

# CT Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

## CT Balance of State Continuum of Care

### Request for Proposals for YHDP project 2

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#### Section A: RFP 2 Overview

##### YHDP Background:

In 2012, the Reaching Home for Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Workgroup (RH YYA workgroup), a statewide multi-stakeholder group staffed by the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC) and chaired by the Center for Children’s Advocacy, was established to end youth homelessness in Connecticut by the end of 2020.

In 2016, the RH YYA workgroup in partnership with the Connecticut Balance of State Continuum of Care (CT BOS) applied for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). This is a new HUD initiative, providing technical assistance as well as funding for planning and homeless assistance projects, to learn how communities can successfully approach the goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness by building comprehensive systems of care for young people rather than implementing individual or unconnected projects that serve this population.

In January 2017, HUD awarded the CT BOS CoC \$6,552,903 under the YHDP initiative. A YHDP Grant Management Team was formed, led by the Connecticut Department of Housing (DOH) with administrative support from PSC, to manage the process of developing a coordinated community plan and executing other YHDP requirements. The Youth Action Hub (YAH) serves as a partner and youth advisory board.

After an extensive planning process in collaboration with the Youth Action Hub and regional Coordinated Access Networks (CANs)/Youth Engagement Team Initiatives (YETIs), we determined that allocating YHDP project funding toward a youth shelter diversion/rapid exit fund, youth navigators, rapid rehousing, and crisis housing will most effectively assist us in achieving our goals in ending youth homelessness. The YHDP projects will be part of a coordinated housing continuum that ensures youth experiencing homelessness receive the assistance needed to rapidly obtain permanent housing.

Additional details about how these housing programs will assist in preventing and ending youth homelessness in Connecticut by the end of 2020 can be found in the draft *Opening Doors for Youth 2.0: an action plan to provide all Connecticut youth and young adults with safe, stable homes and opportunities*, available at [http://www.psychousing.org/files/Opening\\_Doors\\_For\\_Youth\\_Plan\\_2.0.pdf](http://www.psychousing.org/files/Opening_Doors_For_Youth_Plan_2.0.pdf).

**This RFP is an exciting opportunity to be a part of a national demonstration program, learning what types of interventions and strategies can help us to end youth homelessness throughout the country.**

## YHDP Vision:

A Connecticut where all young people have safe, stable places to live and opportunities to reach their full potential. Where:

- Community partners in child welfare, juvenile and criminal justice, and educational systems, among others, work closely to ensure youth falling into homelessness is a *rare* occurrence;
- There is a coordinated response system within each region of Connecticut that provides low-barrier, individualized, and quick access to housing assistance and services needed for youth to obtain stability through self-determined goals, thereby ensuring a youth's episode of homelessness is *brief*; and
- Youth are connected to services within the community, kin and/or other natural supports, and employment as well as provided with the necessary tools, such as living and relationship skills, to maintain stability and well-being, ensuring homelessness is *non-recurring* and providing youth with an opportunity to achieve their goals and thrive.

Once Connecticut achieves this vision, we will continue to update and improve the homeless prevention and response system in collaboration with our youth partners based on feedback from youth participants and providers, data, and emerging best practices to meet the evolving needs of youth.

## Eligible Applicants:

- Eligible project applicants are nonprofit organizations, states, local governments, and instrumentalities of state and local governments. For-profit entities are not eligible to apply for grants or to be sub-recipients of grant funds.
- Applications shall only be considered from project applicants in good standing with the state and federal government, which means that the applicant does not have any open monitoring or audit findings, history of slow expenditure of grant funds, outstanding obligation to the government that is in arrears or for which a payment schedule has not been agreed upon, or history of serving ineligible program participants, expending funds on ineligible costs, or failing to expend funds within statutorily established timeframes.
- Applications shall only be considered from applicants who were not in corrective action status as a result of a 2017 CT BOS project evaluation.

## Project Description:

This RFP is for a fund administrator to manage a Shelter Diversion/Rapid Exit Fund that will provide one-time financial assistance to youth and young adults to assist them with avoiding shelter or rapidly exiting crisis housing.

Since 2015, Connecticut has been implementing the emerging best practice of shelter diversion as part of our statewide coordinated entry process to reduce new episodes of homelessness. At each CAN

intake appointment, trained staff have a trauma-informed discussion with young adults to understand their barriers to housing and assist with problem-solving.

To supplement existing efforts, we plan to use a portion of the YHDP funding to provide financial assistance (i.e. security deposits, utility deposits, bus tickets home, etc.) through this new Diversion/Rapid Exit Fund to youth and young adults who could be diverted from the system with one-time financial help. This one-time financial assistance will also be available to youth in crisis housing, to assist them with rapidly exiting the system.

Youth Navigators (paid through a separate YHDP grant), CAN intake staff, and RHY providers would conduct the diversion conversations and work with youth on the diversion funding application, applying on behalf of youth, and entering the client information into HMIS for those approved for financial assistance. Crisis Housing providers, Youth Navigators and other key providers would also be able to apply for rapid exit funding on behalf of their clients in crisis housing. They would have to attend youth diversion training and have a signed MOU or agreement with fund administrator to apply for the funds on behalf of their clients.

Diversion is a crucial part of a homeless response system, enabling us to rapidly re-house youth as quickly as possible with minimal financial assistance, which reduces the number of youth becoming homeless, the demand for shelter beds, and the size of housing program wait lists. Data suggests that a portion of youth cannot rapidly be diverted, entering crisis housing, but then only require minimal support to return to stable housing – rapid exit funding. Without a rapid exit option, these youth are likely to remain homeless longer than necessary. As Youth Navigators and other providers assist youth to continually remove barriers to housing during this time period, a Rapid Exit fund will allow providers to help those with minimal needs exit homelessness more quickly with one-time financial assistance, reducing the length of their homelessness and ultimately reducing the need for rapid rehousing assistance for this cohort.

The total two year project budget consists of approximately \$580,000 in YHDP funding (subject to HUD approval). DOH is providing an additional \$145,000 to fulfill the HUD 25% match requirement, for a total project budget of \$725,000. DOH cannot guarantee this match funding will be available for project renewal beyond the two year demonstration period. The awarded applicant will need to contract with both HUD and DOH for this funding.

### **Administrator Role:**

The YHDP Grant Management Team is seeking applications for a fund administrator to administer the YHDP Diversion/Rapid Exit funding throughout the CT BOS area. The fund administrator will:

1. Work collaboratively with the YHDP Grant Management Team on project design and implementation once awarded, including on the application submission to HUD through e-snaps. This includes finalizing project scope and budget.
2. Manage the Diversion/Rapid Exit fund: reviewing and approving applications for eligibility; making payments for security deposits, relocation assistance (plane, train, bus tickets), and other eligible expenses; and tracking payments.

3. Establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) or agreements with all agencies that would apply for funding on behalf of youth, such as the Youth Navigator programs and other service providers that will work directly with the youth throughout the CT BOS area, ensuring they record the relevant program information into HMIS for approved clients, they received youth diversion training prior to gaining access to the funds, and they are implementing a Housing First model that incorporates Trauma Informed Care and Positive Youth Development, among other responsibilities. The administrator will manage this collaborative project, ensuring HUD requirements are met.
4. Quickly perform Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections and rent reasonableness review prior to occupancy for housing assisted with security deposits and/or first month's rent. The YHDP communities continue to work with HUD to determine the requirements for programs that are not traditionally funded through HUD's CoC Program – such as diversion/rapid exit programs. We are still waiting for guidance from HUD on whether this YHDP-funded Diversion/Rapid Exit program will require Housing Quality Standards (HQS) or habitability inspections and rent reasonableness review. We assume these standards will apply and the fund administrator will be responsible for these activities.

Timing is critical for these Diversion/Rapid Exit funds so applicants should have a plan to manage eligibility and housing review requirements quickly and process payments without delay. Assuming conducting inspections and rent reasonableness review can take approximately 13 hours per client served, applicants should consider hiring 1 or 1.5 FTE staff to handle these responsibilities and potentially assist with related requirements such as environmental documentation for each assisted unit.

5. Comply with CT BOS CoC Policies and Procedures (unless there is a YHDP-specific exception). In addition, ensure compliance with program requirements per the HUD Continuum of Care Rule (unless there is a HUD-approved YHDP waiver), including but not limited to environmental review documentation and reporting, and the FY2016 YHDP NOFA.
6. Have a plan for **rapid implementation** of the program; the project narrative must document how the project will quickly get ready to begin assisting program participants (HUD requires all YHDP programs to be under grant agreement by September 30, 2018).
7. Participate in an initial training and potentially participate in ongoing YHDP learning collaborative meetings with fellow YHDP projects that will meet at least every other month.

### **Program Target Population:**

Unaccompanied young adult individuals and minors experiencing literal homeless, imminent homelessness or fleeing domestic violence (HUD Homeless Categories 1, 2, and 4). Parenting young adults would be eligible for these services as well if other resources in the CAN region are unavailable.

### Anticipated Eligible Fund Expenditures:

The Diversion/Rapid Exit Fund is flexible funding to divert unaccompanied youth/young adults from staying in shelter or to enable them to quickly exit the system. HUD is still reviewing our potential expenditures list, but we anticipate it will include:

- a. Utility deposits
- b. lease, and utility allowance when paid by tenant
- c. Rental application fees
- d. Security deposits (up to two month's rent) and first month's rent
- e. Moving costs
- f. Tenant legal services
- g. Credit repair
- h. Relocation assistance (i.e. transportation costs)
- i. Car repairs or car insurance arrears if primary transportation to employment
- j. Costs associated with obtaining identification, including but not limited to: birth certificate
- k. Bus passes if primary transportation to employment.
- l. Assistance with grocery costs to accommodate youth staying with extended family or other natural supports
- m. Assistance to purchase relevant furniture to accommodate staying with extended family or other natural supports (*tentative*)

### Eligible Localities:

The Diversion/Rapid Exit Fund will serve youth within the CT BOS CoC regions of the State. This includes all the cities and towns in the following counties: Hartford, Litchfield, New Haven, New London, Windham, Tolland, and Middlesex.

### Application Process Overview:

Similar to CT BOS's annual CoC application process, YHDP projects will be selected locally through competitive RFP 1 and 2 and will then need to work in consultation with the YHDP Grant Management Team to apply to HUD through e-snaps. However, HUD's YHDP project review is a non-competitive process. All project selections through this RFP will be made pending approval from HUD and may be amended based on HUD input.

*Selected projects will be awarded for a **two year term** with potential for renewal through future HUD CoC competitions as part of the CT BOS CoC.*

### Timeline:

- YHDP RFP published: June 5, 2018
- YHDP Application due: June 19, 2018 by 5pm
- *Tentative* Local Award Selection: Last week of June
- HUD submittal by: July 12<sup>th</sup>

**Applications are due by 5pm on June 19th** and should be emailed to Carline Charmelus, Partnership for Strong Communities, at [Carline@pschousing.org](mailto:Carline@pschousing.org) and Katie Durand, CT Department of Housing at [Kathleen.durand@ct.gov](mailto:Kathleen.durand@ct.gov). Please contact Katie Durand via email with questions regarding the RFP. Frequently Asked Questions will be posted on the RH YYA Workgroup website. Questions should be asked by June 15th. Upon award selection, need to quickly work with the YHDP Grant Management Team to apply to HUD through e-snaps.

### **Project Selection:**

YHDP project selection will be accomplished in accordance with HUD's CoC conflict of interest requirements under 24 C.F.R. § 578.95. The YHDP review and evaluation team, comprised of impartial, subject matter experts, will score the proposals (see application scoring sheet) and make a recommendation to the YHDP Grant Management Team. The YHDP Grant Management Team (including Youth Action Hub input) will review the evaluation team's recommendation and vote on final award selection. The YHDP Team reserves the right to negotiate final terms with applicants. All project applicants will be notified of the outcome in writing.

## **Section B: Key Principles**

### **Positive Youth Development:**

Positive Youth Development is grounded in empowering youth to believe in themselves and their capacity to have a meaningful impact in their communities and relationships. The approach focuses on educating and engaging young people in taking initiative, problem-solving, and demonstrating compassion within productive activities rather than highlighting any maladaptive coping mechanisms, negative behaviors, or pathologies. Programs that incorporate PYD, work to develop youths' confidence, character, connections, competence and caring, leading to youth contributions. In the spectrum of programs and services, the emphasis should be placed on helping youth develop and grow rather than "correct" or "cure".

### **Trauma-Informed Care:**

In addition, every aspect (policies, practices, service delivery, etc.) of the programs should reflect a deep understanding of trauma, including the signs and symptoms, and how a youth's exposure to traumatic stress can influence their cognitive, biological, and emotional functioning as well as impact their relationships and identity development. Service delivery should be shaped to recognize and appreciate each youth's resiliency and strengths, while understanding that change for youth experiencing homelessness might be difficult and not always follow an upward trajectory given the challenges they have faced.

### **HUD's Core Principles of Housing First for Youth:**

- **Immediate access to permanent housing with no preconditions:** Youth should be provided with access to safe and secure permanent housing that meets their needs as quickly as possible.

- **Youth choice and self-determination:** Housing First is a person-centered approach that promotes choice regarding housing and service options, while maintaining high expectations for youth.
- **Individualized and youth-driven supports:** All youth are different. Once housed, the level of service offered will depend on the unique needs and choices of the youth.
- **Persistent engagement:** Staff should utilize an assertive style of case management, and continuously attempt to engage youth, even if youth are resistant to services.

### CT BOS Housing First Principles:

Housing First is a programmatic and systems approach that centers on providing homeless people with housing quickly and *then* providing services as needed using a low barrier approach that emphasizes community integration, stable tenancy, recovery and individual choice.

#### Low barrier approach to entry:

- Housing First offers individuals and families experiencing homelessness immediate access to permanent supportive housing without unnecessary prerequisites. For example:
  - a. Admission/tenant screening and selection practices do not require abstinence from substances, completion of or compliance with treatment, or participation in services.
  - b. Applicants are not rejected on the basis of poor or lack of credit or income, poor or lack of rental history, minor criminal convictions, or other factors that might indicate a lack of “housing readiness.”
  - c. Blanket exclusionary criteria based on more serious criminal convictions are not applied, though programs may consider such convictions on a case by case basis as necessary to ensure the safety of other residents and staff.
  - d. Generally, only those admission criteria that are required by funders are applied, though programs may also consider additional criteria on a case by case basis as necessary to ensure the safety of tenants and staff. Application of such additional criteria should be rare, and may include, for example, denial of an applicant who is a high risk registered sex offender by a project serving children, or denial of an applicant who has a history of domestic violence involving a current participant.

#### Community integration and recovery:

- Housing is integrated into the community and tenants have ample opportunity and are supported to form connections outside of the project.
- Housing is located in neighborhoods that are accessible to community resources and services such as schools, libraries, houses of worship, grocery stores, laundromats, doctors, dentists, parks, and other recreation facilities.
- Efforts are made to make the housing look and feel similar to other types of housing in the community and to avoid distinguishing the housing as a program that serves people with special needs.

- Services are designed to help tenants build supportive relationships, engage in personally meaningful activities, and regain or develop new roles in their families and communities.
- Services are recovery-based and designed to help tenants gain control of their own lives, define their personal values, preferences, and visions for the future, establish meaningful individual short and long-term goals, and build hope that the things they want out of life are attainable. Services are focused on helping tenants achieve the things that are important to them and goals are not driven by staff priorities or selected from a pre-determined menu of options.

#### Separation of housing and services:

- Projects are designed in such a manner that the roles of property management (e.g., housing application, rent collection, repairs, and eviction) and supportive services staff are clearly defined and distinct.
  - a. Property management and support service functions are provided either by separate legal entities or by staff members whose roles do not overlap.
  - b. There are defined processes for communication and coordination across the two functions to support stable tenancy.
  - c. Those processes are designed to protect client confidentiality and share confidential information on a need to know basis only.

#### Lease compliance and housing retention:

- Tenants are expected to comply with a standard lease agreement and are provided with services and supports to help maintain housing and prevent eviction. Visitors are expected to comply with requirements in the lease agreement.
- Leases do not include stipulations beyond those that are customary, legal, and enforceable under Connecticut law.
- No program rules beyond those that are customary, legal, and enforceable through a lease are applied (e.g., visitor policies should be equivalent to those in other types of permanent, lease-based housing in the community). Housing providers may ask for identification from visitors.
- Services are designed to identify and reduce risks to stable tenancy and to overall health and well-being.
- Retention in housing is contingent only on lease compliance and is not contingent on abstinence from substances or compliance with services, treatment or other clinical requirements. For example:
  - a. Tenants are not terminated involuntarily from housing for refusal to participate in services or for violating program rules that are not stipulated in the lease.
  - b. Transitional housing programs offer participants due process to resolve issues that may result in involuntary discharge (unless immediate risk to health and safety)



- c. PH providers only terminate occupancy of housing in cases of noncompliance with the lease or failure of a tenant to carry out obligations under Connecticut's Landlord and Tenant Act (Chapter 830 of the Connecticut General Statutes.
- d. In order to terminate housing, PH providers are required to use the legal court eviction process.

#### Tenant Choice:

- Efforts are made to maximize tenant choice, including type, frequency, timing, location and intensity of services and whenever possible choice of neighborhoods, apartments, furniture, and décor.
- Staff accepts tenant choices as a matter of fact without judgment and provides services that are non-coercive to help people achieve their personal goals.
- Staff accepts that risk is part of the human experience and helps tenants to understand risks and reduce harm caused to themselves and others by risky behavior.
- Staff understands the clinical and legal limits to choice and intervenes as necessary when someone presents a danger to self or others.
- Staff helps tenants to understand the legal obligations of tenancy and to reduce risk of eviction.
- Projects provide meaningful opportunities for tenant input and involvement when designing programs, planning activities and determining policies.