**Nothing About Us Without Us**

**Coordinated Community Plan to**

**Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness for Franklin County, Massachusetts**

Acknowledgments

[*From the writing team*]

Welcome

[*A personal letter from someone the reader will respect – e.g., from Claire, ED/Community Action Pioneer Valley, with quotes from YAB on left side)*

**Table of Contents**

[Executive Summary](#_heading=h.2et92p0) **4**

[Introduction](#_heading=h.tyjcwt) **5**

[Vision and Goals](#_heading=h.4d34og8) **6**

[Statement of Need](#_heading=h.2s8eyo1) **7**

[Solution Strategy](#_heading=h.2jxsxqh) **14**

[Signature Page](#_heading=h.2bn6wsx) **23**

[*Appendix A. Process Background*](#_heading=h.qsh70q)***24***

[*Appendix B. Planning Team*](#_heading=h.3as4poj)***26***

[*Appendix C. List of Partners*](#_heading=h.91tx4cz2gpl9)***27***

[*Appendix D. Detailed Action Steps*](#_heading=h.m84jb11xg779)***30***

[*Appendix E. Housing Model*](#_heading=h.49x2ik5)***31***

[*Appendix F. The Three County Youth Action Board*](#_heading=h.2p2csry)***32***

[*Appendix G. Updated Community Needs Assessment*](#_heading=h.ihv636)***33***

# Executive Summary

[*Two pages to capture the vision, goals, high-level needs, and solutions strategy headings. We will write this when we are done with most of the plan content]*

# Introduction

***Nothing About Us Without Us*** is Franklin County’s coordinated community plan to prevent and end youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness. It represents a year and a half of work led by community members from across the County representing a number of different stakeholder groups. YYAs with lived homelessness experience and staff representing homelessness services providers, youth organizations, schools, child welfare, systems of justice, affordable housing, and both local and state government met regularly to share their experiences, expertise, and resources. In their own ways, each has committed to be part of actionable solutions that ensure homelessness among YYA is rare, brief, and one time, without the consequences that might otherwise prevent them from thriving in the future.

This plan first presents a [Vision](#_heading=h.4d34og8) of Franklin County without YYA homelessness and five concrete [Goals](#_heading=h.uzxjvyvw3ok8) that will help us achieve it. It then lays out a [Statement of Need](#_heading=h.2s8eyo1), grounded in our [2019 Community Needs Assessment](#_heading=h.ihv636), that addresses multiple dimensions of young people’s lives and the system that is meant to serve them. Our [Solution Strategy](#_heading=h.2jxsxqh) section begins with the [Guiding Principles](#_heading=h.z337ya) and [Governance Structure](#_heading=h.1y810tw) that we used to craft our plan and believe captures our decision-making priorities and values. It then details the [Objectives and Actions](#_heading=h.2xcytpi) that we think will best help us to address our needs and achieve our five goals over the next three years.

Nothing About Us Without Us is also the outcome of a unique partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD selected Franklin County to participate in its Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) in August, 2019, providing both project funding and technical assistance support to plan and implement an effective coordinated community response. While this plan is unique to our community’s culture, strengths, and needs, we have also written it to address the elements prescribed by [HUD’s YHDP requirements](#_heading=h.hn17inv85yi1).

Each section of this plan is meant to build off the next, providing context, explaining our decision-making process, and carefully articulating our needs and the solutions that will address them. But it also is designed to be a living document. In part through our [Continuous Improvement Strategy](#_heading=h.umsix6h76rlz), we hope that Nothing About Us Without Us will grow and evolve as we learn more about YYA homelessness in Franklin County and see the effects of the actions in this plan. A commitment to improvement and relentless partnership will make sure that it is relevant and serving YYAs well into the future.

# Vision and Goals

***Nothing About Us Without Us,*** a coordinated community plan (CCP) to prevent and end YYA homelessness in Franklin County, Massachusetts,is guided by a vision statement and goals developed by the Planning Team.

## Vision Statement

***Franklin County envisions a community where all young people have equitable access to safe, quality, stable housing, and the supports and opportunities they need to thrive.***

## Five CCP Goals

To achieve our vision, we set the following five goals for our community:

***Goal #1:******Identification****-Franklin County will identify all youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness.*

***Goal #2****:* ***Coordinated Entry****-Using a ‘no wrong door’ approach, Franklin County will continue to expand and improve access to Coordinated Entry for all youth and young adults experiencing homelessness to ensure a seamless linkage to the crisis response system.*

***Goal #3****:* ***Prevention/Diversion****-Franklin County will implement a collaborative system of prevention and diversion strategies to support youth and young adults who are at risk of experiencing homelessness.*

***Goal #4****:* ***Stable Housing****-Franklin County will work to connect youth and young adults to low-barrier, non-time-limited housing opportunities and the supports they need to thrive as quickly and equitably as possible.*

***Goal #5****:* ***Sustainability****-Franklin County will continue the development of sustainable partnerships, plans, resources and system capacity to ensure that the community’s shared vision can be achieved and maintained.*

# Statement of Need

We designed and prioritized this plan’s solutions in response to needs identified in our Updated Community Needs Assessment ([Appendix G](#_heading=h.ihv636)). This statement highlights quantitative and qualitative data that best articulate the uniqueness of YYA homelessness in Franklin County and our most urgent identifiable system challenges. The Stakeholders identified throughout refer to focus group participants and community partners who worked with us in the Spring of 2019 and throughout the planning process. See [Appendix G](#_heading=h.ihv636) for more complete data and citations.

## How Many YYAs Experience Homelessness

***The number of YYAs experiencing the most identifiable types of homelessness in Franklin County are small, but many are not interacting with the homelessness system***. 26 YYAs experienced homelessness primarily in shelters and transitional housing (TH) in the Three County CoC each night according to our most conservative point-in-time (PIT) estimates from 2019. Emergency shelters and TH programs in Franklin County served 131 YYAs over the course of FY 2019. But we are not capturing many YYAs in these homelessness system data sets. Schools identified 73 students experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian in school year 17-18, many of whom were under 18 and do not show up during the PIT or in HMIS. Using a respected national rule of thumb, over 2,400 YYAs may experience some form of homelessness in Franklin County over the course of a year. The YYAs we are missing may be fleeing dangerous living arrangements, sleeping night to night between different homes and apartments (e.g., couch-surfing), sleeping consistently in spaces too small or inappropriately configured to meet basic needs (e.g., doubled up), do not want to be, or cannot be, identified by volunteers during the PIT, or are not seeking traditional homelessness services.

***Need***: Franklin County needs housing solutions for up to 131 YYAs and to develop solutions for the 2,400 that may need support other than independent housing. We also need new tools and practices to better identify young people across a wider variety of experiences.

## Who the YYA Are Experiencing Homelessness

***Most YYAs experiencing homelessness that we see are between 18 and 24, but we know there are many under 18 that we do not identify or interact with.***  The average age of YYAs accessing homelessness services in Three County in FY 2019 was ~21, and only 4% were under 18. In contrast, YYAs reported an average age of a first homelessness experience as 16.6. Homelessness systems are designed to identify and serve older adults and not YYAs. Community and YYA awareness of what homelessness means, when and where a YYA might seek help, and stigma about those who identify themselves as homeless likely suppress counts of under 18-year-olds and mandatory reporting requirements may limit both an agency’s willingness to identify a minor and a minor’s willingness to seek resources.

***Need***: We need to better identify and support YYAs under 18, as well as those 18 to 24.

***Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ YYAs are more likely to experience homelessness.*** 35% of YYAs in the Three County region who accessed homelessness services in 2018 identified as Hispanic or Latinx, compared to only 7% of the general population. 16% identified as Black compared to only 4.5% of the general population. More YYAs (up to 25%) identify as multiracial. 27% of YYAs identified in Three County during the 2019 Youth Count identified as LGBQ, and over 30% of YYAs who used homelessness services in Franklin County identified as LGBQ. 12.5% of Massachusetts high school students and 15.5% 18 to 24-year-olds in Massachusetts identify as LGBQ and 20% to 40% of YYAs experiencing homelessness nationally identify as LGBQ. 4% of YYAs who used homelessness services in Franklin County in FY2019 identified as either transgender or gender-non-conforming compared to national estimates between 0.5% and 3%. Poverty and barriers related to structural racism and homophobia may limit access for these YYAs to community resources when compared to their white cis-gender peers.

***Need***: Solutions must take into account systemic white domination and power that lead to disproportionate rates of homelessness for Black, Latinx, LGBQ and non-cis-gendered YYAs, unconscious and explicit bias, reduced access to system resources and decreased likelihood of thriving once out of the experience of homelessness.

## Experiences That Affect YYA Homelessness

***Young parents experience homelessness in Franklin County at lower than national rates.*** Between20% and 36% of YYAs who engaged with homelessness services or were identified during the 2018 Youth Count in the Three County region were pregnant or parenting. The estimated national average is 40% and rates from other Massachusetts communities are as high as 80%. This discrepancy may be due to limited resources, awareness, identification, and outreach in a region that is largely rural. Within our CoC, Latinx YYAs are highly overrepresented among parenting YYAs (46%).

***Need***: We need to better identify additional sources of data related to young families experiencing homelessness to get a clearer picture of the need. We need more information regarding state family resources and to account for the needs of both parents (e.g., childcare, emotional support) and their children (e.g., early childhood education). We also need to increase housing options for young families.

***Behavioral and other health challenges are barriers for many YYAs experiencing homelessness.*** Somewhere 20% to 50% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County region may need mental health supports. But this may be an undercount; 69% of YYAs participating in a respected national survey reported mental health difficulties. We estimate that between 8% and 13% of YYAs experiencing homelessness need supports to address substance use. 81 YYAs receiving state substance use treatment services report some form of homelessness and we are missing data from many others. Of the 96 YYAs assessed by the homelessness system in FY 2019, 13 scored in the highest level of need category that includes health and homelessness history, and some qualify as chronically homeless, the highest threshold of need established by HUD. Another 58 scored in the medium level of need category, often indicating behavioral health barriers.

***Need***: Solutions need to support the wide range of physical and mental health needs of YYAs and increase the capacity of the community to offer YYA-specific physical and mental health services.

***Many YYAs experiencing homelessness are disengaged from education and employment***. 30% in the Three County region reported being out of school or without a diploma or HiSET, and only 40% reported active employment. For those who stay in school, graduating can be a huge challenge. The lack of a high school diploma or GED equivalent is associated with a 346% higher risk of homelessness, and studies consistently find that reaching higher milestones in education is associated with lower unemployment and higher income. YYAs surveyed who were experiencing homelessness were twice as likely to be engaged in part-time work than full-time. 15% reported working “under the table” and over 20% reported income from the informal sector. Community members identify employment as critical to addressing YYA homelessness.

***Need***: Building on our current youth homelessness programs, we need additional on-site and partner resources to support education and employment goals. Education and employment partners need to be connected and supported to identify and serve the YYAs experiencing homelessness at their schools, including community colleges, certificate programs, as well as out of school YYAs.

***YYAs are entering homelessness at high rates after involvement with systems of care***. Up to 38% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County region reported having been in foster care in 2019 and 34% reported being involved with the justice system. 8% of YYAs engaged with youth homelessness providers report having come directly from either foster care, hospital, jail, or substance use treatment facilities. National evidence suggests the following: some YYAs experience homelessness after aging out of state systems of care, but many who experience homelessness are reunified with their families or adopted; and YYAs who experience homelessness and have systems experience may have different histories of adverse childhood events than their non-systems involved peers.

***Need***: We need to closely collaborate with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Department of Youth Services (DYS) and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to support YYAs as they transition from care to ensure that they have successful outcomes. Programs that serve them need to be aware of, and address, the unique needs of this population.

***We know little about the impact of trafficking and domestic violence on YYA homelessness***. No one interviewed in the 2018 Massachusetts Youth Count reported “sex work” as a source of income and only 6.3% reported exchanging sex for money or housing. 25% of Franklin County YYAs in HMIS reported being survivors of domestic violence, which may include trafficking but more often refers to intimate partner or family violence. Nationally, 15% of YYAs experiencing homelessness may have been trafficked for sex and 32% involved in the sex trade in some way. 14.4% of YYAs with homelessness experience in Massachusetts reported having exchanged sex for money–5½ times the rate for YYAs without homelessness experience.  Community members identified sexual exploitation as one of our community’s critical needs to be addressed, but there are only minimal services to do so.

***Need***: We need to collect or identify existing information on prevalence of trafficking and domestic violence. Solutions need to account for the unique needs of YYAs who have experienced trafficking and domestic violence, to include improved identification tools and practices, and to support YYAs and providers with increasing their knowledge of available supports.

## Where YYAs Experience Homelessness

**YYAs experiencing homelessness, sleep in and interact with many different places and spaces, which impacts their risk of trauma, ability to leverage resources, and likelihood that the system may not identify them**. All but one of 26 YYAs engaged during the 2019 PIT count were in emergency shelter or TH. In the Massachusetts Youth Count, five were sleeping outside, four in cars, three in places not meant for sleeping, and 20 in a doubled up or couch-surfing situation. 11% of YYAs entered homelessness services from the street in FY 2019, 62% from the home of family or friends, 8% from systems of care, and 2% from their own apartment. 12% of students at Greenfield Community College reported experiencing homelessness during the school year and 73 students were identified in middle and high school. Almost 90% of those identified at school were “doubled up,” but others were identified living at hotels and motels, unsheltered, or in shelters.

***Need***: In order to improve our ability to identify and support YYAs experiencing homelessness, we must build awareness of the different pathways YYAs take and places where YYAs live. We need solutions for YYAs who are not experiencing literal homelessness, but living in places that do not qualify for HUD services, including couch-surfing.

## How YYAs Experience the Homelessness System

***Most YYAs engaging with the homelessness system do so for the first time, remain in the system for months, and do not exit to permanent destinations.*** Nearly 64% of YYAs parents and 72% of non-parenting YYAs engaging homelessness services in 2018 did so for the first time. Most used emergency shelter but only 26% of parenting YYAs and 12.3% of non-parenting YYAs had a recorded positive system exit. About half of parenting YYAs and only 11% of non-parenting YYAs left shelter or TH for Permanent Housing (PH) programs. 37% had no exit interview completed and 40% returned to family or friends (either permanently or temporarily). 11% of all parenting YYAs in HMIS in 2018 were identified as long-term stayers and 3% (1 YYA) qualified as chronically homeless. 17% of all non-parenting YYAs in HMIS in 2018 were long-term stayers, and 11% (7 YYA) qualify as chronically homeless. Many YYAs are now engaging with a standardized coordinated entry process for access, assessment, prioritization, and referral, which should accelerate connection to resources and help better target housing and services. For the past year, YYAs have also had access to Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) flexible funds to address immediate needs, including eight during the first quarter of FY 2020.

***Need***: We must improve data collection (e.g., increased exit interview completion) to better identify system pathways. We must target long-term resources to the few YYAs who are high need and not experiencing homelessness for the first time and also develop adequate rapid-response resources for the majority experiencing homelessness for the first time. To improve program outcomes, we must better understand why so many YYAs exit to non-permanent locations.

Homelessness Risk Factors for YYA

***Stakeholders identified seven drivers of YYA homelessness:*** **1**) Generational poverty; **2**) Lack of emergency housing; **3**) High cost of housing; **4**) Trauma from systemic poverty and racism; **5**) Unstable home lives, family rejection, and abuse or neglect; **6**) Immigration status; and **7**) Lack of employment opportunities. They also identified LGBTQ YYAs, young people of color, parenting YYAs, YYAs with behavioral health disorders, YYAs without supportive families, and YYAs leaving DCF care as especially high risk. Finally, they highlighted that the many YYAs who couch-surf are less likely to appear in our homelessness response system. YYAs identified during the Massachusetts Youth Count were most likely to identify some form of family conflict as a reason for leaving home, willingly or unwillingly. The next most likely reasons relate to house size or loss of family housing. 11 indicated that parental substance use led to their homelessness.

***Need***: We must increase access to crisis resources, support local and statewide efforts to increase affordable housing, and engage in broad conversations around equity. We must support families in crisis and ensure high capacity for family engagement. We must build awareness of the experience of immigrants and other at-risk populations into system and program design. We must consider employment outcomes in homelessness programs and explore employment and workforce development efforts that target YYAs at-risk and experiencing homelessness.

***The majority of unrelated 15 to 24-year olds live in poverty in Franklin County***. The poverty rate for this group is 62%–roughly 1,053 YYAs. This leaves many YYAs with few resources and puts them at increased risk for homelessness. The impact is more pronounced for Black and Latinx YYAs: the poverty rate for Black residents in Franklin County region is over four times the average rate and the poverty rates for people who identify as mixed race or Latinx are double the average.

***Need:*** We need to consider the effects of poverty when designing solutions and interpreting performance, particularly for Black and Latinx YYAs. This may impact community-based solutions and prevention and diversion efforts. We also need to support advocacy efforts to reduce poverty for YYAs and their families.

***Fair Market Rents and transportation costs are out of range for YYAs living on their own***. A two-bedroom apartment in Franklin County is $1,095 per month, but renters earning an estimated average wage of $11.02 per hour can only afford a unit up to $573 per month. Residents of the Three County region are paying 36% of median income on housing costs, above the national standard of 30% and the 32% threshold established by a recent national study. Adding to that pressure, one study estimated average transportation costs of up to 25% of median income. Transportation was a top need identified by community stakeholders.

***Need***: We need more affordable housing and solutions to help YYAs retain housing at market rate–e.g., roommates, host homes, etc.

***Many YYAs engaged with child welfare appear to lack a strong permanency plan***. Almost 1000 YYAs in 2018 actively engaged with child welfare in the Three County region, 835 who were between 12 and 17, and 141 who were over 18. 33% were in foster care or group quarters, and 67% were “out of placement.” Many had an Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement as their permanency plan, including 83% of 18 to 24-year olds in foster care or group quarters. 18% of all YYAs had an “unspecified” permanency plan. Latinx and multiracial YYAs are the most overrepresented among all YYAs in foster care. We currently do not have similar data for those involved with the juvenile or adult justice systems and or with DMH.

***Need***: We need to build cross-system partnerships to support stronger transition planning and better tracking. We need to support YYAs who have interacted with systems of care and obtain additional data from justice system and mental health partners.

***The rural nature of the community exacerbates the risk of homelessness among YYAs.***  Approximately 70,900 people live across 725 square miles, in one small city (~17,000), and 25 towns. The resulting isolation impacts quality of life for residents and it is challenging to develop and preserve affordable housing. State investments have reduced the digital divide, but it remains large. Recent surveys identify significant disparities in access to resources like public sewer and water services and transportation that challenge rural residents and limit economic development.

***Need***: We need to analyze our current transportation options and work to increase ways for YYAs to access services.

## The State of the YYA Homelessness System

***The YYA homelessness system is improving but is under-resourced and lacking in coordination.*** The CoC has a new CoC lead agency, a strong collaboration with neighboring Hampden County, improved data and HMIS capacity, and a robust YYA homelessness process. Stakeholders identified strong youth homelessness partners, including DIAL/SELF, CAPV, and the Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, and outstanding individual staff. They described a deep commitment to collaboration and schools and colleges that are becoming more aware and involved. That said, the community has expressed a clear need for a coordinated, transparent, well-resourced, well-organized and comprehensive effort to address YYA homelessness.

***Need***: We must continue to invest in system-capacity to prevent and end YYA homelessness.

***The current housing inventory dedicated to YYAs experiencing homelessness is limited***. There are only 24 units of RRH; 8 units of TH; and, 24 units of PSH. There are limited emergency shelter options for YYAs, particularly LGBTQ YYAs, who avoid adult shelters perceived as unsafe and exploitative. YYAs confront long wait lists for housing and services and there are simply not enough subsidized or affordable housing options for YYAs. Affordable options that do exist are substandard and some stakeholders worry that program time limits and limited budgets for staff engagement are inadequate to support stability.  Stakeholders also identified a lack of mental health professionals and services options to meet the needs of YYAs in emergency or TH.

***Need***: We need more YYA-dedicated housing to match the base-level need identified by our prevalence estimates (i.e., 131 per year); more YYA-specific and LGBTQ-affirming crisis residential options; an array of medium and long-term housing options, including for YYA parents; and more YYA-specific mental health supports accessible to YYAs in housing programs.

***Too few “mainstream” and community partners focus on YYA homelessness***. We lack active partnership from public housing authorities, state agencies, faith communities, local governments, schools, colleges, the health care system, and private landlords.  Community members lack general awareness of YYA homelessness and many myths persist among those who are aware or working with YYAs.

***Need***: We must increase partnership with a variety of non-homelessness-specific partners. We need them to be aware of YYA homelessness and their role in preventing and ending it.

# Solution Strategy

Our solution strategy is designed to directly respond to our statement of need. It is guided by a series of ***principles*** that informed every planning decision and we used a shared ownership and consensus-driven ***governance structure*** to make those decisions. Each solution includes ***objectives and actions*** that reflect both practical and priority considerations, and the entire solutions strategy will be improved over time as a living response through a ***continuous improvement strategy***.

## Guiding Principles

Stakeholders have used the following principles to guide the development of each element of this coordinated community plan. They are central to both systems-level and program level strategies and must be considered when implementing solutions to prevent and end YYA homelessness.

1. [*Add Principle 1*]
2. [*Add Principle 2*]
3. [*Add Principle 3*]
4. [*Add Principle 4*]
5. [*Add Principle 5*]
6. [*Add Principle 6*]

We recognize young people as experts in their own lives and we value the importance of youth voice and youth choice in the systems that we create. We believe that the inclusion of young people most impacted by homelessness is essential to the work of preventing and ending youth homelessness. We strive to ensure authentic youth engagement and leadership throughout our planning and implementation processes.

We respect and honor all cultures, identities and abilities. We create an equitable system that supports all, paying particular attention to those who experience homelessness at higher rates because of systems of power, violence, white supremacy and capitalism, including young people of color, LGBTQ+/GSRM youth, pregnant and parenting youth, and youth who have been involved with state systems.

We utilize collaborative partnerships and collective approaches that leverage existing systems and build community capacity and cohesion through a coordinated planning processes involving all sectors of the community.

We utilize Positive Youth Development. We focus on building resilience and increasing protective factors, including social determinates of health. We implement these principles into systems we create with and for young people.

We utilize evidence-based interventions, including Housing First, to create sate, inviting housing opportunities that are tailored to young people’s needs and desires, and that are sustainable over time.

We believe ending youth homeless involves more than providing housing. We are committed to providing comprehensive person-centered supportive services that are sustainable, strengths-based and trauma informed, creating permanent connections and a feeling of belonging for youth and young adults, leading to autonomy and independence.

We believe in community investment and that we need to advocate for policies and resources that protect those who have been disenfranchised by systems of power.

We believe in continuous improvement, and in the importance of regular reflection on our approach and experiences in order to most effectively meet the changing needs of the community.

## Governance

Stakeholders established the following structure to ensure shared ownership, broad partnership, and consensus-based decision-making:



Four main groups of stakeholders worked between September 2019 and April 2020 to design this coordinated community plan: the YHDP Lead; the YAB; the Planning team; and the Advisory Council.

***YHDP Lead.*** The YHDP Lead team included Community Action Pioneer Valley program staff, CoC staff, and a group of national and local consultants contracted to support the work. They met weekly and established the plan’s development strategy, set agendas for planning meetings and on-site visits, project-managed according to HUD required timelines, conducted background needs assessment and solutions-based research, and synthesized feedback from open YHDP meetings and the Advisory Council for the Planning Team. The YHDP Lead team had no formal decision-making authority other than to propose plan content and facilitate the process.

***Youth Action Board (YAB).*** The YAB is comprised of YYAs under the age of 25 with lived experience of homelessness. One of its members is a voting member on the CoC Board and the YAB is an official committee of the CoC. YAB members participated in weekly planning team meetings and separately in their own YAB meetings. They provided input and expertise throughout all parts of planning process, participated actively in decision-making discussions with authority to approve or contest any element in the plan, and refined proposals as an independent body before reporting back to the Planning Team. The YAB had final approval authority over the final plan.

***Planning Team*.** The Planning team included the YHDP Lead, YAB members, youth-serving providers, and partners from child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and local government. They met bi-weekly and served as the formal YHDP decision-making and expertise body. The Planning Team held the community accountable to the planning timeline, reviewed and edited each section of the Plan, ensured the YAB’s active participation in decision-making, and was responsible for the approval of the final plan.

***Advisory Council.*** The Advisory Council was comprised of a broad group of stakeholders and system partners, including federal technical assistance providers. They met as needed for topical conversations and their members joined a variety of partner meetings. They advised the Planning Team and served as subject matter experts. They had no formal decision-making authority.

***Decision-Making Framework.*** The Planning Team operated according to the following decision-making framework established early in the planning process:

* *At minimum* the YAB, CoC, local government, and the child welfare agency must approve and sign the final coordinated community plan for HUD. All Planning Team members will be encouraged to sign the final plan;
* There should be sufficient discussion on a proposal and members will commit to checking to see that everyone has the information they need *before* we check for consensus;
* *At least* three organizations and YAB members (number to be determined by YAB, possibly 2 or more) must be participating in order to make a decision;
* Proxy votes for planning team members are allowed, but the planning team member will send an email in advance stating that a person is coming in their place and has been provided the information to make a decision;
* Members will show their opinion of a proposal using the following gestures:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | to indicate “Approve” |
|  | to indicate “Stand Aside (not sure, don’t really care)” |
|  | to indicate “Block (against)” |

* *At least* two thirds of the group must approve a proposal for it to be included in the plan;
* If there are any “Blocks” or reservations, we will not move forward. We will discuss these to see if we can move toward more agreement. The Team will give those with “Blocks” or reservations an opportunity to state the reason they voted against a proposal and talk through any concerns they have. All members will have the opportunity to provide input by asking each person present if they would like to do so. Members who initially indicated “Block” or had reservations may continue to have a reservation but agree to “Stand Aside” indicating that they are fine with moving forward with the proposal;
* If someone “Blocks” something and will not either “Approve” or “Stand Aside” after additional discussion, they will need to propose another option;
* If a “Block” continues, we will hold a mediation meeting with representatives from both sides that feel strongly about their position and a neutral party, potentially the YAB if they are not part of the “Block” nor strongly “Approve,” to work this out.

## Objectives and Actions

Nothing About Us Without Us uses our five goals as a framework for completing a series of objectives and actions. They respond directly to our statement of need and the priorities agreed upon by the Planning Committee.

|  |
| --- |
| **Goal 1: Identification** Franklin County will identify all youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness |
| **Objective 1a:** Improve collaboration with schools and colleges around identifying and providing support for YYAs at risk of experiencing homelessness |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 1b:** Explore cross-system data sharing strategies to identify risk of homelessness for YYAs and to track housing and service outcomes |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 1c:** Increase outreach services and create programs for YYAs who are not currently accessing services |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 1d:** Partner with libraries to offer outreach and information on available services |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Goal 2: Coordinated Entry & Crisis Response**Using a ‘no wrong door’ approach, Franklin County will continue to expand and improve access to Coordinated Entry for all YYA experiencing and at risk of homelessness to ensure a seamless linkage to the crisis response system |
| **Objective 2a:** Create more YYA-specific emergency shelter options |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 2b:** Train adult shelter providers on YYA homelessness and work with them to make shelters safer for YYAs |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 2c:** Develop emergency shelter options for pregnant and parenting YYA |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 2d:** Develop more transitional housing on a small, individualized scale |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Goal 3: Prevention/Diversion**Franklin County will implement a collaborative system of prevention and diversion strategies to support youth and young adults who are at risk of experiencing homelessness |
| **Objective 3a:** Develop interventions for families with 14-15 year olds to prevent homelessness |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 3b:** Increase family mediation and conflict resolution services |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 3c:** Partner with DCF, DYS and DMH to prevent homelessness, shore up supports, and prepare YYAs to live on their own |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 3d:** Increase outreach to at-risk youth and young adults |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 3e:** Offer increased parenting education and support/crisis intervention for families |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Goal 4: Stable Housing**Franklin County will work to connect youth and young adults to low-barrier, non-time-limited housing opportunities and the supports they need to thrive as quickly and equitably as possible |
| **Objective 4a:** Create opportunities for integrated services (housing, case management, behavioral health) in central locations |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4b:** Increase access to responsive, trauma-informed, youth-centered mental health care |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4c:** Create a YYA-run recovery program to support YYAs with substance use issues |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4d:** Establish a detox and other treatment options for YYAs with substance use issues |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4e:** Create a flexible funding pool for landlord incentives, transportation, rent, utilities, etc. |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4f:** Develop a continuum of housing options that include supportive services in Franklin County |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4g:** Create housing options for pregnant and parenting YYA |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4h:** Train housing providers in evidence based practices related to different housing models for YYA (e.g. shared housing) |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4i:** Develop case management and supportive service models that allow for more time to work with young people |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 4j:** Develop more community spaces for meals and social connection |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Goal 5: Sustainability**Franklin County will continue the development of sustainable partnerships, plans, resources, and system capacity to ensure that the community’s shared vision can be achieved and maintained |
| **Objective 5a:** Improve transportation and develop more flexible transportation options |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 5b:** Expand employment opportunities for YYA |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 5c:** Develop a robust advocacy agenda to advance policy and funding opportunities |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 5d:** Train local landlords on YYA homelessness and the importance of housing YYA |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 5e:** Support development of YABs in each county/region within CoC to shape policy and programming |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| **Objective 5f:** Initiate anti-stigma campaign around youth homelessness |
| **Action Steps** | **Responsible Party** | **Timeframe** |
| *TBD* | *TBD* | *TBD* |

##

## Continuous Improvement Strategy

[*This is how we will ensure effectiveness over time, adapt as we learn and circumstances change, and involve broad community voice*]

# Signature Page

[*We approve this strategy. Signed by as many committee members as possible - well beyond the required number (i.e., DCF, CoC, Local Gov, YAB Reps)*]

# Appendix A. Process Background

Participation in HUD’s YHDP is the culmination of over a year’s worth of effort in Franklin County, and in the larger Three County CoC. In November 2018, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) awarded CAPV funds as part of a statewide effort to prevent and end YYA homelessness. The YYA homelessness effort included flexible funding for YYAs at risk and experiencing homelessness, funding for capacity building support, and a mandate to conduct a Community Needs Assessment (CNA). In early 2019, Community Action Pioneer Valley (CAPV) completed their transition as the Three County CoC lead agency and began work to improve the CoC’s systems and processes for preventing and ending homelessness among all people in our region.

From April through June 2019, CAPV partnered with a consulting team to complete the CNA requirements of EOHHS funding. That process produced “I’m Still Human, An Assessment of Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in the Three County Continuum of Care (Franklin, Hamphshire, and Berkshire Counties, Massachusetts),” the findings from which have been updated and included in [Appendix G](#_heading=h.ihv636). But the process also produced a groundswell of activity and excitement. Through several focus groups, a broadly distributed survey, widely-attended community events, and the collaborative writing of a YHDP application in April and May, the CNA process proved invaluable for building the type of collaborative environment that a successful coordinated community planning process would require.

The decision to apply as Franklin County, rather than Three County was practical for three reasons:

1. The Three County Region is large and undergoing many system-wide efforts. Our CoC covers three large and distinct counties that are still learning to work together and undergoing several capacity-consuming CoC improvement efforts. Layering on a CoC-wide YHDP effort would be daunting.
2. Franklin County has the most developed YYA-homelessness system and the greatest capacity for system planning. Both CAPV and DIAL/SELF together have an array of programming for YYA, including workforce and leadership development, and services for YYA experiencing homelessness.
3. Franklin County qualifies as a rural community according to HUD’s YHDP definition. Applying as a rural community increased the likelihood that HUD would select Three County to participate. While Hampshire County includes a number of rural areas, it does not meet the rural definition and so an application from the entire CoC would have been scored against the most advanced metropolitan CoCs in the country. Berkshire County qualifies as rural, however, submitting two separate applications or even one covering both Counties seemed above our current capacity.
4. We believed that the entire CoC would benefit from one County’s participation. YHDP would add resources to the community and allow us to test solutions in Franklin that we might then bring to Hampshire and Berkshire.

CAPV formally completed their CNA in the beginning of August, 2019 and was selected to participate in HUD’s YHDP third round a few weeks later. The Planning Team, with intensive support and training from TAC, has been meeting at least two times each month since September and engaging the larger community once a month. Meetings focused on providing input on the vision statement; reviewing data; systems modeling; and creating goals, objectives, and action steps. Members of the Planning Team participated in topical meetings related to YHDP requirements through the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, a convening body of all four counties of Western Massachusetts. The Network served as a forum for both Franklin and Hampden County YHDP communities to support and learn from one another, and hear from partners on topics ranging from human trafficking and family engagement to young families in the family shelter system and career services focused on YYA.

The most important development of the CNA and YHDP processes has been the creation of our YAB (see Appendix F). YAB members participated in focus groups and played a key role in Planning Team meetings. They also met on alternative weeks in order to discuss the content of meetings more deeply and provide feedback for the next Planning Team meeting. Working with True Colors United, the YAB has developed more structure and formalized Vision and Mission Statements, Group Agreements, and Core Values, with plans to focus on member recruitment and retention ongoing. The YAB practiced leadership throughout the planning process, within the YAB, on the Planning Team, and during larger community meetings. One YAB member is a voting member of the CoC Board. The YAB is an official committee of the CoC.

# Appendix B. Planning Team

(In alphabetical order)

**Kat Allen** | *Coalition Coordinator, Partnership for Youth/Franklin Regional Council of Governments*

**Sandy Bastone** | *Director, Family Support Services, CAPV*

**Naomi Bledsoe** | *Juvenile Diversion Program, Northwestern District Attorney's Office*

**Jazmyn Brewington** | *YAB*

**Heather Catlin** | *YAB*

**Sara Cummings** | *Director, Community Services, CAPV*

**Lydia Davis** | *Leadership Development Specialist, Youth and Workforce Development Programs, CAPV*

**Olivia Dombrodski** | *YAB*

**Jena Duncan** | *Youth and Workforce Development Programs, CAPV*

**Kasey Erickson** | *Adolescent Supervisor, DCF*

**Sarah Fitzgibbons** | *NELCWIT*

**Kaia Fulk** | *YAB*

**Lisa Goldsmith** | *Homeless Youth Services Manager, CAPV*

**Tyler Harold** | *YAB*

**Justin King** | *District Manager, DYS*

**Lisa Lapierre** | *Director, Youth and Workforce Development Programs, CAPV*

**Brooke Murphy** | *CoC Program Specialist, CAPV*

**Keleigh Pereira** | *Program Director Three County CoC, CAPV*

**Michele LaFleur** | *CoC Data and Evaluation Manager, CAPV*

**Myck Lemay** | *Leadership Development and Education Coordinator, Youth and Workforce Development Programs, CAPV*

**Stacy Parsons** | *Regional Director, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

**Phil Ringwood** | *Executive Director, DIAL/SELF Youth and Community Services*

**Timothy Rivers** | *YAB*

**Felisha Rosa** | *YAB*

#

# Appendix C. List of Partners

|  |
| --- |
| **Franklin County YHDP Planning Partnerships** |
| **Type of Partner** | **Agency** | **Point Person(s)** | **Planning Participation** |
| **Three County CoC** | Community Action Pioneer Valley Three County CoC Staff  | Keleigh Pereira, Brooke Murphy, Michele LaFleur | YHDP lead, Planning Team, Data Management |
| Three County Continuum of Care Board of Directors | Kasey Erickson, Stacy Parsons, Phil Ringwood, Timothy Rivers (also listed below in their respective partner/agency roles) | Planning Team, Signers |
| **Youth Action Board** | Youth Action Board | Tim Rivers, Felisha Rosa, Olivia Dombrodski, Kaia Fulk | Planning Team, Signer |
| **Local and State Government** | Franklin Regional Council of Governments-Partnership for Youth/Communities that Care Coalition | Kat Allen | Planning Team |
| Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) | Linn Torto | Financial support for planning process, including compensation for YAB, provision of state agency data |
| **Public Child Welfare Agency** | Department of Children and Families | Kasey Erickson | Planning Team, Signer |
| **ESG Program Recipients** | Community Action Pioneer Valley, Community Services Department |  Sara Cummings | YHDP Lead, Planning Team |
| **Local and State Law Enforcement and Judges** | District Attorney’s Office-Youth Diversion Program | Naomi Bledsoe | Planning Team |
| **Early Childhood Development and Child Care providers** |  |  |  |
| **Local and State Educational Agencies** | MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education | Stacy Parsons, Regional DESE | Planning Team |
| Greenfield Public Schools | Matt Holloway | Advisory Council |
| **Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Providers** | DIAL/SELF Youth and Community Services | Phil Ringwood | Planning Team |
| **Non-Profit Youth Organizations** | Community Action Pioneer Valley-Homeless Youth Services | Lisa Goldsmith | YHDP Lead, Planning Team |
| Community Action Pioneer Valley-Youth and Workforce Development Programs | Lisa Lapierre, Myck LeMay, Lydia Davis, Jena Duncan | Planning Team |
| Community Action Family Support Services-Family Center, Healthy Families | Sandy BastoneAndrea Tomsho-Dexter | Planning Team, Advisory Council |
| Children’s Advocacy Center | Samantha Staelens | Advisory Council |
| Youth Villages | Christina Comeau | Advisory Council |
| **Juvenile and Adult Corrections and Probation** | Department of Youth Services | Justin King | Planning Team |
| **Health, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Agencies**  | Opioid Task Force | Taylor McAndrew | Advisory Council |
| Recover Project |  Stacey Shapiro | Advisory Council |
| Mental Health Associates | Kimberley Lee | Advisory Council |
| **Disability Services** | Stavros | Shaundell Diaz | Advisory Council |
| **WIOA Boards and Employment Agencies** | Community Action Pioneer Valley-Youth and Workforce Development Programs | Lisa Lapierre, Myck LeMay, Lydia Davis, Jena Duncan | Planning Team |
| MassHire/Career Center | Anitra Ford | Advisory Council |
| Job Corps | Matt Attesi | Advisory Council |
| **Domestic Violence Agency** | NELCWIT | Sarah Fitzgibbons | Planning Team |
| **Landlords** |   |   |   |
| **Public Housing Authorities** | Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority  | Jacob Hogue | Advisory Council |
| **Institutions of Higher Education** | Greenfield Community College | Sonya Trust | Advisory Council |
| **Community Development Corporations** |  |  |  |
| **Affordable Housing Developers** | DIAL/SELF Youth and Community Services | Phil Ringwood | Planning Team |
| **Local Advocacy, Research, and Philanthropic Organizations** | Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness | Pamela Schwartz | Advisory Council |
| United Way of the Pioneer Valley | Jim Ayres  | Financial support of planning process, including compensation for the YAB |
| **Homeless Organizations** | ServiceNet Family Inn  |  Fran Lemay | Advisory Council  |
| **Other Partners** | Interfaith Council | Amy Clarke | Advisory Council |
| Mass. Service Alliance |  | Support for YAB meetings, including staffing, supplies, training, transportation |

#

# Appendix D. Detailed Action Steps

[*This will be in chart form and detail each action step with a lead person and agency, funding source, methodological approach, partnership, and implementation notes*]

# Appendix E. Housing Model

[*We will incorporate a simple housing model that helps us to estimate how many of which kinds of resources we need to develop in order to end homelessness for the highest need young people currently in our system. The model will get more accurate over time. A version is currently being used by the state, Boston, and Hampden County*]

# Appendix F. The Three County Youth Action Board

Established in the Spring of 2019, the Three County Youth Action Board (YAB) has played an integral part of the YHDP planning process and the development of a more inclusive, responsive, and successful youth homelessness response under the CoC. During the YHDP planning process the YAB have also formalized their vision and mission statements and established a set of group agreements and core values that guide their internal meetings as well as their engagement with external partners.

## YAB Vision and Mission

Vision Statement:

Our YAB envisions a future where youth are treated, and treat each other with compassion and respect, keep each other safe and have an impactful role in decisions that affect them.

Mission Statement:

Our YAB plans, develops and implements policies and projects that improve the lives of youth who are, have been, or are at-risk of being without safe and stable homes.
YAB Group Agreements

* Be respectful
* Step up/step back
* Don’t interrupt/one diva, one mic
* Use correct pronouns/ask

## YAB Core Values

* Youth inclusion (in decisions that impact us)
* Friendship is magic
* Keeping each other safe
* Trying to be inclusive

# Appendix G. Updated Community Needs Assessment

Around 24 YYAs experience homelessness in the Three County CoC each night according to our most conservative point-in-time estimates. Through the course of a year, many more experience homelessness, while untold numbers of others are at risk of experiencing homelessness. They find themselves without a stable place to live because home wasn’t safe, home wasn’t supportive, or home didn’t exist.

## Number of YYAs Experiencing Homelessness

Prevalence estimates describe the size and scope of homelessness. They are often based on point-in time methods, which count the number of individuals experiencing homelessness at a given point in time, or on a typical day. In the January 2018 HUD PIT count, the Three County

CoC identified 24 YYAs on the streets, in emergency shelters, or in Transitional Housing (TH). If we include the young children of YYA parents, the number is 35 individuals (HUD Exchange, 2018). This number provides the clearest minimum baseline for YYA homelessness in the county. However, current PIT counting methods capture only a portion of the total number of YYAs experiencing homelessness. PIT data do not include the following:

* YYAs fleeing dangerous living arrangements;
* those who are sleeping night to night between different homes and apartments (e.g., couch-surfing);
* those sleeping consistently in spaces too small or inappropriately configured to meet basic needs (e.g., doubled up); or
* those who do not want to be, or cannot be, identified by volunteers during the annual count.

Annual estimates are more likely than PIT estimates to include individuals experiencing episodic

homelessness, which research shows is much more common for YYAs than being chronically homeless (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). In 2018, the Three County CoC’s HMIS included 101 YYAs in emergency shelter and transitional housing programs and 50 children in YYA-headed households (HMIS, 2018).

Annual estimates only capture YYAs who interact with our homelessness resources and are therefore constrained by the current system’s limitations. For example, homelessness systems are generally designed to target and provide services to older individuals, and so our PIT and HMIS numbers may be biased towards older YYAs. Three County CoC HMIS for 2018 includes only one unaccompanied YYAs under 18, and yet school districts in the three counties identified 73 students experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian out of 629 total students experiencing homelessness in SY 17-18. The school’s method for identification is itself imperfect, generally requiring that YYAs self-report to a homelessness liaison or counselor, which may significantly suppress the number of YYAs actually experiencing homelessness.

Using the national rule of thumb established by Chapin Hall and its Voices of Youth Count initiative that 1 in 10 18 to 24 year olds and 1 in 30 13 to 17 years olds (Morton, 2017) will experience some form of homelessness over the course of a year, we would expect an upward limit of YYAs experiencing homelessness (10-24 years old) in the Three County region over the course of a year to be roughly 3,750 YYAs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Does that mean we are missing 3,649 YYAs? If there are 101 YYAs being served by homeless programs in the region through the course of a year, how many are we missing? Indeed, the higher estimate of 3,750 is based on national data and ignores the nuances of our local communities, but it does invite us to question whether we are identifying all of the YYAs experiencing some type of homelessness in our region. The wide range of estimates of YYA homelessness indicates that it is larger than is currently acknowledged, and that it is an urgent challenge. While we don’t know the full scope of the crisis of YYA homelessness in the region, we do know that it is within our reach to do something about it.

## The Age of YYAs Experiencing Homelessness and Its Effects

According to our HMIS and PIT data, between 2% and 4% of YYAs experiencing homelessness are under the age of 18 (HUD, 2018; HMIS, 2018), and the average age of all YYAs who are homeless is between 20.4 and 21.5 (Mass.gov, 2018; HMIS, 2018). In contrast, YYAs report their average age of a first experience with homelessness as 16.6 years old (Mass.gov, 2018). This suggests that homelessness begins, on average, when YYAs are still minors, although our systems do not engage them until after they turn 18. The disparity may result from several factors. For example, our homelessness systems are designed to identify and serve older adults and not YYAs. Community and YYA awareness of what homelessness means, when and where a YYA might seek help, and stigma about those who identify themselves likely suppress counts of under 18-year-olds. In addition, mandatory child welfare reporting requirements may limit both an agency’s willingness to identify a minor and a minor’s willingness to present for homelessness resources.

## Racial Disparity in YYA Experiences of Homelessness

21% (State Youth Count) to 35% (HMIS) of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County area identify as Hispanic or Latinx (Mass. gov, 2018; HMIS, 2018), compared to only 7% of the general population and 26% of those with income below poverty level (Census 2017). Between 11% (State Youth Count) and 16% (HMIS) of the total YYA population experiencing homelessness in the region identify as Black (Mass.gov, 2018; HMIS, 2018), compared to only 4.5% of the general population but 43% of those with income below poverty level in the region (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). An additional 4% (State Youth Count) to 25% (HMIS) of YYAs experiencing homelessness in our region identify as multiracial (Mass.gov, 2018; HMIS, 2018), reinforcing that preventing and ending YYA homelessness must intentionally target solutions to minority young people. Disparities may be even more pronounced among parenting YYAs, where 47% pregnant or parenting YYAs between 18-24 identify as Latinx (HMIS, 2018).

## YYA Homelessness, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

Data sources report some variability in gender among YYAs experiencing homelessness, although in all cases the majority of YYAs identified as female: according to PIT and HMIS data respectively, between 50% and 59.3% identified as female and 36.6% to 44.4% identified as male (HUD, 2018; HMIS, 2018). Although 2.1% of YYAs in the State Youth Count identified as transgender (Mass.gov, 2018), four YYAs identified as non-cis-gender among YYAs in the Three County CoC HMIS data (HMIS, 2018). Additionally, 27% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County region identify as LGBTQ compared to 24% statewide (Mass.gov, 2019) and over 30% used homelessness services in FY 2019 (HMIS, 2019). By comparison, 12.5% of Massachusetts high school students and 15.5% 18 to 24-year-olds in Massachusetts identify as LGBTQ (Cahill, 2018), and communities across the country consistently find that between 20% and 40% of YYAs experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ. Percentages of YYAs who identify as non-cisgender (anything other than male or female as assigned at birth) have been estimated by studies at between .5% and 3%.

Research consistently finds that LGBTQ YYAs are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness, that their reasons for leaving home are significantly different from their cisgender straight peers, and that they experience more severe consequences from homelessness, with higher rates of sexual exploitation, violence, and suicidality (Mass.gov, 2019). This was echoed in community survey responses collected in the Spring of 2019 where respondents identified support for LGBTQ YYAs as critical need to end YYA homelessness.

## The Impact of Parenting on YYA Homelessness

Eight YYAs (33%) experiencing homelessness in the Three County CoC were pregnant or parenting on the night of the 2018 PIT (HUD, 2018). As stated earlier, 47% of pregnant and parenting youth ages 18-24 identify as Latinx. Additionally, 36% of YYAs throughout the year who were identified sleeping on the street or who accessed shelter and Transitional Housing during the year were pregnant or parenting (HMIS, 2018). 19% of Three County YYAs identified in the MA Statewide Youth Count Survey were pregnant or parenting (Mass.gov, 2018). These rates are lower than both the estimated national average of 40% (Morton, 2017) and estimates from many other Massachusetts communities whose HMIS and PIT count data indicate that the percentage of pregnant and parenting YYAs may be as high as 80% of all YYAs experiencing homelessness. We would expect over-representation in HMIS and PIT data sets, as Massachusetts is a right to shelter state for families.3 The relatively low rates of pregnant and parenting YYAs may be a function of limited family resources in the region, or perhaps limited awareness, identification, and outreach in a region that is largely rural. As previously mentioned, Latinx YYAs are even more overrepresented among parenting YYAs in our data set than they are among unaccompanied YYAs (HMIS, 2019).

## Homelessness System Experience and Pathways for YYA

Nearly 64% of YYA parents sheltered through the homelessness system in 2018 did so for the first time. Only 26% were recorded as having a positive system exit,4 although HMIS does not include any YYA parents who returned to the system during the same calendar year. Only 56% of parenting YYAs for whom we have data leave shelter or TH exit to PH (HMIS, 2018). 11% of all parenting YYAs in HMIS in 2018 are identified as long-term stayers and 3% (1 YYA) qualify as chronically homeless. Nearly 72% of unaccompanied YYAs sheltered through the Three County CoC homelessness system in 2018 did so for the first time. Only 12.3% were recorded as having a positive system exit, and 10 unaccompanied YYAs returned to the system in the same calendar year. A startlingly low 11% of YYAs leaving shelter or TH exit to PH (HMIS, 2018). 17% of all unaccompanied YYAs in HMIS in 2018 are identified as long-term stayers, and 11% (7 YYAs) qualify as chronically homeless.

|  |
| --- |
| Coordinated Entry Assessments between 10/1/18-9/30/19 |
| Score Range: 0-9Lowest Level of Need | Score Range: 10-18Medium Level of Need | Score Range: 19-26Highest Level of Need |
| 24 YYA | 58 YYA | 13 YYA |

## Behavioral Health Impact on YYA Homelessness Experiences

As many as 21% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County region are in need of mental health services (Mass.gov, 2018), and similarly, 20% of YYAs in HMIS, all but one of whom were unaccompanied, reported mental health to be a disabling condition (HMIS, 2018). These may be regarded as a significant undercount; 69% of YYAs participating in the national Voices of Youth Count study indicated having mental health difficulties. Over 80% of unaccompanied YYAs in the HMIS data have at least one disabling condition.6

8% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County region reported a substance use service need (Mass.gov, 2018), a number that may be regarded as a significant undercount based on the following data from other sources: 13% of YYAs in HMIS, all of whom are unaccompanied, report substance use as a disabling condition (HMIS, 2018). In FY18, the MA DPH Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS) identified 81 YYAs ages 14-24 in the Three County region who were in their treatment system and self-identified as homeless (12% of identifiable enrollments). BSAS lists 311 additional YYA entries as either “missing” or “unable to determine” (BSAS, 2018).

## Education for YYAs Experiencing Homelessness

69% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County region reported being in school or having a high school diploma or equivalent (Mass.gov, 2018). Nationally, the lack of a high school diploma or GED equivalent is associated with a 346% higher risk of homelessness (Morton, 2017).

Two local community colleges, Berkshire and Greenfield, and one four-year college, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), participated in the 2018 Hope Labs survey that assessed for homelessness, housing insecurity, and food insecurity. For Berkshire and Greenfield respectively, the survey identified 10% and 12% of students experiencing homelessness, 49% and 48% experiencing housing insecurity, and 37% and 35% experiencing food insecurity (Hope Labs Berkshire, 2018; Hope Labs Greenfield, 2018). For MCLA, the only four-year institution included in Hope Labs’ surveys in Western MA, the survey identified 8% of students experiencing homelessness, 34% experiencing housing insecurity, and 37% experiencing food insecurity (Wisconsin Hope Labs, 2018).

## Employment for YYAs Experiencing Homelessness

40% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County CoC surveyed during the State Youth Count reported active employment, which is significantly below the 56% of all 16 to 24- year-olds in the Three County CoC estimated to be actively employed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). In the formal economy, 35% of YYAs report part-time work, and 19% report full-time work, while only 15% receive cash assistance, 6% receive SSDI, 10% receive income from family, and 15% work “under the table” (Mass.gov, 2018). Over 20% report income from the informal sector, including hustling, drugs, and panhandling (Mass.gov, 2018). In HMIS, 20% of YYAs reported income when entering the formal homelessness system; 10% reported earned income (HMIS, 2018). Employment was one of the top “needs and gaps” to address in order end YYA homelessness identified by community stakeholders during the Spring 2019 community needs assessment process.

## Prior Systems Involvement of YYAs Experiencing Homelessness

27% of YYAs experiencing homelessness in the Three County region reported having been in foster care, which is consistent with both national and state estimates (Morton, 2017; Mass.gov, 2018). YYAs in the Three County CoC report lower than national rates of involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system–27%, compared to the approximately 50% of YYAs identified in national research. Criminal justice rates are only slightly lower than the state average of 34% (Mass.gov, 2018).

## Commercial and Sexual Exploitation and YYA Homelessness

We know little to nothing about the impact of sex trafficking on YYA homelessness and vice versa in the Three County region. No one interviewed during the 2018 Massachusetts Youth Count self-reported “sex work” as a source of income, and only 6.3% indicated having ever exchanged sex for money or housing (Mass.gov, 2018).7 22% of YYAs in HMIS report being survivors of domestic violence, a larger category of violence that may include sexual trafficking and exploitation, but more often refers to intimate partner or family violence (HMIS, 2018). According to one national estimate, 15% of YYAs experiencing homelessness had been trafficked for sex, and 32% had been involved in the sex trade in some way (Wolfe, 2017). According to the Massachusetts Youth Count, 14.4% of YYAs who had been homeless also reported having exchanged sex for money -- 5.5 times the rate for YYAs without homelessness experience (Mass.gov, 2018). There is some community awareness around sexual exploitation as this was one of the needs and gaps identified during the Spring 2019 needs assessment.

## Where YYAs Experiencing Homelessness Sleep at Night

19 out of the 24 YYAs engaged during the January 2018 PIT count were either in emergency shelter or transitional housing (HUD, 2018). Five YYAs were in unsheltered situations during the same count. In the state youth count, five were sleeping outside, four in cars, three in places not meant for sleeping, and 20 in some form of doubled up or couch surfing situation with friends or relatives (Mass.gov, 2018). 19% of YYAs entered the homelessness services system from the street in FY 2018 (HMIS, 2018).

## Homelessness Risk Factors for YYAs

Many factors place young people at high risk for the experience of homelessness. While difficult to homelessness is difficult to predict, understanding these factors can help us to limit the overall risk among YYAs in Three County and target supports directly to those who may be a higher risk than others, based on national research and local expertise.

Stakeholders identified the following drivers of YYA homelessness in the region during focus groups in the spring of 2019:

* Generational poverty
* Lack of emergency housing
* High cost of housing
* Trauma from systemic poverty/racism
* Unstable home lives, family rejection, and abuse/neglect
* Immigration status
* Lack of employment opportunities

They also identified several groups especially at-risk for YYA homelessness: LGBTQ YYAs; young people of color; parenting YYAs; YYAs with mental health and substance use disorders; YYAs without supportive families; and YYAs leaving the DCF system. Many YYAs also couch-surf, making it less likely that they will appear in our homelessness response systems, a theme that continually emerged in interviews, focus groups, and a community survey.

### The Impact of a High Poverty Rate

The Three County region has a similar rate of poverty (12%; Census, 2017) to the national average (12.3%; Fontenot, 2018). Hampshire County has a slightly higher rate (14%; Census 2017), and Berkshire County has a slightly lower rate (11%; Census, 2017). However, the poverty rate is 53% for unrelated individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, and roughly 2,749 young adults 18-24 live in poverty (Census, 2017). Such high rates of poverty leaves many YYAs with few resources and puts them at increased risk for homelessness.

### The Impact of High Relative Rents

Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two bedroom apartment in Franklin County is $1,095/month (HUD.gov, 2020), and yet renters earning an estimated average wage of $11.02 per hour can only afford a unit up to $573 per month (NLIHC, 2019). It would take a two-income household at the estimated average wage to afford the fair market rent. Hampshire County has an FMR of $1,115/month, Northern Berkshire County an FMR of $1,108/month, and Southern Berkshire County an FMR of $1,108/month (HUD.gov, 2020).

According to an analysis by Glynn, Byrne, and Culhane in 2018, communities experience a dramatic spike in homelessness when residents are spending, on average, over 32% of their income on housing. But the region is an anomaly. While their research estimates that local housing costs are roughly 36% of median income, homelessness rates are relatively low (0.18%) (Glynn, 2018+). This may be due to several hidden protective factors, but also indicates a significant pressure on those protective factors from the lack of affordable housing that may not be sustained indefinitely. The pressure appears even more significant when combined with average transportation costs, which one index estimates at 25% of median income (HTA, 2017).

### The Impact of Racial and Ethnic Disparities

Race and ethnicity are important factors when considering poverty and housing costs. For example, while the overall poverty rate is 12.3% (Fontenot, 2018), the poverty rate for Black residents in the Three County region is 43%. The poverty rates for people who identify as mixed race or Latinx are 27% and 26% respectively. Black individuals in the region have more than twice the unemployment rate of Whites -- 13% compared to 6% overall. In Berkshire County the comparison is 20% to 6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

### Education, Employment, and Opportunity Youth

### The Impact of the Family Shelter System

Community stakeholders identified a need for early intervention with families and adolescents as a way to prevent an immediate housing crisis and mitigate against future homelessness as the adolescent comes of age.

### Exits from Institutions and Systems of Care

While young people experiencing homelessness often have past experiences with institutions and systems of care, it is a two way street: young people also frequently leave institutions and systems of care only to experience homelessness. At the end of 2018, roughly 976 young people between the ages of 12 and 24 actively engaged with the child welfare system in the Three County region. 835 were between the ages of 12 and 17, and 141 were over 18. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) identifies 33% as “in placement” (i.e., in foster care or group quarters) and 67% as “out of placement.” DCF indicated the permanency plan associated with many YYAs “in placement” as “Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement” (APPL),8 including 83% for those over 18 and 3% as “Unspecified.” For those YYAs “out of placement,” 33% of over 18-year-olds had an APPL permanency plan, and 18% of all YYAs had an “unspecified” permanency plan.

Among minority populations, Latinx and multiracial YYAs are the most overrepresented among all YYAs in foster care (15% and 10%) relative to their percentage of the general population (5% and 3%; (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).9

We currently do not have data for involvement with the justice system. Data on the number of 13-17 year-olds engaged with the Department of Youth Services (DYS), including those discharged into unstable housing, may help us plan for young people entering the community with these risk factors and prevent their homelessness. Similarly, understanding the number of 18-24-year-olds who are incarcerated, entering from a homelessness experience, exiting without stable housing, and living with parole restrictions will help us to ensure that these vulnerable young people do not add housing crises to their barriers to success.

### Geography and Transportation

The CoC service area is largely rural, with approximately 360,000 people in 2,133 square miles of land area and 5.3% of the state’s population residing in 27.3% of its total land area. The population centers that do exist are relatively small and can be difficult for YYAs to access. State-led investigations in 2013 and 2014 revealed that this “isolation has significant impacts on the quality of life of rural residents” (Mass.gov, 2013), and that the lack of public infrastructure and transportation, among other factors, make it “difficult to develop and preserve affordable housing” (Snow et al., 2014). The state has made investments in rural communities through its Rural Policy Advisory Commission since 2015, helping to reduce the digital divide between urban and rural areas to the lowest rate in the county (McFarland, 2018). However, surveys from as recently as 2017 still identify significant disparities in access to resources like public sewer and water services and transportation that continue to challenge residents in our rural communities and limit economic development (Mass.gov, 2017). Transportation was one of the top “needs and gaps” to address in order end YYA homelessness identified by community stakeholders during the Spring 2019 community needs assessment process.

## The YYA Homelessness System and Current Resources

Community stakeholders from across the region used the following words and phrases to describe the current state of the Three County homelessness system:

* Slow, cumbersome, repetitive
* Well-intentioned
* Invisible
* Limited and non-responsive
* Lacking comprehensiveness and coordination
* Under-resourced and scrappy
* Under-funded and understaffed
* Inadequate
* Getting more organized

The CoC has evolved significantly over the past year, with a new CoC lead agency, a stronger collaboration with its Hampden County CoC neighbor through the Westen Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, improved data and HMIS capacity, and robust YYA homelessness process. Stakeholders describe a number of strengths in the current system, including the YYA homelessness focus of programs like DIAL/SELF Youth and Community Services, Community Action Pioneer Valley, and the Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, as well as the passion and dedication of individual staff working in the system. Additionally, they described the deep commitment to collaboration among those working to end YYA homelessness and a positive sense that schools and colleges are becoming more aware and more involved. That said, the community has expressed a clear need for a coordinated, transparent, well-resources, well-organized and comprehensive effort to address YYA homelessness.

### Current Resources

In contrast to the potential scope and diversity of YYAs homelessness in the region, the current inventory of housing options specifically dedicated to YYAs experiencing homelessness is limited: There are only 24 units of rapid rehousing 10; 8 units of transitional housing 11; and, 24 units of permanent supportive housing 12.

Stakeholders have acknowledged the limited emergency shelter options for YYAs and a strong sense that young people avoid adult shelters to avoid unsafe and exploitive situations. According to one interviewee: “Our LGBTQ youth will do anything to avoid adult shelter. They will stay anywhere else.” Similarly, YYA are confronted with long wait lists for housing and services. There are simply not enough subsidized housing for young people—including the recent loss of Redfield House in Pittsfield. Long waitlists are also a function of a shortage of affordable housing options. Stakeholders offered that many affordable options that do exist are substandard and run by “slumlords.” CoC stakeholders also worried that there was not enough time built into programs and budgets for staff to engage young people over an adequate period to support stability. Further, they identified a lack of mental health professionals and services options to meet the needs of young people. More dedicated housing and services must be developed to address the growing need for housing and support among YYAs experiencing homelessness.

Stakeholders identified a need for “mainstream” and community partners to increase their focus on YYA homelessness, including public housing authorities, state agencies (e.g., DCF and DYS), the faith community, local governments, schools and colleges, the health care system, and private landlords. There is a general lack of awareness of YYA homelessness among community members and many myths associated with the experience among those who are aware or working with young people. As one young person described:

“Not everyone chose to be in the scenario they are now. I has half a year from turning 16 when I became homeless. There was nothing I could do to prevent it. I had no family. I had no friends I could stay with. I did not choose that. I did not choose to be living in a hotel. I did not choose to be living in a car. I did not choose my lots in life. Please understand that I am scared. I am frightened. I am confused. I just want help. There is a reason we turn to drugs. There is a reason we are impulsive beings. It sucks where we are now, and we want help. We don’t want to become druggies or join gangs or live on the streets. We want to live life and have a family. We are the most vulnerable demographics. We don’t get to choose where we start.”

Another focus group participant sought to remind those in the broader community of the basic humanity of YYAs experiencing homelessness:

“I’M STILL A HUMAN. IT’S AS SIMPLE AS THAT.”