



Rapid Re-housing for Youth: Program Profiles

Rapid re-housing (RRH) for youth (defined as less than 25 years of age) is an evolving model that can be implemented using the PH-RRH component type under HUD's CoC Program. The programs profiled here use a variety of funding sources (e.g. HUD, HHS, private and foundation funding, etc.), so readers should check the eligibility of specific elements. However, each has developed replicable, CoC-eligible, promising practices for: 1.) Rapidly moving youth into permanent housing; 2.) Offering short- to medium-term financial assistance; and 3.) Providing developmentally appropriate case management and services. This information, contributed by representatives from each profiled program, is not intended to represent a complete service description, but rather to highlight what is working for some programs and further an important dialogue on ending youth homelessness.

Northwest Youth Services in Bellingham, WA

Northwest Youth Services has been working with youth since 1976. They assist with both transitional and permanent housing options, including RRH. Their youth RRH program, called Permanent Housing, has been operating for the past 8 years, supported by local, County, and State funding sources. The agency also operates a variety of vocational services focused on youth, which are available to all youth in their housing programs. The average length of stay for youth in the RRH program is 9 months (maximum of 24 months). The program served a total of 39 youth in 2014.

Target Population

Northwest Youth Services' RRH program is targeted toward homeless youth aged 18-24. The priority is focused on the most vulnerable youth, including those who are chronically homeless. The program does not require youth to be clean and sober or addressing mental health issues at the time of enrollment. There is an established street youth culture in the area, and outreach knows the location of the bus stops and camps on the outskirts of town where homeless youth can be found. The program accepts referrals from the local Coordinated Entry system and walk-ins.

Housing Identification

Housing search is tailored to each youth's choices. Youth may want to live with a roommate; if so, staff will help them anticipate roommate problems that might come up and mediate conflicts if necessary. Additionally, Northwest Youth Services will, if needed, help youth look up vacancies online, call a landlord to set up an interview, or take youth to look at vacancies in properties owned by landlord partners. Part of the housing search process is to help youth create a budget that includes rent, expenses, and projected income. Within this budget, the youth decide if they can afford an efficiency, one-bedroom, or shared two-bedroom apartment. The program offers the usual landlord supports: communication, mediation, monitoring, timely payments, etc. Youth hold the lease, which may be for one year, three months, or month-to-month. Landlord partners trust the program, and thus partner to determine the length of lease that will be best for that youth.

"We believe every person has the capacity to change, even if that's not apparent, and this informs the way we approach youth. We're the first to believe in and support their plans. Our style of case management is not telling, it's partnering."

Financial Assistance

Youth must pay at least 30% of any income they have received during the past thirty days toward move-in costs—security deposit, household items, etc.—as well as at least that portion for their ongoing subsidy. Rent subsidies are reviewed every three months to assure participants understand the urgency of obtaining an income to sustain rent.

Furnishings are important and the program relies heavily on a nonprofit clearinghouse that will deliver donated furniture from their warehouse. They also request items from the public via social media, and have a small, flexible pool from private funds to purchase kitchen supplies.

Case Management & Services

The program blends [Positive Youth Development](#), harm reduction, and Housing First practices to serve its youth. This allows Northwest Youth Services to engage youth in the developmental and social stage they are experiencing: “The concept of permanence is important, but at this age, relationships—partners, friends—are changing, sometimes rapidly.” Services and goals for youth need to be flexible in order to quickly adapt to such changes.

“Staff need to have skills, too! They receive psychosocial skills training 2 hours per week for 20 weeks to learn how to de-escalate themselves, manage the stresses of secondary trauma, and self-care. We have two facilitators trained in this work.”

The program’s caseloads are generally 14 youth per case manager. Staff provide weekly case management meetings and home visits as frequently as necessary, but at least monthly. Case managers know how to support lease compliance. For example, if a youth’s music is too loud for their neighbor, the case manager will have conversations about how to resolve the conflict—“Can you wear headphones? What’s ‘too loud’ for your neighbor? Let’s mark that as a maximum on the volume knob.” Staff will sometimes create practice “NO VISITORS” signs if the youth wants help learning boundaries with friends. Staff work as a team to respond to possible crises as soon as possible.

Adequate income is essential for youth to maintain their housing at exit, but many initially lack skills and experience. Northwest Youth Services offers vocational support and employment assistance through other agency programs. This includes help with preparing for the job search, the search itself, and even part-time jobs for youth who have never faced the social and time requirements of employment.

Case plans are reviewed every three months: “Are these still your goals? Are you making progress? Do you need new goals or smaller steps? Where are you now, and where do you want to be?” Youth start with 3 to 4 goals, and can increase the number later. The intent of these goals is to move from crisis to “thriving self-sufficiency.”

Final Thoughts

Northwest Youth Services doesn’t claim that RRH for youth is easy, but they allow a strong belief in the importance of this work guide them: “We were told that rapid rehousing doesn’t work for youth, but that’s what we do. There are risks and challenges—it’s hard—but we need to apply what we believe, and do so creatively, strongly. We evaluate what youth want and make every attempt to say **yes** to that. We’re not Pollyanna; we use available skills and resources to believe youth will be successful and support the development of practical skills. We make the commitment that we will walk with them through risks. It requires a high level of support to landlords and staff, which may be a challenge, but in three years we have had just one eviction; we have found it to be effective.”

For further information on this program:

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