



100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

WEST TENNESSEE AND NORTHERN MICHIGAN: DIVERSION & FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Through the 100-Day Challenge, Northern Michigan and West Tennessee discovered the strength of diversion and family reunification as appropriate interventions for youth experiencing homelessness.

HOW WEST TENNESSEE AND NORTHERN MICHIGAN MADE IT HAPPEN

West Tennessee and Northern Michigan both entered the 100-Day Challenge with a lack of housing and funding that could be dedicated to addressing youth homelessness. Additionally, both communities identified that youth experiencing homelessness were more likely to be doubled-up or couch-surfing than in unsheltered situations. Within these local contexts, both the West Tennessee and Northern Michigan 100-Day Challenge Teams looked to increasing the use of diversion and family reunification as appropriate interventions to help youth prevent or exit homelessness.

Diversion: The 100-Day Challenge helped Northern Michigan identify that there are less youth experiencing unsheltered homelessness than previously thought, with a more significant population of youth residing in temporary, unstable sheltered situations such as doubled-up or couch-surfing. Housing navigators and outreach staff are trained in diversion and family reunification, with the goal of preventing and diverting youth from entering homelessness as a result of family crises or instability. The insights from the 100-Day Challenge on the characteristics of youth homelessness locally led the Team to increase its focus on identifying and diverting youth from experiencing homelessness as an important part of the youth homeless response system.

In West Tennessee, a lack of youth housing options in the region makes diversion an important first step in both preventing and resolving homelessness for unstably housed youth. Case managers have problem-solving conversations with every youth and determine if there is any assistance that can be provided to them or their family to create a stable housing

Key Takeaways:

- Diversion and family reunification can be successful and appropriate interventions for youth experiencing homelessness.
- Problem-solving conversations can be pursued with all youth to identify opportunities for diversion from the homeless response system, including existing family supports.
- Diversion and family reunification efforts can be particularly effective with youth who are in temporary, sheltered situations and need assistance in resolving a crisis, reconnecting with family and other supports, or stabilizing their current housing situation.
- Increasing local diversion and family reunification efforts can help communities maximize utilization of limited housing resources for youth experiencing homelessness by targeting the right amount of assistance to the right person at the right time.

situation. The 100-Day Challenge Team was able to work with churches and other community resources to help provide support, such as utility assistance, for youth who could be diverted from experiencing homelessness.

Family Reunification: In Northern Michigan, 66% of youth and young adults who exited homelessness during the 100-Day Challenge were rehoused through family reunification efforts. The results of the 100-Day Challenge demonstrated to local stakeholders that an increased investment in services that facilitate and support family reunification can have a significant impact on preventing and ending youth homelessness in Northern Michigan.

West Tennessee similarly found that family reunification was an important intervention for connecting youth to stable housing within their community. During the 100-Day Challenge, 33% of all youth who exited homelessness were housed through family reunification; 100% of these youth were experiencing literal homelessness per HUD definition. The 100-Day Challenge helped build momentum around family reunification, which had previously been underutilized in West Tennessee, and ensure that problem-solving conversations are a starting point for working with all youth experiencing homelessness.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Engage Every Youth in Problem-Solving Conversations to Resolve Their Housing Crisis

West Tennessee found that engaging youth in problem-solving conversations from the point of first contact can help to quickly identify opportunities to divert youth from the homeless response system and reunify with family when safe and appropriate. Members of the West Tennessee 100-Day Challenge Team who are case managers conducted outreach to youth during the Challenge to identify what they need and potential solutions to their current housing crisis by asking questions such as, “What do you need to make it ok to go home? What is your idea of a safe and stable living situation? How can we help you get there?” Case managers found that in many cases, youth were facing simple issues that had become blown out of proportion and needed a light-touch intervention such as mediation, family location, and family reunification. The 100-Day Challenge Team approaches problem-solving with youth from a hopeful, positive perspective that begins with the assumption that “no situation is too big to fix” and that there is always a way to support youth in resolving their current crisis.

2) Understand the Local Context and Characteristics of Youth Homelessness

The 100-Day Challenge helped Northern Michigan and West Tennessee learn more about local experiences and characteristics of youth homelessness, which allowed both communities to identify more targeted housing supports and interventions to meet youth needs. As Northern Michigan and West Tennessee worked to identify and house youth through the 100-Day Challenge, they found that there were less youth experiencing unsheltered homelessness than they anticipated, with many youth residing in temporary, sheltered situations such as couch-surfing or doubled-up with friends or family. This improved understanding of how youth are experiencing homelessness in Northern Michigan and West Tennessee helped both communities pursue the challenge with renewed focus on diverting youth from entering the homeless response system. Diversion efforts in these communities included family reunification, family strengthening and support, financial assistance, and case management supports to help youth either stabilize their current housing situation or move into non-time-limited housing option by building on their current strengths and resources.

3) Increase Recognition of Diversion and Family Reunification as Successful Housing Interventions for Youth

In Northern Michigan and West Tennessee, the successful results of family reunification and diversion efforts during the 100-Day Challenge helped increase recognition and momentum around utilizing these interventions to prevent and end youth homelessness. Prior to the 100-Day Challenge, West Tennessee was working to develop family reunification and problem-solving resources for youth but struggled to get them established within the community. The success of utilizing family reunification, problem-solving, and other diversion approaches to move youth quickly into non-time-limited housing options without any new funding or resources during the 100-Day Challenge helped stakeholders in West Tennessee recognize the importance of strengthening these interventions as part of the community's coordinated response to youth homelessness. Similarly, the results of the 100-Day Challenge helped Northern Michigan recognize that family reunification is the most successful type of housing placement for youth across the region and that the community should increase investment in this intervention to help maximize its ability to quickly prevent and end homelessness for youth. Both West Tennessee and Northern Michigan came to see diversion and family reunification as not only viable options for youth, but strong and successful interventions for serving youth in their communities.

4) Use Diversion and Family Reunification to Help Target Housing Resources to Youth with the Highest Needs

Northern Michigan and West Tennessee found that increasing their diversion and family reunification efforts helped to maximize utilization of limited housing resources for youth experiencing homelessness in their communities. Diversion and family reunification efforts empower youth to identify and utilize existing supports and resources to secure alternative housing options and avoid entry into the homeless response system. The 100-Day Challenge Teams in Northern Michigan and West Tennessee worked to progressively engage youth and connect them to the right intervention, with the right level of assistance, at the right time. In many cases, youths' current housing crises were able to be resolved through diversion and family reunification efforts with few or no resources from the homeless response system. As a result, Northern Michigan and West Tennessee have been able to better target more limited, higher intensity housing interventions such as Rapid Re-Housing and Public Housing to youth who cannot safely be diverted from the homeless response system or reunified with family.