

Emerging Practices in Supportive Service Only Projects

Supportive Service Only Projects

The Youth Homeless Demonstration Program (YHDP) has created an opportunity for communities to develop new Supportive Service Only (SSO) projects dedicated to meeting the needs of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. SSO projects provide critical supports within the homeless response system and YHDP communities have developed innovative SSO projects that directly respond to the needs of their local communities.

Designing effective SSO projects starts by honoring the YHDP Values of embedding equity and youth choice by having youth and young adults with lived expertise lead the project development. These experts have the best understanding of the reality of our systems and the gaps that continue to go unaddressed. YHDP communities are integrating Youth Action Boards (YABs) in project design to create supportive service opportunities that young people want to participate in and that will truly change the trajectory of youth homelessness.

SSO projects that are making significant impacts on preventing and ending youth homelessness are developed with the YHDP values and principles embedded in their design and implementation. They are trauma-informed, focus on positive youth development strategies, and provide supports that are youth-driven and led. SSOs can serve all youth or focus on specific target populations, such as youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ), youth who are gender non-conforming, minors who are under the age of 18, youth involved with child welfare, juvenile justice or other systems, and/or victims of sexual trafficking and exploitation.

YHDP Values & Principles

from the FY2018 NOFA

- Special Populations
- Equity
- Trauma Informed Care & Positive Youth Development
- Family Engagement
- Immediate Access to Housing with No Preconditions
- Youth Choice
- Individualized & Client Driven Supports
- Social & Community Integration
- Coordinated Entry

SSO Project Types

Project Type	Project Description
Diversion	Supports offered at the front door of the system to assist youth in finding or maintaining safe & appropriate housing before entering an episode of homelessness. Diversion is a Housing Problem Solving technique that focuses on strategies to help young people identify housing options and avoid an episode of homelessness.
Outreach	An opportunity to engage youth who are unsheltered, providing basic needs assistance, and connections to necessary resources, including shelter & housing.
Drop-In Center	A physical space designed to offer basic needs assistance, connection to other systems, and diversion service.
Navigation	Supports offered to assist young people who are at risk of or experiencing literal homelessness, navigate complex systems, and provide direct support to youth in crisis as they engage with the coordinated entry system.
Host Home	A short-term, family-based setting that can offer youth a safe alternative to shelter.
Coordinated Entry	An opportunity to improve Coordinated Entry System processes to be youth centered.

Community Spotlight- Washington Balance of State

Washington Balance of State is working towards a vision where every youth and young adult in the State has a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment in which they can move towards barrier-free independence. As a means of bringing this vision to life, they understand the need to address the root causes of inequities within the system and to embrace diversity in culture and individual expression to develop a truly youth-driven system that is innovative and accessible to all young people. They knew that this would not be accomplished without authentic representation from youth with lived expertise of homelessness in every level of planning, making funding decisions, and in project design and implementation.

As the Continuum of Care Lead agency, the Washington State Department of Commerce adopted a YHDP governance structure that centered the statewide Youth Action Board, locally named Youth for Youth (Y4Y), in regional and state decision-making bodies. The Y4Y Board identified a need for regional projects to embed young people in implementation, so they wrote that recommendation into the local funding allocation process. When they reviewed project applications, they found this funding recommendation resulted in only two applicants including young people in their staffing

models. At this point, they needed to reconsider how they would ensure youth voice was heard in YHDP implementation throughout the state.

The Y4Y Board went to work and developed a plan to use YHDP SSO funds to create an innovative project that hired six young people to be employed as Youth Program Specialists within different regions of the state. The Y4Y Board developed a consistent job description used by each of the six hires, but they are employed directly by the regional YHDP project recipient. The Department of Commerce administers the statewide Youth Lead SSO project and employs strategies to develop community amongst the group of Youth Program Specialists. Before Covid-19, Y4Y members (including the Youth Program Specialists) met regularly in person to connect and strategize, but now their meetings are held virtually each week.

Developing this youth-centered project has required homeless service agencies that have never hired youth with lived expertise, to engage in challenging conversations and be open to operating in a more transformative way. Across the regions, there has been growth in realizing that there is a significant difference between serving and hiring young people.

Here are some key points about the Youth Lead SSO project:

- Youth Program Specialists are paid at least \$15/hour (though they are striving to increase this to \$20/hour)
- Youth Program Specialists also have a role in the Y4Y Board
- The project is low barrier and Youth Program Specialists are not required to work a traditional schedule
- At least once a month all Youth Program Specialists & their direct supervisors meet with the project administrator at the Department of Commerce for coordination and collaboration
- The Youth Program Specialists meet with the project administrator as a team on a weekly basis
- Youth Program Specialists were hired as part-time staff but all the YHDP recipient organizations identified other funding to increase the positions to full-time
- Since starting the project, some organizations have hired additional young people into other roles

In reflecting on how the project came to be, Washington Balance of State only wishes they would have made a bigger investment in hiring young people across projects. The impact of the project is significant- they have identified a shift in homeless service organizations that are now willing to remove hiring restrictions and create opportunities for youth that were not there before. One employee transitioned from their Youth Program Specialist role into a Homeless Management Information System Administrator within their YHDP organization and another became the Housing Manager for the County.

The YHDP Lead SSO project in Washington Balance of State has operationalized a vision of embedding youth voice into every aspect of the youth homeless response system by institutionalizing the practice of hiring young people in roles where they have the power to shape the work.