



## LESLIE STRNISHA

The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland works to improve the lives of those most in need with special attention to families, women and children living in poverty, working to end homelessness and to reduce health and education disparities in Cleveland's Central Neighborhood. As a faith-based organization, the Foundation extends the values of Jesus Christ through the mission of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine and also works to sustain the ministries of women religious.

Leslie Strnisha is the Senior Program Director responsible for leading the Foundation's program team to develop targeted, outcomes-based approaches for its grantmaking across four strategic areas: addressing health and education disparities with a special emphasis in the Central Neighborhood of Cleveland; ending homelessness and supporting ministries of Catholic Women Religious. She also oversees the work of the staff for the Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood, of which the Foundation serves as the lead agency. In addition, Ms. Strnisha leads the work around preventing and ending homelessness in Cuyahoga County. In that role, she is responsible for convening the community around systems change to end homelessness. She serves on the local Housing First Funders Collaborative and is Vice-Chair of Funders Together to End Homelessness, a national funders' network dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness. Ms. Strnisha was recently the co-chair of the Cuyahoga County Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Advisory Board and the local FEMA Board.

Prior to joining the Foundation in 2006, Ms. Strnisha served in various capacities for the Cleveland office of the Enterprise Foundation until 2003. She provided training and technical assistance to community-based organizations in the areas of community planning, program development, general capacity building and low-income housing development.

Ms. Strnisha holds a Master's degree in urban studies from Cleveland State University and a B.A. in psychology from Indiana University.

## **PREVENTING AND ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN CUYAHOGA COUNTY**

### **A (CROSS) SYSTEMS CHANGE APPROACH**

Since the creation of the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland in 1996, housing and homelessness has been a significant funding priority.

In 2002, the Foundation convened a cross-system collaboration known as the Housing First Initiative to address the issue of chronic homelessness among single adults. Coordinated by Enterprise Community Partners, the collaboration includes low-income housing developers and property managers, mental health and substance abuse service agencies, the Veterans Administration, local office of homeless services and others. The Housing First Initiative has been successful in creating nearly 500 units of permanent supportive housing while chronic homelessness has decreased by 65 percent in Cuyahoga County. Buoyed by this success, the Foundation has worked with the community to broaden our efforts to prevent and end family homelessness. Federal Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP) dollars jumpstarted our systems change efforts to develop a central intake, implement prevention strategies, reduce the length of shelter stays, and support a philosophical shift from managing homelessness to preventing and ending it.

In 2012, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland awarded an initial round of grants aimed at preventing and ending homelessness among youth ages 15 to 24. As with much of our strategic grantmaking work, we seeded some promising projects as a component of learning more about the issue. The overarching goal of this strategic initiative is to build a coordinated system to prevent and end youth homelessness in Cuyahoga County.

Through our initial grants, we funded several demonstration projects to test out best and promising practices to working with homeless and at-risk youth and young adults:

- A \$45,000 grant was awarded to Project Next Step, an independent living program for youth involved in both juvenile justice and foster care, piloting a program that targets youth at greatest risk of homelessness at termination from care at age 18. The program involves an opportunity to develop a youth-directed independence plan focused on the most immediate needs for transitioning youth and creates a “second chance fund” to provide a safety net for youth once they age out. In the 12 months prior to the program, five young people were homeless immediately upon termination and nine were unstably housed. In the 12 months since the program began, all youth who aged out of the program were stably housed, employed and most importantly, not a single incidence of homelessness occurred.
- A \$34,000 grant strengthened the capacity of the street outreach and homeless youth programs of Bellefaire JCB, the largest provider of street outreach services for runaway and homeless youth in Cuyahoga County. Bellefaire expanded its street presence during the early morning hours when youth are likely traveling to school. Outreach workers help youth get to school safely and on time and to connect to services available through their schools.
- A \$40,000 grant to College Now, a college access and scholarship organization working in partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, identified 17 seniors who met the HUD definition of homelessness and were on track to graduate and attend college. College Now worked with these seniors to direct them to apply to colleges with residential housing and then worked with the colleges to ensure that students could remain in their dormitory residence during winter and spring breaks free of charge. A liaison was identified for each of the youth at their respective college (both public and private universities) and a mentor was provided through the College Now iMentor program. As a critical component of a cross-system approach, a solid

partnership with the school district and education service providers is an essential outreach mechanism to identify and engage youth experiencing homelessness.

- A fourth project through the Housing First Initiative is a pilot project for both a 21-unit single site and 21 units of scattered site permanent supportive housing for young people meeting the definition for chronic homelessness. An evaluation is being conducted as the program begins to learn more about types of housing models (scattered vs. single site), service provision and other supports most effective in serving this high-need population.

As these pilot projects were underway, we realized that we needed more information about young people in our community who are currently or at great risk of homelessness and what their unique characteristics are so that we can most appropriately develop and target interventions to meet their needs.

Fortunately, at this time, USICH and other federal partners launched the Youth Count! initiative to focus on identifying homeless youth through the annual point in time count. Cleveland/Cuyahoga County was selected as one of nine communities nationwide to develop new methodologies and strategies for obtaining better data on the prevalence of youth homelessness and the characteristics of these young people. The count was implemented in January 2013. A brief video that documents the results of the count as well as how the community came together to plan for its implementation can be found through this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiHk6tcti7M&feature=youtu.be>

What we learned from our local count is corroborated by national research on homeless youth – that these young people are highly vulnerable, disproportionately lesbian gay bi-sexual and/or transgender, and have a significant degree of entanglement with public systems – including aging out of foster care. In fact, one-third of all the youth identified as homeless through Youth Count! had been in foster care at one point in their lives.

At this time, we also were excited to see the USICH Framework for Ending Youth Homelessness. The focus on data and capacity building provided a structure for our local thinking about this issue. Defining the outcomes for youth clarified our thinking about approaching this work.

From the beginning, the Foundation recognized the importance of not only developing interventions to end homelessness among youth, but to identify ways to intervene that will prevent a young person from becoming homeless in the first place. Recognizing that the child welfare system was unfortunately a significant feeder system to the problem of youth homelessness, we decided to start there.

We began discussions with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, which works in 15 sites across the country to enhance policy and practice changes to ensure positive outcomes for youth leaving foster care. As we learned more about Jim Casey and compared their desired outcomes with those of the USICH Framework there was complete alignment. These outcomes – stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, and well-being – are not just important for homeless youth or youth leaving child welfare but for all young people transitioning into adulthood.

We are just embarking on our planning work, ensuring that the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities plan for youth aging out of foster care is one component of the overall plan to prevent and end youth homelessness. As we all know, a community's vulnerable youth don't belong to any one system – we have to work together to identify and serve them. We continue to see our role as a bridge between these systems.

## **Megan Gibbard**

Megan Gibbard is the Homeless Youth and Young Adult Project Manager with the King County Department of Community and Human Services. She is responsible for coordinating regional efforts around youth homelessness, and the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult (YYA) Homelessness in King County by 2020. Megan's responsibilities also include the county-wide implementation of coordinated engagement, data coordination, prevention and family reunification strategies, and King County's homeless YYA count, Count Us In.

Megan was previously the Executive Director of Teen Feed, an agency providing meals and case management in Seattle, and has 10 years of clinical experience with homeless youth. She serves on the board of the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance. Megan received her MSW from the University of Washington in 2004 and her LICSW in 2011.

## **Katie Hong**

Katie Hong joined the Raikes Foundation in January 2012 as a program officer. She leads the Foundation's efforts to address youth and young adult homelessness and supports the Foundation's education work on strengthening academic mindsets and learning strategies for early adolescents. Prior to joining the Raikes Foundation, Katie consulted with private philanthropic foundations and non-profit organizations on strategic planning and organizational effectiveness. For over five years, Katie worked at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, where she oversaw the work of the Foundation's Pacific Northwest Initiative including their initiative to reduce family homelessness and the Foundation's advocacy grant making in Washington State.

Katie has also served as the Director for the City of Seattle's Office of Housing and spent time as Executive Policy Adviser to Governor Gary Locke. She also served as a White House Fellow for both the Clinton and Bush Administrations and was a program examiner for income maintenance at the Office of Management and Budget under the Clinton Administration. She has a Master's degree in public policy from the University of Chicago and her BA from University of California at Berkeley.

### **Efforts to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in King County**

Preventing and ending youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness has emerged as a King County regional priority. Consistent with the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Framework to End Youth Homelessness, our approach in King County focuses on multiple strategies to get better data on the numbers and characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness and to improve our system's capacity to ensure that every young person in King County has a safe place to live and thrive.

Specifically, we are working to 1) prevent YYA from becoming homeless by promoting family reunification and better systems coordination; 2) quickly intervene for those youth where family reunification is not an option with appropriate housing and/or services; and 3) strengthen young people's access to stable housing, permanent connections, education and employment, emotional well-being and access to healthcare.

### ***Background***

Any young person sleeping outside because he or she lacks a safe home is unacceptable. Yet over 5,000 unaccompanied youth and young adults in King County experience homelessness every year. On any given night in our community, over 700 young people are homeless or unstably housed – including over 100 youth sleeping in parks, abandoned buildings or under bridges.

In 2011, a group of primarily private funders including Ballmer Family Giving, Thomas V. Giddens Jr. Foundation, Medina Foundation, Casey Family Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Raikes Foundation, United Way of King County and the Campion Foundation came together to form the Youth Funders Group and committed over \$3 million in primarily new private funding to support new and expanded **prevention and early intervention** programs, improved data collection including the launch of **Community Sign In**, and launch of **Youth Housing Connection**, a coordinated engagement system for young adults seeking housing.

This past August, our community came together to finalize the Comprehensive Plan to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in King County by 2020<sup>1</sup>. The Plan's recommendations total \$1,470,000 over 18 months and are fully funded by King County, the City of Seattle, and private philanthropy.

### ***Our Approach and Vision of Success***

Our approach is in direct alignment with the 2012 USICH Opening Doors Amendment. Specifically, we are working to:

- 1) ensure that we engage families in the work of ending YYA homelessness;
- 2) ensure that interventions meet the needs of youth of color and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) YYA;
- 3) align across systems (e.g., child welfare, juvenile justice, schools, etc.);
- 4) better understand how many YYA are homeless, their needs, and which interventions are effective for whom;
- 5) use data to drive decision-making and continuous improvement; and
- 6) align and secure sufficient funding from public and private sources to fully implement our work.

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<sup>1</sup> The link to the full plan can be found here:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/socialservices/Housing/ServicesAndPrograms/Programs/Homeless/HomelessYouthandYoungAdults.aspx>

We will measure our success against four key benchmarks: 1) fewer young people experiencing homelessness; 2) shorter stays in shelters or on the streets for youth who become homeless; 3) fewer returns to homelessness by young people; and 4) fewer homeless LGBTQ youth and youth of color.

### ***Roles of Private Philanthropy***

Private philanthropic organizations have helped to catalyze our regional effort in multiple ways. Specifically, they have 1) strategically invested private funds to pay for “systems” capacity such as coordinated engagement and a lead staff person to manage the regional effort; 2) used private funds to more flexibly and quickly invest in good ideas like prevention which is now being sustained by public funding; 3) helped to bring youth voice to the table by funding organizations to help engage youth in advocacy; and 4) used our collective voice to advocate for the importance of this issue.

### ***Lessons Learned***

We are still early in our work but key lessons learned include:

- *The importance of addressing this issue with a diverse coalition:* It is critical to establish shared ownership and bring all key stakeholders to the table.
- *The importance of focus, data and continuous improvement:* Our planning process has been done in phases and has been intentionally designed to be short, time limited and data-driven.
- *Importance of incorporating youth voice:* Direct experience give youth key insights into solutions and their voice on program design and advocacy efforts have been meaningful and powerful.
- *Focus on outcomes for young people:* Ultimately, our work is about improving specific, tangible outcomes for YYA’s.

### ***Critical collaboration with USICH and other federal partners***

- We need to ensure that critical services like street outreach and emergency shelter are supported, as these are foundational to effective systems change efforts. These services have traditionally been funded by federal Runaway Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) dollars.
- Better data is essential to quantify and address the problem, so we applaud the USICH efforts to improve data.
- Convening researchers, practitioners and experts around what is known would be helpful. Funders Together is launching a Youth Learning Network. We encourage co-convening these sessions with our federal funders.
- Identifying and reducing policy barriers that prevent youth programs from better utilizing federal funding streams would be helpful, such as HUD funding which under the HEARTH performance measures rewards shorter length of stay in programs, while longer stays may be more developmentally appropriate for youth.
- Guidance and support are needed on how to better coordinate with education, employment and health sectors.

### ***Closing Thoughts***

Investing in preventing and ending youth homelessness is not just the right thing to do -- it also makes economic sense. We know that many homeless adults first experience homelessness before they turn 18<sup>2</sup>. The longer a youth is homeless, the more barriers he/she will face getting back on a successful path. It is sound fiscal policy to invest early and prevent the cycle of homelessness from starting. We want to thank Secretary Shinseki and members of the Council for the Youth Framework and for your commitment. We look forward to the progress that will be made together and to continuing to partner with you in ending youth homelessness in our communities.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/901087\\_Burt\\_Homeless.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/901087_Burt_Homeless.pdf)

# Homeless Youth and Young Adult (YYA: 12-25 years old) Initiative Logic Model

