

Effectively Reducing Youth Homelessness: A Panel on Washington State’s Efforts

August 6, 2026

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Purpose:

This half day panel in Washington State is designed to unpack how Washington has made the progress it has in reducing youth homelessness, *why* we believe the highlighted four interconnected strategies are essential to population-level change, and *where* communities must go from here.

Through this panel, participants will engage with key partners to explore:

- Prevention strategies that stop homelessness before it starts, particularly through schools, wraparound teams, financial support, and systems exits
- Student homelessness policy and systems approaches that lead to improved student outcomes through school-based supports and housing stability
- Data-driven crisis responses, including functional zero and the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP), that focus resources where they have the greatest impact
- Advocacy and field building that create the policy, funding, and leadership conditions needed to sustain and scale success

Agenda:

Brief Event Outline

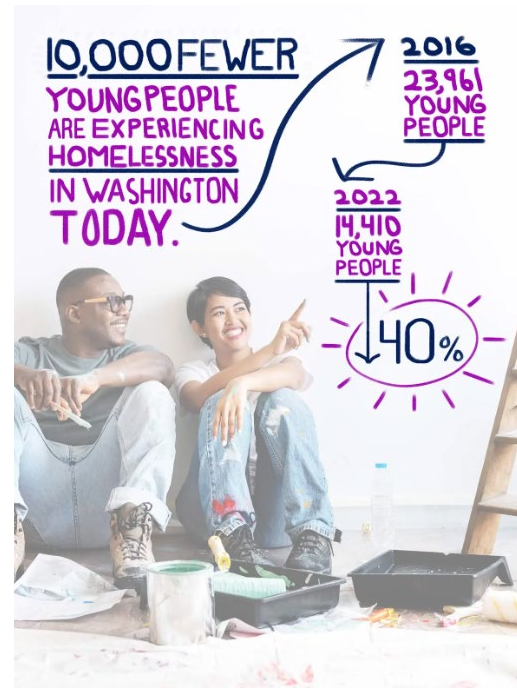
1. **9:00-9:10 — Settling In**
2. **9:10-9:20 — Opening**
3. **9:20-10:00 — Panel 1: How Washington Created Change**
 1. 9:20-9:30 — Section 1: The Early Days
 2. 9:30-9:45 — Section 2: The Role of Philanthropy
 3. 9:45-10:00 — Section 3: From Strategy to Results
4. **10:00-10:05 — Transition Break**
5. **10:05-11:10 — Panel 2: What Made Progress Possible—and What Comes Next**
 1. 10:05-10:15 — Section 1: Youth Power as a Change Strategy
 2. 10:15-10:25 — Section 2: Building a Movement
 3. 10:25-10:35 — Section 3: Functional Zero and Community Change
 4. 10:35-10:45 — Section 4: Moving Upstream
 5. 10:45-10:55 — Section 5: The Next Decade
 6. 10:55-11:00 — Lightning Round
 7. 11:00-11:10 — Audience Q&A and Closing
6. **11:10-11:15 — Transition and Panelists Leave**
7. **11:15-11:30 — Funder Only Discussion**

The Washington State Story:

Washington State has shown that youth homelessness is not inevitable—it is solvable when prevention, education, crisis response, and systems leadership are aligned. In recent years, Washington has reduced youth homelessness by **40 percent**, increased graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness by **34 percent** and decreased the number of young people exiting public systems into homelessness by **26 percent**. These results were not driven by a single program, but by a coordinated, multi-strategy approach grounded in public leadership, strong advocacy, actionable data, and community-level execution.

Three key factors turned strategy into population-level impact and drove Washington's success:

- **Inside/Outside Strategy:** Clear public sector ownership paired with a unified external coalition and shared agenda.
 - *Results:* A strong state youth homelessness office and a strong advocacy field, which have resulted in durable policy and funding, including sustained annual investments in youth homelessness prevention and crisis response, and the ability to scale local successes statewide.
- **Actionable Data:** Reliable, person-specific data that tracks inflow, outcomes, and disparities—and informs decisions in real time.
 - *Results:* More reliable data about the number of youth experiencing homelessness, their education outcomes, inflow from systems and a move towards a By Name List.
- **Data-Driven Practices:** Relying on data and evidence to focus on what works, stop what doesn't, and improve outcomes for young people over time.
 - *Results:* Multidisciplinary teams identify risk earlier and divert more young people from homelessness, prevention programs expand and perform better, schools become effective intervention points.

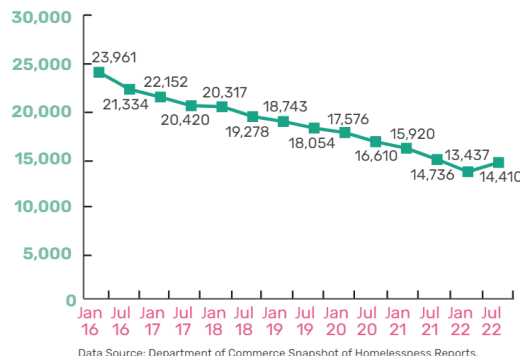


Strategies Supported by Raikes, Campion and Other Funders

The Housing Stability for Youth (HSY) strategy is designed to ensure communities have the systems needed to equitably prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness. Here are our four interconnected initiatives and five objectives, which overlap with and reinforce each other:

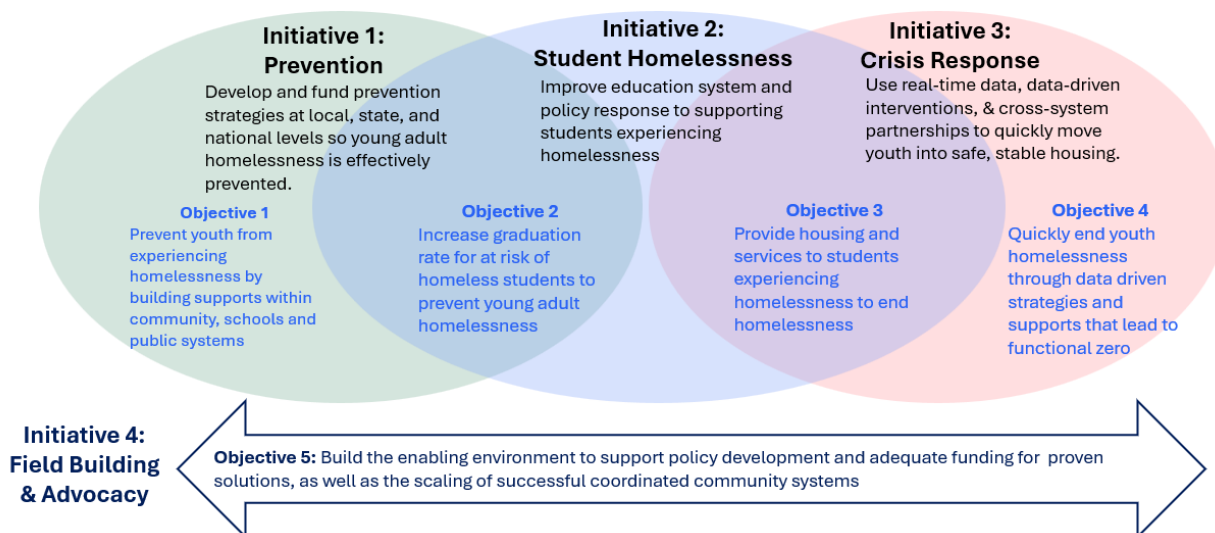
Data Over Time

Number of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability, 2016-2022



Four-Pronged Strategy Objectives

HSY Goal: All communities in the country have eliminated or are equitably reducing youth and young adult homelessness through sufficient systems of prevention, education, and crisis response



Prevention focuses on resolving housing instability before a young person enters the homelessness system by identifying safe alternatives, mobilizing family or natural supports, and providing flexible assistance such as short-term financial help or mediation. Prevention includes longer-term strategies such as stabilizing family housing, improving transition planning for youth exiting foster care or juvenile justice, and strengthening education and economic supports.

Diversion is a short-term, problem-solving intervention used at the moment a young person seeks help for housing instability or homelessness. Diversion is designed to be fast, voluntary, and youth centered and can be used as upstream prevention or at the front door of the homelessness system.

Crisis response supports young people during homelessness, making their experience brief and one-time and helping them return quickly to safe, stable housing.

Prevention

Statewide Strategy Development

Since the establishment of the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY), the state has been building its prevention strategy, with support from private funders, legislation and public funding, and based on lessons learned from communities and young people. Numerous new prevention programs have been created, addressing family stability, financial assistance, school-based prevention, and exits from public systems. These efforts have inspired new funding streams at the state and federal levels. A key focus has been on reducing exits to homelessness from public systems, and there has been remarkable progress.

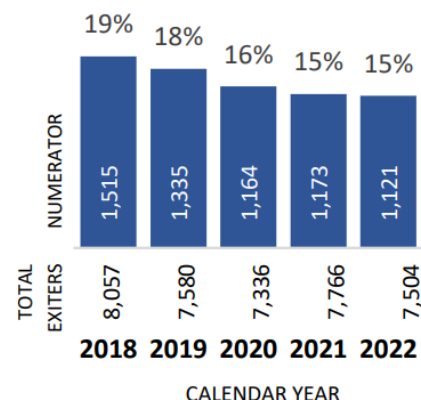
Key Legislation

- **SB 6560 (2018):** Established the statewide goal that no young person exits a publicly funded system of care into homelessness. Strengthened transition planning across child welfare, juvenile rehabilitation, and behavioral health.
- **HB 1905 (2022):** Invested \$5.2 million to advance the vision of SB 6560 by funding coordinated, flexible prevention and diversion efforts.



Key Prevention Programs

- Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF): Operating in 10 counties, with 93% of participating young people remaining housed 12 months after receiving support.
- Youth and Young Adult Housing Response Team (YYAHRT): Cross-agency coordination to support youth exiting systems of care into stable housing.
- Housing Stability for Youth in Courts (H-SYNC): *Youth Homelessness Trend Systems Exits* Identification and prevention for youth at risk of homelessness in the juvenile court system, operating in five urban, suburban and rural counties.
- System of Care Grants: Flexible funding for organizations supporting youth and young adults exiting publicly funded systems of care. Services are expansive and include navigation, family reconciliation, civil legal aid, employment and education supports, case management, etc.
- Youth Diversion Infrastructure Project (YDIP): Flexible diversion resources to help youth exit systems of care into safe, stable housing.



Key Reads:

- [Strategic Plan: Prevention of Youth Homelessness \(Jan 2021\)](#)
- [Shifting Services and Systems to Prevent Youth Housing Instability \(Sept. 2021\)](#)
- [Youth & Young Adult Housing Response Team Annual Report \(2024\)](#)
- [Homelessness Prevention & Diversion Fund \(Jan. 2025\)](#)
- [Homelessness Among Youth Exiting Systems of Care in WA State \(Aug. 2025\)](#)
- [Housing Stability for Youth in Courts \(H-SYNC\) home page](#)
- [A formula that pays off to keep WA's youth housed | The Seattle Times](#)
- [Youth Diversion Infrastructure Project \(Aug. 2024\)](#)

Student Homelessness



Over the past decade, Washington State has taken a proactive, prevention-focused approach to supporting students experiencing homelessness by positioning schools as early identification and intervention hubs. Through sustained state investment, strengthened McKinney-Vento coordination, and programs like the Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP), Washington has improved the ability of school districts to identify housing instability earlier, connect students to flexible supports, and reduce educational disruption. As a result, the state has seen measurable improvements in student outcomes, including higher graduation rates and stronger cross-system coordination between education, housing, and youth-serving agencies.

Key legislation

- **Homeless Student Education Act (2014):** Required semi-annual reporting of educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness
- [Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act \(2016\):](#) Created the Homeless Student Stability Program to support the education and housing outcomes of students experiencing homelessness.

Key programs

- Identify more students and connect them to supports: HSSP funds regional education agencies and community providers to strengthen identification and referral pathways so more students experiencing homelessness access eligible supports. In practice, a regional team can train school-based points of contact and set up a simple referral process, so staff quickly connect families to help.
- Build cross-system partnerships that make services easier to access: HSSP helps schools connect families to housing navigation and stabilization supports through warm handoffs and shared coordination thereby reducing the need to repeat their story across systems. In

this work, a school liaison can introduce a family directly to a case manager who then coordinates documents, applications, and follow-up across partners.

- Strengthen supports for students with specialized needs through trusted community providers: HSSP funds specialized and culturally responsive providers to deliver tailored help while coordinating with school partners, helping reach families often underserved by mainstream systems. A concrete example is tailoring services for families with communication or accessibility needs while keeping the school team looped in on stability planning.

Key Reads:

- [“Homeless Student Stability Program: A new approach to grantmaking”](#) (Building Changes)
- [“Homeless Student Stability Program \(HSSP\) 2025 Policy Brief”](#) (Building Changes)
- [“Key WA homeless student program could lose third of funding”](#) (Seattle Times, January 17, 2026) ([PDF Link](#))
- [“A critical chance to support homeless students”](#) (Seattle’s Child, February 3, 2026)

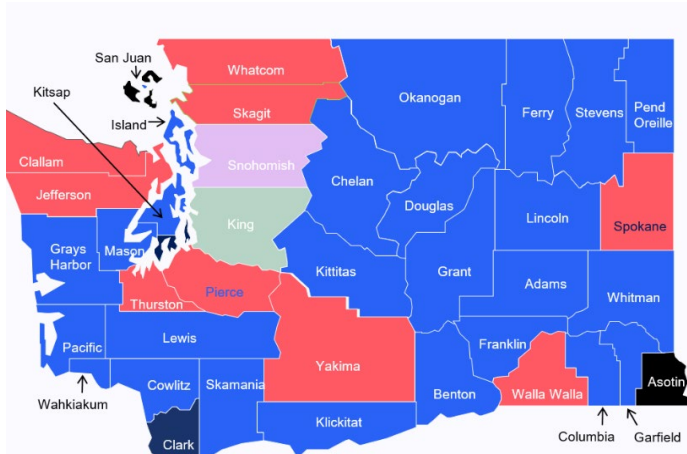
Crisis Response

By braiding federal and state dollars into a sustained, annual investment of nearly \$29 million, Washington moved beyond one-time grants to build durable youth crisis response systems that function across both urban and rural communities. As a result, communities shifted from isolated programs to coordinated systems that can track inflow, target resources, and scale impact statewide.

Through aligned federal and state investments, Washington built youth-specific coordinated entry

systems, Youth Action Boards, and shared accountability structures to help communities respond to youth homelessness. The creation of the OHY was a catalytic step, centralizing funding, contracts, and oversight and enabling the state to move from fragmented investments to a more coherent, statewide approach. This infrastructure was further strengthened through the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) and alignment with the Built for Zero model, which emphasizes real-time, person-specific data and measurable progress toward [functional zero](#).





Communities for Functional Zero (C4Z0) \$9M
C4F0 + YHDP
Balance of State- \$4.63M (2018) + \$5.29M (2022)
King County- \$5.4M
Snohomish County- \$2.39
Spokane City/County- \$2.7M
Pierce County- \$3.1M
****All but 2 counties have YYA programs (Asotin and San Juan)**

Key Reads:

- [Pierce County Invests \\$3.1 Million to Combat Youth Homelessness, Joins 100-Day Challenge Initiative](#)
- [Spokane Achieves 20% Reduction in YYA Homelessness \(Feb. 2022\)](#)

Field Building and Advocacy

Washington's success in addressing youth homelessness comes through collaboration among government agencies, advocates, funders, young people, and service providers. These partners share a vision and maintain clear accountability, which helps build momentum to scale effective solutions. Advocacy is led primarily by the Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocates (WACHYA), supported by statewide advocates, including youth with lived experience. Funders contribute by backing external advocacy, supporting key positions in government, and investing in research and communications to highlight emerging challenges. Local and state funder tables also keep philanthropic efforts aligned and informed.

A strong field is essential to sustaining and expanding progress across Washington. The HSY field building and advocacy portfolio invests in people, organizations, and infrastructure that propel this work forward—strengthening policy, communications, research, and leadership throughout the state. Central to this approach is ensuring youth voice and BIPOC leadership remain at the forefront. By equipping advocates with tools such as research, narrative power, and policy expertise, field building and advocacy efforts create the conditions necessary for enduring, statewide progress in tackling youth homelessness.



Key Reads:

- [WA's 'one of a kind' youth homelessness response shows big results | The Seattle Times](#)
- [Researchers: Washington state saw 40% reduction in youth and young adult homelessness](#)
- [WA Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy](#)