

## 100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

# MARION COUNTY, OR: SERVING YOUTH UNDER THE AGE OF 18

During their 100-Day Challenge, Marion County established a focus on addressing the needs of unaccompanied, non-system engaged youth 12 to 17 years old. The community identified and expanded appropriate solutions to homelessness for youth under the age of 18, including family reunification, shelter solutions, and innovative alternative solutions.

### HOW MARION COUNTY MADE IT HAPPEN

Marion County's commitment to serving youth under the age of 18 was established early in the 100-Day Challenge planning process. Community leaders recognized that there was a lack of available resources, including shelter, for minors experiencing homelessness. Additionally, Marion County focused on serving non-systems engaged youth during the 100-Day Challenge, as this group was particularly likely to be disconnected from homeless and housing interventions.

The Marion County 100-Day Challenge Team tested innovative ways to address the challenges faced by unaccompanied youth under age 18, including strengthening approaches to family reunification, and streamlining and increasing effectiveness of outreach to youth using strengths-based and youth-focused approaches. As a result of these efforts, in 100 days Marion County connected 93 unaccompanied youth under the age of 18 with safe and stable housing.

Marion County's 100-Day Challenge fundraising efforts raised enough money to support the development of a youth homeless shelter for youth under the age of 18. The community is also working to establish a host home model and continues to build the capacity of its coordinated entry system to serve minors. These new and expanded interventions will help bolster the community's capacity to meet the immediate and long-term needs of youth under age 18 experiencing homelessness.

### Key Takeaways:

- Youth under the age of 18 have distinct housing and service needs. Communities should work to identify appropriate housing solutions for this population, including family reunification.
- Youth under the age of 18 may look demographically different from the young adults who are experiencing homelessness. Communities should work to identify and understand the population of youth under age 18 who are unstably housed in order to create tailored housing and service interventions.
- Success in housing youth under age 18 may look different from other populations. Communities should focus on providing safe, stable and appropriate housing solutions.
- Strong community partners such as school districts, local law enforcement, direct service providers, and the local housing authority are key to successful outreach and engagement to minors experiencing homelessness.
- Communities can think creatively and adapt existing resources to better serve this population.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### 1) Identify the Population of Youth Under Age 18 in Need of Housing and Services

Marion County chose to focus on non-systems engaged youth under age 18 due to the urgent needs for housing and services experienced by this population and the lack of current resources available to these youth experiencing homelessness. Through their 100-Day Challenge efforts and their increased focus on serving youth under the age of 18, Marion County also discovered that only about 5% of minors are experiencing unsheltered street homelessness. This information helped the 100-Day Challenge team better target outreach and homelessness interventions and provided an opportunity to increase community awareness of different unstable housing situations experienced by minors. Marion County also ensured that Latinx youth experiencing homelessness were represented and that their needs were reflected during the 100-Day Challenge.

### 2) Reframe Success with a Focus on Safety and Stability

The Marion County 100-Day Challenge Team recognized that providing rental assistance may not be the most appropriate housing solution for youth under the age of 18. Instead, Marion County emphasized the importance of providing safety and stability for youth compared to where they were during their housing crisis. This required working with the community to reframe success to include safely connecting youth under the age of 18 to stable housing through shelter placements, family reunification, and creative alternative placements.

The Marion County 100-Day Challenge Team noted that the emphasis on safety and stability changed the way that service providers and system partners approached their efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness. Education partners increased their engagement with youth to ensure they are in safe and stable housing situations, and direct staff worked with an increased focus on finding what safety and stability looks like for each individual youth they serve. Marion County also found that it is important to recognize successful placements and build momentum from these moments of success.

### 3) Actively Engage Community Partners in Creating Strategies to Serve this Population of Focus

The Marion County 100-Day Challenge Team sought to bring together representatives from across all programs and systems that work with youth under the age of 18 who may be experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Key partners included direct service providers, the Department of Human Services, Salem Housing Authority, Salem Police Department, the school district, the juvenile justice system, and youth with lived experience. Examples of how Marion County actively engaged community partners in preventing and ending homelessness for youth under the age of 18 are highlighted below:

- Marion County found that their partnerships with McKinney-Vento local homeless education liaisons were imperative when working with minors and were vital partners in outreach, engagement, and planning activities for the 100-Day Challenge.
- The Salem Police Department also played a crucial role in planning and outreach efforts, and also served as liaisons with the larger community to demonstrate the importance of preventing and ending youth homelessness. The relationship between the Salem Police Department, direct service providers, and youth with lived experience builds upon the successful relationships built through a local mentoring program that brings together law enforcement officers and at-risk and homeless youth.
- The Salem Housing Authority and Salem Police Department developed an immediate needs station to serve at-risk and homeless youth, which is operated through a mini-resource room on-site at the Housing

Authority. The Salem Housing Authority also provided housing support for minors who were reconnected to their families and is conducting research into opportunities for minors as renters.

The Marion County 100-Day Challenge Team also emphasized the importance of working together as one planning body with a unified message. A strong sense of teamwork, unity, and collaboration allowed Marion County to push boundaries, build upon success, and overcome challenges.

#### **4) Think Creatively, Adapt Existing Practices, and Don't Be Afraid to "Fail Forward"**

A key takeaway for Marion County from the 100-Day Challenge was that great work can be done in the right setting, regardless of the amount of funding available. Marion County utilized the momentum of the 100-Day Challenge to think creatively about the existing resources they already have to serve youth experiencing homelessness and how to better adapt these resources to meet the needs of youth under the age of 18 experiencing homelessness. This included increasing accessibility of existing shelter options for youth under age 18, increasing awareness and implementation of family reunification strategies, and utilizing existing resources to support creative placement options. Marion County also found that the momentum of the 100-Day Challenge allowed them to "fail forward" as they tested new and creative ideas for preventing and ending youth homelessness and used unsuccessful efforts as learning experiences.