



## Coalition for Homeless Youth & YouthNPower: Transforming Care

### Project UNITE Young People's Platform for the Future of Housing in NYC May 2023

UNITE is a partnership of the Coalition for Homeless Youth and YouthNPower: Transforming Care at the Children's Defense Fund-NY. The UNITE Project's mission is to transfer power to young people and to hold systems accountable to dismantle the silos and fill the gaps that perpetuate the intersection of the child welfare system and youth homelessness. We envision a reality where the current systems in power:

- Are held accountable for the harm that they have caused young people.
- Must be transformed by giving equitable decision-making power to those who have been directly impacted.
- Must center the voices and ideas of young people by giving them the support and resources they need to establish their own futures.

In this Platform, UNITE uses the term “young people” to mean all youth who are or have historically received services under the Administration for Children's Services (child welfare, foster care and youth justice) and the Department of Youth and Community Development Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs. We recognize that this work is intersectional and requires a holistic approach. Young people are often carrying histories of contact with the child welfare, youth justice, housing and shelter systems *and* navigating these systems simultaneously.

### **Goal 1: Increase access to permanent housing and successful transitions for all young people**

Ask 1: Establish dedicated staff within HPD and NYCHA to serve as the direct point of contact for young people and youth-serving agencies, to ensure there is direct access to

qualified individuals who can address barriers to securing permanent housing with vouchers, such as expediting needed inspections and repairs.

Ask 2: Increase overall staffing capacity and establish dedicated staff at the NYC Human Rights Commission and HRA's Source of Income Discrimination Unit to serve as the direct point of contact for young people and youth-serving agencies. The purpose is to ensure that there is direct access to qualified individuals to support young people who are facing discrimination in using vouchers.

Ask 3: Make youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs as well as youth transitioning out of the Administration for Children Services (ACS) care (whether foster care, placement or detention) categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having to enter the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system.

Ask 4: Designate units in newly constructed/renovated low-income and other subsidized housing developments for young people.

Ask 5: Increase income access for young people by expanding direct cash transfer and guaranteed income programs to support their financial stability and their ability to obtain and sustain stable permanent housing.

Ask 6: Streamline and simplify the process for young people to transition into permanent housing by ensuring that every young person has access to an experienced Housing Navigator/Specialist, who will connect them to all housing resources that they are eligible for, uphold their power of choice in identifying which available housing option they want to use, and support them until they move in.

Ask 7: Ensure that the existing CityFHEPS voucher rates are adjusted annually to reflect current rental/housing market rates.

Ask 8: Ensure that undocumented unaccompanied young people (including minors) have immediate access to benefits and legal services.

Ask 9: Ensure that all staff in DYCD and ACS programs are required to complete robust immigration training to ensure that young people are connected to all the supports that they are eligible for.

Ask 10: NYC needs to apply for all Federal and State opportunities that will increase the number of housing vouchers available for young people, including having NYCHA apply

for new funding attached to the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative and the Family Unification Program (FUP).

## **Goal 2: Ensure that young people have appropriate supports and resources in the community to stay permanently (long-term) housed**

Ask 1: Work with young people to explore creating community-based hubs that provide access to low-barrier, trauma-informed services during and after housing has been obtained, including: peer support, housing navigation, financial planning services, legal support, and educational and employment assistance.

Ask 2: Create a responsive and accountable oversight / ombudsman body to address youth grievances and complaints attached to the services they receive in ACS and/or DYCD RHY housing programs.

Ask 3: NYC needs to address the barriers and access to permanent supportive housing (PSH) for young people by:

- Increasing beds available
- Ensuring timely access to clinicians to complete required evaluations

Ask 4: Dismantle eligibility silos to create equity for young people across-systems to access housing programs and pilots.

## **Goal 3: Create intentional pathways to information for young people**

Ask 1: Develop youth-informed Know Your Rights (KYR) tools - that are made publicly available on the relevant agency website - to ensure that young people have equitable access to up-to-date information regarding laws and policies for their current system involvement, as well as other resources that young people regularly access. This includes:

- KYR for young people in foster care, placement and detention, including reporting grievances
- KYR for young people in Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, including reporting grievances
- KYR for young people in the Department of Homeless Services system
- KYR for pregnant and parenting young people
- KYR for immigrant youth
- KYR for LGBTQIA+ youth
- KYR for Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Re-Housing
- KYR for housing vouchers

- KYR regarding income discrimination
- KYR regarding tenant rights
- KYR regarding the Department of Education, including rights attached to Students in Temporary Housing
- KYR regarding higher education, including financial aid assistance
- KYR regarding employment access and protections
- KYR regarding public benefits
- KYR regarding health care
- KYR regarding law enforcement in programs and housing where young people are living

#### **Goal 4: Ensure services for young people are grounded in harm reduction and trauma-informed care, including quality shelter resources**

Ask 1: Require DYCD to immediately rescind the current “no-sleep” directive that was issued to the 24-hr Drop-in Centers and work with young people and providers to develop clear guidance that supports the needs of young people and providers.

Ask 2: Create pathways for professional development and economic mobility for peer navigators working with young people.

Ask 3: Increase the number of DYCD Transitional Independent Living (TIL) Programs for homeless young adults ages 21-24.

Ask 4: Require DYCD and ACS to include young people with lived experience in decision-making regarding all agency decisions that impact young people, including:

- Changes to, or development of, new policies and guidance that will directly impact young people;
- Development and prioritization of new programs and initiatives;
- Establishing how DYCD and ACS contracted-programs are evaluated to ensure that there is an emphasis on metrics attached to youth-informed positive outcomes for young people;
- The design of Request for Proposals (RFPs) for new programming and services;
- Requiring that all funded programs and services have positions specifically for people with lived experience; and,
- Establishing the evaluation metrics that are used to inform which organizations are awarded through new funding RFPs.

Ask 5: Ensure that the right to shelter is equitable for all young people, regardless of which system they have history with or enter for housing support.

Ask 6: Young people in the ACS system, including foster care and juvenile justice placement, should have access to placement settings that address their needs holistically, including therapeutic foster care and wrap-around services to reduce reliance on institutionalization and support stable housing.

Ask 7: DYCD should establish RHY residential programs that have robust on-site services and supports for young people who have increased needs attached to their mental health.