**OBJECTIVES AND ACTION STEPS**

**Prevention & Diversion:**

The community will enhance the statewide system of identifying youth and young adults who are at-risk of homelessness by conducting annual assessments of needs, strengthening outreach and access points for assistance with housing and services so that youth who are experiencing housing instability are identified early and prevented from entering the homeless crisis response system.

**Objective 1:** Increase early identification of youth and young adults at-risk or experiencing homelessness.

*Action Steps*

1. Create and implement a statewide annual assessment of need.
   1. Track in-flow and outflow of YYA, including location prior to entry and at exit.
   2. Expand current HMIS mandatory RHY measures for to include all youth and young adults under 25, regardless of HUD or FYSB designation.
2. Engage McKinney-Vento Liaisons in participating in the precarious housed count as part of the annual Point In Time count conducted by the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness.
3. Conduct a statewide Youth Count in the summer (in addition to annual PIT) that tracks both literally homeless as well as precariously housed, as well as captures “traveler” youth who may not have permanent connections in Vermont but are camping or otherwise staying for the warmer months.
4. Work with the Department for Children and Families to develop quality data to understand who is exiting child welfare and the juvenile justice systems that either have or go on to experience homelessness within a year after exit.
5. Work with service providers supporting pregnant and parenting youth and young adults under age 25 to identify YYA at-risk of precarious housing or homelessness and connect to prevention and diversion resources.
6. Create training for community members that build knowledge around early warning signs, how to engage youth and young adults in conversations about homelessness, housing stability, and what resources are available including housing supports, education, and health care.

**Objective 2:** Increase availability of low-barrier access points to services and housing supports.

*Action Steps*

1. Increase availability and youth-appropriateness of community-based resources that serve as access points to crisis and/ or housing programs, such as: drop-in centers, locations for community meals or food shelf pick-ups, clothing donations, hygiene supports like accessible showers and toiletries.
   1. Build in opportunities for peer connections such as specific times for YYA or activities developed by and for YYA.
   2. Increase availability of support workers at these locations for brief contacts and consultations to build relationships with YYA prior to housing crisis.
   3. Expand availability of drop-in centers by expanding beyond site-based permanent entities to also including “pop-up” once a week or weekend only drop-in spaces.
      1. Consider drop-in accessibility and appropriateness for 12-18 year olds and 18-24 year olds.
2. Ensure hotlines such as 2-1-1 and 24-hour hotlines for crisis services are aware of low-barrier supports and can make referrals.
3. Educate members of the community on providing information to youth before they are at-risk.

**Objective 3:** Improve outreach targeting youth and young adult populations to increase awareness of available assistance and housing supports.

*Action Steps*

1. Create a social media campaign that works across a variety of platforms and is used by partners statewide to support clear and consistent messaging about available resources and access points; outreach should work to dispel myths and stigmas surrounding housing crisis.
2. Ensure outreach activities are culturally appropriate and accessible for various sub-populations based on identify, race, or ethnic backgrounds.
3. Make outreach materials available in different reading levels and languages.
4. Identify “hot-spots” for youth outreach, places where youth congregate beyond schools.
5. Conduct outreach activities that target these “hot-spot” locations, such as local libraries or other free wifi hotspots, skate parks, or other public spaces YYA gather.
6. Build specific support services targeting transient “traveler” youth who are often only passing through for warmer months.
7. Create a housing and services inventory that youth can access.

**Objective 4:** Increase partnerships with secondary and post-secondary institutions to help with early identification and crisis prevention for YYA at-risk of homelessness.

*Action steps*

1. Create guidelines and best practices for identifying and serving youth and young adults in school systems.
2. Train McKinney-Vento Liaisons on coordinated entry referral and assessment tools.
3. Develop a statewide workgroup for secondary and post-secondary entities and community-based stakeholders to further define statewide needs and resources for homeless youth.
4. Increase campus-based outreach and awareness activities.
   1. Include a segment in health classes around housing and housing instability where youth can learn about available resources and connect to local housing providers.
5. Build partnerships between educational entities and local service providers that enable coordinated service provision on campus.
6. Ensure McKinney-Vento liaisons are:
   1. Connected with local YYA service providers;
   2. Completing housing assessment tools for Coordinated Entry for unaccompanied youth and youth homeless with their family;
   3. Participating on local Housing Review Teams;
   4. Training other school staff, including volunteers and coaches, on identification of youth homelessness and available resources
7. Connect youth in families who are McKinney-Vento eligible to youth-centered community-based service providers to address their unique individual needs.

**Objective 5:** Increase youth homeless prevention resources

*Action Steps*

1. Create a YYA homelessness diversion fund available across the CoC to support YYA staying in place rather than losing housing, prioritize access for pregnant and parenting YYA.
2. Increase integration of youth-centered family reunification and permanent connection building activities into core case management for all YYA service providers, McKinney-Vento liaisons, and housing providers.
3. Work with providers across the community to coordinate services and ensure youth’s needs are met before they escalate to homelessness.
   1. Service providers should consider co-location or co-planning so youth do not need to attend multiple case management meetings with different providers.

**Continuum of Housing Supports:**

The community will offer youth and young adults a variety of housing options that meet individual needs and empower youth and young adults to reach their full potential in a safe, youth-centered, and sustainable living situation.

**Objective 1:** Improve access to and responsiveness of existing housing options for youth and young adults.

*Action step*

1. Create and disseminate an annual report highlighting where YYA enter and flow through existing response system.
2. Reduce or eliminate system-level barriers that prevent youth from accessing or staying in available housing projects.
   1. Identify system-level barriers to housing and determine ways to address them.
   2. Modify current mainstream programs to incorporate best practices for working with YYA (e.g.. addressing adultism and racism, using housing first approach, PYD, harm reduction, TIC, youth leadership within the agency).
   3. Increase education about the expanded definition of Category 4 for youth fleeing violence.
3. Develop a general application for youth to access housing supports which is used by all housing programs, including crisis response as well as voucher–based programs.
4. Shorten the length of time pregnant and parenting YYA and Black YYA are in emergency shelter.
   1. Examine exits from emergency shelter for White non-parenting youth for stability (are they leaving sooner b/c they are house or b/c they have other options for doubling up?)
5. Identify and address barriers to youth and young adults accessing existing permanent housing subsidies.
   1. Determine estimated level of need vs. availability.
   2. Reduce length of time YYA with complex service needs are on Master List.
6. Increase Identification and address barriers to YYA utilization of VT State Housing Authorities homelessness preference/Family Unification Program vouchers.
7. Improve youth and young adult referral process to project-based units.
8. Work with the BoS CoC’s Coordinated Entry (CE) workgroup to ensure the CoC’s CE assessment and prioritization process is youth-centered and successfully identifies and prioritizes youths’ needs for housing.
   1. Ensure HMIS capacity to monitor YYA coordinated entry outcomes.
   2. Create a mechanism for including youth voice in CE evaluative and design processes.
   3. Evaluate the process for YYA in comparison to older adult populations and identify where YYA are at disadvantage due to age or other barriers.
9. Provide technical assistance and professional development on Coordinated Entry and available services to the Agency of Education and McKinney-Vento Liaisons using multiple platforms to ensure statewide LEA participation.
10. Support the development of YYA-centered practices within existing mainstream housing including:
    1. Employing youth and young adult peers in housing and support programs
    2. Building positive rapport with youth and young adults in agency settings through low-barrier engagement opportunities

**Objective 2:** Develop new housing programs specifically for youth and young adult populations.

*Action steps*

1. Work with local public housing authorities to develop youth preferences and policies that address common barriers such as:
   1. Lack of landlord references.
   2. Hard restrictions on visitors or activities that lead to eviction.
   3. Increased and simplified appeal process.
2. Set aside an increased amount of Housing Choice Vouchers for YYA.
3. Increase availability of Transitional Housing, Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supported Housing options for YYA.
   1. Explore options for these projects to serve unaccompanied youth who are 16 and 17 years old.
4. Develop YYA specific emergency shelter options, particularly focused on 18-24 year olds.
   1. Target emergency options for category 4 eligible youth.
5. Work with developers to explore the possibility of set asides for YYA within new site-based projects.
6. Explore Landlord liaison programs that help YYA fund units and reduce barriers YYA may have to finding community-based housing.
   1. Develop a landlord mitigation fund for YYA housing.
7. Create a system of host homes/ home shares for young adults 18-24.
8. Ensure that all new YYA supporting housing and service projects funded under VT YHDP are aligned with a housing first approach and have:
   1. Affirmed policies and practices around how they will be address unique needs of LGBTQ youth, Black youth, and pregnant and parenting youth;
      1. YHDP funded projects will need to include policies and practices for provision of gender-affirming or gender-free shelter beds, access to gender neutral bathrooms, and connections with specific support services such as support with ID recovery, name or gender marker changes.
   2. Training and professional development plans that include: addressing adultism, PYD, harm reduction, and TIC;
   3. Opportunities for youth leadership in program design and implementation;
   4. Implementation of core service philosophy put forth in this report.

**Objective 3:** Incorporate low barrier and Housing First approaches across the homelessness response system.

*Action steps*

1. Support youth and young adult specific low-barrier and Housing First approaches through CoC project funding.
   1. Address needs of young adults 18-24 who are not eligible for RRH or PSH options
   2. Explore and address disadvantages to YYA in Coordinated Entry that results in those best served by medium- or long-term housing interventions remaining on the Master List for long periods of time due to low complex service need scores and an order of priority that is heavily informed by length of time homeless
      1. Create a compatible YYA specific entry assessment
2. Require that policies are in place to ensure youth are not screened out of housing programs due to: having too little or low income; active or history of substance use: having a criminal record; or history of victimization (e.g. domestic violence, sexual assault, childhood abuse).
3. Require that policies are in place to ensure youth and young adults are not terminated from housing programs due to: failure to participate in agreed upon supportive services; failure to make progress on a service plan; loss of income or failure to improve income; or any other activity not covered in a lease agreement typically found for unassisted persons.

**Education and Employment:**

The community will work to remove all barriers to success in education and employment for youth and young adults, and to support the pursuit of a variety of paths with an individualized approach.

**Objective 1:** Ensure that all youth and young adults in the homelessness response system have the tools and supports they need to find and/or maintain employment.

*Action steps*

1. Require all projects applying for YHDP funds to identify how they will provide transportation and employment services to youth and young adults in their programs either directly or through an agreement with community partners.
2. Require all projects applying for YHDP funds that serve pregnant/parenting YYA can identify how they will ensure services are available that support youth in employment settings (e.g. transportation, childcare, etc.)
   1. Establish partnerships between homeless service providers and community providers serving pregnant/parenting youth and young adults (e.g. Parent Child Centers)
3. VT YHDP housing and service providers will ensure protocols and practices are in place that prioritize supporting YYA in obtaining documentation needed for employment and housing, including identification and citizenship documentation.
4. Create a tool-kit/resource guide marketed to youth and young adults that provides them with information to enhance their job readiness and connections to resources and programs available to support them.
   1. The tool-kit/resource guide will be available to YYA both in print and electronically, as well as other modalities that will help enhance accessibility.
   2. Guide will also address resources for LGBTQ and Youth of Color who may be experiencing workplace harassment or discrimination.
5. Strengthen partnerships between the housing system of care and the Vermont Department of Labor to enhance employment support options for YYA and utilization of WIOA resources.
   1. Create a workgroup with the Department of Labor to explore ways to connect more youth and young adults to low-barrier employment supports.

**Objective 2:** Ensure that all youth and young adults in the homelessness response system have the tools and supports they need to advance or complete their education, including GED or high school equivalency and post-secondary education.

1. Require all projects applying for YHDP funds to identify how they will provide transportation, educational, and employment services to youth and young adults in their programs either directly or through an agreement with community partners.
2. Require all projects applying for YHDP funds that serve pregnant/parenting YYA can identify how they will ensure services are available that support youth completing their education (e.g. transportation, childcare, etc.)
   1. Establish partnerships between homeless service providers and community providers serving pregnant/parenting youth and young adults (e.g. Parent Child Centers)
3. VT YHDP housing and service providers will ensure protocols and practices are in place that prioritize supporting YYA in obtaining documentation needed for educational advancement.
   1. Ensure YYA and families know their rights under McKinney-Vento for immediate enrollment regardless of documentation availability, such as transcripts, proof of address, identification, etc.
4. Partner with VT State Colleges to retain open housing all year long, including summer and winter breaks, for youth with no alternative living arrangement.
5. Explore opportunities for increased funding for Vermont YYA who have been verified homeless and are enrolled in post-secondary education to support additional college expenses, such as supplies, meal plans, clothing, hygiene products and other incidental needs.

**Objective 3:** Ensure all students eligible for McKinney-Vento supports are identified and receive equitable services across all service systems.

*Action steps*

1. Develop an effective strategy for providing ongoing professional development for liaisons, and basic education for other school personnel, resulting in effective McKinney-Vento programing statewide in all public, independent and private schools.
2. The Agency of Education will develop technical assistance for Homeless Liaisons, targeting unaccompanied youth services, including: formal site monitoring, workshops, annual sub-population conference, webinars, regular field memos to Statewide listserv, and other direct assistance as requested.
3. The Agency of Education will explore opportunities for providing the field with incentive grant funding for unaccompanied youth specific programs using evidence-based best practices.
4. Enhance relationships between the youth homelessness response system and the Agency of Education to ensure coordination and shared understanding of resources and protocols for supporting school-aged youth.
   1. Increase awareness of M-V eligibility and supports such as immediate school enrollment and transportation supports.
   2. Enhance statewide availability of AOE’s M-V parental and unaccompanied youth packets for eligible YYA and families.

**Objective 4:** Improve partnerships between alternative education programs and school districts/supervisory unions for the purposes of identification and equitable service delivery to McKinney-Vento YYA.

*Action steps*

1. The State Program Coordinator for McKinney-Vento will establish systems of collaboration with in-put from all stakeholders that include but is not limited to program directors/principals in: alternative school networks, independent and religious schools, CTE centers and Adult Learning Centers serving 16 – 24 year olds.
2. Develop a clear process for youth and young adults in alternative settings to access a variety of educational programs based upon identified needs that are youth-centered, reflective of and supported by stated educational goals as outlined by the Vermont Educational State Plan authorized in spring of 2017.
3. The Agency of Education will collaborate with alternative education program staff to ensure activities comply with education requirements and appropriate resources are available to ensure program efficacy.

**Objective 5:** Ensure that youth and young adults are empowered to define their own education and employment goals and what supports/services they need to achieve them.

*Action steps*

1. Create outcomes and performance measures for YHDP-funded projects that recognize success beyond traditional education and employment outcomes.
2. AOE McKinney-Vento training will include TIC and PYD principles.

**Objective 6:** Create, implement and annually evaluate a network of potential employers who support youth and young adult employment.

*Action steps*

1. Department of Labor and Agency of Education will collaboratively establish employer professional development programs for serving YYA.
   1. Include tips and ideas on how to strengthen and support successful youth and young adult employment.
   2. Department of Labor will work to enhance opportunities for progressive employment for YYA
2. Build partnerships with regional chambers of commerce to educate employers about the needs of youth and young adult employees and what resources employers can connect with to support YYA working for them.

**Permanent Connections:**

The community will support youth and young adults in establishing lasting connections with families, friends, communities, and other natural supports of choice, while cultivating opportunities and interests.

**Objective 1:** Youth and young adults exiting housing programs have permanent connections: stable, positive relationships with family, friends, and others who will be there for the youth and young adults when needed.

*Action Steps*

1. Increase collaboration and coordination between the community housing providers, youth service systems, education, and workforce organizations, etc.
2. Peer and adult mentorship activities are built into housing programs and holistic, coordinated care.
3. Scattered-site, voucher-based and other non-site based housing programs work with community partners to create opportunities for YYA to connect with peers through shared activities, educational events, meals, and group counseling.
4. Housing and service providers assist youth and young adults in identifying areas of interest and support YYA connecting to participation opportunities within the community, such as cultural, faith-based, or recreational groups.

**Objective 2:** Integrate development of permanent connections and the use of family/natural support engagement into every aspect of service delivery system, reunifying families and/or connecting to other supportive adults.

*Action Steps*

1. Expanding services that facilitate permanent connections for youth exiting child welfare system involvement such as DCF’s extended foster care program and permanency pacts
2. Create policies and practices for all housing and services programs that include family and natural support engagement strategies and goals, including young adults aged 18-24.

**Social and Emotional Wellbeing:**

The community will embrace positive youth and young adult development, trauma-informed care, and resilience building; encouraging the ongoing development of skills, strengths, and hobbies among youth and young adults to ensure continued stability.

**Objective 1:** Incorporate youth-centered, culturally-informed approaches to service delivery across all housing and service providers, including those not specifically targeting youth and young adults, to ensure that no young person experiences re-traumatization.

*Action Steps*

1. Train all support workers, including mainstream providers, in trauma-informed care, harm reduction, *Youth Thrive*/Strengthening Families/Positive Youth Development frameworks.
2. Ensure all VTYHDP funded project have policies and protocols in place for training all housing support workers on cultural inclusiveness and how to support marginalized populations including LGBTQ youth, youth of color, unique needs of category 4 youth including safety planning, youth with behavioral or mental health disabilities, youth from various cultural backgrounds, etc.
3. Incorporate youth-focused program evaluation, engaging youth who have gone through programs to provide feedback on efficacy and competency of services.
4. Establish clear avenues of accountability and policies that empower youth to act on their own behalf to address grievances with services or service providers.

**Objective 2:** Youth and young adults will receive ongoing support and connection to resources in their pursuit of social, cultural, community, and recreational areas of interest.

*Action Steps*

1. Increase access to and supports for normalcy activities, including dedicated and flexible funds to pay for fees, clothing, or other resources needed to participate in day-to-day or one-time activities other YYA who aren’t in housing crisis have access too.
2. Ensure that service providers are taking a youth-centered approach to connecting youth with an array of opportunities that connect YYA to peers and their community.

**Objective 3:** Youth and young adults are provided with and engage in local and statewide leadership and advocacy opportunities, increasing youth voice throughout system.

*Action Steps*

1. Institutionalize the role of the VT-500 Youth Advisory Board (YAB)
   1. Establish two member seats on the CoC Board
   2. Identify a long-term financial support for YAB members consultation
   3. Support YAB to develop ongoing outreach and engagement activities to recruit and sustain membership
   4. Connect YAB with other youth leadership groups including YDP FORWARD group, WIOA youth group, VT9to26 youth coalition and other partners working to advance youth leadership across the state.
2. Mobilize local CoCs, YYA and housing providers to develop youth boards and opportunities for youth leadership in decision making processes, ensuring that youth voice is central to program development and assessment.
3. Ensure housing providers have avenues of accountability that empower youth to act on their own behalf to address grievances with services or service providers.
4. Ensure each local CoC creates opportunities that engage youth voices in project planning, development and evaluation.
5. Provide resources to train YYA who have experienced homelessness in leadership, advocacy, and civic engagement.
   1. Develop or select a statewide youth leadership curriculum
   2. Connect precariously housed and homeless YYA to other organizations with leadership and peer councils.

**Objective 4:** All youth and young adults will have access to adequate, timely and appropriate mental, behavioral, physical health services and substance abuse supports.

*Action Steps*

1. Integrate TAY focused health and substance abuse interventions into youth and young adult homelessness system of care.
   1. Develop partnerships with local Mental Health Designated Agencies and housing providers to increase information sharing, care coordination, and referrals.
   2. Housing providers should support YYA in accessing health insurance and connecting to a primary care physician.
2. Expand access to mental and behavioral health and substance abuse services.
3. Address challenges in transition from child-based MH services to adult system of care, including but not limited to:
   1. Warm hand-offs between youth and adult systems,
   2. Increased training for YYA housing providers around transition to adult services,
   3. Increase collaboration with community based mental health teams.
4. Provide communication and conflict mediation skill building into case management with YYA, particularly for pregnant and parenting youth to assist co-parenting relationships.
5. Ensure connections to mental health support for LGBTQ youth, connections to LGBTQ affirming sexual health information, substance abuse programming.

**Objective 5:** Service providers screen for and identify YYA who are experiencing or at-risk of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, from program entry through aftercare.

*Action Steps*

1. Train YYA services and all housing providers on trafficking and exploitation red flags, community resources, and appropriate, non-stigmatizing responses.
2. Ensure youth who have been identified as having experienced potential trafficking or exploitation are connected to appropriate sexual health supports immediately.
3. Work with the VT Department of Children and Families to share resources, such as screening tools, and information about trafficking with community partners.

**Objective 6:** Support youth to achieve goals that will help them achieve long-term stability.

*Action Steps*

1. Ensure YHDP funding projects are supporting YYA with long-term stability through:
   1. Specific educational supports for YYA who have been involved with the child welfare system and experienced housing instability should be available to help youth maintain a 3.0 or above GPA.
   2. Provision of case management or learning opportunities that enhance life skill development, from paying bills, cook and cleaning, to accessing resources.
      1. Specific programming should be implemented with YYA who have been involved with the child welfare system at any point after age 12, including connections to the Youth Development Program for eligible YYA.