

Spotlight Series: Leveraging YHDP Funding - Lessons from Santa Cruz, CA

As of August 2020, HUD has awarded more than \$150,000,000 across 44 communities through the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) to help prevent and end youth homelessness. Part of the YHDP planning process is leveraging the YHDP process to increase community buy-in and investment in youth homelessness efforts above and beyond YHDP funding. YHDP Round I community Santa Cruz, CA, successfully leveraged YHDP funding to engage new partners, funding and resources in the development of a coordinated community response to preventing and ending youth homelessness.

Using YHDP Funding to Initiate a Response to Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

When Santa Cruz was selected for YHDP funding, the community had limited infrastructure and resources to address youth homelessness. Santa Cruz County had recently developed a [Community Strategic Plan to Prevent, Reduce and Eventually End Homelessness](#) that identified youth and young adults as an underserved population among persons experiencing homelessness. However, there were no local resources available to develop strategies or invest in solutions to meet the needs of this population. Encompass Community Services, Santa Cruz's YHDP Lead Agency, described receiving YHDP funding as a "game-changer" for the community. YHDP provided Santa Cruz with the planning structure and resources to take action on youth homelessness, laying the groundwork for broader community investment youth homelessness as a significant local priority.

"YHDP gave us the resources to think deeper and work with youth experiencing homelessness in new and different ways... to pull together non-traditional and traditional partners to dig deep and strategize, as well as the resources to put those strategies into action." – Christine Sippl, Encompass Community Services, YHDP Lead Agency for Santa Cruz, CA

Engaging Non-Homeless Service Providers During and Beyond YHDP

The funding Santa Cruz received through YHDP laid the groundwork for leveraging additional funding and resources from stakeholders throughout the community. YHDP allowed homeless service providers in Santa Cruz to build new relationships with key sectors in the community and engage partners in new, meaningful ways around addressing youth homelessness. These key partners not only participated in the development of a community-wide vision, goals and strategies for preventing and ending homelessness during the YHDP planning process, but also have remained engaged beyond YHDP and are leveraging their own funding and resources to address the needs of homeless and unstably housed youth.

Key to Santa Cruz's success in leveraging additional resources was bringing new partners to the table for planning from the beginning of YHDP, including high level system leaders who were willing to invest in specific goals and multi-year transformation efforts for the youth homeless response system. The YHDP Lead Agency says that YHDP has taken youth homelessness efforts in Santa Cruz "beyond individual services" and has created "a new narrative" around serving this population through collaboration rather than in silos.

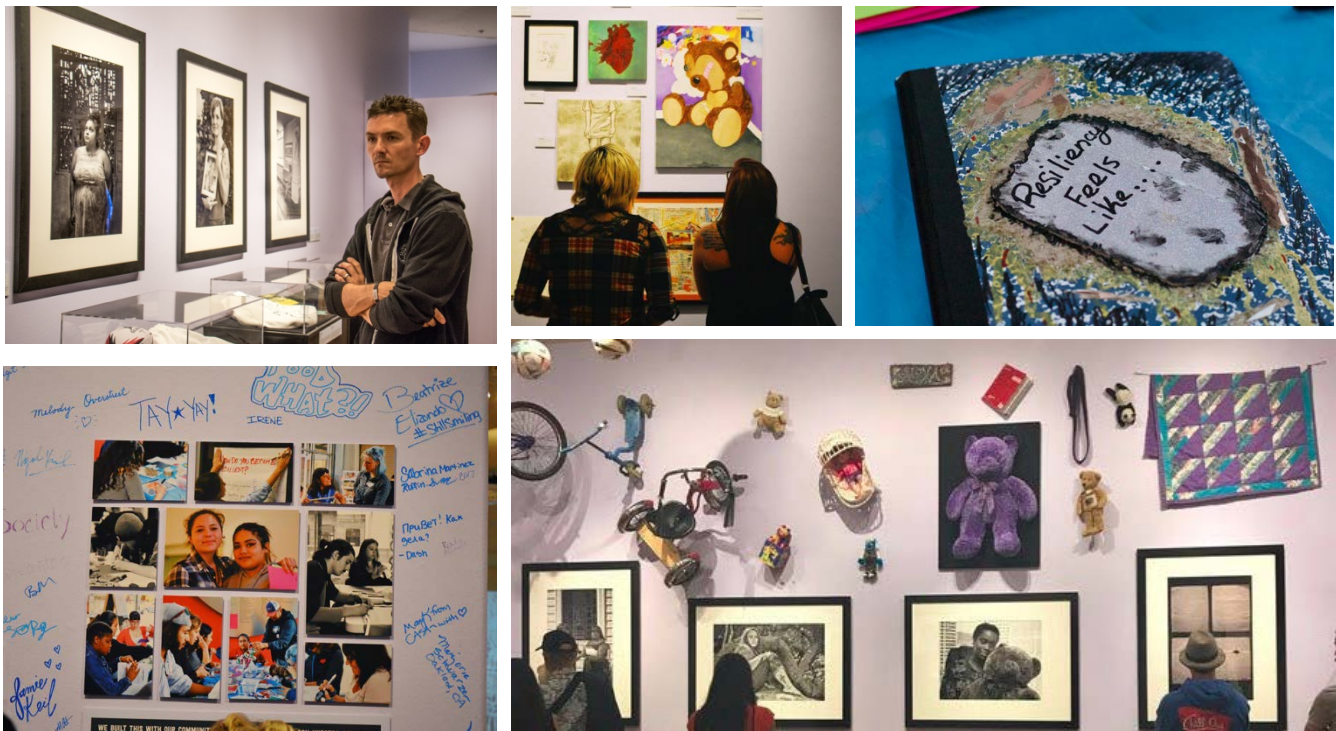
A few of the many organizations and agencies that are engaged in Santa Cruz's YHDP efforts include the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz, Kaiser Permanente, the Community Action Board, and the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. The following section highlights the significant role and impact of two particular partners in the success of Santa Cruz YHDP: Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History and Cabrillo College.

Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History

The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History (MAH) participated in the planning and preparation of Santa Cruz's Coordinated Community Plan to prevent and end youth homelessness. MAH played a particularly crucial role in providing a venue for community engagement and empowering authentic youth voice and collaboration in partnership with the Santa Cruz Youth Action Board (YAB).

As part of the YHDP community planning process, MAH partnered with the YHDP Lead and the YAB to facilitate a creative discussion on ending youth homelessness in Santa Cruz County. MAH provided the forum for this YAB-led event which was designed to help interested community stakeholders learn about YHDP, bear witness to powerful youth presentations and spoken word performances, and brainstorm action plans to address youth homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

MAH also worked with the YAB, the Foster Youth Museum, local artists, Cabrillo College, and other key partners to create an exhibit on the experiences of youth aging out of foster care, made in partnership with foster youth. The exhibit, [*Lost Childhoods*](#), launched during the YHDP community planning process. This installation highlighted the needs of youth as they leave the foster care system and worked in tandem with YHDP to bring community awareness to the needs of one of Santa Cruz's most vulnerable youth populations.



Cabrillo College

Cabrillo College is an open-access local community college that provides a variety of services to students, including youth who are socioeconomically at-risk and facing homelessness. Cabrillo College was involved in the YHDP planning process from the beginning and continues to be a strong partner for the homeless response system, expressing an ongoing commitment to engaging in new efforts to address the needs of unstably housed youth.

YHDP provided an opportunity for Cabrillo College to connect with the wider community in Santa Cruz around concerns regarding housing and food insecurity among students, which was a recognized area of need for the College. Older adult and young adult partners came together from Cabrillo College to support YHDP, with a Cabrillo College student serving as a member of the YHDP Steering Committee and a number of students participating in the YAB. Cabrillo College attributes YHDP with improving collaboration between local organizations, eliminating barriers to accessing services for students, and allowing the community to better “wrap around” and support this population to connect them to housing and resources.

“YHDP was like putting the pieces of a puzzle together and realizing that Cabrillo is only one piece. Now we are connecting with Veterans Services, Encompass, Salvation Army and so many others...and we are completing the puzzle of housing and food resources that our students need.” – Robin West, Cabrillo College, Santa Cruz, CA

Cabrillo College was one of a number of YHDP partners that leveraged their experience with YHDP to apply for and receive funding through the California Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) to support the strategies in Santa Cruz's Coordinated Community Plan, Ignore No More. Cabrillo College was awarded \$137,724 to provide rental assistance in order to help prevent and end homelessness among students through its Emergency Housing Services Program, which has helped fund a new Housing Assistant Position within the College's Office of Follow-Up and Retention Services.

Considerations for Leveraging YHDP Funds to Create Your Coordinated Community Response to Youth Homelessness

Whether your community is considering applying for YHDP funds or is one of the 44 YHDP communities already awarded, it is important to think of YHDP as one part of a coordinated community response to youth homelessness that can be leveraged to gain support from other providers, systems, and funders. Ending youth homelessness requires cross-systems collaboration and community-wide investment. Communities should consider the following ideas for effectively leveraging YHDP funds:

- **Bring potential funders and system leaders to the table early and often.** This will help partners recognize the unique YHDP process and identify their own role in implementing the YHDP vision, goals and strategies.
- **Engage the experience and expertise of the Youth Action Board (YAB).** Youth collaboration and voice is critical to ending youth homelessness. It is important for partners and potential funders to see and understand youth leadership in action and for the YAB to be involved in efforts to identify and leverage new resources.
- **Develop new relationships with traditional and non-traditional partners.** The YHDP planning process is built on bringing together diverse partners to address youth homelessness, traditionally including representatives of the homeless, housing, education, justice and child welfare systems. However, communities should think creatively and work with their YAB to identify unique local partnerships that could support YHDP, including businesses, the arts, and local health care systems who may have an interest or connection in addressing the needs of youth.
- **Establish youth homelessness as a local priority.** YHDP provides an unprecedented opportunity to bring community-wide attention to youth homelessness, including what it looks like locally, why intervening early with housing and services is critically important, and how members of the community – from individuals to systems – can help.
- **Think about sustainability from the beginning.** YHDP brings an exciting new level of investment into communities. Planning early for how to sustain this level of engagement and leverage new investments is crucial for developing a youth response system that goes beyond YHDP to meet the comprehensive needs of youth.

We commend the hard work and dedication of communities across the country who are leveraging existing resources to create responsive housing and service options for youth and look forward to the role YHDP will play or continue to play in those efforts.

“YHDP created a sentiment of partnership rather than a funder/grantee dynamic...we have dismantled the typical hierarchical relationship around funding to have true partnerships to end youth homelessness” – Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson, Encompass Community Services, YHDP Lead Agency for Santa Cruz, CA

Prepared by Homebase