

HUD Cohort 6 100-Day Challenge Case Study

San Bernardino County, CA: Authentic Youth Leadership & Engagement

San Bernardino's 100-Day Challenge was youth-led and driven, including strong youth leadership throughout the process and the development of a robust Youth Advisory Board (YAB) in the span of 100 days.

HOW SAN BERNARDINO, CA MADE IT HAPPEN

The San Bernardino County 100-Day Challenge was “done by youth for youth”, with authentic youth and young adult (YYA) leadership and engagement at every step of the community’s process. YYA with lived experiences of homelessness were represented among all leadership positions in the 100-Day Challenge, including as a System Leader and Team Leads. YYA leadership played crucial roles in developing the community’s goal, defining sub-goals and populations of focus, and identifying workstreams to make progress towards preventing and ending YYA homelessness. YYA leadership helped to ensure that the 100-Day Challenge was a youth-driven initiative and responded to the most significant needs and barriers faced by YYA experiencing homelessness in the region.

San Bernardino County also invested in the development and growth of a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) from the onset of the 100-Day Challenge. One of the Team Leads for the 100-Day Challenge was also the Chair of the newly established San Bernardino YAB. This helped to align recruitment for the YAB with ongoing efforts to engage YYA with lived experience in all aspects of the 100-Day Challenge. YAB members who participated in the 100-Day Challenge helped conduct street outreach, developed a landlord mitigation fund to increase housing options for YYA experiencing homelessness, and participated in the development of a Coordinated Entry System for youth. By the end of the 100-Day Challenge, the YAB had expanded to 22 members who were meeting on a weekly basis to tackle the issue of YYA homelessness in San Bernardino County. As countywide initiatives, the 100-Day Challenge and establishment of the YAB helped amplify the voices of YYA with lived experience in decision-making processes throughout the community and across systems.

Key Takeaways:

- Efforts to prevent and end YYA homelessness should be designed and led in partnership with YYA with lived experience.
- Young people with lived expertise should be intentionally engaged in local leadership opportunities related to youth homelessness.
- Young leaders should be trusted by adult partners and supported in developing their leadership skills through new experiences and responsibilities.
- Youth-led decision-making structures such as Youth Action Boards help to ensure that YYA engagement is authentic, meaningful, sustainable, and that YYA are fairly compensated for their time.
- YYA with lived experience should be engaged in all aspects of the work, including but not limited to outreach, landlord engagement, and Coordinated Entry planning for youth.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Connect YYA with Lived Experience to Leadership Opportunities

The 100-Day Challenge provided various opportunities for YYA with lived experience to take on leadership roles in San Bernardino’s work to prevent and end YYA homelessness. San Bernardino County identified one young leader with lived experience who took on various leadership positions during the 100-Day Challenge. As a System Leader from the homeless response system, this young leader helped to shape the community’s focus area for the 100-Day Challenge and provide recommendations for subpopulations of focus based on existing gaps and needs for YYA experiencing homelessness. This YYA representative was also selected to serve as one of the community’s Team Leads to help keep the Team organized and moving towards the 100-Day Challenge goal through coordination between agencies, systems, and YYA and older adult partners. Additionally, the development of a YAB created new opportunities for YYA with lived experience to exercise collective leadership over developing strategies and taking action to prevent and end YYA homelessness in San Bernardino County. Shared leadership of the 100-Day Challenge and YAB helped to align these efforts and ensure that all work underway in San Bernardino County to address YYA homelessness was authentically youth-led, youth-driven, and youth-informed.

2) Support Young Leaders in their Leadership Development

YYA leaders worked in authentic partnership with older adult members of the San Bernardino 100-Day Challenge Team to make progress towards the community’s goal, while also developing their leadership skills in a supported environment. Crucial to the success of YYA leadership and engagement in San Bernardino County was that young leaders were trusted by partners at all levels to take on authentic leadership roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes. San Bernardino County’s young leaders felt supported by older adult partners throughout the 100-Day Challenge, expressing that they “never felt on their own” in taking on activities that could be challenging but that provided opportunities to strengthen or develop new leadership experiences and skills. For example, older adult partners provided guidance as needed to assist YYA leaders in delegating tasks and responsibilities to Team members. Older adult partners also helped to ensure that YYA leaders were comfortable and that their leadership was recognized and respected in new spaces, such as meetings with public officials and with other systems of care.

3) Develop Decision-Making and Compensation Structures to Support Authentic Youth Engagement

San Bernardino County supported authentic youth engagement through the development of a robust YAB. The San Bernardino 100-Day Challenge Team conducted robust recruitment and engagement efforts to identify YYA with lived experiences of homelessness who were interested in participating in the YAB and informing the County’s work to address YYA homelessness. YYA with lived experience developed the decision-making structures for the YAB, including the organization’s mission, goals, objectives, schedule, and compensation policies. YAB meetings take place every Friday at 4 pm, which was identified by YAB members as the day and time most accommodating to their existing schedules and that would allow for the most consistent attendance. YAB members are compensated fairly for their time at a rate of \$15/hour for every meeting they attend using a “pay right away” structure, in which an immediate bank transfer is used to pay YAB members for their participation following the meeting. The development and expansion of a YAB with strong decision-making and compensation structures helped increase accountability and commitment to authentic youth engagement in San Bernardino County.

4) Engage YYA with Lived Experience in All Aspects of the Work

San Bernardino County's 100-Day Challenge was strengthened by the engagement of YYA with lived experience in all aspects of the work to achieve the community's goal. San Bernardino County recognized early in the 100-Day Challenge that there was a need for improved identification, support, and assessment of YYA experiencing homelessness. YAB members helped lead San Bernardino's local census efforts, as well as much of the street outreach conducted during the 100-Day Challenge. This peer outreach model helped to build trust with YYA experiencing homelessness, engaging more YYA in conversations around housing and supportive services and facilitating more successful connections to the homeless response system. YAB members also participated in evaluating and making changes to improve Coordinated Entry processes for YYA clients, providing education to youth-serving organizations on the TAY VI-SPDAT and how it can be incorporated into HMIS and CES. Additionally, the YAB spearheaded San Bernardino's landlord engagement efforts during the 100-Day Challenge through the development and administration of a landlord mitigation fund. YYA with lived experience were able to support different aspects of the work, in the process learning more about how the homeless response system works and developing new skills.

5) Invest in the Sustainability of Youth Leadership & Engagement

Sustained YYA leadership and engagement requires an ongoing commitment to supporting participation for YYA with lived experiences, formalizing youth-led operations and decision-making structures, and continuous evaluation of current processes to ensure equity, authenticity, and diversity in YYA engagement. San Bernardino County has dedicated funding to support the ongoing operation of the YAB and fair compensation for YAB members. The YAB currently has high YYA involvement, recruitment, and retention due to several factors, including opportunities for professional development and to take on leadership roles; autonomy in decision-making processes; demonstrated impact of the YAB in addressing YYA homelessness in the community; and youth-adult partnerships to provide support as needed. San Bernardino is also working to establish two youth seats on the Continuum of Care (CoC) Board to help sustain the community's commitment to youth leadership in ongoing efforts to address YYA homelessness.