



Summit County Continuum of Care (SCCoC) *a collaboration of agencies working together for the homeless*

*Each person is a branch of
strength within the community.
Strong branches make
a strong community!*

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

FR-6700-N-35

Summit County Continuum of Care (SCCoC) is not requesting participation as a rural community in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) through this application. The geographic area that this application covers is the entire Akron/Barberton/Summit County CoC (OH-506).

NARRATIVE

YAB INTERGRATION

1. The Continuum of Care is the collaborative body, consisting of Summit County CoC (SCCoC) members, including formerly homeless individuals and advocates, interested community members, government agencies, and organizations that serve homeless individuals and families. The SCCoC Board, comprised of elected and appointed positions, acts on behalf of the full SCCoC to maintain direction and oversight for the mission of the SCCoC. The Board must include representation from at least one homeless or formerly homeless constituent. The Board has the authority to establish SCCoC Committees and Workgroups, which are responsible for specific activities and strategies, and which will be reported to the Board.

The SCCoC and its governing structure are integrally involved in designing a coordinated community response to youth homelessness. The SCCoC partners identify and engage youth who serve on the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and support the development and implementation of the youth homeless system. The YAB chairperson has a designated seat on the SCCoC Board, and the Vice chair is a non-voting member. Youth requests, concerns, proposals, ideas can originate from a multitude of sources. Once a matter is identified, the decision-making process to address the matter is presented to the Youth Advisory Board Officers by the CoC Youth



Coordinator. The YAB Officers then present it to YAB members and staff. Depending upon the nature of the matter the YAB Chairperson could present this matter to the CoC Board for recommendation. All feedback is taken into consideration by YAB members, and they make recommendations on how proceed with the matter and take a vote. Once the vote is taken and the decision is made the YAB chairperson presents it to Youth Coordinator and collectively implements the new initiative via training, webinar, or meeting, and then presents it to the YAB staff and members. *(See attachment 1 for YAB Decision Making Flow Chart)*

2. The CoC prioritizes authentic youth collaboration by having youth participate at all levels, whether by serving on the Lived Experience Committee, participating in monitoring CoC funded agencies, by representing the CoC at housing related meetings, by being a voting member of the CoC Board, attending both CoC Steering Committee and Youth Summit Up meetings, by spearheading all youth outreach efforts including Point In Time Counts, and by contributing their ideas and candid feedback to any and all CoC initiatives. The CoC ensures that youth are compensated equitably for their expertise and time. The CoC pays our youth a competitive hourly rate or per diem. The YAB membership holds elections for its officers every January meeting. The officers consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Social Media Coordinator, and Special Events Coordinator. YAB members and the CoC Youth Coordinator prepare youth by holding a weekly Youth Huddle to review relevant issue, review YAB initiatives, discuss upcoming events, review caseloads and client concerns, to ensure the YAB is knowledgeable when informing and enhancing the work of the CoC. Since the YAB Chair and Vice-Chair are part of the CoC Board of Trustees, they function as liaisons reporting to both the YAB membership and CoC on the activities and initiatives of both groups. The YAB Chair currently chairs the CoC Steering Committee as well as participates in the Youth Summit Up workgroup; at both monthly meetings, the YAB Chair or other member reports on the work of the youth. Preparation prior to the monthly YAB meeting includes reviewing previous meeting minutes, developing an agenda, and reassuring youth themselves



to ask questions of committee members or those facilitating planning. YAB members and staff attend community-wide meetings, workshops, seminars, and webinars that deal with a multitude of housing-relevant issues such as, HUD housing programs, trauma-informed care, Mental Health First AID, health equity, domestic violence, human trafficking, youth violence prevention, mentorship, LGBTQ+/SOGIE training and more. This spring YAB members attended the National Network for Youth conference in Washington D.C. and participated in Capitol Hill Day where they met privately with Ohio's two U.S. Senators and their staff to advocate for youth experiencing homelessness. Additionally, youth are included and educated in the debrief process where all key stakeholders come together to assess previous applications, attend forums and any other opportunity presented to illicit their feedback. During these sessions youth can get answers to any remaining or new questions and receive reinforcement of their importance in the work of fighting to prevent and end youth homelessness.

3. Youth are prepared, debriefed, and otherwise supported for participation in committee meetings by maintaining regular communication through multiple platforms such as in-person and virtual meetings, social media, email listserv, text blast, hotline, and website. The CoC Youth Coordinator meets weekly with the YAB Outreach Specialist, Youth Ambassador and Chairperson who are paid staff to discuss current housing issues, projects, and requests. During these meetings YAB staff are prepped and encouraged to attend relevant meetings to engage key community partners, share goals, and identify ways to collaborate. During our YAB monthly meetings experts are invited to facilitate trainings for youth on topics like Advocacy 101, LGBTQ+ allyship, Mental Health First Aid, violence prevention, financial literacy, workforce development, addiction, and youth housing programs. Youth Advisory Board members accompany CoC staff to meetings for leadership development and mentorship to prepare them for any current or future leadership roles. Depending upon the type of event, youth who participate in local meetings and other events are provided one on one training with



the Youth Coordinator to ensure they are fully informed. For example, the YAB attended the recent Akron Mayoral Candidate Forum sponsored by the local chapter of the Urban League. Prior to the event youth staff distributed published information about each candidate and their positions on local issues. A local political activist facilitated an Advocacy 101 training at a monthly meeting for the YAB membership. The YAB members formulated questions about youth and youth homelessness for the candidates to answer. Voter registration forms are available at every YAB meeting and youth assist their peers in completing the applications when needed. As in past years, the YAB organized a group trip to the polls to vote.

4. Youth with the lived experience of homelessness are integral in new project design and implementation. For example, the Ohio Department of Health Youth Homelessness Prevention grant has provided the funding that allows the CoC to employ three youths with lived experience of homelessness to assist Category I and II youth. To provide immediate rental/utility assistance to youth who are in need of housing, pending evictions and/or utility disconnections, our Youth Outreach Specialist conducts intakes from referrals received via the YAB HOTLINE, website, social media accounts and other youth service providers. Once the intake is completed the Outreach Specialist provides a warm handoff to the YAB Chairperson who offers peer support, and light case management to help youth navigate through the process of sustaining housing. Our Youth Ambassador engages these and other youth to join and participate in YAB with a goal of becoming a member. This allows youth staff to track progress and ensure they are successful in maintaining their housing. This strategy allows us to prevent youth from entering the homelessness system which reduces the probability of them becoming chronically homeless. In 2022, this program assisted 47 youth. The CoC administer these unrestricted funds by streamlining the process and taking advantage of our inherent flexibility, while YAB members and staff can quickly place housing dollars into the lives of those who need them.



5. One initiative outside of applying for grant funds and related to youth homelessness that has been implemented by the YAB is WERK IT! program. The program utilizes unsolicited, unrestricted funds from the GAR foundation to assist unemployed/underemployed youth with incidental expenses that accompany obtaining job training, employment, or contract opportunities within the current gig economy. Often youth who grew up in the foster care system and aged out, youth who have a history of running away, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth with justice system involvement are in need specialized, incidental supports to help them to successfully enter the job market.

Youth income levels are an area of concern identified by the 2021 Youth Needs Assessment commissioned by the Summit County CoC. For example, young African American males as a group did not increase their income levels after involvement with housing services. Asking youth with lived experience to weigh in on barriers to employment and income growth, the feedback that the YAB received is that often there are incidental expenses associated with obtaining employment that, while may seem small, are insurmountable for youth without income, a safety net, or reliable familial support. WERK IT! can pay for healthcare worker supplies, such as scrubs, shoes, and background checks. The funds can be used for trade positions tools, uniforms, and protective gear. For those youth in the cosmetology field WERK IT! funding can pay for specific kits and supplies needed as well as paying the fees for licensure for nail technicians, estheticians, massage therapist, and beauticians. If a youth has a great idea and wants to start their own business, WERK IT! program can help them to reach that goal. Youth will receive business-related financial education and be paired with a mentor in their chosen field. Once a youth successfully completes the program, they can get a funded LLC and become a legal business owner. Additionally, costs associated with obtaining a GED, record expungement, and obtaining a Certificate of Employability for youth with justice system involvement are available. WERK IT! can pay for costs associated



with obtaining copies of birth certificates and social security cards. This is by no means a comprehensive list.

(See attachment 2 for WERK IT!! Application)

6. The CoC employs YAB members who work directly with the CoC Youth Coordinator to conduct street outreach, offer peer navigation, case management and referrals to other resources. Their employment with the CoC benefits both the organization as well as the youth. Youth gain professional work experience, on the job training and develop leadership and advocacy skills. Involving youth at all levels of homelessness system planning will ensure that the design of the system is informed by their lived experiences and will demonstrate that the community prioritizes its commitment to ending youth homelessness. Youth are compensated at a rate of \$19.00/hour which is comparable to a traditional employee in this position. Youth meeting attendees are provided bus passes and/or gas cards to facilitate transportation to and from meetings. YAB members are incentivized for meeting attendance and assistance at YAB-sponsored community events with gift cards of their choice, whether for using multiple forms of payment based upon youth choice such as direct cash transfers, electronic gift cards, or gas cards. While at the YAB meetings youth receive meals, food pantry items, case management and information about youth-specific programs. YAB members who are parenting youth are encouraged to bring their children to meetings to ensure that lack of childcare is not a barrier to meeting attendance.

7. We believe youth should have the freedom and power to be the leaders of our own lives. Our autonomy should be promoted as we make decisions about issues impacting us. The CoC is committed to shifting local power and paradigms to achieve authentic youth collaboration. Our progress as an organization is dependent upon full participation and leadership of youth with lived experience. The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is comprised of youth under the age of 24 of whom 2/3 are formerly homeless. Our Board informs and advises on policies and practices that directly impact youth housing instability. We provide an array of individual



experiences that shape systems and services to be more effective. Our YAB advocates for youth experiencing housing instability by collaborating on youth-driven solutions that empower young people to exercise their rights. We strive to lower barriers and improve accessibility by exploring untapped resources and improving upon those that already exist. We assist young people most affected by the trauma of housing instability to move themselves from the margins to the epicenter of this work. Authentic collaboration means that youth are fully involved in planning, development, action, reflection, evaluation, and follow-up. Our CoC puts emphasis on ensuring youth who have been overlooked have opportunities for growth and development so that they have a seat at the table. Our YAB has paid positions that specifically outreach, conduct intakes, peer navigate, case manage, refer, and recruit youth for membership to continuously expose them to new opportunities that otherwise might not be afforded to us.

COMMUNITY NEED

1. On May 28, 2021, the Partnership Center, Ltd conducted a needs assessment in coordination with the Summit County Continuum of Care, Summit County Public Health, Akron Public Schools, Summit County Children Services, Summit County Juvenile Courts, and 48 other organizations serving youth in Summit County.

(See attachment 3 for 2021 Youth Risk Needs Assessment)

a. Using the US Census Bureau's estimated of the population of youth in Summit County and half the rate from the Voices of Youth Count statistics, it is estimated that 1,677 youth are homeless in Summit County each year. Moreover, an additional 1,244 youth are at risk of homelessness in situations that involve couch surfing and therefore may be counted as homeless by funding agencies and providers outside of HUD.

b. The most significant racial equity findings for Summit County's housing projects showed up in comparison of white youth to youth of color. Note that in Summit County, the category "youth of color"



refers predominantly to youth who identify either as Black/African American or mixed race. Black/African Americans make up only 15% of Summit County's overall population however, these youth are severely overrepresented in the county's homeless population. Racial groups who are disproportionately affected by poverty tend to also be disproportionately affected by homelessness. In June 2020 Summit County Council declared racism a public health crisis. The resolution highlighted income, wealth and health disparities between Black and white residents and stated racism as a cause of disproportionately high rates of homelessness, incarceration and poor outcomes in education and health, as well as economic hardship.

(See attachment 4 for Summit County Declaration on Racism)

Ohio ranks 45th in the nation in overall infant mortality; in Summit County non-Hispanic Blacks/African Americans have 2.3 times the infant mortality rate as non-Hispanic whites. 48% of all youth in RRH are parenting, which means that they have children accompanying them in the RRH project. Almost all parenting youth in RRH are women – only one was male. Moreover, it is worth noting that young Black women are much more likely to be parenting in an RRH project than our young white women. Indeed, 72% of all parenting youth in Summit County's RRH projects are Black women. Additionally, identified LGBTQ+ youth and youth experiencing domestic violence were directly raised in the youth risk assessment as examples that are known to be under reported and therefore underserved.

c. Based upon this youth needs assessment the key findings are that existing emergency shelter has capacity but is not youth appropriate. The shortage of youth-specific transitional housing and the RRH programs struggle to place youth with the limited housing market in Summit County. Youth experiencing homelessness in Summit County are most served by ES projects. In total, 451 youth were served in 2019 by an emergency shelter, while 74 youth were served in TH, 55 in RRH, and 30 in PSH. Interestingly, youth also make up a larger percentage of all individuals served in ES, while they make up an increasingly smaller portion of persons served in TH,



RRH, and PSH. Some clients are enrolled in more than one housing project. Therefore, it is not possible to simply add up all the numbers of unaccompanied youth in each project type to get an accurate total number. However, using more advanced techniques with HMIS data, it is possible to determine that in 2019, 498 distinct youth were served in a housing project. Note that although there are HMIS projects that provide services only, all youth who were enrolled in these services were also enrolled in a housing project. Therefore, the total number of youths served in a homeless housing or service project in Summit County during the 2019 calendar year is 498 youth.

d. The author of this report facilitated a “Youth Think Tank,” which is a focus group-style session with youth who were currently experiencing homelessness and receiving housing and/or services from at least one of the community’s providers. After an introductory discussion of their circumstances and particular experiences, the youth were asked questions pertaining to improving access and outcomes in Summit County’s housing and services. Importantly, the confidentiality of individual responses was ensured, and no providers were allowed to be present at the think tank. Confidentiality is crucial during the needs assessment process because it encourages both positive and critical feedback. All youth providers in our community such as housing providers, counseling agencies, case management, and school liaisons contributed to the distribution of the needs assessment. This included youth residents of our permanent housing, transitional housing and rapid re-housing beds and emergency shelter beds within the community. The primary focus of the needs assessment was to capture the opinions of homeless youth in our community and identify what they believe are missing resources and barriers to them engaging with housing providers and other supportive service opportunities. Services covered were outreach, youth housing navigators, mental health services, employment/education, and life skills training.



2. The CoC is developing a community-wide strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness in Summit County, focusing upon strategies and action steps that advance priorities identified by individuals with lived experience. Special attention will be paid to equitably serving BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and people who are differently abled. A major component of the strategic plan focuses on achieving functional zero for youth homelessness. First, our community does not have a youth-specific shelter and needs one with staff experienced in providing trauma-informed services. When faced with limited shelter options youth often stay with friends or family members temporarily or becomes victims of exploitation. Since the current system does not consider these youth as Category I homeless, existing services cannot provide them with housing. Ideally this youth specific shelter would provide on-site wrap-around services including case management, education completion/job readiness, easy access to physical/mental health services, assistance with legal issues, transportation, and obtaining permanent housing. Secondly, Summit County has a shortage of youth transitional housing units. Youth experiencing homelessness often lack the support and financial resources to obtain housing on their own. More TH programs with built in support would assist youth to gain stability and independence. These programs would help youth obtain life and interpersonal skills, provide educational opportunities, assist with job preparation and attainment, and ensure that physical and mental health care needs are met. Thirdly, the CoC seeks again to secure funding to engage landlords willing to work with youth who are first time renters, who don't have income, or have prior evictions/legal issues. The CoC piloted a successful Landlord Mitigation Program and discovered that incentivizing landlords, helped build and foster relationships that increased access to housing stock, prevented evictions, and reduced the stigma surrounding renting to youth. Lastly, using the information collected the CoC identified gaps in services and work to implemented relevant interventions based upon the responses. With this data we can create new resources, tools, and best practices. For example, the responses to this Youth PIT survey revealed 75% of youth were not aware of local housing programs for youth.



As a result, the YAB and CoC launched a comprehensive marketing campaign to make housing information accessible by branding and creating new marketing materials, creating a YAB website, increasing participation in local events, implementing a targeted social media presence, creating a YAB HOTLINE and street card, conducting face-to-face peer outreach efforts, and establishing partnerships with local universities to address homelessness amongst college students. The primary barrier to implementing or improving many of these youth focused interventions is the lack of funding available.

3. Our community has experienced a record-high opioid overdose spike during the pandemic and still to this day. The spike in deaths was caused in part by the pandemic, a sentiment echoed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The widespread use of opiates and methamphetamine in our community triggered an increase in housing instability and in the number of youths dealing with substance abuse issues and living on the street. As a result, more children are entered the child welfare system which increases their chances of becoming homeless, as the data shows. 58,000 people are evicted from their homes every year in Ohio. The City of Akron has the highest eviction rate in the state and ranks 24th in the nation. More than 20 percent of Akron's population lives in poverty. About ten families are evicted every day without having another housing option. According to our local Fair Housing Agency the high eviction rate is being compounded by other issues in our community like lack of affordable housing, increasing rent rates, and conditions of properties not being kept habitable.

4. The CoC has a process of assessing racial equity at multiple levels: systemically, internally and within partner organizations using HMIS data. Preliminary data revealed that BIPOC comprise 60% of the population accessing shelters, but only make up 15% of the population in our county. Since reviewing the data, our CoC has made a concerted effort to recruit more Black- and Brown-led organizations and organizations that exclusively serve BIPOCs to join our board and become CoC members. Over the past two years we have



increased our board composition and continuum members representing BIPOC persons from 8% to 25%. These organizations have also been selected to serve on our Ranking and Review committee, that are charged with implementing the evaluation process and updating scoring tools used to rank projects. The ranking and review committee added equity factors to the Ranking and Review tool, to be scored in future years, which assesses an organization's leadership, governance, and policies to ensure equity is not only happening with front line staff but also with those who are in positions of power. The committee reviews program participant outcomes to assure providers are reviewing their data to identify the programmatic changes needed to make outcomes more equitable and then implement these changes.

The CoC focuses data collection on racial equity and outcomes within our housing system. By integrating a strong racial equity lens, the CoC has identified systemic issues and disproportionate effects of homelessness on minority households. OH-506 was selected to participate in HUD's Coordinated Entry Equity Initiative Cohort 2 where we analyze HMIS data, assessment tools and other policies and processes that may create barriers to housing for overrepresented populations. Over the past year, our cohort has collaborated with individuals with lived experience to transform how our Housing Specialists perform intakes. The CoC understands that in order to accurately assess and effectively eliminate racial inequities, quantitative data analysis must be coupled with qualitative analysis. Centering the work on Racial Equity and prioritizing the voices of those with lived experience in our system were the foundations for the redesign of the vulnerability index utilized by our CoC for prioritization of consumers. Our revisions helped remove cultural biases and sharpened the equity lens of our Coordinated Entry process. *(See attachment 5 for Racial Equity Assessment) (See attachment 6 OH-506 Intake Assessment Form)*

5. The CoC is committed to promoting an inclusive and supportive environment for all youth, including those who identify as LGBTQ+, gender non-conforming and nonbinary. We of the CoC and YAB recognize the



unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ youth and are dedicated to creating and to linking them with the necessary resources and support to guarantee their success. YAB provides an annual allyship training for youth to not only create an environment that invites greater diversity and inclusion but also to foster positive relationships within the group.

Our local Fair Housing Agency in conjunction with LGBTQ+ housing providers conducts an annual Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE) training that is mandatory for CoC members. In addition to training the CoC requires all partner agencies to submit and maintain an Anti-Discrimination policy for Equal Access to housing in HUD programs in accordance with an Individual's Gender Identity, Regardless of Sexual Orientation. We firmly believe that everyone deserves to be treated with kindness and empathy, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. The CoC has a community wide anti-bullying policy that outlines strict protocols to address any incidents of discrimination or harassment, ensuring that every youth feels protected and supported.

The CoC recognizes that supporting homeless LGBTQ+ youth goes beyond policies and programs—it requires creating a culture of acceptance and celebration. While data on the sexual orientation and gender identity of homeless youth are not universally collected, studies show disproportionate rates of homelessness among LGBTQ+ youth compared to non-LGBTQ+ youth. Our Youth Summit Up workgroup added questions to the Coordinated Entry Intake pertaining to youth LGBTQ+ clients and as a result discovered gaps in service. To fill these gaps CoC secured funding to create two programs for this underserved population. *Lavender Landing* offers TH RRH with a Housing First approach to self-identifying LGBTQ+ community members, ages 18 to 29. Staff assist in life skills development and with housing search/placement, acting as liaisons to landlords, and providing service coordination. *Lavender Landing* collaborates with providers responsive to LGBTQ+ needs. *AxessPointe* Healthcare Center is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) provides services at low-to-no



cost to participants. Youth requiring specialized LGBTQ+ medical services are referred to the Summa Pride Clinic. In addition, The CoC secured funds to create the Bayard Rustin LGBTQ+ Resource Center which provides youth-specific services to LGBTQ+ such as housing case management, food pantry, transgender youth groups, weekly free Community Dinners, onsite COVID-19, HIV/STD testing, and more. The Bayard Rustin Center works closely with the Youth Advisory Board and has hosted its meetings; in turn, YAB members volunteer at the Center, signing in people for the weekly dinners and other events. Our Bayard Rustin LGBTQ+ Resource Center also conducts targeted outreach for homelessness youth who identify as LGBTQ+, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming.

Summit County Children Services is implementing a policy where youth will have the option to file under preferred names and pronouns. When intakes are done at our local youth SOS Drop-in Center clients are able to identify as their preferred gender in their private intake room. Information and pamphlets about resources specific to LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming youth are readily available. They also conduct surveys that ask their youth if they feel that S.O.S. respects their gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion. We place transgender youth and adults in safe and appropriate shelter and housing programs based upon both their gender identity and an individualized assessment. Shelter staff are trained on how to be an ally to LGBTQ+ individuals and written policies are put in place to keep discrimination from occurring. TH for LGBTQ+ people and youth provide an opportunity for a safe space to provide dedicated services for those who need it most. It is also beneficial for LGBTQ+ individuals who are experiencing homelessness to see LGBTQ+ staff working at shelters, since they can provide unique understanding and inspiration.

(See attachment 7 for Bayard Rustin LGBTQ+ Resource Center Annual Report)

COLLABORATION



1. The Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) is an active partner in all CoC By-Name list meetings. AMHA and Summit County Children Services (PCWA) work with the CoC in administering the Family Unification Program. Family Unification Vouchers help provide a much-needed service for youth, especially youth on the verge of becoming emancipated or aging out of foster care, who are considered “housed” and do not meet the HUD criteria for Category I homelessness.

In response to this, the CoC collaborated with AMHA and SCCS and was awarded 37 Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers for youth ages 18 to 24 who left foster care and are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless at age 16 or older. Without these vouchers it would be less likely for the involved agencies to be able to meet the needs of those youth who lack adequate housing and supportive services. Additionally, the CoC was awarded 101 Emergency Housing vouchers to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness, prioritizing recently homeless parenting youth (may include participants in rapid rehousing) for whom providing rental assistance would prevent the family from being homeless or having an elevated risk of housing instability.

2. The Akron Public Schools Homeless Liaison and McKinney Vento program, Project Rise, works closely with the CoC and its members. There is a Project Rise representative on the CoC Youth Summit-Up Workgroup and Steering Committee. In these meetings, Project Rise staff update CoC members on available education resources for the youth in the programs. United Way, our HMIS Lead, collaborates with Project Rise to identify school-age youth who are experiencing homelessness. Project Rise is responsible for ensuring that the educational needs of students experiencing homelessness are met. In the past 2 years, Project Rise has appointed two Academic Advocates, an unaccompanied youth advocate and a shelter advocate with specialties to assist youth and families served by the CoC. The primary responsibility of these positions is to remove barriers to education these two populations often face. The Unaccompanied Youth Advocate specializes in serving youth



who are living without a legal guardian, who are in need of securing social security cards, applying for benefits, and supporting their transitions after graduation. The Shelter Advocate works with shelter staff and CoC members to ensure families are aware of their educational rights and monitors attendance barriers for families who are living in a shelter setting.

For all students, the mission of Project Rise is "To ensure that the Akron Public Schools Homeless Youth have access to the same educational opportunities as all students. Project Rise does this by working to identify these students and then removing barriers to education. Youth Advocates at the shelters send a roster of children, ages 0-22, to Project Rise so that the CoC can track and serve all the children staying in shelter. The CoC members are instrumental in assisting with the identification of students experiencing homelessness through data-sharing agreements and shelter lists. Project Rise steps in to inform parents of their school choices, enrollment support, and transportation options.

3. N/A

4. The CoC is actively working with Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) to collaborate and leverage healthcare resources to better address the health risks that are connected to homelessness. Housing status is a key social determinant of health. Medicaid can be a valuable resource for helping individuals facing housing insecurity, and research shows that investing in housing can save money and improve health. Many youths experiencing homelessness suffer from mental illness, substance use disorders and HIV/AIDS at rates that are significantly higher than the general population. Many youths experiencing or at risk of homelessness qualify for Medicaid. During intake, CE Housing Specialists are now required to ask persons experiencing homelessness if they have insurance coverage; and if they are covered, they are then asked to provide the name of their insurance carrier. We send referrals to their providers to increase access to additional health services and resources that have been historically underutilized such as prevention, testing and treatment of STIs, mental



and physical health supports, and treatment of substance abuse disorders. The CoC is finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with all 7 Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) to track data that provides information on the intersection between homelessness and elevated levels of health care utilization.

Equitas Health Inc. provides Summit County with Ryan White services for individuals living with HIV. AxessPointe Community Healthcare is a local FQHC that provides physical health, mental health services, dental, and optometry services are accessed at low-to-no cost to participants. This includes well-child visits and immunizations, health screenings, and disease management for common conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, in addition to dental services, women's health services, and vision screenings. Youth requiring specialized LGBTQ+ medical services are referred to the Summa Pride Clinic. Navigate Counseling is a resource for other LGBTQ+ specific mental health needs and resources. In addition, The CoC secured funds to create the Bayard Rustin Drop-in Resource Center which provides youth-specific services to LGBTQ+ case management including onsite COVID-19, HIV, and STI testing. Unsheltered youth are able to access primary care services and behavioral health services through the FQHC operated by Community Support Services. This dramatically reduces the barriers to obtaining healthcare and individuals receive services regardless of their ability to pay.

5. Foster youth on the verge of becoming emancipated are considered "housed" and do not meet the HUD criteria for Category I homelessness. The PCWA is given the ability to select a placement setting for youth through age 18 yet is not given this ability for them after they turn eighteen. This leaves the young adult in a homeless situation, as they are not able to be placed in substitute care through a PCWA because they are no longer children.

To prevent youth being released into homelessness, the CoC collaborates with Summit County Children Services (SCCS) to provide vouchers and limited transitional housing to youth leaving foster care to reduce the



frequency of youth homelessness once they age out of the child welfare system. The CoC collaborates with Juvenile Court to receive direct referrals for youth who are reentering society and identify as homeless. We receive Community Transitional Programming funds (CTP) that can be used for those exiting or recently exited state prisons, county jails, and halfway houses who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. The referrals come from The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction, and they can receive up to \$2,000 per referral. They have workers assigned to each facility and these individuals must have participated in mental health or addiction treatment. Often, clients who are homeless and have mental health issues, are neurodivergent, or otherwise differently abled can receive vouchers through agencies such as Community Support Services, Goodwill, Portage Path Behavioral Health, or Coleman Health Services for DD Housing Choice or Shelter Plus Care vouchers. Our CoC along with local mental health agencies and other community partners meet monthly to review a by-name list for chronically homeless individuals to coordinate housing for those most vulnerable who are in need.

6. *(See Attachment 8 PCWA Letter of Support Attachment)*

YOUTH COLLABORATION

1. **The Mission:** To utilize the lived experiences of the homeless and formerly homeless youth of Summit County in providing guidance and leadership; to advocate for those without a voice in the processes and practices that directly impact youth; to collaborate with other community stakeholders on youth-driven solutions that empower young people to exercise their rights, to utilize community resources, and to bring issues dealing with youth housing instability and its effects to the public eye.

2. The YAB has been in existence since August 2018

- a. The YAB has 15 members
- b. The YAB meets once a month. The YAB Officers and staff meet weekly.



c. The YAB Chairperson is a voting member on the CoC Board. The CoC also employs a YAB Youth Outreach Specialist, Youth Ambassador, and YAB Chairperson who have a dedicated office in the SCCoC offices. They regularly attend and participate in SCCoC staff meetings where homeless system response decisions are made. YAB members conduct peer navigation in youth specific Transitional Housing programs. Their input and feedback are sought after from youth providers to inform, provide opportunities for youth development, confidence-building, and leadership.

3. Yes, our current membership is reflective of the population we serve.

a. Currently, our YAB membership is comprised 73 % youth of color, with 33% identifying as LGBTQ+.

b. YAB members and staff are intentional about recruiting youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, and gender nonconforming youth for our YAB. Both members and staff attend Wednesday dinners located at the Bayard Rustin LGBTQ+ Resource Center. They conduct weekly street outreach with Downtown Akron Partnership outreach teams, perform intakes that come through on our YAB HOTLINE or through our YAB website. The YAB social media officer posts weekly invitations for youth to join and a text blast is sent to current YAB members reminding them to attend meetings and events and to bring a friend. YAB meetings are held regularly at youth housing and service provider locations such as Youth Street Outreach Services Drop-in Center. Our Youth Ambassador is also a Youth Guidance Counselor in Akron Public Schools and has direct access to at-risk youth. Additionally, our YAB chairperson conducts outreach at meal sites, encampments, recovery meetings, and at faith-based organizations. Lastly, YAB members host multiple events to recruit youth who do not traditionally utilize mainstream resources due to lack of knowledge. For instance, youth are encouraged to attend our annual YAB cookout where there is no membership requirement and youth can enjoy a free meal, spend time with peers and engage with youth with lived experience to learn YAB Membership. YAB Officers continue to review membership and revise their strategy to recruit more members regularly.



4. Barriers to sustaining a Youth Advisory Board include the lack of funding for yearly stipends for members and transportation to meetings. Due to YAB meetings being voluntary it can be challenging to sustain consistent attendance. Personal challenges such as transportation, legal issues, employment, housing instability, mental health, substance abuse and incarceration are factors that prevent youth from attending meetings. According to the YAB Chairperson the biggest challenge is “getting people to realize that it is beneficial to them and to the kids who will come after them if they get active and speak up for themselves. Sometimes when so much has gone wrong or been a struggle, you do not believe people really want to help or want to listen to your story. Or you do not see how telling your story over and over will do any good.”

5. Based on feedback provided by youth during YAB meetings, events, focus groups and surveys conducted, the most common risk factors for youth homelessness are dysfunctional family dynamics, youth aging out of foster care, family rejection due to sexual orientation, and substance abuse. According to members of YAB the biggest areas of risk in the current youth homeless system are for youth who suffer from addiction, youth who aged out of foster care without a support system in place, and the need for housing with programs that include wrap around services. Multiple youth identified the need for temporary housing/shelters that are “safe spaces.” When asked to define what a safe space means to them, their answers invariably included “somewhere free from violence and drug-use.” Some youth also mentioned the act of being solicited for sex as making spaces “dangerous.” One youth stated that to “stay clean” she slept in her car rather than go back to the local homeless shelter because of the presence of drugs available at that shelter. Two youth stated that they could not go back to their families because of the drug use in their homes, which was why they initially had been placed in the foster care system. One youth asked, “If I can’t go home or to the shelter and stay clean, where do I go?” Another youth pointed out how being in a shelter with “older people who have made being homeless a way of life is depressing...I don’t want to live this way forever and want to be around people who want more in life.”



One youth discussed that she couldn't have her children with her in-shelter when addressing her substance abuse issues; another mentioned that while they "didn't have anything against religion" they would have preferred to stay in a more secular setting and "less faith-based" so that they could speak openly about "what you go through on the streets...". Lack of transition planning increases the risk of youth becoming homeless upon release from the juvenile justice system and increases the likelihood of recidivism.

6. Youth shelters provide a safe place to live while dealing with risk factors and challenges that have caused homelessness. When a youth enters a shelter, this can be a healthy decision to seek support and to start resolving their issues. A highly individualized, wraparound program designed to meet the immediate needs of homeless youth and can equip them with the tools they need to grow into healthy, independent adults. Youth can remain enrolled until our case managers locate a stable alternative living arrangement. While in shelter youth will receive the following no-cost services: food, clothing, personal hygiene products, medical service, mental health, and dental care.

Education services outside of traditional classrooms can help youth who have experienced homelessness to thrive. The shelter that we want for our community will provide educational opportunities through field trips, community service projects, social activities, and opportunities for mentorship.

Group and individual counseling and on-site psychiatric care help clients to understand and address mental problems that might otherwise prevent them from achieving success both during and after their stay. During their time in shelter, all youth receive age-appropriate life skills training. Some examples include financial literacy, cooking, healthy communication skills, and college and career readiness. This shelter will be open to all youth, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, CPS status or juvenile justice system involvement.



7. From a youth perspective if selected for YHDP, we would define success as having a youth specific shelter in our community that serves youth ages 18-24, open 24/7, 365 days a year. This shelter would provide services on-site such as mental health services, addictions services (possibly a 3-day onsite detox room), assistance with signing up for benefits, healthcare, legal assistance, hands on job training, assistance obtaining a G.E.D. and/or applying for college, housing navigators, transportation, and peer support at no cost to the youth. The shelter would also provide life skills classes, financial literacy courses in which youth would learn how to pay bills and become successful renters on the path to homeownership. The shelter will help meet the immediate needs of homeless youth with the tools we need to grow into healthy independent adults. This shelter will be open to all youth, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, CPS status or juvenile justice system involvement.

Additionally, we envision a housing community where youth can transition from shelter to their own unit. Once they have transitioned into their own unit, youth would continue to have access to services available at the shelter. Youth in this housing community will work with a case manager and have access to mentorship opportunities which has been proven to be more effective than traditional therapy. This allows us to not only learn how to live on our own, but how to thrive. This is also a natural opportunity to implement a peer mentorship network. *(See Youth Collaboration Screenshot & Video)*

DATA EVALUATION AND CAPACITY

1. Youth Beds Covered in HMIS

Project Type	Total Youth Beds in HMIS	Total Youth Beds in CoC	HMIS Coverage %
ES	14	14	100%
SH	0	0	0



TH	14	14	100%
RRH	22	22	100%
PSH	12	12	100%
OPH	0	0	0
Total	62	62	100%

2. The CoC requires HMIS staff to work with the child welfare system, juvenile court, and local school system to gather relevant youth data. The CoC collects data concerning emancipated youth ages 18-24 which Summit County Children Services gathers and stores in the *Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System* (SACWIS). The CoC collects data on the local public housing waitlist from Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority which is stored in the *Tenmast* system for public housing authorities. Project Rise/Akron Public Schools gives the CoC data on local students experiencing homelessness; that data is stored in the *ESchool, Tableau and Munis*. Re-Entry Specialists from the Summit County Juvenile Court with whom we partner provide data on juvenile re-entry clients and data is stored in the *Law Enforcement Automated Data (LEADS)* system. The data collected from these entities is stored as aggregate data to use for review and is used reflectively to compare with data that is already stored in HMIS.

3. The CoC worked with the YAB to implement a newly designed youth Point in Time count. The YAB spearheaded the youth PIT count by offering insight on where to look for youth in need of housing and how to survey youth effectively. The count was conducted for 5 days, in conjunction with the McKinney Vento provider and other youth serving organizations. As a result of the data gathered, we identified that 51% of our youth are Category II homeless. Many homeless youths survive by couch surfing and sleeping in cars rather



than entering traditional shelter spaces which results in their "invisibility," causing barriers to them accessing housing and services.

With funding from Summit County Public Health, the YAB provides immediate rental/utility assistance, peer support, and light case management to youth with pending eviction and/or utility disconnections. The implementation of this strategy allows us to prevent youth from entering the homelessness system which reduces the probability of them becoming chronically homeless. In 2022, this program assisted 47 youth.

(See attachment 9 SCCoC 2022 Homeless Report)

4. The CoC Executive Director conducts the evaluation and monitoring of all CoC programs on an annual basis. Financial management, HMIS participation, data quality, CE participation, grant management including comprehensive and accurate client files, DEI, and homeless determination are areas reviewed by the Executive Director. The Executive Director issues the results of all monitoring in a letter to program providers including a request for corrective action plan on any finding(s). Providers with finding(s) are expected to consult with CoC leadership and other providers to address best practices for performance improvement. The Youth Coordinator and Youth Advisory Board members conduct the monitoring visits for all youth programs. Monitoring results are reviewed and discussed at Youth Advisory Board meetings to give youth with lived experience the opportunity to provide feedback to program providers on how to lower barriers, improve accessibility, and encourage providers to implement practices that accommodate diverse abilities and experiences. Monitoring results and YAB feedback are reviewed by the CoC Executive Director and Youth Coordinator for any necessary recommendations.

5. If selected as a YHDP community, we would define success by achieving functional zero for youth homelessness. We would achieve this by improving the coordination of a separate access point for youth, training and hiring dedicated staff to conduct youth-specific assessments which include special questions and



protocols and developing a unique prioritization system that would account for the differences in the experiences of homeless youth versus the experiences of adults. We would prioritize them to ensure that the highest need, most vulnerable youth with the most risk factors are referred to the most appropriate housing programs. Our goal is to standardize and streamline the process for youth access to homeless-dedicated resources across the entire homeless crisis response system, and to increase the opportunities for youth to receive needed housing and supportive services. We know that meeting youth where they are is crucial in this process therefore, implementing a “No Wrong Door” model for youth to receive assistance is key.