

HUD Cohort 5 100-Day Challenge Case Study

Charleston, SC: Housing Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness

Charleston, SC focused its 100-Day Challenge efforts on increasing outreach, engagement and housing connections for youth and young adults (YYA) experiencing unsheltered homelessness, improving the community's ability to meet YYA where they are and provide support directly from unsheltered situations.

HOW CHARLESTON, SC MADE IT HAPPEN

Charleston identified early in the 100-Day Challenge that many youth and young adults (YYA) experiencing homelessness were not accessing housing or supportive services through the homeless response system. The Team also found that YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness were being uniquely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and were no longer residing in the same locations as they were prior to the outbreak. As a result, Charleston identified the need to invest in new outreach approaches to engage YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness and to provide them with quick connections to housing and services directly from unsheltered situations.

The Charleston 100-Day Challenge Team began conducting weekly youth-focused outreach in front of a local drop-in center, which provided an opportunity for YYA experiencing homelessness – most of whom were unsheltered – to meet with a case manager in-person to discuss their needs while maintaining COVID-19 safety protocols. This expanded youth outreach effort helped amplify connections to housing for YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness and demonstrated to the community that services can be successfully provided directly to YYA in unsheltered situations. The 100-Day Challenge Team also mobilized a number of housing interventions to respond to the needs of YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including housing problem-solving, reunification with chosen family and friends, and Rapid Re-Housing (RRH). As a result of these expanded outreach, engagement and housing efforts, 100% of the YYA who were housed during Charleston's 100-Day Challenge were unsheltered. YYA were also connected to wraparound supportive services to help sustain their exits from unsheltered homelessness.

Key Takeaways:

- YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness are often disconnected from the homeless response system, making it difficult for them to have their housing and service needs met.
- Expanding youth-focused outreach and engagement efforts can help quickly connect YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness to appropriate housing and services.
- It is important to provide a range of options to help YYA move directly from unsheltered situations into housing, which may include housing problem-solving, family reunification, and Rapid Re-Housing.
- Access to supportive services such as employment, mental health and substance use treatment can help YYA exiting unsheltered homelessness to maintain stable housing.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Understand the Local Conditions that Contribute to Unsheltered YYA Homelessness

Charleston increased its focus on addressing unsheltered YYA homelessness during the 100-Day Challenge as a result of learning more about the local conditions and circumstances – including systems level challenges and barriers – that contribute to high rates of unsheltered homelessness among YYA clients. The Charleston 100-Day Challenge Team found through their housing efforts that key components of the homeless response system – including shelters and the Coordinated Entry System – were not as accessible to youth as they were to adults experiencing homelessness. The Team realized that the YYA experiencing homelessness who were being identified and housed during the 100-Day Challenge had been residing in unsheltered situations and used this information to increase the Challenge’s focus on serving YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness in particular. Charleston’s 2019 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count supported this focus on unsheltered YYA homelessness, with over half (54%) of all unaccompanied YYA identified during the PIT Count residing in unsheltered situations. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis created additional urgency around providing safe shelter and housing to persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness to reduce their health and safety risks. The Charleston 100-Day Challenge Team was able to quickly adapt new outreach, engagement, and housing strategies to respond to this identified need to address the distinct issue of unsheltered YYA homelessness in the community.

2) Invest in Expanded Outreach and Engagement Efforts to YYA in Unsheltered Situations

Key to the success of Charleston’s 100-Day Challenge was the expansion of outreach and engagement efforts in order to better connect with and serve YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The 100-Day Challenge Team worked to develop new youth-focused outreach methods that were built upon how YYA experiencing homelessness were already accessing housing and supportive service resources. The 100-Day Challenge Team identified the local drop-in center, which provides youth-focused programming and services, as a safe and accessible place where YYA experiencing homelessness were already comfortable accessing services. The Team set up a table outside of the drop-in center to conduct weekly youth-focused outreach and to provide an opportunity for YYA to meet with case managers in-person to discuss their needs while still being able to maintain social distancing requirements and other COVID-19 safety measures. This new outreach method was well-received by YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness and gained traction through word of mouth among YYA peers. The 100-Day Challenge Team also invested in new ways to share information about the expanded outreach efforts, including through youth-focused flyers and by sharing details through community partners and the housing crisis hotline. These expanded outreach and engagement efforts helped increase connections to housing and services for YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Charleston.

3) Increase Local Capacity to Provide YYA Clients with Housing Directly from Unsheltered Situations

The 100-Day Challenge helped Charleston demonstrate that YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness could be quickly connected to housing and supportive services directly from unsheltered situations. The 100-Day Challenge Team worked to identify dedicated case managers to work with YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness in order to conduct youth-specific outreach, build rapport, and develop housing and service plans responsive to YYA client needs. The Team also mobilized existing resources across partner agencies to be able to quickly provide a range of housing interventions for YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness depending upon their needs, including housing problem-solving resources, reunification with chosen family or friends, and access to RRH units. RRH was found to be one of the most appropriate housing solutions for many YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness based on their vulnerability and needs, which led the Team to develop a youth by-name list to

improve prioritization and referral of YYA clients to RRH placements. The Team also worked with local landlords to accept YYA tenants and to overcome common barriers to housing among YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness, such as lack of identification documentation. These efforts allowed Charleston to significantly increase their housing placements for YYA overall, and particularly for YYA experiencing unsheltered homelessness, during the 100-Day Challenge.

4) Focus on Providing Wraparound Supportive Services

The Charleston 100-Day Challenge Team ensured that YYA exiting unsheltered homelessness were not only connected to safe and stable housing options, but that they were provided with wraparound supportive services to sustain their housing as well. The 100-Day Challenge Team collaboratively developed a new outreach assessment tool to be used when outreaching and engaging with new YYA clients to determine the services offered by partner agencies for which they are eligible. The Team also developed a youth-specific by-name list and case conferencing process to help quickly connect YYA clients to available housing and service interventions based on their vulnerabilities and needs. Youth-focused case managers worked with each YYA housed or diverted from homelessness during the 100-Day Challenge in order to develop a service plan and provide connections to services, including employment, mental health, and substance use treatment resources. Through these efforts, the 100-Day Challenge Team helped ensure that YYA exiting unsheltered homelessness had the resources they needed to sustain their housing and to avoid re-entries into homelessness.