



Federal and Local Efforts to Support Youth At-Risk of Homelessness

The Children's Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services) is funding a multi-phase grant program referred to as Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH) to build the evidence base on what works to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults who have been involved in the child welfare system. Eighteen organizations received funding for the first phase of YARH, a two year planning grant (2013 – 2015). Six of those organizations received funding for the second phase, a three-year initial implementation grant (2015 – 2018).

YARH focuses on three populations: (1) adolescents who enter foster care between 14 and 17, (2) young adults aging out of foster care, and (3) homeless youth/young adults with foster care histories up to 21.

During the planning phase, grantees conducted data analyses to help them understand their local population and develop a comprehensive service model to improve outcomes in housing, education and training, social well-being, and permanent connections. During the initial implementation phase, grantees are refining and testing their comprehensive service model. They will conduct usability testing to determine the feasibility of specific elements of the model, and conduct a formative evaluation to understand what supports and structures are needed to implement the model with fidelity. Finally, they will develop a plan to test their comprehensive service model in a summative evaluation. A third YARH grant phase, if funded, will involve conducting summative evaluations designed to add to the evidence base on how to support older youth with child welfare involvement and prevent homelessness.

This issue brief discusses the overall YARH grant program, including the rationale for the grant program and the supports provided to grantees.

For more information on YARH, please see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/building-capacity-to-evaluate-interventions-for-youth-with-child-welfare-involvement-at-risk-of-homelessness>

In 2014, more than 22,000 youth reached the maximum age for being in foster care in their state or territory, known as “aging out” of foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2015). Youth and young adults involved in the child welfare system face significant

challenges in making their transition to adulthood. They are at high risk for both homelessness and unstable housing (Children's Bureau 2014; Dworsky et al. 2012). They are likely to have limited education and training, making it difficult to earn a living wage

(Dworsky et al. 2012), and they are at risk for behavioral health challenges, including psychological trauma and substance abuse, which may make their housing situation even more precarious (Courtney et al. 2007; Pecora et al. 2009; Keller et al. 2010; Zlotnick et al. 2012).

Evidence on “what works” for youth in foster care or youth who were formerly in foster care is limited (Courtney et al. 2007). To expand the evidence base and to inform policies and programs for these individuals, the Children’s Bureau developed a multi-phase grant program called Grants to Develop a Model Intervention for Youth/Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH).

YARH is built on the [Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness](#), which was published in 2013 by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). The goals of the framework are to guide the development of data strategies that are intended to reveal the size and characteristics of the homeless youth population and to support the development of local capacity to prevent youth homelessness. The USICH framework targets the population of youth at risk of homelessness and suggests that the [Preliminary Intervention Model](#) be used to address this issue.

The model focuses on four core outcomes: (1) housing, (2) permanent connections, (3) education and employment, and (4) social-emotional well-being. YARH is the first test of the framework in practice.

YARH has **two main goals**: one is to design comprehensive service models intended to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults involved in the child welfare system, and the other is to test these models to build the evidence base on promising strategies that support these youth.

YARH focuses on **three populations**: adolescents who enter foster care between 14 and 17 years old, young adults in foster care who are about to age out, and homeless youth and young adults under age 21 who were formerly in foster care. (See figure 1.)

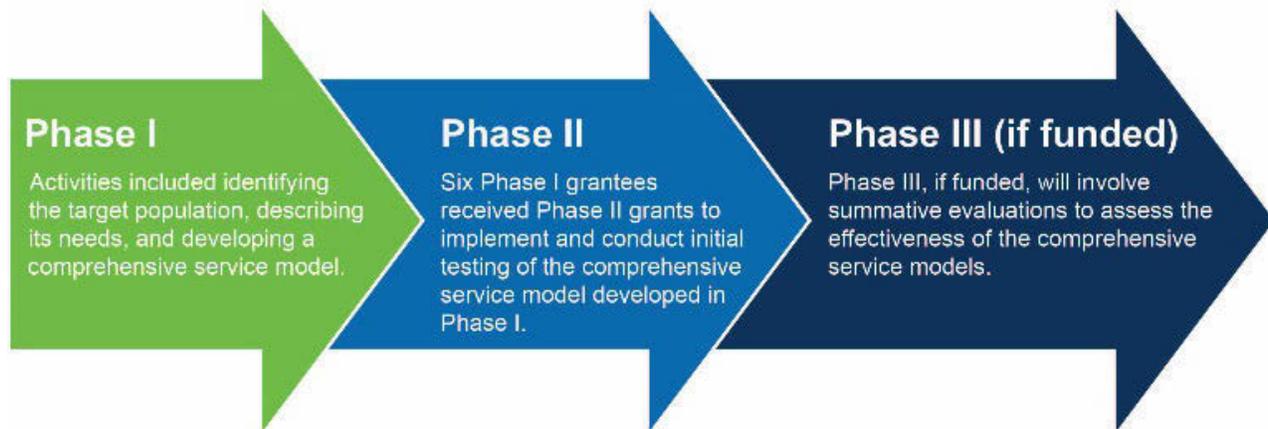
Figure 1. YARH Target Populations



YARH has **multiple phases**, which is not typical for Children’s Bureau grant programs (see Figure 2). But the agency recognized that this phased structure would be an efficient way to “package” the extensive work required to develop and test new approaches to preventing homelessness among youth and young adults who are—or who have been—involved in the child welfare system.

Phase I. In September 2013, the start of the first phase of YARH, the Children’s Bureau awarded planning grants of up to \$360,000 per year for two years to 18 organizations (see the map at the end of the brief for the grantees’ locations). Each grantee was asked to conduct an analysis to understand which youth were most at risk in its community. The grantees were also required to develop a comprehensive service model that identified not only the changes needed in the local child welfare system but also new or modified services or practices that could be implemented in the community to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults involved in the child welfare system. The models could include multiple services to help these

Figure 2. The Phases of YARH



individuals in four outcome areas: (1) stable housing, (2) permanent connections to caring adults, (3) education and employment, and (4) social-emotional well-being.

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) wanted to ensure that the grantees would, when planning their service models, keep in mind the ultimate goal of testing the impact of the models in order to expand the evidence base on how to prevent homelessness among youth and young adults with foster care histories. The agency therefore awarded a contract to Mathematica Policy Research to provide evaluation technical assistance (TA) to the grantees. Mathematica designed and provided group-based TA to ensure that the grantees were thinking through the elements of their models that would allow for a rigorous impact evaluation. Mathematica also conducted a process study to document both the grantees' experience as they designed their models and the lessons they learned in doing so.

Phase II. In September 2015, the start of the second phase of YARH, the Children's Bureau awarded a second round of planning grants worth up to \$670,000 per year for three years to 6 of the 18 grantees (see the map at the end of the document for the grantees' locations). The goals of Phase II are to fine-tune, implement, and test the comprehensive service models developed in Phase I. In addition, grantees are to focus on

evaluating the implementation process and on preparing for a rigorous impact evaluation.

OPRE awarded another contract to Mathematica to provide evaluation TA to the six Phase II grantees and to continue the process study that is documenting the grantees' experience and lessons learned. Mathematica will also design and provide evaluation TA to the grantees individually and as a group to help them prepare for a rigorous impact evaluation. The TA will include support in defining the evaluation sample, the comprehensive service models, outcomes, and the design of the evaluation.

Phase III. The Children's Bureau anticipates a third phase of YARH which will involve conducting summative evaluations designed to add to the evidence base on how to prevent homelessness among youth with child welfare involvement.

References

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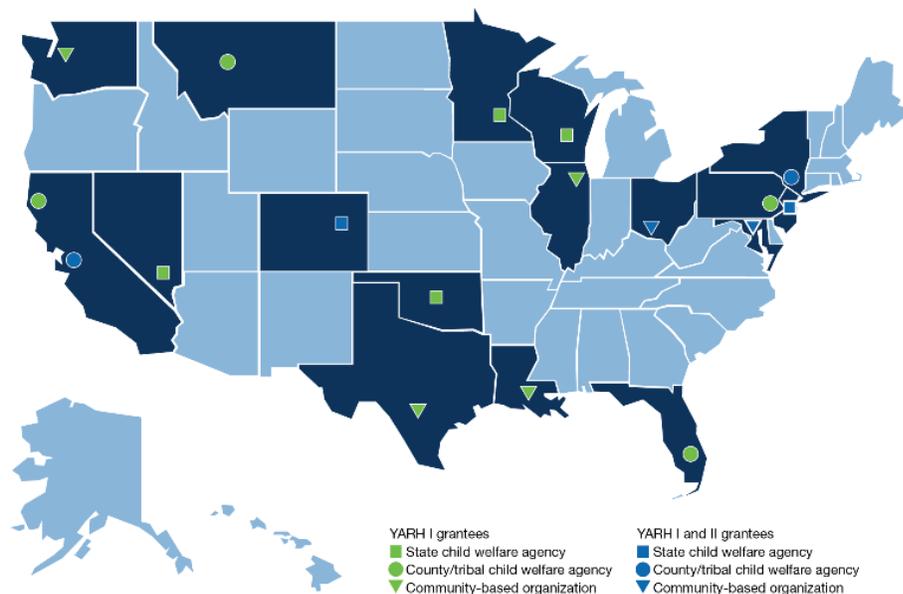
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The YARH grantees represent a diverse array of geographic areas and organizations. The Phase I grantees are located in 17 states across the nation. They include state child welfare agencies, county child welfare agencies, and community-based organizations. The Phase II grantees are located in 6 states and include state child welfare agencies, county child welfare agencies, and community-based organizations.



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For more Information about this project, please contact Matthew Stagner at mstagner@mathematica-mpr.com or Mary Mueggenborg at mary.mueggenborg@acf.hhs.gov.

MATHEMATICA Policy Research

Mathematica Policy Research

P.O.Box 2393

Princeton, NJ 08543-2393