

100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

FRANKLIN COUNTY, ME: ALIGNING YOUTH-ORIENTED RESOURCES AND BUILDING LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Franklin County utilized the momentum of the 100-Day Challenge to raise awareness of youth homelessness within the community, build local infrastructure for serving youth experiencing homelessness, and develop a network of partners to provide youth-oriented resources.

HOW FRANKLIN COUNTY MADE IT HAPPEN

Prior to the 100-Day Challenge, Franklin County had very little infrastructure to serve youth experiencing homelessness, including a lack of short-term interventions to improve safety and stability for unhoused or precariously housed youth. The 100-Day Challenge allowed Franklin County to raise the visibility of youth homelessness locally and begin to address the distinct challenges of serving youth experiencing homelessness in an extremely rural and sparsely populated area.

Throughout the 100-Day Challenge, Franklin County pursued innovative ways to provide safe spaces, available 24 hours a day, for youth who are experiencing homelessness or who are in crisis. The 100-Day Challenge Team also worked with community partners to develop a shared knowledge of the available resources for youth experiencing homelessness in Franklin County. The Team hosted and facilitated a *Community Forum: Helping Homeless Youth* during the 100-Day Challenge, during which community members from across Franklin County learned about youth homelessness in Maine and the community-wide movement underway through the 100-Day Challenge to accelerate efforts to end youth homelessness across Franklin County.

As a result of Franklin County's efforts, the community has been able to lay the groundwork for a homeless services infrastructure and develop a network of partners dedicated to ending youth homelessness.

Key Takeaways:

- Communities can align existing resources to improve their local infrastructure for serving youth at-risk of and experiencing homelessness.
- Increasing community engagement and knowledge is crucial for identifying existing resources and gaps. Community engagement can also help bring new community members into efforts to support youth experiencing homelessness.
- Key resources for preventing and ending youth homelessness may lie outside of the homeless response system, and may include faith-based organizations, community members, local agencies, school officials, and law enforcement. These resources can be aligned and leveraged within the community to better serve youth.
- It may be necessary to make targeted asks of key partner organizations and agencies to fill service and housing gaps for youth.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Identify and Align Existing Partners and Resources

During the first 50 days of 100-Day Challenge, Franklin County developed a network of community partners to explore effective strategies to identify youth experiencing homelessness, refer them into services and create safety and stability. Although Franklin County has very little homeless response infrastructure, they were able to identify existing partners and resources for serving youth outside of the homeless response system, including churches, community members, local agencies, school officials and law enforcement. These partner agencies connected and aligned their resources to collectively meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness, as well as to identify existing gaps in housing and services that need to be filled through new interventions.

As a result of this new alignment of resources, Franklin County was able to develop a resource guide for youth experiencing homelessness detailing resources and assistance available, ranging from housing and case management providers to thrift stores and coffee shops that are friendly to unaccompanied youth. Franklin County also considered system mapping as a next step to identify what resources already exist and what new interventions are needed.

2) Provide Partner Organizations with Diverse Opportunities for Involvement

The Franklin County 100-Day Challenge Team opened up a community-wide discussion around the needs of youth at-risk of and experiencing homelessness during the *Community Forum: Helping Homeless Youth*. Franklin County emphasized that community members from all systems and backgrounds can help support youth. Opportunities to provide assistance and support for youth include:

- A business could consider opening their doors to youth as a place to get warm and hydrated, and allow them to stay for a bit.
- Become a host family.
- Provide meals for those who host a youth.
- Provide transportation for youth.
- Be a supportive presence, a listening ear for someone who is a host.
- Mentor a youth in a host family.
- Provide financial assistance/donations including gift cards for food, survival gear, warm clothing, job interview clothing, footwear, gas vouchers, and hygiene items, among other items.¹

By providing a range of diverse opportunities for community members to become involved in the 100-Day Challenge, Franklin County was able increase community participation and involvement in leveraging existing resources to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

3) Make Targeted Asks of Key Agencies and Institutions

As Franklin County moves forward in building out a robust infrastructure to serve youth at-risk of and experiencing homelessness, they are looking to make more targeted asks of key agencies and institutions to help fill in current housing and service gaps. For example, the Franklin County 100-Day Challenge Team has considered strategies to increase collaboration with local law enforcement to support youth outreach and engagement activities.

¹ Donna M. Perry, Sun Journal. "100-Day Challenge addresses youth homelessness." February 15, 2018. <http://www.sunjournal.com/100-day-challenge-addresses-youth-homelessness/>