



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.

The Salvation Army's Youth Counts Rapid Re-housing Program in Central Ohio

The Salvation Army's Youth Counts Rapid Re-housing Program started in 2009 and operates in the suburban and rural communities outside of the Columbus, Ohio metropolitan area, serving 23 youth per year throughout a four-county region. The average length of stay in the program is 9-10 months, while the maximum length of stay is 12 months. The organization was originally approached about starting the program by the Delaware County Children's Services due to Salvation Army's success with a family RRH program. The community had identified a need to house youth transitioning out of the foster care system quickly and efficiently, so Salvation Army staff started with what they knew from their work with families and asked, "How could this work for youth? How can we adapt this?"

Target Population

The program primarily serves youth who have aged out of foster care, tried independent housing, failed, and become homeless. Youth are generally aged 18-22, but the program will occasionally assist an emancipated 17-year-old.

Consistent with a Housing First philosophy, Youth Counts has a very low-barrier intake process; they accept youth with a variety of backgrounds and barriers, including substance abuse and criminal history. Even when a youth shows up for the intake interview high on drugs, they are not automatically considered ineligible. Staff *expects* youth will have zero income and very limited fundamental life skills: "they lack a reservoir of experience and success to draw from."

"We really try to not screen youth out because we're it for this area. There are no shelters for them; we're the safety net. We've even been able to re-house someone with an arson charge."

Housing Identification

Like most RRH programs, Youth Counts participants move into scattered site, private-market units with a lease in their own name (the program no longer signs master leases). Leases are generally one-year, per both landlord and program preference. If a youth wants to move out early, the program helps them negotiate with the landlord, and may move another client into the unit to finish the term of the lease—as happened when one client abandoned the unit "to join the circus."

Some youth know exactly where they want to live and the program will approach the landlord of the chosen location to describe their RRH services and landlord supports. Many youth, however, have no idea how or where to find housing, and program staff will match them to an appropriate partner landlord, based on landlord preferences and the youth's barriers. This is a common housing search strategy for all RRH programs.

The program has many landlord partners and works to maintain those relationships. Staff “stand by the landlord and do whatever it takes, even when that means shoveling dog poop and ripping out carpet.”

Financial Assistance

Rental subsidies are generally medium-term for youth populations. Youth Counts provides, on average, 6-9 months of rental and utility assistance, reducing the amount gradually, but remaining flexible enough to fit each youth’s situation. For example, if a particular youth loses employment or faces other obstacles and needs a greater amount of financial assistance or services, case managers will work with that youth to develop an individualized plan.

Like all RRH programs, Youth Counts offers all housing start-up costs, including security and utility deposits. Since youth often have no possessions, staff also find bedding, furniture, pots and pans, etc. The program also has flex funds to pay for driver’s license costs, laundry, and cleaning supplies. Salvation Army has a food pantry, and case managers know to bring food supplies to certain youth during home visits. The costs for this program are a bit outside of the box compared to other Salvation Army programs. Being this flexible requires utilizing a variety of funders, including the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program, State funds, United Way, foundations, and other resources of the Salvation Army.

Case Management & Services

“We see our role as being a safety net for these youth to make some of the normal decisions that teenagers make. We realize sometimes they’re going to make bad decisions, and they’ll have to face those, but it doesn’t mean they have to lose their housing.”

Services are more intense than many other RRH programs for other populations. Caseloads are about 5-6, and home visits are at least twice per week. Case managers provide “mobile” case management, meeting the youth where they are—in their homes, grocery stores, the DMV, etc. Youth Counts staff utilize youth-centered communication: they provide TracPhones and text constantly.

The program has a life skills curriculum, but youth self-direct what they will learn—“Here’s what we think you might need to know, what do you think?” Youth Counts employs various practices consistent with a Housing First approach: low-barrier entry, strength-based assistance, harm reduction, progressive engagement, and motivational interviewing. They understand that progress may be incremental and shorter-term for this population, so they celebrate the many small successes along the way—“We have to constantly check ourselves and remember that housing stability can mean many things.”

Final Thoughts

Youth Counts staff acknowledge that their program is not yet perfect, but they constantly work to refine it, knowing the important void it fills in the community. They provide ongoing training for staff on the core practices of Housing First and other methods used in their case management model, not shying away from discussing the hard parts. “We have to temper our wanting to save the world and be okay with knowing we’re setting people on the right track. Even if they fail, they’ve learned something and will keep on learning. The journey, not the end goal, is what’s important.”

For further information on this program:

*Beth Fetzer-Rice, The Salvation Army in Central Ohio, Director of Housing and Disaster Services
(614) 437-2148*

BFetzer-Rice@use.salvationarmy.org
www.SalvationArmyColumbus.org