



A WAY HOME
WASHINGTON

The A Way Home Washington Centralized Diversion Fund:

Using Flexible Funds to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Washington State



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A Powerful Pairing: the CDF in Anchor Communities

The A Way Home Washington (AWHWA) Centralized Diversion Fund (CDF) is a cost-effective, youth and young adult centered solution to homelessness and housing instability that is already transforming Anchor Communities. Since its launch in August 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yakima, Pierce, Spokane and Walla Walla Counties have housed over 220 youth and young adult households through the CDF.

220
youth and
young adult
households
served

Diversion is a core component of AWHWA's strategy to end youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness in WA. The AWHWA diversion model is a person-centered and strengths-based approach that assists individuals or households to quickly secure housing outside of the homeless response system. Together, the young person and trained provider tailor strategies that lead to safe and stable housing, coupled with one-time financial assistance when needed.

At a time when the global COVID-19 pandemic is severely impacting the emotional, physical and economic well-being of young people, the CDF is also reducing racial and other disparities in services and housing for young people of color (POC), pregnant and parenting and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and/or Questioning (LGBTQ+) young people. CDF is more flexible than most housing programs and ensures there are little to no barriers to housing. Young people can access CDF at their college, mental health provider or LGBTQ+ center without ever needing to make direct contact with the homeless system.

Flexible housing resources are particularly important in rural areas where young people rely heavily on informal supports. YYA homelessness is just as prevalent in rural areas as it is in urban areas but it is less visible.¹ Youth in rural areas are twice as likely to seek shelter with others and half as likely to be staying in shelters as youth in urban areas.² The CDF brought flexible diversion funds to Walla Walla for the first time and has been a catalyst for Spokane's shift toward a diversion-first system.

Now that the CDF infrastructure is established in four counties and has been running for almost a year, the CDF is ready for more financial investment so that it can be scaled across Washington. As eviction moratoriums are lifted, young people will need more support to stay stably housed and thriving.

58%
POC households
served

“ The CDF is a particularly potent intervention when paired with the Anchor Community work and access to real-time quality data indicating the young people who are actively homeless and could be diverted from the system. It is also a key component to upstream work by preventing entrances into the system by young people. We also believe the CDF allows for a youth-centered solutioning tailored to that young person's experience and perspective.

Julie Patiño, Executive Director, A Way Home Washington

1 Morton, M. H., Dworsky, A., Samuels, G. M., & Patel, S. (2018). Missed opportunities: *Youth homelessness in rural America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
2 Morton, et al. Missed opportunities: *Youth homelessness in rural America*



The Anchor Community Initiative (ACI)

AWHWA defines youth and young adult homelessness as young people who are unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and between the ages of 12-24, who are unsheltered or living in places unfit for human habitation, in shelter, or unsafely or unstably housed. This definition includes young people who are fleeing domestic violence and those who may be unsafely couchsurfing or doubled-up.³

The ACI is AWHWA's flagship program and is currently working with four communities in WA: Pierce, Walla Walla, Spokane and Yakima counties. The Initiative is set to expand across the state in 2022. The CDF is a key strategy designed to support Anchor Communities to end unaccompanied youth and young adult homelessness by the end of 2022. For this reason, CDF eligibility, program structure, documentation, training and support, and success measures are all crafted with the ACI's overall goal in mind.

To reduce homelessness and reach functional zero⁴, communities need to reduce the number of young people coming into their system (inflow) each month to be less than the number of people leaving the system (outflow). CDF supports Anchor Communities to:



Reduce inflow: Young people can be stabilized before even experiencing homelessness



Expedite outflow: Young people who have limited barriers to being housed outside the system can exit homelessness quickly, preserving limited housing resources for young people who have no alternative solution



Reduce average length of time young people experience homelessness: Diversion solutions can be implemented quickly

“ At a system level, in order to build yes-to-yes communities, we must collectively believe that the young people of our community are all of our responsibility; this model helps ensure that the cracks young people fall into get smaller and close up all together.

Ashley Barnes-Cocke, ACI Project Director

Anchor Communities are uniquely positioned to maximize the CDF because they:

Pursue Systems Change:

Anchor Communities use both system-level data and CDF program data to track how CDF is (or isn't) affecting their system-level outcomes in real time.

Use Real-time Data to Drive Decisions:

Anchor Communities build data literacy through establishing their quality, reliable By-Name-Lists.⁵ AWHWA's data team supports communities to ensure all young people are counted.

Lead with Justice:

Our coaches work with communities to collaborate with young people with lived experience to identify and solve for system inequities.

Focus on Continuous Improvement:

Our coaching also supports communities to rapidly design, test and evaluate change ideas to address system barriers, bottlenecks, and inefficiencies.

³ See the [ACI Resource Hub](#) for more details about our definition.

⁴ Functional zero requires reaching a [number of measures](#) relating to inflow (including returns to homelessness), exits to permanent housing, average length of time experiencing homelessness, and zero disproportionality measures that ensure racial/LGBTQ+ equity in homeless systems. Reaching functional zero means functionally ending homelessness, also referred to as "Yes to Yes."

⁵ A quality [By Name List \(BNL\)](#) allows communities to know every unaccompanied young person experiencing homelessness in real time. It is reliable (net inflow/outflow balances out each month), regularly updated, and person-level. Through the BNL, communities can better understand the scope of YYA homelessness and the services needed to reduce homelessness.



The Power of the CDF

Simple and accessible

- No wrong door.
- Anyone in a community can be diversion trained.
- One centralized administrator in each county reduces administrative burden on individual providers.

Prevents young people from experiencing homelessness

- Combines prevention, diversion, and rapid exit concepts into one community-wide project.⁶
- Two thirds of all young people served are at risk of becoming homeless or unsafely/unstably couchsurfing or doubled up.

Data driven and improvement focused

- Grounded in community-wide ACI strategy to end YYA homelessness
- Data dashboards are real-time, public and disaggregated by race, age group, gender, sexual orientation, pregnant/parenting and living situation.

Addresses racial disparities

- Young people can access the CDF through trusted and identity-based organizations in their community.
- Expansive eligibility, no caps, and “screening in” minimizes provider bias.

Gets young people housed quickly

- Eliminates need for referrals.
- Disburses funds to get young people housed within 72 hours, often 24-48 hours.

Flexible

- Expands housing options outside the homeless system.
- Encourages creativity.
- No arbitrary caps on amounts of money requested.

Designed for young people’s specific needs

- Providers complete specific YYA-focused diversion training.
- Serves unaccompanied minors and minors at risk of becoming unaccompanied.

Housing Domestic Violence Survivors

Sam* was fleeing domestic violence from her significant other and had been couch surfing and staying in friends’ rooms, but needed her own place where she and her child could feel safe. She gained employment and could sustain the unit moving forward with her income, but needed CDF to help with move in costs.

*all names have been changed to protect young people’s privacy

“ I believe the CDF funds are a great step in the right direction of having funds with limited boundaries/ barriers. Homelessness is not uniform and is complicated... funds shouldn’t be either of those and should be able to limit those complications with ease to help benefit our YYA population.

Daniel Cross (DC), ACI Coordinator, Pierce County

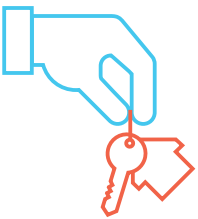
6 U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2019). *Homelessness Prevention, Diversion and Rapid Exit.*



CDF Resources Prevent Homelessness, Keep Young People Permanently Housed and Address Disparities



96%
did not return
to homelessness
within 3 months



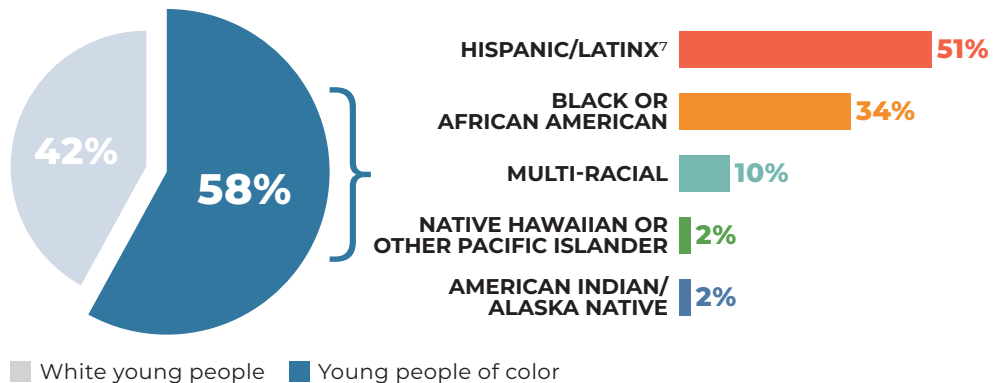
92%
of households
were successfully
diverted from
homelessness⁸

Almost all young people served through the CDF remained housed 3 months afterward. 96% did not return to homelessness within 3 months.

The CDF has housed a significant percentage of young people of color who are at risk of homelessness or unsafely/unstably couchsurfing. These households would not be eligible or prioritized for housing resources through their communities' Coordinated Entry systems.

Over half of households served by the CDF who were at risk of homelessness or unsafely/unstably couchsurfing were young people of color. The CDF is an effective strategy for equitably serving young people who disproportionately experience homelessness. This is especially the case for Black/African American and Latinx young people who make up over 80% of all young people of color at risk of homelessness or doubled up/couchsurfing served by the CDF.

Young People at Risk of Homelessness or Unsafely Doubled Up/Couchsurfing



Housing young people through the CDF is much less costly when compared to other interventions:

Intervention	Cost
AWHWA Diversion ⁹	\$1,356
Emergency Shelter ¹⁰	\$2,423
Rapid Re-housing ¹¹	\$8,649

Young people diverted by CDF spent less time experiencing homelessness, when compared to other interventions:

Intervention	Time Spent
AWHWA Diversion ¹²	2 days
Emergency Shelter	13 days
Rapid Re-housing	144 days

7 Includes hispanic/latinx young people of any race.

8 Successful diversions include exits to safe permanent and temporary housing destinations outside of the homeless system. Find out more on [page 7](#).

9 [AWHWA CDF Public dashboard](#)

10 [Department of Commerce Golden Report](#) averaged across Anchor Communities for youth and young adult serving projects

11 [2019 Department of Commerce Golden Report](#)

12 CDF requests' median processing time.



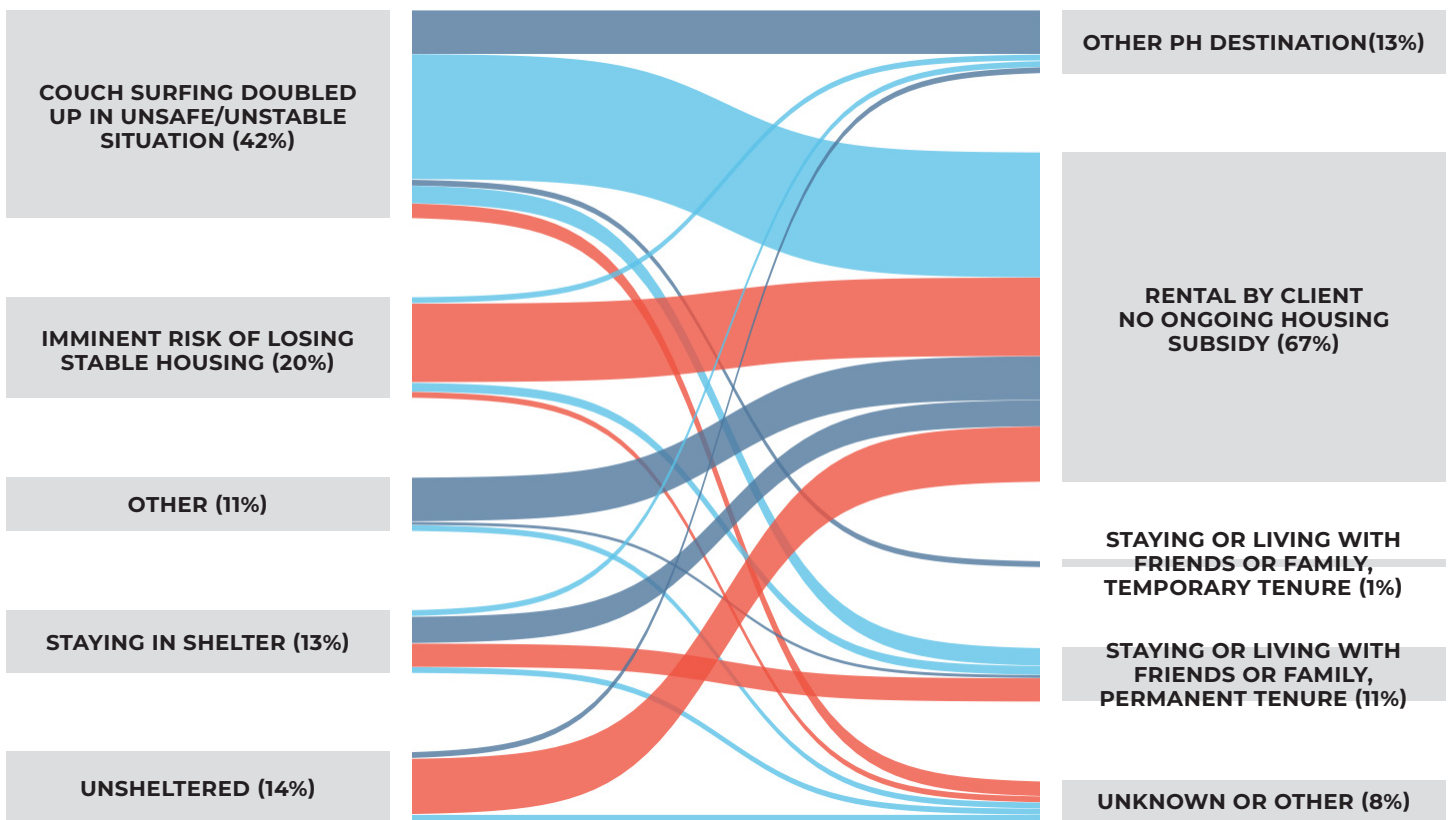
Check out the live CDF dashboard to learn more about the fund and the young people we serve.

Almost all households served by the CDF are successfully diverted from homelessness. The majority of households moved into permanent housing without subsidy.

The Sankey chart below illustrates the relationship between young people’s experience of homelessness or housing instability and what types of housing they move to after being served by the CDF. The width of the paths indicates the rate by which young people move between a certain Living Situation at Entry and their Exit Destination.

92% of households were successfully diverted from homelessness which means that they moved to temporary or permanent housing destinations outside of the homelessness system. Temporary destinations include temporarily staying or living with friends, foster care or group homes and residential or halfway houses with no homeless criteria. Temporary destinations outside of the homeless system only made up 1% of all exits. These are successful diversions because they are examples of how diversion supports young people to move along the spectrum to safe and stable housing in a way that works for their individual situation. Through its intentional design, the CDF recognizes that not all young people are ready or want to rent their own apartment so it pays for the broadest spectrum of housing options outside of the homelessness system.

Journey of Young People Through Diversion: From Entry to Exit



“ This program is going to get me caught up on rent. I am focused on getting reliable transportation and continuing to work even through the loss of my roommate/uncle. This program is saving my stable housing, because when I lost my uncle, I lost part of myself. I am grateful to have a program like this that helps us young people that are struggling.

Young person in Pierce County



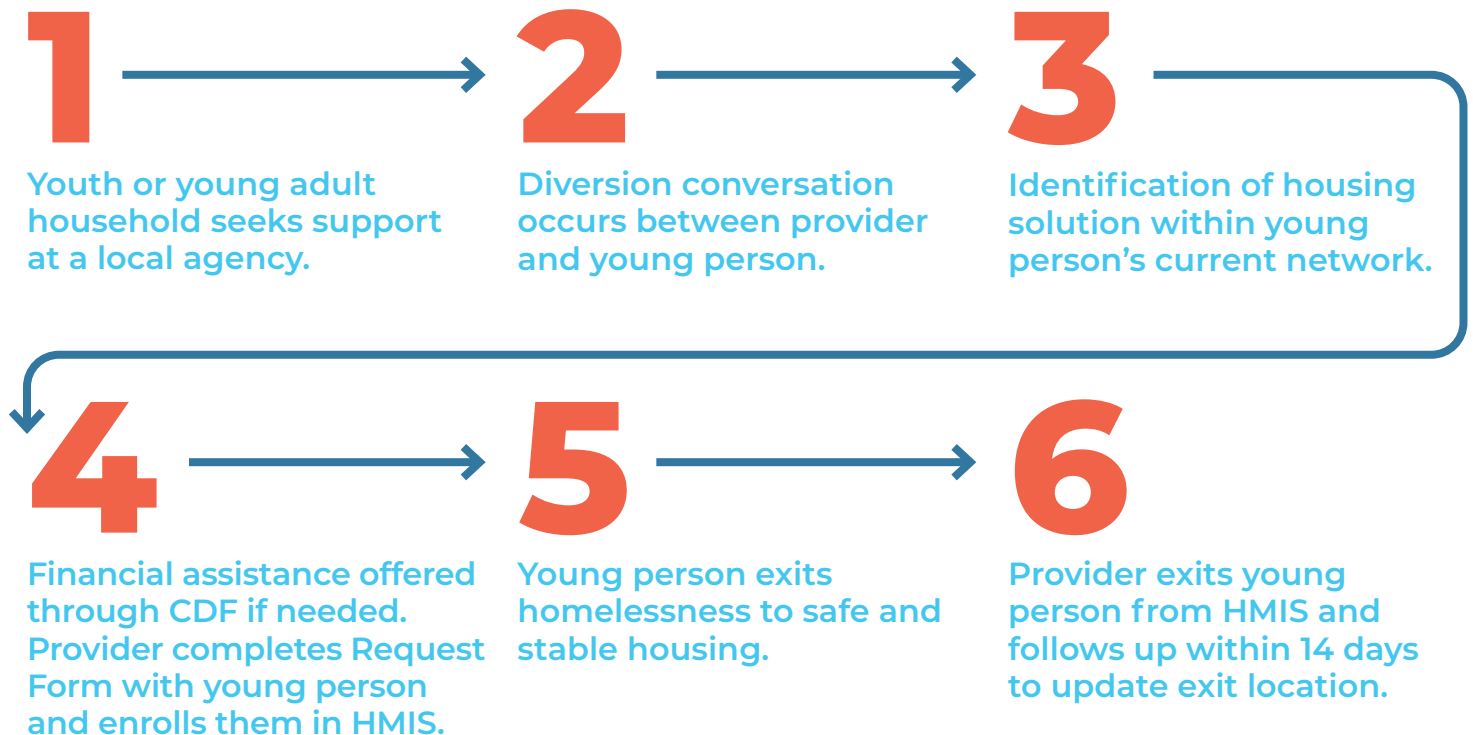
Eligibility & Diversion Process

The CDF is a strength-based approach designed to end a young person's experience of homelessness as quickly as possible. In order to screen young people in, instead of out, eligibility criteria is kept as broad as possible. Homeless verification is not needed and there is no formal cap on the number of times a client can access the fund. All CDF requests must include a housing plan outside of the homelessness system within 30 days.

Eligibility criteria includes young people who are¹³:

- Age 12-24
- Unaccompanied or at imminent risk of becoming unaccompanied
- Experiencing a housing crisis:
 - Literally homeless
 - Staying in shelter
 - Unstable situations: Doubled up/couch surfing
 - Unsafe situations: Fleeing DV or trafficking situation
 - Imminent risk of becoming homeless
- Eligible for McKinney Vento services and who are experiencing a housing crisis are eligible for CDF
- Within the age range and pregnant or parenting are eligible for CDF

Diversion process:



“ I often see programs that by design screen people out. The CDF does a great job at screening people in and uses a lens that looks at all housing instabilities and not just being street homeless. Having this program be client centered I also see impacting YYA lives because it gives them the power to make the decision that they want and/ or think is best for them.

**Mary Clara, LGBTQ Resource Coordinator/ACI Coordinator,
Yakima Neighborhood Health Services (YNHS)**

13 See [CDF Guidelines](#) for more info. The only young people who are not eligible for CDF are those who are currently accessing another homeless housing program within the system (transitional housing, transitional host homes, Rapid Re-Housing, etc).



A Centralized Community Program

The CDF is a community program, rather than a program in the community. It is a unique diversion model originally developed by Building Changes, a Seattle-based nonprofit focused on family homelessness.

A central administrator hosts a diversion fund for a community and any provider that works with youth and young adults can be trained to access the fund when needed. This structure increases cross system participation and accessibility which is particularly necessary in rural communities. The CDF encourages non-traditional services providers such as schools, community colleges, and other community based organizations to have direct access to diversion for their clients. This removes administrative burdens, referrals and wait times for clients.

How a request is processed:

- 1 Provider makes a request for one-time financial assistance on behalf of the youth or young adult household**
Provider fills out the simple CDF Request Form, provides necessary documentation and ensures that the young person is enrolled in HMIS.
- 2 Fiscal administrator processes the request**
Administrator checks eligibility and documentation and determines whether it should be approved, or if additional information is required.
- 3 Fiscal administrator disburses the funds to resolve the young person's housing crisis quickly**
Administrator provides payment (checks, giftcards, bill payment, transportation etc) often within 24 hours of receiving the request but no longer than 72 hours.

Fiscal administrators are trained on eligibility criteria, data collection, and protocols and receive ongoing technical assistance. They are deeply committed to ensuring that all funds are directly linked to a safe housing outcome. Fiscal administrators and AWHWA do not make contact with clients served through the CDF. Instead, fiscal administrators work with case managers who provide all documentation and verify the housing solution. Case managers also ensure young people are enrolled and exited in HMIS in order to track program outcomes and returns to homelessness.

Improvement Science in Action: CDF innovations

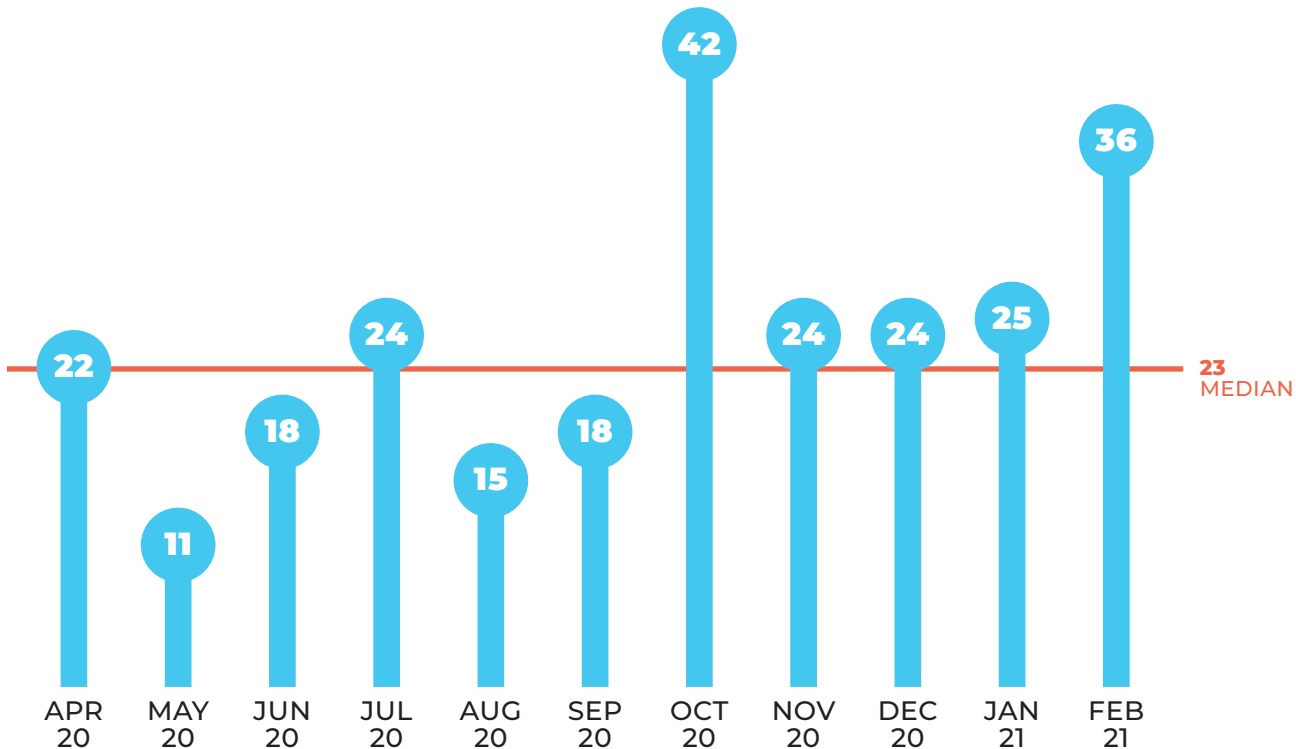
- **Social media advertising for self referrals:** Spokane received a \$5,000 grant from AWHWA's Student Stability Innovation Grants project to test paid social media advertising to increase young people's self referrals to the CDF.
- **Prepaid debit cards:** Walla Walla has a tight housing market, and clients have to apply quickly for rentals. Walla Walla tested giving a prepaid debit card to the top two requesters for application fees.
- **W9 work around:** The Fiscal Administrator in Yakima, Yakima Neighborhood Health Services (YNHS), houses many people each year. When they heard that getting W9s from every landlord that providers did a rental application for was too difficult, they set up a system where providers could check whether YNHS already had a valid W9 for that landlord.

“ Accessing CDF is quick and simple. The turnaround time is great. We have also worked with AWHWA and BMCF to come up with a way to streamline application fees by purchasing a reloadable visa card.

Elisha Pritchett, Homeless YYA Services Navigator, Blue Mountain Action Council, Walla Walla



Spokane Housing Placements Between April 2020-Feb 2021



System Change in Action: Spokane Uses CDF to Increase Housing Placements

In July 2020, Spokane's ACI Core Team set a goal that they would increase permanent housing placements by 30% by the end of October 2020. Spokane increased the number of young people they housed between September and October 2020 from 18 young people to 42. They also sustained increased housing placements between Oct 2020 and Feb 2021.

How did Spokane increase housing placements?

- **Flexible funds:** The CDF and the Eviction Rent Assistance Program (ERAP) provided an influx of financial resources that encourage more creative and rapid housing solutions.
- **Real-time data:** Using their By Name List, Spokane tracks their progress housing young people in real-time.
- **Case conferencing:** Providers meet weekly to house young people on their by-name list, with two meetings each month focusing exclusively on housing Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, POC (QTBIPOC) young people. They also prioritize unsheltered young people for housing. Approximately 40% of the young people who have accessed the CDF in Spokane so far are young people of color and 20% have been unsheltered.
- **Going big:** Making steps to becoming a "diversion first" system.

“ Our community has housed 76 young individuals/families who would have otherwise been living on the street or in shelter. This additional capacity has provided housing stability on an individual level, but our community By Name List has recognized an overall reduced number of households experiencing homelessness within this age demographic since the CDF has been established.

Julius Henrichsen, Youth Homelessness Community Coordinator, Volunteers of America Spokane



Flexible Funds are Central to Diversion

The CDF can pay for almost anything, provided it results in a young person being housed outside of the homelessness system within 30 days. There is no cap on the amount of funds that can be requested. AHWHA trains providers and Fiscal Administrators to ask “if we pay for this, will the young person be housed outside of the homelessness system within 30 days” as a litmus test for funding. The CDF can provide checks, gift cards, tickets, and pay bills or invoices directly.

Top 3 fund type requests:



Housing Deposit

security deposits needed to secure housing



Rental Assistance/Arrears

one-time rent payment (eg. first/last) or resolving previous housing debt to clear barrier to housing



Application Fees

rental application fees

The CDF is funded by a blend of private and public dollars which have different levels of flexibility. Schultz Family Foundation’s support allows communities greater flexibility in utilizing unrestricted gift cards and the ability to serve young people who may earn over 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Furthermore, providers combine the CDF with other funding and resources in their community to get young people into stable housing as quickly as possible.

Average amount disbursed through CDF per household is \$1,356

Reuniting with Family in North Carolina

A young person in Pierce County was able to return to his mother’s home in North Carolina and was able to stay with no requirements. When confirming that her son could stay with her, the young person’s mother stated that “she wants her baby home” and she “will pick him up at the airport any time of day.”

Returning to the Circus

Tom* was returning to work at the circus where he would receive housing and an hourly wage. Through CDF, he obtained an Amtrak ticket to travel to his housing and a gift card for food and expenses until he received first paycheck.

“ CDF has been creating opportunities for young people that were previously nonexistent. Its flexibility allows for the people we work with to see how CDF can fit their needs rather than try to box their needs to fit the program. We have been able to house quite a few young people by accessing these funds. These funds have allowed people to keep from losing all of their stuff without storage units, pay for deposits and first month’s rent, application fees, and keep them from losing their housing by paying rental arrears as well as energy costs.

Elisha Pritchett, Homeless YYA Services Navigator,
Blue Mountain Action Council, Walla Walla

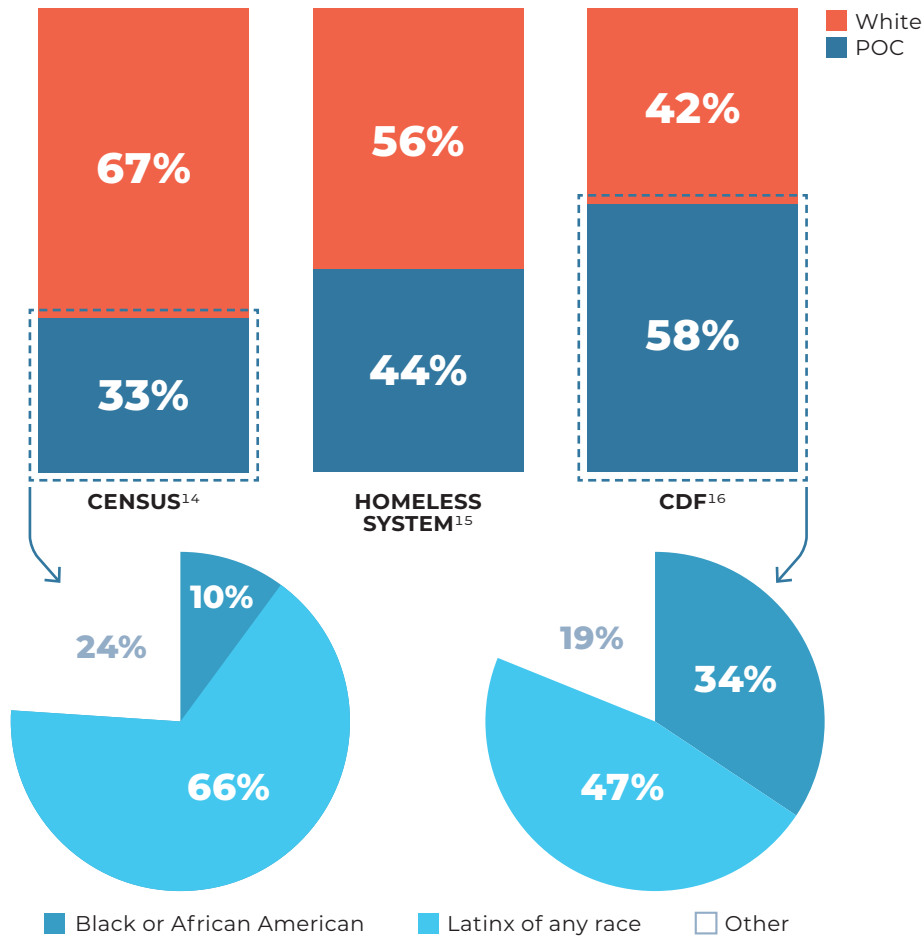


Using the CDF to Address Inequity and Injustice

From expansive eligibility, to using real-time disaggregated data dashboards to drive improvement, extensive training that embeds anti-racism into diversion practice, and by//for LGBTQ+ and POC organizations gaining direct access to flexible diversion resources, the CDF is working within the AHWHA model to dismantle systemic oppression and racism in homeless and housing systems.

By reaching young people in historically marginalized communities, the CDF is reducing racial disparities in homelessness and housing outcomes, particularly for Black and African American young people.

Racial Disproportionality in Anchor Communities



On average, people of color make up one third of the general population in Anchor Communities. However, the population of young people experiencing homelessness across communities is on average 44% POC. This affirms what we already know about young people of color being over-represented in homelessness systems. In serving 58% young people of color, the CDF is proving effective at reaching young people of color and is starting to reduce racial disparities.

Upon further disaggregating the race and ethnicity of young people of color (as shown in the pie charts above), 10% of the POC in the general population across Anchor Communities are Black or African American and two thirds are Latinx of any race. In comparison, Black or African American young people make up over one third of the young people served by the CDF, a much higher proportion than in the general population. This shows that CDF is particularly impactful in reducing the over-representation of Black and African American young people experiencing homelessness.

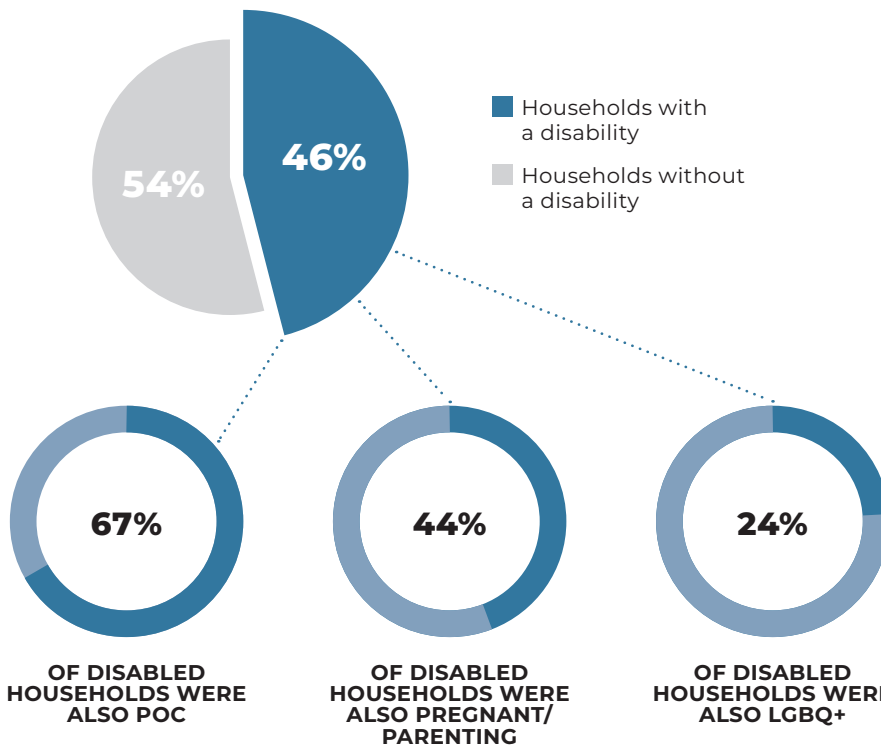
14 2019 American Community Survey 5 year estimates
15 ACI Monthly System level dashboards
16 AHWHA CDF Public Dashboard



Households with Disabilities

While disability data was only collected for 79% of total households, it shows that CDF is serving a significant number of young people with disabilities, the majority of whom are young people of color.

Where data was available, 46% of households served had a disability. It was also common for young people with disabilities to be at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.



Keeping New Parents Sheltered Until Move-in

A young person in Yakima was approved for an apartment but couldn't move in until a few weeks later. She was expecting her first child and needed a safe place to stay until her move in date. The CDF paid for a hotel for the 3 weeks until her move-in date to keep her safe with her new baby.

Paying Urgent Fees to Keep A College Student Housed

A student was attending college in Pierce County and they were being housed through on-campus dorms. Their family was moving away but they were disowned because they were non-binary, leaving them on their own. To take care of the student's immediate housing needs, CDF paid a time sensitive fee that was keeping them from signing up for summer campus housing.

Pregnant & Parenting

CDF's flexible eligibility requirements fill a critical service gap for young families and young people who are pregnant, especially Black/African American and Latinx young people.

- 42% of all households served have been either pregnant or parenting. Of these 87 pregnant/parenting households, over half were people of color.

“ This allowed my newborn child, my oldest son and myself to have some stability in our lives. I had a newborn baby, and a 3 year old while working part time, and living in motels because the price of housing is so high. This program has allowed me to focus on my family, instead of focusing on where we will sleep at night. This program gave me the opportunity to prepare for unexpected expenses such as missing work if one of my children becomes ill.

Young person in Pierce County



Paying for Gas to Get to California

Tara* was couch surfing in the Spokane area but her sister in California said that she could live with her if she could get there. Tara was working for a meal delivery company but was unable to save up enough to make the drive. She had to leave her current location by the end of the week so the CDF paid for gas to get her safely to her sister's house.

Everyone Deserves Housing

Shane* was exited from a local shelter in Walla Walla because he did not want to join the religious program. There was no room at other shelters so he began sleeping outside. A local community member was willing to take him in, in exchange for a one time payment and continued food assistance. A local nonprofit assisted with weekly food assistance and the CDF provided a one time payment to get Shane housed right away.

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

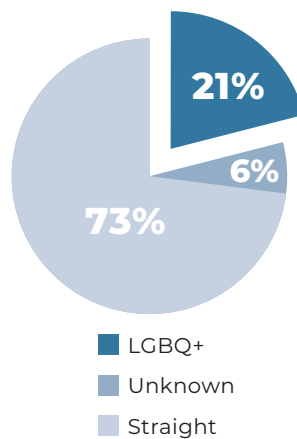
The CDF uses expanded sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) categories to more accurately reflect young people's true self-described identities. This requires ongoing training in communities and is an area of growth for providers.

- Based on feedback from young people we added pansexual, demi-sexual, asexual and queer to the sexual orientation categories young people can select on the CDF request form. We also added genderqueer and non-binary to gender identity categories and updated trans categories to more inclusive language.
- All custom gender and sexual orientation categories have been used by young people at least once.

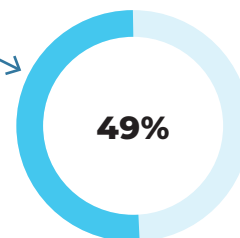
LGBTQ+ young people are accessing CDF but we believe that our data is an undercount given that national data conservatively estimates that between 20-40%¹⁷ of young people who experience homelessness identify as LGBTQ+.¹⁸

- 21% of total households identified as LGBTQ+
 - Of these 40 households who were LGBTQ+, 49% were also young people of color.
- 3% of total households were trans, non-binary or genderqueer.

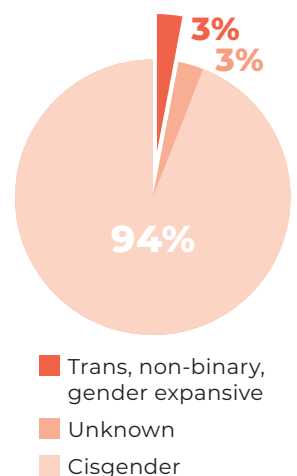
SEXUAL ORIENTATION



OF LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE WERE ALSO POC



GENDER



“ As a human services professional who has experienced homelessness as a young adult, I have seen how debilitating chronic homelessness can be to a young person's self esteem. The requirements within the homeless system leave our young people waiting for housing for months, and sometimes years...I have worked with young people that could not remember the last place they called home. CDF swiftly provides funding for housing solutions and gives these young people hope for a new way of life. Each day that a young person goes without safe and stable housing, is a day they are faced with trauma, anxiety, and fear. With CDF's expeditious process, we are able to significantly shorten those days, or even prevent them from occurring.

Janelle Frazer, Shared Housing Services, Pierce County

17 True Colors United

18 Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.



Population-Specific Training Grounded in Justice and Anti-racism

Seeing the need for YYA-centered diversion training that leads with racial and LGBTQ+ equity, AHWHA developed its own custom CDF training. Our training consists of three, 3-hour sessions for cross-system partners that work with young people who may experience housing crises. Young people were involved in developing this training through initial focus groups and by attending the training to provide critical feedback. It is currently only held virtually due to COVID-19.

We have provided 68 total hours of certification training and certified over 135 people across the housing and homelessness sector, schools, legal system, health care and mental health sectors, by/for POC, Indigenous and LGBTQ+ organizations.

Core principles:

- Everyone deserves housing.
- People have deep wells of resources and potential.
- Not everyone needs an entire suite of services to be able to be housed – people can be housed outside the system.
- People need and want different things, and have different perceptions of what housing will work for them.
- Rejects the idea that people experiencing homelessness are in that position due to fundamental flaws.
- We as service providers actually don't have all the answers.
- We need to actively center justice.

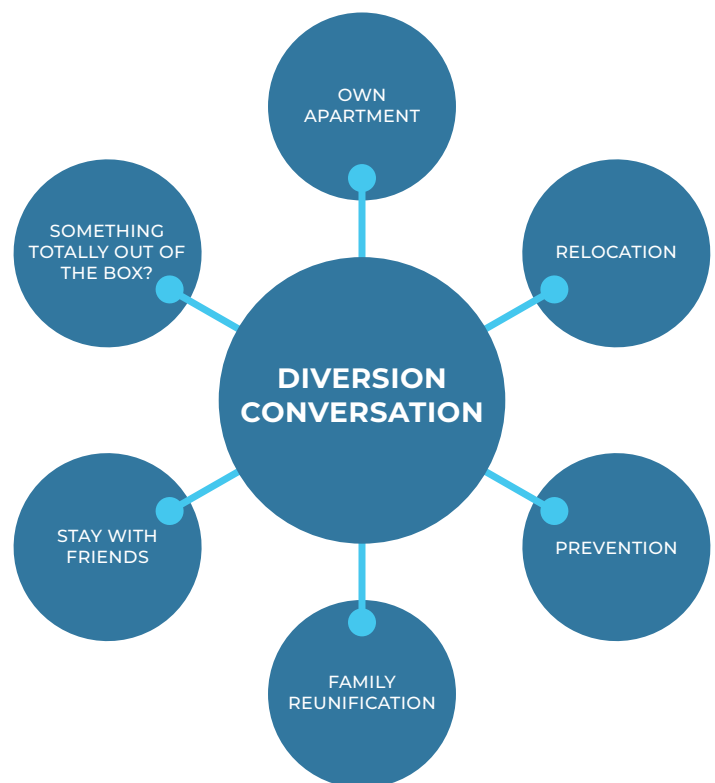
Training Modules:

1. Diversion Philosophy: Centers the beliefs that providers need to embody in order to do justice-centered diversion. We also emphasize the CDF as a strategy for providers to move their communities closer to ending youth homelessness by the end of 2022.

2. Diversion Conversations: Generating creative housing opportunities and limiting provider bias towards particular housing solutions. We deep dive into the solutions-focused questions approach, using eco-maps to generate housing opportunities, and how to connect with young people during COVID-19.

3. Policies and Procedures: Covers roles, eligibility, documentation needed, and the request form. Emphasizes data, accurate exits and how real-time, accurate data is key to reaching communities' overall ACI goals.

We also provide ongoing technical assistance and a community of practice through monthly CDF Cross-Community Learning Circles and monthly Fiscal Administrator Huddles. These learning opportunities center the real-time CDF data dashboards which we use to draw out opportunities for improvement.



“ Although it was on Zoom it felt engaging and full of take-aways. This was my first time attending this training so it was chock full of information about Centralized Diversion Funds and with this not being my first experience with these funds, I was still able to learn new ways to use them and more situations where they are applicable... These funds can literally save the life of someone who needs immediate relief.

Roel Williams, Young Adult Consultant



Challenges and Lessons Learned

COVID-19 and remote training:

Due to COVID-19 we had to pivot to fully virtual training. Although virtual training is flexible and accessible for rural providers, people get distracted easily. We had to cut important content and some providers have missed key information.

Targeted outreach to tribal and trusted community affiliates:

As the CDF is part of our strategy to end racial disproportionately we are working with communities to increase the number of grassroots organizers, tribal, mutual aid and by/for POC organizations getting trained and accessing the CDF.

Shifting the culture of non-traditional providers:

Non-traditional service providers such as McKinney-Vento Liaisons often don't have the flexibility to attend lengthy training. Some continue to refer clients rather than submitting direct requests. We are supporting non-traditional providers to make a greater shift toward directly accessing housing resources.

Learning circles are critical:

We have noticed that providers that have never attended are less likely to make CDF requests. When they do request funds there are often errors or eligibility questions. Providers that regularly attend learning circles tend to use the CDF more often and are more engaged in their community-wide movement to end YVA homelessness.

Some providers are not making requests:

Some certified requesters have not yet made a request. We have been testing strategies to increase uptake including: setting community targets, direct outreach to providers to understand and clear barriers, individually inviting providers to Learning Circles, and hosting a 30 day Diversion surge challenge.

Pooling Local Resources in Spokane

Belinda* was living in her car. She had recently started a job so she did not have enough to pay for move-in costs. The apartment complex was willing to work with her on the condition of her employment. The Spokane Tribe covered her rent for two months and her parents paid the remainder of her lease owed. CDF covered part of her housing deposit so she was all set to move in.

Housing Young People With Chosen Family

Harry* had been sleeping on the streets of Spokane but during a diversion conversation he identified a trusted adult he could stay with. The trusted adult was struggling financially, so the CDF gave her the financial means to house Harry for a few months while he settled into his new job. Harry's goal was to save enough money to get his own place eventually.

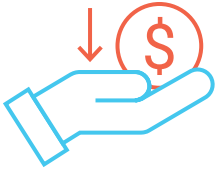
“ CDF impacts youth by empowering them to create and follow through with solutions. A lot of programs we work with can create a sense of powerlessness. They have to wait to be enrolled, wait to access the funds and are at the mercy of the system. With CDF we are able to work in partnership with youth to create housing solutions.

**Michael Woolson, Homeless YVA Services Navigator,
Blue Mountain Action Council, Walla Walla**



Recommendations

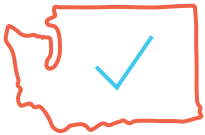
The CDF has demonstrated a need for housing resources that flexibly prevent homelessness before it happens; two thirds of young people served were at risk of becoming homeless or unsafely/unstably housed. It has also sparked system-wide transformation and innovation in Anchor Communities. The next stage of the CDF could include pairing it with other innovative approaches such as Direct Cash Transfers¹⁹ that allow even greater flexibility for young people to be sustainably housed.



Anchor Communities can build on CDF with Direct Cash Transfers (DCTs) to eliminate racial disproportionality in homelessness

Anchor Communities are fertile ground for layering innovative flexible funding strategies such as direct cash transfers or universal basic income because:

- The CDF and By Name Lists provide mechanisms to identify young people at risk of homelessness or couch surfing and would be excellent candidates for DCTs. Given that the majority of young people served by the CDF who were at risk of homelessness or couchsurfing were Black/African American and Latinx, this is a racial justice strategy. DCTs have the potential to offset unequal distributions of wealth and allow POC and LGBTQ+ young people greater autonomy to create their own housing solutions while avoiding structural racism in systems.²⁰
- Combining DCT and diversion programs in a community serves young people in the broadest set of circumstances. For example, diversion is sometimes a better option for undocumented young people or young people on benefits who can't receive ongoing cash assistance.



More counties in WA can benefit from the CDF as a system change catalyst

The CDF has sparked conversations across entire communities about person centered, inclusive, housing first practices even further than the YYA population. We have seen providers shift their focus to housing young people system-wide alongside the particular outcomes of their position. We also saw Spokane adopt the CDF's more inclusive sexual orientation data categories system wide.



Programs must be designed to prevent and end homelessness system-wide

Population-level reductions in youth homelessness require system-wide and cross-sector program design. Communities should combine prevention, diversion and rapid exit programs into one system-wide program for the following reasons:

- Non-traditional providers often don't have time to get trained to access three different program types.
- If communities want to house young people quickly, the focus must be on the housing solution more than on screening and eligibility. Flexible funding with broad eligibility leads to better system outcomes and better experiences for young people.
- A combined model invites innovation because communities are looking across their entire system. Trained providers aren't pigeon holed into serving young people via only one of these three interventions.

19 Direct Cash Transfers involve distributing cash to youth via a safe and accessible mechanism on a frequency that works best for them. This provides opportunities for greater service provider flexibility and greater agency for young people. Programs can offer optional support programs in addition to traditional case management. ([Point Source Youth](#))

20 Morton, M. H., Chavez, R., Kull, M. A., Carreon, E. D., Bishop, J., Daferede, S., Wood, E., Cohen, L., & Barreyro, P. (2020). *Developing a direct cash transfer program for youth experiencing homelessness: Results of a mixed methods, multistakeholder design process*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.



Acknowledgments



Schultz Family Foundation

Office of Homeless Youth, WA Dept of Commerce

\$357,000

\$500,000

The AWHWA CDF is already shifting the culture of service delivery for young people experiencing homelessness across Washington State. It is an exemplary example of successful systems change in action: harnessing innovation and the power of community and young people to prevent homelessness before it happens, while leading with racial equity.

The importance of the CDF is reflected in its public and private support. Key funders include the Washington State Department of Commerce (Office of Homeless Youth) and the Schultz Family Foundation. We are particularly grateful to the generosity and foresight of the Schultz Family Foundation who were the first to invest in the CDF approach in Washington.

More support will allow the CDF to expand to more communities in WA, moving closer to a statewide "Yes to Yes" vision. As the COVID-19 pandemic reaches its final stages and eviction moratoriums begin to be lifted, investments in bringing CDF to more communities, especially rural ones, is particularly urgent. Rural communities often lack flexible funds to prevent homelessness and young people have to travel long distances to get housing resources. CDF addresses these challenges.

Fiscal administrators are key in-community fiscal hubs for the CDF program in each Anchor Community. Fiscal Administrators go above and beyond to process requests by providing payment to house young people often within a few minutes and giving hands-on support to case managers. Our certified providers and fiscal administrators are culture shifters, change makers, and leaders in their communities. We are incredibly grateful to them and the young people they serve for bringing the CDF to life in Anchor Communities.

Our Fiscal Administrators:



COMPREHENSIVE LIFE RESOURCES

“ This [CDF] is the main program I have gone through. The difference is that I was able to meet with Janelle [Shared Housing Services], and was moving into my new apartment within 2 weeks. I have watched friends wait months for programs to accept them all while being homeless.

Young person in Pierce County