Addressing Housing Needs for Youth Returning from Juvenile Justice Placement Transcript

Cassie:

Youth Returning from Juvenile Justice Placement Presentation for Second Chance Month 2022. Next slide. We will be recording today's session. This session is hosted by the Corrections Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center, which is operated by the American Institutes for Research. We do allow for recordings at AIR. By joining, you are consenting to this recording, and if you prefer to participate audio only, please disable your video now, and we will not then have you on video. Next slide. All right. Again, as we mentioned, this webinar is offered as part of Second Chance Month. The Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention have invested a significant amount of dollars, time, and support to reentry efforts for young people and for adults for a number of years. Part of that is a series of events throughout the month of April focused on supporting those of you who are doing this work in the real world, on the ground, every day, to make sure that young people are able to leave facility, reintegrate into their families and their communities, and stay out of our justice systems.

Cassie:

We will share a link to the fiscal year 2022 solicitation for the Youth Reentry Second Chance Act Grant out of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention here momentarily. We also invite you to visit the National Reentry Resource Center's website to learn more about other live webinars, videos from those doing this work in the field, as well as a number of resources. All recordings from webinars will also be available on the National Reentry Resource Center's website, in May. You can also follow us on social media at the hashtags shown here on the screen. With the next slide, I will turn this over to my colleague at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Ms. Leanetta Jessie.

Leanetta:

Good afternoon from the state of Maryland. Thank you all for joining us for our Second Chance Month and helping us celebrate some of the important, exciting reentry learning and successes that we're seeing across the nation and raising up voices of youth with lived experience and frontline juvenile justice professionals. This session is about addressing housing needs for youth returning from juvenile justice placement. My name is Leanetta Jessie, I'm a colleague of Julia Alanen, who would've been present in this presentation, however, she's present, but a little under the weather. I'm helping her today. I'm a program manager also with the US Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, I apologize. OJJDP is a grant-net making component, and we're deeply committed to supporting state and local and tribal efforts to continuously improve juvenile justice systems.

Leanetta:

I'm a member of OJJDP's Intervention Division, which funds system-level demonstration projects, projects that address some critical needs and that are standing up innovative, evidence-based, or promising new programs, policies, and practices that we believe have a high likelihood of proving successful and sustainable, and then serving as replicable, scalable models. You're going to hear today from highly collaborative team of experts who are currently partnering to implement just such demonstration projects in the great state of Maine. Their project is supported, in part, by Second Chance Act funding stream. As you may know, throughout the process of preparing for release from secure confinement or out-of-home placements, and then reintegrating back into their communities during the reentry process, young people confront complex needs and challenges associated with everything from housing and homelessness to education and employment, mental health and substance use, gang involvement, and much, much more. If left unaddressed, these critical needs and challenges can adversely impact the success of your youths' reentry and influence whether they reoffend.

Leanetta:

OJJDP Second Chance Reentry Program encourages collaboration between state and local agencies and community-based organizations to address the challenges that reentry and recidivism reduction holds for moderate to high-risk youth, up to age 24, who are returning from their communities, from juvenile, residential. Or correctional facilities. We've invited a special group, one of more than 30 active Second Chance Youth Reentry Program grantees that OJJDP currently supports to tell you about their efforts to meaningfully support justice involved youths' housing needs throughout the challenging reentry process. Part of what excites us about this particular reentry project is the way this group approaches youths' housing needs. It aligns with OJJDP's belief that if young people come into contact with the juvenile justice system, the contact should be rare, it should be fair, and it should be beneficial to them.

Leanetta:

Maine's programs, emphasis is not on placement, but on permanency and on their young people's ongoing wellbeing and

stability as they transition not only from confinement back into their communities, but also from youth into early adulthood. Historically in juvenile reentry work, stakeholders were trained to look for placements for young people, the next temporary group home, shelter, step-down, or residential treatment program, or they look to return youth to pre-confinement circumstances without putting adequate community support scaffolding in place. This critical work that lives in the intersection of juvenile justice, reentry, and housing stability requires an orientation toward positive youth outcomes. Positive youth outcomes require stable housing, education and employment opportunities, prosocial activities, a sense of belonging, a genuine second chance. All of these create pathways out of delinquency and recidivating and into successful entry.

Leanetta:

I'd like to go ahead and introduce our wonderful panelists. Now, you're welcome to pop your questions into the chat box as we go, but rest assured we've dedicated some time for Q&A at the end of the presentation. Our first panelist today will be Stephanie Mercier. Ms. Mercier is the Director of Impact Investment with Strategy and External Affairs Team at the Corporation of Supportive Housing, where she focuses on her efforts on expanding and supporting CSH portfolio of outcomes, focused investments, and pay-for-success initiatives. She brings more than 15 years of experience working with communities to increase the availability of housing aligned with services. Prior to joining CSH, Ms. Mercier was a housing coordinator directly connecting shelter clients with housing in the community. She holds a Master's in Social Work and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Michigan.

Leanetta:

Also, with us today is Derek Wentorf. Mr. Wentorf is a Senior Program Manager on the Federal Technical Assistant Team at the Corporation of Supportive Housing. He's a big picture, strategic thinker who invests in his skills to help translate theories into pragmatic implementation. He brings more than 15 years of experience overseeing programming and managing system-level funding to end homelessness, with specific expertise in addressing youth and young adult homelessness. Mr. Wentorf has a particular passion for working to center and elevate the voices of young people and creating solutions for their communities. He holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of Washington and lives in Seattle.

Leanetta:

Next, we have Erica King, a Senior Policy Associate at the University of Southern Maine. Ms. King is a MSW with more than 20 years of experience as a policy and program developer, coach, and facilitator. In addition to her work at USM, Erica has earned a national reputation as a consultant helping correctional organizations to implement evidence-based practices and become more gender informed in their work. Erica brings hard knowledge into her relational work with people to inform how data can drive meaningful conversations and intentional decisions to improve the health, wellbeing, and vitality of communities.

Leanetta:

Also, joining us is Sonja Morse. Ms. Morse is a Juvenile Data and Research Coordinator for Maine Department of Corrections, where she manages and oversees data research and state and federal grant and contracts. She has extensive experience working directly with youth, adults, and families on mental health and substance use. She holds a master's degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice and is both a certified alcohol and drug counselor, and a prevention specialist. With experience working in behavioral health treatment, community-based organizations, the court system, and in corrections, Ms. Morse has dedicated her personal life to empowering communities and youth-serving system stakeholders to understand data and make data driven decisions.

Leanetta:

Last, but certainly never least, we have with us Cassy Blakely, Deputy Director of Training and Technical Assistant with the American Institutes for Research, AIR. Among the many impressive hats, she wears as a DOJ-funded Training and Technical Assistance Provider, Ms. Blakely provides coaching to 21 juvenile justice, Second Chance Act grantees as a part of AIR's Corrections and Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center, including Maine's Second Chance Program that you'll hear about today. Outside of the justice realm, Ms. Blakely also provides training and implementation support for the Good Behavior Game in urban and rural schools. She has assisted the interagency work group on youth programs in gathering qualitative data from youth, using in-person and virtual formats. For 12 years, she has supported the inclusion of lived experience in program, community, and system development, particularly with young adults involved in the juvenile justice system, child welfare, behavioral health, and homeless and runaway systems.

Leanetta:

One of Ms. Blakely's superpowers is her broad ranging expertise in braiding funding, project management, event planning, proposal writing, grant reporting, administrative and legislative policy and relationship building with

stakeholders ranging from consumers to funders. She's a licensed mental health practitioner with private, I'm sorry, with private practice experience and centered on trauma, adolescence, eating disorders, adjustment, co-occurring disorders, and anxiety. She holds a BA degree in Psychology and Sociology and a MA Degree in Counseling from Doane University. Cassy is going to shepherd us through the question-and-answer session at the end. We're so grateful to have each of you here with us today. With that, I'm going to hand off our first panelist, Stephanie Mercier. Stephanie, the floor is all yours.

Stephanie:

Wonderful. Thank you so much, Leanetta. Good afternoon, I'm Stephanie Mercier, and I'm so glad to have this opportunity to spend some time with you all today as part of Second Chance Month, really looking forward to the conversation and to your questions and participation. Next slide. My colleague, Derek Wentorf, who you'll hear from shortly, and I are here with CSH. We're a national nonprofit organization, and we have regional offices and staff throughout the country, CSH partners with communities to increase the availability of housing, align with services in order to support people in thriving as part of strong, healthy, and equitable communities. We have about 150 staff in 14 or so locations across the country. Next slide. In the network with communities, we invest in supportive housing, provide technical assistance, engage in systems change and policy reform, and provide training and education. This includes work that's focused on creating high-quality supportive housing for youth and young adults who may be involved with the homeless response system, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems.

Stephanie:

Next slide. I'm guessing that the statistics that are highlighted on this slide aren't a surprise to many of you, but I just want to take a minute and ground our discussion about working with youth to meet their identified housing needs in the broader context of what we know about needs across the country. Not only are there more than 4 million youth and young adults who experience homelessness over the course of a year, but we also know that those young people are having interactions with the justice system at a high rate. What this reinforces is, and what you'll hear from all our presenters today, is that solutions to the challenges that young people face really have to be cross sector and they have to involve transformation across the housing, justice, health, child welfare, and all the systems where young people show up. Next slide.

Stephanie:

We also know that due to systemic racism and other factors, that Black and Brown young people experience homelessness at disproportionate rates, with Hispanic, non-White youth, having a 33% higher risk of reporting homelessness and African American youth with an 83% higher rate. We also see this same disproportionality among LGBT youth who are at an enormously disproportionate risk of homelessness as compared to youth who identify as heterosexual and cisgender. These disproportionalities make it clear that not only do we as a country have a lot of work to do in terms of transforming systems, but also that any solutions we design have to be specifically crafted to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ and Black and Brown youth. I'm now delighted to turn things over to my colleague, Derek Wentorf, who will share some thoughts on ways to design solutions that center and meet the needs of young people. Derek.

Derek:

Thanks, Stephanie. Hey, everybody, happy Tuesday. Just wanted to share a few of the things that we've heard in our experience in walking alongside young people as they move towards housing stability, and would love to get any questions that pop up or comments, or just open up to here if there's anything specific that you'd like us to touch on as we walk through some of these points. First and foremost, you've heard Stephanie reiterate it. You've heard Leanetta reiterate it. Beginning with the fact that... Let's begin, let's start our solutions grounding in what young people are asking for. First and foremost, some of the solutions that we've heard really clearly from young people, consistently now, over the years, is that young people who were experiencing homelessness said two key things really make their lives easier, which should not be shocking for anybody here.

Derek:

One of them is money and another is stable housing. When we think about this, beginning with that root of giving, providing those services with very low-barrier and minimizing the steps that people have to go through to get into housing and receive financial support is huge. Being able to say, how can we think about our interventions and the supports that we're providing to young people as they leave systems, we're specifically talking about juvenile justice today, but there are a lot of different systems that are, the young people we're walking alongside will be touching. How do we make sure that, first and foremost, they get into housing quickly? Beyond that, how do we support them as they look to make income and receive supports to move on to the next steps in their lives?

Derek:

We just wanted to highlight a couple of these things that are not, again, Stephanie's mentioned that with the statistic

you've seen before, I'm sure these comments don't come to you as a shock. I think that most of us would say stable housing and money is what I need to live a fulfilling life so it shouldn't be shocking that young people are elevating that as well. It gives us a chance to step back and saying, are we putting steps in, requirements in place to get into our housing that maybe aren't necessary? How are we working more clearly with our system partners to support young people as they leave institutions and move into housing more quickly. Let's go to the next slide.

Derek:

We wanted to give a quick snapshot of what might a system look like that is supporting young people as they move towards housing stability. One of the opportunities that I have, working at CSH, is that we get to accompany communities that receive Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program Funding from HUD. That really is a nationwide initiative that is rooted in the belief that young people are experts in their own lives and should be guiding the ways that resources are invested to help them move towards housing stability. To that end, HUD gives out awards. In fact, there's actually a NOFO open right now for YHDP applicants, to be able to bring in targeted resources on an ongoing fashion to support young people as they move towards housing stability.

Derek:

That being said, one of the things that we look at is, how do we, kind of, compartmentalize the different steps in the system? We talk about four areas in that conversation. The first one being thinking about upstream prevention. That really is, before young people even would touch housing, losing their housing stability. That is a lot of supports that I'm sure a lot of people on this call today provide, that keep young people connected to the supports.

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Derek:

... keep young people connected to the supports and connected to housing. Then if young people do experience homelessness, then that Front Porch services are all of those services meant to engage young people and build that relationship. Then we think of a couple of different housing interventions really focused in on the timeliness of how long those supports are there. So, we talk about short term housing and long-term housing.

Derek:

These are not meant to be exhaustive lists of the kind of projects. I'm sure there's lots of different interventions that you could think of that are being provided in your community or in the partners that you work alongside. But these are just meant to be some examples that we talk, talk with communities about as they start building out their system.

Derek:

So then on the next slide, if we can move to that, we wanted to visualize a little bit the ways that those different programs might work with young people. One of the biggest things that we think about here is we look at this movement and process map of how systems might connect with each other and support young people, is that very first box on the left side, it says CE intake. That's meant to represent coordinated entry. Apologies for the siren.

Derek:

So that really is actually a really critical thing to think about in your community, is that first and foremost, do you have a connection with the coordinated entry system in your community? What does that look like and how are you connecting the exits from institutions? So, when young people are ready to leave juvenile justice and don't have a placement yet, what does that process to connect with young people look like? How are you there and present? How are your partners and your system more broadly present to support young people so that they don't actually have to experience homelessness and experience any time without a place to be and can move directly into housing placements.

Derek:

But this is a way that we like to work with communities just to see there's lots of different choices and flow of how young people could move through a system. All of this should be rooted in what young people would choose. Far too often, we have systems that are saying, "Well, this is how you should move through the system, young person," and not enough do we have times where we pause and say, "What would you like, young person? What would you like to center your experience?" And how do we respond and move our system according to what young people are asking for, rather than saying, "Oh well, you've got this cap of how long you have to stay in housing, and then we've got to move you to this step and then this step."

Derek:

How can we start as people working within that system to shift and have the system be much more person centered rather than driven by the different regulations that might be in place and moving those regulations to respond to what people are asking for. So, I wanted to give you a snapshot here of what a partnership across systems and how that system and all the different components might work together to support young people as they move towards housing stability. I think with that, Stephanie, I'm passing it back to you. Or is this still me, Stephanie?

Stephanie:
It's still you, although I'm happy to jump in.
Derek:
No, I'm on.
Stephanie:
One more.
Derek:
We got our slide numbers wrong. So, the final thing that we wanted to elevate is that there's a number of different principles as we think about designing supportive housing, that we talk with communities about. The first, the most important portion that I would raise is that it's centered on the expertise of young people. So, this has a lot to do with how are you designing every single element of your program? Your policies and procedures, your hiring practices, your expectations of what it means to support young people as they leave your program. All of that should be grounded in the expertise that young people are providing you.
Derek:
Then there's a number of different elements that we also know are critically important. So, we talked about accessibility already. So how do we lower those barriers to get into your housing programs and make sure that young people are able to move in seamlessly and quickly? Another thing that I know everyone on this call wrestles with all the time is what does it look like to create some seamless partnerships between all the different people and communities? So, we talk about cross sector collaboration.
Derek:
A big piece of that is thinking about how do we create that partnership with young people in the middle, so they're driving it, so they're centering it? And then we're responding and working with each other and not duplicating what young people need to tell us, not duplicating the efforts, but working alongside our partners. How are we really focused in on equity? So, Stephanie elevated the numbers and the data around how black and brown young people are overrepresented in the system and how young people with LGBTQ identities are overrepresented.
Derek:
So how are we thinking about what we like to call targeted universalism? We can expand that more and have some more conversations about that at a different time. But how are we really centering our services on the individuals that are overrepresented in the system?
Derek:
Then finally, this is easy to type down and really hard to create, but choice and flexibility. How are we creating a space and a system that is centered on what young people are asking for and it's flexible to respond as each young person is different? So that's a big lift, but a really critically important one. So now I think I'm actually passing it back to Stephanie.
Stephanie:
Thanks so much, Derek. I just want to emphasize that we understand that you're all coming from different communities, your communities have different initiatives and programs and opportunities to plug in. But the principles that Derek shared, I think can really be helpful in looking at what you have now, and in talking with young people about where opportunities might be to build into to new programs and really thinking about how to apply those across the board.
Stephanie:
We're not going to go into this in detail, because I want to make sure that we have a chance to let you hear more in depth about the wonderful program in Maine that Erica and Sonya are going to talk about. But just to emphasize that there is research out there that shows when we have the opportunity to connect with youth in terms of providing opportunities for them to have affordable housing connected with services, that it turns out in most cases, we see the outcomes that we together would like to achieve.
Stephanie:
So there are programs across the country who have seen initiatives focused on this population with support of housing, generate positive results as it relates to employment, as it relates to young people staying stably housed, as it relates in some cases to young people choosing to decrease their use of substances and other outcomes that aren't captured on this slide. So wanted to just take a moment and say that the evidence does support the use of initiatives like this and others that your community likely has in place. Next slide.
Stephanie:
Just wanted to leave you all, and these slides will be shared. I know there have been some questions in the chat about that, with some additional resources that may be helpful to you as you work to learn more about the challenges that

youth and young people are facing across systems, as well as solutions that can be helpful as your community keeps working to address their needs. Great. And Cassie, remind me if I'm turning it to you or directly to Erica and Sonya.

Cassie:

No, we are going to pause right now to give our participants a chance to ask any questions that they may have. So, this is a chance for our audience to go ahead and put their questions right in the chat, and we will take them. Otherwise, we will then move on to our friends in Maine.

Cassie:

We didn't have any questions come in during the presentation. So, I'm going to give just maybe 15 seconds here for folks. So, we have a question from Hannah Smith about, I'm guessing CSG's location in Georgia.

Stephanie:

So CSH does not have an office in Georgia, but we do some work in that area as part of our Southeast region, which includes Florida to Georgia, and other parts of the country. As a national nonprofit organization, sometimes we have focus on the ground, sometimes we don't, but we always welcome opportunities to partner with states across the country.

Cassie:

Thank you, Stephanie. Other questions for our friends at Corporation for Supportive Housing? Wonderful Camden Hargrove asks, "Do you have advice on outreach to black LGBTQ youth specifically?"

Derek:

Yeah. I'm happy to jump in. Camden, I think it's a great question. I think that that's really rooted in your individual community. So much of what we've seen successful outreach and relationship building has to do with where those locations that young people are going to already. Are there places, those could be community centers. Those might be school networks; those might be other location. It might not actually be in your housing response system. So, I think being able to step back and take that, hear directly from young people, where are they going? Follow their feet. Where are they showing up?

Derek:

Then start looking at, if you don't have that relationship, start thinking about who does have that relationship in communities? There are definitely times where that relationship is just among young people. So how do you start creating that? I think really showing up without an agenda. Young people can sniff out when you are showing up for you or showing up for them. So, I think the big question about if there is an institution, a place somewhere that you're going, or somewhere that young people are going, thinking about where are they gathering? Where are young people gathering? And how do you show up in a way that is genuinely there to listen and hear? And then being responsive to what you're hearing young people ask.

Derek:

They will then continue to show up. If they don't, there is a reason that they're not. There could be lots of different reasons. But I guess there's not one specific answer other than ground your outreach in relationship and thinking about where that relationship comes from and who the young people might have trust in in their community and start having those conversations.

Derek:

I would elevate some of the resources that Stephanie pointed to. True Colors has some wonderful toolkits out there to think about. They're amazing network, wonderful partners in our YHGP work. There's some really helpful toolkits in there to think about outreach and relationship building. But those are some of my things. I think just genuinely showing up and rooting yourself in that relationship and knowing that it's going to take some time to build trust. Those would be some of the starting points from my end.

Camden:

Thank you. I really appreciate it.

Derek:

Yeah. You bet. Thanks for asking, Camden.

Cassie:

Thank you. Stephanie and Derek, it looks like our next round of questions really look at locations for both the True Colors and for your locations where you're doing work.

Stephanie:

I saw the request for the direct link for True Colors. So, we'll find the right link and put it in the chat for folks as we continue the conversation. It's New York based. I don't have the address offhand, but we'll find the right link and get it in the chat in just a few minutes.

Cassie:

Yep. I've got it, Stephanie.

Stephanie:

Oh, great. Okay. Thank you.

Derek:

True Colors is really similar to CSH in that they actually are nationwide reach. So going to that truecolorsunited.org, and then go under their resources and look for the toolkits, there's some really great stuff. Then drop in for Q&As. They're pretty responsive to reaching out for communities and talking through what their availability is. So, they don't really have set locations. They're much more flexible and can meet you in your community.

Cassie:

Great questions, folks. What other questions do we have for our team? I did just also drop the link to the toolkits portion of their website, the True Colors United website. All right. If you think of something after we move on to our friends in Maine, please feel free to drop it in the chat. We will also pause at the end for additional questions, but the chat is open the whole time. So, feel free to get active there.

Cassie:

With this, I will go ahead and turn it over to two individuals that I've had a blast working with the last two years in Maine, Ms. Erica King and Ms. Sonya Morris, who have really looked at how to build partnership and take a lot of these general practices that Stephanie and Derek just spoke to and put them in place and a context that's unique to their state. And at a time where house thing is quite a topic for anybody to tackle in our country right now. So, with that, Sonya and Erica, the floor is yours.

Sonya Morris:

Thank you, Cassie. Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks so much for joining us today. My colleague, Erica King and I, senior policy associate over at the University of Southern Maine will be moving through our State of Maine's project today that we've been working on for about two, two and a half years now so far. Next slide, please.

Sonya Morris:

So, the Maine Department of Correction in collaboration with youth advocate programs as well as the University of Southern Maine was awarded a Second Chance Grant back in 2019. The university assists us and research, evaluations and outcome measures. They also provide a project called the Opportunity Scholars Program, which I'll touch on later in the presentation.

Sonya Morris:

Then also Youth Advocate Programs, which is a transformative mentoring model for youth connecting with supportive adults in the communities who have lived experiences. The purpose of the project here in Maine is to provide youth that are reentering the community from juvenile justice and help them really transition into the adulthood through positive youth outcomes and other supports that they've identified that they need.

Sonya Morris:

Due to the pandemic and other reasons, we began serving youth in about 2021, so last year or so, and we've served about seven youth so far to that date, and about 12 now here in 2022. The reason why that is so low is we also only have one secure facility here in Maine. It's called Long Creek Youth Development Center. On any given day, we only have about 30 youth in that facility at any given time. So, this 10 youth per year aligns with that number of youths that our in secure confinement here at the department.

Sonya Morris:

The youth that have access to this service is any youth that's been both detained and committed. Commitment is when a youth is charged with a crime and then been sentenced to a certain commitment at the facility. Then also detained youth who are charged with a crime but have not yet been to court to receive their sentence. So, any youth that has touched the secure confinement are able to access this program.

Sonya Morris:

Additionally, we have a target population from about 12 to 24 years old, really focusing on a wide range of age and the youth can access this service up until their 21st birthday and then be able to access it until they're 24, which is great for the young folks transitioning into adulthood after secure confinement. We also are giving priority to youth identifying as female and then youth identifying as being youth of color. Then also, those youth in the LGBTQI+ community, to be able to serve them at a greater level than their white peers, as we've identified in Maine and across the nation, that folks in those populations are at higher risk and are higher need. So, we've identified them in Maine to be able to access this. Now I will turn it over to my colleague, Erica King.

Leanetta:

Thanks, Sonya. So next slide, if we could. So, our work in Maine is grounded and we've tried to orient all of the projects that we're working on together, whether they're funded by OJJDP or private foundation or the state toward this result of all Maine transition age youth, 14 to 24 experiences belonging and thrive into adulthood in their communities. Our equity focus is those that have been most deeply impacted by the justice system. As others have alluded to, it has been a huge priority population for all of our cross-sector initiatives within and outside juvenile justice, but especially inside juvenile justice, that these young people can be sometimes categorically denied access to housing.

Leanetta:

So, it's very hard to get workforce development and post-secondary goals without a more robust housing strategy. So, we're very grateful to OJJDP for this investment that helps us to test what we can blend and braid along with others. And very grateful to Cassie for matchmaking us with Derek and with Stephanie at CSH, who have good grounding in Maine and who's who, and see what we can get done together with these resources. So next slide, please.

Leanetta:

One of the things that we have been doing in that is trying to map what a continuum of care is. So probably not unlike states that you're in, the systems can become very siloed. So, there's the continuum of care that DoC funds. Then there's the continuum of care that maybe our DHHS funds, and another continuum of care that our homeless providers are trying to pull together. None of those were aligned or are aligned in place or population or easy to scale. So, you might have in a place like Maine, where we have vast geography but low population density, you might have clusters of services around a few urban areas and then virtual service deserts for nine counties and nine hours of drive where there's not a lot. So, we tried to put together just a continuum of care from prevention to out-of-state treatment, out-of-state home treatment if it has to happen, and back to community reintegration and-

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Leanetta:

... home treatment, if it has to happen, and back to community reintegration. And I know that you can't see these little dots underneath very well, so we're going to send you a new graphic that shows those more clearly, but what are under each category, as examples, are evidence-based practices from OJ JDP that we'd love to see, that each community has some things... We've been calling this our Trivial Pursuit wheel, right? Some things for young people in each of these categories to prevent what we believe is currently happening now, when those things don't exist, and those pieces of the pie aren't there.

Leanetta:

We end up driving young people into higher levels of acuity, into hospital ERs, into crisis beds and into Long Creek, even, when there's no one willing and able to supervise, or we can't find community-based services. So, housing is the one basic need that has been underlying every single request that we've gotten and is really a necessary category that's vastly underdeveloped in the area of community reintegration. So, it's something we've been focused on within and outside of this grant. Beautiful. Next slide. I think it's back to you, Sonya.

Sonya Morris:

Yes. Thank you, Erica. So, just going over the goals of the award, as well as the different projects and programs underneath the grant itself. So, our original goal and goal that we will be utilizing moving forward across the grant, as we continue to utilize the services, is to connect youth with positive youth outcomes to increase their access to those mentors in the community, through the youth advocate programs, increase the housing stability, and then, also offer them some educational opportunities if they choose to pursue post-secondary education or trade school, or really anything that is aspirations lifting for their educational purposes.

Sonya Morris:

So, the project itself, we're calling the Community Success Program, and then underneath that, there is three different programs. So, our Credible Messenger Program that I had just mentioned through the youth advocate programs, as well as our Housing Assistance Program. So, this is the one that we'll be touching more in depth on later in the presentation regarding the fiscal supports of the program, as well as programmatic supports to help kind of bridge the gap between and housing stability for those juvenile justice involved youth. And there is a decent amount of availability of those funds underneath the housing assistance fund, as well as connecting it with a person to help them navigate that process.

Sonya Morris:

And then lastly, we have our Opportunity Scholars Program, which connects formerly incarcerated youth with either post-secondary education, trade school, or aspiration lifting, as well as wraparound services. And then, some mentors that have been through the Opportunity Scholars Program can connect with the youth to help them navigate that program, to get that youth voice involved within the process. Next slide, please. Great. And I'll turn it back over to Erica. Thank you.

Leanetta:

Great. And so, back to looking at justice by geography that happens in our system and probably in your systems too, in that there are some communities that barely send young people to Long Creek and some communities that seem to do it at a more accelerated rate. And so, we wanted to look under the curve and look at what are some of those root causes that might be contributing to pipelines where some young people are having more density in a system of care than others, in some communities.

Leanetta:

And can we use this data to sort of snapshot a baseline so we could change some of these factors over time and address some of these root causes in community together? So, unsurprisingly, you would see that housing, housing and equity, the economic state of these communities, has a huge amount to do with who ends up unhoused as a young person in that community. So again, we can't say... I mean, correlation or cause, but there's definitely a relationship between these root causes and the resource need in those communities. Next slide.

Leanetta:

And so, we're trying to ground people. I know many of you have heard about adverse childhood experiences and ACEs, and that it's sort of an individual frame sometimes of what's happening with people at the individual level through their childhood. Was there abuse? Was there neglect? Was there a divorce or parental discord in the home? Was there a family member that was incarcerated? All of those things tend to produce or predict some negative and lifelong health outcomes. And so, we're also encouraging people to look at the pair of ACEs, but those don't just happen within individuals, but also adverse community experiences.

Leanetta:

That community level poverty and disruption, and if there's a low high school graduation rate, and low aspirations, and no one's ever been to post-secondary education in your family system, and hardly in your community, of course, it's going to be hard to reach for that. Right? And then housing quality, affordability, violence, those things happening in communities tend to compound with those other ACEs. And so, that's what we're trying to do is help people to understand a little bit with data, what some of the big picture challenges are and how we could be addressing them with more robust strategies and performance measures together. Next slide, please.

Leanetta:

So, these are some of those social and economic determinants of wellbeing that we're measuring in that report. We look at household economic wellbeing, economic inclusion, school quality, school belonging, social capital, community financial security, housing affordability, community security, or public safety data, and what the area of economic growth is in that county? And then we were looking at those things in relationship to one front end indicator at each youth serving system.

Leanetta:

If those came up in the red compared to other places in the norm, does that track with how many young people identify in homeless in that community, how many calls to child welfare, how many mental and behavioral health care, educational pushouts, suspension and detention rates? Any youth justice involvement? What are we seeing? We know that the places that we grow up and we're born, where we live, where we age, where we work, those places shape the opportunity landscape in those communities. And so, if we're introducing resources, how do we want to do it in a way that is focused and targeted to what we already know exists there? So, that's just some back work that we did before this grant to try to really focus our resources on communities. Next slide, please. And back to you, Sonya.

Sonya Morris:

Thank you. So, a really important outcome of this project is to leverage different teams and initiate conversations through other stakeholders and develop those cross collaborations like Derek and Stephanie had mentioned earlier. And then within this, we had another program also, Derek and Stephanie had mentioned this earlier, that Homeless Demonstration Program or the YHGP through housing and urban development, HUD. Maine was awarded a grant a few years back for those housing resources, so we were able to connect with those providers that provide different services across the state, whether that be vouchers, supported living, host homes, things like that, to be able to connect the youth that we are working with, with those services as well, so that they can access those in their home communities instead of having to move to different areas of the state to access those services, because we are a very rural state.

Sonya Morris:

From tip to tip we're about what nine, 10 hours from those different areas, so we need to ensure that the service by geography is very limited so that more youth can access those services. Second was the development of our case reviews team. So, these teams meet twice a month or as needed to go over youth that are currently in the juvenile justice system that are eligible to participate in the program. We identify their needs, risk level, what their personal interest is

on the program, what aspirations that they would like to have or see as they transition out of secure confinement, and then discuss those referrals for the project.

Sonya Morris:

And part of the case review team is really having a youth voice involved. So, a lot of the times the young person is filling out their own referral and sending it over with either a psych social worker at the facility or independently with the resources that they have. And we found that's a continuously very helpful piece for youth service so that we can identify barriers, but also identify the barriers that the youth are seeing for themselves, so that we can access them or access the services more and improve the outcomes that they are identifying that they might need. Next slide, please.

Sonya Morris:

Thank you. So, the Housing Assistance Program, this is the big one that is probably the most of interest of this conversation today. So, one of the lessons that we've learned over the past year or so with serving youth is that this Housing Assistance Program really hasn't been utilized to its full potential as it could have been. And with the conversations with our case review team, other folks, experts in the area, to be able to allow this program to be used a lot more than it has been in the past, and kind of reach its full potential to be able to serve youth quickly, effectively, and then, without any barriers associated with it.

Sonya Morris:

So, what we've done today is we've updated the language associated with the program. So, this allows for more low barrier costs, more of a flexible funding account, so that youth can access it very immediately and have a variety of needs met within that as that fiscal support. So, if they have a transportation barrier, which we had mentioned before. Geography-wise, transportation is a big one for youth to get to services. Driver's education, any sober-living beds, anything for housing, basic needs, things like that, that the youth is identifying as they're transitioning out of secure confinement that they might need. And then, so one of the things that we... Lessons learned was connecting a person to this fund.

Sonya Morris:

So, though fiscal support is great, it's only as great as the navigation that they are able to have, and having a person associated with this or case manager housing navigator to assist the youth in finding this stable and supportive housing, or any other identified need that they might have, is what we will be transitioning into in the next few months or so, to kind of navigate any barriers that we have seen over the past few years or so. Next slide, please. All right. Back over to you, Erica.

Leanetta:

So, another thing, the way the grant is structured... And thank you to CSH for originally, I think, helping to conceptualize this graphic, is that it does provide some support, but we have been learning that providing, getting to housing stability really requires a lot more than the resources that we have available in this grant. And we're more challenged in every area right now in WIN, but one is housing stock and landlords, and that's only gotten exacerbated since COVID 19 and lots of folks have decided that they want to move to Maine and the housing was comparatively cheaper.

Leanetta:

And so, that means for a lot of even our families, not even just young people, they are just struggling with the benevolence of a private landlord to rent to them. If they do have a felony or a prior criminal background, they can automatically be excluded on almost every voucher. They can appeal and sometimes they win, but we've got some work to do with housing stock and landlords. And we have a landlord partner on our advisory committee that has been doing some of that work to try to build more willing landlords.

Leanetta:

Second is the payment or the voucher, like the subsidy, the monthly rent payment. And so, while we have through YHDP a lot of new vouchers and new services coming online, and I think we have some willingness and great partners in Maine housing that would maybe help us convert some project-based vouchers, we don't have that yet. So, until we have project-based vouchers that are to serve kids in youth justice who have a history of youth justice, I think we're sort of relying on the benevolence of sister initiatives and it's not taking us as far as we could go with this population in youth justice.

Leanetta:

And then, the third leg of the stool being the support. There are a lot of people in the system and outside the system are like, "What do you mean? You guys are just going to just put them in an apartment and leave them there?" No. We want to make sure that they have wraparound services. So that could be some scatter site apartment with master leasing with a staff that pushes in and does case management, or it could be as intensive as one designated building with staff on the

first floor that are more easily accessible.

Leanetta:

So, we've got a lot to build still, but we, I think have the right building blocks and the right partners around the table to do that. And some seed money from this grant to try to take it all the way, but we're tending to each of those sorts of legs of the stool as we design and go. Next slide. Back to you, Cassie. I know there were some in the chat, but I didn't look.

Cassie:

Sorry, my button didn't want to push. So, we're here. Thank you to Sonya and to Erica for that and thank you to Stephanie and Derek for all of their back and forth with questions in the chat as we were going out. So, Stephanie and Derek got a lot of the questions in the chat answered. However, there was one from Florida that came in after y'all put that in the chat, and Florida asks, "How about housing for 17-year-olds who know going home will set them up for failure, but don't qualify for being removed from their home?"

Derek:

Yeah. I'm happy to at least help and try and process that, Michelle. It's a great question. And I think so much of the challenges of this work are the things that are in the gray area and in the margins. Right? And so, again, similar to Kimden's question, there's not a specific, simple answer. I would say doing everything that you can to build relationship with both the young person, the system, and then, if possible, with the parents to figure out what that right solution is for the young person.

Derek:

There are many different pathways depending on the process for... Each individual state's process for emancipation is different. Right? So, giving young people their rights and autonomy back and removing the guardianship requirement that different courts can allow, that gives young people an opportunity to look at different housing options and not need to get parental consent or system consent to navigate different places. That's not an easy process, but it can free up a lot of opportunities for different housing options that aren't available if you have to get the system or parental consent to move in.

Derek:

There are other ways that you can work with different system partners to provide housing while still under different custody standards. Right? So, it depends on your housing programs that you're operating, and I would just... I would navigate you back to what's Florida's expectation on guardianship and kind of navigating those housing regulations, but it's a really... It's a great question and I think navigating the under 18 housing realities totally vary from state to state.

Derek:

I don't want to go too much into the weeds, and I would love to pass it back to Erica or Sonya, if you have other thoughts on how you've navigated that. But I know, I'm working a lot in Oregon right now, and there are different standards. Actually, a 16 or 17-year-old, you can sign a lease in Oregon, which is amazing, but that's different in every state. So, Erica and Sonya, I don't know if you had other thoughts around navigating kind of what to do in that situation?

Sonya Morris:

Erica, did you want to go first?

Leanetta:

Well, we have some master leasing, you could probably talk about that. So, I'll leave that one for you to talk about master leasing as one creative way we've gotten around it with our TLPs. And I actually wanted to hear Derek and Stephanie talk a little bit more about host homes, which is of interest to me and maybe a little controversial in Maine right now, only because of licensing and people's fears of what could happen within a host home. And yet it strikes me as it's a model we do in youth justice every day. People couch surf, when they abscond.

Leanetta:

So, I just didn't know if you've thought more about host homes as one of those models for the 17 plus, because it keeps... What young people are telling us is it keeps them in their communities when maybe they can stay with a school librarian for a year to finish out their high school years, and not have to move to another community. But I know that there are sometimes legal challenges [inaudible 00:56:37] with it in terms of guardianship. And so, didn't know if you had more information Stephanie or Derek on host homes. I saw it in your slides too.

Derek:

Yeah. I'm happy to talk a little bit about host homes. The tricky thing from a formal implementation standard, if you are using host homes, that doesn't necessarily change the custodial requirements for under 18.

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Derek:

But the model of how host homes, there's a couple different ways to think about it. One of them, they call Kinship Care, which is actually young people that the young person knows, and it's their place of choice. And there could be lots of different ways that kinship is defined in different systems. And then there's another model role that families volunteer their home. They might not know the young person, but they're volunteering their home. And it's driven really by kind of a broad network of support.

Derek:

And again, host homes are really meant to say, these are not... It's growing to become more formalized, where you have occupancy agreements. And you can actually... Some have moved in into doing things as formal as leases. At the end of the day, when you're navigating under 18 housing, the most important thing that you need to understand are, what are your state regulations around custody, and what can, and can't young people decide around?

Derek:

And I hate saying that, because that feels so anti for how I believe young people should be able to navigate the space. But at the end of the day, when you are under 18, in most states, I would say every state outside of Oregon, you have to have another entity sign off for you to be able to move into different housing situations. And so that gray area of 17 homes not safe, don't have a great relationship to be able to talk to the parents, and, in fact, young people are saying that they don't want you engaged there, is one of the most difficult places to navigate, because formal systems, for good reason, there are laws tying what communications should look like.

Derek:

But it is challenging. I can't give you a magic answer, other than do what you can to have conversations with each of the partners and try and navigate a housing situation that is going to be responsive to what the young people are feeling is safe. Yeah. I wish it was clear, but custody laws super, super challenging.

Stephanie:

And I'll just add that I think, assuming you can solve for those custody considerations, which, as Derek is describing and others of you are putting in the chat, is no small thing, there are, different approaches to creating host homes. States have looked at the licensing for that, to sort of make the licensing not as onerous as it might be for foster care, as an example. Or to go the other way, I know the state of Washington sort of did a pretty significant look at it back a handful of years ago, and tried to figure out, what can we do to increase the availability of this option as a safe and stable one for youth, for whom the custody situation is such that they could reside in the them at the age of 16?

Stephanie:

So, I do think that that... I appreciate, Erica, you mentioning that as part of the continuum of housing with some level of supports option that is likely important in your state or community in terms of figuring out, what are the needs of youth? What's missing? And is a host home or a master lease situation something that can help fill the gap? But definitely ongoing challenges across the board, particularly with youth who are under 18.

Sonya Morris:

I'll briefly touch on the master leasing piece. So, for master leasing here in the state of Maine, Department of Corrections has contracted with two separate providers that do master leasing across the state. And what that means is that the provider themselves hold the lease for youth that are accessing that. And we were able to do a 16 to 24 age range for that. So, youth that are 16, 17 are able to access that service. And it is an apartment style living. So, either they have a roommate or a single bedroom, depending on what their need is. And then they have a case manager that checks in with them daily, and then helps them navigate vocation, education, anything like that they might need.

Sonya Morris:

And one of the things that we have transitioned into is the youth that are currently in juvenile justice also have access to it. But youth that are at risk for juvenile justice involvement can access it. So, they don't have to already be in the system to access the service, which is ideal for keeping them out of the system, because that's what we want, is to keep them out and get them served in the community. So, the contracted providers that we have contracts with allow for at-risk youth to be involved in that. And that could be a slew of risks that they're identifying.

Derek:

Oh, actually, that's great. The master leasing option, there was a really cool... Another really great thing that master leasing can do. I was just talking with a colleague in Austin, Texas. And they were talking about the ways that... So, the organization has an agreement with the landlords to say, "We're going to lease these units." And they've worked to say, when a young person is actually ready to move out of... And move into the unit on their own, they can have the young person just transition in place, meaning they don't have to move. You remove your master leasing, and the young person signs the lease directly with the landlord. And so, they're still in the same place. It's just that the agency can actually remove themselves as that middle person, and the young person can stay in that location.

Derek:

And again, one of the things that we hear very commonly from young people is that forced transitions cause trauma, right? And so, the more you can remove the need to have young people move when they're at, "Oh, yeah, I'm ready to be more independent," but that doesn't mean you should have to uproot your life and find an entirely different place to live and find a different neighborhood and find a different community. And so, the more that you can find ways to support transition in place or ways that you are supporting young people as they move, and they move at their choice, not because the program set it up, even better. And master leasing is a really cool tool in that toolbox to be able to respond to that for young people. So, another good option to think about. Master leasing can be a really helpful tool.

Cassie:

Thank you to all of our panelists. The floor remains open for questions. We have plenty of time left, so feel free to throw out any questions that you may have. While we're waiting for questions, I will put this out to all folks. When you're thinking about establishing these collaborative networks to support housing resources and needs, who are some non-negotiable partners that you need to have at the table? I will let whoever wants to jump in and take that. Erica, you came off mute first, so it is yours.

Leanetta:

I will say, obviously, if you have housing providers, you want to stay close to them. And I think my experiences of that group where it's a small and mighty group in Maine, but they are very inclusive. And already by design, being no barrier, have kind of a no eject, no reject policy, which is sometimes, we, can finally resource a young person with something. And you wait and wait. And then the organization can say, "Oh, they weren't a fit. Or they punched a wall. Off to Long Creek they go." So, we know that developmentally is normal and happens sometimes, and there has to be ways to walk through it. So, I would say that group of providers is used to responding to harm in ways that keep people in the community, and they don't give up. So that would be one.

Leanetta:

And I would say at our... We have a regional care team table in each region of the state, where we bring together that cross-sector collaboration. And what often happens there is someone from a different agency will come forward and say, "Oh, we have a resource that could help," instead of us having to tap into grant funds. And so, I would say the cap agencies who have a mandate around re-entry and financial lifting strategies, I think, could be great partners.

Leanetta:

And then, of course, our wonderful friends at CSH and AIR, who can help us get on the balcony and... Because we're in it. So, get up on the balcony and look at what's happening and think about how we could be most strategic with resources. How about you, Sonja?

Cassie:

Sonja shared a great thought in the chat about engaging the young people to ensure that they're providing the voice on the system that will serve them. So, Sonja, I won't speak for you anymore.

Sonya Morris:

Yeah. No, no, that's great. Yeah. Definitely, the young people themselves and the Department of Corrections here in Maine has been moving towards more of that model of allowing youth voice... I don't want to say allow but provide youth voice at every touchpoint of the system, because they're the experts, and we are just here to help them. So, them allowing us to have access to their thoughts, opinions, what their needs are, and able to provide what we can based off of their recommendations.

Sonya Morris:

And one of the things that the Department has moved towards, and, Erica, you could probably speak more about this, is the Young People's Caucus. So here in Maine, the Department has a Young People's Caucus that's made up of youth that have lived experiences across many different sectors, including juvenile justice. That really is a great resource for youth voice, to make sure that that is getting put into all the decisions, whether it's policy programs, implementation, needs, risks, things like that, so.

Stephanie:

I'll just add to these great examples that we tend to try to think about it from a standpoint of, how do we make it easy year for youth and young people to meet the needs that they're articulating? And programs and supports and services, as you all know, all have their very specific definitions of eligibility for who you have to be to get served and to get what. And those things don't line up, and they don't line up with how people show up, right?

Stephanie:

And so how, then, can we think about pulling together in a collaboration at a shared table all of those systems and supports, whether it's the justice system, the child welfare system, the education system, the homelessness response

system, the affordable housing system, right? Add a bunch more. But to what extent can we bring those partners who have something to contribute together, and identify those opportunities to really take the complication out of the system? At least for purposes of youth and young people being able to navigate to get what they need, and then hopefully, to make broader systemic changes that can help to streamline things across the board.

Derek:

If I can just add, this is another big culture shift opportunity within systems, right? To be able to root it in centering on young people, and being able to build what, for lack of... We talk about self-efficacy, or in this belief, self-motivation. Self-belief that, not only that you are worth it, but also the tools and skills to be able to navigate the complicated systems that are surrounding you and engaging you.

Derek:

And so, as we think about who the critical partners are to be talking with and partnering with, the very first one is to give that autonomy and power to the young person to say, "Okay. Let's talk about what next steps are. And who are you working with right now? And how do we all get on the same page? Because you might be meeting with me, housing provider, right now, and then you have to meet with someone from juvenile justice in a second, and then you've got to meet with maybe someone from child welfare, and then maybe you've got to meet with someone from education. And then maybe you have a mental health counselor. And maybe you have..." So, this circle becomes really, really expansive. And all of that is meant to be support, but it can become suffocating, right? And so, how do you think about supporting that young person at the center, and making that the priority, and then growing your system and your systemic response rooted in their guidance and leadership? Right?

Derek:

It is powerful. Stephanie and I were actually chatting about the power of being in person again, after all of the time that we've had. But equally, I know there are providers that have been on the ground and in person with young people throughout all of this, right? But imagining the power of in one room, having all of those individuals there, and having the young person have one conversation, not 15, that need to direct where they're going. And how do you center that leadership from the young person and say, "Okay, we've all heard this young person here has really raised this is how they're wanting to navigate"? And then the partners that are around the table can say, "Okay, who wants to take that? And how do we navigate that together?" Rather than becoming super silent, which is how our systems kind of inherently act.

Derek:

So again, it's a big culture shift. It takes more time. It takes a lot of partnership and communication. But when we talk about for the betterment of the young person, that partnership and that collaboration element is huge.

Cassie:

Wonderful. Thank you so much. And Carrie, if I can get the next slide, please. I want to thank each of our speakers and the support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in funding these efforts and recognizing that housing is a non-negotiable when we talk about re-entering community after being in out-of-home placement.

Cassie:

I also want to encourage all of our participants to reach out to any of our speakers with follow-up questions, to us at the National Reentry Resource Center and Corrections and Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center at the American Institutes for Research, or directly to OJJDP with questions that you may have on anything you heard in today's conversation.

Cassie:

As noted, the recording and slides for today's presentation will be posted to the National Reentry Resource Center website by mid-May at the latest. But we encourage you to visit that website now for more information on Second Chance Month and upcoming opportunities. We also invite you to take a moment to complete the feedback form that can be found in the chat box to tell us how much you appreciated today's session, and what we might be able to offer in the future to be helpful.

Cassie:

With that, I welcome you all to, again, thank our speakers for all of the work that they're doing in community to ensure that young people have safe, stable homes. And we thank all of you for the work that you are doing in your communities to support young people. Enjoy the rest of your Tuesday. And we look forward to catching you on a future webinar.

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This transcript was exported on May 04, 2022.