Developing a Coordinated Youth Housing Stability Program for Juvenile Courts

Sarah Cusworth Walker
University of Washington School of Medicine

Esteban Valencia
University of Washington School of Medicine

Asia Bishop
University of Washington

Michael Irons
Snohomish County Juvenile Court

Arina Gertseva
Washington State Center for Court Research

Abstract

Homeless youth engaging in street survival behaviors are at higher risk of justice involvement. Advocates for reducing youth homelessness have called on the juvenile justice system and allied system partners to minimize the legal consequences of these behaviors and to improve systemic responses to identifying and reducing homelessness. The current study used a community-based participatory approach to develop a model for reducing homelessness from within the juvenile justice system. This mixed methods study leveraged a research-practice partnership between university researchers and a midsized county court in Washington State to examine data from local juvenile filings in 2017, (n=555), statewide juvenile court data from 2016-17, (n=6,791/6,866), and qualitative data from workgroup meetings. Prevalence statistics suggest 20-50 percent of the youth filed in juvenile court had at least one prior episode of running away or being kicked out of the home. Key qualitative findings included tensions around the role of probation in addressing youth homelessness, the need for better methods of identification, and a lack of intensive family-based services targeted at preventing housing instability. The resulting juvenile court based model for addressing youth homelessness is presented and lessons learned from the research-practice partnership are discussed.

Background

Youth homelessness and juvenile justice involvement intersect in a number of complex ways. Youth who are homeless over an extended period of time are significantly more likely to have contact with the justice system as well as other unfavorable outcomes, including higher levels of violent victimization and drug use (Ferguson et al., 2011; Kaufman and Widom, 1999; Stein et al., 2009; Yoder et al., 2014). Using a homeless sample, Yoder et al. (2014) found youth who engaged in a greater number of survival behaviors were 2.6 times more likely to be arrested. This study is consistent with a finding by McCarthy and Hagan (2005) in which youths' perception of danger while homeless was significantly associated with criminal activities, including theft, drug selling, and prostitution. Yoder et al. (2014) described these illegal actions as "survival behaviors" to distinguish them from other theoretical frameworks that assume criminal behaviors are primarily driven by deficits in thinking and problem-solving.

Justice involvement itself can also act as an active barrier to stable housing (Quirouette et al. 2016). For youth transitioning out of detention or incarceration, for example, the legal status of having a criminal record can severely limit opportunities for securing independent housing (Mears and Travis 2004). Having a criminal record can also act as a barrier for youth trying to move back in with their family after release, particularly when the families' housing unit policy prohibits felons from residing on the premises (Snyder 2004). Longer term incarceration of more than a year also disrupts preexisting social networks, leaving youth with lower social capital (for example, diminished relationships or connections with extended family members) upon release. This disruption leaves youth heavily reliant on public systems to provide basic housing and needed resources for successful transition back to the community. When beds are not available in the youths' communities of origin (Tam et al., 2016), youth are often required to search for housing elsewhere. With fewer social networks, youth are less likely to remain in stable placements.

Youth dually involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice system face compounded risks for poor social connections and homelessness. One study by Shah et al. (2017) found youth with justice system contact were 1.5 times more likely to become homeless after aging out of the foster care system. Finally, a less studied but important intersection is the role the justice system plays in identifying youth currently housed but at risk of later housing instability. This risk appears to be particularly salient for youth arrested due to home conflict, one of the most common precipitants of youth homelessness (Administration on Children, Youth and Families [ACYF], 2016). At least 50 percent of youth homelessness appears to be directly preceded by a family conflict resulting in the youth running away or told to leave the home (ACYF, 2016).

There are multiple and often intersecting consequences for youth at risk of homelessness and justice involvement. These various intersections make a compelling case for the need of increased coordination between the juvenile justice system and youth housing systems in order to reduce youth homelessness and promote general youth well-being. The complex and reciprocal nature of this relationship is likely to require a multicomponent approach (Britton and Pilnik, 2018).

Prevalence and Causes of Youth Homelessness

A staggeringly high number of youth in the United States will experience homelessness before the age of 17. A recent national study estimated 1 in 10 young adults (18-25 years) and 1 in 30 adolescents (13-17 years) will experience some form of homelessness over the course of a year (Morton, Dworsky, and Samuels, 2017). Studies over the last twenty years suggest this number is stable and may be modestly growing. For instance, trends found an estimated 1.6 million runaway youth in 1998 (Ringwalt, Greene, and Robertson, 1998), to a possible 1.7 million youth in 2013 (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2016). The prevalence of homelessness also disproportionately impacts certain highly vulnerable subpopulations. For example, a recent national study found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) identified youth are 120 percent more likely to have episodes of homelessness compared to non-LGBTQ identified youth (Morton, Dworsky, and Samuels, 2017), and comprise 20-40 percent of the youth homeless population. Research also suggests youth with trauma histories are more likely to become homeless. One study by Bender et al. (2014) found 93 percent of homeless youth experienced some form of maltreatment prior to leaving home, which is disproportionately high compared to the general population experiencing childhood maltreatment (7-9 percent; Fantuzzo, Perlman, and Dobbins, 2011; Sullivan and Knutson, 2000).

The majority of youth homelessness appears to result from unstable or conflictual home environments. A 2016 study by the Administration of Children, Youth, and Families conducted with over 600 homeless youth found the majority of youth first become homeless when they are asked to leave home by a parent or caregiver (51 percent). Extrusion from the home was followed by being unable to find a job (25 percent), being physically abused or beaten (24 percent), or as a result of a caretaker's substance abuse problems in the home (23 percent). Only 30 percent of the surveyed sample thought they had the option of returning home. Recent studies estimate the average length of homelessness can last nearly two years (ACYF, 2016) with less than one-fourth (23 percent) of youth experiencing short-term homelessness (that is, less than one month; Milburn et al., 2012).

Risks Associated with Youth Homelessness

Homelessness poses significant health risks to youth, compounding any prior mental and physical health challenges. Nearly two thirds of youth will be victimized while homeless, including physical or sexual assault (33 percent), being threatened with a weapon (41 percent), or robbed (41 percent; ACYF, 2016; Kipke et al., 1997; Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, and Koopman, 1991). A little over one-fourth of youth report "being sexual" in exchange for a place to spend the night (ACYF, 2016). Runaway and homeless youth are at a greater risk of depression, substance use, and conduct problems compared to housed youth (Chen et al., 2006).

The Juvenile Justice System's Role in Addressing Youth Homelessness

A number of recent reports include policy and practice suggestions for improving the justice and public health response to youth homelessness (Columbia Legal Services, 2015; Morton, Dworsky, and Samuels, 2017; Britton and Pilnik, 2018; Pilnik et al., 2017). A recent report developed by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice outlines Ten Principles for Change, designed to support communities

to improve housing stability for justice-involved youth (Pilnik et al., 2017). These principles largely focus on reducing or minimizing justice system contact for youth entering the justice system, and on accessing stable housing for youth exiting the justice system. For example, the report recommends jurisdictions should avoid charging youth for survival behaviors, such as prostitution or squatting in abandoned buildings (Pilnik et al., 2017). The recommendations include repealing laws prohibiting loitering, camping, and the like; removing truancy as a chargeable offense; prohibiting confinement for unstable housing; and eliminating court fines. Similarly, the report outlines the different actions multiple systems can take in ensuring youth are not released from justice settings into homelessness (Pilnik et al., 2017). These recommendations include more expansive transition planning, coordinated school reenrollment efforts, and maintaining open child welfare cases through justice placement. The report also acts as a resource guide with links to over 100 different resources focusing on training, policy, direct service examples, and research reports.

A report from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges proposes three specific strategies courts can take to prevent youth homelessness (Britton and Pilnik, 2018). These strategies include (1) prevention with coordinated transition/re-entry planning, (2) prevention with effective legal representation, and (3) prevention with sound judicial leadership.

Recommendations include better identification of risks and improved coordination among systems during dependency and at-risk youth hearings to prevent future housing instability and behaviors that lead to criminal offenses.

While the risk of justice contact is high for homeless youth, there is relatively little known about the prevalence of homelessness among youth arrested or charged with juvenile crimes. We could not find a credible source or study showing the percentage of youth with housing needs among a juvenile population. This prevalence is important to understand because justice systems have a number of competing mandates and performance goals, for example, reducing racial/ethnic disparities, improving gender and culturally responsive services, and addressing trauma and behavioral health needs to name a few. Implementing the systemic changes recommended by the previous policy reports are likely to be more successful to the degree that homelessness is identified as a significant issue for justice-involved youth or can be aligned with other initiatives addressing similar needs.

The Current Study

The recent reports from Pilnik et al. (2017) and Britton and Pilnik (2018) provide valuable guidance and principles for systems to consider when addressing youth homelessness. The current project attempts to translate some of these principles via a research-practice partnership with one juvenile court in Washington State and is the first phase of a larger study to develop and evaluate court-based models that improve the identification and service referral process for youth at risk of homelessness. Principles of community-based participatory research (Israel et al., 1998; Bess et al., 2009) were applied in this process, ensuring that the developed model reflects the values and system operations of the local setting. This report presents the formative process for developing the model, key local and state data used to inform the model, and discusses the findings and potential application of the model for other jurisdictions.

Methods

Program team. To ensure program development was tailored to the system operations of the local court and allied partners, as well as the needs of youth and families, a Development Workgroup was established. To form this workgroup, the court probation manager convened an internal team to brainstorm all of the known systems partners that intersected with homelessness (exhibit 1). Stakeholders identified in this first meeting were solicited to participate in a second meeting, which included representatives from the juvenile court, the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, the local school district, two organization specializing in sexual exploitation and abuse, and a drug abuse task force. At subsequent meetings, workgroup participants were encouraged to identify other important stakeholder contacts, leading to additional invitations to a member of the county drug use taskforce, the director of special programs and services at the school district, and a state level administrator for youth homelessness.

Exhibit 1

Workgroup Participants

Agency	Title
Cocoon House	Program Manager
Juvenile Court	Program Manager
	Probation Supervisor
	Probation Counselor
	Assistant Court Administrator
	Juvenile Justice Fellow
Department of Social And Health Services (State)	Program Quality Assurance Specialist
School District	McKinney Vento Facilitator
	Special Programs Director
	Juvenile Detention Instructor
Sexual Exploitation Intervention Network	Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth Coordinator
Providence Intervention Center for Assault and Abuse	Human Trafficking & Advocate Specialist
Drug Abuse Taskforce	Program Coordinator

The Development Workgroup was the primary driver of model development. An Intervention Mapping process (Bartholomew, Parcel, and Kok, 1998) was used to develop a list of objectives for the program and selected strategies to meet those objectives using the results from the qualitative data analysis, findings from the local and state administrative data, and findings from the academic research literature The theory of Social Development (Hawkins and Weis, 1985) was applied in developing the intervention piece of the program model given the importance of the intrapersonal and ecological factors on youth housing, such as family environment, poverty, and youth development. The discussion was also informed by the juvenile justice and homelessness reduction principles from Pilnik et al. (2017), including (1) current methods of identifying homelessness at the point of justice contact, (2) existing referral mechanisms for connecting youth to services, (3) adequacy of existing services to prevent or address housing instability, and (4) laws and regulations impacting the provision of services.

Finally, the investigators presented research-based approaches to improving family communication and healthy youth development using the prevention to intervention framework (Tolan, Guerra,

and Kendall, 1995). The facilitator of the study team presented the matrix of existing family-based services shown to build family resiliency for reducing conflict and/or addressing youth substance use or delinquency. Using this list as a starting point for discussion, the group identified areas of the county with and without family-based services. The most populated city of the county had the most resources already in place to serve families through phone consultation, parenting groups, or intensive case management. The northeastern part of the county was identified as lacking any known family support services, with other parts of the county having limited resources. The group noted that few of the research-based programs on the list were specifically available in the county, but that available programs appeared to cover similar components.

The investigators facilitated the meetings and captured the discussion through handwritten notes and recordings. In between workgroups, the investigators would follow up on key questions posed by members and bring possible solutions back to the group for further discussion. The workgroup met four times over eight months to provide time between sessions for the investigators to bring additional program and policy information, data, and academic research findings for the group to consider. The discussion was informed by a program review conducted by the study team that highlighted programs shown to be effective in preventing and intervening with family conflict.

Setting. The juvenile court in the study is a midsized court extending across semi-urban, suburban, and rural areas. The 2017 county population included 59, 225 adolescents ages 12-17 (Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2017). The majority of these youth were White (75.33 percent) followed by Hispanic (13.71 percent), Asian (9.81 percent), and Multiracial youth (9.08 percent). Black (3.25 percent), American Indian / Alaskan Native (1.19 percent), and Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander youth (0.68 percent) comprised a smaller proportion of the population. In 2017, the county juvenile court filed 882 criminal offense cases. The court has been a member of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (Annie E Casey Foundation) since 2012 and instituted a number of policies and practices to reduce the number of youth detained for minor and moderate offenses. In 2014, the court had the second lowest rate of detained youth in the state (9.1 per 1,000 youth from general population) and the fourth lowest rate of case filing (11.1 per 1,000 youth from general population; Gilman, 2016).

Qualitative Analysis

Handwritten notes and recordings were captured from each meeting and themes were coded and summarized to inform subsequent meetings. We present qualitative data from the first meeting, as this meeting was similar to a focus group with the investigators facilitating discussion based on questions related to perceived needs, existing resources, potential barriers, and values related to youth housing and juvenile court operations. Notes from the meeting were taken by two of the study personnel and combined into a single set of notes. The notes were then coded for themes using directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), which were analyzed within the topic areas (needs, existing resources, and gaps) identified in the framework used in the workgroup discussion. Information captured in subsequent meetings related to these themes was used to corroborate the information needs and emerging themes identified in the first meeting and to develop a prototype model with greater specificity. This process of triangulation (using multiple sources of information to cross-check) helped establish trustworthiness and credibility of the

findings (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014), a process analogous to establishing validity and reliability in quantitative research.

Quantitative Prevalence Data

Quantitative data to estimate local and state housing instability prevalence came from the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT; Hamilton, van Wormer, and Barnoski, 2015), a case management risk and needs tool used by juvenile courts in Washington State to guide service planning. The PACT is completed in two phases. A shortened, "prescreen" version of the form is administered to all court-referred youth and some diverted youth for classification into low, moderate, or high risk for recidivism. Only youth scoring at moderate or high received the full assessment. State data was requested from the Washington State Center for Court Research to inform the group about the overall need for a specific emphasis on housing for justice-involved youth, and to estimate the number of youth likely to need intensive housing support as housing status is only available through the full assessment. This process included two data extracts. The first data extract was taken from the PACT pre-screen, to examine how local data compared to state data on presumed indicators of housing instability risks for 2016 (n=6,791) and 2017 (n=6,866). The second extract used the full PACT assessment to examine the percent of current housing instability among youth assessed as moderate or high risk for recidivism for 2016 (n=4,307) and 2017 (n=4,296).

Local data on indicators of housing instability risk were examined to provide monthly estimates of how many youth could be expected to be flagged as at risk for housing instability. The data included all cases (which could include duplicates) receiving the PACT prescreen between February 2016 through February 2017, n=555. The prevalence of local data items presumed to indicate risk for housing instability were also compared to the state findings as a check on generalizability of the developed model for other jurisdictions. These indicators include previous runaway incidents, previous out of home placement, and level of conflict in the home.

Results

Themes from the meetings highlighted the perceived main sources of youth homelessness, the limitations of existing ways to identify housing needs, and ideas for leveraging existing supports and addressing needs.

Housing and services gaps. Workgroup discussion of service model gaps primarily focused on the lack of long term housing for 12- to 15-year-olds, and on the challenges of finding appropriate, family-based services to prevent homelessness. In the county, limited long term housing was available for transition-aged youth (18-24) and adults. Long term housing for youth under age 18 was only available through child welfare services. Accessing child welfare dollars and beds was restricted to a finding of dependency after substantiated parental abuse or neglect, which was not the case for many of the homeless youth known to the workgroup members (five mentions).

Workgroup members also reflected on their experiences with parents who "are done" by the time a youth comes in contact with the justice system, making reunification after a detention

stay difficult (six mentions). Workgroup members noted that families will become frustrated with the perceived inadequacy of available justice responses to home conflict and youth intractability. One workgroup member shared that "it's very frustrating for the families when services engage with lower level ideas and families have already tried it." The services available through the justice center, however, in collaboration with the county-based youth shelter were perceived as adequate for youth with lower justice involvement (for example, low-risk youth). The shelter representative noted that an outreach employee attended court on Mondays to identify and refer families who were in need of brief family support and that this process was working well for some families.

Workgroup members also noted ways in which court processes created additional barriers for homeless youth. For example, court summons are mailed and the workgroup members discussed how these notices were likely not reaching youth who are unstably housed, creating greater legal consequences: "Warrants, how many kids show up to court because they don't get the notice, or they get it but they're so all over the place they can't prioritize it? So there's a court outcome due to the status of [homelessness]."

Identifying homelessness. The workgroup members noted two significant challenges with identifying youth homelessness from within the juvenile court. The first challenge was the lack of items relating to homelessness in existing screenings and assessments. The court uses the PACT as a validated criminal risk assessment to guide service decisions. A shortened, screener version of the tool is administered by probation counselors to all youth charged with a non-divertible crime following a law enforcement referral. The screener contains items about past runaway instances but not items about current homelessness. The full assessment, administered with youth who score as moderate or high risk on the screener, contains a question about whether the youth was currently under adult supervision, but the workgroup members had concerns about whether probation counselors had a shared understanding about how to score this item. For example, "[We] can't rely on PACT because it doesn't have a good indicator of stability of youth's housing status at the moment of recording." The group also agreed to adopt the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness used for school-based assessment. The McKinney-Vento definition considers "unaccompanied" to be not in "the physical custody of a parent or guardian" (42 U.S.C. § 1143a(6)).

The second challenge related to concerns about introducing a new assessment tool and new job responsibilities for court employees. One of the probation counselors commented, "What's going through my mind is 'does that mean that [Probation Counselors] are going to have another assessment to administer'?" This comment lined up with concerns expressed by other workgroup members about implementation of any new tools or roles, as existing probation staff had inconsistent views on the probation counselor's responsibility to address homelessness as a part of supervision. The workgroup also noted that the detention school was run by the educational school district, and instructors had access to youth administrative files, including homeless status (McKinney-Vento). One workgroup member noted, however, that prior requests to look up this information while a youth was in detention had been complicated by a similar confusion about whether this assessment fell under anyone's specific job responsibilities.

Leveraging existing service providers. The workgroup members also noted a number of existing resources and services that could be leveraged to create better connections between

systems (five mentions), including existing community-based expertise working with homeless youth and the court's existing relationships with the youth shelter for diversion services: "So an option can be that when kids are enrolled in school at the detention center, school staff should identify who are homeless...for kids who have already been identified [as homeless] ... [we] connect with services when they reach detention." The workgroup also recommended that child welfare and detention alternatives (community-based alternatives to detention stays, largely as a response to probation violations) be included in planning as other important systems to have involved in the workgroup.

Summary

The meetings provided an opportunity for the members to share ideas and expertise about existing challenges and resources and begin to map out some potential approaches to improving system coordination. The major themes from the first meeting highlighted (1) challenges with identifying youth homelessness and risk of homelessness from within the court using existing tools and human resources, (2) the inadequacy of the existing service options for youth and families at an elevated level of need including long term housing for adolescents and intensive family-based services, and (3) the need for child welfare and other community-based justice service providers to be involved in planning.

Prevalence of Youth Homelessness

For the local data, exhibit 2, The Prevalence of Youth Housing Indicators, displays the frequencies of selected items for youth who received the PACT screen. A minority of the youth, about 10 percent, had at least one previous out of home placement in foster care, mental health treatment, or a state justice facility. The percent of youth with assessed runaway history was also relatively low compared to the total assessed group: 22 percent had at least one previous runaway episode, and 7 percent of the assessed population had more than five runaway episodes. Youth displaying consistently hostile behaviors at home, presumed to be at risk for being kicked out by parents, reached 11 percent of the assessed sample.

While the presence of these indicators was relatively low in the overall population, the number of youth with at least one of the above indicators reached 175 youth a year (not accounting for possible duplicates) when runaway history was set to at least two prior episodes. Divided by 12 months, the court could expect about 14 referrals a month if these items were considered "flags" for potential housing instability or risk. Including the indicator for consistent youth hostility in the home could add another 60 youth a year, for an estimated 19-20 "flagged" youth per month from court-referred youth alone. The court also processes about 20 at risk youth (ARY) cases a year, increasing the estimated monthly referrals to 22-24 cases. The workgroup was not able to access detention data for the planning phase, but estimated another five referrals monthly from detention and diversion/non PACT screened youth. This information led the workgroup to estimate approximately 30 referrals per month for a housing coordinator to assess, triage, develop case plans, and coordinate follow up with indicated services.

Exhibit 2

Prevalence of Youth Housing Instability Indicators in One Juvenile Court, February 2016–February 2017, n = 555

Indicator	N	%
History of out-of-home placement		
No out-of-home placement exceeding 30 days	501	90.3
1 out-of-home placement	33	6.0
2 out-of-home placements	8	1.4
3 or more out-of-home placements	13	2.3
History of running away/kicked out		
No history of running away or being kicked out	434	78.2
1 instance of running away/kicked out	33	6.0
2 to 3 instances of running away/kicked out	42	7.6
4 to 5 instances of running away/kicked out	9	1.6
Over 5 instances of running away/kicked out	37	6.7
Parental authority & control		
Minor usually obeys and follows rules	359	64.7
Sometimes obeys or obeys some rules	136	24.5
Consistently disobeys and/or is hostile	60	10.8

As shown in exhibit 3, The Prevalence of Homelessness for Justice-Involved Youth, (n=6,791/6,866) the prevalence of any runaway history in the screening sample (n=6,791/6,866) decreased slightly from 42 percent in 2016 to 41 percent in 2017. Items indicating current housing instability among the population of youth who scored as moderate or high risk on the screening tool and received the full assessment were also examined (n=4,307/4,296). The prevalence of current runaway status in 2016 (39 percent of the sample) was slightly lower than the prevalence of runaway history for the same year. In 2017, however, the prevalence of both indicators was equivalent among the sample (41 percent). The full assessment also includes a question about whether the youth was currently under adult supervision. The recorded number of youth who were unaccompanied by an adult was unexpectedly low given these other numbers, with only 2 percent identified in both 2016 and 2017. This item defines adult supervision as "someone who is responsible for the minor's welfare, either legally or with parental consent," and allows three response options for no adult supervision: (1) Living with peers without adult supervision; (2) living alone without adult supervision; and (3) transient without adult supervision.

Exhibit 3

Prevalence of Homelessness Risk for Justice-Involved Youth in Washington State, 2016–2017

Indicator	2016		2017	
	n	%	n	%
All court referred youth	6,791		6,866	
History of runaway/kicked out	2,842	41.9	2,781	40.5
History of runaway/kicked out/ or living without adult supervision	2,854	42.0	2,792	40.7
Youth at moderate – high recidivism risk	4,307		4,296	
Currently a runaway/kicked out	1,648	39.1	1,708	40.5
Currently without adult supervision	92	2.1	81	1.9

Note. Within group percentages are displayed. Data produced from responses to Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT), the standard juvenile court risk assessment in Washington State.

Taken together, the prevalence data suggests one-fourth to one-half of juveniles referred to court will have at least one indicator of unstable housing, either from past or current episodes of running away or being kicked out of their home. The statewide data also suggests that the majority of these youth end up in some other situation in adult care if the assessments are being conducted accurately and represent a shared understanding of what constitutes reasonable and sustainable adult supervision.

Youth Housing Stability Program for Juvenile Courts

Data from the qualitative and quantitative analyses were reviewed along with the principles identified from the Intervention Mapping exercise and the prevention services' literature to develop the Youth Housing Stability program model for juvenile courts as shown in exhibit 4. The workgroup members reviewed the major gaps and resources identified from the previous meeting and the prevalence data to develop a working model to improve identification, system coordination, and services to reduce youth homelessness through prevention and intervention services. The results model specified the need for five major components: (1) agency wide awareness training, (2) referral criteria, (3) housing coordination, (4) prevention services, and (5) housing services.

Exhibit 4

Components, Objectives, and Content for a Youth Housing Stability Program for Juvenile Courts

Component	Target Population	Objective	Content
Awareness Training	All court divisions (diversion, probation, ARY, detention)	Engage court staff in supporting a new direction in practice Set expectations about referring youth based on routine data flags Educate staff about common signs of housing instability for discretionary referrals	Definitions of youth homelessness Overview of existing services Signs and risk for homelessness Existing screening items requiring referral
Referral	All court divisions (diversion, probation, ARY, detention)	Identify youth across the continuum of court involvement Create court wide expectations for referring youth	PACT prescreen items: 2 or more runaway episodes; any out-of-home placement; highest level of hostility at home. At-Risk-Youth (ARY): All petitions Detention: 2 or more runaway episodes; all domestic violence assault holds; current McKinney Vento.

Exhibit 4

Components, Objectives, and Content for a Youth Housing Stability Program for Juvenile Courts

Component	Target Population	Objective	Content
Housing Stability Coordinator	All court referred youth and families	Centralized coordination of services	Conducts agency wide awareness trainings
		Brings expertise on housing and family-based prevention to court operations	Follows up on court referrals to conduct a housing stability assessment
		Works flexibly with court staff to support housing as one component of a case plan	Develops case plans
			Monitors case plans through completion of services (for prevention) or after confirming contact with community-based case management (for unstably housed youth)
Prevention Services	Youth assessed as low to high risk for instability but currently housed under adult supervision in a family that is currently housed	Provide a continuum of care for families based on need	Low need: Brief family support through telehealth, phone coaching, education and information about community resources.
		Save costs and time with a stepped care model	Moderate need: Selective family-based prevention services, 5-7 weeks of curriculum, practice and coaching.
		Build resiliency in youth and families to promote youth development	High need: In home support using intensive family intervention, for example, Wraparound, family systems therapy models.
Housing Intervention	Youth unhoused at the time of assessment	Provide youth with immediate shelter	Court Housing Coordinator refers to existing community case management to support long term housing stability.
		Plan for long term housing	
		Build youth resiliency and life skills	

Training. The workgroup identified agency wide training as a needed component of the model in order to address the challenge of inconsistent awareness and perceived responsibility to address homelessness among current court and probation staff. As identified by the workgroup, the training would need to be offered to all probation and diversion staff and focus on flags for homelessness not available in the existing assessment tools, the benefits of addressing homelessness for reducing youth recidivism, and any new procedures the court adopts to assist with system coordination.

Data flags using routine data. Given the challenges of instituting an entirely new screening tool on top of existing paperwork and responsibilities, the workgroup focused on how to use existing indicators to flag youth for referral to a central coordinator for further assessment. The workgroup identified the indicators on the prescreen assessment as noted above, as well as indicators from detention (McKinney Vento data), the ARY non-criminal court, and for youth with warrants for failing to appear in court. Court-referred youth included all youth with two or more instances

of running away, current or past foster care status, and the highest score possible (3) on an item measuring levels of home conflict. For ARY youth, the workgroup recommended that all be referred to the program for assessment. For detained youth, all youth with an active McKinney Vento indicator, all youth detained for an assault, and all youth with more than one runaway episode would be referred. Because of various screening practices for youth on diversion, the recommendations varied. For diverted youth receiving the PACT screen, the same indicators would apply as for youth referred to court. For youth not receiving the PACT screen, the diversion staff would be trained on common indicators of family stress and housing risk to facilitate referrals to a housing coordinator. Combined, these various indicators would likely identify 15-20 youth a month who could be referred to a housing coordinator for follow up consideration.

System coordinator. The workgroup felt a dedicated job position was necessary to avoid underserving youth who could benefit from further assessment if the responsibility to provide comprehensive housing and services coordination otherwise fell to the probation counselors. Further, this dedicated position would ensure that referral would not be limited to only youth on probation and eligibility could be opened up as needed. The workgroup also felt that the coordinator should come from a community agency rather than the court so that the youth could continue to have contact with the individual past the point of justice contact, if necessary. The coordinator's job would be to locate youth referred by court staff, conduct a housing assessment, and develop a support plan that includes leveraging available resources and services to keep youth in the most stable, home-like situation available. Potential possibilities could include connecting the family with effective family support services, coordinating short and long-term housing, providing or arranging for transport, coordinating with schools to preserve enrollment, and advocating for the youth in relevant social service systems. The coordination would prioritize transitioning the youth and family to longer term case management services and would not be expected to last more than two to three months per case.

Community services. The workgroup identified a number of community services already in place that were providing supportive services to families. For the model, the workgroup proposed additional family-based services to assist with high levels of family conflict and "host homes" as a potential solution to the problem of housing 13- to 16-year-olds long term. Host homes are an emerging innovation for housing youth who are not involved in the dependency system but are no longer residing with their family of origin. Volunteers from the community offer to host youth for a period of time, and may or may not receive a stipend depending on the arrangement. To date, the contractual agreements for these homes are managed directly through counties or funding agencies. In Washington State, host homes are not licensed or regulated. The workgroup also identified the need to obtain more information about research on host homes' safety and effectiveness.

Finally, the workgroup discussed the need for family-based services to prevent youth from being kicked out or running away when reunification or prevention was an option. The group discussed needing to "right-size" the family program to the level of the family's need in order to address the original concern that some families need more services than are currently provided or offered. The program model, therefore, aimed to build a feasible system level intervention for coordinating communication and referral across service systems while articulating the program principles necessary for effectively preventing and intervening to improve youth housing stability.

Consequently, the workgroup proposed a "stepped care" model of intervention. In this model, youth are assessed and triaged into one of five paths: no need, low need, moderate need, high need, or currently unhoused. Each path specifies a set of appropriate services given the level of need and theory-driven approaches to reduce risk and support long term housing stability and youth development. These services include, at the low need level, brief family stabilizing interventions including information about community resources and parent phone coaching. At the moderate level of need, families would be referred to in-person group sessions based on evidence-based principles of family-based prevention science. These models (for example, Strengthening Families, Guiding Good Choices) build communication skills and positive relationships between parents and adolescents. At the high level of need, families would be referred to more intensive in-home supports including Functional Family Therapy (Sexton and Turner, 2011) or Wraparound services (Bruns et al., 2010). At each level of care, families would be assessed for whether more intervention services were needed, with families moving up the hierarchy of intensity as indicated.

Summary

The Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach adopted by the team resulted in a model that is expected to be feasible to implement and meets the needs of the court and youth serving agencies to effectively meet the housing needs of youth. A number of important findings emerged from the juvenile court workgroup process. The initial meeting identified the court's current challenges with accurately identifying youth who have housing instability risks and highlighted the tension involved in proposing a new area of focus for existing court staff and probation roles. As capacity already existed in the community to work with homeless youth, the workgroup identified system coordination as a key feature of improving outcomes for justice-involved youth, along with some enhancements for community services to (1) increase the geographical spread of family-based supports, (2) provide more intensive family-based services when indicated, and (3) provide long term housing for younger adolescents when reunification was not possible. Data from local and state court-based assessments showed that current or past housing instability is a concern for 25-50 percent of the justice-referred population. A key finding from the workgroup process was that adequately addressing youth housing was not something that could be accomplished with existing court resources. It will require a new position dedicated to managing referrals, assessment, triage, and light case management, as well as the funding or connection to existing community resources based on effective principles of family-based prevention, intervention and housing services.

Discussion

This study adds to the literature by reporting the prevalence of housing instability within a justice-involved population, highlighting the tensions involved in court and probation roles for addressing the complex needs of youth, identifying a data-informed service coordination model grounded by practice-based expertise, and providing a program review of existing family-based programs designed to improve family communication and promote youth well-being.

While studies of homeless youth show high rates of justice contact, no studies have yet examined the prevalence of homelessness within a justice-involved youth population. Data presented in this

report supports the assumptions made in other reports that housing instability is a prevalent issue for justice-involved youth (Pilnik et al., 2017). A little over 20 percent of the local sample and 40-60 percent of the state sample had previous running away or being kicked out episodes. Somewhat surprisingly, the incidence of being housed without any adult supervision was very low (2 percent) for the youth receiving the full PACT assessment. The low number requires some scrutiny and may reflect interpretations of the item (for example, youth in detention may be counted as under adult supervision) or reporting issues (for example, youth may inaccurately report they are in a shelter or with an adult) and should be viewed as information needing additional exploration.

The workgroup process highlighted the challenges facing multiple areas of justice reform as existing staff are continuously pushed to incorporate more holistic and developmentally-friendly approaches into their work (Mulvey, 2014). As a profession, probation began as an alternative to incarceration and existed outside of the court system (Matthews and Hubbard, 2007). In its formative years, probation was akin to supportive case management and mentoring. As the effectiveness of this approach became apparent for cost savings and outcomes, courts began to adopt the model in-house, contingent on the probationers' compliance with the court orders. This approach had the benefit of vastly expanding the use of probation as an alternative to incarceration but also, by bringing the model under the supervision of the court, shifted the emphasis away from supportive case management to compliance-focused supervision. Consequently, probation officers in adult and juvenile contexts can variously see themselves as carrying out orders from the court and/or conducting case management services. Even under the case management model, courts that adopt a service-oriented framework are advised to invest in services that will reduce the risk of youth reoffending with a heavy focus on individual capacities, such as problem-solving, anger-management, substance use, and family-focused interventions. Court services are not intended to address all areas of youth medical, physical and housing needs due to concerns about funding resources, cost-benefit, and widening the net of justice involvement in cases where service access is only possible after a youth is charged with an offense (Nadel et al., 2018).

Cross-system coordination is a key feature of working effectively with youth who are justice-involved as many youth have current involvement in at least one other social system (such as foster care, mental health; Farineau, 2016). Effective and promising strategies include models of team-based coordination such as multidisciplinary teams (Arciaga, 2007; Arredondo et al. 2001; Hochstadt and Harwicke, 1985) and Wraparound services (Howell et al., 2004; Maschi et al., 2008; Pullmann et al., 2006), ecological interventions facilitated by a highly trained coach therapist such as MultiSystemic Therapy (Timmons-Mitchell et al., 2006; Schaeffer and Borduin, 2005), and navigator services such as Parent for Parent (Law et al., 2001; Singer et al., 1999). The selection of a particular model to improve service coordination for a particular outcome, in this case homelessness, should be guided by the proposed benefits of bringing multiple professional partners together versus the efforts and costs of doing so, the scope of the coordination (short or long term), and the scope of the services provided (comprehensive vs. focused). In the present case, the workgroup selected a navigator model to help youth and families bridge the different service systems because the county already supports Intensive case management for youth homelessness and Wraparound services for youth with intensive mental health needs. The county identified their local need was to be more consistent in connecting to these services from the juvenile court.

Finally, interventions focused on homeless youth are rarely evaluated on their ability to reduce days of homelessness (Altena, Brilleslijper-Kater, and Wolf, 2010). For example, there are no family-based interventions that have outcomes relating to improved youth housing stability, specifically, even for programs targeting runaway youth (Altena, Brilleslijper-Kater, and Wolf, 2010; Rice et al., 2012; Slesnick and Prestopnik, 2005). As noted by Slesnick and Prestopnik (2005), researchers have focused on this population as an intervention group at increased risk of poor health outcomes (for example, HIV and/or substance abuse) and have largely focused on understanding the impacts on health outcomes rather than homelessness. Many family-based programs have demonstrated effectiveness in improving family functioning, reducing conflict, and improving youth well-being, which suggests these benefits would likely extend to increased housing stability, particularly in preventing a homelessness event. Family-based programs, however, need more examination to assess their full effectiveness. In the current study, the county workgroup identified available family-based resources to support the prevention of youth homelessness. At the same time, all of the services were locally developed and their consistency with research-based models of intervention or independent effectiveness for supporting improved family functioning and youth well-being are not yet known.

Conclusions

The present study examines the process of developing a juvenile-court based model for addressing youth homelessness. As a result of this process, the court found housing instability events, such as runaway episodes or out-of-home placements, were fairly common, but no consistent processes were already in place to address these issues. A key finding was concern about using existing court staff, such as probation counselors, to act as system navigators for youth who needed support with basic needs, such as housing. The workgroup did, however, recommend agency wide awareness training to support identification and referral to a housing coordinator. Next steps will include implementing and evaluating the model for expected improvements in identification, service referral, the prevention of homelessness events, and securing long term housing.

Acknowledgments

Authors

Sarah Cusworth Walker, Ph.D., is a Research Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Washington School of Medicine, 2815 Eastlake Ave E Ste. 200, Seattle, WA 98115, and can be emailed at secwalkr@uw.edu.

Esteban Valencia, BS, is a Research Analyst in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Washington School of Medicine.

Asia Bishop, MSW, is a Predoctoral Research Associate at the School of Social Work and a Research Analyst Lead in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Washington.

Michael Irons, MA, is the Program Manager at the Snohomish County Juvenile Court.

Arina Gertseva, Ph.D., is the Senior Research Associate at the Washington State Center for Court Research.

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