



FYSB Family & Youth
Services Bureau

**Division of Runaway
and Homeless Youth**

What We Have Learned from RHY Grantees

Get to Know a Grantee Series Overview | October 2022

The RHY Program regularly spotlights its grantees in a blog series called **Get to Know a Grantee**. To create these blog posts, we conduct detailed interviews with grantees to gather information related to managing a RHY grant program, how culture is considered when providing support services, strategies used to navigate operations

during the COVID-19 pandemic, and inspiring success stories of their clients. This blog highlights grantee experiences in hopes of supporting innovations and information sharing within the community of organizations serving youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability and researchers.

The Grantee Summary

Since March 2021, the RHY Program has featured **10 grantees in a series of blogs**, spanning diversity in:

- > Location
- > Clients served
- > RHY grant programs

10 Total Grantees



Funding Breakout:

- 3** – grantees received Street Outreach Program (SOP) funding
- 5** – grantees received Basic Center Program (BCP) funding
- 3** – grantees received Maternity Group Home (MGH) funding
- 9** – grantees received Transitional Living Program (TLP) funding
- 5** – grantees received funding from a combination of programs

Some grantees focused on special populations such as young girls, African American or Pacific Islander youth and families, or American Indian or Alaska Native youth.

Regardless of their primary focus, all grantees supported LGBTQ youth and each ensured their staff are trained in trauma-informed care and human trafficking identification and prevention. We heard **reoccurring, interconnected themes from all grantees regarding strategies they have found effective in supporting vulnerable youth.**



Building trust



Listening without judgment



Respecting their experience



Showing love in their interactions

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Building Trusting Relationships

When asked to share advice for youth-serving organizations, all of the grantees highlighted in the Get to Know a Grantee series indicated that **forming a trusting relationship is key** to clients having a successful experience in their program.

“*The relationship is everything. We do a lot of staff training centered around relationship building.*”

Cornelius Ford

RHY Manager, Ambassadors For Christ Youth Ministries (Houston, TX)



Whether **connecting with clients on the street, at a drop-in center, or responding to a call on a hotline**, grantees reported how critical it was for outreach workers and case managers, from the beginning, to create and maintain a trusting environment throughout the youth’s experience with the grantee. Grantees indicated that a good start toward laying the foundation for building trust is through listening without judgment to the youth’s experience, acknowledging traumatic life events, and providing encouragement that their situation is not permanent and can improve. Grantees also used tradition and culture to connect with youth from diverse cultural backgrounds.

“*Girls have voices, and it behooves us to listen to them. Hearing what they have to say may suggest new initiatives and conferring with them also helps to build their leadership skills. After all, engaged youth grow to become engaged adults, building thriving communities.*”

Amy Good

Chief Executive Officer, Alternatives for Girls, Inc.



Navigating the Pandemic

Our spotlighted grantees used **creative strategies to “keep the doors open” during the pandemic**. These include:

- Sponsoring virtual events
- Use of outdoor space to ensure recommended social distancing spacing
- Wearing masks
- Performing temperature checks
- Implementing disinfection procedures for rooms dedicated to housing quarantined clients

While all attested to the difficulty of managing services during this time, they also reported that making these adjustments to sustain operations ensured that services could continue, even if in some cases services were temporarily reduced.

“*Sanctuary used multiple pandemic prevention health and safety best practices to protect its staff and clients at the height of the pandemic and beyond. We changed intake procedures to include practicing social distancing, wearing masks, and ensuring that all staff members are vaccinated.*”

Stephanie Drilon

Crisis and Corporate Communications, Sanctuary Incorporated of Guam

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Cultural Relevancy

Some RHY grantees serve predominately underserved populations and shared how they use **culturally relevant interventions to connect with their clients.**



Victor Camacho, Executive Director of Sanctuary Incorporated of Guam, understands that Guam youth **homelessness may look differently from homelessness among off-island youth.**

He says, "Homelessness on Guam is less about living on the streets and more about living in substandard housing or couch surfing." The most significant cultural tradition that positively impacts Guam runaway and homeless youth is *poksaj*, Camacho reports, roughly translated as 'rearing.' "It's very common to have kids raised by uncles and aunties, grandparents, godparents, other relatives, and neighbors. This helps in the reunification process because of familiarity with the youth and the large extended family offers additional placement options."

“As you're making decisions about African American young people, get feedback from them and offer strong messages of hope and resiliency. Challenge racial stereotypes, whether it's your own or theirs, and promote racial healing across the board.

Rosalynn Fliggins

Associate Executive Director, Open Arms

The mission of the Ain Dah Yung Center, a RHY grantee located in St. Paul, Minnesota, is to provide a culturally relevant safe space for American Indian youth. Residential Director Holly Henning says, "It really takes a person being able to get grounded and to start healing from some of that historical trauma before they can even try to focus on where they are going to go to school or how to get a job." Therefore, ADYC focuses on ensuring that "whoever comes through our doors has the resources and the things that they need, cultural wise, to move forward in healing before figuring out the rest of their case plan," says Henning.

Many of the grantees featured in these blogs find that **having staff and board members who reflect the population served is a valuable asset in effectively serving youth.** Also, many grantees have staff who have experienced homelessness themselves, providing a direct connection to the clients served. Professional development and training for grantee staff is also an important consideration in appropriately supporting their clients. Training in cultural competence, human-trafficking prevention, suicide prevention, and trauma-informed care were often cited as priority training topics.



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Life Skills

RHY grantees across all programs **provide critical life skills training**, such as:

- > Financial planning (e.g., opening and maintaining savings accounts)
- > Opportunities for employment and continuing education to help provide sustainable pathways after exiting the program

All grantees featured reported having strong relationships with community partners, which have substantially supported the success of their clients. Grantees have worked with an extraordinary range of partner organizations, from a professional ice hockey team, schools,

houses of worship, Rotary Clubs, and a variety of nonprofit community-based organizations. Partners provided mentorship and employment opportunities for grantee clients, and educational institutions also provided onsite classes for grantee clients. Grantees reported inspiring success stories of former clients, such as a youth receiving a full scholarship at top-ranked Spelman College in Atlanta, GA.

“ Always keep a positive attitude, never stop advocating, never be afraid to learn from youth, immerse yourself, and always be by their side. Go the extra mile and seek to understand.

Natali Marrou

Case Manager, Vita Nova, Inc.



We Invite You...

to explore the insightful information contained in our blog posts. We feel they can help inspire new ideas or help expand services you currently provide.



Let us know what you think of our Get to Know a Grantee series and what you would like to see next.