



## Operating a Youth Homelessness Prevention Program: A Case Study from the P3 Pilot in Sacramento, California

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Caitlin Grey and Melissa Mack, Social Policy Research Associates

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**Submitted by:**

Mathematica  
P.O. Box 2393  
Princeton, NJ 08543-2393  
Telephone: (609) 799-3535  
Facsimile: (609) 799-0005  
Project Director: Linda Rosenberg  
Reference Number: 50152

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## Abstract

In August 2017, the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA) was awarded a pilot as part of the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3). Through this pilot, SHRA convened community partners to establish a process through which disconnected youth ages 18 to 24 experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity could access specially set-aside Housing Choice Vouchers and receive case management to support their housing placement and retention. This case study explores the Sacramento P3 pilot operated by SHRA and its three youth-serving partner agencies—Lutheran Social Services, Waking the Village, and Wind Youth Services—from P3 grant application through program design and implementation. It focuses on lessons learned and considerations for youth homelessness prevention and intervention programs. This case study is based on data collected during a two-day site visit in August 2019 that included interviews with 4 SHRA and 12 partner program staff, as well as a youth focus group. Follow-up interviews were conducted in March 2020 with SHRA and partner program staff.

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## Introduction

According to the 2019 national Point-in-Time count of homelessness conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 12,673 youth ages 18 to 24 were counted as homeless in California; this comprised nearly one-third of all such youth in the country (HUD 2020a). Homelessness and housing instability are stressors that can impede adolescent and young adult development and the transition to independence (Baiocchi et al. 2019; Morton et al. 2017). They can interfere with young people's abilities and opportunities to pursue their education (Kull 2019), which, in turn, is likely to limit their access to job and career opportunities (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness 2018). Further, homelessness can render youth vulnerable to victimization, exploitation, and trafficking (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness 2018).

To address the persistent issue of youth homelessness in its community, the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA) applied for and was awarded a Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3) grant in August 2017 (hereafter referred to as the Sacramento P3 pilot or the pilot). (See Box 1 for information about P3 and the national evaluation of P3.) With the nearly \$250,000 in start-up funds awarded by the grant, SHRA convened youth-serving agencies and community partners to design and implement a program for homeless youth ages 18 to 24. As part of the program, SHRA set aside and offered Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV)—a housing subsidy for individuals and families with low income—to youth experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. (See Box 2 for definitions of terms and information about HCVs.)

### **Box 1. Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth overview**

To help state, local, and tribal communities provide services to disconnected youth seamlessly across multiple federal funding streams, the U.S. Congress authorized the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3) in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (the Act), and the authority has been included by Congress in appropriations acts each year since fiscal year 2014. Each act allowed for up to 10 pilot sites in which state, local, or tribal government entities and their partners could pool funds from across the discretionary programs of participating federal agencies to provide innovative evidence-based interventions to youth. Applicants could request and receive waivers from these programs' eligibility and reporting requirements to better serve their youth in exchange for accountability for achieving previously negotiated performance goals (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017).

The 2014 Act included five Federal agencies, including U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services; the Corporation for National and Community Service; and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The 2015 and 2016 appropriation acts added certain programs from the Departments of Justice and Housing and Urban Development, respectively. The flexibilities made available through these agency partners were designed to reduce barriers to providing effective services, changing service delivery systems, and improving outcomes for youth ages 14 to 24 (U.S. Department of Education 2014). The P3 grants provided start-up funding for coordination and planning. The federal P3 agencies awarded nine pilots under the 2014 Act. As of the writing of this brief, they awarded grants to six additional pilots under subsequent appropriations acts. The Sacramento P3 pilot was awarded under the 2016 authorization.

In 2015, on behalf of the federal agencies participating in P3, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded Mathematica and its partner, Social Policy Research Associates, a contract to conduct the National Evaluation of P3. This paper is one in a series of implementation study papers of that evaluation.

### **Box 2. Key terms**

**Disconnected youth.** Under the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth, disconnected youth are defined as individuals ages 14 to 24 who are low income and either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, unemployed, or not enrolled in or at risk of dropping out of an educational institution.

**Homelessness.** The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has multiple definitions of homelessness. The definition pertaining to people younger than 25 includes a range of circumstances from those living on the street or in shelters to those who are chronically housing unstable and have not had their own lease or occupancy in a permanent house for the last 60 days.

**Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.** The HCV program is the federal government's primary program for assisting very low-income individuals who are 18 years or older with affording housing in the private market. HCVs, previously referred to as Section 8 vouchers, are administered locally by public housing agencies, such as the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency. Individuals with an HCV must find units that pass inspection and are within the local area Fair Market Rent amounts. If a voucher is accepted by a landlord, a housing subsidy is paid directly to the landlord and the individual or family pays the difference, which is a maximum of 30 percent of their income. The primary eligibility criterion is a low income. Preference points, which grant increased priority to individuals with particular barriers, are given for factors such as disability and veteran status. Once approved, HCVs stay with an individual or family as long as they remain income eligible.

**Housing insecurity.** Housing insecurity is defined by HUD as the lack of stable shelter. For example, an individual at risk of losing their home or "couch surfing" with family members is considered housing insecure.

For the pilot, SHRA created a pool of set-aside vouchers to be made available to youth who qualified for the program. In the typical process, after submitting a voucher application, an individual might remain on a waitlist for two to five years before receiving a voucher. The pilot allowed youth who qualified to gain immediate access to the vouchers. During the grant period, from September 2017 through September 2020, SHRA expected to provide vouchers to 100 youth and had issued 67 as of March 2020.

In addition to housing vouchers, youth received high-touch case management and support services from one of the youth-serving agency partners and HCV navigation support from a designated SHRA staff person. The pilot's purpose was also to foster strong partnerships between SHRA and homeless youth-serving agencies in the region, and it incorporated the HCV component into the agencies' other housing programs. Based on its experiences with its P3 pilot, SHRA committed to sustaining the program beyond the grant period by making permanent the pool of set-aside vouchers available to youth experiencing homelessness.

This paper provides a case study of the Sacramento P3 pilot. As such, it seeks to understand the context for the pilot and describe the pilot's approach to supporting homeless youth. First, drawing on current literature, the paper provides an overview of the state of youth homelessness and housing insecurity in Sacramento, along with a review of approaches that may have promise in supporting this population. Next, it provides details of the pilot, including the motivations of the lead agency for applying for the P3 grant and of partners for becoming involved. It then describes the envisioned program model and the model's implementation. The paper concludes with a discussion of lessons that the authors drew from the case study.

## Youth homelessness: An overview

Homelessness, and youth homelessness in particular, is a widely studied issue, with many interventions and policies implemented to address it. The study team reviewed 16 studies or meta-analyses, including several in-depth reviews of evidence from evaluations of programs and practices. Although not a formal systematic review, it was intended to provide a general picture across the United States and in Sacramento County, in particular, of the numbers, characteristics, trends, contributors, as well as promising approaches to preventing and intervening in youth homelessness. The studies reviewed are listed in the References.<sup>1</sup>

### The state of youth homelessness

In the Sacramento area, approximately 400 youth ages 18 to 24 were designated as homeless in the 2019 Point-in-Time count (Table 1) These youth comprised more than 7 percent of the area’s total homeless population. The number of homeless youth had increased from the 313 cited by SHRA in its application, drawing on the 2015 Point-in-Time count.

**Table 1. Homeless youth in the United States, California, and Sacramento, 2015 and 2019**

	Homeless point-in-time count	
	2015	2019
United States	36,907	45,629
California	10,416	12,673
Sacramento	313	400

Source: HUD 2016 and HUD 2020a.

Note: Table includes homeless youth ages 18 to 24 years old.

Approximately 50 percent of youth experiencing homelessness in the United States are people of color (Table 2); 35.7 percent identify as African American, 3.6 percent identify as Native American, 2.5 percent as Asian, and 9.8 percent identify as multiple races (HUD 2020a). This comprises a much larger proportion than the general youth population where, for example, 14.9 percent of all youth identify as Black or African American and 4.2 percent as two or more races (IPUMS 2010–2019). Similarly, in Sacramento County the percentage of homeless youth of color was much greater than the percentage of youth of color in the general population. Nearly 50 percent of counted homeless youth identified as Black compared to 8.7 percent of Sacramento’s overall youth population (IPUMS 2014–2018).

Homeless youth have diverse experiences. Many have histories of involvement with the foster care and criminal justice systems, experience with domestic violence, and substance abuse and mental health challenges (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017). In particular, 33 percent of youth experiencing homelessness have spent time in foster care, and 50 percent have had criminal justice system involvement (Morton et al. 2017, 2018). These national statistics were echoed in Sacramento County, where 34 percent of homeless youth indicated that they had been in foster care or a group home before age 18 (Baiocchi et al. 2019). Homeless youth are also twice as likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition as their housed peers (Kozloff et al. 2016), and many are also members of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ youth make up about 20 percent of all youth experiencing homelessness and up to

<sup>1</sup> Studies reviewed for the purposes of this scan of the literature are indicated with an asterisk in the References.

40 percent of the youth experiencing homelessness in large, urban communities (Morton et al. 2018). In addition, 44 percent of transition-aged young women experiencing homelessness were either pregnant or parenting (Morton et al. 2017). In Sacramento County, 8 percent of unsheltered female youth indicated that they were currently pregnant, and nearly 12 percent were parenting (Baiocchi et al. 2019).

**Table 2. Homeless youth in the United States and Sacramento County**

	United States		Sacramento	
	Homeless youth (%)	Overall youth population (%)	Homeless youth in county (%)	Overall youth population (metropolitan area) (%)
White	48.3	68.0	39.9	57.2
African American	35.7	14.9	47.7	8.7
Native American	3.6	1.0	0.3	0.5
Asian	2.5	5.6	0.6	16.2
Multiple races	9.8	4.2	11.6	8.4
Other	Not available	6.2	Not available	9.0

Source: HUD 2020a; IPUMS 2010–2019; IPUMS USA 2014–2018.

Note: The data are for homeless youth ages 18 to 24.

In Sacramento, addressing youth homelessness has been further complicated by the housing market and HCV policy. All youth and staff respondents referred to the difficulty of finding affordable housing in Sacramento. Staff in particular described the tight housing market and lack of renter protections in Sacramento that make finding and keeping housing a challenge—even with an HCV. Also, there has been a disparity between market rate rents in Sacramento County and the Fair Market Rent (FMR) calculation for the area that is used to designate HCV amounts (Department of Numbers 2017; HUD 2016). At the time of the site visit in summer 2019, the value of the vouchers was \$700 to \$800, according to the FMRs set by HUD, but SHRA and partner agency staff explained that most units in Sacramento County were renting for a minimum of \$1,000 (HUD 2016; Public Policy Institute of California 2018). FMRs are readjusted annually, and local housing authorities can set their payment standards between 90 percent and 110 percent of the HUD standards. In 2020, SHRA set the standard at 109 percent of the FMR, which was approximately a 35 percent increase from the year before; staff indicated that this has helped mitigate the issue of finding affordable units. Rent control (with an annual cap of 6 percent) was approved by the Sacramento City Council and took effect in September 2019 (Clift 2019). However, there are no additional eviction protections in Sacramento, and the state of California allows broad use of evictions by landlords for breaking the terms of the lease for nonpayment of rent (California Courts 2020).

### Services for homeless youth

Approaches to assisting youth experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity include prevention and early intervention programs; short-term housing, such as drop-in centers and shelters; rental assistance, such as HCVs; and other types of transition or long-term services. These services include transitional housing; host homes; and longer-term solutions, such as rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing (HUD 2016; Morton et al. 2019). (See Box 3 for information about housing services.)

### **Box 3. Homeless services definitions**

**Transitional housing.** Transitional housing is time-limited supportive housing (usually up to 24 months) for youth who are gaining independent living skills. This model focuses on developing youths' life skills, education, and employment skills. Housing models are typically either congregate housing with an on-site supervisor or scattered site apartments.

**Host homes.** Host homes are an arrangement between community members who volunteer to host a young person to live in their home with the support of a youth service provider. Hosts provide safe shelter and food, and the service provider offers program coordination, host support, and case management services. Hosts may receive financial assistance to defray the costs of hosting the youth.

**Rapid rehousing.** Rapid rehousing is an approach typically used with older youth with greater independent living skills. It uses a housing-first approach in that it provides immediate access to stable housing with low barriers to entry and intensive services. The youth receive subsidized rent payments that diminish over time (typically up to 24 months) to achieve the goal of long-term independent housing stability.

**Permanent supportive housing.** Permanent supportive housing typically uses a housing-first approach, but it ranges in terms of target population. As it is permanent in nature, there are no specific time limits. To provide both housing and supportive services, the program typically aims to develop strong partnerships with housing providers and/or developers and social service providers.

Sources: HUD 2016; Morton et al. 2019.

The Sacramento P3 pilot is most similar to the rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing models, which include partial payment systems, provide supportive services, and are not time limited. Both rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing use a housing-first approach in which individuals receive housing before their other needs are addressed. Rapid rehousing generally requires individuals to earn a stable income<sup>2</sup> so they can eventually cover their rent. Individuals who are deemed likely to achieve financial independence based on job attainment and retention tend to be the target population for these programs (HUD 2016). Permanent supportive housing has shown promise in related research. In a study of this model in Los Angeles, individuals previously experiencing homelessness substantially decreased their use of public services, including medical and mental health services, and self-reported that mental health improved (Hunter et al. 2017). This was also cost saving for the county. However, as with rapid rehousing, the permanent supportive housing model is limited by the supply of supportive housing units compared to the need for them (National Academies of Sciences 2018).

Although there is a lack of causal studies of HCVs impacts on youth, descriptive research suggests that SHRA's approach for its P3 pilot may be promising. The most well-known HCV program for youth is the Family Unification Program (FUP), which is run by HUD in partnership with public child welfare agencies to offer HCVs to transition-age youth in the foster care system. The HCVs are limited to 36 months (HUD 2020b). In addition to its partnerships with child welfare agencies, FUP includes collaborations with public housing authorities for housing search assistance and case management (Dion

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<sup>2</sup> A stable income can be defined as a reliable and regular income that is equal to three times the cost of rent. This is the metric often used in rental applications as well as in HCV benefit calculations.

et al. 2014). Also, FUP focuses on recruiting youth who are focused on education and employment so they can be successful in retaining housing (Dion et al. 2014).

Some of the key features of Sacramento’s P3 pilot, such as case management and supportive services, have been shown in other settings to play a role in preventing homelessness for housing-insecure youth and to contribute to homeless youths’ behavioral health. The latter finding was from an evaluation of an intervention that provided counseling only to homeless youth (Morton et al. 2019). An intervention that included both rental assistance and wraparound services (including case management and supportive services) revealed that youth who received both services stayed stably housed longer (Morton et al. 2019).

## Implementation of the Sacramento pilot

This section includes details on the implementation of the Sacramento P3 pilot, including the planning and partners as well as the program model and service flow. We conclude by discussing available data on the P3 pilot as of April 2020.

### Planning and partners

Leading up to its application to become a P3 pilot, SHRA leadership reported that had they identified solutions to youth homelessness as an agency priority. Highlighting data from the 2015 Point-in-Time count to illustrate the scope of youth homelessness in Sacramento County, SHRA applied to leverage P3 to set aside 100 HCVs for homeless and housing-insecure youth and develop a system for awarding the vouchers. The set-aside vouchers would allow homeless youth who qualified for the program to have immediate access to the pool of vouchers rather than applying to the general HCV program, which often entails a long wait.

**SHRA managed P3 partners and roles.** Upon award of the P3 grant, SHRA initiated planning by convening community providers interested in collaborating on the pilot and finding solutions to the problem of youth homelessness in Sacramento County. Three nonprofits emerged as SHRA’s central partners for the pilot and co-designers of the intervention—Wind Youth Services, Waking the Village, and Lutheran Social Services (LSS). All three agencies had locations in Sacramento County and worked with homeless and housing-insecure youth. According to SHRA leadership, the agencies’ prior work providing transitional housing and other housing interventions gave them the experience necessary to implement the program. (See Box 4 for short profiles of each agency.) As the P3 award included only start-up funds, community partners were expected to leverage existing funds to support other aspects of the intervention.

In the planning stage, SHRA had also involved the public workforce agency, the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency, to provide the youth with employment-related services, such as job readiness, occupational training, and job search and placement assistance to ensure long-term housing stability. The waivers approved in SHRA’s P3 application pertained to flexibilities associated with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth program.<sup>3</sup> Further, two of the youth agencies participating in P3 have had WIOA Youth contracts or close connections (such as through colocation) with WIOA youth providers or their own workforce and education programs.

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<sup>3</sup> The Sacramento pilot received two WIOA-related waivers—one regarding the negotiated minimum out-of-school youth expenditure amount and the other allowing youth attending a high school equivalency program to be considered out-of-school youth for the purposes of WIOA eligibility.

#### **Box 4. Youth agency partners and services**

##### **Waking the Village**

Waking the Village (WTV) was founded in 1999. It runs five programs centered on an interactive environment that inspires growth and builds community. WTV offers five programs:

- Three housing programs—Tubman House, the Doorway, and Audre's Emporium of New Tomorrows—that provide stable and nurturing home environments for young families experiencing homelessness.
- Two artistic hubs—Art Beast and the Creation District—that are rooted in the belief that youth and children need creativity and expression embedded into their lives in order to thrive and flourish.

##### **Lutheran Social Services (LSS)**

LSS has assisted formerly homeless individuals and emancipating foster youth in Sacramento County for more than 50 years. It operates a number of supportive housing programs in Sacramento and San Joaquin counties that offer:

- Transitional housing for homeless families, individuals, and youth.
- Permanent supportive housing for disabled individuals, families, and youth emerging from foster care.
- Case management for individuals and families who are permanently housed.

##### **Wind Youth Services**

For more than 25 years, Wind Youth Services has provided homeless and at-risk youth ages 12 to 24 with basic safety net and survival services and a safe place to stay. Services include:

- Street outreach and a youth drop-in center.
- Two temporary, low barrier, emergency overnight shelters for youth ages 12 to 18 and 18 to 24.
- Transitional housing program: A two-year transitional living program for youth ages 18 to 24 who are focused on living in the community and developing independent living skills. Youth live together and work with a case manager to gain and maintain employment, further their education, or meet other self-determined goals.
- The Doorway: A two-year rapid rehousing program for youth ages 18 to 24 in which they pay a portion of their income to rent. Youth live independently in their own apartments and have intensive support from a case manager.
- Step-Up Sacramento: A permanent, supportive housing program in partnership with Next Move, another community-based organization, where chronically homeless youth are given intensive supportive services.

Source: Respective agency websites.

SHRA and the youth-serving agencies ultimately decided on a program model in which SHRA would award the HCVs and the partner agencies would provide intensive case management and support services (see Figure 1). Agency roles and staff positions were as follows:

- **SHRA** managed the set-aside HCVs, and two SHRA staff provided key navigation and liaison services:
  - *An eligibility specialist* within the HCV division was designated the key contact for the youth-serving agencies and youth participants. The eligibility specialist met with case managers monthly and, according to staff at the agencies, was critical in helping youth and their case managers navigate the HCV application and award process. The eligibility specialist worked part

time on P3 but was not paid with grant funds. Before P3, youth service agencies reported that communicating with and helping their youth clients work with SHRA was difficult and often involved long wait times for responses.

- *The housing services coordinator/landlord liaison* was hired after the P3 award and as a direct result of the pilot (although not paid with those funds). The landlord liaison was charged with networking with landlords for all SHRA HCV programs, including the P3 homeless youth set-aside vouchers. SHRA reported that they created this position because of the value in working with landlords who are willing and equipped to rent to HCV recipients.
- **LSS, Wind Youth Services, and Waking the Village** provided case management to the youth participants. Each partner agency had one or two P3 case managers. The salaries of these case managers did not come from the P3 start-up funds, but rather out of a combination of Sacramento County homelessness prevention and intervention grants and other agency funds. Waking the Village maintained two part-time case managers who, in addition to working with P3 youth, also worked with youth in Shelter Plus Care, an HCV program for homeless individuals with disabilities and their families. The case managers at Wind Youth Services and Lutheran Social Services were fully dedicated to P3. In addition, a county grant funded one prevention and intervention case manager at each of the three youth partner agencies. This staff position was assigned as an additional support to P3 youth and other youth receiving services from the agencies.
- **Wind Youth Services** maintained the shared data system, Efforts to Outcomes (ETO), which was used to track P3 participant demographic data and outcomes. Staff from all three agencies entered data into this system.

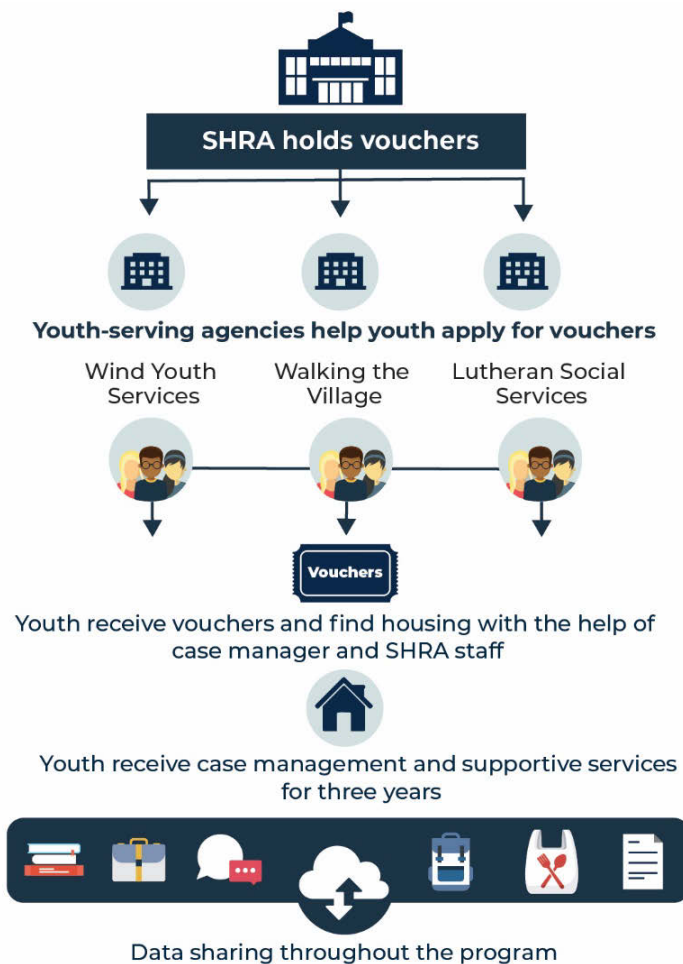
Other partnership experiences. The youth partner agencies reported having experience working with SHRA prior to P3 through Shelter Plus Care grants and supporting youth with HCV applications informally. However, the three youth agency respondents shared that they lacked a formal partnership and a designated point of contact at SHRA to help their youth access SHRA programs. The prospect of partnering with SHRA was a motivating factor for all three youth-serving agencies, as was access to HCVs for some of the homeless youth they served.

The three youth-serving agencies already had experience working together prior to P3. According to the three youth agency respondents, this experience strengthened the overall P3 partnership. They reported collaborating since about 2017 on grant applications to make sure they were not competing for funding. For example, the three agencies collaborated on the Shelter Plus Care grant.

Most coincident and relevant to the P3 pilot was the three agencies' collaboration on a Sacramento County homelessness prevention and intervention grant. This grant, awarded shortly after the P3 award, became the primary funding source for the intensive case management and supportive services provided to P3 youth. In particular, the county grant increased the agencies' capacity because it allowed them to decrease their staff-to-youth ratios. One director noted that, without the county funds, their agency would have had a ratio of one case manager to 23 youth (1:23). With the county funding, they could have a 1:16 ratio, which was closer to their ideal of 1:10. The county grant also supported the partners' decision to use ETO as the shared data system for tracking P3 youth services and outcomes.



**Figure 1. Sacramento P3 pilot program model**



Source: Site visit and follow-interviews.

### Program model and service flow

Youth began applying for and receiving vouchers as part of the pilot in early 2018. Based on data collected for this case study, implementation of the pilot appeared to occur largely as designed, except that the workforce partner was not actively involved.

### Staff training

Early on, staff at youth service agencies were trained on the HCV application process by SHRA staff, and the SHRA-dedicated eligibility specialist began meeting with case managers every few weeks. The training on the HCV process was held in groups with the different partner agencies, and individual meetings were held as new P3 case managers were hired. The meetings were approximately two hours long. The landlord liaison also conducted training sessions with case managers and P3 participants on how to get a tenant rent ready and on the do's and don'ts of renting. These sessions were about two hours long and offered as needed.

## Eligibility

Both SHRA and the youth-serving partner agencies established eligibility for the pilot. SHRA set the target population for the HCV set-aside to be youth ages 18 to 24 who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Youth had to secure housing with their voucher within four months or before turning age 25; if they did so, they could use the voucher past age 25 and continue to receive supports from the youth-serving agency as per the program design (three years of case management post placement in housing). HUD did not approve the waiver that SHRA had requested in its application to serve 16- and 17-year-olds. However, this did not impact the pilot, as youth younger than 18 cannot typically be listed as primary leaseholders.

All HCV applicants, including P3 youth, must pass a criminal background check as well as a check for previous evictions before being approved for an HCV. If applicants did not pass the criminal background check, their case would go for an SHRA Admission Review Team (ART) screening. For the pilot, the ART agreed to take into consideration additional factors, such as youth having demonstrated maturity and stability in the youth agency partner's transitional housing programs, despite any previous charges. Case managers could also submit recommendation letters on behalf of youth who had failed the background check. Finally, only youth applicants who did not owe any other housing authority money or who did not otherwise leave their public housing on negative terms (for example, through eviction) were eligible for an HCV.

Youth agency partners also applied eligibility criteria. The partners worked together to determine a common set of eligibility criteria designed to set up youth for success. To meet the partner agencies' eligibility requirements, youth applicants needed to be:

- Successful in one of those agencies' transitional housing programs
- Working or in school
- Accessing individualized support services, such as childcare or mental health support, as needed

Finally, there was an informal suitability review conducted by case managers. As one case manager explained, the program was deemed to be a good fit for youth who had done "a little more work toward their own healing" and had developed their capacity for problem solving in their own lives.

## Outreach and enrollment

Given that participants were required to have successfully participated in a youth agency partner transitional program, all participants were recruited from those programs. The partner agency enrollment process involved the following three steps:

1. **Referral.** Partner staff referred youth to P3 if they met the eligibility criteria described above.

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### Youth snapshot: Darnell

Darnell is turning 25 in a few months and has been couch surfing. He has a disability resulting from an accident several years prior. He has been in a rush to find an apartment before his birthday so that he would not lose his voucher. He found one in time with his case manager's help. He hopes to be a dental assistant and is working on enrolling in school.

Source: Youth snapshots are composites drawn from case manager accounts of youth enrolled in P3. All names are pseudonyms.

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- 2. Documentation.** Youth interested in applying then gathered required documentation, including bank statements, pay stubs, and documentation of other public assistance. This step could be challenging for youth who were often juggling work, school, child care, and mental health or other health care services. If applicants were receiving financial assistance through California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (California’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program) or other public assistance from the state Department of Social Services, SHRA could use that information to verify that the applicants were low-income, which simplified the application process. However, if youth applicants were working two jobs, receiving occasional assistance from family members or friends, or had any other circumstances that brought complexity to their finances, they were required to submit documentation explaining each item.
- 3. Criminal background check.** After all documentation was submitted, youth needed to pass a criminal background check and the ART screening described above, if applicable.

If youth applicants passed these three steps with the help of coaching from the SHRA eligibility specialist, then they were given a voucher and considered enrolled in P3. At that point, they would begin their housing search with the support of the youth agency’s case manager. Once placed, they began their three years of ongoing intensive case management and access to supportive services.

Initially, each of the three partner organizations made a commitment to fill a certain number of the 100 P3 slots (HCVs). However, in practice, each agency enrolled youth in their respective programs based on eligibility and suitability using a first-come, first-served approach. Waking the Village, for example, had initially committed to filling 15 of the slots, but it had enrolled double that number by the time this report was written. Ultimately, according to SHRA, the focus was to provide the available vouchers to youth who met the program requirements and completed the HCV process on a first come first served basis regardless of which service provider partner referred the youth.

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### Youth snapshot: Maria

Maria, age 22, is attending nursing school and has a plan to become a registered nurse. Her voucher was delayed as she had to provide signed affidavits from family members from whom she had received one-time support payments to her bank account. Although she has some mental health challenges, she was connecting to the care she needed. Securing her own apartment through P3 has allowed her to find stability.

Source: Youth snapshots are composites drawn from case manager accounts of youth enrolled in P3. All names are pseudonyms.

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### Service elements

Aside from receiving the voucher, participating youth were offered four distinct service elements: case management for housing placement, case management for housing retention, supportive services, and public housing assistance navigation and landlord liaising.

- 1. Case management for housing placement.** When youth participants received their voucher and started to look for housing, they usually met with their case manager at least once a week. High-touch case management continued through the housing inspection and leasing process. As noted, the agencies all maintained relatively low case manager-to-participant ratios to help case managers’ stay connected to the youth they served.

**2. Case management for housing retention.** Case management to support housing retention and referrals to support services were key components of the model. Through these contacts, case managers often worked with youth on their education, employment, and career goals with the aim of having them earn sufficient resources to maintain their housing. After housing placement, contact gradually decreased to biweekly or once a month, depending on the needs of the youth. According to youth service agency staff, how much time youth spent on education and employment services depended on their life circumstances. Those with older children, minimal wellness or mental health challenges, and no domestic violence history were often able to focus more intently on their education, employment, and career goals.

**3. Supportive services.** Extensive supportive services were coordinated by the case managers and often provided in-house by their agency. Support services included basic needs, such as laundry, showers, and food; health and mental health services; domestic violence prevention and intervention; education support; onsite music and art programming; and employment services. If youth needed assistance not available through the agency, then case managers would seek assistance through partners and community organizations. Supportive services were funded by the Sacramento County youth homelessness prevention and intervention grant.

**4. Public housing assistance navigation and landlord liaising.** Participants also received housing navigation support specific to finding

and keeping permanent housing accessed with the HCV. Case managers provided this assistance along with the SHRA eligibility specialist and landlord liaison. For example, the eligibility specialist trained case managers in housing inspections—what to look for that could cause an inspection to fail and how to work with landlords to fix the issue before the inspection so that the unit would pass and could be rented. According to staff, tips like these helped facilitate and speed up an otherwise complex and potentially lengthy process. Small issues could cause an apartment to fail inspection and require the youth to start the process over again. The case managers often accompanied youth when they were looking at apartments and introduced themselves to property managers. All five case managers interviewed reported investing a lot of time and effort into building rapport and trust with property managers so that the managers would have someone to call if issues arose, such as an abusive family member moving in with the youth. Case managers also explained to landlords and property managers that they could be part of the solution in addressing the problem of youth homelessness. In some cases, partner agencies reported that property managers and landlords held prejudiced views about renting to youth, but having agency staff available to help resolve any issues that arose convinced the landlords to continue to work with these youth.

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**Youth snapshot: Alexis**

Alexis, age 23, has been working for two years in a manufacturing plant and would like to go to school to earn a credential that would allow her to move up in her trade. She was in an abusive relationship and struggled to secure protection against the abuser after she moved out. Moving out left her homeless. Her case manager was working to connect her with domestic violence prevention services. At the same time, with the support of her case manager, she has been searching for housing where the HCV would be accepted. Alexis is looking forward to going to school once she had settled into her new housing.

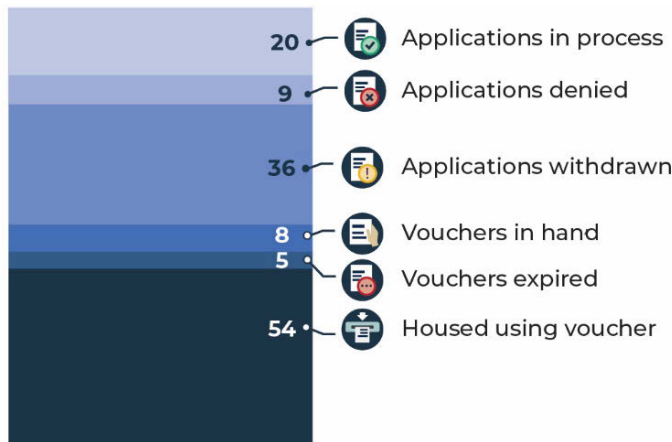
Source: Youth snapshots are composites drawn from case manager accounts of youth enrolled in P3. All names are pseudonyms.  
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**Workforce services.** By participating in the youth-serving agencies’ services prior to enrolling, agency staff reported that many of the youth were already connected to employment opportunities before enrolling in the pilot. All three agencies also offered employment-related programming that was distinct from WIOA-funded services. As a result, the Sacramento P3 pilot did not rely on the workforce partner to the extent initially envisioned and did not need to use the two WIOA-related waivers that had been approved for the pilot. As of July 2020, the pilot reported that seven P3 participants were enrolled in WIOA.

### Participant data

The SHRA eligibility specialist kept records of the vouchers applied for, reviewed, and awarded. In addition, all P3 case managers recorded case management data in the joint ETO database. From the beginning of the program (September 2017) to the time of report writing (April 2020), 132 youth had applied for an HCV (Figure 2). Of those, SHRA had issued vouchers to 67 youth. This included 54 youth who were housed using vouchers, 5 youth who had vouchers expire due to housing not being found within four months, and 8 youth with vouchers in hand, meaning they were currently with youth looking for housing. Another 36 applications had been withdrawn by a case manager because the youth found other housing or stopped seeking services.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 2. Program data on applications and awarded vouchers as of April 2020**



Source: SHRA data, provided April 21, 2020.

### Youth perspectives

During the August 2019 site visit, site visitors conducted a focus group with nine pilot participants recruited by program staff. These youth were not selected to be representative, so the information they provided cannot be generalized to all participants. Still, they help to illustrate youths’ experiences in their perspectives of the services they received.

<sup>4</sup> Demographic data was available for only 45 of the 67 youth who had received vouchers. Of these youth, 76 percent identified as women. Fifty-eight percent identified as African American, 20 percent as multiple races, 13 percent as Hispanic or Latino, and 2 percent as White, with the remainder self-identifying with other racial groups. Sixteen percent of participants had previously been in foster care and 18 percent had been on probation. Thirty-four percent were parents.

All nine youth in the focus group had received a voucher (although several volunteered that they were still looking for housing) and had been participating in the program through one of the three partner agencies for six months to a year. They were working, in school, parenting, or in some combination of these circumstances. All were also experiencing challenges with health, mental health, domestic violence, or other family trauma. Focus group participants generally reported positive experiences, although some experienced housing delays that led to stress.

In the discussion, youth described the challenges they faced in securing their vouchers and maintaining their housing:

- **Feeling overwhelmed by the process.** Many of the youth volunteered that completing the paperwork and waiting through the lengthy approval process were challenges, given that they were struggling to maintain stability in transitional housing programs and were eager to move into independent housing. For instance, youth had to provide pay stubs for each job worked, as well as signed affidavits from each person from whom they received monetary payments. Gathering this documentation often delayed the voucher process. Youth also had to deal with such issues as credit repair or eviction and record expungement before a voucher could be awarded. Although receiving the vouchers often took a long time and the paperwork was burdensome, one youth said, “The voucher was worth the wait.”
- **Navigating the housing search and inspections.** Although youth generally found receiving the HCV exciting, they then had to overcome additional hurdles. With the voucher in hand, they still had to find an apartment or house that would accept the voucher and then pass inspection. Youth described that, without the help of the case manager (who had themselves learned from the HCV eligibility specialist at SHRA), their desired housing unit could have failed inspection.
- **Maintaining their housing.** The next challenge was dealing with the basics of home maintenance—unfamiliar to youth who have never lived independently. As one youth explained, “I never thought about all the little things you need for your own house, like a plunger.”

Youth also discussed the parts of the program that were helpful to them:

- **Securing housing through the voucher.** All youth were positive about the changes they were able to make in their lives as a result of receiving the voucher and becoming housed. As one youth summarized, “[P3] helped me get out of survival mode.”
- **Case managers and support staff.** The youth indicated how helpful it had been to have a case manager to support and guide them throughout the process. They voiced appreciation for the support they had received from case managers to help them deal with the many stressors often associated with youth homelessness.
- **Support services.** Youth discussed how staff helped connect them to services to heal from experiences of trauma, such as domestic violence, and mental health challenges.

## Conclusion and considerations

Through the P3 pilot, SHRA and its partners implemented an intervention aimed at addressing the needs of homeless youth in Sacramento. As of this writing, it enabled 54 formerly homeless youth to secure housing using set-aside HCVs. Case managers provided intensive support in an effort to help these youth apply for their HCV, find housing, and then retain their housing. Although no impact study has been

conducted to assess the effects of this intervention and the case management provided, the intervention may hold promise in helping youth obtain housing using the HCV.

As a result of the opportunities offered through the P3 pilot, Sacramento also developed new partnerships. During its planning process and subsequent consolidation of partners, SHRA reported fostering collaboration across agencies and systems in the interest of serving homeless youth. Although not all envisioned partnerships came to full fruition, the parties that came to the planning table included education, workforce development, and public and private housing entities, as well as the nonprofit agencies that formed the core team during implementation. Ultimately, the combination of partners and dedicated SHRA staff helped to develop a housing pipeline and program designed to support homeless youth.

This section summarizes some of the aspects of the pilot—features available to other parties interested in working across domains to serve disconnected youth. We conclude by offering considerations for stakeholders interested in replicating the model.

### Key aspects of the Sacramento P3 pilot

Based on analysis of the qualitative information collected, key elements of the pilot were as follows:

**The pilot focused on fostering collaboration among youth-serving agencies.** SHRA worked to foster collaboration with and among the three youth-serving agencies that came to the fore during the planning process and throughout implementation. The partner agencies had worked together before, but the process of identifying a common point in the service continuum for P3 youth, and the regular communication with SHRA staff around voucher approval and landlord liaising, brought the agencies into closer coordination. In addition, the three agencies shared a data system (Efforts to Outcomes) to collect and track services and outcomes among the youth served.

**The pilot partners sought to improve the system for serving disconnected youth and house more youth.** The Sacramento P3 pilot was able to provide available housing options for youth transitioning out of homelessness. In particular, P3 provided access to permanent housing for low-income youth who completed a transitional housing program and were ready to live independently but needed stable rental assistance. As of this writing, SHRA remained committed to sustaining the homeless youth set-aside HCVs, and the youth-serving agencies to supporting youth participating in the set-aside program.

**SHRA and the youth partner agencies reported working together with the aim of improving youth outcomes and expand the knowledge base of successful approaches.** In conversation with SHRA, youth partner agencies played an important role in sequencing P3 participation for youth who met HCV eligibility requirements. Specifically, the opportunity to apply for an HCV was inserted into the existing programming sequence for youth being served by the agencies. This sequencing created an effective on-ramp for youth who had developed the capacity for retaining permanent housing through experiencing transitional housing and skill building with youth agency programming. Youth agency partners played an important role in deciding on these suitability criteria and sequencing. While limited data were available on participant outcomes, the pilot planned to collect data about participating youths' placement and retention.

### Considerations for homeless youth prevention programs

Equipped with information about the Sacramento HCV set-aside, youth and their allies throughout the country may consider advocating for voucher set-asides in their own communities. Based on these case

study findings, the authors recommend that agencies consider the following when developing a similar program for homeless youth:

- **Plan for intensive case management to help youth address multiple barriers and retain housing.** Intensive case management is critical because of the trauma many homeless youth have experienced and their lack of experience living independently. Such services can help youth manage short-term needs and develop important long-term self-advocacy skills. Low staff-to-client ratios also allow case managers to provide for regular (weekly or more) in-person, phone, and/or text check-ins.
- **Identify key staff at the public housing authority to be the point of contact for the intervention.** Having an HCV eligibility specialist tasked specifically with liaising with youth voucher applicants and recipients and the community agency staff that are supporting them can speed up the process of voucher award. Further, an eligibility specialist or other dedicated staff members can help partner agency staff and youth navigate the inspection process and provide guidance on how best to interact with potential landlords, thereby leading to a higher and faster rate of voucher usage once awarded.
- **Develop relationships with landlords to increase their knowledge about homeless youth set-aside HCVs and accompanying services.** Staff serving as landlord liaisons can help educate landlords about the youth vouchers. They should also explain that voucher recipients will be supported through community partner case management, as another point of contact for the landlord or property manager if issues with tenants arise. Appointing a landlord liaison specifically charged with educating and liaising with landlords renting to HCV set-aside recipients can help HCV recipients more easily navigate the rental process.
- **Work across the community's housing and youth service and advocacy organizations to best meet youths' needs.** It is important to tap into all the community's resources to support youth and to choose partners wisely based on those who have experience working with the population and are ready to take on the responsibility. Partner agencies can provide access for youth participants—through youth service agencies or their partners—to additional programming once housed, such as support with education, job training, job search and placement, and access to other forms of public and private support, such as health care, child care, and mental health care.
- **Understand the local housing market to help youth navigate their options.** Youth and youth advocates can review their own local housing market and the existing renter protections to become informed consumers and facilitators of access to public resources; by doing so they can become advocates for additional protections, should they be lacking. Local housing authorities can also set their payment standards for FMRs between 90 percent and 110 percent of the HUD standards. In 2020, SHRA set the standard at 109 percent of the FMR, which allowed the amounts of the voucher to be closer to market rate rent.

Through its pool of HCV set-aside vouchers and access to high-touch case management and supportive services for homeless youth, the Sacramento P3 pilot worked to address a gap in the system for serving disconnected, homeless youth in their community. The partnership of SHRA and the youth-serving agencies helped to foster cross-system collaboration. Through its intervention providing youth with access to HCVs and housing supports, the Sacramento pilot expands the knowledge base of approaches to serving disconnected youth experiencing homelessness.



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