

HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

(Line Item 4000-0007; MA General Law Chapter 6A,
Sections 16W and 16X)

The legislation, passed by the Legislature in December 2014 and signed into law in January 2015, was created to increase housing opportunities and expand support services for youth and young adults ages 24 and younger who are experiencing homelessness outside the custody or care of a parent or guardian. For Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16), the Legislature allocated \$2 million to implement the law. Due to the time required to complete a procurement process and establish a statewide network of consortia, \$1 million was distributed in FY16 and the remaining \$1 million was made available to support the consortia in FY17. An additional \$1 million was included in the FY17 budget for a total investment of \$3 million for FY16 and FY17.

The funding has gone to 8 regional consortia across the Commonwealth:

- Metro Boston – United Way of Massachusetts Bay
- Metro West – South Middlesex Opportunity Council
- Worcester/Worcester County – Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
- Fall River/New Bedford/Taunton/Attleboro – Catholic Social Services
- Hampden County – City of Springfield
- Merrimack Valley – Community Teamwork
- North Shore – Lynn Housing and Neighborhood Development
- Franklin, Hampshire, Berkshire Counties – Community Action

Community-Specific Responses

Although each consortium has had the flexibility to craft its own response to the needs of the individual communities, one common variable weaves through all eight consortia. Projects have kept the unique strengths, struggles and developmental tasks that differentiate the young adult population central to their design of services and interventions. Some of the services delivered to date include:

- Opening a new 8-bed transitional housing program in New Bedford
- Data collection to develop an accurate picture of homelessness and housing insecurity in the North Shore
- Funding for the emergency overnight Warming Center in Boston
- Creating a “Host Home” program in Springfield
- Rapid re-housing in congregate supervised apartments in Worcester County
- Collaboration with the Massachusetts High Risk Victims Unit in the Merrimack Valley
- Expanding the age range served by previously existing shelter and housing services from 18-21 to 18-24 in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire, and Worcester Counties
- Intensive support for YYA with substance use disorders in Metro West

Additionally, **all** of the consortia are providing:

- Case management, supportive services and outreach
- Flexible financial assistance to young adults to meet unique financial barriers to stability, such as utility arrears, move-in costs, child-care fees, and transportation needs
- Rental assistance and subsidies
- Collaboration and network development
- Coordinated assessments and coordinated entry development

Collaboration

All of the consortia have created networks, expanded relationships and deepened collaborations. They have worked across systems and silos to better serve YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Collaborations have included:

- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)
- Local high schools and alternative education programs
- State Police High Risk Victims Unit
- Institutes of higher education including community colleges
- Housing authorities
- Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
- Veterans' organizations
- Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- Immigration support organizations
- Health Centers/Substance Use treatment programs
- Social service providers

MV is an 18-year-old young adult in high school who was referred to a consortium case manager who had begun keeping office hours in the high school. MV is an honor student who found herself unstably housed due to her parents' abuse and neglect. MV had spent most of the year staying with friends while continuing to attend school and maintain her grades. The program was able to assist MV in finding an apartment; and, through flexible funding, MV was able to cover the costs for the first and last month's rent and security deposit for the apartment. The program continues to provide case management services to MV to ensure she successfully reaches her goal to graduate with her class. At this time MV has received college acceptance letters to Urban College, Emanuel College and Boston College.

Preliminary Data

In the 9 months of funding (4/16-12/16) funded consortia have served:

834 Unaccompanied YYA, including 249 Parenting YYAs, and 195 LGBTQ YYAs

Programs have made:

- 400 referrals to shelter programs and
311 referrals to housing

Resulting in:

- 236 YYAs secured stable housing
- 160 reconnected with family
- 454 enrolled in education programs
- 60 have completed/graduated from education programs
- 230 enrolled in workforce development/job training
- 430 have gained job experience

"This funding has allowed us to come together as a region and fundamentally change the way we provide services to Unaccompanied Young Adults."

JR is a young man who was struggling with sobriety and unable to find stable housing or employment. While working with one of the programs, JR made the decision to enroll in substance abuse treatment. Flexible funds provided him transportation to the treatment center and a calling card to use when he needed to hear supportive voices during treatment. After successfully completing treatment, JR relied on program staff for support with decision-making, life planning, and sobriety support. With the program's support, JR gained employment and applied for supportive housing. In the last 6 months, JR has maintained his employment, continues to work on staying sober, has secured safe and stable housing, and has since enrolled at a local Community College. Flexible funds were used to help JR pay for the first month's rent at the supportive housing program and to purchase academic books.

Future Directions

Consortia have ambitious goals that will be achievable with continued and increased funding. They include (but are not limited to):

- Increasing young adult involvement and leadership development
- Coordinated assessment, entry and data collection
- Increasing housing and shelter availability and capacity to serve population
- Developing new housing options
- Expanding resources and leveraging additional funding
- Community education and awareness
- Creating comprehensive and accessible resource guides
- Collaboration with community colleges

KB is a young man who moved into the housing program created by one of the consortia. During his 5-month stay at the program, the case manager helped him set up and attend medical appointments and mental health counseling. Case management also supported him in resolving his legal issues. KB increased his Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and obtained his Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC) entitlements while working on budgeting and savings. He has also engaged in HiSET testing while enrolling in Mass Rehab services. Having stable housing and supportive services enabled KB to reconnect with his mother, secure a Section 8 mobile voucher and locate an affordable apartment. He will be moving into his own apartment in March 2017.

Continued funding will allow the Commonwealth to continue to build a systemic, effective response to young adult homelessness in Massachusetts.