

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN EDUCATION AND HOUSING PARTNERS:

Lessons from Providing Technical Assistance to the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program Grantees, Rounds 1-7 (FY 16-24)
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THIS NCHE PROGRAM PROFILE:



- explores the role of education in the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP); and
- summarizes key lessons learned through technical assistance provided to YHDP communities.

Introduction

In 2021-22, roughly 111,000 of the 1.2 million students experiencing homelessness were unaccompanied, meaning that they were unhoused without a parent or legal guardian (NCHE, 2024). Unaccompanied homelessness can create barriers, making it difficult for students to access and successfully complete education. In 2017, the [National Center for Homeless Education \(NCHE\)](#) began providing technical assistance to communities participating in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). This document is the third in a series of profiles sharing lessons gained from cross-systems collaborations in funded sites to inform partnerships across homeless education programs.

About the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

YHDP is a United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) initiative designed to reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness.¹ The goal of the YHDP is to support selected communities, including rural, suburban, and rural areas across the United States, in the development and implementation of a coordinated community approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness. To date, 110 communities have been funded through a competitive process to carry out this work. Since the 2016 federal fiscal year, HUD has invested more than \$440 million in this initiative (HUD, 2024). The first YHDP communities were announced in January 2017.

YHDP communities must:

- Convene a youth action board (YAB), comprised of youth and young adults who have current or past lived experience of homelessness, to lead YHDP planning and implementation;
- bring together a wide variety of partner systems, including housing, child welfare, education, workforce development, juvenile justice and behavioral health;
- assess the needs of special populations of youth at higher risk of homelessness; and
- create a coordinated community plan (CCP) that assesses the needs of local youth at risk of and experiencing homelessness and describes how the community will use the money from the YHDP grant, along with other sources to address these needs.

The Role of Education in YHDP

As part of their CCPs, YHDP communities must address four core outcomes of youth experiencing homelessness: stable housing, *education and employment* (emphasis added), permanent connections, and well-being.² To support communities in carrying out these requirements, HUD and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) provide communities with dedicated YHDP technical assistance.

¹ Learn more about YHDP by visiting the program page on the HUD Exchange: https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/yhdp.

² See page 7 of [YHDP Foundations and Beyond: Coordinated Community Plan](#).

NCHE technical assistance to YHDP communities has emphasized the importance of education in two ways. First, local educators are systems-level partners working with housing organizations to engage in the coordination of planning, strategies, and services. Second, NCHE technical assistance accentuates education as a youth pathway through which individual youth receive supports for educational access and success tailored to their goals and needs.

NCHE technical assistance offers communities two options for support: (1) cohort technical assistance, which includes monthly large group webinars and discussions with light-touch individual support by request, and (2) intensive individual technical assistance support customized to a community's priorities, including weekly community check-ins, and options for on-site convenings. Fifty-five YHDP communities have participated in intensive education-related technical assistance provided by NCHE.³

Key Lessons Learned

KEEP YOUTH CENTRAL TO EDUCATION WORK

One of the key tenets of YHDP is authentic youth engagement. Each community must have a YAB that has the authority to sign off on the CCP and must approve any projects funded through a local competition. The use of the word **action** rather than **advisory** is intentional. Youth come to the table as equal partners in the work and serve as paid subject matter experts. The program acknowledges that youth bring a unique perspective to the table as individuals who have navigated the system and understand the ways that it is currently functioning. Youth can help identify gaps in services and opportunities for system improvement.

In establishing YABs and other youth partnerships, it is important to include young people who are representative of the population served. For example, if most students you serve are young Black women, but they are not part of your YAB, you may find the goals and strategies implemented do not have the intended impact.

³ For more information about NCHE's YHDP technical assistance, download NCHE's [Incorporating Education into Coordinated Community Responses to Youth and Young Adult Homelessness: Lessons from the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program \(2021\)](#), [NW Michigan and the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program \(2022\)](#), and the [Youth Homelessness Demonstration](#)



"You really want to bring in people that represent your student population that is facing homelessness. In Montana, that meant bringing in Native American educators. Think about what that looks like in your state. Remind people that services should reflect the unique needs of the communities they serve and that those communities must be at the table when those decisions are made." – Montana Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC)

Working with students as equal partners may be a new experience for some educators; ongoing training may be needed to assist older adult partners in this work.⁴ YHDP technical assistance provides several sessions on authentic youth engagement to communities, including adultism, equity, and power sharing. Youth are also given training and support to ensure their success. Youth training includes topics such as project governance, facilitation and presentation skills, project evaluation, and continuous quality improvement.



"During the implementation phase of Tucson/Pima County's YHDP, leadership of the Education Change Team, the committee tasked with monitoring progress on the education goals in the community's CCP, was turned over to a member of the YAB. With support, the YAB leader set agendas, managed communication, and facilitated meetings for a group of older adult partners that included county government officials, non-profit leaders, school administrators, federal TA providers, and the state EHCY program coordinator." – NCHE Technical Assistance Provider

[Program Round 1: Lessons Learned on Partnerships with Education Brief \(2019\)](#).

⁴ To learn more view NCHE's recorded webinar [Elevating the Leadership of Students and Families with Lived Expertise \(2023\)](#).

USE AN ASSET-FOCUSED APPROACH

When faced with large, complex social problems, it can be tempting to focus on problems rather than solutions. As large groups of community partners come together to study youth homelessness in their localities, YHDP grant recipients work to build trust among participants. Invest time to develop shared norms and vocabulary for meeting spaces as well as clear expectations for work between meetings.



“One thing that surprised me during YHDP was the disconnect between EHCY and housing services. School and housing partners needed a lot of explanations of terms, eligibility, and types of services provided in each system. It was important to never assume that anyone knows a definition.” – Tucson/Pima County, AZ

Community planning not only seeks to identify system gaps but also the unique resources that different partners bring to the table. Teams look for areas of alignment between systems and search for ways to reduce duplication of effort.

BUILD SYSTEMS FOR LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT

Systems change takes many years. YHDP can be a springboard for strengthening existing community partnerships or building new relationships that endure long past the initial planning phase of the program. Some



“Make sure that education partners aren't siloed to conversations only about education. In particular, make sure that they are also invited to conversations about the statement of need, goal setting, and project design.” – HUD Technical Assistance provider

⁵ A [Continuum of Care \(CoC\)](#) is a state, regional, or local planning and administrative body that coordinates housing and services funding for youth, families, and single adults experiencing homelessness. A “balance of state”



“Our YHDP partnerships focused on systems navigation for unaccompanied youth, but we found that the project opened doors that improved communication and services for all of our families experiencing homelessness.” - Waco, TX

YHDP communities have worked to create avenues for long-term engagement by including education partners on Continuum of Care⁵ (CoC) boards, establishing youth education committees within CoC governance structures, and establishing communities of practice for ongoing sharing of knowledge, thought partnership, problem solving, progress monitoring, and future action. Support also includes encouraging school districts and institutions of higher education to apply for YHDP funds.



“As a state coordinator, I can't always commit to local and regional meetings for several hours each week. It is very helpful for me when the YHDP leadership committee identifies specific, discrete tasks where my office can assist with ongoing planning.” – Metro Denver, CO

ENGAGE LOCAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP EARLY IN THE PROCESS

In any cross-system work, securing buy-in from partners is necessary for long-term success. Inviting education partners early, being clear about why they are needed, and identifying what role they will play can help set the stage for a successful collaboration.

Strong YHDP collaborations bring together representatives from a variety of roles within the education system. Although local homeless liaisons have deep knowledge of what is happening in schools on a day-to-day basis, they may not have the authority to authorize program changes.

refers to a jurisdiction not covered by another CoC and includes non-metropolitan areas and some or all of the state's smaller cities.

Engaging with district, regional, or state leadership early, even simply to keep them aware of ongoing work in the program, may prevent barriers later in the process. Additionally, education leaders who are known to school district staff in the community may more easily conduct outreach on behalf of housing and other cross-systems partners than people from outside agencies who are unknown to school and district staff, particularly in large geographic areas.⁶



“The knowledge and leadership of EHCY state coordinators have been very helpful in gathering more local partners. They lend a ‘seal of approval’ to the collaborations and can help housing partners understand the broader context of state education regulations.” – HUD TA provider

Summary

Many different systems impact youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and no single system can solve this complex issue on its own. Intentional strengthening of relationships between housing systems, education systems, and others, with a focus on youth voice and long-term engagement, can move communities to responses centered on equity and dignity. NCHE thanks the educators, local homeless assistance providers, YAB members, and HUD- and ED-funded technical assistance providers whose feedback informed this document.

REFERENCES

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⁶ Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, every state educational agency must appoint a State Coordinator for Homeless Education to serve as the department’s key homeless education contact, and to oversee the Act’s implementation in LEAs across the state [42 U.S.C. §11432(d)(3)]. Some states also use regional models wherein regional bodies – including

intermediate units, regional service centers, or county offices of education – serve as intermediary planning and administrative bodies between local school districts and the state educational agency.

Appendix A: Examples of Education-Funded Projects in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP)⁷

Community/YHDP Round	Project Type	Details
Georgia Balance of State	Supportive Services Only	Funding was awarded to co-applicants from a local school district and a service provider for a drop-in center.
Louisville, KY	Supportive Services Only	Funding was awarded to a local service provider to offer systems navigation and case management for single parents and other special populations while participants pursued education.
Montana Balance of State	Supportive Services Only	Funding was awarded to four projects, including a community college-based systems navigation project, two school district systems navigation/diversion projects, and a school district host home project that primarily serves native youth.
Prince George’s County, MD	Joint Transitional Housing/Rapid Rehousing	Funding was awarded to the Maryland Multicultural Center and the Latin American Youth Center.
Sacramento, CA	Supportive Services Only	Funding was awarded to the county office of education and a service provider to operate a systems navigation project.
San Antonio-Bexar County, TX	Rapid Rehousing	Funding was awarded to the University of Texas San Antonio for a rapid rehousing project that services students and community members.
San Diego, CA	Supportive Services Only	Funding was awarded to the County Office of Education for a systems navigator position.

⁷ This list should not be considered exhaustive as NCHE did not participate in the project selection process in all YHDP communities.