

**Youth Homeless Demonstration Program  
(YHDP)  
Coordinated Community Plan  
Worcester County**

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## Introduction

In the fall of 2022, Worcester County CoC was awarded \$2,608,992 to prevent and end youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness. Beginning on January 19, 2023, work began to develop a Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) that reflects the current challenges, needs and vision of the community. This was through a coordinated and collaborative effort by community partners throughout the county. Representation came from the realm of homelessness and housing, education, child welfare, developers and entrepreneurs, justice system, local government, and advocacy groups. Led by a project management team that consisted of the YAB and their adult partners: CoC (Central Mass Housing Alliance), the leading YYA service provider in the county (LUK Inc.), and YHDP Technical Assistance (TA) providers, the planning committee met biweekly in a mix of virtual and in-person meetings spanning January 19, 2023, through April 27, 2023. The planning committee was committed to addressing the pertinent housing needs of YYA they encountered in their work.

This CCP begins with our **Vision Statement** aimed at ending YYA homelessness in the county. We then highlight the governance chart, decision-making process, and the community partners in the **Governance and Community Partners** section. Next, we discuss in detail the most pressing gaps, barriers, and needs identified in Worcester County under our **Statement of Need**. We then highlight our **Goals, Objectives, and Actions steps developed by the** planning committee. Finally, we report on the new projects that we decided to fund: **Rapid Re-Housing (RRH)** and **Coordinated Entry Supportive Services Only (SSO)**.

This plan will be a living document and it is our intention to update it on a regular basis as the needs of the community shift and evolve.

## Acronym/Terms and Definition

Acronym/ Terms	Definition
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, People of Color
CCP	Coordinated Community Plan to prevent and end youth homelessness
CES	The Coordinated Entry System is a powerful piece of a community’s housing crisis response system as it ensures that people at risk of or experiencing homelessness can readily access and navigate housing assistance– no matter where in the community they first seek help. It is designed so that households are prioritized for and matched with the appropriate intervention as quickly as possible based on their vulnerability and severity of needs. Overall, CES aims to standardize the access, assessment, prioritization, and referral process across all agency providers in a community in order to quickly and successfully provide assistance.
Chronic Homelessness	An unaccompanied person experiencing homelessness with a disabling condition who has been homeless for a year or more OR has had at least 4 episodes of homelessness in the past three years.
CoC	A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.
CoC Lead Agency	Agency that is designated to carry out the activities of the CoC or grant including fiscal and compliance activities. The Lead Agency is tasked by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with developing a systemic response to homelessness, and to increase capacity and improve rapid re-housing (RRH) practices and performance. Central Mass Housing Alliance is the CoC lead Agency for Worcester County.
Doubled Up	A shared living arrangement where one stays with someone like a relative, a partner, a friend, family of a friend or even a stranger without being on the lease or owning the property.
Coordinated Access	A process through which individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness are provided access to housing and support services.
DCF	Massachusetts Department of Children & Families
Diversion Program	Is “an intervention designed to immediately address the needs of someone who has just lost their housing and become homeless. Diversion is a client-driven approach; its goal is to help the person or household find safe alternative housing immediately, rather than entering shelter or experiencing unsheltered homelessness. It is intended to ensure that the homelessness experience is as brief as possible, to prevent unsheltered homelessness, and to avert stays in shelter.
ES	Emergency shelter means any facility, the primary purpose of which is to provide a temporary shelter for people experiencing homelessness in general or for specific populations of the homeless and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements.
ESG	Emergency Solutions Grant is a grant program which provides individuals experiencing homelessness with basic shelter and essential supportive services. Eligible activities include funding for essential services, operations, and homeless prevention activities to emergency shelters, transitional housing, and day/night shelters.
HIC	Housing Inventory Count is a Point In Time inventory of provider programs within the CoC that provide beds and units dedicated to serve persons experiencing homelessness

HMIS	Homeless Management Information System, an information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and people at risk of homelessness.
Host Home	A private home associated with a host home program that volunteers to host youth in need of temporary housing. Host homes offer youth a safe alternative to shelters on either a short- or long-term basis and are paired with supportive services provided by a service agency.
Housing First	A homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness, and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues. Additionally, Housing First is based on the theory that client choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service participation, and that exercising that choice is likely to make a person more successful in remaining housed and improving their life.
HUD	[United States Department of] Housing and Urban Development.
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual
Sexual Orientation	A person's sexual identity stated in relation to the gender to which they are attracted; the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.
Transgender	The term transgender refers to people whose gender identity (the sense of gender that every person knows inside) or gender expression is different from their sex at birth.
Lived Expertise	A core value of this plan is Youth Voice. We believe that people with lived experience in homelessness provide invaluable expertise and that this input should be prioritized.
NOFA	Notice of Funding Availability
NOFO	Notice of Funding Opportunity
PIT	Point-in-Time Count is a nationwide count of sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness on a single date in January
Pregnant or Parenting Youth	Individuals who are age 24 years or younger who are pregnant or who are the parents or legal guardians of one or more children who are present with or sleeping in the same place as that youth parent, and where there is no person over age 24 years in the household.
PSH	Permanent Supportive Housing, long-term housing with supportive services for homeless individuals with disabilities.
PYD	Positive Youth Development, an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.
RFP	Request for Proposals
RHYA	Runaway and Homeless Youth Act are grants that provide foundational support to address youth and young adult homelessness
RRH	Rapid Re-housing, A program model that assists individuals or families who are experiencing homelessness to move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and to achieve stability in that housing through a combination of rental assistance, housing search and supportive services.

Shared Housing	Long-term living arrangement between two unrelated people who choose to live together as a way of sharing costs and building a community of support.
TA	Technical Assistance
TH-RRH	Joint Transitional Housing to Rapid Rehousing. A Joint TH and PH-RRH Component project is a project type that includes two existing program components—TH and PH-RRH—in a single project to serve individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
Transition-age Youth	Individuals between age 18 and 24 years.
Transitional Housing	Transitional housing (TH) is designed to provide homeless individuals and families with the interim stability and support to successfully move to and maintain permanent housing. Transitional housing may be used to cover the costs of up to 24 months of housing with accompanying supportive services. Program participants must have a lease (or sublease) or occupancy agreement in place when residing in transitional housing.
Trauma-Informed Care	An approach that recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others; responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.
Unaccompanied Youth	Persons who are age 24 years or younger, who are not part of a family with children and who are not accompanied by their parent or guardian during their episode of homelessness. This also includes two or more youth aged 24 years or younger who are presenting together as a family without children.
USICH	United States Interagency Council on Homelessness is an independent federal agency within the US executive branch that leads the implementation of the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness
YAB	Youth Action Board, a group of youth included in CoC decisions, particularly on policies that relate to preventing and ending youth homelessness. Each YAB member is age 24 years or younger and at least two-thirds of the YAB members are homeless or formerly homeless.
YHDP	Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, a HUD initiative to help communities drastically reduce youth homelessness through innovative strategies.
Youth	A person who is under the age of 25 years.
YYA	Youth and Young Adults

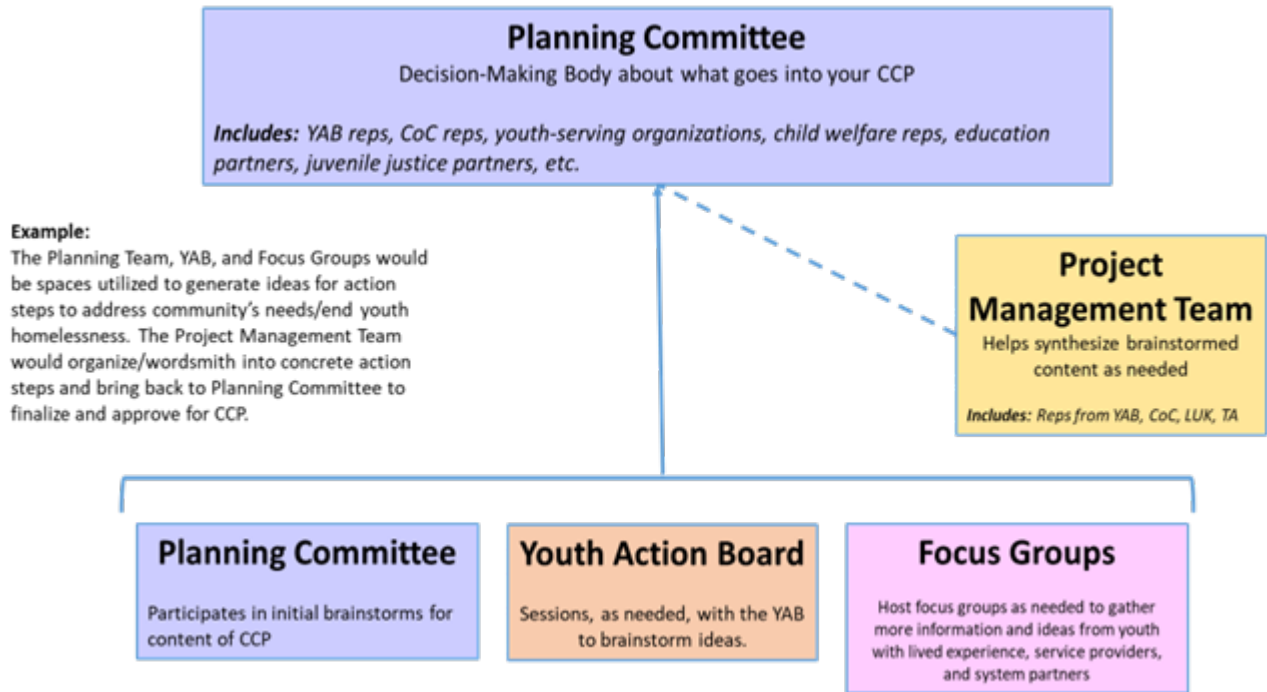
## Vision Statement

The planning committee developed our vision statement after several illuminating discussions. The YAB constructed the first draft of the vision statement and they actively contributed to adjustments made until it was finalized. The statement is what guided us as we developed our goals, action steps, and the RFP for new projects.

*Our vision is to ensure all youth and young adults in Worcester County are housed and supported through their transition into adulthood. Our community will continuously work to empower, earn trust, and center the needs and voices of YYA, uplifting of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and disabled communities. We will erase the red tape, honor autonomy, provide relief and equitable access to quality services and resources, and raise awareness of stigmas and stereotypes that would negatively impact the lives of youth.*

# Governance & Partners

Chart



The governance structure consisted of the project management team, the planning committee, Youth Action Board, and focus groups.

**Planning committee:** This consisted of all community partners including the CoC and YAB.

This was the decision-making body for the content included in this Coordinated Community Plan including our specific action plan.

**Youth Action Board:** This consisted of YYA with lived experience of housing instability and homelessness. They participated at every level of the planning and no important decision was made without YAB. Examples of YAB participation include having four active members on the Planning Committee and three members on the Project Management Team, and conducting YYA focus groups to inform the statement of need and the action plan. YAB were compensated \$22/hour and focus group participants were compensated either \$30/hour or \$35 for 1.5 hours.

**Focus groups:** This consisted of YYA, adult allies and service providers throughout the county. They generated ideas and informed the planning committee and the project management team



***Project management team:*** This consisted of representatives from YAB, CMHA (Worcester County CoC) LUK, and TA providers. This group helped manage the process, timeline, synthesized information collected and advised the planning committee.

### **CCP Decision-Making Process**

The Planning Committee agreed to adopt the consensus decision-making model to determine the content of our Coordinated Community Plan. Consensus decision-making means all Planning Committee members have decision-making power and a decision cannot move forward without ALL members feeling at least 80% comfortable before consenting to the decision.

Additional parameters with the consensus decision making model were established by the planning committee and included:

- No important decisions are made on the Planning Committee unless YAB members are present.
- In the event that the Planning Committee cannot come to consensus and needs to move forward with planning, the decision will be made by the YAB.
- In the event the YAB does not feel comfortable making the decision, a proposed decision must be approved by a 60% vote in the Planning Committee to move forward.

### **Project Selection Decision-Making Process**

The Project Management Team, including the YAB engaged in a robust process to design the local project selection procedure for determining the use of the YHDP funds. Once the Planning Committee designed the projects to be funded with YHDP, the Project Management Team collaboratively developed the content of the Request for Proposals (RFP), the Evaluation and Scoring Criteria, the project application scoring tool, and the Project Application. Once these documents were approved by the CoC Advisory Board, the Collaborative Applicant, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance (CMHA) distributed them widely via Constant Contact to greater than 600 Worcester County service provider organizations, local government, and educational system contacts. All documents were then uploaded to the CMHA website. A Project Selection committee will be formed, comprised of the YAB and community partners that are not

affiliated with organizations that are applying for YHDP funding. The Project Selection Committee will evaluate all applications using the scoring based upon the Evaluation and Scoring Criteria. Project applications will be selected using the consensus decision making process.

**Community Partners**

<b>Partner</b>	<b>Partner’s Name &amp; Role</b>	<b>Involvement</b>
Youth Action Boards	Youth Action Board (YAB)	Integral members of the planning committee and project management team. Participated actively in all meetings and conducted YYA focus groups.
Public Child Welfare Agencies	Massachusetts Department of Children and Families	Voting members of the planning committee and shared data that informed our statement of need
Continuum of Care	Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance	Integral members of the planning committee and Project management team. Helped with writing the CCP.
Local and State Government	Worcester City	Member of the planning committee
Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Providers	LUK	Integral members of the planning committee and Project management team. Adult advocate for YAB
Health, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Agencies	University Of Massachusetts Chan Medical	Member of the planning committee
	Open Sky Community Services	Members of the planning committee
ESG Program Recipients	City of Worcester	Members of the planning committee
Institute of Higher Education	University Of Massachusetts Chan Medical	Member of the planning committee
	Fitchburg State University	Member of the planning committee
Public Housing Authority	Worcester Housing Authority	Member of the planning committee
Non-Profit Youth Organization	LUK	Integral members of the planning committee and Project management team. Adult advocate for YAB

	YOU Inc.	Members of the planning committee
	African Community Education	Member of the planning committee
Juvenile Justice Agencies	Legendary Legacies	Members of the planning committee
Community Development Corporations	Worcester Community Housing Resources	Members of the planning committee
Affordable Housing Developers	Worcester Community Housing Resources	Member of the planning committee
HIV Serving Organizations	AIDS Project Worcester	Member of the planning committee
CoC Board	President of the Board	Member of the planning committee
	SMOC	Member of the planning committee
	Friendly House Inc.	Member of the planning committee
	New England Non-Profit Consultant Directory	Member of the planning committee
	Ascentria Care Alliance	Member of the planning committee

## Statement of Need

In this section we highlight the most pressing needs raised during discussions held by the YHDP planning committee, focus groups, and collaborative data collection and analysis efforts. First, we listed Worcester county's estimate for YYA at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. We then reported current housing interventions available in the county. Lastly, we organized the needs, gaps, and barriers on a table around 6 target areas. The target areas are based on the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) core outcomes (Stable Housing, Education/Employment, Permanent Connections and Social-Emotional wellbeing) and some additional areas that are important to our community. Our target areas were:

***Prevention & Diversion-*** Upstream methods to prevent YYA homelessness in Worcester County.

***Identification & Outreach-*** Strategies and resources available to identify and reach YYA experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity in Worcester County.

***Stable, Permanent Housing-*** Permanent housing options for YYA in Worcester County.

***Health & Wellbeing-*** Physical, mental, and emotional health resources for YYA throughout the county.

***Education & Employment-*** Availability of educational training which leads to attainment and retention of employment for YYA in Worcester County.

***System Transformation-*** Structural, political, and systemic factors that affect YYA in Worcester County.

We combined the Prevention & Diversion section with the Identification & Outreach on the table under the section "Target Area Needs, Gaps, and Barriers" on Page 16 because of similarities in themes.

A positive outcome that we anticipate as a result of this CCP is that our community will benefit from improved data quality. The collaborations formed in the planning process have created pathways for shared data, and enhanced outreach resources resulting from soon to be implemented SSO-CE project will improve our capacity to identify and assist youth experiencing homelessness.

## YYA Data Estimates

According to 2021 Census Data, the population of Worcester County was 862,029, and the population of Worcester City was 205,918. We used this data to inform some of our YYA data estimates.

1. At risk Unaccompanied Youth Estimate: 3,000
  - a. We conservatively estimate the number of at-risk unaccompanied youth to be 3,000 in Worcester County. According to data from RAFT, a state-wide rent assistance program, about 540 individuals ages 18-24 qualified for the program in 2022 in Worcester City. For someone to qualify for this resource, one needs to meet income requirements and have a housing crisis. Most of the people who meet eligibility are couch surfing/Doubled up or they are trying to maintain their tenancy and they have been issued a notice of eviction, usually because of running behind on rent. If we extrapolate the 540 number of the city to the population of the whole county, that is about 2,160 individual youth who have a qualifying housing crisis and are at-risk for homelessness. The population of the county is about 4 times that of the city ( $4 \times 540 = 2,160$ ). This is a conservative estimate because it is only accounting for; (1) young adults aged 18-24, (2) know about the program, and (3) are able/capable to apply. What came up in the YHDP Planning Committee is that many YYA that are in more rural towns in the county do not have the same level of access to these resources and may not be counted in this data. BIPOC, LGBTQIA and other marginalized communities are the most impacted. For example, 27% of the at-risk homeless youth in the RAFT data were Black or African American while the county consists of only 6% Black or African American population.
  - b. In addition to the RAFT data, we also explored self-reported data from K-12 and FAFSA data. We found that the number of students grades K-12 who were reported to be unaccompanied and at risk of homelessness in 2021 to be 50. According to FAFSA, self-reported college aged unaccompanied at-risk youth in 2021 was approximately 79. Young adults that were 24 y/o were not counted in

this data. In addition, housing security data isn't collected in a mainstream way in a traditional FAFSA application, therefore, this is also a conservative estimate.

2. Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness: 675 over a two-year period
  - a. The preliminary 2023 Point in Time Count indicated that there were 48 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness between the ages of 18-24 in 2023. The number was 53 in 2022.
  - b. According to the YOUth count data, 86 YYA reported to be living at a shelter and 14 to be unsheltered
  - c. For a longer view, we pulled HMIS data. In doing so, we found that 675 Unaccompanied Homeless Youth were found in HMIS over the prior 2-year period.
3. At-risk Pregnant or Parenting Youth: 2,000 per year
  - a. The Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (2018) identified “four clusters of vulnerability” that increase the risk of youth homelessness: Family substance abuse, family economic instability, early pregnancy and parenting, and sexual orientation or gender identity. The towns of Fitchburg, Leominster, and Worcester have some of the highest teen birth rates in the state, ranking 12th, 13th, and 16th, respectively (Dept. of Public Health, 2022). The state birth rate for young people ages 15-19 averaged 7.1 per 1,000 females, however, Fitchburg's rate was 14.2, Leominster's was 14.1, and Worcester's was 13.5. Using this data, we can estimate the number of pregnant and parenting youth at- risk of homelessness is conservatively 2, 000. Historically, most teen mothers are Hispanic/Latina (rate of 24.8) or Black non-Hispanic (rate of 10.0) compared to rates of 2.6 for White non-Hispanic and 1.4 for Asian non-Hispanic young people.
4. Pregnant or Parenting Youth Experiencing homelessness: 159 over a two-year period
  - a. The preliminary 2023 Point in Time Count data indicated that there were 64 Parenting homeless youth experiencing homelessness between the ages of 18-24. The number was 61 in 2022.

- b. To look at a longer time period, according to HMIS data, 159 Parenting Youth experiencing homelessness were identified in Worcester County over the prior 2-year period.

### **Needs of Unaccompanied Minors**

According to HMIS data captured from October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021, our CoC homeless response system encountered eight child-only households. While this is a small number of households, minors are incredibly vulnerable when experiencing housing instability and homelessness and require an immediate response. LUK, a prominent youth service provider in our community, currently provides host home options for minors in this situation and successfully partners with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to ensure access to support. LUK utilizes Federal RHY funding as well as state Homeless Youth Services funding to serve unaccompanied minors. Adhering to MA State Law regarding the care and custody for minors, LUK seeks to gain parental consent for placement in host homes through one or both of the funding streams noted. The CoC plans to improve partnerships with the DCF and Department of Education, including liaisons in the local school systems, through YHDP implementation efforts to increase identification of minors experiencing housing instability and swiftly provide support in response. Access points to the system, especially the new SSO-CE staff, will be educated on the current housing and service options available to minors, both locally and at the state-level and actively support minors in getting connected to the support needed.

### **Available Housing Interventions**

The following table is a list of available housing interventions in Worcester County based on the HIC. What may not be included in this count are some state-funded programs like the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) or special housing arrangements like host homes. While there are some youth-specific resources, these resources do not span the geography of the CoC, particularly having underrepresentation in rural areas of the County. Additionally, many of the transitional housing beds are not quickly accessible to youth in need of a place to stay more immediately and are not currently considered a crisis housing option.

<b>Housing Intervention</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Youth-Specific</b>
Emergency	1069	6
Safe Haven	13	0
Transitional Housing	392	76
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)	926	0
Rapid-ReHousing (RRH)	777	3
Other Permanent Housing	167	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3344</b>	<b>85</b>



## Target Area Needs, Gaps, and Barriers

### 1. Prevention & Diversion and Identification & Outreach

Prevention & Diversion and Identification & Outreach: NEEDS, GAPS, and BARRIERS	
<p><b>There are socio-political circumstances impacting youth homelessness.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systemic racism leads to a disproportionate number of Black, Indigenous, and Other Youth of Color experiencing homelessness.</li> <li>• A lack of acceptance and support from families for youth who are LGBTQIA+ leads to a disproportionate number of LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.</li> <li>• The lack of affordable housing and health care leave youth and young adults in vulnerable situations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Youth and young adults who end up in a housing crisis that leads to homelessness generally lack familial supports.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YYA are experiencing family conflict and a lack of resources to support the family.</li> <li>• There is a lack of jobs that pay a living wage, naturally occurring affordable housing, and adequate or affordable childcare.</li> <li>• YYA who are victims of sexual trafficking and exploitation in Worcester County remains high. In 2022 YOUTH count, 36 YYA said that they have exchanged sex or sexual content for needs and 46 reported that they exchanged sex or sexual content for needs in the past.</li> <li>• All this at a time when we are seeing an increase in YYA homelessness. For example, in 2022, we saw an increase of 37% of YYA who connected with street outreach compared to 2021.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Even when youth and young adults do access</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services are not accessible/effective as quick as they are needed.</li> </ul>

<p><b>support, it is difficult to navigate.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a great deal of red-tape, such as burdensome paperwork and inefficient processes.</li> <li>• Transportation is a barrier to accessing services, jobs, etc. that would prevent homelessness, especially in small towns.</li> <li>• Services are particularly difficult to access for youth and young adults in the rural areas of the county.</li> <li>• At a systemic level, service providers are not adequately compensating/supporting their frontline staff, leading to unsustainable caseloads, compassion fatigue, and burnout. This affects the quality of service and interactions between youth and staff, which prevents youth from continuing to reach out for support.</li> </ul>
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## 2. Stable, Permanent Housing

<p>Stable, Permanent Housing: NEEDS, GAPS, and Barriers</p>	
<p><b>There is a lack of youth-specific permanent housing programs in the homeless response system.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently only three rapid rehousing slots reserved for youth and young adults in our Worcester County CoC</li> <li>• No housing supports for young people in rural areas and smaller towns.</li> <li>• There are no Permanent Supportive Housing slots reserved for young adults with disabilities in our Worcester County CoC</li> </ul>
<p><b>There are no housing programs targeted to subpopulations of youth or designed for populations that disproportionately experience homelessness.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have no established safe housing options for LGBTQIA+ identified youth and young adults.</li> <li>• We have a lack of stable housing to transition young people out of other systems and into permanent housing, such as youth exiting juvenile justice and DCF.</li> <li>• For some context nearly a third (31%) of homeless youth in the county have been involved in foster care; approximately 12% of YYA have experience with the justice system. BIPOC, LGBTQIA and other marginalized</li> </ul>

	YYA are disproportionately represented in both those systems.
<b>Youth and young adults accessing the system are not accessing long-term housing options such as homeownership and wealth-building programs.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lack of knowledge of first-time homebuyer programs and Fair Housing Act mortgage programming in the county.</li> <li>• Home ownership remains elusive for many young people especially those from marginalized communities like BIPOC and disabled youth. For instance, about 90 % of homeowners in Worcester City are white.</li> </ul>

### 3. Health & Wellbeing

Health & Wellbeing: NEEDS	
<b>The difficulty of navigating health care and insurance creates barriers to accessing health services.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One thing that came up and resonated with many members of the planning committee is that certain types of insurance, specifically dental and vision, are particularly hard to access.</li> <li>• Equipment, prescription, nutritional food, and other treatment costs are not affordable for many people and particularly YYA.</li> </ul>
<b>Young people may not access health care and services due to not feeling safe or welcomed.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many healthcare providers are not representative of the population served or provide culturally grounded care.</li> <li>• Not knowing which healthcare providers are safe and affirming.</li> <li>• Language may act as a barrier for those that do not speak English or have disabilities.</li> </ul>
<b>There is a general lack of health-related resources specific for youth.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need more medical, mental/behavioral health, and substance use treatment options for young people throughout the county.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a previous survey, 30% of youth expressed a need for behavioral health services that met their needs</li> </ul>
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## 4. Education & Employment

Education & Employment: NEEDS, GAPS, and Barriers	
<b>There are financial and social barriers keeping youth and young adults experiencing housing instability and homelessness from pursuing education.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lack of financial resources, including funds to secure reliable transportation to attend school and secure childcare which act as a barrier. Oftentimes young people prioritize work so they can survive.</li> <li>• Gang involvement and safety concerns keep young people from attending school.</li> <li>• Learning differences, including learning disabilities, lead to difficulty in school and social stigma which can lead to bullying, low self-worth, lack of belonging etc.</li> <li>• Attending school while homeless/low income similarly carries social stigma and may be a barrier to education for YYA experiencing housing insecurity.</li> <li>• Achievement-based scholarships perpetuate inequitable access to higher education.</li> </ul>
<b>Young people experiencing housing instability find it difficult to get a job due to the hiring process.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs that pay a living wage often require high educational degrees or extensive experience. Additionally, there is a lack of job training/certification programs.</li> <li>• Young people who have a criminal background are not making it through the screening process.</li> <li>• The instability of their housing leads to a lack of time and flexibility to meet the requirements of a full-time job. Add that to the fact that job applications often require a home address.</li> <li>• All those factors create a vicious cycle that contributes to low income for YYA. In 2022, about 48.6% of YYA</li> </ul>

	earned income at levels that placed them under the federal poverty line.
<b>Even when a young person can get a job, there are external factors that make it difficult to keep that job.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is lack of public transportation outside of urban areas, especially transportation that operates during the hours needed.</li> <li>• Affordability and availability of childcare makes it difficult for parenting youth to secure employment.</li> <li>• Having a source of income can disqualify you from being eligible for certain programs/services even when the income is inadequate to meet needs.</li> </ul>

## 5. Systems Transformation

Systems Transformation: NEEDS	
<b>The youth homeless response system is decentralized and under-resourced.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people throughout the county have to seek out multiple ‘access points’ to find suitable housing programs.</li> <li>• While there are important practices, such as housing problem solving/diversion, happening in Worcester County, it is not happening consistently across the system.</li> <li>• There are little to no crisis housing options or permanent housing specifically for youth and young adults.</li> </ul>
<b>Staff in organizations serving youth and young adults are not compensated well leading to burn-out and turnover that negatively impacts those being served.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One thing that was voiced very enthusiastically in multiple discussions is that we need better pay for frontline workers who are often the first contact YYA have when in a crisis or while attempting to access resources.</li> <li>• Some employee programs, such as Paid Family Medical Leave, may not cover transgender health needs.</li> </ul>
<b>There should be more opportunities for leadership by people with</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations should hire CEOs, presidents, directors, etc. that are people with lived experience throughout the county.</li> </ul>

<b>lived experience across the system.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We also need more innovative ways for the Youth Action Board to be integrated into the CoC</li><li>• We also need YYA service providers throughout the county to be informed through youth voice/lived experience.</li></ul>
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## Goals, Objectives, & Action Steps

The Goals, objectives, and actions presented were developed by YHDP planning committee members. The planning committee consisted of community partners across several sectors, including the YAB, child welfare, homelessness service providers, local government, developers and others. We grounded the goals, objectives, and action steps in YHDP principles.

### YHDP Principles

**Youth Voice:** Ensuring the voices of youth and young adults with lived experience root all elements of our plan and its implementation with authentic opportunities for involvement - especially involving young people who are more often marginalized by the dominant culture. Specifically seek input from youth and young adults who identify as LGBTQIA+, have experience in the foster care system, are pregnant or parenting, are immigrant youth, have experience in the juvenile justice system and/or survivors of human trafficking and exploitation. Provide opportunities for on-going involvement for youth and young adults.

**Youth choice:** The capacity for self-determination may be a critical factor in obtaining many positive outcomes for Transition Age Youth, and is closely related to the principles of PYD. Consistent with federal youth policy, allowing youth to exercise self-determination is a youth centered approach that values youths' expressed needs, self-awareness, and community knowledge. This youth centered approach emphasizes youth choice in terms of the kind of housing youth need and the extent and nature of supports and services they access and presents alternative options for youth who avoid programs with barriers like sobriety or abstinence. The coordinated community plan must address how youth choice will be integrated into all aspects of the youth crisis response system.

**Embracing Respect and Change:** Be willing to listen and learn through this process and foster a culture that embraces change and seizes opportunities to improve our system for youth and young adults.

**Addressing Disparities:** Apply a racial and gender equity lens within the implementation process and actively address implicit bias and racial disparities in Worcester County.

**Data-driven Decision Making:** Utilize data and an active performance management framework to drive all decision making, including investment decisions and tracking progress towards outcomes. Use data to target and prioritize assistance to youth with the greatest needs.

**Housing First:** A foundational principle of the Worcester City and County CoC, Housing First means that assistance and housing are offered to youth and referrals made, including access to intensive, youth-focused case management and services, without preconditions and barriers to entry such as sobriety, criminal background, rental history, credit score or service participation requirements.

Similar to the prior sections, we organized the **goals, objectives, and actions steps** using our 6 target areas.

## Prevention & Diversion

**GOAL:** Through our community partnerships there will be a network of accessible and equitable prevention and diversion supports and strategies that meet the individual needs of youth so they do not have to enter the system in the first place.

Action Step	Responsible Entity	Timeframe
<b>Objective:</b> Improve cross-system collaboration to prevent young people from becoming homeless.		
Identify the safe prevention and diversion resources available throughout the county. This will include <b>family engagement</b> resources that works to strengthen, stabilize, or reunify YYA families.	CoC - YHDP Executive Committee	Year 1
Work with other systems of care to identify flexible funding to be used for prevention programs. Especially for YYA that don't typically qualify for resources like the undocumented YYA and minors.	CoC - YHDP Executive Committee	Year 1
Partner with other systems of care to implement strategies to prevent youth from exiting systems into housing instability or homelessness. This can be helpful for YYA and Minors involved in juvenile justice or DCF for example get opportunities for a positive <b>social and community integration</b> .	CoC	Year 2



Support all system access points to use diversion/housing problem solving when a young person is interested in finding a safe alternative and avoid homelessness.	YAB + CoC Youth Services Coordinator + Youth Specific Coordinated Entry Staff	Year 1 - 4th quarter
Connect youth to prevention and diversion resources that meet their needs such as financial assistance, crisis counseling, etc. These resources will contribute to <b>Positive Youth Development (PYD)</b> and put YYA on a path to housing security.	CoC - YHDP Executive Committee	Year 1
Provide continuing education to partners about prevention and diversion resources available.	CoC + YAB	Year 1
<b>Objective:</b> Promote systemic change to prevent young people from experiencing housing instability and homelessness		
Organize legislative and local advocacy to address barriers to affordable housing development, LGBTQ+ rights, systemic racism, and access to healthcare.	CoC Public Education/Advocacy staff + YAB	Year 2
Educate the public on adverse factors impacting young people/Minors and their experiences with housing instability.	YAB + CoC	Year 1

## Identification & Outreach

**GOAL:** There will be a common and collaborative structure of marketing and outreach with multiple points of entry that includes and supports frontline workers and people with lived experience in creating a trustworthy system that will reach youth across all subpopulations in both rural and urban areas. This will ensure equitable access and awareness of resources so that youth can feel safe self-identifying when they need help.

Action Step	Responsible Entity	Timeframe
<b>Objective:</b> Expand identification and outreach strategies across the whole CoC geography.		
Expand street outreach programs for youth by either increasing staff to existing programs or funding additional outreach programs. This effort will increase awareness of available services to unsheltered YYA and connect them to those services.	CoC	Year 3
Seek additional funding sources for Street Outreach especially in rural areas and small towns. Sufficient funding will help in the identification and outreach of unsheltered YYA in small towns and rural areas.	CoC	Year 2
Utilize a workgroup or case conferencing to strengthen partnerships with child welfare, juvenile justice, and the education systems to better identify young people in vulnerable situations that are at-risk of discharging to housing instability or homelessness. This strategy seeks to improve identification of foster-involved youth.	CoC	Year 1
Use YHDP funds to create a youth Coordinated Entry project with multiple staff positions to cover each sub-region of the CoC to make access to housing resources more accessible to YYA and unsheltered youth across the CoC geography.	CoC YHDP Executive Committee	Year 1
<b>Objective:</b> Make the homeless response system more accessible to young people seeking services.		
Create youth-specific crisis housing options, such as a youth emergency shelter.	CoC	Year 3
Partner with existing adult-oriented emergency shelters to create safe spaces within their shelters for young adults experiencing homelessness and identify a shelter staff person to act as an advocate/liaison for young people accessing the shelter.	CoC Shelter & Outreach Workgroup + YAB	Year 1
Establish more Coordinated Entry access points by connecting the youth Coordinated Entry staff with youth-serving organizations and other spaces including virtual spaces where young people experiencing housing instability may spend time.	CoC	Year 1

## Stable, Permanent Housing

**GOAL:** Youth and young adults have the autonomy and tools to access a wide choice of non-discriminatory, sustainable, flexible affordable housing reflecting their individualized need, including location-preference. This access should come with consistent, **trauma-informed** support to navigate housing systems and community partnerships that push for better access and increase in affordable housing units in our community which will lead to permanent housing stability.

Action Step	Responsible Entity	Timeframe
<b>Objective:</b> Increase the supply of stable, permanent housing opportunities for young people.		
Use YHDP grant to fund rapid rehousing specifically for youth and young adults to provide financial assistance and services to young people experiencing homelessness.	CoC YHDP Executive Committee	Year 1
Collaborate with the Coordinated Entry System and existing housing programs in the Continuum of Care to prioritize some existing housing resources for youth and young adults.	CoC	Year 1
Explore strategies like homeless set asides or homeless preferences for subsidized or income-restricted housing for young adults in need of long-term housing support like YYA with disabilities.	CoC	Year 2
Pursue affordable housing development to increase affordable housing stock in the CoC geography and ensure some affordable housing is dedicated to young adults experiencing homelessness.	YAB + CoC Landlord Liaison Workgroup	Year 1
<b>Objective:</b> Ensure there is a diverse variety of housing options for young people.		
Establish connections to organizations experienced in providing services to special subpopulations, such as LGBTQ Asylum Task Force and Worcester Health Center, to help design new or modify existing service models for LGBTQIA+ youth and youth who are undocumented or immigrants to ensure models are culturally responsive.	CoC + YAB	Year 2

Make shared housing available to young people being served in YHDP rapid rehousing by creating opportunities for program participants who want to find roommates to meet each other and provide mediation/conflict resolution support as needed.	YAB + YHDP Executive Committee	Year 1
Convene a workgroup to explore and potentially pursue innovative programming, such as direct cash transfer programs and tiny home communities.	YAB + CoC	Year 2
Connect with local first-time homebuyers programs and Fair Housing Act programming to regularly provide an educational workshop to young people in permanent housing programming to learn about opportunities for long-term housing stability.	YHDP Executive Committee	Year 3

## Education & Employment

**GOAL:** Community organizations supporting all young adults in developing an education and employment plan of their choice that addresses and eliminates barriers and provides opportunities. Develop a strong network of professionals and peers that can support the young adult in achieving their aspirations.

Action Step	Responsible Entity	Timeframe
<b>Objective:</b> Reduce barriers to access education and sustainable employment opportunities.		
Provide financial assistance and support to obtain documentation (like birth certificate, ID, etc.) necessary for obtaining educational and employment opportunities, like certification programs.	YHDP Projects	Year 1
Build partnerships with potential employers to increase their wages and hire young people by expanding wage-subsidy and workforce development programs.	CoC	Year 2
Work with education programs that can lead to higher-paying jobs to be more accessible to young people experiencing housing instability by reducing paperwork burden and helping youth navigate financial assistance.	CoC	Year 3

Participate in local advocacy to make sure there are more affordable public transportation options across Worcester County.	CoC	Year 1
YHDP projects will provide transportation to their program participants and support participants to have their own transportation with the goal of getting and keeping employment or education opportunities, this may include partnering with existing programs that offer transportation.	YHDP Projects	Year 1
Ensure young people are connected to support for applying for FAFSA, grants, scholarships, and loans through existing programs in the schools.	YHDP Projects and CoC	Year 1
<b>Objective:</b> Help young people increase their income and financial wellbeing.		
Identify financial advising, tax filing, and credit repair programs in the community that youth-serving programs can connect their participants with and/or partner with these programs to provide workshops or clinics in these topic areas specialized for youth experiencing housing instability.	CoC and YHDP Projects	Year 1
Support young people to find legal support so they can establish independent status in order to access benefit programs. This can be beneficial to juvenile justice involved youth for example	CoC and YHDP Projects	Year 1

## Health & Wellbeing

**GOAL:** Youth and young adults experiencing housing insecurity/homelessness throughout Worcester County will have equitable and sustainable access to choose local, timely, individualized and **trauma-informed** support services and resources to attain and maintain physical (inclusive of dental and reproductive), mental, and emotional health.

Action Step	Responsible Entity	Timeframe
<b>Objective:</b> Improve the experience of accessing healthcare services.		

Educate healthcare providers to provide culturally responsive, <b>trauma-informed care</b> . This can help service providers better serve BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, Minors, and other marginalized YYA. This level of care will also contribute to <b>PYD</b> for those marginalized communities.	CoC and YHDP Projects	Year 2
Provide financial assistance to cover healthcare costs such as copays, prescriptions, nutritional food, and health-related costs for YYA and minors.	YHDP Projects	Year 1
Help young people and particularly pregnant and parenting youth to connect with affordable health programs, like gyms, nutrition programs, and other health and wellness programs. These health and wellbeing programs are critical to building <b>PYD</b> .	YHDP Projects	Year 2
Work with healthcare providers to use translation services for non-English speakers.	Coc and YHDP Projects	Year 1
Ensure housing programs and services are accommodating of support-animals and pets.	YHDP Projects	Year 1
<b>Objective:</b> Increase the amount of health-focused resources for young people.		
Take inventory of all existing affordable medical, mental and behavioral health, and substance use treatment options and ensure all youth-serving programs have information about these resources.	CoC	Year 1
Support existing youth-serving programs in building capacity for staffing models that include specialized roles for mental health professionals.	YHDP Projects	Year 3
Identify funding to create additional health services, like trauma therapy (for YYA that have been victims of sexual trafficking and exploitation for instance and housing insecurity) .This will contribute to <b>social and community integration</b> for YYA to meaningfully participate in community activities.	YHDP Projects	Year 2

## Systems Transformation

**GOAL:** Develop a YYA homeless response system that is collaborative, active, innovative, ever evolving and ensures staffing is inclusive of individuals with lived experience. The system will decrease barriers by centering equity inclusive of geography and YYA voice, serving as a leader in removing societal hate and inspiring acceptance.

Action Step	Responsible Entity	Timeframe
<b>Objective:</b> Ensure youth and young adults with lived experience of homelessness have decision-making power in system planning.		
Integrate the Youth Action Board in CoC planning activities.	CoC and YAB	Year 1
Develop a strategy to incentivize organizations to equitably hire people with lived experience at all levels of the organization, including executive leadership.	CoC	Year 2
Support the Youth Action Board to develop a sustainability plan.	CoC	Year 1
Provide anti-adultism training to CoC members to support authentic collaboration with young people.	CoC and YAB	Year 1
<b>Objective:</b> Advance racial equity in the youth homeless response system.		
Provide training on “Social Identities and Systems of Oppression” and “Equity and Power Sharing” to YHDP program staff.	CoC and True Colors	Year 1
System regularly monitors demographics to ensure equity is being implemented across all operations and makes program changes when disparities are discovered.	CoC	Year 1
<b>Objective:</b> Improve the interpersonal experience of youth and young adults receiving services from the homeless response system.		
All access points, organizations, and programs serving youth and young adults will prioritize building trust and cultivating connections with YYA by receiving <b>trauma-informed care</b>	YHDP Projects	Year 3

<p>training, hiring peer supports, and hiring staff that reflect the population served (people of color, LGBTQ+ identified, people with lived experience).</p>		
<p>Assist youth-serving programs to improve work conditions by paying frontline staff better, providing supportive supervision, and promoting self-care and professional development so staff will avoid burn-out that often results in compassion fatigue, adultism, and overall harmful experiences for youth. Programs and services are delivered in a light handed, non-judgmental manner that meets young people where they are.</p>	<p>YHDP Executive Committee</p>	<p>Year 3</p>
<p>Develop and implement a continuous quality improvement process for YHDP Projects.</p>	<p>YHDP Projects</p>	<p>Year 1</p>



## **YHDP Funding Allocations**

The needs and gaps identified during the community planning process informed our decision for new projects. The two target areas that the new projects will be addressing are *Identification and Outreach* and *Stable, Permanent Housing*.

### *Identification & Outreach*

YYA face barriers navigating the system to access resources. Services are not as quick as they are needed and red tape and burdensome paperwork creates additional challenges. In addition, services and resources remain inaccessible to youth in smaller towns and rural areas. It was clear system navigation and case management support that covers the whole county could work to bridge those gaps.

### *Stable Permanent Housing*

When analyzing available housing interventions, it was evident that there is a lack of youth-specific permanent housing programs in our homeless response system. Currently, there are only three rapid rehousing units and zero permanent supportive housing units in Worcester County CoC. Therefore, stable, permanent housing came up as a priority during the planning.

# New Projects

## Project Description: Rapid Re-Housing

Rapid Rehousing-Permanent Housing	
<b>Project Type</b>	Rapid Rehousing (RRH)
<b>Summary of Project and Supportive Services Description</b>	<p>This project prioritizes a quick transition out of homelessness and into permanent housing by providing up to 36 months (with a special YHDP activity) of housing and supportive services. RRH will offer housing either with the young person as the leaseholder or with the agency as the lease holder in a master lease.</p> <p>Assistance for youth households (individuals and families) with rapid rehousing will be provided by helping them locate and move into permanent housing using financial assistance and housing focused services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Two lease structure options to meet the specific needs of each participant:</li> <li>● Lease between the participant and property owner (using tenant-based rental assistance)</li> <li>● Lease in the name of a sponsor agency, recipient, or subrecipient which then subleases to participant (using leasing or sponsor-based rental assistance) in circumstances where the participant has high tenant screening barriers preventing them from obtaining housing</li> <li>● Shared housing when participants are interested in having roommates</li> <li>● Staffing models that include staff specialized in landlord engagement and housing search, case management, peer supports, and grant management/administration.</li> <li>● Participant-driven, individualized financial assistance and services, outlined in the Key Service section below.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Services</b></p> <p>Upon receipt of referral, project staff will provide youth with optional, individualized support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Searching for and identifying different accessible/suitable permanent housing options (e.g., including roommates) available.</li> <li>● Navigate application process, leasing signing and move in</li> <li>● Rental assistance</li> <li>● Case management</li> <li>● Peer support</li> <li>● Tenant’s education (tenants’ rights, understanding leases, etc.)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life skills support (tailored to various neuro-types) – including activities associated with daily living, money management, health management.</li> <li>• Financial assistance until they find stability. Examples of financial assistance: rental assistance, moving costs, first/last security deposit, furniture, household items, transportation, car maintenance/gas, childcare, job training fees, utility deposits, internet, food, healthcare co-pays, cell phones, education costs, vital documents, legal fees</li> <li>• Connections to community support: substance abuse treatment (e.g., peer recovery coaches, affordable mental health clinics, mainstream benefits, FAFSA navigation, furniture banks, food pantries, clothing, fuel assistance, affordable mental health care clinics, tax filing support.</li> </ul>
<b>Target population and number served</b>	Youth and Young Adult under 25. Projected to serve approximately 60 youth annually
<b>Target number of housing units</b>	Approximately 44
<b>Staffing</b>	Projects should have adequate staffing, including case management and peer navigation. Staff to client ratio should be 1:15 at any given time
<b>Projected Cost</b>	Approximately \$997,000 per year

**Project Description: Coordinated Entry supportive Services Only**

Coordinated Entry	
<b>HUD CoC Project Type</b>	Supportive Services Only
<b>Project summary</b>	<p>Funding for this project will support the hiring of three Coordinated Entry Specialists, hired to ensure youth and young adults are connected to housing and supportive services through the Coordinated Entry System. If the youth chooses, specialists will be expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engage youth using culturally appropriate, <b>trauma-informed</b> practices to build trust, emphasize autonomy, and communicate support and resources available.</li> <li>● Identify and triage for crisis needs.</li> <li>● Assess youth for Coordinated Entry System if immediate need is not resolved.</li> <li>● Assess housing needs and preferences, including a youth’s interest in shared housing</li> <li>● Assist youth with collecting and storing identification and housing documents.</li> <li>● Ensure youth have access to mainstream benefits and resources, such as SNAPS,</li> <li>● Match, refer and provide youth with a warm handoff to housing and resources in the community.</li> <li>● Resources: transportation, crisis and mental health supports, family mediation and education, financial literacy (reducing debt, saving, investing, understanding credit scores)</li> <li>● Conduct outreach to youth using multiple, innovative methods to reach as many youths as possible.</li> <li>● Build and expand existing partnerships with organizations (juvenile justice, parole, schools, etc.) that can identify and connect youth to Coordinated Entry staff, housing, and resources.</li> <li>● Educate community partners and businesses who interact with youth (hospitals, urgent care clinics, libraries, coffeeshops) on who to contact if they encounter an at-risk or homeless youth, and what resources are available.</li> </ul>
<b>Needs met</b>	Service spans the entirety of Worcester County to include Worcester, North and South counties, smaller towns and rural areas.

<b>Target Population</b>	Minors and Transitional aged youth under 25 years of age.
<b>Target number of youth served</b>	150 annually
<b>Staffing</b>	3
<b>Projected cost</b>	Approximately \$185,000 per year

## Summary

In summary, Worcester County CoC was awarded \$2,608,992 to prevent and end youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness. Beginning on January 19, 2023, we started to develop a Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) that reflects the current challenges, needs and vision of the community. Led by a project management team that consisted of the YAB and their adult partners: CoC (Central Mass Housing Alliance), the leading YYA service provider in the county (LUK Inc.), and YHDP Technical Assistance (TA) providers, the planning committee met regularly and were committed to address the housing needs of YYA in Worcester County. We identified needs facing YYA in the county, developed a **Vision Statement** aimed at ending YYA homelessness, a **governance structure**, and **goals, objectives, and action steps**. The community decided to fund RRH and CE-SSO with YHDP funds. This plan will be a living document and it is our intention to adapt it on a regular basis as the needs of the community change.

## Signatures

### HUD Required Signatures

HUD requires that representatives of the Continuum of Care, Public Child Welfare Agency, a Local Government Agency, and the Youth Action Board, to participate in the planning process, approve the coordinated community plan, and provide a signature verifying their approval. The purpose is to ensure broad partnership and shared ownership in a program that crosses multiple sectors and jurisdictions.

We, the representatives of these entities, verify that our agencies have participated in the planning process, reviewed this document, and approve of Worcester County Coordinated Community Plan to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness.

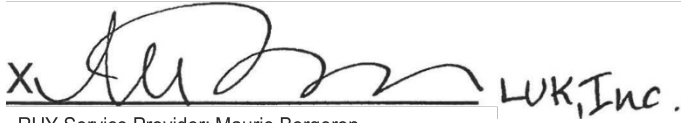
We commit to supporting the implementation of this plan. We will work to ensure that its values and principles are upheld and that we remain reliable partners to the many community partners who have invested so much time and effort in its creation. Together we can end youth and young adult homelessness in Worcester County.

x   
Worcester County CoC: Christine O'Connell



City of Worcester

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 LUK, Inc.

RHY Service Provider: Maurie Bergeron



Worcester County YAB: Ariana Casasanta