YOUTH VOICES TO THE FRONT

A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF
YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS

IN MANCHESTER NH

DISCLAIMER

The substance and findings of this work are dedicated to the public. Matthew Aronson Consulting is solely responsible for the accuracy of the opinions, statements, and interpretations contained in this publication and these do not necessarily reflect the views of the Manchester CoC or any of its partners.

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Manchester CONTINUUM OF CARE

YOUTH SUCCESS PROJECT • EST. 2020

Matthew Aronson Consulting
The Goal is to End Youth Homelessness

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On any given night, at least 30 Youth and Young Adults (YYA) live on the streets of Manchester, NH, in emergency shelters, or transitional housing programs (HUD Exchange, 2020) and up to 1,500 YYA may experience some kind of homelessness over the course of a year (Morton, 2018; Census, 2021). They find themselves without a stable place to live because home isn't safe, isn't supportive, or doesn't exist.

ASSESSING OUR NEED

Between July 2021 and January 2022 Waypoint and Matthew Aronson Consulting assessed the system and individual needs of YYA experiencing homelessness in Manchester. We engaged community members, service partners, and YYA via interviews, focus groups, and surveys focused on homelessness prevention and intervention. We investigated the experiences of YYA under 18, and between 18 and 24 (parenting and unaccompanied) and considered issues of race,

ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity to understand YYA needs related to stable housing, education, employment, health and wellbeing, and permanent connections.

This report identifies seven key findings and recommends three next steps for the Manchester Continuum of Care (CoC) to strengthen their YYA homelessness response.

KEY FINDINGS

1. As many as 1,500 YYA may experience some form of homelessness over the course of a year, although many go unseen.

Using national averages suggest that as many as 1,500 YYA experience some form of homelessness annually in the Manchester CoC. Other more limited counts offer floor estimates. Specifically:

- The Manchester CoC annual Point-in-Time (PIT) count identified 30 YYA in 2020 (HUD Exchange, 2020)
- The Calendar Year (CY) 2020 HMIS service-based count included 435 YYA sleeping in emergency shelter, the street, other places not meant for human habitation, and both transitional and permanent housing, as well as those accessing services only (HMIS, 2021)
- The Manchester School District independently identified 100 "unaccompanied" students experiencing homelessness during School Year (SY) 2019-2020.

2. Homelessness affects vulnerable and minority populations disproportionately.

In Manchester, Black YYA, including refugee populations, are three times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population. Latino/a/x YYA are two times more likely, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ+) YYA are two times more likely (HUD Exchange, 2020; HMIS, 2020; Census, 2021). But system stakeholders demonstrate low awareness of these disparities. Very few identify racial equity as a significant factor explaining homelessness or a barrier preventing YYA from thriving, and many programs do not collect data on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. We know little about how the refugee system and YYA homelessness affect each other in Manchester and there is little existing information collection on the impacts of systemic racism, homophobia, and transphobia, despite anecdotal evidence that they are having significant negative impacts on YYA.

3. Manchester needs active facilitation of a structured collaborative network of resources.

Manchester lacks the consistent, coherent, community-level collaboration to end YYA homelessness. This prevents the community from sustaining community-wide initiatives that engage a diverse set of partners, efficiently coordinate resources, and prioritize system goals over program goals. Past systems change efforts that had initial success lacked the structure or support to continue because they relied on a single person, a temporary source of funding, or some other time or capacity limited factor.

Community stakeholders are proud of their individual and organizational partners and have deep relationships with colleagues and long histories of one on one collaboration. But these are not enough to bring system wide collaboration and change. There is a strong desire from partners for a dedicated lead to build a collaborative effort that is staffed, resourced, trusted, and well-facilitated.

4. Need for flexible, on-demand resources, including those that address gaps in housing, mental health, basic needs, and guidance.

Manchester providers are not equipped with the resources necessary to meet the urgent and specific needs of YYA. Some can only use their budgets for limited purposes that do not always align with YYA needs. The lack of coordination limits their ability to refer YYA or access resources outside of their organization or agency. When resources are available, they may have limited operating hours, real or perceived eligibility restrictions, limited capacity, or barriers related to physical access. Flexible, on-demand resources available throughout the system would ensure that YYA are able to meet their crisis needs in a timely and effective way, particularly those for housing, mental health, basic needs, and guidance.

5. YYA have tremendous value to add to their own path and to the community, but their voices are largely absent from decision making.

YYA have a myriad of traits, skills, and talents to offer efforts to prevent and end YYA homelessness. They understand homelessness and mainstream systems more accurately than adult experts, and yet, community stakeholders fall short in offering them opportunities to authentically participate in community decision-making. The community must do better and the Youth Success Project is a bright exception. Members hold prominent positions on the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program's Advisory and Leadership committees and they have pushed community stakeholders to envision a new kind of YYA partnership that, if implemented, will increase opportunities for YYA decision-making, fund high levels of support, center YYA development, recruit a broad range of YYA, and build awareness about the power and importance of YYA in this work.

6. Prevention, identification, and early intervention are under-resourced but necessary to make progress.

The community needs to invest in prevention, identification and early intervention strategies that prevent or quickly resolve homelessness. This includes engaging YYA in middle school and high school before they have extensive histories of surviving homelessness without robust community support. Current identification methods involve self-identification, word of mouth, or luck, but partners envision methods that are proactive and standardized. Early intervention strategies must include and move beyond YYA-specific shelter, address the cliffs YYA face when turning 18 or aging out of systems, and disrupt family disruption that results from poverty, incarceration, and unsteady reunifications. These strategies must also incorporate grassroots and community-based organizations as part of a prevention and early intervention "ecosystem."

7. Low public awareness, stigma, and ideology suppress the community response.

Stakeholders indicated low public awareness of YYA homelessness, high public stigma towards YYA experiencing homelessness, and unhelpful public ideologies regarding deservedness, delinquency, and success. They believe political leadership is disconnected from the reality they experience, with little understanding of who the YYA are, what they are experiencing, the system consequences of their homelessness, and the impact policy has on their ability to thrive.

Stakeholders want their neighbors to understand that these YYA matter. They exhibit incredible strengths, have the ability to contribute to the success of the City, and do not fit stereotypes. This may require talking in terms of return on investment or speaking to self-interest, but stakeholders mostly want people in power to talk with them, walk a day in their shoes, and see them and treat them as human.

NEXT STEPS

1. Hire or identify capacity for full-time YYA homelessness system leadership.

This full-time staff person should have the experience, talents, and energy to build relationships, facilitate meetings, develop long-term strategy, and project manage. They must have the trust of the community to be a fair arbiter of the planning, management, and continuous improvement processes. They need the capacity to dedicate their focus to the YYA homelessness response.

2. Leverage this CNA in developing the YHDP Coordinated Community Plan.

The community is in the midst of a transformational YHDP community planning process. Data should be central to it and used to develop and interrogate the proposed goals, objectives, and actions steps identified as necessary to prevent and end YYA homelessness.

3. Commit to bolstering YYA partnership among system stakeholders.

The Youth Success Project needs the community's financial, technical, and relational support to pursue their own agenda, support member development, and sit in positions of power on formal community committees and boards. The community also needs training in YYA partnership and adultism, as well as the support to changing power structures within programs and across system.

"COME LIVE A DAY IN MY SHOES"

-YYA WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

This report assesses the needs of youth and young adults (YYA) experiencing homelessness and evaluates the system that is supposed to support their successful transition to safe and stable independence.

OVERVIEW

It is the first step in an effort to develop a coordinated community response for the Manchester Continuum of Care (CoC)[1] and is part of a statewide effort to prevent and end YYA homelessness in New Hampshire. Waypoint NH, the largest YYA homelessness agency and lead agency in the CoC's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP)[2], is leading this effort and has worked closely with Matthew Aronson Consulting to design and implement a process that identified the best available data and incorporated community voice, including the voices of YYA.

DEFINITION OF "YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS"

This assessment uses a broad definition of YYA homelessness that is inclusive of the homelessness definitions established by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, and includes both the "homeless" and "at-risk of homelessness" definitions established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)[3].

» The assessment reviewed data and experiences concerning YYA sleeping on the streets, in shelters, and transitional housing programs, and those fleeing violent or potentially violent living arrangements.

» This includes YYA sleeping on couches, in temporary living situations with no expectation of stability, and exiting state systems (e.g., child welfare, juvenile justice, adult incarceration, mental health).

This scope is in line with the requirements of YHDP and national evidence regarding YYA pathways (HUD Exchange, 2020a; Samuels, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This report describes seven key findings and three recommended next steps that will be important to the design and implementation of a coordinated community response, a central requirement of Manchester's participation in YHDP.

• **We used quantitative and qualitative data collection** methods from primary and secondary data sources to determine our key findings and recommended next steps.

• **We conducted interviews, focus groups, and surveys** with key stakeholders.

• **We analyzed data** from well-respected local, state, and national sources.

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1. The CoC is responsible to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for their community's response to prevent and end homelessness and must include broad community representation, including public and private entities, and persons with lived experience of homelessness. https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/

2. YHDP is an innovative community planning and implementation grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development designed to help communities prevent and end YYA homelessness. For more information, see: https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/yhdp/

3. For a comparison of federal "Homeless" definitions, see: https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Federal-Definitions-of-Youth-Homelessness.pdf.

For HUD's "At-Risk" definition, see: https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/1975/criteria-for-definition-of-at-risk-of-homelessness/

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Our quantitative analysis focused on the prevalence and characteristics of YYA homelessness in Manchester and the resources available to help them meet their needs. We used local YYA homelessness data whenever possible, and state and national data, regarding YYA homelessness and YYA in general, to provide reasonable estimates as needed.

Our analysis relied on:

- Manchester CoC HMIS[4] data for Calendar Year (CY) 2020
- Manchester CoC PIT[5] data for CY 2020
- McKinney Vento Homeless data from the Manchester School District for School Year 2018-2019
- Data provided by Waypoint (e.g., Manchester CoC Housing Inventory Chart[6])

- Voices of Youth Count Initiative
- Data from several local and state agencies
- YYA-serving programs
- Other systems of care and national surveys

A full reference list is included in the References section of this document.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

YYA Focus Groups

The team conducted three focus groups with a total of 15 YYA participants between October and November 2021.

We used a hybrid virtual-in person approach for each focus group, with the lead facilitator over Zoom and a second facilitator on-site with all YYA participants helping to coordinate activities and address local challenges.

Facilitators also used a two-method approach for information gathering:

1. **Small group work on flip chart** paper followed by facilitated large group reflection on YYA strengths, needs, and barriers, and the systems, places, and people with which YYA interact

2. **Open discussion** to identify what needs to change about the homelessness system in Manchester and what older adults in power need to know about YYA homelessness

Sessions lasted 1.5 hours including a brief introduction and conclusion (see Source Material).

Non-YYA Focus Groups

The team conducted three focus groups with a total of 13 non-YYA participants between October and November 2021.

Facilitators conducted all sessions over Zoom and Mural using a two-method approach:

1. **Individual work on virtual sticky notes** to identify YYA needs, strengths, and barriers, and systems, places, and people with which YYA interact, followed by facilitated group reflection after each subtopic to fill in gaps.

2. **Open discussion** to identify the ways in which participants and their organizations interact with YYA homelessness, the way they interact with the homelessness and services systems, and the biggest challenges and most important solutions that they would prioritize for the CoC.

Sessions lasted 1.5 hours including a brief introduction and conclusion (see Source Material).

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4. HMIS: Homeless Management Information System is a computerized data collection tool designed to capture client-level information over time on the characteristics and service needs of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness.

5. Point-in-Time (PIT) counts are conducted annually on a single night during the last week of January and serve as a longitudinally-tracked baseline estimate for the number of people sleeping on the streets, in places not meant for human habitation, emergency shelters, and transitional housing programs.

6. Chapin Hall has produced a useful toolkit that provides more information on the count and why it is generally considered by the field to be a minimum count, specifically for youth and young adults:
http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Voices-of-Youth-Count-Toolkit-2018-FINAL.pdf
Housing Inventory Chart (HIC) is a data set required annually for participation in HUD homelessness programs that includes all of the homelessness-specific housing available in the CoC, regardless of funding source.

Key Informant Interviews

The team conducted 13 interviews between September and October 2021 using a standard format designed for 30-minute phone calls.

Key Informants included community leaders who run or have run organizations, agencies, or efforts related to YYA, homelessness, or general systems change. All 13 calls were conducted using Zoom.

The interviews focused on the following four areas (see Source Material):

- **Understanding the person's role** related to YYA homelessness.
- **Learning from their experience** with similar system change efforts.
- **Identifying system partners** and insight into community relationships.
- **Learning their top priorities** regarding challenges and solutions for an end to YYA homelessness.

Surveys

MAC developed and broadly distributed a 29-question survey (see Source Material).

Our team designed it to fill gaps in our understanding of the YYA homelessness system and provide an opportunity for system partners to prioritize a set of needs and solutions. 31 community stakeholders from a diverse set of professional backgrounds opened and completed at least half of the survey questions. 21 stakeholders completed the survey.

The survey was open for four weeks and covered the following topics:

- Respondent organization details
- LGBTQ+ data collection and services
- YYA needs and risk factors
- Systems strengths and weaknesses
- YYA partnership and "Moving forward together"

Co-interpretive Meeting

MAC presented preliminary findings for this CNA at a YHDP Advisory Committee meeting in January, 2022.

It included a diverse array of community stakeholders:

- YYA
- Providers
- Local agency representatives
- State agency representatives

Participants provided feedback in the meeting and submitted worksheets after the meeting that identified gaps in data interpretation or offered additional insights.

> "HAVING SOMEONE TO TALK TO WHILE GOING THROUGH HARD STUFF MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE."
>
> -YYA WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

As many as 1,500 YYA may experience some form of homelessness over the course of a year, although many go unseen.

Based on national estimates there may be as many as 1,500 YYA in Manchester who experience some form of homelessness during the course of the year.

Local data sources, specifically the 2020 HUD PIT, CY 2020 Manchester HMIS, and the Manchester school district, show lower estimates. These sources target specific populations at specific times and, taken together, can help us understand the broader picture of YYA homelessness in the community.

National YYA homelessness expereince (Morton,2018)
10% age 18-24
3.3% under 18
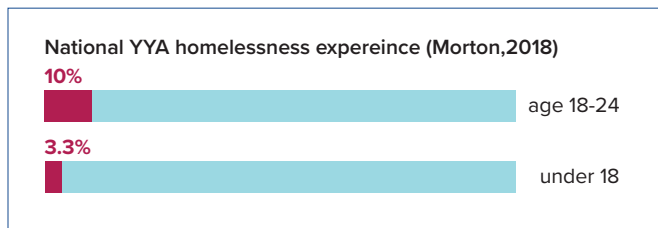
"Nationally, 10% of YYA age 18-24 and 3.3% of YYA under 18 experience homelessness over the course of a year, including YYA who couch-surf while lacking a safe and stable alternative living arrangement" (Morton, 2018)[7]. Using annual population estimates for Manchester, these data offer an upward limit of YYA experiencing homelessness over the course of a year as high as 1,497, or about 1,500 YYA (Census, 2021). It includes YYA with "low" needs who only need services to prevent or end the experience of homelessness, YYA who need some housing and services, and "high-need" YYA who need more significant housing and services interventions.

During the January 2020 HUD PIT count, Manchester CoC partners identified 30 YYA (46 if you count the

children of parenting YYA) on the streets, in emergency shelters, or in transitional housing programs for people experiencing homelessness (HUD Exchange, 2020). However, PIT counting methods only capture a portion of the total number of YYA experiencing homelessness. PIT data do not include:

- YYA fleeing domestic violence, commercial sexual exploitation, or other forms of physical and psychological abuse.
- YYA who are couch-surfing, YYA who are doubled-up, or those who do not want to be, or cannot be, identified by volunteers during the count.

CoC's also conduct PIT counts in January, the coldest month in NH[8], when YYA are most likely to convince acquaintances, friends, or family to let them stay temporarily in a home, make significant personal sacrifices to stay warm, or stay well covered and therefore hidden.

In CY 2020, the Manchester HMIS, which captures cumulative homelessness system data, included 345 unique YYA in 338 YYA-led households with 90 young children, for a total of 435 persons (HMIS, 2021). These YYA accessed community shelters, two year transitional housing, and longer-term permanent housing programs, and represent the population for which we have the most complete data. They all completed comprehensive intake assessments using largely standardized data elements, and many completed exit assessments or are still participating in programs. But HMIS counts only capture YYA who interact with homelessness resources and are therefore constrained by the current system's

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7. Because their methodology combined multiple strategies (national household surveys, YYA-specific PIT counts, and long form interviews with YYA) across diverse geographies and levels of urbanicity (including rural and urban New England communities), and included a broad range of homelessness experiences, we can understand this estimate as the most thorough assessment of the prevalence of all homelessness experiences among YYA in a given community. (Morton, 2017)

8. https://www.weather-atlas.com/en/new-hampshire-usa-weather-january#climate_text_1

9. YRBS is administered in 9-12 grades. 4104 students were enrolled in grades 9-12 in Manchester in SY 21-22, 16% of which would estimate that 657 experienced some form of homelessness over the course of the year. https://www.publicschoolreview.com/new-hampshire/manchester-school-district/3304590-school-district/high

limitations. Homelessness systems are generally designed to target older individuals, and so HMIS (and PIT) numbers may be biased towards older YYA. They are likely places of last resort for YYA who may have already exhausted their non-system resources, and so HMIS skews towards those YYA who have no other options. Homelessness programs often have restrictive eligibility criteria for being served, further skewing the data toward more visible YYA perceived as "high need."

The Manchester School District identified 100 students experiencing homelessness in SY 19-20 who did not have a parent or guardian (McKinney-Vento 2019-2020). Although the number is smaller than in HMIS, this figure uses a broader definition that includes couch-surfing and being doubled-up. The difference can in part be explained by age, where the school based count targets a younger population who may not have as much time to experience more visible forms of homelessness. However the school based counts have additional limitations. Most significantly, they require students to self-report to a homelessness liaison or counselor, which our stakeholders suggest likely result in an undercount. Even the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, in which over 16% of all students reported experiencing some form of homelessness in 2019 (YRBS, 2019) likely suffers from the same self-reporting bias.

Based on our understanding of the data limitations, we can understand our formal counts, identifying between 30 and 657 YYA, as data floors from which we can set our minimum resource requirements. These YYA likely have a variety of needs, but are also likely to be among the most vulnerable who have the fewest non-system resources, feel as though they are at the greatest risk, and may be the most visible. We should therefore proactively design solutions to meet their specific needs, including investing resources for those YYA who likely have a high level of service and supportive housing needs.

For the rest of our YYA, national studies suggest that the majority experience homelessness briefly. Research also shows that YYA are more likely to experience episodic homelessness than chronic homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). YYA are more likely to couchsurf and double up than they are to be on the streets or in a shelter, and they frequently bounce between different living situations, and experience housing instability and stabilization in a non-linear fashion (Morton, 2018; Samuels, 2019).

As one stakeholder put it bluntly, "kids that are couchsurfing...you know, we have plenty of them." Another similarly reminded us "that youth homelessness often looks different than what we imagine homelessness to look like—sleeping at a friends, on couches, in a car."

This suggests that for many of the 1500 YYA, a proactive, flexible, and light touch response might be enough to offer stability. While not nearly as visible as street homelessness, these experiences of homelessness have significant long-term consequences on education, employment, health, and well-being. Additionally, each day of homelessness may increase their chance of future homelessness by 2% (Morton, 2018a).

PIT counting, cumulative annual service counts, and school-based self-reporting, are not sufficient to produce an accurate number of YYA experiencing homelessness or the services that they need. The community should therefore consider more robust identification methods (e.g., universal in school screening for housing stability) that address the limitations associated with self-reporting, service-based, seasonal, and highly targeted counts. Improving capacity to fully identify and serve all YYA experiencing homelessness will require significant work. We therefore recognize the imperative to improve services for the YYA who have already been identified while building toward a better identification and assessment regime.

"YOUTH HOMELESSNESS OFTEN LOOKS DIFFERENT THAN WHAT WE IMAGINE HOMELESSNESS TO LOOK LIKE–SLEEPING AT A FRIENDS, ON COUCHES, IN A CAR"

-NON-YYA STAKEHOLDER

Homelessness affects vulnerable and minority populations disproportionately.

Over the past several years, equity has emerged as a central component of the national fight to prevent and end YYA homelessness[10]. There is growing national consensus that achieving that goal requires addressing homelessness among young Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), including Latino/a/x YYA, and LGBTQ+ YYA.

YYA HMIS Rates Compared to General Population Rates
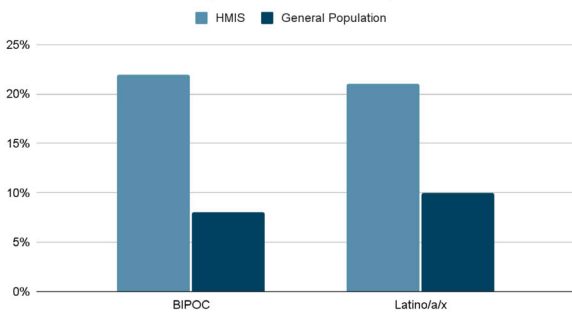
Data from multiple systems validate this assumption for Manchester; however, stakeholders vary in their level of awareness of disproportionality and its importance for preventing and ending YYA homelessness.

YYA HMIS Rates by Race and Household Type
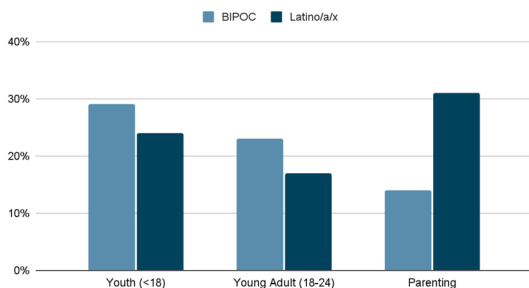
The proportion of BIPOC and Latinx YYA in HMIS[11] is in great disproportion to the percentage of Black

and Latinx persons among the general population of Manchester, with a difference of 14% and 11% respectively (HMIS, 2021, Census, 2022). That disproportionality is not evenly distributed among age groups and household types. For example, 29% of youth under 18 in HMIS are BIPOC and 14% of parenting YYA are BIPOC. For Latinx YYA, it is 31% for parenting YYA and 17% for non-parenting young adults between 18 and 24.

Several factors may explain the observed racial and ethnic disparity in HMIS data including poverty, the composition of available resources, resource design, cultural and linguistic competency, and differential access to services due to skin color or language proficiency. Poverty rates among Black and Latinx residents present a potentially compelling story: 30% of Black and 24% of Latinx persons in Manchester (all ages) live below 100% of the poverty level (Census, 2022). But income alone does not provide the full picture.

Most persons who live near or below the poverty level do not experience homelessness, and we know that some YYA experiencing homelessness in our systems do not come from poor households. Our needs assessment did not identify data on the specific reasons why YYA left home, which if collected in the future, might shed better light on these disparities. Similarly, our analysis did not focus on structural racism and historic systems of oppression, including how they present at different programs for different subpopulations (e.g., Black Parenting YYA, Black Trans YYA, Latino YYA), that impact a variety of outcomes for BIPOC YYA. Analyses of national homelessness data have been able to control for additional variables, including income, and found that Black and Latinx YYA were still at higher risk

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10. Equity for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ YYA has been elevated as a key application and evaluation component in HUD's CoC and YHDP programs, is the focus of briefs from Chapin Hall, has been regularly highlighted by the NAEH, and is a core component of the AWHA outcomes measurements and grand challenge to end YYA homelessness.

11. Data in HMIS are captured separately for "race" and "ethnicity." In this case, "ethnicity" is a euphemism for hispanic or latino/a/x origin. Because the data are captured separately, they cannot be easily disaggregated and so the data points for BIPOC and White include both latino/a/x and non-latino/a/x YYA.

for experiencing homelessness with these variables removed (Morton, 2018).

A variable unique to Manchester may be the number of refugees in the city who also identify as BIPOC. According to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the state resettled 1,166 refugees to Manchester between 2012 and 2021 (DHHS, 2022). During that same period across the state, 51% of refugees originated from African countries and 49% from Asian countries (DHHS, 2022a). As one YYA reminded us, "we are a city of refugees" and so may need to pay special attention to the impact of our responses on a community that may be fearful of systems engagement. Unfortunately, there is limited data on the experience of refugees with the homelessness and social service systems in Manchester.

Stakeholders rarely mentioned the experience of BIPOC YYA:

» Only one survey participant identified BIPOC YYA as "at risk of homelessness" (1/23), and no respondents mentioned racism as a factor "contributing most significantly to YYA homelessness in Manchester." Two non-YYA stakeholders identified refugees as both a current and future challenge (expecting to receive refugees fleeing Afghanistan), but without discussing deeper issues associated with racism.

» Only one non-YYA stakeholder named race when discussing the difference he sees between YYA who seem to need support, and those who homelessness housing programs are currently serving: "Most of my clients are white. I don't know if that really reflects those who are struggling in the City, but those are who I deal with."

» One YYA stakeholder referenced the challenges faced by refugee populations, and another discussed community power dynamics that may have implicitly included racial equity, but no YYA directly addressed racism.

Like race and ethnicity, data on gender and sexual orientation among YYA experiencing homelessness is limited. 17 out of 24 organizations represented in our survey do not collect information on sexual orientation or gender identity and their own estimates of the number of LGBTQ+ YYA they serve varied wildly from 0% to 50%. In HMIS, 23% of YYA identify as LGBQ (27%

for youth), although data on sexual orientation was not collected for 57% of system participants. That figure does track national trends, with estimates between 20% and 40%, and so likely reflect a large disparity compared to the general population (4.7% of the general population identify as LGBQ, although young people are most likely to identify as LGBTQ+ (LGBT, 2019)). 1.45% of YYA in our homelessness system identify as Trans (HMIS, 2021) compared to 1% for the general YYA population (Herman, 2017).

National research consistently finds that LGBTQ+ YYA are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Their reasons for leaving home are significantly different, on average, from their cisgender-straight[12] peers, and they experience homelessness more severely, with higher rates of sexual exploitation, violence, and suicidality (DeChants, 2021).

Some stakeholders seemed aware of the higher prevalence and disparate impact of homelessness on LGBTQ+ YYA. Nearly half of survey participants identified LGBTQ+ YYA as "at risk of homelessness" (10/23), and stakeholders acknowledged seeing LGBTQ+ YYA at much higher rates. They report that YYA identify their sexual orientation and gender identity as the reason they are kicked out or running away, saying "they don't feel either safe or supported at home." YYA stakeholders in one focus group discussed homophobia and transphobia, describing being repeatedly denied services and both turned down from and fired from jobs because of their gender expression. "I've been denied plenty of things cuz I'm transgender." "I've been fired for being trans. It's not fun." But most focus groups and interviews, YYA and non-YYA, did not discuss LGBTQ+ YYA, and no survey respondents mentioned homophobia or transphobia as a factor "contributing most significantly to YYA homelessness in Manchester."

It is important to note that most of the non-YYA participants engaged during this needs assessment were White, over age 30, and were not explicitly asked if they identified as LGBTQ+ or as a refugee. Engaging community members who better represent the diversity of the population being served, including BIPOC, refugees, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, would better inform the development of culturally competent programs and policies.

12. The term cisgender denotes or relates to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Manchester needs active facilitation of a structured collaborative network of resources.

Stakeholders consistently felt that a coordinated system to address YYA homelessness was missing, despite describing the people and organizations as "committed" and "dedicated" to the effort. When asked to describe the YYA homelessness system with a word or phase, survey participants used words like "inadequate," "lacking," "under-resourced," "desperate," and "dire."

Stakeholders with leadership roles repeatedly described a lack of system coordination and the coherent, consistent, community level collaboration needed to end YYA homelessness. They described past efforts driven primarily by a single person, a temporary source of funding, or some other time or capacity limited factor; but as soon as the person, funding, or momentum left, the collaborations did not have the structure or support to continue. One informant described an example where "no one stepped up," and the effort "withered on the vine."

Some stakeholders described a system with the capacity to only face the current crisis, and without the ability to maintain focus on a particular issue or get out ahead of the next challenge. They see the current system "chasing crises," through a kind of constant "swapping of problems." Others identified silos between stakeholders from a diverse set of sectors working with YYA at very different touch points: schools, child welfare, criminal justice, workforce development, mental health, and adult, YYA, and family homelessness. They don't necessarily "see themselves" in the same work or know how to contribute to ending YYA homelessness, even though many describe a "strong desire" to work together and overlapping programming.

Stakeholders also explained the difficult role that funding plays, particularly in hindering collaboration between the large, savvy organizations that win large contracts and small grassroots organizations that cannot compete.

Some see this competition as providing a disincentive for partnering in the work, while others point to the "fickle" nature of funding priorities as driving their chasing of crises. Still others see funding restrictions as a "barrier to collaboration" that "clouds our communication." Regardless of the actual effect, the perception may have a negative effect on partners' openness to collaboration with one another.

"HOW DO WE HAVE A VERY SIMPLE PROCESS OF THE WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN AND WHY'S THAT ARE HAPPENING IN MANCHESTER AND THE SERVICES THAT ARE BEING PROVIDED BY THOSE ORGANIZATIONS."

-NON-YYA STAKEHOLDER

Closer to the ground, stakeholders described a resource rich system that is not well coordinated and often requires redundancy and many "hoops to jump though." They explained that organizations don't know about each other's services or how to access them. However, they also described significant overlap in who is working with this population and the consequences of their homelessness, suggesting shared values and an opportunity for collaboration.

In our survey results, for example, a diverse set of respondents overlapped significantly on their shared provision of educational supports, mentoring, outreach, youth leadership development, case management, and peer supports.

A few successful past collaboration efforts may point to key lessons for YYA homelessness:

- One stakeholder detailed the community's positive response to the opiate crisis. When the challenge got bad enough, it "opened our eyes that there was no 'those people,' it was everybody! Everything is connected!"

- Another held up Compass, an initiative of Manchester Proud, as a successful collaboration between the school district and a variety of community partners. In that case, they appear to have used momentum from the COVID crisis, hired a community partner lead for sustained capacity, and built a structure that regularly engaged partners while protecting their time and energy.

Every non-YYA stakeholder identified strong partners, one on one relationships, and organizations with whom they are making connections and helping to serve YYA beyond their organizations.

Survey respondents ranked one on one or group collaboration efforts as the second most common thing that is working in Manchester. Non-YYA Focus Group participants consistently celebrated their "awesome

community partners," and stakeholders are clear that the "people and individual organizations are a huge asset that everyone is proud of." The challenge is that those connections are not enough to bring or sustain the system wide change and coordination that informants say the community needs.

As one stakeholder put it, the community needs "a connector, coordinator...facilitator of the homelessness response;" someone "neutral and well-respected" with the capacity "to do this and keep it going."

A lead community YYA homelessness facilitator can:

» **Address these issues** of capacity and sustainability, while also focusing on medium and long-term challenges rather than the next crisis

» **Engage diverse stakeholders** to see themselves in the work and understand their role in it

» **Facilitate conversations** between large and small partners to address perceived funding barriers

» **Identify real funding barriers**

» **Work towards a goal** that one stakeholder described as "pooled or collaborative funding to support all organizations and all the resources YYA need."

"NEVER STOP TRYING TO HELP PEOPLE WHEN THEY NEED IT."

- YYA WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Need for flexible, on-demand resources, including those that address gaps in Housing, Mental Health, Basic Needs, and Guidance.

Stakeholders described a significant disconnect between the needs of YYA who present for support and the supports that are available for them when they show up. They strongly suggest that the system does not currently have the capacity to respond effectively to YYA homelessness. More specifically, there is a need for a flexible mechanism that can quickly meet YYA where they are and provide targeted resources for housing, mental health, basic needs, and guidance.

Stakeholders described a variety of age, job, and income requirements that prevent YYA from accessing the services that might meet their needs, or continue to meet their needs, if they could stay in the program (e.g., "aging out," maintaining compliance with strict program criteria). As one stakeholder explained, "there are some good services, just very, very specific eligibility and time and monetary limits." Some resources, for example, are only available for YYA who are over 18, while others are only for YYA under 21. Other programs are designed for YYA who the program intake staff identify as "best suited for success." These programs are generally very structured, have high barriers to entry and similarly high barriers to maintaining enrollment or benefits.

Other participants described a challenge related to "double dipping." In these cases, a YYA's participation in one system, regardless of their unmet needs, disqualifies them from receiving support from another system or organization. For example, if a young person is involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, most homelessness system programs cannot serve them "despite the opportunity to provide complementary services." Similar challenges around definitions may prevent YYA from accessing a resource based on whether one system or another considers them to be "homeless." Each federal agency that provides local resources to address YYA homelessness has their own definitions and eligibility

requirements, which can cause significant confusion between partners about who can be served by whom. Stakeholder responses suggest that some partners might not offer support or a referral to some YYA when they might in fact be eligible. At the state level, there is also disagreement regarding who can be "homeless," preventing some minors, for example, from accessing "homelessness" resources.

Time is another barrier to meeting needs. Even when a program can acquire a needed resource or help a YYA obtain it, stakeholders described frustration with not being able to make the connection fast enough. They explained that few places can provide immediate resources with the urgency they need. Some critical supports take days, months, or years to access, depending on the level of bureaucracy or resource availability. The risk is that if we ask YYA to wait, we may lose them: "I can't get it immediately, and then, if they have to wait, or they need to leave a voicemail, they could be lost for a number of reasons: they've relocated, they've gone somewhere else, the cell phone has run out of minutes." As a result, some YYA may learn that they cannot trust the system to support them. As one stakeholder described, "when I was talking about the clients that I see, they are so disenfranchised, they're so distrusting of systems and that anybody is actually going to ever call them back, or get them the thing that they need."

"TAKING IT STEP BY STEP IS EASIER AND MAKES IT EASIER TO SUCCEED."

- YYA WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

YYA stakeholders described cascading consequences when the urgent needs that they present with are not met. A missed meal or shower, transportation or a decent night's sleep, can immediately impact health, employment, education and more. For example, "I can't even take a shower today because Waypoint's not open on time or it's the weekend. And then you're like, oh, I have this appointment, or I have this job interview or something and then you're trying to, like, do all that. You're hectic because you didn't have a place to sleep last night… You can't get to your stuff… Those are a lot of the challenges that I experience everyday."

In response to these challenges, the community needs the capacity to respond to individual YYA needs more rapidly wherever and whenever they present. This will likely require a combination of policy changes, coordination, education, and new, broadly available, and flexible resources. Programs might voluntarily remove barriers to entry or broaden intake criteria, funders might coordinate to remove eligibility requirements, the CoC might offer cross-training with staff from multiple organizations, and the community might create unrestricted cash transfer programs that allow YYA the utmost flexibility in meeting their individual needs.

SPECIFIC RESOURCE GAPS: HOUSING, MENTAL HEALTH, BASIC NEEDS, AND GUIDANCE

Based on our research, we identified four key resource gaps that Manchester should focus on addressing: housing, mental health, basic needs, and guidance.

See Source Material for more detail on our gap analysis and how we landed on these four categories.

HOUSING

There is a stark disconnect between the demand for housing resources and the availability of housing resources in the homelessness system.

While 338 YYA-led households engaged with the homelessness system last year, we identified only 24 beds in programs designed for those YYA. That means many of them will not have access to a housing resource, and others will compete for the remaining 276 beds designed for older adults experiencing homelessness. Unfortunately, the 24 YYA beds are not equally accessible to all YYA who need them. Four are crisis beds, 15 are Transitional Housing (TH), and only five beds are considered "permanent," assuming YYA can pay the rent after the two-year Rapid Rehousing (RRH) subsidy ends. Further complicating access, the crisis beds are only available for youth under 18, nine of the TH beds are for individuals under 21, six of the TH beds are for young parents under 21, and the five RRH beds are for young adults 18-25. This patchwork of YYA beds is confusing for YYA and providers; and non-YYA designated beds are similarly subpopulation specific, further limiting options for YYA.

⚤ × 338 YYA HOUSEHOLDS

4 BEDS FOR CRISIS RESIDENTIAL <18

9 BEDS FOR TRANSITIONAL HOUSING INDIVIDUALS <21

6 BEDS FOR TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PARENTING <21

5 BEDS FOR RAPID REHOUSING 18-25

Market rate apartments are largely out of reach in a county that has seen median rents rise by over 28 percent in just the past five years. YYA residents would need an annual salary of $65,700 to afford an apartment at the median monthly rent ($1,643), roughly 133% of the average renter household income. Finding any unit available for rent can also be a challenge. The vacancy rate was 0.9 percent in 2021 and ranged between 0.9 and 2.3 percent from 2016 to 2020 (NH Housing, 2021).

Stakeholders confirmed these data, describing a "lack of available space" and remarking that "prices are out of control." Another stakeholder exclaimed that "nobody can afford housing around here," let alone YYA. And yet another described the exhaustion of not being able to offer a housing resource, "and that was all I did all day, every day, interview people who needed housing. And I would say sorry, I got nothing for you, all day."

Stakeholders also underscored that YYA need an array of housing options and not just low prices. "It's easy to get stuck on the idea of, oh well, if pricing was more affordable, then everything would be solved. And I just don't think it's that simple." This sometimes meant housing for specific populations, like those under 18. "There are no housing resources for these kids [under 18]," and "most of them are staying with friends," forced to couchsurf and wait until they are 18. It also meant subsidized housing programs that are longer than two years and adopt a housing first strategy. As one stakeholder explained, "before you know it, their time is up and you've really only scratched the surface. And then we're just releasing them back into homelessness because we weren't able to tackle any of the other things."

YYA participants saw the solution with greater clarity:

- They repeatedly asked for "easier housing," with no waitlist, tedious paperwork, eligibility restrictions, other requirements, steps, red tape, etc.

- They want the system to smooth their transitions out of systems of care (i.e. avoid "cliff effects"), include aftercare support while they are still housed, and meet them where they are.

- Others asked for housing that "helps them move on," provides them with "steps to stable living," and "actually get you housed, a GED," and connected to "real resources."

"NOBODY CAN AFFORD HOUSING AROUND HERE"

-NON-YYA STAKEHOLDER

MENTAL HEALTH

Both Non-YYA and YYA focus group participants identified "Mental Health'' as the number one unmet need for YYA experiencing homelessness. However, the concept of mental health appears to mean different things to different people.

Mental Health was occasionally brought up in a clinical context, referring to "mental illness," "trauma," "high need YYA," or "disabilities." More frequently, stakeholders invoked concepts of mental health that appear less formal. Focusing specifically on YYA focus group participants, they were most likely to use terms like, "stress," "shame," "depression," "desperation," "trauma," "sad and alone." Similarly, they described challenges in maintaining "balance (fun and work)," "drive," "faith," "confidence," "hope," "momentum," "motivation," "self-care," "self-worth," and "strength." This distinction suggests a bifurcated mental health response. On the one hand, some YYA appear to need a clinical response, including a formal diagnosis and attendant high level of YYA-specific mental health care. On the other hand, YYA appear to need a non-clinical response that supports their daily mental wellbeing.

Regardless of the level of care needed, stakeholders described the significant consequences associated with this mental health crisis. Non-YYA Focus Group Participants identified mental health trauma as having a major impact on their YYA that can "ripple and ricochet" into other challenges. A YYA similarly described trauma, which they believe is largely ignored, as "the gateway drug." YYA identified an ever present "stress in everyday life" that builds from worrying about "where you're going to get your next meal," where they are going to shower, how they are going to fill out necessary paperwork, shelters "denying," or "am I a crappy adult because I didn't get like this, this, and this done, but it's because I had to figure out the first three things!" Other YYA identified negative mindsets that their peers might fall into that persist. They described an "embarrassment" mindset from constantly being judged, a mindlessness where "you don't know what your next step is, just walking and smiling," and a lack of self-efficacy that comes from "a fear of the unknown," a fear that "their gonna fail or mess up," and seeing "the worst shit—and the kids look at that all day long."

> ## "WE NEED SOMEONE TO REMIND US THAT IT IS OK TO BE A KID."
>
> ### – YYA WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Unfortunately, there are few mental health resources designed for YYA experiencing homelessness in Manchester. Those that are available are described by providers as overburdened and by YYA as impossible to access, with waitlists measured in months and years. Organizations feel as though they lack the training and capacity to support the mental health needs of their YYA but know that the mental health system's long waitlists inflict negative consequences on them. YYA in one focus group competed over who had waited the longest for an appointment (nine months and counting), with one participant describing the system in the following terms: ""Like I call, they put me on [the list]. They drop my name. They put me back on. They drop my name. It's just, it's just an endless waiting game with them sometimes."

There are additional barriers concerning consent for support among minors, particularly for students in the public school system, and many YYA may not present to a supportive adult for mental health support because of the inherent stigma or being afraid of sharing their specific struggles. YYA identified a need for mental health awareness as a community and suggested that mental health may be hard to talk about in the Black community, specifically, leading to additional system inequities.

Despite these challenges, community mental health is seen as a valuable resource. Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester is very well-regarded, although one key informant reminded us that not all YYA will have a good experience with them and so need options.

In general, YYA are looking for a mental health experience that is:

- non-judgmental
- trauma-informed
- timely
- easy to access.

BASIC NEEDS

Community stakeholders described a number of resources and supports that we have grouped into our category of "Basic Needs." They include everything from better internet, car repair funds, clothing, community spaces that are safe, food, phones, and transportation, to safe YYA-specific shelter, and basic life skills, as well as "basic needs" more generally.

Stakeholders made it clear that it is difficult to succeed in adulthood when YYA cannot meet their basic needs. While some needs lead to obvious consequences, like food and hunger, others are not as straightforward. YYA stakeholders reminded us, for example, that the lack of transportation to resources can be a real challenge, particularly medical rides and getting to and from both jobs and interviews. Without these needs met, YYA experience negative cascading and compounding consequences. As one Non-YYA stakeholder explained, "if they don't have [their basic needs met], none of the other stuff really can be focused on."

» There appear to be only a few locations and organizations that offer basic needs support, including outreach, for YYA experiencing homelessness. Waypoint offers the most comprehensive basic needs support, including outreach.

» As the only YYA-member of the Outreach Collaborative, Waypoint meets YYA on the street and in the community, provides emergency basic needs support, information about community resources, and connections to those resources.

» Waypoint's Drop In Youth Resource Center offers an array of basic needs support and connections for YYA, including, food, clothing, laundry, showers, computers, phone access, and connections to Waypoint programming, as well as access to Waypoint's crisis beds for youth under 18.

» Waypoint has also launched a pilot direct cash transfer program that offers unconditional cash to help YYA meet their needs with flexibility, speed, and autonomy.

» Both YYA and non-YYA stakeholders consistently described Waypoint as a leader and key provider in the community, highlighting their "awesome staff" and mentioning that "we'd have a lot more challenges if it wasn't for [Waypoint]."
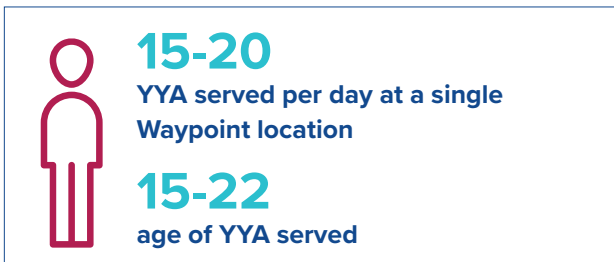
At the same time, despite their current capacity and reputation, Waypoint staff acknowledge that they don't have the resources to do everything that YYA need. Waypoint's resources are not diverse enough or abundant enough to serve all YYA (they serve 15-20 YYA per day, aged 15-22, at a single location), and there will always be YYA who prefer to work with another program or organization. While stakeholders were clear in their praise and appreciation for Waypoint and their staff, the research also makes clear that a solution to YYA homelessness in Manchester requires other organizations to play a greater role.

Outside of Waypoint, there are other important touch points that offer access to basic needs.

» School social workers are on the front lines of meeting the basic needs of students in the Manchester School District (MSD). They have daily access to their YYA, have access to a broad array of resources, including in school referrals, and the MSD Compass initiative offers a platform for comprehensive out of school referrals. However, school staff only have access to YYA in school and even their basic needs capacity has limits. One stakeholder explained, "I can't transport kids anywhere, I can set up transportation for them to get to and from school...but, if they want to do an extracurricular or do something after school, I can't drive them anywhere, and we can't set up transportation for that." She continued, "there's all these things that are external, that I have no control over...there's really nothing I can do for you other than...these things that I have right here in my office."

» 1269 Cafe provides hot meals, showers, clothing, laundry service, short term storage lockers, and onsite support services. Their limitations include that they are faith-based, which may not work for all YYA, and are generally designed for older adults and not YYA.

» FIT similarly offers a broad array of basic needs supports, including a food pantry, clothing shop, and shelter, that are all designed for older adults.

YYA stakeholders expressed tremendous gratitude for the basic needs supports that they have access to, but they are also frustrated with the system's limitations:

• They are frustrated that minors don't qualify for supports and that they lose all support when aging out.

• They are similarly frustrated that programs they rely on do not extend beyond age 22.

Instead, they dream of basic needs simply being met, with flexible programming that offers "automatic access to clothing," "more shelter and lower waitlists," "food," and, "a program that does everything - all of the supports right there."

"PEOPLE IN POWER NEED TO KNOW THAT THIS IS A REAL THING AND JUST BECAUSE WE ARE MINORS DOESN'T MEAN WE DON'T GO THROUGH THINGS THAT WE SHOULDN'T GO THROUGH. IF WE ARE OUT OF THE HOME, THERE IS A REASON. WE SHOULD BE TREATED LIKE ANYONE ELSE OUT THERE BECAUSE WE MATTER TOO."

– YYA WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

GUIDANCE

Non-YYA focus group participants identified connections with a trusting adult as an important support for the beginning of a crisis, during engagement with crisis resources, and for long-term success.

One participant suggested that bringing people together who supported a YYA in the past would help them at the next step and in the next program. They underscored that many YYA lack those connections and feel abandoned or let down by broken relationships. Unfortunately, they also acknowledged that it appears difficult to fundraise for this kind of community programming.

YYA-focus group participants made similar observations. They highlighted that navigating systems and resources, as well as the social and emotional transition to adulthood, is challenging. They don't always know the resources available in the community or how to access them. When they do access them, application and intake can mean 30 pages of complicated forms ("I don't understand half the paperwork that they're giving me"), multiple stops, and more. YYA often look to trusted adults for that support and they are asking for guidance and help navigating within the homelessness and parallel systems as well as in the community.

YYA-focus group participants reflected on specific examples from their own lives where different forms of positive adult guidance made an impact:

- For example, some described positive school experiences: "when I went to school, I needed support with actually staying focused...my advisor and guidance counselor, would help me that way;" "Participating in like different study groups and stuff, different sources of support, different study groups getting support to focus on what you need to do."

- Others described informal family relationships: "I grew up on the streets really. I was raised by everyone I knew, really, when my dad worked;" "Yeah there was always like, a street mom. You always had a house you could go to. That one house on that street."

In the absence of a trusted adult, YYA rely on their peers to navigate their environments, which they describe as leading to both positive and negative outcomes. YYA describe being connected to peers who know how to help them meet their basic needs, understand the "unwritten rules," and find the "different resources that are available." YYA also identified negative consequences associated with these peer resources. One YYA suggested that peers influence at times, "leads you into bad habits," while others acknowledged that two competing fears of being left behind and leaving others behind can lead to negative behaviors. One YYA summed it up with the following: "If you're going downhill, and the people you're hanging around are going down that path, then you're most likely to be destructive and follow that path, instead of if you're in an environment where people are doing good."

> "IF YOU'RE GOING DOWNHILL, AND THE PEOPLE YOU'RE HANGING AROUND ARE GOING DOWN THAT PATH, THEN YOU'RE MOST LIKELY TO BE DESTRUCTIVE AND FOLLOW THAT PATH, INSTEAD OF IF YOU'RE IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE ARE DOING GOOD."
>
> - YYA WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

YYA have tremendous value to add to their own path and to the community, but their voices are largely absent from decision making.

» **YYA stakeholders readily identified their positive attributes, personality traits, skills, and talents, describing themselves as ambitious and athletic, brave and compassionate, dedicated, driven, and effective, experienced and forgiving, hopeful, mature, reliable, resilient, useful, and wise.**

» **They explored how weaknesses turn into strengths and how much a YYA learns from tragic circumstances.**

» **They displayed a high level of self-awareness, discussed the importance of humility during homelessness and the transition to adulthood, and they were often much tougher on themselves and their peers with regard to personal responsibility than are older adults.**

During our research, YYA consistently demonstrated their ability to design and participate in the implementation of solutions to YYA homelessness.

15 unique needs that YYA identified

such as networking, staying focused, peer support, and balance, were missed by older adults.

They also offered unique "magic wand" requests that inform where Manchester should prioritize efforts, including:

• the expansion of Waypoint,

• focusing resources on building YYA self-confidence,

• making sure that all YYA have "someone in their corner,"

• and "automatic access to clothing," among others.

To make sure their other ideas are reflected in the system, YYA participants asked for spaces where "we can actually voice our real opinions," and that are "different—non-judgmental." They appreciated the opportunity during the focus group to "say what we need to," and "speak your mind," and expressed strong interest in continuing to do so.

In general, the field has moved strongly in the direction of authentic YYA partnership and decision-making[13]. The field recognizes YYA strengths, their unique experience with and expertise in our community systems, and the moral imperative to include YYA in the decisions that will affect their lives. The Youth Success Project (YSP), a Youth Action Board comprised of YYA with lived homelessness and housing instability experience who represent Manchester and the State of NH, is a good example of this movement in action. Over the last year, the YSP co-led the City and State's application for and participation in YHDP, conducted its own focus groups, presented findings and insights to decision-making committees, and participated in a variety of other important policy-making forums[14].

Despite the success of the YSP, Manchester stakeholders reported that YYA partnership is almost non-existent in the community or that they were unsure whether or not YYA are being included in community processes and decision-making. Where partnership does exist, it is often described as tokenism[15].

13. For example, HUD's most recent YHDP NOFO included high expectations and requirements for YYA partnership https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/yhdp/

14. For more information on the YSP, visit their website https://www.nhyouthsuccess.com/about

15. Tokenism here refers to purely symbolic inclusion, where no power is shared, and the appearance of partnership is exploited purely for the benefit of those already in power.

When asked to envision what authentic YYA partnership would look like in Manchester, survey respondents dreamed big. Respondents offered many progressive actions that see YYA significantly impacting community decision-making, recommended high levels of support, including payment and mentorship, centered the YAB members' development as critical to success, identified opportunities for recruiting more YYA, and saw them building significant awareness about their work and YYA homelessness.

Encouragingly, Waypoint and others have substantially increased their support of the YSP (which is also required by HUD to access YHDP funding), committing staff capacity and hiring YYA directly as staff. This presents an opportunity to leverage current gains and momentum toward building system wide authentic YYA partnership.

How Frequently Are YYA Involved in Decision-Making
(Survey Responses)

● **5% - Never**

● **33% - Sometimes**

● **62% - Rare/Occasionally**
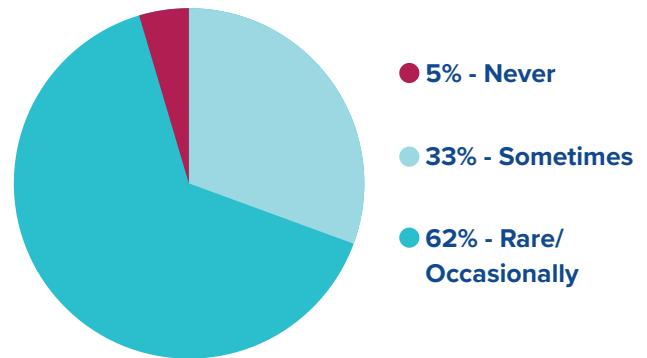
What Would Authentic Partnership Look Like?
(Survey Responses)

ACTION	SUPPORT	DEVELOPMENT
A seat at the table	Allies encouraging involvement	Confidence building
Active and vocal	Appropriate compensation	Education
Active roles	Connecting with allies	YYA helping build capacity
Afterschool groups	Connecting with peers	Skills development
developing plans	Allies involved and helping	Focusing on community building
Defining the problem	build capacity	
Engage youth and adults	Feeling supported	**MORE YYA**
Engagement not window dressing	Holding school board meetings	Student buy-in
Informing policies and activities	at school	Equitable engagement
On every board	Live in staff for shelters	More YYA Involved
Policy change	Mentoring	
Sharing experience	Paid stipends	**AWARENESS**
Youth advisory group	Peer support workers	Changing adult mindsets
YYA working with people in power		Health workers promoting
		Educating each other

Prevention, identification, and early intervention are under-resourced but necessary to make progress.

Non-YYA stakeholders described a system designed to simply react to crises. As one participant put it, "a lot of times, we're just putting a bandaid on something that needs a serious operation." As a result, the system has little capacity to prevent homelessness before it happens, efficiently and comprehensively identify risk and the early onset of a housing crisis, or intervene quickly and effectively when it happens.

Non-YYA stakeholders emphasized that shelter is not prevention, and that focusing primarily on shelter can distract from prevention efforts that seek to keep YYA from needing shelter in the first place. One participant observed that, "I feel like if we build 5 shelters we'll need six, if we build 10 we'll need 12, and that'll always make us feel like, hey, we're making headway, people are warm and safe, which is obviously what we want. But are we really making progress on this issue? Or are we just constantly, you know, putting a bandaid on it?"

Focusing on shelter without addressing prevention also has financial costs on the community. The experience of homelessness managed through emergency response services and shelters can cost many tens of thousands of dollars a year[16], in addition to the lost tax revenue from someone not being workforce ready and in declining health (Foldes, 2015). One participant put it in terms of a return on investment, where it is "economically advantageous to the State of New Hampshire to put more upfront money into these programs, then the return on investment will be better for all the taxpayers".

Family disruption was one of the most commonly described examples of when more upstream prevention might be beneficial. Several non-YYA stakeholders described the slow disintegration of the family due to

poverty. They have observed families moving from their own homes, doubling up with others, and splitting up to stay housed, with an older child often needing to leave on their own. They have worked with YYA who have an incarcerated parent, presenting serious resource and social emotional challenges while the parent is away and potential re-engagement challenges and conflict when the parent returns. They also described the challenges for YYA who are "doing well" in the system and return home from out of home care: "Sometimes the families got used to them not being there…and it's like, you know, we can't live under the same roof and you need to leave." Along each of these pathways, there were likely many opportunities to intervene.

Several YYA stakeholders described the impact of negative family experiences, where YYA were "running away from people who either didn't care about the person or didn't support them for who they were." This appears to have had a particularly traumatic effect on LGBTQ+ YYA who feel like they are showing their real self for the first time and then "being told to leave if you go through with your choice."

They also described a domino effect in their lives when families fall apart. As one YYA put it, "one thing leads to another," while another added, "being born into a broken home leads you to do other things and…that shit doesn't make you want to do better…it made me just like, want to follow my parents and everybody around me, and…I followed the wrong path." YYA stressed that they take responsibility for their actions, but that they also felt "thrown into…their family's choices and actions."

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16. Several studies have developed local estimates for the experience of homelessness, along with a few national studies of specific populations. They generally range between $35,000 and $150,000 depending on the community and the specific population included in the study (e.g., high system users, chronic homeless, all system users). A 2012 Politifact investigation offers a useful survey of the data at the time: https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2012/mar/12/shaun-donovan/hud-secretary-says-homeless-person-costs-taxpayers/

Effectively preventing homelessness requires a comprehensive identification strategy. Current identification practices described by study participants often require YYA to self-identify to an older adult, identification through a friend, a classmate, or family networks, or trained staff to go out into the population to gather information informally. These pathways often mean identifying YYA long after they first experienced a housing crisis or an episode of homelessness, with one key informant noting that we are simply, "not identifying [YYA] at an early age." In response, several non-YYA stakeholders expressed a strong desire for better identification of risk much earlier, to educate front line staff, and identify YYA when they are underaged, staying with family or friends, and still "under the radar."

Several proposed solutions to identification focused on school aged YYA:

- For example, one stakeholder proposed a student-family response team and community schools model[17] to bring better identification and supportive services to YYA in school[18].

- Another stakeholder added that we need to figure out how to identify YYA who are not already in systems, "an algorithm where certain things are happening or not happening, something is triggered, and that person has a warm referral, someone approaches them and offers them assistance."

- They also suggested that a more anonymous or ubiquitous system might avoid a key challenge with self-identification; that students and families are afraid of the consequences of "admitting that there is a problem."

This sentiment was shared by our Non-YYA stakeholders, with one participant advocating that such solutions be implemented early, in elementary, middle, and high schools to "somehow divert those situations before they ever reached that homeless precipice."

"WE NEED A BETTER SYSTEM TO IDENTIFY AND CONNECT YOUTH AND YOUNG PEOPLE THAT ARE AT RISK, EARLIER. ONCE IDENTIFIED WE NEED A SYSTEM DESIGNED WITH WARM HAND OFF, AND CONSISTENT CLEAR SUPPORT."
-NON-YYA STAKEHOLDER

Non-YYA stakeholders began to diagnose the gap in prevention programs supporting YYA experiencing homelessness in Manchester. They believe that grassroots and community-based organizations are responsible for most of the prevention work that happens outside of "systems" and larger homelessness organizations.

Unfortunately, they believe that these organizations struggle to compete for funding and struggle to build connections with larger institutions. "That's one of the biggest barriers...you have some of these bigger organizations and then you have some smaller grassroots organizations that are doing great work, but they might not know how to connect together."

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17. Community schools models generally refer to placing the school at the center of students and their family's lives beyond their traditional education needs. This may include incorporating social services on-site, adding robust before and after school programming, and forming partnerships with a range of community organizations to connect students school lives to their lives outside of the classroom. See the following report, published in 2017 by the Learning Policy Institute for a review of the evidence on this model: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_REPORT.pdf

18. The Upstream Project is the first community schools model in the United States to focus on YYA homelessness – you can learn more about that effort, led by Chapin Hall, here: https://www.chapinhall.org/project/leading-on-youth-homelessness-prevention/

Low public awareness, stigma, and ideology suppress the community response.

Stakeholders believe that the general public has a low understanding of YYA homelessness and that it inhibits the community's ability to imagine, fund, and sustain a coordinated community response, impacting all six previous findings. They identified common stigma and misconceptions about who and why YYA experience homelessness and endemic "help yourself" mentalities as having the biggest impact, most importantly when identified among community members in power.

YYA have come to expect people to be suspicious of them, judge them, and assume they are responsible for or chose to experience homelessness. They described being "scattered" by police and told in public places that "you're not supposed to be here at night." They understand the distinction between them and "the upper class, or whatever you want to call them," and no YYA stakeholder appears to believe that the community has a sympathetic opinion of them or their experience. But YYA stakeholders want people to know that they are hardworking, dedicated, driven, grateful, humble, and "more than their appearance." They reminded us that "anyone could be homeless if you really think about it. It all depends on what you go through," and that "homelessness isn't a choice." They were "good" kids doing the right things and acting in the same way as their peers: "I was on a lot of sports teams. I played soccer, softball, basketball. I did gymnastics. I did all of that. I did all that every day of the week. My dad worked every day of the week and still came home and did all that with us. And I still ended up where I am." And even now, when they have every right to simply focus on their survival, many YYA stakeholders stress the importance of personal responsibility, looking for jobs, and doing their best to play by the rules.

Non-YYA stakeholders believe strongly that these YYA matter, that they are deserving of our support, and do not fit the stereotypes that they see reflected by their community. They acknowledge that YYA have incredible strengths and the ability to contribute significantly to the community if we support them. They are also incredibly frustrated when their programs and systems fail YYA, even when they can see it coming, because the community hasn't armed them with the resources or policies that they know will keep their YYA stable.

"OUR YOUNG PEOPLE MATTER, THEY JUST FREAKIN MATTER. WE NEED TO BE PUTTING THEM FIRST AND WE NEED TO PUT THINGS OUT THERE THAT ARE GOING TO MAKE THEIR LIVES BETTER."

-NON-YYA STAKEHOLDER

Stakeholders indicated that political leadership seems far removed from the reality of YYA homelessness. They have little understanding of YYA and their experiences, the consequences of YYA homelessness on the community, and what impact policy has on YYA's ability to thrive. One stakeholder explained, "my guess is most of the politicians are coming from more privileged and advantaged lifestyles and so it's hard to [understand]." They are missing the opportunity to learn by physically separating themselves and not communicating with YYA or providers. Others believe that ideologies play a role. For example, stakeholders pointed to the state's identity, "live free or die," being tied to independence and inspiring a bias toward personal responsibility for your outcomes (i.e., homelessness must be your fault) and a libertarianism that assumes the community will naturally take care of itself without additional public intervention. "The assumption is that there's groups and there's organizations that are [already] taking care." Some stakeholders believe that mentality is only getting stronger as more recent political polarization pushes people to further extremes.

In response to these challenges, stakeholders were unanimous in their desire for people with decision making power, "the people who sit on councils, our local councils, our local representatives," to come and talk with YYA and system providers.

» YYA were explicit in asking people in power to "talk to me" and "come live a day in my shoes." "Walk a mile in my shoes. Most people don't understand the shit you go through in life. It's like, just put yourself in our shoes for five minutes."

» Non-YYA stakeholders expressed a similar sentiment saying things to the effect of, "until they literally are walking alongside us and in our shoes, they're never going to understand the needs that our young people need."

The idea is that if they "get out of their office, and they come to downtown Manchester, and they see the kids, the youth, the young adults, and kind of get a better sense of what they're dealing with, and not read a news story about the camp outside of City Hall, but actually like talk to the students and talk with the people who are doing the work," then they will finally understand and respond to what is really going on.

Others believe that we need to change the way we talk about YYA homelessness to break through:

• For example, if we talk in terms of ROI, how expensive homelessness is, and how much lost revenue we are wasting, then we can connect with fiscally conservative folks about how it is "economically advantageous to the State of New Hampshire to put more upfront money into these programs" and "better for all the taxpayers."

• Similarly, if we can clearly communicate the evidence-based cause and effect, that "if the city doesn't want all of these problems, these people, then you have to help them," not ignore or "remove" them.

• In addition, creating opportunities for YYA and providers to have decision-making authority, supporting candidates for office with lived or provider experience, and recruiting like-minded foundations, might all have the effect of changing the political landscape.
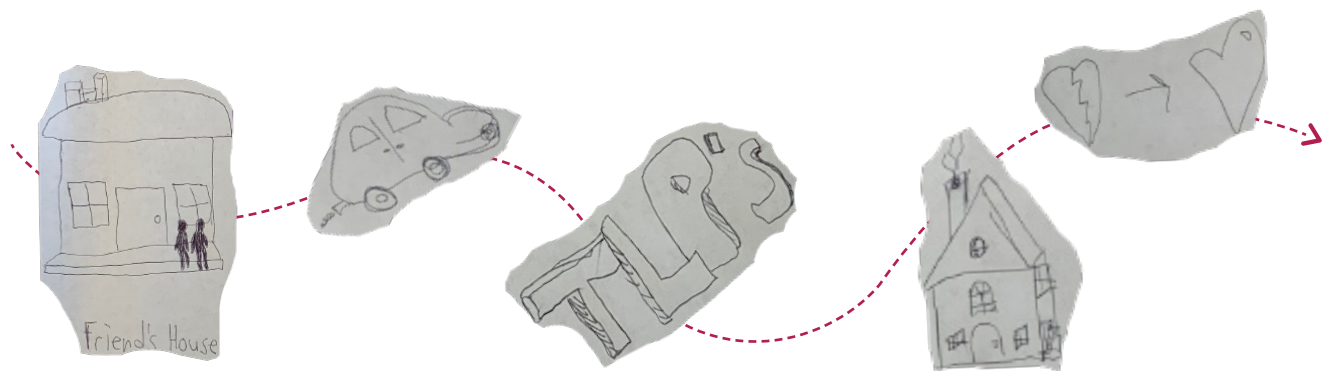
EXPERIENCES OR FEELINGS FOR BEFORE, BEGINNING, MIDDLE & AFTER HOMELESSNESS ILLUSTRATED BY YYA

The seven findings in this report suggest the following next steps:

1. Hire or identify capacity for full-time YYA homelessness system leadership.

We recommend that the community hire a full-time staff person to lead the City's YYA homelessness efforts. The role of this YYA Homelessness Lead should focus on the following:

- Building relationships with and gaining commitments from community partners;

- Facilitating information gathering, brainstorming, and strategic planning conversations with a representative group of stakeholders;

- Managing the community response to ensure that it stays on track and maintains momentum.

To be successful, the YYA Homelessness Lead will need a deep understanding of YYA homelessness, strong project management skills, and a willingness to invest significant time and energy getting to know the community. They will need to be a trusted and neutral partner. Providers and YYA expressed discomfort with those in power and a suspicion that competitiveness might be inhibiting collaboration. We suggest hiring someone who can quickly build trust hosted by an entity that is not a threat to other community partners. They will also need to build strong rapport with the YSP, have experience in authentic YYA partnership, and expertise in building systems that incorporate YYA decision-making.

City government is a natural home for the YYA Homelessness Lead. The City is a trusted neutral partner with built in community accountability mechanisms, and formal relationships with private non-profit, local public, and state public entities. A public agent is close to policy making levers and can work within the system to help partners remove barriers and stand up positive new public programs and regulations.

Communities around the country have used this model to good effect. In New York City, Houston TX, and Springfield MA, homelessness leads have led broad systems transformations through policy making, facilitating, and both public and private fundraising. Funding models for the position have been both public and private. Most communities eventually fund the ongoing role publicly, however, both New York City and Houston launched their dedicated roles with private dollars, with a special advisor to the mayor on loan from or supported by a philanthropic organization. This role might also be funded, in whole or in part, by YHDP or CoC planning funds.

It is critical that the YYA Homelessness Lead has the capacity to focus substantial attention on YYA homelessness. The breadth of stakeholders, range of experiences, and diversity of subpopulations, make YYA homelessness one of the most challenging homelessness populations to coordinate. To do it well, while incorporating authentic YYA partnership, will likely require a full-time position.

2. Leverage this CNA in developing the YHDP Coordinated Community Plan.

The YHDP process allows a community a rare opportunity at transformational change. The funding and national attention offer communities a significant momentum boost that often opens a variety of local and state policy and fundraising opportunities that were previously inaccessible. In order to maximize the community impact, we strongly recommend that the YHDP leads use the data and analysis present here and in the supplementary material we have developed to inform your planning process and the many decisions that you will make during the transition to implementation.

Most directly, this CNA should inform the "Statement of Need" for your coordinated community plan. Often separated into several "Statements," this is a required threshold element for your participation in the YHDP and the strength from which your objectives and action steps will flow. You will use your Statements to interrogate whether your action steps are responsive to your needs, where there are gaps in your response, and why you are prioritizing certain actions steps over others. Using the CNA will offer power to your justifications and ensure that HUD approves your plan.

Using the CNA to complete your plan will help you maintain legitimacy deep into YHDP implementation. As action steps roll out over the course of the project, you will be asked by new partners to explain why a project or initiative is important and should be prioritized. Having that effort explicitly in the plan, or justified by key plan elements, and backed by solid evidence will prove a powerful tool in convincing them to support it.

The CNA can also be a critical part of your continuous quality improvement strategy. This document and the Prevalence and Characteristics Report present a framework that you can regularly update with new data and insights. Adding a brief annual update as an appendix or follow up report, will keep the document relevant and critical information available for continued community decision-making.

ILLUSTRATED BY YYA

3. Commit to bolstering YYA partnership among system stakeholders.

YYA partnership is critical to a community's successful YYA homelessness efforts. YYA have experience with neighborhoods, programs, and systems that older adult allies do not, and they have expert insights that we will rely on to make the most accurate assessments and beneficial decisions. But YYA partnership is hard. It takes continued investment and regular support so that the YYA who participate are successful and their engagements with the community are valuable.

Manchester needs to ensure that the YSP is well supported. They are the backbone of YYA partnership in and will need the funding to ensure that theyhave adequate staff support capable of professional development, logistics, and consistent personal engagement. They will need consistent stipend and salary funding for YSP members at different levels of involvement, technical support for a variety of unique projects, as needed, and relationship building support as they engage a broad range of partners, many of whom may not be trained or experienced in sharing authority or space with YYA.

Most importantly, the community must commit to giving the YSP autonomy. CoCs have many priorities, and as the federal government has increased the importance of YYA partnership in their programs, communities are asking a lot of their Youth Action Boards.

But the YSP will only be as strong as its internally developed identity and its ability to pass on that identity to new members over time. To maintain a strong identity, the YSP needs time, permission, and funding, to pursue its own projects, set its own priorities, and control its agenda. CoC projects are important, and hopefully mutually beneficial; but they cannot be all that the YSP does or it will lose its identity and struggle to maintain membership.

Beyond the YSP, the community needs to invest in the education of community members in authentic YYA partnership and in the structure to include YYA in formal roles of authority within the City and CoC. Many CoCs have dedicated CoC board membership for YYA, and a few have even elected YYA as board co-chairs.

» The CoC should investigate each committee, even those not dedicated to YYA, for opportunities for YYA members.

» YYA can also participate in grant reviews, monitoring visits, and provider feedback and technical assistance sessions.

» YYA can lead or co-lead adultism training, and adult allies can start turning the community conversation from one that asks "why" YYA should be included as partners, to one that asks "how" can we include more YYA as partners in each initiative.

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Source Material: Links to all source material used in this report, including transcripts from qualitative information collection and other information collection materials can be found at the following:

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- nhyouthsuccess.com
- manchester-coc.org/mcoc-meetings