**7th Annual Point Source Youth National Symposium on Solutions to End Youth Homelessness**

*“place power and resources in the hands of young people”*

On June 20th and June 21st, the National Symposium on Solutions to End Youth Homelessness took place in New York City. This two-day event brought together providers, activists, front line workers, and youth to make connections, form relationships, and learn about current policies and programs that are focused on ending youth homelessness. The conference was centered around the practice of direct cash transfers (DCT) as prevention—providing money directly to youth before crisis, so they never have to experience homelessness.

Plenary sessions focused primarily on DCT, while breakout sessions covered topics such as Host Homes, assisting youth in navigating food deserts, and a Policy 101 training.

**JUNE 20TH 2023**

**Land Acknowledgement + Welcome Message**

* “we are more than the harm that has been done to us”
* “the reimagining of our lives through storytelling”
* We must work with young people to end youth homelessness
* We, and the youth we support, are good enough.
* Youth are experts in their own lives—they know what they need!
  + Trust involves giving up control and power which isn’t easy but necessary for this to work
* We have to love ourselves

**Youth-led Roundtable**

* “nonprofit industrial complex”
* Dreaming and imagining
* DCT thoughts?
  + Investment, equity, restorative
    - Youth are the future
  + Autonomy (giving back power) and trust
  + Abundance (moving away from scarcity model)
* More on DCT model
  + Cash and wraparound services (housing navigation, financial literacy, etc.)
  + More than money, not charity. Support, community, opportunity.
* UBI? Guaranteed income?
  + DCT can have criteria for specific community & programs
  + UBI is for everyone, guaranteed income is about having $500 in savings
* Pilot Programs
  + Oregon: 18-24, not counted as income so SNAP benefits not impacted
  + CA: enough $ to actually secure housing…
  + \*\*How does DCT improve housing outcomes?
  + \*\*How do you message this to build broad support?
* Didn’t have to show receipts for the stimulus check…
* Lived experience is priceless
* Not acting under assumptions; building relationships (need trust as foundation)
* “disrupting the disparities”, youth centered à youth led
* First step for DCT programs?
  + Get youth involved, see what they need
  + Be committed and authentic
* How to speak to concerns?
  + \*\*present the data because it’s harder to argue with numbers

**Keynote Address**

* Author of the book “All Boys Aren’t Blue”
* “possibility model”
* \*\*Housing as a social determinant of health
* Advocates, Accomplices, Assassins
  + Talk the talk, walk the walk, have your back
  + Hold your hand
  + In front, taking people out before they can take you out
* “waking up and saying yes to the assignment the universe has given you”
* “[youth] homelessness is a [policy] choice.”
* Exchange of info, etc.
* Have to start asking, “how can I help you?”

**Host Homes in Rural Communities**

* Not a new intervention
  + Formal and informal
* Rural communities like to help our neighbors
* Three types of host homes
  + 1. Stranger match
  + 2. Kinship
  + 3. Found family
* Alaska statewide YAB
* Youth led, how?
  + Build with intention, “how do we build this together”
  + Youth having positive experience
* Rebuilding as a community, not as individual orgs.
* What is different?
  + More personal, form a relationship with the Host
  + Not “one size fits all”
  + More autonomy, part of decision-making progress, treated as adult in the household
* Who becomes Host?
  + “extreme volunteers” 24/7 commitment
  + It is your job to invite them into your life—it’s not foster care, lot of reframing
  + This (Indianapolis) program is 6 months (so as not to impact chronicity)
* Outreach for Hosts
  + Faith communities
    - Which are often segregated so be intentional
* Green flags
  + Active approach and listening, spending time, people that genuinely care
* Red flags
  + Belittling other young people
* Continue to work with young people
  + Relationship is the first intervention
* Some things are not caught in the screening process
* Best practices
  + Build trust with young person by cultivating relationships with current resources—warm hand off
  + “build the black and white so we can live in the grey”
  + Bringing people together over food
* Skills that can be developed while hosted
  + Learned how to budget, kept a car for a year, better meal planning and grocery shopping
  + Self love, worthy of love
* Transforms everyone
* So many important things to learn beyond practical skills to help us survive in capitalism
* 6 months, and then?
  + Transition time spent having conversations around reality—we want you to have your own space but you don’t have to do it alone
  + Being as creative as possible
  + Building relationships with property managers
    - “you can trust him because I trust him”
* Policy work
  + Essential
* Host Homes able to be individualized
  + Providing timeless relationships so critical
  + People seeing themselves reflected in their communities
    - “beloved communities”
* Best resources?
  + The youth
  + The Hosts that came before
    - What not to do, what’s missing
  + Advocacy, connect with political leaders
  + Be outgoing, reach out to other programs
* Avenues for Youth
  + Bring the community together and ask what is community already doing—what can we lean into? What gaps need to be filled?
* Advice/takeaway
  + Invitation. Hosts are not parents or case managers, they are providing an invitation into a full beautiful messy life
  + Everybody has something to give

**Supporting Youth Navigating Food Desert and Food Injustice**

* Food desert?
  + Challenge because deserts are naturally occurring ecosystems; reframing as food apartheid because it is purposeful, structural (infrastructure)
    - How food is impacting the health of the community
    - All the systems in place that influence food access being more intentional in the words we use
  + Classified by area with low to no access to healthy food but abundant fast food…no farmers markets…
* Food insecurity?
  + Lack of access, not speaking to the quality
* Food sovereignty
  + People having power over the policies that dictate their food access
* Food & racial & environmental justice
  + People most impacted by climate change
* Self sustaining and thriving communities
* Can’t rely on the market to put grocery stores where we need them
* Beginning to have conversations with communities, individuals
  + Exposing the youth to growing, trying new fruits
* Farm Bill 2025
  + Adding tax pieces to that
* Freedom School?
  + Education, voter registration
  + Teach community what they’re not going to be taught in schools
    - Have to take things into our own hands
* How to support young people in this space?
  + Feel comfortable having conversation, uplifting, not shaming
  + Representation, connecting to culture
  + Removing judgement around how talking about foods
* Supporting unhoused youth?
  + Being creative with programming
    - Community fridges
    - Dignity of choice
* DCT?
* Food recovery

**Trauma-Informed Care for Youth Who Use Substances**

* Placing the blame where it belongs—with the trauma
* Bringing harm reduction to where people are
* Creating a space “I wish I had:
  + Setting intentions, guidelines
* Epigenetics, “blood memory”
* “it was community that gave me recovery”
* “there’s nothing wrong with them, there’s something missing”
* “we have to make services as easy to access as heroin”
* “He saw my life beyond what it was”
* “hold hope for people before they can hold it for themselves”
* Become acutely aware of how you feel in people’s presence
* Moving away from the single story of recovery

**Federal Policy Fireside Chat**

* ~96 communities receive YHDP funds
  + Really built from youth PLE feedback
  + Can fund Host Homes with YHDP
* No answer as to when no longer “Demonstration Program”
* Youth Homelessness System Improvement grants
  + For new communities
* How to engage HUD with DCT?
  + Grey area…
    - Advocates should look to elected officials to change regulatory language, OMB, etc. to be able to use HUD funds for DCT; “congressional intent means a lot”
* Pushing the framework of current regulations

**JUNE 21ST 2023**

**Land Acknowledgement & Welcome Message**

* “fourth dimension prevention”
* Healing on a larger level, what we pay attention to grows

**Mourning, Grief, Loss**

* “pulled the strings out of the fabric of reality”
* Nonlinear nature of grief
* “rituals speak to staying connected”
* Community is how we heal
* Other grief beyond losing loved one?
  + Lost opportunity, lost potential (what could’ve been), spaces (things will never be as they were)
* “making a playlist of songs”

**Disrupting Pipelines into Homelessness: DCT as Prevention**

* WA State, A Way Home
* Definitions
  + 12-24 in all sorts: couch surfing, imminent risk, sheltered, unsheltered
  + County level bring model to address youth homelessness, 3 parts
    - Real time BNL
    - Reducing phase (diversion, DCT, creative ideas for reduction)
    - Functional zero (community has resources and systems in place) (includes ending disproportionality)
  + All people, situations, communities are unique, individualized approach needed
  + “systems are designed to get the results they want”
* HPDF?
  + Diversion: one time short term intervention to lead youth to permanent housing outside the homeless response system (not through CE)
  + Creating a no referrals system
  + Walla Walla (rural) reduced youth homelessness by 60%
* Criteria?
  + Under 25, experiencing OR at risk of experiencing (able to keep people housed so they never have to experience homelessness)
* DCT at Reach?
  + Lite case management
  + Went to founders, then private donations
* Data!!
  + August 2020-May 2023. Housed 929 YYA
    - 92% housed 12 months later
    - $2,100 average cost per household
    - 71% used HPDF as prevention
* Best practices?
  + Prioritizing youth, bring them to the table AND let them set the agenda
  + Low barrier
  + Youth driving solutions
  + “there’s a solution to every problem”
    - You have the answers, I have the ability to get things done
  + Just try, get out of your own way
* Favorite part?
  + Flexibility, “catches” those who have slipped through the cracks in the system
  + Space to get creative
    - Can’t cover work supplies unless direct tie to housing
* Leverage strengths and resources
* How to trust youth?
  + Ask the youth in the community what they need, how you can support them
* HPDF =/= DCT as prevention
  + DCT is true prevention so youth never have to access the homelessness response system

**Policy Training**

* Advocacy
  + Process of presenting public support/rejection of a particular cause or policy
  + Systems change level
  + YABs
* Activism
  + Efforts to promote, impede, or direct change with the desire to make “improvements in society”
  + Can include advocacy but usually refers to direct action / civil disobedience tactics (something that risks arrest)
* Community organizing
  + To literally organize individuals into a collective for action
  + Cooperate efforts and campaigning carried out by people directly impacted

Social Change Strategies

* Public Opinion
  + Narrative/strategic communication
  + Public awareness/popular ed/political ed campaigns
  + Civil disobedience/rallies/press conferences
* Coalition building
  + Rise above feelings of separateness
  + An art
  + Actively collaborate in a spirit of mutual understanding, patience, and flexibility
* Leadership Development
* Policy/Legislation
  + Regulation: rule within a law that specifies how the ideas of the law are actually going to be implemented
  + Policy: system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities enacted or enforced by a governmental entity or its representatives
  + City, county, state, federal
  + Law vs. policy
    - Fair Housing Act is a law (no discrimination). HUD put forth policy saying you can’t discriminate against criminal background.
    - A policy can clarify specifics around a law
* Social Justice Campaigns
  + Montgomery Bus Boycott
  + “Don’t Say Gay”
    - What is the main issue? Who is responsible?
      * Fear of change, reaction to loss of control, hatred, ignorance, replacement theory, gaining of rights to marginalized groups & backlash
      * “the first rule of activism is knowing who to be mad at”
  + 2020 BLM

**Launching a Successful Direct Cash Transfer Program: PSY Partners Share Out**

* System disruption? Innovation?
  + In OR, using state public funds
    - Matthew Rasmussen (DHS)
  + So many systems
  + Equity based eligibility system
    - Prioritized most vulnerable youth

**National Human Services Data Consortium**

On July 12th the CoC's Data & Evaluation Manager attended the one-day virtual conference held by the [National Human Services Data Consortium](https://www.nhsdc.org/) (NHSDC). This event highlighted a few popular presentations from previous in person conferences, including “The Power of Data in the Hands of Those with Lived Expertise” opening panel; a session on “Fostering Change through Data Quality”; a presentation by the Colorado Balance of State on their process to implement coordinated entry over a vast rural geography; a session on “Engaging Your Community With Data - Take-Home Tactics for Engaging Data Conversations”, and a closing session by NHSDC called “Sensitive Demographic Data - How to Keep Your People Safe.”

Read a synopsis of all sessions below!

**The Power of Data in the Hands of Those with Lived Expertise** talked about the impact of giving people quantitative data that they can use to strengthen their arguments and when we have data, to move away from presenting the data as the 'data person' sees it to making it part of the conversation and empowering people to use it. There was an interesting comment about how data has been used to perpetuate white supremacist values and to put the blame on individuals instead of society and therefore many people don't trust it, especially when data appears to contradict someone's lived experience. The suggestion was to listen to how data *doesn't* represent people and why they don't trust it.

Not every session was groundbreaking, but all had some valuable insights to share. **The Power of Data in the Hands of Those with Lived Expertise** talked about the impact of giving people quantitative data that they can use to strengthen their arguments and when we have data, to move away from presenting the data as the 'data person' sees it to making it part of the conversation and empowering people to use it. There was an interesting comment about how data has been used to perpetuate white supremacist values and to put the blame on individuals instead of society and therefore many people don't trust it, especially when data appears to contradict someone's lived experience. The suggestion was to listen to how data *doesn't* represent people and why they don't trust it.

**Fostering Change through Data Quality** was a presentation by our counterparts in Boston around their efforts to improve poor data quality after their funding was reduced in FY21. Their strategies included getting buy in from agency and program leadership and building out extensive required trainings not just on how to use the system but on how to resolve specific data quality errors- they created dozens of videos explaining key concepts and how to resolve different errors, each between 30 seconds and 7 minutes long, focusing on very concise videos. They've seen great results, and staff have begun asking for those in leadership and decision making to take some of the courses as well.

**Colorado Balance of State: A Roadmap for Coordinated Entry for Rural Communities** was an interesting look at how the Colorado Balance of State (a 'Balance of State' or BoS CoC is essentially everywhere in a state that isn't covered by a specific CoC. The Balance of State in MA covers many towns in easter Mass outside of Boston and the immediate suburbs such as Bedford, Lexington, Acton, Chelsea, Everett, Framingham, Malden, Tewksbury, Revere, Natick, Melrose, and more) implemented coordinated entry over their vast area with the help of our mutual HMIS vendor, Bitfocus Inc. They stated that the BoS of Colorado covers a region the size of Maine, VT, MA, NH, NJ, and Delaware combined! Needless to say they were able to develop a robust coordinated entry system and some of the highlights they learned were to be realistic about human power, set up equipment in a way that eases data entry, streamline HMIS and CE training, standardize work, set up regional community queues, build data dashboards and teach people how to use them to find issues/bottlenecks/wins. They also emphasized having real time notes within HMIS everyone has access to, a staff person assigned to help move someone to housing (driving, helping get ID, etc), and following up on housing transitions during case conferencing meetings.

**Engaging Your Community With Data** talked about the different kinds of audiences for data- exploratory audiences who are close to the work and have context and are engaging in conversations and looking to learn how to make improvements to the system and explanatory audiences who may not have as much context and are focused on advocacy and education, although the two groups aren't mutually exclusive. The presenters emphasized not sharing your own insights when presenting data and instead explaining how to read the graphs and then waiting while the audience digests the information, particularly with exploratory audiences. Another key highlight from this session is that adding visuals makes someone 6x more likely to remember information. They shared some very interesting example graphs that we'd like to try and recreate with Three County data!

The last session on **Sensitive Demographic Data - How to Keep Your People Safe** was a little different than expected. We went into it thinking it would be around safety practices for Victim Service Providers or shelters or housing programs serving those experiencing or fleeing domestic violence and it was instead around how several agencies have been asked for data on specific populations in the United States including LGBTQ and transgender individuals, undocumented individuals, and pregnant people. They shared maps and trackers of places where abortion access is restricted and where there are anti-transgender legislation either in place or proposed and emphasized that the key points they want to make are that if we notice concerning legislation being proposed in our state we should be preparing for data requests for one or more of these populations and that there are legal ways to push back on requests for data. Thankfully we are in a state where rights for these groups are being expanded instead of suppressed but it's helpful to be aware of the possibility and reality for many providers in other parts of the country. We can also continue to strengthen our policies and procedures regarding immigration status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, and transgender status to avoid unauthorized disclosure and adapt to changing legislature as needed.