A Youth and Young Adult Community Response

To the Regional Action Plan

The Mockingbird Society’s & King County Youth Action Board’s Report

May 2020
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Acknowledgments

This report would not be possible without all the voices of the young people in King County who participated and who are the experts in their own experience and are the ones we need to look to for solutions. This was a joint effort between The Mockingbird Society and the End Youth Homelessness Now Youth Action Board with support from the End Youth Homelessness Now campaign. The Mockingbird Society is grateful to the Raikes Foundation for supporting our work in King County. Thank you again to all who gave feedback, and who helped put this report together, it was important to us that this was the voices of young people, written by young people!
Summary

In the Fall of 2019, the City of Seattle and King County signed an interlocal agreement to create a regional homelessness authority, the intent is to help coordinate a unified response. A part of that authority is to create a regional action plan (RAP), a community plan that would be the roadmap to help provide success benchmarks, milestones and recommendations as we move forward with this work. In order to have a RAP that is truly informed by the community the RAP needs to center around the voices and experiences of those with lived experience including those of youth and young adults (YYA) who are experiencing homelessness and receiving services county wide; It is crucial, as they are most impacted by the structures and plans included in the RAP.

As such, The Mockingbird Society (TMS) compiled the King County Youth and Young Adult Plan Survey in March and April of 2020. In partnership with the End Youth Homelessness Now Campaign’s Youth Action Board (YAB), this is the final written report of the survey findings.

The purpose of the survey was to gather the experiences, needs, wants and suggestions of homeless YYA throughout King County regarding the following:

1. Prevention of Homelessness
2. Crisis Intervention
3. Long-term services
4. Aftercare Services
5. Stable housing
6. Permanent Connections
7. Employment and Education
Survey Goal

We believe that for a Regional Homeless Authority to function most effectively, it should be informed by the experiences and knowledge from impacted communities. Our goal in this survey was to collect general feedback on young people’s experience, and synthesize that into clear, concise, and relevant data. This report is not an effort to present a detailed picture on any one person’s journey, but rather a depiction of trends. This data is to be used as qualitative evidence when constructing a work plan to the homelessness and housing crisis as it applies to youth and young adults.

Survey Process

This Report did not benefit from a perfect process. There were multiple external and unavoidable circumstances that hindered our ability to engage with young people. Because homelessness is more than just an issue with affordable housing, young people experience an incredible digital inequality which corrupted a comprehensive assessment. Our process for outreach included sharing our materials with service providers at the staff and director level. In addition to social media posts, we also utilized TMS Network Representatives and the YAB to share directly with young people. There were multiple ways for participants to complete the survey: online, by phone, or paper copy. The survey was open for almost two weeks before we became overburdened and had to shut down.

Although there was a financial incentive to complete the survey, too many young people were overwhelmed with COVID-19, housing insecurity, and a digital divide to fully engage with our outreach. For a more robust process, there should be more communication infrastructure and networks for service providers, advocates, government bodies, and young people to quickly and safely share knowledge. A “snapshot” in time quickly becomes irrelevant when other environmental circumstances impact our homeless neighbors. A standardized process for continuous feedback is imperative for effective crisis management. Furthermore, young people’s needs for easy and cheap access to the internet and other technologies was increasingly apparent. As society becomes more and more paperless, we cannot allow poor communities to suffer additional inequities.
Survey method/results

Data for this report was collected via an online survey created using survey monkey. Each survey had a total of 20 questions; five of those questions were demographic questions (See appendix A for full survey questions). Respondents were those ages 13-26, who have or are currently experiencing homelessness, and were asked for their opinion on the new regional action plan, for those who have not heard of the plan prior to this they were given an information sheet to explain what exactly it is (see appendix B). A total of 110 individuals were included in the survey, each participant was given a $25 gift card to Target for their feedback.

In order to recruit participants that fully reflected the youth and young adult population in King County we reached out to partners throughout the different regions of King County, with a specific emphasis on South King County, East King County, and rural areas. As we know a lot of times these areas are not engaged in the same way that Seattle and surrounding areas are. We also emphasized reaching out to service providers that serve Native American, LGBTQ+, and youth of color as we know there are disparities among these populations. Overall, we sent our survey to 25 different coalitions, organizations, and committees.

Although we sent our survey to several partners that worked with diverse groups of people to include the ones we mentioned above, we were surprised to see that out of 110 responses just under 51.38% of individuals identified as white. We think much of this has to do with additional barriers that COVID-19 produced, such as many shelters and drop in centers for young people were temporarily closed or operating at reduced hours, and so many did not hear about this opportunity, as well as many young people access Wi-Fi or use the computers at these shelters. It is important to note that these barriers should have impacted clients similarly if it was not for the prominence of race, youth of color must deal with all the same barriers listed above as well as navigating an inherent racist system. Also many partners who would usually help us spread the word did not have the capacity to help us, as the first priority is making sure the young person has shelter, food, and their healthcare needs are met, and again this is made harder with the threat of COVID-19.

As mentioned above just over half of all respondents self-identified as white, (51.3%), a majority self-identified as male (54.13%), 65.74% said they were straight, and a majority of respondents (90.38%) agreed that the plan addresses the key areas to help prevent and end homelessness. Of those who self-identified as white, only 6 respondents self-identified with more than one race. 76 respondents answered a question to self-identify as pregnant or parenting (34.21%), have a chronic condition (47.37%), or diagnosed
with a disability or impairment 48.68%, is also important as many respondents when asked what also needs to be included in the plan, the overwhelming response was access to medical services including mental health.

Survey Data

Environmental factors and digital inequity contributed to the gaps in our data. We saw a disproportionate amount of white folks in urban areas that had time or ease of access to our survey. This provides a certain amount of survivorship bias*. Because these young white urbanites had easier access, their feedback was built into the report. Because young people of color, indigenous communities, and rural dwellers had less access, their feedback will have a smaller impact on the report, and subsequently, the policy. Our intent was to flip this dynamic, and yet our process was still heavily disrupted by this survivorship bias. Please keep this in mind when reviewing the data.

*a data gap from concentrating on the people that made it through some process and overlooking those that did not.

When it comes to the materials of the survey, we attempted to naturally funnel the feedback into the 4 RAP framework components: Coordination and Foundational Items, Housing, Crisis Response, and Mainstream Systems and Services.

Under Coordination, young people expressed lacking flexible services that allowed longer hours or were easier to access. For those in rural areas, there were difficulties in transportation to/from work. Some young people found it difficult to learn about services or where to find them.

When young people talked about Housing, they consistently referenced needing financial literacy. Some specifically asked for cash or a steady income, implying a feeling of insecurity even when employed. They often talked about the affordability of housing, again implying a sense of being overwhelming when needing to pay rent/bills. On the topic of jobs, some folks would ask to be given an opportunity or have a job offered to them. Young people generally have little to no experience applying for a job, so this is understandable. Several participants mentioned aspects of community (friends, family, “government”) when asked what makes them stable in their housing. These statements probably relate to a greater need of belonging that young people often experience while homeless.

Not many young people addressed Crisis Response directly. However, there was an obvious desire for medical access. Every young person mentioned needing physical or mental/emotional health service. Several times, participants reflected that
mental health could have prevented their homelessness altogether. There were repeated asks for food. In most shelters meals are often provided for young people; this could relate to their experiences outside a shelter, or the feeling of food insecurity as they navigate between services.

School was often referred to as a **Mainstream System**. Either as a trusted institution and a source of empowerment or stability, young people wanted to find services at a school. There is no doubt that young people have their lifetimes heavily influenced by being in school. There was a consistent reflection that education, job training, and money management was foundational to career and life success. Most young people that talked about money management skills, stated wanting to be taught how to balance their income and expenses. Again, this suggests an experience informed by a paternalistic education system.

Our intent was to collect a spectrum of experiences and relate them directly to the existing framework. This serves as an effective way to collect specific feedback rather than detailed feedback. This approach no doubt contributes to gaps in the data.

When combing through the responses, there were consistencies that lay outside the 4 RAP components. Many times, young people communicated a desire for emotional support. There is a sense of loneliness in these responses. Young people stated wanting someone to talk to or just be with -- sometimes they specifically stated needing friends or family -- but there were also statements that would suggest wanting peers (coworkers, other students, other LGBTQ acquaintances, “community members” etc.). There is a possibility these responses of loneliness could be directly related to the timing of this survey, as with the COVID-19 response there are not many gathering spaces open and with social distancing shelters and drop in spaces are closed or limited. These responses were closely related to other messages of needing safe places to have fun or unwind. Safe spaces and peers are components of community that young people clearly communicated a need for. This trend of wanting/needling community was also present when asked about maintaining a stable job; suggesting that young people need a network of accountability to be successful and stable.

In dozens of forms, young people communicated that the internet was both a source of opportunity and an opportunity gap. Young people knew they could look up resources, find a job/education, or make friends on the internet; yet they still had difficulties in these matters. This feedback comes from young people who do have access to the internet since they were able to complete the survey. This reveals that lack of internet access directly correlates with a lack of access to other resources, which then negatively impacts a young person’s chance of escaping homelessness.

These data gaps are unique to a young person’s life experience, as well as their experience being homeless. Please evaluate the gaps and consider adding or adjusting the RAP components to better respond to the thoughts and behaviors of young people.
Anonymous Quotes

Coordination & Foundational Items

“Service time is too short.”

“Please just try and connect with youth more, understand that the freedom they’re experiencing is a newfound sensation…”

Housing

“Make sure I have job safety, stable income so that I can pay bills and insurance, a support group that would work for us and take care of our situation under any circumstances”

“Clear pathways to gainful employment, financial literacy and a sense of community/support.”

Crisis Response

“The problem [of] homelessness is people give up, lose hope, lose interest in things, we get lost in all this social media, and wanting this, wanting that, we are not taught how to keep going with that same power, you once had.”

“Provide basic living expenses when my life is not guaranteed.”

“Don’t just think about the physical needs of homeless people, think about their minds and hearts because a lot of the time that is a big part of why they are homeless in the first place.”

Mainstream Systems & Services

“Social security card, Birth Certificate, ID: Those always came up as a problem and a lot of people who are homeless either haven’t had one for a while or lost theirs somehow”

“Affordable college would be a great way to minimize homelessness.”

Other/Policy Gaps
“Make sure students in need have access to extracurricular activities. Activity fees may limit the ability of homeless/low-income students to participate”

“Counseling to help talk about mental health issues that can ruin relationships”

“I believe nothing is permanent. So even though I am employed today I can be unemployed anytime. So people [who] get out of homelessness should be ready for anything and any challenges.”
Q3 What part of King County are you from?

- North Region: 16.36%
- East Region: 7.27%
- Seattle: 43.64%
- South Region: 27.27%
- Other: 5.45%

Q7 How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

- White: 44%
- Black or African American: 27%
- Latinx or Hispanic: 17%
- Asian or Asian American: 4%
- American Indian or Alaskan: 2%
- Native Hawaiian or other: 2%
- Choose not to answer: 0%
- Other: 4%
Q8 What gender do you identify with?

- Female: 54%
- Male: 40%
- Transgender: 6%
- Gender Nonconforming: 1%
- Other: 1%
- Choose not to answer: 1%
- Questions: 1%

Q9 How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- Straight: 66%
- Bisexual: 16%
- Gay or Lesbian: 9%
- Pansexual: 3%
- Asexual: 3%
- Transgender: 1%
- Gender Nonconforming: 2%
- Other: 0%
- Choose not to answer: 1%
- Questions: 1%
Q10 The county and city are considering these key areas to address in the homelessness plan for young people:

- Prevention of homelessness
- Crisis intervention
- Long-term services
- Aftercare services
- Stable housing
- Permanent connections
- Employment

Comments: I don’t know, No

Q18 Do you Identify with any of these conditions:

- Chronic Condition
- Pregnant or Parenting
- Diagnosed with a disability or impairment

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pregnant or Parenting</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diagnosed w/ disability or impairment</td>
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<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not Respond</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
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Recommendations

1. **Develop and modify approach based on feedback from Youth and Young Adults.** Youth and Young Adults should be engaged throughout the process of building, implementing, and reviewing King County’s regional homelessness approach. We must use a Racial Equity and Anti-Oppression lens to ensure that young people from communities most impacted are at all tables where planning is happening, and decisions are being made. Young people should be included in creating the review parameters and the County, City, and local philanthropic partners supporting this endeavor must accommodate the proper time requirements it takes to engage young people in ways that are meaningful and non-tokenizing. If circumstances hinder the process of engaging young people, these variables should be considered, and expectations should be adjusted. Because young people expressed interest in their governments and community’s action, there should be a standard process for continuous reporting to, and feedback from, young people. And because young people are more vulnerable to change, King County, City, and local philanthropic partners must be nimble enough to respond to the shifting dynamics.

2. **Continue to solicit feedback from YYA, we also recommend a similar survey process once the COVID-19 crisis has ended.** It is critical that youth continued to be engaged; consider focus groups, and feedback session throughout the region and especially in areas outside of the Seattle area, there are also several YYA organizations that can be engaged outside of the YAB and TMS. We consider the gaps in our data to be unacceptable. For a more comprehensive assessment we need the voices of underinvested communities to be included.

3. **There needs to be a clear report back on progress and decisions.** Regular reports that are youth legible should be provided to the correct points of access (web-based, service providers, advocates, community services, schools etc.) Young people are working-class voters and valued members of our communities. They deserve a government that works to respond to their needs.

   “Give us an opportunity to attempt and prove our abilities.”
   -Anonymous participant
Conclusion

As acknowledged already, we felt the limitations of this report included that of time frame, accessibility, and lack of diversity in respondents. We noticed limitations especially in technology as accessibility for our desired populations were limited and the experience of spammed responses. There may have been some limitations in how the questions were formed and came across misunderstood.

We, The Mockingbird Society and the End Youth Homelessness Now Youth Action Board, hope this report will be used to inform more inclusive, thoughtful decision making as the RAP and the county decide how to best serve the youth out of homelessness. We hope that this data will inform how the RAP will best pursue each of the four key areas; coordination & foundational items, crisis response, mainstream systems, and housing.

Including youth experience is vital to the very work that organizations and partners like the Youth Action Board and The Mockingbird Society to better support and transform the systems that affect those with lived experiences by being informed by lived experiences. We say young people are the future and it is so true that they hold the key to creating the next generation's societal experience and we especially need to be informed on more populations we have interest in, such as homeless young people, young people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, young people in the juvenile system, etc.

When we do not include young people in the decisions, we make about them, we see that some decisions made can be more harmful than helpful, we see that certain demographics get missed and these things contribute to generational homeless.

Due to the current circumstances, we want the RAP to keep in mind that again we have not had the chance to collect data for this survey as we would have liked to and therefore affected the results of this survey. We emphasize the request to conduct a similar, if not the same survey, to the partners and organizations that would help us gain the necessary data for better informed responses.
# Appendix A. Full survey

King County Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Plan Feedback

### Basic Registration Information

King County is developing a new joint plan to address homelessness for King County and the City of Seattle. The voices of young people are important to include in the plan. We appreciate your feedback!

1. **First Name**

   

2. **Last Name**

   

3. **What part of King County are you from?**

   - [ ] North Region- includes areas of Bothell, Cottage Lake, Kenmore, Lake Forest Park, Shoreline, and Woodinville
   - [ ] East Region- includes Bellevue, Carnation, Duvall, Issaquah, Kirkland, Medina, Mercer Island, Newcastle, North Bend, Redmond, Sammamish, and Skykomish
   - [ ] Seattle
   - [ ] South region- includes Auburn, Burien, Covington, Des Moines, Enumclaw, Federal Way, Kent, Maple Valley, Normandy Park, Renton, Tukwila, SeaTac, White Center/Boulevard Park, and Vashon Island
   - [ ] Other (please specify)

   

4. King County considers parts of these areas as “rural” if you identify as coming from any of these areas, are there any challenges you face in receiving resources? (lack of resources, hours of services, etc.)

- Sammamish
- Duvall
- Carnation
- North Bend
- Skykomish
- Issaquah
- Maple Valley
- Covington
- Auburn
- Enumclaw
- Vashon island

5. You will receive a $25 gift card for completing this survey. How do you want to receive the gift card?

   Please email the gift card to me. My email address is: 

   Please give me a physical gift card. The best way to get the card to me is: 

6. What is the best way to contact you in case we have questions about sending you your gift card? (phone, case manager, text, etc.)

7. How would you best describe your race/ethnicity? (check all that apply)

   - White
   - Black or African American
   - LatinX or Hispanic
   - Asian or Asian American
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   - choose not to answer
   - Other (please describe)
8. What gender do you identify with (please choose one)

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Gender nonconforming
- Choose not to answer
- Other (please describe)

9. How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- Gay or Lesbian
- Straight
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- Questioning
- Choose not to answer
- Other (please describe)
10. The county and city are considering these key areas to address in the homelessness plan for young people:

- Prevention of homelessness
- Crisis intervention
- Long-term services
- Aftercare services
- Stable housing
- Permanent connections
- Employment and education

Are these areas the right areas to focus on to help young people who are homeless?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I don’t know/need more information

☐ Comments:

11. Besides the areas above, what else should be included in a plan to help youth who are homeless in Seattle and all parts of King County?
12. What are three things that would have helped you the most when you were homeless?

13. What services could have helped to prevent you from experiencing homelessness? Where would you want to access these services? (school, online, etc.)

14. For young people who are able to get out of homelessness, what kinds of supports are needed so that they won’t experience homelessness again?

15. What are three things that would help you be stable in your housing?

16. What would help you have a network of supportive people in your life?

17. What help do you need in order to get a job or go to school when you are experiencing homelessness?
18. Please check all of the boxes that you identify with.

☐ Chronic Condition
☐ Pregnant or parenting
☐ Diagnosed with a disability or impairment

19. Are there resources that are not currently available to you that would be helpful in navigating the system with an impairment, chronic condition or disability?


20. Do you have any additional suggestions/comments/feedback?
Appendix B. Information sheet

The King County Regional Homeless Authority was established by King County and City of Seattle to significantly decrease homelessness county-wide. Their plan to do so is referred to as the Regional Action Plan (RAP).

The RAP’s youth and young adult focus is informed by the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) from King County, and a plan from the King County Youth Service Providers (KCYSP) who directly assist youth and young adults who are homeless. Because young people are most affected by these structures and plans, The Mockingbird Society and The Youth Advisory Board think it is important for young people to be involved in the process of building the RAP.

This summary is meant to provide you with clear and concise information on the plans for your expert opinion.

**King County Youth Service Providers Plan**

This collection of agencies and providers interact directly with youth and young adults as they navigate out of homelessness. The broad goals are focused on stability, self-sufficiency, and personal growth.

The plan has four key areas of work:

- **Prevention Services:** Targeted services that help avoid crisis that result in youth becoming homeless.
- **Crisis Intervention:** Emergency services like therapy, shelters, and detox beds.
- **Long-term Services:** For individual growth and navigation. Includes pathways to permanent housing.
- **Aftercare:** Follow-up outreach to prevent a return to homelessness.

* Individual growth includes employment/education, life-skills building, mental health counseling, family reunification/guardianship.
Additional details:

- The KCYSP acknowledge the racism and disproportionality within the homelessness system. More youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth are homeless despite being a smaller population in the region.
- Providers know that their staff need additional training and less workload to improve their interactions with youth and young adults. They also hope to pay their staff a living-wage to decrease the effect of personal stress on their work.

**Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program**

This program is oriented towards the homelessness system to coordinate the many agencies and government structures. The main mission is **Functional Zero** by 2021 – preventing youth and young adults from becoming homeless and, if they do, housing them in 30 days or less.

The Joint Committee is the governing structure in charge of implementing the plan and holding the system accountable.

When **Functional Zero** is achieved, youth homelessness will be Rare, Brief, One-Time, and with No Inequitable Disparities.
King County Regional Action Plan (RAP)

This plan will be the core function of the new King County Regional Homeless Authority. There are four "framework components":

**Coordination and foundational Items**
- Focus on addressing disproportionality with YOC and LGBTQ+ youth
- Collaboration between regions and addressing regional challenges for impactful results
- Person-centered rather than based solely on identities
- Implement unique policies for sub-populations (including youth and young adults)

**Housing**
- Creating affordable housing pipeline for people making less than 30% area median
- Subset of housing to be paired with supportive services

**Crisis Response**
- Diversion fund to help prevent inflow of homelessness
- Expand emergency housing service to include a robust variety (safe parking, 24hr shelter with case management, basic shelters)

**Mainstream Systems**
- Reaching into institutional settings to improve homelessness prevention
- Expansion of behavior/mental health and other health care service for people experiencing homelessness
- Increase income and employment to prevent inflow and returns to homelessness