

Greater New Haven HUD Youth Demonstration Project Needs Proposal

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Greater New Haven Youth Needs Assessment

The Greater New Haven area has a variety of housing and economic interventions available to assist young people in preventing and/or exiting homelessness; however, there remain significant system gaps in service that we propose to fill through the HUD Demonstration project. The following recommendations have been thoroughly discussed through the community Youth Engagement Team Initiative, the Operations Workgroup meetings through the Greater New Haven CAN, and the youth expertise and systemic knowledge of the Youth Workgroup. By closing these systemic gaps, we will ensure a streamlined screening and assessment system; that youth can be linked to the economic interventions currently in place with regards to employment; and safe housing opportunities are expanded to protect them from the streets.

This concept paper outlines the ways we plan to utilize existing resources in the community, pending attempts to increase housing resources in the area, and the staffing roles that will aid in the coordination of this new subsystem with the local CAN.

A Variety of Housing Options: The most highly-rated resource our region has identified as the leading priority is an increase in diverse housing options for young people experiencing homelessness. There are currently 8 set-aside rapid rehousing beds for youth available in the New Haven area through The Connection, 7 set-aside units of permanent supportive housing for former systems youth aging out of foster care through a collaboration between DCF and DMHAS at New Reach, and a variety of youth programs through Youth Continuum that can house about 40 young people 18-25 at any given time through permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, emergency services and a transitional living program. This is not an adequate supply of housing to service the young people coming through the current 2-1-1 system in Greater New Haven, which at the last Youth Count in January 2016 estimated 769 homeless and housing unstable youth in the region.

According to the latest shelter waitlist data from the Greater New Haven CAN spanning January 1-June 29 2017, it appears that many youth (44% of individuals and 58% of youth head-of-household CAN appointment attendees in the last fiscal year) are added to shelter waitlist, unable to be diverted. We will need increased efforts put forth to tackling shelter waitlists, including examining other options that may exceed the capacity of existing emergency shelter resources. This may include the concept of Host Homes, and/or development of youth-specific shelter beds. Local youth-serving agencies are continually seeking additional funding options that would allow them to increase their capacity to serve more young people in a variety of youth-friendly settings, but those resources are rarely available, and even more rarely are the available resources focused on the unique needs of homeless youth.

Flexible Funds: In addition to stable housing options, both emergency and longer-term, there need to be flexible funds that can be utilized to keep young people safe in their homes of choice. This includes funding for family return projects, food stability, security deposit assistance, public transportation to and from employment and safe housing, car repair, moving and storage, and furniture. Diversion funds would be maintained and utilized within the region and prioritized upon need and collaborative intervention through the young person working with the Greater New Haven systems.

CAN Staffing, Supervision, and Training: To best assess and service the needs of the Greater New Haven area, there need to be creative, dedicated staff trained in Motivational Interviewing, Positive Youth Development, Trauma-Informed Care, and Relational Dialogue. These skills will allow staff to build rapport quickly with young people attending CAN appointments and accurately field information that will inform the most appropriate intervention. These Youth Navigator staff positions (2) would be

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funded through this demonstration project and would conduct eligibility assessments and diversion screenings throughout the Greater New Haven area, with the ability to travel and multiple drop-in locations in the area to ensure accessibility. These staff would need unified programmatic supervision and ongoing training to ensure quality services are provided and any noted changes in population, demographic, or trends. Having specific personnel completing the assessments and screenings will not only build community familiarity but will also aid in the diversion planning that may take place over time, ensuring that youth are building connections with trusting staff that they can come back to for guidance. These staff will need thorough training in diversion, mediation, and knowledgeable on the resources in the community to help housing unstable young people navigate the variety of options they may be eligible for.

A third staff position is proposed that would report to the CAN and provide operations oversight regarding youth systems, as well as supervising the service provision and wait list management that the youth navigators would provide. The oversight position would need to be specialized in more programmatic and clinical skills given the nature of youth diversion, mediation, and assessment given best practices. This leadership position would manage any reporting required to HUD and facilitate the various community meetings the regional system would need; as this is a pilot project, we will need to ensure we are tracking details to demonstrate our systems effectiveness and this quality assurance will need to be overseen by a dedicated staff to ensure outcomes. This position would also cultivate community resources on an ongoing basis to ensure the most current protocols and criteria for said resources is documented so that referrals are current, preventing the youth from experiencing frustration within the system and decreasing their engagement. This position would be held accountable to the CAN and remain flexible to meet the demands of the community as the youth system is underway, while also ensuring that youth navigators are employing trauma informed services and are making appropriate diversion calls that best serve youth need.

Retooling the accessibility of 211/CAN Entry System: As youth leadership has identified that social media is the preferred method of communication for young people to gain information, the Greater New Haven CAN system would need to have an increased social media presence, marketing 2-1-1; drop-in center services; potential diversion routes (employment programs, helpful tips re: DSS) and demystifying the 2-1-1 process. This social media information dissemination might also dilute the demand on 2-1-1 and CAN assessments, as it would be more resource-driven and allow individual providers the opportunity to connect with youth as well as allow youth ownership to take charge on proposed resources in the community. This youth oversight role would be able to maintain the marketing of the 2-1-1 system and tweak it according to influx of navigator-informed need. For example, while there are an estimated 769 homeless and housing unstable young people in Greater New Haven according to the January 2017 Youth Count, only 105 of those youths have contacted 2-1-1 for services and received a CAN appointment since January 1, 2017. We know that we need to diversify and lower the barrier to systems to ensure best practice in service provision. While the 2-1-1 system will be in place, youth should only have to talk to one system should they walk in for services. Youth Navigators will ensure that 2-1-1 is alerted to youth who have walked into services while alleviating the additional burden and barrier of calling for a prescreen.

The “Youth Systems Oversight” role and Youth Navigator roles would play a hand additionally in ensuring the following, through the support of the Greater New Haven YETI:

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Increased Coordination with Employment Providers: Economic considerations will need to be included heavily, as employment is often a key factor in diversion and a crucial part of exiting homelessness. ConnCat and Job Corps will be utilized as frequent referrals, and we have already identified single points of contact to ensure smooth referring. Additionally, American Job Center is developing a specialized youth employment program, and STRIVE, WIOA, and New Haven Works will be recruited to ensure youth have access to the economic supports in their region. These programs will be utilized at the front-end of diversion as well as referrals for when young people access shelter, so they can gain the skills and career training needed to move themselves out of poverty. Job Corps will also be utilized for eligible young people for combined housing and job training as a diversion effort against shelter. Relationships will continue to be fostered with these programs to ensure that young people are aware of the protocols to enroll and that there is a low barrier to accessing these systems.

Increased Coordination with Education Systems: Education is a predictor of future economic success, and young people whom have not achieved their high school diploma or GED face difficult prospects in the job market. There will be coordinated efforts with McKinney-Vento Liaisons and the Board of Education to identify housing unstable youth early, before drop-out, and to reenroll young people into education programs of their choice that will help them obtain high school completion certificates. Local Community Colleges will need to be outreached as well to ensure that the programs designed for low-income youth and families are utilized to obtain certificates and training as well as higher-education courses.

Increased Coordination with Health/Behavioral Health Providers: In reviewing the demographics of services being provided to 18-24-year old youth in the Greater New Haven area, we are noticing a trend around an increased number young parents accessing services. Drop-in centers in the area might consider a sex education component and build collaboration with community health centers emphasized to ensure access to mental and physical health care as well as reproductive health options as these health outcomes affect youth level of functioning. We will also continue to build relationships, formal or otherwise, with substance use treatment facilities and emergency care centers to ensure that access to services are clear, which will support housing maintenance and employment stability by proxy. Coordination efforts will need to be in place to ensure that youth in Greater New Haven know where there are resources available to them; The Greater New Haven YETI will be a driving force in ensuring that the agencies providing services to youth are working in coordination with the GNH CAN.

Summarizing Ongoing Needs Assessment: Strong, skilled staffing, diversion funds, transportation funds and approved housing are the main, easily identified funding needs for the Greater New Haven area.

There is a commitment to the ongoing assessment of services and community needs that will be managed through constant improvement and accountability to the Greater New Haven CAN and the trends that are observed as the project goes on. Community partners involved in referring homeless or housing unstable young people will be invited to join YETI and/or ongoing Youth Workgroup meetings to discuss trends, community conferencing, and feedback on a quarterly basis. The Greater New Haven CAN Youth Workgroup will host those meetings as the navigator of that feedback loop, and the Youth Workgroup leadership will also work collaboratively with the State to ensure that collaborative idea sharing and best practices are continually employed and considered for the region. The Greater New Haven CAN has a commitment to action in resolving youth homelessness and will continue to explore funding opportunities that will enhance and expand a youth-friendly system.