

Youth Working Group Update

Champions: Arash Ghafoori & Melissa Jacobowitz (Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth) COVID-19 Meetings (March 23, 2020, through July 21, 2020)

- From March 23, 2020 to May 12th the Youth Working Group met (weekly changing to a bi-weekly basis as of May 26th through July 21, 2020, and then changing to meeting monthly on the third Thursday of the month from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. beginning on August 20th) to discuss efforts around providing services to homeless youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, with key topics including needs for information, how services have been affected, and brainstorming on collaborative efforts.

Attendees of these YWG COVID-19 special meetings included:

Arash Ghafoori (Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth); Melissa Jacobowitz (NPHY); Allison Steinzor (NPHY); Catherine Huang Hara (Clark County Social Service); Danita Osborne-Morris (CCSS); Brenda Herbstman (CCSS); Meg Pike (CCSD Title I HOPE); Christina Vela (St. Jude's Ranch for Children); Sharon Cameron (CCSD Title I HOPE); Kelly-Jo Shebeck (CCSD Title I HOPE); Norean Saldivar (BitFocus); Julee King (BitFocus); Holly Huth (The Center); Dr. Ray MacFarlane (The Center); Hassan Chaundry (FORESIGHT Companies); Nancy Brune (Guinn Center); Kim Moore (Shannon West); Laura Obrist (NSHE); Joe Taylor (Step UP); AJ Huth (The Center); Kelly Robson (HELP of S. NV); Amy Licht (OliveCrest); Jaymie Junsay (Legal Aid Center); Rhonda Lee (El Shaddai Refuge Homes); Taisacan Hall (Young Adults in Charge); Arshawn Turner (YAC).

- Highlights of the meetings:

- **NPHY:** NPHY reported that the NPHY DIC remains open to youth in need of basic needs services and case management in a modified manner, the Safe Place Program is operational, and that youth in NPHY's Emergency Shelter Program and Independent Living Program practice social distancing and shelter-in-place (unless there is a need to attend a medical appointment or go to work); NPHY's outreach program (including the YO Team) went to high-need areas to connect youth with basic needs services and referrals to shelter programs. NPHY also launched a virtual volunteer program to offer youth remote access to enrichment activities and learning opportunities.
- **HELP/SWHYC:** The MCIT outreach team continued to conduct street outreach to deliver essential services and connect families to emergency housing on a modified schedule, and HELP's diaper bank remained available to the public. Shannon West started accepting six new youth, then expanded to ten youth, being held in quarantine (for 72 hours) at a time before being admitted into their transitional housing program. Beginning in June youth were allowed to participate in group activities while practicing social distancing. HELP received funding from Southwest Gas to assist individuals with utility costs of up to \$400 (including late and disconnect fees).
- **CCSD Title I HOPE:** The Title I HOPE office ordered Chromebooks and Hotspots and distributed this technology to homeless shelters to assist homeless students to participate in distance learning while schools remain closed. Title I HOPE provided training on June 12th to inform CCSD administrators about the McKinney-Vento law and is preparing for an increase in homeless students over the next school year.

- **CCSS:** CCSS shared information about available quarantine sites, testing sites, and cooling stations. It was mentioned that HUD sent out Mega-Waivers for CoC, HOPWA, and ESG. Clark County began a housing assistance program for households behind on their mortgage, similar to efforts programs put in place by the City of Las Vegas and the City of North Las Vegas.
- **BitFocus:** Created a “Be on the Look Out” list for homeless individuals and engaged in conversations with the S. NV Health District regarding public alerts of clients in need of testing and assistance. Together with CCSS, they worked on creating a list of agency locations to see if homeless individuals are frequenting other providers while on public alert (this way contact tracing can be performed as needed). They informed all providers to inform them of any updates to their bed count/housing inventory so they can make adjustments in HMIS. A process was created for emergency shelters to become part of the community queue in alignment with new HUD requirements.
- **NSHE:** NSHE provided youth living in college dorms the option to stay or leave and continued providing food assistance on campus. Following direction from the CDC, local health officials, and the Governor they are considering a hybrid model for the upcoming school year concerning college enrollment.
- **StepUP:** Continued to provide youth with bus passes and distribute \$773 payments.
- **The Center:** Mentioned they were open to assist individuals with basic needs services and began offering their programs remotely; they were also provided funding to provide financial assistance to assist LGBTQ youth and victims of crimes and started a victims’ crisis hotline.
- **Legal Aid:** Legal Aid’s website has a legal and financial toolkit available for those in need of assistance with domestic violence protection orders, housing, employment, and landlord/tenant issues. Their hotline remains open to those in need of assistance.
- **Youth Action Board, Young Adults in Charge (YAC):** Members regularly participated in the CoC Board Meetings, participated in the Nevada Homeless Alliance’s Policy Roundtable Discussion, attended the Statewide Conference held by the Nevada Housing Coalition, attended Youth Collaboratory’s “Youth Engagement During the Pandemic” webinars, voiced opposition to the Backpack Ban Ordinance, brainstormed about how youth providers and the broader community could work together in case of a curfew enactment, and prepared a presentation to present to the CoC Board Members at the August Board Meeting.
- **Brainstorming efforts:** It was suggested that a utilization map be created to evaluate the occupancy of youth beds during the COVID-19 pandemic: this way that information can be used to inform elected officials of the needs of youth experiencing homelessness in our community.