health Specialists - the YET prioritized building connections and consistent touchpoints

Secret Sauce:

Relationships & each system seeing their role in solving YYA homelessness

Kent County Child Welfare + Foster Care System Partnership

- **Formalizing partnerships:** Youth providers established MOUs with child welfare and foster care
- **Co-location model:** Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) staff were embedded at the local youth drop-in center
- **Proactive Engagement:** Child Welfare agencies notify the youth housing team up to 6 months & 90 days before a youth turns 18 or 21
- **Expanding housing access:** This partnership has increased the utilization of Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers



Cross-sector Activity (20 min)

- Identify & generate a list of the local adjacent systems that intersect with youth & families
- Rate the current level of engagement with your homeless response system
- What role does each system hold? *(Do you have folks from those systems at your table? Ask them!)*
- Rate how much that system is currently living in that role
- Choose 1 key adjacent system & create a 3-step action plan to deepen that relationship

Table Share-out (5 min)

- Share your 3-step action plan with your table and get feedback

Built For Zero.

What we did today

1 **Reality check**

Human lives, human structures, and people's identities are inherently fluid but our systems are designed to be rigid

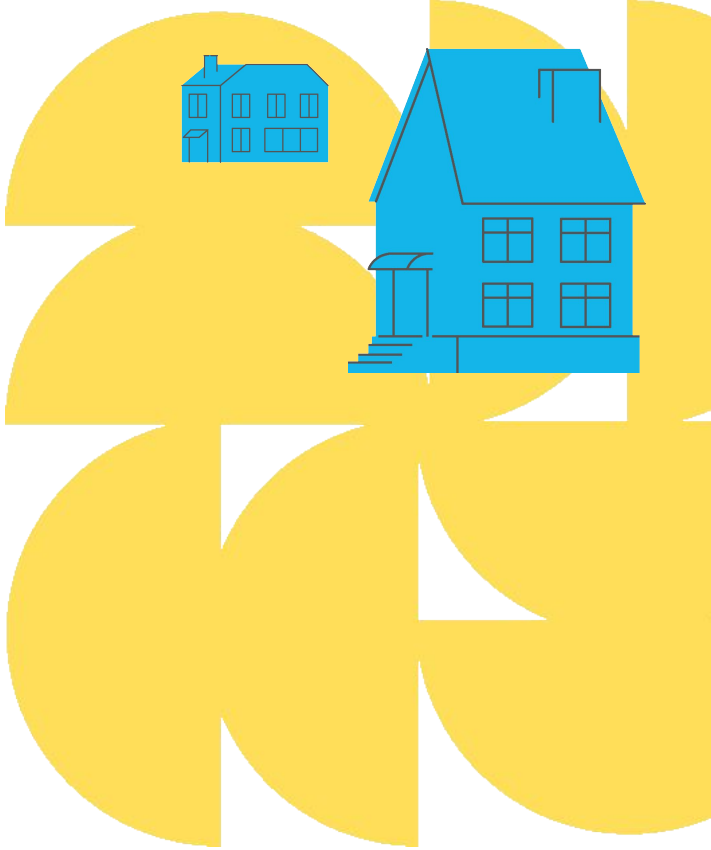
2 **Stress-tested our own programs and systems**

An honest look at how are systems are designed so we can understand where there is opportunity for improvement

3 **Bridging the solutions**

Identified ways we can begin transforming our systems to serve the person or family vs forcing them to fit the system & mapped out concrete, multi-sector partnerships

Shout out one thing you are taking away from our time together today!



Thank you!

Thank you to our partners for making this work possible!

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schultz family foundation®

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

CAMPION FOUNDATION

Raikes Foundation

Built For Zero.

Opportunity to shape support for building strong and interconnected youth and family systems

Location: Outside the main ballroom → tables on the far left

Session Feedback

Please scan the QR code to complete the Session Feedback survey.

House People Every Day