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Unstable housing for former foster youth in Santa Cruz County

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Abstract

A lot of former foster youth are currently homeless. Homeless youth face the financial burdens of having to afford the cost of application fees. Rental application fees range from \$30 to \$50. The Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County (CAB) is a non-profit organization made up of six separate anti-poverty initiatives that concentrate on addressing the needs of people with limited resources. The Transitional Age Youth Housing Navigation (TAY NAV) is a program that works with former foster youth. The purpose of my project was to help raise funds in order to help pay for rental applications. The project was a fundraiser in the form of a bake sale. People were able to make monetary donations. We anticipate for the fundraiser to be an annual event to be able to help former foster youth with rental application fees. The event was implemented on April 1st, 2023, and raised a total of \$625. It is encouraged that TAY NAV continues to promote the annual bake sale on social media and in local newspapers.

Keywords: Former, Foster, Youth, Unhoused, Homelessness

Agency & Communities Served

The Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, INC., (CAB) is a non-profit organization located in Watsonville, California. “CAB’s mission is to partner with the community to eliminate poverty and create social change through advocacy and essential services” (Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, 2021, para. 1). “Their vision is to create a thriving, equitable, and diverse community free from poverty and injustice” (Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, 2021, para 2). CAB has many different departments. The Homelessness Prevention and Intervention Services (HPIS) Department is one of seven departments within the agency. The other six departments offered by CAB are Alcance, Day Worker Center of Santa Cruz Country (DWC), DavenPort Resource Service Center (DSRC), Santa Cruz County Immigration Project (SCCIP), Calworks Emergency Payment Program (CEPP), and The Thriving Immigrants Collaborative program (Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, 2023). TAY NAV is one program that the HPIS Department offers. The focus of this department is to provide resources and services to the unhoused and those facing housing instabilities.

The Transitional Age Youth Housing Navigation Program (TAY NAV) is one of the programs the HPIS Department offers. TAY NAV works to overcome barriers to attaining and maintaining housing while facilitating the FUP Family Unification Program (FUP) housing voucher application which is essentially section 8 for foster youth. TAY NAV works with former foster youth ages 18 to 24. The program provides housing navigation, case management, and beneficial workshops. They also help youth build basic life skills and linkages to other services. If the program doesn't offer services that these youth need they always make sure they can direct

them to other programs that would best fit their needs (Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, 2021).

The Santa Cruz County Homeless Census and Data Survey (2022) reveals that 39 % of survey participants have experience with the foster care system. (Applied Survey Research, 2022, p.9). A lot of clients that were surveyed are not getting housed. Out of the unaccompanied children and transition-age youth surveyed, 97% of participants are currently unsheltered (Applied Survey Research, 2022, p.9). TAY NAV works to serve former foster youth in connection to housing, case management, and other services. Out of the former foster youth aging out of foster care, 97% of youth are currently unhoused (Applied Survey Research, 2022, p.9). Former foster youth are not getting housed due to the housing crisis in Santa Cruz County.

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Figure 1: Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Lack of knowledge of services	Too many former foster youth are unhoused	Lack of education
Lack of financial resources		Incarceration
		Mental health concerns

Problem Statement

The housing needs of former foster youth are not getting met since the majority of unhoused youth surveyed are former foster youth who are still unhoused. Youth who lack a reliable place to sleep at night are frequently referred to as homeless. In a *Point-in-Time Homelessness Count*, in comparison to homeless families who are not involved with child welfare, those who are more likely to have bad social and economic results, which have a ripple

effect on society's economic and social expenses are the unhoused former foster youth (Applied Survey Research, n.d.). Almost one-third of the 552,380 people who were homeless in the United States in January 2018 were family members, according to the Point-in-Time Homelessness Count (Applied Survey Research, n.d.). It is hard for those who may be able to rely on family members to find housing and even harder for former foster youth who may not have family members. Housing instability and child welfare make it nearly impossible for foster youth to get housed. Youth transitioning out of foster care have difficulty finding housing because of the housing crisis. There are so many requirements they need to meet to be eligible for housing.

Furthermore, unstable housing for former foster youth is a huge problem in today's society. Youth not being able to find stable housing contributes to the issue of homelessness. In an article in the Journal of Planning Education and Research, the authors analyzed improved stability in the face of a housing market crisis (Chakraborty & McMillian, 2018, p. 1).

Chakraborty and McMillian discuss how a variety of housing types, including affordable, high-income, large, and small, create housing stability (2018, p. 1). Creating housing stability, there is a positive impact on the issue of homelessness. However, currently, the local housing market and the housing market in California as a whole are unstable which is negatively impacting former foster youth and negatively contributing to the issue of homelessness.

Contributing Factors

Lack of knowledge of services

There is a huge housing crisis due to the shortage of housing. An article published in *Children and Youth Services* states that there need to be more resources available to youth (Collins et al, 2020). Housing in California is so expensive that it makes it hard for anyone to

afford it. Credit is another barrier to youth getting housing since many youth do not have credit. Collins further explains how well child welfare works to help homeless families. It covers the economic dangers and shortfalls of these families, attempting to distinguish between those who have received aid from those who have not by comparing the two groups of families (Collins et al, 2020). Former foster youth are not covered by welfare and tend to struggle with housing which leads to vulnerability. When these youth are vulnerable, they lack assistance from a guardian and the welfare system.

Youth who are homeless gain from programs that not only take care of their immediate needs but also provide a range of resources to help with other elements of their lives. Affordable housing, employment and job training programs, education, and health care benefits are a few examples of services (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019). Since youth lack trust among all individuals, it is hard to find available resources. The lack of trust in all individuals leads to difficulty in finding resources for housing. Youth are not aware of the services available so it creates a barrier to where they can seek help. It is also challenging for the youth to participate in supportive services due to the dearth of resources available to them. In order to enlighten former foster youth about their possibilities, community advocates must also engage in outreach. Outreach is a tactical tool to increase homeless youth's awareness of accessible community resources. Lack of funds from an agency means less support clients get. Lack of funds also leads to the lack of outreach available. Youth are not able to utilize resources that could be provided due to the lack of knowledge. When foster youth have trouble seeking assistance, it makes things difficult as to where to find resources to get housing. By being unaware of what their community has to offer, youth may lack access to stable housing.

In a study done by the Hope Home Cohort, it was found that, the majority of participants who are unhoused display systems of profound loneliness, which has been connected to poor outcomes in patients with cancer and other illnesses (Patanwala et al.; 2018). When an individual is homeless it leads to vulnerability. When an individual is vulnerable they lack the ability to find resources. There are many resources out there that are beneficial to homeless individuals. However, when TAY NAV's youth are struggling to find a stable house it makes it difficult for them to connect with the program because they do not have an address to receive resources.

Lack of financial resources

Lack of financial resources plays a huge role in being able to get housing. A lot of foster youth have a hard time finding housing due to the gap between their resources and the expense. Credit is another barrier to youth getting housing since a lot of youth do not have credit. Foster care provides a way for individuals to have some form of housing or assistance during their childhood to figure things out for when they are ready or have reached an age where they can be on their own legally. The lack of funding creates a huge barrier to getting housing. One reason foster youth are not housed is due to the cost of rental applications. Rental applications are so expensive that it creates an additional setback to getting these former foster youth housed.

Former foster youth who are enrolled in programs benefit because they have access to different resources. According to a study analyzing national data, "Remaining in foster care, continuous receipts of academic support, and financial assistance services at ages 17-19 protected foster youth from experiencing homelessness" (Huang, et al., 2022, para 3). This finding confirms that stability and financial resources, not only in terms of housing but also in support of education, reduce homelessness among aging-out foster youth.

Consequences

Lack of education

Homelessness causes a lack of education. Former foster homeless youth differ from homeless adults in that they frequently lack the fundamental life skills necessary to live independently, such as how to drive or ride a bus, get employment, or handle money matters, according to the National Safe Space (n.d, para.2). Youth's access to resources like financial aid, scholarships, and programs that can support their educational pursuits is limited by the absence of support from a caring adult. Because they may believe they lack the qualifications to get employed at a job, homeless youth also miss out on work possibilities. Homelessness leads to a lack of education since former foster youth don't have access to the same education as others. If a youth is unhoused they don't have a safe space to study which causes a lack of motivation or success in pursuing an education.

When it comes to education, one needs stable housing in order to be successful. When you are in the comfort of your own home, you are able to focus on your education. According to a study done by *Children and Youth Services Review*, housing enhances academic results (Lee et al., 2009). Since there are so many unhoused youth they are unable to successfully pursue their education goals. If the number of housed foster youth in Santa Cruz County increased, there would be an incline in education. Lack of housing affects educational outcomes.

Incarceration

When these individuals are homeless, they tend to look for a place to sleep. Sometimes trying to get a full night of sleep leads to these individuals getting incarcerated because of vagrancy laws. No one ever likes to sleep in the cold, which can make incarceration look like a

temporary solution. While being incarcerated these individuals are able to have a place to sleep and have a plate of warm food. However, research shows that individuals who are incarcerated have a hard time finding housing since they are labeled as criminals (Tejani et al., 2013). When individuals don't have a place to stay it is normal for them to take the alternative routes.

Although when you are labeled as a "criminal" it creates a barrier to getting housed. According to a study from Hope Home, "Individuals experiencing homelessness have an increased risk of police citations related to survival behaviors" (Garcia-Grossman et al., 2022, p.1). This finding proves that individuals are more likely to get incarcerated as a survival tactic.

Mental and physical health concerns

Homelessness and mental diseases are linked in numerous ways. Finding assistance is a challenge for many homeless persons, which has a significant impact on their well-being.

According to a study done by the 100,000 Homes Campaign, those who live in unsheltered settings, such as the streets, frequently have worse health, less access to healthcare, and a higher chance of premature death (Montgomery et al., 2016, p.1). Being homeless takes a huge toll on a person's mental health. Due to individuals being homeless, mental health concerns increase due to individuals not being able to connect to resources.

Youth who experience homelessness may potentially suffer long-term physical health consequences. "Chronic health disorders, including asthma, other respiratory problems, diabetes, hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS are frequent among homeless individuals," claims the California Coalition for Youth (2023, para. 5). Living outside in bad weather can lead to chronic health disorders including asthma and lung difficulties. Due to their involvement in criminal activities including drug use, prostitution, and unprotected sex, homeless youth also run a higher risk of developing HIV/AIDS. These young individuals suffer possibly fatal long-term health issues if

they don't have access to medical assistance.

Project Description and Implementation Process

Project Proposal

Most of the former foster youth served in TAY NAV are young adults. Young adults range from the ages of 18-24 years old. One barrier our youth face is paying for rental applications. Finding affordable housing in Santa Cruz County is very difficult due to how expensive it is. Not finding affordable housing adds stress to our youth. On top of the difficulty of finding housing, our youth have to pay for the application fee while not knowing whether they will get approved for the housing unit they applied for. Adding this additional stress is not healthy for our youths' well-being. This takes a toll on them mentally, physically, and emotionally. This is why my project is a fundraiser. Bake Sale for Rental Applications is a one-day donation event that will raise money to help ease the stress of having one less thing on their plate to worry about. The proposed project will consist of hosting a bake sale for a few hours on March 18th, 2023 where community members can stop by and get some fresh homemade baked goods. Who doesn't enjoy baked goodies and donating to a good cause? If a person is unable to attend the event in person, they can still support the cause by making a monetary donation online. CAB's new location will be an ideal location for this event. With the spacious parking lot, we will be able to set up tables, where community members can enjoy fresh baked goods. A little budget of \$30 to \$40 will also be allocated to purchase snacks and decorations that will make the occasion welcoming for the attendees. The goal for this fundraiser is to raise \$250 to help assist with rental application costs as well as other support our youth may need. TAY NAV bake sale meets evidence-based practices since online donations are welcome.

According to a study done by *Fundraising in the digital era* they say “In terms of network, online networking can not only bring in online donations but also potentially increase offline donations” (Zhou et.al, 2019, p.1). For those who are not able to attend the bake sale, there will be a way for community members to make an online donation. Online donations are beneficial because it allows people to donate to a specific cause even if they are not able to attend the event. It also increases the rates of people being able to physically attend the fundraiser event through online networking.

Project Justification & Benefits

The Transitional Age Youth Housing Navigation (TAY NAV) program is a fairly new program that has been around for almost two years. TAY NAV is funded through Santa Cruz County. TAYNAV also depends on grants and donations which means money is not always available when clients are in need. This project intends to help our former foster youth by getting monetary donations to help pay for any necessities they may need during their housing process. The main benefit of this project is to receive monetary donations that will help former foster youth with barriers that may arise when getting housed. To give our former foster youth a better tomorrow, our fundraiser even gave us the chance to support them in a way that builds community. TAY NAV’s bake sale is a fun welcoming event, where community members can get together and eat baked goods. With their monetary donations, they will be contributing to helping our foster youth get one step closer to getting housed which is a huge stress reliever for former foster youth in Santa Cruz County.

Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes

A single-day charity event, TAY NAV’s Bake Sale emphasizes the significance of helping people in need. Equity, dignity and diversity, service, community action, and inclusion are values

that CAB upholds (Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, 2021, para. 3). With the use of social media networking and by inviting the community to take part in helping those in need, we will uphold these values through our fundraising. A significant portion of the former foster youth in our community are denied access to basic essentials. Through our fundraising efforts, we aim to help provide the youth with funding for rental applications.

In order to follow through with TAY NAV's Bake Sale, we have set a goal of raising \$250 dollars. We are hoping that at least ten community members are willing to attend this fundraiser event. On a Saturday morning, ten community members may be a lot. Some people work weekends, or people who have the day off might want to spend time with their loved ones. However, who wouldn't enjoy eating baked homemade goods with their loved ones?

We would be able to see how much money we receive in donations at the end of the fundraising event. The amount of money raised will be the main measure of success. Another way to assess the success of this fundraiser would be to see how many rental applications our youth have completed before the event compared to how many they are able to apply to after the fundraiser event. With the money received, youth may apply to multiple units.

The organization anticipated three main results when I put TAY NAV's Bake Sale into action. TAY NAV's Bake Sale goal was to raise money for client help in the long run. Last but not least, TAY NAV's long-term goal was to make TAY NAV's Baking Sale an annual fundraiser. To be able to offer client assistance to former foster youth served by TAY NAV, the event needed to raise the \$250 which we set as our specific project objective.

To determine how well the initiative will contribute to raising the agency's financing, I will conduct interviews with important individuals. I will also use administrative data to see how many of our youth have been housed after this fundraiser. After the interview, the organization

will be able to offer proof and give statistics demonstrating the achievement of the predetermined expected results.

Implementation Process

Several factors went into planning the fundraiser of the TAY NAV bake sale to ensure a successful event. There was a predetermined time frame that needed to be followed to guarantee that this fundraising event was processed as planned and that the conclusion would be positive. There were several staff members overseeing the project which included a chain of command to seek approval of the fundraiser. Additionally, after receiving approval for the fundraiser, resources were needed for the bake sale.

The designated staff members in charge of overseeing the entire project's execution in order to launch it included the following people. I, Mariah, in my role as a Collaborative Health and Human Services (CHHS) Intern, took the initiative to organize the fundraiser and ensure that the planning process went smoothly. Secondly, Anissa, the program coordinator for the Youth Homeless Response Team program (YHRT), collaborated closely with me in organizing the event. Hannah, the executive director of the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, INC., gave aid when higher-up permission was required. We needed to get the program coordinators of the Homelessness Prevention and Intervention Programs approval. I met with Anissa and we discussed what the fundraiser was for. Anissa then spoke with Department Coordinator, Elyssa, and further explained the fundraiser. She then approved. Once Elyssa was aware of the project, I made a proposal so that Hannah could know more in detail about what was needed and what the outcomes of this fundraiser would be. Below, I have attached Appendix A where I have shown the steps that were needed to complete this project.

Once Elyssa approved the TAY NAV bake sale, flyers were then made. I used Canva to make flyers of what baked goods would be sold and the pricing. After making fliers I advertised on social media such as Instagram. I asked my friends to repost so that others would know. Then, I asked local bakeries to see if they would be willing to donate to our bake sale. My mentor Anissa was asked to support the admin letter and get our tax ID for our bake sale. I continued to advertise our bake sale and locked in donations.

Project Results

In implementing this project, we were able to see how many people shared our social media posts and Instagram flyers explaining TAY NAV's Bake Sale. These flyers and Instagram posts were uploaded on CAB's social media as well as mine. I had over 500 views on the flyers. By April 8, 2023, we had raised \$625 dollars. At the Bake Sale, we had 15 community members as well as one dog. One of my friends posted it on Facebook and some of their followers reposted it.

The measure that was used to assess my project's success was the fundraiser amount. TAY NAV had surpassed its goal by raising over \$375 of its original goal of \$250. All this money is going to help TAY NAV's youth pay for rental applications. This helps ease the stress of our youth and potentially get them one step closer to getting housing. TAY NAV is currently in the process of helping one youth pay for her rental application. The method of accepting online donations was very successful. We received most of our monetary donations online. We wouldn't have been able to have such a successful event if it wasn't for social media. With social media, we were able to get the word out a lot faster. With everyone posting, we were able to get donations from different cities.

The project did achieve the expected outcomes since we surpassed the goal. However, it was a little stressful in the beginning. It was hard getting a location, but I continued to search for locations. One week later, I was able to secure a location where I was able to make the fundraiser happen. It is inspiring to see how many other foster youth rental applications the agency can pay for. After conducting an interview with the program director from the HPIS department she found this fundraiser very successful. Due to this fundraising event we now have additional client assistance for the youth enrolled in our program which is always helpful. She was also very proud that I surpassed my goal. She had stated, “The value of the project was very helpful to TAY NAV’s youth since we were able to pay for three of our youths' rental application fees (A. Banuelos, personal communication, May 5, 2023).”

Conclusion & Recommendations

After reflecting on this initiative, it is suggested that TAY NAV continues to host fundraisers to offer foster youth much-needed client assistance. Housing in Santa Cruz County is so expensive so the money raised will ease some stress from our foster youth in the program. Because TAY NAV is such a new program, it is advised that they do another fundraiser once all the money is used. So far, TAY NAV has currently assisted three youth pay for rental applications. As of today, one youth has been approved for a unit and is in the process of getting housing. TAY NAV and I are waiting on the inspection and if all goes well our youth will sign the lease within the next week. TAY NAV will assess how many homeless foster youths in the organization will use the fund by seeing who is currently in the process of housing navigation. TAY NAV currently has four youths searching for potential housing. All four youths are currently eligible for housing since they are building their credit. It is recommended that

fundraisers take place in both in-person and online formats to avoid being confined. If a person is unable to attend the event they can still donate online.

After assessing the overall success of the fundraiser, the youth enrolled in our program can apply to at least two units. Although this doesn't determine whether they get approved. I would recommend the organization look over to see who is eligible for housing. Nowadays, most landlords require tenants to have good credit and work. Once the organization determines who is eligible for housing it would make things easier. In the sense of seeing those specific youth would benefit from the funding.

Hosting in-person events establishes a physical space for community members and partners to congregate. It provides everyone with the opportunity to network in person with one another, which opens up new opportunities and openings. The benefit of organizing online fundraisers is a way where people can connect with others from all around the world. When you upload anything online, others can share it, making more people aware. People from work and school shared our flyers and donated to our fundraising. If TAY NAV's fundraising had just been held in person, we would not have had the community participating that we did online, which played a significant role in the event's success.

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Appendix A

Project Implementation Plan

Tasks	Timeline/ Deadlines	Supporting Staff	Materials/ Services Needed	Deliverables/Co mpleted Project
Met with mentor to discuss capstone ideas	Dec 2022- Feb 2023	Anissa	Paper & pen	Capstone ideas
Decided on creating TAY NAV bake sale to help pay for rental applications and other necessities our youth may need	Jan 27- Feb 7, 2023	Mariah & Anissa	Paper & pen	TAY NAV bake sale
Let our Program Director Elyssa know about the capstone idea	Feb 7th 2023	Anissa, Mariah & Elyssa	In-person meeting	Capstone pitch
PC spoke to Hannah to know of a possible TAY NAV bake sale	Feb 7, 2023	Anissa	In-person meeting	Capstone pitch
Send proposal of Bake Sale to PC Anissa to send to Hannah	Feb 13, 2023	Anissa	Laptop	Proposal
Final approval by Elyssa	Mar 1- Mar 3, 2023	Anissa & Elyssa	Laptop	Proposal approval
Make flyers of TAY NAV's Bake Sale	Feb 24 - Mar 4, 2023	Mariah	Laptop	Flyers
Advertise for event	Mar 6- Apr 1, 2023	Mariah	Social media	Advertisement of event
Asked for donations/confirmed donations	Mar 6- Mar 11, 2023	Mariah and Anissa	Phone	Confirm donations
Confirmed menu and prices of baked goods	Mar 6-Mar 30, 2023	Mariah and Anissa	Laptop	Confirm menu & pricing

Get Tables/ Baked goods	Mar 31, 2023	Mariah & Anissa	Tables, baked goods	Logistics
Costco run	Mar 30, 2023	Mariah	Baked goods - Croissants - Creamer - Muffins	Logistics
Starbucks run	Apr 1, 2023	Mariah	Starbucks coffee	Logistics
Set up for the event	Apr 1, 2023, before the event	Mariah & Anissa	2 Table cloth, 2 tables, chairs	Event set up
Get donations & the amount of money donated for TAY NAV foster youth	Apr 8, 2023	Mariah & Anissa	Money & jar for donations	Funding