

Youth-Led Research in Youth Homelessness and Mental Health with Youth Healers Stand Up! and the Young Adult Leadership Committee (YALC) of OHS



Youth Healers Stand Up!

Youth Healers Stand Up! Is a collective of youth ages 13-24 who have lived experience of youth homelessness and who work to elevate the voices of young people in shelter, the child welfare system, and in neighborhoods facing poverty and displacement in the fight for affordable housing, economic justice, and effective services.

Mission: The acronym **HEAL** stands for **Housing, Education, Action, and Leadership** which shows a little bit of what our mission as an organization is. While our overall goal is to end youth homelessness in Philly, as Healers we want to be able to take our experiences and stories and share them to give a voice to the unheard. Young people are so often left out of the conversation when it comes to homelessness and so people don't know what it looks like and don't know what to do to help.

We're here to educate the community about the life of young people experiencing housing insecurity in Philly, whether that means living in a shelter, couch surfing, or some other form of unstable housing that youth experience. We are also here help promote the creation of solutions by youth themselves to help empower and support youth affected by homelessness. We want to make connections with communities, leaders, and decision makers to make real change about the issue that is youth homelessness.

Major Accomplishments: The Healers have trained and organized 100s of youth experiencing homelessness, foster care, juvenile justice, and other situations resulting in housing instability to participate in advocacy and housing justice work. Facilitated trainings for local professionals and youth, contributed to the passage of House Bill 1615, which allows youth in foster care to attend in-state school for free, and hosts the annual Heal the Future Youth Power Conference, bringing together youth leaders from around the city to educate the community on youth inclusion on complex issues like mass incarceration, homelessness, and gentrification.



Youth-Identified Priorities for Research

- How do bias/mental health stigma affect youth who are trying to get housing?
- How does youth homelessness stigma affect youth's ability to identify/seek help?
- How does program dropout relate to stigma?
- What is the best way or point to access mental health services? What is the most common way?
- What do youth access online?
- Is youth homelessness (in Philly) a thing?
- What is the definition of homelessness? How is this related to mental health? How does the definition affect access to mental health services?
- What are the mental health effects of "couch surfing?" (or other definitions of homelessness) Trauma? Anxiety?
- What does "couch surfing" cost communities?
- How do peer networks/support affect mental health and housing? How do youth get and maintain them? How do we know they're strong/long lasting?
- What is youth's sense of "home?"

Youth Healers Stand Up! and the Young Adult Leadership Committee recently partnered with the Philly Homes 4 Youth Coalition, Healing Hurt People, Forget Me Knot Youth Services, and the Youth Peer Support Think Tank at Temple University to host a "New Directions in Youth Mental Health and Housing" event. The agenda included a community conversation about youth and mental health, housing, and inclusion as well as youth-led directions in research. The questions presented above reflect what youth indicated are research priorities.

YALC at OHS

The Young Adult Leadership Committee (YALC) was created out of the Office of Homeless Services Continuum of Care Board with the goal of advising the Board and Homeless Services on ways to make the system better for youth.

Mission: We, the Young Adult Leadership Committee, strive to end youth homelessness by elevating the voices of youth with lived experience in policy making, and advocating for a more youth-friendly system for young people experiencing homelessness.

Major Accomplishments: We have co-hosted awareness and speaking events, provided feedback to policymakers about how to improve systems for youth, advocated for resources for youth experiencing homelessness, attended local conferences, and participated in other related committees and coalitions to elevate youth voice in decision-making.



Youth-friendly, trauma informed mental health services are something local youth experiencing homelessness stress should be a priority for advocacy in Philly, and promoting mental health is one of our top campaign priorities. Local youth advocates recommend:

- Establishment of youth peer support teams
- Expanded access to mental health services for young people who have experienced housing instability
- Coordinated and continuous care for transition-aged youth

For more information about Youth Healers Stand Up!, contact youthhealersstandup@gmail.com or visit www.pec-cares.org/youth
For more information about the Young Adult Leadership Committee, visit www.philadelphiaofficeofhomelesservices.org/services/youth-initiative