

RESEARCH BRIEF

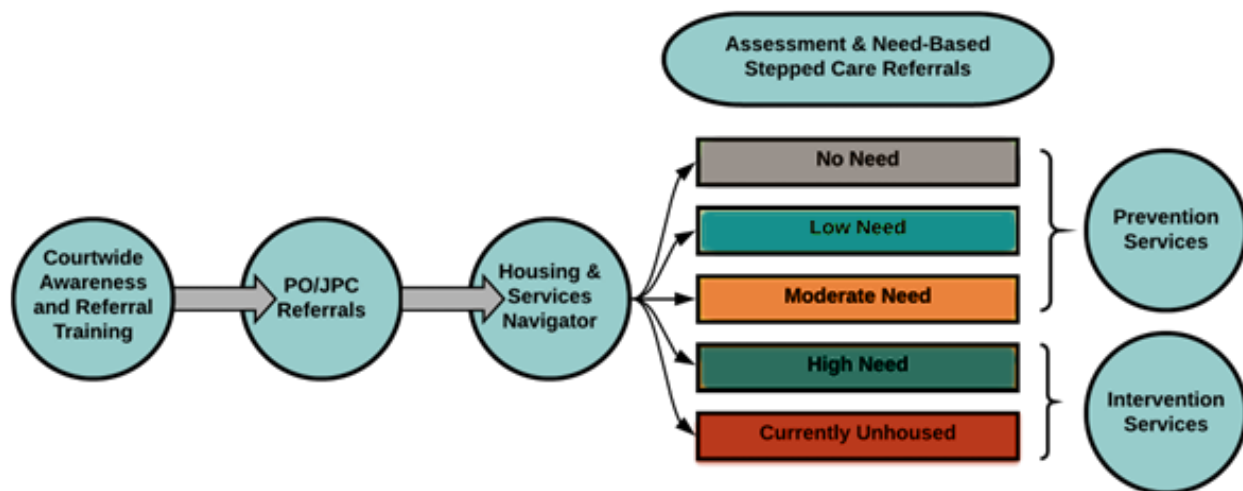
Housing Stability for Youth in Courts: A “cash-plus” model for legally involved youth

Background

Youth involved in the criminal legal system (YILS) experience significantly worse social determinants of health. **Nearly 40% of youth involved in the legal system (YILS) will experience housing instability as well as higher levels of neighborhood disorganization, violence, and higher levels of family conflict.**

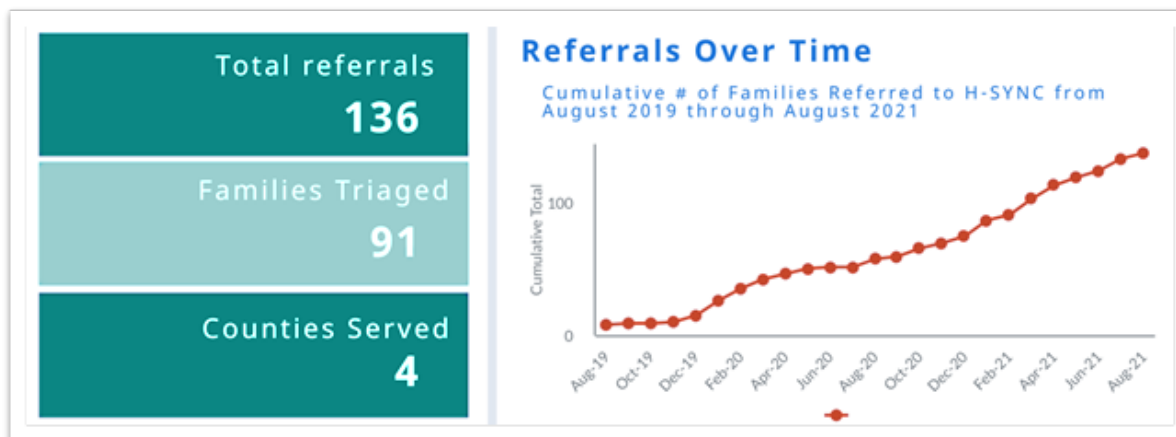
HSYNC was designed to focus on addressing malleable social determinants of health with the aim of preventing onset or ongoing episodes of housing instability as well as strengthening family cohesion as high family conflict is a demonstrated risk factor for youth homelessness.

The program integrates two key programmatic components: 1) A cascade model; 2) Cash-plus service navigation.



A cascade is a health framework that identifies upstream and downstream points of contact with clients and patients to catch early warning signs and prevent health crises. For HSYNC, this involved universal screening of youth who were referred to probation services and discretionary referrals for youth in civil and truancy courts. Screening occurred with the existing court risk assessment and included flagging youth who had either 1) previously runaway, or 2) high levels of family conflict. Youth and their parents were then referred from probation or court staff to the HSYNC navigator. The navigator was most frequently employed by an external social services organization. All engagement with HSYNC programming was voluntary for families and youth. The navigator reached out to the family to introduce the program and conduct a client-centered triage assessment, prioritizing housing needs, and then moving to family-focused services, and general support

services (e.g., utility support, SNAP benefits). The family or youth could request cash support with short term needs, for example, car registration or cell phone bills, to support short term stabilization as the family worked with the navigator to connect with longer term services (cash plus).



Evaluation

A study of the program over three years in four communities examined contributors to program implementation success across sites, including which factors contributed to higher service engagement for HYSYNC clients. The evaluation found that the program was as successful as other, legally-mandated programs in juvenile courts from previous studies. This suggests that the cash-plus model is promising as an alternative to legally requiring youth and families to engage in interventions and services. The evaluation also found that families receiving cash as part of cash plus were five times more likely to successfully engage in recommended services. Finally, the program found that non-white youth were more likely to engage in services.

Clients receiving cash as part of cash-plus were 5 times as likely to engage in recommended services

Areas for Improvement

Sites struggled to deliver cash to clients in quantities recommended by the research-program development team. While clients who received cash saw better service engagement outcomes, sites expressed concerns about providing funds in ways that aligned with other organizational regulations. To expand cash-plus, governments will need to resolve these concerns with social service agencies proactively.

Conclusion

The cascade, cash-plus approach is a promising approach to instituting social determinants of health programs for legally-involved youth. Research on the program's effectiveness in reducing re-offense and stabilizing long term housing is ongoing.