



Responding to Youth Homelessness in California:

Three Program Approaches Funded by the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP)

JANUARY 2022

A report by the Division of Social Work and the Center for Health Practice, Policy & Research at the California State University, Sacramento

Prepared for the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (formerly the Homelessness Coordinating and Financing Council) in the California Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency

Executive Summary

In response to a growing crisis of homelessness across the State of California, Senate Bill 850 (2018) established the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) to provide \$500 million for flexible block grants to help communities address the substantial rise in homelessness. The program awarded 54 one-time block grants to 43 Continuums of Care (CoCs)¹ and 11 large cities in California.² HEAP block grants could be allocated to three general funding categories: direct social services (e.g., street outreach, navigation services), rental assistance (e.g., housing subsidies, rapid rehousing programs), or capital improvements (e.g., constructing new shelters or permanent supportive housing units). Moreover, 5% of each grant was required to be spent on programs or services that explicitly address youth homelessness, commonly referred to as the “HEAP youth set-aside”.

This report highlights how some communities leveraged the HEAP youth set-aside funds to specifically support intervention models that increase outreach, engagement, and housing assistance to young people facing homelessness in California.

Youth Homelessness in California and the HEAP youth set-aside

In 2019, an estimated 12,000 unaccompanied youth (ages 16-25) faced homelessness on any given night across California. However, this is likely an underestimate, given that many young people experiencing homelessness cycle through informal living arrangements, which may make them invisible to traditional point-in-time counts (Morton et al. 2018). Nonetheless, it is estimated that California has the largest number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in the U.S.³

The Homelessness Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC)* required jurisdictions to allocate 5% of their HEAP grants specifically for youth services.

Notably, this HEAP youth set-aside broadly defined “services” and allowed jurisdictions to consider the needs of both “homeless youth” and “youth at risk of homelessness.” This flexibility made it possible for jurisdictions to invest in an array of new initiatives and programs, including those that have not been supported by traditional funding for homelessness services. In this report, we discuss three unique and promising program models funded by the HEAP youth set-aside: host homes, rapid rehousing, and flexible funding. Drawing on our interviews with administrators, service providers, and youth who participated in programs in four communities, we explore some of the learned lessons and the impacts of these investments.

Program models and key approaches

Host homes

Investing in community care

Four jurisdictions across California used the HEAP youth set-aside to start new host home programs in their communities, housing a total 138 youth in private homes during the course of the grant period. The host home model builds on a long history of informal hosting practices, which have been a part of marginalized communities’ social safety nets for generations. In recent years the host home model has emerged as a formal strategy to address youth homelessness in the U.S. Host home programs connect youth who are insecurely housed with supportive adult community members willing to host them in their own homes. Hosts are sometimes individuals known to the youth from their own social networks. Programs also provide ongoing assistance to support host home arrangements, such as helping establishing shared household agreements, training hosts, navigating conflict, and doing youth case management and service referral.⁴ Host homes share some similarities with foster homes, but are not part of the child welfare system even when housing minors.⁵

* HCFC is now the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH). HCFC will be used to refer to Cal ICH throughout this report.



Sacramento | Sacramento LGBT Center

The Sacramento LGBT Center provides advocacy, cultural activities and programming for the LGBT community and allies in Sacramento County. In line with the Center's focus on LGBTQ+ youth and addressing housing insecurity, the Center secured HEAP youth set-aside funds to start a host home program for youth ages 18 to 25. The goal of the program was to support and leverage existing kinship hosting arrangements in the community while also recruiting and training new hosts.

Host homes leverage and strengthen youth connections

Relationships are at the heart of host home programs. Providers emphasized the value of hosts' relational support for youth, and worked to equip hosts to meet youth's needs for social and emotional support. One provider reflected on the value of honest conversation between hosts and youth: "[When] you give [hosts] a little more context, information and training, so that they're prepared and they have the right answers... [Those kitchen table conversations are] why host homes are amazing!"

Most programs also provide some type of financial stipend and/or reimbursements to hosts to offset the additional costs associated with a youth staying in their home or those associated with purchasing basic needs items. Across communities, program staff emphasize that this type of financial support is critical to make host homes sustainable for hosts over time.

Host homes complement other housing resources

Some organizations used host homes to bridge gaps in housing and complement other resources in the community. For example, a staff member in San Luis Obispo explained that host homes can

serve as a source of interim housing while waiting for permanent housing:

"The host home, I hope, is a stepping stone to permanent housing...while we've got them in a safe place rather than an encampment or couch surfing, if we can just keep them in one place so we can go to them and work on these things..."

Similarly, in Lake County, Department of Education staff saw this model as a way to provide some stability to students, particularly high school students, as they prepare for the transition to college or other training. While not all host home programs are intended to serve as interim housing, the administrators we spoke to indicated that HEAP-funded host homes helped youth stay housed while waiting for more permanent solutions.

Host homes are low-cost, flexible and scalable

One major benefit of host home programs is that they do not require the development of new built infrastructure. Communities noted that not having to create new housing units would allow them to try a new program idea that was perceived as a needed option for youth in the area, with enough flexibility to allow program adaptation as needed. The flexibility of HEAP allowed many communities to begin a host home program when they otherwise may not have been able to do so.

Rapid rehousing for youth

Supported transitions to permanent housing

Over two dozen communities across the state used their HEAP youth set-aside to fund rapid rehousing programs focused on young adults. These programs ultimately helped 1,582 young people get rehoused quickly. Rapid rehousing is a Housing First intervention that seeks to quickly reconnect individuals and families facing homelessness to permanent housing. The core components of the model include: helping clients identify and secure housing quickly, providing a time-limited subsidy for rental and move-in assistance, and providing ongoing case management to help clients remain stably housed over time.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in adapting the rapid rehousing model to address youth homelessness. Youth may benefit from tailored support to develop independent living skills, like managing household finances and paying for utilities. Rapid rehousing programs for youth in the U.S. commonly support youth for up to two years, in contrast to the short-term support provided by rapid rehousing programs for adults and families.⁶

Rapid rehousing provides youth-focused housing connections with flexible support

Several of the communities we highlight in this report chose to direct their youth set-aside funds toward rapid rehousing, rather than invest in building a

shelter or another brick-and-mortar program. This strategy allowed them to tap into the existing housing infrastructure in the community—the rental market—to expand the housing available to youth facing homelessness.

Program staff described how the flexibility of HEAP also allowed them to amend the traditional rapid rehousing model to better fit the realities and circumstances facing youth. They stressed that some youth benefit from longer periods with rental subsidies than is typical of a rapid rehousing program. The programs also provided more extensive case management services than the typical rapid rehousing program.

Rapid rehousing provides a stable launchpad for the transition to adulthood

Communities that invested their HEAP set-aside toward the rapid rehousing model hoped to help youth facing homelessness make a successful transition to adulthood, whether that meant securing stable employment or completing postsecondary education. As we heard from a number of program staff, homelessness can lead a young person to delay or abandon their postsecondary education, derail their career and life goals, as well as expose young people to risks that can have lifelong consequences. Rapid rehousing is based on the premise that quickly recovering from homelessness is central to helping vulnerable young people identify a path toward their stability, their goals and plans for the future.



David Seibold (CC BY-NC 2.0)

San Luis Obispo County | 5Cities Homeless Coalition

5Cities Homeless Coalition (5CHC) is dedicated to identifying and filling gaps in the homeless services array across San Luis Obispo County. Among its services, 5CHC has operated a rental assistance rapid rehousing program for some time that occasionally housed some youth ages 18-25. HEAP allowed the 5CHC to jump start a range of new youth-focused services and initiatives, including a dedicated rapid rehousing just for youth, a host home program, street outreach, and case management.

Flexible funding

Preventing and addressing youth homelessness with responsive financial support

Some communities used part of their HEAP youth set-aside to provide flexible, short-term, financial assistance to youth experiencing homelessness. These funds were sometimes referred to as a “flexible housing pool,” a “flexible spending fund,” “flexible fund,” or “flexible housing funding.” The definition and core components of flexible funding vary widely. However, the central aim of this type of intervention is to quickly address individual needs related to housing stability through direct assistance. Flexible funds can be used to help clients secure or maintain housing through move in and utility assistance, housing deposits, moving costs, housing applications, housing stabilization supports (e.g. a gift card for food when someone moves in). Flexible funding can sometimes be used to pay an individual’s rent or back rent, generally through one-time or short-term assistance to prevent immediate eviction.

Flexible funds allow programs to respond to youth’s immediate needs

Flexible funds capitalize on the fact that communities were allowed to determine how best to use HEAP funds, within the broad parameters of homelessness services and prevention. In Lake County, staff reported that flexible funds allowed them to address a wide range of needs, including rental deposits, one-time rental assistance, clothing, phone cards, bedding, a PO box, birth certificate fees, court fees, diapers

and wipes, and bus tickets. The Lake COE also provided one-time or short-term housing support grants. They found that these investments made a difference, helping to prevent the youth they worked with from becoming homeless or returning to homelessness.

Flexible funds can expand the scope of existing supports

Prior to HEAP, Lake COE relied on McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance funds to support unaccompanied youth and families facing homelessness. But as one interviewee in Lake County reflected, “There are certain things that are allowed with [McKinney Vento] funding. And then there are certain things that aren’t allowed with that funding, right? And normally, it’s those things that are not allowed with the funding that our families need.” The HEAP funds allowed them to cover housing-related costs and immediate needs, which often fall outside of the scope of the McKinney Vento program.⁷ In another county, the HEAP youth set-aside was used to expand an existing flexible fund program primarily for youth in the foster care system, run by a local child placement agency. The HEAP youth set-aside allowed the program to give out grants to more youth facing homelessness, and to address their housing needs in particular.

Compared to other funding streams, HEAP had few restrictions on the use of funds. Given this, it is not surprising that administrators saw HEAP as an opportunity to expand the range of support available in their current service and funding array. Communities chose the flexible fund to fill in gaps and expand existing service capacity.

Lake County | Lake County Office of Education

The Lake County Office of Education (Lake COE) has a long history of providing support to youth and families in need. The office coordinates the McKinney Vento Homeless Student Services program for Lake County, helping school districts better serve students facing homelessness in their community. In addition to launching a college-focused rapid rehousing program, the office used the HEAP youth set aside for a flexible fund, to meet individual youth needs and stabilize informal hosting arrangements.



Conclusions and Recommendations

This report highlights some lessons for decision makers in policy and state agencies about how to best support community efforts to address youth homelessness in California. Below, we describe three themes that emerged across programs and communities. After each theme, we propose a specific policy recommendation for HCFC and other state-level stakeholders to consider.

Required investment in youth-centered supports is critical

Based in our interviews with program administrators, staff and clients, we re-emphasize the importance of public investment in programs and interventions that specifically address youth homelessness. While every age group and demographic face homelessness and its impacts, the long-term consequences of homelessness can be particularly deleterious for young people navigating the transition to adulthood (broadly defined as 18 through 25).

Given these impacts, well-targeted interventions can be life altering for youth. In light of this, policy efforts over the last two decades have increasingly focused on programs and services targeting transition age youth, and particularly young people from marginalized backgrounds (e.g., former foster youth, LGBTQ+ youth). However, awareness of this subpopulation and the infrastructure of these programs vary widely from community to community. As we heard from administrators from some rural jurisdictions, youth homelessness is more of a hidden problem—and as a result, not widely recognized as a pressing social issue in their communities. Additionally, prior to HEAP, some of the more rural communities had few to no programs specifically designed to assist young people facing homelessness.

Recommendation #1

Future HCFC funding initiatives should build on the success and impact of the HEAP youth set-aside, which spurred jurisdictions to invest in programs focused on transition aged youth. Indeed, findings from a recent JBAY (2020) report indicate that many communities used HEAP to allocate twice the minimum required amount into youth-specific services.

Because this set aside funding had to be used for local services that explicitly focused on youth, rather than just funding general programs that incidentally assisted youth, jurisdictions sometimes made large, unprecedented investments into their youth-specific service infrastructure. Given the tremendous impact these programs can have on the life trajectory of youth, we underline the potentially long-term benefits of these service investments.

Consequently, we strongly recommend that the HCFC continue to require that funding recipients allocate a minimum percent of resources to programs which center youth and their unique needs. It is notable that subsequent funding initiatives by the HCFC, such as the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program, have increased the youth set-aside requirement from 5% (under HEAP) to 10%. The findings of this and other reports on the HEAP youth set-aside support this HCFC policy.

HEAP made new forms of assistance possible

HEAP was instrumental in helping some communities implement new program approaches. Each of the interventions discussed in this report were programmatically unique in two central ways: first, they were relatively time-limited interventions often focused on immediately stabilizing a young person's housing situation, and secondly, they provided direct assistance to youth relatively quickly and without the need for deep service support or brick-and-mortar infrastructure. Undoubtedly, this was in part a pragmatic response to the one-time nature of HEAP as well as the fact that the youth service infrastructure in some communities was limited, if not nonexistent, when HEAP was deployed.

Since ongoing state funding for youth-centered services wasn't guaranteed, some communities strategically directed most of their youth set-aside toward interventions that are easily scaled and do not require much infrastructure or continued capital investment. For some small rural communities, the HEAP youth set-aside was relatively modest in size, making substantial investments toward infrastructure and staffing impractical. In this context, direct assistance interventions were strategic in the sense that they could be implemented quickly, and with most of the limited funds going directly to address the needs of youth in crisis rather than staffing or capital investments.

Recommendation #2

We recommend that HCFC continue to encourage jurisdictions to fund youth interventions that vary in terms of intensity, duration, and comprehensive support. As state funding for youth programs increases and becomes more formalized in California, jurisdictions will likely begin using these funds toward longer-term investments, such as hiring permanent staff and investing in service infrastructure for programs to provide more comprehensive support services in their communities. These investments will be critical for some youth, especially those who may be transitioning into adulthood in the context of multiple challenges and disadvantages. But our findings highlight how less structured, direct-assistance interventions can have an impact.

We recommend that HCFC explore policy and funding mechanisms to incentivize investment in a diverse array of interventions. Moreover, we recommend that future studies investigate how “light-touch” interventions can be connected to a broader set of services, and expanded to be more comprehensive or intensive when necessary.

HEAP fostered collaboration and ambitious plans which were sometimes difficult to implement

As a result of these efforts to address youth homelessness in new ways, in many communities HEAP was instrumental in fostering new collaborations between different organizations, agencies and people who are not traditionally part of the local homeless service system. As we heard from a number of administrators, HEAP was the impetus to “bridge silos” as well as bring “new allies to the table” to discuss youth homelessness in their community, such as landlords, community volunteers, and representatives from local high schools and nearby community colleges. Without HEAP, most of these new collaborations would not have occurred.

The pandemic and wider shortage of housing impacted how these programs were able to perform. Unfortunately, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early Spring 2020 meant that many of these new collaborative efforts were effectively “paused” right as they were launching, forcing providers to adapt to changing circumstances.

Additionally, homeless services providers and administrators we talked to in every jurisdiction identified the lack of affordable housing as an enduring and growing challenge that impeded their efforts to address youth homelessness. While most jurisdictions in this report cited HEAP as an important launchpad for new youth programs in their communities, nearly all also discussed the limits of these interventions within the context of a growing housing affordability crisis. In particular, stakeholders discussed how rising rents made it difficult for providers to identify realistic pathways to permanent housing for their clients, after a crisis period had subsided.

Recommendation #3

Because HEAP incentivized ambitious plans surrounding youth homelessness in some communities, we recommend that HCFC interpret the partial implementation of some of these plans with nuance given the challenges of the pandemic. Youth homelessness initiatives that relied on new partnerships and collaborations in particular struggled in the context of the pandemic. While these initiatives were often able to implement a version of what had been originally planned, it is unclear how these collaborative efforts would have unfolded in a non-pandemic context. We recommend that HCFC continue to encourage jurisdictions to be ambitious and collaborative in their effort to address youth homelessness, and to invite new community partners to the table. Further, housing affordability is a complex policy issue that is both related but also distinctive from the issue of homelessness.

Nonetheless, HCFC should consider investigating how the stock of affordable housing options for young people affects the performance of interventions highlighted in this report. Given the common desire to track performance measures of publicly funded homeless programs, HCFC should consider how these metrics should be interpreted within the broader context of housing-rental market conditions. New state initiatives to substantially increase the stock of housing options near and around college campuses, for example, could have a substantial impact on the successes of rapid rehousing and host homes programs in particular. HCFC should carefully assess how these and other housing policies may have differential impacts across localities, and in turn influence the effectiveness of interventions targeting youth homelessness across California.

Table of Contents

2 Executive Summary

- 2 Youth Homelessness in California and the HEAP youth set-aside
- 2 Program models and key approaches
- 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

9 About HCFC/Cal ICH, CHPPR and Authors

10 Acknowledgments

11 Introduction

- 11 About the Homeless Emergency Aid Program
- 11 Youth homelessness in California
- 12 Report roadmap

13 Model Interventions to Address Youth Homelessness

- 13 Host homes
- 14 Community spotlight | Sacramento County and the City of Sacramento
- 19 Rapid rehousing for youth
- 20 Community spotlight | San Luis Obispo County
- 25 Flexible funds
- 26 Community spotlight | Lake County

29 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 29 Required investment in youth-centered supports is critical
- 30 HEAP made new forms of assistance possible
- 31 HEAP fostered collaboration and ambitious plans which were sometimes difficult to implement

34 Endnotes

36 References

About HCFC/Cal ICH, CHPPR and Authors

The Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council, now the California Interagency Council on Homelessness, oversees the implementation of Housing First guidelines and regulations, and identifies resources, benefits, and services to prevent and end homelessness in California.

The Center for Health Practice, Policy & Research (CHPPR) at California State University, Sacramento is dedicated to impacting community health by promoting collaboration, interdisciplinary practice, and innovation to reduce health inequities across California.

Authors

Susanna Curry, PhD, MSW
Assistant Professor
Division of Social Work
Center for Health Practice, Policy & Research
California State University, Sacramento

Mallory VanMeeter, MS
PhD Candidate and Consulting Researcher
School of Human Ecology
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Arturo Baiocchi, PhD
Associate Professor
Division of Social Work
Center for Health Practice, Policy & Research
California State University, Sacramento

Bob Erlenbush, PhD
Senior Research Analyst and Lecturer
Division of Social Work
California State University, Sacramento

The conclusions and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH). While Cal ICH and associated staff provided feedback on an earlier draft of the report, this final report was written solely and independently by the university researchers listed above.

Acknowledgments

The Sacramento State research team would like to thank the CoC staff, program administrators and youth who participated in our interviews about their experiences with HEAP youth set-aside and the services it funded. We also appreciate the direct service providers who took time from their important work to talk to us about the programs and services they are helping coordinate in their communities to address youth homelessness. In particular, we wish to thank:

5Cities Homeless Alliance
Andrea Curry, Tehama County CoC
Emily Halcon, County of Sacramento
Lake County Office of Education Healthy Start Youth and Family Services Program
Sacramento LGBT Community Center
San Luis Obispo CoC

Thank you as well to the program clients who shared their perspectives on youth services, the impact of HEAP-funded programs on their lives, and areas for growth and improvement.

We also wish to thank Angelina Ruiz, Graduate Student Researcher, for her assistance with interviewing youth program participants. We also express our gratitude to the Center for Health Policy Practice and Research, the Division of Social Work, and the College of Health and Human Services at Sacramento State, particularly Dean Mary Maguire, Associate Dean Robert Pieretti, Dr. Tyler Argüello, Kat Hughes, and Minnie Chabot.

Map shapefiles included in the report are from ©Geonames, TomTom.

Introduction

Youth homelessness⁸ is a crisis affecting families and communities, rural and urban,⁹ across California. Through the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP), the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC)* has made a significant and deeply needed investment in local responses to youth homelessness. The present report provides a deep dive into three HEAP-funded youth homeless service approaches—host homes, rapid rehousing for youth, and flexible funding—drawing on the perspectives of service providers, government and nonprofit administrators, and youth with lived experience of homelessness. These insights illuminate how organizations leveraged HEAP to fill gaps in the array of services in their community and chose program approaches that address the unique needs of youth facing homelessness.

About the Homeless Emergency Aid Program

The Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) was established by Senate Bill 850 (2018) as a response to the severe housing and homelessness crisis facing California. The initiative allotted within the State's 2018-19 budget a \$500 million set of flexible block grants to help local communities throughout the state address the substantial rise in homelessness. The program awarded 54, one-time funding, block grants to 43 Continuums of Care (CoCs)¹⁰ and 11 large cities in California.¹¹ HEAP block grants could be allocated to three general funding categories: funding more direct social services (e.g., street outreach, navigation services), increasing rental assistance (e.g., housing subsidies, rapid rehousing programs), or investing in new capital improvements (e.g., constructing new shelters or permanent supportive housing units). Moreover, 5% of each grant was required to be spent on programs or services that explicitly address youth homelessness (commonly referred to as the "HEAP youth set-aside").

This report is the third in a series that explores emerging and promising intervention models that communities funded using HEAP. As discussed in our prior reports, HEAP allowed many communities to substantially expand their homelessness response system, in part due to the flexibility of the grants. Some communities used HEAP to create new collaborations across sectors, while others scaled up the capacity of existing housing programs. The two case studies in this research series, including this report, provide a closer look at specific intervention models that either emerged out of HEAP or were significantly expanded upon during the funding period. Our August 2021 report focused on three emerging intervention models (safe parking programs, navigation centers, and integrative street outreach) that directly reduce the immediate harms associated with homelessness but also help unsheltered individuals transition into housing. This current report focuses on how some communities leveraged the HEAP youth set-aside funds to specifically support intervention models that increase outreach, engagement, and housing assistance to young people facing homelessness in California.

Youth homelessness in California

In 2019, an estimated 12,000 unaccompanied youth (ages 16-25) faced homelessness on any given night across California. This is likely an underestimate, given that many young people experiencing homelessness cycle through informal living arrangements, which may make them invisible to traditional point-in-time counts.¹²

Youth pathways into homelessness often stem in part from issues related to family conflict, family instability, and involvement in the child welfare system.¹³ These family struggles take place in the context of ongoing economic and racial inequality, reflected in the disproportionate rates of homelessness among youth from low-income households and communities of color.¹⁴

* HCFC is now the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal ICH). HCFC will be used to refer to Cal ICH throughout this report.

Discrimination related to gender identity and sexual orientation can also play a role in youth homelessness, putting LGBTQ+ identified youth at greater risk of homelessness. Other risk factors include being unmarried and parenting, coming from a low-income household, and having less than a high school diploma/GED.¹⁵ Young people face unique challenges in accessing stable housing due to their age and limited life experiences. Most youth have limited to no rental or credit histories, which are often required for rental applications, and youth under 18 in California cannot enter a contract to lease property unless they are emancipated.¹⁶

Youth and adults who experience homelessness face similar risks to health, employment stability, and overall well-being. However, because of their developmental stage, the impacts of homelessness can be particularly damaging for a youth.¹⁷ The stress of housing instability can get in the way of school, lasting supportive social connections, and successful transition to adulthood.¹⁸ A growing body of research literature indicates that prolonged instability and homelessness during this time can be precursors to chronic periods of housing instability later on in life.¹⁹ Accordingly, preventing and addressing youth homelessness are critical steps toward reducing rates of unsheltered and chronic homelessness more broadly.

Youth also have different needs for formal services and support than adults. Research suggests that

youth facing homelessness have concerns about accessing adult housing services and tend not to seek help from formal services.²⁰ There is also evidence that youth prefer supported housing or housing with peers, rather than fully independent subsidized housing.²¹

Recognizing the serious impacts of homelessness on youth and their unique needs, HCFC required jurisdictions to allocate 5% of their HEAP grants specifically for youth services. Notably, this HEAP youth set-aside broadly defined “services” and allowed jurisdictions to consider the needs of both “homeless youth” and “youth at risk of homelessness” in their communities. This flexibility made it possible for jurisdictions to invest in an array of new initiatives and programs, including those that have not been supported by traditional funding for homelessness services.

In February 2020, John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) published a comprehensive evaluation of the HEAP youth set-aside, drawing from administrative data, interviews, and surveys conducted across California. The report found that most jurisdictions went beyond the mandated 5% requirement of the youth set aside and many made substantial investments to their youth service infrastructure. The report concluded that in many communities in California, the HEAP youth set-aside was instrumental in expanding their ability to address youth homelessness.



Report roadmap

In this report, we highlight three specific intervention models for addressing youth homelessness that were funded through HEAP: host homes, rapid rehousing, and flexible funding programs. For each model, we begin by summarizing the current literature on best practices and program outcomes. Next, we draw on our interviews with CoC administrators, program staff, and participants across communities to describe some of the motivations and community factors that underpinned jurisdiction decisions to fund these specific approaches. Throughout, we include “Community Spotlights” profiling three communities that implemented one or more of these approaches. The final section of the report presents three policy insights and recommendations, based on current literature and community perspectives.

Model Interventions to Address Youth Homelessness

Host homes

Investing in community care

In recent years, the host home model has emerged as a promising approach to addressing youth homelessness. Host home programs help house unaccompanied youth with supportive adult community members, who may be volunteers or individuals known to the youth. The program also fosters stable host home arrangements by providing outside support, like establishing shared household agreements, training hosts, helping youth and hosts navigate conflict, and providing youth case management.²² Although formal host home programs are relatively new, this kind of community housing for unaccompanied youth is not. Many communities, particularly marginalized groups, have participated in these types of informal hosting arrangements for generations.

The host home program model is generally recognized as being well-adapted to the unique circumstances of youth homelessness. Host homes can offer a family-like residential environment, which is developmentally appropriate and for some youth may feel less stigmatizing than congregate housing. Compared to brick-and-mortar housing programs like shelters and transitional housing, host homes have lower startup costs. Further, host homes can be geographically dispersed and capacity can grow or shrink according to need. These factors make it well-suited to rural and low-density regions, which rarely have youth-centered homeless services despite a similar rate of youth homelessness to cities and suburbs.²³

Beyond the core elements described above, host home programs vary significantly.²⁴ Some of these differences include the allowed length of stay, the ages of youth served, the support provided to youth, and whether or not hosts receive a stipend. Host home programs may focus on a particular group of youth, like LGBTQ youth, youth of color, pregnant and parenting youth, or youth formerly involved in the child welfare system. Many host home programs choose to only serve young adults ages 18-25, but some also or exclusively work with minors. Some states place restrictions on host home programs serving youth

under 18; restrictions include limiting the length of stay to 21 days or less, requiring hosts to be registered foster families, or requiring delegation of parental authority. Although host homes share some similarities with foster homes, host home programs are not part of the child welfare system, even when they work with minors.²⁵

Programs also differ in terms of what hosts and hosting arrangements they support. Currently, most programs recruit and train volunteer community members to serve as hosts. Other programs work with hosts that already know the youth, like an extended family member or friend's parent. These hosts, who are sometimes called kinship hosts, are either already housing the young person informally or agree to take them in after being identified by the youth as a potential host. The kinship host approach builds on youths' permanent connections, but may be more difficult when youth are new to the area and have not formed many relationships. In those cases, programs can draw on program-identified hosts, other housing options, or help youth travel back to where they have support.²⁶

Although the host home model shows some promise, as of Fall 2021, there are no peer-reviewed publications focusing on host homes for young people experiencing homelessness. The available research on host homes comes from evaluations of a handful of host home programs in the US, Canada, and UK.²⁷ It is worth noting that none of the programs that were evaluated used the kinship hosting approach. One unpublished thesis also provides an overview of the host home model including kinship hosting and program-identified hosting.²⁸ Together, these form our current knowledge base on host homes.

Staff, volunteers, and youth across these limited studies shared that host homes provided a safe and stable place for youth to stay.²⁹ Several evaluations also found that providers valued the family-like living environment of host homes and felt that they effectively diverted youth from shelters.³⁰ Although they valued the support they received, participants in some short-term host home programs felt the approach didn't effectively address the root causes of their homelessness and sometimes contributed to instability.³¹

Community spotlight | Sacramento County and the City of Sacramento

Sacramento County, located in the Sacramento Valley in Northern California, is home to just over 1.5 million people.³² Sacramento is one of the fastest-growing major cities in California³³ and has continued to grow during the COVID-19 pandemic in part due to migration from the Bay Area of California.³⁴ In Summer 2021, average rental rates in Sacramento were \$1,760 per month, up from \$1,587 in 2020.³⁵

In 2019, the most recent year in which a Point-in-Time Count of homelessness was conducted in the county, an estimated 5,570 people were homeless on any given night, with an estimate of 10,000 to 11,000 experiencing homelessness over a year.³⁶ Transition age youth (ages 18-25) represented an estimated 8% of the total homeless population, with an estimated 415 youth experiencing homelessness on any given night in 2019. Much like trends across California and within the population of people who were unhoused in Sacramento, a majority (59%) of youth were unsheltered on the night of the count, meaning that they were sleeping outdoors, in a vehicle, or another place not meant for human habitation.

In Sacramento County and the City of Sacramento, youth set-aside funds through HEAP were allocated to host homes, a youth shelter, and rapid rehousing activities from the Flexible Housing Pool Rehousing Youth Program. Funding for host homes and the youth shelter were distributed to the Sacramento LGBT Community Center.

Sacramento LGBT Community Center

The Sacramento LGBT Center provides advocacy, cultural activities and referrals and programming for the LGBT community and allies in Sacramento County. Currently, the Center has a large emphasis on outreach and support for LGBTQ+ youth facing housing insecurity. Their housing services include a drop-in center, a short-term emergency shelter, a Transitional Living Program, and a host home program. Upon consultation with youth homeless services providers in Sacramento, the City of Sacramento chose to use set-aside funds to support an existing youth shelter and create a new host home program.



The LGBT Community Center was interested in implementing a host home program that supported and leveraged existing kinship hosting arrangements in the community, the idea being that adults already hosting a young person in their homes could also be supported through the program. Staff viewed this practice as aligning their program with traditions of informal hosting pre-existing within some marginalized communities. As one staff member explained,

“The reality is, culturally, many racial groups have been doing host homes for generations, right? Most African American or Native folks have an aunt that raised their cousins. ... So culturally, host homes makes a lot of sense, because it resonates with many, particularly BIPOC. Because there’s a generalized notion that if we don’t take care of our kids, nobody is going to take care of our kids ... or no one’s going to take care of them well. So yeah, we’ll take this young person into our house.”



Photo of the Martha P. Johnson Center, courtesy of the Sacramento LGBT Center

While staff at the LGBT Community Center supported “kinship hosting” (hosting through people already known to youth) through their host homes funding, they also worked with program-identified volunteers (i.e. hosts that the youth do not already know) as hosts. This allowed them to “engage people and systems that are traditionally not involved in serving people who are unhoused.” The LGBT Community Center was able to leverage an extensive network of active volunteers, who they could train and support through the process.

The Center bases their host home recruitment and matching processes on the process outlined in the guidebook created by the organization Point Source Youth. Staff initially recruit program-identified and kinship hosts³⁷ and conduct interviews, background checks, and training. The program provides six hours of training for hosts, covering communication styles, anti-racism, and other topics. Administrators indicated that they see this as a divergence from conventionally paternalistic social work norms, giving families the resources that it costs to care for a young person. However, staff also mentioned that supporting young people in this age group can be challenging because of their developmental stage

and tendency toward pushing boundaries. Thus, the program structure is an additional way to scaffold that transition to adulthood.

The first step in the program after referral is having a meeting with the young person, identifying what their needs are, and determining whether the host home program is a good fit. If the youth is not already in a hosting arrangement and does not identify a trusted adult who could host them, the case manager sends over one or more profiles for potential program-identified hosts. Once youth have identified if there is a potential good fit, they convene the youth and host to do a shared housing questionnaire. They then check in separately on both sides to determine whether or not to move forward with the hosting arrangement. The program initiates a contract between hosts and youth to set expectations on both sides. There are a range of options, from more of a roommate-like setup to one which is more familial or parental. If at any point in this process the match doesn’t work out, youth can generally stay in the emergency shelter, get referred to another housing program, or work toward identifying a kinship host from their network.

Why host homes?

Host homes **leverage community relationships, complement other housing resources, and are low cost, flexible, and scalable.**



Why did communities fund host homes through HEAP?

A review of grant applications submitted to HCFC suggests that at least four communities used HEAP to support some iteration of the host home concept with youth. These programs combined housed a total 138 youth during the grant period. The discussion below summarizes the interviews we conducted across three of these communities. While these programs varied in terms of structure and scope of services provided, below we identify some of the common reasons why communities directed HEAP funds toward host home models specifically. Above, an illustration depicts the main findings from our qualitative interviews regarding why communities chose to develop host home programs.

Host homes leverage and strengthen youth connections

One of the most attractive aspects of the host home concept, according to administrators, is how these programs both leverage but also strengthen existing arrangements and relationships in the community. Administrators interviewed across different communities similarly described the importance of these programs reinforcing and building on the social capital and human connections in the community. Some also framed host homes as a stepping stone toward housing stability.

Building relationships with hosts looked very different across communities. In Sacramento, the LGBT Community Center wanted to support youth who were staying with their extended kin networks, or had someone in their life who could take them in. Staff viewed this as an extension of existing community traditions of informal hosting. While staff at the LGBT Community Center supported “kinship hosting,” they also worked with program-identified volunteers as hosts.

The Lake County Office of Education (COE) funded an iteration of the host home program model using youth set-aside funds. In this program, staff identified young people staying in informal hosting arrangements with extended family members or friends' parents. Staff would then reach out to the hosts who had opened their homes in these arrangements and identify opportunities for COE to support and provide financial assistance for the living arrangement. One administrator described an example in which they were able to help a young man who was staying with someone he knew:

"..He did find one of his friends whose mom would allow him to stay, to share a room with his friend. But he was sleeping on the floor because there was no bed. So I was talking with the mom, I checked in with her...and she says, 'Yeah, I really wish that I was able to provide a bed for him. But I can't because of my limited income.' ...And I got him a bed! And he was ecstatic, he'd never had his own bed before."

These types of interventions with existing hosting arrangements not only made them more comfortable but also more stable over time. Similarly, in San Luis Obispo, HEAP funding was used to provide hosts a stipend so that they could help the youth in their homes with things they may need that might otherwise not get addressed due to lack of funds.

"[A host home] is this opportunity for generational healing within the queer community. ... [A] lot of the hosts have been in similar situations themselves. So, it's a full-circle moment."

Administrator at the Sacramento LGBT Center

While these different host home programs varied substantially in structure, they nonetheless provided similar support for youth and hosts. Most programs, for example, provide some type of financial stipend and/or reimbursements to hosts to offset the additional costs associated with a youth staying in their home or those associated with purchasing basic

needs items. In Sacramento, for example, the LGBT Center provides all hosts, both program-identified and youth-identified, a housing stipend. In Lake County, the program reimburses informal hosts for purchasing laundry and hygiene supplies. Across communities, program staff emphasize that this type of financial support is critical to make host homes sustainable for hosts over time. As one staff described in Lake County,

"Because it's an expense [for the host], with an extra person showering, an extra person doing laundry. It's not a lot, but it helps!"

In Sacramento, additional support around transportation and other needs is also provided. The case manager does some of the transportation for youth directly, when necessary, but the program also provides a transportation monthly stipend that goes to the youth to help cover costs. Further, the program staff assist with needs such as help searching for jobs, educational support, or referrals for other needs that the host home program cannot pay for directly.

In multiple communities, staff see hosts as important sources of support for youth beyond providing housing and other basic needs. They provide training to hosts so that they feel equipped to support youth needs for emotional support and advice:

"When it comes to supporting a young person...I mean how much more wonderful is it when someone says, 'Yep, I'll do that. I can do that [help a young person].' And then, when you give them a little more context, information and training, so that they're prepared and they have the right answers... [Those important conversations are] why host homes are amazing!"

Communities were also attracted to the possibility of funding host homes through HEAP because the flexibility of HEAP allowed them to fill a gap in community needs. For example, according to staff at the LGBT Community Center in Sacramento, there were previously limited housing services in the community that met the needs of trans and gender non-conforming youth. The host homes program through the LGBT Community Center was able to provide support to youth who identify as LGBTQ and BIPOC youth in a setting that may be more supportive of needs. According to one administrator, the host home approach gives trans youth someone who is "solidly in their corner" as they explore their identity.

Another administrator noted that this is especially important because so many of these young people don't have that bedrock from the households where they grew up,

"[It] is this opportunity for generational healing within the queer community. Frequently we hear about generational trauma within the community, so I think this is a great way to kind of like, make steps toward flipping that script, based on something that's already happening. A lot of these people have been hosted by someone already, a lot of the hosts have been in similar situations themselves. So, it's a full-circle moment."

Administrators in multiple communities also noted the need for different types of sheltering models and were drawn to the idea that there could be a place for youth to land that was perceived to be outside the "homelessness system." For some, host homes were seen as an option for youth that would provide some form of permanency or relationship-based connection to the community. As one staff member in San Luis Obispo explained,

"Too often we put youth in this housing with all these rules, and if you violate the rules, you get kicked out. And when we can put people in these environments where they—I mean, the host home could still kick them out, but hopefully there would be a little more ability to relate to them as people, and not just, you're following rules."

Host homes complement other housing resources

In many of the communities that were using HEAP funding to begin a host home program, host homes were used to bridge gaps in housing for youth, complementing other resources in the community such as rapid rehousing. For example, a staff member in San Luis Obispo explained that host homes can serve as interim housing while youth wait on permanent housing options:

"The host home, I hope, is a stepping stone to permanent housing... [While] we've got them in a safe place rather than an encampment or couch surfing, ... we can go to them and work on these things. So the host is a stepping stone to get them housed, get them safe, that respite that they're needing from having to struggle about where they are going to stay, how they're going to eat, all those stressors."

Similarly, in Lake County, staff at the Office of Education saw host homes as a way to provide some stability to students, particularly high school students, as they prepare for the transition to college or other training. They explained the goal of support to kinship hosts:

"Help to stabilize them [the youth] there, so that [youth are] not worried about, 'Where am I going to sleep tonight?'... It does help them get that stability before they can get to somewhere else like a college or a dorm or the military or Job Corps, Conservation Corps, something. It gives them the normalcy of—'I'm going home.' Where they haven't had that in a long time. Or, there's going to be dinner tonight, and there might be breakfast in the morning. I'm going to have clean laundry, because there's laundry there."

While not all host home programs are intended to serve as interim housing, the administrators we spoke to indicated that HEAP-funded host homes filled an important gap, keeping youth housed while they worked toward a more permanent solution.

Host homes are low-cost, flexible and scalable

One of the primary reasons that communities allocated some or all of their HEAP youth set-aside funds to a host home program was that host homes do not require the development of new built infrastructure

"[A kinship host home] gives them the normalcy of—'I'm going home.' Where they haven't had that in a long time."

Staff at Lake County Office of Education

such as new housing development. Communities noted that not having to fund new housing units allowed them to pilot a program that they felt was needed, with the flexibility to adapt the program as needed. In Sacramento, the idea of a host home program had been circulating prior to the HEAP funding becoming available, but staff had not yet been able to identify funding until HEAP. With HEAP, the Sacramento LGBT Center was able to pilot a host home program with support from the technical assistance provider Point Source Youth.

One staff member explained,

“It’s kind of a dream until the money becomes available. And then it can kind of coalesce into a plan. ... But I think the availability of the funds really did make it possible to have an innovation.”

The concept of host homes had been increasingly part of the conversation about the possible options for youth, but had not been possible in many communities until HEAP funding became available. The flexibility of HEAP allowed many communities to begin a host home program when they otherwise may not have been able to do so.

Rapid rehousing for youth

Supported transitions to permanent housing

Rapid rehousing is a “housing first” intervention that has grown in popularity during the last decade. The primary goal of rapid rehousing is to quickly reconnect individuals and families facing homelessness to permanent housing, often through the private rental market. The core components of the model include helping clients identify and secure housing quickly, providing clients a time limited subsidy for rental and move-in assistance, and supporting clients with ongoing case management to help them remain stably housed over time.

Agencies implementing rapid rehousing typically begin by developing relationships with local landlords and housing management companies. Program success relies in large part on this robust network of property managers willing to work with households experiencing homelessness and with less-than-perfect rental histories. Programs build relationships by mitigating the perceived financial risks of renting to their clients. For example, rapid rehousing providers can act as the cosigner to the lease agreements signed by their clients, cover expanded security deposits, or master lease a number of apartments on behalf of a number of clients in the same apartment complex. These arrangements often result in a lower rental rate than households would otherwise have to pay. Service providers leverage these negotiated arrangements with local property management companies to help their clients identify viable housing options, matching clients with appropriate housing options that are affordable and meet their needs (e.g., proximity to transportation, employment, etc.).

After a suitable housing unit is identified, clients receive assistance completing the rental application. Agencies typically also provide some financial assistance for move-in costs, like the security deposit, furniture, and housing supplies. A central goal of rapid rehousing is for these move-in steps to be completed quickly so that clients can make a timely transition into housing. Clients are then provided a monthly subsidy to offset the cost of their rent, which gradually decreases over time (typically 6 to 9 months). The amount of financial assistance is structured to the particular needs of the client; the goal is to provide households enough assistance to obtain and eventually sustain their own housing. These financial resources are paired with case management to help clients eventually transition to independence and pay the full cost of their housing on their own before they exit the program. Accordingly, case management goals for clients often focus on securing stable employment, increasing income, entering a training program, as well as enrolling in public assistance or housing programs if eligible.

HEAP youth set-aside directly supported rapid rehousing programs in almost a third (31%) of the jurisdictions that received HEAP funding.³⁸ This reflects the prominence of the rapid rehousing model in many communities, given its eligibility for federal funding.³⁹ Since 2009, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness has framed rapid rehousing as a central component to the national strategy to end homelessness.⁴⁰ During the past decade, an emerging body of evidence has shown rapid rehousing for adults is associated with a reduction in the duration of homelessness, high placement rates into permanent housing, and relatively low rates of return to shelter.⁴¹

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in implementing the rapid rehousing model to address youth homelessness. However, there is general consensus that youth facing homelessness may need different or additional support to secure and maintain stable housing. Landlords may need additional financial assurances to agree to rent to youth. Youth may need special help with independent living skills, like managing household finances and paying for utilities.⁴² One Housing First for youth model describes the need for a “positive youth development and wellness orientation,” pushing programs like rapid rehousing to embed youth-centered support in their work.⁴³

Current best practices for youth-focused rapid rehousing program indicate a need for flexibility above and beyond what is generally provided in adult rapid rehousing. Programs should expect longer stays and more moves during the program period. One of the key tenets of the housing first for youth model is “individualized, client-driven supports with no time limits.”⁴⁴ A common timeline across rapid rehousing programs for youth in the U.S. is two years, compared to the short-term nature of rapid rehousing for adults and families.⁴⁵ While rigorous evaluation of rapid rehousing for youth is still limited, a number of recent case studies highlight its promise as a housing first practice with youth.⁴⁶

There are some indications that particular groups of youth may benefit more from rapid rehousing, while others may need additional support to make sustained exits from homelessness. A relatively small study of youth in a rapid rehousing program in Texas

found that youth with a history in foster care, LGBTQ youth, and youth experiencing depression were more likely than their peers to lose their housing during the program, and thus may need additional support.⁴⁷ Another study found that youth who scored high on a standard measure of vulnerability (above 10 on the VISPIDAT-NSP) had variable levels of success in a rapid rehousing program, compared to permanent supportive housing.⁴⁸ In light of these and other findings, many communities prioritize rapid rehousing for youth with medium to low vulnerability scores.

Though the evidence base is limited, HUD regards rapid rehousing as a promising practice for helping youth secure permanent housing, particularly when they cannot return to their household of origin.⁴⁹ Given this, HEAP significantly expanded the implementation of rapid rehousing in some communities, particularly in rural areas of the state, and particularly with youth and young adults.

Community spotlight | San Luis Obispo County

San Luis Obispo county is a largely rural county on the central coast of California. It is home to several micropolitan centers, including Atascadero and San Luis Obispo, the county seat. The county as a whole has a population of just over 269,000 residents, with a median household income comparable to the state as a whole. Interviewees identified geographic patterns of income inequality in the county, with concentrations of wealth and high value real estate along the coast. In 2019, the San Luis Obispo point in time count identified over 1,400 individuals experiencing homelessness (using the HUD definition) across the county. This included 151 transition-aged youth and 23 unaccompanied minors, nearly all of whom were unsheltered.⁵⁰ The latest available data, from 2013/2014 school year, shows 56 youth identified by the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education as experiencing unaccompanied homelessness, under the Department of Education definition.⁵¹ This number does not include youth over age 18 and those who are not attending school.

Prior to HEAP, there were no services in San Luis Obispo county focusing on the unaccompanied youth population.⁵² The county has several emergency shelters for adults 18 and older. However, research indicates that youth are reluctant to seek help from the adult homeless system.⁵³ McKinney



Vento liaisons worked with students who were identified as being homeless or unstably housed, but they don't reach youth not in school. The LINK Family Resource Center provides services to families, but not unaccompanied youth.



David Seibold (CC BY-NC 2.0)

The Family Care Network similarly provides family services and administers transitional housing services for youth with experience in the child welfare system. One study estimated that almost 30% of youth facing homelessness have past experience in the child welfare system; however, these eligibility requirements mean the program doesn't serve the majority of unaccompanied youth.⁵⁴

5Cities Homeless Coalition

The 5Cities Homeless Coalition (5CHC) is an organization dedicated to identifying and filling gaps in the homeless services array across San Luis Obispo County.⁵⁵ Among its services, 5CHC operates a rental assistance rapid rehousing program which has always served some youth ages 18-25. But when the HEAP funding was announced, 5Cities saw an opportunity to fill a gap in the county's service array by providing truly youth-focused housing and support.

The CoC conducted focus groups around the county to shape their proposal. 5CHC organized a feedback session with young adults, and ended up submitting a proposal for youth-centered housing supports—including a host home program, rapid rehousing for youth, and construction costs for a youth transitional housing facility. The organization also invested HEAP funds in a new staff position to manage these youth-focused services and youth outreach.

The new youth-focused staff was also charged with starting up a new host home program, initially based on Point Source Youth's model. That approach calls for short-term host homes with program-recruited hosts, which 5CHC saw as a complement to the rapid rehousing for youth approach. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, 5CHC faced significant barriers to recruiting hosts. As a result, they were only able to begin training hosts toward the end of the HEAP funding period. In the interim, 5CHC did reach and provide support to hosts and youth in existing informal arrangements.

Why did communities fund rapid rehousing for youth through HEAP?

Our review of grant applications submitted to HCFC indicates that two dozen communities used their HEAP youth set-aside to fund a youth-focused rapid rehousing program. Within these 24 communities, a total 1,582 youth were placed in housing during the grant period. In the following section, we report findings from our interviews with staff, clients, and administrators from Lake County and San Luis Obispo County. These jurisdictions leveraged HEAP to fund rapid rehousing programs to address the needs of youth. Their perspectives highlight the reasons why communities chose to use HEAP funds for rapid rehousing, and how HEAP's flexibility allowed them to tailor the rapid rehousing model to more effectively serve youth in crisis.

Why rapid rehousing for youth?

Rapid rehousing provides **youth-focused housing connections** with **flexible support** and a **stable launchpad for the transition to adulthood**.



Rapid Rehousing provides youth-focused housing connections with flexible support

Lake County and San Luis Obispo county both lacked youth-focused congregate or permanent housing supports, like a youth shelter or transitional housing program. Both jurisdictions chose to prioritize connection to permanent housing as a goal, given this gap in housing services. One staff at 5CHC described:

"I think housing more youth was the big hope [for the HEAP funds]. Because we really just didn't have a lot of housing options for them. They can, of course, come to the shelters, but they don't want to come to the shelters. And particularly, in the south county, there are no shelters there."

The Lake County Office of Education (COE) structured their rapid rehousing program around the needs of college students and trainees, including transition-aged youth and adult learners. Staff at Lake COE noted that the community colleges in their county lacked student housing and campus bathing

facilities, and that many of the students facing homelessness were staying in an encampment near one of the colleges. When the HEAP funds came through, they prioritized connecting these students with permanent housing.

Rather than invest the HEAP youth set-aside in building a shelter or other brick-and-mortar program, Lake COE and 5CHC chose the rapid rehousing approach. This allowed them to tap into the existing housing infrastructure in the community—the rental market—and use the funds to subsidize youth rent directly. Further, rapid rehousing can be adapted for youth, taking into account the distinct barriers youth face to securing and maintaining housing.

One of these barriers is the challenge of finding a landlord that will agree to rent to youth, given their lack of rental history and stereotypes about young tenants being destructive or unreliable. One administrator from 5CHC described: "[Landlords] see it's a youth, and well, you know, there's this—"How are they going to be able to sustain this after?" It's almost like a red flag for them."



Lake COE and 5CHC both tackled this issue by building relationships with landlords and property managers in the community. Because 5CHC was already doing rapid rehousing for adults, their youth program successfully built on those existing relationships. The case manager reported that fifty to sixty percent of clients were able to secure permanent housing at the time of the interview. He reflected,

"I think part of [our success] is having those connections with the landlords, and them having really good hearts and seeing, this is a young parent that is going to get disqualified from a lot of places due to credit. But they have this program that will help them. They [the landlords] have a relationship with us where they know that if something goes wrong, we're going to make it right however we can."

Staff at Lake COE felt that although they were starting from scratch, landlords were convinced by the offer of "guaranteed money". Over time, the case manager at Lake COE developed relationships with properties willing to rent to youth in their rapid rehousing program.

Administrators at Lake COE and 5CHC also talked about the benefits of having flexibility in the HEAP youth set-aside, which allowed them to tailor the rapid rehousing structure to youth. For example, rapid rehousing for adults often lasts for a brief period, until clients are able to get back on their feet. In comparison, youth may need more time to stabilize, because they are going through a period of educational and developmental transitions. Lake COE wanted to be able to support students as long as they needed it, while they were in school. Similarly, the case manager at 5CHC emphasized that the timeline for clients was flexible, though they aimed for transition out of the program in around a year.

Funding and program model flexibility also allowed Lake COE and 5CHC staff to be responsive to individual youth needs. To reach the ultimate goal of long-term sustainability, providers felt that youth needed individualized and developmentally appropriate support beyond rental subsidies. The 5CHC program staff prided themselves on providing individualized support for youth. As one administrator at 5CHC described, "The mantra of the agency is, we want to say yes. ... If the client wants it, we're going to try and make it happen."

This includes case management, connection to services, and in some cases help covering incidental costs. Youth who are connected with 5CHC receive case management before, during and after participation in the rapid rehousing program. Case management is more intensive at the beginning, and then generally tapers off as youth become more independent. The case manager at Lake COE's rapid rehousing program talked about the value of providing warm handoffs to other social service agencies, but she also did more direct support like helping students in the rapid rehousing program buy food or pay off court fees. Similarly, 5CHC used some of the rapid rehousing funds to help cover gas cards, school supplies, insurance payments, and other needs that contribute to long-term stability.

Rapid Rehousing provides a stable launchpad for the transition to adulthood

Lake COE and 5CHC ultimately hoped to help youth facing homelessness make a successful transition to adulthood—whether that meant securing stable employment or completing their education. Housing first is based on the premise that residential stability is central to achieving those goals. Both organizations saw rapid rehousing, a housing first approach, as a stable launchpad to success.

Lake COE chose to specifically focus on supporting students and trainees in their rapid rehousing program. Originally, their hope was to prevent housing instability during the transition from high school to community college or other postsecondary institutions. They recognized the critical impacts of housing instability during this developmental phase, in terms of its impacts on educational continuity and student wellbeing. As one staff described:

"[We] just wanted them to keep that momentum from high school. That's the way we originally wrote it, to help them get those first twelve [class credits] ... so that they, you know, when the real world kind of hits them, at least they have that structure and know that they can do college."

This focus on successful transitions to higher education or training programs grew naturally from their office's mission and their prior work with students facing homelessness. But based on input from the broader community, the program was expanded to serve community college students and trainees of all ages.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to have this [rapid rehousing program] in our community. ... You know, we had one [youth] that just had a baby, on Friday. ... So that newborn didn't go to a car, it went to a home."

Staff at 5 Cities Homeless Coalition

5CHC saw rapid rehousing as a stepping stone to a range of long-term goals, including but not limited to educational outcomes. The case manager reported working with clients to figure out what they hoped to achieve, shaped by their own individual aspirations and plans for the future. However, he said that at least some of those benchmarks needed to be things that both he and the youth agreed would contribute to successful transitions out of the program, like stable employment. One staff at 5CHC described their approach to long-term stability:

"That's something I tell every person when they come in and we're helping them with anything. ... [We're] not just trying to help you move into a spot and then leave you be. We want to make sure that we're moving you into a spot and helping you be successful in that spot, and not need a program like ours again."

The program also worked with clients toward agreed-upon goals, to help motivate youth to progress toward independence. However, the main priority for the case manager was to make sure youth had the support they needed.

One staff member explained the impact they saw from the program:

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to have this [rapid rehousing program] in our community. I can see that already in the short time that we've had it, that it has had an impact, and that, you know, we're putting people's lives on the right track. You know, we had one [youth] that just had a baby, on Friday. ... So that newborn didn't go to a car, it went to a home."

Although serving youth was a priority for the Lake COE, program staff reported facing significant challenges identifying and connecting with youth experiencing homelessness due to COVID-19. This was due to the nature of remote schooling, as well as the closure of in-person student assistance offices at the community colleges. By the end of HEAP, about half of the clients served by the rapid rehousing program were transition aged youth. When asked what Lake COE would do differently if they were able to continue the rapid rehousing program after HEAP, one administrator said they'd like to return to that initial focus on the transition from high school to college: "I'd like to do more of an easy handoff from high school to college, so we can help those kids."

Flexible funds

Preventing and addressing youth homelessness with responsive financial support

Many communities used part of their HEAP youth set-aside to establish a community fund to provide flexible, short-term, financial assistance to youth experiencing homelessness. These funds were sometimes referred to as a "flexible housing pool," a "flexible spending fund," "flexible fund," or "flexible housing funding." The definition and core components of flexible funding vary widely. However, the central aim of the program is to quickly address individual needs related to housing stability through direct assistance. Flexible funds can be used to help clients secure or maintain housing, such as move in and utility assistance, housing deposits, moving costs, housing applications, housing stabilization supports (e.g. a gift card for food when someone moves in) or a subsidy to pay the individual's rent.⁵⁶ Sometimes flexible funding is used to pay an individual's rent or back rent, though usually as one-time or short-term assistance to avoid immediate eviction.⁵⁷

The "flexible fund" umbrella also includes the emerging concept of a "Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool," also known as a "Flexible Housing Fund," which subsidizes rent and provides additional flexible financial support to pay for housing-related needs.⁵⁸ An intensive version of this model was piloted in Los Angeles in 2014, by the city Department of Health Services Housing for Health Division. Clients received flexible rental subsidies with intensive case management, using a "whatever it takes" approach to keep individuals in housing.⁵⁹ Another model in Napa County, the "Napa Flexible Housing Funding Pool" provides payment for security deposits and furniture but also incentivizes landlords to rent to individuals experiencing homelessness by paying any damages made by tenants.⁶⁰ Other communities may choose to provide what are referred to as "shallow" or "flat" subsidies to individuals for housing. These programs typically provide a smaller subsidy to individuals or households, but for a longer period of time or to more people.⁶¹



Community spotlight | Lake County

Lake County is a largely rural county in North central California, with just over 68,000 residents. The main population centers are located on the eponymous Clear Lake, including the county seat, Clearlake. The county's population is older on average than California, and is majority white. However, 3% of the county is American Indian or Alaska Native alone, and the county is home to seven tribal nations.⁶²

Wildfires are a significant contributor to displacement in Lake County. Between 2015 and 2018, a series of wildfires burned 60% of the county's land-mass and destroyed 6% of the total housing stock.⁶³ Most recently, the Cache fire in the Clearlake area destroyed 50 homes and forced the evacuation of 1,600 individuals.⁶⁴

These wildfires have caused housing instability for many of the region's residents and continue to put pressure on the housing market. In 2018, the rental vacancy rate in Lake County was 3%, compared to a national average of 6%.⁶⁵ As of 2017, almost two thirds of Lake County residents were rent burdened, spending over 30% of their income on rent.⁶⁶

The 2020 Point-in-Time count in Lake County recorded 572 individuals facing homelessness under the HUD definition, including 38 youth ages 18-25 and 29 youth under 18 (both in families and unaccompanied). Notably, almost half of those surveyed reported that their homelessness was a result of a fire.⁶⁷ There are few youth-focused housing services in Lake County, outside of the support provided by the Lake County Office of Education described below. However, there are several adult homeless services that can work with youth ages 18-25 as well as a housing program specifically for young parents ages 18-25.⁶⁸

Lake County Office of Education

The Lake County Office of Education (Lake COE) has a long history of providing support to youth and families in need across the county. The office coordinates the McKinney Vento Homeless Student Services program, helping school districts better serve students facing homelessness in their



community. Lake COE also operates the Healthy Start Youth and Family Services Program, which helps parents and caregivers access the support they need. The Healthy Start centers also provide advocacy, service referral, and support for homeless students.⁶⁹

During a community needs assessment on foster youth and homeless youth, local college liaisons on the executive advisory council raised the problem of homeless students in the county's community colleges. The Lake COE took up this issue, eventually getting full approval from their board to pursue HEAP funds through the newly formed Lake County Continuum of Care. One Lake County staff person reflected on how strong relationships between agencies makes it easier to build out a new program or idea:

"Small counties are very good at communication. ... It's the same people you see all the time at the same meetings. And so if you have an idea, you just email somebody ... and it just starts a conversation, and we bring it up at meetings. ... That's the way our county works."

Lake COE ended up receiving HEAP funding for two programs: a flexible housing fund for K-12 students, which was funded through the HEAP youth set-aside; and a rapid rehousing program for homeless students in college and training programs, including youth and older adults.

Lake COE's flexible fund was designed to meet the immediate needs of individual students, especially needs that fell outside of the bounds of McKinney Vento program funding. They secured supplemental investment from the county so that they could use the flexible fund to serve both unaccompanied youth and youth in families facing homelessness. By the end of the HEAP funding period, Lake COE staff had used the flexible funds for a wide array of needs, including rental deposits, one-time rental assistance, clothing, phone cards, bedding, a PO box, birth certificate fees, court fees, diapers and wipes, and bus tickets. Some of these needs, if left unmet, may lead to continued housing instability and homelessness. For example, if a young person is unable to pay for a PO box, they may not receive crucial mail that they need in order to secure housing.

Lake COE's rapid rehousing program was initially designed to help students entering postsecondary education and training maintain stable housing. Based on input from a community survey, the rapid rehousing program was expanded to include students of all ages. Following the rapid rehousing model, program staff connected students with available housing units, subsidized rent while they were enrolled, and provided referrals and other support.

Why did communities use the HEAP youth set-aside for flexible funds?

This section of the report draws on interviews with providers and administrators at the Lake County Office of Education and the Tehama County Continuum of Care. Tehama County is not included in the report as a full case study; however, they used the HEAP youth set-aside to expand a flexible fund program called the Solutions for Youth Fund (SFY), and a few staff shared their perspectives on the program model for this research. Below, we include an illustration depicting the main findings from our qualitative interviews regarding why communities chose to provide flexible funds to youth using HEAP youth set-aside funds.

Flexible funds allow programs to respond to youths' immediate needs

As the name implies, the core element of flexible fund programs is flexibility. As one interviewee in Tehama County reflected,

"For many years, all the CoCs had been like, 'We need more flexible funding!' Everybody's saying that because, it's never good when really stringent funder guidelines dictate what you do, rather than having the need in your community inform what you do."

Flexible funds capitalize on the fact that HEAP left it up to communities to determine how best to use the resources, within the broad parameters of homelessness services and prevention. This was central to decision-making for both Lake County and Tehama County, from the perspective of CoC and program staff. Rather than being forced to follow a particular program structure, providers can draw on funds as needed to directly respond to individual youth needs. One interviewee in Tehama County talked about why they didn't dictate what specific kinds of needs could be covered through the flexible fund: "What we didn't do was restrict them to [a specific kind of support], because this being the first year of it, we weren't really sure where the need was going to be. ... We wanted to keep [the funds] as flexible as we could."

For example, Lake COE helped one young person find an apartment, as well as paying her deposit, first month's rent, and last month's rent. That young person described the impact of these one-time grants:

"I never thought I would have my own place and have my own place now, I was actually because of the program and..they helped me pay rent. I was able to save up enough money to get my own car...Honestly, none of this would have been possible without the help of my program because I honestly wouldn't have been able to do it myself and it's exciting, you know I love my apartment it's a studio but it's like something that's mine, you know?"

One of the benefits of flexibility, for Lake COE and Tehama County, was that they could use the HEAP youth set-aside to cover a wide range of needs.

Why flexible funds?

Flexible funds **respond to youth's immediate needs** and can **expand the scope of existing supports**.



One Tehama County CoC staff observed, “[SFY] is a great program because it’s really flexible. ... The need may be simple, school clothes, all the way through technology needs so that these students have a good chance of keeping up with their education.” Like the Lake COE flexible fund, the Tehama County program also provided support for housing costs. Together, this array of services was seen as an effective response to meet the needs of youth and prevent, or address youth homelessness.

Flexible funds expand the scope of existing supports

Lake COE was largely relying on McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance funds to support unaccompanied youth and families facing homelessness. But as one interviewee in Lake County reflected,

“There are certain things that are allowed with [McKinney Vento] funding. And then there are certain things that aren’t allowed with that funding, right? And normally, it’s those things that are not allowed with the funding that our families need.”

HEAP funds gave them a pool of resources that could be used to cover housing-related costs and immediate needs, which fall outside of the scope of the McKinney Vento program.⁷⁰

In Tehama County, the HEAP youth set-aside was used to expand an existing flexible fund program, run by a local child placement agency. Prior to HEAP, this program was primarily serving youth in the foster care system, funded by the state child welfare system. However, the program also had a relatively small, donation-funded arm of the program for youth facing homelessness. But as Tehama CoC staff described, “There wasn’t funding to provide [services] to that same [homeless youth] population who didn’t have history in foster care.” The HEAP youth set-aside enabled the flexible fund to expand its scope and capacity to give out grants to more youth facing homelessness, and to address their housing needs in particular.

This was an intentional goal of the Tehama CoC:

“[We] provided them funding that would allow them to provide short term assistance with housing costs ... so that things like a deposit or arrears that might be contributing to a potential eviction, that kind of thing, that those funds could be available for that.”

Compared to other funding streams, HEAP had few restrictions on the use of funds. Given this, it is

not surprising that administrators saw HEAP as an opportunity to expand the range of support available in their current service and funding array. Lake County and Tehama County chose the flexible fund because it was most able to fill in gaps and expand existing service capacity. HEAP enabled small rural communities, who had restricted youth-focused infrastructure, to creatively leverage their existing assets to expand youth services. By partnering with adjacent organizations, they were able to build youth-focused capacity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Together, the three case studies discussed in this report highlight some lessons for decision makers in policy and state agencies about how to best support community efforts to address youth homelessness in California. Below, we elaborate on three policy themes that have emerged across programs and communities. After each theme, we propose a specific policy recommendation for HCFC and other state-level stakeholders to consider, in light of these findings.

Required investment in youth-centered supports is critical

Findings from this report reemphasize the importance of public investment in programs and interventions that specifically address youth homelessness. While every age group and demographic are susceptible to homelessness and its impacts, the long-term consequences of homelessness can be particularly deleterious for young people navigating the transition to adulthood (broadly defined as 18 through 25). As we heard from administrators, providers, and youth themselves, homelessness during this time of life can be a substantial roadblock on the path toward youths' goals and plans for the future. Homelessness can lead a young person to delay or abandon their postsecondary education, derail career and life goals, as well as expose young people to risks that can have lifelong consequences. This is consistent with a growing body

of research literature linking later life outcomes to the previous experiences and challenges faced by individuals during their twenties.⁷¹

If instability during the transition to adulthood can be derailing for a young person, it is equally true that well-targeted interventions can be life altering. In response to this opportunity, policy efforts in the last two decades have increasingly focused on growing programs and services for transition age youth, and particularly young people from marginalized backgrounds (i.e., former foster youth, LGBTQ+ youth). However, awareness of this subpopulation and the infrastructure of these programs vary widely from community to community. As we heard from administrators from some rural jurisdictions, youth homelessness is not well understood or even acknowledged as a pressing social issue in their communities. Additionally, prior to HEAP, some of the more rural communities had few to no programs specifically designed to assist young people facing homelessness.

As staff in San Luis Obispo County observed, youth facing a crisis may be hesitant to use adult shelter, but have few youth-centered emergency or transitional housing alternatives. HEAP has significantly changed the housing services landscape in some rural communities, as evidenced by the emergence of new youth-centered housing and supports like rapid rehousing programs exclusively for youth, outreach efforts at local colleges, and deployment of emergency housing grants.

Recommendation #1

Future HCFC funding initiatives should build on the success and impact of the HEAP 5% youth set-aside, particularly in terms of encouraging jurisdictions to increase their investments into programs focused on transitional age youth. Indeed, findings from a recent JBAY report indicate that many communities used HEAP to invest twice this minimum required amount into a growing array of youth-specific services. And the fact that this set aside funding had to be used for local services that explicitly focused on youth, rather than just funding general programs that occasionally assisted youth, meant that jurisdictions sometimes made large, unprecedented investments into their youth-specific service infrastructure. Given the tremendous impact these programs can have on the life trajectory of youth--as discussed above--we underline the potential long-term benefits of these service investments. Consequently, we strongly recommend that the HCFC continue the practice of requiring a minimum level of funding that centers youth and their unique needs when facing homelessness. It is notable that subsequent funding initiatives by the HCFC, such as the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program, have increased the youth-set aside requirement from 5% (under HEAP) to 10%. The findings of this and other reports on the HEAP youth set-aside support this HCFC policy.

HEAP made new forms of assistance possible

In some communities, HEAP supported the development of new approaches to addressing youth homelessness. It is notable that each of the interventions discussed in this report were programmatically unique in two central ways: first, they were relatively time-limited interventions often focused on immediately stabilizing a young person's housing situation, and, secondly, they provided direct assistance to youth relatively quickly and without the need for deep service support or brick-and-mortar infrastructure.

Rapid rehousing programs, for example, often function as time-limited rental subsidies that are rapidly deployed with some support services that nonetheless taper off over time. Host homes can often be quickly arranged and include a flexible short- to longer-term timeline; they resemble "informal" housing arrangements negotiated by private parties, with program support stabilizing youth in family-based housing rather than a congregate setting. And the flexible financial funds administered by many communities function in practice as emergency grants that can be provided to youth immediately on a case by case basis.

Undoubtedly, this was in part a pragmatic response to the one-time nature of HEAP as well as the fact that the youth service infrastructure in some communities was limited, if not nonexistent, when HEAP was deployed.

Given the uncertainty that the state would continue to explicitly fund youth centered services after HEAP, some communities strategically directed most of their youth set-aside toward interventions that are easily scaled and do not require much infrastructure or continued capital investment. Indeed, for some small rural communities, the HEAP youth set-aside was relatively modest in size, making substantial investments toward infrastructure and staffing impractical. In this context, these direct assistance interventions were strategic in the sense that they could be implemented quickly, and with most of the limited funds going directly to address the needs of youth in crisis rather than staffing or capital investments.

Nonetheless, our interviews provide some evidence that some young people may prefer these types of targeted, time-limited, and what some characterized as "light touch," interventions. As one staff member discussed, many youth welcome receiving this type of assistance, especially if doesn't make the youth feel like they are engaging with the "formal homeless services system." This sentiment is consistent with a number of recent studies that highlight how young people facing homelessness are often reluctant to engage with formal housing programs that are perceived as overly structured or potentially stifling to their sense of autonomy and independence (Curry et al., 2020). Some of the programs discussed in this report were able to provide support to youth for needs that were immediate and also did not make them feel "over-managed." These types of flexible supports to youth were made possible by the more flexible nature of the HEAP program.

However, our interviews with staff also highlighted some challenges. As some staff members reported, some youth may face more significant difficulties that unfold over time, sometimes requiring more assistance than what these limited scope programs typically offer. While most youth may appreciate the lack of structure these programs offer, some youth facing

more significant challenges will likely struggle without additional and comprehensive support (including ongoing case management, and access to mental health resources). Undoubtedly, there is a balance between providing youth enough support, while also ensuring that they retain a sense of autonomy and independence.

Recommendation #2

Further, in light of the strengths and limitations of low-barrier and community-embedded housing support, we recommend that HCFC continue to encourage jurisdictions to fund youth interventions that vary in terms of intensity, duration, and comprehensive support. As state funding for youth programs increases and becomes more formalized in California, jurisdictions will likely begin using these funds toward longer-term investments, such as hiring permanent staff and investing in service infrastructure for programs to provide more comprehensive support services in their communities. These investments will be critical for some youth, especially those who may be transitioning into adulthood in the context of multiple challenges and disadvantages. But findings of this report highlight how less structured interventions are also impactful for many of the young people that struggle with instability during this critical phase of life. While funding personnel and infrastructure is important, these large investments should not overshadow the need to fund direct, time-limited, supports. We recommend that HCFC explore different mechanisms by which jurisdictions can be incentivized to fund these different types of interventions. Moreover, we recommend that future studies investigate how “light-touch” interventions can also be connected to a broader set of services, and how targeted interventions can be expanded to be more comprehensive or intensive when necessary.

HEAP fostered collaboration and ambitious plans which were sometimes difficult to implement

In many communities, HEAP was instrumental in fostering new collaborations between different organizations, agencies and people who are not traditionally part of the local homeless service system. As we heard from a number of administrators, HEAP was the impetus to “bridge silos” as well as bring “new allies to the table” to discuss youth homelessness in their community, such as landlords, community volunteers, and representatives from local high schools and nearby community colleges. Without HEAP, most of these new collaborations would not have occurred. Moreover, these new collaborations and connections sometimes resulted in some ambitious plans of how communities intended to leverage HEAP to address service gaps in their homeless service system, engage youth who

may be disconnected from traditional services, and improve the outreach of interventions in schools and local colleges.

Unfortunately, the pandemic, as well as the ongoing housing crisis, impacted how these plans were ultimately implemented. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early Spring 2020 meant that many of these new collaborative efforts were effectively “paused” right as they were launching and had to adapt to changing circumstances. For example, integrating rapid rehousing programs and outreach efforts at community colleges, sometimes fell short of what was envisioned, given the reality of extended campus closures. Similarly, some host home programs struggled using program-identified hosts, because of risks of transmission of the COVID-19 virus through shared housing. Some programs ultimately delayed their rollout until transmission levels had declined, while others pivoted their approach and scope altogether.

A number of programs also struggled to reach youth for their services, while others leveraged social media to do outreach and build new referral systems.

Despite creative efforts to overcome the barriers COVID-19 introduced, many providers still felt they weren't able to realize the full scope of their initial plan. These programs demonstrated great promise and should be further explored, including in contexts where COVID-19 is not as disruptive.

Additionally, homeless services providers and administrators we talked to in every jurisdiction identified the lack of affordable housing as an enduring and growing challenge that impeded their efforts to address youth homelessness. While most jurisdictions discussed HEAP as an important launchpad for new youth programs in their communities, nearly all jurisdictions also discussed the limits of these interventions within the context of a growing housing affordability crisis. In particular, stakeholders discussed how rising rents made it difficult for providers to identify realistic pathways to permanent housing for their youth clients after a crisis period had subsided. For example, jurisdictions that provided emergency subsidies to youth reported that some of these same clients sometimes found themselves in similar financial struggles a few months later. Similarly, some rapid rehousing providers acknowledged that a number of their youth residents were unlikely to afford their current apartments after the subsidy period, and that plans to identify more affordable alternatives in the community had not

panned out given rising rents. As a consequence, some youth had stayed much longer in rapid rehousing programs than anticipated—even in situations when an individual was able to secure stable employment and substantially increase their income. While the pandemic was undoubtedly a related factor to this challenge, some providers remained skeptical that affordable housing options for their youth clients would emerge over time.

Host home operators also discussed some programmatic challenges implementing their program in the context of increasing rents in their communities. For example, recruiting “hosts” in the community willing to open up their homes to a youth became increasingly more difficult over time. While providers encountered a number of individuals interested in the host home concept at first, some potential hosts backed out of arrangements due to their concerns about the uncertain length of time that youth may stay with them. While, again, the pandemic and its effects on the rental housing market underpinned many of these challenges and concerns, it should be noted that a housing affordability crisis has been developing for some time in California. Consequently, the issue of housing affordability and its impacts on homelessness, as well as on service providers addressing homelessness, will continue to be an issue for policymakers to confront.



Recommendation #3

Because HEAP incentivized ambitious plans surrounding youth homelessness in some communities, we recommend that HCFC interpret the partial implementation of some of these plans with nuance given the challenges of the pandemic. Youth homelessness initiatives that relied on new partnerships and collaborations in particular struggled in the context of the pandemic. While these initiatives were often able to implement a version of what had been originally planned, it is unclear how these collaborative efforts would have unfolded in a non-pandemic context. We recommend that HCFC continue to encourage jurisdictions to be ambitious and collaborative in their effort to address youth homelessness, and to invite new community “partners to the table.”

Moreover, housing affordability is a complex policy issue that is both related but also distinctive from the issue of homelessness. Nonetheless, HCFC should consider investigating how the stock of affordable housing options for young people generally affects the performance of the types of interventions highlighted in this report. Given the growing concern and desire to track performance measures of publicly funded homeless programs, HCFC should consider and study how these metrics should be interpreted within the broader context of current and changing housing-rental market conditions. New state initiatives to substantially increase the stock of housing options near and around college campuses, for example, could have a substantial impacts on the successes of rapid rehousing and host homes programs in particular. HCFC should carefully assess how these and other housing policies may have differential impacts across localities, and in turn either increase or decrease the effectiveness of interventions targeting youth homelessness across the state.

These are just a few of the lessons that will be learned over time from the implementation of HEAP across California. The findings in this report speak to the value of intentional investment in young people and designing our homeless service system to meet the needs of youth. To address the complex challenges of youth homelessness moving forward, we

will collectively need to mobilize a coordinated and wide-ranging policy effort. Such efforts could include programs targeting prevention, housing affordability, as well as efforts to help households that have exited homelessness maintain stable housing over time. This is a tall task, but because of HEAP, many communities have a head start.

Endnotes

- 1 A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a community board that coordinates local homelessness planning efforts and disperses federal funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- 2 These one-time funds were distributed to jurisdictions based on factors including the Point in Time Count, which our community-level estimates of homelessness reported to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- 3 HUD AHAR, 2020, p. 46
- 4 This is a working definition that captures the baseline characteristics of host home programs. For more specific and divergent definitions of host homes and host home programs, see: <https://www.hosthomes.org/about-host-homes>; <https://www.pointsourceyouth.org/host-homes>; <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Commerce-Host-Homes-Report-2017.pdf> page 3.
- 5 VanMeeter, 2020.
- 6 HUD, n.d.; Cunningham & Batko, 2018.
- 7 ICPH, 2020.
- 8 In this report, “youth facing homelessness” refers to individuals up to age 25 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian. It includes individuals who are unsheltered, staying somewhere not fit for human habitation, living in hotels or other temporary housing, and those who are doubled up. Some unaccompanied youth are themselves parents and may have their child or children with them. Youth ages 18 to 25 may sometimes be referred to as “transition-aged youth.”
- 9 Morton, Dworsky, Samuels, & Patel, S., 2018
- 10 A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a community board that coordinates local homelessness planning efforts and disperses federal funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- 11 These one-time funds were distributed to jurisdictions based on factors including the Point in Time Count, which our community-level estimates of homelessness reported to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- 12 Morton et al., 2018.
- 13 Samuels et al. 2019; Shelton & Bond, 2017.
- 14 Morton et al., 2018.
- 15 Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017.
- 16 National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty & National Network for Youth, 2019.
- 17 Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, & Karnik, 2012.
- 18 Cutuli et al., 2013
- 19 Tevendale, Comulada, & Lightfoot, 2011
- 20 Ha, Narendorf, Santa Maria & Bezette-Flores, 2015; Pryce, Napolitano, & Samuels, 2017; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016.
- 21 Forchuk, Richardson, Laverty et al. 2013; Henwood, Redline, & Rice, 2018; Quilgars, Fitzpatrick, and Pleace, 2011.
- 22 This is a working definition that captures the baseline characteristics of host home programs. For more specific and divergent definitions of host homes and host home programs, see: <https://www.hosthomes.org/about-host-homes>; <https://www.pointsourceyouth.org/host-homes>; <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Commerce-Host-Homes-Report-2017.pdf>.
- 23 Morton, Dworsky & Samuels, 2017.
- 24 Some host home funding streams (like RHYA funding, child welfare aftercare funds, or YHDP funding through HUD) may set restrictions on length of stay, the youth served, or who can volunteer as a host. However, there is no official definition of “host home program” that is broadly recognized or enforced.
- 25 VanMeeter, 2020.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Bell, Strickland & Arzenton, 2010; Ecker, Saryannis, Holden & Traficante, 2018; McTeague, 2015; Petering, 2019; Ecker, Saryannis, Traficante & Hermans, 2018.
- 28 VanMeeter, 2020.
- 29 Ecker, Saryannis, Holden & Traficante, 2018; Petering, 2019.
- 30 Bell, Strickland & Arzenton, 2010; Ecker, Saryannis, Holden & Traficante, 2018; McTeague, 2015; Ecker, Saryannis, Traficante & Hermans, 2018.
- 31 Bell, Strickland & Arzenton, 2010; Ecker, Saryannis, Traficante & Hermans, 2018.
- 32 U.S. Census, 2020.
- 33 Caraccio, 2017.

- 34 Bizjak & Kasler, 2021.
- 35 Clift, 2021; Reese & Bizjak, 2021.
- 36 Baiocchi et al., 2019.
- 37 Kinship hosts span biological and chosen family, as well as friends—as long as they are 21 or older and not a biological parent.
- 38 John Burton Advocates for Youth, 2020
- 39 Rapid re-housing was identified as a HUD-eligible housing intervention by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, which established federal funding for the program model within HUD's Continuum of Care Program (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grants Program (ESG). Other federal programs and agencies, such as the U.S. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), also support the program at the national level.
- 40 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2013
- 41 Cunnighan, Gillespie & Anderson, 2015.
- 42 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.
- 43 Gaetz, 2017.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.; Cunningham & Batko, 2018.
- 46 Morton, Kugley, Epstein, & Farrell, A., 2020.
- 47 Youngbloom, Farnish & Schoenfield, 2021.
- 48 Rice et al. 2018.
- 49 U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, n.d.
- 50 ASR, 2019.
- 51 San Luis Obispo County Office of Education, n.d.
- 52 <https://www.slocity.org/living/neighborhood/homelessness-solutions>; County of San Luis Obispo Social Services, n.d.
- 53 Ha, Narendorf, Santa Maria, and Bezette-Flores, 2015; DeRosa, Montgomery, Kipke, Iverson, Ma, and Unger, 1999.
- 54 Dworsky, Gitlow, Horwitz, & Samuels, 2019.
- 55 5Cities Homeless Coalition, n.d.
- 56 HomeBase, 2020.
- 57 Abt Associates, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2019.
- 58 HomeBase, 2020.
- 59 Abt Associates, 2017, p. 1.
- 60 Homeless Policy Research Institute, 2018.
- 61 Homeless Policy Research Institute, 2018.
- 62 Miller et al., 2018
- 63 County of Lake, 2018
- 64 NBC Bay Area Staff, 18 August 2021.
- 65 Department of Numbers. (n.d.).
- 66 Hope Rising, n.d.
- 67 Lake County CoC. 2020
- 68 Lake County CoC. n.d.
- 69 Lake County Office of Education, n.d.
- 70 ICPH, 2020
- 71 Shanahan 2020; Hayward & Gorman 2004.

References

- 5Cities Homeless Coalition (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved from <https://5chc.org/about/>.
- Applied Survey Research. (2019). *San Luis Obispo County homeless census & survey: Comprehensive report*. San Luis Obispo County. https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/getdoc/ba133495-851b-4ef4-8c63-70c4a203c9d0/2019-PIT-Count_SanLuisObispo_Final.pdf.
- Baiocchi, A., Curry, S., Williams, S., Argüello, T., Price Wolf, J., & Morris, J. (2019). *Homelessness in Sacramento County: Results from the 2019 Point-in-Time Count*. Sacramento, CA: Institute for Social Research and Sacramento Steps Forward.
- Bell, L., Strickland, M., Arzenton, V. (2010). *An evaluation of Nightstop Devon*. Socio-economic Research and Intelligence Observatory.
- Bizjack, T. & Kasler, D. (2021, February 12). The Bay Area tech crowd is flooding Sacramento. What it means for real estate, our economy. *The Sacramento Bee*. <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/sacramento-tipping-point/article249038205.html>.
- Caraccio, D. (2017, May 3). Sacramento is the fastest growing big city in California. *The Sacramento Bee*. <https://www.sacbee.com/article148080179.html>.
- Clift, T. (2021, September 29). Why this potential solution to Sacramento's housing crisis has made little progress. *The Sacramento Bee*. <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article254245833.html>.
- County of Lake. (2018). Cumulative Impact of Lake County's Disasters. <http://www.lakecountyca.gov/Assets/Departments/Administration/Vision/Cumulativelmpact.pdf>.
- Cunningham, M. & Batko, S. (2018). Rapid re-housing's role in responding to homelessness: What the evidence says. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99153/rapid_re-housings_role_in_responding_to_homelessness_3.pdf.
- Cutuli, J. J., Desjardins, C. D., Herbers, J. E., Long, J. D., Heistad, D., Chan, C. K., et al. (2013). Academic achievement trajectories of homeless and highly mobile students: Resilience in the context of chronic and acute risk. *Child Development*, 84(3), 841-857.
- Department of Numbers. (n.d.). *Lake County California residential rent and rental statistics*. <https://www.deptofnumbers.com/rent/california/lake-county/>.
- De Rosa, C. J., Montgomery, S. B., Kipke, M. D., Iverson, E., Ma, J. L., & Unger, J. B. (1999). Service utilization among homeless and runaway youth in Los Angeles, California: rates and reasons. *The Journal of adolescent health : official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 24(3), 190-200. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x\(98\)00081-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x(98)00081-0).
- Dworsky, A., Gitlow, E., Horwitz, B., & Samuels, G.M. (2019). *Missed opportunities: Pathways from foster care to youth homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Ecker, J., Sariyannis, P., Holden, S. & Traficante, E. (2018). *Bridging the Gap's host home program: Process and outcomes evaluation*. Hub Solutions. Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/bridging-gap%E2%80%99s-host-homes-program>.
- Edidin, J. P., Ganim, Z., Hunter, S. J., & Karnik, N. S. (2012). The mental and physical health of homeless youth: A literature review. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 43(3), 354-375.
- Forchuk, C., Richardson, J., Lavery, K., Bryant, M., Rudnick, A., Csiernik, R., ... & Kelly, C. (2013). Housing First, Treatment First, or Both Together. *Implications for Policy and Practice*, 95.

- Gaetz, Stephen. (2017). *THIS is Housing First for Youth: A Program Model Guide*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.
- Ha, Y., Narendorf, S. C., Santa Maria, D., & Bezette-Flores, N. (2015). Barriers and facilitators to shelter utilization among homeless young adults. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 53, 25-33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2015.07.001>.
- Henwood, B. F., Redline, B., & Rice, E. (2018). What do homeless transition-age youth want from housing interventions?. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 89, 1-5.
- Homeless Policy Research Institute (2018). *Flexible housing subsidy programs*. USC Sol Price Center for Social Innovation. Retrieved from <https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Flexible-Housing-Subsidy-Literature-Review-with-Cover-10.5.18.pdf>.
- Hope Rising. (n.d.). *Housing & homelessness: A summary of core issues affecting Lake County*. Lake County CoC. <https://www.lakecoc.org/housing-fact-sheet>.
- ICPH. (2020). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. https://www.icphusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/McKinney-Vento_April23.pdf.
- John Burton Advocates for Youth. (2020). *Youth homelessness in California: The impact of the five percent youth set-aside in the Homeless Emergency Aid Program*. https://www.jbay.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/HEAP_report2020_draft4.pdf.
- Lake County CoC. (2020). *Lake County, CA January 2020 Point In Time Results at a Glance*. <https://www.lakecoc.org/2021-pit-count-results>.
- Lake County CoC. (n.d.). *Lake County Continuum of Care housing resource directory*. <https://www.lakecoc.org/housing-resource-directory>.
- Maricopa Association of Governments (n.d.). *Flexible housing subsidy pools/funds*. Retrieved from https://azmag.gov/Portals/0/Documents/Homelessness/Flexible-Pool_2020-12-19.pdf.
- McTeague, M. (2015). "The host home program model for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness: A program evaluation." [Master's thesis, St. Catherine University].
- Miller et al., 2018. *Lake County Economic and Demographic Profile*. <http://www.lakecountycalifornia.gov/Assets/Departments/SpecialDistricts/Lake+County+Economic+and+Demographic+Profile.pdf>.
- County of Lake, 24 November 2020. *November is National Native American Heritage month*. <http://www.lakecountycalifornia.gov/Government/PressReleases/HeritageMonth2020.htm>.
- Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National estimates*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Morton, M. H., Dworsky, A., Samuels, G. M., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in rural America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- Morton, M. H., Kugley, S., Epstein, R., & Farrell, A. (2020). *Interventions for youth homelessness: A systematic review of effectiveness studies*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 116, 105096.
- National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty & National Network for Youth. (2019). *Alone without a home: A national review of state laws affecting unaccompanied youth*. Retrieved from <https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/Alone-Without-A-Home-2019.pdf>.
- NBC Bay Area Staff. (18 August 2021). *Cache fire destroys about 50 homes, prompts evacuations in Lake County*. <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/california/wildfire-in-clearlake-triggers-evacuation-order/2635245/>.

- Petering, R. (2019). *Short-term host homes for formerly homeless young adults: An in-depth look at the impact of the first 3-months*. LensCo. Retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ada55b15417fcd-98fe83953/t/5e14c56259f8eb5218e95a08/1578419557271/Host+Home_+3MonthImpact_LensCo.pdf.
- Pryce, J., Napolitano, L., & Samuels, G. M. (2017). Transition to adulthood of former foster youth: Multilevel challenges to the help-seeking process. *Emerging Adulthood*, 5(5), 311-321.
- Quilgars, D., Fitzpatrick, S., & Pleace, N. (2011). *Ending youth homelessness: Possibilities, challenges and practical solutions*. York, UK: Centre for Housing Policy, University of York & School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University.
- Reese, P. & Bizjack, T. (2021, February 10). See where apartment rent is rising fastest in the Sacramento region, as demand surges. *The Sacramento Bee*. <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article249130140.html>.
- Rieger, K. (2021). *A Transitional Living Program for LGBTQ youth in Orange County: A grant proposal* (Doctoral dissertation, California State University, Long Beach).
- Rutman, D., & Hubberstey, C. (2016). Is anybody there? Informal supports accessed and sought by youth from foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 63, 21-27.
- San Luis Obispo County Office of Education (n.d.). *Homeless students in San Luis Obispo County schools*. <https://www.slocoe.org/about/programs/homeless-and-foster-youth-services-coordinating-program/homeless-students-in-san-luis-obispo-county-schools/>.
- Sullivan, C. M., Bomsta, H. D., & HacsKaylo, M. A. (2019). Flexible funding as a promising strategy to prevent homelessness for survivors of intimate partner violence. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 34(14), 3017-3033.
- Tevendale, H. D., Comulada, W. S., & Lightfoot, M. A. (2011). Finding shelter: Two-year housing trajectories among homeless youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 49(6), 615-620.
- U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (2013). *Opening doors: Federal strategic plan to end youth homelessness (update 2013)*. Washington, D.C.: HUD.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, (n.d.). *Jump Start Tool: Rapid Re-Housing for Youth*. <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Jump-Start-Tool-Rapid-Re-Housing-for-Youth.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (n.d.). *Rapid rehousing models for homeless youth*. <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-homeless-youth/rrh-models-for-homeless-youth/>
- VanMeeter, M. (2020). *Many ways home: An overview of the host home model for addressing youth homelessness*. (Unpublished MS thesis). University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI.
- Youngbloom, A. J., Farnish, K. A., & Schoenfeld, E. A. (2021). Characteristics Associated with Housing Loss Among Youth in a Rapid Rehousing Program. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 1-13.