Best practices: serving youth & young adults experiencing homelessness

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Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) Guiding Vision

Every family and youth in Washington State has the individualized support they need so that no young person has to spend a single night without a safe and stable home. Every community has services that are equitable, accessible, effective, responsive, and coordinated.
Who we serve

Young people ages 12 through 24 who are living on their own, without a parent or guardian, and are without a safe, stable living arrangement.

Also referred to as “unaccompanied” youth
Shelter, Outreach, Housing Programs

- Short-term shelter for youth under age 18 through HOPE Centers and Crisis Residential Centers
- Young Adult Shelter
- Street outreach services for youth and young adults
- Housing for young adults through Young Adult Housing Program and Independent Youth Housing Program
- Transitional Housing for youth ages 16-17
Reflection

What were you like as a teenager or young adult?
Adolescent development

- Key developmental window
- Peers become more important than parents
- Identity formation
- Need to practice independence, have agency
- Creative exploration
A unique period that demands a tailored approach

Young people who experience homelessness often:

- Lack work experience
- Have not completed their education
- Do not have experience living independently
- Have never been on their own lease before
- Don’t have established credit
- Are at greater risk of victimization
Myth-busting: Majority of youth do not choose to be homeless

- **Relational factors**: family conflict or dysfunction, rejection due to sexual orientation or gender identity
- **System failures**: foster care, justice system, physical and mental health care
- **Structural factors**: economic instability, underemployment, generational poverty, institutional racism

Source: AWH Canada
BIPOC and LGBTQ youth at highest risk

In Yakima County, American Indian youth represent 10% of youth accessing services, but only make up 5% of the population.
Anti-racist approach

• Use data and measure performance to ensure racial equity
• Shift power
• Practice being anti-racist in our approach, process, environment and culture.