

4. Community needs questions:

- a. How do you think the community could serve homeless youth better, without additional funding? Do you have a specific suggestion, strategy, or idea for improving services?

Proposed CAN shelter prioritization policy change

Young Adults are not currently prioritized on the shelter waitlists. As this is a regionalized policy made by the Greater Hartford CAN, we would propose that youth get some level of prioritization when they are literally homeless or in very unsafe doubled-up environments. A proposal for prioritization would be for youth to be prioritized as a tie-breaker, shortly after pregnant females for available shelter beds.

Reserved youth beds at existing adult shelters in order to increase accessibility to safe shelter

The CAN would reach out to existing shelter providers to see if any would be willing to set a preference for a fixed number of existing beds specifically for homeless 18-24 year olds or emancipated youth.

Amend shelter rules so that they are more youth-friendly

Presence of curfews at many shelters is often identified by homeless youth as a deterrent from accessing shelter. By encouraging existing shelter providers to examine removing curfews from their practices, acceptance of available shelter beds by youth may increase.

Engagement of existing behavioral health clinics to serve as family mediation sites.

As mediation is a billable service, the YETI would reach out to existing behavioral health centers to determine if any of them would be willing to serve as a “family mediation” site, which would provide mediation services to homeless youth and their families in order to increase rates of youth being able to return home. (Ex: RECLAIM in Minneapolis).

Development of volunteer Host Home/Couch Surfing network?

Regional recruitment of community members that would be willing to serve as a form of safe shelter for homeless young adults in their community. Home studies with criminal background checks would be conducted for each host home. Host Homes would not be paid but would ideally be supported through services and flex funding that could cover incidental costs such as transportation, food, basic needs, etc. As a homeless young person was identified, volunteer host homes could be contacted to see if they were willing to take someone in for the night.

- b. What exists already and do you need more in any of the above categories?

See GH CAN Housing Inventory Chart and Greater Hartford Residential Programs for Youth Chart for current existing inventory available to homeless youth.

Participating members in the YETI identified an increased need in 18-24 emergency/crisis beds, the presence of youth-specific navigators/diversion case managers (discussed in more detail in section e), and an increase in longer-term rapid re-housing specific to youth.

- c. How would you alter existing models to better suit needs of youth/young adults?
YETI members feel that youth can better serve youth by extending the length of stay of most shelter/crisis housing options, extending the length of financial assistance provided by existing rapid re-housing programs, and making several of the prioritization/reservation/curfew adjustments for shelters noted in section a) above.
- d. Thinking creatively, if you had flexible funding, what assistance would help youth/young adults stay safe during housing crisis and/or help them get permanently housed in your region?
As discussed in a. above, flexible funding would be helpful for rolling out a host home program to pay for incidental expenses like transportation, food, basic needs, job training, criminal background checks, and home studies. It could also be used to pair with navigation/case management for diversion purposes while youth are waiting on a shelter, host home, or rapid rehousing placement.
- e. If you had \$200,000 to spend on ending youth homelessness, what would be your housing priorities (outreach/engagement – permanent housing) broken down by percentages?
The YETI community members noted that the prioritization of this funding would be for the presence of Youth Navigators (further definition of this navigator’s responsibilities below) and for Permanent Housing options in the form of Rapid Re-Housing (also discussed below).

Youth Navigation Role

Of note is that this would be a different role functionally than existing CAN navigators in that their responsibilities would only partially be in getting youth “document ready”. Rather, Youth Navigators (YN) would primarily be responsible for provided case management services to youth from the time they are placed on the by-name-list until they are stably housed, with targeted services in the following specific areas:

- Employment readiness and employment maintenance. By helping youth entering the CAN, the navigator can work from an “employment first” framework in an attempt to see if youth can increase their permanent/temporary/shelter options provided they have income.
- Connection to education services/resources, McKinney-Vento liaisons, etc
- Reaching out to potential natural supports (including family) to assess under what conditions they could serve as permanent/temporary housing. Attempting to engaged in family members to engage in mediation services with the homeless youth.
- Obtaining needed documents (birth certificate, social security card, etc) which are mutually needed for housing programs and employment/educational resources.

- Working to connect homeless youth to one another, in an attempt to have them “pair up” to increase the potential for shared living arrangements with 2+ youth that have income.
- Connecting youth and navigating youth through the process to enter rapid rehousing if other solutions are not possible. These services could continue and include housing search and housing stabilization while the youth is in rapid rehousing as described below:

Rapid Re-housing Financial Assistance

YETI members identified that existing rapid re-housing programs available through the CAN tend to not provide the necessary financial assistance for long enough for some members of this younger population. Given that, the community would be seeking flexible rapid re-housing funding assistance for young adults ages 18-24 with the approximate breakdown as:

- 50% rental assistance for up to 1 year
- 25% rental assistance for up to 2 years
- 25% rental assistance for 2+ years

(These percentages are partially informed by data obtained from The Connection’s rapid re-housing program, which can provide rental assistance for up to 2 years.)

- f. What training do you think would be most helpful? For whom?

The community identified a need for increased training around how 211 communicates with youth that call seeking shelter, based on feedback gained from youth that have tried to access the 211 system. (i.e. youth not understanding what the 211 operator is instructing them to do)