

New Mexico's System of Care for Young People Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness

Crisis and Opportunity

- The system for housing and caring for some of our most vulnerable and high-need young people is under significant stress. These young people are typically aged 15-22 and include those who are:
 - Homeless
 - Aging out of foster care
 - Significantly traumatized
 - Exhibiting high behavioral health needs
 - Not in school and not employed
- The facts:
 - According to “America’s Health Rankings”, 16.4% of young people in New Mexico ages 16-24 were disconnected, meaning they are neither in school or employed.
 - Youth are the fastest growing segment of people experiencing homelessness and may be at greater risk of homelessness than any other age group. In 2014, 34% of people experiencing homelessness were under age 24,
 - Of youth who experience homelessness 44% have been confined in a jail, prison, or juvenile detention center and 62% had been arrested.
 - While 20% of general population youth experience behavioral health disorders, these numbers rise to 75% and 80% youth experiencing homelessness populations.
 - The nexus between homelessness, mental health, and the corrections system is undeniable.
- The invisible nature of the crisis – This age group tends not to show up on street corners or in adult shelters. These young people are “precariously housed, are “sofa surfing”, living in cars, camping out, or trading sex for shelter.
- Historical approach to working with this population:
 1. Incarceration
 2. Placement in Residential Treatment Centers – in state or out of state.

Neither has shown evidence of being effective, and there is less availability all the time (Closure of Desert Hills, closure of two Treatment Foster Care agencies, reduction of number of youth in incarceration). This is putting significant stress on the low end services.

- Another definition of crisis -a turning point when an important change takes place. What do we do? What is a new choice?

Brene Brown – “We are hard wired for belonging. It is in our DNA.” Young people will belong to something – gangs, traffickers, drug dealers.

- Can a community compete with this? What message does a community give to young people? Brene Brown – “True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. True belonging doesn’t require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.”
- **“The What and the How”** – If we want to compete, we must pay attention not only to what the services are that we offer, but how we offer them. “There is tremendous opportunity for behavioral health intervention among young people who are homeless and who have histories of justice system involvement. Research has shown that the engagement phase is critical to such efforts, with an empowering strengths-based approach bringing the most promise for successful engagement.” SAMHSA

- The most effective system is one that is a coherent continuum that has a value base, often looking something like below:

Low End Services (currently the most prevalently utilized)	Intensive Community-Based Services (most evidence of effectiveness for this population, currently the least financed)	Intensive Residential Programs (Currently these kinds of residential programs don't exist in a form that is evidence-based)
Outpatient Therapy	High-Fidelity Wraparound / Intensive Care Coordination	Community Group Homes
Case Management / Comprehensive Community Support Services (CCSS)	In Home Therapy Services	Short term , family-based residential services in the community
Shelter	Mobile Crisis / Crisis Triage Centers	
	Specialized Foster Care / Treatment Foster Care	

- In such a system, the column with the “**Intensive Community Based Services**” has the most evidence base, is the most cost-effective for high-need young people, has the best chance of helping our young people grow up in a healthy way in our community, and is not well developed in our state.
- With the loss of Residential Programs in the state of New Mexico along with two large Treatment Foster Care Programs, and the lack of Intensive Community Base Services, the lower end services are becoming seriously stressed and often unable to meet the needs of young people.
- The new Family’s First federal legislation will require that the community-based services be expanded, but it comes with many requirements and restrictions. We must build a system that has strength, that has infrastructure, a value base, and an approach designed for young people who have been traumatized.
- The danger is that, if we do not build the Community Based system correctly, we will return – out of lack of options - to sending more young people to out -of-state facilities, which has the least evidence of effectiveness and is the most expensive. .

It is incumbent upon all system partners in the state to be informed of the current broken situation, to understand what best practice is, and to come together to build a range of services - with an emphasis on Intensive Community-Based Services - so that our young people have the best chance possible to become healthy, positive, contributing members of our community.