



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### ABOUT A WAY HOME WASHINGTON

- **What is A Way Home Washington?**

A Way Home Washington (AWHWA) is a statewide movement to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness, with a focus on prioritizing young people of color and LGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness at higher rates than their white, straight, cisgender peers. Co-Chaired by First Lady Trudi Inslee, AWHWA unites passionate stakeholders across the state to build systems that respond to the unique needs of *all* young people.

- **What is Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Washington?**

An estimated 13,000 – 15,000 young people in Washington are experiencing homelessness – the equivalent of nearly a quarter of the state’s entire high school graduation class per year.

The circumstances that lead youth (ages 12 to 18) and young adults (ages 18 through 24) to experience homelessness can vary from person to person. They may be rooted in family conflict, like running away from an abusive household or being kicked out of their home after coming out to their family as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or Queer/questioning. Other key contributing factors include racial disparities and systemic inequalities, lack of affordable housing, exiting from a system of care, poverty, mental health challenges, substance misuse and more.

When young people have a stable home, supportive connections and access to needed services, they have the opportunity to successfully transition into adulthood and thrive.

- **How does AWHWA define ‘youth and young adult homelessness’?**

Young people between the ages of 12-24 unaccompanied by a parent or guardian who are unsheltered or living in places unfit for human habitation, in shelter, or unsafely or unstably housed. This includes young people who are fleeing domestic violence and trafficking, and those who may be unsafely or unstably couchsurfing or doubled-up.

- **What do Functional Zero and Yes to Yes mean?**

A set of measures communities across the country used to determine whether a community has functionally ended homelessness. Communities know they have reached functional zero when they have the capacity to:

- prevent most homelessness
- quickly identify all the unaccompanied young people who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability at any given time
- quickly resolve homelessness with connections to safe and stable housing

Young people experiencing housing instability can access services they need and want quickly without leaving their home community and are no longer homeless in the process. When a young person says “Yes, I need help,” a community is able to say “Yes” back – Yes to Yes!

- **Why was AWHWA created?**

A Way Home Washington was started by a coalition of philanthropy, nonprofit, and government leaders who saw a gap in Washington state. There were many organizations doing important work, but no single organization was specifically responsible for improving systems to end unaccompanied youth and young adult homelessness. Shortly after Governor Jay Inslee first took office in 2013, he and First Lady Trudi Inslee were approached by philanthropists Tricia Raikes and Sonya Champion. Out of these initial conversations, the ideas for both AWHWA and the state Office of Homeless Youth were born.

The Raikes Foundation, Champion Foundation, Satterberg Foundation, and other inaugural funders founded AWHWA, initially lending several members of their own staff to get the organization off the ground. For AWHWA’s first-ever Executive Director, they selected Jim Theofelis, a storied advocate for young people and founder of The Mockingbird Society.

Raikes, Champion and Satterberg remain funders of AWHWA, and have been joined over the years by funders such as Ballmer Group, the Schultz Family Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. After launching AWHWA and the Anchor Community Initiative, and numerous advocacy victories in the state legislature, Jim officially passed the baton to Julie Patiño at the end of 2020.

AWHWA is fortunate to have a leader and champion in the First Lady of Washington, Trudi Inslee. Mrs. Inslee has served as co-chair since AWHWA’s inception, and ending youth and young adult homelessness continues as a priority for Governor Jay Inslee’s administration.

## ABOUT THE ANCHOR COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

- **What is the Anchor Community Initiative?**

The circumstances that lead to the experience of homelessness can vary greatly, so solutions also need to be varied. Tailoring approaches to prevent and end homelessness that are centered on the experience and expertise of young people and take into account their circumstances and the communities they live in is the focus of the Anchor Community Initiative, A Way Home Washington's flagship program.

In each Anchor Community, a diverse coalition brings together all parts of a community with partners committing to work across systems and silos, sticking with their collective approach until they have functionally ended youth homelessness. Each community's plan and approach is unique, typically covering a prevention network, emergency response, housing and supportive resources, treatment services, employment and educational attainment.

- **What is required to be an Anchor Community?**

Communities interested in participating in the Anchor Community Initiative must be willing and able to partner with AWHWA to address youth (ages 12 to 18) and young adult (ages 18 through 24) homelessness, with a focus on prioritizing young people of color and LGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness at higher rates than their white, straight, cisgender peers. Local communities must be able to commit to:

- **Ongoing community buy-in and key stakeholder support** for participation in this initiative, including the CoC Lead Agency and HMIS Lead;
- Upholding the **values and aim** of the Anchor Community Initiative, including authentic youth engagement and a commitment to end disproportionality for YYA of color, LGBTQ and trans/gender nonconforming YYA;
- **Authentic engagement** with young people with lived experience as partners and leaders, including supporting an active YAB and ensuring that all young people are compensated for their work;
- **Setting specific, measurable goals** to drive a functional end to YYA homelessness in your community;
- **Identifying and securing key local positions** (a community lead, data lead, and agency to host the local Coordinator and the Youth and Community Engagement positions) *within the first quarter of 2022;*
- **Convening cross sector teams** (both a Community Team and an Improvement Team) working in sync with youth action boards (YABs) who are responsible for making progress towards functional zero, uplifting youth voice, and centering racial and LGBTQ+ justice in the work

Convening your local Improvement Team *twice a month*

Hosting Youth Action Board meetings *at least monthly*

Hosting Community Team meetings *at least quarterly*

- **Engaging in meaningful relationships** with partners outside of the homeless response system, including by/for organizations, school, child welfare, inpatient behavioral health and juvenile justice systems;
  - **Building and using a quality and reliable By-Name List (BNL)** of all unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness in your community;
  - Using your BNL data to **reduce the number** of young people experiencing homelessness and **reach functional zero**, including an **end to disproportionality** for BIPOC, LGBTQ and trans/gender non-conforming young people;
  - Monthly system-level **data reporting**;
  - **Participating in a Community of Practice**, which includes attending **Learning Sessions** (*2x per year*) and other trainings, webinars, and peer-sharing opportunities;
  - Engaging in robust analysis around how **systemic racism, homophobia and transphobia** are showing up in your system and programs, and taking concrete action to transform it; and
  - **Being brave and innovative** - willingness to honestly interrogate your system and creatively test new ways of doing things, even when there is a possibility of failure
- **How did you come up with this model?**  
Our model was originally based on the Community Solutions Built for Zero framework. AWHWA adapted this model for systems change work with youth and young adults and further embedded the goals and implements necessary to address the gross disproportionality of LGBTQ+ and young people of color. We work with communities to address homelessness and disproportionality at the same time by disaggregating data to ensure that these young people are seen by the ‘system’ and that targeted efforts can be marshalled to drive reductions both to flow into the system, as well out of the system. This level of disaggregation and tactical support add a layer of complexity to the work but also operate to address arguably the biggest unmet need in the homeless system – that of addressing the disparate impact and harm to young people of color and those with intersectional identities (LGBTQ+).
  - **What relationship does the ACI have to the Office of Homeless Youth?**  
OHY and AWHWA share a mission to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness throughout Washington state and to do so in a manner that addresses disproportionality for young people of color and LGBTQ+ young people. Further, we know that we cannot do this without young people with lived expertise guiding the way. We also form the two pillars of public-private partnership, as financial resources and political will are aligned to move resources provided through legislative acts specifically to support the Anchor Community Initiative and Anchor Communities. AWHWA in turn marshals private dollars to seed the pathway forward for communities as they titrate to adoption, and then sustainability, arising from more direct local support resources. AWHWA is also able to provide in-depth support to communities without a local cost to communities due to philanthropic partners who are mission-aligned.

- **What specific equity components are in the ACI definition of Functional Zero and why did you choose these measures?**

The three specific equity measures built into the ACI definition of functional zero are:

- Zero disproportionality in returns from housing: People of color and LGBTQ and trans and gender nonconforming young people are returning to homelessness from housing at the same or lesser rate than others;
- Zero disproportionality in permanent housing: People of color and LGBTQ and trans and gender nonconforming young people are being housed at the same or higher rate than they experience homelessness; and
- People of color and LGBTQ and trans and gender nonconforming young people young people spend equal or less time experiencing homelessness than others.

These measures were chosen as key indicators to ensure that a community's homelessness system is not reproducing disproportionality for these key populations, while being measurable and useful for guiding communities to improve their system. These measures are unique to the ACI, and we have been collaboratively working with other initiatives to center equity and justice in our efforts to end YVA homelessness.

You can find more information in our [Functional Zero 1-Pager here](#).

- **What are the benefits to communities participating in the Anchor Community Initiative?**

Communities that are selected as an Anchor Community can expect the following benefits and supports:

- Strategic coaching, data infrastructure, subject matter expertise, and state level advocacy support from a dedicated team who use a data-driven, continuous quality improvement model to support local communities in setting measurable goals, identifying system changes, and using system data to track results;
- A Lead Coach who will support communities to reach their local goals;
- Focused support for the collection and utilization of quality data;
- Connection to other Anchor Communities across the state through facilitated, cross-cohort calls, various learning opportunities, ACI learning sessions, and access to shared material, best practices, tools, data dashboards, and resources through the ACI Resource Hub;
- Targeted data and evaluation tools to uncover inequities and make progress towards key milestones;
- Strategic support for staff in key local positions, including securing host agencies for the Local ACI Coordinator position and Youth & Community Engagement Coordinator roles; and
- Access to state-level funding and policy advocacy based on local needs.

- **What successes have been achieved by the original four Anchor Communities?**
  - All communities have established data supports that allowed them to reach quality, real-time data for YYA and are working on sustainability
  - All communities have Youth Advisory Boards doing ACI work, with two communities are meeting the [‘Gold Standard’](#)
  - All communities have set reducing goals
  - Three communities are universally collecting Sexual Orientation Gender Identity data, a key implement to addressing LGBTQ+ disproportionality
  - Key supportive resources such as the [Centralized Diversion Fund](#) and AHWHA’s [School-centered Innovation Grant Program](#) are embedded and leveraged to drive prevention and diversion efforts
  - All ACIs are acculturated to tracking and making use of real-time strategy insights that continually drive innovation, improvements, and learning ([see Resource Hub](#))

- **How much do AHWHA and the Anchor Communities work on advocacy?**  
 AHWHA and the Anchor Communities are prominent advocates on the state and local levels, working closely with elected officials and government agencies to advance policies and secure resources that support our collective mission. In Olympia, AHWHA and communities collaborate with a statewide coalition of progressive housing and homelessness advocacy groups, called the Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy (WACHYA). This includes partner organizations like The Mockingbird Society and Building Changes.

AHWHA also has successfully advocated for millions of dollars from the state that flow from the Office of Homeless Youth and go directly to the Anchor Communities in support of their efforts to end youth and young adult homelessness.

- **Do members of both political parties support the Anchor Community Initiative?**  
 Yes. A Way Home Washington is a bipartisan initiative with support from both Democratic and Republican legislators. Some of the earliest champions of the Anchor Community Initiative include former Mayor of Spokane David Condon, State Senator Curtis King, and former State Senator Maureen Walsh, all Republicans. On the Democratic side, we are fortunate to have champions in legislators like Senate Majority Leader Andy Billig, Speaker of the House Laurie Jinkins, and former Speaker Frank Chopp.