

## Lessons from a Federal Initiative to Build Capacity to End Youth Homelessness

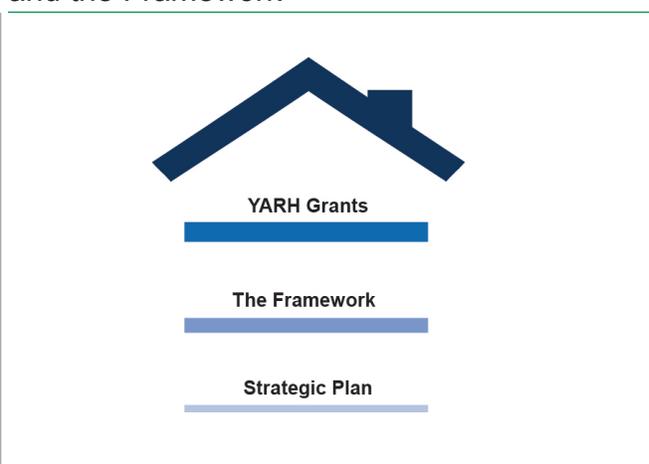
The Children’s Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services) is funding a multi-phase grant program to build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the child welfare system. This program is referred to as Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH). Eighteen organizations received funding for the first phase, a two year planning grant (2013 – 2015). Grantees used the planning period to conduct data analyses to help them understand their local population and develop a comprehensive service model to improve youth outcomes related to housing, education and training, social well-being, and permanent connections. Six of those organizations received funding to refine and test their comprehensive service models during the second phase, a three-year initial implementation grant (2015–2018).

This brief discusses the capacity strategy associated with [The Framework to End Youth Homelessness: A Resource Text for Dialogue and Action](#) (USICH, 2013) (hereafter referred to as the “Framework”) and how the strategy was implemented by YARH Phase I grantees (Figure 1). This framework expanded on the 2010 strategic plan, “Opening Doors,” which was geared toward preventing homelessness among multiple populations (USICH, 2010). The 2013 framework targets the specific challenges and needs of homeless adolescents as they transition to adulthood. It presents a data strategy, a capacity strategy, and an intervention model designed to prevent and eradicate homelessness among unaccompanied youth. The information in this brief comes from grant applications, semi-annual progress reports submitted by YARH grantees, and two-day site visits with each grantee in January – March 2015.

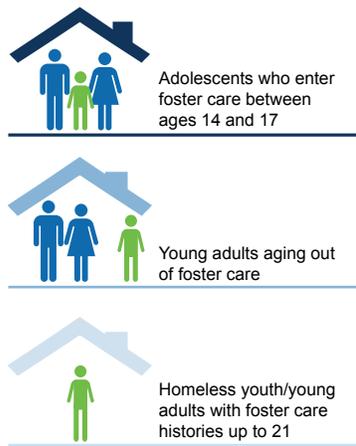
### The YARH grant program

Whereas the Framework targets the broader population of youth at risk of homelessness, the YARH multi-phase grant program focuses on a subset of this population—youth currently or previously involved with the child welfare system. The Children’s Bureau (CB) developed the grant program to support the design of comprehensive service models to prevent homelessness among (1) adolescents who enter foster care between 14 and 17; (2) young adults aging out of foster care, and (3) homeless youth/young adults with foster care histories up to 21 (Figure 2). CB directed grantees to

**Figure 1.** Relationship between YARH grants and the Framework



**Figure 2. YARH Target Population**



develop comprehensive service models that address outcomes in four core areas: housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and social-emotional well-being (Figure 3).

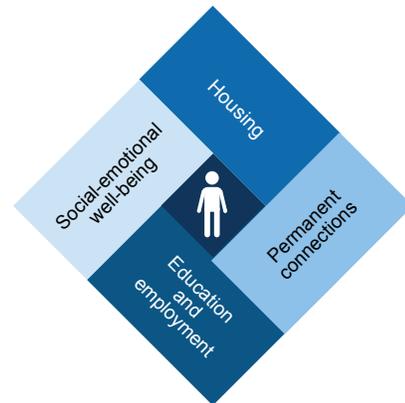
The YARH grant initiative is organized into three phases:

- **Phase I:** The activities in this phase focused on identifying the target population for, describing its needs, and developing a comprehensive service model for subsequent implementation. Eighteen grantees received Phase I funding.
- **Phase II:** Six of the 18 grantees received Phase II grants, to be used to implement and test the model developed in Phase I.
- **Phase III:** The Phase II FOA indicates that a Phase III competition may take place; in this phase, grantees will conduct a summative evaluation of the comprehensive service model and add to the evidence base.

**Complicated work requiring time and attention.** The YARH grants highlight the challenging and complicated nature of ending youth homelessness, as reflected in the multi-phase nature of the effort. The work requires a wide range of partners, public and private.

A successful capacity strategy depended on the ability of grantees to obtain and analyze high-quality data.

**Figure 3. Core outcome areas for the Framework and YARH**



**Complementary strategies—data analysis and capacity building.** The Phase I grants emphasize data analysis as a key step to building capacity and informing service strategies. Phase I grantees were asked to incorporate evidence-informed screening and assessment tools to identify target youth and their individual service needs and to expand service capacity to meet these needs.

**Use of evidence-based and evidence-informed intervention strategies<sup>1</sup> to provide services aligned with youth's needs.** The YARH grants emphasize both the need to tailor services and to encourage providers to use data on risk and protective factors to identify youths' needs. YARH expects providers to draw on existing evidence regarding intervention strategies and to contribute to the evidence base about what works for youth in foster care through analysis of their own efforts.

### Insights on capacity strategies from the Phase I grantee experience

YARH grantees' experiences during Phase I offer several lessons for capacity development. First, it's important to identify grantees' technical assistance needs early on through discussions about their experience serving the target population and history of working with partners. The Phase I grantees required significant support, guidance, and technical assistance to obtain data, develop capacity, and work toward goals efficiently. They requested help in areas such as program development and implementation; perma-

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nency; creation of data-sharing agreements; building partnerships; evaluation; and methods of data analysis. Grantees also requested more structured support and guidelines in general.

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Second, developing a successful capacity strategy depends on grantees obtaining high quality data and performing analysis to inform service needs. Many Phase I grantees struggled to obtain and analyze the data required to understand the needs and characteristics of homeless youth. For the grantees that struggled with data analysis, moving forward with other tasks and engaging stakeholders was a major challenge. In contrast, grantees that had access to high quality data, successfully performed analysis, and disseminated their findings were able to engage key stakeholders in capacity building.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the Phase I grantee experience shows that partnerships with key stakeholders are crucial to successful data analysis and capacity building. YARH offered new opportunities to work with partners to analyze data, understand the needs of the target population, and develop intervention strategies. Keeping partners engaged was an ongoing challenge for many Phase I grantees, but it was vital. Exploring and supporting team-building, particularly early in the process and for those in new partnerships, aided grantees with subsequent data and capacity-building activities.

Building strong partnerships with key stakeholders is crucial to successful data analysis and capacity building.

## Looking ahead

The YARH grant initiative is based on the Framework and provides an opportunity for grantees to put the framework's guidance into practice. As CB continues to support the implementation of the framework, YARH grantees moved into Phase II of their work in September 2015—implementing and testing their interventions. Their efforts will continue to offer insight into how the Framework can be put into practice.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Evidence-based interventions have rigorous research supporting the effectiveness of the intervention. Evidence-informed interventions are based on theories with supporting research but are not yet supported by evaluations of the particular intervention.

<sup>2</sup> See our companion brief, *The USICH Youth Framework in Action: Analysis of Data on Youth with Child Welfare Involvement At Risk of Homelessness* available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>, for more information on the data analyses conducted by Phase I grantees as well as the challenges and successes related to data analysis.

## References

U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness: Amendment 2012." Washington, DC: USICH, 2012. Available at <https://www.usich.gov>.

U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). "The Framework to End Youth Homelessness: A Resource Text for Dialogue and Action." Washington, DC: USICH, 2013. Available at <https://www.usich.gov>.

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