

# From Surviving to Thriving

How communities can help Vermont's rural homeless youth and the programs that serve them



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Staff and consultants involved in researching, writing and editing this report:

Karen Bielawski-Branch

Melanie Goodman

Gail Gramarossa

Hattie Johnson

Jennifer A. Smith

Doug Tanner

Cindy Carraway-Wilson

Melanie Wilson

David Barnes

Design by Douglas MacLaughlin

New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services

PO Box 35

Charlotte, VT 05445

Ph: 802.425.3006

Fx: 641.795.2014

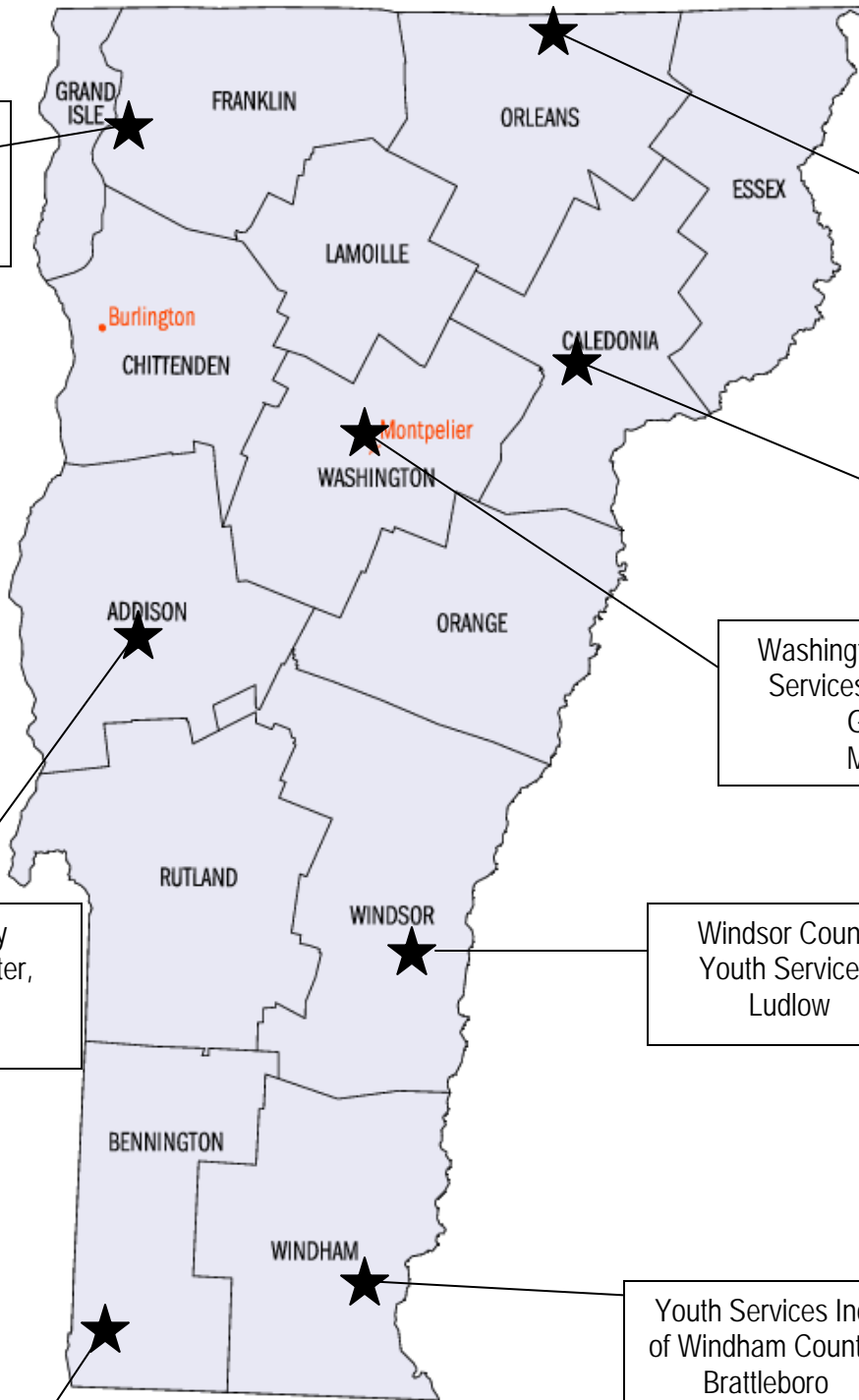
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# Vermont's Rural Transitional Living Programs for Homeless Youth, 2008



Northwestern  
Counseling &  
Support Services,  
St. Albans

Northeast Kingdom  
Community Action,  
Newport

Northeast Kingdom  
Youth Services,  
St. Johnsbury

Washington County Youth  
Services Bureau/Boys &  
Girls Club,  
Montpelier

Addison County  
Parent/Child Center,  
Middlebury

Windsor County  
Youth Services,  
Ludlow

Youth Services Inc.  
of Windham County,  
Brattleboro

United Counseling Services  
of Bennington County,  
Bennington

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the culmination of a year-long review of Vermont's eight rural transitional living programs (TLPs) for homeless young people. Its findings will inform statewide strategic planning intended to strengthen those programs and therefore improve the outcomes of the young people the programs are designed to help. All eight TLPs provide essential services to youth such as life-skills education, educational and employment assistance, referrals to mental health and substance abuse treatment, and housing or housing subsidies. However, given the level of need of their clients and the paucity of resources in their communities, all are underfunded and several are only one grant away from being forced to close their doors. None of the TLPs offer all the types of housing that young people need. Most typically, they lack emergency shelter and supervised, interim housing. Most report that local educational options for youth are flexible and adequate. But transportation, particularly in the more rural parts of the state, is a serious problem for youth, as is securing living-wage jobs. Finally, the high cost of housing creates insurmountable obstacles for many youth. Though the programs are supposed to prepare youth for self-sufficiency, in reality many youth cannot live independently even after spending the maximum allowable time in a TLP. This report recommends that TLPs clarify their mission and receive significant training and technical assistance in fund development, staff training and other areas. It also recommends that they take the lead in organizing comprehensive community action on behalf of all vulnerable young people, those already homeless and those headed for homelessness. Though the TLPs can increase their own efficiency, creativity and resourcefulness, lasting solutions for vulnerable young people lie in systemic changes. In other words, the TLPs need the help of their broader communities. The report outlines the issues that rural TLPs in Vermont currently face, describes promising practices in TLP programming elsewhere, and gives examples of community-wide efforts being implemented around the country to help transitioning youth – initiatives that Vermont itself should work to promote.

# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This report assesses the strengths and weaknesses of eight rural transitional living programs in the state of Vermont. It has been prepared by New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services, under contract to the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCRHYP), as the first step in VCRHYP's plan to improve services to this vulnerable population of young people. The assessment addresses matters of sustainability, community culture, available resources, and the vision and mission of the programs, with a particular emphasis on describing unmet service needs for transition-aged youth in Vermont and areas where the development of additional programming may be needed. The findings of this report will become the basis of strategic planning in Vermont that will aim at increasing the capacity to serve transition-aged youth, particularly those who need special services to avoid unemployment and homelessness.

The eight TLPs that are the subject of this report are housed in independent agencies around the state. (See map on page 4.) Each program is funded through a federal grant administered by VCRHYP, and each works in small-town and rural areas. (Spectrum Youth and Family Services, also a VCRHYP member, is based in more urban Burlington and operates its TLP under its own federal grant. It was not included in this rural-program needs assessment.) The eight TLPs considered in this study are:

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services, St. Albans

Northeast Kingdom Community Action, Newport

Northeast Kingdom Youth Services, St. Johnsbury

Addison County Parent/Child Center, Middlebury

Washington County Youth Services Bureau/Boys & Girls Club, Montpelier

Windsor County Youth Services, Ludlow

United Counseling Services, Bennington

Youth Services Inc. of Windham County, Brattleboro

Between July and Oct. 2007, NEN conducted on-site interviews at each of the eight TLP sites, talking to 14 TLP staff in all. Discussions focused on a description of each TLP's service model; program strengths and weaknesses; local issues that affect each program and youth population; gaps in service; and trends over time.

NEN also collected written materials from each TLP; gathered recent TLP service use and outcome data collected by VCRHYP; gathered recent and current data on youth well-being in Vermont; and researched promising practices in services for transition-aged youth across the country.

#### BACKGROUND: TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAMS

Specialized programs for runaway and homeless young people grew out of federal legislation in 1975 that recognized youth homelessness as a significant social problem and allocated funds to agencies providing services to such youth. Those services included emergency shelters for youth temporarily without a place to stay, many of whom would end up reuniting with their families; street outreach, which sent trained workers into the community to engage disconnected young people who might need help; and transitional living services, for young people 16 or over who could not reunite with their families and who faced significant challenges beyond basic shelter needs.

These young people needed help finishing high school, finding housing, obtaining a job, overcoming substance abuse issues, and often much more.

By law, TLP grantees are required to offer the following services, either directly or through referral:

Programs for runaway and homeless youth grew out of federal legislation that recognized youth homelessness as a significant social problem.



The government has declared Runaway and Homeless Youth programs effective, a label shared by only 18% of the 1,004 federally funded programs evaluated to date.

- Safe, stable living accommodations
- Basic life-skills education, including consumer education and instruction in budgeting, using credit, housekeeping, menu-planning, food preparation, and parenting skills
- Interpersonal skill-building, including enhancing young people's abilities to establish positive relationships with peers and adults, make decisions, and manage stress
- Educational opportunities, such as GED preparation, postsecondary training, or vocational education
- Assistance in job preparation and attainment, such as career counseling and job placement
- Education, information, and counseling to prevent, treat, and reduce substance abuse
- Mental health care, including individual and group counseling
- Physical health care, including routine physicals, health assessments, and emergency treatment

TLPs work, according to the federal government. The US Office of Management and Budget has instituted a rigorous assessment process known as PART that analyzes management and outcomes data from each of the hundreds of programs receiving government money. Only 18% of the 1,004 programs evaluated to date have been declared effective, and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program – that is, TLP and its sister services – is among them. Far more government-funded programs are rated only moderately effective or adequate, and some have been rated ineffective. Today, the country's 190 transitional living programs receive \$35.2 million in federal money through highly competitive grants. (This funding also supports the recent Presidential initiative creating maternity group homes, which are transitional living programs for young mothers and their children.)

## VERMONT COALITION OF RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAMS

Founded in 1981, the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCRHYP) is a coalition of 13 member agencies serving runaway and homeless youth throughout Vermont. Most, but not all, of these operate transitional living programs (others offer shelter and street outreach programs only). Each RHY program exists within its own distinct community-based organization – half in youth-service agencies, half in community mental health centers – and some have been in operation since the early 1970s.

Washington County Youth Service Bureau/Boys & Girls Club serves as the administrative agency for VCRHYP, maintaining fiscal and programmatic responsibility for these programs. VCRHYP staff are employed by the Bureau and provide assistance with program development and evaluation; fundraising; public education; training; data collection, maintenance and analysis; administration of Medicaid matching funds; and representation on state and national boards. As an intermediary organization, VCRHYP applies for federal funds and distributes grants to its various members, who essentially act as subcontractors to VCRHYP while maintaining a large degree of independence. Vermont is one of only three states in the country – Wisconsin and Hawaii are the others – that has such a coalition, and the arrangement creates opportunities for system-wide planning and collaboration that would be difficult to achieve elsewhere.

Rural programs receiving federal TLP funding since 1993:

- Washington County Youth Service Bureau/Boys & Girls Club (Montpelier)
- Northeast Kingdom Youth Services (St. Johnsbury)
- Northeast Kingdom Community Action (Newport)
- Youth Services of Windham County (Brattleboro)

Vermont is one of only three states with a broad coalition of RHY service providers, creating opportunities for system-wide planning and collaboration difficult to achieve elsewhere.

Most youth who meet common definitions of homelessness will never be associated with a social service agency that will count them.

Programs receiving federal TLP funding since 2000:

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (St. Albans)

Addison County Parent/Child Center (Middlebury)

United Counseling Services (Bennington)

Windsor County Youth Services (Ludlow)

Each of the TLPs above provides support to youth ages 16 to 21 (in some cases, services can extend to age 22) who are homeless or at risk for homelessness. Case management, life skills and social skills training, employment counseling and educational support services are offered. Housing assistance is an integral piece of TLP services, and is generally offered in two ways: by assisting youth in finding affordable apartments, and then by subsidizing the rent as needed for up to 18 months. Supervised congregate housing is available in a few programs.

How serious a problem is youth homelessness in Vermont? Each year the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness conducts a point-in-time count of homeless families and individuals in the state. On a single day in January 2008, the organization and its partners counted 267 youth between 15 and 21 who were homeless – in shelters, on the street, or doubled up with friends. Of that number, 215 were between 18 and 21. While probably as rigorous as any such census can be, the data surely underrepresents the problem of youth homelessness, primarily because it includes only individuals receiving homeless services, or who were known or suspected to be homeless, on the day of the survey. But since many, probably most, youth who meet commonly accepted definitions of homelessness will never be known to any social service agency that would count them, the figure by definition must exclude a large percentage of them. Instead, it reflects the homeless population already known to service providers, and thus (presumably) already receiving offers of help.

According to VCRHYP data, the eight TLPs served a total of 114 youth between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007. As an indicator of the size of the state's homeless youth population, however, this figure is also misleadingly small. There are two reasons for this. The first is that youth are counted as TLP participants only when they officially enter a program, even though the majority of young people who receive some assistance from TLP staff never become full-fledged participants. The second is that none of the eight TLPs promote their services aggressively to youth in their communities, fearing that doing so would attract more young people than the programs could possibly serve. A majority of young people find their way to the programs through word of mouth. Even so, most programs are working at full capacity year-round.

#### DECLINE IN VERMONT'S YOUNG ADULT POPULATION

Recent initiatives in Vermont have focused new attention on the state's young people, both those who are already succeeding and those who need help to succeed. Some of the concern about Vermont's youth is occasioned by ongoing reports about the exodus of young people from the state. Data collected from the US Census Bureau shows young people are leaving all New England states, and in particular Vermont, where the number of 25- to 34-year-olds fell 27% between 1990 and 2004. Policymakers fear that a continuing decline in the number of young people would create a demographic imbalance, forcing the closing of schools and imperiling the future workforce, which is projected to need more college graduates and fewer non-graduates in the coming years. The consequences of inaction are "severe," according to Gov. Jim Douglas. One of the governor's early proposals was aimed at encouraging successful young people to stay in Vermont by promising partial forgiveness of college loans to students who committed to work in the state after graduation. A special commission

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looked into the proposal and came back with a series of four interconnected recommendations meant to bolster college attendance and career training for all young people and adults.

The fate of a different population of youth – the most needy group, and the one least likely to leave the state – has prompted a different array of initiatives. These proposals focused on creating a more comprehensive, prevention-driven system of supports for young people who would otherwise almost certainly fail to achieve their potential. These young people are particularly vulnerable due to poverty, acute family dysfunction, substance abuse or emotional/cognitive disabilities.

One way to assist vulnerable young people is to focus on those who “age out” of foster care at age 18. Numerous studies show that these unattached, disconnected young people tend to fare poorly compared to other youth, dropping out of school, becoming pregnant, becoming homeless, or ending up in the criminal justice system in disproportionate numbers. For all these reasons, the Governor’s FY’08 budget recommended funding to expand services to youth aging out of foster care up to the age of 22 so that caseworkers could help plan their transition and, if need be, help them find supportive housing. Ultimately, \$668,000 was appropriated.

The problems facing foster youth are similar to those facing young people receiving services from the state’s mental health system. Indeed, there is considerable overlap between the two populations. Recognizing that young people face a services “cliff” when they reach age 18, the Vermont legislature recently passed Bill H. 449 to extend services to young people up to age 22. Youth who have a functional developmental disability and who received state-funded services under an individualized education program (IEP) at school, or who received state-funded services for severe emotional

disturbance, would be eligible. Funds have not yet been appropriated, however, and the cost of the program, according to a state report, may be prohibitive. Instead, the committee reviewing the project has suggested an alternative: that various services already available, but somewhat fragmented, be ramped up and integrated into a more coherent whole.

Where do the state's TLPs fit into this picture? These programs are more likely than any other to see vulnerable young people who need help transitioning to adulthood – youth who typically have experienced family breakdown and have no caring adult in their lives. Although federal transitional living programs were not meant to serve “system” youth (those young people who already receive services from the state's child welfare, mental health, or juvenile justice systems), they in fact do work with such youth, usually after they have left these other systems. Thus the distinction usually made between “system” youth and “non-system” youth in the context of social services is false. These youth tend to have the very same problems, leading to the very same negative outcomes. Typical TLP youth, for instance, leave high school before graduating. They may have mental health problems or substance abuse problems, and may need help finding a job. They almost all need to be taught basic living skills: how to understand a lease, manage a budget, cook dinner, balance a checkbook. The one characteristic they all share is that their families either cannot or will not assist them. Often, because of mental illness, addiction, or poverty, they are simply unable to.

The one characteristic all TLP youth share is that their families cannot or will not care for them.

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### ADDISON COUNTY PARENT/CHILD CENTER, MIDDLEBURY

The Addison County Parent/Child Center provides family education and support services for families in Addison County (770 square miles). It uses a highly integrated center/outreach model and its programs are flexibly designed for individuals and families. This agency is unique within VCRHYP because it splits services to runaway and homeless youth with another agency, Counseling Services of Addison County, which provides emergency shelter.\*

### TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

The Parent/Child Center serves all needy youth, but focuses particularly on young parents and their children. Staff consider this approach particularly powerful because it supports two generations concurrently, impacting both young parents and their children.

The agency maintains an outreach staff of nine, each of whom stays with individual clients as they move through different programs. The model is somewhat unusual. “We don’t want a family or individual to have to work with five different people because they are in five different programs,” said Donna Bailey, coordinator of the TLP.

The agency's TLP works with about 15 youth at any given time, though, in terms of housing, the program doesn't make a distinction between clients enrolled in the TLP and its other youth. “At any one time, we have about 15 to 20 kids who are active, who we put into the computer. But in fact we

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\* This reports describes each of the state's rural TLPs and the services they offer. The services mentioned are not meant to constitute an exhaustive list. All of the state's TLPs offer a wide variety of supports and services, delivering them on a flexible, case-by-case basis. See page 8 for a list of services required by the programs' federal funder.

actually are dealing with maybe 100 kids at one time, only a small proportion of whom are TLP,” said Jordan Engle, a caseworker. “But we work on housing with everybody – it’s an issue for everybody.”

This program offers stipend assistance for scattered-site apartments, and maintains a 10-unit boarding house (the Elm Street facility), which opened in January 2006. Each TLP client has her/his own outreach worker who teaches independent-living skills, and each also attends “Learning Together,” an intensive 28-hour/week academic, job preparation, and parenting education program. According to VCRHYP data for the year ending 10/1/07, the TLP served seven new clients and 10 carry-over clients; 10 were over the age of 18.

#### PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**Highly integrated and savvy about funding.** This program is unique among Vermont’s rural TLPs for its high degree of program integration, its reach into the community – particularly to pregnant and parenting youth – and its expertise in developing and mixing funding streams to support its programs. Its development of the Elm Street boarding house is one example. Elm Street is a \$1-million project that the agency funded through a combination of large private donations, Community Development Block Grant money, Vermont Housing Conservation Board funds, and a bank loan. The agency is not licensed to provide clinical services on site and thus the boarding house is not “staffed” per se. Instead, the program provides an upstairs apartment gratis to a local woman who provides very general supervision.

In addition to a rotating staff of outreach workers, the program employs its own outreach nurse, who identifies pregnant teens in the county and assesses their need for the agency’s help. College interns seeking social work experience bolster the agency’s workforce. Indeed, Engle says the agency’s

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proximity to Middlebury College benefits the agency in many ways, because the environment attracts staff who are passionate about the agency’s mission and willing to work for lower salaries.

**Collaborates and advocates.** Like most other TLPs, this one collaborates extensively with other service providers in the community. On the advocacy level, it is involved in a “housing solutions” group, which has created a new county-wide one-stop process for accessing short-term and emergency housing assistance. The agency is even well-connected with its local Continuum of Care network. These county-wide coalitions of homeless service providers join together to apply for public funds through the state. The networks should be an obvious resource for TLPs seeking to create new housing, though only a few TLPs have pursued the funds aggressively. Perhaps PCC’s experience is part of the reason why. Historically, Continuum of Care money for Addison County has always gone to the same local agency – one that needs it as much as PCC does. The agency didn’t see the point in rocking the boat. “They need the money, there’s no question about it,” Engle said. “Finally we let go and went our own way.”

#### PROGRAM CHALLENGES AND GAPS

**Limited housing options.** The staff recognizes the need for additional housing options for clients, especially for immediate, short-term shelter, and for intermediate transitional housing that youth can move into, out of, and back into as needed. Spectrum Youth and Family Services in Burlington has such an arrangement, and the Parent-Child Center would like the same thing. “If someone blows it in our house [the Elm Street boarding house] I’d love to have a back-up,” said Bailey. “When we have to ask someone to leave, we know we’re sending them back to be homeless again. It’s not a part of what we want to be doing. We could say, ‘Go away for a month,’ but to

where? That's a huge missing piece, and it's a funding issue, and quite honestly in this county we need more shelters, we need a shelter that can do this."

**Drug rehab.** PCC staff cited a need for substance abuse treatment that is accessible, available and tailored to the unique needs of young people.

Opiates are a particular problem, because good treatment for teens isn't available. "When we've tried to get somebody into a rehab program, it doesn't always work. They can't always get in. And just because there's a spot in one rehab, doesn't mean it's the best spot for that kid. Rehab for a 16-year-old ought to look different from rehab for a 40-year-old, and it doesn't necessarily. And it shouldn't look like jail, which it what it ends up looking like for a lot of people."

**Hunger.** Meeting basic needs like food is a growing issue for many of the young families with whom PCC works. "More and more people come to the program and this is the only place they eat," said Bailey.

**Transportation.** There is a local bus system, but it is insufficient. "It doesn't run at, say, 10:15, when Shaw's and Hannaford's closes," said Engle. "It also doesn't work at all if you have two babies to cart around."

**Transition to community apartment.** For youth living at the boarding house, "the transition from Elm Street is very hard and the kids who are successful have Section 8 vouchers," said Engle. "But that doesn't guarantee anything. How do you come up with the money in one shot to both get a place and to keep it up? We need more money. Having Elm Street has been fantastic – it means we have six kids, or seven or eight or nine, who otherwise would be out couch-surfing with their babies. We've also had some great success stories of kids who entered the TLP program before we had Elm Street, and now they are living in a nice apartment. They're wonderful

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“That’s the great conversation: how to move kids from our vocational program, where they have to show up on time and get supervision, to the outside world.”

success stories because we had that money. I’d love to have more money, because we have lots of kids who need places. If they don’t have a place to live, they can’t parent well – and if they did, they wouldn’t be able to work, so everything starts with that.”

**Transition to community employment.** “This has been the struggle the whole time we’ve been here,” said Engle. “That’s the great conversation: how to move kids from our vocational program, where they have to show up on time and get supervision, to the outside world. How do you make that step so that they’re competent enough to take those jobs?” The PCC staff have tried many strategies. They report that state workforce programs that provided compensation to employers for trying out young workers were effective, but those programs were defunded. Other strategies, such as making individual arrangements employer-by-employer, remain a struggle. “We just haven’t come up with anything,” said Engle. “I don’t know what the solution is.” Though there are entry-level jobs in the area, many employers are unwilling to take a risk on hiring a PCC client with little job experience. And many of the PCC TLP participants are also parenting, creating other challenges, said Engle. “As an outreach worker, I think the biggest need is entry-level jobs that have not necessarily great pay, but that have decent hours for parents with children, and that have thoughtful supervision.”

**Accessible, available and stable housing.** There is simply not enough affordable housing in the county, and the consequences for program participants are incalculable. “The worst thing that happens to the children of our teens is these kids having to move around a lot,” Engle said. “That moving around, that lack of consistency of place, is devastating developmentally for kids, for the babies and young children.”

**Recent increases in the cost of living.** The PCC staff said the rising cost of daily living is making it harder for their clients to afford food, gas, housing, and insurance. As prices continue to rise, young people become less able to pay for basic needs. This reality also impacts the agency itself, because inflation hurts its own ability to fund its programs. “It’s about programming dollars and the ability to keep running our programs,” said Bailey.

**More emergency shelter.** The family homeless shelter in Vergennes, 12 miles away, is the only homeless facility in the county. PCC refers young people there in emergencies. But it is often booked, and many young people don’t want to go there. “I just saw the director of the shelter,” said Bailey. “It’s scary; the numbers are just increasing and increasing, and they’re booked. The campgrounds aren’t even affordable anymore. There’s not a back-up or safety net.”

“The campgrounds aren't even affordable anymore. There's not a back-up or safety net.”

“Two full-time staff help youth get a roof over their head, hygiene, employment, everything.”

## NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING & SUPPORT SERVICES, ST. ALBANS

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (NCSS) is the community mental health agency for Franklin and Grand Isle Counties (720 square miles). NCSS is divided into three major divisions: Behavioral Health, Developmental Services, and the Division of Children, Youth and Families.

### TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

The agency's TLP works with youth ages 16 to 22 who are homeless. Substance use and mental health services are a main focus of its work with young people, as is employment. Clients must be employed to become eligible for a subsidy to put towards an apartment; both the subsidy and length of participation vary depending on need.

“Usually how it works is that youth have had at least 90 days of employment, and attend a transitional living class that our youth development coordinator brings together. But any kid who comes to us must be employed first – it's our bottom line criteria,” said Andrea Yandow, program director of Adolescent Services. The program also has two full-time staff “helping kids get a roof over their head, hygiene, employment, everything.” Youth are assisted in finding their own housing with the support of a TLP stipend. Young people come to the program on their own, or are referred by schools, the local JOBS (Jump on Board for Success) employment program, or hot-line calls.

If youth have significant mental health issues, developmental issues, or are pregnant/parenting, the TLP may refer them to other divisions or programs within NCSS.

During the one-year period ending 10/1/07, the program served 21 new clients and seven carry-over clients. Fourteen of them were over 18.

## PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**Mental health connection, employment orientation.** The TLP is clinically strong and connected to mental health, community, and adult services. Like other TLPs, the program creates individual plans for each young person, and is flexible in its delivery of services. The employment-oriented focus of the program helps youth establish themselves in a job and become financially accountable early on. To respond to the needs of Native American youth, the program receives cultural competency training each year from the local Abenaki community.

## PROGRAM CHALLENGES & GAPS

**Survival orientation.** TLPs that are attached to mental health centers are fortunate to have an on-site mental health resource, but they also can be burdened by the clinical orientation of their environment – that is, focused on the problems of clients rather than on their strengths. NCSS grapples with this issue as well. “We are survival-oriented,” said Yandow. “We get them so they’re surviving but not thriving. All those youth development components are missing.”

**Transportation.** The lack of transportation makes it very difficult for youth to get to jobs and other community resources. Public transportation is limited, and given the extreme rural nature of much of Franklin and Grand Isle counties, that makes employment – a prerequisite to TLP entry – difficult to obtain. Youth often move into the more “urban” St. Albans area to find jobs.

**Limited housing options.** Like many other TLPs, NCSS cites a need for transitional housing options – “in-between” housing where youth can be supervised while they become competent to live on their own. “Often when they come to us as homeless, they have nothing. Sometimes I use the adult homeless shelter (for youth over 18),” said Yandow. “Most kids don’t want to go there. Often they find their own places – boyfriends, etcetera. Some kids get put in a shelter home, but they can’t be there very long.”

“We get them so they’re surviving but not thriving. All those youth development components are missing.”

“Often when they come to us as homeless, they have nothing. Sometimes I use the adult shelter, but most kids don't want to go there.”

**Job development.** The program says it needs to improve relationships with area businesses and factories so that it can continue to develop jobs for its TLP clients.

**Substance abuse treatment.** Yandow noted an ongoing need for youth-friendly substance abuse services.

**Needs more funding.** NCSS has more staff available to youth than many other TLPs in the state, but even so, it needs more support if it is to help young people complete TLP and become fully self-sufficient without staying on (or returning) to the program's caseload after 18 months. This is particularly true as the TLP population itself grows more needy. According to Yandow, the program has recently seen more youth coming straight from the foster care system without the skills they need to live on their own. To cope with this and other challenges, the program will first and foremost need more money, and that means securing funding to augment its federal TLP grant.

## NORTHEAST KINGDOM COMMUNITY ACTION, INC., NEWPORT

Northeast Kingdom Community Action, Inc. (NEKCA) is large multi-service agency that provides a variety of programs and services for low-income residents in the northeast corner of the state, a particularly large and rural area with limited transportation and pockets of poverty among the worst in Vermont. The Community Action Youth Services Department, where the TLP is housed, works with youth and families in Orleans and northern Essex counties to develop positive life skills through prevention programs and support services.

### TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

NEKCA runs a scattered-site TLP using subsidized apartments in and around Newport. The TLP housing program works with youth 16 to 21 who need safe living arrangements; services include helping youth secure housing, subsidizing rents, and supporting youth relationships with landlords. The TLP frequently teams with the agency's Youth Development Program (YDP), which works with state-involved youth 15 to 21 who will also be transitioning to independence. The YDP teaches independent living skills, refers youth to community services, and provides emotional support, advocacy, and case management.

Like most TLPs in Vermont, this one believes in building on the strengths of youth rather than focusing on their weaknesses. The best evidence of this approach is the program's self-written 24-week life-skills curriculum, which takes a hands-on approach to teaching young people by connecting them with community organizations like the fire department, health department, culinary arts school, Planned Parenthood, and others. The exercises are practical. One, for example, asks participants to demonstrate their ability to

“Staff have seen many youth abusing drugs or selling drugs to pay the rent, and an increase in teen suicide attempts and completed suicides.”



“The life-skills curriculum puts a face on someone in the community who might be able to assist them.”

put out a fire started by a firefighter. In addition to learning concrete skills, the young people make connections to individuals in the community. “It puts a face on someone in the community who might be able to assist them,” said Bobbi Higgins, the program’s youth development coordinator. In an exercise popular in some other TLPs as well, young people go on a scavenger hunt by themselves to find specific resources in the community. Higgins pointed out that staff often learn from these excursions as well: “I had no idea that men and boys could get physicals at Planned Parenthood.”

The curriculum “is an absolute strength,” said Lisa Daigle-Farney, director of the agency’s Parent/Child Center. Other organizations have asked for permission to use the course. The implementation of the curriculum involves engaging volunteers from the community to come in and provide information and training to the young people. The interaction between youth and volunteers through these classes often lays the foundation for future relationships. For example, a bank teller may come in to teach youth about opening bank accounts, balancing check books, and developing a savings program. A young person meets the teller and in the future goes to that teller’s bank to open an account. The teller and youth then have a relationship that began in the class. These connections are small but important strands in the social web the program tries to weave for youth – one that makes young people feel like they belong somewhere.

To get housing assistance, a young adult has to be employed and have a savings account. The TLP director gives each youth a savings goal to reach before giving the go-ahead to start looking for apartments. In the meantime she helps youth explore other living options. The director also helps youth look at their income and expenses so they can figure out what they can actually afford. This approach often leads youth back to their families.

"We help youth realize that their parents want them out of the house, but do not want them to be homeless," said Ann Collins, director of the TLP. Collins will refer young people headed back home to the agency's runaway program, which does crisis counseling and works toward family reunification. If the young person is over 18 and NEKCA can't provide rental support, staff help youth explore adult shelters or make use of motels, friends, and, whenever possible, family.

### POPULATION & TRENDS

Over the past five years, slightly older youth have begun using the program. Staff have seen a significant increase in referrals for pregnant and parenting teens, and also in the number of youth who are struggling with learning disabilities severe enough to affect their ability to complete the NEKCA assessment without staff support. At least 50 percent of the program's youth are high-school dropouts. The problem is exacerbated for homeless young people who come to the area from very small rural schools; they often find the large regional high school overwhelming and decide not to attend. The program has seen many youth who are using or abusing drugs, or selling drugs to pay the rent. Staff have noted an increase in teen suicide attempts and completed suicides; more youth with signs of depression; and more youth coming out of adult prisons with no housing, no educational or medical records, and no social security cards or other documentation that could allow them to work.

According to VCRHYP data for the year ending 10/1/07, the TLP served 16 new and 2 carry-over clients. Twelve were over the age of 18.

“We help youth realize that their parents want them out of the house, but do not want them to be homeless.”

“The local bus system doesn't have many routes and stops running at 7 p.m. Young people walk to and from work on dark rural roads.”

#### PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**Large-agency setting and resources.** The program is part of a large agency and benefits from a larger staff and more volunteer involvement than most of the state's rural TLPs. A recent agency reorganization resulted in all youth services being brought together under one director, making for easier coordination and management of services.

**Independent life skills course.** The program's unusually lengthy and creative 24-week life skills course provides a significant benefit for young people. The very existence of the course indicates a high level of commitment to helping youth grow toward self-sufficiency – a goal that all TLPs strive for but have increasingly found elusive.

**Well-known agency, good reputation.** The TLP enjoys a good reputation with local landlords and with subsidized apartment managers, who periodically send them information about available rentals.

#### PROGRAM CHALLENGES & GAPS

**Limited funds for subsidies.** The scattered-site approach is not sustainable due to limited funding for subsidies. The program frequently has to turn youth away because it runs out of rental assistance money and funds to subsidize other basic needs.

**Transportation.** The program has difficulty getting youth to needed services because of the rural nature of the area and a minimal transportation budget. The Rural Community Transportation, Inc. (RTC) system doesn't operate many routes, the schedule is sporadic, and the buses stop running at 7 p.m. Young people walk to and from work on dark rural roads. Lack of transportation has a major impact on employment, access to medical, mental health and other treatment, and the types of services NEKCA can offer.

**Lack of housing continuum.** The program lacks options early in the housing continuum; emergency, respite, or supervised housing is unavailable. The program likes the idea of a transitional house where young people could have individual rooms and share a communal kitchen and living area. The house would also have two apartments where youth could stay for a year while they adjusted to being alone, a key issue for rural young people.

“Their first apartment is wonderful for the first week but the loneliness factor is the worst nightmare for these young people,” said Ann Collins, director of the TLP. “All of a sudden, they are responsible for themselves and they are vulnerable. Most youth have a place in their homes and they have 18 years of living there, learning with the support of their families. The youth we work with don’t have that. They are out in their own apartments alone and they are scared.”

**No funds for enrichment.** There are no funds for enrichment activities such as visiting museums or attending community/cultural events, and none for helping youth explore possible next steps, such as a placement with Job Corps.

**High unemployment rates.** Young people must have jobs before NEKCA will subsidize apartments for them. Yet Newport's unemployment rate is almost 12%, far higher than Vermont's overall rate of 4.2%, meaning that youth compete with adults for a limited number of jobs (VT Dept. of Labor, 2008).

**Health care is difficult to access.** Barriers to health care for young people include long waiting lists, the usual stigma attached to mental health treatment, and the intimidating atmosphere in some providers’ offices. Staff say that physicians in Newport are not accepting new patients and that there are no dentists in the area.

“Their first apartment is wonderful for the first week, but the loneliness factor is the worst nightmare for these young people.”

“Our experience with scattered-site is that kids were not ready to be on their own. They were getting in hot water and sometimes suffering serious consequences in the community. Elm Street is a better stepping-stone for them.”

#### NORTHEAST KINGDOM YOUTH SERVICES, ST. JOHNSBURY

Northeast Kingdom Youth Services (NEKYS) offers a wide range of supportive and educational programs for youth and families in Caledonia and southern Essex counties, including juvenile restorative justice, mentoring, street outreach, court diversion, and afterschool programs. Like its northern neighbor Northeast Kingdom Community Action, it serves a particularly large, rural part of the state, with most programs covering an area of about 826 square miles.

#### TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

The agency's TLP serves young adults 16 to 21 years old who have been in foster care, are homeless, or at high risk of becoming homeless. Most of the youth referred to the TLP participate in an eight-week life skills course, get educational and employment support, and have access to services such as mediation; a minority of these actually end up in program-supported housing.

The TLP maintains both a scattered-site apartment program in the St. Johnsbury area and a relatively new boarding house/shelter for youth. With the new slots in the Elm Street shelter, the number of youth receiving subsidies for their own apartments has decreased. “It’s not that we’re not serving the same number of kids; it’s that we’re choosing to serve them differently,” said Jen Smith, program developer and evaluator. “Our experience with the scattered-site apartments was that kids were not ready to be on their own. They were getting in hot water and sometimes suffering serious consequences in the community. If they blew it with one landlord, they could be blackballed by other landlords. It could mess up their credit and have lots of other consequences. Elm Street is a better stepping-stone for them. It gives them more support, more opportunity for hands-on learning, more ability to go out and make mistakes and learn.”

## ELM STREET OVERNIGHT SHELTER

The TLP struggled to fill in the gaps in its housing continuum, and the process involved trial and error. Its first attempt at supervised congregate housing for youth ended in April 2006 due to funding issues and problems with the basic model. The shelter ran on a shoe-string budget and depended on live-in staff who received only stipends. But staff turnover and other emergency needs stretched the program's finances to the breaking point, and it closed the facility when it couldn't maintain safety overnight.

At that point the program made strong efforts to connect with partners in the community. With several new streams of support – from the state Office of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Corrections and Northeast Kingdom Community Action, with whom NEKYS partners in other ways as well – the agency reopened the Elm Street facility with fully paid staff, three rotating staffers to cover overnight shifts, and 10 respite workers who are on-call to supplement staff. Most of the respite workers are paid a stipend, though a couple serve on a purely volunteer basis – an aspect of the program that the agency would like to expand. The volunteers go through an interview process including background checks. They also attend an agency orientation and shadow the full-time staff to learn about managing the house and working with the youth.

The Elm Street shelter also changed the way it worked with its clients. In the past, staff had focused only on longer-term transitional housing. Every young person who came into Elm Street was already known to NEKYS staff. This approach was NEKYS' way of ensuring safety; if staff knew the youth, they could effectively judge the youth's appropriateness for the program.

“Elm Street shelter has 10 respite workers who are on-call to supplement staff. Most are paid stipends, but some serve as volunteers. They go through interviews and background checks, attend an agency orientation, and shadow full-time staff to learn about working with youth.”

“The TLP is seeing more pregnant and parenting teens not yet eligible for state aid, and more youth with serious mental health diagnoses such as bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder and schizophrenia.”

The problem was that young people in crisis couldn't wait long enough to establish those relationships. They needed immediate help. Now, Elm Street has five beds devoted to helping these youth in crisis, and five longer-term single-occupancy rooms for youth using transitional services. Youth can live in the facility for as long as necessary before moving on to other living arrangements. Since reopening, seven to eight young people have occupied the house at any given time.

A day shelter called The Living Room complements the housing program, providing an extra resource for youth living on their own. The shelter, which offers a shower, a laundry, internet access, food and educational/recreational activities to area young people five afternoons a week, helps reduce “the isolation that youth often experience in the scattered-site apartments,” said TLP director Alexis Proia.

Recent trends in the TLP population include more referrals of pregnant teens not yet eligible for state aid (the Reach Up program); more youth with serious mental health diagnoses, such as bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, and schizophrenia; and young couples who refuse to live separately.

According to VCRHYP data for the year ending 10/1/07, the program served 10 new clients and 12 carry-over clients. Thirteen of the clients were over 18. According to NEKYS, about 30% of the youth they serve are pregnant or parenting.

#### PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**The ‘big picture’ approach.** NEKYS takes a “big picture view” in working with the TLP population, focusing not just on housing but on thorough assessments and a process that engages youth in planning. The program has a strength-based perspective and focuses on resiliency.

**Makes connections.** Staff work to involve families and attempt to help youth maintain life-long connections.

**Has a housing continuum.** The program is one of the few rural TLPs in Vermont that has developed a continuum of housing that begins with emergency shelter and ends with independent apartment living. To fund this continuum, it has successfully tapped into state Continuum of Care monies.

**Collaboration and use of volunteers.** NEKYS takes advantage of opportunities to collaborate and, unlike most other TLPs, has created a volunteer program to augment the services of paid staff. The other TLPs make little use of volunteers, though some say they are interested in the idea.

#### PROGRAM CHALLENGES & GAPS

**Community agreement on the main issues.** The program sometimes struggles to get other community providers to agree with what they perceive as the youths' primary needs: safe and affordable housing and staying off the streets.

**Transportation.** Rural Community Transportation, Inc. (RTC) runs very limited routes and schedules; service stops at 7 p.m. The local cab company is expensive and stops service at 9 p.m. Even when young people have cars, they are faced with rising fuel costs. The lack of transportation has a serious effect on youth. Because of intense competition for jobs, young people tend to work the least desirable second and third shifts, and often walk to and from jobs late at night. Young people also have difficulty getting to medical, mental health, and school-related appointments.

“Young people tend to work the least desirable second and third shifts, and often walk to and from jobs late at night.”



“The Living Room day shelter helps reduce the isolation youth often experience in the scattered-site apartments.”

**Access to education.** Staff say the school in St. Johnsbury is relatively intolerant of behavioral problems, and often expels youth when they get into trouble despite NEKYS' efforts to mediate. It is a common complaint among agencies that work with homeless youth, and points to the need for both solid school-agency relationships and a variety of educational options for vulnerable youth.

**Extra resources for youth enrichment and leadership.** Staff want to broaden the horizons of youth who have never left the area by exposing them to the larger world and the array of opportunities it can offer; they would also like to develop leadership roles in the community for program participants, giving them the chance to, say, organize festivals or co-facilitate trainings in youth development. But these things take time, money and staff, all in short supply at the agency.

**Job shadowing.** Youth need help realizing their full potential in the job market, and most don't know where to start. For that reason, staff would like to create or partner with another organization to develop a job shadowing program for youth, “something beyond traditional community mentors.”

**Aftercare.** Follow-through with teens is sometimes a challenge. Staff make connections and work with youth for a while and then lose touch with them. The community struggles to understand that the services NEKYS offers are voluntary and that youth can opt out; the agency is not a detention center.

## UNITED COUNSELING SERVICES, BENNINGTON

United Counseling Services is the only source for comprehensive mental health services in Bennington County (676 square miles). The agency offers services for people with severe mental illness, developmental disabilities, and emotional and behavioral disturbances; 24-hour crisis intervention; Employee Assistance Programs for businesses; job development programs for consumers seeking supported work; and outpatient and substance abuse counseling. The agency also runs the Bennington County Head Start Program and the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program. The TLP is one of several specialized children's services; it is formally connected to the area's JOBS Program because both work with needy youth.

## TRANSITION LIVING PROGRAM

UCS' TLP is an independent-living skills and housing program for youth 16–21 years of age who, for a variety of reasons, need to transition to their own apartment. Some, but not all, are at risk of imminent homelessness.

A majority of clients have been involved with other social service providers at some point in the past. Typical presenting issues include borderline personality disorder, PTSD, and depression; homelessness or risk of homelessness; and problems at home such as generational substance/alcohol abuse or domestic violence. The program also sees many young people who are either pregnant or who already have children.

Criteria for entry into the program are fairly loose. Youth do not have to be homeless or even at risk of homelessness; the program sometimes helps borderline disabled young people learn life skills in anticipation of their eventual departure from home, and is willing to assist young teen parents, helping them set up a household together so that they can function as a family.

“Typical issues include PTSD, depression, generational substance abuse and domestic violence.”

“A lot of times, the places they can afford are God-awful. They are places we don't encourage them to live.”

The program reported 60 referrals between summer 2006 and 2007. Thirty-four of those young persons spoke with the TLP coordinator; 22 of them completed the group life skills course, 11 were in apartments as of July 2007, and seven were receiving a rent subsidy from the agency. According to VCRHYP data for the year ending 10/1/07, the TLP served 23 new and 11 carry-over clients and 15 were over the age of 18.

Youth entering the TLP must commit to a series of 10 two-hour independent living classes that take place over two and a half months. Topics include money management, employment skills, shopping and cooking, social skills, and decision-making. If participants successfully graduate and have a job, the program will work with them to find a local apartment. The program provides small stipends on a month-by-month basis as needed; stipends range from \$75 to, in rare cases, \$400. Like many TLPs, the program is flexible in what it funds: in the past the program has paid for furniture, car repairs, and a client's college course.

The financial assistance is flexible. “There may be some kids you identify at the beginning who, when they get into an apartment, they're going to need \$150 a month to help them stay in the apartment, and it may be that consistently for a year they need \$150 from us in order to stay in that apartment and be successful. We hope that their circumstance changes so that they can receive less. But there may be somebody else who needs only \$25 a month, and someone who needs \$300 a month,” said Lorna Mattern, Director of Specialized Children's Services.

The TLP is somewhat unusual in that it has successfully developed group classes, and even added an extra six-week course, “Cooking for Life,” which it managed to get funded through a \$5,000 grant from an insurance company. It is assisted in the course by a University of Vermont extension program nutritionist and local chefs who conduct on-site demonstrations.

Most youth earn low-end wages, but several have actually landed decent jobs. “We have one kid working at the local Post Office who’s making more money than Debby (Stanlewicz, the TLP coordinator)” said Mattern. “We have someone working at NSK (a local factory). We have somebody working at Energizer. So the first thought that people have of the McDonald’s fast food job isn’t really accurate. One person is going for LNA (licensed nursing assistant) classes; another works at a cheese factory.”

But housing remains a struggle for most youth. “Some of our kids have gotten Section 8; some are in Regional Affordable Housing Corp. apartments, but currently, to be honest, some of the local landlords are cheaper and easier to get into because of the (affordable-housing) waiting list,” said Stanlewicz. The average one-bedroom rent in Bennington is about \$650 a month, with a two-bedroom going for \$700-\$900 a month. All youth apply for fuel assistance, and all are encouraged to look for apartments where utilities are included.

But in some places, like Manchester, rents remain so high that under normal circumstance no TLP youth could ever afford to live there. “A lot of time, the places they can afford are God-awful,” Mattern said. “They are places we don’t encourage them to live.”

## PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**Individualized programming.** Like most TLPs, this one is highly individualized, with regular individual case management meetings and assistance targeted to level of need. The program offers an unusual series of independent-living courses that allow youth to make connections with one another, prove their commitment to the program, and learn the skills they will need once they move out on their own.

“The first thought people have of the McDonald’s fast-food job isn’t really accurate.”

**Employment connection.** Many TLP youth seem to get reasonably good jobs; the program benefits from its formal connection to the local JOBS program.

**Collaboration.** Like other TLPs, this program has extensive connections and partnerships in the community.

#### PROGRAM CHALLENGES & GAPS

**Shelter and transitional housing.** The program needs emergency shelter beds for youth who are literally on the streets, but until recently had none to offer. Instead, teens in such dire straights ended up in hotel rooms; the agency spent \$9,000 or \$10,000 in the summer of 2006 this way. “We’d have two or three kids in a hotel at a time, for about 10 days,” said Mattern. “Nobody wants to put two or three 18-year-olds in a hotel. But we had a hotel locally where we could call and say, this is so-and-so from UCS, and they’d give us a deal and bill us. But in the last couple of years there’s been an increase in the number of kids who are homeless.” With more needy youth and more hotel bills on the horizon, the agency found a solution by simply renting an apartment designated for such clients. It was cheaper as an emergency option for already-homeless youth, and it actually prevented homelessness by giving the agency a place to put young people in its care who were transitioning from one place to another. But, despite that fact, after a year the agency found that it could no longer afford the apartment, and now is back to square one.

Apart from the problem of providing emergency shelter, staff say the program also needs apartments where homeless youth could stay while they complete the independent-living classes that are a prerequisite to moving into subsidized TLP housing.

“ We spent \$9,000 or \$10,000 last summer, where we'd have two or three kids in a hotel at a time for about 10 days each. ”

**Spotty presence in remote areas of county.** Some parts of the county are not effectively served because the agency has little presence there. Like other TLPs, this program barely promotes itself, and thus never enrolls many of the young people who could use its services. With additional funds for staff and housing stipends, recruitment efforts could grow.

**High housing costs.** Rents in some areas of the county (such as Manchester) have risen much faster than the grant anticipated, and youth simply can't afford to live there. The average one-bedroom rent in the area is about \$650 a month; the average two-bedroom is \$700 to \$900 a month.

**Transportation.** There is limited local bus transportation and it is inadequate for getting clients to jobs and classes. Unlike many programs, this one has no van; youth are transported in individual staff cars.

**Flexible schedules for work and school.** Young people need access to post-high-school or post-drop-out training programs that are more flexible, and child care must be made available for young parents who work the second shift.

“Some of our kids have gotten Section 8; some are in regional affordable housing. But to be honest, some of the local landlords are cheaper and easier to get into.”

## WASHINGTON COUNTY YOUTH SERVICE BUREAU/BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB, MONTPELIER

The Washington County Youth Service Bureau/Boys & Girls Club (WCYSB) provides a wide array of counseling, support and prevention services for youth living in the county (695 square miles). WCYSB is the administrative agency for the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs.

### TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

The agency's TLP assists youth between 16 and 21 who are in need of stable housing. "There are lots of young people where there's been ongoing family conflict in the home for many years. Sometimes they're 18 now, and they just need to get out," said Nora Lovelette, the program's coordinator. "A lot of times we have folks in DCF custody, they are out, they go back to their biological parents, and it doesn't work out. If there's a lapse in time between them leaving state custody and coming back to us, we can do it, but we're not the next step [directly from foster care]." The program also does not accept young people on furlough from prison or those with serious developmental disabilities. "If the person doesn't have the ability to live on their own, and they're never going to have [that ability] then it is not an appropriate referral for me."

The program provides up to 18 months of financial assistance to help participants pay for rent, groceries, and other necessities while they transition to self-sufficiency. (That, at least, is the goal; in reality, many clients do not reach self-sufficiency by the end of the program, mostly due to high housing costs in the area.)

“There are lots of young people where there's been ongoing family conflict for many years, and they're 18, and they just need to get out.”

According to VCRHYP data for the year ending 10/1/07, the TLP served 14 new clients and 15 carry-over clients. Fifteen of the clients were over the age of 18.

Following a one-month assessment that takes into account a youth's independent-living skills, drug and alcohol use, and source of regular income, the young person and the program coordinator decide on an appropriate living situation. This can be an apartment of their own, an apartment shared with peers, a mentored roommate situation, or a host home; all are options advertised in the program's brochure. In reality, almost all youngsters end up in their own or shared apartments. The other options, while potentially beneficial, "are hard to find, and the young people are just not interested in that," said Lovelette, echoing other program coordinators. Early in the program, youth submit applications for Land Trust housing and for Section 8 vouchers. When they enter housing, they receive rent stipends that average about \$300 a month; there is no ceiling. "If they were sick one day and didn't work, or needed new tires for their car, we can offset that a little bit."

Lovelette has been in her job for eight years – long enough to see the program, and what it can realistically achieve for youth, change. "It's so different from when I started," she said. "When I started, a young person who was in the program would oftentimes be finishing high school – they were younger. There are a lot of kids in their 20's now. It was possible then for folks to live on their own. My idea of the program was that we were trying to get folks to live independently without living off the system. Now, I feel like we're just waiting for a Section 8 voucher to free up or for their Reach Up to kick in, or for the system to otherwise come into place to help these folks. It's too expensive to live otherwise."

“When I first started, a lot of clients didn't even stay for the 18 months. Now, we've extended it at times, because we'd be pulling the rug out from under somebody if we ended.”



“They're doing everything they're supposed to be doing: they're working, they're going to school, and they just can't make it.”

Many clients now can't make it financially no matter how many hours they work.

“When I first started, a lot of people didn't even stay for the 18 months.

Nowadays, we've extended it at times, because we'd be pulling the rug out from under somebody if we ended. Because they're doing everything they're supposed to be doing: they're working, they're going to school, and they just can't make it.”

#### PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**Staff.** The TLP has a committed, knowledgeable long-term coordinator who knows the issues and is visible in local advocacy efforts.

**Collaboration and advocacy around housing.** The program is active in the city's attempt to create affordable housing. A local coalition has started a “Rental Opportunity Center” at Central Vermont Community Land Trust. Modeled on a center in Burlington, this is one-stop shopping for people looking for low-cost housing. Lovelette will share staffing duties.

#### PROGRAM CHALLENGES & GAPS

**Funding.** Like most TLPs that subsidize youth in apartments, the program can only help young people as long as its budget holds out. The program needs more funds, more diverse funds, and more staff; Lovelette is the program's sole worker.

**Short-term shelter for youth who are over 18.** WCYSB has an emergency host-home program for younger teens who are headed toward reunification with their families, but there is no shelter for older teens in crisis. The adult shelter in town isn't a good choice for young people, said Lovelette.

**The rising cost of housing.** Young adults often cannot make it on their own even after being in the program for 18 months. “When I first started, what really needed to happen was for folks to finish school, so they could work more hours” and pay their rent. “Well, that’s not the case anymore. You have to work 60 or 80 hours to pay it now.” Because of local housing costs, the agency needs more access to Land Trust apartments for its young people. Those apartments rent for about \$650 for two bedrooms; “that’s affordable,” said Lovelette. She notes, however, that there are waiting lists for those units, and it takes luck and good timing to get one.

**Coverage of county.** The program acknowledges that it misses a lot of youth who never hear about the TLP or are too far away to get to it. This is a common problem for the state’s rural TLPs; they are too busy working with youth who show up at their doors to reach out to young people in their catchment areas who may need them just as much or even more.

**Youth with marginal ability to be self-sufficient.** This is an issue for all TLPs, who sometimes see young people who qualified for special services as children but, at 18, no longer do. Often there is no short-term residential program for such youth, and certainly not the long-term assisted living programs that they truly need. To illustrate the difficulty, Lovelette points to Nelson Street Apartments, run by a local mental health agency. The facility has several apartments, one of which is occupied by a “housemother type person who looks in on the residents, makes sure their apartments are clean, takes them grocery shopping, etc.” Lovelette said that Nelson Street “picked up some of the borderline kids,” but that residents in the program must receive Supplemental Social Security, which goes directly to the program to pay for the apartment. She’s gotten one youth into the program, but only because she could support him financially (he didn’t qualify for SSI payments). Eventually, he got a section 8 voucher and moved into another apartment.

“Back then, we were trying to get folks to live independently without living off the system. Now, we're just waiting for a Section 8 voucher to free up or for Reach Up to kick in. It's too expensive to live otherwise.”

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**Perception of youth.** Lovelette doesn't feel young people are valued by the community. Finding employers willing to hire her clients, and landlords willing to rent to them, remains difficult. What would help? A shift in attitudes, she said. It is not clear, however, how to effect such a change.

Youth with  
marginal ability  
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problems for  
all TLPs.

## WINDSOR COUNTY YOUTH SERVICES, LUDLOW

Windsor County Youth Services (WCYS) offers emergency and longer-term shelter, counseling, case management, and educational services to distressed, runaway or homeless young people in the county. The agency operates two shelter facilities: Mountainside House, in Ludlow, which houses boys 13 to 22; and The House at 20-Mile Stream, in Proctorsville, which houses girls 13 to 22. Windsor County is the largest in Vermont at 971 square miles.

### TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

Windsor County Youth Services houses small TLP units, one for boys and one for girls, housed in each of the two shelter facilities. Mountainside House, the male shelter, has a total of nine beds, with two designated for TLP clients (the rest are shelter beds, for younger clients who will reunite with their families). The female shelter, The House at 20-Mile Stream, has seven beds, with two designated for TLP. Because both sites offer short-term shelter beds for children under 18, both have 24-hour staffing and caseworker support. That means that – unlike most other TLPs in the state – this agency has the ability to house TLP participants on an immediate, emergency basis.

The TLP conducts a two-week assessment with youth to see if they'll fit into the program, during which time the youth stays in the shelter. Once the youth becomes a TLP client, a plan is developed for education, employment, support services, and therapy. The program does not have or need a waiting list. "It doesn't really work to keep people in the wings," said Jacqueline Hanlon, director of Mountainside House. "Most kids, if they're 18 or under, if they want TLP service but we don't have a bed, we'll take them through the shelter and try to help them find a place where they can be – Job Corps, sometimes, family members, that kind of thing. So everybody comes in through the shelter." The program does provide some informal assistance with apartment-finding, as part of after-care, but this is not a formal program component.

“It really doesn't work to keep people waiting in the wings. If they're 18 and we don't have a TLP bed, we'll take them through the shelter and try to help them find a place where they can be.”

“Once they come, as long as they're willing to work within our parameters, they're safe and fed and can get medical care and get their GED done.”

Among recent TLP clients are a young man with mental health issues waiting for Supplemental Social Security payments to kick in; a youth coming out of drug rehab; and a young man aging out of child welfare custody “who is probably going to fall apart as soon as he turns 18.” The program is also seeing youth with cognitive issues who need long-term supportive housing. “You’re not sure what to do with them,” said Cristin Kenyon, director of the girls' program.

But even the needs of the more typical youth are daunting. “It’s pretty rare when you have a girl who comes in and tells you she wants to finish school. Maybe they have job experience, but probably not, aside from maybe working for a family member or working in the yard for a parent. Drug and alcohol abuse is huge, and poor relationships, abusive relationships, I get that a lot.”

Pregnant and parenting youth are “very few and far between” at the TLP; program staff said they seem to go elsewhere. “We’re residential and quite often with p-and-p teens, they’ll go to Lund, or to [a] program in New Hampshire,” said Hanlon. “The couple of girls who have been through the program had kids in custody they were trying to get back, so they were trying to get stabilized, and we work well with DCF.”

According to VCRHYP data for the year ending 10/1/07, the WCYS TLP worked with a total of 10 new youth and two carry-over. Five of the clients were 18 or older.

## PROGRAM STRENGTHS

The program is unusual in that it offers both emergency housing for youth in crisis, and supervised housing for teens in the TLP. Thus the first two stages of the continuum – immediate shelter and supervised residential services – are in place, and that is a distinct benefit for youth in need. Said Hanlon: “Once they come, they’re safe, and as long as they’re willing to work within the parameters of what we can offer for safety reasons and our licenses, the kid’s fed and safe and can get medical care and get their GED done.” Youth can achieve a great deal if they’re motivated; for instance, living in the TLP can give them a chance to save money toward their own apartment. For a variety of reasons, though, such youth are not particularly common. “Of all the kids who get referred here, there’s probably one every year who can really come through and be successful. But lots of kids get some help.”

## PROGRAM CHALLENGES & GAPS

**Efficient housing model, but unappealing to older youth.** Because the program is very structured, TLP youth, who are older and seeking a measure of independence, can find it constraining. That translates to less-than-optimum use of services; the agency’s relatively few TLP beds aren’t always full, and most youth in the program don’t stay the allowable length of time (18 months). “The trouble here is that there isn’t as much freedom for a kid as there would be in their own homes,” said Hanlon. “You can’t even smoke on the property, even if you’re 20. There are those kind of things that make it tough for kids here.”

“Of all the kids who get referred here, there's probably one every year who can really come through and be successful. But a lot get some help.”

“Once the youth gets a bank account with 1,000 or 1,500 bucks in it, the parents are interested, so they return home.”

**Need for transitional housing.** The WCYS has the ability to provide immediate, emergency shelter and recognizes the need to develop more of the housing continuum for TLP youth. The agency did attempt to open a TLP house in the past, but was not able to fill it. The staff sometimes thinks about how nice an apartment program would be. “We’ve talked about it – shelter a couple of weeks, then TLP in-house, then graduate to an apartment,” said Hanlon. “It might be a good incentive for them, if we could provide that level. It would be a situation with a lot less supervision and more freedom.”

**Rural area, lack of personal connections.** Kenyon said that many of the girls coming into the program are not local, and thus don’t have the personal relationships that could help them stabilize and put down roots. For them, the rural nature of the area makes the isolation worse. “There is not that out for them, so it’s work, it’s adult ed, it’s coming home, and ‘what do I do with myself?’” said Kenyon. “It’s rural, so if you want to take them to Springfield, you have to have a staff do it, or they’ve got to work around the bus. So it’s more difficult for them to create new relationships.”

**Family pressure.** The program notes a problem typical for TLPs: manipulation by parents who prey on youth once they’re stabilized in the program. “Once they (the youth) get a bank account with a 1,000 or 1,500 bucks in it, the parents are interested in that, so the kids return home. ” Those situations usually don’t end well, of course; the young person is only welcome so long as the money lasts.

**Transportation.** There is a public bus system, but it tends to work only for a minority of TLP youth – the ones who have Monday-to-Friday, 9-to-5 schedules. Otherwise, the program staff provide transportation for TLP youth. Clearly TLP clients would benefit from more options. Since buying a car, plus paying for maintenance, gas and insurance, is beyond the means of most TLP

youth, a program that makes low-cost or free cars available to people in need would be particularly welcome in the area.

**Jobs.** Most of the program's young people work in retail stores or in restaurants, with low wages and little or no opportunity for advancement. With the recent closing of the JOBS program in Springfield, a valuable employment resource for many TLP clients was lost. The TLP has not really been able to duplicate its services. "We don't have the time. We have one program coordinator and she works with every kid in both programs, and we have our regular staff who are willing to chip in, but it's hard," said Hanlon.

Creating safe and positive opportunities for social time for the TLP participants is also a program wish. "It would be nice if the TLP kids could spend some more time together (boys and girls)," said Hanlon. On the other hand, that's when ill-fated romances begin happening. "They're so needy and so lonely that they just want to get married to each other."

“Drug and alcohol abuse is huge, and poor relationships, abusive relationships. I get that a lot.”



“It's all about who we are, what it is we want youth to have, and which pieces are our pieces.”

## YOUTH SERVICES OF WINDHAM COUNTY, BRATTLEBORO

Youth Services of Windham County offers an array of programs for children, adolescents and families in Windham County and nearby New Hampshire. Among its programs are clinical services, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, youth development programs, juvenile/adult court diversion and restorative justice programs, and alcohol education.

## TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

Youth Services' TLP offers a range of services to 16- to 21-year-olds who are homeless or in imminent danger of becoming homeless. The TLP uses both program-subsidized individual apartments that youth locate themselves, and host homes generated through the youth's own contacts.

As in most TLPs, clients are not run-of-the-mill teenagers who simply want to leave home; they are troubled by any standard. “Everybody on my caseload is connected to some other community or internal resource – often counseling, or an education or jobs program, or sometimes a diversion program,” said Kati Knapp, the program's coordinator and sole worker. Pregnant and parenting youth constitute one-third of the TLP case load and Knapp said teen pregnancy “is definitely on the rise in the community.”

The TLP deals with basic needs first. Youth are assessed for about a month and screened for major mental illness, substance abuse and major involvement with the legal system. They are also assessed for financial readiness, because they must have an income to go into the housing program. Clients set short-term goals in the areas of housing, education, employment, health and life skills. Housing stipends are available, generally ranging from \$300 to \$350 per month. In emergencies, youth may receive more.

“One of the things about having a scattered-site program is that there’s an expectation that youth will be able to contribute toward their housing, and that they’ll have an income of some form (before getting into an apartment),” said Knapp. “I definitely get people who are working, who aren’t working, who are at different places in the process, and if the assessment takes more time or less time, it’s honestly about money.”

Youth are often referred to the program by friends; many are referred by the local JOBS program and Vermont Adult Learning as well.

According to VCRHYP data for the one-year period ending 10/1/07, the TLP worked with six new and seven carryover clients, and 10 of them were age 18 or older. As with many of the state’s TLPs, those numbers look smaller than they actually are. “The thing about this program is that, if you look at the statistics, people who come in and get housed generally stay for the whole 18 months,” said Knapp. “They’re housed, we’re helping to support them financially, they have this service base. So people generally stay in the program. That means that those numbers are low. Last year, we had 15 people who were officially ‘open’ clients and in housing. But the number of people I saw was 50-something. People come in, and I work with them for two weeks, and they kind of figure out somewhere they can go, and they go off and do their own thing.”

## PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**Energetic and experienced coordinator.** Knapp, who doubles as coordinator of the agency’s street outreach program, has been in her job for five years, and in that time she has become known in the community as a powerful advocate for young people. “The strength as I see it is our one staff”

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“There are higher-need youth in town who maybe we could take if there were more staff present.”

person who’s totally dedicated to it,” said Youth Services executive director Allyson Villars. “She has a reputation in the whole community. It’s about a personal presence, a person who really believes in and is dedicated to this.” (Energetic local champions are key to the success of all the TLPs in this report, and that very fact underscores the programs’ vulnerability. Inadvertently proving this point, in spring 2008 Knapp left her job to pursue graduate education.)

**Collaboration.** The program has numerous productive collaborations both with other Youth Services programs and with agencies in the community. Its youth benefit from the state’s alternative high-school degree program, and the program is good at finding local resources and services to assist clients.

**Commitment to clarifying its mission.** More than most other programs interviewed for this report, Youth Services is working to clarify its mission, a process that should make it easier to set goals for the TLP. “It’s all about who we are, what it is that we want youth to have, and which pieces are our piece and what are the priorities of those pieces, so we can move according to an agenda that’s been established by a vertical slice of the community,” said Villars. “I believe that (transitional living) will be one of the higher priority topics.”

#### PROGRAM CHALLENGE & GAPS

**Limited staff, limited money.** All aspects of the program – which covers an area of 789 square miles – are run by one person. With more money, Knapp said she would “hire another full-time person. There’s a lot of stuff that could happen if there were more staff people. There are higher-need youth in town that maybe we could take if there were more staff present.” With such limited staff and the pressure of keeping TLP youth in school, in work and in

scattered-site apartments, the “extras,” such as conducting group cooking classes or other life-skills classes, have been almost impossible. Meeting the needs throughout the county and surrounding areas is challenging; “I feel like Deerfield Valley and Bellows Falls are totally underserved,” Knapp said. One of Youth Services' case managers in Bellows Falls describes “a whole population of kids” who are homeless, unemployed and heavy substance abusers with no place to go, she said.

**Peer outreach workers.** One way to address the lack of regular staff would be to create a peer outreach worker program. “In my dream world I have an army of peer outreach workers. I really do think that peer outreach carries so much weight, and I see that with the people who come into the program. Why should they trust me? Because their friend told them I’m okay. In my dream, there would be pair outreach workers in all the major town centers – Wilmington, Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, Townsend.”

**Emergency shelter.** There is no emergency shelter for youth in crisis; the area's one adult shelter is often full and not really appropriate for young people. The closest youth shelter is in Windsor County, but Youth Services can rarely find an open bed there for out-of-county youth. There is a local program for young mothers and some supports for parents, but no other housing programs for TLP-aged clients.

**Need for a continuum of housing within the TLP.** Because of these gaps, the program recognizes the need for additional housing options for TLP youth. Knapp talks wistfully about the possibility of a youth shelter, though she notes that without more staff, running a shelter would be unrealistic. “I would love to add some sort of staffed residency – in my dream world, that exists. It’s probably an SRO model; it has 24-hour awake staff. It would be for all the kids I feel I can’t serve now, because they need a level of supervision (they can’t get in a private apartment).” Longer-term housing options are also a problem. The one boarding house in the community is entirely inappropriate for young people. “It is full of substance-abusing middle-age men” and is not a safe place for youth, Knapp said.

“I would love to have some kind of staffed residency – in my dream world, that exists. It’s probably an SRO model. It has 24-hour awake staff.”

“I’m seeing more kids who don’t quite have the skill sets necessary to meet TLP expectations without a lot of turmoil and difficulty.”

**Limited transportation.** There is a local bus system, but no public transportation in the rural areas of the counties. Most youth find their own rides with friends or others. “Most of the people that come into my program want to move into a downtown area, because that’s where the jobs are and where things are accessible,” said Knapp.

**Gaps in services for youth with disabilities turning 18.** “I feel like there are some gaps in larger systems when you turn 18, around developmental disabilities,” Knapp said. “I’m seeing more kids who don’t quite have the skill set necessary to meet the TLP expectations without a lot of turmoil and difficulty, but the requirements of severity to access other services related to developmental disabilities in the community really shoots up once you’re 18.”

As an alternative for youth with developmental delays, Knapp has tried long-term host homes, but knows that these young people need more support – sometimes even permanent support – as they transition to adulthood. Knapp gives an example suggesting the difficulty of finding appropriate housing for cognitively borderline clients. “I have a young woman I’ve worked with for about a year, and she’s definitely made some strides in the host home she is in, but she needs a supported living environment. But moving her now – it’s time for her to take another step – and finding something else for her is really hard. Her IQ is 10 points higher than what would qualify her for any developmental disability. When she was under 18, she could access all those services.”

The young woman’s personal story, and her utter lack of family support and resources, is typical of TLP youth. “Her family is scattered; her mother has some pretty severe mental health and substance abuse issues; her father is traveling around and doesn’t have a permanent residence. The host home where she landed has been a great resource for her, but life changes in that family are making it so she can’t be there any more.”

## PROMISING PRACTICES ELSEWHERE:

### WHAT OTHER SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES ARE DOING

#### PANHANDLE COMMUNITY SERVICES - SCOTTSBLUFF, NEBRASKA

Rural TLPs can be more or less effective depending on how they marshal their resources, and on the strategies they decide to use to overcome their most intractable problems. Panhandle Community Services is as rural as an agency can get: it serves seven counties in the northwestern corner of Nebraska, an area of 91,000 people spread over 14,000 square miles.

The agency maintains five apartments in a 16-apartment building in one of its larger towns, Scottsbluff. One apartment is used for an office and four are occupied by TLP participants; the landlord charges the agency only for those four. The program used to provide scattered-site apartments but found the model didn't work well because the distances were too great to monitor and support residents effectively. TLP clients come from all over the region, some from as far away as California. No matter where they come from, to participate in the TLP, they must move to Scottsbluff.

The agency uses its Street Outreach Program (SOP) as a bridge to its TLP. The bridge works two ways: it gets staff into the most rural places, where they can find and establish relationships with youth who need help; and it provides assessment and triage for clients headed toward the TLP. Along with outreach staff, the SOP uses adult volunteers in rural communities to establish support groups and distribute educational materials. The outreach schedule is posted on a "My Space" website; youth check the schedule and show up to meet with workers. Meeting locations are public places like mini-marts and parking lots, but the agency also maintains offices in some small towns. Outreach staff and volunteers meet regularly with center-based staff.

Street outreach is a bridge to the TLP. Adult volunteers in rural areas establish support groups and distribute agency materials. The outreach schedule is posted on a 'My Space' website.

## YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES - EL RENO, OKLAHOMA

It is natural and common for young people on the cusp of adulthood to leave home for opportunities elsewhere. Indeed, moving away from home and parents is a rite of passage for more affluent youth, who can enjoy quasi-independent life in college while benefiting from the sheltered environment that a dorm or college apartment can offer. But poorer youth don't have the same structured opportunity for adventure and independence. Their lives, particularly in extremely rural areas, are far more circumscribed, and their chances for education and jobs are limited to what their local environment offers. Like the Scottsbluff program, Youth and Family Services, located in El Reno, Okla., has found that working effectively with homeless rural youth sometimes means moving them to a more urban location.

The agency covers Kingfisher, Blaine and Canadian counties, where El Reno, about 20 miles south of Oklahoma City, is located. Though hardly a big city, El Reno has a community college, public transportation, jobs, apartments, and access to social services simply unavailable elsewhere in the area.

A single full-time outreach worker provides services to youth in Blaine and Kingfisher counties. Her position is supported by a combination of TLP and Workforce Investment Act funds. It is a particularly appropriate pairing of funds, since both programs support young people who are transitioning to adulthood.

“A lot of what she does is preventative stuff, going in and seeing what's happening in particular situations, sending counselors out to families to resolve issues that will keep youth from getting kicked out or leaving home,” said Kirk Huff, an independent living specialist with the program. Other resources, such as rural technology education centers that are free for resident youth, allow many young people to stay in their home counties. Although the WIA program maintains stricter eligibility requirements than the TLP, the funding still is flexible enough to allow the agency to occasionally help young people in those outlying counties with rent or utilities. But to get substantial help with housing, young people must move to El Reno, where the program rents 10 regular TLP apartments and five apartments for pregnant/parenting teens in a single building.

“A lot of what the outreach worker does is send counselors out to families to resolve issues that will keep youth from getting kicked out or leaving home.”

Once they move in, they receive an unusual level of financial support. A young person going into a TLP apartment is first encouraged to pay off his or her debts, then to try to make payments of \$50 per month toward rent. The agency holds that money for them, and the youth get it back in a lump sum when they leave the program. With rents in the town fairly reasonable – the market rate for apartments can be less than \$400 a month – the agency finds the arrangement affordable from a budgetary point of view, and helpful for its young people, who can concentrate on getting on their feet rather than on simply paying the bills.

#### TABOR COMMUNITY SERVICES - LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA

Tabor Community Services is a housing and financial counseling agency in Lancaster, Penn., a small city located in the center of rural Lancaster County. Since 1988, the agency has taken the lead in reducing rural homelessness through an approach called “rapid re-housing” – a model that aims to help homeless families and individuals locate permanent rental housing within three months of their initial referral, using no cash subsidies whatsoever.

Clients are referred by many sources – drug treatment programs, the faith community, school social workers, mental health agencies, and homeless services providers (there are two small shelters in the city of Lancaster, and none outside the city). Public transportation is extremely limited, so agency caseworkers are posted in satellite offices around the county and always travel to clients rather than asking clients to come to them.

The agency conducts two orientation meetings a week for new clients, each of whom leaves with an appointment with a case manager. Each client is required to attend a class on landlord-tenant relationships that describes the responsibilities of each party. (Clients receive a certificate of completion, which the agency finds to be both a point of pride for recipients and helpful with landlords even after the clients have left the program.)

The Tabor model aims to help homeless clients locate permanent housing within three months, using no cash subsidies whatsoever.



Efforts to raise clients' incomes take place only after they are housed. The approach is unconventional, but has been successful.

The agency offers no cash subsidies to clients, and, because of long waiting lists for Section 8 vouchers, is almost never able to place them in designated low-cost housing. Instead, its choices are limited to whatever rental units are available, at whatever the market rate happens to be.

How does the agency manage, especially in a county with low vacancy rates and a recent upward drift in housing costs? The answer is relationships. Each case manager has his or her own landlord contacts, and constantly develops connections to others, especially the small “mom-and-pop” operations that may have only one or two apartments to rent. Trust develops over time, and gradually landlords become willing to negotiate. Sometimes, a security deposit can be paid in increments over twelve months, or utilities not initially included in the rent can be added in. Other times, landlords who want to “give back” to the community can be persuaded to reduce the rent to a sum that just covers their own costs. Landlords rarely run credit or criminal background checks on prospective renters from Tabor; as long as clients remain in the program, landlords count on the agency to vouch for them and keep them in good standing. (Dropping out of the program will result in a call to the landlord, who can then begin standard eviction proceedings if the renter is problematic. In reality, though, this almost never happens; very few clients leave the program. Program services can last up to 18 months, but most clients are managing well on their own after a year.)

Even with such negotiated arrangements, “affordable” is a relative concept, and many clients initially pay 75% or more of their income in rent. Efforts to raise their income, by helping them acquire a better job and/or apply for benefits, take place only after they are housed. The approach is unconventional, but the agency has been successful; a year after placement, 86% of its clients are still in their housing and are doing well.

The extremely limited number of emergency shelter beds in the county still poses a problem, however, because clients need some place to stay while they wait for a permanent home. The answer hasn't been to augment the county's small shelter system, however. Instead, the agency has invested in long-term relationships with

the county's faith communities. Through an interfaith organization called Love INC. of Lancaster County, congregations can join together to pay the rent on apartments in which homeless clients can live for up to three months. Some churches use their parsonages for housing; at least one congregation bought a double-wide trailer that it uses for this purpose. In the last six years the program has grown to include 18 transitional apartments where homeless families and individuals can live while awaiting more permanent housing. Part of that expansion was driven by Tabor's own staff, who talked their own congregations into joining the faith coalition. As with all aspects of its programming, the agency has found that the real work of homeless advocacy is about building personal relationships and slowly bringing the community around to the recognition that only it can provide long-lasting solutions to homelessness.

#### PROMISING PRACTICES ELSEWHERE: BUSINESS & COMMUNITIES

The easiest place to run a TLP is in an urban area, where social resources – alternative schools, job training, transportation, substance abuse treatment, and employment – are plentiful. In such areas, TLPs can concentrate on the youth who are most likely to succeed, referring extremely high-need young people to other services. Rural TLPs work under almost opposite circumstances. Social resources are scarce in rural communities, and that scarcity creates serious obstacles for both agencies and youth. Furthermore, programs in rural areas work with a wide range of young people, those who will probably succeed and those who may not. For these reasons, running a rural TLP can seem like a constant struggle.

All the programs in this report are, by necessity, extremely resourceful. Staff are excellent at collaboration and partnerships, and highly knowledgeable about every actual or even potential resource their environment might make available for youth. They know both the social services system and their communities intimately, and exploit the resources available to them. Thus the problems of TLPs are often not embedded in the programs themselves. Instead they are external community problems like high housing costs, rising inflation, inadequate public transportation, and lack of job training – dysfunctional social arrangements that make it difficult for vulnerable, troubled young people to stabilize themselves and move into productive, self-sufficient adulthood.

The problems of TLPs are often not embedded in the programs themselves. Instead they are external community problems.

Evaluations show that the retention rate for School-to-Work graduates is higher than for other employees.

In the past 10 years, the country has seen a burgeoning of innovative, large-scale efforts to meet the needs of transitioning young people. The following section looks at some of those sponsors, first from the private sector, and then from communities at large.

#### BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Most TLPs in this study said the lack of available, accessible and livable-wage employment is a major challenge for young people. While youth can get decent, career-track jobs in some areas, in other places those jobs simply aren't available, are impossible to get to, impose work schedules that youth in school or with babies cannot adhere to, or require skills and training that they do not have. Staff from most TLPs voiced a hope that their communities would begin to value young people, to prioritize them, and to step up in a coordinated way to give them opportunities that, in the long run, would benefit both the young people and the larger society. This section highlights successful employment programs that could serve as a model for public-private collaboration in Vermont.

**United Parcel Service (UPS) and the Annie E. Casey Foundation** pioneered a model for private-sector workforce development in 1998 in Baltimore, where it began the School-to-Career Partnership, focusing specifically on young people who had been in foster care. Under the program, teens are trained for job interviews at UPS and learn the skills necessary for holding down a job. Participants who successfully complete the three-week training apply to UPS for a part-time position. If hired, they receive \$8.50 to \$9.50 an hour, on-the-job support, tuition reimbursement of up to \$5,000 a year and medical benefits. The program has since spread to other areas, taken on new partners, and expanded eligibility to other at-risk youth. Evaluations show that the retention rate for School-to-Career graduates is higher than for other employees.

**First Jobs Maine/Hannaford Bros.** First Jobs Maine began in 2004 as a partnership between a Portland-based employment services agency and the Hannaford grocery chain. The goal was twofold: to produce a trained, reliable workforce for Hannaford, and to provide first-time jobs and longer-term career opportunities to youth who were, or had been, in foster care. The program offers an unusual degree of support to both youth participants and store management. With funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and technical assistance from Casey Family Services and the University of

Southern Maine, the young people get customized job placement, coaching, and retention support, while store management staff learn about the behavioral and emotional problems common to children who have been abused or neglected. The program has been successful: to date, Hannaford has employed more than 150 youth in 21 stores, with a retention rate of 82 percent. First Jobs has since expanded to serve youth with disabilities who are referred through Maine's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and it now places young people in other businesses as well, including Home Depot and TD Banknorth. The program has found that young people are more likely to succeed if they have had solid life-skills preparation and get ongoing support. For that reason, the partnership is creating "First Jobs Academy," which will be housed in several Hannaford stores in southern Maine. The academy will provide additional life-skills training to selected participants; it will also provide training in youth vocational support to Hannaford employees headed for jobs in management.

**TJX Companies and Job Corps.** TJX has partnered with Job Corps in New England to provide young people in five Job Corps sites with the skills they need to get and keep jobs in the retail industry. The company's recruitment staff conducts a training program twice a week over a twelve-week period at selected Job Corps sites. The training, which teaches real-world business skills, is as an optional component young people can elect to take in addition to their regular Job Corps classes. The training program focuses on customer service, communication skills, dressing for success, conducting job searches, and creating budgets. Once adequately prepared, the students are granted job interviews with a TJX company.

**CVS/Pharmacy Pathways to Pharmacy.** This program, begun in 2000 in partnership with America's Promise/Alliance for Youth, works with city school systems and youth-serving agencies to identify young people interested in a career in pharmacy. It offers paid internships, career mentoring and life-skills training. In 2007, CVS pledged to introduce one million inner city and rural youths to careers in the field.

**Bank of America and Year Up** (a Boston-based non-profit that partners with area businesses, and provides education, support, and training to youth) have teamed up to create

First Jobs offers an unusual amount of support both youth employees and store management.

New efforts are based on the conviction that small, scattered programs for young people already in serious trouble will never be enough to solve or prevent homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, or other youth problems.

apprenticeships for urban youth in Boston. Bank of America runs the 6-month apprenticeships and provides funding to support the apprentices during the year-long program, which includes a training period as well as the apprenticeship.

#### COMMUNITIES: THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Below are four models of large-scale collaborations taking place around the country on behalf of transitioning youth. They are examples of community or state efforts to combine the resources and expertise of public and private sectors, and in some cases, local faith communities as well. The trend toward such integrated community strategies suggest that localities can come to a new understanding about the issues of young people. The guiding philosophy behind such efforts is the conviction that small, scattered programs for young people already in serious trouble will never be enough to solve or prevent youth homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, or other serious problems. The issues of troubled youth are multi-faceted, and require many different approaches spearheaded by different types of organizations, coordinated by one central player capable of forging consensus, formulating a clear framework for action, and then moving forward aggressively.

These collaborations assume that the problems that lead to serious youth dysfunction begin early, are identifiable, and are impossible to “treat” separately. Therefore they focus on that segment of young people in their communities who seem headed for trouble. How large is this population? If disconnection from family is an indicator, it is large indeed. One study conducted in New England in 2000 and 2001 indicates that the number of unduplicated transient/homeless students connected to any given high school is equal to between 10% to 16% of that school’s student body population.

**Connected by 25**, a coalition of 35 community groups, educators, business leaders, and policy makers in Portland, Ore., was founded in 2006 after community leaders became convinced that a growing number of young people were entering adulthood without the skills they needed to work or contribute positively to society. The coalition has looked hard at the research on youth, and on the interventions that can really make a difference. Its first initiative, Ninth Grade Counts, targets students just as they begin their high school careers, a make-or-break time when many teenagers begin a long downhill slide. The program is made up of three interrelated efforts, all drawing heavily on volunteers and

backed up by research. The three prongs are: academic programs and tutoring during the summer months; mentoring by adult advocates; and “community connection” activities (opportunities to volunteer or intern that help kids learn about service and what is happening in their communities). Ninth Grade Counts takes place in the context of an overall attempt to identify youth in trouble at various points and places, and to coordinate all city programs providing educational, mentoring and social services into a more complementary, effective system.

### **The Massachusetts Youth Teenage Unemployment Reduction Network**

**(MY TURN), Inc.** is a private, non-profit corporation that helps disadvantaged youth transition into job training or college. The organization focuses on first generation college-bound students, students who are leaving high school straight for the workforce, and high school drop-outs who need to finish their education and learn workplace skills. For youth in the last category, the program provides work-based learning experiences and permanent jobs as well as mentoring, supervision and on-going training. To make the program work, the agency relies on extensive collaborations between businesses, schools, community agencies and religious organizations.

**Pathways to Success by 21 (P21)** is a statewide effort to improve the future prospects for vulnerable youth ages 16 to 21 across Massachusetts. It seeks to encourage greater collaboration between state-level youth-serving agencies, while simultaneously helping local and regional youth-serving systems to better coordinate the delivery of services to vulnerable youth. Mostly a collaboration between various parts of the child welfare system, the program has, among other things, developed a workplace assessment tool for youth, and expanded public funding for housing for transition-aged youth not from the foster care system.

**Fostering Success** was launched at Vanderbilt University in 2002 as a pilot program aimed at helping foster youth succeed after aging out of the system. The program, originally funded by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, is now a large community collaboration between traditional youth-service agencies, the United Way, Vanderbilt, and local businesses, each of whom provides a critical

These collaborations assume that the problems leading to youth homelessness begin early, are identifiable, and are impossible to ‘treat’ separately.

“There are so many things the faith community can do. It can range from doing a backpack/school supplies drive, to hosting foster parent training classes, to wrapping the congregation around a foster family.”

service component. Youth receive an “Opportunity Passport” – a key feature of all Youth Opportunities Initiative pilot programs – that offers a 100 percent match for savings up to \$1,000 each year for three years. Most youth save for cars, housing, education and insurance. U.S. Bank hosts the Individual Development Accounts for foster youth and provides program participants with a personal bank account for their short-term expenses. Another coalition partner houses a youth advisory board that carries out its own projects, some of them surprisingly ambitious. For instance, in 2006 the youth advisory board decided to target Nashville’s faith community as a source of support for transitioning young people. **Faith in Foster Care** asks churches, synagogues, and other worship centers to focus on the needs of young people. “There are so many things the faith community can do. It can range from doing a backpack/school supplies drive, to hosting foster parent training classes, to wrapping the congregation around a foster family,” said the advisory council president in a newspaper article promoting the effort. The council created a packet of information for the faith community, did presentations and conducted a media campaign. While *Fostering Success* is an unusual city-wide effort on behalf of children in the foster care system, there is no reason the same effort cannot be made for disadvantaged transitioning youth who have not been in foster care. Their issues, after all, are the same.

#### FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR THE HIGHEST-NEED YOUTH

Youth with mental health issues, some severe and others less so, often show up at TLPs because there is no place else for them to go. They may have aged out of the state’s juvenile mental health system, or may never have been in it in the first place. Few have any family support or regular source of income, and their mental health status may make it unlikely that they can live self-sufficiently. This subset of youth is particularly difficult to serve, and like many states, Vermont is struggling with both how to help them and how to pay for that help.

TLPs are not designed to handle young people with serious mental health or emotional disorders, yet many are located in counties with no residential program for such young people. When such youth turn up at their doors, the question is always the same for TLPs: where do we send them?

In 2002, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration funded pilot programs at five sites under its **Partnerships for Youth Transition** (PYT) initiative. Localities in Maine, Pennsylvania, Utah, Michigan, Washington, and Minnesota worked out new approaches to supporting youth with mental and emotional difficulties as they entered adulthood. The solutions varied from site to site. Maine concentrated on young people hospitalized for the first time, working intensively to help them negotiate a few critical areas: completing school, getting into college or vocational training, finding and keeping a job, and securing stable housing. In Minnesota, the project made positive use of the transportation problems faced by youth in rural areas. ‘Transition facilitators’ began driving young people to job shadowing experiences, medical appointments, and other meetings; the “windshield time” gave them an opportunity to spend long periods working together on goals and individualized transition plans. An evaluation of PYT found that young people at the five sites were more likely to be employed and to be pursuing high school or post-secondary education, and less likely to have dropped out of high school, than peers who did not take part in the initiative.

In rural Minnesota, transition facilitators take advantage of long travel distances for ‘windshield time’ to work with youth on plans and goals.



With their energy and dedication to young people, the state's TLP staff constitute the system's greatest resource.

## FINDINGS

### COMMON PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**TLP coordinators and staff are highly energetic in their work with vulnerable youth.** The energy, knowledge, talent and reputations of the state's TLP workers is impressive, especially in light of their unusually wide range of duties, their programs' limited resources, and their own relatively low salaries. Indeed, many TLP coordinators have occupied their current positions for several years – a fact that can only be attributed to their dedication to their clients and their commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of needy young people. They constitute the TLP system's greatest resource.

**Programs collaborate extensively with local social service, job, education and housing programs.** Intensive collaboration is a strength for all TLPs. Programs are highly resourceful in their utilization of available state and local resources, and have enormous on-the-ground knowledge about how to leverage those resources to help their clients. Some TLPs located in larger agencies also gain from in-house collaborations, where referrals to other agency programs benefit TLP participants.

**Many programs are eager to learn about new models and approaches.** Most programs are open to ideas about improving their services. For instance, TLP staff expressed interest in learning about new ways to use volunteers; about models for collaboration with the private sector around developing employment opportunities; and about the potential of distance learning and distance employment programs for their rural clients. Openness to experimentation and change will be critical to any system-wide attempt to strengthen programs and improve outcomes for clients.

**The programs value a holistic, strengths-based approach in program and service delivery.** Many TLP staff stressed the importance of considering “the whole person” in their work with youth, noting the importance of developing plans and

creating opportunities that touch all areas of their clients' lives. Youth in TLPs survive, but programs would like them to thrive. Given scarce resources and the complexity of these youths' lives, making this kind of difference for them can feel all but impossible. Yet the programs continue to aim high.

**TLP staff and program models demonstrate resourcefulness and creativity.**

TLPs are very good at making the most of insufficient resources to develop creative, individualized programming for youth with complex needs.

**COMMON PROGRAM CHALLENGES**

**Programs are inadequately funded and understaffed.** The eight TLPs we interviewed each receive \$44,000 per year in federal grant money – in most cases the programs' only income. Most are understaffed; several, in fact, are staffed solely by part-time coordinators. TLPs are a “one-stop shop” for youth with no family support and nowhere to live, and therefore the assistance they provide is extensive. Staff assess client needs; work with clients on short- and long-term life plans; assist with crises; connect youth with medical and mental health services, education, and employment; and usually help subsidize housing and other basic purchases. Staff are often active in advocacy and community organizing as well, particularly around affordable housing initiatives. Because these programs are so stretched, staff say their most urgent need is for more funding. If they had it, they would hire additional workers, enabling them to take on more clients and expand their budgets for housing assistance.

**Programs underserve youth in hard-to-reach parts of their**

**catchment areas.** Most programs don't aggressively promote their services in the community, partly because doing so would generate more referrals than the programs could possibly handle. Therefore, most do not adequately

Staff from most TLPs voiced a hope that their communities would begin to value young people and step up in a coordinated way to give them opportunities that, in the long run, will benefit everyone.

Fund development at the local level is often very limited, due primarily to time pressures and lack of expertise.

serve their entire catchment area, in particular missing youth who live in distant or rural communities. Expanding services into these areas is a goal for many TLPs.

**Programs lack one or more levels in the housing continuum.** Most programs suffer from a lack of housing options early in the ideal continuum – they do not have an emergency shelter, and/or do not have housing for youth who are not completely ready to live on their own. In one program, the problem is reversed: it offers shelter and supervised housing, but no independent living arrangement. An incomplete continuum of care means that some youth – those with urgent housing needs and those with specialized needs, for instance – cannot be adequately served by the TLP system.

**Programs have limited ability to raise additional funds.** Fund development at the local level is often very limited, due primarily to time pressure and lack of program expertise. Thus almost all of the TLPs are financially vulnerable – truly one grant away from being forced out of business.

**Transportation is a problem for every rural TLP in Vermont.** Some counties have small public transportation systems, and occasionally youth can get vouchers to use their local system free or at reduced cost. But even where there are buses, they cannot meet the needs of individuals working late or odd hours. Nor, frequently, is car ownership a realistic option for young people. Cars are expensive to buy and maintain, and the cost of insurance (and, more recently, gas) is often too high for young people.

**Programs need help from the private sector; they cannot do it alone.** Most TLP staff believe that the nonprofit sector alone is unable to make a long-term difference for transitioning youth, especially in times of high housing prices and inflation. They point out that the most serious obstacles to success for transitioning youth are located in the community – in the lack of good jobs, affordable housing, and transportation. They say that local employers must be more willing to take a chance on youth they see as risky;

affordable housing should be made more available to young people; and transportation, public and private, should be more accessible and affordable. (In at least one program, young people routinely drive without insurance or even licenses – they can't afford them, yet can't give up their only way of getting to work and school.) While all TLP programs engage in local advocacy, they are often too stretched to apply pressure strategically, to educate themselves in new models, or think creatively about local solutions to these problems.

**Programs' work is undermined by rising housing costs and**

**inflation.** In most areas the cost of housing continues to rise, meaning that even after 18 months in the program, many youth are still dependent on financial supports (such as heating assistance and Section 8 vouchers). This was a particular problem in Montpelier. In places such as Addison County, inflation has led to rising poverty rates, making it difficult for young clients even to feed themselves and their children adequately, let alone to provide for more expensive needs like shelter.

**Criteria for youth entry to TLPs vary from agency to agency.** Some programs require that youth entering the program be either homeless or on the verge of homelessness; others require only that youth need assistance to set up an independent household. Whether or not these policy variations are problematic in themselves, they speak to a lack of standardization that may make cross-agency training and system solutions difficult. It also suggests that programs are sometimes unclear about either the requirements of their federal grant and/or their own mission.

**Programs suffer from a lack of a clearly articulated vision.** Understandably, the state's rural TLPs have focused on day-to-day program survival. The long-term strategic planning that programs must do in order to grow – or even weather cyclical economic downturns – is notably absent in

Long-term strategic planning is notably absent in programs focused on day-to-day survival.

Local profiles of TLP populations vary slightly, but most programs are seeing an increase in the number of young people needing help and in the severity of their issues.

these TLPs. But programs will never grow beyond this subsistence level without envisioning what they want to be, need to be, and can be, and then finding ways to move toward those goals.

**Meeting the needs of special youth populations.** While local profiles of TLP populations vary slightly, an ongoing issue for many programs is the increase in both the number of youth in need and the severity of their problems. Specific groups – for instance, pregnant and parenting teens, young people who are coping with a developmental disability, mental illness, or substance abuse, and youth transitioning from DCF custody – are already served by TLPs, though TLPs are not necessarily the ideal place for them. Programs vary in their ability to handle these specialized populations, which often need a creative, intensive, multi-tiered, youth-tailored, community approach. In addition to the above challenges, there needs to be ongoing recognition of the unique challenges facing youth who have cultural, racial or ethnic differences, and issues facing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth. Rural youth are already contending with isolation, limited positive social opportunities, and lack of mobility and economic stability. Providing TLP services to youth while being mindful of the unique qualities and challenges each youth faces is continuously challenging for staff and their programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this assessment of Vermont's eight rural transitional living programs, it is clear that the programs are doing a great deal with very little, but could do more if they set clear goals, planned carefully, and made strategic use of all resources, including a few that remain untapped.

### **Articulate a practical vision and establish a clear mission.** An

organization's vision is its hope for the future, an articulation of what it thinks is possible. Its mission is its purpose for being – why it does its work, and what about that work is most important. Vision and mission are critical for defining program ambitions and setting goals, both locally and system-wide.

For rural TLPs, one area of such work should include clarifying which youth are truly the target of program services. Each TLP needs to better define who it is serving, who it perhaps should be serving, and who, practically speaking, it *can* serve. Is it simply a matter of which youth show up at the door? Or should there be a concerted effort to identify and serve the youth who could most benefit from the program?

This sort of formal introspection determines program focus, and goes beyond the technical parameters of the federal TLP grant to broader program (or coalition) philosophy. If programs seek to serve a wide range of vulnerable, transitioning youth (rather than simply youth already homeless or on the verge of homelessness) then TLPs and VCRHYP must engage in serious capacity-building and advocacy work on both the local and state levels. If the programs want to remain strictly focused on homeless youth, than it is reasonable to assume that they should target youth clearly in that category. Either way, greater clarity around mission and vision should lead to clearer program policies and procedures on eligibility, intake, and outreach.

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Programs are required to record services provided and whether youth exit to 'safe' or 'unsafe' situations. But measuring real progress toward self-sufficiency is much more difficult.

In the same way, programs must envision what a comprehensive TLP continuum of care would look like in their community. Recognizing that there are many obstacles that make such “big picture” work daunting, TLP staff, youth, and community members nevertheless often know themselves, and indeed know better than anyone else, which services are critically missing in their area. For most agencies, it is emergency housing and supervised, interim housing for young people not quite ready to live independently. The TLPs need support in creating a clearer vision and action plan for filling in those continuum gaps. In some cases, solutions can be found in community partnerships or even partnerships between TLPs in adjoining counties. A housing continuum that is unaffordable for one agency might be affordable for two, who could then share facilities, outreach workers, and TLP participants.

**Define success.** Building a more comprehensive range of TLP services requires that programs clearly define success for TLP participants. When interviewees were asked whether their programs “work” for youth – that is, whether youth make substantial progress towards, or even achieve, self-sufficiency before leaving the program, most seemed unsure how to answer. The fact is that many young people are helped by the programs, but spectacular successes are rare. With the complex, sometimes multigenerational problems these young people face, incremental progress is probably the best outcome TLPs can generally hope for. But what are reasonable and achievable goals for clients? Programs are required by their federal funder to record services provided to each youth and note whether each youth exited to “safe” or “unsafe” situations. But measuring real movement toward self-sufficiency – which is, after all, one of VCRHYP’s goals for young people in TLPs – remains elusive.

**Strengthen the VCRHYP community.** TLPs are already very good at working within their own towns and counties to strengthen the social services network. They are less adept at networking with one another, sharing their own effective practices and learning about new approaches. For instance, two of the programs interviewed in this report make creative use of volunteers, but most do not. Some are profitably involved in their local Continuum of Care groups, but most are not. The reason? They haven't had the time or expertise to exploit these resources, and in fact are not sure if expending effort in these directions makes sense. Cross-training and resource-sharing can help answer these questions. VCRHYP, which exists partly to provide programmatic oversight and training, has an important role to play in assisting with this cross-fertilization of ideas. Regular best practice forums/program development roundtables – conducted at group meetings, by webinar, conference call or even blog – could ease the isolation of these programs and help them grapple with common program challenges.

**Take a leading role in wide-net community initiatives.** A strength of the TLPs described in this report is their high level of collaboration with other local service providers and the visibility and good reputations of TLP staff. Even though TLP programs collaborate extensively with local job, education, and housing programs, most also feel that the needs of transitioning youth should be made a policy priority in their communities. The need for a large-scale community response to the issues of transitioning youth is critical precisely because so many obstacles to successful adulthood are community problems, not social service problems. High rental housing rates may affect everyone, but they are devastating to young people in TLPs. Successful employment at an entry-level job is important for any young person, but critical for TLP youth, who don't have a parent's income to fall back on. Therefore, stronger advocacy efforts are needed that include not only the usual social service groups but city and town officials, schools,

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Faith communities in particular are a largely untapped resource, though congregations can make extremely effective allies.

universities, the private/corporate sector, and faith communities. If Vermont's young people are both a dwindling resource and a valuable one, parties who haven't up to now invested much in them will need to step up to the plate. This is all the more true in tough economic times, when new public spending on disadvantaged youth seems extremely unlikely.

**Develop robust volunteer programs.** Volunteers can provide numerous services to nonprofits, from small, one-time building projects to long-term client mentoring. With scarce resources, using volunteers may in fact be the most powerful means nonprofits have of reaching out to youth, building capacity and partnering with the community. Faith communities in particular represent a largely untapped resource; many programs in this report have never approached local congregations for help, though the Love INC. collaboration in Lancaster County, Penn., illustrates that they can make extremely effective allies. Those TLPs with successful volunteer programs should share their experiences with those that make no use of them, and VCRHYP should seek technical assistance in volunteer recruitment and planning for all its members.

**Sustain programs and build capacity through increased and diversified funding.**

TLP funding is inadequate and impacts staffing, outreach, service delivery, future planning and stability. Staff need ongoing training and technical assistance in fund development and grantwriting. This sort of training is widely available, fairly inexpensive, and can be delivered in a variety of ways, including through low-cost, no-travel webinars.

**Engage in capacity-building to support greater stability and growth.**

“Capacity-building,” a buzzphrase in the nonprofit world, can mean a variety of things, but at heart, it always boils down to improving programs’ ability to receive, and then make use of, new ideas and tools. Assessment, training, and technical assistance for Vermont’s rural TLPs should focus on an array of issues: communications/marketing strategies, program evaluation, staff training, and community engagement (particularly on extending partnerships

into new areas such as the corporate sector and the faith community). It should also focus on creative use of resources that already exist outside programs' doors. For instance, an independent living program in Contra Costa, Calif., reached an agreement with its local school bus company to transport aged-out foster youth to services. The idea makes intuitive sense: school buses go everywhere, and even very rural areas have them. Could such an idea work for any of Vermont's TLPs, which otherwise have to ferry youth around in staff cars or agency vans? Possibly, but not if programs never hear about the idea. Often, unusual but successful practices surface in the context of conferences where a critical mass of youth practitioners get together and exchange ideas. Such cross-pollination cannot occur where programs are isolated, or only talk to one another.

The implementation of these recommendations would improve Vermont's local and statewide capacity to address the needs of vulnerable transition-aged youth. Individual needs of youth would be better met, and communities would benefit significantly from the increased stability and employability of their young adult residents.

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This report has focused on the ability of the state's rural transitional living programs to work effectively with marginalized young people. The initial question it asked is whether these understaffed, financially struggling TLPs can improve themselves, and thus improve life chances for their clients. The answer is clearly yes. Without a doubt, they can. But they cannot do it alone, and communities should not expect them to. The most important finding of this report is that business, civic and faith communities can do more, and where they have done more – in cities like Portland, Ore. and Nashville, Tenn., and in states like Maine and Massachusetts – the benefits for young people, both those already in trouble and those headed for trouble, can be enormous. The current nexus of social, economic and political forces in Vermont, with its dwindling youth population and urgent need to ensure a productive, stable workforce for the future, creates fertile ground for such innovations here; all it will take is the genuine desire to make them happen.

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