

Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs Transitional Living Program Standards

Member agencies of the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCRHYP) who receive contractual funds to provide runaway and homeless youth services through the Transitional Living Program (TLP) federal grant and State of Vermont contract agree to the following program standards.

The goal of these standards is to promote:

- Enhanced youth outcomes through best practice service provision
- Support for program development and implementation
- Program alignment with state and federal guidelines
- Program protection from liability issues

TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM SERVICES PRINCIPLES:

- (a) Youth need opportunities, supports, and guidance to develop a healthy sense of self and successful life.
- (b) Effective services that result in long-term benefits are developmentally appropriate, helping youth address psychological, social, economic, and educational issues.
- (c) Each youth progresses differently depending on the severity of challenges faced, social determinants of health and adverse childhood experiences of trauma.
- (d) Youth can be their own best resources.
- (e) Services must help youth discover and/or develop their own strengths and competencies; strength-based work is integrated into every aspect of case management.

TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY:

TLP projects provide medium and long-term residential services to transition age youth between 16-24 years old and who are homeless or precariously under any federal definition. These definitions include youth who are:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as doubled-up or couch surfing)
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- Abandoned in hospitals
- Living in a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; examples include: living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above
- In shelter, transitional housing settings or residential programs for youth or adults experiencing homelessness
- Exiting an institution where they temporarily resided for up to 90 days and were homeless immediately prior to entering the institution
- Fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member¹

Federal funding through the Family Youth Services Bureau's TLP limits use of funding to youth entering services between the ages of 16-21; the maximum period of stay permitted is 18 months except for youth who begin residential services before they turn age 18 may be eligible to remain beyond 21 months if they would be leaving the program prior to their 18th birthday (up to an additional 180 days). Youth who enter services before age 22 can continue to be served using federal funding until they reach a total of 18 months in the program. State of Vermont funding can serve youth 16-23 years old, however, youth entering services AFTER the age of 21 need prior approval from the Director of the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs.

Youth in TLP programs must not be eligible for residential support from a state or federal program, such as the child protective system, or the juvenile justice system. Many people are involved with one or more "system" but are not eligible for residential assistance from that source. Those youths would still be eligible for TLP services if it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative or other safe alternative living arrangement.

¹ *Definition is a compilation from USICH's Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness, HUD HEARTH Act definition of homelessness and the U.S. Department of Education's Non-Regulatory Guidance on Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*

STANDARDS AND MEASURES

A. PERSONNEL

STANDARD: *The program shall be adequately staffed by qualified personnel to ensure quality service delivery, effective program management, and the safety and supervision of youth in their care.*

MEASURES:

1. The agency will hire and maintain qualified staff to manage and implement TLP services:

- i. The program sustains a reasonable staff-to-youth ratio.
- ii. All personnel have a written job description that at a minimum addresses the major tasks to be performed and the qualifications required for the position.
- iii. The agency selects, for its service personnel, employees and/or volunteers with appropriate knowledge, related experience, or potential for working with youth and families in crisis.
- iv. Agency personnel with responsibilities for supervision of the casework, counseling, and/or case management components have an advanced, post-high school (bachelor's) degree in a human service related field and/or experience in working with youth and families or demonstrated ability and experience that qualifies them to assume such responsibility.
- v. Personnel with supervisory responsibilities for overall program operations shall have, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree in a human service related field or demonstrated ability and experience that qualifies them to assume such responsibility.
- vi. The program provides training to all paid and volunteer staff (including youth) in both the policies and procedures employed by the program and in specific skill areas as determined by the program to effectively service TLP youth.
- vii. The program operates under an affirmative action/civil rights compliance plan.
- viii. Whenever possible, youth are included as participants in the interview process.

2. Adequate supervision, ongoing training and development for all personnel and volunteers:

- i. The program has written procedures regarding employee supervision and evaluations.
- ii. Case supervisors review current cases and individual service plans on a monthly basis (with relevant project staff through case or team meetings) to ensure quality/coordinated services.
- iii. All paid and volunteer service personnel (including shelter and host home staff) participate in ongoing internal and/or external training, supervision, and development to further enhance their knowledge and ability to work with youth. Trainings will include the core competencies of youth care workers:
 - a. Professionalism, including but not limited to, and consistent reliable job performance, awareness and used of professional ethics to guide practice
 - b. Applied positive youth development approach

- c. Cultural and human diversity, including, but not limited to, gaining skills and knowledge to meet the needs of clients of a different, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion/ spirituality, gender identity/ expression, and/or sexual orientation
- d. Applied human development, including, but not limited to understanding the needs of those at risk and with special needs
- e. Relationship and communication, including, but not limited to, working with clients in a collaborative manner and
- f. Developmental practice methods, including, but not limited to, utilizing methods focused on genuine relationships, health and safety, and intervention planning.
- iv. TLP staff attend statewide bi-annual grant meetings to review project performance, identify trends, discuss challenges, share information, and receive training.
- v. New TLP staff hired in member agencies are connected with VCRHYP for orientation training.

B. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

STANDARD: *The agency shall administer the program in compliance with VCRHYP, State and Federal standards.*

MEASURES:

1. Maintenance of a local board:

- i. The program shall have a local board of directors and/or a local advisory board that is representative of the communities it serves.
- ii. The program provides training to the Board of Directors and/or Advisory Body designed to orient the members to the TLP program goals and objectives, as well as to the liabilities and responsibilities of the directors.
- iii. The Board of Directors and/or Advisory Body meet on a regular basis (at least quarterly) throughout the year to review program activities and progress.
- iv. The Board of Directors or Advisory Body annually reviews and/or approves the overall goals, objectives, contract compliance, and budget activities of the program.

2. Demonstrated ability to operate under accounting procedures and fiscal control devices as required by state and federal agencies:

- i. The agencies accounting procedures align with current federal regulations outlined in 2 [CFR part 200](#)
- ii. The agency budget items for the program are in accordance with the allowable contract allocations and guidelines for use of federal and state TLP funds.
- iii. The agency participates in an annual audit by a certified public accountant.
- iv. The agency maintains adequate liability insurance as evidenced by current policies covering:
 - a. Personal injury insurance
 - b. Professional liability insurance

- c. Directors and Officers liability insurance

3. Proper maintenance of client information and documentation necessary for the effective delivery of service and client confidentiality:

- i. To ensure secure and confidential treatment of client information, each site agrees to:
 - a. Use a participant ID created in HMIS to ensure names and personal identifiers are not used when reporting or providing statistical data
 - b. Present data used for reporting in aggregate so that individually identifying information is not disclosed
 - c. Keep paper documents in locked file cabinets that are only accessible to specified program staff
 - d. Have staff and volunteers sign confidentiality agreements concerning the release of participant information
 - e. Provide staff and volunteers with training on confidentiality
 - f. Require consent (youth or parent/guardian if youth is under 18) in order to release participant information to other service providers
 - g. Only allow disclosure of records without written consent in response to a court order, a medical emergency, a report of child abuse and/or neglect, a report that the youth intends to harm him or herself or others, and the disposition of criminal charges against the youth
 - h. Keep electronic records password protected, encrypted, and only accessible by select staff
 - i. Shred all confidential records and identifying information 7 years after the close of services

4. All sites work towards cultural competency:

- i. Agencies adhere to the [Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services](#) (CLAS) standards to provide effective, equitable, understandable and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices,
- ii. Case managers ensure that all youth enrolling in TLP understand that the program operates in a safe, inclusive, and non-stigmatizing manner and that services are sensitive to culture, gender & identity, and language needs.

5. All sites will prohibit harassment:

- i. All staff is required to create harassment and bully-free environments and prohibit harassment based on race, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, religion, national origin, and socio-economic status.
- ii. Each site's parent agency provides additional annual training to prevent harassment.
- iii. Sites have detailed procedures for handling reports of harassment or bullying behaviors that include:
 - a. Written documentation of harassment reports submitted to the agency's Executive Director
 - b. Written action plans to address the behavior of the harassers

- iv. At every site, the Executive Director, case managers, youth and /or youth’s family are included in the process for addressing harassment.
- v. All program participants are notified of these policies at intake and provided with information on how to report any harassment witness or experienced on site.

C. TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM SERVICE DELIVERY

STANDARD: *TLP sites shall provide all services required by the RHY Act*

MEASURES:

1. Each site operates a 24-hour/7-day a week crisis line to ensure youth have immediate access to help:

- i. Agency will maintain phone access to crisis services 24-hours a day, seven days a week through on-call schedules, utilization of answering services, or MOUs with other community partners as approved by VCRHYP.
- ii. Case managers and those assigned to crisis coverage respond to crisis calls immediately and non-crisis contacts within 24 hours.
- iii. When youth need immediate shelter, staff arrange transportation to a shelter, host home, or in rare cases when other suitable shelter is not available, a short-term hotel stay.
- iv. In non-crisis situations, case managers schedule initial meetings at times and locations convenient for the youth.

2. Access to safe, stable emergency shelter and extended housing assistance that meets federal and state length-of-stay and age limitations outlined above.

- i. All sites are licensed with the status of Commissioner Designated Shelter Program, placing them in compliance with all state and local licensing requirements to operate at least one or more of the following housing models:
 - a. *Single Room Occupancy (SRO)*
 DEFINITION: Housing consisting of single room dwelling units with access to private or shared food preparation or sanitary facilities. Units are owned or leased by TLP site.
 - Case managers meet with participants in SROs at least one time per week.
 - Youth-to-staff ratio of 3:1 is maintained.
 - b. *Host Homes*
 DEFINITION: A family or single adult home that provides shelter to a homeless youth.
 - Host Home families are screened and trained as dictated by VCRHYP policies and procedures.
 - When recruiting/selecting host homes, TLP sites:

- Conduct in-depth interviews with candidates
 - Check personal references
 - Screen them through state and national background registries for criminal involvement and child abuse and neglect
 - Inspect homes to ensure living space is adequate, clean, and safe
 - Provide host families with training on substance abuse, trauma-informed support, adolescent development, and setting and maintaining personal boundaries.
 - TLP coordinators provide regular supervision to youth and host family and are available 24-hours/7-days a week through each agency's on-call system.
- c. *Supervised Apartment (SA)*
 DEFINITION: Shelter setting using building(s) with separate residential units where client supervision is provided on site or on call 24-hours a day. Units are leased or owned by TLP site.
- Case managers meet with youth in SAs an average of once weekly (announced and unannounced).
- ii. All sites have policies dictating procedures to be followed in the event of a disaster that include the following:
- a. A list and location of all emergency equipment located at the sites
 - b. Evacuation plans for each site
 - c. Instructions regarding the process of informing site leadership, the VCHRYP admin team, and FYSB when a disaster occurs
 - d. Instructions for completing a disaster incident report
 - For sites that use Host Homes or SAs additional instructions are included that:
 - Detail emergency/first aid equipment that must be available at each area housing youth
 - Detail communication plans to contact the TLP case manager in the event of an emergency
 - Detail site-specific evacuation plans
 - Detail time frames in which TLP case managers must conduct a physical check of youth
 - e. Youth and host families review emergency plans and the location of emergency equipment upon assuming residence.
 - f. TLP case managers check equipment to ensure proper working order on a regular basis.
- 3. All sites provide case management including: intake assessment, counseling, community service linkages and outlined in the RHY legislation, life skills development, financial literacy support, connections to mental and physical health care, and parenting education (as appropriate).**

- i. Case managers and intake counselors conduct an initial needs assessment using an evidence-based or evidence-informed assessment tool and collect HMIS intake data.
- ii. Case managers meet individually with youth at least once weekly.
- iii. Case managers help youth connect with other community resources including accompanying youth on initial visits to ensure relationships are established with other caring adults in the community
 - If not accompanying youth, case managers follow up with youth to ensure connection was made and to troubleshoot it wasn't
 - Case managers advocate for youth and teach youth to self-advocate for their own rights and needs with schools, health care providers, and other resources

4. All sites will provide employment and/or educational attainment support.

- i. Case managers will work with each TLP participant to include one or more educational or employment goals in their service plan.
- i. Project will provide participants with educational supports:
 - When youth have not completed high school, case managers work with youth and school systems to enable youth to complete requirements for graduation
 - Sites use the [National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Toolkit for Shelters and Service Providers](#)
 - When youth are not interested in completing high school, staff help them explore other opportunities including GED, secondary training, and technical/vocational education

5. Case managers will ensure that each TLP participant has a written service or treatment plan/ plan of care.

- i. Service plans are created within 30 working days of intake and updated at least every 6 months.
- ii. Plans need to be approved and signed by a licensed clinician within 30 days of intake.
- iii. Youth sign an agreement acknowledging they are voluntarily participating in services and agreeing to program requirements. If a youth is under 18, parent/guardian signature is obtained.
- iv. Plans address stable housing, employment, education, permanent connections, social and emotional wellbeing, and basic life skills development needs.
 - a. All plans include a housing goal and strategies for securing housing that is safe, stable, and within budget
 - b. All plans should include employment or educational goals
 - c. Primary goal of every plan is the youth's transition to independence or another safe, stable, and appropriate living situation
 - d. Plans should be created with youth input and reflect youth voice in goals
 - e. Goals should be written with measurable indicators of progress which will be used to track youth's progress towards goals

- f. Plans should be referred to regularly to celebrate incremental successes and, if needed, revise goals or strategies

6. All TLP agencies will conduct outreach activities to connect eligible runaway, homeless, and street youth to programming.

- i. Each TLP site engages in one or more of the following outreach strategies:
 - a. Personal contact and collaborative work with other community organizations, including participating in local Continuum of Care and coordinated entry systems.
 - b. Formal and informal presentations to community groups
 - c. Youth driven street outreach and drop-in centers
 - d. Print and non-print media advertisements
 - e. Maintenance of social media and website presences
 - f. Employing peer outreach workers in the community
 - g. Creation and dissemination of outreach brochures, resource cards, posters, and flyers

7. TLP sites engage youth in aftercare services.

- i. Within 30 days of intake, an initial aftercare plan has been created with the youth. An aftercare plan includes:
 - a. Information on how contact with the youth will be maintained after the youth exits services or disconnects from the case management. To maintain contact, case managers may use the youth's cell phone number, email address, agency Facebook pages, and other social media such as Instagram messaging with the youth's prior permission.
 - b. Consent from the youth for the agency to conduct follow up contacts after the youth has left services at 3, 6, and 12 months.
 - c. Referrals to other community resources.
 - d. Information on how the youth can reconnect with the program at any time in the future, regardless of status of how they left the program in the current intake.
- ii. Case managers will contact youth who have left services at 3, 6, and 12 months after exit to encourage youth to follow-up on referrals, make additional referrals if needed, reassure youth that additional supports are available, assess if stable housing is still in place and continue to gather data and feedback about each youth's progress

D. PARTICIPATION IN VCRHYP'S CENTRALIZED DATA COLLECTION AND STATEWIDE HOMELESSNESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (HMIS)

STANDARD: *TLP sites shall participate in VCRHYP's data collection mechanisms, including providing required client level data to the centralized Data Entry Clerk for entry into HMIS.*

MEASURES:

- 1. Each site will submit client level HMIS data to VCRHYP for entry into HMIS within 30 days of intake, when youth switches programs, when client information changes and an interim update is needed, and at exit.**
 - i. TLP sites will use VCRHYP's most current HMIS reporting forms for client intake, interim, assessment and exit data.

E. ACCOUNTABILITY:

STANDARD: *TLP sites shall participate in VCRHYP's monitoring activities, including site visits, file reviews and submission of any required documentation.*

MEASURES:

- 1. Each TLP state and federally funded agency will provide information to VCRHYP's administrative team for an annual file review per VCRHYP's accountability oversight policy.**
 - i. VCRHYP admin team will assess compliance with:
 - a. Medicaid file management
 - b. TLP standards of service delivery
 - c. Outlined documentation and data practices
- 2. Each TLP state and federally funded agency will participate in VCRHYP Site Visits every two years.**
 - i. Bi-annual site visits by the VCRHYP admin team will be used to:
 - a. Assess compliance with TLP standards
 - b. Review required documentation
 - c. Monitor practice
 - d. Identify training/technical assistance needs
 - e. Review Positive Youth Development and trauma-informed approaches
 - f. Evaluate how well the needs of diverse youth are being met
- 3. TLP sites are evaluated annually by the Vermont Department of Children and Families Residential Licensing Unit to ensure housing meets state codes and requirements for safe, appropriate housing for youth.**