

HUD Cohort 5 100-Day Challenge Case Study

North Central West Virginia: Youth-Focused Behavioral Health Outreach

North Central West Virginia supported the launch of an innovative mobile mental health and substance use program for youth called Resilient Minds during the 100-Day Challenge, improving access to behavioral health services for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness by meeting them where they are.

HOW NORTH CENTRAL WEST VIRGINIA MADE IT HAPPEN

The North Central West Virginia 100-Day Challenge Team recognized early in the Challenge that youth and young adults (YYA) experiencing homelessness often do not seek out mental health or substance use services, and when they do they face long waiting lists for appointments. This creates a significant barrier for YYA experiencing homelessness to access needed behavioral health resources that can help increase housing stability and support exits from homelessness.

In response to this identified need, West Virginia University (WVU) Medicine and United Summit Center worked with the 100-Day Challenge Team to develop a youth mental health and substance use street outreach program called Resilient Minds. Resilient Minds is a new program developed during the 100-Day Challenge to provide community-based behavioral health outreach to YYA ages 18-21 who are experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or aging out of the foster care system. The program provides 24-hour youth-focused crisis response services to youth in their own environments, including behavioral health assessments, referrals to treatment, case management, counseling, and medication management using telemedicine platforms. Common issues addressed by the Resilient Minds team include anxiety, stress, depression, post-partum care, and trouble with a living condition or situation.

Homeless outreach workers can call and request an on-the-spot assessment for YYA experiencing homelessness with mental health or substance use needs who they identify during outreach efforts. Resilient Minds staff can assess YYA clients where they are and streamline their referral for mental health or substance use resources as needed.

Key Takeaways:

- Behavioral health supports can help young people increase housing stability and support their exits from homelessness.
- Partnerships between the behavioral health and homeless response systems can lead to new and innovative supportive service delivery models for YYA.
- Youth-focused behavioral health outreach programs provide an alternative to site-based, adult-focused programs and can increase youth access to behavioral health care.
- Coordination between behavioral health and homeless outreach providers can help create a seamless and streamlined process for connecting YYA to mental health and substance use services as needed.
- Behavioral health services are more accessible when providers “meet youth where they are” in their own environment.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Work with Health Care Partners to Understand the Mental Health and Substance Use Needs of YYA

The North Central West Virginia 100-Day Challenge Team worked in partnership with a local health care partner to better understand the mental health and substance use needs of YYA experiencing homelessness. WVU Medicine was engaged as a partner in the 100-Day Challenge from the beginning and helped Team members build a deeper understanding of the behavioral health needs that impact housing stability and increase the risk of homelessness for young people. This collaboration with WVU Medicine also highlighted the intersection of housing and health care needs and the importance of collaboration across these systems to support YYA in accessing the health and housing resources they need to successfully end their homelessness. WVU Medicine was able to leverage existing resources, including internship opportunities, to work with the 100-Day Challenge Team and United Summit Center in developing the Resilient Minds program.

2) Embrace Innovation in Service Delivery Methodology

Resilient Minds is a completely new program developed during the 100-Day Challenge as a result of cross-system problem-solving and innovation. In response to the identified need for increased access to mental health and substance use resources for YYA experiencing homelessness, WVU Medicine conducted research and shared information on community-based health outreach program models with the 100-Day Challenge Team to help develop the Resilient Minds program. WVU Medicine and United Summit Center also worked directly with street outreach workers to understand their process and design the Resilient Minds program so that it works with the street outreach workflow. The Resilient Minds program model provides a new, innovative approach for homeless and health care providers in North Central West Virginia to identify YYA experiencing homelessness who have mental health and substance use needs and quickly connect them to appropriate resources.

3) Develop Coordinated and Streamlined Processes for YYA to Access Behavioral Health Resources

Key to the success of the Resilient Minds program is meeting YYA in their own environment and breaking down barriers to accessing youth-focused behavioral health services. North Central West Virginia found that YYA often do not access mental health and substance use services despite a need for these resources. This disparity between the need for behavioral health resources and the number of YYA accessing services may be due to a number of barriers, including lack of transportation, long waiting times, and concerns regarding the cultural and youth-specific competencies of adult health care providers. The Resilient Minds program helps overcome many of these challenges and concerns by providing youth-specific behavioral health services that meet YYA where they are, rather than requiring YYA to seek out services from site-based, adult-focused behavioral health programs. The program also makes the process simple and easy for YYA through coordination between homeless outreach workers, who are able to identify YYA in need of services, and Resilient Minds outreach staff, who are able to facilitate streamlined assessment and referral processes for mental health and substance use services.

3) Facilitate Cross-Systems Coordination on the Client Level and the Systems Level

The Resilient Minds Program demonstrates a commitment by North Central West Virginia to cross-systems coordination at both the client level and the systems level. At the client level, coordination is facilitated through a warm handoff and referral process between the homeless outreach worker and the Resilient Minds outreach staff. This collaboration between frontline staff is intended to make the process of requesting and accessing mental health and substance use services as easy and supportive for YYA clients as possible. At the systems level, Resilient Minds facilitates weekly coordination meetings during which housing providers and street outreach workers are

invited to share referrals for clients they have identified in need of behavioral health services. The North Central West Virginia 100-Day Challenge Team plans to strengthen systems-level coordination and collaboration with behavioral health partners, including inviting United Summit Center to attend bi-weekly housing placement calls to identify YYA who would benefit from accessing behavioral health services.