

Feb 16, 2023 | The Creation District

Pregnant and Parenting Youth and Young Adults Listening Circle

This Listening Circle was attended by 17 parents (14 mothers and 3 fathers) with lived experiences of homelessness. Across the group, the attendees had direct housing experiences in programs led by Waking the Village, Lutheran Social Services, Wind, Sac LGBT Community Center, Adolfo, The Grove, and Sac Self-Help Housing.

What are the needs of pregnant and parenting youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness?

- More programs that support teenagers: Many participants emphasized the need to move upstream and reach youth in middle or high school to address both housing crises and service support needs.
- Finding, keeping, affording, and transporting to preschool/childcare
- Stable environments: Many spoke of the challenges of raising children in environments that were unsafe or that were not lasting. Frequent moves and lack of consistent spaces impacted their children's development and the parents' opportunities to advance education and employment as well as improve wellness.
- Programs with less strict guidelines: Some people struggle following guidelines and policies so they get excited and lose housing. Participants identified that many TAY are tired of following rules and need opportunity to exercise adult decision making.
- Transport needs - some can't afford to pay for bus, ubers, etc
- Mental health needs
 - People to talk to in moments of immediate crises as well as for regular support
 - Long term networks for support as parents and as young adults
 - Allow time to heal and overcome trauma: Programs rush into wage earning and/or education as a solution without giving time to heal trauma
 - Post partum support and safe spaces: The early months of parenthood deserve specialized support.
 - Places to honor the transition into parenthood: Participants spoke of wanting the same opportunities for maternity leave as a time to bond and grow into parenthood.
- Funding for education
- Food - SNAP benefits don't last the entire month and some can't get it if they are working. Formula and solid baby foods are expensive.
- Clothing resources: Cold weather, Interview clothes, and Laundry money
- Single parent household support: MANY youth spoke to the unique needs of single parents who are struggling under the relentlessness of parenting while still growing into adulthood. The need for long term, trusted support and occasional respite from the demands of parenting were highlighted by many.
- Respite and in home nurses, especially in the immediate post-partum phase
- Delivery of essential needs to spare the demands of transport with babies

- Workshops - financial literacy, parenting, CPR, knowing your rights (police, housing, restraining orders)
- Acting earlier before youth get homelessness
- Sobriety support
 - Programs that also allow children to be with them since they don't have childcare
 - Without the fear of CPS taking child
- Peer mentors - helping with needs such as appointments and teaching how to navigate adulthood and responsibilities

What are some ways our community and its programs can meet those needs?

- DV services for transitional age youth: A TAY DV center is wildly needed.
- More high quality, long term therapy
- Support building and sustaining long term support networks that ensure support in the years after program exit.
- Mobile outreach: Ensure services to youth parenting in camps
- Create free, fun, and healthy spaces to connect with other adults: Yoga, Sports, Self-care, Poetry, Others such as intramurals in colleges
- Support navigating development of entrepreneurship and career
- Education programs on household management and adulting
 - Family budgeting
 - Credit
 - How to overcome barriers
- Shelters
- Transitional housing or congregate housing that leads to long term housing: There was broad consensus that parenting youth need long term transitional housing with lots of support services embedded. Shelters force too many transitions and often lack private space. Participants called for much more transitional housing "like Waking the Village" that offers community, own room, long stays, and intensive services.
- House that you can live with roommates then take over the lease: Participants wanted the opportunity to continue to live with others they built connections to in programs.
- Contracts with apartment leasing: Participants suggested that agencies master lease units or build strong partnerships with landlords so that securing apartments was not so onerous.
- Processes with vouchers are slow: Participants heavily emphasized how slow the SHRA process moves and how this leads them to lose units. Inspections take too long. The RFTA takes too long. Landlords who are willing to take a voucher finally give up and participants lose units. Many also spoke to vouchers timing out before they could attach to a unit.
- When asked if we should have more rapid rehousing scattered site models or more congregate living TLP models, most participants believed that youth and young adults benefit from starting in a congregate living TLP were they can develop life skills, heal, and receive daily support. They spoke to "not earning" the apartments of the scattered site model and "taking it for granted" and not being ready to take over lease when the RRH term ends. They also spoke to loneliness and lack of parenting support in scattered

site models and the resulting problematic relationships that form as a way to resolve loneliness.

- In programs, allow friends/partners/family to come over so support networks can be maintained and so home feels truly like their home.
- In programs, reduce curfews so participants can live like typical young adults and work late shifts.
- Participants highlighted how heavy structure and policies are helpful in parenting communities as residents come in and learn how to care for the household. They also highlighted that as residents progress- working, school, healthy rhythms, saving-freedoms should increase.

What are some of the situations causing our youth and young adults to become homeless?

- Unstable households / environments
- Parents - some get kicked out as soon as they turn 18 or get pregnant
- Domestic violence
- Relying on others / broken promises (counting on people and they let you down)
 - Programs
 - Relationships
 - Families
- Foster care - feel like you are always on the run
- Lack of education (school systems don't teach you real-life skills)
- Substance use (drugs or alcohol)

How could a program address this situation to PREVENT homelessness?

- Improve systems
 - Caring staff
 - Proper training / education for staff
 - Trauma-informed care
 - Inspections of programs to ensure they follow best practice
 - Staff on top of their work and getting things done
 - Accountability for staff
- Increase advertising and outreach so young parents know about options.
 - Send mail to families that could be at risk
- Improve education about life skills
- Offer second chances: Too often participants are denied housing based on past mistakes, legal record, or behaviors that are common among young adults. (Essentially, in programs, we pathologize some of the behaviors that are common among young adults.)
- Getting to people who are younger
- Getting to people who are older
 - Aging out, less resources

Why do some youth or young adults decide not to engage with services?

- Pride: The stigma around being homeless is huge!
- Lack of trust: Most people would choose the known over the unknown.
- Shelters discontinue or refuse services for those with a child
- Programs don't treat housing crises as homelessness so people get trapped in couch bouncing or violent relationships. Parents will do a lot to avoid hitting the streets with children- and this ends up disqualifying them from programs.
- Bullying from peers
- Stigma around services
- Embarrassing
- Struggle with sobriety
- Fear of unknown
- Feeling judged
- Uncomfortable asking for help
- Don't know who to ask for help
- Lack of advertisement
 - What is out there?
 - What exactly do they offer or what will it be like?
 - Provide clarity
- Lack of passion from workers
- Not on the same page of what they can or can't provide / lack of consistency
- Don't meet the qualifications / requirements
 - Age - Services not available for individuals outside of 18-24
 - Challenges navigating the unique eligibilities for each program
- Not enough chances

What would an amazing housing program for pregnant and parenting youth and young adults look like?

- **Long stays, own room, and intensive services.**
- Childcare embedded in the housing program or facilitated with transport and quick connection.
- Parenting classes
 - How to be parent
 - Open to individuals under 18
 - Classes for fathers
- Support groups to learn from peers
- Allowing people to heal from trauma before expecting them to take next steps
- Spaces in drop-ins for kids to play and interact with other kids
- Legal services around child custody, restraining orders, expungements....
- Programs that teach how to secure and maintain housing
- Embedded, high quality mental health supports

Dream program:

- Be able to come into a safe space with a clean slate - judgement free

- No screenings or qualifications to get help
- Swift offering of safe space to sleep, eat, and meet needs
- Build relationships to staff and supports before assessment
- Not navigating rules that seem controlling or for teenagers
- Meet immediate needs
- Be able to just get into the program without jumping hoops
- Recommended a program like one in Oakland where you go to one single place for 3 days. You get immediate case management. They then point you to the place that would be a good fit for you, support with transportation, and offer a warm hand off.
- Job Corps for parents
- Programs available until end of twenties

Why do housing programs exit youth?

Why SHOULD youth be exited

- Fights
- Stealing
- First offense: mediation with parties involved and necessary staff
- Second: contract
- Third: relocate / exit
- NOT exiting for addiction to drugs or alcohol

What are some of the ways homelessness impacts a youth after homelessness is resolved?

Positives:

- Relationships built in programs or shelters
 - Especially raising children there, once you move it is like family they grew up with is gone
- Become more resilient
- Greater understanding of the world
- New view on the world - more grateful

Negatives:

- Still navigating the trauma that is lingering
- Decrease in drive: It changes the way you view your possibilities
- Childhood stress and understanding emotion. You respond to stress with more intensity.
- Don't know what to do next. The challenge is so big and survival so key. It is hard to focus beyond that and once you re-stabilize, it is hard to trust that things will stay stable.

What impacts should a GREAT program have on youth in the years after they exit?

- Teach you how to live once programs are gone: How to be self-sustaining and healthy and connected to long term supports. They also help start a lifelong journey to healing trauma.

- Being able to find what you want to be in life: A great program helps young adults clarify goals and directions for the future.
- Maintaining relationships and connections after the program: A great program allows you to stay connected and also to build lasting connections with peers, with personal networks, and with community resources.
- Knowing even if you made a mistake someone is still cheering for you and supporting you. A great program will make sure you can overcome the next hurdle, crises, or mistake without falling back into homelessness.