



## Benefits and Recommendations of Transitional Housing for Youth and Young People Experiencing Homelessness

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This BrainGain summarizes a new report by **Covenant House International, National Network for Youth, and SchoolHouse Connection** (2021), *“To Become the Best Version of Myself: Youth-Supportive Transitional Housing Programs As An Essential Resource for Addressing Youth Homelessness.”*

The original report was collected by Covenant House International in examining records of 564 young people who exited transitional housing programs in 15 U.S. cities over a 12-month period. Find the original report here: <https://bit.ly/3kY5T1S>

### Highlights

*To Become the Best Version of Myself* demonstrates the **need** for transitional programs for youth and young adults experiencing unaccompanied homelessness while also providing recommendations on how to adequately support these individuals to become stably housed.

It is estimated that on average 4.2 million individuals ages 13-25 in the United States experience unaccompanied homelessness each year, with youth who identify as Black, Indigenous (and/or) People of Color (BIPOC) to be **disproportionately represented** in this rate along with **unmarried parents**. Unaccompanied homelessness is defined as experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian present to provide support. Individuals in this situation may only require short-term assistance services such as emergency shelters before getting back on their feet. Many others require additional assistance for a longer time, as can be found with transitional housing programs. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) tends to favor more short-term assistance programs, though the longer-term transitional housing programs have shown **more success** with young people.

### What are Transitional Housing Programs?

The two main types of government-funded transitional housing programs are the Transitional Living Program and the Transitional Housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and HUD respectively. This paper defines youth-supportive transitional programs as those that provide the following:

- housing that is longer-term,

- services to aid in gaining life skills and improving chances of post-program success such as help enrolling in school, applying for jobs, or tending to mental health needs, and
- rules and structure.

Surveys found these to be the areas of assistance most needed by young people experiencing homelessness. While many of these services are beneficial to adults experiencing homelessness as well, these transitional programs are mainly geared towards providing youth and young people the tools needed to properly transition into adulthood without having to focus all their energy on fulfilling their basic life needs.

## Benefits of Transitional Housing on Youth and Young People

Studies of transitional housing outcomes in 15 cities across the United States over one year has found that 73% of individuals left the program with stable housing lined up, and 69% left either employed or enrolled in school. As one Schoolhouse Connection Scholar noted, “Transitional [programs are] a much more stable environment than a motel or the streets. **Having a safe place to sleep freed my mom and I to worry about other things and gave us time to focus on work and education.** It’s frightening to be homeless on the streets or in a volatile housing situation, and it’s nearly impossible to prioritize your health and well-being when you’re pre-occupied with ensuring your survival.”

Individuals who identify as BIPOC showed a higher rate of leaving the program with stable housing and a job lined up but showed lower rates of leaving the program enrolled in schooling. The paper suggests that this is because these individuals were more likely to enter the program having already completed a high school degree. Young mothers were also more likely than the average youth to leave the program with stable housing but showed lower rates of leaving the program employed.

Young people who stayed in the program longer (365+ days), were more likely to leave the program with stable housing, a high school diploma, and employed compared to their counterparts who only stayed in the program for a few months. They were also less likely to re-enroll in the transitional housing program within the next year.

Transitional housing programs geared towards young people have shown similar success in terms of housing stability, employment, and education outcomes of their mentees all over the United States and even in some outside countries as well.

## Conclusions

Young people experiencing homelessness often need more support than adults because they are making the transition into adulthood with all the accompanying responsibilities and stressors. As one Schoolhouse Connection Scholar said, “**If I had Transitional Housing as a minor, I could have created a much safer environment for me and my younger sister.** Both of my parents were abusive and used drugs, and we lived

very far away from any relatives who could take us in...There are so many minors who are in that situation right now whose future could have been much brighter with this option.”

Short-term housing-only programs **do not provide the support and assistance** needed to help youth adequately navigate this part of their life.

On the other hand, translational housing programs have been found to **successfully** support these individuals during this period especially in terms of finding stable housing, finding employment, and completing education, all while receiving mental health services to help them get through their current and past traumas as well.

These programs also help arm individuals with the **skills and credentials** needed to continue to find success in their future.

## **Recommendations**

*To Become the Best Version of Myself* provides the following recommendations to help support young people through their homeless episode and beyond to avoid future homelessness later in life.

### **To Congress, HHS, HUD, State and Local Policymakers and Human Services Agencies, and Philanthropy:**

- Ensure all communities provide transitional housing programs with additional services for young people.

#### **To Congress:**

- Increase funding to Transitional Living and Maternity Programs along with other programs focused on helping homeless youth.
- Amend HUD’s definition of homelessness so young people do not have to face severe traumas before they have access to appropriate services to help them.

#### **To HHS and the Family and Youth Services Bureau**

- Continue to support and expand Transitional Living and Maternity Program grantees.

#### **To HUD:**

- Write future Notices of Funding Availability (NOFA) incentivizing Transitional Housing for young individuals and families based on local need.
- Assess youth programs for effectiveness using age-appropriate measures.

### **Philanthropy and State and Local Governments:**

- Support local programs, including transitional programs, so the funding of these programs is not strictly tied to federal priorities.

### **Who Should Read This?**

This report would benefit individuals working for government agencies and social service and housing providers who serve young people experiencing homelessness. This includes members of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), as well as state and local policymakers. This also includes state and local services agencies as well as philanthropic organizations that be able to help push these recommendations into fruition and fund future programs.

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### **About People's Emergency Center (PEC)**

[People's Emergency Center \(PEC\)](#) uplifts our community by providing housing, social services, and quality of life supports that empower people and encourage more prosperous and safer neighborhoods.

For families and youth experiencing homelessness, we offer housing, social services, access to early childhood education, and educational programs in career training, parenting, financial literacy, life skills, and technology.

The PEC Community Development Corporation programs respond to community needs and build on neighborhood assets to help bridge the digital divide, expand mixed-income housing opportunities, stimulate economic growth, create wealth, and improve the quality of life for all West Philadelphia residents.

PEC advocates for urgently needed public policy changes on behalf of families and youth experiencing homelessness and the neighborhoods we serve. We have worked successfully with local, state, and federal government agencies to advance legislation and budgets that prioritize these communities.

PEC thanks Maria Abdul-Masih for contributing to this BrainGain.