Fostering Optimism: Housing Units for Homeless College Students

Morgan Paden, Development Director, Grants

ABSTRACT

The overarching goal of the Fostering Optimism: Housing Units for College Students Experiencing Homelessness Program is to provide comfortable and supportive transitional housing for community college students who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless.

THE CHALLENGE

In Los Angeles County, 35-60% of youth aging out of foster care have no safe, affordable housing available. In 2020, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) reported the number of homeless youth in Los Angeles County increased more than 18.5% over the previous year. Homeless youth with a history of foster care report an average duration of 36.6 months, which designates them as chronically homeless.

For youth transitioning out of the fractured foster care system, successful educational attainment is key to self-sufficiency in adulthood. However, foster youth have significantly worse educational outcomes. Only 65% of youth in foster care complete high school or earn a GED by age 21, and less than 11% go on to earn a college degree.

Many community college students in the U.S. are experiencing homelessness. Youth, desperate for an education, are living in their cars at night as they attend class during the day. This is even truer for former foster youth who have few family supports to rely on. Optimist aims to remove barriers to student success and create stability for students who are at risk of homelessness.

CONCLUSION

- In 2022, LACCD and OYHFS entered an agreement to provide housing to 13 unhoused community college students
- The available rooms filled quickly and there remains a waitlist with 30+ applicants hoping for housing.
- Approximately 50% of the LACCD students who sought housing were also former foster youth and many have requested supportive services such as therapy and educational support which Optimist provides onsite.

Meet Carolina:

A previously unhoused Mother and College Student. Now an Optimist Resident

“I had an apartment with roommates, but it became so expensive that I found myself living in my car. My daughter went to live with her father because I did not want her to see me like this. I would visit her and pretend like everything was ok, but really it was a bad situation.”

“Our view is that foster youth are not defined by what has happened to them; they are only limited by access to supports and resources to achieve their dreams.”

Dr. Todd Sosna, Chief Executive Officer, Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services

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