



# WORKING TOGETHER TO END YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS

*A Summary of West Coast Convening II*

## BACKGROUND

In January 2013, a small group of homeless youth advocates and service providers from Los Angeles and Seattle got together at a Seattle coffee house in advance of a national conference to talk about innovations in their respective communities.

The informal gathering led to multiple phone calls and a substantive sharing of tools, logic models and best practices around a whole range of topics relating to homeless youth. This generated interest and excitement over how to create a geographically focused learning community around these issues.

Since young people often travel up and down Interstate 5 through California, Oregon and Washington, we wondered if it would be possible to inexpensively bring together thought leaders and innovators from the entire West Coast to have the type of conversations that could advance all of our work significantly. If the gatherings evolved as we hoped, our sharing of tools, instruments and perspectives would result in better data and better programs across the region.

We pitched this idea to youth providers from California, Oregon and Washington in February 2014 while attending the National Alliance to End Homelessness Conference on Youth and Family Homelessness in New Orleans. Based on the positive feedback we received, we scheduled the first **West Coast Convening (WCC)** in Los Angeles for June 2014. **WCC I** was a huge success, exceeding all of our expectations. **WCC II** was scheduled for Seattle in October 2014.

## WHAT WAS WCC II?

The second in a series of planned meetings where a dynamic mix of providers, funders and advocates from California, Oregon and Washington come together to discuss ideas for *ending youth and young adult homelessness*.

The West Coast Convenings are based on the idea that regional forums can promote a more rapid spread of new ideas and approaches, and accelerate our efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness.

With federal, state and philanthropic attention freshly focused on the issue, *our window of opportunity is now*. The **WCC** series builds upon this movement with a shared sense of energy, urgency and anticipation for change.

## WHAT MADE WCC II SO SPECIAL?

### I. The Participants

A mix of public and private providers from across three states provided a rich environment for important discussions over a day and a half. Participants included representatives from homeless youth-specific agencies; agencies focusing on special at-risk populations (e.g., LGBT youth, former foster youth, youth who have been trafficked); state, regional and national advocacy organizations; formerly homeless youth advocates; local government agencies; and federal agency staff.

## 2. Articulation of Key Challenges Facing Providers, Funders and Policymakers

The conversations about best practices brought to the surface some intrinsic tensions that can arise in our work. While many of these challenges are well-recognized, the sometimes-competing priorities of programs and systems were striking.

### *Challenges faced by individual programs and organizations*

- \* Balancing youth and young adult developmental needs for independence and interdependence.
- \* Balancing the roles of program staff, families of origin and natural supports in the lives of youth and young adults.
- \* Balancing the need to support the development of young staff while supporting the development of young people experiencing homelessness.

### *Challenges faced by a system or across systems*

- \* Simultaneously working to both prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness, which involve different activities.
- \* Lack of clarity about how to effectively share the responsibility for preventing youth homelessness with existing child welfare programs.
- \* Using outdated systems and strategies to meet the urgent needs of youth while we are developing and testing innovative models of care.
- \* Navigating among the required outcomes and reporting systems of multiple funders, such as HUD and HHS.
- \* Maintaining our energy and commitment to homeless young people despite the limited array of resources available from local, state and federal sources.
- \* Defining what permanent and stable housing means for young people in the context of normal adolescent development.
- \* Maintaining our enthusiasm and challenging ourselves to use data to design and improve service systems while maintaining a healthy skepticism about the significance of this limited and imperfect data set.

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**Approaches may differ but everyone supports the same goal: Ending youth and young adult homelessness, once and for all.**

## 3. Honest Sharing of Successes and Challenges

We embarked on an honest and constructive dialogue. We recognized good work and shared examples of when our best intentions and careful planning didn't lead to the desired results. This sharing of what wasn't working in our communities was as valuable as sharing successful model programs. We realized that discussions about programmatic missteps are absent from the national conversation but are particularly vital to our work.

## 4. New Relationships and Connections

The number of participants, along with the small group format, fostered an environment conducive to more interaction and sharing among participants, during and between learning sessions. The small-group format has helped develop trust among the leaders and has led to a deeper understanding about the challenges and opportunities we face in our various communities.

## WCC II TOPIC AREAS

*WCC II focused primarily on three content areas:*

- \* Homeless youth typologies
- \* Coordinated entry/engagement systems
- \* Permanent connections

*We also took an introductory look at two topics:*

- \* System level performance
- \* Meaningful youth engagement

## HOMELESS YOUTH TYPOLOGIES

By using our resources strategically and focusing on specific outcomes, we are learning to more effectively target interventions for homeless youth and young adults.

- \* We are developing strategies, driven by data, to better direct housing and services for young people in a deliberate, targeted way based on their unique needs.
- \* We are working to become more proficient at matching young people with the right services.
- \* We are committed to considering both resilience and protective factors, along with risk and needs.
- \* The development and refinement of typologies, informed by insight from providers, is a promising path for matching youth and young adults with the right resources.

### //Lessons Learned//

*New data-driven typologies will help communities more effectively connect youth and young adults with the services they need the most, but we have a long way to go!*

By sharing what we are learning through our experiences as providers, funders and advocates, we can more effectively articulate to policy-makers what is needed to end youth and young adult homelessness.



**WCC II examined the King County, Washington typology project, which works in three ways:**

- \* Helps size and scope housing resources to better meet needs.
- \* Establishes a theory to test what type of housing and services are needed for which particular group of young people.
- \* Encourages advocacy for policy and funding solutions.

## COORDINATED ENTRY/ENGAGEMENT SYSTEMS

We continue to reflect on the critical importance of collaboration among systems, organizations and individuals to be successful in implementing Coordinated Entry/Engagement Systems (CES) and ultimately to ending homelessness among young people.

- \* The trusting relationships required for CES do not “just happen.” To create the environment for an effective CES, we must proactively reach across communities and sustain these efforts over time.
- \* For success, the following needs must be balanced against one another:
  - Equity in housing access.
  - Efficient use of resources.
  - The targeting and triage of resources.
  - Relationship between young people, providers and families.

### //Lessons Learned//

*Collaboration requires long-term relationships and commitments.  
Coordinated systems are better positioned to target the right housing and services for youth.*



### WCC II examined two regional collaboration efforts focused on CES:

- \* Portland, Oregon
- \* King County, Washington

#### Promising practices from these efforts include:

- \* A focus on model/system fidelity.
- \* Recognition that the model is dynamic and must adapt to changing information.

Acknowledgment was made that coordinated entry is only effective if it isn't a “gilded door to nowhere.” CES must be built on top of, and not instead of, a coordinated continuum of care.

#### Challenges that arose from these efforts include:

- \* Differences in desired outcomes from funders can create complications and potential conflicts in systems.
- \* Coordinated entry/engagement can be expensive and complex.

## PERMANENT CONNECTIONS

Communities are testing new approaches to help young people build healthy and supportive relationships with their families, even in situations where families may have once been identified as beyond repair.

- \* Definition of “family” is broadly defined to include newly chosen families identified by youth.
- \* Natural supports may include families, chosen families, caring adults and peers.
- \* Those working with young people must follow the lead of youth and young adults in defining family.
- \* Agencies must rethink old attitudes about “dysfunctional families” and recognize that many youth want to connect in healthy ways to families of origin.
- \* We must explore additional best practices and train staff to effectively help young people build lasting connections to family and other natural supports.

### //Lesson Learned//

*Agencies need to continue to grapple with how to support lasting social connections for youth, even though best practices are still emerging.*

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEDERAL LEADERSHIP

Today, in local communities and at the federal level, we are uniquely positioned to end youth and young adult homelessness. Awareness never has been greater. We have strong national advocates and federal partners who have a commitment to addressing the needs of homeless youth. Young people are involved and contributing their knowledge. Communities are poised and positioned to better understand—and become more responsive to—the needs of homeless youth and young adults. Researchers and coordinated systems are actively engaged in better identifying the scope of the problem by collecting better data about youth struggling with homelessness.

Like local communities coming together to address the problem, federal departments must align their policies and priorities for working toward ending youth homelessness. We applaud the work of the U.S. Interagency Council on Ending Homelessness to address the unique needs of homeless youth. However, individual federal agencies must set aside their differences so that a true collaboration for ending homelessness among our nation’s young people can be sustained. The first step could be developing a common definition of homeless youth across federal departments. Federal government departments also must maintain open communication with the communities they serve so that solutions reflect local desires and concerns.

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**We stand as partners in providing information and encouragement so we succeed in ending youth homelessness.**

With federal officials as active participants, WCC II developed the following recommendations for breaking down barriers between the various departments of government, and between government and communities:

- \* Align HUD outcomes with outcomes measures established in the [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness \(USICH\) Framework to End Youth Homelessness](#).
  - Promote the definition of permanent housing as one that includes “safe and stable” exits for YYA.
  - Allow education as an outcome equivalent to income and employment.
- \* HUD should support youth and young adult-appropriate housing and services.
  - Allow flexible use of McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant funds to provide youth and young adult-appropriate housing, specifically Rapid Re-housing (or “Rapid and Supportive Housing”) for young adults.
  - We propose replacing the term “Rapid Re-housing” with “Rapid and Supportive Housing” for youth and young adults.
  - Continue to support Transitional Housing for youth, alongside investments in Permanent Supportive Housing for homeless young adults.



**Similar recommendations have emerged from the following organizations:**

*(please click individual links for more information)*

- \* [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)
  - ▶ [An Emerging Framework for Ending Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness](#)
  - ▶ [FY 2015 Appropriations: HUD Homeless Assistance Grants](#)
  - ▶ [Policy Priorities](#)
- \* [National Network for Youth](#)
  - ▶ [Youth Homelessness in America](#)

## **MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE WCC SERIES**

The **West Coast Convenings (WCC)** bring together innovators and thought leaders from public and private homeless-youth-serving agencies in California, Oregon and Washington at a series of intensive collaborative learning events in 2014 and 2015.

Participants are taking what they are learning at the **WCC** and translating new practices to their own communities.

The **WCC** series is inspiring others to host local and regional gatherings focused on the USICH outcomes and best practices in homeless youth service delivery.

### **PAST MEETINGS:**

WCC I: June 5-6, 2014, Los Angeles

WCC II: Oct. 16-17, 2014, Seattle

### **NEXT MEETING:**

WCC III: March 5-6, 2015, Portland

### **CONTACTS:**

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## WCC II ATTENDEES

### Washington

Building Changes: Margaret Woley, Declan Wynne  
Catholic Community Services: Emily Harris-Shears  
City of Seattle: Marci Curtin, Pat Wells  
Cocoon House: Cassie Franklin  
Committee to End Homelessness: Megan Gibbard, Carrie Hennen  
Friends of Youth: Terry Pottmeyer  
Northwest Youth Services: Riannon Bardsley, Robin Meyer  
Raikes Foundation: Katie Hong  
Teen Feed: Brandy Grant  
The Mockingbird Society: Erin Hatheway, Jim Theofelis  
United Way of King County: Courtney Noble  
Workforce Snohomish: Svea Stromme  
YMCA of Greater Seattle: Seán Walsh  
YouthCare: Melinda Giovengo

### Oregon

Boys & Girls Aid: Andrea Logan Sanders, Vera Stoullil  
Community Action: Trina Biton, Tricia Ratliff  
Multnomah County, Department of County Human Services: Mary Li  
State of Oregon Department of Human Services: Kevin George, Adrea Korthase

### California

Alameda County: Connie Linas  
Bill Wilson Center: Sparky Harlan  
California Coalition for Youth: Paul Curtis  
California Homeless Youth Project: Shahera Hyatt  
Children's Hospital Los Angeles, Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine: Arlene Schneir

City and County of San Francisco, Human Services Agency: Ali Schlageter  
Corporation for Supportive Housing: Angela Rosales  
Covenant House California: Daniel Ballin  
Corporation for Supportive Housing: Angela Rosales  
Encompass Community Services: Susan Paradise  
First Place for Youth: Deanne Pearn  
HOME & HOPE: Raj Rambob  
Larkin Street Youth Services: Sherilyn Adams, Dina Wilderson  
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority: Rhonda Johnson, Laura Petry  
Los Angeles LGBT Center: Simon Costello, Curt Shepard  
Los Angeles Youth Network: Brian Coughlin  
Safe Place for Youth: Alison Hurst  
San Diego Youth Services: Sarah Merrill  
University of Southern California School of Social Work: Jonathan Hoonhout, Eric Rice

### Canada

Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary: Christine Boyd  
United Way of Calgary and Area: Kiran Kadavil

### National Partners

MANY: Megan Blondin  
National Alliance to End Homelessness: Mindy Mitchell  
National Network for Youth: Darla Bardine  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth & Families: Caryn Blitz  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth & Families, Family & Youth Services Bureau: Stephen Ice  
U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness: Katy Miller

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE WEST COAST CONVENINGS



*The convenings are wonderful opportunities both for providers and systems folks to share experiences and challenges, and for those of us doing policy work and research to learn from them.*



*There are so many different agencies and providers working on the issue of youth homelessness. It's helpful to have a place to connect and share common challenges and best practices. It also gives us the opportunity to learn about recent innovations, programs, and research that ultimately shape our practices for the better.*



*It's been so important to hear about both the challenges and successes in doing the work, which in turn can help me and my federal colleagues determine how to better support the work and integrate best practices into policy and research.*