

WHITE PAPER

The RHY Impact Study

Moving from crisis to independence:

The characteristics, quality, and impact of specialized settings for runaway and homeless youth



NYU

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Acknowledgments

We are indebted to the organizations, program staff, administrators, youth, and stakeholders who participated in the RHY Impact Study, from which this white paper has been crafted. Their generosity of time, spirit, and wisdom shaped insights that we hope will advance research, policy, and practice for runaway and homeless youth and the settings that serve them and fill in some gaps in our understanding of what is required for organizations and communities to support this highly vulnerable population of youth and emerging adults.

We are grateful for our research and thought partner, the Coalition for Homeless Youth, and for the support and guidance from the William T. Grant Foundation, the project's sponsor, which enabled us to conduct the research study described in this report. Moreover, none of this work would have come to fruition without the efforts of our research team at the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research (CDUHR) at the New York University (NYU) Rory Meyers College of Nursing and the Coalition for Homeless Youth.

We are grateful for the time and insights from stakeholders interviewed for this white paper related to policy and practice implications:

Nina Aledort, Associate Commissioner, New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Darla Bardine, Executive Director, National Network for Youth

Nancy Downing, Executive Director, Covenant House New York

Valerie Douglas, Director of Counseling and Runaway/Homeless Youth Services, The Center for Youth Services

Andy Gilpin, Associate Executive Director, CAPTAIN Youth Services

Valerie Paul, Director of Youth Services, HONOR

Francis Aponte-Veras, Director, Streetwork Project, Safe Horizon

We would like to give special thanks to our colleague, Craig Hughes, board member of the Coalition for Homeless Youth, for providing expert guidance and feedback, and to Amanda Applegate, for editorial assistance.

Last, we wish to send out special thanks to Judy Schoenberg, who took the lead in crafting this white paper, interviewing stakeholders, and distilling study findings.

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This white paper can be cited as follows: Gwadz, M., Freeman, R., Cleland, C. M., Ritchie, A.S., Leonard, N.R., Hughes, C., Powlovich, J., & Schoenberg, J. (2017). *Moving from crisis to independence: The characteristics, quality, and impact of specialized settings for runaway and homeless youth*. New York: Center for Drug Use and HIV Research, NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing.

Disclaimer: Opinions and interpretation of study findings presented below do not necessarily represent the views of the William T. Grant Foundation, Coalition for Homeless Youth, or the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research, NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing.



An Invitation

This white paper is intended for the community of those who care about and work with runaway and homeless youth (RHY), including service providers, practitioners, administrators, program planners, policymakers, and other stakeholders. By disseminating findings from a rigorous research study, this white paper will advance what is known about the organizations that serve this vulnerable population and how these settings can best support the overall wellbeing and development of RHY as they transition out of crisis and toward self-sufficiency. We hope to inform future program development, advocacy, policy, funding, and evaluation efforts.

“ We have to move them from crisis to independence. So, I think the hope is that collectively, as a staff that we help a young person move on in this world. ”

— RHY service provider



Executive Summary

RHY, also called unaccompanied youth, are young people who have run away from or been forced to leave their homes, who reside without parental/guardian supervision in temporary situations, places not intended for habitation, or emergency shelters. Although precise figures are lacking, as many as 2.8 million youth are estimated to be homeless in the U.S. each year (Cooper, 2006; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). Many of these young people return home within a week, but a substantial proportion remain out-of-home for substantial periods of time or even permanently (Tevendale, Comulada, & Lightfoot, 2011). The federal definition of RHY includes those between 12 and 24 years of age, although some funding is restricted to those under the age of 22 years, and states may have their own particular age ranges and thresholds for RHY and RHY service eligibility.

It is well documented that RHY experience high rates of trauma, chronic stress, and abuse through their lifespans, but only minimal involvement in the settings and systems that typically protect youth, such as school and family. Moreover, youth homelessness occurs within a larger context of systemic and structural influences including structural and institutional racism, poverty, and discrimination in the housing and job markets—all of which can result in inequality in health and developmental outcomes among these young people. Insufficient, high-barrier, and austere public benefits systems only add to the difficulties young people face in establishing stable lives. Of particular concern, youth of color and LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the population of RHY, and they face even greater challenges on the path to self-sufficiency compared to their white, heterosexual, and gender normative RHY peers.

This constellation of risk factors, combined with a lack of buffering resources, not surprisingly, places RHY at risk for increased involvement with disciplinary systems (such as police and criminal courts) and poor psychosocial outcomes.

In response to the above-mentioned issues, a network of specialized settings has been developed to locate, engage, house, and treat this highly vulnerable population. Yet almost no research to date has been conducted to understand these settings, including their best practices, which characteristics of these settings best promote positive youth development, what factors impede or promote settings' effectiveness, and how settings can be improved. This serious gap in our knowledge has impeded settings' ability to implement model programs and new approaches for treating RHY, as well as optimal public policies to support them. The RHY Impact Study was a research project designed to address this serious gap in the research literature and provide valuable information to the community of providers and policymakers dedicated to this population of young people in need of the highest quality specialized services and support.

The risk factors that RHY face are apparent and well described in the research literature, and they are well known to RHY service providers. Yet what is less frequently documented is that RHY demonstrate substantial resilience in the course of adapting to being out-of-home. For example, leaving home is often a coping response (and often the best coping response), and surviving on one's own after being thrown out of one's home or leaving home requires fortitude and ingenuity. Moreover, "perceived resilience," that is, the sense of oneself as able to successfully overcome life's challenges, may be particularly vital for RHY. In fact, two separate research studies have shown that self-perceived resilience is linked to reduced suicidal ideation and fewer life threatening behaviors, such as attempted suicide, among RHY (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011; Rew et al., 2001). Thus, perceived resilience can be vital for these young people.

Yet, these disrupted family relationships and experiences of abuse and trauma—sometimes at the hands of institutions intended to help them—lead to a population of young people that is wary of professional adults, hesitant to engage in services, and adjusted to functioning autonomously and/or moving from crisis to crisis. Not surprisingly, trust and relationships do not always come easily to RHY. As a result, RHY are challenging for organizations to locate, engage, retain, and serve. This white paper highlights the importance of specialized settings and treatment approaches tailored to RHY, to help RHY survive and become their best selves.

The RHY Impact Study focused on settings (that is, social service and housing organizations and/or programs within organizations) that serve RHY across a large and diverse geographical region, New York State, including settings in rural, suburban, and urban areas. These settings, by and large, employed a strengths-based perspective called the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach. Consistent with this approach is the belief that youth homelessness is not destiny, and that, with services and support such as safety-net interventions; access to public assistance; and longer-term housing options, education opportunities, and workforce readiness skills training and job placement, young people are able to heal from severe trauma and go on to lead healthy lives.

Yet how exactly do programs within these settings bring RHY from crisis to independence? We address this question in this document—from the perspectives of staff, program administrators, RHY themselves, and other experts.

Purpose

Settings that serve RHY have existed for decades, but to date we know little about how these specialized organizations influence RHY's behavioral and psychosocial functioning or which specific characteristics of these settings promote young people's positive development. Yet settings for RHY are commonly called upon to demonstrate the positive effects of the specialized services they provide. Thus understanding what works in these settings, as well as barriers that settings experience and gaps that remain, is critical. The RHY Impact Study sought to extend the body of past research on settings, which has largely focused on single organizations or individual programs for RHY (or a small set of organizations), and study a range of diverse settings across a large geographical area, New York State. Thus from 2013 to 2016 a pioneering research study was conducted by the New York University Rory Meyers College of Nursing in collaboration with the Coalition for Homeless Youth and with support from the William T. Grant Foundation.



Part 1. The RHY Impact Study

Evidence to Advance Research and Practice

To address the research questions described above, we conducted a mixed methods research study, using quantitative and qualitative research methods, focused on long-term settings for RHY; namely, drop-in centers (DICs), transitional living programs (TLPs), and settings with two or more such programs, called dual/multi-program settings in this study. As described in more detail in published research articles (cited below and available from principal investigator Marya Gwadz), the RHY Impact Study focused on twenty-nine randomly selected diverse organizations in New York State and assessed program quality and RHY outcomes using a multi-pronged strategy that included observing programs in action; interviewing program administrators; interviewing staff; and focus groups, qualitative interviews, and structured assessments with RHY. This comprehensive assessment approach was useful in that it allowed the study to gather information about what works in settings, and gaps that remain, from diverse perspectives—thereby increasing the validity of study findings because critical aspects of settings were assessed from multiple perspectives and data sources. Importantly, the study includes the voices and experiences of staff who are experts on the settings in which they work and the voices of youth themselves, mirroring the youth-centered approach that RHY service providers strive to employ. This white paper will highlight key findings from the RHY Impact Study.

Specifically, this white paper will provide

- > evidence that the quality of settings is positive, overall, with some variability;
- > evidence for the importance of these specialized settings, which are uniquely qualified and positioned to serve this complex population of young people;
- > a description of struggles and challenges evident in all programs and the characteristics that allow some settings to overcome these challenges ;
- > evidence for the main, critical, specific ways these settings help young people ;
- > information for service providers on how to improve their programs and systems; and
- > implications from the research to assist decision makers as they develop policy and legislation questions that warrant attention in future research,

We include case studies throughout this white paper to highlight key themes that emerged in the study analyses. To protect youths' confidentiality, the case studies are composites of a number of young people, rather than descriptions of single individuals. Nonetheless, the themes presented in the cases were common among the youth in the sample. Similarly, we maintain the confidentiality of the settings that participated in the RHY Impact Study; we do not provide details that would allow the identification of the settings.

We hope this white paper will serve as a useful tool for advocacy and fundraising, as RHY stakeholders leverage new knowledge, find documentation of their successful efforts, and strategically coordinate activities.

Research Background

About the Settings in the RHY Impact Study

Given their disrupted family relationships and the adverse impact of abuse, trauma, and neglect on RHY's interest in engaging with professional adults and settings, population-specific approaches are needed to effectively meet RHY's needs and work with them productively. Over the past few decades, a network of specialized settings, and programs within settings, has emerged to locate, engage, shelter, and work with RHY, backed by federal, state, and/or local funds. These include the basic center program (providing services to younger RHY for 30 days or less), crisis programs (providing services for 30 days or less), as well as long-term programs including TLPs and DICs (New York State Office of Children & Family Services, 2014). TLPs are supported residences where RHY can live up to 18 months (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2016). DICs tend to provide more basic or "low threshold" services, giving youth a safe space to gather, rest, socialize, and obtain basic services (showers, food, laundry) and counseling, health services, and street outreach. The overall goal of settings is to prepare youth for successful independent living (The National Network for Youth, 2015).

RHY providers report that funding levels for RHY programs are chronically inadequate to meet their needs, and in particular, housing units available to RHY are insufficient. Further, funding levels are not always stable or predictable over time (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2016). These fiscal factors and constraints complicate settings' efforts to meet the needs of this vulnerable population.

The Positive Youth Development Approach

In many RHY settings the PYD approach is the accepted framework guiding programming. PYD is a strengths-based approach that encourages autonomy and resilience among youth and emphasizes the importance of youths' investment in their own goals (Eccles & Appleton-Gootman, 2002). In keeping with PYD as a strengths-based approach, youth are seen as assets for their communities, as opposed to as "problems." PYD practices inform overall organizational approaches in RHY settings, as well as specific program offerings for youth. Settings that receive funding allocated from the federal RHY Act are typically guided by PYD principles; in keeping with PYD, settings emphasize physical and psychological safety, belonging and membership, self-worth and social contribution, independence and control over one's life, and closeness in interpersonal relationships (Family & Youth Services Bureau, 2017). The RHY Impact Study used a model called the Youth Program Quality Assessment to assess settings, as we describe in more detail below, which is heavily grounded in, and consistent with, the PYD approach.



Research Goals and Methodology

The specific goals of the RHY Impact Study were as follows:

1. Describe the overall quality of settings for RHY, grounded in the Youth Program Quality Assessment model.
2. Explore how settings foster good outcomes among RHY by exploring whether the quality of settings plays a role in positive or adaptive RHY outcomes in a number of key areas.
3. Uncover other ways that RHY settings influence the wellbeing and development of these young people.
4. Elicit perspectives on what types of factors serve as facilitators of or barriers to setting quality and effectiveness, including aspects of the larger context (including other organizations and the larger economic environment).
5. Elicit expert opinion on strategies to improve settings based on study findings and gaps that remain, with an emphasis on identifying best practices leading to positive outcomes.



Design and Sample

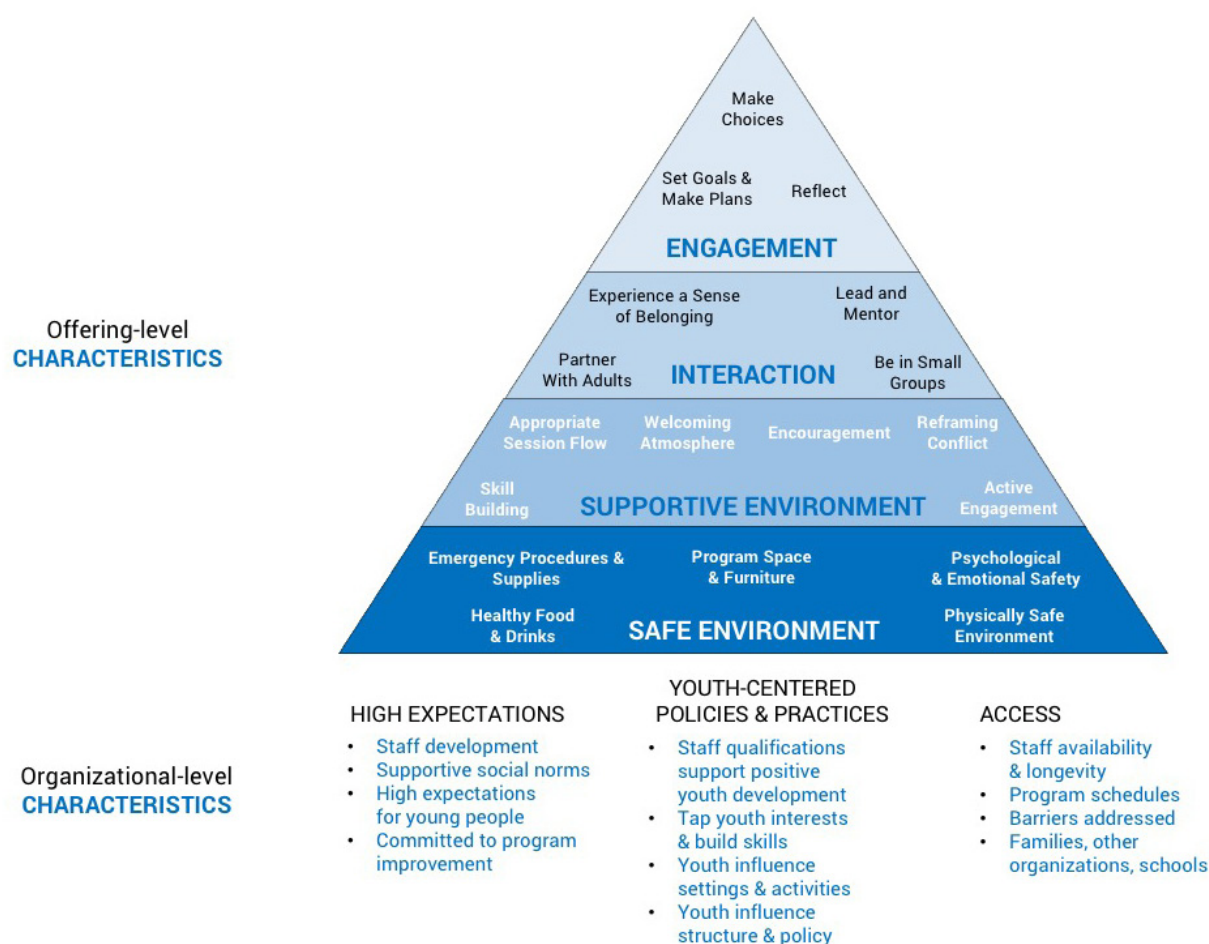
Settings were defined as organizations providing one or more long-term programs for RHY, including DICs, TLPs, and dual/multi-program settings (e.g., those with DICs and/or TLPs and, in some cases, other types of RHY programs). The study focused on settings in New York State, a region with more than 50 organizations serving RHY “upstate” (made up of urban, rural, and suburban areas) and “downstate,” namely the densely urban New York City metropolitan area. A random sampling approach was used to capture diversity in setting types (TLP and DIC only and dual/multi program settings) and geographical region. From a total of 50 settings, 29 settings that varied in type and geography were selected for inclusion in the study. The research methods are described in more detail in published papers, cited below, and described in brief here.

One strength of the RHY Impact Study was that program quality was assessed from various perspectives. The RHY Impact Study used the Youth Program Quality Assessment model to assess program quality in two categories: specific organizational-level characteristics and specific program offerings (called offering-level characteristics), as shown in Figure 1. The model is a tool, grounded in PYD as noted above and developed for the evaluation of out-of-school settings for youth, such as after-school programs (Smith and Hohmann 2005; Yohalem et al. 2009). The Youth Program Quality Assessment Form A, focused on offering-level characteristics, was used to score observations of setting quality and Form B, focused on organizational-level characteristics, was used to assess program administrators and score their responses. Youth rated their views on the settings with a measure that captured similar offering- and organizational-level characteristics, called the Supports and Opportunities Scale.

The data collection process to assess setting quality was robust. The research team conducted program administrator interviews at all 29 settings (30 interviews in total), 24 interviews with staff at 17 settings, 53 observations at 23 settings, 21 youth focus groups at 13 settings, and assessment batteries with 463 RHY at all 29 settings. Additionally, the team conducted 38 in-depth individual interviews with RHY at 11 settings.



FIGURE 1. Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) model



Rating of Setting Quality

We created a multi-perspective score of setting quality by combining ratings from RHY, observations of programs in settings, and interviews with program administrators. The overall setting quality score could range from 0 to 4, with higher values indicating higher quality.

Cross-Sectional Design

The study was cross-sectional; that is, it explored settings at a single point in time. For that reason, we cannot make assumptions about causal relationships among factors. We hope that this study inspires and provides a basis for future work into causal relationships.

Introduction

Who are RHY?

For the purposes of research, RHY are defined as the subpopulation of young people in the U.S. between the ages of 12 and 24 who have left, runaway from, or been forced to leave their homes, residing without parental supervision in emergency shelters, places not intended for habitation, or temporary situations (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2015). Although the precise size of the RHY population is difficult to pinpoint, we know at least 500,000 and as many as 2.8 million youth in the U.S. are homeless each year (Cooper, 2006; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012).

African American/Black, Hispanic, and LGBTQ youth are over-represented among RHY compared to their proportions in the general population (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; Keuroghlian, Shtasel, & Bassuk, 2014). These minority group statuses influence patterns of risk factors, in part due to aspects of the larger environment, such as youth from these minority groups facing a greater likelihood of being stopped by police and being involved in the criminal justice system compared to their white, heterosexual, gender normative peers (Himmelstein & Brückner, 2011; Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015). Additionally, these minority group statuses influence RHY's treatment needs (Keuroghlian et al., 2014).

Consequences of Youth Homelessness

Disconnected from support systems, such as family, work, and school, RHY face a confluence of numerous adverse life experiences, combined with few protective factors for mitigating these risks. It is well documented that RHY face high rates of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, trauma, and chronic stress throughout their life spans (Bao, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2000; Gwadz, Nish, Leonard, & Strauss, 2007). As a result, RHY evidence high rates of serious mental and physical health problems, which place them at greater risk for unstable relationships, substance abuse, chronic unemployment, involvement in the street economy (e.g., drug dealing, transactional sex), incarceration, police harassment, adult homelessness, and even early mortality (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011; Tucker, Edelen, Ellickson, & Klein, 2011). Thus the sooner RHY can access and engage with appropriate services, the greater the likelihood they can avoid some of the serious effects of being out-of-home, such as chronic adult homelessness.

The Importance of Resilience

At the same time, as noted above, the fact that RHY exhibit resilience and positive coping cannot be overlooked. In fact, leaving home and surviving out of the home are adaptive responses, and making use of services and support can enable youth to heal, rather than exacerbate trauma. Past research has found experiencing or perceiving oneself as resilient is a powerful correlate of persistence, resourcefulness, self-efficacy, and resultant positive behavioral and mental health outcomes (Sapienza & Masten, 2011). And, as noted above, among RHY, one past study found perceived resilience is associated with less suicidal ideation (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011) and another found it was associated with fewer life threatening behaviors, such as attempted suicide (Rew et al., 2001). Perceived resilience may be particularly vital for RHY because RHY lack the social and organizational resources available to non-RHY, and thus have to work harder and persist longer to achieve their goals.

Outcomes Studied

In the quantitative analysis, we selected outcomes that most settings address and that are prioritized in most settings and explored whether the quality and type of settings were associated with these outcomes.

Behavioral outcomes included increased involvement in school, training, and/or work; reduced frequency of substance use; and prevention of involvement in the street economy.

We also examined psychosocial outcomes: RHY's perspectives on whether settings help them in these three domains (school/job training/work, substance use, street economy), as well as perceived resilience.

We speculated that RHY's perceptions that settings that are helpful may have long-term beneficial effects on their engagement in other settings and relationships with professionals, and therefore, on their adaptation and functioning. Moreover, perceived resilience is critical for RHY, as described above. We hypothesized that RHY in higher-quality settings would have more favorable behavioral outcomes in these domains, be more likely to report the setting helps them achieve positive outcomes, and have greater perceived resilience. This is because, as suggested by the Youth Program Quality Assessment model, higher setting quality allows organizations to not only meet RHY's basic needs, but also move beyond these to higher order program offerings that engage, motivate, and build relationships with RHY.

In qualitative research we explored other ways that settings help RHY in personal and distinctive ways, and those that were common to or prevalent among the population of RHY.



Results

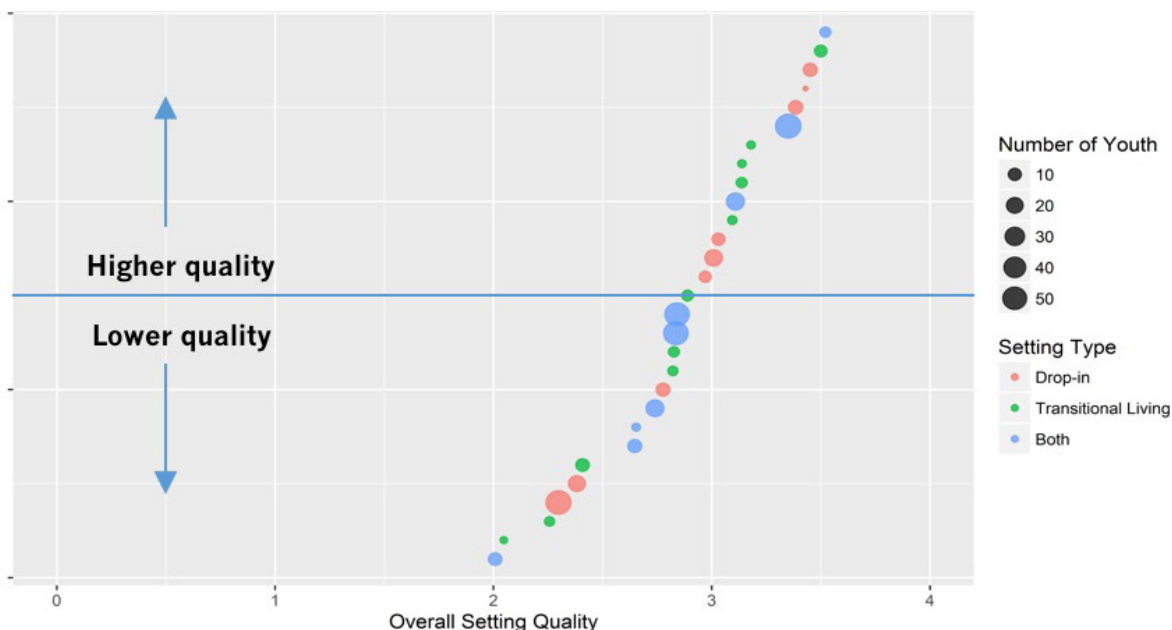
I. Setting Type and Quality Matters, and Higher-Quality Settings Yield More Positive Psychosocial Outcomes for RHY

While results from the RHY Impact Study suggest all settings benefit RHY, higher-quality settings showed evidence of an ability to move beyond meeting RHY's basic requirements and address higher-order relational, psychosocial, and motivational needs. Importantly, fostering a sense of resilience among RHY, as well as their ability to experience settings as helpful to them in achieving good behavioral outcomes, indicating long-term beneficial effects on RHY's engagement in other settings, relationships, adaptation, and functioning.

Finding #1: Overall, settings for RHY evidenced a high level of quality

Program quality varied among settings, but overall, the quality scores ranged from satisfactory to high. Figure 2 shows that all programs received mid-to-top range scores, with similar patterns of quality across DICs, TLPs, and dual/multi program settings.

FIGURE 2. Settings Ranked by the Quantitative Multi-component Setting Quality Score



IMPACT

The overall high quality evident in settings is encouraging. We believe these overall high quality scores are driven in part by support from decades of RHY-specific legislation that provide resources not only in the form of funding, but also guidance on optimal strategies for RHY settings, notably, emphasis on the PYD approach. Thus setting quality is important, as it may be the vehicle by which organizations move beyond meeting RHY's basic needs, in order to function more efficiently, retain staff, develop and maintain deep and trusting relationships between staff and RHY, and address higher-order needs of RHY.

Details about the work in this section can be found in this paper: Gwadz, M., Cleland, C., Leonard, N., Bolas, J., Ritchie, A., Tabac, L., ... Powlovich, J. (2017). Understanding organizations for runaway and homeless youth: A multi-setting quantitative study of their characteristics and effects. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 73, 398-410. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.01.016>

Finding # 2: RHY in TLPs and dual/multi-program settings did better than RHY in DICs

We found that most RHY (81%) were engaged in school, job training, and/or work. However, rates of involvement differ by the type of setting. This was somewhat less likely among RHY in DICs (68%), and more likely among RHY in TLPs (92%) and in dual/multi-program settings (87%), as might be expected. Yet even in DICs, rates of involvement in school/job training/work were almost 70%, a rate higher than usually found in studies of RHY. (Note that tables describing the RHY sample in detail are provided below as an appendix.)

RHY in TLPs and dual/multi-program settings were less likely to be involved in the street economy than youth in DICs. We found 46% of RHY in DICs were involved in the street economy in the past 3 months, compared to 15% of youth in TLPs, and 37% in dual/multi-program settings.

Rates of substance use, which tended to be fairly modest, were similar across the three types of programs.

TLPs enrolled in the study tended to be located in rural and suburban locations, and DICs and dual/multi-program settings tended to be located in large, densely populated urban areas. We considered these geographical differences when interpreting findings.

IMPACT

The more favorable outcomes among RHY in TLP and dual/multi-program settings may be due in part to the stabilizing effect of supportive housing and requirements in housing programs. But findings suggest that the high rates of involvement are not exclusively due to housing, since rates of stable housing among RHY in dual/multi-program settings were comparable to those in DICs. DICs take a low-threshold approach and serve the most vulnerable RHY, often serving as an entry point for many youth first taking advantage of RHY services. While DICs provide valuable services that are associated with improved youth outcomes, DICs alone may be insufficient to address the distinct, multiple needs of these high-risk RHY. Dual/multi-program settings and TLPs may be better positioned to foster youths' strengths and meet their complex needs. TLPs on the other hand are typically smaller which may allow for more personalized treatment and support.

These findings highlight the importance of housing programs and multi-program settings to foster positive outcomes in this complex population and also the fact that RHY in DICs tend to be at highest risk for poor outcomes. (We wish to note that RHY may be engaged in more than one type of setting, but we emphasized the setting where they were recruited for the study.)

Finding # 3: Higher setting quality was associated with RHY's experiences of being assisted by programs in the domain of education/job training/employment

Setting quality was not associated with RHY's rates of actual involvement in school/job training/work. We believe this is, in part, because RHY evidenced such high rates vocational and educational engagement. Settings overall promoted engagement in school/job training/work, regardless of quality.

Setting quality was associated with whether RHY experienced the setting as helping them engage in school/job training/work, providing evidence for the role of setting quality in RHY outcomes.

IMPACT

RHY in higher-quality settings are more likely to experience the setting as helping them engage in school/job training/work, providing evidence for the role of setting quality in RHY outcomes. Higher-quality settings may foster higher satisfaction with services and settings, which may in turn promote engagement, self-efficacy, and positive youth outcomes over the long term.

Finding #4: Higher setting quality was associated with RHY's experiences of being assisted by programs in the domain of substance use management or avoidance

Almost two-thirds of RHY (64%) reported substance use in the past 90 days, but only 17% reported use of substances other than alcohol or marijuana. On average, RHY reported using illicit substances (alcohol, marijuana, crack and other forms of cocaine, heroin, nonprescription/street methadone, painkillers, opiates, analgesics, hallucinogens, anti-anxiety drugs or tranquilizers, methamphetamine, amphetamines, stimulants, barbiturates or sedatives, and any other drugs) on 17 of the past 90 days. These are fairly low rates compared to past studies of RHY.

Half of youth reported the programs helped them to manage or avoid substance abuse. Similar to the findings described above, setting quality was not associated with rates of substance use in our analyses, partly because rates of use were low overall. However, RHY in higher-quality settings were more likely to experience the setting as helping them manage or avoid substance use.

IMPACT

RHY in higher-quality settings are more likely to experience the setting as helping them manage or avoid substance use, providing evidence for the importance of setting quality in influencing RHY outcomes.

Finding #5: Higher setting quality was associated with RHY's experiences of being assisted by programs in the domain of street economy avoidance.

More than one-third of youth (37%) were involved in the street economy in the past three months (e.g., drug dealing, burglary, transactional sex/being trafficked). These rates are similar to past studies of RHY. Almost all (86%) reported a moderate to strong desire to avoid the street economy. Setting quality was not associated with rates of involvement in the street economy, but RHY in higher-quality settings were more likely to report the setting helps them avoid the street economy.

IMPACT

RHY in higher-quality settings are more likely to experience the setting as helping them avoid the street economy, providing evidence for the role of setting quality in RHY outcomes.

Finding #6: RHY in higher-quality settings evidenced greater perceived resilience

Perceived resilience, the sense of oneself as able to successfully overcome life's challenges, plays an important role in youths' persistence, self-efficacy, and resourcefulness. Importantly, perceived resilience is associated with reduced risk of engagement in life-threatening behaviors among RHY, including suicide (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011; Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001). We found that RHY in higher-quality settings had higher rates of perceived resilience.

IMPACT

Cultivating resilience among RHY may have long-term positive effects on their adaptation and functioning, particularly given the serious setbacks and challenges faced by this atypically developing population. It may even be life-saving. Higher-quality settings are better able to foster perceived resilience among RHY.

The following sections highlight the specific characteristics and practices that shape higher-quality settings and discuss the challenges that impede RHY settings' effectiveness.

II. RHY Insights Demonstrate the Benefits of RHY Programs

A core tenet of PYD is listening to the voices of youth directly and having their insights inform program and policy. The RHY Impact Study was conducted in accordance with this value. Using qualitative data, we uncovered the main ways youth experienced the setting as making an impact on their growth, wellbeing, and development.

Overall, findings highlight the importance of specialized RHY settings—their unique abilities to locate, engage, and work with RHY who have experienced markedly high rates of trauma, abuse, and neglect over their lifetimes, resulting, not surprisingly, in distrust of professionals, peers, other adults, and social service settings. While RHY have experiences with many different types of settings over their lifetimes, some RHY-specific and some not, they report the greatest benefits from RHY-specific programs. Indeed, RHY identified four critical ways in which RHY-specific programs in particular influence and improve their wellbeing, sense of optimism, resilience, behavioral functioning, and life circumstances:

- 1) RHY organizations uniquely provide a safe environment for the transition out of acute crisis and into service provision and, ideally, supportive transitional housing.
- 2) RHY organizations provide integrated instrumental (that is, tangible) and emotional support needed for positive development.
- 3) The confidence, resilience, and optimism fostered within RHY organizations are key for successful adulthood.
- 4) Youth have a strong desire to remain connected to settings after they leave RHY organizations.

Moreover, RHY suggested ways in which settings could improve. Regarding RHY's perspectives on gaps in services and needs for program improvement, two additional insights emerge:

- 5) Staff need to balance providing structure with youths' need for autonomy.
- 6) Youth input in program governance was lacking but is key for improvement.

We described these six findings in more detail in the next section.

Details about the work in this section can be found in this paper: Gwadz, M., Freeman, R., Leonard, N., Ritchie, A., Cleland, C., Kutnick, A., Bolas, J., & Powlovich, J. (2017). Do programs for runaway and homeless youth work?: A qualitative exploration from the perspectives of young people in diverse settings. Manuscript submitted for publication.

RHY Insight #1: RHY programs provide a uniquely safe environment to transition from acute crisis into service provision

Entering RHY programs is rife with emotional challenges. When reflecting on their initial engagement with RHY-specific programs, RHY reported trepidation, resistance, and fear. This is not surprising, given the high rates of serious trauma, abuse, and fractured family relationships they experience throughout childhood and adolescence. Further, RHY generally anticipate being treated poorly or even being in physical danger upon first engaging with RHY-specific settings. Whether RHY had personal experiences with shelters or not, they often have preconceived, largely negative, views of these types of settings. Yet these preconceptions appear to be, in large measure, a function of the emotional challenges RHY face to entering emergency shelters, often their first experience with RHY-specific settings.

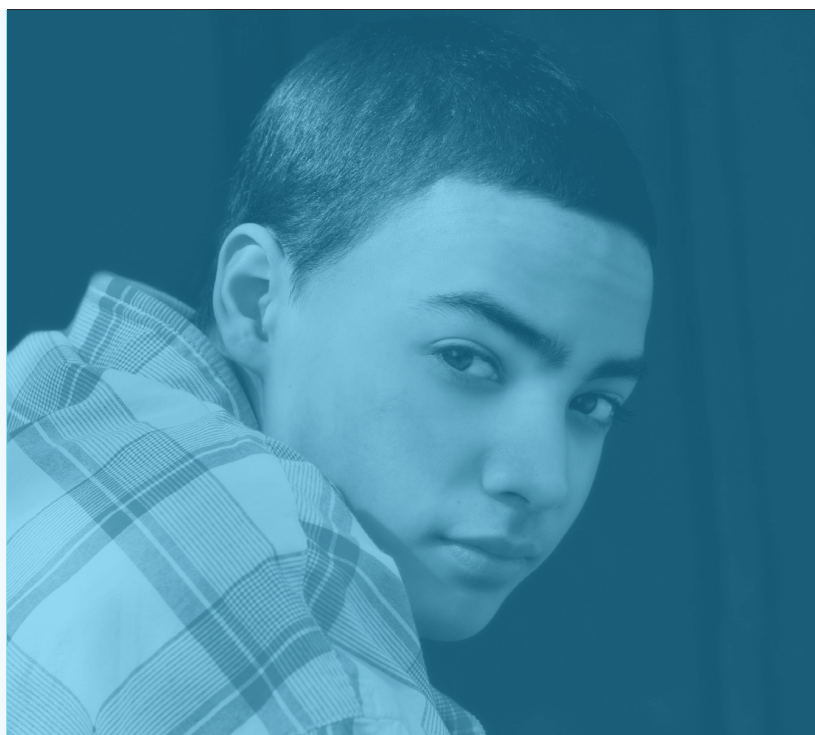
“ When I thought [about] a shelter, I thought of like a big room with bunk beds that people sleep in at night. That’s what I thought. And I didn’t want to do that. But when my guidance counselor had told me about it, and told me it was a house setting, I went for the intake, which is like an interview. And they accepted me. And I came. And from there I stayed.”

“ I honestly [at first] felt more safe in the street than I felt in one of those shelters....I did an intake asking for all my problems, and I’m like no, no, no you’re not going to get me anywhere. Um, just the, like, the atmosphere. It was brand new to me. I’d never been to that. So, coming from, uh, from a home to that environment I was like, I don’t know like... I’d rather be on the streets because I know the streets, I don’t know the shelters. A lot of people, they think of a shelter and they probably, like, immediately think of, like, this really dark, dreary kind of place. And it’s true for most places, but the [RHY setting] is set up like a home. So it’s really, really a fun welcoming environment that really helps you, and supports you, and listens to you. So it’s really awesome.”

RHY generally experienced the transition from living with their distressed families or on the streets to a shelter as a final, tangible confirmation that their own family home environment was no longer tenable. Thus, for many, entering an RHY-specific program triggered a profound and sobering realization they are officially out of home and on their own; that is, officially “homeless.” Thus the transition into RHY-specific crisis shelter settings is generally emotionally challenging. This is, in large measure, to be expected, and may even be unavoidable. Yet RHY-specific crisis settings are vital for these vulnerable young people, and serve a bridge to longer-term programs:

RHY programs are “more homey” and provide “space to breathe.” Many youth were quick to note the RHY programs’ unique ability to provide a relatively safe and stable environment. This description is consistent with the trauma-informed care approach, a common approach guiding RHY programs (Ferguson & Maccio, 2015; Hopper, 2009; McKenzie-Mohr, Coates, & McLeod, 2012). Throughout the interviews youth repeatedly distinguished between RHY-specific programs and other types of shelters and group homes, consistently reporting that RHY-specific programs were better able to understand them and meet their needs than other types of settings. RHY’s experiences with and knowledge of a variety of both youth and adult shelters enabled them to contrast different types of settings, and thereby highlight the benefits of RHY-specific services, such as DICs and TLPs. For example, one young person with past experiences with street homelessness in a large urban environment, as well as adult and youth crisis shelters, and with RHY-specific programs, compares and contrasts these settings:

“ Yeah, you know, like [RHY programs] help you become more independent and... it’s not like when you’re getting kicked out of your house. It’s... more like a process. It takes time. And it’s actually, it’s time that you can actually deal with and you can actually handle... Once you get kicked out of your house,... you’ve got to develop that mindset. You know, automatically, you know, to survive. At least here, at [RHY program] it’s like you have time to actually think about stuff, whereas on the street, it’s more like you’re in survival mode. You know, your survival instincts... So... it’s good to actually have, you know, some space to actually breathe...”



IMPACT

For many RHY, the process of first engaging with an RHY setting is fraught with emotion and trepidation. Safety and emotional security within RHY settings are critical to encouraging young people’s transition out of acute crisis and into engagement with services

RHY Insight #2: RHY need integrated basic and emotional support for positive development

Accessing services and resources. RHY report RHY staff help them prepare to apply for jobs, continuing education, housing, and other programs for which they may be qualified. Notably, for many youth, a critical component of this type of basic support also includes the emotional support they find necessary to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and to prepare for potential rejection. For most RHY, simply having staff to assist them in navigating the otherwise daunting world of non-RHY social services was vital. For instance, RHY typically needed help obtaining the proper identification required for applications for school, employment, and public assistance, all of which are an essential part of transitioning out of homelessness and becoming more self-sufficient.

RHY programs are “a type of surrogate family.” RHY commonly refer to RHY-specific programs as operating as a type of surrogate family, and youth repeatedly cited benefiting from such instrumental support as transportation costs, referrals to other programs such as vocational training and mental health services, and programs that cater to RHY’s individual interests (e.g., art and music programs), always within the context of emotional support and one-on-one guidance. As one participant noted,

IMPACT

The ability of RHY programs to provide thoroughly integrated basic and emotional support distinguished these programs from non-RHY programs, and RHY ultimately credited this integrated support as most beneficial in helping them to begin to transition out of homelessness.

“ I came into this program with basically nothing. No clothes, no food, no money. And I didn’t basically have anything to fall back on. And they made sure that by the time I got to where I am now that I have everything that I need to make sure that I’m independent, an independent youth. And being at a young age like 14, 15, 16 years old, not a lot of kids survive. And [they] would usually have nothing if they went through something that I’ve been through. And I just can say it’s been a blessing to have them like support me through it all. They’ve helped me get back in school to get my GED. They’ve helped me find jobs. Helped me become more independent with myself, and be comfortable in my community. They’ve helped me find apartments. They’ve given me apartments like through their transitional living program. And it’s just been working me up to success from there. And I’m just so thankful for it all. I don’t think I would have done it on my own. I don’t think I’d have made it this far on my own if I never knew about them.”

RHY Insight #3: Confidence, resilience and optimism is key for a successful adulthood

Helping youth build confidence to seek help. Developing resilience, confidence, and optimism within the context of ongoing trauma is a vital function of RHY-specific settings. As many youth noted, months or years of nearly uninterrupted trauma and relative social isolation have left them suspicious and distrustful of others and more skilled at surviving on the street than anywhere else; RHY often described this lack of confidence as feeling “shy” in unfamiliar settings. For many RHY, and especially those who reported a lengthy history of abuse, developing confidence in their abilities to succeed outside of RHY-specific settings often translated into simply having the courage to ask for assistance when necessary. As one young person noted:

“Before I became homeless, I was never the type of person to ask for anything. I was so shy I would never ask. I would never ask, I barely listened, and I was just the type of person that liked to do things on my own. But when it comes down to it, my mom would do whatever I don’t know how to do. So, I decided to take a different route and go out of my comfort zone. And do what I had to do to get myself up there in the world. [...] But [our groups in the TLP] just love to bring up things, ask questions, and I feel like I could talk about anything around them, like, we’ve got so much in common...And the life skill groups that they provide us are pretty, pretty, pretty awesome.”

Again citing the negative psychological effects of chronic homelessness, others reported the emotional space provided by TLPs led even more directly to developing self-confidence and resilience.

Developing resilience through peer socialization. RHY evidence a high level of skill related to survival out of home, but socialization experiences and competencies to thrive in more traditional settings are less evident. For others in DICs in particular, simply being able to interact with similarly experienced peers in a relatively stable environment was enough to allow social skills to begin to develop.

IMPACT

Developing confidence is key for RHY. This is made possible through prolonged interactions with staff and other RHY in a safe and supportive environment where the unique needs of RHY are acknowledged and where self-expression is valued.

“It’s fun and kind of brought me out of my comfort zone. Uh, I was—I was always nervous meeting people. I was always too shy. Um, I really like staying in my room, reading stories, write and stuff like that. But when I found [my boyfriend], he brought me here and kinda made me come out more and things like that. I mean like meeting new people and things like that. I was always shy meeting people. [...] Well I started to talk more and stuff like that. I started feeling like—I don’t know, not like so shy...”

“So one thing I learned right off the back is never tell myself no. So a lot of times, I think, um, definitely people who’ve been homeless and have, like, a long history of homelessness—um, because before I even moved to New York State, I had a long history of homelessness with my mother as a young child... and another thing I did to assess my life was that speaking negatively about myself to myself, so it was a lot of I didn’t so much focus on the outside at first, but I really looked at me on the inside and how I really felt about myself. And that’s where I started to change my life is-is there.”

RHY Insight #4: Youth want to remain connected beyond their stay in RHY organizations

Youth need assurance that staff will *always* be there. Follow-through and aftercare are vital as RHY transition out of settings. RHY who “graduated” from a TLP expressed a strong sense of appreciation for knowing that they had the ability to reach out to RHY staff even after having “aged” or “timed” out. RHY and staff alike stressed the importance of having a clear understanding that the instrumental and emotional support, which characterized the RHY’s time with the program, would never completely terminate. As one young person described, “I’m at the last part of it all. So, they’re still gonna help me, and they’re not gonna stop until I reach my goals. And I like that about the [RHY setting].” Similarly, another young person described,

Maintaining relationships through the next developmental stage. Due to the large number of youth who return to either TLPs or DICs multiple times, it is understandable that youth appreciate staff checking in with them after they have moved on as a way of maintaining that stable relationship. Just as families provide support to their emerging adult children, so do RHY settings maintain connections with former clients as they move to the next developmental level.

IMPACT

Given the paucity of long-term supports in RHY’s lives, the support of understanding and caring adults, even after they age-out of services, is comforting for RHY and increases their sense of confidence that they can survive in their post-RHY-service world.

The following two insights relate to the feedback RHY shared in regard to program gaps and potential improvements.

“Once you leave, like, one of their programs, they’ll still check in with you, like, even if it’s through text or they’ll give you a call or e-mail you. They’re trying to reach out any way they can and ask you, how’s it going? What’s going on? Um, are you guys getting along? Just different things along that nature. Do you need any money for food or anything of—like that. So they’re still there for you in a capacity they can—they can be. Um, and I do believe they have an—have a program, like within the [RHY setting] and that’s like their whole goal. I think it’s called like aftercare or something like that.”



RHY Insight #5: Staff need to provide a balance of structure and autonomy

Ambivalence about RHY programs as overbearing parents. Many RHY recalled that as they began to develop the confidence necessary to question the conditions within which they were living, they gradually began to feel a need for increased autonomy. This, in turn, provoked a sense of unease related to their previously identified need for structure and security. This is particularly evident in statements made by youth in TLPs, who frequently moved fluidly back and forth between indicating extreme gratitude for the emotional and basic support of the staff and slight contempt for what they often described as overbearing and unnecessarily strict guidelines.

This tension is exacerbated in many cases by RHY's ambivalent feelings about being supervised by an RHY-specific setting, but not by their parents, and, in many cases, ambivalent feelings about their parents.

Self-sufficiency as a goal within programs.

Especially in the TLPs, but to a certain extent in the DICs, one of the ways that RHY attempted to comparatively locate themselves with respect to their "maturity" was through articulating a clear desire for self-sufficiency over and against what is frequently referred to as "freeloading" or "taking advantage" of what the program had to offer. Indeed, for some, being perceived as genuinely desiring of self-sufficiency, which was equated with "normality" by many, might even be seen as a way of beginning to truly distance themselves from the stigma of "homelessness," however this term or situation might be conceptualized.

“ I mean, I like it, but then I don't because I want to be able to be on my own, and I have to be in a group program, uh, where I'm still being watched because I kind of feel like I'm in my parents' house. But I mean, other than that, the program is perfect. I mean, they help you with what, you know, your GED classes, uh, they help you, you know, they try to make goals for you, and they kind of like—like goals, you know. Because if I don't get on top of the goals, they'll sit there, and they'll try to, you know, not to harp on me, or to be mean, but they try to push you to gain that enthusiasm to go do those things even if you don't want to.”

“ People want to be out on their own, and there's people that don't. I'm one of those people that want to be on my own. I've—I mean, it's not a good thing to me that I use the [electricity] here. And that, you know, put nothing into it like moneywise because, of course, [electricity] cost money. So that's why I'm saying, like people might think it's cool, and it's a good that they wish they had it, but after a while of you being in here, you feel like you're not doing nothing for them. I mean besides doing what they ask you do to. That's just not enough.”

Nonetheless, given the gratitude that most youth showed for even the most basic services and support, many noted they were willing to capitulate to what they considered to be inconvenient or even unreasonable demands rather than face the street or a shelter again.

IMPACT

It is critical for staff to be in tune with RHY's needs to apply newfound confidence demonstrated by the desire for self-sufficiency and autonomy in programs. Staff needs to take into account that while this transition for RHY is often marked by ambivalence toward program demands, it also reflects a deep appreciation for what they have been given.

“ And the only thing that I didn’t like was that we had to be back at certain times for meetings, like, at five o’clock or four o’clock, and then we can leave again. But curfew times were, like, 10 and 11. So, I mean—I liked that part. But just not the coming for meetings and stuff. But once I ended up going there, I decided to give it—give it a chance. I had about a month left till I was having my baby, and the [RHY-specific setting] was pretty much my only option left.”



RHY INSIGHT #6: Youth input is key for program improvement

RHY input in governance is not the norm. Youth input into governance is a core tenet of the PYD approach and the Youth Program Quality Assessment tool used in the RHY Impact Study. Yet aside from a small number of examples, youth input was limited to mundane household rules and decisions, doling out chore assignments, talking out interpersonal problems among residents, and disputes over internet access and usage. One of the most notable areas for program improvement regarding youth’s psychosocial development had to do with incorporating RHY input regarding the ways in which programs operated on an institutional level.

Moving beyond “we just comment.” Most strikingly, throughout the majority of interviews, even when explicitly asked about the degree to which they were able to genuinely contribute to decision-making, youth were frequently confused or needed time to respond, and the vast majority seem to have clearly never considered themselves in this role. Indeed, most RHY didn’t seem to understand that their input could be something valuable to the setting. As one youth tellingly puts it, “we just comment.” However, it is unclear whether this ambivalence relates simply to a lack of effort on the part of program staff to engage with youth at this level, or whether the lack of ownership over programs is something in which youth simply aren’t interested, or both.

IMPACT

Youth input related to program governance provides RHY the opportunity to lead and feel empowered to make change in the settings in which they are participating. More clarity is needed about how youth input is operationalized and what RHY roles in the process should be.

III. All Settings Face Systemic Internal and External Challenges, but Higher-quality Settings are More Successful at Overcoming Them

As we described above, overall, setting quality was positive across the diverse range of settings, and no setting scored below the middle of the rating scale (Figure 2). We found all settings experienced challenges. RHY settings are embedded in their local economies and communities and face related structural barriers that impede program effectiveness. These include inadequate funding; lack of shelter and housing options for youth; mismatched age restrictions on some funding sources; difficulties interacting with other systems youth are involved in, including child protective services, criminal justice and the police; difficulty accessing cash aid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and health insurance through public assistance; and limited employment opportunities for youth in the larger environment. Yet despite these obstacles, some settings still evidenced higher quality than others. For instance, while lower-quality programs demonstrated positive effects on RHY's wellbeing, particularly in the provision of basic services such as housing and job placement, these settings nonetheless evidenced several inter-related challenges that hampered program effectiveness. We took advantage of this variability in setting quality to understand the characteristics of higher-quality settings and how they overcome these challenges that all settings face, in comparison to the settings rated as lower-quality.

Details about the work in this section can be found in this paper: Gwadz, M., Freeman, R., Leonard, N., Kutnick, A., Silverman, E., Ritchie, A., Bolas, J., Cleland, C., Tabac, L., Hirsch, M., & Powlovich, J. (2017). Understanding organizations serving runaway and homeless youth: A multi-setting, multi-perspective qualitative exploration. Manuscript submitted to *Child and Youth Care Forum*.

Practices that Distinguish Higher-quality Settings for RHY

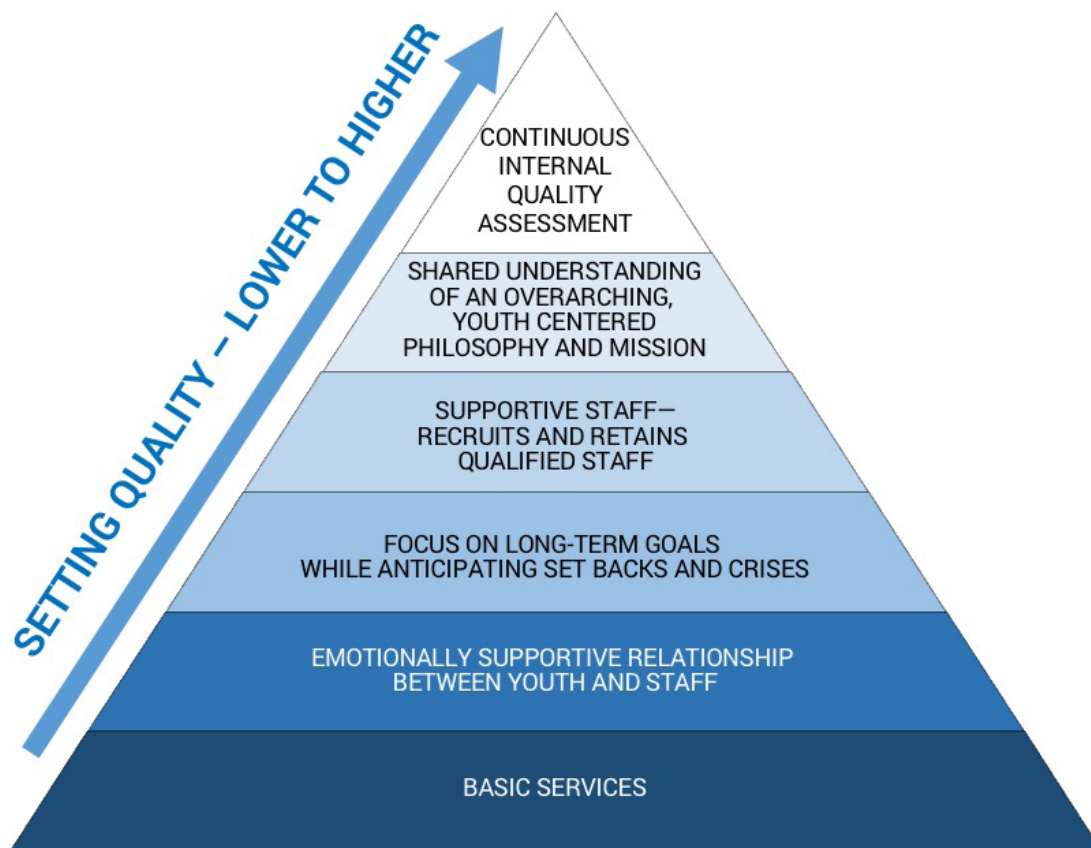
Analyses of qualitative data collected from staff, program administrators, and youth revealed four major themes that provided a picture of the specific best practices in higher-quality settings that have potential to positively influence youth outcomes. Importantly, many of these features point to the centrality of the youth-adult partnership and span both offering- and organizational-level characteristics. These promising practices include

- 1) Cultivating a shared understanding between staff and youth of program philosophy and mission,
- 2) Developing supportive relationships between youth and staff,
- 3) Maintaining a focus on RHY's long-term goals amidst periods of crises and instability
- 4) Staff support and retention, and
- 5) Ensuring continuous program improvement, including staff support and retention.

As shown in Figure 3, all settings experience challenges, but higher-quality settings manage to move beyond RHY's basic needs to higher-order challenges and goals.

We describe these findings in more detail in the section that follows.

FIGURE 3. Influence of Setting Quality on Setting Characteristics



Promising Practice #1: Shared understanding of youth-centered philosophy and mission among staff and RHY

A shared, youth-centered approach. A youth-centered program philosophy that is shared and understood by administrators, staff throughout the organization, and RHY was a common feature of higher-quality settings. Inherent in the youth-centered philosophy is the balance between flexibility to meet the ever-changing and unique needs of RHY and clear and necessary structure. In most settings, the youth-centered approach was informed by the PYD approach and trauma-informed care and, in many cases, complemented by two client-centered types of care, the harm reduction model (Blume & Lovato, 2010; Marlatt & Witkiewitz, 2002) and the motivational interviewing approach (Miller & Rollnick, 2012; Miller, 1996; Miller & Rollnick, 2012). One RHY program director described her approach, which was echoed by many others:

“ I want them to feel like this is their life and that they’re in control of it and we’re here to help. I think a lot of them come in and they’ve been other places, or if they’ve come from other institutions, or if they were in foster care, they have no sense of control over their life. A lot of them had said, like they feel “everyone’s always trying to make decisions for me,” and really we want to stay within our guidelines, and our regulations, but we really want them to feel like they have a say in what’s happening to them.”

Consistent with a PYD approach, higher-quality settings emphasized the importance of youths’ own personal goals and expectations as key to driving the process of moving from crisis to independence. However, due to the risks that RHY face, many programs faced challenges to remain true to youths’ goals and help them develop a sense of personal autonomy while maintaining boundaries and promoting broader pro-social goals set forth by the organization. This can be a delicate balance, and higher-quality settings worked to ensure that the centrality of this approach was understood at all levels of the organization, including by the youth themselves

IMPACT

In higher-quality settings there was a strong adherence to a shared understanding of the goals and philosophy of the program—a youth-centered approach—that led to a cooperative environment among youth and staff who worked together to help RHY reach their goals.

Promising Practice #2: Supportive relationships between youth and staff

Balancing the provision of basic services with emotional support. A distinguishing feature of higher-quality settings was the ability of staff to consistently provide individualized basic services (housing, food, education, employment assistance) within emotionally supportive relationships. Many RHY have had prior, often negative experiences with other, non-RHY-specific organizations and institutions that have not been able to effectively meet their unique needs. Importantly, youth experience RHY settings as distinct in their ability to understand them and meet their needs. Key to this experience of being understood and well cared for is the *emotionally supportive and genuine relationships RHY form with staff*, which promoted a sense of physical and emotional security they had not experienced elsewhere. Further, these relationships encouraged youth to develop trust and to openly discuss issues such as trauma, trust, substance use, and identity. One youth described how a staff person had encouraged him to develop a greater sense of autonomy.

Conversely, in many lower-quality settings, youth experienced settings providing tangible services without emotional support. This created a sense of “institutionalization” in which programs were described as a “homeless shelter” or a “group home” rather than a living space whose goal was to foster belonging, as one of the pillars of the PYD approach. Youth also commented on a lack of transparency in rules and regulations and everyday happenings in RHY organizations, which causes tension in their relationships with staff. Nonetheless, even after recognizing the challenges that organizations faced in serving them, youth were very appreciative of the services and acknowledged that for many of them this was their only source of support.

“ I’m 21. Like I’m more of an adult.
Like I’m ready for life on my own.
[This program] has helped with that.
They are part of it. Like people care,
they’re giving us the motivation, [to]
build my own confidence and now
I’m ready for the world. ”

IMPACT

In higher-quality settings, the development of genuine partnerships between staff and youth evolves from emotionally supportive relationships that promote self-confidence and autonomy among RHY. These partnerships, in turn, increase their motivation to build skills for transitioning out of homelessness and into independent living.

Promising Practice #3: Maintaining a focus on RHY's long-term goals amidst periods of crises and instability

A primary focus on basic services and managing crises overshadows other considerations. As noted in the previous section, providing support for basic services alongside emotional support was key for youth. However, across setting types, and particularly in settings with high staff turnover, striking this balance was difficult, as it was often difficult for staff to balance providing support with assisting youth with constant struggles and crises. Achieving goals is critical to keep RHY moving toward independence. Higher-quality settings worked to ensure that youth have the ability, autonomy, and motivation to set their own, self-identified goals and that they can count on staff to provide individualized support during the process. Yet this is not easy to do, particularly when resources in the larger community are scarce, and program funding is unpredictable and, in some cases, insufficient. Rural areas especially suffered from scant resources and operating on “shoestring budgets” that often made it impossible to fulfill even the most basic needs of youth.

“*But we can't send him like deodorant and a toothbrush and toothpaste. We used to have all that stuff here. We used to have bus passes, but we don't have that anymore. We don't even have business cards.*”

Staff expressed frustration in not being able to provide more long-term services to help youth transition to self-sufficiency and said that they felt as if they were often just putting a “band-aid” on their situation. This points toward the need for a long-term safety net options for RHY, which will be discussed in the implications section.

Nonetheless, while crises are often primary, higher-quality settings were able to support youth and deal with crises while maintaining a focus on youths' individual longer-term goals.

Realistic staff expectations about youth outcomes. Higher-quality settings were realistic about the impact they could have on youth. Staff understood that they might not always see measurable outcomes in their work with youth. As one staff member related:

Finally, staff in higher-quality settings who experienced being supported by the administration reported being more able to provide the emotional support RHY needed.

IMPACT

While RHY's crises are serious, and may be primary, it is essential that settings foster longer-term goals. Otherwise, RHY may age-out of services ill equipped for independent living.

“*We're not there to, like, you know, sweep them up and save them. That's not the goal. The goal is whatever they're—they choose to help them to be safe in whatever they choose. So if somebody does decide, um, to go back out [on the streets] we at least can provide them with a phone to make sure that if they ever need anything or if they ever decide they want to help, they can always call us.*”

Promising Practice #4: Staff support and retention

Supporting and maintaining a high-quality staff and preventing burnout are continual challenges for RHY settings. While settings typically reported operating with insufficient, strained budgets that limited the number of staff positions, the amount of compensation they were able to provide to staff, and the amount of time that staff were able to spend with individual youth, lower-quality settings had significant challenges providing ongoing support to their staff. In some cases, lack of adequate support and resources to prevent staff burnout undermined their ability to remain engaged with their work. Staff and RHY agreed that, in contrast to staff who were committed to improving the lives of RHY, staff who seemed dissatisfied with their work and who were just “there for the paycheck” provided lower-quality services and contributed to a negative environment.

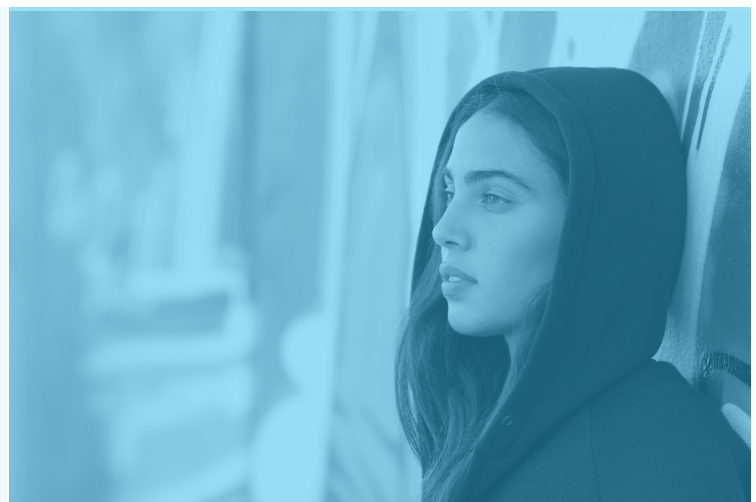
Youth recognized staff that was dissatisfied with their work in lower-quality settings. Yet at the same time, many young people understood the plight of the staff that worked with them and were empathetic to the fact that they were poorly paid and struggling in many of the same ways that youth were, saying that working in the setting “is not their only job. They have a day job too, so they come from their day job and they come here. And then they’re tired, they get mad at us.”

The risk of staff burnout is high, given the multiple challenges that staff face supporting RHY, coupled with the context of limited resources and depressed local economies in which many programs operate. Preventing burnout and maintaining a high-quality staff is crucial. Support for staff mental health needs and support from colleagues and supervisors are critical. One RHY staff member shared,

Promising Practice #5: Continuous program improvement

Mechanisms for internal quality assessment, staff support, and informal reflection. Higher-quality settings distinguished themselves from other settings in that they had routine processes for assessing different aspects of the organization, including youth outcomes, program improvement, and staff support. These programs typically engaged in informal, on-going reflection.

“One thing I can tell you about this place is that we have a lot of support here as far as mental health. They don’t burn out the staff...It can get overwhelming, don’t get me wrong. But, I think, [this setting] does a really good job of making you feel supported...If you need a mental health day, they give it to you... I’ve never not felt supported here. Strangely enough. Never felt that.”



IV. Case Study 1: Kira

Kira is a Latina heterosexual young woman who was 20 years of age when she was interviewed. She described her family relationships as close and loving through her childhood and adolescence. Her mother was employed as a home health aid, and, although it was challenging for her mother as a single parent to make ends meet, Kira and her siblings had a sense of being cared for and protected. Kira enjoyed school and was an “A and B student.” However, all of this changed quite abruptly when she was 17 years old. Tensions in the home escalated as Kira and her mother began to fight almost daily over the appropriateness of Kira’s relationship with her boyfriend, Julio, who was a friend of her brother. Kira’s brother had frequently seen Kira and Julio arguing, which at times became physical. Arguments between the siblings and their mother regarding the verbal and physical abuse they witnessed escalated and became unbearable for the entire family. Feeling exhausted and depressed, Kira felt strongly pressured by her mother to end her relationship with Julio or to leave her family’s home. As a single, stressed, and overwhelmed mother struggling to support her family, and well aware of effects of violent relationships on young women from her own experiences, her mother felt “tough love” was the best approach. Kira noted,

Life without Julio felt unimaginable, and at 17 years of age, Kira felt “grown.” Plus, she was angry at her mother for forcing this choice. Her brother was barely speaking to her, or to Julio, which hurt. She felt she had no choice but to leave home and hope for the best.

“Um, at home, things wasn’t really going right. I was very stressed. You know, when you’re around your mom a lot, and especially when you guys have the same personality, things don’t go right. So I needed to get away for a while.”

Homeless

During those first, warmer months, she managed to get by sleeping on neighborhood park benches and by moving between couches at various friends’ family homes. After several months, however, Kira became aware that she was wearing out her welcome, and was alarmed to realize that she lacked the skills and resources necessary to live independently. Meanwhile, winter was approaching, and Kira felt the acute emotional stress and pain of not being welcome at her family’s home. Then, her loneliness was compounded by a sudden, terrifying awareness that she had no bank account, no source of income, no awareness of possible resources for homeless or unstably housed youth, and absolutely no discernible safety net. Moreover, at this point Kira began to acknowledge to herself that her use of alcohol and pills while on the street was becoming more of a problem than she had initially realized. Finally, although she and Julio were still together, he was preoccupied with his own struggle to survive, and was unable to offer her much in the way of either emotional or practical support. Having never anticipated that at such a young age she would have to live on her own and without help from her family, Kira came to a difficult realization: “Little did anybody know, I didn’t know anything about life. Didn’t know what to do with myself...So I was completely lost.” Kira saw other young people on the streets being enticed into selling drugs or coerced into sex work and desperately wanted to avoid that fate.

Not knowing what to do or how to move forward, Kira, now 18 years old, found a temporary solution by spending her nights at a local adult women's shelter. However, she found the conditions at the shelter to be both disturbingly unfamiliar and unsafe, and spent the majority of her time there ensuring that her belongings were not stolen and trying to secure a bed for the following night. Kira eventually "ran away" from the shelter, and began to enjoy the freedom of spending time on the streets with friends. During her first six months away from home, a time which Kira now describes as both enjoyable and regrettable, despite having enjoyed reading and learning, she was forced by necessity to drop out of high school in order to concentrate on finding stable housing. After six months on her own, as she gradually began to consider that she was "not going nowhere," Kira learned that she was pregnant with Julio's child. At this point, Kira felt that she needed to consider options that offered much more safety and stability. Yet an attempt to return home resulted in a physical altercation with her recently returned sister that, she felt, endangered her pregnancy. When a combination of severe cold weather and a lack of options left her with no other choice, she returned to a women's shelter she had previously utilized.

Living at the TLP

Once again, however, this situation proved less than ideal. After expressing her frustrations related to staying in the women's shelter to a sympathetic social worker, Kira was soon referred to Anne's House, a TLP in a small city in upstate New York specifically set up to meet the needs of young mothers and pregnant young women who were experiencing homelessness. After some initial trepidation over what she imagined would be an overly controlling and potentially hostile environment, Kira was surprised to find that the TLP was decidedly more "homey" and "comforting," and, unlike the adult women's shelters, provided the safety and stability that she found necessary to "find myself again" and to take steps toward more self-sufficiency. In particular, Kira recalled that upon entering the TLP while pregnant, she was able to rely on staff to provide her with food, clothing, transportation, and a means to bathe and care for herself while preparing for the birth of her child. While seemingly simple needs, for Kira these remained out of reach while on the streets or in the adult shelters. Perhaps most importantly, during this period Kira began to speak with personal and relationship counselors and to attend workshops that helped her to develop important life skills such as dealing with substance abuse, making doctor's appointments, managing finances, understanding basic nutrition for her and her newborn, and obtaining the necessary documents to rebuild her life.

However, as Kira would soon realize, her strong desire for personal independence would become one of the most difficult challenges she would face while integrating into the TLP. Because engaging with the TLP on this level served as a daily reminder of her dependence on others, Kira was initially reticent to rely on either material or emotional support from the TLP staff. As she recalls, "Before I became homeless, I was never the type of person to ask for anything...I never used to take the help of people that were giving me help in these shelters because I felt like—I'm an adult. I can do what I want." After acclimating to the setting, which took several months, and upon developing personal connections with the staff and other residents, however, Kira eventually came to appreciate the welcoming and supportive atmosphere of Anne's Place. Remembering a particularly significant moment of personal growth, she recalled that for perhaps the first time in her life she was able to accept help and advice from others: "I've never tried so hard." Not surprisingly, these changes did not come without difficulty. For Kira, raising a child while under the close supervision of TLP staff posed a series of what seemed at times to be insurmountable challenges. Indeed, Kira's experience was largely characterized by frustrations over constantly wrestling with a desire for independence for her and her child on one hand, and what she perceived to be unnecessarily "strict" but nonetheless necessary rules and regulations on the other. When discussing house policies related to kitchen and laundry access, curfews and visitation, and mandatory progress reports, for instance, Kira described these with a mixture of appreciation and resentment.

Moreover, raising a child in such close proximity to other young, inexperienced mothers all struggling to transition out of homelessness created an atmosphere of stress and tension for Kira. Like many residents, Kira found her dreams of having a space all to herself and her baby, which she could decorate and where she could feel “normal” was constantly thwarted by the realities of her situation. This often led indirectly to disruptive conflicts with other residents. Kira currently lives in Anne’s Place with four other mothers, several of whom have been previously expelled from the very same TLP, but who are now back for a second or even third chance with the program. Nonetheless, despite the occasional dispute, Kira found a surprising camaraderie with other TLP residents, which became key in helping her learn to work through emotional and interpersonal difficulties. For instance, while preparing daily meals and eating together in a common kitchen, Kira was provided with ample opportunity to share common frustrations, assist the other residents with child care and receive assistance, and talk about the confusions and anxieties related to being both a homeless young person *and* a new parent.

A brighter future

A little more than a year after Kira was first introduced to Anne’s Place, she had given birth to her son and was back in school and working toward her high school diploma, with hopes to soon enroll in a local college to pursue a career in the medical field. Although she was anxious about having to eventually move out of the TLP, Kira reported feeling far more prepared for life, being excited about becoming more independent, and also described a feeling of assurance, knowing that if she needs help, advice, or encouragement from TLP staff and the other young mothers with whom she had developed friendships, she is both willing to reach out and confident that she will have someone *“in my corner”* and *“a backbone to fall back on.”* As Kira puts it, “When you’re here, you got 18 months unless you find somewhere else to go. That’s totally up to you, but—whereas you can stay here longer, and then they help you get things if you need them, if you really need them that bad, they help you.”



V. Future Research: Next Steps Explore a Deeper Understanding of What RHY Need

The study generated additional research questions that can expand upon what we know about RHY and how to help them succeed:

- **Longitudinal studies to better understand the impact of RHY settings on youth.** Longitudinal research designs are needed to understand more precisely the impact of setting quality on RHY outcomes and how barriers to healthy development among RHY can be overcome.
- **Understanding and addressing the needs of specific subpopulations of RHY.** More research is needed to address some of the most vulnerable subpopulations of RHY including youth of color, pregnant and parenting youth, youth with disabilities, and LGBTQ youth.
- **Developing tools to assess the quality of RHY settings with more precision.** The Youth Program Quality Assessment tool was not developed for RHY settings, which are purposefully designed to engage with and provide services to youth whose needs are complex and varied. While we found Form A of the tool was able to reliably capture many of the offering-level characteristics of settings, some of the domains in the model are not generally present in or appropriate for RHY settings, whose programs are necessarily structured differently than those in after-school settings. Further, some critical aspects of RHY settings, and in particular those most heavily shaped by trauma-informed and youth-centered approaches, were not well-captured by the tool. Thus future research to adapt the Youth Program Quality Assessment for RHY settings, or to develop new assessments of program quality for these settings, is needed.
- **Identifying optimal models of housing for RHY.** While settings in this study provide a safe haven for RHY, future work is needed to identify longer-term housing models that will address RHY's basic and psychosocial needs.
- **Developing models to reduce educational inequality among RHY.** Research is needed to learn what is needed for RHY to succeed in school and receive steady access to quality education tied to wraparound services.
- **Developing models to improve occupational functioning in RHY.** Many RHY need support with life skills that they would have otherwise learned from caregivers in the home, and models are needed to address best practices that will help them succeed throughout adulthood.
- **Developing policies and approaches to prevent involvement with the criminal justice system.** A disproportionate number of RHY are involved in the criminal justice system. Approaches need to be developed to prevent criminal justice involvement, which include targeted intervention with youth at risk of becoming victims or offenders.
- **Identifying optimal treatments for trauma and its effects for this population**

RHY experience high levels of mental health issues stemming from trauma and abuse. Future studies are needed to provide treatment guidelines for RHY experiencing trauma and to identify training needs for RHY staff to be able to address their needs.

TABLE 1. Overview of Findings and Implications

<i>RHY settings are unique in their deep understanding of RHY, and abilities to serve them</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth report that RHY settings better meet their unique developmental and contextual needs, in contrast to settings that are not RHY-specific. • RHY programs help youth to transition from crisis into engagement in services to independence.
<i>Relationships are critical to fostering RHY's outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust and engagement with adults do not come easily to RHY. • Higher-quality RHY programs feel like 'home' to youth, where staff members, and the setting itself, act as a surrogate family. • Supportive, appropriate relationships between staff and youth are essential to their survival and development.
<i>Stable, sufficient funding is a chronic problem for RHY settings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstable and/or insufficient funding strains and limits settings. • The lack of sufficient housing resources for RHY is an ongoing problem. • Funding constraints such as age and time limitations often do not align with the needs of the population.
<i>All settings provide a sense of safety and meet youths' basic and tangible needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounded in Positive Youth Development and trauma-informed care, settings provided RHY with a safe environment. • Settings provided services to meet youths' basic and tangible needs. • RHY recognized and appreciated this safety and these services.
<i>Higher-quality settings yield more positive psychosocial outcomes for RHY</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher-quality settings balance the provision of tangible support with emotional support, with profound effects on RHY. • Higher-quality settings promote individualized and developmentally appropriate steps toward self-sufficiency. • RHY reported that higher-quality settings helped them foster positive outcomes related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —school, job training and work —managing and or avoiding substance use —avoiding street economy involvement. • Higher-quality settings were also associated with cultivating resilience among RHY, which may play an important role in youths' persistence, self-efficacy and resourcefulness.
<i>Several characteristics of higher-quality settings were identified and described, which can serve as model for other settings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In higher-quality settings we found a youth-centered program philosophy was well-articulated and equally understood by staff throughout the organization by administrators, staff and youth; • Setting practices foster developmentally appropriate relationships between youth and staff, promote staff retention, and prevent staff burn-out; • These settings help youth develop both short and long-term goals, the latter despite the primacy of youths' crises; and • They conduct continuous internal quality assessment, with a strong focus on staff support. • All settings face internal and external/systemic challenges, but some settings overcome them better than others.
<i>Lower-quality settings are challenged to overcome systemic internal and external challenges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges in lower-quality settings hamper program effectiveness. • These gaps include difficulties related to staff retention, training, job satisfaction, and support, which reduces the quality of services provided to RHY and fosters staff turnover. • Issues with funding have a direct negative effect on the ability of settings to hire and retain appropriate staff. • RHY face constant crises. Lower-quality settings evidence a primary focus on attending to crises rather than supporting the emotional development and longer-term goals of RHY.
<i>Youth insights further demonstrate the benefits of RHY programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research captures the voices of youth, highlighting important issues from their own perspectives. • These include insights into how RHY programs help them build confidence by achieving their personal goals, and how settings the balance autonomy and security and regulations. • There is a need for greater youth input and governance in organizations, and this is hard to achieve given the complexity of RHY and the task of serving RHY.
<i>Future research: Next steps explore a deeper understanding of what RHY need</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas of future research include outstanding questions related to addressing the needs of sub-populations of RHY and considerations for design and methodology. • Models for reducing educational inequality among RHY are needed, as quality educational and vocational preparation is vital for the successful transition to adulthood. • While many RHY programs indicate that they use a trauma-informed care model, there is a great need to specify how such trauma-informed care is actually delivered in RHY settings.
<i>Call to action: Policy and practice implications focus on greater collaboration and consistency in approach among RHY stakeholders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We review a number of implications of the study findings. • These include directions for program improvement, particularly related to the relationships between youth and adults, and a need for a coordinated response to RHY in communities and across government agencies particularly the criminal justice system.

VI. Case Study 2: Marcus

Marcus described himself as a “bi-racial” (white and African American/Black) heterosexual young man about to turn 21 years old at the time of his interview. Marcus was born in South Carolina, where he lived with his mother, father, and siblings in a small city. He described the family as having good times and bad. When his father was working, things were stable and pleasant in the home, but when he was not, his father drank, and there was “chaos.” Through good times and bad, his mother held the family together. Then, when Marcus was 15 years old, his mother announced she had had enough and, based on advice from a relative in New York City, she moved herself, Marcus, and his siblings to Brooklyn. His mother got the family on public assistance and into public housing while she looked for work. Meanwhile, Marcus and his siblings enrolled in the local school, where he joined the flag football team and made friends.

Homelessness

In New York City, Marcus’s family life became turbulent, marked by regular emotionally violent outbursts, instigated and exacerbated at various times by himself, his mother, or siblings. Despite the fact that he viewed himself as a hard-working contributor to the family and a good student, based on her experience with the neighborhood, Marcus’s mother was suspicious that he was being dishonest about his activities away from home:

“*She thinks the people around the neighborhood would influence me. And I told her, so your plan—you are really jeopardizing my future, my education, because of your suspicions? She didn’t have faith in me a lot. She thought I was more of a follower than a leader.*”

Confused by the nature of their disagreements, Marcus was alarmed when at age 17 his mother deemed their situation to be intolerable and told him she had no choice but to ask him to leave the family home. Looking back, he suspected she felt he was a bad influence on the younger siblings, and just couldn’t handle an older teen on her own. He noted, “I never thought I’d have no place to live, no family, no home. I still can’t believe it sometimes. I don’t want to believe it. But I guess it was too much for her.” Having no idea where to turn, Marcus felt he had no choice but to drop out of high school and to spend his days just surviving—focusing on how to get food and where he would spend the next night. Like many RHY in New York City, Marcus experienced frequent

police harassment while on the streets or the subway, and he found the city’s youth crisis shelters to be overcrowded and chaotic, if there were even a bed available at all. Nonetheless, Marcus was often left with no other alternative than to rely on these shelters, but the day-to-day crises and stresses prevented him from thinking about a long- or even moderately short-term plan by requiring him to constantly be in what he describes as “survival mode.”

First experience with a DIC

Eventually, after a brief stay at a local hospital related to what he refers to as an emotional breakdown, Marcus was referred by a social worker to the RHY-specific program called Directions, a DIC. Due to his generally negative experiences in crisis shelters, and after several unsuccessful attempts to re-establish a positive relationship with his mother and siblings, Marcus somewhat reluctantly decided that, for the sake of stability and safety, approaching Directions was his best option. Upon entering Directions, Marcus found that, although he had far more “space to actually breathe,” he found it difficult to make friends and instead focused his energies on studying for the General Education Development (GED) test and finding employment. Despite his having no GED diploma at that point and very little work experience, Marcus found the staff at Directions went out of their way to provide him with individual assistance, such as help with resumes and job applications, scheduling job interviews, and even conducting mock interviews. Because of the help he received, and motivated by the fact that maintaining steady employment was one of the requirements at Directions for moving up in the program and eventually securing a place at a TLP, Marcus achieved this goal and landed a part-time job as a cashier at a pharmaceutical chain store, while he worked with a tutor in his spare time to prepare for the GED test.

More support at the TLP

While Marcus initially found it sufficient to take advantage of Directions' willingness and ability to provide basic needs such as food, clothing, and transportation assistance, he eventually sought more involved aid and support to foster steps toward independence, such as obtaining referrals, creating and submitting applications for education and employment, and setting up his first bank account. As he became more and more integrated into the program throughout this process, Marcus also found himself increasingly comfortable with the Directions' staff members and began to discuss his issues with them; namely, his anger and his constant feelings of vulnerability, and particularly his frustration regarding his past family life and current living situation. For Marcus, staff at Directions provided a different experience in coping with these stresses and traumas. As he put it, "It's now more like I'm not fighting all my battles by myself. You know, or I'm just carrying all the weight on my shoulders by myself." In particular, Marcus noticed his anger became noticeably more manageable after months of attending a group geared toward helping young homeless young men share their problems and coping strategies with one another. "You get to sit around a table and just like—you know—say your feelings and stuff like that and no one could judge you about it."

Gradually, as Marcus began to develop more meaningful relationships with program staff and other RHY, he started to attend life-skills workshops dealing with money management and basic cooking and cleaning skills. In order to fulfill another requirement for TLP residency, Marcus also began to meet with a case worker whom he found particularly relatable, and agreed to create and track the monthly progress of four short- and long-term goals. This, for him, was a unique experience in building self-confidence: "I like when someone pushes me so that I know that it's the best—they not pushing me for the worst, they're just pushing me for the best." After finally feeling at home in the program's DIC and developing positive relationships with the program's staff, including close guidance from a counselor/case manager, staff suggested to Marcus that he was ready to apply for the TLP. He was quickly accepted.

Unsurprisingly, as Marcus notes, life at Directions' TLP was not without its struggles. As is the case with many other RHY who regularly visit the DIC or who reside in one of the program's TLPs, Marcus finds that he and fellow residents must constantly struggle to negotiate interpersonal tensions not only with each other, but also with staff. In particular, Marcus' time at the TLP has been in part characterized by what he describes as an ever-present conflict between the desire to move toward relative independence on the one hand, and the restraints of program rules such as curfews, chore assignments, and mandatory workshop attendance on the other. Marcus' frustration often stems from his perception that at times it can seem as if staff "talk to you as if you were a child." Nonetheless, as Marcus resignedly put it, "I guess there's a free roof over your head like you can't complain about nothing else."

A brighter future

Marcus, having moved his way up through the Directions program, is now residing in one of the program's TLPs, where he is required to set aside a portion of each paycheck to pay for his program dues. These dues serve as an ad hoc savings account, which will be returned to him and used for a deposit on an apartment when he graduates from the TLP. Marcus expressed that having even a small amount of money to fall back on helps him to feel hopeful about the future in a way that he previously had not. Yet despite his current financial savings and progress with counseling and anger management, Marcus still does not feel completely emotionally or financially ready to live independently at this time. Yet Marcus, like many other TLP residents, expressed great concern that residents are no longer able to stay in the facility once they turn 21, or once they have "timed out" (usually after 18 months). However, because he had been able to progress through the DIC and TLP, he was confident that he would soon be ready to live independently. Marcus is still working with several of the program's counselors to reconnect with his family in a healthy and meaningful way, and has finally started to make friends at the TLP. As he frequently mentions, when not working or attending workshops at Directions, Marcus can be found most days exploring the city with friends on his longboard.

VII. Case Study 3: Kae

Kae is an avid fiction writer who has been heavily engaged with the RHY program called Passages, located in upstate New York, for over 4 years. Much like the characters in her writing, she describes herself as bold, courageous, and tough-skinned, and credits the support from Passages for helping her to grow from an introvert who was hesitant to ask for help to meet even her most basic needs to a successful, assertive 21-year-old African American transwoman. For Kae, becoming confident in her independence was especially critical, as she reluctantly decided to leave home at 17 to avoid constant conflict with her mother and aunt, which, as she noted, meant that she had to “grow up quick.” In particular, Kae found herself suddenly without a place to eat and sleep, while simultaneously experiencing depression, gender dysphoria, and frequent police harassment, which proved to be both emotionally unsettling and physically dangerous.

A double-whammy

For Kae, who describes being a homeless transgender youth as “a double whammy,” accessing services outside of RHY-specific programs was especially difficult. Not only had Kae experienced the adult homeless shelters she had often been forced to rely on as “unnecessarily hostile” to herself and to other transgender individuals, but she also explains why even today she is reluctant to visit the department of social services, where social services workers have repeatedly refused to recognize her by her preferred gender pronoun: “I would rather have my dignity and respect, and not be helped, than be helped but be disrespected.” Indeed, conflicts related to her gender identity have resulted in Kae being forced to leave an apartment, which several years ago led to Kae being homeless yet again. After discovering Passages via word-of-mouth, however, Kae was introduced to a setting that, unlike previous experiences with social service providers, she experienced as almost immediately positive: “It was just like coming into a new environment of family.”

Feeling accepted

In fact, in the past several years Kae has felt so comfortable and supported at Passages that she gradually worked her way through various programs at the program’s DIC and eventually secured a coveted spot in Passages’ TLP. Yet Passages is not specifically designed to serve LGBTQ RHY. And indeed, while in the program Kae experienced a few instances of bullying and discrimination as she transitioned from male to female. Yet after one particularly troubling incident that included being repeatedly misgendered, the staff organized and conducted a sensitivity workshop for all RHY in the program. This was one of the first times that Kae felt her concerns being taken seriously, and this, in turn, caused her to feel safe, heard, and “at home” within the program. Indeed, to this day Kae feels confident that the program’s staff has always been very supportive of her gender identity, and recalls that Passages staff actually played an active role in Kae’s transitioning, including connecting her with a primary care physician and therapist, helping her to begin hormone replacement therapy, and eventually to officially change her name.

Kae’s time at Passages has not always been without other difficulties however. She has had to leave the program on multiple occasions due to escalating interpersonal conflicts with staff and other program participants and for violating rules and regulations that she experienced as threats to her autonomy. Despite this, Kae was eventually able to address and resolve these differences, and was eventually accepted back into the program. Indeed, Kae went on to become an intern and peer counselor, in which capacity she began to independently facilitate groups that have helped to direct many other youth to housing resources, a process she describes as often overwhelmingly complicated for many RHY.

A brighter future

Asked if she had any advice for youth in a similarly difficult situation, Kae says that for her, it was key to realize that “even if you fall off your horse, get back on and try again. Like you go back twice as harder, three times as harder. It’s been a bumpy road. But, glad that I’m still alive.” For Kae, this has applied not only to learning to understand, accept, and follow the rules at Passages, but also to successfully completing her GED and taking part in a pilot program designed to help gender atypical RHY succeed in the corporate world, and to encourage companies to hire more transgender individuals. Overall, for Kae the best thing about being involved in the program has been “occasionally being acknowledged, you know. Just saying, hey, like we know you exist and, you know, you still have a voice here. Like, don’t ever feel like you have no voice.” In addition to participating in the aforementioned pilot program, she is now enrolled in a local college and is especially interested in computer science.



Part 2. A Call to Action

Part 2. A Call to Action: Practice and Policy Implications of the RHY Impact Study

Stakeholder Interviews:

Nina Aledort, Associate Commissioner
New York State Office of Children and Family Services

James Bolas, Former Executive Director
Coalition for Homeless Youth

Darla Bardine, Executive Director
National Network for Youth

Nancy Downing, Executive Director
Covenant House New York

Valerie Douglas, Director of Counseling and Runaway/Homeless Youth Services
The Center for Youth Services

Andy Gilpin, Associate Executive Director
CAPTAIN Youth Services

Valerie Paul, Director of Youth Services,
HONOR

Francis Aponte-Veras, Director, Streetwork Project
Safe Horizon



Greater Public Recognition for RHY Issues but Challenges Remain

As part of the process of developing this white paper, we took the study findings to a group of experts, including subject experts, federal/statewide agency staff, national homeless youth organizations, and local providers, and asked them both to interpret what we found and outline possible policy and practice implications of these study findings, as well as areas the RHY Impact Study may have missed. Quotes were attributed to stakeholders with their permission.

Many thoughtful insights emerged from the interviews with these stakeholders. A recurring theme among the stakeholders was the general consensus that RHY, a population traditionally ignored and underserved in our society, is getting more attention at the city, state, and federal level in recent years, with resulting positive effects for settings and RHY themselves.

For example, at the federal level, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is shifting away from a primary emphasis on ending veteran homelessness, to ending youth homelessness as well. Additionally, more recent attention on human trafficking has brought greater awareness that among the population of adolescents and young people, RHY are most likely to be trafficked, and policymakers are looking more closely at the trafficking component of the RHY legislation. There are efforts for different sources of funding (i.e., HUD and the Department of Health and Human Services [HHS]) to come together to create shared definitions and principles related to what works for RHY programs as well as to develop collective systems for data collection.

Practice implications provide direction on both organizational and programmatic levels. In terms of organizational issues, there is a need to demonstrate impact and provide strong arguments for validity. Additionally, there was a consensus that staff reflection is key to preventing program stagnation and ensuring services and approaches are relevant to youth. Program-level implications include the need for an integrated and holistic community response to RHY so that the services that they come in contact with, such as child welfare, foster care, education, public assistance, subsidized housing, and criminal justice, have a shared understanding and approach to meet their unique developmental needs. Importantly, when it comes to supporting RHY in their transition from homelessness to self-sufficiency, relationships are central in RHY's lives and need close attention, alongside the basic provision of services. There is a call to action as well for organizational cultural competency for LGBTQ youth, many of whom are homeless due to family conflict over their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.



Funding Constraints and Organizational Instability

Several stakeholders commented on issues related to the tight funding environment and how that impacted their abilities to deliver on their mission. In fact, a substantial number of settings closed or ended their RHY programs during the course of the RHY Impact Study (5 out of 29 settings). These program closings underscore challenges RHY settings face to maintaining program stability and longevity. In fact, there is agreement among RHY providers and stakeholders that funding levels are generally insufficient to meet the needs of the population; for example, tens of thousands of RHY are denied shelter each year due to insufficient appropriate housing resources. These fiscal problems have been even more acute since the economic downturn beginning in 2008, when local funding for RHY programs decreased dramatically in many areas, and at the same time federal funding levels were frozen, placing RHY settings under great strain (Bardine & National Network's Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), 2015; National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth & National Network for Youth, 2016). The study's implications are interpreted in this larger context of funding constraints and instability.

At the time of writing in 2017, many RHY stakeholders are also concerned about the support their work will receive with the new presidential administration, as the priorities of RHY have always been at the "bottom of the list." As the political landscape changes, their concerns about the future grow. The following section highlights bright spots and challenges that remain from the practice and policy implications that surfaced from the study findings as well as from the stakeholder interviews and their interpretation of study findings.

TABLE 2. Organizational-level Implications for RHY Settings

<i>Build stronger arguments for the value of RHY programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share organizations' value in the RHY community • Draw attention to the issues RHY face • Advocate for organizational strengths to policymakers • Enhance resources and sense of value for RHY programs • Build public support for and awareness of RHY programs
<i>Foster in-depth analysis of program impact</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create funding streams for data collection tools and training in data collection • Consider impact beyond metrics for success required by the federal government for reporting purposes • Create new shared/collective outcomes for youth across agencies • Harmonize data collection practices and resources across agencies • Track youth longitudinally to capture longer-term program outcomes
<i>Avoid program stagnation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-examine and challenge existing program models to achieve optimal outcomes for youth • Promote programmatic innovation • Be open to opportunities to expand RHY services through linkages with existing systems
<i>Encourage staff reflection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote critical reflection among staff to consider the ways in which they engage and connect with youth • Include anti-racism and other anti-oppression analyses and practices as important portions of staff reflection exercises • Involve young people in process evaluation activities • Maintain an approach that adapts and responds to the needs of RHY.

Practice Implications: How RHY Providers Can “Up their Game”

Organizational-Level Implications: Creating a Culture of Learning and Impact

Four broad organizational-level implications, which also inform the day-to-day execution of programs, focus on RHY programs sharing their value with the community and in the community, transforming RHY program culture, documenting impact, and engaging in continuous staff reflection.

1. Promote stronger arguments for the value of RHY settings

A new development in the RHY field that has the potential to draw even more attention to the issues RHY face is that programs are thinking creatively to make better arguments for their validity. Programs are gaining more experience in self-advocacy and sharing their value in the community. They are better able to voice their strengths to policymakers and the world at large. This has shifted over the last decade and will enable the RHY field to garner more respect, traction, and resources for their work. Organizations need to keep this in mind as the day-to-day work often leaves little time for communicating their important role in the community. Programs need to build public support for their work and view wider engagement as critical in reaching their outcomes with youth.

2. Document program impact work beyond grant requirements

The RHY Impact Study looks at the comprehensive impact of RHY programs from diverse perspectives and codifies the characteristics that make up higher-quality settings in New York State. Until now we have known about the programmatic outputs that the federal government requires for grants as evidence for success, but ideally these data will serve as a starting point for future in-depth program impact and evaluation work. This would require creating new shared and collective goals for youth across agencies. Currently there is not specific funding to support RHY providers with data collection and capacity; therefore, providers do not have robust data sets. One encouraging development is that HHS and HUD merged their data systems. However, more work is needed to implement and operationalize this change. As well, providers need access to funding that will specifically support systems and staffing that can track youth longitudinally, as positive outcomes may not be apparent at the time when RHY exit the program. This will also allow identification of program characteristics that produce the strongest long-term gains.

“*It is important to track youth over time. While the RHY programs impact on youth may not be seen immediately, gain might be seen later down the line.*”

—Nancy Downing, Executive Director,
Covenant House

3. Resist the pull of organizational culture and program stagnation: Move beyond “we’ve always done it this way”

Many RHY organizations have been in existence for decades, and programs can often get confined to their history. For example, stakeholders commented that outdated models framed in the mentality of “helping children” may score well enough to secure funding for multiple years, but are at risk of perpetuating a model that keeps receiving support even though it may not produce the optimal outcomes for youth.

Addressing the pitfalls of maintaining the status quo will help agencies be more open to innovations. The culture of many RHY programs may prohibit more forward-thinking conversations due to being steeped in historical roots. Stakeholders shared one common example regarding staff attitudes toward youth that have gone unexamined: they noted that sometimes staff gain secondary benefits of helping youth in more “parental roles,” which does not empower youth to make their own decisions effectively—but this is how “it’s always been done.”

4. Conduct continuous staff reflection and process evaluation

It is critical that staff continually looks into how they are engaging, connecting, housing, and clothing young people and involve RHY in process evaluation. If programs are federally or state funded they have a mandate to integrate a PYD model, but how does that happen in a thoughtful way? Staff and administrators need to talk to RHY (and each other) and be adaptive as they learn more about what works and what needs improvement.

Staff should consider asking themselves hard questions:

“How do you understand and work with young people to acknowledge them as the experts in their lives and help them make better choices? How do you understand where youth have been by looking at our own trauma we have suffered? How staff interacts with young people is key to the outcomes we can help them achieve.”

—Nancy Downing, Executive Director, Covenant House

There are other important questions. How does racism, including structural racism, factor into relationships between administrators and staff and between staff and clients? How does our agency celebrate racial diversity and embrace people with experiences of racial oppression? How does we celebrate all gender identities and sexual orientations? How does stigma about receiving charity of public aid factor into how we talk about resources with homeless young people?

In addition, young people themselves should be part of this continual learning and reflection so the PYD approach is modeled at all levels and the programs can adapt and change to RHY’s needs.

Program-level Implications: Fostering the Conditions for Positive Youth Development

The following practice implications provide direction for how RHY settings can strengthen their work on a programmatic level.

1. Implement a Positive Youth Development approach—it works!

One of the bright spots from this research is the finding that PYD works—this intentional approach can be therapeutic for youth even without conventional therapy or other clinical interventions. Our society tends to recognize youths' pathologies more readily than the assets they bring to the table. Our findings suggest that a strengths-based approach is effective with the RHY population, and stakeholders noted that this resonated strongly with their experiences in RHY settings.

Creating the space for youth to have stable relationships with adults can be life-changing. It is often difficult for funders and other stakeholders who support RHY programs to trust that particular tenet, but we present evidence for the importance of relationships in this comprehensive research study. One key finding is that RHY programs need staff that can maintain relationships with youth even when circumstances are difficult, such as when youth speak to them in disrespectful ways or even threaten them. In these instances, staff needs to maintain boundaries while still supporting youth. In providing this space for reflection in addition to basic life skills, RHY programs become a place where youth can grow and learn from their crises in adaptive ways. There is a consensus this can best be accomplished through a PYD approach.

Many stakeholders noted that the PYD approach is so important for youth because the adult shelter system does not typically take into account the specific developmental needs that young people have as their cognitive development is still underway. Because RHY lack family support, they have a greater need for supportive adults to work with them to build on their strengths and help identify education and vocational goals that have the potential to impact their lives in the long term.

“ I am moved and thrilled by this study! It is complete validation that good youth development fundamentally works and actually has an impact. There is a reparative nature in RHY youth development work that enables youth to have spaces to feel like they have a say, they belong, and that life is not out of control for them. RHY providers give youth a space where they can make mistakes and grow.”

—Nina Aledort, Associate Commissioner,
Office of Children and Family Services

2. Foster emotional supportive RHY-adult relationships

Healing and growth take place in the context of relationships. RHY are wary and distrustful of adults and social service systems, but urgently need to develop trust to engage with services, heal, and grow. Fostering trust among RHY can be a complex task that requires patience and empathy. For many youth, it is difficult to bond immediately with program staff as they feel that they have just rescued themselves from the very adults who were supposed to keep them safe and protected. RHY staff members find themselves in a complicated role that necessitates strong boundaries between youth and adults.

Even if trusting staff does not come easily to RHY, staff needs to help RHY connect with adults such as mentors, guidance counselors, or coaches. This is critical in helping RHY manage their crises and also in assisting them with the typical developmental tasks of adolescence and young adulthood. The executive director of the National Network for Homeless Youth emphasizes the centrality of supportive adult relationships in youth development:

“For the National Network for Youth’s National Youth Advisory Council—15 formerly homeless youth—for all of them the relationship mattered—whether it was the street outreach worker, the director of the transitional living center, a coach etc. Research in robust mentoring demonstrates that the key outcomes for youth come from long-term relationships with caring adults. RHY programs need to help youth identify who these adults are. Staff members can’t always be that person.”

—Darla Bardine, Executive Director,
National Network for Youth

Staff emphasized that it takes gifted people to work with RHY, and those with a unique sensibility, that is, people who can be nonjudgmental and open to listen to youth and have empathy toward them, while avoiding power struggles. Staff spoke about their role as surrogate parents, and that serving as a coach or guide to RHY was key to engaging RHY where they were. A key component of building trust is acceptance. Especially in DICs, there was an emphasis on serving as a low-threshold program, where there were few barriers for entry (e.g., abstinence from substances, working as a prerequisite). Ideally, RHY programs are a safe space where youth have easy access to talk with someone about their next steps and are never turned away.

“Sometimes staff has to reach and dig deeper to get to the tears. Many homeless youth don’t know how to express their feelings—they can be mistaken to be disruptive but they have been through so much—sometimes in and out of shelters since the age of 12. We need to help them express how they feel in constructive ways.”

—Valerie Paul, Director of Youth Services,
Honor

3. Persist through the challenges of being youth-centered

Service providers working with RHY commented on the youth-centered approach being difficult for outreach workers, case managers, and staff who often drop into a parental, “I know what’s best” stance because they have had similar experiences with other youth. However this does not allow youth to set their own parameters of what is right for them, and RHY may see it as another example of adults trying to control them. It also denies them the learning experience of making a poor decision and recovering from it.

“ Youth should not be un-housed. The sooner you catch homelessness the better the community is as you are not feeding the pipeline of domestic violence, substance abuse, trafficking, mental health. The community would save so much if funds were invested on the front end—then they would not have problems for decades to come.”

—Andy Gilpin, Associate Executive Director, CAPTAIN Youth Services

“ Staff can often use power and authority to control youths’ behavior—saying things like “If you don’t stop that, we’ll discharge you” instead of helping them make better choices and understand the consequences. They need to have a conversation in a way that allows them to make choices.”

—Nancy Downing, Executive Director, Covenant House

“ We need young people to talk about their experiences and what they need and for their voices to be factored into the equation in organizations. We must adhere to the philosophy of ‘nothing about us, without us’.”

—Francis Aponte-Veras, Director, Streetwork, Safe Horizon

Being youth-centered starts with how outreach is conducted with youth. Providers note that formerly homeless youth paired with social workers are effective teams. Challenges persist, as sometimes youth are not ready to join structured youth programs. Street outreach workers have to be “salespeople,” since systems have let RHY down and they need to see the value of coming to an organization. There is value in bringing a youth into an RHY program as quickly as possible:

Interactions between youth and staff are stronger if the program uses a motivational interviewing technique, a style of counseling where staff support autonomy, use questions and reflective listening, refrain from advice, and enable youth to direct staff where they need to go and to uncover their own motivations. Case managers have been trained in this technique, which helps maintain a youth-centered approach. There is success here from which to build:

Trauma-informed care and a resilience approach are critical to a youth-centered approach in that each recognizes that young people are the experts in their own lives and helps them make good choices. Yet a rich service environment is needed to implement these approaches. However the PYD approach has its limitations. It can be seen as a “best case scenario approach” and only may work well in organizations that are functioning at a higher level, since staff in lower-functioning organizations need to attend to so many daily crises while maintaining safety. At the same time, it is an ideal worth upholding, and some organizations carry it out well, for example, by having youth clients participate in the staff interview process. Francis Aponte-Veras of Safe Horizon employs an aphorism to help the organization stay grounded in putting youth first in its decision-making processes.

4. Family connectivity and reunification as a goal

Family reunification is a key goal for the RHY field. While the federal RHY regulations declare that family reunification is a major objective, it is important to ensure that the circumstances that youth are returning to are safe and appropriate. The culture of RHY organizations needs to intentionally create the space for conversations with youth focused on connection with families; yet stakeholders agree this aspect of RHY service provision is inconsistent across settings. Further, best practices do not exist to facilitate this dialogue. In the past, reunification has been targeted for runaways who left voluntarily and have a safe space to go back to.

Individual and family interventions are important because if families have more support they are more likely to stay together. At the same time, staff needs to engage young people in identifying other supportive adults in their life. Family context plays an important role in whether reunification is feasible. Where family reunification is impossible, often due to the strains of financial and housing precariousness, family connectivity emerges as a more realistic goal.

In the new federal presidential administration, stakeholders predicted there would be an increased emphasis on family reunification, but not enough resources to make this happen. Reunification is easier with certain age groups and populations. For example, in the Basic Center Program, an RHY program for minors for 21 days, stakeholders noted more than half of young people are re-united (a rate higher than in other types of programs), as it is easier to do this work with minors than with adults. Reunification as a goal is also harder with LGBTQ youth due to family conflict as a reason for leaving home or being forced out of home. In addition, funding models need to expand the definition of families to stabilize communities overall and support families to provide healthier environments for RHY who return home.

“One of the most important issues for the Positive Youth Development framework in RHY programs is that family connection needs to be part of the conversation. We historically have not had a strong practice orientation around family, and providers can be hesitant to walk down this road with youth. For runaway youth, reunification is key and for homeless youth we see family connectivity as very important. Fostering social connections with related or fictive kin is not a live enough conversation in the field in NY.”

—Nina Aledort, Associate Commissioner,
Office of Children and Family Services

5. Understand what it takes to serve the LGBTQ RHY population

Much national data points to LGBTQ youth as disproportionately impacted by youth homelessness. Family conflict and rejection around sexual orientation and gender identity may need to be addressed in the up to 40% of youth experiencing homelessness who identify as LGBTQ. Staff need support on how to work with families and identify the person in a family with whom programs can work to support the LGBTQ RHY. There is a need to learn from families and youth where reunification has worked to develop best practices. Staff also need tools to develop cultural competency to deal with the LGBTQ RHY population. How do you speak with an African American/Black family about their child being gay? A white family? A Latina family?

There are certain areas where providers can “up their game.” Programs need to call upon the services provided by LGBTQ-focused organizations. In New York these include the Hetrick Martin Institute, and nationally, organizations such as the True Colors Fund and PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays). These types of organizations can train staff to be more culturally competent. Programs can also ensure that staff receive training in transgender and sexual orientation issues and can review existing materials to ensure that they are culturally relevant for LGBTQ individuals. Stakeholders expressed concerns that LGBTQ issues will be a major challenge in the new presidential administration beginning in 2017. Additionally, RHY programs should make efforts to recruit LGBTQ staff so that youth see themselves reflected back in the adults with whom they work.

There are complexities housing the LGBTQ RHY population. Having LGBTQ-only areas in transitional housing works in larger settings, but this does not mirror society. What can we do as a system to make sure all people feel safe and included? What practices can we use? At the same time, young people from the LGBTQ community overwhelmingly want to be integrated into programs as they see their gender identity and sexual orientations as only one piece of who they are.

“*Staying youth-centered in however the youth want to identify is important—be pronoun neutral and don’t make assumptions. Some providers have gender-neutral rooms. RHY programs need to have zero tolerance for discrimination against undocumented immigrants, pregnant girls, sexual orientation and gender identity—they must be able to stay in housing with the gender identity they have.*”

—Andy Gilpin, Associate Executive Director,
CAPTAIN Youth Services

Of note, some stakeholders noted that too often RHY programs rely on notions of ‘deservingness’ to pit one sub-population of RHY against another in search of revenue, and too often they may feel they are encouraged to do so by funders and media. They noted this is counter-productive and ultimately unhelpful to young people who experience homelessness and the staff who serve them.

6. Build ongoing relationships with RHY through outreach and advocacy

If one of the main goals of the RHY movement is ending youth homelessness, the importance of outreach and relationship building cannot be emphasized enough. Street outreach is a core component of RHY programs. Many RHY programs have street outreach programs seven nights a week, as well as outreach that is conducted in the middle of the night and the early hours of morning. Peer outreach is a successful strategy. It engages youth through word of mouth. The goal of outreach is not necessarily to bring RHY into the program, but to build a relationship based on what the young person currently needs:

“Some relationships will be built on the street. Youth will need sleeping bags, food, and clean needles. Some youth will come into a program at some point but some never will. A lot of youth have accessed the adults shelter system and have horror stories—they have been beaten up, sexually harassed, witnessed violence and they choose to stay on the street. What is key is offering options—building a consistent relationship. The first six months they maybe just want food. Maybe all they want is respite for sleep. Success is providing the client with what they need and not forcing them.”

—Francis Aponte-Veras, Director,
Streetwork, Safe Horizon

“The stigma that is attached to homelessness is so prevalent these days. A lot of times kids don’t even know homelessness services exist or are so distrusting and then the word “homelessness” is in the name of the organization and they don’t want the association with homelessness as it is not a positive one.”

—Valerie Paul, Director of Youth Services,
Honor

Once a young person has entered an RHY program, in addition to providing the daily necessities they need such as meals, showers, and clothing, one of the most important jobs that RHY staff has is serving as advocates for youth and connecting them with services that they might not know exist, or be too embarrassed to access due to the stigma of homelessness:

Staff give RHY referrals for public benefits, recommend appropriate services, and refer them to other agencies that can provide support. As advocates, staff provide referrals to medical care, legal assistance, mental health services, support with obtaining identification, and assistance applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, supportive housing, Supplemental Security Income, and more. Staff also assist with discharge planning when youth are transitioning out of programs. For example, after thirty days at a DIC, youth may go to a variety of settings. The first goal is to reunite with the family, but when this is not possible or suitable, staff try to identify another family member to whom the young person can be discharged or find a foster home or group home.

7. Understand and address structural barriers: Beyond the individual's story

Insights from RHY are highly individualized and often do not explore the larger contexts in which their of homelessness occurred. The reason for this is complex and multi-faceted. Findings from RHY staff reveal that it is important to work with youth to understand the factors that have come together to create their current reality.

Some providers noted that part of their role is to help youth see how structural barriers related to inequalities such as racism, classism, sexism, poverty, and discrimination due to their gender identity or sexual orientation impact their homelessness. One of the barriers to unearthing some of the larger issues that factor into youth homelessness is that a young person's story is not always readily accessible to them. Young people can be cautious about what they say (as well as what they don't say), as they want the staff person to help them—that person is their lifeline. Early in a relationship with a staff member, many RHY are hesitant to discuss issues that they think might cause staff to look upon them unfavorably. For example, there can be a sense of shame or embarrassment that comes with a young person admitting that they had a troubled relationship with their parent, a parent is incarcerated or has a substance use problem, or their family actually could not afford to house them adequately as their living quarters were severely overcrowded. In cases like these, which are many, it can be easier to address the relationship with the parents than admit poverty or substance use has come into play as a reason for leaving.

Additionally, providers noted that RHY don't always have the vocabulary to talk about issues like sexism and racism and their impacts. When young people learn the words for some of what they are feeling in regard to inequalities, they can connect those words to their experiences and understand that there are systems in place that created these conditions. Some organizations do a more thorough job than others in helping RHY contextualize their personal experiences in a larger socio-political narrative. Training is needed so that staff are prepared to deal with youth who may be experiencing lives very different from them—from being more sensitive, to using the correct pronoun, to communicating with RHY who speak different languages, to acknowledging that it might take time for youth to reveal the many layers of their experiences.

“When you are doing intake, you don't get the full story or they don't understand what you are asking. The words we are using to describe things are important. They are mindful of what they tell you. How they present themselves is what helps them survive in the world. But you will find out things later about why they are homeless. You will learn they love their family and have younger siblings at home. You will learn they have had so many relationships with institutions. You will learn they feel embarrassed but you don't get that information until later. You will learn they have so many people living in their NYCHA [public housing] apartment without a lease. But they won't say those things to you right away or sometimes never. If they did it would mean something about them and their family.”

—Francis Aponte-Veras, Director,
Streetwork, Safe Horizon

TABLE 3. Program-level Implications for RHY Settings

<i>Embody a positive youth development (PYD) approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote a youth development approach that is strengths-based and youth-focused such as PYD, which works to help youth grow and learn in adaptive ways. • Create and maintain stable and supportive relationships between youth and adult staff, which are critical to the success of the PYD approach.
<i>Foster emotional supportive RHY-adult relationships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage youth to connect with adults such as mentors, guidance counselors, or coaches, which is critical to help RHY manage crises and promote normal developmental tasks. • Empathy, acceptance, and a nonjudgmental attitude are key components of earning and building RHY's trust. • Respect for RHY's autonomy, while providing support, helps earn and build RHY's trust.
<i>Promote a youth-centered approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A youth-centered approach empowers youth to be in control of their own lives and learn from making decisions for themselves. • Maintaining a youth-centered approach can be challenging for service providers. • Motivational interviewing is a key youth-centered approach. • Trauma-informed care and a resilience approach are also critical to a youth-centered approach. • There is a benefit to engaging RHY in services as early as possible when they are out-of-home, as the streets and the street economy are dangerous for youth. • Engaging RHY in services can prevent serious adverse outcomes and is likely cost-effective.
<i>Facilitate family connectivity as appropriate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater consistency is needed in how RHY agencies facilitate family reunification, when the circumstances that youth are returning to are safe and appropriate. Family context plays an important role in whether reunification is feasible. • Where family reunification is not possible, RHY organizations can facilitate discussions with youth about family connectivity and help them identify non-familial supportive adults in their lives. • Family-level interventions and supports are needed to support families and allow RHY to return home to healthy environments.
<i>Enhance service provision for LGBTQ RHY</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQ youth are disproportionately impacted by youth homelessness and RHY programs need greater support and access to best practices around working with the families of LGBTQ RHY. • More tools are needed to help RHY service providers develop cultural competencies around supporting the LGBTQ RHY population. • Housing programs for LGBTQ RHY must balance ensuring a safe, inclusive environment for youth while also fostering their integration in society at-large and honoring their full identities beyond their gender identities and sexual orientations.
<i>Elevate outreach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer-led street outreach is a core component of RHY programs. • The goal of outreach is not necessarily to recruit youth to participate in RHY programs, but to build relationships based on youth's immediate needs.
<i>Understand and address structural barriers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RHY programs can help youth examine the socioeconomic forces, contexts, and structural inequalities that shape their experiences. • RHY may not feel comfortable or have the vocabulary to discuss issues such as sexism, racism, and poverty with service providers. • Time and training for staff can help overcome these barriers to foster open, productive dialogue between youth and staff on complex structural issues.
<i>Incorporate an anti-oppression approach to the work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrators and front-line staff members come from varied experiences of access and privilege in relation to racial privilege, gender privilege, class privilege and so on. Programs can incorporate an analysis from the top down that encourages a reflection of how structural positions impact work with clients and coworkers, and modify practice approaches as needed. • Supervision can incorporate anti-oppression as a guiding principal of successfully practice.

Policy Implications: Coordinated Responses Tailored to Youth

1. Develop a systems perspective and coordinated community response

Many stakeholders remarked on the lack of an integrated system to look at the lives of youth holistically. Changes in the current political climate demand changes to strategy, and there was a sense of urgency among organizations for policy to keep up with these changes. A youth-centered approach requires that the needs of RHY are central, but throughout the services that youth receive, the definitions and agenda that guide their work are different.

This includes more than a program-level response and looks at a broader series of questions: How does a community respond to a PYD approach? How do we create a youth-centered community approach in which the different players who encounter RHY understand this population's unique developmental needs and are trained to respond appropriately? This would require that child welfare, law enforcement, the education system, foster care, and HUD all be trained according to best practices in working with RHY, such as PYD and trauma-informed care.

For example, per the McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Education Assistance Act, there is a call for a stronger relationship with the education system and a call to hold the RHY liaison in schools accountable for RHY success. There was a consensus among stakeholders that communities need to look across systems to make sure that RHY is part of every conversation.

RHY stakeholders also called for a structured process within a city or county to evaluate the priorities and look at community readiness and the role of RHY. This would include organizations conducting coordinated strategic planning, whose outcomes would be revisited periodically so they remain relevant over time.

“A key national trend is trying to foster a community approach to youth-centered programming, where you have child welfare, public housing, law enforcement and education at the table—many young people encounter all of these other systems before they come and rely on these services in order to exit homelessness.”

—Darla Bardine, Executive Director,
National Network for Youth

2. Raise visibility of the complexity of RHY funding streams

The field is rounding a corner on attention for RHY. Many stakeholders pointed out that there is increasing recognition at the federal/city/state level that RHY have been ignored and underserved. At the federal level, stakeholders pointed out that each funding stream available to address RHY needs to understand and mandate best practices, and grant applications need to have similar requirements so that the field will provide high-quality services across the country. Many RHY stakeholders commented on the lack of coordination of terminology and criteria. One bright spot is that providers in New York State successfully advocated for a bill to expand the age definition of RHY to 25 years for municipalities and programs that choose to opt in. By aligning its definition of RHY with that of the federal government, New York better positions itself to work towards meeting HUD's goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020.

To that end, it is promising that HUD has a new focus on youth, but it must meet this corresponding focus with funds. Youth were typically the last served by HUD because the focus has historically been to prevent chronic adult homelessness. Stakeholders noted it is important that existing programs retain their funding, but additional new funds are needed for RHY. Stakeholders indicated that funds are also needed for Opening Doors, the nation's first comprehensive federal strategy to prevent homelessness, as most shelters are chronically full or over-crowded. In addition, RHY settings need the capital funding to cover the high start-up costs associated with opening a new program or expanding an existing one.

Stakeholders further noted that funding is needed for resource access and advocacy. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income, and Medicaid exist for youth 18 years and older, but these programs are difficult for youth to access. There is more work to be done for providers to link youth to these services and act as their advocates. As well, specialized services are needed for trafficked, exploited, and LGBTQ homeless youth. RHY providers have supported them with limited resources and training. Policymakers need to take these subpopulations into account when creating funding opportunities that reflect the diversity of the RHY population.



3. Maximize outcomes for RHY across federal agencies with a developmental approach

Many stakeholders noted that laws have not kept pace with advances in research on adolescent and young adult brain development and other psychological research, which can and should impact how policy is shaped. In 2018 New York State will amend its definition of RHY and increase the age range to include youth through 24 years old. We know from recent research in brain development and cognition that the adolescent/young adult brain does not fully develop until age 24 or 25 years, and young people therefore need support through their twenties. Additionally there is a lack of understanding of what happens developmentally when people experience trauma and how that impacts their developmental trajectory. Policies need to be contextualized within these larger developmental needs.

Definitions of youth homelessness are inconsistent across agencies that fund RHY (e.g., HHS, HUD). This causes inefficiencies for providing high-impact services. For example, “couch surfing” is not included in HUD’s definition of homelessness, but street homelessness is. For RHY programs funded by HHS, being “doubled up” or couch surfing is included in housing instability, taking into account that the longer youth are homeless, the greater the chance that they develop mental health and substance use issues, among other risks.

“ HUD was created for adults—how do we ensure that young people are treated in a developmentally appropriate way? Best practices need to be codified.”

—Darla Bardine, Executive Director,
National Network for Youth

In addition to inconsistent definitions, there are also differences in goals and principles that guide support for RHY. The goal of researchers and service providers is to reach the young person right when homelessness happens, and engage them in a network of specialized programs that exist to intentionally support their physical, emotional, and mental health, and their engagement in their own development. RHY programs require that youth make goals and plans for themselves. Their work focuses

on getting young people to think about their passions and the steps they need to take to move toward their goals. These factors help young people find emotional support and develop resiliency. Some stakeholders noted HUD funding for RHY needs to be better informed by youth development principles and practices that have already been demonstrated effective with this population, rather than relying solely on adult service provision programs, as has been the case in the past.

The RHY Act is prescriptive, in that if RHY providers that receive a grant must implement certain requirements. HUD is not prescriptive in this way and does not address requirements specific to the homeless youth population. Stakeholders noted that there should be a HUD requirement that organizations have a PYD philosophy and provide trauma-informed care, physical and mental health services, connections to education and vocational opportunities, job training, and instrumental services necessary for basic living.

We found another bright spot in discussions with stakeholders: HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) program, which covers a certain geographic area that comes together to provide community-wide planning and coordination of services, has been addressing RHY since 2013. As well, since 2013, RHY have been included in HUD’s point-in-time count of the homeless population. However, work remains to integrate youth needs, as not all CoCs have RHY providers in their area, and stakeholders note there is little incentive for adult providers to work with youth. Additionally, point-in-time methodologies are still in need of significant work in order to develop a realistic estimate of RHY on the streets on any given night.

“ The impact is greater than the sum of the parts. There is not just one lever that can drive success with RHY. It’s systemic, and many of the pieces that go into creating a paradigm that works have to do with the nature of the non-judgmental relationship that the young people have with the providers and meeting the participants where they are, guided by trauma-informed care and PYD.”

—James Bolas, Former Executive Director,
Coalition for Homeless Youth, Site
Principal Investigator, RHY Impact Study

4. Advocate for equity in funding

There was a consensus that programs outside of New York City, which comprise urban, suburban, and rural areas, face more critical funding issues than the programs in New York City. During the recession in 2007-2009, funding for RHY settings was cut, and funding levels have not increased significantly since 2006, even as the economy has improved. These patterns are similar in other geographical locations, and the findings discussed in this section apply to many geographical areas outside of New York State.

Besides very limited funding from HHS and HUD for RHY programming across New York State, RHY settings rely heavily on the support from state and local government. Unfortunately, the methodology that New York State uses to distribute funding to the municipalities is seen by many stakeholders as a barrier to ensuring that there is fair distribution across the state. The current methodology distributes funds based on the number of beds certified for RHY per municipality by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and does not consider the needs of the individual areas. Importantly, the support and funding that localities provide to RHY services varies across the state. In response to the limitations of federal and state funding, New York City has significantly increased its RHY budget over the past 5 years. Funding for programs outside of New York City tends to be more piecemeal and, stakeholders concurred, is not adequately supported by local government. Thus, there is not enough programming across New York State to meet the needs of the RHY population. Also, due to inadequate funding, program staff spends more time on administrative functions and filing reports to various funders that takes time away from working directly with youth. Increased funding is needed across upstate/rural and urban locales to be able to hire and retain qualified staff:

“ We need to raise staff salaries to improve outcomes for youth. Many RHY programs are piecing together funding from various sources. This research backs up the need for advocacy on a federal level that the amount of funds is not enough to keep people on staff to provide the care they need.”

—Darla Bardine, Executive Director,
National Network for Youth

Additionally, providers that are underfunded often are forced to only provide basic programming, forgoing programming that may be sorely needed, but unaffordable. This often includes specialized programming for trafficked or LGBTQ youth, as well as programming to support RHY with their mental health and/or substance use problems.

5. Build public awareness and sustainability

One of the most important issues for RHY service providers from a national perspective is continued credibility and being able to prove their worth in order to obtain funding and gain community support. Issues persist related to service providers getting blocked due to “not in my back yard” mentalities and a general resistance to creating services for RHY:

“The motivating force behind this research study was that we got tired of funders saying, “how do we know this works” and we did not have science-based data for federal and state funding. We got tired of going to legislators without the data, and we needed the evidence to give programs the weight so that they could move forward with policy and advocacy work in compelling way. The RHY Impact Study is the first, very important, step in our effort to address this gap.”

—James Bolas, Former Executive Director, Coalition for Homeless Youth, Site Principal Investigator, RHY Impact Study

A key priority is building public awareness about RHY. This will result in programs having relationships with their public representatives at the federal/state/local/ district level, so that they can advocate for stakeholders to be at the table when policies are being defined and legislation is being drafted. Many programs are so involved in working at the level of serving youth that they don't see their role in influencing policy and raising awareness of their issues. Several recent developments provide an opportunity for providers to be advocates.

Recent changes to the RHY Act, the sole federal law targeted at RHY/unaccompanied youth, are encouraging. In December 2016 a new rule created performance standards to help assess the quality and effectiveness of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program nationally by providing indicators of successful outcomes for youth. The performance standards will be used to monitor grantees' performance in achieving

the goals of the act (Office of the Federal Registrar, December 2016). While overall this is a positive direction, there is concern among providers that the new administration's HHS mandate will steer young people to the federal outcomes, rather than giving them the opportunity to define their own outcomes. This issue needs to be considered as policymakers roll out these performance standards in the field.

As well, \$2 million has been allocated for a first-of-its-kind homeless youth prevalence study to document the needs and characteristics of RHY. In 2016, the RHY Act had a \$5 million increase from \$114 million to \$119 million, the highest funding level in its history. The attention that sexual exploitation and trafficking have received have also increased awareness of homeless youth issues, as this subpopulation is most likely to be trafficked. Efforts are underway to include trafficking in RHY Act legislation.

Additionally, there is a push for settings to become more sustainable by tracking long-term outcomes and advocating for resources for after-care programs:

“Currently this is a weakness in the field as it only happens program-specifically but not holistically. Youth need to be tracked over time so that programs can get behind the more positive outcomes they are having as a result of the program. If reporting covered youth over a period of time, you might see changes in youth later down the line that were not captured immediately after they left the program.”

—Nancy Downing, Executive Director, Covenant House

6. Develop mental health services models to meet the needs of the RHY population

As noted earlier in this document, it is well known that RHY experience high rates of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, trauma, and chronic stress throughout their lives. As well, poverty and unstable housing can impact RHY's mental health. While some young people experience mental health issues before they become homeless, living on the streets and being exposed to violence and exploitation can cause some young people to experience trauma, exacerbate past trauma, and spur psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. Developing resilience is key for RHY's survival:

Stakeholders noted that mental health systems are lacking for this population. Currently, there are separate adult and child models for mental health services. As a result, homeless young adults and teens are caught in the middle and often feel like mental health services have failed them. For example, many RHY have received diagnoses of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and receive medication to treat their condition, but there are not many models that have served them well. Research is needed on the subpopulation of RHY facing mental health problems to understand how to meet their needs. Comprehensive care for RHY who are experiencing mental health issues is scant. Often providers do not collect information on mental health, and they are not funded and staffed to provide treatment for youth facing the effects of psychological trauma. Further, mental health and substance use problems are closely linked.

Policymakers need to take into account providing resources for comprehensive mental health services as part of RHY legislation, as providers cannot adequately care for this population without funds.

“Most kids who come here all have experienced trauma, some more than others. Just being separated from your family is traumatic and having resilience is so important for their survival.”

—Valerie Paul, Director of Youth Services, Honor

“RHY providers are often the last stop from juvenile justice before incarceration, for kids aging out of foster care and have persistent and serious mental health issues. Other systems have failed them and RHY providers are the least funded to provide services for this subgroup of youth.”

—Nancy Downing, Executive Director, Covenant House



7. Looking ahead: A “Place to Call Home,” supportive housing, and rental subsidies

While RHY programs play an important role in the survival of RHY, in order to prevent creating a pipeline to adult homelessness, the systems in place to address the issue must look beyond these programs to address the lack of long-term supportive housing options.

From RHY and staff perspectives, the RHY Impact Study indicates the adult shelter system is not an appropriate place for RHY’s optimal positive development. Yet RHY need a plan in place after discharge from RHY services. There are very limited options for safe housing and for them to have a “place to call home.”

As the US Interagency Council on Youth Homelessness (2017) notes, challenges exist for creating and financing housing opportunities for youth unable to return to their families. One bright spot is that some communities are beginning to find success with housing for RHY through a supportive housing approach that does not include traditional time limits or programmatic requirements. Importantly, many of these programs also provide trauma-informed services that address the physical, socio-emotional, and life skills development of youth on a pathway to independence. RHY providers echo the need for long-term supportive housing options with a low-threshold approach:

“In addition to needing more crisis shelters and more beds in general, there needs to be more permanent long-term supportive housing options for RHY. The threshold for housing also needs to be lower—there cannot be an expectation that a young person coming off the street have a job tomorrow in order to obtain more permanent housing.”

—Francis Aponte-Veras, Director,
Streetwork, Safe Horizon

Additionally, stakeholders recommended local social service districts and government housing agencies ensure that RHY are given an opportunity to access rental subsidies, which will allow them to afford their own housing. Many RHY, given access to long-term rental subsidies, may be able to manage their own apartments or homes. However, RHY are not always considered when resource access is determined at the local level. For those homeless young people who find themselves ready to manage their own home but unable to afford to do so, ongoing rental assistance can be a true game changer.

Conclusions and Future Research

The aim of the present white paper is to draw on a rigorous research study to advance practice with and policy regarding RHY, as well as future research on this large and important population of young people. Study findings also bring to light the complexity inherent in serving RHY and the importance of a coordinated, community-wide, systemic approach to serving RHY.

At the same time, while youth homelessness is currently garnering more support from public and federal agencies, stakeholders engaged in interpreting study findings noted it is imperative that RHY-specific settings collaborate around a shared list of definitions and principles related to service provision and policymaking for RHY. This is a large task, but without it, agencies risk being at cross purposes with each other, and their effectiveness at staving off youth homelessness will be at risk, further jeopardizing the lives of the youth they are dedicated to serving.

Indeed, as RHY programs continue to develop, it is important that they learn from one another and organize together rather than allow themselves to compete against each for limited funding and limited media attention.

What is encouraging is that the understanding of what it takes to provide youth high-quality programming is becoming clear, and at the same time RHY providers are increasing their visibility and advocacy work, raising the profile of their organizations in their communities as they fill a unique need not being met by the other systems serving youth—child welfare, foster care, criminal justice, education, foster care, public assistance, and subsidized housing systems. As one provider said, RHY programs are the “last stop” for youth. We hope this research helps providers to not only be the last stop, but the “best stop” for youth.

To the above point, one area alluded to at points in this white paper is the importance of staff advocacy in ensuring success in navigating diversionary public welfare bureaucracies that are often more prone to denying or complicating assistance than offering an accessible helping hand. Many young people rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, cash assistance, Supplemental Security Income, subsidized housing, and other forms of aid to survive and thrive. In context of the welfare reforms of the past twenty years, such benefits can be very difficult for young people to access. Ensuring RHY staff are trained in approaches to effective advocacy and the types of benefit available to homeless youth may help many young people exit youth homelessness. Ensuring that RHY staff does not further stigmatize already-stigmatized forms of assistance when working with young people is as important.

An important piece of developing an effective framework is ensuring that RHY-serving programs take seriously an anti-oppression framework, in contrast to blaming and pathologizing frameworks. In consideration of this, in contrast to blaming and pathologizing frameworks that look for the roots of an individual's homelessness in their individual actions and distribute blame accordingly, an anti-oppression framework ensures that an individuals' actions are understood within the larger contexts of racism, heterosexism, and class that determine the chances of survival and access for young people. From here, service approaches acknowledge the lived realities of oppression rather than deny, marginalize, or ignore them. Anti-oppressive service models are non-judgmental and embrace practices that foster open dialogue with young people while proactively rejecting racism, sexism, heterosexism, and transphobia between administrators and staff, and between staff and clients.

Finally, we found evidence for the importance of competency to work effectively with LGBTQ youth and young people of color. While there is undoubtedly an ongoing need for LGBTQ-exclusive programs, all RHY programs must ensure particular practices to embrace, support and celebrate young people's varied gender identities and sexual orientations. Additionally, we found evidence for the utility of acknowledgement of race and racism in RHY-specific settings and the importance of acknowledging, supporting, and celebrating the diversity of backgrounds and experiences that youth of color face. Race - a concept not rooted in biology - is a social construct, and the oppression of racism is a social fact. Yet only by truly engaging in practices that celebrate marginalized and oppressed racial identities and experiences are programs likely to truly serve young people of color.

We hope that this white paper will be a platform for RHY-specific settings to garner the support, resources, and funding they need to accomplish just that.

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Sponsor

Funding for the research was made possible from a grant from the William T. Grant Foundation

We wish to acknowledge the guidance and support of our Program Officer at the William T. Grant Foundation, Dr. Kim DuMont.

Papers Published on the RHY Impact Study to Date, or in Submission

Gwadz, M., Cleland, C., Leonard, N., Bolas, J., Ritchie, A., Tabac, L., ... Powlovich, J. (2017). Understanding organizations for runaway and homeless youth: A multi-setting quantitative study of their characteristics and effects. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 73, 398-410. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.01.016>

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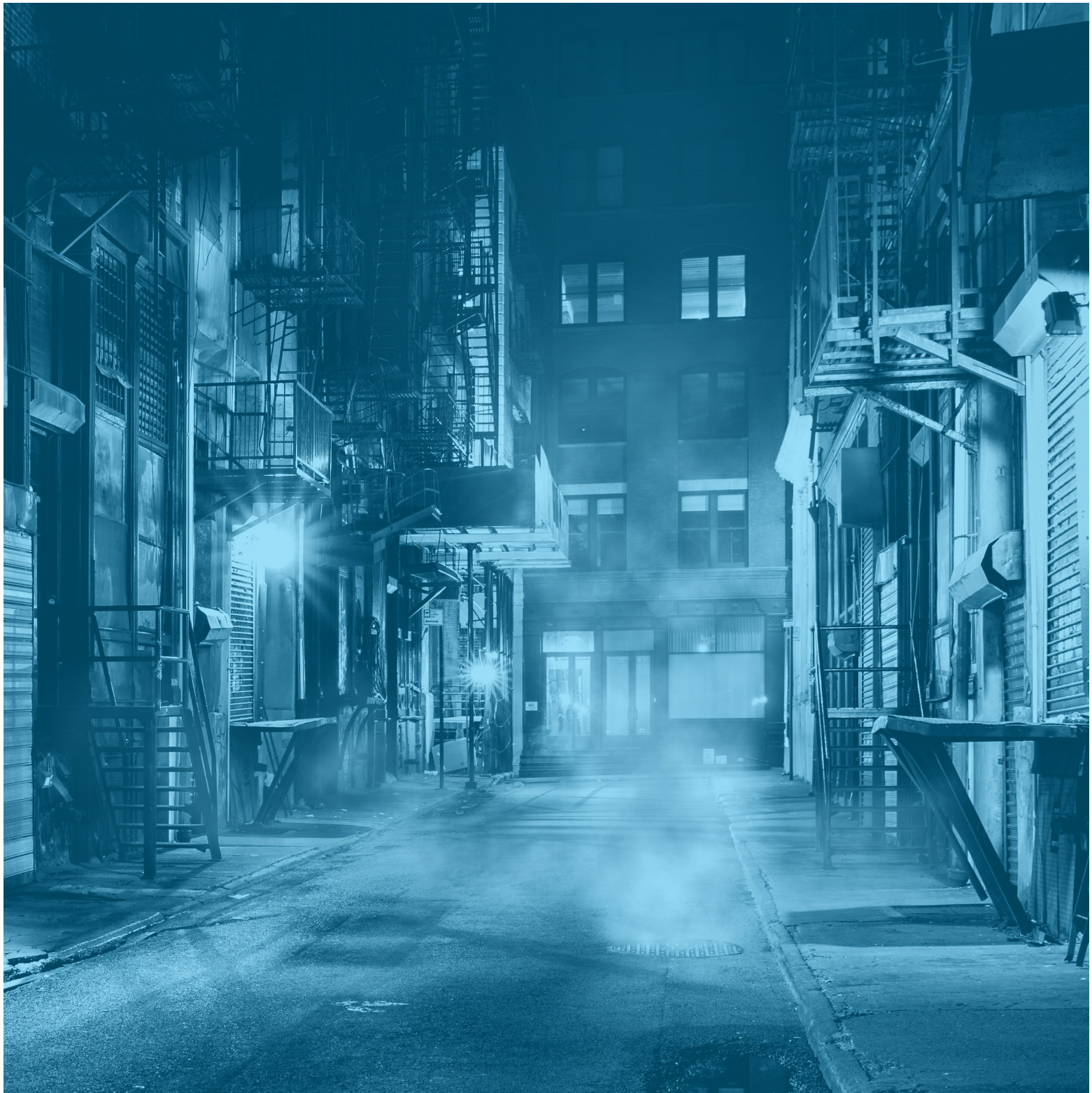
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APPENDIX: Tables describing youth characteristics

APPENDIX TABLE 1. RHY's Socio-Demographic and Background Factors (Mean [SD] or %)

	DIC (N=156)	TLP (N=61)	Dual or multi-program (N=246)	Total (N=463)
Age in years	19.81 (1.30)	18.23 (1.53)	19.26 (1.48)	19.31 (1.51)
African American/Black	42.31	34.43	51.22	46.00
Latino/Hispanic	34.62	24.59	34.96	33.48
White/other	18.59	54.10	16.26	22.03
Female sex at birth	49.36	73.77	54.47	55.29
Transgender gender identity – Female-To-Male	19.48	2.22	14.18	13.67
Male sex at birth	50.64	26.23	45.53	44.71
Transgender gender identity – Male-To-Female	11.39	6.25	4.46	7.25
Non-heterosexual sexual orientation (LGBQ)	55.13	26.67	40.74	43.79
<i>History of being out-of-home</i>				
Age first out-of-home (runaway, thrown away, kicked out)	16.01 (7.02)	15.21 (3.91)	15.77 (3.84)	15.78 (5.24)
Ever in foster care or group home	44.23	40.98	33.74	38.23
Number of foster care placements (including group home)	8.52 (17.88)	3.20 (2.06)	6.76 (14.68)	6.94 (15.08)
Total number of years in foster care/group home	5.80 (6.67)	4.60 (4.92)	4.28 (5.07)	4.92 (5.74)
Been out of home \geq 3 years	44.29	38.60	34.06	38.03
Currently considers self to be homeless	56.77	47.46	55.51	54.90
<i>Where lived in past three months</i>				
Temporary crisis shelter	25.33	10.00	34.31	28.06
TLP	16.00	73.33	32.64	32.52
In own home or rented room	26.00	8.33	20.50	20.71
In someone else's home	29.33	20.00	31.38	29.18
In a place not intended for habitation	7.33	1.67	7.11	6.46
Other	32.00	20.00	24.27	26.28
Lived in \geq 1 place in past 3 months	22.44	26.23	28.86	26.35
Stably housed over the past 3 months (i.e., lived in only 1 appropriate and potentially long-term location)	33.33	58.33	37.66	38.98
Earned less than \$100 in the past month	48.28	48.21	46.89	47.51
Severe economic need (did not have food for 2 days or more in past month)	35.95	18.03	35.95	33.55
<i>Education, job training, employment</i>				
High school diploma or equivalent	43.59	41.67	49.80	46.64
High school diploma or equivalent (among those age 17+ years)	44.16	49.02	52.36	49.09
Currently in school or GED program	43.59	68.85	54.07	52.48
Currently has job that is on-the-books	24.36	47.54	40.65	36.07
Currently has job that is off-the-books	17.95	9.84	14.63	15.12
Currently in job training program	30.77	18.03	43.09	35.64

Note: Shaded rows note differences between groups at statistically significant levels.

APPENDIX TABLE 2. Risk and Protective Factors Among RHY (Mean [SD] or %)

	DIC (N=156)	TLP (N=61)	Dual or multi-program (N=246)	Total (N=463)
<i>Physical and mental health</i>				
Health very good or excellent	59.62	60.66	59.35	59.61
Depression at clinically significant level	59.09	62.30	63.52	61.87
Anxiety at clinically significant level	69.23	80.33	75.61	74.08
<i>Involvement in the criminal justice system</i>				
Ever picked up by police	69.23	63.93	66.67	67.17
Ever been in jail	54.49	29.51	47.15	47.30
Age first in police custody, jail, prison (years)	17.06 (8.53)	15.33 (1.82)	15.73 (2.58)	16.22 (5.06)
Total amount of time ever spent in detention, jail, or prison is greater than six months	15.38	6.56	8.54	10.58
Setting helps youth avoid being picked up by the police or being put in jail or prison	55.13	68.85	62.20	60.69
<i>Substance use</i>				
Ever smoked cigarettes	67.95	75.41	61.79	65.66
Ever used alcohol	69.23	81.97	75.61	74.30
Ever used marijuana	65.38	75.41	68.70	68.47
Ever took painkillers/opioids/other analgesics	18.59	21.31	19.11	19.22
Ever used other drugs (crack, heroin, etc.)	24.36	27.87	17.48	21.17
Ever injected drugs	5.77	3.28	1.63	3.24
Ever had a problem with alcohol	16.45	22.41	13.58	15.67
Ever had a problem with marijuana	11.11	20.34	16.80	15.35
Ever had a problem with other drugs	9.62	9.84	5.28	7.34
<i>Involvement in street economy – lifetime</i>				
Panhandling	42.31	21.31	23.58	29.59
Drug dealing	38.46	22.95	32.93	33.48
Being trafficked/transactional sex (traded sex for money, drugs, etc.)	28.21	11.48	23.17	23.33
Theft, shoplifting	53.85	47.54	53.66	52.92
Mugged or robbed someone	22.44	3.28	11.79	14.25
Breaking into house, store, or car	17.31	13.11	18.70	17.49
Pimping someone	12.82	4.92	10.16	10.37
<i>Involvement in street economy – past 3 months</i>				
Panhandling	23.72	1.64	13.01	15.12
Drug dealing	16.67	0.00	13.41	12.74
Being trafficked/transactional sex (traded sex for money, drugs, etc.)	7.69	6.56	6.91	7.13
Theft, shoplifting	23.08	6.56	17.07	17.71
Mugged or robbed someone	7.69	0.00	2.85	4.10
Breaking into house, store, or car	2.56	1.64	3.25	2.81
Pimping someone	3.21	0.00	2.44	2.38

Note: Shaded rows note differences between groups at statistically significant levels.

APPENDIX TABLE 3. RHY's Behavioral and Psychosocial Outcomes, by Type of Setting (Mean [SD] or %)

	DIC (N=156)	TLP (N=61)	Dual or multi- program (N=246)	Total (N=463)
<i>School, job training, and work</i>				
Currently in school, job training, and/or employed in the formal economy	67.95	91.80	86.59	80.99
Setting helps with school, job training, job	52.26	75.41	64.34	61.74
<i>Substance use</i>				
Days used alcohol/drugs in the past 3 months (range 0-90)	19.35 (30.60)	9.07 (21.05)	16.94 (27.04)	16.72 (27.74)
Setting helps manage or avoid drug use	50.71	58.72	47.37	50.00
<i>Street economy</i>				
Involved in the street economy in the past 3 months	45.51	14.75	36.59	36.72
Setting helps avoid street economy	58.02	76.79	68.78	66.42
<i>Perceived resilience</i>				
Perceived resilience (range 0 – 40)	27.30 (8.91)	27.59 (7.84)	29.20 (7.54)	28.35 (8.10)

Note: Shaded rows note differences between groups at statistically significant levels.

APPENDIX TABLE 4. Comprehensive List of the Ways in Which RHY Reported Settings Help them Drawn from Qualitative Interviews with RHY

Basic Instrumental Support (non-housing related)

Laundry facilities
Shower and basic hygiene products
Food (breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks)
Safe place to keep your belongings
Having a place to go every day (not “on the streets”)
Providing a mailing address
Having a “safety net”
Having a “roof over my head”
Transportation assistance to and from appointments, job, and school
Provides clothing
Clothes for special events such as graduation
Making sure you have a bed
Help watching young children
Helping find ways to pay back student loans
Legal assistance
Immigration assistance
Linking to other support services
Reconnecting with family

Basic Instrumental Support (housing-related)

Help finding apartments
Help obtaining rental assistance
Housing and cleaning supplies
Furniture

Emotional Support (e.g. encouragement, confidence, advice, etc.)

Feeling of stability
Harm reduction techniques (alcohol and drugs)
Good advice
Being in a judgment-free space
Having somebody to turn to
Having someone “in your corner”
A safe space (free from extreme physical and emotional conflict)
Welcoming environment
Finding out one’s own strengths

Checking in even after leaving the program
Learning to never tell yourself no
Feeling positive about oneself
Learning how to handle gender dysphoria
Transitioning from male to female with confidence
Becoming more independent
Having a comfortable space/environment
Having space to breathe
Security
A place to relax and gather your thoughts
Being treated like a human
Finding yourself again
Becoming independent
Feeling listened to
Being validated (feeling “more sane”)
Providing a space to “get it together”
Feeling supported in choices regarding sexual orientation and gender identity
Having self-esteem “elevated”
Feeling respected
“Safe sleep”
Coping with parental abuse and domestic violence
Advice dealing with day-to-day difficulties
“Bettering yourself”
Learning about healthy relationships

Support w/Social Skills

Building meaningful relationships with peers
General life knowledge (“what goes on in the world”)
Gaining the confidence to explore new opportunities
Learning how to ask questions
Learning how to stick up for oneself
Learning conflict resolution
Learning how to be respectful of different “lifestyles” (e.g. trans folk)
Dealing with bullying

Making connections with others
Learning how to introduce oneself
Becoming more open to others
Being “in the same boat” as other RHY
Becoming not so timid
Talking about feelings more
Anger management
Training in non-violent communication
Learning to make new friends
RHY get-togethers and group outings
Socializing with other young mothers
Becoming less introverted

Health and Mental Health Services

Sexual health information
Referrals to mental health services
Referrals to general and reproductive health care
On-site crisis counseling
Assistance locating and attending prenatal visits

Life Skills

Learning to save money and to budget
Learning how to shop for food on a budget
Learning how to cook healthy meals (not eating fast food all of the time)
Setting realistic goals and working toward them
Learning how to do laundry
Preparation for living on your own
Finding resources in the community
Preparing for adulthood
Learning to focus on more than just the most immediate things
Learning to provide structure and stability for your children
Navigating social services (DSS, subsidized housing)
Housekeeping skills (e.g. cleaning the kitchen, doing the dishes, taking out the trash)

Emotionally preparing for success
Learning how and when to pay rent
Time management skills
“Learning to be independent”
Learning basic childcare skills
Dealing appropriately with difficult situations and relationships
Opening a bank account
Learning to do basic chores (housekeeping, etc.)
Following through with self-assigned goals

Educational and Vocational Opportunities

GED training
On-site job training
Getting a job
Practice with job interviewing
Free textbooks for school
RHY internship
Going back to (high)school
College applications
Financial aid for licenses (e.g. security, beauty, business, etc.)
Deciding future career goals
Linking to vocational training (e.g. Job Corps)
Going to school for fashion in Italy
Computer training
Matching funds for higher education
Proper attire for job interviews
Building a resume

MISC (e.g. hobbies, etc.)

Learning how to play pool
Getting in shape (exercising, eating healthier)
Pursuing outside interests (boxing, dancing, music, fashion)