BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

“Unaccompanied youth homelessness remains a persistent challenge for our nation. Every night, thousands of unaccompanied young people go to sleep without the safety, stability, and support of a family or a home. In contrast to common perceptions, homelessness is not just an adult phenomenon; youth are resorting to abandoned buildings, park benches, makeshift shelters, and staying with friends and sometimes strangers. Many of these youth have experienced significant trauma before and after becoming homeless. Often they face struggles across multiple aspects of daily life that contribute to their vulnerability. At the same time, all youth have strengths, but youth experiencing homelessness often lack positive opportunities and supports to apply them. An effective strategy must account for the specific needs of adolescents and youth transitioning to adulthood and the role families can play in both the reasons for becoming homeless and the potential solutions.

Over the past several months, an expanding group of federal, state, and local agencies, philanthropic partners, service providers, advocates, researchers and young people have been meeting to strategize about ways to create a national movement to achieve the goals of the Opening Doors Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness to prevent and end youth homelessness by the end of 2020. Together, in September, we agreed upon a big goal:

*In 2020, prevent and end homelessness among all youth and young adults, and if it occurs, ensure experiences of homelessness will be rare, brief and one-time.*

We call the movement *A Way Home America* (AWHA), echoing an inspirational national campaign to end youth homeless in Canada by our partners and colleagues to the north, *A Way Home Canada* (www.awayhome.ca).

In the United States, we are at a critical moment to leverage national, state, and local momentum around youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness:

- **Increased alignment and commitment between federal agencies** - The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and its federal member agencies, specifically, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Labor (DOL), and the Department of Education (ED), and the Department of Justice (DOJ) are actively engaged and working to meet the federal commitment to achieve the

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Opening Doors Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness goals to prevent and end YYA homelessness by 2020.

- **Local model development** - Local community efforts to prevent and end YYA homelessness are underway across the country in communities like Houston, Cincinnati, Seattle/King County, the Twin Cities, and Cleveland—often complementing and building on state leadership/efforts. USICH has developed a “Coordinated Community Response” guidance to support communities to implement a coordinated and comprehensive community response to prevent and end YYA homelessness.

- **Expanded research** – YYA-focused studies are currently underway by leading researchers, such as the *Voices of Youth Count* study led by Chapin Hall of the University of Chicago. Beginning in mid-2015 through 2017, the study will undertake a comprehensive count of homeless and unstably housed youth in the United States. A critical part of their work will be conversations with youth, surveys, policy analysis, and rigorous reviews of evidence-based interventions for ending YYA homelessness.

- **Heightened awareness and visibility** - As efforts to end chronic and veteran homelessness have shown growing success, there is increasing national visibility and focus around the next target populations in the *Opening Doors Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness*: families and youth. Through this focus, there is an increasing understanding of the complexity of YYA Homelessness, including how it intersects with experiences of sexual exploitation, education systems, child welfare, juvenile justice and the disproportionate overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth and youth of color.

- **Increased advocacy and network engagement** - There are significant national advocacy efforts to prevent and end YYA youth homelessness underway, led by National Network for Youth, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, the True Colors Fund, and other advocacy partners in A Way Home America.

- **Philanthropic commitment** – There is a growing focus and commitment from within the philanthropic sector to preventing and ending YYA homelessness. Foundations for Youth Success, a two-year learning collaborative of Funders Together to End Homelessness launched in 2015, specifically focuses on funding strategies for preventing and ending YYA homelessness. Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) has expressed interest in working with AWHA to find connections and funding opportunities for its membership.

- **Urgency** - The partners engaged in AWHA are poised to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the intersection of all of this critical work. We are particularly focused on the commitment of the current Administration and federal partners to work collaboratively and make progress at the national, state, and local levels by January 2017. We feel a sense of urgency and a need to work together now to accelerate our collective efforts and support national, state, and local momentum before the opportunity is lost.

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3 An example of this work is the LGBTQ Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiative that is being conducted in Houston and Cincinnati. These two-year community built, cross-sector initiative is testing and evaluating effective models to prevent LGBT youth from becoming homeless in the first place. HUD is a leading partner in this work, along with the True Colors Fund, HHS, ED, DOJ, and USICH.
Moving quickly, we plan to work together to:

- Create a national movement, awareness and action to prevent and end YYA homelessness.
- Develop increased alignment among YYA homelessness efforts – public policy, advocacy, research, practice, communications, and funding (both public and private).
- Establish common measures of success and similar, aligned approaches to preventing and ending YYA homelessness at the local level.
- Create measurable progress, as seen by reductions in the number of unsheltered youth, length of stay, and reductions in returns to homelessness.
- Inform the new Administration during the transition process, which begins in November 2016, about the needs for the upcoming four years.

**PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Currently AWHA has an Executive Committee primarily composed of funders, and a Steering Committee representing federal, state and local agencies, philanthropy, research, advocacy, and the provider community. A larger Advisory Committee of more than forty sector representatives has met and will be engaged in an ongoing manner as needed. The committees will consider a more formal structure following the February 2016 meeting of AWHA.

In 2016, a Director will be hired to manage the work of AWHA. This position will report to the co-chairs of the Executive Committee, a subgroup of the Steering Committee. Currently, the Butler Family Fund, the Raikes Foundation, the Melville Charitable Trust and the Campion Foundation have committed funding to AWHA for 2016, while the True Colors Fund will provide ongoing in-kind support. These funders, and others, have been engaged since the beginning of this work, supporting convenings, meeting facilitation, participant travel, calls, and meeting follow-up in a variety of ways. They, along with the Steering Committee will continue to guide the work and look for additional sources of funding and support for AWHA to be sustainable through 2020.

AWHA should be a lean, nimble structure that can easily work with and support other agencies and partners working in the field at the national, state and local levels, while not competing with them for funds and resources. The current budget reflects this structure, with funding primarily focused on the Director’s position, travel, meetings, website, and stipends for youth.

AWHA will be funded through a fiscal sponsor, Third Sector New England (TSNE), in its initial iteration. TSNE’s Fiscal Sponsorship program offers 501(c)(3) nonprofit status and administrative support which allows regional and national groups and community coalitions to maintain focus on mission and program. They provide full financial and accounting services, grants management, legal compliance, and human resource management. We anticipate that by the end of 2016, the Executive Committee will determine if this organizational structure is sufficient or if AWHA needs to be its own 501c3.

**DIRECTOR of A WAY HOME AMERICA**

The Director will be a coalition builder, working with AWHA partners across sectors to meet the goals of the initiative. The Director will be responsible for the creation of an Action Agenda to drive the expansion of this movement-building effort and plan for the five-year effort. The three main objectives of the Action Agenda as agreed upon by the Steering and Advisory Committees are to:
1. Take advantage of the commitment of the current Administration and sectors to work collaboratively and make progress at the national, state, and local levels by January 2017.
2. Inform the new Administration during the transition process, starting in November 2016, and continuing as officials take office in the new Administration about what will be needed for the following four years.
3. Inform the expansion of this movement-building effort as we determine our plans and framework for the following four years.

FOCUS AREAS

At the most recent in-person meeting of the Steering and Advisory Committees in September 2015, partners agreed to focus on three areas of work: Practice, Policy and Communications. These areas will inform and frame the development of the Action Agenda. It is anticipated that the Director will work closely with Steering Committee members who will help lead work in these focus areas.

PRACTICE

GOAL 1: Identify a process for working with different communities to identify, test and highlight promising practices to make YYA homelessness rare, brief and one-time. While communities will test out different interventions and approaches, the efforts will be aligned in:

- common metrics to assess baseline and progress
- the approach, as identified by the USICH guidance on a coordinated community response to YYA homelessness

GOAL 2: Create an evidence-informed spectrum of housing, services, and policies that are most effective for making YYA homelessness rare, brief and one-time. These recommendations should take into account that one size does not fit all, and that different interventions are needed for different sub-populations.

GOAL 3: Community based learnings are shared and disseminated through the AWHa Planning and Advisory Committees structure so that lessons learned can scale nationally and inform the field and future policy and resource development.

Currently, HUD, HHS, the Raikes Foundation, the Melville Charitable Trust and Casey Family Programs are exploring the idea of jointly funding a “100-day Jumpstart Challenge” that would engage key stakeholders in a total of eight communities (in two cohorts of four geographically proximate cities each), and present them with a challenge (from Federal leaders, funders, national homeless leaders, and their Mayor) to house an “unreasonable” number of homeless youth in their community, within 100 days, and to do this in a way that increases the odds of housing stabilization. In response to this challenge, local system leaders in each community will mobilize a Rapid Results team comprised of public sector decision-makers (housing, mental health, foster care, juvenile justice, homelessness), philanthropy, providers and consumers.

The partners and the Director would engage the Rapid Results Institute, who will create 100-day journeys for these community teams that are designed to stimulate innovation, intense collaboration, and rapid experimentation, and that set the stage for more permanent systems change. This will be anchored in the Rapid Results principles and experiences, incorporate
elements of the National Governors’ Association Policy Academy model, and draw on the experiences and know-how of thought leaders in the sector and in the change-acceleration arena.\textsuperscript{4}

Once the eight communities complete their 100-day journeys to house youth, the Rapid Results Institute and the NAEH will work with federal leaders, the Melville Charitable Trust, the Raikes Foundation, the Director of AWHA, and other partners in AWHA to analyze the policy and practice lessons and implications of the experience, and create a plan to scale up the process and the emerging interventions. The Director will use the website, social media, webinars and convenings and other tools to reach the field and communicate lessons learned as well as strategies to take best practices to scale.

The premise of the Rapid Results approach is that innovation in both program and systems is needed on this issue, and that joint discovery of solutions will emerge in the course of the 100-day journeys of these community teams. Also, that while the mix of solutions may be different in each community (and that some degree of local ownership will be critical for the discovery and execution of these solutions), lessons emerging from local efforts will have policy and practice implications not only in the communities, but nation-wide, and will help to build national momentum for the effort to end youth homelessness.

\textbf{POLICY}

\textbf{GOAL 1:} Increase and diversify federal resources to prevent & end YYA homelessness in America.

\textbf{ACTIVITIES:}
1. Build consensus for specific funding requests at the federal government level.
2. Communicate a strong case for the funding, e.g. X number of X housing units, etc.

\textbf{GOAL 2:} Identify and propose solutions to remove barriers for youth to receive housing and services.

\textbf{ACTIVITIES:}
1. Build on existing efforts coordinated by USICH.
2. Survey field and new stakeholders to widen scope of barrier identification.
3. Investigate to determine “cause” of barrier. e.g. statute, regulation, HUD Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), state decision, or potential misinterpretation of statute/regulation.
4. Craft solution to address barrier & strategy to remove it (including real time “workarounds” while advocating for solutions).

\textsuperscript{4} In 2013, the Rapid Results Institute worked with the 100,000 Homes Campaign to introduce the Rapid Results Approach in 42 of the largest cities in the US, launching in each city 100-day journeys focused on moving chronically homeless individuals into permanent housing. The average increase (in 100 days) of monthly placement rates of chronically homeless individuals (and veterans) in these cities was 128%. An estimated additional 32,000 unsheltered individuals moved from streets and into permanent housing as a result.
**GOAL 3:** Prepare a policy framework for addressing YYA homelessness that will enable the next administration to build it into their transition plan.

**ACTIVITIES:**
1. Steering and Advisory Committees work with National Director to craft key components of framework.
2. Barriers work will inform the key priorities included in the framework.
3. Develop strategy to present plan to new Administration and push for implementation.

**COMMUNICATIONS**

**GOAL:** Establish unified and evidence-based messaging regarding YYA homelessness

**ACTIVITIES:**
1. Develop a broad-based communications plan that the movement begins to use, including the development of resources and talking points for the presidential and other elections.
2. True Colors Fund is developing messaging based on focus groups and polling.
3. This work should leverage the communications activities and efforts of Chapin Hall’s Voices of Youth Count.
4. The Director will use the website, social media, webinars and convenings and other tools to share the communications plan and strategy with the field.

**RISKS AND CHALLENGES**

There are inherent risks to starting a new initiative, particularly one where there are currently many players already deeply engaged in the work. However, AWHA could fill current gaps in the field by providing national coordination at the practice and policy levels, as well as consistent, evidence-based messaging about the issue. AWHA can also serve as a vehicle for ongoing input from all of the critical sectors involved.

The creation of AWHA followed a deliberate process of sector engagement and consensus building over the past nine months. The sense of excitement and impatience from our sector partners around next steps, and the distinct absence of significant pushback indicates that we are moving in the right direction. Having philanthropy take a leading role in this effort and provide the seed funding helped to demonstrate commitment and build enthusiasm among the sector partners.