



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.

Valley Youth House in Philadelphia & Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Valley Youth House offers 10 distinct independent living programs and subprograms in Philadelphia and Montgomery County, and 26 within the agency as a whole, serving a total of 400 youth. The agency has been working with foster youth for 40 years, and assisting them with housing for over ten years. In 2009, they received funding through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program, and were able to launch a program for LGBTQ-identified youth experiencing homelessness. Their methods of providing RRH for youth continue to evolve through experience with RRH for youth with children. In 2014, the organization's total caseload for youth RRH programs was 52 youth and 8 children with an average length of stay of 6-12 months, though generally closer to the one-year mark. The maximum length of stay is 2 years, but it is very rare that a youth will need to stay in the program for that long.

Target Population

Valley Youth House assists youth experiencing homelessness, ages 18-24. Youth may start in RRH with an option for other more supervised Valley Youth Housing programs if appropriate.

The program is intentionally transitioning to Housing First: "A few years ago we had conditional acceptance. We would help the youth with planning, but offer no financial assistance until they did everything in their plan. We had good outcomes, but were probably taking the highest functioning youth." The program has since dropped drug screening as a prerequisite, and has only screened out one youth in the past year.

"We believe in setting expectations rather than rigid rules. We focus on letting youth learn community norms, not Valley Youth House rules. Don't sweat the small stuff."

Housing Identification

Apartments are scattered site, private-market units. Program participants can find housing on their own if they wish—though few do—or be matched with a partner landlord. Shared housing is permitted, even encouraged for financial reasons, and the program will pair roommates if the youth don't know anyone they can live with—even though roommate conflict may require staff intervention or negotiation.

"It takes years to build up a list of landlords who will work with us and our youth." Landlords are often more concerned about renting to youth than renting to more experienced renters, so youth rapid re-housing programs must be diligent in allaying concerns about noise, behavior, care of the unit, and crime. Valley Youth House has maintenance staff who can clean an unacceptably dirty unit or fix damage. Within limits, the program uses flexible funding sources to pay for repairs: "We'll eat the cost if it's the right thing to do."

Financial Assistance

As with most RRH programs, multiple funding sources are essential to help program participants with the various costs related to obtaining and maintaining permanent housing. Valley Youth House utilizes funding from the City of Philadelphia, Montgomery County, Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program funds, and fills in with more flexible foundation dollars and private donations. Accordingly, funding for some youth requires a non-negotiable contribution of 30% of their gross income toward their housing, while subsidies from another source can be more individually tailored. The program can and does assist youth with zero income.

Youth rarely have the essential possessions needed to begin a new life and Valley Youth House has been creative in securing them. Foundations pay for some furnishings and supplies; others are donated. The program has a unique relationship with a local Bed Bath & Beyond; the retailer donates all of their merchandise returns, many of which are useful and attractive items for cooking, cleaning, and decorating an apartment.

Case Management & Services

Participants in RRH programs for more experienced tenants may not always need to be taught the basics of caring for a rental unit or meeting the terms of a lease. However, youth RRH programs are working with a population that is universally unfamiliar with successfully living in independent housing and has little or no employment experience. Thus, Valley Youth House, as most youth RRH programs, offers intensive and frequent case management with caseloads of 10 or fewer and weekly home visits. Staff and youth proactively identify and plan for likely issues (such as drawing limits with family and peers). The program assumes youth know little or nothing about household management and is very hands-on, using a sequential approach to teaching: “with, watch, confirm.”

Valley Youth Housing historically and systematically uses a [Positive Youth Development](#) approach, including age-appropriate goals, youth-directed planning, and choice. Staff are building knowledge and skills around trauma-informed care, although the concepts are not yet fully institutionalized. Many staff have also attended training about the effects of trauma on brain development. The program stresses that having the right staff and enough case management is critical. In 2014, 25 youth completed the LGBTQ RRH program in Philadelphia (PRIDE) and 88% were in their own apartment. Additionally, 64% graduated from high school or obtained a GED, and 72% had full or part-time employment. Another 4 completed the Montgomery County RRH program—all left for their own housing or to live with a relative as per the youth’s plan.

“We ask youth: what are your bad days like? What helps you on a bad day? How would I know when you’re having a bad day, and what can I do that day to help?”

Final Thoughts

Valley Youth House stresses the importance of system-level conversations as it works to refine its programming: “Five years ago we had the idea of helping those who would be more successful, but that has changed. This didn’t happen overnight. Cross-level and cross-county conversations are critical to integrate and understand why the shift to this population is important.”

For further information on this program:

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