



THE EXCHANGE

News from FYSB and the Youth Services Field

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AFTERCARE: STAYING IN TOUCH WITH YOUTH AFTER THEY HAVE LEFT THE SYSTEM

Elizabeth*, 16, resented having to look after her younger siblings while her mother worked two jobs and struggled as a single mother with three small children. One day, Elizabeth refused and her mother snapped, and Elizabeth ran away. She ended up at a safe house at the YMCA Safe Place Services—a basic center and Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) grantee in Louisville, Kentucky— which she had learned about in her high school.

“We called Mom right away,” says Dennis Enix, executive director of YMCA Safe Place Services. “It was a wake-up call to both of them that they were both suppressing a lot of their feelings and holding on to a ton of anger and frustration.”



During a respite process that lasted 10 days, Elizabeth stayed at the YMCA and she and her mom were able to open up and talk about their relationship. With mediation by staff, Mom and Elizabeth developed a written plan on what they needed from each other that they could both agree upon.



“It was a wake-up call to both of them that they were both suppressing a lot of their feelings and holding on to a ton of anger and frustration.”

But staff at the YMCA didn’t stop there. They continued to follow up with the family through phone conversations and meetings for a year. Now, Elizabeth regularly comes to their drop-in program and participates on the youth advisory board. Mom has spoken to other parents about how the program has helped her.

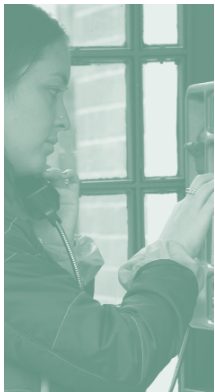
FYSB has three programs to benefit runaway and homeless youth—the Basic Center Program (BCP), Transitional Living Program (TLP), and Street Outreach Program (SOP). BCPs and TLPs are programs that offer temporary shelter. Most BCPs can provide 15 days of shelter, food, clothing, counseling, and referrals for health care for

*Names of clients have been changed.

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up to 20 youth through 18 years of age. TLPs provide longer term residential services to homeless youth ages 16–21—usually up to 18 months, and an additional 180 days is allowed for youth less than 18 years old. TLPs are designed to help youth who are homeless make a successful transition to self-sufficient living.

FYSB standards require each grantee to have an aftercare program that may consist of directing youth to other community-based housing or government assistance services, and providing counseling before they exit the temporary shelter program. Many programs go one step further and maintain contact with youth long after they have “graduated.”



Keeping in touch with youth is increasingly a priority for service providers. With fluctuations in the job market, and with the housing boom causing affordable housing to become

scarce, young people are finding it harder than ever to transition to successful independent living.

Most FYSB grantees agree that aftercare planning should begin while the youth is still in care. But aftercare can take many forms. Aftercare at shelter discharge—for example, when the youth is leaving a short-term basic center—may include care such as referring youth to affordable housing services, to ongoing counseling, and to other agencies and community services.



“Some people may think when we talk about aftercare we are talking about a scheduled series of appointments for the next 5 months—follow up visits, treatment—but it can also be a counseling session on the day the youth decides to leave or graduates.”

Aftercare at final disposition—when the youth has graduated from basic center or transitional living programs—could include things such as client and family evaluations, referrals to other agencies and community services, and followup procedures. Service providers agree that services can vary depending on the length of time the youth has been sheltered, the resources the provider has, and other factors, including the cost of living in the area.

“Some people may think when we talk about aftercare we are talking about a scheduled series of appointments for the next 5 months—follow up visits, treatment—but it can also be a counseling session on the day the youth decides to leave or graduates,” says Stan Chappell, director of evaluation and research for FYSB. “It could be followup contact with their parents if they return to their home. If a youth



decides to leave before counseling and other interventions have been successfully completed, it could also be just saying, ‘Okay, let’s see where you’re going and how to stay safe, and by the way, here’s a sandwich and a fare card.’”

Some FYSB grantees at the basic center programs say that they struggle with aftercare because they only have a short period of time to connect with youth. Providers say that having a substantive relationship with youth is essential to



staying in touch with them. Staff retention is also important to grantees because if youth return several years later, they will want to connect with the staff member they knew when they were in the program. Lifeworks, a FYSB grantee in Austin, Texas, has a basic center, a street outreach program, and a transitional living component, and staff rotate throughout all three so that youth get to know all of the staff members.

Many FYSB grantees have developed innovative approaches to stay in touch with youth. Some approaches have included having youth develop their own long-term plans, matching youth



with life coaches who will provide them support for as long as they need it, and developing creative ways to tackle the problem of finding affordable housing.

Grantees realize that like most young people, youth that successfully complete their programs will continue to struggle with their transition to adulthood. That’s why staying in touch with youth, even after they have left the system, has increasingly become a top priority for youth workers. ■

LETTING YOUTH MAKE THE CHOICES



Seventy-five percent of Lifeworks' teen parents graduate from, remain in, or return to school.

Within the last 10 years, researchers and policymakers have learned that key elements of successful youth development include providing youth with caring adults, safe places, marketable skills, and opportunities to serve. With this understanding, the term Positive Youth Development was coined. This approach recognizes that empowered young people need support, guidance, and opportunities during adolescence. Positive Youth Development emphasizes youth creating their own future goals and plans and implementing them with the support of caring adults.

Youth workers can use the Positive Youth Development approach in arranging aftercare by encouraging youth to develop their own plans as soon as they begin a program and to build their own connections to their community through community service, community mapping, or cultural activities. According to data from the Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS), youth in basic center programs who participate in community service are more likely to have a safe exit—an exit to a home or shelter rather than back to the street or to an unknown location.

“Opportunities to participate in an acting troupe, sports team, or artistic endeavors attract and retain youth

because they build on their strengths and interests,” states an October 2005 research and policy report from the National Conference of State Legislatures, entitled *Strengthening Youth Policy*.

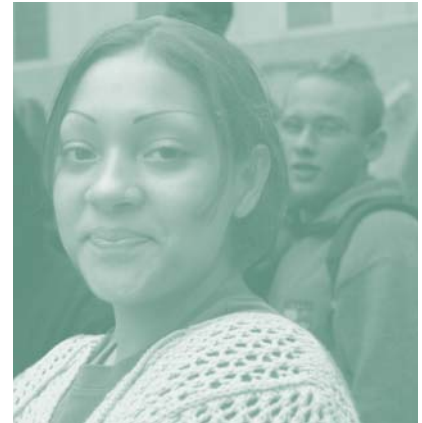
“They provide them with an opportunity to develop deep relationships that can change their lives.”

Programs that focus solely on fixing or preventing problems often have little appeal to young people, according to the report.



At Lifeworks youth decide on their aftercare plan as soon as they enter one of the programs. Director Steve Bewsey offers ways that their program has created a Positive Youth Development approach to aftercare:

- ❖ Youth choose counselors or therapists from different people in the community employed by Lifeworks and decide where they want to meet with the counselor—for example, in their own apartments or in group facilities. “It’s to let them feel a little control in establishing these relationships. When they have more control they are more interested, it seems, in having those kinds of relationships,” says Bewsey.
- ❖ When youth come to the emergency shelter, staff ask, “What can we do for you?” Bewsey explains. “This is about forming a relationship based on what they want, not what we want.”
- ❖ Staff encourage youth to establish relationships with people in the community as much as possible.



At Lifeworks, youth decide on their aftercare plan as soon as they enter one of the programs.

“Why pay my staff to take youth out to the movies? I am more interested in them going to the movies with other people they are going to be with in the community,” Bewsey says. “I will pay them to take their neighbor to the movies.”

- ❖ A resource center at Lifeworks helps youth who need additional services. “We have immediate access to all of their information that they had with us. I had a 28-year-old call and I was able to say, ‘Come over to the resource center and we can go back and look and see examples of how you solved these problems before—how you got rent paid, how you used this service to get utility money,’” Bewsey recalls.
- ❖ Lifeworks has a long-term goal of making it possible for youth to access important personal records, such as birth certificates and social security cards, online.
- ❖ Lifeworks provides opportunities for graduates to come back and share life lessons with current program participants. ■



“Opportunities to participate in an acting troupe, sports team, or artistic endeavors attract and retain youth because they build on their strengths and interests.”

KEEPING IN TOUCH: COMMUNITY SERVICE



“Involving young people in community-building activities is a connector that benefits both youth and adults in the neighborhood. It’s a no-brainer.”

Research shows that becoming engaged in the community can, for youth, be a powerful stimulant of self-reliance and prosocial attitudes. FYSB promotes community service learning for youth as an effective approach to linking them to community resources.

Fellowship of Lights Youth and Community Services, a basic center and FYSB grantee in Baltimore, Maryland, has an aftercare program in which licensed social workers see families at the center or at their homes and make referrals to community services that can give ongoing support.

For 8 years a partnership with AmeriCorps also allowed the program to extend beyond the emergency shelter. Youth volunteered in the community through AmeriCorps, and the partnership brought youth into the program because they were being paid for their participation in the community. In addition, it connected youth to resources they would need after leaving care.

“Lots of kids are looking to get paid; time is of value to them,” says Ross Pologee, director of Fellowship of Lights, who adds that they are thinking of reinstating the partnership with AmeriCorps. “Involving young people in community-building activities is a connector that benefits both youth and adults in the neighborhood. It’s a no-brainer.”

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE



Youth take part in a drum ceremony at the Ain Dah Yung Center.

The Ain Dah Yung Center—a FYSB grantee that operates a basic center, a transitional living program, and a street outreach program in St. Paul, Minnesota—creates cultural connections for youth by introducing them to Tribal traditions that, in turn, help anchor them to their communities.

“We wanted to be a part of the process of keeping kids in their placement by providing cultural activities for them in groups. We thought hopefully we could retain contact with kids and their families and minimize their risk of coming back to shelter because we are keeping them busy and supporting their families,” says Yvonne Barrett, executive director of Ain Dah Yung.

The organization whose name means “Our Home” in the Ojibwe language, created a locally funded aftercare program to support their basic center in the early 1990s. Called Ninijanisag (“our children”) because many youth returned to the shelter after they had graduated, the program was created to bridge the connection to the community, and to culture and identity, so youth would want to stay where they were placed. Now the program, which features traditional ceremonies and cultural activities, is available to youth who have left the shelter and also to the broader community.

Barrett says that having youth participate in cultural activities like tanning deer hides, making drums, and learning indigenous languages helps to build their self-esteem.



In the spring, Shawnee Hunt, Ninijanisag director, took the youth ice fishing one weekend on a traditional Indian campsite where ice fishing has

been practiced for hundreds of years by Tribes in northern Minnesota.

“Time slowed down and they had time to reflect and talk,”

Hunt says. “By Sunday they started to open up, and they felt they could trust the people they were with. One of the kids said this was something that he would have never been able to do, and he would remember it for the rest of his life.”

“It helps them build their identity to see and be around those kinds of things,” Hunt adds. “It helps them feel unique, knowing that there are people out there that care about them, that they have an extended family.”

Having the youth participate in these cultural traditions also helps the staff in tangible ways. Youth come back for annual cultural events like the



powwow or Elders Lodge—where they participate in a talking circle at a senior living facility. This provides a good time for staff to check in with the youth and see how they are faring in their placements.



“Time slowed down and they had time to reflect and talk.”

Some youth have received Indian names from elders in the program—a tradition that means the adult has

dedicated his or her life to being the youth’s teacher.

“It’s different from the mainstream where you work with a therapist, you see the family for eight sessions, and they are cured,” says Richard Garland, associate director. “The relationships are much more long lasting. We are community based people; we are going to see each other down the line at some kind of ceremony or event.”

Though the program doesn’t have hard data on how a cultural approach helps



“We are community based people; we are going to see each other down the line at some kind of ceremony or event.”

them to stay in contact with youth, they can personally attest to its success.

“I can say with confidence that we are helping kids to stay in their long-term placements,” says Barrett. “We are helping the parent to almost coparent in a way. For kids, it gives them something to look forward to. They have come to rely on these positive activities.” ■

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WORK



Key to giving youth a positive outlook on civic engagement is consulting with them about what they are interested in and then linking them to a variety of different types of community projects. A Positive Youth Development approach to civic engagement will allow youth to decide on what is most meaningful to them.

Michelle Charles, a researcher and author, recently studied African American inner-city teens and civic engagement in Philadelphia. She argues that for the African American community, the concept of “giving back to the community” is an important component of civic engagement that

has not been formally recognized. Her interviews revealed that the phrase is a term steeped in oral tradition, faith, and the success of individuals as well as the group. “Giving back to the community” would differ from service learning in that it would offer service opportunities for young, inner-city African Americans that are directly relevant to their lives. For example, service projects would be designed to focus on social problems that are unique to the inner-city African American population.



TIES THAT BIND: A LIFE COACH

By the time John was 17 years old, he had bounced around between semi-independent living programs and foster homes for years. In one of his foster homes, another foster youth destroyed paintings John had created. Then his entire wardrobe was stolen. John spent many winter nights outside because the owner of the house wouldn’t provide him with a key.

So, he didn’t know what to expect when his caseworker assigned him to , a FYSB grantee Lighthouse Youth

Services, a transitional living program in Cincinnati, Ohio. He received a caseworker and a life coach. The caseworker successfully handled the minutiae that enabled his transition and helped him with his basic needs. The life coach provided him with emotional support and became his “mother figure” long after he graduated from the program.

“My role is to give an extra set of ears and hands to help with issues like budgeting, cooking, relationships,

apartment issues, job issues,” says Merry Paul, 54, an administrative assistant at Lighthouse and John’s life coach. John is now 21 years old and Paul continues to talk with him by telephone once or twice a week.

Life coaches are paid mentors matched to support youth after they leave care.

Though Lighthouse has a formal after-care program that works with youth as they leave care and after leaving care—particularly with financial hardships

after they have graduated from care—more informal approaches to aftercare like life coaches have also been very successful. Life coaches have been particularly helpful for high risk youth, like those with mental health issues or substance abuse problems, who need ongoing emotional support along with assistance with their basic needs.



Lighthouse began using the life coach approach 9 years ago, according to Lighthouse director

Mark Kroner, when the Hamilton County Children's Services Department kept approaching them with youth, but were unsure about whether the youth were able to live in an independent setting without acting out or running away. Lighthouse came up with the idea of hiring a part-time person outside of the program to visit with the youth. In most cases that worked, and now when a youth is assigned to Lighthouse, he or she is routinely assigned a caseworker and a life coach.

"We have used it for all different types of situations," says Kroner, for example, for youth who were going through a suicidal phase. "If a youth is acting out in school, the coach can go to school with the youth. It has given us a lot of flexibility."

Kroner sees life coaches as an extension of aftercare, not as a replacement for their standard aftercare program. And, he says, the expenses of having a life coach are minimal.

"Group homes average \$170 a day. Our independent living program is \$62 a day, plus a life coach at \$24 an hour for an hour a day. It is actually cheaper," says Kroner, adding that youth often fare better as a result of the individualized attention.

Having a life coach eased Eric's transition to independent living. Because social services had removed him from

his home when he was 15 years old, after his mother couldn't handle struggling to raise five children in a low-income apartment, having a nice place to live was important for him. When it came time for him to look for an apartment, he chose one in a nice area near a university, with plenty of other young people around. His life coach helped him with his budget to make sure he could afford the place.

"We looked at several different scenarios based upon how much money he made. I said, 'If you only got a job making \$8.50, this is what you have.' I am a very visual person, so I made a lot of lists and visual reminders," Paul says.

More importantly, she prepared him for the unexpected. She told him to budget and save enough money to pay his rent and other expenses for 2 months, in case he ever loses his job.

But she also helped him with intangibles like learning boundaries at his job at Home Depot. Paul explained to him appropriate ways to voice his opinion.

John says he is motivated to keep working and saving because he knows what it's like to live in low-income housing. Now he doesn't have to compete for the bathroom with his siblings, and he knows that his belongings will still be there when he gets home. And if things don't go according to his plan, he knows that he can always call his life coach and talk with her about his problems.

"She helped me believe in myself. She taught me that I can do whatever I want to do," he says.

While John benefited from having a paid mentor or life coach, other youth reject the fact that everyone in their lives—teachers, social workers—are people who are paid to help them. Some programs, like Panhandle Community Services, a transitional

living program and FYSB grantee in Garing, Nebraska, have utilized nearby faith-based programs to find lifelong mentors or life coaches.

Seventeen-year-old Rhonda came to Panhandle Community Services to escape an abusive boyfriend and begin regaining custody of her young son, who had been taken out of the home by social services because of



the violence. Director Vicky Lawton teamed Rhonda with a "mentoring

mom" from a nearby faith-based organization that routinely volunteers to mentor youth in their program.

"The mentoring mom would just come and pick her up in a van and they would go out and just sit and talk," says Lawton. "They spent a lot of time just breaking through that trust thing."



"She helped me believe in myself. She taught me that I can do whatever I want to do," he says.

Rhonda has since regained custody of her son, married, and given birth to a new baby, but she and the mentoring mom stay in touch and talk once or twice a week. This helps staff at Panhandle because the mentoring mom then keeps them informed on how Rhonda is doing.

"Whichever staff is assigned as the caregiving staff will call and try to follow up on things that the mentoring mom has told us," Lawton says.

Having a life coach or mentor helps the staff to follow up on youth long after they have graduated from the program. At the same time it gives youth the feeling that their connections are more "like a family." ■

Worksheet for Youth Preparing To Find Housing

1. Describe your housing needs:

- ❖ Where do you want to live? (location or area)
- ❖ Do you want to live alone or with others?
- ❖ Will children be living with you? (full-time, part-time?)
- ❖ How much can you afford for rent each month?
- ❖ Do you need subsidized housing?
- ❖ Do you need parking or access to public transportation?
- ❖ Do you need to be on the first floor or to have wheelchair access?
- ❖ Are you allergic to animals?
- ❖ Do you want to share food?
- ❖ Do you want a quiet environment?
- ❖ Do you have a short-term and long-term plan? (For instance, do you want to plan to own a home in the future?)
- ❖ How do you want to speak about your lack of a current address to landlords/property managers?



2. Check your own credit history. Maintaining good credit is important, particularly when the time comes to rent your own apartment or purchase a home. Landlords and mortgage lenders use your credit history to determine whether you will be a reliable tenant or to determine what interest rate you would receive for a mortgage for your home. Monitoring your credit report is also important in these times where identity theft is common. You may order your credit report online free once a year from www.freecreditreport.com, which will give you the reports from the big three reporting agencies: Experian, Equifax, and Transunion.

3. Check your CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information).

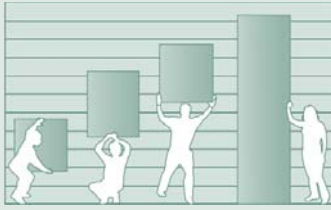
- ❖ If there is a possibility that you have a criminal record—e.g., you have been arrested before, been summoned to court or spent time in jail, a house of corrections, or prison—and you do not have a recent copy of your CORI, ask staff to help you obtain a copy of your CORI.
- ❖ Know what is on your CORI; make sure it is accurate, make corrections, and prepare a case for why you should receive consideration in spite of the CORI.

4. Provide reliable contact information:

- ❖ Offer a good phone number that has an answering machine or voice mail.
- ❖ Provide an Email address if you have one.
- ❖ Give a work number if you have one.



Source: Rebecca Muller, Grantworks



MEASURING SUCCESS

“We at the ACEF/Family and Youth Services Bureau hold tightly to one overarching principle: young people

deserve our very best efforts to help them succeed in life,” says **Harry Wilson**, Associate Commissioner of the Family and Youth Services Bureau.

As many grantees will attest, it is challenging to evaluate the successful impact of programs serving runaway and homeless youth. One way to measure a program’s success is to determine how frequently youth served make safe and appropriate exits when their residency in the program ends.

A safe exit from a basic center program is an exit to a home or shelter rather than to the street or to an unknown location. A safe and appropriate exit for youth leaving transitional living programs may be an exit into an independent living program,

a residential apprenticeship, higher education, military service, or other destinations with positive opportunities. An exit from a TLP to the street, an unknown location, or a homeless shelter is regarded as an unsafe exit.

Here are some things that FYSB will measure and hope to increase in the months ahead to evaluate the success of its runaway and homeless youth shelter programs:

- ◆ The number of transitional living program youth who are engaged in community service and service learning activities while in the program.
- ◆ The percent/number of youth who complete the transitional living program by graduating or who leave ahead of schedule based upon an opportunity.
- ◆ The proportion of basic centers providing preventive and nonresidential services to families and youth in at-risk situations.

AFTERCARE CHECKLIST: ARE YOU PROVIDING YOUTH WITH WHAT THEY NEED?

Temporary financial assistance

Most young people have financial management problems in the first few months on their own, particularly when faced with unexpected expenses.

Peer support

Trying to live on a minimum-wage salary can be frustrating and depressing for youth. Peer support groups provide opportunities for youth to talk to others who can understand what they are going through.

Advocacy

Dealing with problems can be overwhelming. Youth may occasionally need someone to advocate for them with health care systems, legal systems, and housing authorities.

Information and referral

Sometimes a youth may simply need to know where to go if he or she should ever need help. With the right information, the youth can often handle problems alone.

Support for youth during the transition to permanency

Young people need emotional support as they either make the transition to life on their own or go back to

their families. Having a personal connection with a staff person or mentor who knows them and cares about them is important. This person serves as the young person’s lifeline as he or she goes about making new friends and reestablishing family connections.

Temporary housing

Many youth experience at least one period of homelessness, either because a living arrangement has not worked out or because of a loss of income.

Help in establishing and maintaining living arrangements

In many communities, safe and affordable housing is hard to find. Landlords may be reluctant to rent to a young person without a cosigner on the lease. Youth who have not lived in a supportive independent living program may not be sufficiently skilled to maintain their living arrangement without assistance.

Crisis counseling

Some youth have difficulty coping with life on their own and may find themselves in serious or even dangerous situations. Having someone to call in times like these is essential.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



The Dream Tree Project in Taos, New Mexico, is building casitas, or little houses, for TLP graduates.

FYSB grantees that are operating transitional living programs say that directing youth to safe, appropriate, and affordable housing after they exit their programs is the single most important issue affecting aftercare. If youth are unable to secure stable housing, they may end up back on the street. Finding appropriate housing also helps service providers maintain contact with youth after they have left programs. Grantees say they are more likely to lose contact with youth who are forced, because of limited housing, to return to unstable neighborhoods or situations.

The Dream Tree Project in Taos, New Mexico, a 6-year-old FYSB grantee and transitional living program, has found that community connections make it easier to gain access to affordable housing for youth.

Dream Tree has created an innovative program. *Casitas* (“little houses” in Spanish) were designed as a series of four apartments located on the same property, 100 feet away from their cur-

rent transitional living program. The houses are attached to a large community room that will allow residents to participate in the community while maintaining individual space.

Onyx Construction, a local company,



“How can we motivate them and say, ‘Hey guys, you don’t really need this program anymore, but how can we support you?’”

provided much of the construction work pro bono, and YouthBuild and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps—programs that employ young people to rebuild their communities and their lives—are providing some of the labor. Many of the youth who will be living in the *casitas* are helping to build them.

The *casitas* will provide a structured living environment for those youth who need extra support after they graduate from the transitional living program.



Onyx Construction, a local company, has provided much of the construction work for the casitas.

Larkin Street Youth Services in San Francisco, California, a FYSB grantee that operates several transitional living programs, also developed a collaborative community approach to finding affordable housing for youth. Together with the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, they launched Ellis Street Apartments, which consists of 24 studio units. Subsidies that go towards lowering rent for Ellis Street come from the Housing Authority and allow residents to pay 30 percent of their income, or if they are unemployed, a smaller amount compared to market rate.



Larkin Street Youth Services launched Ellis Street Apartments in San Francisco.

Motivating young people to move from a supportive environment to a truly independent living situation sometimes proves difficult, says Eliza Gibson, chief of programs for Larkin Street.

“There are people who need it, and then there are people who need it for awhile and then they can be quite successful on their own,” Gibson says. “How can we motivate them and say, ‘Hey guys, you don’t really need this program anymore, but how can we support you?’”

The reality is that in San Francisco, market rate rent is sometimes too high even for adults. In addition, many youth that need extended care have health issues.

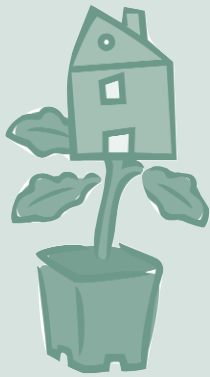
Gibson says one way they are trying to meet this challenge is by becoming more familiar with adult resources and adult

housing and developing stronger linkages with adult housing providers. ■

Positive Youth Development in Action

After being released from a juvenile facility, Diego entered the Dream Tree transitional living program. Though Diego, now 20 years old, graduated from the program and now lives on his own in a community far away from Dream Tree, he checks in regularly because he works for Onyx Construction, helping to build the casitas.

“They have been giving me regular counseling. They invite me to dinner, help me to budget money,” he says about Dream Tree.



PLANTING THE SEEDS OF HOME OWNERSHIP

One FYSB grantee is working to make home ownership appealing to rural youth. In many rural areas it is sometimes cheaper to buy a home than to rent an apartment. Stepping Stones, a transitional living program for pregnant and parenting teens in Houlton, Maine, educates youth about the home-buying process.

Susan York, a teacher at the onsite school at Stepping Stones, says it is still possible to buy a home in Houlton for \$50,000, with monthly payments below the average market rent.

“We have worked with some banks that have come in and done day seminars where they go over first-time home buyers programs,” says York. In addition, she adds, the State of Maine administers a program called Family Savings, a matching savings program where two dollars is matched to every dollar that the youth put into their savings account. The money can later be spent on a first home, future education, or a new business.

While Stepping Stones has not yet seen any youth opt to buy instead of rent, York says they hope that youth will remember what they have learned.

“We are looking at the long term,” says York. “Building those foundations, planting those seeds, helping them know where to access things, and letting them know what programs are available. Some of them just can’t see the possibilities at the moment.”

TRANSITIONING YOUTH TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Tips From Housing Expert Rebecca Muller of GrantWorks

- ◆ Know your local housing scene. Build relationships with different landlords so that you have a variety of housing types to steer youth towards, such as apartment complexes that have several units set aside for youth that you recommend.
- ◆ Offer a “Preparing Yourself for Housing” workshop, where youth can identify their personal housing needs, their living habits, references, a housing resume, and any barriers they may have to overcome such as bad credit.
- ◆ Use creative and flexible strategies with landlords and youth; for example, agency and youth cosign the lease for the first 6 months and then the youth assumes the lease.
- ◆ Develop a peer or neighbor mentorship arrangement where a young adult, community volunteer, or neighbor acts as a sponsor, meeting regularly with youth to support them through their transitions.
- ◆ Create opportunities for graduates from your program to volunteer with your agency or another community-based or youth-serving organization. This helps to develop ongoing connections and a community role for youth and motivates them to become good neighbors.

BEFORE YOUTH WALK OUT THE DOOR



- Talk to youth and provide exit counseling that includes possible followup treatments (e.g., family reunification or counseling) that have been prescribed or scheduled.
- Make sure written transitional, aftercare, or followup plans or agreements have been worked out with youth, understood, and agreed to.
- During intake, place belongings of youth in a locked storage area where the lock will be changed after nights of unexcused absences. Youth will mostly likely come back to discuss the situation.

- As a preventative approach, post notices by the exit that say, "Talk to us before you leave us."
- Provide referrals for assistance, such as Housing and Urban Development Section 8 programs or other permanent housing assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, etc.
- Verify that youth have safe places to go prior to release
- Provide youth with transportation tokens, food, information about local shelters and resources, phone cards, and other necessities.
- Tell youth that they are always welcome to come back in and talk—even if they have broken the rules.
- Upon intake, collect contact information for people other than relatives from youth—close friends, significant others, teachers, mentors.
- Give youth mementos (e.g., toothbrushes, pencils, wallets) inscribed with the program's phone number or a runaway hotline number.
- Make sure youth know how to use and find post offices, libraries, employment and education services, laundromats, public transportation, supermarkets, pharmacies and recreation centers.
- Connect youth with mentors.
- Remind youth of traditional activities that may bring them back, such as holiday events or dinners. ■



Safe exit posters used to get the attention of youth before they leave youth shelters. PDFs of the posters are available for download at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/FYSB.

RESOURCE LIST FOR AFTERCARE

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