



A Strategic Plan for Addressing Youth Homelessness in Pinellas County



LGBTQ+ Homeless Youth Project 



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- | | | |
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| * Community Tampa Bay | * Homeless Emergency Project | * Equality Florida |
| * Juvenile Welfare Board, Pinellas | * Pinellas County Schools | * Richard London |
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through a collaborative process that started over a year ago, a group of community stakeholders including our youth came together to talk, listen and find meaningful resolutions to address and end youth homelessness, especially as it relates to our most vulnerable population of LGBTQ+ youth. The following is a plan of action involving our community so that we can take valuable steps in supporting youth in our community who find themselves homeless.

We had three main objectives when we started this process: SAFETY, SUPPORT & HOUSING. Those three areas were focal points as we explored how to ensure all homeless youth had those three basic needs met. We evaluated our strengths and weaknesses as a community and built our plan around our ability to really impact change through coordinated and consistent efforts in the areas of 1. Prevention and diversion, 2. Access and assessment, 3. Coordinated entry and housing.

Each priority area has a specific focus to improve outcomes for youth and young adults in our community:

1. **Prevention and Diversion**

- a. Create a community-wide resource guide to inform homeless youth and providers of youth-specific and LGBTQ+ resources available.
- b. Create a mechanism for disseminating important information regarding available resources through social media, PSAs, on-line portals, one-on-one consults.
- c. Develop family-strengthening supports for families of origin and foster care families dealing with LGBTQ+ youth in the home or during reunification.
- d. Develop 'best practice' guides to providing culturally competent service provision to LGBTQ+ youth and offer training to interested youth-serving agencies and school personnel.
- e. Support advocacy efforts to create more effective interventions to school-based bullying.
- f. Encourage, identify and support families in the foster care system that will provide safety and affirmation to minority and LGBTQ+ youth.

2. **Access and Assessment:**

- a. Create a community-based centralized access center for homeless youth that will provide basic needs, assessment, referral and other needed services onsite.
- b. Create or revise an existing assessment tool to ensure an accurate reflection of homeless youth needs and LGBTQ+ specific issues that leads to appropriate housing options.
- c. Ensure front line safety for our youth through street outreach and collaboration with trained and affirming law enforcement agencies.
- d. Utilize appropriate community partners in the initial contact and ongoing access to vital medical and legal services.

3. **Coordinated Entry and Housing**

- a. Accurately assess and prioritize need and acuity in the homeless/housing-insecure youth population and integrate youth into the county-coordinated entry system.
- b. Design a continuum of housing resources and support services for youth and young adults that meets their needs at all stages of independent living skills development.
- c. Seek and advocate for funding to support a continuum of housing options that meets the specific needs of youth in transition to permanent housing.

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

COLLABORATIVE BACKGROUND

The continuum of housing services for youth in Pinellas County, as in most areas of the country, has been largely focused on youth under the age of 18 for decades. In recent years, there has been quite a bit of talk in our community about the high incidence of homelessness of youth who have aged out of foster care, and more recently, of LGBTQ+ youth who have been ejected from their homes of origin or have run away after being bullied or finding no acceptance in their home. These youth are particularly vulnerable living on the street and are often ill-served in the adult homeless system of care. Homeless shelters are often large facilities that house men and women, some chronically homeless, some mentally ill or actively abusing substances. These are sometimes the same people who take advantage of young people on the street.

Several local youth housing providers have attempted transitional living programs for youth 16-21 years old, with limited success. The programs are very expensive to operate because they require round-the-clock awake staff, as well as counseling and case management services to assist the young people with what in recent years has been widely acknowledged as traumatic life experiences related to abuse, violence in the family and community and exposure to substance abuse and mental illness.

Pinellas County has had a coalition of homeless services providers since the 1980's, which has led to a great deal of collaboration and coordination of services over the years. The current Homeless Leadership Board (local Continuum of Care) has representation from the current iteration of a providers group as well as elected officials, homeless individuals and other entities from the community which has allowed for a much higher level of planning and funding coordination to develop and mature. Most recently, the Homeless Leadership Board (HLB) has formed a Youth Action Board with enthusiastic young representatives from a variety of youth service providers.

In 2016, Family Resources applied to the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg for funds to support a survey and plan development for homeless LGBTQ+ youth. This document is the result of the efforts of a group of community providers and youth who carried out the survey, presented the results to the community and, with technical assistance from the True Colors Fund, and over the last year, developed this plan. The group had and continues to enjoy a great deal of buy-in and engagement from the initial steering committee and is committed to continuing to work on implementing this plan. The plan has been expanded to include homeless youth in general and not just LGBTQ+ youth, because many of the issues that impact homelessness are the same for both groups. Some specific elements are more narrowly focused.

Some parts of this plan are starting to be addressed with existing resources, and fundraising is underway to support others. The most valuable aspect of this work has been the awareness raised of the issue of homeless youth, the need for specialized services and the close working relationships that have developed through this work. As its outcome, we have a committed group dedicated to the vision of every youth having a safe and stable home.

SECTION II: LOCAL CONTEXT FOR IMPLEMENTATION

SWOT ANALYSIS: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS

Strengths – As we examine the scope of what Family Resources and other providers have accomplished over the past 2+ generations, coupled with bold transformational plans developed over the past year, it is relatively easy to identify elements that predispose successful outcomes:

1. Stability and Experience
2. Leadership
3. History of Success
4. Holistic approach
5. Addressing environmental & social needs
6. LGBTQ+ liaison at SPPD
7. Interdisciplinary approaches
8. Creating community partnerships
9. Transitional living programs

Weaknesses – In developing and successfully implementing ambitious plans, it is important to assess potential shortfalls in policy, review any previous conflicts, and identify obstacles.

1. Lack of continuity and coordination with providers
2. Limited support and funding for programming
3. Lack of active participation of stakeholders
4. Inconsistency in standards and levels of training, i.e., LGBTQ+ and trauma education

Opportunities – New and exciting opportunities may arise as collaborative initiatives take shape and become a reality.

1. Continuing and new collaborations
2. Motivated community stakeholders
3. First of its kind youth center/improved access to resources
4. Increase access to longer-term housing for young adults
5. Increase community awareness
6. Willingness to broaden funding sources
7. Provide education to youth-serving providers and educators with emphasis on LGBTQ+

Threats – It is important to be mindful of and anticipate potential obstacles to success.

1. Lost or discontinued funding sources
2. Maintaining collaborations and communication
3. Prolonged planning/logistics
4. Delays in implementation
5. Competition vs. collaboration with other stakeholders
6. Lack of community awareness

SECTION III: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PREVENTION AND DIVERSION

Resource Guide

While shelter is a primary consideration in assisting homeless youth, many other basic needs have to be addressed. The need for food, health care, education, and emotional support are only a few of the vital concerns faced by homeless youth, and we endeavor to create the collaborations and partnerships essential to meet these needs more expediently. This initiative supports the overall vision of the strategic plan in its core and fundamental approach to considering basic needs in a comprehensive way. An important form of front line intervention is a mechanism for disseminating important information regarding available resources through social media, PSAs, on-line portals, one-on-one consults, and a resource guide created especially for homeless youth with intersectional considerations.

Goal: Create a community-wide resources guide to inform homeless youth and providers of resources available to youth and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Objective 1: Utilize existing resource guides to disseminate services specific to the needs of homeless youth and young adult for a specialized youth resources guide.

Success Criteria – By the end of 2018, we will have completed and disseminated our resource guide in print and digitally to identify service providers and the general youth population.

Goal: Create a full-scale information campaign utilizing multiple platforms.

Objective 1: Use social media to increase awareness of services and resources.

Objective 2: Participate in outreach forums at schools, community health fairs and similar events.

Success Criteria: Participate in at least three outreach forums annually, distributing resource guides and information about social media platform applications.

Stakeholders: Prevention/diversion committee, Family Resources, HLB, Metro Wellness Center

Estimated Timeline: January, 2019

Expense Budget: \$10k

Family Strengthening

Most studies suggest that reunification with family or other close, responsible family members is key to reducing or eliminating many of the risks associated with LGBTQ+ youth homelessness.

Goal: Develop family-strengthening supports for families of origin, guardian ad litem and foster care families dealing with LGBTQ+ youth in the home or during reunification.

Objective 1: Identify and train a team of expert therapists/ care managers who can provide responsive services to youth and families with this identified need. Create a strong marketing component for these services.

Success Criteria – By January 1, 2019, specific counseling and support services will be made available to families and youth-serving providers.

Stakeholders: Prevention/diversion committee, Family Resources and Metro Wellness.
Estimated Timeline: 1 Year
Expense Budget: TBD

Best Practices and Training

Community partners who wish to be an effective resource for homeless youth must be culturally competent regarding homeless youth, LGBTQ+ inclusion, terminology, safe spaces, etc.

Goal: Develop “best practices” guide for culturally competent service provision to LGBTQ+ youth and offer training to interested youth-serving agencies and school personnel.

Objective 1: Utilize comprehensive best practice guide to improve cultural competence of relevant youth and young adult serving agencies.

Success Criteria – Committee will select or develop best practice curriculum for community training and disseminate invitations to participate to youth-serving agencies and educators by end of 2018. Three group trainings held by mid-2019.

Objective 2: Create a standardized checklist of educational materials to be provided to community partners and providers of services to homeless youth and LGBTQ+ homeless youth to ensure “friendly” and “safe” spaces.

Objective 3: Provide educational opportunities to community partners using existing educational materials relevant to homeless youth with intersectional considerations. Provide competency certification.

Success Criteria – Materials are created and implemented. Criteria for Competency certification established based on best practices and distributed to providers and community partners.

Advocacy

Goal: Increase school engagement and support stronger interventions for school-based bullying.

Objective 1: Partner with local school board HEAT team to help maintain school enrollment for homeless youth by identifying and ameliorating barriers to success in school such as bullying, frequent relocation, etc.

Success Criteria – Meet with school personnel to discuss intervention strategies for bullying of straight and LGBTQ+ youth. Obtain guidance from Equality Florida on playing a role in supporting statewide efforts.

Stakeholders: Prevention/Diversion Committee, HEAT team, school board members
Estimated Timeline: February 2018 through December 2019
Expense Budget: TBD

LGBTQ+ Friendly Foster Care

One of the key findings in our homeless youth survey was evidence of increased incidences of bullying and of physical violence against the LGBTQ+ homeless youth community. Often, they run from traditional shelters or the foster care system because of this. Foster families who are friendly to LGBTQ+ needs and willing to be trained will create much safer environments for LGBTQ+ homeless youth.

Goal: Encourage, identify and support families in the foster care system that will provide safety and affirmation to minority and LGBTQ+ youth.

Objective 1: One dedicated, paid person will be hired to identify, collaborate, and train organizations that provide services and affect LGBTQ+ youth in foster care. This person will develop a relationship with Local and Regional offices and staff of Department of Children and Families.

Success Criteria – At least two scheduled meetings will be completed to discuss and outline collaboration with DCF by the end of 2018.

Objective 2: Recruit LGBTQ+ friendly foster parents.

Success Criteria – One marketing/recruitment plan will be developed and implemented throughout the region by the end of 2018.

Objective 3: Provide competency training to Eckerd and other foster care related agencies. Develop an LGBTQ+ training requirement policy.

Success Criteria – At least four trainings will be scheduled and completed with Eckerd and other foster care agencies by the end of 2019. At least one LGBTQ+ training requirement policy for contractors will be implemented with identified fiduciary agencies granting contracts by the end of 2019.

Stakeholders: Family Resources, Florida Department of Children and Families, Guardian Ad litem, Metro Wellness, other community partners as identified

Estimated Timeline: 2 years

Expense Budget: \$70,000

ACCESS AND ASSESSMENT

Access/Resource Center

The earliest possible identification and assessment of homeless youth in need of shelter and services is imperative to their safety and survival. In addition to partnerships with the medical and law enforcement community, the continuing use of Street Outreach personnel and the creation of a central point of access for homeless youth will provide an immediate path to safety and access to needed services.

Goal: Create a community-based centralized access/resource center for homeless youth that will provide basic needs, assessment, referrals and other needed services onsite.

Objective 1: Plan and build Safe Connections (access center) on a current Family Resources property. Existing building to be renovated per design to facilitate first access needs of homeless youth and young adults.

Success Criteria – Building renovation completed and open to homeless youth.

Stakeholders: Family Resources, community partners

Estimated Timeline: End of 2019 for funding for resource center, Safe Connections

Expense Budget: \$550k for building & ongoing \$160k per year for SO staff and vehicle

Assessment Tool

Goal: Choose and implement a comprehensive assessment tool for use with homeless youth and young adults and integrate into Coordinated Entry System of CoC.

Objective 1: Determine assessment tool to be used.

Success Criteria – An appropriate assessment tool has been chosen for administration that can enhance the TAY-VI-SPDAT.

Objective 2: Establish assessment as part of Homeless Leadership Board's "Youth Navigator" role.

Success Criteria – Homeless Leadership Board acknowledges assessment as part of their established criteria for evaluating homeless youth.

Objective 3: Work with HLB to research and select most appropriate assessment tool in coordination with the implementation plan for TAY-VI-SPDAT throughout the county.

Success Criteria – TAY-VI-SPDAT and additional assessment (if necessary) is fully integrated into the coordinated entry system for the county.

Stakeholders: Access & Assessment Committee, HLB, homeless youth and young adults.

Estimated Timeline: By June 30, 2018

Expense Budget: TBD

Front Line Safety – Street Outreach and Law Enforcement

Provide an immediate path to safety and access to needed services to help homeless youth find safety, shelter, and resources in the fastest possible time frame, helping to prevent many of the high-risk consequences of homelessness (i.e., dropping out of school, human trafficking, drug use, physical violence and suicide).

Goal: To have a fully staffed and active Street Outreach team.

Objective 1: Fully staffed and functioning Street Outreach Team

Success Criteria – Obtain a designated vehicle and a minimum of 2 specially trained staff who are deployed into the community per criteria already established by Family Resources and HLB.

Goal: To have law enforcement first responder personnel actively identify and refer homeless youth.

Objective 1: Build strong relationships with St. Petersburg LGBTQ+ police community liaison and street outreach program for adults.

Success Criteria – Local law enforcement agencies are integrated into outreach process and are active participants in referral for services.

Stakeholders: HLB Homeless Youth Navigator, Family Resources, St. Petersburg Police Dept., other local law enforcement agencies, community partners as identified

Estimated Timeline: 2 years

Expense Budget: \$70,000 to \$140,000

Access to Medical, Dental and Legal Services

Goal: To utilize appropriate community partners in the initial contact and ongoing access to vital medical and legal services.

Objective 1: Establish partnerships and develop procedures for emergency medical personnel and law enforcement personnel to identify homeless youth and guide them into appropriate safe accommodation (i.e., Safe Connections, SafePlace2B shelter, etc.).

Success Criteria – Medical and law enforcement first responder personnel actively identify and refer homeless youth. St. Petersburg LGBTQ+ police community liaison and proposed homeless youth task force play an active role along with Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital emergency dept.

Objective 2: Identify low-cost providers to provide ongoing medical and dental services to homeless youth.

Success Criteria – Partnerships and scheduled services established. Participants receive and have access to regular services.

Objective 3: Identify low-cost providers of legal services for homeless youth and establish protocols for accessing services.

Success Criteria – Partnerships and scheduled services established. Participants receive and have access to regular services.

Stakeholders: Metro Wellness, St. Petersburg Police Dept., Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital, Stetson Law School.

Estimated Timeline: By the end of 2018

Expense Budget: TBD

Mechanisms for Disseminating Information

Goal: Create a mechanism for disseminating important information regarding available resources through social media, PSAs, on-line portals, one-on-one consults.

Objective 1: Design a multifaceted social media campaign of public education.

Objective 2: Use social media to increase awareness of services and resources.

Success Criteria – Create a presence on at least 2 social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter).

Objective 3: Conduct in-person outreach at forums like schools, health fairs and other related events.

Success Criteria – Identify and participate in at least 3 in-person outreach opportunities annually.

Stakeholders: LGBTQ+ Homeless Youth committee

Estimated Timeline: By the end of 2018

Expense Budget: In-kind services

COORDINATED ENTRY AND HOUSING

Coordinated Entry Process

Goal: To accurately assess and prioritize need and acuity in the homeless/housing insecure youth population and integrate youth into the county-coordinated entry system.

Objective 1: Develop or select an existing assessment tool to measure prioritization of needs for homeless youth. This will act as a “triage” of acuity and should be standardized and adopted throughout the network of providers/community to insure consistency.

Success Criteria – Consensus is reached on a specific model to be used and its implementation.

Objective 2: Provide training in the use of the assessment tool for homeless youth resource providers.

Success Criteria – All identified community partners receive training on the agreed-upon assessment tool and are certified.

Objective 3: Measure the success of the tool’s use and its application to the needs of homeless youth.

Success Criteria – Utilize appropriate and agreed-upon metric to measure service delivery data and success outcomes for recipients.

Stakeholders: The Homeless Leadership Board, community providers, law enforcement agencies, emergency services.

Estimated Timeline: June, 2018 through December 31st, 2018

Expense Budget: TBD

Continuum of Housing Resources

The intent of this component is to examine the current continuum of housing options for youth and young adults, ages 16-24 who are either homeless or housing-insecure, to develop a plan for future enhancements to the continuum, and to seek and advocate for funding to carry out the plan.

Goal: To design a continuum of housing resources and support services for youth and young adults that meets their needs at all stages of independent living skills development.

Objective 1: Inventory current housing and support options and identify gaps.

Objective 2: Determine how best to meet the needs of the population using existing resources and identify which options need additional funding.

Objective 3: Provide longer-term housing for homeless and housing-insecure youth 18-24 through the purchase or lease of rental properties located in safe neighborhoods.

Objective 4: To provide comprehensive service programs with attention to positive independence outcomes and intersectional considerations (i.e.: LGBTQ+ youth, minorities, gender).

Success Criteria: Properties procured in partnership with real estate agents and owners on board as community collaborators.

Success Criteria: Placement of 12 or more homeless young adults, ages 18-24, in the appropriated rental properties in the calendar year 2018.

Stakeholders: Real Estate agents, youth housing providers

Estimated Timeline: January, 2019 and ongoing

Expense Budget: TBD

Funding Support

Goal: Seek out and advocate for funding to support a continuum of housing options that meets the specific needs of youth in transition.

Objective 1: Development efforts to raise appropriate funding for procurement of properties and to subsidize required services.

Objective 2: Coordinate efforts with the Homeless Leadership Board (CoC) to identify and apply for sustainable funding sources for operations of various housing and support service options.

Success Criteria: Funding goals are met to sustain a continuum of housing choices for youth and young adults.

Stakeholders: HLB, youth housing providers, partner agencies

Estimated Timeline: Ongoing

Expense Budget: TBD

SECTION IV: CONCLUSION

The development of this strategic plan represents over 12 months of dedicated effort toward understanding the problem of youth homelessness and in Pinellas County with the intent of finding ways to enhance and broaden existing programs. In that time a formidable coalition has been formed through the leadership of Family Resources and Metro Wellness, anxious and committed to contributing all necessary resources in the struggle against this threat to the cultural health of our local community. There is no more important natural resource than young people. Homelessness and the host of potential risks associated with it are an undeniable threat to that resource. Through collaboration and a sense of solidarity, members of this partnership possess a true desire to intervene on multiple fronts, in meaningful ways that garner positive results. The bottom line is that we want to keep these youth safe, put roofs over their heads, help heal their minds and bodies, keep them in school, and give them a sense of family and belonging. The ultimate success will be to restore their hope in the future and provide the roadmap that leads there.