

# Drop-In Centers & Local Collaboration Lead to

## Improved Housing Outcomes in Kentucky

**H**omelessness and housing instability present serious challenges to young people and their development. Young people experiencing homelessness face intense levels of stress to find options for safety and survival,<sup>1</sup> which often overshadow a young person's ability to explore other essential decisions that adulthood presents, such as employment and higher education. With approximately 4,025 people in Kentucky experiencing homelessness any given night,<sup>2</sup> homelessness and housing instability is a significant issue for the population of transition-aged youth and young adults served by Kentucky's Healthy Transitions grant program – Transition Age Youth Launching Realized Dreams (TAYLRD). Youth drop-in centers established as part of the grant provide an important engagement environment where transition-aged youth can access an array of developmentally-appropriate behavioral health and related services and supports. The TAYLRD Drop-In Centers and the services and supports they provide have played an important role in improving housing and mental health outcomes for the youth and young adults they serve.

Transition-aged youth and young adults were involved in the design of the TAYLRD Drop-In Centers to ensure that they are engaging, comfortable, and safe spaces where youth can access services and supports to meet their life goals. The drop-in centers provide access to peer support, case management, employment/education support, therapy, and medication services, as

well as assistance with setting personal goals and connecting to resources such as housing. To help connect and engage young people the drop-in centers also have computer labs, snacks, board games, pool tables, and video games. A young person can choose to become a TAYLRD Drop-In Center member after three visits. As a part of the membership process, peer support specialists assist young people in identifying life goals and connecting with services and supports that best match their interests and needs. A young person who identifies as being homeless or precariously housed is connected to case management and local housing services.

In 2015, when the TAYLRD Drop-In Center opened in Louisville, Kentucky's largest city, the number of young people coming to the center who were experiencing homelessness was higher than anticipated. As a result, the staff quickly established a more intentional and coordinated approach to helping young people find housing. The drop-in center became a part of the local Coalition for the Homeless, a group of leaders and staff from 30 member agencies that work collectively to serve homeless people in the community. As a part of the Coalition, TAYLRD was able to learn about and connect youth to other organizations that provide housing services and supports.

In 2017, the TAYLRD Louisville Drop-In Center director worked with the Coalition and other leaders to implement the 100-day Challenge, with the goal of providing housing supports to 100 youth in 100 days. The goal was exceeded and within 100 days, 112 youth

were provided housing and support services.<sup>3</sup> The 100-day challenge collaboration increased the TAYLRD staff's understanding and awareness of housing programs and eligibility requirements. These local partnerships helped to increase the ability of staff to connect young people to housing programs more effectively and efficiently. It also provided staff an opportunity to advocate for young people at the local system level. Concurrent with referring young people to housing services, the drop-in center staff connect the young person with other services and supports, such as mental health and substance use services, case management, job skills, and peer and

that had an overwhelming proportion of its members reported to be homeless at baseline and it was the drop-in center that established specific partnerships to address housing needs. It should be noted that only data from youth who responded to *Stability in Housing* questions at both baseline and six months were included in the analysis.

At baseline, most youth at the Louisville Drop-In Center identified as male (62%), while fewer respondents identified as female (36%), gender-neutral or transgender (2%). Two questions from the NOMs were included in the analysis of housing conditions. The answer options to the questions provided not only the number of homeless nights spent, but also the types of housing (e.g. owned, rented, foster care, hospital, detox, correctional facility, shelter, street). Overall, 12.8% of the 39 youth answering the questions at baseline reported living in an owned or rented house/apartment/trailer/room. At six months, this proportion increased to 30.8% and the number of youth selecting "homeless" decreased by 25.6%.

Thirty-five young people answered the question "In the past 30 days, how many nights have you been homeless?" At baseline, 7 youth reported that they spent 1 to 9 days homeless, 2 youth reported 10 to 19 days homeless, and 19 youth reported 20 to 30 days homeless. At the 6-month reassessment, the number of youth who spent 20 to 30 days homeless and the number of youth who spent 1 to 9 days homeless decreased, while the number of youth who spent 10 to 19 days homeless increased. Sixteen youth reported a reduced number of homeless days after 6 months; 8 of these went to "0 days" (5 of whom had been at 30 days of homelessness prior to baseline). Of the 16 youth who indicated at baseline they had spent 30 days homeless in the past 30 days, only 4 reported they had spent 30 days homeless in the past 30 days at 6 months. Ten youth experienced more homeless days than they had prior to baseline; 5 of these youth were homeless for 30 days. Overall, the average number of homeless days per youth decreased from 21.6 to 19.2. Initial analysis also showed positive improvements in some mental health and social connectedness outcome measures. At baseline only 24% of young people reported that they did not feel or rarely felt restless, and at 6 months this number increased to 40%. At baseline 58% of youth reported that they had a feeling of belonging; at 6 months that increased to 69%.

Preliminary analysis indicates that drop-in center services, when coupled with strong partnerships with

*"...it came together quickly. Like, I probably was waiting two to three months max, so I would say it was fast, and their system, I guess. I was surprised. Being a youth that's had a couple of apartments and then felt some glory, and then lived in his car and living with people on the side too, and then getting housed was kind of a big deal to me because going from zero to hero kind of meant a lot, because when you get your own keys to your spot it's kind of a step toward independence."*

**- TAYLRD youth who got housed**

community supports. The drop-in center also empowers young people to advocate for themselves by providing independent living skills. Often, young adults who were experiencing homelessness sought Louisville Drop-In Center services after learning through word of mouth that the drop-in center was youth-friendly, helpful, and able to connect them to needed resources.

In order to explore the impact of the drop-in center services on youth homelessness, the National Outcome Measures system (NOMs) dataset was used.<sup>4</sup> The measurement tool collects data on various life domains, including housing. The NOMs is administered by the TAYLRD Youth Coordinator at baseline, every six months, and discharge. For the purposes of this examination, only NOMs from the Louisville TAYLRD Drop-In Center were included in the analysis because it was the region

housing and related agencies, help improve housing conditions for youth and decrease the number of days spent homeless by a young person. These results indicate that a tight-knit partnership and coordination among agencies at the local level, coupled with youth-friendly services, greatly facilitate the engagement of youth experiencing homelessness and connect them to housing services and supports. It should be noted that because of the small sample size, the findings of the study should be cautiously interpreted. Future studies will focus on youth perspectives on how the services and supports available at TAYLRD Drop-In Centers helped them find jobs or housing.

## REFERENCES

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