

Evidence Summary

Shelter and Housing Interventions for Youth Homelessness

November 2019

Highlights

- ▶ There is an **urgent need for reliable evidence** overall on shelter and housing models for youth.
- ▶ Supportive housing interventions show **promising results for increasing housing stability**, but we do not know whether these results can be sustained.
- ▶ There is some evidence that transitional housing programs **may support independent living in the long term**, but the evidence is limited and two evaluations showed many young people **exiting programs before completion**.

Overview

The **Voices of Youth Count** initiative's systematic evidence review is the most comprehensive synthesis of evaluation evidence on programs and practices related to youth homelessness to date.¹ This document is one in a series of seven topical evidence summaries derived from the longer evidence review brief. We screened many studies and only included those that met specific criteria. Here, we summarize evaluations of shelter and housing interventions for youth experiencing homelessness. The evidence here includes only impact evaluations designed to assess measurable changes in outcomes due to specific programs and practices. Other kinds of evaluation, including assessments of program implementation, processes, or participant experiences, will be summarized and reported elsewhere.

Shelter and housing interventions provide residential facilities or rental assistance along with other services. Despite the substantial policy focus on shelter and housing interventions to address youth homelessness, few studies of shelter and housing interventions for

youth met our inclusion criteria. Of the 62 studies of 51 programs in this evidence review, eight evaluated seven shelter and housing programs. Six programs were evaluated in the U.S. and one in Canada. No effectiveness studies of crisis shelters, basic center programs, rapid rehousing, or host homes met our inclusion criteria.

Evidence Summary

Evidence suggests that providing low-barrier housing with support services tailored to individual youth needs can lead to positive outcomes. Importantly, however, most of these evaluations did not continue to measure housing stability after youth exited the programs. This limits our understanding of how well these programs prepare young people for longer-term stability without direct housing assistance. A few evaluations of transitional housing programs, all of which were non-experimental designs (low in rigor), found improvements across a range of outcome areas, such as well-being, positive connections, education and employment, and health.

1. For detailed information about our evidence review methods and findings, please refer to Morton, M.H., Kugley, S., Epstein, R.A., & Farrell, A.F. (2019). *Missed Opportunities: Evidence on Interventions for Addressing Youth Homelessness*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

These evaluation designs involve high risk for bias and generally lacked follow up beyond the period of transitional housing, and there is little evidence as to whether or not these programs helped youth transition

into sustained housing stability. Additionally, among the two evaluations for which follow-up data were available, the rates of youth leaving the programs early were high (50-80%).

Included Studies of Shelter and Housing Interventions

Description	Study design*	Results
At Home/Chez Soi (Kozloff et al., 2016)		
A “housing first” intervention for adults with mental illness—24-month rental subsidy with wrap-around services tailored to need—evaluated with young adults (18-24).	Randomized evaluation (n=156)	Improved housing stability; reduced employment; no effects on a range of wellbeing and service utilization outcomes.
Community Unity Project (CUP) (Duncan et al., 2008)		
One-year residential transitional housing program for young mothers (18-21) with life skills classes, counseling, GED or vocational training, and parenting classes.	Pre-post evaluation, no comparison group (n=145)*	No overall discernable improvements in outcomes.
Transition House (Jones, 2011)		
A transitional housing program for former foster youth (17-19) unlikely to return to their biological families and lacking a permanency plan. Included education, independent living, and programming in a supervised environment.	A non-randomized evaluation comparing youth who chose to participate in transitional housing to those who chose other living arrangements (n=106)*	Improved housing stability, but youth in other living arrangements more likely to live independently at follow-up; reduced unemployment, substance use, and criminal justice contacts; no effects on savings or independent living skills.
Daybreak’s transitional housing program (Pierce et al., 2014)		
Transitional housing for homeless youth (18-21) involving progression from more to less structured living arrangements and a range of programs and services tailored to youth needs.	Pre-post evaluation, no comparison group (n=174)*	Improvements in a range of measures of positive connections, education, employment, and wellbeing. More positive outcomes associated with longer involvement (18 months).
Phoenix Youth Programs’ supportive housing (Kisely et al., 2008)		
Supportive housing—involving semi-independent living with residential supervision, counseling, and support—for homeless youth (16-24).	Post-test-only comparison between youth that used supportive housing and those who only used drop-in center services (n=45)*	Improvements in stable housing, education, and general health; reductions in emotional problems and substance use; no significant differences for employment.
New York/New York State-Initiated Third Supportive Housing Program (NY/NY III) (Lim et al., 2017)		
Program for former foster youth (18-25) including affordable housing and access to supportive services, including case management, job training, education support, and connections to health services.	A matched comparison evaluation of eligible youth who participated in supportive housing to those who did not using administrative data (n=895)	Improved housing stability and reduced STI rates.

Description

Study design*

Results

Bridge, Inc.'s Independent Living Demonstration Project (Upshur, 1986a; 1986b)

A structured 6-8 month pilot residential program for homeless youth (16-17) with counseling, goal setting, and support for activities such as assistance finding jobs and pursuing education.

A non-randomized evaluation comparing youth in the independent living program to those in other living arrangements (n=31)*

Improved self-concept, stable living, and education and employment outcomes; reduced defensiveness; no significant changes in personal control.

* All evaluations, even the most rigorous, have some risk of bias. Bias is especially likely when an evaluation lacks a credible comparison group to assess what would have happened without the intervention. Without such a comparison group, we can't know if changes occur (for example) because youth got older, they were already motivated to improve, or due to other influences in the young person's life. We indicate evaluations as "high risk of bias" if they lack a "usual services" comparison or control group, or if the group was created without specific efforts (like statistical matching) to create comparable groups. Without similar comparison groups, findings are interpreted with additional caution. In some cases, it is necessary to rely on less rigorous studies to inform interventions while we await additional evidence.

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