



Rapid Re-housing for Youth: Program Profiles

Rapid re-housing (RRH) for youth (defined as less than 25 years of age) is an evolving model that can be implemented using the PH-RRH component type under HUD's CoC Program. The programs profiled here use a variety of funding sources (e.g. HUD, HHS, private and foundation funding, etc.), so readers should check the eligibility of specific elements. However, each has developed replicable, CoC-eligible, promising practices for: 1.) Rapidly moving youth into permanent housing; 2.) Offering short- to medium-term financial assistance; and 3.) Providing developmentally appropriate case management and services. This information, contributed by representatives from each profiled program, is not intended to represent a complete service description, but rather to highlight what is working for some programs and further an important dialogue on ending youth homelessness.

Pathfinders Q-BLOK Program in Milwaukee, WI

The Pathfinders Q-BLOK Program launched in 2009 with a 25 youth caseload using Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) funds. Since the end of HPRP, Pathfinders has continued on at a smaller scale with about 8-10 youth at a time. The average length of stay for the program is about a year, while the maximum stay is generally 18 months. If a youth needs longer assistance, the program may be able to provide it under one of its more flexible funding sources. The program is primarily funded by Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program funds, funds from the Milwaukee County Housing Division, and local United Way dollars.

Target Population

Q-BLOK is designed to assist young adults, aged 18-25, who are LGBTQ-identified, and entering adulthood ill-equipped to achieve successful independence and self-sufficiency due to their histories of running away, homelessness, and family rejection. The program also serves "allied youth," or those comfortable with an LGBTQ community, but who don't personally identify as such. This target population was chosen based on local data when University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee researchers found in 2008 that 23-24% of the area's homeless youth identified as LGBTQ. Because the program uses multiple funding sources, some youth meet one set of eligibility requirements and others qualify under different criteria.

Housing Identification

"We don't address any other issues until we get the housing secured."

Q-BLOK works with a single landlord who has multiple safe and affordable buildings, with many units in different locations. The landlord is a strong, supportive partner and would offer more units if the program wanted to expand. The program master leases ten units and initially paid the damage deposits, which roll over as new program participants move into the unit. Units are all efficiencies or one-bedrooms; the youth signs a sublease and can convert that to an individual lease at program exit (the program transfers their master lease to another unit). This method allows reasonable choice between the properties and enables the program to move youth into housing "incredibly fast." Master leasing also avoids the problem of breaking the lease if a youth moves early. The landlord trusts the program's decisions on placing new youth into vacated units and allows a youth who is not succeeding in one property to move into another. They have had zero evictions.

Financial Assistance

When Q-BLOK began, rental subsidies declined on a fixed timeline. However, the program found that this rigid schedule rarely worked; their population needed greater support while gaining the skills and education needed to obtain

employment and financial independence. As a result, the program now covers 100% of housing costs, as long as the youth is enrolled in the program, so that case managers can work on budgeting, saving, and job searching at each person’s pace and direction.

Heat is included in the rent, but other utilities are in the youth’s name, with utility subsidy, if needed. Units are rented unfurnished, but can usually be filled with local donations. When a youth exits the program, they have the option of taking the furnishings with them.

The program understands the kind of lease violations common to youth: “We don’t try to *catch* them; we won’t hold the housing over their heads if they are doing drugs, etc.” The program can’t allow a friend to be doubled up or couch-hop with a program participant, but they understand the issue and “may try to help the friend, too.”

Case Management & Services

Positive Youth Development is deeply embedded in Q-BLOK’s service delivery approach. In addition, the program utilizes harm reduction, trauma-informed care, and Housing First concepts to best engage youth. As with most youth RRH programs, case management is intensive. The program’s case manager works with 8-10 youth and each youth is assigned a volunteer mentor who acts as a stable, adult presence in their life, assisting with their social and emotional well-being. At the program’s end, many of the youth stay in contact with this mentor.

Services are customized to meet the individual needs of each youth—some may have an educational goal, while others are focused on gaining employment, or obtaining disability benefits. Many skills are taught directly in the youth’s housing unit, such as cooking or doing laundry.

“All services are client-centered and client-driven. I think that works really well for young people based on where they are developmentally. We don’t set unrealistic benchmarks and timelines, which is what fails for young people in more adult-designed systems of care. We get more and earlier buy-in with youth when we use this approach, tailoring services and supports that work for them.”

Final Thoughts

Pathfinders is a community leader in adopting Housing First, though it is a newer concept that continues to be refined. They recognized that providing housing, first, wasn’t necessarily the same as being “Housing First” after an incident earlier in the program’s history where they removed a youth from her housing and separated her from the program when she wasn’t able to meet employment goals and service requirements.

“We use that example of why we’re moving to a Housing First approach. If we had already been there philosophically, she would not have moved back into a homeless situation. It shows how the way we were doing our services wasn’t working for some of the youth who needed our program the most.”

For further information on this program:

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