

HUD Cohort 5 100-Day Challenge Summary

Central Alabama

100-Day Challenge Goal

In 100 days, 30 youth experiencing homelessness ages 19-24 will enter safe and stable housing and be offered supportive services, with 60% having touched the child welfare or justice systems.

*Central Alabama's partnerships with the municipal court and child welfare system were crucial for identifying youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness with histories of systems involvement and providing referrals for housing, supportive services, transition planning, and homelessness prevention resources as needed. Please see Central Alabama's **Partnerships with Municipal Courts** case study to learn more about how the local Continuum of Care (CoC) developed these new partnerships to support progress towards their goal.*

100-DAY CHALLENGE CONTEXT & FOCUS AREAS

BACKGROUND: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN CENTRAL ALABAMA

While Alabama has the third-lowest rate of homelessness in the country, it also has the fourth-highest rate of unaccompanied youth experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the country according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress.¹ Central Alabama is dedicated to addressing the issue of youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness, but has historically faced the challenge of meeting the needs of YYAs experiencing homelessness with very few youth-dedicated homeless response resources.

The 100-Day Challenge provided an opportunity for Central Alabama to reach and serve an unprecedented number of YYA experiencing homelessness while also gaining a deeper understanding of the strengths and gaps that exist in the youth homelessness response system. The 100-Day Challenge also provided the momentum for local homeless and housing providers to engage partners from other systems of care and leverage additional resources to develop a newly coordinated dedicated youth homelessness response system in Central Alabama.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD), *2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, January 2020, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

100-DAY CHALLENGE FOCUS AREAS

System leaders from across Central Alabama came together to identify the following area of focus for the community's 100-Day Challenge to prevent and end youth homelessness:

To strengthen connections and supports between the foster care system, the housing support system, and justice-involved youth to ensure a smoother transition for youth exiting various programs to housing self-sufficiency.

System leaders also identified a number of areas in which the Central Alabama 100-Day Challenge Team could focus their work:

- Increasing homelessness prevention by developing stronger data sharing practices between the foster care and housing systems;
- Strengthening the communication between juvenile and criminal justice systems and the housing support system to support youth exiting justice programs;
- Improving communication with YYA who might be eligible to access services and benefits from the housing or foster care systems;
- Improving education and communication about policies and processes among the various actors involved in this project; and
- Beginning to increase the stock of affordable housing through landlord education and recruitment.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE 100-DAY CHALLENGE

Only a couple of weeks into their 100-Day Challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic became a reality for Central Alabama and the other Cohort 5 100-Day Challenge communities. A decision was made to pause the Challenge so that the community could first address its immediate needs related to the growing pandemic, including staffing changes, shifts in local priorities, and changes in how YYA were engaging with the homeless response system.

During this pause, a number of Central Alabama 100-Day Challenge Team members were transitioned into new roles in local COVID-19 crisis response. However, a key group of youth-serving providers and system leaders remained focused on responding to the emerging housing, health care and supportive service needs of YYA experiencing homelessness.

About 6 weeks after the initial pause, the 100-Day Challenge relaunched for another 75 days. Central Alabama maintained its original 100-Day Challenge goal, but increased its focus on improving communication and data sharing across systems, particularly between the CoC, child welfare and justice systems.

Central Alabama chose to increase its focus on cross-systems coordination to ensure that YYA at risk of or experiencing homelessness with histories of systems involvement— a population that the CoC found had become even more "invisible" during the COVID-19 crisis – did not experience a surge in unsheltered homelessness due to decreased shelter capacity, barriers to transition planning, and limited housing stock resulting from the pandemic.

100-DAY CHALLENGE SUCCESSES, ACCOMPLISHMENTS & INNOVATIONS

SNAPSHOT OF 100-DAY CHALLENGE PROGRESS

100-Day Challenge Goal: In 100 days, 30 youth experiencing homelessness ages 19-24 will enter safe and stable housing and be offered supportive services, with 60% having touched the child welfare or justice systems.

OUTCOMES AS OF DAY 100: 35 YYA safely and stably housed

Safe and Stable Housing



35 YYA safely and stably housed, including through connections to Rapid Re-Housing (RRH), market rate housing, and self-resolution

Family Reunification



Over 30% of YYA safely and stably housed were reunified with chosen family during the Challenge

Populations of Focus



At least 30% of YYA housed during the Challenge touched the child welfare or juvenile justice system

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN SYSTEMS CHANGE

CROSS-SYSTEMS COLLABORATION

The Central Alabama 100-Day Challenge Team worked to deepen CoC relationships with cross-system partners, including the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and Birmingham Municipal Court, as a key step in developing a more coordinated community response to YYA homelessness. Representatives from DHR (child welfare) and Birmingham Municipal Court were engaged throughout the Challenge and brought new ideas to the 100-Day Challenge Team on how their systems can work with the CoC to prevent youth from exiting their care into homelessness. This collaboration during the 100-Day Challenge also allowed system partners to cultivate an improved understanding of how the homeless, child welfare, and justice systems each operate and the resources available across systems to help prevent and reduce homelessness for YYA with histories of systems involvement.

DHR, Birmingham Municipal Court, and the CoC made significant progress on formalizing their collaborative partnerships during the 100-Day Challenge, including working together to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between systems to share client-level data and developing a youth by-name list. Improved data sharing and communication helped increase identification of YYA at risk of or experiencing homelessness with connections to DHR and the Birmingham Municipal Court so that they could be more quickly assessed, prioritized, and referred to housing, supportive services, transition planning, or homeless prevention resources as needed. Central Alabama plans to expand and leverage this work to create a monthly by-name list meeting that involves case conferencing and coordination of care for YYA from across all three partner systems.

ANALYZING RACIAL AND GENDER INEQUITIES

Central Alabama utilized the 100-Day Challenge as an opportunity to begin collecting and analyzing data on race and gender among YYA experiencing homelessness for the first time. The Team was able to identify substantial racial and gender inequities in accessing housing resources within the community based on data collected during the 100-Day Challenge. Central Alabama found that less than 50% of YYA housed during the 100-Day Challenge were Black, while Black YYA made up about 65% of the youth by-name list (BNL). Additionally, 40% of YYA housed during the Challenge were male, while males made up 65% of the youth BNL. Central Alabama is committed to using this data to identify and address barriers that result in disparities in accessing housing and services for YYA populations. One area of focus for improving equity outcomes among YYA in Central Alabama is work with youth-serving housing providers to increase adoption of low barrier, Housing First principles. This shift from “document readiness” to Housing First would help increase access to housing for YYA populations that have greater challenges in obtaining identification documents, including Black YYA and YYA who have histories of involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice system.

LANDLORD OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

A key focus for the Central Alabama 100-Day Challenge Team was increasing housing options for YYA through landlord outreach and engagement. Team members shared critical information with each other, both about specific landlords and about fears related to landlord competition. This dialogue opened the door for conversations about cultivating landlords as a community-wide resource and developing tools and resources to support collaboration rather than competition around landlord engagement for YYA clients. The 100-Day Challenge Team worked on developing a uniform letter that can be sent to potential landlords explaining services available from each agency, providing education on youth homelessness and breaking down myths around housing YYA tenants, and outlining the types of supports and aftercare services available to YYA tenants once housed. Central Alabama also began development of a comprehensive and up-to-date housing asset list, including information on landlords who are open to serving YYA tenants and other housing resources that are available to YYA experiencing homelessness throughout the community. The housing asset list includes “traditional” housing options such as Rapid Re-Housing as well as less traditional options such as housing available through the child welfare system.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

The Central Alabama 100-Day Challenge Team found that family reunification was a significant permanent housing destination for many YYA experiencing homelessness, which has led to new considerations around housing strategies and options. Nearly a third of YYA housed during the 100-Day Challenge were reunified with chosen family, many without the financial assistance of the CoC or the homeless response system. Central Alabama wants to capitalize more on using family reunification as a safe, stable housing destination for YYA experiencing homelessness in the future, while also ensuring that there is a support system in place to address the unique challenges and supportive service needs that sometimes accompany family reunification. Central Alabama is working to develop new processes that would allow homeless and housing provider staff to follow-up with YYA who exited homelessness through family reunification to ensure that the placement is safe and appropriate and to provide any additional supports as needed.

IMPROVED DATA COLLECTION & DATA SHARING PROCESSES

The 100-Day Challenge helped Central Alabama launch new efforts to improve data collection and data sharing processes for YYA experiencing homelessness. Central Alabama identified over the course of the 100-Day Challenge that gaps in data collection, including lack of engagement in HMIS among youth-serving agencies,

hindered the community's ability to track progress on YYA housing and service connections. To help address this data collection challenge, the Team developed a youth by-name list that will track data on YYA experiencing homelessness from all youth-serving agencies and prioritize YYA for services and housing. Data specialists on the 100-Day Challenge Team are in conversations with child welfare as well as Birmingham Municipal Court to create a data-sharing process that protects client privacy while also allowing the CoC to populate a more comprehensive youth by-name list. Once these data sharing agreements are in place, the by-name list will be accessible to DHR and the Municipal Court to facilitate cross-systems case conferencing for YYA involved in multiple systems of care. Additional non-HMIS participating agencies, such as Birmingham Schools, will be able to add to and share information during monthly cross-system by-name list meetings.

MAINTAINING 100-DAY CHALLENGE MOMENTUM

In order to lock in their gains and maintain the momentum around preventing and ending youth homelessness, the Central Alabama 100-Day Challenge Team plans to focus on the following priorities moving forward.

ACTION PLAN FOR ONGOING WORK

- Finalize the MOU and the process for sharing information for cross-system case conferencing;
- Publish and keep updated the database of wraparound services;
- Investigate the best platform to house the youth by-name list;
- Perform a Youth Needs Assessment; and
- Perform a Providers Assessment.

ACTION PLAN FOR NEW WORK

- Expand participation in the Youth Council;
- Explore opportunities to integrate the Youth Council into regular member meetings and decision-making processes;
- Set clear expectations around data collection for youth clients and foster a sense of community obligation to collect YYA data;
- Identify champions and appropriate frontline staff to invite to cross-community case conferencing from DHR and Birmingham City Schools.

PRIORITIES FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

Additionally, the team has established the following priority system shifts needed to sustain performance and proposed actions to make those system shifts a reality.

- Expanding the monthly By-Name List meeting to include representatives from Birmingham Municipal Court, DHR, Birmingham City Schools, youth-serving agencies, and Youth Action Council members and incorporating a focus on policy decisions;
- Expanding the recruitment pool for Youth Council members beyond OneRoof and integrating responsibility for nurturing development of the Youth Council into CoC Member responsibilities;
- Incorporating the Youth Council into the governing structure of the CoC;
- Making data/reporting on youth a priority for HMIS and Coordinated Entry leads;
- Strengthening communication/follow up with YYA, especially when they get an unfit referral; and
- Continuing landlord education and management efforts.