



The Office of Homeless Youth Services 2015 Annual Report

Executive Summary

The Colorado Department of Local Affairs Division of Housing is pleased to present the 2015 Annual Report for the Office of Homeless Youth Services (OHYS).

Youth under 24 years of age comprise nearly one third of homeless individuals in our country and our state.¹ Nationally, 180,760 unaccompanied children and youth experienced homelessness on a single night in January 2015. In Colorado, 3,285 youth were homeless, 714 of which were unsheltered and tens of thousands more at risk of homelessness.

The OHYS believes no youth should experience homelessness and therefore aims to prevent homelessness among youth or make it as brief as possible. Towards this goal, the OHYS has adopted the federal strategic plan, *Opening Doors*, and Colorado's statewide plan, *Pathways Home Colorado*. Since its inception in 2002, the OHYS has been a resource for and a coordinator of the efforts of public and private entities serving Colorado's homeless youth.² In alignment with House Bill 04-1107 and towards the goal to end youth homelessness, in 2015 the OHYS worked to:

1. "Identify and remove obstacles to the provision of services" through partnering on efforts such as the development of the new Pathways to Success Program (Pathways). Pathways will connect 400 youth to housing and services over the next three years through improved coordination between state agencies and service providers for youth who are homeless or exiting the foster care system.
2. "Improve the quality of services provided to homeless youth" by providing leadership to the Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth (ACHY). ACHY coordinates youth service providers across the state and leads statewide policy regarding youth homelessness. These efforts aid in building consensus among partners and further interagency collaboration in census building.
3. "Reduce needless expenditures caused by the provision of overlapping services" by participating in the development of the Youth Coordinated Assessment & Housing Placement System (CAHPS). CAHPS prioritizes homeless youth based on their vulnerability for available housing resources in the Denver Metro Area. This helps to efficiently utilize the limited resources available and ensure appropriate housing intervention is used when serving homeless youth.
4. "Identify funding resources available to entities serving homeless youth by sharing resources as they become available." The OHYS has led the efforts in Colorado to improve the quality of data surrounding youth homelessness in the annual Point in Time (PIT) count. In doing so, a more accurate picture of the problem will be captured and resources can be identified and applied for strategically.

While progress has been made, youth homelessness continues to be a crisis across Colorado. Federal partners have made this a priority and have set the goal to end this epidemic by 2020. The OHYS anticipates increased federal resources to be allocated for this purpose. In the coming year, the OHYS will coordinate the effort to bring new resources to Colorado by expanding current initiatives and continuing to act as a community resource.

Sincerely,


Alison George, Director
Department of Local Affairs, Division of Housing



The OHYS Background

Established in 2002, the Office of Homeless Youth Services (OHYS) was created by the Colorado State Legislature with the Homeless Youth Services Act (House Bill 02-1159). The OHYS was first administered by the Department of Public Health and Environment, moved to the Colorado Department of Human Services in 2004 with House Bill 1107 and in 2011 moved to the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) Division of Housing (DOH) through House Bill 1230 where it continues to reside today. The primary intent of the original legislation was to respond to the unique needs of homeless youth by providing statewide coordination for the sharing of best practices and technical assistance to those who serve homeless youth across the state. The OHYS continues to fill that role.

The OHYS aims to address and prevent youth homelessness by improving the quality, availability and accessibility of housing and supportive services for youth across the State. The OHYS strives to increase stable housing options, create permanent connections and increase educational/employment options specifically for this vulnerable population.

Youth Homelessness

Nationally, 180,760 unaccompanied youth experienced homelessness on a single night in January 2015 during the Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) annual Point in Time (PIT) count. HUD's PIT is a national count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January.ⁱⁱⁱ Communities across the county use data collected to identify gaps and prioritize resources for persons experiencing homelessness. Youth comprise nearly one third of the total number of homeless individuals.^{iv} In Colorado, the 2015 PIT identified 3,285 unaccompanied youth and youth experiencing homelessness, 714 of which live outside and on the streets. Comparatively, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) found that 24,062 students experienced homelessness, 550 of which were unsheltered, during the 2013-2014 school year. CDE's data shows over seven times the number of homeless youth as HUD's PIT. The numbers differ due to two main reasons: data capture methodology and homeless definitions. CDE captures instances of homelessness for youth who are currently enrolled in school and compiles this data over the course of the entire school year. HUD's PIT survey reflects the number of homeless individuals on a single night, and may be more likely to capture older youth who are not enrolled in school. In addition, CDE identifies students who are temporarily staying with family or friends as homeless, whereas the PIT regards literal homelessness as living in shelters or on the streets. It has been an ongoing concern that youth homelessness is underrepresented in the PIT count; strides have been made across the state to better capture accurate youth data across systems, and the OHYS is leading this effort in Colorado.

Impacts of Homelessness

Homelessness has significant negative impacts on the current and future well-being of individuals, particularly those who experience it at a young age. *Opening Doors*, the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, explains that "youth often leave home as a result of a severe family conflict, which may include physical and/or sexual abuse. Many unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness, particularly those in at-risk groups, have significant experience with trauma. Traumatic experiences can include multiple types of abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence. Research also shows a high prevalence of depression, suicide initiations, and other mental health disorders among youth who are homeless; chronic physical health conditions including asthma, hypertension, tuberculosis, diabetes, and hepatitis; and high rates of substance use disorders... Some groups of children and youth are particularly vulnerable and over-represented among youth who experience homelessness. These subpopulations include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth; pregnant and parenting youth; youth involved with juvenile justice and child welfare systems; children with disabilities, and victims of human trafficking and exploitation."^v

The OHYS Initiatives

The OHYS recognizes the complications and risks that homeless youth face. In the past year, the OHYS has led or participated in many initiatives with key partner agencies, such as Colorado Department of Health and Human Services and Colorado Office of Children, Youth and Families, to provide varied interventions tailored to the unique needs of homeless youth and to address the requirements of House Bill 1230. The OHYS statutory requirements include:

- A. To provide information, coordination, and technical assistance as may be necessary to reduce needless expenditures associated with the provision of overlapping services and to improve the quality of services provided to homeless youth;
- B. To identify both procedural and substantive obstacles to the provision of services and to make recommendations to the entities specified above concerning procedural, regulatory, or statutory changes necessary to remove such obstacles;
- C. To obtain information from service providers concerning known services available for the homeless youth population in the state of Colorado and to post such information on a website on the internet;
- D. To develop, maintain, and make available a listing of all rights and organizations that may be relevant to the homeless youth population in the state of Colorado, including but not limited to a listing of legal, educational, and victims' rights and organizations related thereto;
- E. To obtain information concerning known funding sources available for the homeless youth population in the state of Colorado;
- F. To work with entities to identify issues concerning sharing of information in providing services to homeless youth and to facilitate resolution of such information-sharing issues; and
- G. To prepare and submit a written annual report for the Governor and the General Assembly concerning the performance of the OHYS.

Please refer to Table 1 (below), which identifies ways in which the OHYS’s current initiatives directly satisfy the statutory requirements listed above. Additional information regarding each initiative is described after the table.

Table 1: The OHYS Initiatives Which Satisfy Statutory Requirements							
Current Initiatives	House Bill 1230 Statutory Requirements						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth (ACHY)	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Behavioral Health Transformation Council & Under 26 Group	✓	✓					
Colorado Statewide Positive Youth Development Plan	✓	✓					
DOH Next Step Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program	✓	✓			✓		
Family Unification Program	✓	✓			✓		
Homeless Prevention Activities Program	✓	✓			✓		
OHYS Annual Report							✓
Pathways to Success Colorado	✓	✓					
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Bonus Expansion	✓	✓			✓		
Point in Time (PIT) efforts	✓	✓					
Rural Collaborative on Homeless Youth (Rural Collaborative)	✓	✓	✓			✓	
SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR)	✓	✓					
Website			✓	✓			
Youth Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement System	✓	✓				✓	
Youth Host Homes	✓	✓			✓		
Youth Summits	✓	✓	✓	✓			

Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth (ACHY): Led by the OHYS, ACHY was created to assist with the implementation of the Homeless Youth Services Act and is made up of key stakeholders who represent federal, state, and local governments, non-profit service agencies, faith based organizations, foundations, and homeless/formerly homeless youth to coordinate youth services and drive statewide policies to end youth homelessness. This group meets monthly and develops and implements the Colorado Homeless Youth Action Plan.

Behavioral Health Transformation Council and Under 26 Transitions Work Group: Led by the Colorado Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health, the council's mission is to reduce costs of untreated behavioral health disorders by improving current behavioral health systems. The OHYS participates on the council as the subject matter expert on the intersection between homeless populations and behavioral health. The council has worked to provide training and education to professionals who work with transition age youth. This workgroup has prepared, organized and delivered a series of webinars to over 300 individuals across the state.

Colorado Statewide Positive Youth Development (PYD) Plan: Created by the Colorado Office of Children, Youth and Families, Division of Child Welfare, PYD is a guide for utilizing Positive Youth Development as an intervention for youth ages 9 to 25 to help them achieve their full potential. The PYD Plan aims to improve systems and policies that impact youth. The OHYS is DOLA's designated staff on the Planning Committee and provides expertise on issues surrounding youth homelessness.

Division of Housing Next Step Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) Program: TBRA is a rental subsidy that helps make up the difference between what a renter can afford to pay and the actual rent for a home. TBRA grantees provide rental assistance and supportive case management services for homeless families with school-aged children. Intensive case management for families in this program addresses the causes of their homelessness and leads toward a higher degree of self-sufficiency and academic stability with the goal of permanent housing at the end of the program. There are currently three Next Step programs across the state, which cover Boulder, Jefferson, and Mesa counties.

Family Unification Program (FUP): FUP utilizes Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) to serve two target populations: 1) families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in the imminent placement of the family's child or children in foster care, or the delay in the discharge of the child or children to the family from foster care; 2) youth at least 18 years old and not more than 21 years old who left foster care at age 16 or older and who lack adequate housing.^{vi} Through OHYS, the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) administers up to 160 transitional housing vouchers annually for youth 18-21 years old who are transitioning out of foster care and lack adequate housing. Community partners provide supportive services to program participants to ensure successful transitions for homeless youth moving into independent living. The FUP program has successfully housed over 300 young adults in the last 3 years.

Homeless Prevention Activities Program (HPAP): Administered by DOLA, HPAP is funded through the State Income Tax Check-off, which allows Colorado residents to make voluntary contributions on their State Income Tax Return to social programs. In the last funding cycle, the HPAP advisory committee, in alignment with the federal and state plans to end homelessness, prioritized the funds which totaled \$81,296 in 2015, to provide homeless prevention support to agencies serving youth and families throughout the state.

Pathways to Success Colorado: Led by the Office of Children, Youth & Families, Division of Child Welfare, the OHYS is a sub-recipient of this federal award and has taken the lead in creating the housing component of the program. The 2015 award was a planning grant to develop an intervention targeting homeless youth with child welfare involvement. Beginning early 2016 through an implementation grant, the project anticipates serving 400 youth with housing and supportive services over the next three years.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Bonus Expansion- Youth: DOLA submitted a new project application under the annual HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) Notice of Funding Availability. This year new funds were made available by HUD, and DOLA was selected by the CoC to be the primary applicant for this new youth project. The expansion is to be a scattered site, non-time limited, tenant based, supportive voucher program that will serve 44 chronically homeless youth (ages 18-24). The project will include both supportive services and ongoing housing subsidies for all project participants. The project will use the Youth Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement System (Y-CAHPS) in order to serve the most vulnerable homeless youth first. Awards should be announced Spring of 2016.

Point in Time (PIT) efforts: HUD's PIT is a national count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January.^{vii} Communities across the county use data collected to identify gaps and prioritize resources for persons experiencing homelessness. It has been an ongoing concern that youth homelessness is under-represented in the PIT count. Strides have been made across the state to better capture accurate youth PIT data, and the OHYS has let this effort in Colorado. The OHYS has assisted with providing information and training to help communities develop key partnerships and planning to develop efficient, accurate methods for counting homeless youth statewide.

Rural Collaborative on Homeless Youth (Rural Collaborative): The Rural Collaborative is a work group comprised of homeless service providers across the state that work to address the unique challenges faced by homeless youth in rural communities. In addition, the OHYS has partnered with the Rural Collaborative to share best practices and creatively work to better capture accurate PIT data in non-urban areas throughout the state.

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR): SOAR is a national program designed to increase access to the disability income benefit programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) for eligible individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.^{viii} The OHYS participates in the Colorado SOAR Advisory Council meetings, provides expertise on issues unique to youth homelessness, and leads the effort to incorporate SOAR practices into youth homeless service provision.

Website: The Department of Local Affairs recently redesigned its website. To create an efficient and effective experience for individuals seeking immediate assistance, a link has been embedded directly to the Colorado 2-1-1 website. This is a free and confidential community referral service that connects individuals with resources which provide food, shelter, rent assistance, clothing, child care options and other types of community assistance.^{ix} The OHYS continues to maintain and make available listings of relevant legal, educational, and victims' rights and organizations for homeless youth. The link can be found here: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dola/office-homeless-youth-services-ohys>.

Youth Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement System (Y-CAHPS): The OHYS participated in the development of Y-CAHPS. Y-CAHPS prioritizes homeless youth based on their vulnerability for available housing resources in the Denver Metro Area. This helps to efficiently utilize the limited resources available and ensure appropriate housing intervention is used when serving homeless youth.

Youth Host Homes: This intervention has been found to be effective with homeless youth in rural communities where traditional resources are scarce. "Host Homes entail a formalized mutual agreement between a community member and a service provider. The community member provides shelter, food and sometimes transportation for youth, while the provider delivers case management services."^x In recent years, a demonstration project was launched, a guidebook was developed, and in the coming year continued training will be provided throughout the State to increase utilization.

Youth Summits: The summer Youth Summit was hosted by the Rural Collaborative and Mile High Behavioral Health, and brought together community mental health centers and youth service providers. Over 45 youth and 25 agency partners participated to bring awareness to the mental health needs of homeless and run-away youth. In November 2015, the OHYS, in collaboration with the Colorado Office of Children, Youth, and Families, Spark Community Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, Shiloh House, and Unfolding Directions hosted the 7th annual ACHY Youth Summit to kick off Colorado's Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month. This event involves homeless youth in both planning and event implementation. A variety of training opportunities were provided to both youth and service providers.

Continued Progress

In the coming year, the OHYS plans to continue with the initiatives listed above. In addition, the OHYS will prioritize evaluation and implementation of improved processes to most accurately capture comprehensive data throughout the state, as the current methodology appears not to accurately capture instances of youth homelessness. The scope of the problem must be better established in order to end youth homelessness by 2020. The OHYS is committed to continuing efforts to better coordinate services to ensure youth are connected with appropriate resources. This will include coordinating and integrating youth providers with the larger matrix of service providers across the state. The OHYS will coordinate the effort to bring new resources to Colorado by expanding current initiatives and continuing to act as a community resource.

ⁱ The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, HUD, www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2015-AHAR-Part-1.pdf

ⁱⁱ Colorado House Bill 04-1107, Colorado General Assembly, www.statebillinfo.com/bills/bills/04/1107_01.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ PIT and HIC guides, HUD, www.hudexchange.info/hdx/guides/pit-hic/

^{iv} The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, HUD, www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2015-AHAR-Part-1.pdf

^v Opening Doors, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, www.usich.gov/goals/youth

^{vi} Family Unification Program, HUD,

http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/family

^{vii} PIT and HIC guides, HUD, www.hudexchange.info/hdx/guides/pit-hic/

^{viii} SOAR works, SAMHSA, <http://soarworks.prainc.com/>

^{ix} Mile High 211, United Way, <http://www.unitedwaydenver.org/2-1-1>

^x Housing and Outreach Strategies for Rural Youth, National Alliance to End Homelessness http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/Housing%20and%20Outreach%20Strategies_final.pdf