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DUVAL, NASSAU, AND CLAY COUNTIES CONTINUUM OF CARE

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS: COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Prepared for Changing Homelessness by Focus Strategies

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Northeast Florida Continuum of Care (the CoC), through its lead agency, Changing Homelessness, engaged Focus Strategies to conduct this Needs Assessment of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in the CoC. The CoC is comprised of Duval, Clay, and Nassau Counties. Focus Strategies is a national consulting firm that specializes in using qualitative and quantitative data to help communities improve their homeless response systems and has a history of working in the CoC.

The CoC identified several purposes for the youth needs assessment that guided Focus Strategies' work on the project. Following the difficult years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CoC wanted an updated understanding of the current dimensions of youth homelessness and the system of care designed to address it. A new needs assessment would provide a basis upon which to plan and prioritize new youth-focused services in the CoC. Finally, the CoC plans to use the needs assessment to accurately describe the challenges facing unhoused youth to policy makers and prospective funders, including the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

A needs assessment is, with intention, focused primarily on needs that are not being met, areas where systems and programs could be improved, and gaps in services. There is less focus on needs that are being met, and the aspects of systems and programs that are working well. This Needs Assessment follows that pattern. However, the Needs Assessment does highlight some of the many important strengths of the current youth services system in Northeast Florida. And it is important to keep in mind that many of the identified areas for system improvement and gaps are by no means unique to the Northeast Florida CoC. In communities across the country, decades of insufficient federal and state resource allocations to youth homelessness have left CoCs struggling to meet the needs of unhoused young people.

This project could not have been completed without the generosity of scores of young people from Northeast Florida who shared their personal experiences with homelessness and their expert opinions on how to improve the system of services available to unhoused youth. Focus Strategies is also indebted to members of the project leadership team, and the numerous service providers and community stakeholders who took the time to sit for interviews, who shared their documents and data, and who helped engage other partners in the project.



II. NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The scope of this Needs Assessment was developed in consultation with Changing Homelessness, the CoC's lead agency, and with input from stakeholders, including young people with lived experience of homelessness. The implementation was overseen by a leadership committee that met weekly and included a young person with lived experience of homelessness and extensive knowledge of the local homelessness response system. As described in the introduction, the project objective was to develop an assessment that: (1) accurately describes the unhoused youth and young adult population and its needs; (2) serves as a foundation for future youth-specific strategic system and program planning; and (3) allows the CoC to convey to policy makers and funders how they can help young people in Northeast Florida end their homelessness.

A. Guiding Principles

Focus Strategies conducted this needs assessment according to several guiding principles:

- **Stakeholder Confidentiality:** To encourage participants to share openly and honestly, Focus Strategies committed that none of the information collected would be relayed to Changing Homelessness, to any other entity, or to the public in a manner that could be traced back to the person who provided the information.
- **High-Quality Quantitative and Qualitative Data:** Focus Strategies used the best available quantitative data and developed a body of complementary qualitative data for this Needs Assessment, recognizing that the significance of the quantitative data is found in qualitative information provided by people experiencing and working with the issues being studied.
- **Centering Lived Experience:** To accurately understand the needs of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in the CoC, Focus Strategies engaged youth in all phases of the needs assessment process, and provided them with multiple ways to share their input.
- **Equity-Lens:** Focus Strategies applied an equity lens to all aspects of the needs assessment process, understanding that someone's experience of homelessness and service needs may vary significantly based on whether they identify as a person of color, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, male, female, or non-binary, a person with a disability, an immigrant or refugee, or with multiple intersecting identities that shape and reinforce their barriers to permanent housing.



B. Methods

From February 2023 through May 2023 Focus Strategies worked with Changing Homelessness, local providers and institutions, and youth to collect the qualitative and quantitative data that support the findings of this Needs Assessment.

Focus Strategies obtained a commitment from Changing Homelessness that the information collected as part of this Needs Assessment would only be shared with them, and in the report, in a non-individually identifiable form. This commitment was made to everyone who participated in any aspect of the data collection process.

Focus Strategies relied on a range of relevant quantitative data to determine the needs of youth and young adults in the CoC. The primary data sources utilized include:

- Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
- Housing Inventory Count (HIC)
- Current and past Point in Time Counts (PIT)
- Public school districts
- Youth-focused social service provider internal data

In designing and implementing the qualitative community stakeholder components of this Needs Assessment, Focus Strategies worked with Changing Homelessness and several community-based organizations in Duval County to ensure that the perspectives of young people with lived experience of homelessness were incorporated. A formerly homeless young person was on the project leadership team; she helped identify stakeholders, reviewed and revised interview and survey questions, and led a youth focus group. Input from youth was obtained through one-on-one interviews, a youth survey, and a focus group. Attention was given to obtaining input from as diverse a group of young people as possible. All youth who participated in any aspect of the Needs Assessment were compensated for their time.

In addition to seeking input from young people with lived experience of homelessness, Focus Strategies conducted stakeholder interviews, including with representatives from three school districts, several non-profit organizations serving young people, and representatives from local academic institutions. Focus Strategies also reviewed numerous reports, documents and plans produced by local governmental and non-profit entities. Below is a table describing the stakeholders engaged, the engagement format, and how many people participated. A



complete list of stakeholders who were interviewed is included as Attachment A to this needs assessment.

Stakeholder Group	Type of Engagement	Number of Participants
Service Providers/Institutions	Individual Interviews	12
Youth experiencing homelessness	Individual Interviews	4
Youth experiencing homelessness	Focus Group	8
Youth experiencing homelessness	Youth Survey	24

C. Limitations

As with any project of this type, limitations to the available data should be considered when interpreting the findings reported. While extensive efforts were made to engage a diversity of young people experiencing homelessness, there are some sub-populations (e.g., unhoused immigrant youth) who were not engaged directly; information was obtained from providers who work with them. Similarly, some governmental agencies (e.g., foster care, law enforcement) were not available for an interview during the timeframe; however, in most cases relevant information was provided by young people and providers who had actively engaged with those systems. As discussed in greater detail below, there are also limitations with the CoC's HMIS, HIC, and PIT data that require caution when drawing conclusions from these sources about unmet need and system performance.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Most of the information available regarding the number and characteristics of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in Duval, Nassau, and Clay counties comes from HMIS and the PIT Count, although that data should be contextualized using information from other quantitative and qualitative data sources.



A. Quantifying Overall Need

According to the CoC's 2023 Point in Time Count, there were a total of 295 people under the age of 25 experiencing literal homelessness¹ in the CoC on a single night in late January of 2023. Of youth counted, about 60% were under the age of 18. There were 12 unsheltered youth, all between the ages of 18 and 24. This translates to 4% of the total enumerated youth homeless population being unsheltered in 2023. The table below summarizes the 2023 PIT count results for youth.

	2023 PIT	Percent of Total
<i>Age Group</i>		
Younger than 18	176	60%
18-24	119	40%
Total Youth	295	--
<i>Living Situation</i>		
Sheltered	283	96%
Unsheltered	12	4%

There was general agreement among stakeholders interviewed that the PIT likely undercounts the youth and young adult populations, and that certain youth sub-populations are particularly likely to be undercounted. For example, those who are unsheltered are less likely to be engaged with the system, and thus more likely to be missed in a count than youth who are staying in shelters, motels, and transitional housing programs. Youth and providers alike believe that the number of youth living in vehicles, squats, and other places not suitable for human habitations exceeds what the PIT is able to capture.²

¹ Literal homelessness is defined by HUD as: Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

1. Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; or
2. Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); or
3. Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

² Changing Homelessness, which led the 2023 PIT Count on behalf of the CoC, noted several factors that may have contributed to an undercount this year in particular, including greater reluctance on the part of those who were unsheltered to participate than in past years, the loss of a key meal program that in the past served as a vital point of contact with the unsheltered population, and a lack of resources to commit to Clay and Nassau Counties.



Data from the Nassau and Clay County school districts, where there are fewer service providers and youth specific services, supports the conclusion that the PIT may also undercount youth homelessness in Nassau and Duval Counties. Because of differences in how data is collected by the schools, their data can only be suggestive of who may have been missed in the PIT Count; unlike the CoC, the school districts collect data on a rolling basis, rather than at a point in time, and they use a different definition of homelessness than what HUD prescribes for the PIT Count.

Nonetheless, it remains instructive that Clay County reported 661 students enrolled in school who were homeless about six weeks after the PIT Count was conducted. Of those, 93 likely met HUD's definition of literal homelessness; the remainder - the significant majority - were living doubled up and would not have been counted in the PIT. Ninety-three is more than five times higher than the 16 people of any age in Clay County identified as experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness in the 2023 PIT. Similarly, from the beginning of the 22-23 school year, Nassau County enrolled 78 students who were living unsheltered, in vehicles, substandard housing conditions, motels, or shelter. Another 285 enrolled students were living doubled-up. The 78 literally homeless students contrast with the 55 people of all ages who were identified as living unsheltered or in a shelter in Nassau County during the 2023 PIT count.³

The school district data also illustrates a point made by multiple stakeholders: youth are much more likely to be living doubled up than in shelter or on the streets. While HUD does not consider these young people to be experiencing homelessness, they may well be suffering many of the same traumas as literally homeless youth and are at higher risk of becoming literally homeless.

Another indicator of need among youth is the number who are being served by the homeless response system. Over the course of calendar years 2021 and 2022, the CoC's homeless response system served 1,663 unique young people aged 24 and under. Of those served, 75% were aged 18-24, and 25% were aged 1-17. Young adults 18 and older participated in a broad range of services, while youth 17 and under were almost exclusively served within shelters, either as part of a family with children or as unaccompanied youth awaiting

³ Recognizing that the PIT Count has very likely not captured the true size and demographic make-up of the unsheltered population over the last several pandemic years, the CoC is taking several measures to obtain a more accurate count, including conducting an additional unsheltered count in the summer of 2023.



unification with adult caretakers. The system disproportionately served female-identifying young people overall (59%), and in each service category, except shelter, where those identifying as male and female were served relatively equally.

Of those served in the system, less than one-fifth of youth reported living with a disabling condition (18% overall). Of those connecting to coordinated entry - which prioritizes based on disability - only 19% reported a disabling condition. Among those in shelter only 10% reported a disability, and none of those in transitional housing were disabled. By contrast, young people with disabilities made up a significantly higher percentage of those enrolled in housing programs (e.g., 33% in rapid rehousing programs).

B. Race & Ethnicity

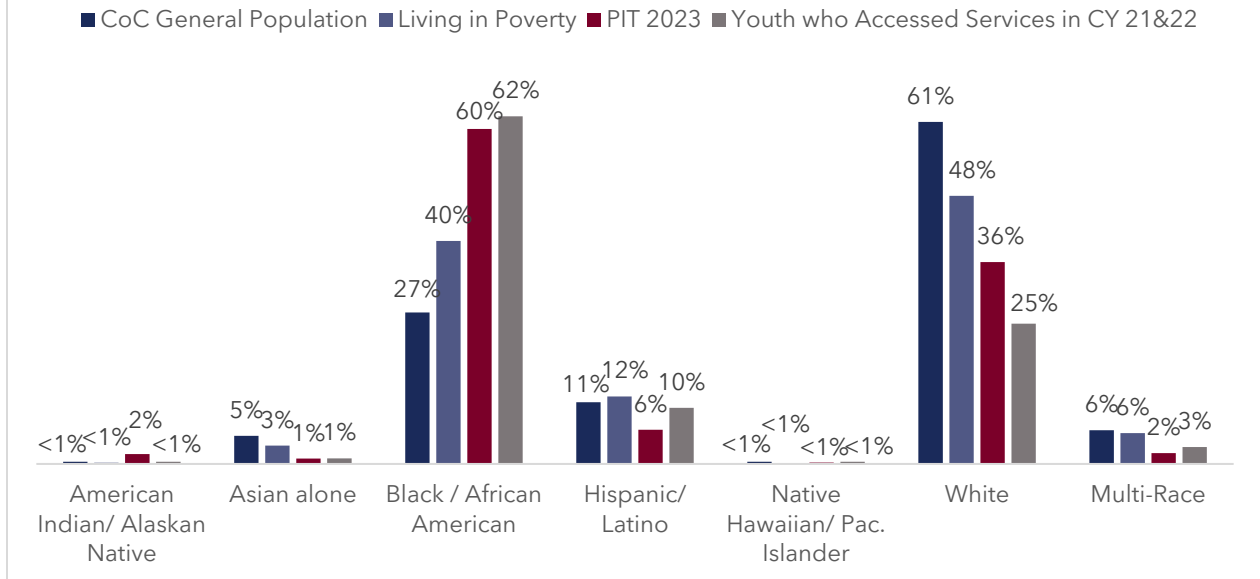
In the Northeast Florida CoC, people who identify as Black or African American are especially overrepresented in the population experiencing homelessness. According to U.S. Census data, the region's population is 61% white, 27% Black, 11% Hispanic/Latina/e/o, 6% multi-racial, and 5% Asian. In contrast, the population experiencing homelessness, according to the 2023 PIT, is 60% Black, 35% white, and 6% Hispanic/Latina/e/o.

The pattern is similar for Black youth. Although race and ethnicity data for all unhoused youth in the region is not available, the overrepresentation of Black youth is seen in youth who access services through the CoC. While the region's population is 27% Black, 62% of youth who access homeless services are Black, in line with the proportion of Black individuals experiencing homelessness.

The graph below illustrates the racial and ethnic composition of the region's population, the population living in poverty, the population experiencing homelessness, and youth who accessed CoC services in 2021 and 2022.



Northeast Florida CoC Demographic Breakdown



It is important to note that demographics differ significantly by county. In Duval County, 51% of people identify as Non-Hispanic white, 31.1% of people identify as Black/African American, and 11.3% identify as Hispanic/Latina/e/o. In Clay and Nassau Counties Non-Hispanic white people make up 70% and 85% of the population, respectively. In Clay County, only 14% of people identify as Black and 3% identify as Asian. In Nassau County, 6% identify as Black, 5% as Hispanic/Latina/e/o, and 1% as Asian.

C. LGBTQ+

Nationally, young people who identify as LGBTQ+ experience homelessness at much higher rates than other young people their age. According to some estimates, over 880,000 people over the age of 13 in Florida identify as LGBTQ+, and about 4.6% of the population that is over 18.⁴ While the data does not indicate how many LGBTQ+ people are under the age of 25, CoC data indicates that of youth enrolled in HMIS-tracked homeless services, 8% identified a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, and 2% identified their gender as non-binary. The HMIS data analyzed did not include any youth who identified as transgender, so local comparative information is not available for this youth sub-population. Although the option is

⁴ Movement Advancement Project, *Florida's Equality Profile*. 2023. https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/FL



available in HMIS, providers and Changing Homelessness noted that trans youth do not feel comfortable identifying as trans in a shared data system. In 2021 and 2022, 23 youth did identify as " a gender other than singularly female or male".

It should also be noted that gender identity and sexual orientation data was only available for about half of the young people who had records in HMIS, indicating that efforts to improve data quality in these areas are needed. Other data support stakeholder feedback that the number of LGBTQ+ youth who access the homelessness response system is greater than what is reflected in HMIS. For example, JASMYN, a community provider that focuses on LGBTQ+ youth, served 240 youth who identified as LGBTQ+ in FY21-22; this is nearly four times the 64 youth identified in HMIS as gender non-binary or having a sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

Based on the HMIS data that is available, youth who identify as non-binary were underserved in shelter (1%) and transitional housing (0%) relative to their share of the overall service recipient population (2%), while they were more likely to be served in street outreach (8%) and prevention (7%). This may be an indication of challenges people who are gender-nonconforming face accessing and/or being successful in shelter and other interim housing programs, although given the level of missing information in HMIS it is difficult to draw firm conclusions.

IV. RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

The Continuum of Care has a small network of community-based organizations that deliver specialized services to youth and young adults who experience or are at risk of homelessness. These services are heavily concentrated in Duval County and focus on meeting young people's needs for survival services, emergency shelter, access to healthcare, and, to a lesser extent, permanent housing placement. According to the CoC's most recent Housing Inventory Report (HIC), the CoC features 48 beds of shelter and transitional housing dedicated to youth, 1 rapid rehousing (RRH)/permanent supportive housing (PSH) unit for unaccompanied youth and 415 units for families with children.

Faith-based organizations are an integral part of the homelessness response system, especially for temporarily housing youth. According to HMIS, out of all youth who accessed emergency shelter or transitional housing services in years 2021 and 2022, 86% did so through a faith-based organization.



The system features critical specialized services for youth facing a range of specific barriers to ending their homelessness. JASMYN, an organization that participated in this Needs Assessment as a provider stakeholder, offers culturally specific services to LGBTQ+ youth. Other providers specialize in offering behavioral health support services, a range of wrap around services and interim housing to young people who have run-away, are escaping sexual exploitation, being diverted from the juvenile justice system, and exiting foster care. There are also family-focused programs serving people escaping domestic violence.

In addition, several mainstream institutions regularly engage young people who face severe housing instability and homelessness. These institutions have developed internal capacity and partnerships to help young people escape homelessness. For example, several stakeholders highlighted the state foster care system's program to provide a range of independent living resources to youth who transition out of foster care without adequate supports in place.⁵ Similarly, there are targeted resources for young people who lack stable housing who are involved in the juvenile justice system. In the CoC, many of these services are delivered by the Youth Crisis Center.⁶

The school districts in Duval, Clay, and Nassau Counties have well developed McKinney Vento Title X programs for homeless students. Each of these programs serves hundreds of students who lack stable housing and helps them navigate the challenges they face pursuing their education. The community colleges in the area offer a range of programs that help young people receive the education and training they need to obtain employment. Under Florida law, for example, a student experiencing homelessness is eligible to apply for an exemption from tuition and fees at a network of 28 community colleges.⁷

Overall spending to address youth and young adult homelessness in the CoC is limited. In FY 2022, the CoC's award from HUD was \$6.6 million.⁸ Of this amount \$2.3 million was dedicated to rapid rehousing programs across NE Florida. While young adults are eligible for these programs, the funding is not set-aside to serve them. The State of Florida provides approximately \$6 million in Challenge Grant funding to Florida CoCs, of which \$148,500

⁵ Daniel, *Florida I.L Resource Center*. 2023. www.danielkids.org/our-programs/florida-i-l-resource-center

⁶ Youth Crisis Center. 2023. www.youthcrisiscenter.org

⁷ FLA Statutes Title XLVIII Chapter. 1009.25

⁸ Florida Council on Homelessness, *Annual Report*. 2022. <https://www.myflfamilies.com/document/1046>



comes to the NE Florida CoC and, of that, approximately \$119,000 is dedicated to JASMYN, a youth-focused organization in Jacksonville that specializes in serving LGBTQ+ youth.

V. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS



"Cost of living is increasing so it feels impossible to afford all my basic needs such as rent, food, gas, and medical care."

Youth Survey Respondent

Focus Strategies asked stakeholders and youth who participated in an interview, a focus group, or a survey to identify the primary causes of homelessness for youth and young adults. While responses varied, by far the most common answer was lack of affordable housing.

A. Lack of Affordable Housing

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Florida has 575,379 extremely low-income households - households with incomes at 30%, or below, of the state's median income. The state has a deficit of 443,892 rental units that are affordable to those extremely low-income households; there are only 23 affordable homes available for every 100 extremely low-income households. Not surprisingly, 83% of the extremely low-income households that have housing are paying more than 50% of their income to remain housed. This puts them continuously at risk of becoming homeless.⁹ And for those who are already experiencing homelessness - including young people - the lack of available deeply affordable units makes finding housing they can afford extremely difficult.

As difficult as the housing situation is for Florida as a whole, it is particularly challenging in the Jacksonville area, which has experienced some of the fastest increases in rent in the country. According to a recent report by the Northeast Florida Center for Community Initiatives, rents in Duval County increased 38.8% from January 2020 to November of 2022. "To put this in dollar figures, the average renter in Duval County saw somewhere between a \$370-\$470 increase in their monthly rent payment over the past two-year period".¹⁰ Lack of affordable

⁹ nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/florida

¹⁰ David Jaffee, *Jacksonville's Affordable Rental Housing Crisis: Description, Diagnosis, and Potential Policy Solutions*, The Northeast Florida Center for Community Initiatives. 2023, 4. <https://jaxrentalhousingproject.domains.unf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/JRHP-Report-2023-Jax-Rental-Housing-Crisis-1.pdf>



Summary of Key Factors Contributing to Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Northeast Florida



Lack of Affordable Housing



Lack of a Living Wage Employment



Inadequate Transportation



Mental Health



Insufficient Quality Services



Discrimination

housing was by far the most common answer among individuals surveyed about the causes of youth homelessness. This mirrored the responses of more than 20 community based providers interviewed in 2022 about the most urgent needs in the overall homeless response system as part of Duval County's HOME American Rescue Plan proposal to HUD.¹¹ In addition to the absence of affordable units, participants in this Needs Assessment emphasized a wide range of barriers to accessing the units that do exist, including knowledge of how to access housing, screening criteria, and discrimination by landlords. These are discussed in more detail below.

B. Lack of Living Wage Employment

For young adults, a key corollary to the rapidly rising cost of housing is the difficulty finding employment that can pay the rapidly escalating rents. Youth reported that even when they were working, they could not earn enough to afford rents. Many entry-level jobs pay only a fraction of what it would take to afford market rents, and even rent restricted housing is out of reach for young people working in many sectors. For example, the median hourly wage for a cashier in Jacksonville is just over \$11/hr. This is about 26% of the area median income.¹² A youth working full time at this wage can only afford about \$550 a month in rent; that is \$400 a month less than the HUD Fair Market Rent for a studio in Jacksonville (\$960).

C. Other Significant Obstacles

In addition to the lack of available affordable housing, and the insufficiency of wages, participants shared several other

¹¹ City of Jacksonville - Duval County HOME - American Rescue Plan Grant Allocation Plan. 2022.

<https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/CPD/documents/HOME-ARP/ALLOCATIONPLANS>

¹² Jaffee, *Jacksonville's Affordable Rental Housing Crisis: Description, Diagnosis, and Potential Policy Solutions*, 7.



significant reasons that young people find themselves unhoused and struggle to access stable housing. These include:

- **Lack of Family/Social Supports:** Young people identified lack of support at home, or being in a family that was struggling with financial and other challenges, as a critical reason they found themselves unhoused. Young people often felt compelled to leave home, or were forced out, and did not have the life skills and resources to obtain and maintain permanent housing. Several young people shared that they saw the lack of familial and organic social support as one of the biggest reasons they and their peers found themselves homeless.
- **Lack of Transportation:** Lack of public transportation that effectively connects young people to educational, employment, and housing opportunities was frequently cited as a barrier to escaping homelessness. Stakeholders reported spending hours navigating public transit that did not get them close enough to key locations, and, even if the routes brought them to the right areas, the hours of operation were often too limited. The concerns were especially pronounced in Clay and Nassau Counties, but transportation was frequently mentioned as a challenge in Duval County as well.
- **Mental Health:** Several stakeholders identified young people's mental health, and difficulty accessing quality mental health care, as major contributors to youth homelessness. These mental health challenges have many sources; as one young person explained, in their experience youth find themselves without housing because of "a lot of mental illness" and one place that can come from is "disapproval from the people you are expecting to love you, it bothers you mentally, emotionally." A provider of mental health services specifically identified executive functioning as an area where youth experiencing homelessness need more support than other youth of the same age. Types of services that can support youth with mental health needs are discussed below.
- **Lack of Sufficient Quality Services:** A number of stakeholders identified an overall inadequate level of services for youth and young adults facing a housing crisis as a reason so many become homeless and struggle to find housing. This was particularly true in Clay and Nassau Counties, which have very little dedicated youth services programming, but was also the case in Duval County. Among youth and young adults surveyed, only 40% thought shelter and other services were easy to access, and only 13% thought permanent housing resources were readily accessible. In addition, less than half (46%) of the youth surveyed indicated that they thought the services that exist



are working well and meeting the needs of youth. The gaps in services and areas for system improvement are described in greater detail below.

D. Discrimination

While all youth face some combination of the above obstacles, many young people also face discrimination based on aspects of their identity, making them disproportionately vulnerable to becoming and remaining unhoused. This is particularly true for young people of color, people who identify as LGBTQ+, and people with disabling conditions. As one service provider explained, "[i]n terms of barriers within the community—racism and transphobia are the major factors for our young adults." This discrimination can show up in family and friend relationships, in school, when looking for a job, in social services, and, more broadly, within the culture of the larger community that young people are struggling to feel a part of. However, participants in this Needs Assessment particularly emphasized facing discrimination in the housing market. Some of these experiences are described in greater detail below in the sections on special populations and racial equity.

VI. SYSTEM ANALYSIS

This section described the current performance of the Northeast Florida CoC's system of youth services and some of the strengths of the system that can be built upon. As a needs analysis, however, the primary focus is on aspects of the current system that could be improved upon, and gaps in the available services for unhoused youth. Overall, the services that currently exist appear to be working well, but the range and scale of services is not sufficient to meet the need.

A. Quantifying Performance

Over two calendar years (2021 and 2022), the CoC served 1,663 unique young people ages 24 and under. Those 17 and under were served almost exclusively with shelter, while those 18 and over received a broad range of services, including outreach, shelter, permanent housing placement, and housing retention supports.

Young people of color were served at proportionately higher rates. While people who identify as Black or African American make up 27% of the region's population, Black youth made up 62% of the young people served. Within permanent housing programs, young people of color made up an even larger percentage of those served. People of color make up approximately



50% of the region's population, but young people of color represent 84% of those served by coordinated entry and 89% of the youth served in rapid rehousing programs.

In addition to understanding how many young people access services, it is critical to assess how many successfully use the services to exit homelessness and remain housed, and whether these successful outcomes are experienced equitably. Looking at exits from the homeless response system for calendar years 2021 and 2022, 1,331 people under the age of 25 exited programs. As the table below illustrates, rates of known exits to permanent housing varied by the type of service. Of those served by coordinated entry, 10% exited to permanent housing. Overall, only 7% of people served in emergency shelter exited to permanent or stable housing. By contrast, 56% of those enrolled in rapid rehousing exited to permanent housing.

Type of Service	Total # of Youth Exits	Percent of Exits to Permanent or Stable Housing
Coordinated Entry	207	10%
Emergency Shelter	693	7%
Homeless Prevention	71	42%
Permanent Housing - Disability	6	100%
Rapid Rehousing	34	56%
Services Only	250	33%
Street Outreach	8	50%
Transitional Housing	62	31%
Total	1,331	17%

Evaluating the import of these percentages is complicated by the fact that rates of exits to Unknown Destinations are as high as 80% for coordinated entry, and over 25% in all program types except Prevention, where only 7% of exits were to Unknown Destinations. Additional inquiry into these percentages is warranted to better understand the implications for system performance.

The table below compares rates of exit to permanent housing among racial and ethnic groups by service type. American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian/Asian American, and Multi-Racial youth were grouped into an "Other People of Color (POC)" category due to small sample sizes when broken down by type of services. Where the number



of youth who identify with a particular race or ethnicity is less than five, the data is omitted from the table to avoid misinterpretation of exit data.

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Exits to Permanent or Stable Housing					
	Coordinated Entry	Emergency Shelter	Rapid Rehousing	Prevention Programs	Transitional Housing	Services Only
Black/African American	11%	9%	58%	39%	26%	32%
Hispanic/Latina / e/o	9%	5%	--	--	--	28%
Other POC	8%	11%	--	33%	57%	44%
White	9%	6%	43%	48%	32%	33%

Black youth exit from coordinated entry to permanent or stable housing at a somewhat higher rate than white youth (11% v. 9%). In emergency shelter, 11% of people who identify with Other POC categories exit to permanent housing, as compared to 9% of Black youth, and only 6% of white youth. Notably, only 5% of people who identify as Hispanic/Latina/e/o exit to permanent housing.

In rapid rehousing, Black youth successfully exit to permanent housing at a higher rate than white youth (58% v. 43%). The opposite is true in transitional housing, where 26% of Black youth exit to permanent housing, compared to 32% of white youth and 57% of Other POC.

Comparing successful exits to permanent housing for those who identify as male and female yields the following:

Gender	Percent of Exits to Permanent or Stable Housing					
	Coordinated Entry	Emergency Shelter	Rapid Rehousing	Prevention Programs	Transitional Housing	Services Only
Female	10%	9%	50%	44%	47%	30%
Male	5%	8%	50%	18%	40%	28%

Female identifying clients exit to permanent housing from coordinated entry at twice the rate as male identifying clients (10% and 5%, respectively). They also exit emergency shelter to permanent housing at a higher rate, but the difference is smaller (47% and 40%, respectively). The difference is most pronounced in prevention programs, where 44% of female identifying



clients exit to permanent housing, as compared to only 18% of males. Success rates are equivalent for females and males in rapid rehousing, and similar in services only programs. Overall, the system appears to be helping youth of color and women that enter services succeed at rates as high or higher than people who identify as white or male. However, there are challenges with data completeness and some high percentages of exits to unknown destinations that caution against drawing firm conclusions based on this data. Additional work to address these challenges would be beneficial to future system evaluation and planning.

B. Strengths of the Youth Services System

All participants in this Needs Assessment were asked to identify aspects of the youth system that are working well. Among providers and CoC leaders there was general agreement that the agencies serving youth maintain good collaborative relationships with each other. Organizations with different service models and sub-population priorities report working well with their peers to support youth accessing services. Several respondents identified the successful pre-pandemic "100 Day Challenge," focused on accelerating youth transitions to permanent housing, as an example of how well the community of providers collaborates. As one interviewee said, reflecting on the 100 Day Challenge, "When the [provider agencies] do come together, it is beautiful. They all offer something unique and different."

The collaboration among providers has also led to increased access to information about the resources available for youth experiencing homelessness and a practice of warm handoffs between providers when youth have needs better met by other system partners. Youth surveyed for this Needs Assessment expressed having a good understanding of the services that are available to them, with 88% of reporting that they knew what resources are available for people in their age group.¹³

Stakeholders reported that the service providers generally had a good understanding of the unique needs of youth and young adults, and they felt the agencies did a good job of meeting those needs within the constraints of their resources. Youth assessed positively the organizations that they were most closely connected to; they identified these organizations as providing critical personal support, structure, and services that had them on the path to

¹³These survey responses reflect what respondents felt they knew about resources as youth already connected to the system. As described below, youth and other stakeholders shared in interviews that, while there is good coordination and information sharing among providers and the youth they serve, young people and organizations not already connected to the system often struggle to learn about available services and how to access them.



greater stability. As one focus group participant shared, "I feel like everyone I have worked with all empathize genuinely, even if they have not experienced homelessness; the resources are good, but feeling seen is important and both [the agencies I have worked with] make me feel seen."

Several respondents highlighted the strengths of the CoC lead agency. They highlighted Changing Homelessness' commitment to working to improve the system (e.g., HMIS, Coordinated Entry, and the PIT County) and to expand the CoC's internal partnerships and collaborations with the health care and education sectors. These partnerships have led to cooperative efforts to increase youth's access to mainstream system resources and to additional financial resources for the youth services system as whole.

One stakeholder shared that they felt the youth system had sufficient emergency and transitional housing options, and that it offered young people sufficient pathways to get off the street. This perspective was unique among stakeholders and youth who contributed to this Needs Assessment, the vast majority of whom identified the lack of adequate emergency and permanent housing services as a major concern for the system (see below).

Finally, more than one respondent highlighted the relatively moderate Northeast Florida climate as a strength of the system, as it removed some of the risks that unhoused youth face in less hospitable climates.

C. Areas for Improvement of the Youth Services System

All stakeholder interviewees, focus group participants, and survey takers were asked about opportunities to improve the current system of youth and young adult services. The objective was to identify changes to existing system components and programs that would help achieved better outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness. The following were the most commonly cited areas for improvement:

- 1. Governance:** While assessments of the CoC lead agency and the CoC Board were generally very positive, and the collaboration among providers was highlighted as a strength of the system, stakeholders called out the need for a standing governance structure specific to youth services. A youth-specific governance structure started to emerge during the 100 Day Challenge, but with the end of that initiative and the onset of the pandemic, it dissolved. In addition to lacking a standing body within the CoC to oversee youth services, there is currently no Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to ensure that the



voices of young people with lived experience of homelessness are shaping the programs and policies that serve them. The call for a YAB resonated with the call heard from several stakeholders that youth need a more significant leadership role in the youth homeless response system as whole.

- 2. System Access & Coordinated Entry:** Stakeholders, including several youth, reported that lack of access to information about the services available is a barrier to getting off the streets. Stakeholders highlighted a need for better information sharing strategies focused on youth and organizations that are not already part of the homeless response system. As one focus group participant shared, the system could do a better job of bringing information to where youth are, urging providers to "get out in community and show your faces; that's what prevented me [from getting help], I just did not know."

There were also specific recommendations to redesign the coordinated entry system to better serve youth. To date, the CoC's coordinated entry system has required adults and youth alike to come to an adult shelter in Jacksonville. With only one coordinated entry access point, it has been difficult for youth, especially from Nassau and Clay counties, to access coordinated entry services. Previously, there was youth-specific outreach that connected young adults to the coordinated entry system, but these services were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic and have not been funded since. As one provider commented, calling for youth-specific case conferencing, "If a young person presents to my office, and I don't know of any resources, that does not mean they are not out there. A youth-specific case-conferencing or by name list, to help coordinate...[it] would be good to have that resource."

Another stakeholder identified the need to develop a system of service coordination for youth that goes beyond serving those who meet the HUD definition of homelessness, or who score high on the vulnerability assessment; the youth service coordination system should reflect the unique experiences of youth experiencing homelessness. The lack of a youth-focused and accessible coordinated system of access to services presents particularly significant challenges for youth outside of Jacksonville, especially given the inadequate transportation system.

The CoC has recognized the challenges with its coordinated entry system and is actively working to improve it. Among other things, the CoC has selected Changing Homelessness to be the new implementing agency for coordinated entry. CoC leadership



Summary of Gaps in the Youth Homeless Response System in Northeast Florida



Permanent Housing



Interim Housing



Education



Behavioral Health



Transportation



Services in Clay & Nassau County



Organizational Capacity

is working with Changing Homelessness to improve how and where people are screened for inclusion in Coordinate Entry, and to ensure more complete data collection and entry into HMIS.

3. Quantitative Data: There is a clear commitment from the CoC's lead agency to improve the quality and completeness of quantitative data about youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

Nonetheless, the CoC lead agency is among the first to acknowledge the limitations of the current HMIS system and the recent challenges with the PIT. It is difficult to rely on currently available data to provide an accurate assessment of how many youth are experiencing homelessness, the extent of disparities in the rates of homelessness for different sub-populations, and to gauge how effectively and equitably the system is achieving positive outcomes for youth and young adults. Individual providers maintain data on the performance of their programs, but in many cases this data is not reportable at the system level. As part of its review, Focus Strategies looked at internal data from the schools and from two of the largest youth providers, and it was difficult to reconcile those data sources with the findings from HMIS and the PIT. This is by no means an issue unique to this CoC, but it is nonetheless an important area for system improvement.

As with so many other aspects of the system, stakeholders identified the cost of quality data collection, reporting, and evaluation, and the lack of resources for this critical work, as a primary barrier to improvement. In addition, providers cited privacy concerns related to entering data from non CoC-funded programs into HMIS.



4. Doubled-Up Population: Several stakeholders highlighted the difficulty of truly understanding the scale and demographics of youth homelessness in the community, and the level of services needed, when those who are living involuntarily "doubled-up" or "couch-surfing" are not counted as homeless in HMIS or the PIT. As one respondent put it, "youth typically have a different homeless situation than adults; much less street homelessness, more often in hotels, couch surfing, housed but not safe and stable housing." Based on the school district data cited above, the number of young people experiencing this kind of homelessness, and needing support to obtain permanent housing, is likely 3 to 4 times higher than the number who are experiencing literal homelessness.

D. Gaps in the Youth Services System

Although stakeholders identified aspects of the current system for improvement, the most significant challenges they pointed to were gaps in the system; areas where resources are entirely absent or need to be provided at a much greater scale, and in a more integrated and sustained fashion. Providers and youth alike agreed on the critical need for more youth-specific service providers, and services that are designed around the unique needs of youth who are experiencing homelessness. With respect to service types, respondents identified the most significant gaps as:

- 1. Permanent Housing:** The lack of permanent housing options was identified as a primary cause of young people becoming, and remaining, unhoused. It is not surprising, therefore, that stakeholders cited housing that is affordable to youth and young adults as one of the most significant gaps in the system. For youth who accessed services during 2021 and 2022 and had a known exit destination, only 27% exited to permanent housing. In stakeholder interviews, providers and youth alike cited deeply affordable housing as the primary unmet need. Within this larger category, stakeholders identified several specific new and expanded permanent housing interventions in need of support:
 - a. Rapid Rehousing:** Youth-focused rapid rehousing programming that includes a combination of significantly expanded limited-duration rent assistance, housing case management, and wrap-around housing retention services.
 - b. Landlord Recruitment:** Services to help overcome the resistance that many landlords have to working with youth; youth are often perceived as a greater rental risk because of a lack of rental and income history. Stakeholders suggested specific youth-focused landlord recruitment and retention efforts and targeted financial incentives for landlords that agree to rent to youth.



c. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): Dedicated youth-focused permanent supportive housing. Too often it is incorrectly assumed that youth do not need PSH, and the current coordinated entry system prioritization tool does not adequately assess the unique vulnerabilities and needs of unhoused youth.

d. Eviction Prevention: Prioritized and targeted prevention services for young people, including those who are unaccompanied and those living in families. These services would significantly reduce the number of youth and young adults living on the streets or in shelter. Stakeholders noted both the lack of prevention case management services and the lack of financial resources as significant gaps.



I had received a voucher...it was outdated - the zip codes had max rents, but a lot of the areas had rents higher than the max rent; I couldn't go over \$800 in an area where starting rents were \$1200. Then who works with HUD and who doesn't work with HUD. HUD doesn't answer their phone. I got a new case manager when my voucher expired. It expired twice. I couldn't get good information about how it would work. Now the housing list is closed. I lost the voucher; I got approved by an apartment, but by the time I did, the voucher was expired.

Youth Focus Group Participant

e. Housing Navigation: Outside of rapid rehousing programs, youth and providers identified a need for additional housing navigation support. Youth reported struggling to know where to access housing navigation services. Even young people with rental assistance and vouchers reported challenges. They could not find units that met prescribed rent levels, and often landlords were unwilling to accept their rental subsidies. In the quote box, a youth describes their experience navigating an affordable housing program and the barriers they encountered.

f. Flexible Financial Assistance: In addition to short and long-term rental assistance integrated into programs with housing placement and retention supports, there is a need for flexible client assistance funds that can be used to help young people pay for IDs, application fees, pet fees, utility connections, deposits, past debts, and other costs that often represent barriers to housing access, even when someone has enough income or a long-term voucher to pay rent.



These identified permanent housing gaps are very similar to those identified by the community-based providers that participated in developing Duval County's 2022 HOME-ARP application to HUD. In those interviews, however, there was an even greater emphasis on the difficulty that people with long-term rental vouchers have finding units because of the lack of private market units that meet HUD's rent reasonableness standards for the area.¹⁴

- 2. Interim Housing:** Across the Continuum of Care, there are insufficient interim housing options for youth and young adults, including emergency shelter and various forms of transitional housing. Youth too often find themselves having to choose between staying in adult-oriented shelter programs, where they often feel unsafe, or sleeping unsheltered or doubled up in situations that also present risks and offer little access to support services. Stakeholders shared concerns about parents having to separate from their older teenage children in order to access shelter. Within the larger call for additional emergency and interim spaces for youth to live, respondents identified the need for:
 - a. LGBTQ+ Programs:** Shelter spaces that are geared specifically toward the needs of LGBTQ+ young people. Many LGBTQ+ young people feel particularly unsafe and unsupported in the community's adult shelter programs. There was also a specific request for shelter that recognizes the unique experiences and needs of trans youth.
 - b. Lower Program Barriers:** While some youth in the more structured programs within the CoC expressed appreciation for that structure, providers and youth both identified the need for additional low-barrier shelter and interim housing options. They sought programming that could better accommodate couples, provide more flexible hours to support youth's work, transportation, and education schedules, and that does not come with overt or implied expectations around accepting a particular faith or set of religious beliefs. One respondent suggested that the system needs a comprehensive 24/7 low-barrier youth shelter, modeled after a youth hostel, that offers multiple agencies the opportunity to provide health, education, and housing services to the youth staying there.
 - c. Non-Congregate Programs:** Respondents were particularly interested in expanding access to motel rooms, shared housing, and other non-congregate interim housing models. These models allow for greater privacy and an increased sense of safety for a

¹⁴ *City of Jacksonville - Duval County HOME - American Rescue Plan Grant Allocation Plan. 2022.*
<https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/CPD/documents/HOME-ARP/ALLOCATIONPLANS>



diverse population of youth. This gap in non-congregate shelter was also a central theme among providers interviewed in 2022. While they were speaking to people experiencing homelessness in general, the arguments were largely applicable to young adults as well. As one provider reportedly shared, "[f]aster access to non-congregate shelter rooms would improve local health [and] get folks back on road to safe, stable housing faster."¹⁵

d. Outside Duval County: There is no youth-specific shelter or interim housing in Nassau or Clay County, other than a limited amount of family and domestic violence shelter that accommodates parents with younger children. The need for expanded shelter and interim housing capacity in these counties was part of an overall request for more robust youth-focused safety-net services outside of Duval County.

3. Education: Young people and providers shared that the homeless response system needs additional educational capacity to help youth and young adults with a combination of life skills and preparation for living wage employment.

a. Life Skills: In interviews, young people and providers highlighted their need for additional access to life skills education. They specifically identified skills related to securing housing, securing employment, and financial literacy. They also sought additional support around accessing formal educational opportunities, and a range of government and social service programs. Some of these services are currently available through individual providers, but youth reported not necessarily knowing how to access them and that they are not available at the necessary scale.

b. Career Education: Stakeholders and young people identified the need for improved access to formal education that helps young people secure living wage employment. That includes high school completion programs, college, and vocational training. Florida offers free community college tuition to young people experiencing homelessness, but by itself that is often not enough to allow a young person experiencing extreme housing insecurity to complete a degree; they will often need housing and support services coupled to their educational programs in order to successfully complete their degrees and training certifications.

¹⁵ *City of Jacksonville*, pgs. 4-7



4. Behavioral Health: The Northeast Florida CoC is fortunate to have community-based organizations that specialize in providing mental health and recovery services to young



It's really hard for transportation. I lost my job at target after getting rained on really bad, showed up soaked. You can take three hours on the bus. I would take the bus to work but have to uber home because the bus is not running that late. I was fired because I couldn't do my shift.

Youth Focus Group Participant

people experiencing homelessness and other forms of trauma. It is at once a strength of the system, and an area where several stakeholders and youth identified a gap; they expressed that the need for mental health counseling is growing for young people, and services are not keeping up with demand. Specific areas of concern included serving youth with complex traumas and conditions that affect

youth's development and executive functioning. Stakeholders also mentioned the importance of meeting the mental health needs of parents and caretakers.

Organizations providing services to youth experiencing homelessness identified key components of mental health services that are important for effectively supporting unhoused youth. These components include wrap-around services, longer-term engagement, low-barrier "rules" or compliance requirements, and opportunities to explore family reunification and family-focused clinical services.

5. Transportation: One of the most consistent gaps identified by youth and providers alike was the lack of transportation access. This presents a major barrier to youth who are trying to access services, pursue education, find, and maintain employment, and obtain stable housing. Youth reported having to spend hours getting from their sleeping location to jobs, services, permanent housing options, and school. Public transit often does not reach areas where young people need to go in order to access these critical amenities, and routes that do reach those areas reportedly start too late or shut down too early to meet young people's needs.


6. Services in Clay and Nassau Counties: The services dedicated to serving youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in Northeast Florida are predominantly located in Duval County. While available data suggests that the significant majority of youth seeking services live in Duval County, data from Clay and Nassau school districts indicates there are sizable populations of youth and young adults experiencing various forms of



homelessness in those areas, including unaccompanied youth, and young people in families with children. Without more data, it is not possible to identify precisely the scale and nature of the service gaps in Clay and Nassau Counties, but stakeholders report that they are substantial and mirror the types of gaps found throughout the CoC; information and access, transportation, interim housing, permanent housing, and a range of support services. Stakeholders in the outlying counties also identified a lack of integration into the CoC service delivery system as a barrier to their ability to serve the unhoused young people they work with.

7. Organizational Capacity and Diversity:

Service providers were generally viewed favorably by stakeholders and youth. However, stakeholders highlighted the significant and varied ways that those agencies are struggling to meet demand. They face critical staff shortages, particularly for positions with specialized skill requirements, such as clinical behavioral health. They struggle with funding to sustain current programming. And several providers identified the need for flexible funding that would allow them to fill the gaps left by more rigid government funding streams, and to tailor their services to the unique needs of the young people they see. Stakeholders also identified a gap in culturally specific services and in provider agencies that better reflect the full diversity of young people experiencing homelessness in Northeast Florida.



As a minor, I could not get services at all. I went to every shelter out here, and every one of them told me I needed a parent. I wrote all of them down, it was over 12, and all of them said I needed an ID, or you had to have a parent. I have never stayed at any type of shelter. I had to find someone to stay with or I had to sleep outside.

Youth Stakeholder Interview

E. Considerations for Special Populations

Within the overall population of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, there are sub-groups that have unique experiences and needs that the current youth system is only partially able to meet.

1. Youth Under Age 18: Young people under the age of 18 make up a significant portion of the youth experiencing homelessness in the CoC, especially when considering the school districts' data. For the most part, young people under the age of 18 have not been emancipated. Therefore, the services for this population are primarily geared toward supporting them as part of a family with children that is experiencing homelessness, or as



an unaccompanied minor needing to be reconnected with family or to housing through the foster care system. Young people under the age of 18 find support through the Title X programs in their local school districts, and from specialized programs set up to meet their behavioral health and transitional housing needs while in the state's care. In interviews, youth under 18 expressed considerable frustration with the inability to access services without parental consent, and some reported not finding the support they needed from the child welfare system.

Providers similarly identified challenges in serving youth who are not emancipated and expressed a need for additional resources to support reunification of unaccompanied minors with their parents or family members. One frequently cited concrete example of a barrier that unaccompanied youth under 18 face is the inability to obtain a variety of vital documents without parental consent, documents that they need in order to access essential services, housing, and employment.

2. LGBTQ+ Youth: National statistics are clear that LGBTQ+ youth are much more likely to experience homelessness than their straight, cisgender peers.¹⁶ There was widespread agreement among providers and youth surveyed for this Needs Assessment that the data on the LGBTQ+ population captured in the Northeast Florida CoC's PIT and HMIS substantially underrepresents the population. This may be attributable to the data not being collected in some cases (e.g., sexual orientation), certain categories being too limited (e.g., gender identity), and a reluctance of LGBTQ+ people to share their identity with providers and survey takers, fearing that this information may be used against them. Providers and youth alike reported that LGBTQ+ youth face discrimination. In particular, transgender youth reported being discriminated against in the search for housing and services, as well as in the workplace. Some faith-based providers struggle to serve this population effectively due to conflicts with their religious teachings. And while official shelter and program policies may be accepting of LGBTQ+ youth, several providers and youth identified gaps in shelter, health care, and other support services that are truly responsive to the needs of this population. The CoC benefits from having a highly regarded youth-serving organization that specializes in serving LGBTQ+ youth with survival and housing services, but their scope and capacity is insufficient to meet this sub-population's significant needs.

¹⁶ Youth.gov, *Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care: Challenges and Solutions*. 2023. https://youth.gov/youth-briefs/foster-care-youth-brief/challenges#_ftn



3. Child Welfare System-Involved Youth: Youth with a history of child welfare involvement, in particular foster care involvement, face a substantially higher risk of homelessness, nationally and in Florida. A recent article published by the University of Florida Extension Services reports that 40%-50% of foster care youth who age out of the system experience homelessness within 18 months.¹⁷ Several stakeholders praised the programming available in Florida to assist young people to transition from foster care to independent living and stability. At the same time, youth and stakeholders alike reported that these programs were often not robust enough, and too often young people would fall through the cracks. In some cases, the system lacked the particular, culturally responsive, services that a young person needed, and in other cases youth reported not learning about available services in time to benefit from them. Youth also reported that in some cases the bureaucratic hurdles to accessing community integration services were too high to overcome. This is an area for additional inquiry and coordination between the CoC and child welfare.

4. Juvenile and Criminal Legal System Involved Youth: Young people with a history of involvement in the juvenile and adult criminal legal systems are more likely to experience homelessness. For example, among homeless and runaway youth living in one of 11 U.S. cities, researchers found that 44% had stayed in jail or prison, and 62% had been arrested at least once.¹⁸ Nationally, there is also a significant correlation between youth who have been in foster care, the juvenile justice system, and have experienced homelessness; youth with multiple system involvements have a particularly high likelihood of long-term struggles with homelessness, addiction, and adult justice system involvement.¹⁹

As with foster care involved youth, stakeholders in Northeast Florida highlighted programs that serve young people, both diversion programs that help them avoid becoming part of the juvenile justice system, and re-entry programs designed to support youth coming out of the justice system with family reunification and/or transition to independent living. As one provider explained, these programs wrap a range of services around young people in an effort to set them up for success. However, stakeholders and youth also reported that these programs are not robust enough and too many young people are not obtaining the

¹⁷ Francesca Michelini, *Foster Care Youth in Transition: How to Help Mitigate Risks of Homelessness Faced by Teens and Emerging Adults in the Foster Care System*. IFAS Extension University of Florida. 2022. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FY1516>

¹⁸ Youth.gov. *Juvenile Justice*. 2023. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/runaway-and-homeless-youth>

¹⁹ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2019.104609>



services they need. One provider reported particular difficulties with youth under the age of 18 coming from juvenile justice facilities who lack access to specialized programs that address their, often serious, drug and mental health challenges.

Several youth and stakeholders also expressed concerns about the treatment that unhoused youth receive from police and other parts of the criminal legal system. While making a point of saying that they had encountered 'nice cops' as well, one young interviewee explained that they had seen police officers abuse their power when dealing with young panhandlers and a young trans woman. Other youth commented on the added burden that a history of criminal legal system involvement places on them: "Once you have a record, you are a menace to others who don't. That is a challenge."

5. Survivors of Human Trafficking: Sex trafficking was identified as a particularly significant issue in Jacksonville. Youth experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. In one study of unhoused youth, 42% of those surveyed had experienced sexual exploitation.²⁰ In Jacksonville, interviewees attributed the high rate of sex trafficking to the city being a transportation hub and to tourism, in particular tourism connected to professional football. The community features several programs dedicated to addressing sex trafficking, including the Dolores Barr Weaver Policy Center, Northeast Florida Human Trafficking Coalition and ReThreaded. While these services are not exclusively for youth, they specialize in serving trafficking survivors and have relationships with the youth providers. Recognizing the unique traumas and risks that sex trafficked youth face, providers called out the importance of partnerships with specialized agencies, the sheriff's department, and state agencies. Several service providers reported offering counseling tailored to sex trafficking survivors, and some take extra precautions in their facilities to protect trafficking survivors from their abusers. In interviews, some youth and providers drew a distinction between sex trafficking and sex work. Sex work was discussed as one of a limited number of means unhoused young people have of earning enough income to cover the costs of living. However, sex work was also recognized as dangerous and as highlighting the need for additional access to education and employment services that lead to living wage jobs for unhoused young people.

²⁰ Jennifer S. Middleton, Maurice N. Gattis, Laura M. Frey & Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, *Youth Experiences Survey (YES): Exploring the Scope and Complexity of Sex Trafficking in a Sample of Youth Experiencing Homelessness*. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 44:2, 141-157, DOI: 10.1080/01488376.2018.1428924



6. Immigrant Youth: According to several stakeholders, there is a relatively invisible population of immigrant youth, including undocumented immigrant youth, experiencing homelessness in Northeast Florida. They are both unaccompanied and in families experiencing homelessness. The most recent data available on the undocumented population in Florida suggests that 3,000 undocumented youth ages 16-24 live within Duval County.²¹ While school district data suggests that a portion of these young people are experiencing homelessness, neither the number of immigrants or undocumented immigrants is captured in HMIS or the PIT. Agencies serving unhoused youth acknowledged that relatively little is known about this population, and that there are few mechanisms in place to connect these youth to services, other than the Title X public school programs.

School liaisons shared that in their experience many immigrant youth are living in sub-standard conditions, with multiple families sharing a single bedroom apartment. They noted an influx of migrant youth into their programs in the last couple of years. According to the liaisons, language barriers and documentation status often prevent immigrant youth and their families from accessing services. Even when immigrant families do access services, the same barriers, and the overall lack of affordable housing, make it challenging for them to obtain appropriate permanent housing.

7. Suburban & Rural Youth: The Northeast Florida CoC is characterized by one highly urbanized county, Duval, and two suburban/rural counties. Stakeholders were consistent in their view that the system does not have a good measure of how many young people are experiencing literal homelessness in Nassau and Clay Counties. Stakeholders reported that the safety net services in Clay and Nassau counties are extremely limited, and those that exist are not designed to meet the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness, especially those who are unaccompanied. Further, stakeholders reported that due to constraints like provider connections, access to other services (e.g., education, employment, mental health), and transportation, youth from Clay and Nassau are often not able to return to their community of origin after being placed in permanent housing. The CoC would benefit from a thorough review and planning process focused on the service needs in Clay and Nassau Counties.

²¹ "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: Duval County, FL." <https://www.Migrationpolicy.Org>. Migration Policy Institute, Accessed June 20, 2023. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/county/12031>.



VII. EQUITY ANALYSIS

As described throughout this Needs Assessment, some youth and young people are especially vulnerable to becoming and remaining unhoused because of aspects of their identities that subject them to various forms of bias and discrimination. This is particularly true of many young people from communities of color, and young people who identify as LGBTQ+.

Understanding and addressing the impacts of systemic oppression on young people through the homelessness response system requires good quantitative and qualitative data. Data can not only reveal where and how young people are impacted by discrimination, but it can also demonstrate how well the various services in the homeless response system are addressing these inequities.

The data collected for this Needs Assessment provides only the beginning of what is needed for a more comprehensive equity analysis of the system. Some of the insights gained from stakeholder engagement and a review of the available quantitative data include:

- Young people of color, in particular those who identify as Black/African American, are overrepresented in homelessness, relative to the percentage of people of color in the overall population. The quantitative data on youth homelessness in the CoC is not yet robust enough to more precisely determine for other individual communities of color whether they are also overrepresented, the degree of any overrepresentation, and whether there are differences across the three counties in the CoC.
- Young people who experienced being unhoused, and providers that work with them, shared that youth of color experience additional obstacles to overcoming homelessness. They experience discrimination in their efforts to access housing and employment, adverse experiences with the legal and child welfare systems, and a lack of services designed to address the unique barriers they face by virtue of their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities.
- The CoC's homelessness response system is creating access for young people of color and is reaching Black/African American young people in particular. The data also suggests that Black young people are generally experiencing successful exits to permanent housing at rates as high or higher than Non-Hispanic white youth across the range of service types. The quantitative data does not yet provide reliable insights into the experience of youth from other individual communities of color, but the available



qualitative data suggests there may be challenges for Hispanic/Latina/e/o young people and immigrant youth accessing the services they need.

- The level of need within the LGBTQ+ community, particularly among young trans people, is not well captured in the available system-level quantitative data. However, there is provider-level quantitative data, and qualitative data from interviews with youth and providers, to suggest that the national patterns of overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ youth in homelessness are replicated in Northeast Florida. According to youth and stakeholders, LGBTQ+ youth face forms of institutionalized discrimination that are only partially addressed through culturally-specific services in the homeless youth system. Stakeholders called out, for example, the lack of appropriate interim housing options and health care for LGBTQ+ young people.
- Without diminishing the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ youth, several LGBTQ+ youth of color expressed in interviews their appreciation for the level of understanding and support they received from some service providers in the system. They reported that those services helped them overcome the challenges they faced in their familial relationships, in school, and in their search for employment and housing.

Addressing youth and young adult homelessness in Northeast Florida will require a continued commitment to fully quantifying and understanding the reasons that some young people are experiencing homelessness at higher rates than others. That analysis must extend to better understanding how well the available services meet the needs of those overrepresented populations, and what additional services, and service delivery models, are needed to support those young people's efforts to end their homelessness.

VIII. YOUNG PEOPLE'S ADVICE AND VISION

Young people who participated in interviews and the focus group for this Needs Assessment were asked what advice they would give a young person who had just become unhoused, and what kind of organization or program they would create if they could. Their answers are rooted in their personal experiences and interests, and they offer important insight into what it takes young people in Northeast Florida to overcome homelessness. Some of the perspectives youth they shared are presented here.



A. What advice would you give a young person who just became homeless?

Accept help.
Open yourself up to accepting help.

Educate yourself - try school, do the things you thought you could not do, just go after it, you have nothing to lose.

Don't feel sorry for yourself, these are just the cards that you are dealt, **you can still make something out of nothing.**

Don't get in the mindset that I'm a failure or give up on yourself. When I first got here, I felt so embarrassed. When I heard the word homeless, I went mute...You have to have faith that you are going to get through it.

Take advantage of every resource that you can, maneuver through it...have a mindset, I'm going to get out of it.

B. What kind of organization would you create and why?

I have always wanted to build a **big old homeless shelter** for people to stay in - I want to be a motivator, a voice, that there is a way out.

Hotel or two for people...I'm watching people sleep out in the middle of sidewalks in the rain. It rained two days in a row. It's basic needs for me. **And a place where people have their own space too.**
I know how that is.

Transitional housing for girls. I want to be a mental health counselor and provide that in a transitional housing program.

A twenty-four hour place. There are girls like me that do sex work, they could use a place to be. To relax and be safe.

An education program, but would adapt the teaching style to the needs of the students...**Teach people aspects of life, taxes, finances, life coaching.** Anything that people need to know in adulthood.

Transportation - the bus sucks... **I would want to provide better transportation.** They have shuttles for disabled folks, and elderly folks, you should have that for kids too, to get them where they need to go.

I want to build a place for special needs people like me. Somewhere to relax, a room to be by themselves, anything they need to do, food and snacks and stuff and they can come everyday...I want there to be somewhere where they can come and get friends.



IX. CONCLUSION

Youth and young adults in Northeast Florida who find themselves unhoused face enormous obstacles to ending their homelessness. Whether they are unaccompanied or part of families with children, the biggest obstacle most youth face is the lack of access to permanent housing that they can afford. They face other obstacles as well, including a lack of family and social support, the need for life skills and career-focused education and training, the lack of access to transportation, and unmet behavioral health needs. Young people of color, and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ face additional forms of discrimination that lead them to experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates. Young people in Northeast Florida with certain types of experiences – for example, foster care, criminal justice involvement, or sex trafficking – are also more likely to experience homelessness and face additional obstacles to escaping the streets.

As is true in communities around the country, a comparatively small and under-resourced network of non-profit organizations and local government agencies in Northeast Florida are working diligently to help young people overcome these obstacles to safe and stable housing. The quantitative and qualitative data developed and analyzed for this Needs Assessment illuminates a system of homeless youth services that has many core strengths, including strong collaboration among provider agencies, an array of quality youth-specific services, and indications that the system is making progress toward addressing some of the stark disparities in rates of homelessness for example among Black youth. At the same time, the data clearly indicates that the Northeast Florida CoC requires more capacity to meet the diversity and scale of the need among unhoused young people in Duval, Clay, and Nassau Counties.

With respect to improvements to the current system of services designed for youth experiencing homelessness, there is a need for greater capacity to collect and analyze comprehensive quantitative data. This would allow the CoC to more accurately determine the evolving scale and nature of the need, and to better assess the system’s capacity and performance in meeting that need. Improved quantitative data would also allow the CoC to reliably disaggregate need and system performance by key demographic factors like race, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, geographic location, and immigration status.

The performance of the system would also very likely improve with the creation of a youth system-specific governance structure that further integrates all three counties and centers the voices of young people. As the CoC experienced with the 100 Day Challenge, this kind of governance structure would facilitate effective strategic and program planning, and help the



CoC build the case for additional resources. Finally, providers and young people in the CoC agree that there is a need to improve the connection of youth, and mainstream organizations that serve youth, to appropriate and available services.

While these improvements to the existing system would very likely lead to improved outcomes for youth, the biggest challenges facing the Northeast Florida CoC are that gaps in the system's capacity. Starting with permanent housing options and extending through the full range of interim housing and support services for young people, the system needs additional services that meet the geographic, cultural, and experiential diversity of unhoused youth in the CoC. Existing providers lack the resources to expand high performing programs that they already offer, and this Needs Assessment lays out multiple areas where additional programming is needed. The permanent housing services available to young people are particularly inadequate at every level, including prevention, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, housing navigation, housing case management, and flexible housing/client assistance funds.

It is beyond the scope of a needs assessment to make strategic recommendations. Instead, the information here can support the CoC's future strategic planning and resource development efforts on behalf of unhoused young people. As one formerly homeless young person interviewed for this Needs Assessment advised others who become unhoused about how to escape the streets, "[t]ake advantage of every resource that you can, maneuver through it...have a mindset, I'm going to get out of it." This is good advice, and it will work only if the services are there to match a young person's efforts and particular needs. It is a difficult challenge for any community to meet, but it is a challenge that must be met in order to end youth homelessness in Northeast Florida.



APPENDIX A

List of Stakeholders Engaged to Inform Needs Assessment

II. Stakeholder Interviews

Name	Organization	Date
Allison Martin	University of Florida Health	March 29, 2023
Beth Mixon	Family Promise	March 17, 2023
Carolina Thompson	Clay County District Schools	March 30, 2023
Carmella Prescott	Daniel	March 20, 2023
Cosmos Cranston	JASMYN	March 24, 2023
Daphne Brusoe	Catholic Charities	March 29, 2023
Dr. Jametoria Burton	Florida Community College at Jacksonville	March 13, 2023
Heather Coleman	Changing Homelessness	March 20, 2023
Dr. Laura Lane	Changing Homelessness	March 22, 2023
Mollie Cressey	Nassau County District Schools	March 30, 2023
Patricia Pough	Duval County Public Schools	March 30, 2023
Peter Hicks	Youth Crisis Center	March 14, 2023



APPENDIX B

Demographics of Youth Survey and Focus Group Participants

	Survey Respondents		Focus Group Participants	
Total Participants	24		8	
	#	%	#	%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Am. Indian/AN/Ind.	--	--	1	13%
Black/Af. Am/ African	10	42%	6	75%
White	9	38%	--	--
Hispanic/Latinx	6	25%	1	13%
Prefer not to answer	6	25%	--	--
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	11	46%	3	38%
Male	6	25%	5	62%
Gender-variant/non-conforming	1	4%	--	--
Transgender	1	4%	--	--
Prefer not to answer	5	21%	--	--
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>				
Bisexual	3	13%	2	25%
Lesbian	1	4%	--	--
Straight/Heterosexual	12	50%	5	62%
Prefer not to answer	8	33%	1	13%
<i>Age Group</i>				
15-17	7	29%	--	--
18-20	7	29%	5	63%
21-24	4	17%	3	37%
Unknown	6	25%	--	--
<i>Current Living Situation</i>				
Renting house or apartment	4	17%	--	--
Staying with friends or family	4	17%	--	--
Emergency Shelter	5	21%	--	--
Motel	1	4%	--	--
Trailer/RV	2	8%	--	--
Prefer not to answer	8	33%	--	--

