BACKGROUND

Lydia’s House is an innovative transitional housing program focused on helping youth in crisis in three main target vulnerabilities: foster care youth (particularly ones aging out of the system), homeless youth, and juvenile justice-involved youth. The philosophy of Lydia’s House is to use a holistic and kamali'i-centric approach by providing wraparound services (e.g., addressing physical health, mental wellbeing, education and vocational training, finances, and housing needs) tailored to youth in crisis. This issue brief provides an overview of the target vulnerabilities and recommendations for how to help youth break the cycle of poverty.

HIGHLIGHTS

Below are the key takeaway points of this brief review of existing literature and recommendations:

- Native Hawaiian youth are overrepresented in the foster care and juvenile justice system, as well as homeless population.
- To break the cycle of poverty and alleviate the negative consequences from being in the system and/or homeless, the following is recommended:
  - Offer programs and services that are a) grounded in a community-based healing approach, b) flexible and adaptable, and c) tailored to meet the unique physical, mental, educational, and vocational needs of youth in crisis.
  - Collaborate with systems and community partners to a) ensure a continuity of care and successful transition to adulthood, and b) impact system practices and policies.

IMPLICATIONS

- To best offer services for youth transitioning from crisis, advocating for emancipation and expanding minor consent laws to empower youth to choose to receive services are vital.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and magnified existing weaknesses and faults in the system, leading to a need for quick adaptation and transformation of programs and services. Future planning for Lydia’s House must take the pandemic into consideration as it is likely to continue for years ahead.
INTRODUCTION

In June 2020, Liliʻuokalani Trust (LT) launched an ambitious and innovative project called Lydia’s House: a transitional housing program focused on helping youth in crisis in three main target vulnerabilities: foster care youth (particularly ones aging out of the system), homeless youth, and juvenile justice-involved youth. Lydia’s House is a facility that includes 5,000 square feet of commercial space and 18 apartments, including one and two-bedroom units which can house up to 42 tenants (as of 2020; subject to change).

The mission of LT and of Lydia’s House is to break the cycle of poverty for Hawaiʻi’s youth and families. Native Hawaiians are overrepresented in systems serving individuals and families in distress including juvenile justice and foster care and in the homelessness population. While the Lydia’s House program launch was pushed forward as a rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and needs for stable housing, the facility will be renovated in 2021 to include the full range of planned services: shelter beds for youth in need, transitional housing, a status arrest diversion program, and much more. These services are a response to the gap in available facilities and programs in Hawaiʻi (e.g., lack of emergency shelters, long-term stable housing, drop-in centers, diversion-oriented programs, and overall weak coordination among systems services).

The philosophy of Lydia’s House is to use a holistic and kamaliʻi-centric approach by providing wraparound services (e.g., addressing physical health, mental wellbeing, education and vocational training, finances, and housing needs) tailored to youth in and transitioning from crisis. Lydia’s House has collaborated with Hale Kipa and other community partners to demonstrate the value of early intervention and stabilization through long-term transitional housing and culturally grounded, consistent, wraparound support programs.

FOSTER CARE YOUTH

In 2018, there were approximately 437,200 youth in foster care nationwide. Sixty-two percent of the youth were placed in foster care due to family neglect, while 36% were removed from the family due to parental drug abuse (HHS, 2019). In Hawaiʻi, Native Hawaiian youth are more likely to be engaged with the foster care system and therefore will be more likely to suffer the consequences of that experience, such as homelessness and contact with the juvenile justice system (Cutuli et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2017). There were 2,759 youth in foster care in Hawaiʻi in 2018, almost half (46%) of whom were Native Hawaiian. The majority of children (75%) entered foster care due to threatened harm, while 10% enter the system from physical neglect (State of Hawaiʻi Department of Human Services, 2019).

The path from foster care to poverty is very clear. Foster care youth typically come from low income minority groups, and therefore, face more disadvantages than others, particularly if they were victims of physical, emotional, sexual, and mental abuse. Twenty percent of youth who were in foster care will become homeless after...
turning 18 (National Foster Youth Institute, 2017), with upward estimates of 33% or more. With a high rate of homelessness among such emerging adults, they have limited educational attainment, face economic instability, struggle with mental health issues, and are more at risk for adult arrests (particularly during the transition to adulthood period) and legal system involvement in general (Crawford et al., 2018; Kretschmar & Flannery, 2011; Lee et al., 2014; Shah et al., 2017; Turney & Wildeman, 2016).

While each youth aging out of foster care should have a basic transition plan, lack of Child Welfare resources means that successful planning and implementation do not necessarily happen. Plan outcomes such as reunification along federal guidelines may not be appropriate for all youth as well. Extending foster care support during the transition, such as what Imua Kākou does, can be vital to lowering negative outcomes (Imua Kākou, 2014). The timing of the intervention is also crucial; research has shown that intervention within the first year of a youth exiting out of the foster care system can have a significant impact in decreasing the risk of arrest and becoming homeless, but that effect decreases the longer the youth is out of foster care without intervention (Lee et al., 2014; Shah et al., 2017).

That said, there is no one size fits all solution to helping foster care youth; the range of adverse childhood experiences is large, and each youth will have different economic and psychosocial risks. Therefore, implementing comprehensive screening of each youth’s challenges and tailoring programming to meet their physical, mental, educational, and vocational needs while increasing individual resiliency can be vital for their successful transition to adulthood (Rebbe et al., 2017). Consistent and ongoing educational and employment support can help ease foster care youth transition to adulthood. To account for racial and ethnic disparities, such programs should also be culturally appropriate and responsive (Rosenberg et al., 2020).

HOMELESS YOUTH

In 2019, there were approximately 35,000 homeless unaccompanied youth (under 25 years of age) nationwide (HUD, 2020). Homelessness in Hawai‘i is a well-known problem — the state typically ranks among those with the highest rates of homelessness in the nation. In 2019, 44.9 in every 10,000 people experienced homelessness in Hawai‘i compared to the national average of 17 per 10,000 (Jedra, 2020). There were approximately 6,500 homeless individuals in Hawai‘i as of January 2019. Approximately 1,500-2,200 of them are chronically homeless (i.e., homeless for more than 6 months). Native Hawaiians are disproportionately represented in homeless and homeless youth populations (Green, 2020; USICH, 2019). According to a point in time count conducted in January 2020, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders made up 51% of the homeless population on O‘ahu (Partners in Care, 2020).
Homelessness is a damaging cycle for youth. Homeless youth have high rates of drug use and abuse, leading to significantly increased morbidity and mortality rates. The mortality rate of homeless youth is 10 times higher than housed youth, “with drug overdose being one of the leading causes of death” (Santa Maria et al., 2018, p. 551). Drug use decreases the chances of achieving housing stability, thus exacerbating struggles with finding food security, and increasing their likelihood of physical/sexual victimization and exposure to violence (Edidin et al., 2012; Santa Maria et al., 2018; Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Street victimization further leads to more high-risk behaviors, unstable housing, and even the development of PTSD (Bender et al., 2014; Tyler & Schmitz, 2018; Whitbeck et al., 2007).

Homeless youth are more likely to utilize drop-in centers and street outreach services that 1) do not require long term commitments and 2) allow for flexibility and changes in need (Ryan & Thompson, 2013). Building positive relationships and trust with program staff without restrictive rules and regulations can help homeless emerging adults overcome their fear and distrust of such services. Programs with low barriers of entry, such as ones that do not require heavy documentation or have length-of-stay requirements, can also address an oft-neglected subgroup of homeless youth – non-system homeless minors who have trouble accessing conventional housing and support programs (for example, due to lack of documentation or disability status) (Baker Collins et al., 2018; Winkel, 2015). Transitional housing with flexible time limits and programming that foster independence are effective long-term.
The third target vulnerability Lydia’s House aims to address is juvenile justice youth. Native Hawaiian youth are generally disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system. In 2019, there were 7,345 total juvenile arrests, of which 1,647 were Native Hawaiian youth. The top reasons for the arrests were status offenses and petty misdemeanors. Among status offenses, Native Hawaiian youth were arrested for running away from home and truancy most often. In addition, “Native Hawaiian youth are disproportionately referred to court for runaway: 39 percent of referrals to court for runaway for both girls and boys are Native Hawaiian” (Sederbaum & Tamis, 2017, p. 9). Such a low barrier entry to the juvenile justice system makes it too easy for youth to fall into the cycle of poverty and a life of offending.

Youth that come into contact with the juvenile justice system face a range of negative consequences and are more likely to become homeless and adult offenders. Youth put in detention centers are four times as likely to commit suicide than non-incarcerated youth, and are more likely to have a history of psychological trauma and traumatic stress (Hayes, 2005; Kretschmar & Flannery, 2011; Wasserman et al., 2010). In examining such facilities, research has found that juvenile incarceration fails to reduce recidivism overall, and in some cases, may even increase the chances of recidivism (PEW, 2015).

In various state studies, the findings overall show that being placed in community-based programs is more effective long term compared to correctional facilities (Hayes, 2005; Kretschmar et al., 2018; PEW, 2015). Diversion and intervention programs that remove the youth from the juvenile justice system as early as possible are essential to help youth thrive (Chesney-Lind, 2010; Flores, 2013). Pre-adjudication diversion program that allows for police officers to bring youth (particularly first time offenders or youth charged with misdemeanors or non-violent offenses) to a youth service center instead of formal processing can serve as an informal channel to help the youth (Models for Change, 2010; OJJDP, 2020). Similarly, prearrest programs and civil citation programs have been effective at reducing crime and recidivism rates for youth, as demonstrated in Florida (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2019; NCSL, 2018). By avoiding formal processing and institutionalization, we can decrease the odds of crime, recidivism, and stigmatization for the youth (OJJDP, 2020).

Thus, a continuity of care plan with collaboration between systems players and community partners can be vital to a) divert youth, and b) if not diverted, then support them while they are under the state’s supervision, then including a strong transition program once released from custody. Not only should the supportive housing facility be easily accessible to the youth, there should also be trauma and grief-focused therapy as well as educational and vocational training programs to help rehabilitate the youth for successful transition into adulthood and reentry into the community (Mathur & Clark, 2014; Olafson et al., 2018; Tam et al., 2016).
BROAD RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are some recommendations for best practices to help youth in crisis stabilize and transition successfully to adulthood.

In terms of housing and programming, available evidence suggests that youth in crisis need consistent services and long-term housing to help stabilize them and prepare them for independence (Giffords et al., 2007). Experiencing housing instability can exacerbate the negative effects of foster care and juvenile justice experiences. Thus, transitional housing programs that have flexible time limits with 18-24 months at minimum have shown to be effective (HUD, 2016; Mobbs, 2014; Siegel, 2016). Housing options with a fixed fee structure instead of a percentage of income¹ such as Kahauiki Village decreases the stress that comes with the possibility of increased rent and fear of eviction, and instead encourage saving and build money management skills (Cunningham, 2016; Fujii-Oride, 2018; Semuels, 2015). Lydia’s House therefore charges a fixed fee of $200 (as of 2020, subject to change), an amount that ideally is low enough that will not be stressful to the tenants but still encourage accountability.

Research has shown that current systems solutions such as detaining youth in hardware secure facilities is neither effective nor recommended as the outcomes are usually detrimental and long term. Therefore, it is recommended that services for youth in crisis should use a community-based healing approach. Holistic, wraparound services that provide a range of help for youth in crisis from mental health to educational to vocational training are effective long term. For foster youth, extending support beyond when they age out, and for juvenile justice youth, providing help through diversion programs can be effective. For homeless youth, helping them find shelter or housing through collaboration with community partners can help them overcome the barrier of access. Programming should be tailored to the specific youth in crisis population, as they face unique challenges and difficulties different from early childhood or adult populations. Youth are more likely to utilize drop-in centers and be more susceptible to flexible but consistent programming that encourages their

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¹ Section 8 housing charges approximately 30% of income, which may discourage individuals from pursuing higher paying jobs (Semuels, 2015).
autonomy and growth. As such, advocating for emancipation and minor consent laws that allow for independence without (foster) parental intervention can be vital.

Programs that work in collaboration with community partners are more likely to be successful in helping juvenile justice youth and increasing the likelihood of successful reentry (Mathur & Clark, 2014). The Child & Adolescent Mental Health Division (CAMHD) in Hawai‘i funds and coordinates community-based residential programs for youth who have been in contact with the juvenile justice system. LT can continue to support such partnerships between the mental health system and juvenile justice system, for example. The Behavioral Health Juvenile Justice Initiative in Ohio is one example of a diversion initiative that resulted in lower odds of recidivism and future offending as young adults. The initiative focused on diverting youth with mental health or substance use issues from juvenile justice and instead into community behavioral health treatment programs. Youth are assigned a team of specialists and are engaged in multiple therapy sessions. This type of cooperative and holistic approach to serve the youth connects providers together as well as connects the youth with the community. The longitudinal results examining the program found that those who did not enroll in the program were twice as likely to be charged with an offense than those who were enrolled (Kretschmar et al., 2018).

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed how Lydia’s House can operate. Due to various state shutdowns and restrictions, the pandemic has exposed Hawai‘i’s insufficient safety net and the many barriers to stabilizing youth in crisis. For example, youth are unable to get help from therapists and cannot meet with their case management officers regularly. Not only is physical space limited, access to technology is also limited. Programming at Lydia’s House has had to be delayed and transformed significantly to accommodate for social distancing and health guidelines. Staff at Lydia’s House have had to adapt rapidly in response to these challenges while still providing tailored programming for the current residents. Updating the IT infrastructure in the building for example, has allowed for every programming room to have streaming capabilities, which will assist in program delivery. As the pandemic is likely to continue long term, Lydia’s House will have to continue with such considerations and plan for future operations accordingly during the renovation process.
REFERENCES


