Results of Support Systems for Rural Homeless Youth (SSRHY) Demonstration Projects 2008–2015

December 2018

FYSB Family & Youth Services Bureau

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Executive Summary

This report details the activities and outcomes of six demonstration projects offering services to youth who are experiencing homelessness in rural communities, funded under the **Support Systems for Rural Homeless Youth (SSRHY)** initiative of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Project Descriptions

Each of the following SSRHY projects focused on rural youth ages 16–21[2] who were approaching independence but had few or no connections to supportive family structures or community support systems.

Project/State Lead Agency	Lead Partners	Years	Target Population
Colorado Rural Collaborative for Runaway and Homeless Youth/ Colorado Department of Human Services	Urban Peak Denver, FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service provider with temporary shelter and transitional living programs (TLPs)	2008– 2014	Alamosa, Moffat, Garfield, Huerfano, Montezuma, and Montrose counties
Iowa, Rural Opportunities and Connections/Iowa Department of Human Services	Youth and Shelter Services, FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service provider with temporary shelter and TLPs	2008– 2014	Central Iowa towns of Boone, Ogden and Madrid
The Minnesota SSRHY Transitional Living Program/Minnesota Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Opportunity	Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, an existing FYSB TLP for rural youth experiencing homelessness	2008– 2014	Tribal communities, including Bois Forte and Leech Lake Reservations

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2   Nebraska, Colorado, and Vermont extended the target age of youth to 16–24.

Project/State Lead Agency	Lead Partners	Years	Target Population
Nebraska Demonstration Project/ Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services	Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska (CAPWN), an existing FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service provider, and Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF)	2009– 2014	Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, and Scotts Bluff counties
Oklahoma Bridge to Independence Network/Oklahoma Department of Human Services	State entities and multiple existing FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service providers	2009– 2014	Rural areas of Blaine and Kingfisher counties
Youth Factor NEK (Northeast Kingdom)/State of Vermont Department for Children and Families	Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service provider with transition living and family stabilization programs	2009– 2015	Newport

Key Findings

Collaboration

- In general, states leveraged existing relationships with local agencies, often TLPs, to develop and implement their demonstration projects.

- Ensuring that local collaborating partners had experience supporting rural communities was crucial to the success of the demonstration projects.

- Local collaborating partners were an important element in the successful implementation of an SSRHY demonstration project, but states also enlisted additional entities in the delivery of project services.

- Although states leveraged a diverse set of local partners in developing and implementing their demonstration projects, the reporting structure for these collaborations were relatively consistent across all demonstration projects, with state agencies assuming an oversight function.

Services

- The interim and final reports submitted by states reveal six broad categories of services and supports provided as part of the SSRHY initiative:

  1. **Community engagement and public outreach** focused on drawing attention to the "invisibility" of rural youth homelessness in their communities as well as improving the negative community perceptions of homelessness.

  2. **Dedicated spaces** were developed/provided for at-risk youth, including both temporary housing and socializing spaces, as rural youth face a dearth within their communities of both social and living space.

3. **Education** was an important element of many states' SSRHY demonstration project support.

4. **Employment support** was also offered as part of each project.

5. **Survival support skills** were important for three states' demonstration projects.

6. **Case management** was part of at least three states' demonstration projects.

Additionally, some programs supported **cultural awareness** and created a **platform for advocacy** in support of at-risk youth.

- All states provided multiple services under the demonstration projects, and the projects enabled the states to better coordinate services from multiple providers.

Outcomes

The states provided different services, used different methods of evaluation, and collected different data. Therefore, the data are not comparable among the states. The following are data highlights:

Project	Key Outcomes
Colorado (CO)	- Nearly all youth improved in survival support, community attachments and education and employment activities. - Colorado had a very low program return rate. 94% of Colorado rural youth (211 out of 225) exited to a safe place compared with the 88% national rate.
Iowa (IA)	90% of youth receiving work readiness and job placement services (78) were successful or partially successful. - Of those youth receiving housing services (45), 84% were discharged successfully or partially successfully.
Minnesota (MN)	91% of participating youth (59 out of 65) successfully transitioned into stable housing either in an apartment on their own or into a housing situation with friends or family.
Nebraska (NE)	74% of youth gained employment (71 out of 95). 41% of youth reached educational goals (39 out of 95) that included: working on their GED, applying for and attending post-secondary education, and graduating from high school. The majority of youth rated themselves as frequently or always feeling safe. They also reported that they frequently managed aspects of themselves successfully, both internally and externally, but had less ability to manage stress in a healthy way. - After leaving the program, 25% lived independently, and 75% lived with a parent/guardian, relative or friend.
Oklahoma (OK)	101 youth in Blaine County and 28 in Kingfisher County were served (only process data was available).

Promising Approaches/Sustainable Models:

1. Effective collaboration between rural service providers for runaway and homeless youth and service providers not typically focused on youth at risk of homelessness greatly expanded and/or strengthened services and supports for those at–risk youth.

2. A readiness to look beyond the presenting problem of youth homelessness to issues and risk factors crossing multiple service systems is critical to establishing and sustaining a community's willingness to act on behalf of rural youth at risk of homelessness.

3. Engaging youth in both project planning and implementation, and the planning of services, in keeping with the principles of positive youth development (PYD), was a key factor in project success.

4. Physical spaces, such as community centers and housing were, more often than not, unsustainable, once SSRHY funding ended. However, other services or supports—especially those where collaborations went beyond just the local collaborating partner—remain in a number of states. Likewise, the less tangible but equally important impacts that better coordination of youth services provides rural youth, and the systemic and policy changes and community awareness from outreach activities, are the lasting legacy of the demonstration projects.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to detail the activities and outcomes of six demonstration projects offering services to youth who were experiencing homelessness in rural communities. These demonstration projects were funded under the **Support Systems for Rural Homeless Youth (SSRHY)** initiative of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The report provides background information on the demonstration projects, presents available quantitative and qualitative information on their outcomes, and describes promising practices, activities and approaches emerging from these projects that could assist FYSB and state agencies in offering more comprehensive, collaboration–based supports and services for rural youth. These may be of value to FYSB in future efforts to enhance services to rural youth and promote youth development community–based initiatives.

FYSB promotes positive outcomes for children, youth, and families by supporting a wide range of comprehensive services and collaborations at the local, tribal, state, and national levels. FYSB has incorporated a PYD) framework into all of its activities, emphasizing the need for youth service models and approaches that direct young people toward positive pathways of development. Key elements of PYD are:

- Healthy messages to adolescents about their bodies, their behaviors, and their interactions.

- Safe and structured places for youth to study, recreate, and socialize.

- Strengthened relationships with adult role models, such as parents, mentors, coaches or community leaders.

- Skill development in literacy, competence, work readiness, and social skills; and

- Opportunities to serve others and build self–esteem.

To promote these principles, FYSB has used its demonstration authority to encourage states to adopt collaborative, community–based approaches to youth development that actively engage local service organizations, community members, and youth. Demonstration projects provide a "laboratory" setting for promising practices to be piloted and, if successful, scaled (i.e., expanded or re–created on a larger scale). Demonstration projects also provide an opportunity for states to develop targeted interventions that better reflect the needs of local communities and youth—needs that can vary greatly between states and regions.

In autumn 2008, FYSB launched the SSRHY demonstration project focusing on rural youth experiencing homelessness in three states: Colorado, Iowa, and Minnesota. The following year, three additional states—Oklahoma, Nebraska and Vermont—were added. The Funding Opportunity Announcement specified that the demonstration projects should target young people ages 16 to 21 in rural areas (including Tribal lands and other rural Native communities) who are approaching independence and young adulthood, but have few or no connections to a supportive, family structure, or community.

Rural youth experiencing homelessness, as well as the service agencies that support them, face a number of unique challenges, including:

- **Invisibility—**The image of youth idling on the streets, sleeping on steam grates, or panhandling on street corners does not fit the rural reality. Rural homelessness, instead, is characterized by "couch-surfing"—youth finding transient and temporary shelter in the homes of friends, neighbors, and family. This "invisibility" allows rural communities to be largely unaware of the problem, and presents challenges to youth services providers in estimating the extent of rural youth needs.

- **Rural difficulties—** In general, rural communities are facing no or low employment opportunities, no or negative population growth, aging housing infrastructure, and fewer community resources. In addition, rural communities typically lack adequate public transportation.

CHALLENGES FACING RURAL YOUTH:

- Invisibility
- Rural Difficulties
- Lack of Safe Places

- **Lack of safe places—**Rural youth are at particularly high risk because, more so than urban youth, they often have little to do and nowhere to go for affordable, accessible activities. The single loudest complaint heard from young people in the SSRHY demonstration is the need for safe places and something to do.

With these challenges in mind, the SSRHY demonstration project enabled states to explore ways to improve the delivery of services and supports to youth in rural communities who have little or no connection to stable housing and family situations—including runaway and homeless youth, as well as youth making unsuccessful transitions out of foster care.

Figure 1: SSRHY Demonstration Project States—First Cohort and Second Cohort
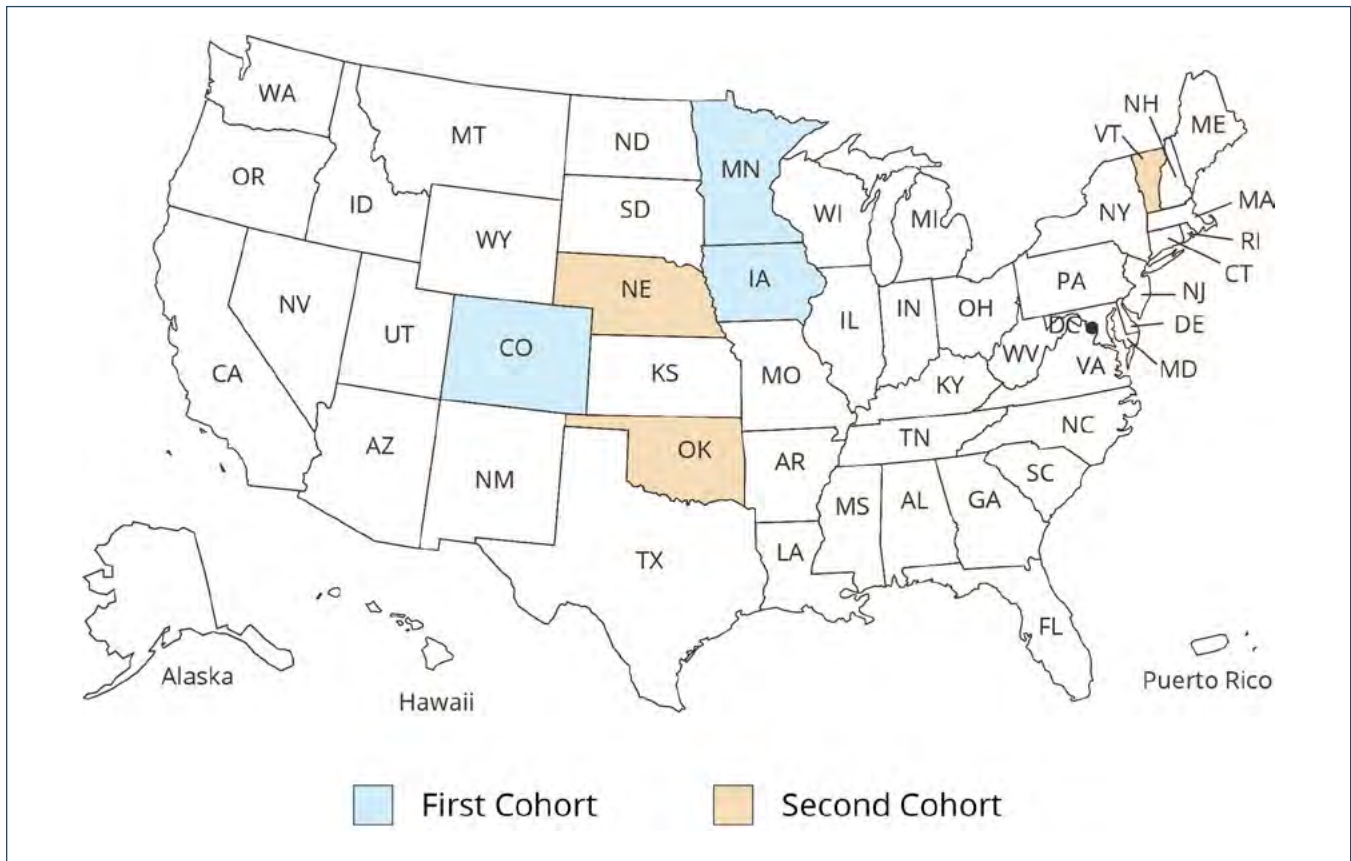
While each of the six states participating in the SSRHY demonstration project addressed the general challenges facing rural youth experiencing homelessness in the United States within a framework of PYD, the states also focused their attention on the acute challenges facing those rural youth in their local communities, such as human trafficking, a lack of cultural awareness, insufficient housing, and unemployment.[1] As a result, the SSRHY demonstration project provides a snapshot of the diverse strategies that states are using to address rural youth homelessness by improving the delivery of existing services and developing and delivering new services. For example, pressures to serve youth with relatively sparse resources have, in many cases, forced high levels of provider cooperation and collaboration. And the relatively smaller networks of providers have made communication and collaboration easier than might be the case in larger urban communities.

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1   U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Family and Youth Services Bureau. *Report to Congress on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011.* Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services. Undated. Retrieved from: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/rhy_congress_2010_11.pdf

Methodology

This report was commissioned after the demonstration projects (except Vermont) were completed, and Manhattan Strategy Group (MSG) analyzed documents and gathered information available at that point, as well as the final report from Vermont, subsequently received. To help FYSB better understand the outcomes of the six demonstration projects and identify any promising practices emerging from these projects, the following questions were developed:

- How did states collaborate with local partners, including local rural youth experiencing homelessness, to develop and deliver their SSRHY demonstration project? How did these collaborations affect the delivery of services for rural youth experiencing homelessness?

- What effective practices did states identify for improving the coordination of services, building capacity, or creating new supports for rural youth experiencing homelessness, as a result of their demonstration projects, especially in areas of PYD, including survival support services, engagement with community, and education/employment?

- How did states evaluate the effectiveness of their SSRHY demonstration project and what were the results of these evaluations?

- What strategies do the SSRHY demonstration projects provide FYSB for successfully promoting youth development through state demonstration grants and community–based demonstration initiatives?

To answer these questions, MSG analysts relied on a number of primary and secondary sources of demonstration project information:

- Demonstration project applications, interim reports, and final reports submitted by participating states

- Data collected by the states as part of the National Extranet Optimized Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (NEO–RHYMIS), including information on the number of youth served, their status at entry and exit, and trends in these metrics over time

- Telephone interviews with state project directors and, in some instances, local collaborating partners associated with demonstration projects funded under the SSRHY initiative

Appendix A provides additional details on services developed under the SSRHY demonstration projects, and Appendix B includes the protocol used to interview state directors and local collaborating partners.

Summary of State Demonstration Projects

This section provides details on the demonstration projects funded under the SSRHY initiative beginning in 2008 and 2009. The state snapshots reflect a broad approach to serving rural youth experiencing homelessness developed under the SSRHY initiative. States sought to address a number of issues facing these youth in their communities, including a lack of safe places, insufficient housing, insufficient employment opportunities, and unmet educational needs. In each instance, states utilized a PYD framework through the collaboration with a local partner—often the organization (or organizations) providing TLP services in rural areas of the state.

In general, states reported numerous successes in providing more coordinated services for rural youth experiencing homelessness as a result of the five-year demonstration projects. The funding also allowed states to provide additional supports for rural youth experiencing homelessness—supports that were often identified through direct participation of those youth in the design of the demonstration project consistent with PYD principles. At the same time, states also reported a number of barriers to serving youth in rural communities, including resistance from the communities to address the problem of youth homelessness outside urban areas, and difficulties in maintaining adequate staffing or support.

Colorado

Colorado Rural Collaborative for Runaway and Homeless Youth

The **Colorado Rural Collaborative for Runaway and Homeless Youth** was a demonstration project implemented from 2008 to 2014 by the Colorado Department of Human Services, in collaboration with Urban Peak Denver, an existing FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service provider with temporary shelter and TLPs. The project targeted young people in Alamosa, Moffat, Garfield, Huerfano, Montezuma, and Montrose counties, ages 16 to 24, who were approaching independence but had few or no connections to supportive family structure or community.

The goal of this demonstration project was to increase the knowledge and capacity of rural communities to provide sustainable services to runaway and homeless youth within their communities. By doing so, the program hoped to mitigate unplanned youth transitions to urban areas for services and reduce the risk of potential youth homelessness, human trafficking victimization, and/or survival crime.

The focus areas of service provision included: 1) survival supports services, 2) community attachment services, 3) education, and 4) employment services.

Capacity Building and Collaboration

The demonstration project expanded services by connecting local partners through collaboration planning meetings. The project improved community readiness by including all key community stakeholders, youth and families in these planning meetings. Remote partners were connected through monthly learning teleconferences where sites shared local challenges, solutions and information on new resources. These collaborative management programs improved service integration and sustainability across multiple agencies to meet the cross–systems needs of runaway and homeless youth. The teleconferences became a sustainable best practice and fostered deeper community connections.

THE DATA: COLORADO

225 total served **ages 16–24**

94% of youth exited to a safe place
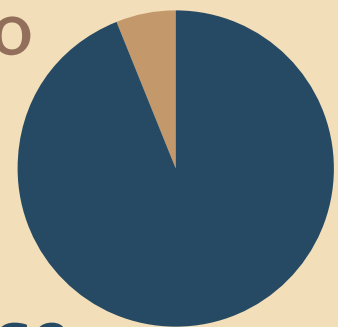
Significant Barriers to Implementation

Initially, the authority to provide services to undocumented runaway and homeless youth was unclear because of a state law prohibition. These youth were served through the SSRHY grant after FYSB provided a clarification of federal law (Runaway and Homeless Youth Act).

Because 90% of rural youth are in couch-surfing situations that are not readily perceived as homelessness, rural homelessness is "invisible" compared with urban street youth. This invisibility factor makes homeless rural youth harder to locate and engage when using typical urban street outreach strategies. The most effective means of outreach to rural youth experiencing homelessness was found to be the creation of local community youth leadership teams that raised awareness and provided word-of-mouth marketing and peer support. These teams also created safe social places for youth experiencing homeless to go, belong, and receive supportive services that negated the typical stigmatizing label of "homeless youth" services.

Lessons Learned

Instilling values of cooperation between rural programs, not competition, led to the development of the Rural Collaborative, with six project sites versus the one site initially required by the grant. The Rural Collaborative concept demonstrated the collaborative strength of leveraging resources, expanding services, and creating state-wide, long-term sustainability. In addition, the use of multi-media, including public service announcements and digital billboards, along with outreach teams, was valuable in increasing community awareness of rural homelessness, counteracting the invisibility of rural homeless youth.

HIGHLIGHTS: COLORADO

Public Awareness: The project created the branding slogan, "A Couch Is Not a Home" for public service announcements and media to bring attention to the "invisible" quality of rural youth homelessness. PSAs raised awareness that communities can take action to address the issue of community runaway and homeless youth. The "Making the Connection" awareness video for use on digital murals/billboards was created with inputs from 11 states.

Policy Leadership: The project transformed federal and State rural youth support policies, programming, practices and evaluation by presenting quantitative and qualitative data at national and State conferences. This evidence-based advocacy led to the passing of Colorado House Bill 2011-1079, which increased safe housing options statewide and expanded Family Unification Program housing vouchers for youth in project sites.

Iowa

Rural Opportunities and Connections (ROC)

Rural Opportunities and Connections (ROC) was a demonstration project implemented from 2008 to 2014 by the Iowa Department of Human Services, in collaboration with Youth and Shelter Services, an existing FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service provider with temporary shelter and TLPs. The project targeted young people in the Central Iowa towns of Boone, Ogden, and Madrid, ages 16 to 21, who were approaching independence but had few or no connections to supportive family structure or community.

The goal of this demonstration project was to better coordinate formal and informal systems to address the issue of homeless and disconnected youth in rural areas. The project also sought to identify and create additional supports for youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in Boone and to enhance service delivery.

The focus areas of service provision included: 1) survival support services, 2) community connections, 3) education, and 4) employment services.

Capacity Building and Collaboration

The SSRHY State Core Team partnered with the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development (ICYD) Council on state policy issues. ICYD is a member of the Children's Cabinet Network, which is working with the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to identify federal barriers for disconnected youth. The ICYD's approach is a "reengagement center" model that utilizes outreach to recruit out-of-school youth, screens and assesses the needs of the youth, and uses a wraparound process to provide services and supports for youth up to 21 years of age.

Youth-centered Planning

In Iowa, child welfare, transitional living, and independent living programs (ILPs), as well as the juvenile court system, tend to rely on plans developed by professionals for the children, youth and families they are serving. This approach, while efficient, does not engage youth and families in decision-making, leading youth to potentially disagree and have little ownership of their service plans. Iowa's child welfare system is moving towards shared decision-making with families, but this practice could be expanded and adapted for older youth. Youth Transition Decision Making (YTDM) is a process that provides a structure for intentionally
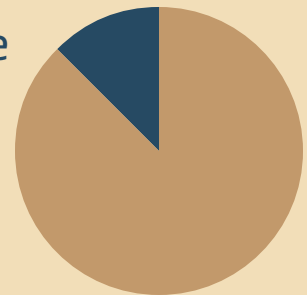
THE DATA: IOWA

90[%]

of youth were at least partially successful in job readiness or placement

84[%]

of youth were discharged successfully or partially successfully

building informal community supports around transitioning or disconnected youth to facilitate lifelong connections with community, family, education and employment.

Significant Barriers to Implementation

Lack of existing services, such as mental health and substance-abuse treatment, made providing comprehensive services more challenging. Youth also did not have adequate transportation to jobs, education, and other services, which increased the difficulty of engaging youth most in need of services.

HIGHLIGHTS: IOWA

The "HUB": A safe community center hosting monthly ROC youth council meetings, work readiness classes, and other activities. Participants in the youth council determined the activities hosted at the HUB. The HUB averaged 25 unduplicated participants annually.

Caring Hearts: This program provided job training and placed youth with existing businesses to gain hands-on work experience. Businesses hosted youth for up to eight weeks, and ROC paid the youth salaries during participation. Participants were also required to attend weekly work-readiness classes at the HUB, which focused on money management, career exploration, and completing job applications and time sheets. Seventy-eight youth participated in this initiative.

Lessons Learned

Re-engaging youth ages 18 to 21 is difficult, and the best method to reach this population was word of mouth from youth participants to other youth. During the planning period, youth consistently identified lack of involvement in decisionmaking as a challenge, especially as it applied to their own future. Therefore, they greatly benefitted from the personalized, youth-driven planning approach utilized in this project. Collaborative community and state partners were a necessity to enhance services and supports to the participants in the project for rural youth experiencing homelessness. Increased collaboration and more efficient use of existing resources allowed programs to identify and move toward best practices drawn from multiple service areas rather than remaining in silos and operating in relative isolation without the benefit of potential cross-pollination. The opportunity to develop and implement innovative strategies led to improved outcomes for those youth (i.e., the 90% who were successful or partially successful in their work readiness and job placement). Moving forward, project staff felt the needs of the homeless youth clearly cannot be met without the concerted effort of partners from employment services, education, and other areas.

Minnesota

The Minnesota SSRHY Transitional Living Program

The **Minnesota SSRHY Transitional Living Program** was developed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Opportunity, in partnership with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, an existing TLP for rural youth experiencing homelessness. The project targeted young people in Tribal communities, including the Bois Forte and Leech Lake Reservations, ages 16 to 21, who were approaching independence but had few or no connections to supportive family structures or community support systems. The SSRHY TLP provided youth experiencing homelessness with housing through subsidized scattered–site apartments, or through host homes, for up to 18 months.

The overall goal of this demonstration project was to develop an effective model for TLPs in rural areas and on reservations. This goal was pursued through the development of strong, effective relationships between state government and rural communities to enhance community and culturally specific services.

The focus areas of service provision to youth included: 1) independent living skills, 2) employment and education assistance, 3) chemical dependency treatment and support services, 4) parenting programming, and 5) opportunities to reconnect and learn about Ojibwe culture.

Capacity Building and Collaboration

The demonstration project led to the development of a statewide advisory committee, which created dialogue between rural programs and state agencies. Collaboration around culturally specific services, on and off reservations, also fostered relationships with Tribal councils and elders. This resulted in the provision of culturally appropriate housing options for homeless youth and their families, such as host homes.
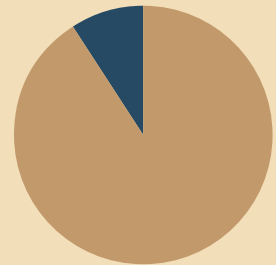
THE DATA: MINNESOTA

65 served

ages 16–21

72% American Indian

91% of youth made safe exits

A youth–directed advisory committee supported the development of the program through the initial planning year and continued to guide the pilot project through the remaining four years. The youth advisory committee provided the opportunity for youth to be involved in the development and operation of the program, resulting in continued integration of PYD into programming. Participating youth consultants also gained leadership skills and earned a small stipend for their involvement. The involvement of youth in the advisory committee added authenticity and validity to the development of the program, and gave youth an opportunity to develop leadership skills.

Significant Barriers to Implementation

Building trusting partnerships among all the agencies took time and concentrated effort but resulted in strong relationships. The turnover of some Leech Lake Tribal Nation staff presented difficulties, but the development of the program manual, personnel policies handbook and structured staff training supported smoother staff transitions. The integration of PYD and the inclusion of youth voices was a new and challenging undertaking. However, the integration of PYD turned out to be one of the most powerful and meaningful outcomes of this demonstration project.

HIGHLIGHTS: MINNESOTA

Cultural Integration: The integration of PYD and culturally specific programming, such as attending a pow–wow or learning to drum and dance, were integral to the development and success of the project and participating youth. Cultural activities provided opportunities for youth to experience, and teach others about, Ojibwe culture and to develop leadership skills.

Leadership: Throughout the project, youth who participated in the advisory committee meetings developed leadership skills to further their education and increase their employment opportunities. One youth consultant is now a paid youth worker with Lutheran Social Service. Youth consultants also participated as youth panel members at national conferences. These opportunities increased their ability to utilize their leadership skills.

Lessons Learned

Engaging youth in the development and ongoing functioning of the program contributed to the effectiveness of serving rural youth experiencing homelessness and gave youth an opportunity to develop leadership skills. The collaboration and strong relationships that formed between the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Lutheran Social Services, and the Bois Forte and Leech Lake Reservations demonstrated that partnerships between state governments, local agencies, and reservation communities are not only possible but also the most effective way to serve small rural communities. Without collaboration and involvement of partners, the state would not have been able to provide such successful, specialized, and culturally specific services.

Nebraska

Nebraska demonstration project

The **Nebraska demonstration project** was implemented from 2009 to 2014 by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), in collaboration with the Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska (CAPWN), an existing FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service provider, other state entities, and the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF). The project targeted young people in Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, and Scotts Bluff counties, ages 16 to 24, who were approaching independence, but had few or no connections to supportive family structures or community support systems. The initiative, which enhanced local–state and public–private partnerships, was based on grassroots, youth–centered identification of issues and their solutions.

The goal of this demonstration project was to build state and local capacity to effectively address the comprehensive needs of rural youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness while transitioning to adulthood and independent living. Capacity was built on the professional expertise of providers serving this population and on the experience and needs of target youth as conveyed by the youth themselves.

This overarching goal was pursued through:
1) relationships and community engagement,
2) education, 3) employment, 4) daily living and housing, and 5) physical and behavioral health.

Capacity Building and Collaboration

The primary capacity–building need identified was the necessity of TLPs, ILPs, and other youth programs to cooperate in the design and delivery of services and policies shown to be effective for youth at risk of experiencing homelessness. This challenge was addressed by funneling collaboration efforts through the Panhandle Partnership for Health and Human Services, a membership–based, nonprofit organization that exists solely for the purpose of assessing and planning for services in the region. All of the agencies and organizations that participated in the SSRHY initiative are members of the Panhandle Partnership, which created a shared philosophy, positive working relationships, and a systems approach to service delivery, with multiple agencies working in planned collaboration.

To strengthen the systems approach, the core leadership team, including youth, worked extensively in the second year to clearly define the process for serving youth, from screening through aftercare, and to identify the core services and access points for youth to receive services. Written practices were designed to ensure that all youth have access to the same opportunities within the community and cultural context,

THE DATA: NEBRASKA

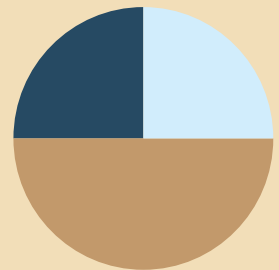**95** **ages 16–21**

total served

Brief contacts: 2,862

After program

25% live independently

50% live with parent/ guardian, relative or friend

standardized through screening documents, assessment processes, and a flow chart. A key component of building a comprehensive system is cross-training staff from all partner agencies in the same skills, such as trauma-informed care and suicide prevention. The team developed an annual training plan, which was then implemented through the Panhandle Partnership Training Academy.

Policy

The SSRHY project demonstrated the effectiveness of host homes as a resource for youth at risk of homelessness as modeled by the Bridges to Independence program. Bridges, developed and initiated through grant funds, utilized host homes as housing for homeless youth. State officials saw the Bridges model as a significant contributing factor in the passing of state legislation, supporting host homes as an option for housing. The process of establishing partnerships, and the multiple steps in supporting legislative and policy change to increase housing opportunities for rural youth at risk of homelessness, required the support of a recognized and respected organization seen as neutral, pushing no particular agenda beyond necessary services to youth. Neither the local partners nor DHHS could have (by mandate, staffing, and/ or influence) accomplished this important component of the work. As a neutral backbone organization, and one of three primary partners in the SSRHY grant, Nebraska Children was able to amalgamate information from organizations serving youth and programs across the state and assist in determining policy concerns. The ability to amass support and speak for a group larger than just SSRHY was essential to improved policies and successful legislation.

Lessons Learned

The high levels of training and collaboration resulted in a common understanding and joint practice among partners in juvenile justice, housing, employment, and youth services (a systems approach), and standardized the practice of including youth as partners in the project. A systems approach, rather than a program/agency approach (where each program operates within its own narrow framework without the benefit of other service systems), is essential in building service capacity, enhancing the quality of services, and coordinating community outreach. The systems approach ensures that all agency partners are working with common philosophy and practices. Youth were also key partners, involved in the design of the work and remaining a core part of the leadership team, which met monthly to review progress, assess needs, and define additional actions. The value added by having youth perspectives included in planning, design, and implementation was essential to maintain the integrity and momentum of the project.

HIGHLIGHTS: NEBRASKA

Panhandle Partnership Training Academy: Philosophy and skill development courses focused on strength-based work with youth. The Native American community enhanced these courses with Sons of Tradition and Daughters of Tradition workshops based on cultural virtues and the role of youth within the community.

The *Forever People* photo exhibit: This youth-driven project funded by the Sherwood Foundation was planned and implemented by youth and premiered at the NCFF statewide meeting.

Leadership: Two of the youth are now employed as youth specialists at CAPWN. Both have become spokespersons for homeless youth in the state, including presenting to Senators and community leaders.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma Bridge to Independence Network

The **Oklahoma Bridge to Independence Network** ("The Bridge," not affiliated with Bridges discussed in the Nebraska section above) was implemented from 2009 to 2014 by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, in collaboration with state entities and existing rural runaway and homeless youth service providers. The Bridge project targeted young people in the rural areas of Blaine and Kingfisher counties in Oklahoma, ages 16 to 21, who were approaching independence, but had few or no connections to supportive family structure or community.

This demonstration project had four main goals:

1. **Conduct statewide inventory** and assessment of current programs for youth in transition.

2. **Conduct a national review** of programs and distill a synopsis of what works and what doesn't work with regard to programs addressing various transition issues.

3. **Develop a 4–year plan** to address state and local needs of rural youth in transition/

4. **Increase capacity in state and local service** levels to develop high–quality, effective services for the target population.

Services provided

- Emergency shelter
- Basic shelter
- Screening and intake
- Group education/counseling
- Individual counseling
- First time offender program
- TLP
- Drug and alcohol counseling
- Foster care
- Community at-risk services
- 24–hour crisis line
- Information and referral
- Community outreach
- Community education
- Public awareness
- Training/education

HIGHLIGHTS: OKLAHOMA

The SPOT: A 1,500 square–foot community center for rural homeless youth featuring a recreation lounge, laundry room, workout room, full kitchen, and computer center. The SPOT served as a safe space for rural homeless youth to congregate off the streets, obtain education and job skills, and access survival and support services. The SPOT also provided bikes for transportation and recreation.

Mission Mentors: Mentors engaged the entire community in providing tutoring and mentorship to rural homeless youth by building one–on–one relationships between responsible adult volunteers and youth. This porgram is sustainable and will continue.

Transition Academy: This three–week summer program included training and work experience. The Academy was so successful that it will be repeated in the future after the demonstration project is complete.

Barriers to Implementation

Community economic problems in the City of Watonga made it difficult to maintain qualified personnel and local professional resources. There were also challenges with zoning for emergency housing. Generally, the lack of transportation services (e.g., buses, taxis) made it difficult to run programs and retain youth participants. Many youth also left the community to pursue opportunities elsewhere. The surrounding community was not supportive and labeled youth attending the SPOT as "the bad kids." Generally, the community was not knowledgeable about RHY.

Lessons Learned

Expansion of a business advisory committee assisted with project outreach and development of community activities. Involvement of the local school district increased the number of referrals. Case management services should be enhanced to meet individual needs. Programs should provide incentives to reward RHY participation. Public relations outreach must be continuous because it is critical to build community support earlier rather than later.

Vermont

Youth Factor NEK (Northeast Kingdom)

Youth Factor NEK (Northeast Kingdom) was a demonstration project implemented from 2009 to 2015 by the State of Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF), in collaboration with the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, an existing FYSB rural runaway and homeless youth service provider with transition living and family stabilization programs. The project targeted young people in Newport, ages 16 to 24, who were approaching independence but had few or no connections to supportive family structure or community. The goal of this demonstration project was to elevate the profile of youth at risk of homelessness within the community in order to allow them to be perceived by the community as an asset. The project also endeavored to increase education, employment, and housing opportunities and access to health and dental care..

Youth–Factor NEK promoted Youth Development by creating and supporting youth opportunities to make individual and collective contributions to the community, which increased the youths' own sense of competency and connection while also building their skills, resumes, network of supportive adults, and financial and physical well–being.

Partner Collaboration

The unified approaches to youth work that were developed under this demonstration project are now being integrated into statewide networks of service providers funded by Chafee grants (Independent Living), FYSB, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, with shared and integrated data collection, training and coaching. This ongoing collaboration includes an annual Youth Workers Training Conference and monthly meetings of practitioners from all the participating networks.

THE DATA: VERMONT

178 total served **ages 16–24**

18 out of **55** youth in the Youth–Work NEK project gained and sustained fulltime employment
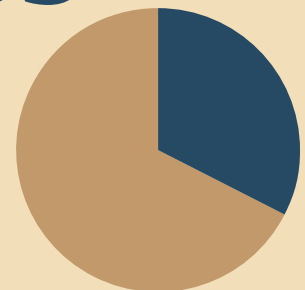
Youth–Driven Design

To engage the youth in the project design and implementation, runaway and homeless youth participated in three youth–driven assessment activities. Five hundred youth completed a written survey detailing their views of the strengths, assets, and needs of their community. Youth also completed a Photo–Voice pictorial assessment and presentation of the positive and negative images of their community as it relates to youth. Finally, the youth designed and implemented a youth summit to discuss critical issues, such as housing, substance abuse, employment, and youth recreation, and their possible solutions.

Information from all three of these efforts was incorporated into the specific planning for the project, and a youth advisory group provided ongoing input for the effort.

Significant Barriers to Implementation

One of the most significant barriers to maximizing the programming activities generated by the grant was the difficulty of sustaining momentum through the hiring and retention of qualified staff. One of the concerns expressed by members of the community in the assessment was the difficulty they experienced in keeping their more talented youth in the region. The combination of low wages for entry–level youth work and high costs of living resulted in out–migration experienced in the general population, and more directly in the project through staff turnover.

Lessons Learned

Youth Factor NEK, through support of the SSRHY demonstration project, has allowed DCF to implement targeted approaches that support youth development, enhance youths' participation in and contributions to their communities, and create a sense of self–worth and belonging. The progressive employment approach implemented through the Youth–Work NEK initiative was the cornerstone of the project and is pivotal to working with at–risk youth. In the words of project staff: "Youth are not afforded the opportunity to acquire all of the building blocks to a meaningful career and a job at a living wage; we condemn them to poverty, and all other interventions will fail."

HIGHLIGHTS: VERMONT

Youth–Work NEK: This progressive employment program applied the principles of the Casey Family Programs' *It's My Life-Employment* approach to preparing youth for careers, through a combination of exploration, training, and experiences designed to help them identify strengths and interests. Building on Vermont's statewide Creative Workforce Solutions program, Youth–Work fostered intentional linkages between youth and regional employers seeking employees. Youth–Work NEK was one of the most successful components of the demonstration project, with 55 youth participating in progressive employment activities and 18 exiting to sustained full-time employment.

Media: An important part of this effort was to use media to showcase what youth can do, as a vehicle to shift community perception. These media projects, including television interviews about youth projects and a dynamic website, encouraged the community to see youth as assets, not potential problems, nor in continuous need of services. The website project has generated significant positive feedback and financial contributions to the agency.

Key Findings

A. Collaboration

How states collaborated with local partners to develop and deliver their SSRHY demonstration projects and how these collaborations affected the delivery of services for rural youth experiencing homelessness

In general, states leveraged existing relationships with local agencies, often TLPs, to develop and deliver their demonstration projects. For many states, local agencies selected as the local collaborating partner for the demonstration project grant brought years of experience working with local communities and at-risk youth, as well as the infrastructure needed to deliver programs at the local level. As one state director explained:

> *"Our [local collaborating partner] was known in those communities quite well and was well-respected. Plus, they...were big enough that they have a very solid leadership structure. [While] we believed that lots of communities needed this service...in the end we went with [the local collaborating partner] because we had that leadership infrastructure and their connections to the community."*

Ensuring that local collaborating partners had experience supporting rural communities was crucial to the success of the demonstration projects, according to state directors, as well as interim reports submitted by the states over the course of the projects. State agencies often lack the nuanced understanding of youth at risk of homelessness, and community perceptions of these youth, that can emerge from a sustained engagement at the local level. Bringing these agencies into the demonstration project as local collaborating partners helped state agencies better connect their supports and services with the actual—rather than perceived—needs of both the youth and their communities.

Local collaborating partners were an important element in the successful delivery of an SSRHY demonstration project, but states also enlisted additional entities in the delivery of project services. These additional entities often brought the resources needed to successfully deliver the demonstration project as planned. For instance, the local Chamber of Commerce played a pivotal role in helping Oklahoma deliver the employment component of their demonstration project, helping to connect youth services agencies with potential local employers for an internship program. The Chamber, according to one interviewee from the state, "was...one of our best advocates, and got us into places that we wouldn't normally have an audience. [It] was a really good relationship for us."

In other states, provisions within the demonstration project grant to include local collaborating partners provided an opportunity to develop or expand existing collaboration networks. Nebraska, for instance, used the local collaborating partner provision to create a virtual network of rural provider agencies in order to centralize funding applications, share resources, and coordinate services at the state level. One state director explained:

> *"Rural communities don't have the resources to compete on a level playing field for funding because there's not a designated funding stream, and usually they have to compete with urban centers for funding."*

In the words of another director:

> *"What I envisioned was we would create a virtual platform...to provide project management and a project fiscal agent for this particular grant. Since then, we've used this platform for other grants and it's been very successful...We're rural communities and we do co-ops on everything. If you don't have all of us, you have none of us!"*

Although states leveraged a diverse set of local partners in the development and delivery of their demonstration projects, the reporting structures for these collaborations were relatively consistent across all demonstration projects, with state agencies assuming an oversight function. State agencies often provided oversight within the project, bringing together stakeholders during the planning phase of the project and then overseeing project implementation. Local collaborating partners were then responsible for program delivery, relying on the expertise and experience with the local community and community youth. States and local collaborating partners were generally pleased with this reporting structure. As one local collaborating partner put it, the reporting structure allowed local agencies "to get down to business...and not worry about all the federal paperwork." This is not to suggest that state agencies were disengaged from the implementation of project activities. In many instances, state officials were "on the ground," working with local collaborating partners to ensure the successful delivery of project activities and provide support, as needed. "[The state agency] was right there with us advocating for this project," one local collaborating partner explained. "So we really did the project together."

State directors and local collaborating partners interviewed for this report all saw their collaborations as successful. In many instances, the local collaborating partner provisions required as part of the SSRHY grant helped usher in new connections between the state and local agencies that continued beyond the conclusion of the SSRHY initiative itself. As one interviewee explained:

> *"I think it definitely started out as requirements…but then, definitely, the longer we worked together, the more we saw the benefits of [working together] and we really saw the change…in the youth, in the communities. The more we started coming together collaboratively to work on issues, the more they did as well. It wasn't just folks working with state wards on one side of the room and runaway homeless youth on the other side. We were able to work through issues together, and you saw the youth doing that together."*

B. Services Provided

Approaches states employed in their demonstration projects for helping rural homeless youth and improving the coordination of services, building capacity, or creating new supports

1. *Analysis of the interim and final reports submitted by states reveal six broad categories of services and supports provided as part of the SSRHY initiative:*
   · *Community engagement and public outreach*
   · *Dedicated spaces for at–risk youth*
   · *Education*
   · *Employment support*
   · *Survival support skills*
   · *Case management*

These categories of supports and services, which follow the general guidance detailed in grant application documents, were used in varying degrees within each state demonstration project. As detailed in Section I: Summary of State Demonstration Projects, every state participating in the SSRHY initiative had services and supports from more than one category.

Community engagement and public outreach

Community engagement and public outreach were more formalized services that took multiple forms across all six demonstration projects. These services focused on the invisibility of rural youth homelessness and the negative perceptions of homelessness held by many rural communities. The invisibility of rural youth homelessness presents a high hurdle for stakeholders seeking to address this growing problem. States participating in the SSRHY initiative acknowledged the impact that such invisibility can have on rural youth. "A lot of people [in rural communities] like to think this is an urban issue," one state director explained. "They think 'oh, this doesn't happen here'." The invisibility of rural youth homelessness is exacerbated by the temporary living arrangements in which these youth often find themselves. Couch–surfing was reported as a common practice in all six states, where rural youth stay with extended family, friends, or sympathetic community members for relatively short periods of time. "It tends to hide the fact that these kids are homeless," one interviewee explained. "It's [not] like [in cities] where you see homeless kids on the street corner... It's just different in rural areas."

States employed a variety of strategies to make rural youth homelessness visible. In Colorado, collaborations with a local advertising agency and input from rural homeless youth resulted in the "A Couch Is Not a Home" campaign, which included public outreach events and radio advertisements to make rural communities more aware of the difficulties facing rural homeless youth. In other states, public outreach campaigns included travelling exhibits on rural youth homelessness created by the youth themselves, as well as local community events designed to, as one state director explained, "put a face to homelessness in our community."

States also focused on community engagement activities that sought to address the stigma attached to rural homeless youth in communities. In rural communities where, as one interviewee put it, everyone knows your business, homeless youth are often seen as the "bad kids in town." Homeless youth in rural areas might come from homes with a history of violence or anti-social behavior—homes that are known to the local community. Such a stigma can present challenges—not only to the youth themselves but also to the agencies and providers that are seeking to help those youth. At least two states reported relatively strong community opposition to some demonstration project activities, often because of a general perception among community members that such activities were supporting delinquent youth or their families. In these states, demonstration project collaborators worked with engaged community members to dispel stigmas around youth support services, helping to achieve buy-in from the community and better support for rural homeless youth in the process. For instance, a local judge and high school principal acted as champions for one demonstration project, using their influence in the community to encourage community members to embrace some of the employment and housing activities proposed under the demonstration project.

Dedicated spaces for at-risk youth

Dedicated spaces for at-risk youth were important elements of many demonstration projects. While rural youth in general often lack socializing spaces within their communities, rural homeless youth face a dearth of both living *and* social space. To address the lack of living space, a number of states used their demonstration project funding to provide temporary housing for homeless rural youth, often renting apartments or other housing for youth who did not have a stable living situation.

To address the lack of social space, two states used their demonstration project funding to create community centers for rural homeless youth. These centers provided youth a space not only for socialization—a place to "hang out" in the words of one local collaborating partner—but also for the provision of other services or supports such as survival support skills or education and training. As one state director explained:

> *"We did listen to the young people, and they needed a place to be, and so that's why [the community center] was developed, because they didn't have any place to go...I think we met the needs of the young people...because it was a 'drop in' center but also it wasn't just dropping in and doing nothing. There were many things that they could advantage of...and that was very beneficial to the young people..."*

Education

Although not always provided in a community center or other physical space specifically created as part of the demonstration project, education was an important element of many states' demonstration project supports and services. In most instances, education supports consisted of tutoring for individual youth offered on an ad hoc basis, in addition to other education supports such as GED completion. In other instances, education supports followed the PYD model more closely, focusing on building social-emotional skills for at-risk youth. For instance, one state used its demonstration project funding to create a Leadership Institute, where rural youth at risk of homelessness assisted in developing curriculum and topics on a variety

of social–emotional skills not generally taught in high schools. As the state director explained:

> *"Each Saturday [youth] would come together…[for] a leadership course…in a real experiential learning model practicing, planning, reflecting, and the college [a local partner] would provide the lunch, which is awesome… Last summer, the two topics we focused on were…community service learning and social entrepreneurship for youth. The [youth] split themselves up and worked on either one of those topics throughout the week and created a presentation."*

Again, integrating local agencies or providers was important to the successful delivery of these services. In the instance above, a local community college acted as a key collaborating partner. In other states, local high schools, alternative schools, or school districts acted as important partners in the delivery of education services for rural youth experiencing homelessness—providing staff, space, or both, to the demonstration project's local collaborating partner.

Employment Support

Employment support was another important service offered as part of the SSRHY demonstration projects. In four states, employment support took the form of internships or work experience opportunities. Such services had an impact not only on youth, who were able to gain key employment skills that were in demand within their local community, but also on the employers themselves. "I think it helped show these employers that these kids aren't worthless…that they can contribute," one interviewee explained. In some states, employment services went beyond work experience to provide at-risk youth opportunities in entrepreneurship:

> *"Some youth worked with mentors [i.e., business leaders from the local community] to create a business plan…that will really build [upon] and feed into this larger social enterprise work for the [region]. So, if the youth choose to continue their business or want to really grow…there are some funding opportunities through those social enterprise funds…they can actually tap into…resources to really build that business."*

Survival Support Skills

Survival support skills were an important element for three states participating in the SSRHY demonstration project. In these instances, survival support skills included helping at-risk rural youth learn basic survival skills, such as cooking and personal finance, in order to help them transition into adulthood. Although important, survival support skills were, in the words of one state director, "provided more on an ad hoc basis. If a kid needed help with something, we would try to provide it to them."

Case Management

Case management was part of at least three state demonstration projects. However, case management was not necessarily a formal support offered to all at-risk rural youth. In one state, case management was integrated through collaboration with a local partner. In this instance, case managers from a local youth program assisted youth who were referred from the demonstration project's local collaborating partner. As discussed previously, such collaboration was instrumental to the success of the SSRHY demonstration projects by leveraging local provider expertise and infrastructure.

Although services and support for rural homeless youth offered under the SSRHY initiative generally fell into the six aforementioned categories, states also provided locally specific activities and services that fell outside these broad categories.

In one state, for instance, a large part of the demonstration project focused on creating **cultural awareness** for at-risk youth.

In other states, demonstration project activities provided a **platform for advocacy**. In two states, demonstration project activities provided an opportunity to raise awareness of the need for additional state funding to support homeless youth that led to codifying certain provisions for supporting rural homeless youth in particular. For instance, the public outreach activities detailed above provided the visibility needed to effect legislative change. As one interviewee explained:

> *"I think the work that we're doing [as part of the demonstration project] really was evidence to show what young people needed to help with the transition. I believe many of those stakeholders, the youth and young adults out in that area, also advocated for the program and came and presented to the Senators. I know that a media project was presented to the senators, right at the same time we were promoting Bridge to Independence [a proposed statute providing support for youth transitioning out of the foster care system]. So, the demonstration project was instrumental in helping with the publication of the need for this type of programming and the support for this age group."*

In another instance, an SSRHY state leveraged the experiences of the rural youth it was serving under the demonstration project, which resulted in legislative action allowing foster care homes to be licensed host families, allowing these homes to house youth in the foster care system as well as youth who require temporary housing but are transitioning out of the foster care system. Such a certification was critical for rural homeless youth who often fall through the "transition cracks" as they move out of the foster care system, but are not yet able to establish themselves. As the state director explained, "I am a firm believer that if you ensconce whatever you're doing in statute, it will eventually be supported long-term and it will be sustainable."

2. Rather than focus on a single service or support for rural homeless youth, the six states participating in the SSRHY demonstration project developed and delivered multiple services and supports over the life of their projects.

These supports and services reflected the general issues facing rural youth experiencing homelessness—from invisibility to a lack of resources—but also reflected the unique needs of rural homeless youth in each state. This flexibility in the type and number of supports and services allowed under the demonstration project enabled states, as one state director put it, to experiment:

> *"We tried a few different things. We tried some [different] programs…We tried…employment support. We worked with…youths and we taught some classes. What was great is that we could try different things out, see how they worked, and then improve our supports for the kids based on that."*

3. Demonstration projects provided an opportunity for some states to better coordinate the services offered to at–risk youth by multiple sources.

In three states, the demonstration project was directly linked to other social service agencies, including foster care, juvenile justice, and workforce development. Such collaboration helped better coordinate services, such as the employment activities offered by the demonstration project—leveraging state employment resources but targeting them in a way that directly supported at-risk rural youth. Likewise, demonstration project staff and foster care staff ensured that at–risk youth who were close to or already transitioning out of foster care had adequate supports.

Connecting the services and supports under the demonstration project to other opportunities or supports available for youth at risk of homelessness was an important strategy for many states participating in the SSRHY initiative. It ensured that services and supports offered under the demonstration project were not isolated, and that their potential impacts could be enhanced by the supports offered by other providers or agencies in the community.

C. Evaluating Project Effectiveness

Using Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS) Data for Quantitative Results

The use of quantitative data to assess the impact of their SSRHY activities was not consistent across all states. In addition, the quantitative data that was used—often data reported to FYSB as part of the NEO-RHYMIS system—was not seen by some state project directors to be an effective measure of project success. When using RHYMIS data, states often focused on the number of safe and appropriate exits of rural youth. At the same time, some states indicated that the quantitative data reported in the RHYMIS system is not necessarily useful for project evaluation. One state director explained:

> *"RHYMIS was very lacking in even showing… the services provided… It was really just when a kid exits; that's when you say what you did and you don't say what you did with them for the last 18 months."*[3]

Many state directors also hoped that future revisions to RHYMIS data collection and reporting would enable them to dig deeper into available data—cross-referencing safe exits with education or employment outcomes, for instance, or more easily segmenting reporting data to draw comparisons between sites or regions within a state.[4]

MSG analysts used available RHYMIS data on "safe exit" (i.e., exit to a safe environment with a relative, legal guardian, residential facility, or other safe alternative living arrangement) to better understand state-level trends in safe and appropriate exists for youth ages 16 to 21. These data, which are available from 2001 until mid-2014, had to be looked at as correlating to the project periods, rather than as direct results of SSRHY activities. Increases or decreases during the years that the SSRHY project was in operation (colored band in the graphs below) may be explained by other factors. For example, overall trends in the number of rural youth experiencing homelessness may cause variations in the number of youth involved with RHY programs. Economic and social conditions at the state and community level may affect the availability of safe, stable housing. But looking at the number and percentage of safe and appropriate exits over time—and across the length of the SSRHY projects—does offer clues about the number of youth being served, as well as how these youth were exiting services in grantee states during the SSRHY initiative.

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3   RHYMIS does, in fact, allow for tracking of service provision throughout a youth's stay/contact with an RHY program, including employment services, life skills training, counseling, substance abuse services and a range of other intervention and preventative services. In addition, employment status and educational status, two of the outcomes these programs focused on in addition to housing stability, are specifically asked at exit and entry and could thus be used as pre/post measures. However, the states may not have access to, or understand how, the information can be accessed.
4   RHYMIS may have the capacity for the desired cross-referencing of data, if requested of RHYMIS administrators for specific reports of this type.

As seen in the graphics beginning on the next page, there was not a consistent trend in the number of youth served, or the percentage of safe exits, across all of the SSRHY states. Some states, including Colorado and Nebraska, saw large increases in the number of youth being served by TLP's during the operation of their SSRHY projects. In the case of Colorado, this increase in the number of youth being served corresponds with large population increases in the state beginning in the early 2000's. In other words, increases in the number of youth served below could be the result of natural variations in population, rather than an increase in youth receiving TLP services due to a particular SSRHY activity.

RHYMIS Data: Safe and Appropriate Exits by State

Colorado

Colorado: TLP Safe and Appropriate Exits vs Unsafe Exits During the SSRHY Demonstration Grants

Colorado: Percentage of Exits That Were Safe
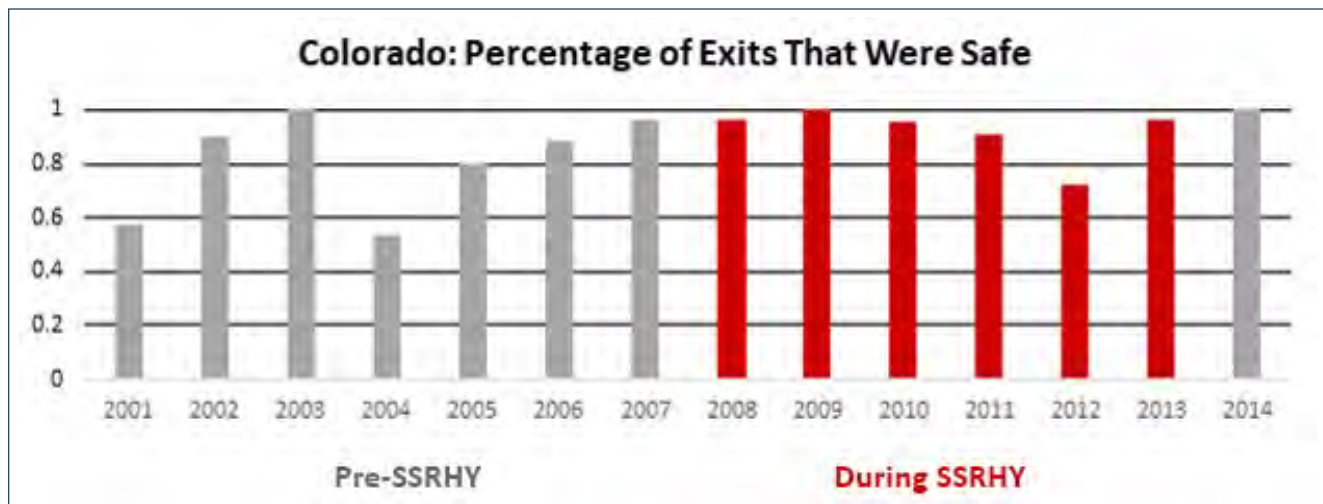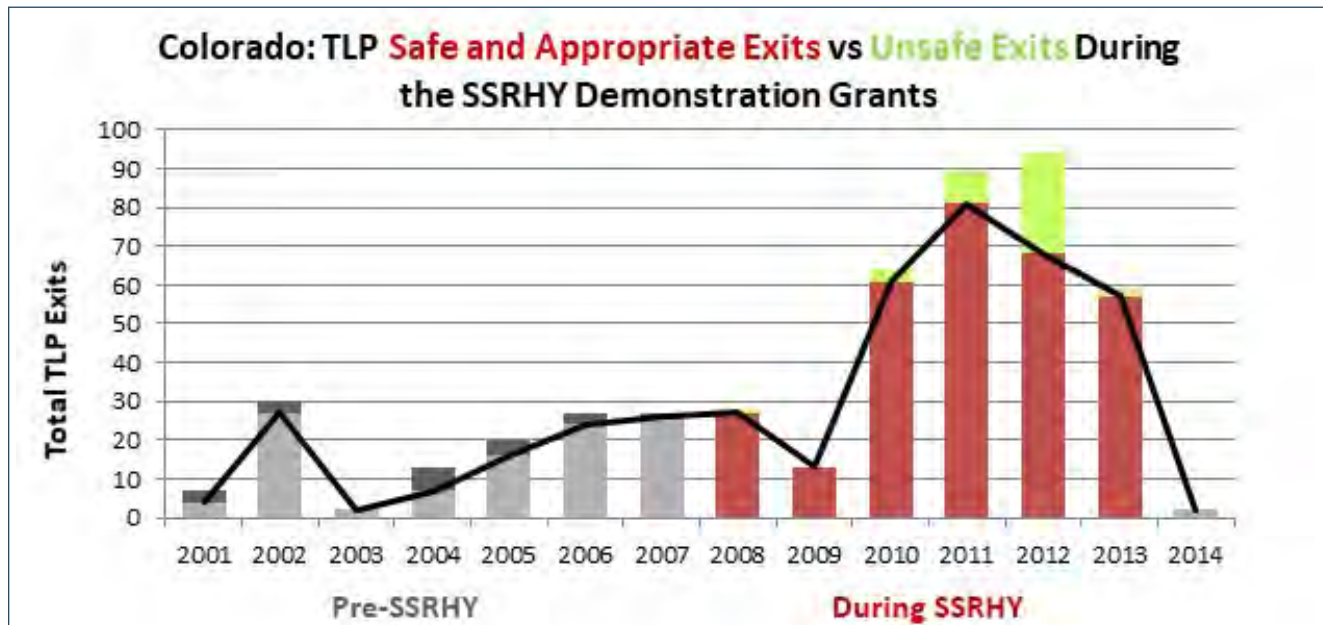
- The number of SSRHY exits more than doubled beginning in 2011 and was at times triple that of pre-SSRHY years. The average number of exits in the six grant years was 58, versus 20 in the 6 prior non-SSRHY years.

- The percentage of safe exits climbed slightly in the second year of the SSRHY grant, then declined until seeing a large growth spike in the last year. The six SSRHY years were nearly a mirror image of the pattern for the prior six non- SSRHY years but 5% higher: 92% over time versus 87%.

Iowa

Iowa: TLP Safe and Appropriate Exits vs Unsafe Exits During the SSRHY Demonstration Grants

Iowa: Percentage of Exits That Were Safe
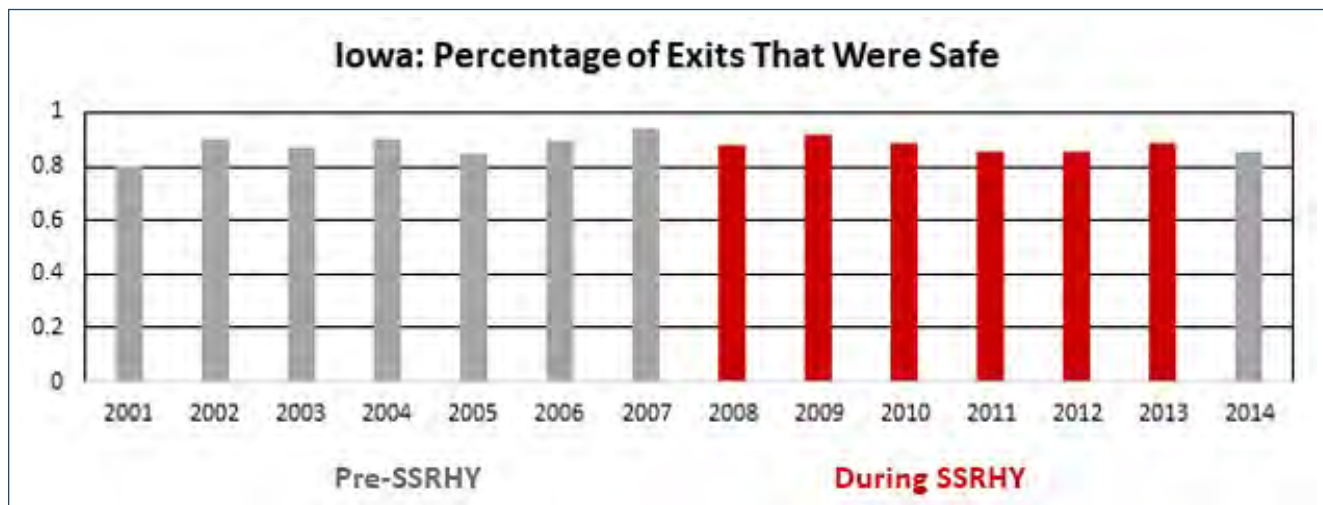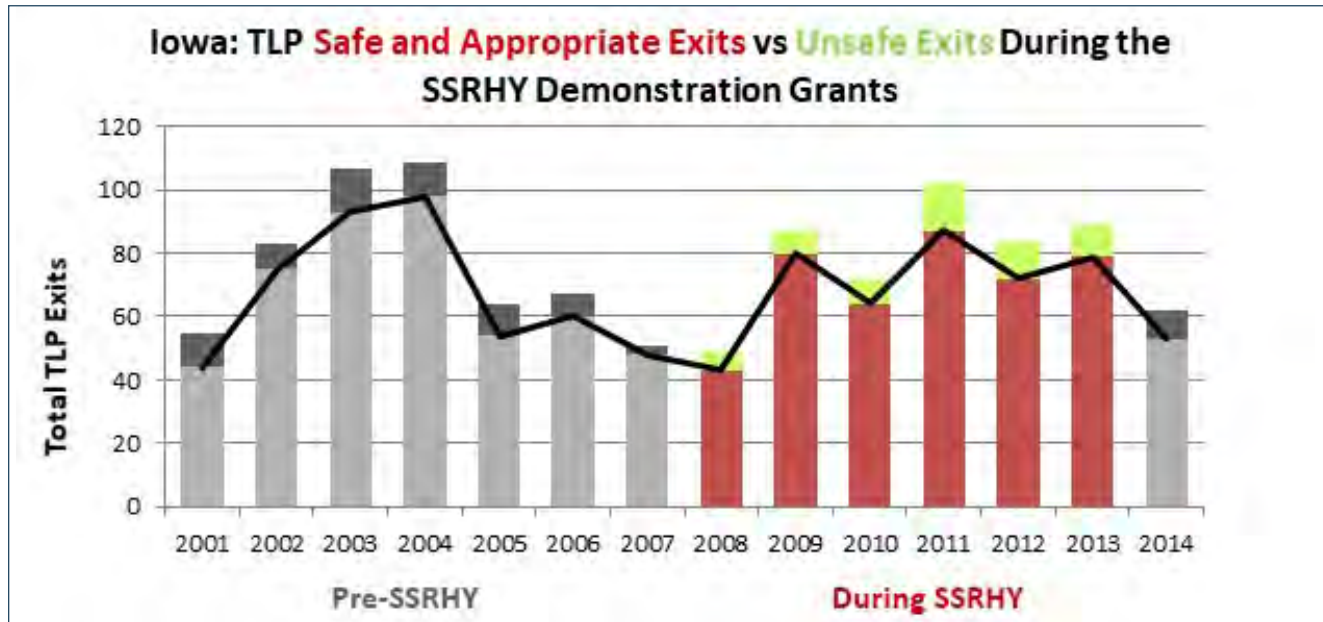
- The number of RHY exits grew substantially beginning in 2009, went down, then up, higher than pre–SSRHY years 2005–2007, but not reaching numbers for 2003 and 2004 peaks. The average number of exits in the six SSRHY years was 81%, the same as in the 6 prior non–SSRHY years.

- The percentage of safe exits climbed in the second year of the SSRHY, then declined/levelled until seeing a large growth spike in the last grant year, similar to Colorado. Overall, the six SSRHY years saw nearly the same percentage of safe exits (88%) as the comparable number of non–SSRHY years (89%).

Minnesota

Minnesota: TLP Safe and Appropriate Exits vs Unsafe Exits During the SSRHY Demonstration Grants

Minnesota: Percentage of Exits That Were Safe
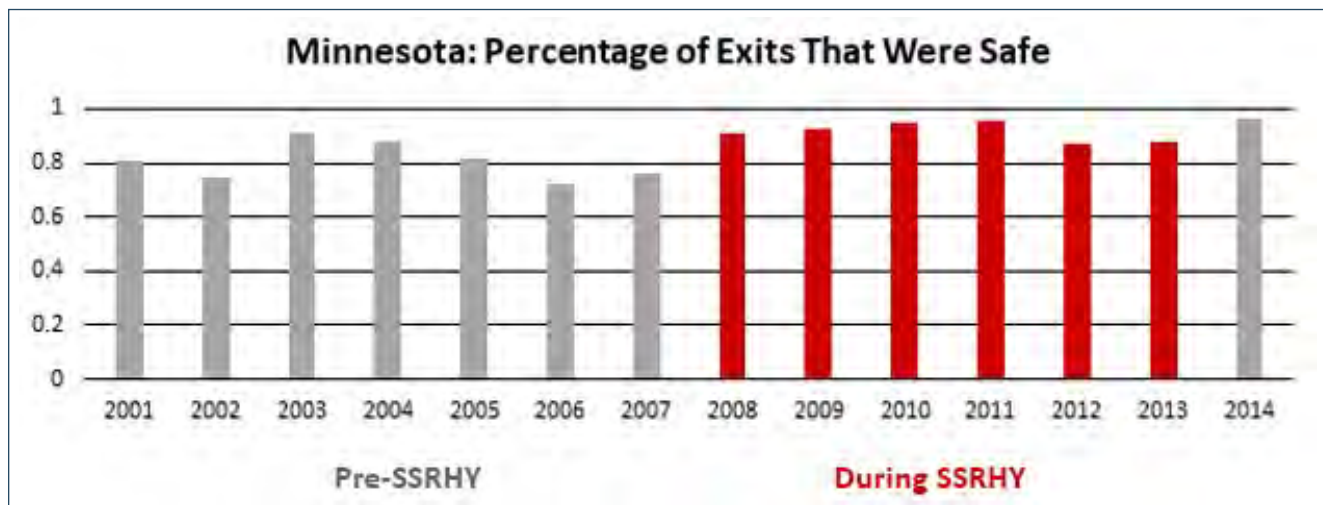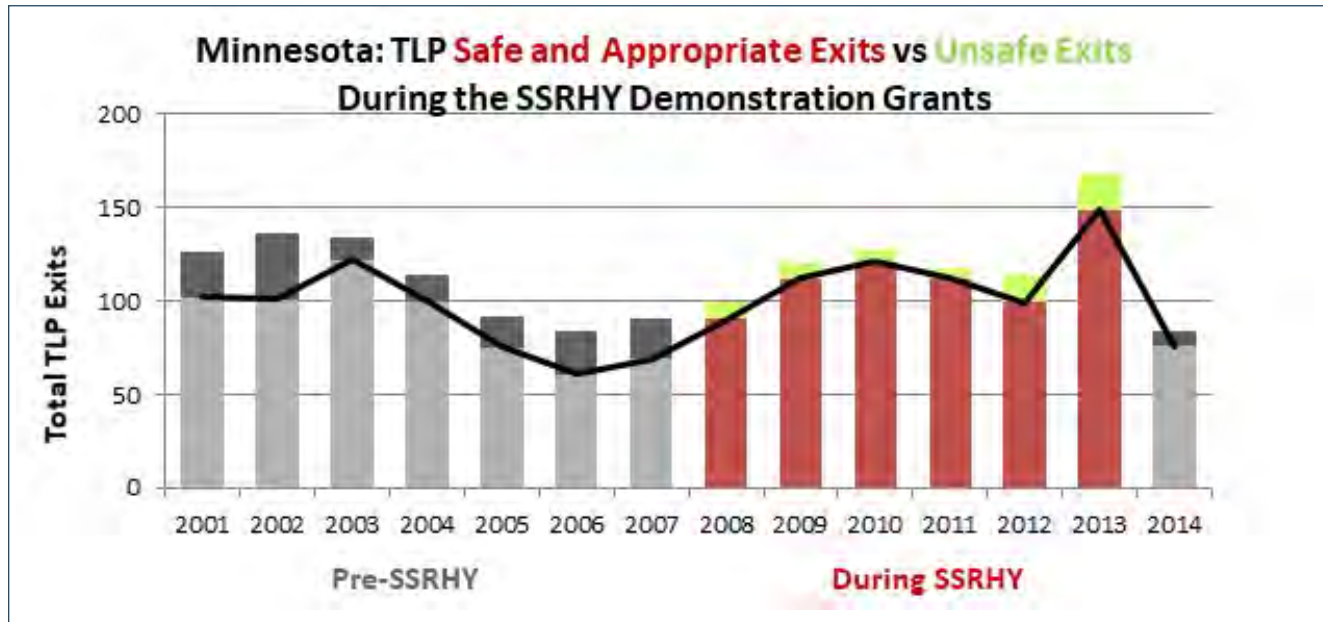
- The number of RHY exits grew the first three years of the SSRHY grant, then decreased for two years, followed by a spike in the sixth year (that was also seen in Colorado and Iowa). The average number of exits in the six SSRHY years was 125, versus 109 in the 6 prior non–grant years.

- The percentage of safe exits also grew slowly in the first three years of the SSRHY grant, followed by two years at a lower percentage. Throughout the SSRHY grant, the safe exit rate averaged 92%, versus 79% in the prior six non–SSRHY years.

Nebraska

Nebraska: TLP Safe and Appropriate Exits vs Unsafe Exits During the SSRHY Demonstration Grants

Nebraska: Percentage of Exits That Were Safe
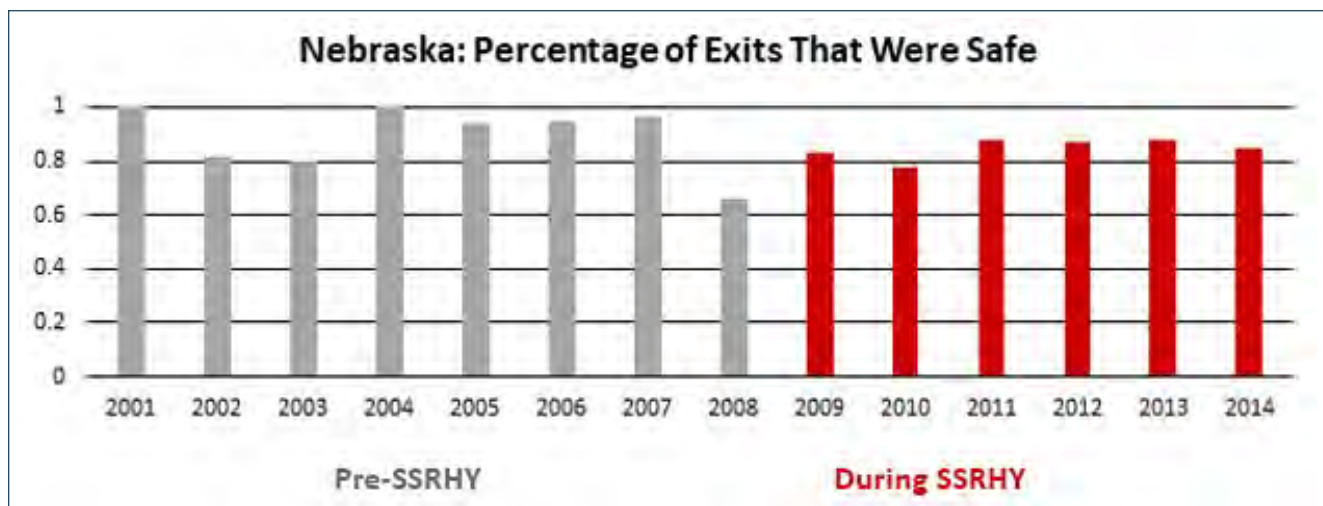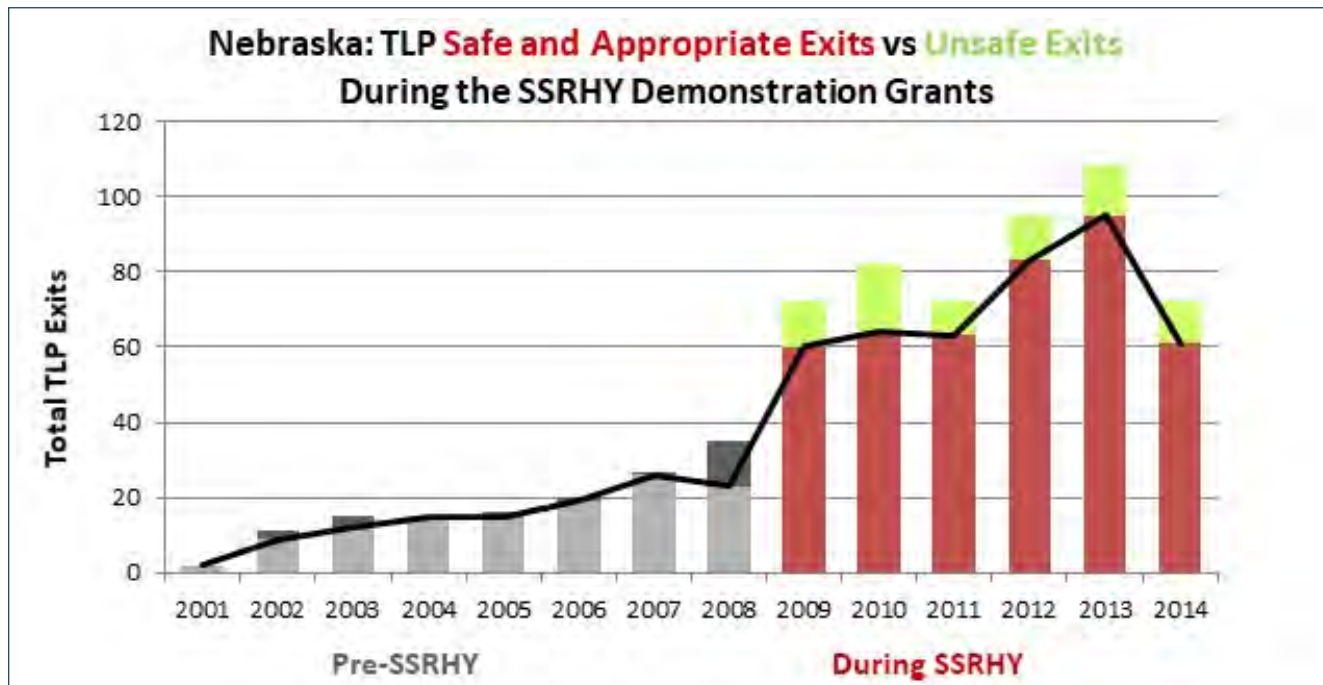
- The number of exits during the six SSRHY years was consistently two to four times the number of exits during non–SSRHY years. The average number of exits in the six SSRHY grant years was 84, versus 21 in the 6 prior non–SSRHY years.

- The percentage of safe exits rose in the first year of the SSRHY grant, dropped, then rebounded and held nearly steady for four years, typically below pre–SSRHY levels. Safe exits averaged 85% during the six SSRHY years, versus 89% in the six years prior to the SSRHY grant.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma: TLP Safe and Appropriate Exits vs Unsafe Exits During the SSRHY Demonstration Grants

Oklahoma: Percentage of Exits That Were Safe
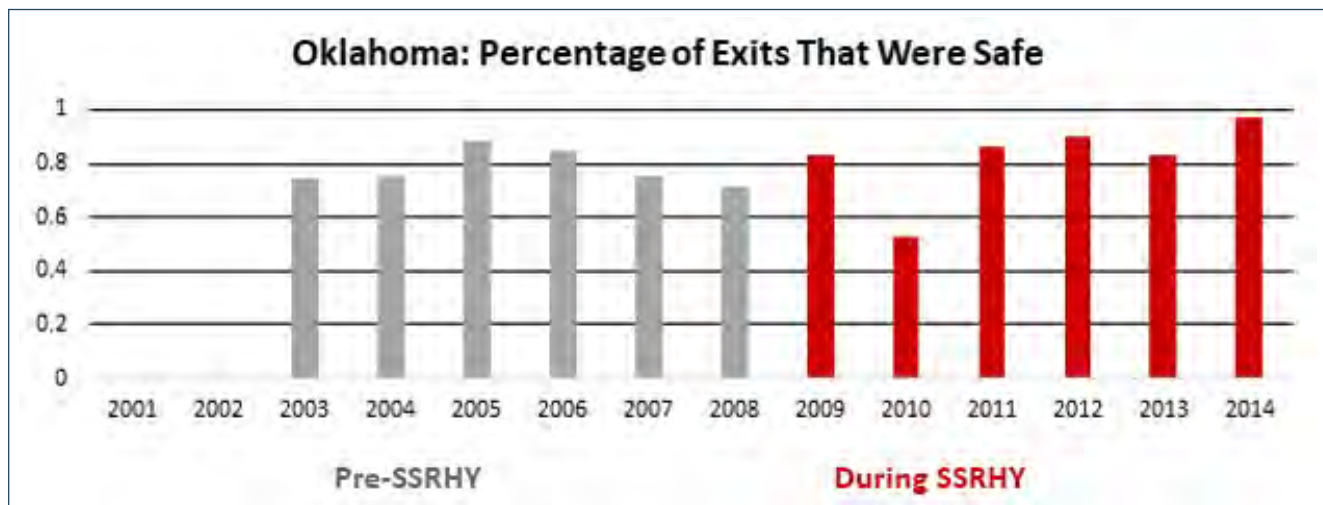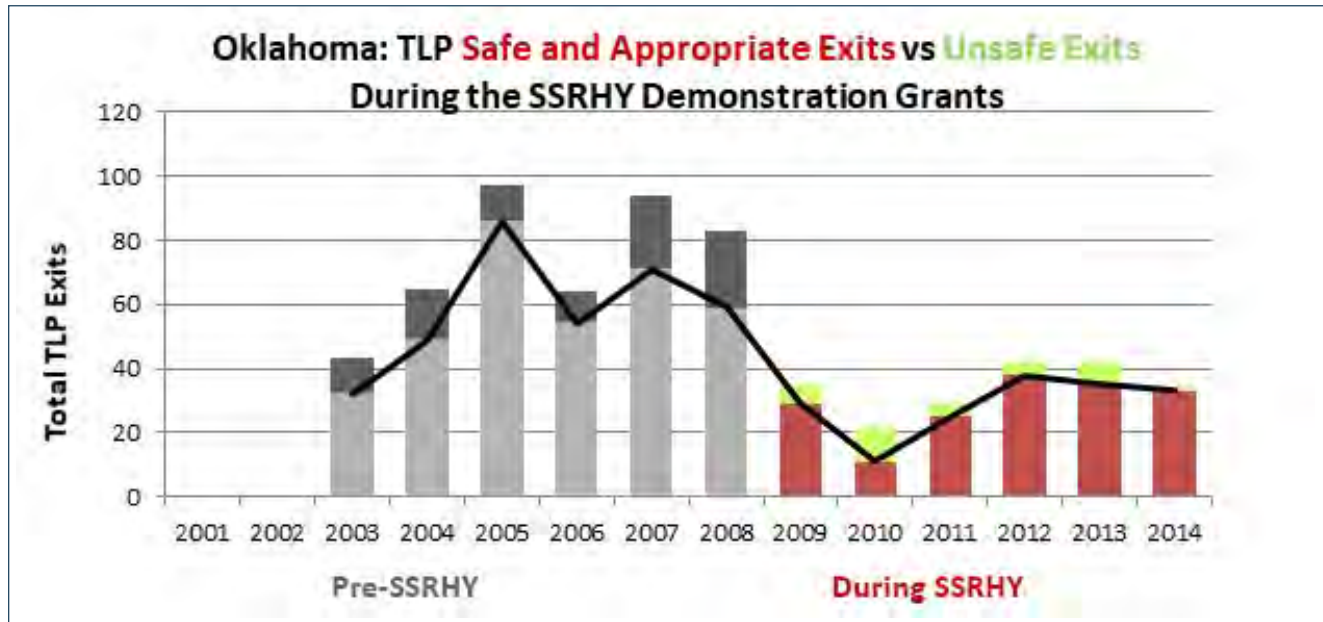
- The number of exits during the six SSRHY years was consistently less than half, sometimes less than one third, of the exits during non–SSRHY years. The average number of exits in the six SSRHY years was 34, versus 74 in the six prior non–grant years.

- The percentage of safe exits rose in the first year of the SSRHY grant, dropped substantially, and then rebounded to above pre–SSRHY levels. Safe exits averaged 82% during the six SSRHY years, versus 78% in the six years prior to the grant.

Vermont

Vermont: TLP Safe and Appropriate Exits vs Unsafe Exits During the SSRHY Demonstration Grants

Vermont: Percentage of Exits That Were Safe
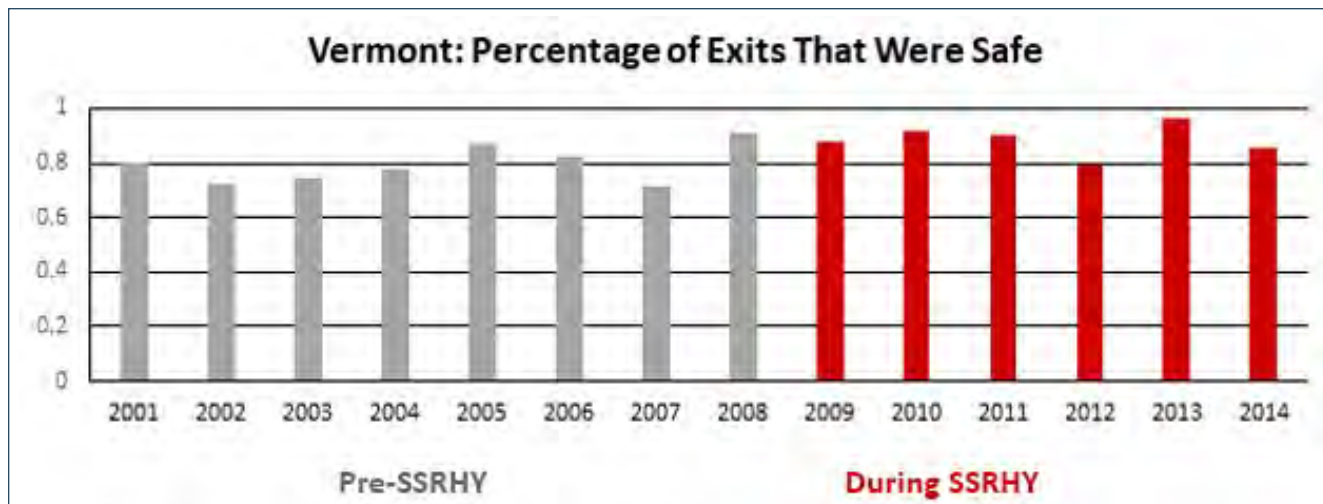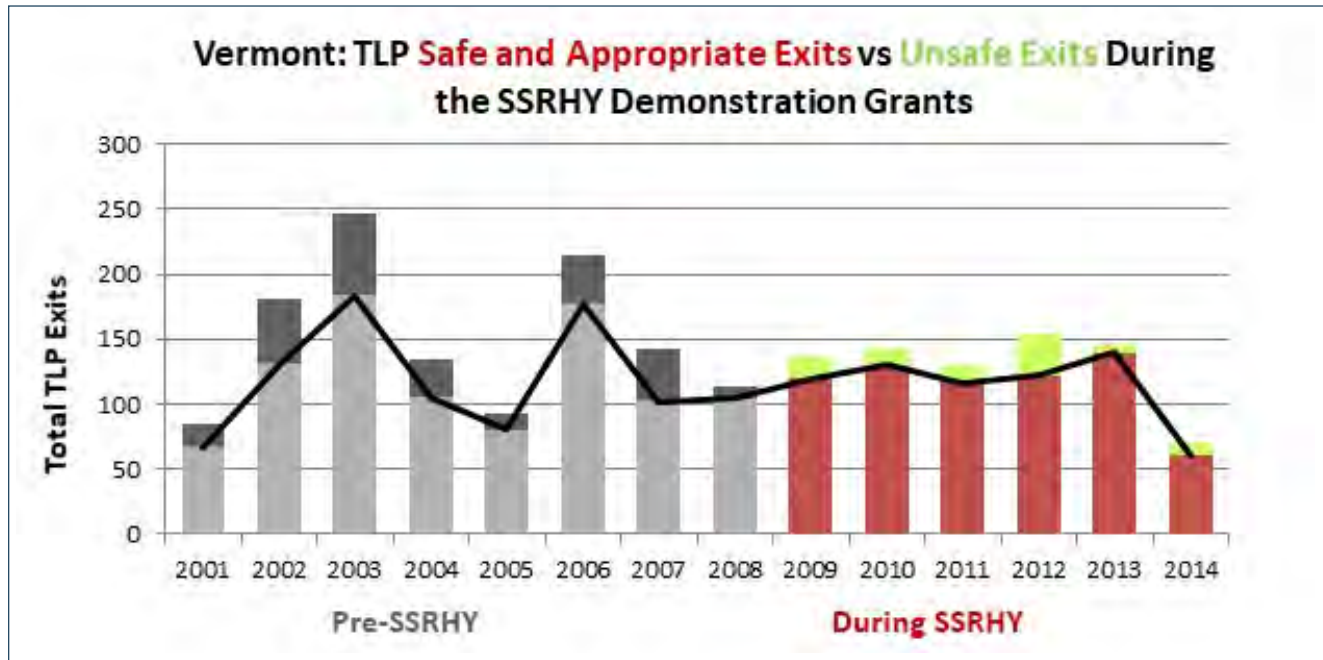
- The number of exits during the six SSRHY years was relatively stable, dropping significantly in the last year. The average number of exits in the six SSRHY grant years was 129, versus 143 in the 6 prior non–SSRHY years.

- The percentage of safe exits varied less than 10%, was lowest in 2012, then rebounded in 2013. Safe exits averaged 89% during the six SSRHY years, versus 81% in the six years prior to the SSRHY grant.

In summary:

- There was no consistent pattern across states, either in the average number of exits or the percentage of safe exits.

- The average number of exits rose in three states, between 24% and 300%, and dropped in two states, by 10% and 54%, remaining level in the sixth state.

- The average percentage of safe exits increased during SSRHY years for four of six states, between 4% and 13%, and decreased during the SSRHY projects for the other two states, between 1% and 4%.

The quantitative data collected, reported, and used by participating states was supplemented by additional information collected by the states and by anecdotal evidence, included in the following section of this report. As one state director explained:

> *"We relied very heavily on the people that were working closest to the youth [to assess the impact of our programming], and I'm not just saying our local collaborating partners, but [also] the case workers that were working directly with youth."*

Given the relatively small number of at–risk youth in rural areas, social service staff were able to know many of the youth they served on a personal level. Their experience working with these youth, and working with the communities in which these youth lived, provided important evidence to support evaluations of SSRHY project activities. Case workers or staff delivering SSRHY services could see the impact these supports and services were having on many of the youth who participated. In such a context, qualitative data may be more useful than in communities with relatively large numbers of at–risk youth.

D. State Evaluations

State measures of effectiveness of their SSRHY projects

Project evaluation was a component of the SSRHY demonstration project initiative. As part of the grant, participating states received technical assistance, including assistance on developing and delivering an evaluation of demonstration project activities and their impact on rural homeless youth. The six participating states each developed a unique approach to project evaluation—with some states monitoring project performance annually and others electing to assess project impacts near the end of the five-year grant period.

Some states utilized local or regional evaluators to conduct assessments of SSRHY activities, with some administering surveys or conducting focus groups with participating youth. States and their local collaborating partners also relied heavily on their previous experience working in rural communities and with at-risk rural youth when considering the success of SSRHY activities. This combination of evidence provided several states with what they felt was a more meaningful assessment of project success than a review of the RHYMIS data alone.

States utilized both qualitative and, to a lesser extent, quantitative data to assess the impact of the SSRHY project activities on rural youth experiencing homelessness. Qualitative data often focused on feedback from youth receiving SSRHY services. In Oklahoma, for instance, an external evaluator was hired to survey youth. The results of this particular survey revealed that, in general, youth felt better prepared to deal with stressors such as peer pressure or issues with family as a result of participating in SSRHY activities. Such results were consistent with similar surveys or qualitative data collected by other states, with a majority of youth reporting that SSRHY project activities helped them develop survival support skills, empowered them with employment or educational opportunities, and/or provided them with a space to socialize.

Below is a summary of state-collected data that was made available for the purposes of preparing this report. The types of data collected differed by state, as indicated in the key data and findings from each of the following state evaluation summaries. The data is not comparable among the states and is, therefore, not readily presented in an aggregate fashion. In addition, each state's evaluation summary notes where specific types of evaluation data were not provided by that state.

Colorado Program Evaluation and Results

Methodology

Colorado utilized data from RHYMIS (data noted under Other Impacts, below) and surveys at five of the seven project sites.

Youth Served

A total of 225 youth were served.

Findings

Tables represent results of surveys conducted at five of the seven the project sites, indicating what percentage of youth in the project demonstrated improvement in survival supports, community attachment, and education and employment.

Improvement in Survival Supports	Alamosa County	Garfield County	Huerfano County	Moffat County	Montrose County
All youth (100%)	–	–	–	–	–
Nearly all youth (70–99%)	–	X	X	–	–
Most youth (50–69%)	X	–	–	X	–
Many youth (20–49%)	–	–	–	–	X
A few youth (2–29%)	–	–	–	–	–
No youth (0)	–	–	–	–	–

Improvement in Community Attachment	Alamosa County	Garfield County	Huerfano County	Moffat County	Montrose County
All youth (100%)	–	–	–	X	X
Nearly all youth (70–99%)	X	X	X	–	–
Most youth (50–69%)	–	–	–	–	–
Many youth (20–49%)	–	–	–	–	–
A few youth (2–29%)	–	–	–	–	–
No youth (0)	–	–	–	–	–

Improvement in Education and Employment	Alamosa County	Garfield County	Huerfano County	Moffat County	Montrose County
All youth (100%)	–	–	–	–	–
Nearly all youth (70–99%)	X	X	X	X	–
Most youth (50–69%)	–	–	–	–	X
Many youth (20–49%)	–	–	–	–	–
A few youth (2–29%)	–	–	–	–	–
No youth (0)	–	–	–	–	–

- Nearly all youth improved in survival supports.

- Nearly all youth improved in community attachments.

- Nearly all youth improved in education and employment activities.

- Most youth participated as members of youth and adult collaborations.

- Significant increases of youth involvement were found in multiple areas:

  - Developing planning, programming, and activities in the project at local and state levels

  - Exercising leadership through site youth leadership teams

- Participating in new opportunities for youth leadership in visible community projects
- Informing policy development at the state, county, municipal and provider levels

Other Impacts

The following outcomes were identified by the state using information from RHYMIS data:

- Colorado had a very low program return rate.
- Colorado was the lead state for rural homeless youth self-referring into the program.
- More Colorado rural youth (94%) exited to a safe place compared with the 88% national rate.

In May 2012, FYSB recognized Colorado's leadership in the creation of the "Making the Connection" digital mural awareness video composite with input from 11 states.

Sustainability

After the SSRHY grant ended, the Rural Collaborative expanded and continues to serve youth[5].

Iowa Program Evaluation and Results

Methodology

Iowa utilized data on the participation of youth in programs (attendance, continued participation over time), attainment of housing and employment, community assessments conducted during the project, and staff assessments of successful outcomes/program completion.

Youth Served

The total number served was unknown. Looking at program components:

- Work readiness and job placement
  - Caring Hearts (employment services) served a total of 78 youth during the project. During the time of the program there were three clients that were hired as staff for Caring Hearts. During the length of the program those three clients rarely had enough hours and eventually moved on to other employment opportunities. This program led to the work program, then, which had a total of 78 clients.
  - The "HUB", a safe community center, averaged 25 unduplicated participants annually

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5   Family & Youth Services Bureau. (2012). Mural Contest Winner: Colorado Teens Take a Stand Against Youth Homelessness. Retrieved from:
http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/news/2012/05/mural-contest-winner-colorado-teens-take-stand-against-youth-homelessness

- Housing

    - 45 youth (along with children at one site) received housing services from May 2010 through September 2014.

- Youth-centered planning and case management

    - Provided to all project participants, total number unknown.

Findings

Based on community assessments and experience as the project evolved, the following services and supports were implemented:

- Work readiness and job placement—90% were successful or partially successful. The 78 clients all gained some level of work experience. A client could complete the program in four different ways: no treatment plan established, unsuccessful, partially successful, or successful. During the length of the program, one client did not have a treatment plan established (1%), seven clients were unsuccessful (9%), 28 clients were partially successful (36%), and 42 clients were successful (54%).

- Housing—Of those 45 youth receiving housing services, 84% were discharged successfully or partially successfully. The length of stay for clients during this time was anywhere from two days to 20 months, and the average length of stay during this time period was 4.9 months. Of the 45 clients that left the program, five clients (11%) did not complete orientation (which was 30 days), two clients (5%) were discharged unsuccessfully, 19 clients (42%) were partially successful, and 19 clients (42%) were considered successfully discharged.

- Youth-centered planning and case management—All participants received case management services.

Sustainability

Based on the sustainability planning, the prioritized activities that will remain operational in Boone County at the conclusion of the SSRHY project are:

- Case management;

- Work readiness classes in partnership with the local Workforce Investment Act provider; and

- Transitional-supported housing for young men and women

At the end of September 2014, four clients and two children were still being served.

Three of the clients were females that were pregnant and preparing to have their children. One of the two 2-bedroom apartments established by the project in Boone for independent/transitional living will remain available for youth beyond the grant period. Long term, the TLP is going to reassign funds within the federal TLP grant so one of the two apartments can remain open and males can continue to be served in Boone County. The other apartment was open until September 30, 2014. The second apartment was going to be covered with a state grant for long-term sustainability; however, the next year's grant funds were not sufficient to sustain this site. In Boone County, there is also a site for women known as the Lighthouse. This site is able to serve single females and females with children, and it will remain open and continue to serve clients beyond the grant period. This site is funded through multiple sources, ensuring long-term sustainability.

Minnesota Program Evaluation and Results

Methodology

Program participant data was collected at program entry, exit, and 3-, 6-, and 12-month intervals after the youth exited the program in order to evaluate program effectiveness. Program entry and exit information was collected through the RHYMIS system, and 3-, 6-, and 12-month reviews were conducted through a youth survey on the phone or in-person. Youth received a small gift card for a gas station or grocery store for completing each survey. Each September/October, results from RHYMIS and the 3-, 6-, and 12-month youth surveys, along with narrative feedback from youth on the Advisory Committee, were reviewed by the SSRHY TLP staff and the SSRHY Advisory Committee

Youth Served

Throughout the five-year demonstration project, 65 youth participated in the program. Of the 65 youth served in the program, 47 (72%) were American Indian. Approximately 20% of the youth were age 18 and under, while a little over 75% of the youth were 19 to 21.

The demonstration SSRHY TLP was the only program in the state that provided services to homeless youth in reservation communities. This is a concern, considering that American Indian youth are one of two racial groups (the other African American) that are over-represented in the homeless youth population. The Wilder Research Center found that 23% of homeless youth in Greater Minnesota are American Indian, while they represent 1% of the general youth population in the state.

Findings

Ninety-one percent of participating youth successfully transitioned into stable housing either in an apartment on their own or into a housing situation with friends or family.

Sustainability

Before the SSRHY TLP, Minnesota had the capacity to serve 17 youth in TLPs and had 46 emergency shelter beds available in rural Minnesota (including reservations), while there were approximately 165-195 homeless youth age 17 or under and an additional 390 youth between the ages 18 and 21 living in these rural areas. There are currently 15 beds or units of emergency shelter available through four Basic Center Programs in rural areas, none of which are on reservations (located in Brainerd, Willmar, Mankato, and Bemidji). As of 2012 (per Minnesota Department of Human Services), a sustained increase to 171 units of housing is available through seven TLPs or youth housing programs (located in Bemidji, Willmar, Mankato, Virginia, Grand Rapids, Bois Forte, and Leech Lake Reservations).

Nebraska Program Evaluation and Results

Methodology

A multifaceted evaluation, the most comprehensive among the states, included extensive process data (e.g., number of youth receiving services, community engagement events), tracking of employment and educational outcomes and safe exits to stable housing, a survey assessing the areas where youth felt resilient, and staff assessments of youth improvements (by the time of their exit from a program or service).

Youth Served

A total of 95 (unduplicated) homeless and former foster youth received case management support services and brief contacts (out of 2,862 youth residing in four rural counties: Alliance, Sidney, Chadron, and Scottsbluff). Transition planning has occurred for all youth in the SSRHY program. Where additional services and supports were needed, youth were transferred to the transitional services.

Findings

Process Measures

Physical and Mental Health (seamless access to services)

- Twenty-three youth were provided physical health screenings or services.
- Twenty-eight total youth were provided mental health counseling referrals.

Youth Friendly Landlords

Nine youth-friendly landlords have been identified in the following counties: Dawes (2), Box Butte (2), Cheyenne (2), and Scottsbluff (3).

Rent Wise Training

Thirteen youth completed Rent Wise Training.

Independent Living Skills

- One hundred sixty-four youth (case managed and brief contacts) were provided with independent living skills training that included: anger management and self-concept, obtaining driver's license, assistance in obtaining vehicle, parenting classes, nutrition programs, personal wellness and fitness, and legal issues and living wills.
- Youth in Sidney (Cheyenne County) participated in a movie night once per month and learned life skills as a group before attending. They learned about budgeting and goal setting during this reporting period.

Daily Living and Housing Process Measures and Outcomes

- Ninety-two housing services were provided to youth including housing via host homes, rental assistance, TLPs, cluster sites, and emergency shelter.
- Outcome: Of the youth involved in the project, 25% lived independently post program, and 50% lived with parent/guardian.

Employment Process Measures and Outcomes

- Nineteen (unduplicated) youth attended the financial skills class. The majority of youth completed this course in the first 6 months when a new curriculum was developed.

- Five youth specialists and two youth attended four regional Social Entrepreneurship workshops and, with the skills gained, redesigned the Sherwood project to develop a youth-run start-up business that will help sustain the rent for the youth center.

- Outcome: 71 youth gained employment.

Education Outcomes

Outcome: 39 youth reached educational goals that included working on their GED, applying for and attending post-secondary education, and graduating from high school.

Personal and Community Engagement Activities

Enhanced youth leadership in public service and community engagement was evidenced as follows:

- Youth completely planned and operated a Spark in the Dark dance to bring attention to Children's Mental Health and Foster Care Awareness. Over 150 youth and community members attended.

- The Forever People photo exhibit, a youth-driven projected funded by the Sherwood Foundation, was implemented by youth in September 2015, premiering at the NCFF statewide meeting.

- Older youth leaders organized and ran the Youth Leadership Institute and camp.

- Youth have been equal members at the table on social entrepreneurship.

- Four youth have been partners in planning the transitional services.

Youth Resiliency

Fifteen youth in the program in October 2013 completed a resiliency survey assessing the areas they felt resilient in, within various aspects of their lives. The youth had been in the program an average of over four months with an average age of 18. Overall, the majority of the youth rated themselves as frequently or always feeling safe. They also reported that they frequently successfully manage aspects of themselves both internally and externally, but had less ability to manage stress in a healthy way. Most youth could frequently or always rely on family, other adults, or at least one friend for support. However, they did not feel as strongly that adults in the community respect young adults/youth. Again, most youth had plans for the future and felt proud of themselves. They struggled to find ways to share feelings, thoughts, and ideas less frequently. Youth did not always know what community resources were available and were not always comfortable accessing resources.

Overall Impact on Youth

After leaving the program, approximately one-fourth of the participating youth were living independently. Approximately half were exiting the program to live with a parent or legal guardian, or at a relative's or friend's home. In addition, program staff provided subjective ratings of the extent youth improved (in the aggregate) as a result of the program. In the aggregate, staff rated the youth as "tremendously" improved in the following areas: job, life, leadership, social skills, the expansion of their networks of helping resources,

and their preparation to be successful as adults. Slightly lower ratings were given to the youth as a group for increased social networks and achievement of stable residency.

Sustainability

Per the state's final report, each component of the project was developed in a manner that enhanced sustainability. For example, the Youth Leadership Institute utilized staff from numerous programs that were already working with youth. Project Ever last (foster youth), PRIDE (Latino youth group supported by the University of Nebraska Extension), Chadron Native American Center (and now Native Futures), Preparation for Adult Living (PALS) operated by Central Plains Center for Services, and Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska Youth Services, all provided staff and transported the youth to collaboratively operate the Youth Leadership Institute. Western Nebraska Community College provided meeting space and food. Community businesses and partners supported service–learning projects. This level of leveraged resources results not only in a sustained Youth Leadership Institute but also in a high level of community engagement that draws attention to the needs of the youth population.

In the fourth year, key youth– serving programs of the Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska did not receive new competitive federal grant funds. The result was a $700,000 loss in resources for the core infrastructure of the program. In other circumstances, there would have been a question as to whether the SSRHY initiative would continue. Because the group had already been planning for sustainability, and had engaged in actions such as contracting for services and cross–training staff, the SSRHY project moved forward and flourished.

Planning for sustainability focused on outcomes, partnerships, policy changes, and enhanced resources. Per state project staff, these activities resulted in solid data and structure that helps tell the story for state partners and possible funders. When everyone is focused on the outcome, the dialogue changes from a program discussion to a community change discussion, with the community's support leading to greater sustainability.

Oklahoma Program Evaluation and Results

Methodology

In terms of program impact, process measures (e.g., service counts) were submitted for this report. The state also submitted a summary of an evaluation survey that detailed lessons learned and qualitative impact; however, the methodology for determining this qualitative impact is unclear. No additional performance data was available from the state.

Youth Served

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Jurisdiction	Males Served 2009–2013	Females Served 2009–2013
Blaine County	61	40
Kingfisher County	15	13

Findings

Community Awareness Survey

The program contracted with Oklahoma Association of Youth Services, which developed, collected, and analyzed results from a community attitude/perceptions survey during spring 2011. Six hundred surveys were distributed, and the program achieved a sample size of 437 respondents for a 73% response rate. Data was collected in both Blaine and Kingfisher counties. The survey was conducted as a point-in-time measure during the second year of the project, not post-program, and thus measures attitudes and opinions toward the type of youth served by this grant project, rather than final attitudes after the project was completed. Results from this survey include:

- 31 (7%) agreed that teenagers in transition to independent living are a source of problems within their community,

- 40 (9%) agreed that teenagers learn needed new skills in public school to live independently upon graduation,

- 28 (6%) agreed that there were employment opportunities for our high school and college graduates locally,

- 22 (5%) agreed that there are positive independent life skills activities for teenagers in the community,

- 39 (9%) agreed that there are health and medical services locally for teenagers in transition,

- 29 (7%) agreed that teenagers in transition have adequate transportation to needed services,

- 20 (5%) agreed that teens in transition to independent living are often homeless,

- 77 (18%) agreed that service programs that help teenagers successfully transition to adulthood are necessary, and

- 44 (10%) agreed with the statement, "I am confident that I have knowledge of services available to teenagers in my community."

Although the responses indicate an understanding of many of the issues facing youth, and specifically youth in transition, only 5% acknowledged the risk of homelessness for those youth, and less than one in five felt transitional living services were necessary for those at risk of homelessness. This may be due in large part to the fact that only one in ten of the respondents felt they knew about the services available to teens in their community.

Evaluation Survey

In October 2013, Oklahoma conducted an evaluation survey in collaboration with Dr. James Hyman. A summary of the findings was submitted; however, the survey itself was not provided to MSG. The findings presented in the summary are detailed below.

Lessons learned from this project include:

- Small communities have very limited resources: qualified people for staff, good (positive and supportive) jobs for disadvantaged youth, private support and funds for programs, and other social service resources for linkages;

- Programs need to set up infrastructure that can withstand personnel changes. Finding the right local project leader can be very challenging;

- Because not everyone understands what it takes to help homeless and disadvantaged youth, it is important to find the early adopters in the community, and include them in your project;

- Be prepared to have to demonstrate over a long length of time;

- Mixing the ages of youth (16–21) and younger adolescents (8–15) in service provision and activities became a problem because of developmental behaviors. When services were divided by age group, each group's participation increased; and

- Programs should strive to provide services within the context of the community rather than starting exclusively stand–alone events.

In conclusion, without this project, the majority of project youth would not have:

- Completed their GED or high school education;

- Learned essential life skills;

- Obtained housing;

- Developed leadership skills;

- Had the benefit of interactions with safe and caring adults; and

- Accessed essential community services.

Vermont Program Evaluation and Results

Methodology

Vermont did not provide specific evaluation information in their interview or summary grant reports.

Youth Served

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Findings

As noted under the description of state activities, the Youth–Work NEK component was found to be one of the most successful components of the demonstration project, with 55 youth participating in progressive employment activities and 18 exiting to sustained full–time employment.

E. Strategies for FYSB

Approaches for successfully promoting youth development through state demonstration grants and community–based demonstration initiatives

In general, states were satisfied with their experiences with the FYSB SSRHY demonstration projects, and staff felt they were able to successfully create and expand services and supports for rural runaway and homeless youth. Of particular note was the **impact of establishing collaborative partnerships**. As the Iowa state director explained:

> *"This is the one thing that stands out to me as a good example of how government can do a good job of working with provider partners in the local communities and really force us, help us…to get out of our box and think about other systems. So I would thank FYSB for giving us the opportunity, and [we] will continue to benefit from the experience."*

Some collaborative partnerships became sustainable beyond the demonstration grant. Many of the collaborative partnerships developed under the SSRHY demonstration project are still being utilized in other projects targeting rural homeless youth. The Nebraska state director commented that, through the implementation of the demonstration project, it became "obvious that a collaboration of both private and public partnership works effectively for this population." Building on this collaborative success, they "then entered into a memorandum of understanding with…major funders and did a private/public type partnership for across the state." The more the agencies "started coming together collaboratively to work on issues, the more [the youth] did as well." Many of the agencies that collaborated on these projects still continue to meet, and in some cases apply for funding together. One state highlighted the importance of having some consistency in partners, especially when they are "a group of people who are very committed to that work." Collaborating partners in Nebraska created a virtual network of rural provider agencies in order to centralize funding applications, share resources, and coordinate services at the state level. Across the states, **connecting the demonstration projects to other opportunities or supports for youth at risk of homelessness ensured that projects did not operate in isolation** and could be potentiated by those other providers or agencies in the community, essentially creating a whole greater than the sum of the parts.

Another key strategy that contributed to the success of the demonstration projects was the **year–long planning period**, which allowed more time and energy to be put into the design and

PROMISING PRACTICE

Comprehensive Services

An informed selection of participating organizations, sometimes beyond the traditional youth service entities, increased the odds of both success and sustainability in pilot or innovation projects. The basis for selection included a readiness to look beyond the presenting problem of youth homelessness to issues crossing multiple service systems, such as poverty. Such a readiness for change is consistent with both the Transtheoretical Theory of Change and strategic planning models engaging the full range of stakeholders.

development of the project components. In regard to the planning period, one state director noted **the importance of involving youth in the process to ensure services and supports are relevant but to also allow youth to take ownership over the interventions.**

> *"People tend to spend tons of money hiring consultants and… that's great, but, actually… when you're doing designs for youth it makes sense to hire them as consultants because they know all of that… It helps them build their career development – but then, [it] also helps us as service providers or state government people, it helps us design a best practice model."*

The combination of services provided also played an important role in the success of the demonstration projects. Rather than focus on a single service or support for rural homeless youth, the six states participating in the SSRHY demonstration project developed and delivered multiple services and supports over the life of their projects. As the Oklahoma state director noted, projects "literally have to be prepared to be a comprehensive case management system for all of [rural homeless youth's] needs." Many states noted that it became important to tailor the package of services to the individual needs of each youth. As one state director commented:

> *"Some [youth] clearly needed those real, immediate concrete supports of housing case management, and some of them were ready to move on. You had to almost cater to those different kinds of extremes of where the youth were at in their development."*

States developed a combination of different interventions, including housing, employment support, education, mentoring, and counseling.

One successful employment program was the Transition Academy, pioneered in Oklahoma. The Transition Academy was a three-week summer program that provided training and work experiences. The first week prepared young people through training on workplace and successful living skills. Over the next two weeks, participants worked in paid positions in the community in areas such as clerical, maintenance, stocking, and cleaning. This program helped youth build their resumes and significantly improved youths' skills in work settings.

Another successful intervention was the Mission Mentor program, which **paired at-risk youth with an adult community member to establish special, one-on-one relationships.** Mentors helped youth overcome problems and build self-esteem.

PROMISING PRACTICE

Collaborative Partnerships

Collaboration between the project and other state and community service providers, including those not typically focused on youth at risk of homelessness, greatly expanded and/or strengthened services and supports. This is consistent with agencies' moving out of isolated 'silos' to effect greater levels of change.

PROMISING PRACTICE

Tailored Support Services

State and community service providers developed a comprehensive package of support services, tailored to the needs of each youth participant. These community interventions provided support in the areas of employment, education, housing, mentoring, and counseling.

In addition to involving other youth services and community organizations, some states utilized media and public relations strategies to educate the broader public about rural youth homelessness and decrease the stigma surrounding this population. In Colorado, for example, the team developed an ad campaign with the slogan "A Couch Is Not a Home" to bring attention to the invisibility of rural youth homelessness. According to the Colorado state director, "about 90% of the youth were couch surfing with people," which made this ad campaign relevant to the rural context. Posters and public service announcements were designed and distributed. Full descriptions of some of the special programs and community interventions among the demonstration projects are available in Appendix A.

Consistent across all projects, state agencies noted the **importance of selecting the right communities to participate in RHY interventions** as a key determinant to the success and sustainability of the project. Communities need to be ready to examine power structures, poverty, and other issues in order for projects to be a success. One interviewee elaborated on this idea further, stating that projects have to focus on "creating some change and some different dialog among community people" mainly because "if you can't get those people onboard, the sustainability is not going to be there."

PROMISING PRACTICE

Media Campaigns
Utilizing media to educate the public decreases stigma and raises awareness about rural youth homelessness.

PROMISING PRACTICE

Engaging Youth
Engaging youth in both project planning and implementation, and the planning of services, was a key factor in project success.

Many interviewees did recognize, however, that there a delicate line to walk in selecting the community, because it is necessary to balance community readiness with the needs of the rural homeless youth. In the words of one collaborating partner:

> *"If you go to the community that's the most ready...the argument can be made that, well, maybe they don't need you as much because they have the gumption to figure out how to get this done whether or not you're there, whether or not you bring new dollars, whether or not you bring a new program...and then you look at [a less prepared community] which has this gigantic need but yet maybe wouldn't be as successful there as it could be somewhere else."*

To determine the readiness of a community, some interviewees recommended that FYSB or other agencies develop a questionnaire for community leaders ascertaining feelings about kids that were homeless or at risk of homeless, specifically in their community. The questionnaire could also gather information about the economic base, current interventions for youth, and the school system. A key outcome of the questionnaire exercise could also be to "find who the movers and shakers are in communities," who would be key allies in moving a project forward and generating community support.

PYD is at the core of FYSB's runaway and homeless youth model, supporting active roles for youth at individual, program, and system levels. In Minnesota, the integration of PYD was cited as having the greatest impact with Ojibwe (Native American) youth and was seen as one of the most significant results of the demonstration project. Effective PYD means youth are active partners not just in their own service

plans but also in the planning and development, the implementation, and the evaluation of services for all youth. In Vermont, RHY participated in three youth-driven assessment activities, including the design and implementation of a youth summit to discuss critical community and state issues and possible solutions to those challenges, such as housing, substance abuse, employment, and youth recreation. Youth-centered planning was at the core of several of the state projects. **Traditional programming and planning views youth and families as CLIENTS, while youth-centered programming and planning (e.g, the Iowa model described under that state's details) views them as PARTNERS, as detailed in the following graphic.**

Figure 2: Youth Centered Programming and Planning

Figure 2: Youth Centered Programming and Planning

PARTNERS:
Actively involved in planning, implementation/design
Seen as experts in their own experience, capabilities

PARTICIPANTS:
Seen as part of the process, not necessarily 'one down'
Not involved as key decision makers

CLIENTS:
Recipients of services, often assumed to need 'fixing'
Not given the opportunities and support of a strength-based approach

Finally, many **interviewees expressed frustration at the emphasis placed on defining the success of a project by the number of youth served.** Given the unique challenges of rural projects, measuring success in this way was felt to be "an obvious disadvantage for rural communities." Rural communities don't have the same raw numbers of youth at risk of homelessness that they can serve and impact, and it takes the same staff to serve fewer youth because the distances that need to be covered (e.g., multiple towns and communities versus city blocks or neighborhoods) are greater, both in terms of reaching out to those youth, and connecting them with services. As one director said, "Once you get rural, everything is really far away." Project directors were concerned that the lower number of youth often discourages federal agencies from focusing on rural services, and they stressed how important it was that "FYSB puts some energy to rural communities."

F. *Sustainability of Project–Initiated Practices*

The strategies resulting from the demonstration projects, namely the collaboration structures, community engagement, and involvement of youth in the planning process, greatly contributed to the perceived and measured successes of these demonstration grants.

States used the flexibility encouraged under the SSRHY initiative to experiment with a number of supports and services for at–risk rural youth. In some instances, the sustainability of these supports or services were not possible due to the budgetary constraints that all six states reported over the course of the demonstration project. **Physical spaces such as community centers and housing were, more often than not, unsustainable, once SSRHY funding ended. However, other services or supports—especially those where collaborations went beyond just the local collaborating partner—remain in a number of states. Likewise, the less tangible but equally important impact that a better coordination of youth services provides rural youth is a lasting legacy of the demonstration projects.** The list below delineates specific practices and approaches that have "outlived" the grant period.

Colorado

- State legislation increased safe housing options state–wide and expanded Family Unification Program housing vouchers for youth in project sites.

- The Rural Collaborative concept demonstrated the collaborative strength of leveraging resources, expanding services, and creating statewide, long–term sustainability. Monthly learning teleconferences, where collaborative members shared local challenges, solutions and information on new resources, became a sustained practice.

Iowa

- Additional transitional housing was added in one community (Boone), and these services remain post–grant.

- Collaboration with the Workforce Investment Act on the (work) readiness class is ongoing, along with the integration of case managers.

- A personalized, youth–driven planning approach developed for, and utilized in, this project continues at the state level.

- Collaborative community and state partners were identified as a necessity to enhance services and supports to rural youth experiencing homelessness. Increased collaboration was found to be more efficient and thus continues as the operating model for these services.

Minnesota

- A shift occurred to a PYD approach in a range of youth services at the state level, with youth truly involved in both planning and implementation, and this has been sustained post–grant.

- State funding for homeless youth programs was $5.2 million by the end of the program, as compared with pre–grant funding levels of $238,000 for two years.

Nebraska

- Systemic and policy changes, as opposed to expanded housing and services, continue. For example, the state worked with Nebraska Children around youth transitioning (i.e., aging out) out of foster care continuing to receive support; the state feels this will continue long term.

- High levels of training and collaboration resulted in a common understanding among partners and standardized the ongoing practice of including youth as partners in the project.

- A youth-run start-up business was developed that will help sustain the rent for the youth center opened during the grant.

Oklahoma

- The Transition Academy, a three-week summer program including training and work experience, was seen as successful, leading to its being repeated after the demonstration project was complete.

- Mission Mentors engaged the entire community as volunteers in providing a research proven combination of tutoring and mentorship to RHY[6] and this mentoring continues post-grant.

- Public relations outreach has been integrated as a continuous component in services to youth at risk of homelessness, as it is critical to build community support for such services in order for them to be supported/funded/implemented.

Vermont

- Collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce was initiated as part of employment services, and this has been sustained since the grant ended.

- Through a combination of blended funding elements, the teen center and associated services at the area federal anti-poverty agency are being sustained beyond the SSRHY grant period.

- The Youth-Work NEK program has been replicated statewide and imbedded in practice through training, coaching, and outcome data–tracking across Chafee (Independent Living), Runaway and Homeless Youth, and Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention service delivery systems.

- The state Department of Children and Families has implemented targeted approaches that support youth development, enhance youth's participation in and contributions to their communities, and create a sense of self-worth and belonging.

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6   Herrera, C. (2012). Making the Most of Youth Mentoring: A Guide for Funders. Philadelphia, PA, Public/Private Ventures.

G. Conclusions

Key lessons learned about promising approaches and sustainable models

Drawing from the promising approaches utilized by the 6 sites, and the project components that have been sustainable beyond the SSRHY grant period, the following system-level lessons (as opposed to individual program models or services alone) can be applied to future demonstration grants and programming for rural youth at risk of homelessness and runaway and homeless youth as a group:

1. **Effective collaboration between rural service providers to runaway and homeless youth and service providers not typically focused on youth at risk of homelessness greatly expanded and/or strengthened services and supports for those at risk youth.** Moving out of isolation, or 'silos,' project agencies were able to create sustainable collaborations with multiple groups, including (but not limited to) Chambers of Commerce, Workforce Investment Act providers, state agencies working with youth and families, foster care systems, and juvenile justice systems. This is of particular value for providing services in rural areas, including largely rural states, where smaller populations often mean a narrower range of services dedicated to youth, runaways, and other target groups. These collaborations developed and/or leveraged access to resources including joint teleconferences and training, outcome data tracking across service systems, and a summer program including training and work experience.

2. **A readiness to look beyond the presenting problem of youth homelessness, to issues and risk factors crossing multiple service systems, is critical to establishing and sustaining a community's willingness to act on behalf of rural youth at risk of homelessness.** Educational efforts, including media campaigns and continuing public outreach, generated a readiness for change, engaging the full range of stakeholders. This in turn has led to action by communities, statewide organizations (such as Vermont's Department of Children and Families), and state legislators who previously had little awareness or knowledge of homeless youth. This is particularly important in rural areas, where homeless youth are often invisible as they couch surf. In more than one state, the legislators and other policy makers have provided additional funding for an often invisible group of youth, as well as legislative changes that expanded services to rural youth at risk of homelessness, including making host homes eligible to provide transitional living housing. Iowa, Minnesota, and Vermont, in particular, have seen a transition state-wide to youth-driven and youth-informed efforts, and Nebraska has been able to provide sustaining funding for programming through youth entrepreneurial efforts.

3. **Engaging youth in both project planning and implementation, and the planning of services, was a key factor in project success.** Following the principles of PYD, youth were engaged in the entrepreneurial efforts, mentioned in item 2 above, that sustain rent payments for a youth center opened through the SSRHY grant. Service planning across Iowa has shifted to a youth-driven model consistent with seeing youth as partners rather than client/recipients, and youth have become an integral part of successful, ongoing efforts to create an awareness of rural youth at risk of homelessness and shift negative perceptions of them.

Appendix A:
Descriptions of Some Unique Programs, Services, and Service Structures Developed Through the SSRHY Grant

Transition Academy (Oklahoma)

A program of Youth and Family Services, Inc.
https://www.yfsok.org/programs/

Program Description

(From Youth and Family Services, Inc. reporting materials)

Many activities have been completed, but the most significant activities were the three summers of the Transition Academy, a three–week summer program that included youth training as well as work experiences and prepared young people to increase their knowledge and experience in employment and survival support services. The Academy goals are to: prepare the participants for employment and successful living skills; involve the local community through educational sessions and job placements; implement a model that can be replicated in other Oklahoma communities; and evaluate effectiveness of model through young people successes.

The first Academy week, the attendees obtain information about employment and successful living skills. The next two weeks, the participants are placed in paid community work situations to gain skills in work settings. The Academy began in the summer of 2012 and was funded with 2010 carryover dollars. This event was such an accomplishment that it was decided to repeat it in 2013 and 2014. Because the funding was not adequate for the second year (2013), the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding was also tapped to present that year's event.

Examples of employers tapped and types of jobs were:

- Opportunities Inc.– help with home repairs, clerical, and janitorial work
- City of Watonga –janitorial
- Watonga Public Schools – ground maintenance
- Real estate company – clerical
- Hospital – maintenance
- Shirt design center
- Medical office –clerical
- A bed and breakfast – ground maintenance
- Indian Casino – assist in Casino
- An oil company – warehouse work (stocking, cleaning, etc.)
- Welding company – assist with welding tasks
- Hardware store – general stocking and cleaning
- Barbecue restaurant –assist with cooking
- Concrete company – assist with concrete pouring
- Local church –work on grounds
- Public library – assist attendees

Mission Mentors (Oklahoma)

"The Power of an Hour"
http://missionmentors.com/

Program Description

The Mission Mentors Program was established in 2010 in order to engage the entire community in building special, one-on-one relationships between responsible adult volunteers and a child in need. The program is designed to target children from single parent homes, those with low self-esteem, those with behavior problems, and those that do not get enough attention.

Goals:

1. To help children become aware of, avoid, and overcome problems that can cause young people to act in negative or destructive way.

2. To build self-esteem, self-motivation, and self-determination in children.

Mentors are recruited through local churches, civic organizations, large employers, and referrals from existing mentors. This program executes its mission through two different types of mentorship, one inside school and one outside school, depending on the needs and age of the child. School-based mentors are matched with children that need academic support, typically in grades 1-5. School-based mentors spend an hour per week with their mentees, to build healthy relationships that enables children to discuss educational concerns. Community-based mentors interact with children, typically in grades 6-12, after school hours at least three times a month during suggested activities. Progress is tracked through yearly surveys, executed on surverymonkey.com.

As of 2013, 83 matches between mentors and mentees have been made, and more are added each month. After two years of mentor-mentee relationships, the results have been astounding. The program has helped to improve classroom participation and academic success of children, and many teachers commented that students with mentors are significantly happier than before. Teacher surveys also indicated that 86% of students with mentors improved in self-esteem, self-motivation, and self-determination and 77% improved attendance in school. 68% of children surveyed said the missions mentor program has helped them establish relationships that allow them to discuss concerns.

The mission mentor program has made a positive impact on the lives of many children in need. Mission mentors have helped children make important, stable connections that allow them to improve academic attendance and work habits, as well as enrich their mental health and general wellbeing.

Youth Transition Decision Making (Iowa)

https://childwelfareproject.hs.iastate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/YTDM-Brochure.pdf
(from Youth Transition Decision Making material)

Everyone has dreams for the future. But dreams are not easily attained – it takes focus and hard work to make them a reality. Youth transitioning from foster care who have healthy and meaningful lifelong connections are better able to gain knowledge, skills, and resources to support themselves and realize their dreams. YTDM enables youth transitioning from foster care to become active participants in their lives and make strategic decisions for their future.

Through YTDM, youth can plan their short- and long-term goals. As part of the process, youth choose a network of supportive adults and peers to help them prepare for the future. As steps in their successful transition to independent adulthood, each youth in YDTM:

- Creates and shares an "All About Me" booklet or presentation that explains who they are: what they want and what they need in their life in order to be successful;

- Identifies their strengths (assets) and any immediate concerns (needs, risks) in the areas of education, employment, housing, health and relationships; and

- Works with their own team to put together a plan of action.

With their team, youth share and discuss their long-term goals. They chart a course for success, enlisting members of their team and others to help accomplish the goals.

Youth Factor NEK (Vermont)

http://dcf.vermont.gov/

http://nekcavt.org/
(Material adapted from North East Kingdom Community Action Youth Services website)

Program Description

This initiative of the Vermont Department for Children and Families focused on building support systems for youth transitioning to independence in communities in the Northeast Kingdom. The Youth Factor NEK demonstration project partnered with the Northeast Kingdom Community Action/Community Action Youth Services agency in Newport.

The five-year demonstration project was coordinated by North East Kingdom Community Action, Youth Services and Vermont Department for Children and Families with support from the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, and was funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau of the US Administration for Children and Families through 2014.

Local partners joining the effort focused on three vital areas: stabilizing youth in housing and providing health care and mental health services; linking young people with youth-adult partnerships, mentoring and PYD activities; and creating educational and employment opportunities that lead to high school completion, job training and livable wage jobs for young people.

The federal grant, which focused on developing solutions to the problems of older youth in rural communities, was awarded to only three states in 2009. Model practices and approaches developed by public, private and state agencies in this community were coordinated at the state agency level to support replication in other communities in Vermont through policy, program, and funding initiatives. By integrating evaluation measures for the grant project with existing measures for related services for transition aged youth, these results will broaden our understanding of the impact of the project and support further replication in Vermont and other states.

In addition to emphasizing effective state/local collaboration and viewing local partners as 'learning communities,' the demonstration project emphasized youth involvement and leadership. Young people themselves will played a significant role in creating solutions in the Northeast Kingdom and will work in partnership with adults to create lasting opportunities for meaningful engagement in community life.

A Couch Is Not a Home (Colorado)

Bright Idea: Getting Rural Homeless Youth off the Couch and Into Their Own Beds

The child of drug addicts, Celina spent three years being shuffled between other people's houses in southern Colorado, crashing on floors and sofas and not knowing where she'd be sleeping the next night. Through all that, she never thought of herself as homeless.

Today, at 17, she lives a stable life with her grandparents and serves on the San Luis Valley Mental Health Center's Homeless and Runaway Youth Prevention Leadership Group. Only recently, she learned that her family's past situation meets a federal definition of homelessness.

"If I had known I was homeless and that resources existed, I would have gotten help earlier and wouldn't have had to spend as much time being homeless," she says.

Like Celina, most homeless youth in rural Colorado never live on the street. According to the Colorado Rural Homeless Youth Profile, a recent survey of youth in the state, seventy-five percent of rural homeless youth "couch surf," living with friends or relatives and frequently moving from place to place. Like Celina, most wouldn't know they were homeless unless someone told them. As a result, they often don't seek help from social service agencies.

The antidote, say members of Colorado's State Systems for Rural Homeless Youth project, funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau, is to raise awareness among youth and the general public. To that end, community members in Moffat County last year came up with a campaign that is spreading to other corners of Colorado. Its slogan, "A couch is not a home," aims to tackle the stigma rural youth may face if they are called homeless.

"It's hard to be considered homeless in an area that prides itself on being self-sufficient," says Bob Coulson, an adolescent services administrator at the Colorado Department of Human Services. By showing what rural homelessness looks like, the campaign "takes the sting out of the stigma," he says.

Moffat resident Matt Beckett and Amanda Cleveland, a specialist with the State Systems for Rural Homeless Youth project, created artwork based on conversations with youth and youth workers. Their input enabled the artists to depict the reality of sleeping on someone else's couch: hat, jeans, sneakers and all.

"Everyone seems to relate to this," Coulson says. "Everyone has spent a night or two on a couch somewhere and they certainly wouldn't want to call that a home."

Celina and other youth across the state have put up posters at coffee shops and libraries. The campaign image also appears on bags and t-shirts that are distributed to youth and adults who can explain the campaign and refer youth to services. "I use the bag as my backpack, and when people ask about it I tell them what it means," Celina says.

"Right now we're raising awareness," Coulson says. The next step will focus on connecting youth to services. The group is creating colored wristbands advertising the [National Runaway Switchboard](#)'s 24-hour hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY) and the local social services helpline 211. Because most rural counties don't have shelters, the state aims to build a host-home program in which outreach workers would engage youth and their extended family and social networks to identify a stable home.

Ultimately, Coulson says, the goal is to provide services where young people live and reduce the chances that they'll migrate to cities where they might be victimized. "We need to help communities get organized to work with their own kids because they want their kids to stay, but they don't realize they're homeless."

For more information about the campaign or to order materials, please contact Amanda Cleveland at amandaurbanpeak@csi-policy.org.

Appendix B: Protocol for Interviews with State Directors and Local Collaborating Partners

Manhattan Strategy Group (MSG)
Summary of Support Services for Rural Homeless youth (SSRHY)

Conference Line: 855.212.0212

Meeting ID: 175–196–925

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

Title/Affiliation:

Date/Time:

Notes for Interviewer

- This is a semi-structured interview. Interviewers are allowed to ask additional questions, or re-order questions to better accommodate the discussion with interviewees.

- This interview protocol contains probing questions that should be addressed as necessary.

- This interview protocol contains notes and excerpts from the SSRHY Demonstration Project final reports submitted by states (excluding Vermont). These notes, in smaller print, provide background information relevant to an interview question. They should be used to probe deeper into a question or construct. If necessary, please confirm details of these notes with the interviewee.

- This interview will be transcribed. In order to assist the transcriber, please announce the interview date, time, and interviewee at the start of the recording. Also announce the question number you are asking if you decide to re-order the questions during the interview or ask additional questions not listed in the protocol.

Introduction

Thanks again for taking the time to speak with me this morning/afternoon. The interview should last about 60 minutes. Before we start, I'd like to provide a bit of background on this study and answer any questions you may have.

As you may already know, MSG is working on behalf of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) of HHS to better understand the agency's Support Services for Rural Homeless Youth (SSRHY) Demonstration Project Initiative that started in either 2008 or 2009. In particular, we'd like to:

1. Understand how states and local partners collaborated to deliver their SSRHY project and how this collaboration helped better serve rural homeless youth

2. Identify any effective practices for improving the coordination of services, building capacity, or creating new supports for rural homeless youth that emerged from the SSRHY demonstration projects

3. Understand how states and local partners evaluated their SSRHY demonstration project—that is, how did they determine if the project was successful?

We've had a chance to review the applications and final reports of the six states participating in this demonstration project. We're hoping that our conversation today will help add some additional details about the demonstration project in your state, and allow you to talk more about the important work that you've accomplished as part of this demonstration project grant.

I'd like to point out that this study is not an evaluation of the demonstration projects or the performance of the project teams. Our goal for this study is to summarize the work that states did as part of the demonstration project initiative, report on any trends, and offer FYSB recommendations for future efforts to serve rural homeless youth (RHY).

All the information obtained today will only be used for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name, and we will not attribute any quotes to your name. We also will not share what you and I discuss with other people at FYSB or with other states participating in the SSRHY demonstration project. You may end this interview at any time and you may choose to not answer any question that I ask.

With that said, FYSB is aware that we scheduled this interview with you and, given the small number of interviews being conducted for this study, it is possible that someone reading the study report could determine who a particular interviewee is based on their project and/or state. However, input you provide during the interview will be combined with information from other interviews of participants in this demonstration project. The combined information will be analyzed. Only combined results will be presented in reports. If at any time during this interview you would like to speak off the record, just let me know. We will not share or report on any off-the-record comments.

If you don't mind, I would like to record this interview simply for note-taking purposes to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements. No one outside of our study team will hear the recording; it will just be for our own reference. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Would that be OK?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Project Background

To start, I'd like to ask you a few general questions about your project, including why your state/agency decided to apply for the SSRHY demonstration grant and how you developed your grant proposal as part of the application process.

1. Let's start with some background information on your demonstration project. Could you provide me with a brief summary of the project (i.e., an 'elevator speech')?

   Probe, as necessary:

   a. Could you tell me why your state/agency applied for this demonstration grant funding and did you achieve your goals?

   b. Did you apply for or receive additional funding from other sources for this project?

   c. What was your role for this project?

2. What are the specific challenges facing rural RHY in your state?

   Probe, as necessary:

   a. How did these challenges inform your decision to apply for a demonstration project grant? Was there one challenge—or set of challenges—facing your rural RHY that was important to address through a demonstration project grant?

   b. Was there a particular challenge—or set of challenges—facing your rural RHY that could only be addressed through a demonstration project grant?

   c. What (if any) changes have there been to the RHY community in your state? How have these changes influenced your program and its mission (e.g., high unemployment causing increased demand, budgetary cuts limiting services)?

State and Local Collaboration in Delivery of Services

Now, I'd like to ask you some more specific questions about the collaboration between your state and the local service providers that participated in the demonstration project.

3. Walk me through the collaboration process between the state and local partners. How or why was this collaboration started? Why these local partners?

4. How did this collaboration operate during the life of the project? For instance, how were responsibilities divided? What was the reporting structure?

5. How useful was this collaboration or set of collaborations?

   Probe, as necessary

   a. Did you encounter any roadblocks or face any challenges that needed to be overcome? If so, how did you overcome these issues?

6. How did this collaboration improve the delivery of services to rural homeless youth?

   Probe, as necessary

   a. How was this improvement measured? What data did you rely on?

Effective Practices for Serving Homeless Youth

The next set of questions are about the effective practices that your state and/or local collaborating partners developed for serving RHY as a result of your demonstration project.

7. As you know, the states in this demonstration project developed various practices—practices related to the coordination of services, practices related to capacity building, and practices related to new supports for rural homeless youth. What practices did your project develop?

8. How did these practices contribute to survival support services, if at all? By survival support services we mean services such as housing, health care, substance abuse support, and/or mental health support.

    Probe, as necessary

    a. Were these supports already in existence or were these supports created as part of the demonstration project?

9. How did these practices contribute to community engagement and awareness, if at all?

    Probe, as necessary

    a. Were these supports already in existence or were these supports created as part of the demonstration project?

10. How did these practices contribute to education and employment of RHY, if at all?

    Probe, as necessary

    a. Were these supports already in existence or were these supports created as part of the demonstration project?

11. Finally, how sustainable are these practices? To put this another way: have these practices continued beyond the end of the demonstration project?

    Probe, as necessary

    a. Has anything changed since states submitted their sustainability plans during year two of the project? If so, why did plans change?

Project Evaluation

In this set of questions, I'd like to ask you about how you or your team evaluated your state's demonstration project.

12. As you know, a part of the demonstration project grant was devoted to creating an evaluation plan and then evaluating the outcomes of your demonstration project. Could you tell me how you planned to evaluate your demonstration project?

    Probe, as necessary

    a. What measures were used in the evaluation plan? What data were used and/or collected?

    b. Did you or your staff receive technical assistance training on evaluation as a part of this demonstration project grant? If so, what was covered in this training(s)? How useful was the training?

13. How useful will this evaluation plan be in the future? To put it another way: could you use this evaluation methodology for other projects or programs?

14. Would you be able to share any of the data you collected as part of your evaluation with our study team? We would like to use these data to create some comparative statistics for the final report that summarize, for instance, the number of RHY served or the outcome of any feedback surveys that might have been conducted.

Future Plans/Applying Lessons Learned

In this final set of questions, I'd like to talk about how the lessons you learned during this demonstration project might be applied in the future.

15. To start, how has this demonstration project affected plans for future funding applications?

16. How has this demonstration project affected plans for future programs or supports for rural homeless youth in your state?

17. Will any of the effective practices for serving RHY be used for other homeless youth or at–risk youth populations in your state?

18. What challenges did you face implementing your demonstration project? How did your agency overcome these challenges?

19. What advice would you give to other states considering programs for RHY?

20. What advice would you give FYSB in the operation of this demonstration project initiative? Is there anything you would have changed?

21. Is there anything else you'd like to add?