

## 100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

# GULF COAST, MS: TRANSITION PLANNING

**Throughout the 100-Day Challenge, the Mississippi Gulf Coast worked in partnership with representatives from the juvenile justice and child welfare systems to develop housing transition plans for youth and young adults who are exiting these systems into unstable housing situations.**

### HOW MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST MADE IT HAPPEN

The Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge team established youth and young adult homelessness prevention as one of its priorities for the 100-Day Challenge. In establishing its 100-Day Challenge goal, the team narrowed its focus on prevention around improving the percentage of young adults who transition to permanent solutions by implementing cross-sector housing transition plans for youth aging out of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The decision to focus on transition planning was the result of having diverse representation from youth-serving systems at the table, including decision-makers from the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. These team members brought new perspectives on addressing the inflow of youth into homelessness from other systems of care that aligned with local data regarding the connection between systems involvement and youth homelessness. The Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge team approached transition plans as roadmaps to not only help youth transition out of the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, but also to support their transition into adulthood.

As of the completion of the 100-Day Challenge in March 2018, Mississippi Gulf Coast had completed 78 transition plans for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system or juvenile justice detention. Additionally, the Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge team has started to see a change in the inflow of youth into homelessness, from an average of 11 youth per month prior to the Challenge to 8 youth per month since the completion of the Challenge. These results reflect the strong commitment to cross-system collaboration and comprehensive transition planning to meet the needs of at-risk youth in the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

### Key Takeaways:

- Transition planning is key to preventing homelessness for youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.
- Transition plans should help youth transition into stable housing situations, as well as support safe and stable transitions into adulthood.
- Transition planning goes beyond housing and the homeless response system, child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Diverse partners and service providers play an important role in connecting youth to other needed supports such as education, employment, and health services.
- Build trust for cross-system transition planning efforts by sharing how this work is mutually beneficial and will lead to better client outcomes.
- It is important to understand how systems such as the child welfare and juvenile justice systems work, the nuances of their processes, and where they are currently in their transition planning efforts. Housing and service partners should work to meet these systems where they are at to help build more robust transition planning processes.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### **1) Bring Diverse Partners Together to Share Resources and Address Distinct Needs**

The Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge team found that improving local transition planning processes required more than having representatives from the child welfare and juvenile justice systems at the table. Transition plans should provide pathways to personal, economic, and housing stability for youth, which may require a range of supports including housing, education, employment, health and mental health services, and other independent living supports. By bringing diverse partners together to participate in the transition planning process, representatives from the housing, child welfare and juvenile justice systems increased their knowledge and utilization of existing resources from other systems and establish referral partnerships to support youth as they transition out of care.

### **2) Share How Collaboration Around Transition Planning Can Lead to Better Client Outcomes**

The Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge team emphasized the importance of building trust and establishing mutual benefit when working across systems to improve transition planning processes. It is important for the CoC and housing providers to understand how the resources in the homeless response system can benefit youth transitioning out of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and identify gaps that the CoC and partner organizations can fill for these systems. Housing and service providers can approach partners in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems with ways to help them serve their clients more effectively, which may include infrastructural supports such as coordinate entry or resource support such as housing, case management, and education and employment services. It is important to establish how such collaboration will result in better client outcomes for youth exiting these systems and will help prevent youth from experiencing homelessness and entering the homeless system of care, creating a mutual benefit across systems.

### **3) Meet Partners Where They Are in the Transition Planning Process**

The Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge team worked to meet other systems where they were at in the transitioning planning process. At the time of the 100-Day Challenge, the Mississippi Department of Child Protective Services (MDCPS) was actively considering changes to the current transition planning process. The 100-Day Challenge allowed the child welfare system to test how it can better interact with housing providers to ensure exits to stable housing through the transition planning process. Through the internal review process and the work of the 100-Day Challenge, MDCPS Transition Navigators were also able to make the transition planning process more individualized for youth, including the incorporation of more integrative questions into the process.

Through county-level youth courts, the juvenile justice system was also working to maintain contact with youth who were transitioning out of the system and provide an open door for youth to come back for assistance if they experience a crisis. However, the juvenile justice system has very limited resources available to support youth once they age out of the system. The 100-Day Challenge Team worked with youth court judges in three separate counties to institute a transition planning policy and to share information regarding existing community resources that can support justice-involved youth as they transition out of the system.

### **4) Work to Understand the Nuances of Each System and Its Processes**

The child welfare system and juvenile justice system each have distinct regulations, requirements, and processes that can impact or play a role in collaboration, including transition planning. Some considerations for cross-sector collaboration with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems based on the Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge are listed below.

- **Confidentiality:** Due to strict confidentiality rules and restrictions, partners in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems may be limited in their ability to share data.
- **Terminology:** There are significant differences in terminology between the child welfare system, juvenile justice system, and homeless system of care. Take time to learn and understand each other's terminology and find common ground as you move forward in transition planning and other collaborative efforts.
- **System Resources:** Different systems bring different resources to the table. In the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the juvenile justice system has very limited resources to support youth once they age out of care. The child welfare system, however, has a number of resources that can be utilized by youth with current or past experiences in care, such as housing, education and employment services. It is important to discuss each systems strengths and weaknesses, align resources, and identify gaps.
- **Centralized Versus Decentralized Systems:** In the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the juvenile justice system is decentralized, with youth courts run at the county level (or state level for very rural counties). The child welfare system is a centralized system operated at the state level. Different types of systems may require different approaches for collaboration and transition planning, which may include localized (county by county) or regional approaches.
- **Periods of Increased Need:** In the Mississippi Gulf Coast, there is a greater housing need for youth with involvement in the child welfare system over the summer than during any other time of year, due to the lack of school support and stability over the summer. As a result, collaborative relationships and transition planning efforts may look different, and differ in intensity, throughout different points in the year.
- **Non-Judgement:** Housing and service providers should ensure that they show compassion, acceptance, and non-judgement in their work with systems-involved youth. Youth should not be defined by their systems involvement; however, partner organizations should understand how systems involvement impacts the risk of homelessness and how to address the specific needs systems-involved youth may face.

##### 5) Follow-Up on the Transition Planning Process

The Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge team emphasized that follow-up on transition plans is just as important as establishing transition plans during the intake and assessment processes. It is important for transition plans to remain living documents that reflect changes in goals, situations, and needs for youth as they move closer to transitioning out of systems as well as into adulthood. Providing follow-up support for youth during the transition planning process may also include sharing new options and opportunities with youth, such as offering information regarding extended care in the child welfare system until age 21.

##### 6) Use Transition Planning as a Starting Point to Expand Prevention Efforts

For the Mississippi Gulf Coast 100-Day Challenge team, prevention efforts were focused on stemming the inflow of youth into homelessness from other systems of care. Cross-system transition planning provided the community with a way to identify and address risk factors for youth homelessness before they resulted in unstable housing situations. In its work beyond the 100-Day Challenge, the Mississippi Gulf Coast is looking to dig deeper into how and why youth experience homelessness and systems involvement so that they can pursue more proactive prevention strategies. The community is working with the University of Southern Mississippi to conduct a study on the root causes of homelessness for youth and young adults in the region that is set to begin in January 2019.