Intro to Youth Specific Data

The Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) provides a unique opportunity for communities to implement innovative strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness. Using data is one important part of this process because it helps uncover areas for change or development in the community as well as demonstrate which interventions are having the greatest impact.

The use of quality data can help inform virtually every part of a community's work in preventing and ending youth homelessness. However, two broad topics stand out as starting points that will help build the foundational knowledge each community needs to make data-driven decisions:

(1) **Access**: An accurate portrait of the youth who are currently accessing services and housing through the community's homeless response system, and

(2) **Outcomes**: a comprehensive picture of the outcomes youth are achieving through this system.

Getting quality data for both access and outcomes is crucial to getting a complete picture of the existing system and therefore of finding the best ways of making systemic improvements.

There are many good sources of data for a community to use in putting together an accurate portrait of the youth who access its housing and service projects as well as what outcomes those youth achieve. One important source of data is in the Annual Performance Report (APR).[1] More specifically, Question 27 (Q27) of the APR is a good starting place because it applies a "youth filter" to important questions in the APR. Q27 is broken down into multiple parts that show data for the number, ages, parenting status, gender, living situation, length of participation, exit destination, income data, and disabling conditions for all unaccompanied youth at each project.

What is important to note about these points of data is that they show only the *youth* clients in a given project, even if there are other clients who are 25 or older in that project as well. This is helpful because many housing and service projects aren't necessarily considered to be "youth specific providers" even when, in reality, they may be serving many unaccompanied youth. Because Q27 applies a "youth filter" to each of the topics listed above, it is a great resource to find data about the youth who access YHDP and Continuum of Care (CoC) projects in a community. For example, the Parenting Youth section of Q27 shows the number clients in that project who are parenting and also defined as unaccompanied youth. Moreover, this section breaks down the data further and also shows how many of those youth are under 18 and how

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[1] Each project funded by the CoC Program and the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program is required to submit an Annual Performance Report to HUD (24.CFR 578.103(e)).

many are 18-24, how many children are in the households of these parenting youth, and other related information. Another useful example is the Living Situation section of Q27, which shows where the youth in a project were sleeping before they entered the project (e.g. various homeless situations, institutional settings, or other locations).

The experience of Ohio Balance of State (BoS) in their YHDP planning provides an excellent example of how and why to use Q27 of the APR to get a deeper understanding of the youth that accessed their existing system. Ohio BoS is a large, rural CoC that has been divided into regions in order to assist in developing and implementing region-specific solutions to ending homelessness. In the southeast region of the state, the YHDP team knew how important their existing RRH projects were for serving youth. However, they were becoming concerned about the situation of youth before they accessed the RRH projects and whether or not more crisis-response programs were needed in their community. In order to learn more, the team took a deep dive into the Living Situation section of Q27. There, they found 90% of youth served by RRH projects in that region were entering from unsheltered locations. This finding was pivotal for the community, because they now saw a clear need for crisis-response housing for their youth experiencing homelessness.

> "We already knew that we didn't have shelters in the region for adults or youth so we needed to take that known and investigate what the data told us about that. The data told us that youth remained unsheltered until they entered RRH. What we know about the RRH program is that it takes time and that youth being unsheltered is unsafe. **We saw that as a call to action to develop safe locations for youth to remain while working through the RRH process**." – Lisa Brooks, Ohio Balance of State CoC; speaking to the experience of the southeast region.

A second use of Q27 data is to understand the outcomes that youth achieve in all YHDP and CoC projects. Important sections of Q27 related to youth outcomes are sections on length of participation in the project, exit destination, and income sources. For example, a community might explore whether its existing projects are achieving permanent housing destinations for their clients. This question was pertinent in the YHDP planning process of another region of Ohio BoS. In a northeast region of the state, the YHDP team took a close look at the Exit Destination section of Q27 for all of their emergency shelters. What they discovered was that almost 60% of youth who entered their emergency shelters exited to unknown or temporary destinations. Moreover, the Length of Participation section of Q27 showed that youth were exiting these shelters very rapidly. These data points spurred a conversation among the Youth Action Board and other community stakeholders to investigate the reasons youth did not feel fully welcome at existing shelters and design a more appropriate, youth-specific intervention.

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"The biggest takeaway from studying our outcomes is that what we were doing wasn't working, and that sparked a conversation about what to do in the future. **It sparked a conversation among most of the non-youth that what they currently had wasn't youth friendly and something drastic needed to change**." – Miles McGinnis, YAB Chair for OH Balance of State, Region 6; speaking to the experience of the northeast region.

Taken together, these two examples highlight how important it can be for YHDP communities to start their data gathering process with the information about youth access and outcomes in existing projects that is recorded in Q27 of the APR. These pieces of data can spark meaningful conversation, and they are also likely to lead to interest in finding more data.

Additional sources of HMIS data include the CoC's Longitudinal Systems Analysis (LSA) that is visualized in the Stella Performance Module, the CoC's System Performance Measures (SPMs), and the YHDP Supplemental Reporting Tool and Collaborative Dashboard, which can help share insights across YHDP communities. HMIS Leads in the community and technical assistance (TA) providers can help accessing these sources for communities working to improve their efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness.

Additional Resources

APR: To see all of the data points available in the APR (including but not limited to Q27), see the APR Table Shells. For more information on how to run and submit an APR report, see these APR Trainings.

YHDP: YHDP projects have the ability to collect and report on supplemental, youth-specific data. For more information, see the YHDP Data Collection and Reporting Manual.

LSA: The Longitudinal Systems Analysis (LSA) and Stella visualization resources provide additional data at the system level. See the LSA Tools and Guidance and Stella Tools and Guidance for more information.

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