



H O M E W A R D

2023

Youth Homelessness
Demonstration Program

POLK COUNTY YHDP

REPORT





POLK COUNTY YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL MEMBERS AS FEATURED PRESENTERS AT PREVENT CHILD ABUSE IOWA'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

INTRODUCTION TO YHDP

Innovation to End Youth Homelessness

Polk County is dedicated to supporting youth and young adults with the resources they need to thrive. As a community, it is our task to ensure there is a clear pathway for young adults to swiftly access appropriate services, thereby making youth homelessness a rare, brief, and nonrecurring experience for Polk County residents.

In 2019, Des Moines/Polk County was awarded a **transformative grant by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development** to meet this very need. As one of several communities nationwide selected for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP), Polk County seized a unique opportunity to increase resources to prevent and end youth homelessness. YHDP awarded our community \$1.86 million (\$930,000/yr.) for two-year demonstration grant projects that display our **community-wide approach to serving youth in innovative ways.**

YHDP grant **projects were developed in partnership with the greater Des Moines community** including Homeward, the City of Des Moines, community health and service providers, youth specific-providers, government partners, HUD, and the Iowa Department of Human Services. Crucially, the **process was also led by the Youth Action Council**, a local group of young people with lived experience in homelessness who ensured the new grants would meet the needs of youth in new and powerful ways.

“

FOLKS DOING THIS WORK GENUINELY LOVE IT. IT'S REALLY HARD, BUT WE'RE TRYING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR YOUTH AND THE COMMUNITY.

-CLIF ANTOINE, PHC YOUTH HOUSING NAVIGATOR

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Polk County's YHDP projects completed 2 years of service in late 2022. Through the grants are continuing on as part of Polk County's annual homelessness funding process, this report highlights the **accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned from the initial years** implementing these brand-new youth-serving programs.

WHAT MAKES YHDP UNIQUE?

The YHDP grant process engaged partners across systems and sectors for a comprehensive planning process to prevent and end youth homelessness. In addition to planning for implementation of grant projects, the community also worked to create Polk County's Coordinated Community Plan, a document that outlines our community's larger strategy to support young people as they secure safe, stable housing. Though the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic upended our Polk County community and the homeless response system, YHDP grantees continued to implement this crucial work in 2020 and beyond.



YOUTH [IN THE PROGRAM] ARE TECHNICALLY ADULTS, BUT THEIR BRAINS ARE NOT FULLY DEVELOPED. THE TRAUMA OF ROUGH CHILDHOODS AND LACK OF POSITIVE ADULT INFLUENCES ALSO DELAY DEVELOPMENT AND REQUIRE OUR COMMUNITY TO APPROACH YOUNG FOLKS WITH MORE GRACE AND SUPPORT.

-ANA ABRAHAM, CFI YHDP COORDINATOR



YOUTH LEADERS COLLABORATE WITH A LOCAL ARTIST ON A PUBLIC ART PROJECT TO INCREASE AWARENESS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.



Polk County's YHDP process focused on supporting youth via the following areas:

HOUSING



As our community continues to advocate for more affordable housing choices, additional options are needed for youth and young adults. By providing clear avenues of housing and services for youth, Polk County can ensure our most vulnerable residents have access to safe housing options for long-term stability.

EDUCATION



As a community, it's our role to step in quickly for young adults with necessary programming, supports, and accommodations to connect youth with education, learning, and training opportunities.

EMPLOYMENT



It's difficult for many young people to find sustainable work that pays enough to maintain housing, food, and other costs. There's a great need for Polk County youth to pursue passions, build skills, and develop connections to the community through job and employment opportunities.

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SUPPORT



For many youth, trauma is often intertwined with mental health concerns and family dynamics. A healing-centered approach serving youth experiencing homelessness can truly address the social/emotional needs of young people while helping them reach safe, stable housing.

YHDP COMMUNITY GOALS

Early in the YHDP planning process, youth leaders and community partners developed 6 goals for Polk County's approach to youth homelessness. These goals drove the creation of grants and continue to inform systemic work to support youth and families.

POLK COUNTY'S YHDP GOALS:

1

The community will join together to **prevent youth homelessness** by fostering safe, healthy, stable families and permanent connections for youth.

2

The community will **identify all youth and young adults** who are experiencing or are at imminent risk of experiencing homelessness.

3

The community will rapidly link youth and young adults with **safe, affordable, and low-barrier housing** of their choice and voluntary supports.

4

The community will provide **opportunities and supports that are healing-centered** and responsive to the individual strengths of youth experiencing homelessness.

5

The community will improve **education and employment** outcomes and provide diverse, skill-building opportunities to ensure youth are successful and thriving.

6

The community will **eliminate disparities for youth of color and LGBTQ youth** to ensure equitable experiences within high quality programs and services.

YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS COLLABORATE ON STRATEGIES TO PREVENT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.

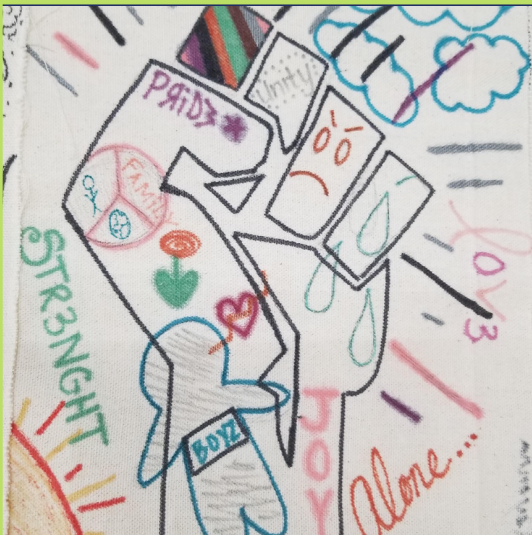


COMMUNITY VALUES IN YHDP

The community created the following guiding principles to drive YHDP projects and the work to end youth homelessness:



YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS CELEBRATE AFTER A COMMUNITY WORKGROUP MEETING



ART CREATED BY POLK COUNTY YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL MEMBER

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- Recognize young people's strengths and promote opportunities for growth



TRAUMA-INFORMED & HEALING-CENTERED CARE

- Strengths-based approach to address the lasting impacts of trauma in youth



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Safe, healthy connections for youth via family and friends



HOUSING FIRST

- Assistance and housing offered without preconditions or barriers



YOUTH CHOICE

- Opportunities for young people to set goals and make decisions



INDIVIDUALIZED AND CLIENT-DRIVEN SUPPORT

- Considerations for unique needs of all youth



SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

- Social connections for youth create purpose and productivity



CENTRALIZED INTAKE

- Limit re-traumatization from multiple forms of assessment



Polk County's Funded

YHDP PROJECTS

The YHDP demonstration period produced 6 brand-new grant projects.

YHDP projects are designed to provide housing options and supportive services for people under the age of 25 who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. Crucially, the projects also focus on equity and addressing the disproportionate number of black and/or LGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness. Polk County's YHDP grant award of \$1.8 million for 2 years funded the following projects:



ANAWIM HOUSING YOUTH PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

\$375,464 for a non-time-limited housing assistance and supportive services program for youth ages 18-24 with disabilities.



CHILDREN & FAMILIES OF IOWA JOINT TRANSITIONAL HOUSING/ RAPID REHOUSING

\$364,618 for Joint Transitional Housing & Rapid Rehousing program for youth who have experienced domestic violence.



INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY ALLIANCES HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

\$74,940 for YHDP project data evaluation and analysis.



IOWA HOMELESS YOUTH CENTERS MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK YOUTH DROP-IN SERVICES

\$304,178 for this unique project that functions as a Supportive Services Only (SSO) grant to provide crucial community supports and services to young people.



IOWA HOMELESS YOUTH CENTERS (IHYC) RAPID REHOUSING

\$527,448 for rapid rehousing assistance for youth/young adults, including rental assistance, security deposits, case management and services.



PRIMARY HEALTH CARE YOUTH HOUSING NAVIGATOR

\$162,446 for this project to help young people 18-24 who are experiencing homelessness navigate the rental market and find housing.

YHDP'S IMPACT IN POLK COUNTY

Targeted Investments to Support Youth

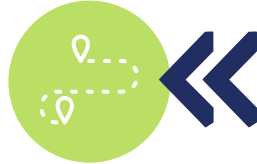
Data from the YHDP demonstration period (Oct. 2020- Dec. 2022)

\$1.86

MILLION DOLLARS

Invested into youth-specific housing and supportive services (\$930,000/yr.)

JOBS CREATED TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY YOUTH



1 HOUSING NAVIGATOR SPECIFIC TO YOUTH

Assists young people under 25 in finding housing, completing applications, and overcoming barriers to stability.



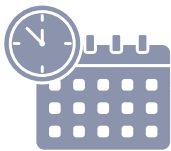
2 LICENSED MENTAL HEALTH THERAPISTS

Provide accessible, youth-specific therapy and mental health support for youth experiencing homelessness



5 CASE MANAGERS AND ADVOCATES

Walk alongside youth as they access safe housing while providing access to supportive services to help youth meet their goals.



YHDP Projects launched in **October 2020** and completed the 2 year demonstration period in **December 2022**.



Grants funded **36 brand new units of scattered-site housing** for young people.



Of those, **12 were Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) units** to support youth with higher-level needs and barriers. These are the **first youth-specific PSH units in Polk County**.



YHDP also created several part-time **peer support roles** for folks with lived experience in homelessness to lead and mentor other youth.

252

YOUTH SERVED
AGES 16- 25

IN 176 HOUSEHOLDS



55

KIDS

of YHDP participants

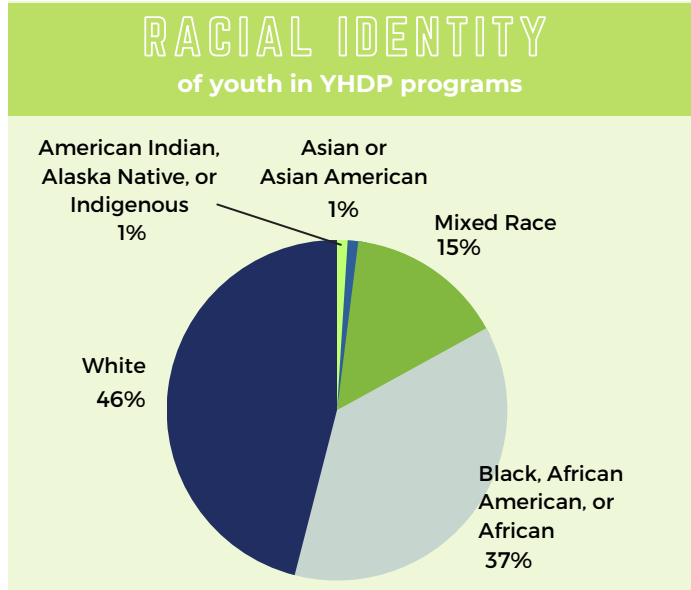
OVER 68

PARTNER

organizations
joined YHDP
workgroups

WHO DID YHDP PROJECTS SERVE?

Data from the YHDP demonstration period (Oct. 2020- Dec. 2022)



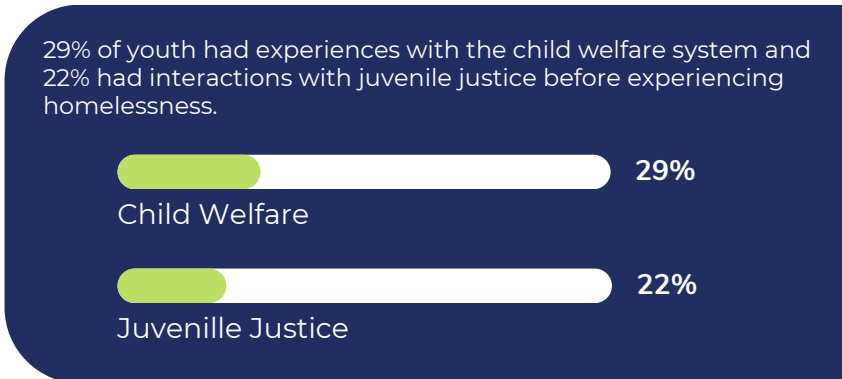
19 Percent

OF YOUTH SERVED WERE HISPANIC/LATINO



YHDP participants:

- single youth
- youth with partners
- and/or young adults with children



66%

OF YOUTH IDENTIFIED AS HAVING A DISABILITY

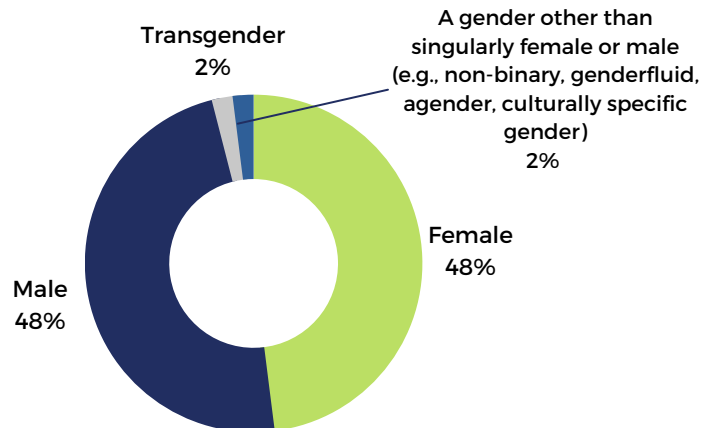
41%

OF YOUTH HAD EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



GENDER IDENTITY

of youth in YHDP programs



For more data on YHDP projects, visit <https://icalliances.org/yhdp>

ANAWIM HOUSING

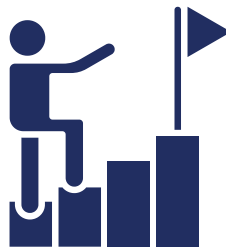
Youth Housing Opportunities Program

\$375,464 for a non-time-limited housing assistance and supportive services program for youth ages 18-24 with disabilities. This YHDP Grant project serves youth 18-24 who have a mental illness, substance use disorder, or medical need. The program has 12 units available to serve single youth or youth-led families. In addition to housing supports for as long as the youth wants and needs, the program offers an array of intensive supportive services including case management services, life skills training, and connection to vocational or educational services. YHOP is staffed by a program manager and peer support specialist.



PROGRAM SUCCESSSES

- YHOP youth are **engaging in supportive services** including employment, treatment, school, and parenting support.
- Participants set goals for their future and have made great steps toward achieving them.
- Program staff works with youth on **harm reduction** strategies.



PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Some participants require **more intensive supports** than the program can provide and are instead connected to another resource in the community.
- Staff faced unexpected barriers for clients dealing with immigration and citizenship documentation.
- **Lack of affordable housing** units in the community make it difficult to provide options for youth.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Before entering the program and safe housing, **10 youth were living unsheltered** or in places not meant for human habitation
- **75%** of clients participated in the program for a year or longer, achieving the goal for long-term support.
- 71% of clients moved into housing in under 2 months.



YOUTH HAVE TO FEEL SUPPORTED AND SAFE IN ORDER TO ENGAGE IN PROGRAMMING. THAT IS A LOT OF THE WORK, JUST BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND GETTING TO KNOW THEM.

-WANDA PRICE, ANAWIM YHOP PROGRAM MANAGER



CHILDREN & FAMILIES OF IOWA

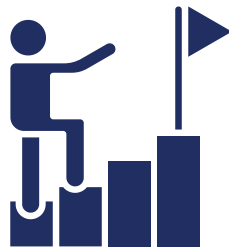
Transitional Housing/ Rapid Rehousing for Youth

\$364,618 for Joint Transitional Housing & Rapid Rehousing program for youth who have experienced domestic violence. The program has a transitional housing component for youth who need a landing spot. And/or youth can also choose to enter the Rapid Rehousing side of the program. The program serves 11 youth 18-24, providing services in domestic violence support, healthy relationship education, substance use treatment, mental health support, career planning, and education.



PROGRAM SUCCESSSES

- With **domestic violence on the rise**, the program is very needed in the community to fill a critical gap in youth-specific services.
- Program staff have built **great relationships with clients** and continue to stay in touch even after youth exit the program.
- The program has served many young parents, youth of color, and/or LGBTQ+ youth, helping to address **systemic inequities**.



PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- The first year in the program is often simply about **stability, safety, and mental health**.
- Inflation and cost of living makes it difficult for youth to maintain housing, education, transportation, and childcare costs.
- COVID created additional trauma and barriers for youth, meaning they require more support. It was difficult to serve all YHDP participants with one staff member.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- 100% of youth interested in **education, training, or employment** were connected to services within 3 months of entering the program
- 71% of households moved into permanent housing within 90 days
- **100%** of youth that have left the program have exited to permanent housing.

PEOPLE CANNOT BUDGET THEMSELVES OUT OF POVERTY. THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE MAKES IT SO CHALLENGING FOR YOUTH TO SUCCEED AND BUILD STABILITY- ESPECIALLY IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN. I'VE SEEN HOW POLICIES AND STATE LAWS REALLY HAVE A DIRECT IMPACT ON PEOPLE'S LIVES. THINGS LIKE SNAP BENEFITS AND LGBTQ+ POLICIES ARE HUGEY IMPORTANT.

-ANA ABRA, CFI YHDP COORDINATOR

INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY ALLIANCES

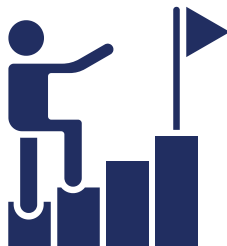
YHDP Homeless Management Information System Work

\$74,940 for YHDP project data evaluation and analysis. The Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) is a crucial partner in the work to support and monitor YHDP direct-service grants. The ICA team provides training, support, and guidance to grantees in utilizing the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). ICA also tracks program outcomes, provides evaluation suggestions, and produces reports.



PROGRAM SUCCESSSES

- ICA used existing data points and created new ones to evaluate the success of the demonstration projects.
- Staff created a Tableau **online dashboard** (icalliances.org/yhdp) which allows the community to view YHDP data and outcomes.
- The dashboard can be filtered dynamically to show different populations of youth, different programs, and different timeframes for analysis.



PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Because YHDP projects were new and unconventional, there were not established HMIS measures to describe their success.
- YHDP also **required a lot of tracked data elements**, which can be burdensome for program staff and HMIS professionals alike.
- **Staff turnover within projects** made it difficult to have consistent data collection and completeness.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- ICA **supported service providers** through data collection with training and technical assistance.
- At regular intervals, staff **generated reports** so YHDP projects could check-in on progress towards goals and continually improve services.
- By partnering in workgroups and Youth Action Council, ICA supported every aspect of YHDP, ensuring a **spirit of collaboration and partnership**.

HAVING THE YHDP GRANTS HAS REALLY RAISED AWARENESS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN OUR COMMUNITY, WHY IT'S A BIG ISSUE, AND HOW IT DIFFERS FROM OLDER ADULT HOMELESSNESS. IT'S GOOD TO SEE MORE PEOPLE ENGAGED IN THE SOLUTIONS.

-EHREN STOVER-WRIGHT, ICA SENIOR ANALYST

IOWA HOMELESS YOUTH CENTERS

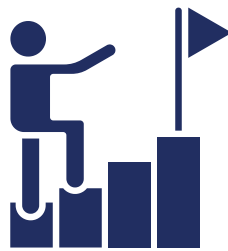
Mental Health and Drop-In Services

\$304,178 for this unique project that functions as a Supportive Services Only (SSO) grant to provide crucial community supports and services to young people. The grant aims to serve at least 75 youth annually at the IHYC Youth Opportunity Center (YOC). This project includes 2 licensed mental health therapists to make mental health support more accessible for youth experiencing homelessness. In addition, drop-in center extended hours are part of this program for youth to access emergency and basic need items, laundry facilities, life skills classes, and Behavioral Health Intervention Services (BHIS). Peer Support Advocates with lived expertise in homelessness serve as crucial members of the staff for this program.



PROGRAM SUCCESSSES

- The drop-in center has become a **safe space for youth to gather**. The grant has brought community partners into the space for jobs, haircuts, healthcare, and other services.
- Peer support advocate positions have been a success in innovating new youth leadership and flexibility.
- Youth are having **open discussions about their mental health**, reducing stigma around asking for support.



PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- Staff experienced **difficulty in connecting youth to BHIS** due to the pandemic and administrative burdens.
- The center experienced challenges with staff turnover among drop-in center support and therapists.
- The community has seen an **increase in mental health needs** of youth and increasing substance use.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- The program served **121 youth** through drop-in services and therapy.
- 29 youth came from places not meant for human habitation, allowing the most vulnerable young people to get their basic needs met.
- **80%** of youth participated in programming for more than 90 days, signifying long-term engagement with services.

SOMETIMES YOUTH ARE HESITANT TO ENGAGE [IN PROGRAMMING] AT FIRST BECAUSE THEY'VE HAD SUCH BAD EXPERIENCES WITH SERVICES OR SYSTEMS IN THE PAST. WHEN THEY DO FINALLY COME INTO DROP-IN, THEY'RE ABLE TO HANG OUT, GET A GOOD MEAL, BE AROUND THEIR PEERS, AND RELAX. IT'S GREAT TO SEE THAT YOUTH CAN ENGAGE WITH SERVICES AT THEIR OWN PACE WITH NO REQUIREMENTS.

*-JULIA ANDERSON, FORMER YOUTH OPPORTUNITY CENTER
PROGRAM COORDINATOR*

IOWA HOMELESS YOUTH CENTERS

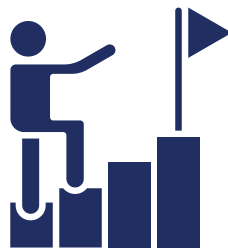
Family/Youth Rapid Rehousing

\$527,448 for rapid rehousing assistance for youth/young adults, including rental assistance, security deposits, case management and services. The program provides 13 units of scattered site Rapid Rehousing support for young people 18-24 and youth-led families. Youth receive up to 24 months of housing assistance as well as wrap-around supportive services. 2 YHDP Youth Advocates provide young people in the program with tailored case management and one-on-one time to work on the youth's goals, finances, connection to community resources, education, and employment.



PROGRAM SUCCESSSES

- Case mangers connect with clients on a personal level throughout the housing process.
- The program supports youth with food planning, grocery shopping, and **life skills development.**
- Youth get **experience with renting apartments** and working with landlords.



PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- **Staffing challenges** and turnover are tough for the program and the youth to navigate.
- Youth and staff struggle to find **safe, affordable housing options** for rent.
- With the emergence of COVID, the program began serving clients with higher needs in mental health and substance use.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- **42 Youth households** participated in the Rapid Rehousing Program
- Before entering the program, **32%** of youth were living unsheltered, in vehicles, camps, or other locations not meant for human habitation.
- The program adapted to serve youth in families, helping to provide a safe foundation for children as well as their parents.

YOUTH ARE GREAT ADVOCATES FOR THEMSELVES AND USING THEIR VOICES TO EXPRESS WHAT THEY WANT IN HOUSING. IT'S IMPORTANT TO LISTEN TO THEM AND HELP MAKE THEIR GOALS A REALITY.

-TOBY O'BERRY, FORMER DIRECTOR, IOWA HOMELESS YOUTH CENTERS

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

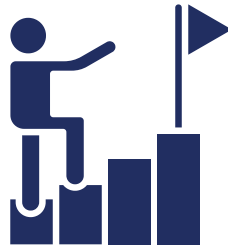
Youth Housing Navigator

\$162,446 for this project to help young people 18-24 who are experiencing homelessness navigate the rental market and find housing. Clients in the program have some barriers to finding housing including their age, rental history, and criminal background. The Housing Navigator helps ease those barriers and make connections with landlords. This grant functions as a Supportive Services Only (SSO) grant meaning that the program does not provide rental assistance, but can serve youth who have income or support from other programs to find and maintain housing. Primary Health Care works closely with other organizations in the community to take referrals and hand-offs.



PROGRAM SUCCESSSES

- The program serves as a crucial connector in the community and inspires collaboration between agencies to serve youth.
- Housing navigation has **supported a lot of single parents**, helping them to find housing while balancing work and childcare costs.
- The navigator **supports youth with barriers to housing** who might not be able to secure a rental and stability otherwise.



PROGRAM CHALLENGES

- **Staying in contact with youth has been a challenge** due to transience and changing communication.
- With COVID and higher needs in the community, many youth are seeking a program with rental assistance or more intensive support.
- The housing market, inflation, and challenging landlord relationships make housing navigation increasingly difficult.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- **48 average days to housing** for youth in the program.
- Housing navigation **served 101 total youth**, providing them with a trusted adult figure and guidance in achieving their goals.
- Due to housing navigation, youth **learn critical skills** in researching, completing applications, and maintaining housing.



IT'S HARD FOR YOUTH TO ESTABLISH A WORK/LIFE ROUTINE WITHOUT HOUSING. THEIR LIVES ARE SO IMPROVED BY HAVING THAT SAFE PLACE AND HOME BASE.

— CLIF ANTOINE, PHC YOUTH HOUSING NAVIGATOR





THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DRAKE UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL AND THEIR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS CLINIC, YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL MEMBERS HOSTED A BAKE SALE TO RAISE FUNDS TO SUPPORT THEIR COMMUNITY WORK.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YHDP?

The Polk County community has made incredible strides in supporting youth experiencing homelessness since the implementation of YHDP grant projects in 2020. Grant recipients **navigated the intense effects of COVID-19**, standing up brand new programs in the midst of the pandemic to meet an ever-growing need. Hundreds of youth under 25 were able to access **safe housing, employment, education, and/or basic needs and mental healthcare**. Partners and youth leaders across Polk County mobilized to ensure the success of these grant projects and continue the systemic work to prevent and end youth homelessness.

A successful demonstration period served youth in powerful, innovative ways and immediately moved the needle in Polk County's work to prevent and end youth homelessness. Service providers also learned valuable lessons in how to tailor services to better serve youth as they achieve their goals.

Despite the success of YHDP programming and the achievements of community youth, there is much work to be done to better support young adults in the community with the resources they need to thrive. **With youth leadership, community collaboration, and targeted investments**, we can ensure that every young person can access the housing and services they need to thrive.

YHDP grants will continue to operate in Polk County, becoming part of Homeward's annual funding process. With the learning from the demonstration period applied, programs will become even stronger over time and continue to evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of young people.

Beyond the grants, Polk County will continue to work on **long-term systemic solutions to youth homelessness**. Youth Action Council leaders and their community partners will work until one day, everyone in Polk County has a safe place to call home.



ART CREATED BY POLK COUNTY YOUTH

Polk County's YHDP grants were only made possible by powerful community collaboration. Though many partners ensure YHDP's continued success, Homeward would like to specifically acknowledge the contribution of the following groups and individuals. A heartfelt thank you to:

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development
- YHDP Steering Committee
- Community Stakeholder Group
- Polk County Homeless Service Providers
- City of Des Moines
- Polk County
- Homeward Board of Directors
- YHDP Technical Assistance Providers
- Iowa Department of Human Services
- The Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines
- Mid-Iowa Health Foundation
- Youth Homelessness Prevention Workgroup Members

Finally, a huge thank you to the Polk County Youth Action Council and the YHDP grantees. Their tireless work, innovation, and passion are the key to this program's success. Our community is forever better because of their expertise and dedication.

CONTACT US

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POLK COUNTY YHDP REPORT
Prepared by Abbey Barrow

2023

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Demonstration Program**