



Youth Diversion Infrastructure Project

Background

The Youth Diversion Infrastructure Project (YDIP) is an ongoing project of Building Changes (BC) and A Way Home Washington (AWHWA). In its first year, YDIP aimed to implement **centralized diversion funds for youth and young adults (YYA) exiting systems of care** in different communities throughout Washington. YDIP is funded by the Washington State Department of Commerce’s Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) and through private funding from the Raikes Foundation and the Schultz Family Foundation.

OHY funding for this project was appropriated by the Washington State Legislature for House Bill 1905, which seeks to ensure that youth exiting a **publicly funded system of care** exit into safe and stable housing.

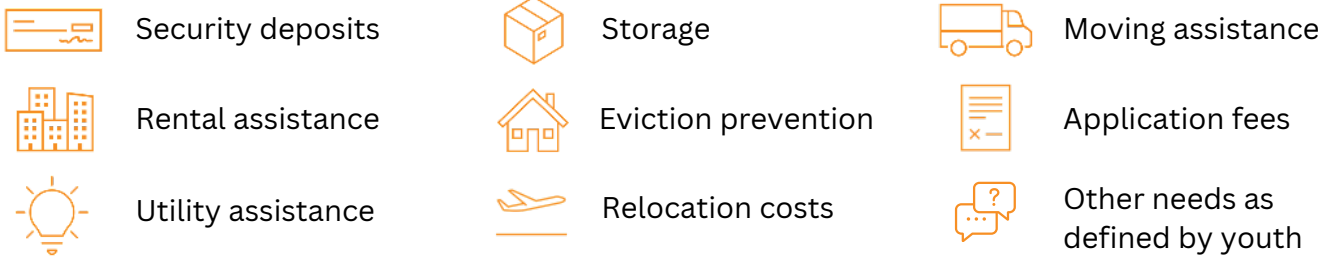
Publicly funded systems of care are defined as the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, the behavioral health system, and programs administered by OHY.

Project Description

Diversion is an approach used to assist individuals and families experiencing a housing crisis to quickly move into stable housing through creative housing solution conversations. Through these conversations, the service provider, who is trained in Diversion, listens and converses with a household to help them move toward a housing plan in an empowering and client-led way. Diversion is culturally responsive and trauma-informed, and can be effective in meeting the needs of communities experiencing housing instability, including young people.

A key aspect of Diversion is that it allows for **flex funds**, one-time flexible financial assistance to help the individual or family obtain stable housing. We know that this is a critical need for young people seeking stable housing, **who may face lower wages, lack of employment opportunities or rental history, and—if exiting a system of care—who may be in the process of reestablishing connections with their community on their path to independence.**

Examples of what flex funds can be used for:



Youth and young adults are eligible for flex funds from YDIP if they are under the age of 25, exiting or have exited a publicly funded system of care, at imminent risk of homelessness, and need safe and stable housing as defined by the young person.

YDIP utilizes a “Centralized Diversion Fund” model aimed at increasing access to Diversion in communities by making flexible funding more available to a community. **The overall goal of YDIP is to eliminate referral-based access to housing resources in favor of creative problem-solving with a young person about their specific housing needs.** This way, young people who have exited a system of care can get what they need from the places they are already comfortable with and the providers they trust and go to for support.

This model is an efficient and effective alternative to traditional Diversion services where flexible funding access is based on the organization and available funding. Instead, this model empowers the robust network of community-based organizations, service providers, and practitioners across a community through a two-day Diversion training that certifies them to access flex funds from a single Fiscal Administrator (FA) in their community. **The FA’s role is to quickly review, process, and disburse flexible funding once a request is submitted on behalf of a young person.**

In the first six months of implementation of YDIP, as of October 2023, AHWHA provided 7 trainings resulting in **158 certified providers trained in Diversion across 58 agencies.** YDIP is an opportunity to meet the goals set by House Bill 1905 and support YYA exiting systems of care in different communities. The YDIP process is illustrated in Figure 1.

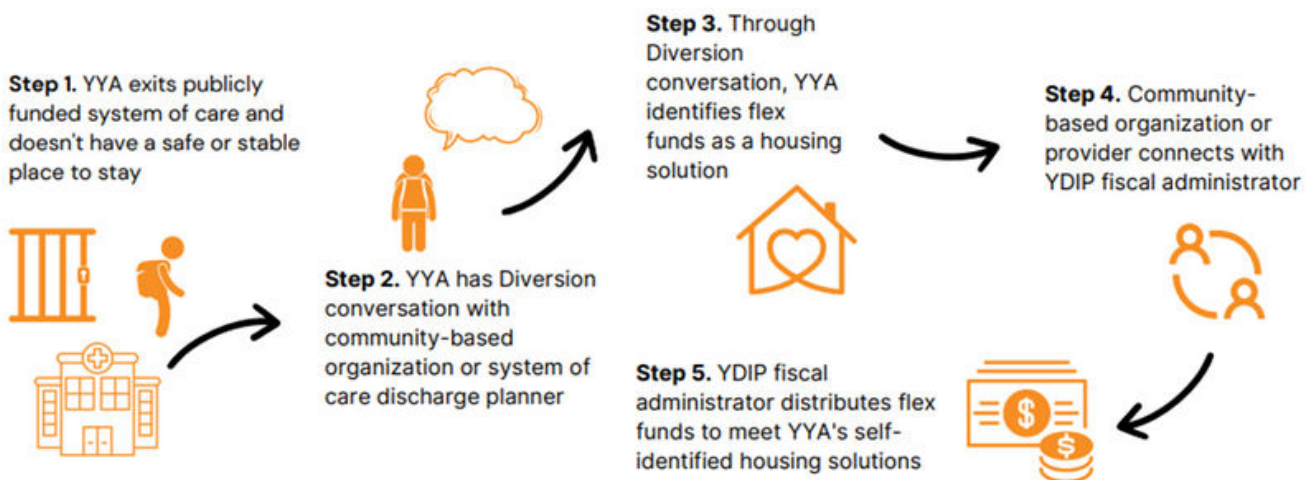


Figure 1. Steps for a youth or young adult receiving funding and support through YDIP

Impact of YDIP

After six months of implementation, **110 YYA had accessed YDIP** to receive flex funds for a housing plan toward stability. FAs disbursed funds to YYA in **five counties**, with 63 requests fulfilled in Spokane, 17 in Walla Walla, 15 in Pierce, and 15 in Clark and Yakima counties combined.



Figure 2: Counties where YYA accessed YDIP

Demographics

Age

- Approximately one-third of YYA served were under 18 years of age and nearly two-thirds were ages 18-24.

Sexual Orientation & Gender

- Although the majority of YYA served identified as straight, 18.2% identified as asexual, bisexual, gay, pansexual, and queer.
- Exact percentages for each cannot be shown to protect client privacy.
- The majority of YYA clients identified as cisgender men/boys or women/girls, although a few YYA identified as transgender or nonbinary.

Pregnant & Parenting

- Among YYA served, 26.4% were pregnant and/or parenting while 68.2% were not.

Race & Ethnicity

- Figure 3 shows the proportions of YYA clients served that identified as a person of color (POC) and non-Hispanic white. Overall, nearly half of YYA served identified as a POC.

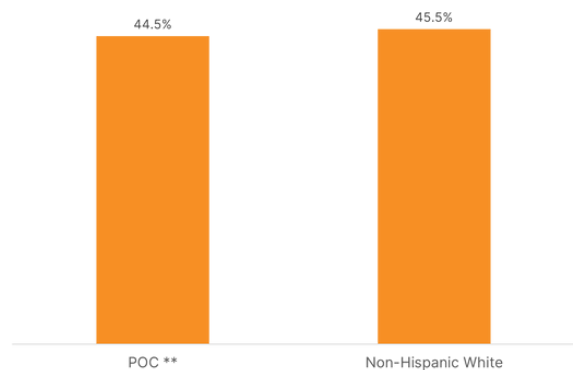


Figure 3: Proportions of persons of color (POC) YYA *

*Those who identified as Other or did not include race/ethnicity information were not included in the figure.

**POC includes those identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and/or those who identified as Hispanic/Latinx.

Spending

The average amount spent per household was \$2,089. The majority of requests were geared towards **rental assistance/arrears and for housing deposits**. The rest of the requests were for utility deposits/payments, transportation (including relocation), application fees, moving expenses, emergent needs, storage, legal services and fees, or other requests.

Key Learnings

No Minimum Age for YDIP

Providers who serve YYA shared that they liked the ability to serve YYA without having to think about a minimum age. YYA are unique and have their own experiences which are separate from their families, household, etc. Being able to serve YYA as the primary client, especially when there is no minimum age, allows for recognition of their unique and individual experiences. It also allows for the additional benefit of serving the entire family, if the primary YYA client is part of a household, while also recognizing that the YYA is the main client of that household. Therefore, no matter the age, it allows providers to center the YYA client and their needs.

Housing Strategies Focused on Systems of Care

Many providers and Fiscal Administrators we talked to appreciated that there was a focus on systems of care through YDIP. Providers shared that many YYA they already serve have experiences with a system of care or multiple systems of care. Additionally, given the need for stable and safe housing for those exiting systems of care, targeted strategies for this population are needed. YDIP has provided an effective way to do that.

Community-Based Approach

The strength of YDIP lies in the efficient approach that puts the power in the hands of young people and the communities they are connected with. It relies on a Fiscal Administrator that helps support the work across a county and creates a funding pool available to anyone within the community. BC and AWHWA strive to recruit as many system partners, providers, community organizations, and others that interact with YYA to be part of YDIP in these communities and access it as needed. We have seen many systems of care partners participate in YDIP trainings and hope to see more interaction from a variety of systems of care. Additionally, BC and AWHWA work to foster collaboration within communities through YDIP.