



August 6, 2013

SNAPS Weekly Focus: Considering the Needs of Families and Youth

A couple of weeks ago, we talked about the importance of prioritizing chronically homeless persons in your permanent supportive housing as a way to increase progress on meeting the first goal of [Opening Doors](#). While ending chronic homelessness is a top priority for HUD, we have not forgotten about the *Opening Doors* goal of ending homelessness for families, children, and youth by 2020.

Families

Despite the worst recession in decades, the number of families living on the street or in homeless programs at a point in time has remained steady—a remarkable feat given how much worse it could have been. According to the [2012 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR\)](#), there were 77,157 family households that were homeless on a single night in January 2012. The data shows that while some families experience long-term homelessness or multiple homeless episodes, most only experience homelessness for a brief period of time and leave the homeless services system without returning.

The research is clear that the majority of families experiencing homelessness are not that different in characteristics or service needs from other low-income families. Most families experiencing homelessness simply need short- or long-term rental assistance or affordable housing and connection to benefits and community-based supports. For most families experiencing homelessness, permanent supportive housing is not the right intervention.

Ending family homelessness will require us to use resources strategically. I would encourage all CoCs to assess whether the current portfolio of housing and service resources are being deployed in the most strategic way. That may mean using a greater share of your local resources for rapid re-housing over other more expensive interventions. CoCs should also ensure that shelters for homeless families are safe and provide stabilization services to address immediate crisis needs.

CoCs should also work closely with the local [Public Housing Agency](#) (PHA) and owners of housing with [Project-Based Rental Assistance](#) to adopt a homelessness preference, as described in two recent Notices issued by HUD.

Youth

Ending homelessness among youth is also a priority for HUD. The number of homeless youth is still not well known, in large part because of how challenging it is to count youth experiencing homelessness. Unlike single adult individuals, youth tend to avoid traditional homeless services, choosing instead to stay with friends or remain hidden out of fear of being returned to abusive situations. Many fled their homes and families because of abuse, in many cases in response to their sexual orientation. Although only five percent of the general youth population identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), the information



we have indicates that forty percent of homeless youth identify as LGBT. Too often, they flee one abusive situation only to land in another.

To end youth homelessness, CoCs should partner with schools, the child welfare system, and Runaway and Homeless Youth providers to implement a youth-informed system of care that includes developmentally appropriate services and housing programs for youth. Many youth experiencing homelessness need transitional housing to achieve stability, connect to a support system, and gain the education and employment skills needed to achieve longer term housing stability and well-being. Youth with the highest needs and who have frequent contacts with crisis systems like juvenile justice and behavioral health may need permanent supportive housing.

Resources

Following are some resources and ideas that CoCs should consider when thinking about your strategy to end homelessness for families and youth by 2020:

- **Research.** HUD has released an interim report on [The Family Options Study](#), which is a multi-year experimental study sponsored by the HUD. The objective of the Family Options Study is to provide research evidence to help federal policymakers, community planners, and local practitioners make sound decisions about the best ways to address homelessness among families. The ultimate goal of this study is to determine what interventions work best to promote housing stability, family preservation, self-sufficiency, and adult and child well-being for families who are homeless. This study represents the largest experimental study of family homelessness conducted to date. You can find the interim report, which has some interesting information about the take-up rates for the interventions being tested, on [HUD's web site](#).
- **Education.** The HEARTH Act includes four educational assurances requiring collaboration between HUD-funded homeless service programs and school districts that are intended to ensure that homelessness does not cause children to fall behind in school. HUD recently participated in two webinars with the Departments of Education (ED) and Health and Human Services (HHS), in collaboration with the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), focusing on the importance of collaboration between CoCs, schools, and early childhood education programs.

[View the Opening Doors Together: Strategies for Integrating Education and Housing Services Webinar slides.](#)

[View the Working Together: Increasing Early Childhood Education Services for Homeless Children Webinar.](#)

- **Child Care.** In January, HHS's Administration on Children and Families (ACF) sent Head Start programs and state child care administrators a [letter](#) strongly urging Head Start and Child Care programs to look at the ways they are identifying and serving homeless children and recommending additional strategies to do so. CoCs should use this letter as an opportunity to develop new or stronger partnerships with these local programs.



- **Unaccompanied Youth.** It is critical that CoCs incorporate strategies that are specific to serving this population and should include early intervention services, family reunification efforts and youth-specific housing programs. USICH, in September 2012, [released a Framework for Ending Youth Homelessness as an amendment to Opening Doors](#), which was developed to specifically address what strategies and supports should be implemented to improve the educational outcomes for children and youth, and the steps that need to be taken to assist unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.

We know that HUD's homeless assistance grants funding is not sufficient to prevent and end homelessness for youth. Homeless youth are more multi-jurisdictional than any other homeless population and may interact with adults from educational, child welfare, juvenile justice, and/or homelessness systems. It is therefore critical that CoCs collaborate with schools, child welfare agencies, juvenile justice systems, and, if applicable, projects funded under [HHS' Runaway and Homeless Youth Program](#). You may also want to see what our philanthropic partners are working on – visit [Forty-to-None](#) for more information on their work to end homelessness for LGBT youth.

- **Better Data.** With a goal of acquiring better national data, HUD joined USICH, ED, and HHS this past year in an interagency initiative called Youth Count! The initiative involved nine participating communities and designed to improve collaboration in conducting point-in-time (PIT) counts among HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) providers, ACYF Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers, State and ED Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and other local stakeholders. [View a report containing the outcomes of that initiative](#). The SNAPS office has also been working internally to address our own data collection capabilities. Over the past two years we have been updating our data systems and grant applications to account for unaccompanied youth between the ages of 18 and 24.

Don't forget to check back to [SNAPS Weekly Focus page](#) over the coming weeks as we will continue to post related materials and TA products related to each weekly focus, as they become available.

As always, we thank you for your commitment to ending homelessness.

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