

**A RESOURCE  
GUIDE  
FOR  
YOUNG ADULT  
SUPPORTIVE  
HOUSING  
PROVIDERS**



A resource prepared by the Corporation for Supportive  
Housing Metro Team in Collaboration with the New Jersey  
Department of Children and Families



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# INTRODUCTION

Young adults (18 to 24 years old) are one of the fastest growing homeless populations in the country. According to the 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, there were 34,210 unaccompanied homeless young adults under the age of 25, over 90 percent of whom are 18 to 24 years old. This represents just over six percent of the total homeless population and eight percent of people experiencing homelessness as individuals.<sup>1</sup> The report identified an additional 7,334 young adults experiencing homelessness that were also parenting at least one child under the age of 18. National estimates by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago show that as many as 1 in 30 adolescents (13 to 17 years old) and 1 in 10 young adults (18 to 25 years old) experience some form of homelessness in a year. Further, 20 to 40 percent of young people across the nation that experience homelessness identify as LGBTQIA+, and a vast majority are young adults of color. The risk of experiencing homelessness is 200 percent higher for unmarried parenting young people than for young people who are not parenting.<sup>2</sup> In New Jersey alone, Monarch's 2020 NJCounts Annual Point in Time Count found that, at a single point in time, homeless young adults (individuals and families with heads of households 24 years old or younger) represented 9.8 percent of the counted homeless population with 943 persons identified. Of these individuals, 69 percent (or 650 persons)



are between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. Additionally, 57.9 percent (or 546 persons) identify as Black/African American and 55.5 percent (or 523 persons) identify as female.<sup>3</sup>

The factors that contribute to homelessness among young adults vary and because of this, solutions must span a range of interventions that meet their physical, developmental, cultural, and social needs, including education and employment supports as well as a range of short and longer-term housing options. Supportive housing programs tailored to meet the unique needs of young adults transitioning to adulthood are relatively new, but there are promising approaches to serve the highest-need of these young adults – those with mental health and/or substance use disorders as well as those with histories of foster care and juvenile justice involvement.

Addressing homelessness among young adults who are precariously housed presents its own unique challenges, whether young adults are non-systems involved – runaway and homeless young people living outside of mainstream, public systems – or systems involved – young people placed in state custody and involved in child welfare, juvenile justice, or mental health and healthcare systems. This population often lacks or has an unstable connection to family; is vulnerable and at high risk for exploitation; lives in poverty; often has significant trauma histories that include physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and abandonment; and includes young people who are pregnant or parenting. This population of young adults is often operating in survival mode possibly without adequate skills or savvy to navigate the adult world. They are often afraid to be known to young adult and/or adult service systems or feel they have been neglected by the system(s). As a result, many stay under the radar and do not access formal services, including those that could promote stable housing and emotional well-being for them.

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF), New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) have partnered for many years working together to build a young adult supportive housing program that adapts to the needs of the population. For example, they partnered to develop a program known as Connect to Home. Programs like Connect to Home offer a crucial intervention that serves young adults as they are leaving an institution before they experience homelessness and become underserved and even more vulnerable individuals. Through the early implementation of Connect to Home, CSH and DCF gathered resources, consulted with peers across the country, and learned from the experience of building a program that can work for young adults. This document outlines the concepts that anyone hoping to create or refine supportive housing programs for young adults need to know.

CSH defines supportive housing for transition age young adults (TAY) in the following way:

*Housing is permanently affordable with no time limits and every individual has their own lease. Wrap-around support services are voluntary and not a condition of housing. Particularly for TAY, wrap-around services do not only focus on helping the young person stay housed. Fostering life skills,*

*supporting educational and career goals, building leadership skills, and connecting young adults with physical, mental, and behavioral health services are critical components for supporting these emerging adults. Therefore, unlike permanent supportive housing for adults, young adults are encouraged to move on, but at their own pace.<sup>4</sup>*

This definition continues to align closely with the efforts of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) Youth Intervention Model's risk and protective factors and four outcomes of:

1. Stable Housing
2. Permanent Connections
3. Education and Employment
4. Social-emotional Well-Being<sup>5</sup>



# PILLARS OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING AND HOUSING FIRST MODEL

## Housing First Principles

Removing barriers to housing allows young people to move in without conditions on treatment acceptance or compliance. Robust services are attached to housing, but young adults access such services through assertive engagement and motivational interviewing and not through coercion (i.e., continued tenancy is not dependent on participation in services).

Housing First is an evidence-based strategy where the most pressing priority is to keep people housed, followed by surrounding them with the services that can help them to stay that way. Housing First rests on two premises: the first is that quickly providing housing without barriers is the central goal of our work with people experiencing homelessness, and the second is that by providing housing assistance and case management services after individuals are housed, the time people spend in homelessness can be reduced and further episodes can be minimized. Rapid re-housing can be practiced by using several methods in combination. Barriers to gaining housing need to be reduced, and individuals will be screened into housing rather than screened out to be excluded. There will be enough outreach to the young adults, and throughout the leasing process, they will be engaged and included. The supportive services provided to young adults in a housing first model will be voluntary and flexible so that young adults always have the option to participate if they so wish, not barred by whatever their circumstances are.

There are seven key principles of housing first, and the first is that it will be centered on consumer choice. Ideally, a young adult is afforded the choice of housing provider and unit in a building, or they are provided a housing voucher if applicable. In cases where this isn't possible, management attempts to figure out other ways to promote housing choice from the outset of the interaction (such as choosing the furniture for their unit, or being able to participate in committees and hold leadership roles). Young adults are highly recommended to be involved in program design, evaluation, and the crafting of house expectations. They need to be encouraged to make their own decisions and to participate in young adult councils, and staff are open and welcoming of feedback. Two of the other pillars are quick access to housing, and units or vouchers targeted to those most vulnerable. The application process will be short and simple, and the criteria for rejection needs to be clearly delineated.

Based on these guidelines, a program will analyze who has access to the program in the community, and whether the entrance criteria are open, low barrier, equitable,

and updated. Young adults are unlikely to complete an application process when the requirements are excessive or tedious. This is especially true when those individuals have histories with trauma or have had negative experience with service providers or systems in the past. A program will ask participants to contribute ideas that might help make the process more succinct and successful. Robust support services with assertive engagement is another essential principle. The services provided in programs can make the difference between a person being housed and a person being homeless. Substance use disorder services, counseling and mental health services, career counseling and employment placement, educational support, housing stability services, community-building activities, and teaching independent living skills are all services that – in combination with a stable home – help to provide the support that people need to break out of long-term cycles of homelessness.

Another important principle is that tenancy cannot be based on participation in services. Services are voluntary and driven by young adults' needs and individual goals, and will not be held against young adults. A harm-reduction approach is vital to allowing providers to effectively engage with persons actively engaged in risky use of addictive substances who may not want to be completely substance free yet. This approach helps individuals who may participate in high-risk behaviors acquire knowledge they can use to keep themselves safe.

Lastly, providing leases and protections are important to making sure that young adults have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities. An initial lease is recommended to be at least six months to one year, and there are no conditions requiring that they be sober or participate in services. A goal of supportive housing is to support housing stability and avoid tenants facing eviction. Eviction may only be pursued by the property management/owner when documented egregious or repeated lease violations occur and must follow the legal eviction process. Staff will walk through the lease agreement with the young adult to ensure there is a full understanding of its terms.

## **Engagement Skills and Voluntary Services**

Using the assertive engagement technique, all services will be voluntary, customized, and comprehensive, reflecting the needs of all household members, and staff work actively to ensure that young adults are aware of available services, all of which need to be scheduled at convenient hours and location. The primary supportive housing service provider will have established connections to mainstream and community-based resources, and individual staff support young adults in developing and strengthening their connections to the community, as integration is an important aspect of quality supportive services. Supportive housing programs will be funded enough so that it is possible to provide services to young adults on an ongoing basis, and so that services are flexible enough to accommodate changing young adult wishes and needs.

Several effective service approaches can promote a voluntary service environment, and assertive engagement is an important start. Understanding the stages of

change, and where the young adults you work with are in those stages, can help to guide your approach to issues that may arise and determine the ideal timing for various interventions. It is also important to adopt a harm reduction approach to help build a trusting relationship and promote sustainable change for young adults exhibiting unhealthy habits. Motivational interviewing is another technique that can help identify an individual's goals and help to clarify a next step toward achieving those goals.

Understanding how trauma can impact those served – known as trauma informed care – is another means of promoting a voluntary service environment, by giving providers a foundation to guide and inform the various interventions and conversations that may become necessary when working with individuals who have experienced trauma like many young adults. This knowledge would also be useful for assisting individuals who may need additional support accepting and recognizing their trauma and seeking the aid if necessary.

The young adult always takes the lead throughout the engagement process to facilitate the support and services they receive once stably housed. Motivational interviewing is a useful tool for helping to ensure the process is young-adult-centered and focused on the young adult's goals, rather than on what the case manager may think a young adult's goals need to be. A case manager has a clear idea of how a young adult can establish, achieve, and evolve the goals they have in mind, how to set reasonable expectations at the start of a program for young adults to follow through on, and how to keep the young adult in charge of their achievement process. The young adult and services staff are a team, working together to help the young adult meet their goals. The service staff brings some key knowledge to the table in the relationship, offering guidance, support and accountability, and creating developmentally appropriate opportunities to take risks and practice skills. The services are developed based on the varying needs of different young adults, and young adult input. Staff work to keep young adults engaged in the voluntary services and adjust when necessary so that the intensity of services mirror the need of the young adult at any given time.

Each young adult is filled with tremendous promise and possesses unique strengths, skills, and potential that are ready to be harnessed. While it may seem counterintuitive to allow someone with a limited history of independence to lead their own plan of service, studies have shown that this is the only way to effectively help an individual to implement lasting change in their life.<sup>6 7 8</sup> Young adults tend to participate at high rates even when these types of services are not mandated as a condition of tenancy. Young adults appreciate when they have the autonomy to decide for themselves which services they would like to opt into, and this “low demand” model is more likely to house and retain those who were formerly homeless.

## Harm Reduction

Although recovery from mental health and substance use disorders is always the goal, Harm Reduction acknowledges that individuals are at different places along the continuum of behavior change, and accepts behavior change as an incremental

process in which individuals engage in self-discovery and transitions through stages of change. It recognizes complex social factors that influence vulnerability to drug use – including poverty, social inequality, discrimination, and trauma – and takes a non-judgmental approach that enhances quality of life for individuals and communities rather than promoting cessation of all drug use and empowers the person engaged in risky use of addictive substances as the primary agent in reducing the harms of their drug use. The approach has been shown to increase participation in substance use disorder and mental health treatment.<sup>9</sup> The harm reduction approach expands the therapeutic conversation between providers and young adults by allowing providers to engage with persons engaged in risky use of addictive substances who are not yet considering a substance free lifestyle.

Providers have a responsibility to be aware of how their own beliefs can inform their biases, and to develop a trusting relationship with their young adults. They will help young adults to identify their strengths and abilities by seeking the necessary support and supervision to facilitate these goals. Providers empower young adults with choices and break down their goals into manageable pieces to maximize prospects of success. Providers will not have any expectations and will celebrate a young adult's successes regardless of its size. The harm reduction plan decided on will be revisited regularly and updated as necessary with the young adult. Harm reduction is not being in support of or against drug use, nor is it anti-abstinence or “don't ask, don't tell.” To help young adults reduce harm, providers keep their services focused on young adults staying housed, regardless of any special needs they may have. The atmosphere will be open and non-judgmental, and while helping young adults achieve these goals, a trusting relationship will be established.

Successfully implementing a harm reduction approach relies heavily on building the provider-participant relationship in a way that emphasizes partnership, in contrast to traditional power dynamics.<sup>10</sup> This is especially true when considering the relationships that young adults sometimes have with service providers. Some suggestions from leaders in the field for implementing Harm Reduction with the population include:<sup>11</sup>

- Setting up satellite sites when program is staggered across a large geographic area, allowing individuals to find support close to them in time of need.
- Maintain a drop-in center for young adults only that can be a safe space for young adults and their peers.
- Establishing plans for stability based on the things the young adult identifies that make them feel safe.
- Support the young adult in developing a contingency plan that would go into effect in case of a mental health crisis and/or relapse. Such a plan might include whom to activate, what steps the young adult will take to reduce risk of harm or negative consequences (for example, any substance use occurring offsite to prevent lease violation), strategies for how and whom to reengage the young adult, and so on. The young person can sign the plan as an agreement with themselves and share with a trusted natural support and/or provider.

# ADDRESSING TRAUMA

Recognize that most young adults experiencing homelessness have experienced trauma and emphasize the need to rebuild a sense of self and control in their lives. Intervention or service approaches identify negative behaviors and have awareness of the possibility that negative behaviors are a result of adverse past experiences. Rather than take punitive action or pass judgment, providers link young adults to supports or provide direct support to young adults who are returning to or seeking to achieve a healthy path.

Trauma is a difficult experience that may cause someone to have mental or emotional problems for an extended period. Trauma can overwhelm someone's coping response, and some may have difficulty moving on after a traumatic event. Trauma that occurs earlier in a person's life is more likely to result in more intense psychological damage, and multiple sources of repeated experiences can magnify this impact.

The severity of trauma that a person has experienced can predict long-term housing instability. There are certain signs and physiological symptoms common in victims of trauma: unpredictable emotions, changes in thoughts or behavior, strained relationships, headaches or nausea, and flashbacks. Staff members are also vulnerable to their own unique sources of trauma: vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, or critical incident stress. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – an anxiety disorder stemming from experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event – is another common symptom in those who have experienced trauma. Not every traumatic experience will cause PTSD, and not every reaction to a traumatic experience is PTSD. Staff members can also experience burnout and compassion fatigue as a result of the type and level of investment in their young adults' lives and successes.

The heavy load that trauma can pose on both young adults and staff must be addressed appropriately for the relationship to remain healthy, and for the young adults to be able to rely on staff for the support they need. To ensure this balance, organizations have the responsibilities of making sure staff are always up to date on relevant training and receiving supervision and coaching. Also, staff workloads are assigned and monitored for acuity, considering that some young adults may need more time and support than others, and staff need to take time to prepare and debrief before and after working with certain young adults. Employees have the responsibilities of taking care of themselves and maintaining a healthy work/life balance. Staff need to maintain a network of friends, family, and others who can

## **BOX #1: MODELS FOR ADDRESSING TRAUMA**

- Cognitive-behavioral therapies
- Emotion regulation therapies
- Relational –interpersonal therapies
- Psychotherapies for dissociation
- Parent-child and family system therapies
- Social/helping network therapies
- Peer-to-peer support programs

provide a source of social support if they need it and seek therapy if necessary. Staff also need to establish clear boundaries with young adults at the outset of a relationship, so that neither party is confused as to their respective roles, and so that all parties can feel comfortable in the relationship.

Special consideration is paid to implementing a Trauma Informed Approach for programs targeting young adults like Connect to Home. By its very nature, homelessness and housing instability experienced by young adults has a traumatic effect. In addition, a program for young adults must be prepared to work with individuals who may have also experienced trauma related to being removed from their home, violence, exploitation, family rejections etc. Not every member of a supportive housing team can be a clinician treating the trauma of program participants. However, a trauma informed program is one that understands that recovery is at the center of all services. Staff must be aware that past trauma has a great possibility to influence behaviors and engagement in services, which means being patient and seeking to better understand young adults when they resist services, behave in ways that seem detrimental to their well-being, or behave in ways that are difficult to understand.<sup>12</sup> Once the need to address trauma is recognized in young adults, providers work to connect them to appropriate supports including those listed in Box #1.



# TAILORING A SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAM TO WORK WITH YOUNG ADULTS

By and large the Supportive Housing Services model that CSH promotes which has been described in previous sections is adaptable to most specialty populations. It is important to not try to reinvent the wheel in terms of the evidence based supportive housing and Housing First practices that make supportive housing programs effective interventions for vulnerable populations. However, there are some adjustments that may need to be made to dimensions of quality supportive housing when working with young adults.

Supportive housing programs targeting young adults need to pay special consideration to the following which will be explained in further detail in subsequent sections of this resource:

- Adherence to Positive Youth Development (e.g. Youth Thrive)
- Trauma informed programming
- Engagement and relationship building
- Incorporation of peer staff
- Encouragement of young adult involvement and advocacy
- Flexible support services delivery

Like people of all ages, young people need a stable home to serve as a platform for achieving life goals. Stable housing makes it easier for young adults to access health care, find and sustain employment, pursue education and become self-sufficient. Without stable housing, young adults are at greater risk of physical and sexual victimization as well as mental health, and/or substance use issues.

## Designing a Flexible and Adaptive Program

Providers of supportive housing need to understand that many homeless young adults have long histories of involvement with public services systems and institutions, and they may be hesitant to participate in supportive services that are highly structured or housing that feels institutional. Offering flexible supportive services that are driven by and responsive to the needs of individual young adults will be essential for engagement and assisting them toward stable, independent futures.<sup>13</sup>

- **Flexible intake and admission processes:** The intake process is recommended to require as few appointments and as little follow up by the

young adult as possible.

- **Understand young adult culture and development and adapt programs accordingly:** For example, young adults generally keep late hours – therefore, offering flexible “off hours” opportunities for young adults to access supportive services and public spaces such as laundry rooms or computer centers, will be appropriate. Evenings and weekends are critical times to offer structured activities and recreation, because these are the times when young adults might otherwise engage in less positive activities.<sup>14</sup>
- **Treat young adults as partners:** Within the empowering Positive Youth Development framework, it is appropriate to treat young adults as partners in program development and service delivery. Therefore, creating venues in which a young adult can provide input is a priority. Creating leadership opportunities for young adults — leading group sessions, mentoring other young adults or serving on an advisory board — supports the development of young adults’ self-esteem and provides them with opportunities to practice skills for future success.
- **Emphasize Employment:** Employment can play a key role in permanently ending homelessness, by helping young adults gain confidence in their abilities and self-worth, while generating income, creating independence, identifying career pathways, and reducing their future reliance on entitlements. Young adults may need considerable support to learn job-seeking skills, find employment, develop job skills and retain employment. Not all young adults may be ready or able to fully pursue employment goals especially at the onset of their engagement with support services. Some individuals may require that support services engage in sequencing and/or building steps to work toward any stated employment goals, with the young adult’s voice, choice and goals centered.

## Organizational Changes and Structure

In order to implement a supportive housing program based on Housing First Principles, a program considers making appropriate organizational changes. Policies and procedures established to serve adults or that are set up to serve young adults in settings other than supportive housing will not necessarily be transferable or reflect what young adults are looking for in a program. The following are organizational changes from HUD’s recommendations on Using a Housing First Philosophy When Serving Young Adults.<sup>15</sup>

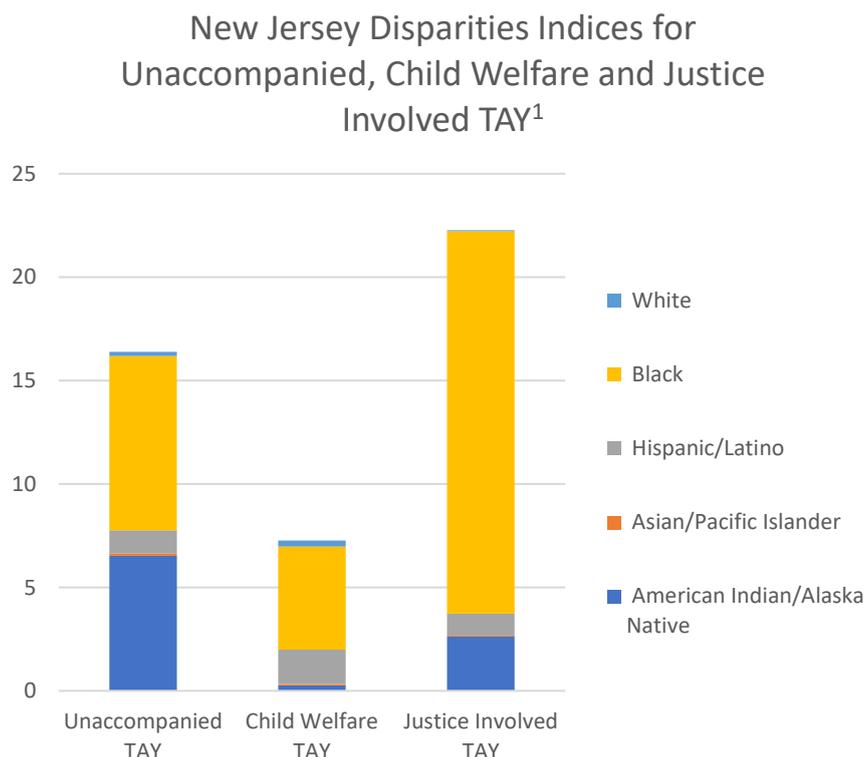
- **Staff Buy-in:** From the organization’s Board of Directors to residential staff to case managers, all members of the organization will need to be trained (and re-trained) on Housing First. During the initial stages of implementation, the organization needs to provide a safe atmosphere for staff to discuss barriers to and difficulties with adhering to Housing First. The organization may

experience turnover from staff who are unwilling to commit to the new direction. Turnover is a part of the process, and when hiring new staff, the interview process includes screening for understanding of and belief in the principles of Housing First.

- **Staff Roles:** Various roles within the organization may need to change. For instance, to provide the intensive supports that Housing First requires, an organization may need to hire additional staff with the intention of reducing case manager caseloads, allow staff to accompany each other on supportive services appointments, hire staff who have related lived experience/expertise, or hire staff who have clinical expertise. An organization may need to re-define job positions so that project management staff are separate and distinct from staff providing supportive services.
- **Transparency:** Utilizing a Housing First approach requires a greater level of transparency at all levels of the organization. Rather than engaging young adults in a consequences-driven environment, providers explain expectations of the program. Additionally, organizations are clear with young adults about other aspects of the programming, such as the length of the application and intake process, and the conditions of being terminated from the program.
- **Relevant Services:** Organizations need to structure their service packages to be responsive to needs identified by the young adult in their programs and appealing in a way that so that young adults want to engage. While engagement with services is not a requirement of tenancy for the young adult, staff will continue to attempt to engage young adults in services, even if offers of services are continually or periodically rejected.
- **Termination Policy:** As with other populations, programs need to provide young adults with leases or occupancy agreements similar to those used in market rate apartments. This means that a lack of participating in supportive services will not be reason a program can evict a young adult from the housing. It will also not be a reason for terminating a young adult from the program as this will happen in only the most severe circumstances with staff doing their best to keep the young adult housed. Program keep in mind that eviction and termination from the program are two different things and it is possible for a young adult to be evicted from one unit while still participating in the program, meaning the provider can re-house the young adult in a new unit.

# ADVANCING EQUITY

It is critical for supportive housing providers to understand the population they are serving and advance equity through their policy and practice. Due to historic and systemic racism and marginalization, there are significant racial and ethnic disparities within the child welfare, homeless, and justice systems in New Jersey for young adults who are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC), compared to their white counterparts.



*CSH's Racial Disparities and Disproportionality Index (RDDI) tool, analyzing demographic, child welfare and homeless data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). For more information visit: <https://www.csh.org/supportive-housing-101/data/>.*

At the same time, young people who are BIPOC are underrepresented in the workforce, particularly in leadership positions within organizations that serve vulnerable children and youth who are child welfare, homeless, and justice impacted. Additionally, the LGBTQ community are also highly represented among young adults experiencing homelessness. According to the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, 40% of young adults experiencing homelessness are LGBTQ, with family rejection and abuse the key cited reasons for homelessness among this group.<sup>16</sup> This subgroup has even higher rates of behavioral health and substance use compared to non-LGBTQ young adults experiencing homelessness.

Understanding the existing racial, ethnic and LGBTQ disparities and having policies

and practices designed to reduce these disparities will be a priority for any supportive housing provider. A critical piece of this is to understand an organization's workforce and the prevalence of racial leadership gaps, including provider staff engaging in racial equity and cultural competency training and discussion to examine their own cultural biases.<sup>17</sup>

A lack of understanding of an individual's background – whether ethnic, racial, sexual orientation,<sup>18</sup> or cultural – can have a serious detrimental effect on a provider's ability to connect with young adults.

It is important that providers learn and acknowledge the existence of structural racism. This includes understanding intergenerational homelessness and poverty, including redlining and other discriminatory policies<sup>19</sup> targeted towards Black communities. Recognizing past and current immigration policy and forced separation from families is critical, especially when working with Latinx participants.<sup>20</sup> There is significant historical trauma directly connected to child welfare for Native Americans and understanding the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the history tied to this federal legislation is important. Finally, recognizing the racial bias and racism that exists in formal supports needs to be included in providers' ongoing equity trainings and work.<sup>21</sup>

- Developing an Action Agenda is a good place to start, and there are several frameworks that could guide your organization. See for example: <http://www.antiracistalliance.com/SWPIRacialEquityReport.pdf>.<sup>22</sup>
- Sometimes seeing how peers are approaching this can be helpful; Kings County, Washington is a good example of this: <https://www.nwnetwork.org/youth-of-color-needs-assessment>.<sup>23</sup>
- Finally, the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute has additional race equity resources for supportive housing providers to leverage: <https://ncwwi.org/index.php/resourcemenue/racial-equity>.<sup>24</sup>

Building equity and cultural competency needs to be at the core of supportive housing programs serving young adults. In addition to equity tied to existing racial, ethnic and LGBTQ disparities, providers need to be mindful of young adult culture in service delivery, expectations, and engagement of young adult participants. This will consider technological approaches to traditional programmatic aspects. Providers must also continually be aware of local street culture including drug and sex trafficking in order to be aware of warning signs and potential dangers for participants.<sup>25</sup> By its nature, young adult culture is a bit of a moving target. The more that peers and young adult participants are encouraged to participate in shaping the program, the better the likelihood that providers will understand young adult culture.

# POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a comprehensive framework for understanding the support needs of all young people. Programs that aim to provide supportive housing for young adults will be well versed in the Positive Youth Development model and the understanding of this model influences all aspects of service delivery in a supportive housing program for young adults.

At its core, PYD is a means for understanding the ways in which behaviors of young adults can be attributed to their ongoing development. The model also helps to structure interventions and better understand goal setting between providers and Young Adults.<sup>26</sup> Providers operating with an understanding of this model work as partners in service planning and the ongoing development of the young adults in the program. A program with a strong understanding of PYD will be able to adapt to the unique needs of each young adult based on their unique circumstances and developmental needs. New Jersey utilizes the Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP) Youth Thrive protective and promotive factor framework, which includes Positive Youth Development in its design.

An understanding that development is a process not a goal that can be achieved is fundamental to supporting young adults in their developmental progress. This is especially true as young adults in supportive housing programs are thrust into independent living, sometimes for the first time in their lives. Support staff must find ways to highlight progress with goals rather than focus on the attainment of specific outcomes. For example, a team needs to be able to understand that two individuals with similar backgrounds and histories may have very different developmental needs. One of those individuals may be prepared to enter/re-enter the workforce while the other is still trying to find ways to feel safe sleeping in their apartment at night. Time will be given to establishing goals that accommodate the developmental needs of each young adult.

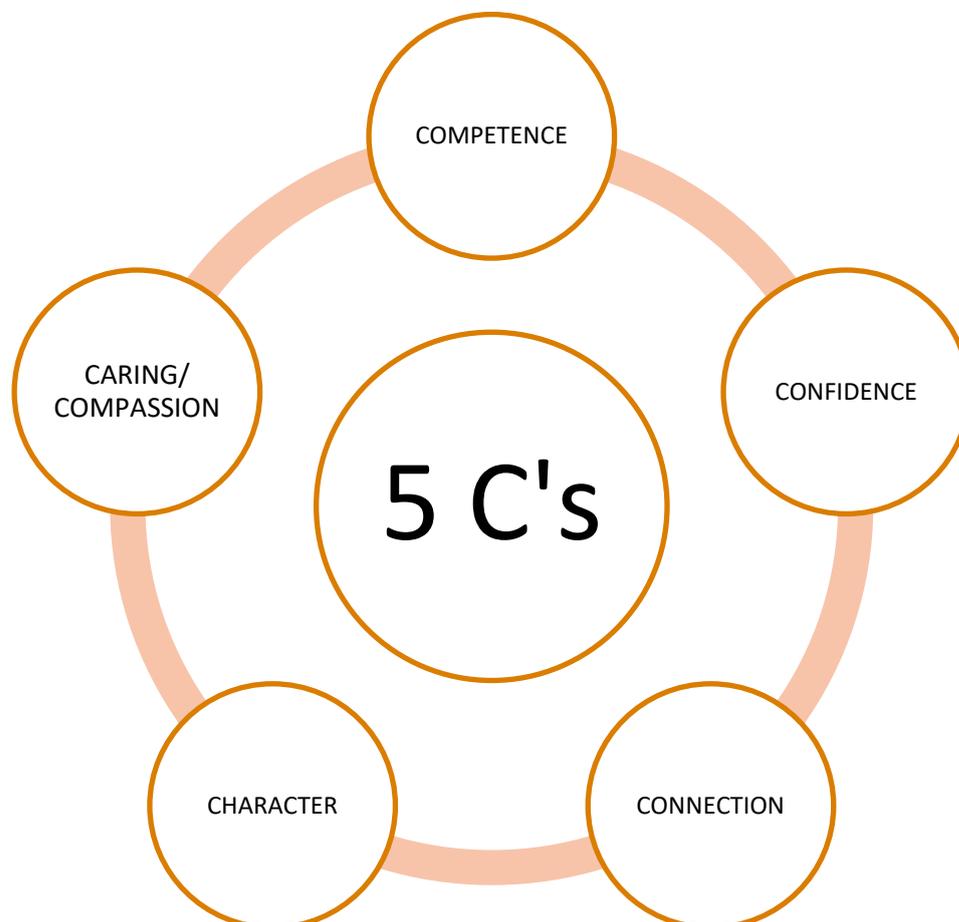
## The Five C's

One way to better frame the characteristics of Positive Youth Development is to better understand the way that Lerner's 5 C's contribute to a young adult's ability to transition into adulthood.<sup>27</sup> The Five C's is a formulation that lays out goals for positive development. Without progress in these areas, it will be difficult for Young Adults to establish and accomplish goals that will lead to positive outcomes. The Five C's are defined as Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring/Compassion.

- **Competence:** *An individual's perceived ability to accomplish what they intend*

*and to adapt to external circumstances.*

- **Confidence:** Assuredness a person needs to act effectively.
- **Connection:** Social relations, especially with adults, but also with peers and with younger children.
- **Character:** What makes a person do what is just, right, and good.
- **Caring/Compassion:** Empathy for the needs of others.



Techniques and suggestions for developing the 5 C's can be found at:  
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/whatispyd20120829.pdf>.

All individuals are in different places in terms of their progress toward any of the five C's. Support staff can help guide young adults in strengthening any of these factors. For example, support staff can structure goals in ways that start at their most basic element then increase in complexity as the individual builds competence in a way that establishes confidence. This highlights the understanding that goals that start with complex action steps may not be appropriate for many program participants. These factors are often interrelated and create a balance between social isolation and an emphasis on superficial social connections at the expense of character and caring. There is no limit to the need to develop any of these elements. No one can ever become perfectly confident or be of such a compassionate mindset that no further development is necessary. Through development of these five characteristics, young adults can develop a Sixth C, defined as Contribution. Contribution typically mirrors the community inclusion aspect that is a cornerstone of

quality supportive housing. This is the stage at which the young people feel and are engaged in efforts that truly make them a contributing member of their community.<sup>28</sup>

## TEAM ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are many roles that need to be fulfilled in a successful supportive housing program. There are variations between programs in how services are adapted to fill these roles. Programs looking to target supportive housing interventions to young adults need to pay special attention to ratios and staffing needs. There also needs to be a strong emphasis on the role of peer staff as a member of the services team.

Staffing patterns in supportive housing vary based upon the population being served, the goals of the program, the number of young adults to be served, and available resources. The ratio of direct service staff to young adults will vary based upon the anticipated intensity of a young adult's need, but it will often fall between 1:10 and 1:25 (staff to young adult ratio). This ratio is for supportive service staff only and does not include housing or property management staff. The ratio will vary from program to program and depends on factors like the vulnerability and service needs of the population, the likelihood for quick response time to emergencies, the geography of the housing and proximity to services, and collaborative partnerships.

Some programs have suggested that the ideal ratio for programs targeting young adults is closer to 1:7 (Way home Canada & Providing Stability and Support),<sup>29</sup> especially when the population has a high likelihood of traumatic lived experience like foster care.

The examples of services and staff roles below are commonly offered in conjunction with supportive housing, but do not represent an exhaustive list. Services and staffing will be tailored to the needs and interests of young adults.

### Case Management/Service Coordination

This is the most widely used form of services in supportive housing. The case manager does not provide every service a young adult needs but helps broker relationships between the young adult and other service providers. Case management can include new young adult orientation, assisting the young adult in accessing services such as childcare or mental health treatment, and supporting the

young adult in meeting all obligations of tenancy. To learn more about the role of the Case Manager reference: [https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CaseManager\\_F.pdf](https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CaseManager_F.pdf).

Case managers help young adults identify and achieve their goals and meet their needs by providing access to various services. A case manager addresses the physical, psychological, and social needs of the person and helps them to obtain and sustain stable housing. This position does not provide all the direct services a young adult might need but makes referrals and linkages with appropriate community-based services and provides transportation support when needed.

Roles and responsibilities of a case manager in a supportive housing program might include:

- Working with a young adult to create an individualized service plan and assisting the young adult in meeting those goals.
- Helping to coordinate mental health/substance use disorder treatment appointments and/or physical health care appointments.
- Facilitating access to educational services and employment services.
- Supporting young adults' recovery from a substance use disorder.
- Helping manage crisis.
- Supporting young adults in the development of life skills such as budgeting, cleaning and cooking.
- Providing education about medications and medication management support.
- Assisting young adults to connect with and develop support in the community, including reuniting with family members.
- Additionally, a case manager will negotiate, advocate, inform, coordinate and serve as a liaison to other professionals and supportive services. Some of the linkages that case managers access to help people meet their goals include education and employment services, medical providers, entitlement centers, advocacy groups, substance use treatment, psychotherapists, and psychiatrists.

## Mental Health Services

This category of services focuses on assisting a young adult in improving their mental health. Services under this category may include psychosocial assessment, individual or group counseling, support groups, and peer mentoring. Click here for an overview of community-based mental health services:

[https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CommMHSrvcs\\_F.pdf](https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CommMHSrvcs_F.pdf).

The mental health needs of young adults are deserving of special consideration. This is especially true of young adults who live through traumatic experiences such as foster care. Typically, the onset of mental illness occurs in late teens through early 20s<sup>6</sup>. This means that programs serving young adults are likely to work with individuals who are experiencing the symptoms of their mental illness for the very first time. This experience is disorienting and difficult for any individual to live through. Providers will need to understand that many young adults will not be ready

to engage in mental health treatment services. Many will also resist acceptance of a mental health diagnosis and struggle with the stigma associated with mental illness. Providers need training in mental health basics, such as mental health first aid to help identify symptoms and needs, as well as tactics for supporting young adults, such as motivational interviewing and assertive engagement. Staff will also need to be aware that behaviors they are witnessing may be signs of underlying mental illness and or trauma.

One recommended intervention that young adult providers have found effective is Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). While DBT has traditionally been thought of as an effective treatment for behavioral dysregulation or personality disorders, it has shown to address concerns prevalent among young adults such as substance use, risky sexual behavior, impulsivity, and other risky behaviors.<sup>30</sup> For recommendations on how to implement DBT groups to address young adults' needs, refer to the Child Mind Institute's DBT for Teens and Young Adults Page here:

<https://childmind.org/center/dialectical-behavior-therapy/#.XV6tXFjddGI.mailto>.

For more information on mental illness and services for young adults look here:

- **Healthy Transitions:** The provider toolkit for emerging adults with serious mental health conditions  
[https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/sites/dbhdd.georgia.gov/files/related\\_files/site\\_page/HTI%20Toolkit%209.10.15.pdf](https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/sites/dbhdd.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/HTI%20Toolkit%209.10.15.pdf)
- **Engaging Youth with Serious Mental Illness in Treatment:** STARS Study Consumer Recommendations  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3536447/>
- **Fact Sheet:** First Episode Psychosis  
[https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/raise-fact-sheet-first-episode-psychosis/raise-first-episode-psychosis-fact-sheet-pdf\\_152942.pdf](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/raise-fact-sheet-first-episode-psychosis/raise-first-episode-psychosis-fact-sheet-pdf_152942.pdf)

## Alcohol and Substance Use Treatment Services

This category of services is designed to assist young adults in addressing substance misuse. Services may include relapse prevention and recovery planning, individual or group counseling, harm reduction services, and inpatient rehabilitation.

For more information on substance use services and supportive housing, see:

<https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SubstanceUseSvc F.pdf>.

Substance use among supportive housing young adults can be common. Typically, the first use of addictive substances occurs between the ages of 18 to 24 years old. This means that providers may be dealing with individuals who are in a stage of pre-contemplation and not ready to acknowledge substance use as a problematic behavior. Providers need to employ a harm reduction approach to substance use by

young adults in supportive housing programs.<sup>31</sup>

For more information on substance use among young adults, look here:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/day-life-young-adults-substance-use-facts>.

## Independent Living Skills

Young adults in supportive housing programs may be living on their own for the first time. These young adults may need assistance in acquiring or regaining skills to maximize their independence. This may include assistance with rent payments and budgeting, conflict resolution, training in cooking/meal preparation, training in personal hygiene and self-care, and training in housekeeping and apartment safety.

## Employment Services

These services are designed to assist a young adult in accessing employment or improving their employment situation. Services may include vocational counseling, job placement and supported employment. Employment service staff may assist young adults in developing career plans, establish relationships with businesses in the community to help secure jobs for young adults, and serve as liaisons between young adults and employers to address problems and issues. For more resources and tools to assess employment, look here:

- **Employment Services in Supportive Housing**  
[https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/EmpSrvcs\\_F.pdf](https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/EmpSrvcs_F.pdf).
- **Employment History and Preferences Assessment**  
[https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/EmpAssessment\\_F.pdf](https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/EmpAssessment_F.pdf).

## Health/Medical Services

This category of services ensures that a young adult is addressing their physical health. This is particularly important as persons experiencing homelessness often have serious, unaddressed physical health needs. Services may include routine medical care, HIV services, medication management, and nutrition counseling. For more on HIV services in supportive housing, see:

[https://cshorg.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/HIVServices\\_F.pdf](https://cshorg.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/HIVServices_F.pdf).

Some young adults may not prioritize routine and/or preventative medical care. Staff can utilize motivational interviewing and an understanding of the stages of change to help young adult participants comprehend the need to engage in medical services.

# Peer Support Services

For adults, peer support services are provided by someone who is on their own recovery journey and has received training in how to help others who participate in support services. For young adults, peer support is often best provided by individuals close to their age that have similar lived experience. These individuals are highly recommended to be fully incorporated into the services team. Peer support specialists can help people find interesting or fun things to do, advocate for themselves, make friends, get a job, find better housing, and learn skills to live well in the community.<sup>32</sup>

Young adults and transition-age-youth with lived experience have great potential for increasing the efficacy of service delivery in a supportive housing program when they are part of the staff.<sup>33</sup> Young adult peer staff can help the services team with the following:

- Assist the staff with helping to better understand the experiences and behaviors of young adults.
- Assist young adults with better understanding program expectations, services, opportunities, and interventions.
- Conduct focus groups with participants to elicit feedback on and inform service delivery and program structure.
- Role play with staff.
- Engage young adults who are resistant to engage with typical adult providers.
- Help plan social events that will be attractive to young adults.
- Advise on written materials, pamphlets, and media targeted to young adult.

Hiring, supervising, and incorporating peers into service teams needs to be a mindful process. Peers have the unique ability to bring insight from lived experience to help improve service delivery. However, they must be supported appropriately in this role. Supervision of young adult peer staff needs to be consistent and frequent. Supervision is structured to ensure that services are being delivered within quality standards, but to also ensure professional development of the peer staff. Time needs to be given to allow the peer to process the interactions they are having with young adult participants. Supervisors and managers must also ensure that the peer is being incorporated into the service team as a full member of the team.<sup>34</sup> For more information on incorporating peer staff look here:

- **Supervision of Peer Workers Toolkit**  
[https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/brss\\_tacs/brss-209\\_supervision\\_of\\_peer\\_workers\\_overview\\_cp6.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/brss-209_supervision_of_peer_workers_overview_cp6.pdf)
- **Core Competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health Services**  
[https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/brss\\_tacs/core-competencies.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/core-competencies.pdf)
- **Effectively Employing Young Adult Peer Providers Toolkit**

<https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/publication/effectively-employing-young-adult-peer-providers---a-toolkit/>.

## Landlords

Whether or not they see themselves having an active role in a supportive housing program, the landlord and/or property manager that a young adult interacts with will play a role in their housing. In every aspect from rent collection to lease violations, the landlord or property manager plays a crucial role in supportive housing. As such, providers must cultivate this role to be part of the support team. The role you play in rent collection will depend on the model of supportive housing you are implementing. A separation of these roles is strongly encouraged where each party is part of a coordinated team working together to ensure stable housing for all residents. If possible, it is recommended that the service team remain separated from handling finances directly, but rather assisting where program participants request assistance.

The following are recommendations for establishing these roles and incorporating the landlord as part of the support team:

- While it is not advised that support services be involved in the collection of rent, a case manager can serve as a liaison by addressing issues as they arise and helping to communicate with the landlord. The role of the case manager working with someone who is leasing from a private landlord is to know if the young adult has made their payments and, if they miss one, to assist them in problem-solving how they can address it. Ideally the tenant will communicate a potential payment issue proactively in advance of the due date. If the young adult has granted a release of information, a member of the support services team may assist them in negotiating how they can cure their delinquent rent payment.
- Ensure that there are clear, fair, consistent policies and procedures for rent collection and processing. Policies will be applied to all young adults consistently and uniformly.
- Have a rent repayment plan. If a young adult is behind on rent, staff will work with them to create a rent repayment plan and to ensure that they have the necessary supports to fulfill it.
- Consistent and frequent communication among property management, fiscal, and support services staff is essential. This should occur even when there are no acute issues or concerns to address.

# LANDLORD ENGAGEMENT

Supportive housing staff not only need to establish trusting relationships with the young adults they serve; they also need to form relationships with landlords and assist young adults in advocating for their entry into housing. Housing management staff has relationships with landlords who are willing to consider young adults who have poor credit, criminal backgrounds or prior evictions. With young adult permission, housing management staff assists young adults in advocating for themselves with landlords and explaining potential background issues.

Housing First and Trauma training is not only helpful for service staff, but it is also beneficial to landlords and property management working with vulnerable young adults. This may require intensive landlord engagement to ensure that young adults' rights are being held and that landlords have the support and resources needed to best house young adult and young adults. Supportive housing providers are encouraged to share information regarding the services the agency offers. Working closely with landlords and/or property managers will ensure that young adults sustain their housing and will make addressing any concerns that arise much easier.

There will be a comprehensive, written eviction prevention policy that details how all supportive housing partners work together to promote housing stability. If eviction occurs, there is evidence of communication between service provider and property manager/landlord, including evidence of prevention efforts. If a young adult is behind on rent, staff works with young adults to create a rent repayment plan and ensures they have the necessary support to fulfill its terms.

# LEASE EXPLANATION

Young adult providers understand that for many participants, having a lease and being a responsible young adult are relatively new concepts. Participants will require assistance with understanding rights and responsibilities as explained in even the simplest and standard leases. Leases are reviewed both at the onset of tenancy but also periodically and whenever there are issues with the apartment. For a model for a tool to help guide this process look to:

<https://endhomelessness.org/resource/rapid-re-housing-toolkit/3-9-lease-explanation-tool/>.

## Leases and Substance Use

Supportive housing leases will address substance use like a market rate lease does. Substance use itself is not a lease violation, but it may lead to behaviors that could result in a lease violation. And it is the lease violation that is the focus of the landlord. Supportive service staff can assist young adults in addressing issues that lead to the behavior that resulted in the lease violation. Young adults will not be evicted for failure to maintain sobriety or to take medications. Landlord Engagement tips can be found in National Alliance to End Homelessness' Rapid Re-Housing Toolkit:

[https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NAEH-Rapid-Re-housingToolkit\\_2017-FINAL.pdf](https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NAEH-Rapid-Re-housingToolkit_2017-FINAL.pdf).

# SUPERVISION

Supervision in a supportive housing model is a crucial component of ensuring successful implementation of best practices. Individual supervision is recommended to be scheduled in advance and occur regularly. How the supervisor sets this may impact how services are provided. If a supervisor is not consistent in keeping appointments, that can impact the culture of the program team and undermine the importance of commitment to appointments (which is paramount in the provider-participant relationship). Supervision needs to be frequent, occurring either weekly or bi-weekly.

Supervision will be a process to review a case manager's or peer's caseload and any concerns or challenges they are experiencing. It can also be a venue to celebrate success and progress. The focus will be on outcomes more than adherence to a specific standard.<sup>35</sup> This fosters creativity and puts the emphasis on the good the program can do. By reviewing details of caseloads, the supervisor can be aware of the general needs of all program participants and can identify themes and needs for training or resources. Time will also be given to self-care and professional development. Burnout can be high for providers working with vulnerable populations like young adults. Supervisors will be mindful to include attention to self-care, secondary trauma, and reflection to allow time for team members to process what they are seeing. Whenever possible, supervisors will accompany staff in the field to get a full understanding of the young adult and what they are experiencing the program.

## GROUP SUPERVISION

Group supervision can be an effective way to help team members problem solve together on particularly challenging cases, build the team's awareness of all program participants, help process secondary trauma, engage in training, skill build, and/or role play. Occasional recurring group supervision can have a positive impact on team building and can allow for different members of the team to exercise different problem-solving skills. Group supervision is also one way to strategize how to share appointments and address all participants' needs. This is especially helpful when scattered sites require travel to multiple locations. Teaming can help reduce unnecessary travel and effort.<sup>36</sup> Group size should be relatively small to ensure that all participants have opportunity to present or participate.

Examples of group supervision:

- Daily or multiple days a week to discuss daily team activity and challenging issues.
- Recurring monthly meetings (or more frequent) to bring challenges team members are struggling with to group conversation, and for revisiting training material or literature.

# ASSERTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Effective engagement in supportive housing with young adults is vital to a successful services relationship and sets the stage for formal case management and treatment sessions where assessments, counseling, and referrals can occur on an individualized basis. The housing process is a great opportunity to establish a relationship with young adults, but it is important to remember that some individuals who were homeless have been promised housing and other services and were let down in the past; following through opens the door for young adults to agree to accept services and begins the relationship on a good note. Some ways to start to establish a relationship with young adults are to help them with obtaining their entitlements or mainstream resources, help them while their food stamps are activated. There are activities like this in the early stages of engagement that take less time to complete. These “layups” (see Box #2) can often help demonstrate the value of the supports being offered to the young adult even when they seem like less important activities to the support provider. It could also entail showing them around the neighborhood and to places where they will likely need to go, such as grocery stores, transportation routes, and places of worship, especially if the neighborhood is new to them. Staff are recommended to have fun with young adults when they can, in recreation centers, at the library, and other places of entertainment.

## BOX #2: FIND THE LAYUPS

- Acquire ID
- Set up email / phone access
- Apply for entitlements / benefits
- Submit job applications
- Help create resume
- Locate and identify community resources

When engaging with young adults, staff need to be authentic yet nonjudgmental about young adults’ behaviors; young adults will be viewed and treated as partners rather than service recipients. Staff examine their own biases and be cognizant of how their biases can become evident to young adults in their actions and speech. Staff also need to remember that positive reinforcement is effective in pushing people toward productive behavioral change and are recommended to acquire meaningful supervision and peer support to facilitate both their own well-being and the positive growth of the young adults. In supportive housing, the young adult and staff need to find common ground to start their relationship off.

Privacy and individuality is respected by all staff, who listen to opinions, preferences, views, and values of the young adult and incorporate them into any decision-making regarding the young adult. Staff will interact with young adults with brief conversations, but over time these may evolve to become longer and more in depth. There is no one method of delivering services; however, a variety of different service delivery tools are needed to effectively address the needs of each client. One method of providing effective services is to identify young adults’ stages of change on specific issues, such as behaviors that may pose as an obstacle to housing or physical health, substance use, or others that may affect what kind of intervention is

necessary. For example, people do not always progress linearly through the stages of substance use management and cessation and may move back and forth between stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and possibly relapse. To help young adults through these stages, providers must be able to offer accurate information followed by compassionate advice, also helping young adults realize that struggle and relapse do not equate to failure. Contemplators are especially aware of their desire to change and think about it often; service providers validate these feelings and help young adults who want to manage their use or make actions toward change without taking sides.<sup>37</sup>

An outsider's perspective is important to the conversation, so the more engaged a provider, the better they may help the individual see the benefits and consequences of their behaviors. When preparing to make a change, young adults need to be provided with a menu of the various services available to them. If their resistance increases, then providers need to pay attention to and discuss what has just happened with the young adult to try and resolve any hesitance. Providers need to help develop realistic change plans and be creative in terms of how to develop a plan that will be the most effective. The "taking action" stage tends to be short, consisting of modifying behaviors, activities, and/or environments. Service providers can support appropriate steps to change and help young adults revisit and explore how their plan is working. Providers do not view the young adult's outcomes as a measure of their own competence. Maintaining change is difficult without the necessary support. Service providers need to remember that reaching a goal does not mean the job is complete. Behavioral change is reinforced, and next steps are centered on how the change will be maintained. Various life events – both stressful and positive – can be triggers. Providing young adults with the support they need while they make big transitions and move through life is key.

# PRE-TENANCY WORK

It is important to understand that young adults may be renting or leasing for their first time; therefore, supports are designed accordingly. Staff provide young adults with information on being good neighbors, their rights and responsibilities as leaseholders, building positive relationships with property management/landlords, and other tenancy topics of interest to young adults. Quality programs ensure that young adults are given ample resources to understand the full set of rights and responsibilities – which may include guides on how to read a lease, case management meetings to review leases, or peer-to-peer consultation.

Shortly after move-in, staff provide young adults with an orientation to help maximize their experience with the housing and as young adults. This orientation introduces them to the housing unit, neighborhood, and their rights and responsibilities as leaseholders. Additionally, young adults will be provided with written materials to support the content covered in the orientation; these materials will be reviewed by staff with input from young adults.

Staff provide all the necessary support to help the young adult overcome possible fear of living in their own place for the first time. Moving into a place of their own for the first time can be intimidating to some young people and requires attention to young adult-specific tactics that might sabotage quick move-in. Programs include accommodations, such as peer navigators, and staff are trained to understand and appropriately respond to challenges so that they can support young people with these challenges.

The Housing Preference Toolkit is an example of a tool that can be utilized to help navigate the conversation with young adults about preferences to promote agency in the housing selection process:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/housingsearchtool/?housingsearchtoolaction=public:main.conducting-the-housing-search-resources>.

# NAVIGATING THE HOUSING VOUCHER PROCESS

The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) partnered with the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) by allocating sixty (60) Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV). The HCV program is administered by DCA's Division of Housing and Community Resources and is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The purpose of the program is to make decent, safe and sanitary housing available to very low-income households in the private rental market. Households that meet eligibility requirements generally pay no more than 30 percent of their adjusted monthly income towards their monthly rent and utility costs. The program pays the balance of the rent directly to the owner of

the rental property. Although DCA and DCF partnered for this program, this information is relevant and applicable for other similar partnerships.

As a participant in the HCV program, young adults comply with specific obligations. Providers need to help young adults navigate the DCA voucher process. As per DCA, it is the head of household's obligation to know about the actions and income of all household members and to report same accurately to the DCA. These obligations are part of the program's regulations and are included in the voucher that was issued to the young adult. Service providers review the obligations with young adults as failure to comply with these obligations is grounds for denial or termination of assistance.

DCA created a guidebook on the HCV program that is available here:

[https://www.state.nj.us/dca/divisions/dhcr/publications/docs/Appendix\\_D-GUIDE\\_TO\\_THE\\_HCVP\\_2019.pdf](https://www.state.nj.us/dca/divisions/dhcr/publications/docs/Appendix_D-GUIDE_TO_THE_HCVP_2019.pdf).

## **PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES**

No one provider can meet all needs of every program participant. Many young adults in supportive housing will require a coordinated network of support in order to be successful. This requires supportive housing providers to be responsible for coordinating care with community-based services. When care is uncoordinated, there is a high likelihood for duplication of efforts, ineffective service delivery, and frustration that can lead to a lack of engagement by the young adult service recipient. When care is coordinated, there is a greater chance that the participant will value and participate in the services.

### **Community-Based Services**

Although every supportive housing program has an organization that functions as the lead service provider, this does not mean that it will provide all the services that young adults may need. Instead, the lead service provider establishes linkages to community-based organizations that provide core services needed by young adults. Common linkages in supportive housing are to providers of behavioral health care, employment services, primary health care, and substance abuse treatment and support. Increasingly, supportive housing programs are also establishing connections to resources such as their local Veterans Administration and child welfare services. Even if the program offers some of these supportive services at the project site, young adults may still prefer to access services in the community and build their support network outside of where they live.

Codifying these linkages using written agreements can help ensure young adults have quick and easy access to these providers, once they express a desire to receive services.

Some helpful tips to ensure that coordination with community-based resources can occur at optimal levels:

- Ensure ability to share data and information. This may rely upon a robust release of information maintained by the supportive housing provider.
- Defined team structure and defined roles and responsibilities across domains.
- Set a template for defined roles that is reviewed with the young adult on a regular recurring basis (for example, monthly or quarterly). Provide the young adult with a copy of this service plan so they know whom to contact when they need a specific service.

## Community Connections

Although young adults may choose to connect with other supportive housing young adults or with peers — and service staff need to provide opportunities for this to occur — it is also important for young adults to have the opportunity to connect with the larger neighborhood and community. This is particularly important for supportive housing young adults who may be living in scattered-site settings in which they may feel isolated. These activities also can give young adults a foundation through which to build friendships with diverse individuals. They may also serve as a neutral space through which young adults can reestablish connections with family members.

The following are ideas for connecting young adults with the community:

- **Linkages:** Create linkages to networks of other provider organizations, self-help groups, coalitions and advocacy groups that will likely be of interest to young adults and staff.
- **Identify Social Issues:** Staff and young adults can identify social issues and concerns that are important to them — such as AIDS, homelessness, crime, mental illness — and work together (e.g., attending rallies, participating in letter-writing campaigns, etc.) in the interest of promoting change or more progressive social policies with other community members.
- **Community Involvement:** Supportive housing has support staff and resources (however limited) that many neighborhoods and communities lack. In many cases, the efforts of staff and some resources can be adapted to assist the neighborhood and broader community. Young adults clearly benefit from efforts to improve the quality of life in the broader community, and sponsors realize long-term benefits as well. The value of being able to garner community support when requesting new funding or attempting to locate new supportive housing units, for instance, cannot be underestimated. From almost any angle, connecting with the neighborhood creates “win-win” scenarios.

- **Community Engagement Plan:** Work with young adults to develop a community engagement plan based on their individual interests. Staff and young adults can work together to identify and prioritize ways to be involved in the community including activities and social connections.<sup>38</sup>

Supportive Housing staff work with young adults to identify community opportunities and relationships of interest and ensure that they have the support needed to pursue them (see Box #3 for examples).

**BOX #3:  
EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS AND PLACES THAT OFFER TENANTS  
OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND LARGER  
COMMUNITY**

- Open 12-step meetings
- Voter registration drives
- Local park cleanups and community gardening
- Fitness centers and activities that promote movement and exercise
- Public speaking (speaker's bureau)
- Community board meetings
- Spiritual community such as a church, temple or mosque
- Parent/Teacher Association

When moving into a community, young adults are given information about community resources and local activities; this also includes an orientation to the neighborhood. Examples of activities include:

- Staff supports young adults in identifying and accessing community activities of interest, such as public gardens, faith communities and peer associations. This may include support with obtaining transportation.
- Staff provides young adults with opportunities to connect with peers, including other supportive housing young adults, if desired.<sup>39</sup>
- Host events with all participants of the supportive housing program. This can be a mix of social activities and opportunities for participants to provide feedback on service delivery.
- Staff ensures young adults have opportunities to interact with diverse individuals, including persons without disabilities, persons that are not in supportive housing programs, and the like.
- Staff supports young adults in establishing or strengthening positive relationships with friends and/or family members.

# YOUNG ADULT INCLUSION AND ADVOCACY

Young adult involvement in a service program is a crucial element to a successful supportive housing program serving young adults. The following information will provide more detail on ways in which to pursue this.

**From Young Adult Power: New York State Success Young Adult Involvement Toolkit:**

[http://nyssuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/YOUTH\\_SOC\\_TOOLKIT\\_2015\\_Final\\_Document.pdf](http://nyssuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/YOUTH_SOC_TOOLKIT_2015_Final_Document.pdf)

“The young adults who are engaged in Systems of Care have a specific expertise to offer. They know what it is like to navigate multiple systems and services. Their insight can help you design and implement innovative and effective programs.”

## Young Adult Leadership

Beyond the significant and ongoing input that young adults provide to an individual supportive housing program, they are an important voice in the larger community. Individuals who have experienced homelessness have often been marginalized and disempowered. They are also experts on the successes and failures of the systems of care that most communities are trying to improve in order to address challenges such as homelessness. In addition to leadership opportunities that young adults may access through their involvement in faith organizations, community organizations or issue activism, organizations involved in providing housing and services to young adults can play an important role in ensuring that the community values the leadership of young adults.<sup>40</sup>

A crucial element of supportive housing programs for young adults is the degree to which program participants are included in decision making, program design, service delivery, and advocacy. Young adults are far more likely to participate in services they feel they have a say in. Supportive housing programs need to structure ways in which the insight of young adults can be incorporated into how the program is designed and how services are delivered. For example, young adults can provide feedback on how case managers create service plans, help them access services, perform assessments, and the like. The supportive housing program establishes a structure to solicit this feedback on a recurring basis. This can take the form of group meetings, surveys, or young adult leadership councils. Providers cannot expect that this process will unfold passively. The program will undergo regular assessment to ensure that program participants' feedback is being incorporated and shaping the programs adaptations and continuous quality improvement. For an example of an assessment of young adult involvement and engagement in the program look here:

[https://youngadult.gov/docs/pyd\\_AssessmentTool.pdf](https://youngadult.gov/docs/pyd_AssessmentTool.pdf).

A best practice in promoting young adult leadership is reserving spots on the agency Board of Directors for persons with lived experience.<sup>41</sup> However, simply offering young adults the opportunity to be on a Board is not enough. In order to promote young adults' ability to be successful in these roles, organizations can:

- Provide an orientation and experienced mentor to all board members, including supportive housing young adults.
- Provide transportation or offer public transportation passes.
- Schedule meetings at times that young adults can attend or vary the meeting times/dates based on the schedules of all members.
- Emphasize that board members can contribute in a variety of ways, such as through offering their life experiences or volunteering, not just through financial contributions.
- Consider having more than one young adult on the board at one time so that young adults will not feel as isolated.
- Establish a core group of young adults that will engage as leaders of the effort to involve participants.
- Hold a recruitment event that is entertaining, engaging, and explains the opportunities and expectations of your young adult involvement initiative. Get people excited and provide clear information about what it means to have a young adult guided system of care.
- Make a flyer, brochure, or video to grab young people's attention. Promote the activity as something new and exciting. A flyer or brochure needs to include the group's name, meeting times and locations, the group's purpose, and the benefits of joining. Try to use as few words as possible and include graphics. This is a good task to engage a core group of young adults to work on.
- Try using media that will appeal to young adults, such as videos, music, and graphics. The more modern and tech-savvy you can appear, the better.
- Educate young adults about the young adult movement and the results of civic activism. For example, it is important for young people to learn about the disability rights movement, so they can break down the stigma attached to disability and understand their rights to accommodations if they have a qualifying disability. A disability timeline is located at: <http://www.ncld-youngadult.info/index.php?id=61>.
- Young adults are likely to be attracted to success and being able to see for themselves that a process works. Put together a presentation demonstrating the successes of other supportive housing communities and programs. As time passes this may include success stories from the program in which young adults are participating.

For more information on starting a young adult advisory council, reference:

<https://youngadultpowerny.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Starting-a-Young-adult-Advisory-Council-stage-1.pdf>

## Hart's Ladder

One way to assess how involved participants are in the program design and service delivery is to utilize Hart's Ladder of Young adult Involvement. The ladder illustrates the scale of young adult involvement from a minimal level where young people are not empowered even at a nominal level to a maximum involvement where they have an impact on the way that the program delivers services. Young adult involvement can range from no involvement to nominal involvement (where there is an appearance of involvement but no real empowerment that the participants feel) to various forms of young adult-initiated efforts. Hart's Ladder can be an effective assessment tool to help programs understand the level of young adult involvement in program design and service delivery. For a more detailed description of steps on Hart's Ladder, click here: [https://ipkl.gu.se/digitalAssets/1429/1429848\\_shier2001.pdf](https://ipkl.gu.se/digitalAssets/1429/1429848_shier2001.pdf) and/or [https://1pfrv014ujrr1r2k8m4e2igt-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/127/2017/08/Young\\_adult-Engagement-Policy.pdf](https://1pfrv014ujrr1r2k8m4e2igt-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/127/2017/08/Young_adult-Engagement-Policy.pdf).



## Identifying Barriers

Supportive housing programs for young adults that endeavor to include the voice of participants must be aware of common barriers to authentic and meaningful partnerships, including:

- **Tokenism:** Including young adults for the nominal value of being able to claim inclusion.
- **Cultural insensitivity or lack of cultural competence:** Misunderstanding the needs of young adults with lived experiences that are different from one's own, and/or lack of acceptance or awareness of cultural differences and power dynamics.
- **Exploitation:** Benefiting unfairly from the efforts of young adults.
- **Adultism:** The belief that adults know more about what young adults need than young adult themselves.

For more specifics on how to address these barriers, look here:

[https://learn.truecolorsunited.org/young\\_adult-collaboration-toolkit/](https://learn.truecolorsunited.org/young_adult-collaboration-toolkit/).

## Young Adult Advocacy

As programs promote the leadership qualities of their young adult participants, they will typically find that some have a passion and or talent for advocacy. Earnest advocacy is needed for more housing resources for young adults facing homelessness and leaving foster care. Young Adults are often very effective advocates when provided support to speak to their lived experience.<sup>42</sup> Participants of supportive housing programs often have insight into how the systems of care that serve young adults operate, what interventions work well, and what practices young adults are not receptive to. A program serving young adults supports and encourages advocacy among the young adult population it serves.

## Story Telling

Many participants have a powerful and inspiring story to tell. For those that wish to do so, support is offered to help them find their voice and structure their story. Shared stories can illustrate targeted recommendations for interventions, but only if they are structure to address a specific request for change. Young adults may require and be offered help with refining their story so as not to dilute the impact it may make in an advocacy effort. Often, young adults who are skilled story tellers are asked to speak on panels, present at conferences, and other speaking engagements. Young adults may benefit from training like Strategic Sharing to help them find ownership over their authentic story as they are asked to do so. Staff need to pay attention to assistance that participants may need to establish boundaries and to know when and how to turn down opportunities. For resources on Strategic Sharing, look here:

- <https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbStrategicSharingGuide.pdf>
- [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info\\_services/download/StrategicSharing.pdf](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/download/StrategicSharing.pdf)
- [http://www.yetoolkit.ca/sites/default/files/ye\\_tip\\_sheet\\_strategic\\_sharing.pdf](http://www.yetoolkit.ca/sites/default/files/ye_tip_sheet_strategic_sharing.pdf)

## Attention to Trauma for Advocates

For some young adults, reliving past events can be re-traumatizing. Supports need to be aware of the possibility that trauma may have an impact on an individual even after they become an effective advocate, telling their story multiple times. Those that can sustain their advocacy efforts are often seen for their resilience not their need for support. Programs need to build in routine check-ins for young adults that transition to an advocacy role to ensure that signs of re-living trauma are recognized and that advocates are appropriately supported.

# MOVING ON

A major goal for supportive housing programs is the ability to ensure housing stability for vulnerable individuals with complex needs that are challenging to serve in other housing programs. Several studies of programs across the country demonstrate the effectiveness of supportive housing for retaining young adults with very high needs, leading to decreased shelter use, reductions in acute care utilization, and improvements in health, behavioral health and other quality of life outcomes.<sup>43 44 45</sup> However, while many individuals with severe disabilities may always require supportive housing, some young adults eventually reach a point in their recovery where they may be better served in a less intensive service environment. Once stable, young adults often wish to leave supportive housing in order to have more privacy, reside in a bigger unit or different neighborhood, or move closer to family or work or school. However, because most young adults continue to need housing assistance, many choose to remain in supportive housing.

The fundamental goal of Moving On is to promote the highest levels of independence and choice for young adults. Moving On is not just a program; it also is a larger movement to promote supportive housing as a platform for young adult recovery and success. It is about empowering and supporting people with disabilities to willingly take steps forward and providing them with the supports necessary to live in the housing of their choice. For some that may mean moving to other affordable housing; for others it may mean remaining in supportive housing but working toward greater self-sufficiency and self-determination in day-to-day life.<sup>46</sup> This issue is especially critical for supportive housing providers serving young adults and those exiting the foster care system. While non-time limited, these programs will focus on offering housing as a foundation for a healthy and successful transition to a more independent adulthood.

The guiding principles of Moving On are:

- **Voluntary:** A core component of supportive housing is that young adults are bestowed all the rights and responsibilities of tenancy under state and local law, including the right to remain in their apartment as long as they desire and comply with lease terms. To be clear, Moving On is not about coercing young adults out of their units, limiting the rights of tenancy, or otherwise violating the fundamental principles and values of supportive housing. Consistent with the principle that all services in supportive housing are voluntary, programs must build processes and procedures that ensure that the decision to move on from supportive housing is voluntary and self-initiated. While programs are highly recommended to use creative strategies and incentives to encourage individuals and families to consider moving on if they feel ready, no young adults will be made to feel pressured or coerced to leave their unit.
- **Maximizing Housing Options:** A primary goal of Moving On is to provide supportive housing residents the opportunity and support they need to be able to live, work and receive services in the most integrated setting possible in a

community of their choice. Policies need to further young adults' rights to choose where and with whom to live, as well as whether to engage in services. Young adults will be offered a variety of housing options, to the extent possible, and are not be required to accept an accommodation if the individual chooses not to do so.

- **Promoting Economic Mobility and Self Sufficiency:** Moving On is first and foremost about celebrating growth, recovery and young adult success. As such, Moving On is not created or operated as just a voucher rental assistance program, but as an opportunity that is approached with holistic, comprehensive pre-transition services in place – including living skills training, employment, and community integration supports - as well as strong aftercare supports to ensure a successful transition over the long-term.

## Moving On Assessment

Moving On assessment tools must focus on key risk and protective factors for independent living. In addition to evaluating readiness, assessment tools allow case managers to identify strengths and key areas of support that can then be used to inform pre-transition service planning. Once assessment forms are completed, they are reviewed with the young adults through a structured review process. While assessment tools vary, some key areas for assessing young adult capacity include:

- Emotional independence (interest and confidence in moving on)
- Financial Capacity (employment, income, savings, budgeting skills)
- Housing history (housing tenure, ability to maintain rental payments, history of rental arrears, past evictions, neighbor/landlord relationships)
- Intensity of service use (need for on-site services)
- Health/behavioral health (substance use, mental health, medication management, treatment engagement, mobility, etc.)
- Connection to mainstream resources, including rental supports if needed
- Connection to family or other natural supports
- Community living skills (self-managing behavior, limit setting relating to drugs, etc.)
- Activities of daily living skills (ability to get meals, keep apartment clean, follow lease, etc.)
- Housing goals (location, size, affordability, live with family/friends, etc.)

## Preparing a Young Adult to Move On

Preparing a young adult to move on can begin before a young adult's lease is up in their housing unit by talking about the concept, discussing normal development and life stages, and addressing that the young adult will have support from the case manager including assessing progress toward their goals and moving on to be more independent along the way. Introducing the concept that while housing will be permanent, the need for intensive services may not while early in the engagement with a young adult, sets the tone for the skill building nature of supportive housing

services. Once a young adult has decided to move on from supportive housing, the hard work of preparing them for a successful transition begins immediately. Comprehensive Transition Plans will include the following:<sup>37</sup>

- **Provide an assessment:** A thorough assessment will help clarify the young adult's housing preferences including area, size of apartment, proximity to public transportation and other relevant issues. Additionally, it will offer staff a better understanding of a person's housing history and the impact the young adult's specific needs may have on maintaining housing. Both the provider and young adult can assess what skills will assist with moving on.
- **Set clear goals:** A housing plan allows the worker and young adult to have candid dialogues about setting goals and the steps needed to assist the young adult to "move on" to other housing. The plan will be youth driven with the case manager guiding and supporting the goal setting and plan development process. They can work as a team to identify and document each of the steps needed to meet the goal of securing housing. This includes clearly communicating the goal to help the individual move on from services in time as they are orienting to the program.
- **Identify resources needed:** A good housing plan helps both the young adult and worker identify the resources needed to make the transition. This may include, but is not limited to, activities of daily living, budgeting, advocacy, income or entitlements, Housing Choice Voucher or other rental support, clean credit report, medication and symptom management and aftercare.
- **Clarify roles:** The housing plan helps establish what tasks will be assigned to the young adult and which will be the responsibility of the worker.
- **Create a time frame:** A housing plan takes into account the time goals as well. Benchmarks can be set for meeting objectives that will lead to "moving on" for the young adult and assist the worker in establishing time frames for their role in supporting the move.
- **Measure success:** By creating benchmarks and documenting steps and objectives, both the worker and the young adult are able to measure success toward moving on.
- For more information on the Moving On model, please reference the Moving On Toolkit: [https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/MovingOnToolkit\\_Complete.pdf](https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/MovingOnToolkit_Complete.pdf).

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A. List of Acronyms

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BIPOC – Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color

CBT – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

CSH – Corporation for Supportive Housing

CTH – Connect to Home

DBT – Dialectical Behavioral Therapy

DCA – New Jersey Department of Community Affairs

DCF – New Jersey Department of Children and Families

HCV – Housing Choice Voucher Program

HUD – US Department of Housing and Urban Development

LGBTQIA+ - Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer Intersex Asexuality – the “+” symbol stand for any other sexual identity that is not included in these categorizations.

OAS – Office of Adolescent Services

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PYD – Positive Youth Development

USICH – United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

TAY – Transition Age Youth

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