



100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MD: PARTNERSHIPS WITH INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Prince George's County utilized the 100-Day Challenge to deepen and expand partnerships between the homeless response system and institutions of higher education around the shared goal of preventing and ending student homelessness.

HOW PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY MADE IT HAPPEN

Prince George's County involved institutions of higher education from the beginning of the 100-Day Challenge, leveraging existing relationships and conversations within the community around student homelessness. The Prince George's County 100-Day Challenge Team embraced a cross-system focus on addressing student homelessness, establishing a goal of ensuring that 100% of students at three targeted 2-year and 4-year higher education institutions who identify as homeless will be housed or who identify as at-risk of homelessness will remain housed.

Through the 100-Day Challenge, representatives from the homeless response system and institutions of higher education invested in learning about each other's systems, understanding the different resources and services available in the community, and building relationships. This work building cross-system relationships helped the 100-Day Challenge Team pursue new and innovative strategies for identifying students experiencing homelessness and implement a case conferencing process to connect students to housing and resources. Improved cross-system understanding and communication has also helped the community better leverage existing resources to serve students experiencing homelessness, including the Maryland Tuition Waiver for Foster Care Recipients and on-campus housing options.

Key Takeaways:

- Higher education institutions work with unstably housed students and offer a range of housing, financial and supportive services. They are vital partners in a community's efforts to end youth homelessness.
- Higher education collaboration efforts should include diverse representation, including 2- and 4-year institutions, on-campus Financial Aid Offices, and supportive service programs.
- A focus on fostering student success through housing stability can help strengthen investment from the higher education system.
- Communities can better serve unstably housed students by expanding on-campus pathways for youth to self-identify as homeless.
- Communities can improve matching of on-campus housing options to unstably housed students and explore community-based housing options when on-campus housing is unavailable.

As a result of Prince George's 100-Day Challenge efforts, 100% of students identified as at risk of or experiencing homelessness at three 2- and 4-year higher education institutions were housed or remained housed. The community has found that once students are housed they remain housed due to the comprehensive wraparound supports provided through both the homeless system of care and the higher education system. Prince George's County is continuing its intentional cross-system efforts to prevent and end homelessness for students in higher education institutions, including outreach to additional institutions of higher education in the region and continued advocacy around improving the use of Maryland's Tuition Waiver for students experiencing homelessness.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Secure Robust Representation from Within and Across the Higher Education System

Prince George's County ensured that there was robust 100-Day Challenge representation from the higher education system through the targeted involvement of three post-secondary institutions – Prince George's Community College, Bowie State University, and the University of Maryland. Each institution has different operational processes and offers its own range of resources for students at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It was particularly important for Prince George's County to have representation from institutions that provide on-campus housing as well as those where students must utilize off-campus housing options to develop appropriate housing strategies across the community. The 100-Day Challenge Team also worked to identify the right people from each institution to bring to the table, including system leaders, Financial Aid and Student Engagement staff, and other champions already engaged in on-campus work to address student housing and homelessness. Additionally, the Prince George's County Public School System was engaged to ensure that the financial, academic, and housing needs of youth were being addressed as they transition from the public school system into institutions of higher education.

2) Invest in Authentic Collaboration Between the Homeless Response and Higher Education Systems

The success of the Prince George's County 100-Day Challenge relied not only upon bringing representatives of the homeless response and higher education systems together, but also on establishing clear cross-system relationships and lines of communication around addressing student homelessness. The 100-Day Challenge Team worked diligently to establish shared language, learn about each other's systems, and identify and overcome key challenges to coordination between the homeless response system and institutions of higher education. These efforts helped establish more authentic collaboration between the homeless response system and higher education institutions, including regular and frequent communication around providing immediate support and follow-up care to students experiencing homelessness. The 100-Day Challenge Team has also worked to remove barriers to connecting students to homeless and housing resources by establishing more direct processes and clear points of contact for making referrals between institutions of higher education and the homeless response system, including case conferencing to better serve the youth that cross over between the two systems of care.

3) Shift the Conversation Away from Homelessness and Towards Fostering Student Success

Prince George's County found that framing the 100-Day Challenge around fostering student success strengthened the initiative's cross-system impact. This shift in perspective helped create a stronger sense of investment and responsibility among institutions of higher education, while reframing the homeless system of care as a support system for helping students and higher education institutions achieve academic success. This change in perspective has also helped the community prioritize educational success as a means of breaking the cycle of homelessness from youth into adulthood by improving self-sufficiency and expanding employment opportunities. Through these

reframing efforts, Prince George's County has successfully fostered a shared sense of responsibility for preventing and ending student homelessness across the homeless response and higher education systems, rather than this responsibility being siloed within the homeless system of care.

4) Explore New & Innovative Strategies to Identify Students Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness

One focus of the Prince George's County 100-Day Challenge was improving strategies to identify youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness who are enrolled in institutions of higher education. The 100-Day Challenge Team worked closely with on-campus Financial Aid Offices to identify and follow-up with students who may face financial and housing stability challenges, including students utilizing the Maryland Tuition Waiver for Foster Care Recipients and those applying as "independent" on financial aid applications. The 100-Day Challenge Team also collaborated with on-campus supportive services programs to help identify students who may be struggling with housing stability. One such program is PGCC Cares, a program at Prince George's Community College that helps students respond to challenges that impact their academic success, such as paying for tuition, housing, and transportation.

Prince George's County has also invested in community-wide efforts to improve self-identification of homelessness among higher education students. Local colleges and universities are working to provide a pathway for current and prospective students to identify as homeless and to support campus staff in making referrals for housing assistance programs and resources. Prince George's County has developed the R-U-OK? Campaign to help students self-identify as homeless based on five youth-generated questions around housing stability. The homelessness awareness campaign was launched during the 100-Day Challenge for use on university and college campuses and is currently being expanded community-wide for use across youth-serving systems and providers.

5) Identify Systemic Challenges and Gaps in Serving Students Experiencing Homelessness

The Prince George's County 100-Day Challenge Team utilized its expanded cross-system knowledge to identify systemic gaps in serving students experiencing homelessness. Within the homeless response system, the Team identified challenges with students accessing Coordinated Entry and addressed issues within the system that had resulted in student referrals for services being denied. Within the higher education system, the Team found that the closing of on-site campus student housing during breaks throughout the academic year resulted in students experiencing episodic homelessness and accessing the Prince George's County shelter system. The team worked to identify options for students to stay in on-campus housing year-round and to provide temporary housing options for students who are displaced from student housing during academic breaks.

6) Rethink How Existing Resources Can be Utilized to Address Student Homelessness

The Prince George's County 100-Day Challenge helped the community re-evaluate and leverage its existing resources in new ways to more effectively respond to student homelessness. The 100-Day Challenge Team worked with on-campus housing offices to improve matching and prioritization of year-round dormitory options for students who are at-risk of or experiencing homelessness to avoid housing displacement during academic breaks. Additionally, the 100-Day Challenge Team is exploring non-traditional housing options for students at higher education institutions where on-campus housing is not available. To improve off-campus housing options, the community is working with property management companies to identify units that can be used as year-round student housing with separate leases for each student tenant. Prince George's County has also identified an opportunity for students to use financial assistance awarded through the federal Pell Grant program to rent off-campus housing units, providing a stable housing option for students in situations where on-campus housing is unavailable or is not accessible year-round.