



NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

The Road Home: City Strategies to Support Homeless Youth
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Moderator: Carlos Becerra
Senior Associate, Disconnected Youth
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
National League of Cities (NLC)

Jamie Van Leeuwen, Executive Director, Denver's Road Home, City of Denver, Colo.
Joan L.H. Bickweat, Runaway/Homeless Youth Service Coordinator, Monroe County, N.Y.

BECERRA: Good afternoon. Good day to all those of you joining us for our regular series of audioconferences. Today's call is focused on "City Strategies to Support Homeless Youth." We're pleased to present this discussion today and hope to present some food for thought, some promising practices in some of our participant cities, and also just get a good discussion going between our panelists and you all out in the field.

Here at the National League of Cities in our Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute), the topic of homeless youth continues to be given much more of our attention as we attempt to look at what opportunities are out there for city leadership. And much of this, we know, deals with collaborating with partnering agencies and other systems. The population of homeless youth, we know, is one that overlaps many other subpopulations, if you will – those that might have been disconnected from other systems such as dropouts, older foster youth that have transitioned out of state care, also youth with difficulty with mental health issues and substance abuse, etc. So we know – even though we discuss homeless youth, we know it also involves many shades of other disconnection.

So we're pleased to bring you this panel today. We have a representative from the City of Denver, that's Jamie Van Leeuwen, who you'll meet in a moment, as well as Joan Bickweat from Monroe County, New York to speak on what that local collaboration looks like. So our plan for the call today is we'll give both Joan and Jamie some minutes to kind of give you a broad brushstroke of what some of their initiatives and strategies and programs are locally to kind of set up our discussion, and then we'll open up the lines. I will moderate a discussion between them too and then questions from the field. As a reminder, you'll be able to ask a question on this through the phone by dialing star-one and you can always be added to the queue for questions, or you may also email a question by emailing Meade, that's M-E-A-D-E, at nlc.org, and that's also on the dial-in information.

With that being said, I want to introduce Joan Bickweat, who is the runaway and homeless youth service coordinator in Monroe County, New York, who is going to give us some perspective on what the city and county connections and partnerships look like in her community. Joan?

BICKWEAT: Yeah. Hi. Welcome. First, I can say that I'm from Monroe County, which is in upstate New York, which is closer, actually, to Canada than New York City. We are in between the cities of Buffalo and Syracuse. We have a city population of about 190,000 – no, that's wrong. Oh anyway, the county, the whole county, is about 210,000, so there's both – we have a community that has both rural, suburban, and city populations. Now specifically Rochester has many challenges, and we are, I think, 11th in the child poverty rate for the country. So what we have had in Monroe County for many years is a runaway/homeless system. It's funded through the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, and we also access our federal runaway and homeless dollars from HHS (Health and Human Services) to do a continuum of services from crisis counseling through transitional living. So we house – place in emergency housing – about 1,200 placements a year, which is an unduplicated amount of kids of about 800, and they have 300 of their own children with them. In addition to that, we place about 400 kids in youth shelters.

So what we know is that many of these kids won't be successful in their own life until they are able to be able to support themselves. What we have tried to do is infuse employment readiness and employment strategies into the programs that we provide for kids. In order to do that – we've accessed different funding streams to do that. Most recently, about three years ago, we got a grant from New York State Office of Children and Family Services which accessed federal youth development dollars, and we have a program called Ready for Life. And what that does is take kids that are aging out of foster care and homeless kids, and give them skills like soft skills and independent living skills and some job readiness opportunities to work in community service learning in the community, and then hopefully grow to the point where they can have employment.

We also have a grant that we've used with WIA (Workforce Investment Act) that specifically targets homeless kids. They went through the normal application that anybody else would with our Workforce Investment Act applications, but they targeted those services to kids who were homeless. Some of those kids live in our transitional living programs, some kids lived in double-up situations. Same idea. What we have done very strategically is take a look at what are the things, the basic needs, that the kids have, whether that be clothing, interview skills, clothing, food, making sure they have breakfast, all those skills. Teaching kids to be on time to appointments, what "on time" means, being able to make eye contact, all the social skills that you would need – we do that.

In addition to that, there are many kids that find – because this is such a neglected group of kids, some kids just have – you know, they are pretty intelligent, doing well in school. They just need employment skills. So the range of kids that find themselves in this situation, they have to access the employment services like in the general public services. So some kids do very well. They just need help with getting a job. Other kids need, you know, real intense services one step at a time. So what we've done in our community in terms of youth services is have a comprehensive approach where we try to use all the services. You know, we really try to

seek out whatever funding we think would benefit any one of the subpopulations in that like eclectic group. The services usually have targeted the ages of 12 to 21.

So that's kind of what we do. What we really try to work very hard at is coming together on common issues and kind of concerns, and then bringing the strengths of each one of our resources together. The Rochester/Monroe County Youth Bureau is actually one of the only metro departments in the county of Monroe – that we combine our youth services money to try to maximize the number of kids that we can reach. Our challenge again, is the economy today, the economy of families as well the economy at the state level. Our outcome is that – what we try to do is have kids work towards reaching their optimum potential, and that's kind of what we do.

BECERRA: Okay. Thank you very much, Joan, for those intro remarks. Jamie Van Leeuwen, you on the line?

VAN LEEUWEN: I am on the line.

BECERRA: Okay. Jamie Van Leeuwen, who heads up Denver's Road Home, which is the City of Denver's initiative for homelessness.

VAN LEEUWEN: Great. Well, thanks for having me on today, Carlos. You know, I can give you a little bit more of a – ours will be a little bit more macro just in the sense that Denver's Road Home is our 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. And so, one of the decisions that was made very early on when the Homeless Commission started writing the plan in 2003 was that, as we looked at our 10 year plan, cities around the country had approached homelessness from a number of different angles. Philadelphia had really said they wanted their plan to be focused specifically on chronically homeless. What we said is that, because of the population in Denver and the homeless population that we were seeing, that it really made sense for us to look at all of the populations of homelessness, from youth to seniors. And that's the way that we've really approached the 10 year plan.

So specific to the youth issue, what we know is Denver's population, in 2005, the city and – we're a city and county entity, and when you look at just the city and county of Denver, our population is about 750,000 just in the city, and then when you go metro wide, it goes up to about three million. And when we started addressing our plan in 2005, we saw that there were about 5,000 homeless men, women, and youth in the city and county of Denver, and that that youth population was probably about 1,000 of them, that there were about 1,000 homeless and runaway youth between the age of 15 and 24 based on our point-in-time counts. So the plan really said we need to make sure that we create housing for each of these populations. The agency that is the primary provider of homeless youth services in Denver is an agency called Urban Peak, and they work closely with Volunteers of America and Family Tree. But in terms of the bulk of homeless and runaway youth services, it's centered at the work that Urban Peak is doing. They have a 40-bed youth shelter, and about 65 units of youth housing.

So the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness has really worked. One of the policies that we set very early on is that every housing unit that we bring online needs to have mental health, substance abuse, and medical services attached to it, as well as case management and employment services depending on the population that we're serving. What we've really seen as

some promising practices is that we know that Urban Peak – and prior to my work with the mayor of Denver and being appointed to run the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, I had spent about six years working at Urban Peak and really doing things – everything from program and service delivery to really looking at legislative issues and researching the youth population here in Denver and nationally. And one of the things that we were able to develop and still continues to be a model is the work that the hospitality industry started doing in terms of employing some of the young people from Urban Peak in creating almost a mentoring program through the hospitality industry to engage young people in the workplace as we are transitioning them into housing programs. And we continue to do that now in terms of the workforce development piece and providing them with the support that they need to transition in a successful way into the workplace.

Denver's Road Home has worked really closely with the Department of Human Services. We have a collaboration with a 36-unit housing development for homeless youth here in Denver called Ogden Street, and the idea is how do we get as many young people who are at risk of becoming homeless – many of them who are probably aging out of foster care – into some sort of a transitional housing program that's going to provide them with some community support and services that will maintain them from becoming homeless during that transition.

You know, the city and county of Denver has really looked, and Denver's Road Home has been very interested, not just in how many units of housing and the services that we're attaching to those units are being created, but really also what are some of the outcomes beyond just production? And we just went through the last six months and really kind of revisited our data on that issue. And what we're finding is that there's a lot of cost avoidance that we're experiencing as we move our homeless – both our homeless adults and youth – into housing, what that translates to in terms of building a healthier community. And so we have in the last four – we started implementing Denver's Road Home in July of 2005. And since implementation, we've seen a 31 percent reduction in our jail census amongst the homeless. And we know that as we start moving the homeless into housing, they stop accessing some of those expensive emergency services that were not really designed to be permanent supported housing, but end up getting used in that capacity. Jail and detox are ones that we particularly pay close attention to. We've targeted our 436 frequent users of our detox facility in Denver – it's called Denver Cares, it's one of the largest in the country – and said how do we take those individuals and connect them with treatment and housing and transition them out of detox and into permanent supported housing? And what we've seen is a 75 percent reduction in census amongst that population of users. Denver Cares has reported to the city council that they estimate about \$2 million in cost avoidance as a result of some of the interventions that have happened with that particular program.

And so then, you know, a final piece. One of the other ways that we've really been able to connect with our homeless youth is really creating a more collaborative process amongst our service providers. I actually started at Urban Peak running their outreach programs. And over the years, I think what we've been able to really foster and develop is a much more collaborative spirit between our outreach workers and the city. We created the Denver Street Outreach Collaborative that we fund out of the city now, and there are 19 street outreach workers across agencies – agencies that are serving homeless adults, agencies that are serving homeless youth. All of those outreach workers still work for their respective agencies, but they work together as a team doing their outreach services. They do outreach together.

We have hired or contracted with the Denver Police Department, and have two police officers that actually are focused on homeless related issues, are very homeless friendly, have been trained, and really work with the other police officers around intervention so that we're not having to arrest as much and that we can really get homeless youth and adults back into the service delivery system rather than into a jail cell for a night where they're going to end up back in the same place the next day if we don't do some sort of an intervention. And then, that collaborative also works really closely with our Downtown Denver Partnership and our safety ambassadors. And we've done a lot of co-collaborative training together so that everybody is at least familiar with all of the populations and especially homeless youth, who tend to congregate in a lot of our areas where we have high volumes of pedestrian traffic and tourism. The idea is not to hide them and not to move them off of the mall or off of the business sector, but really to connect them with the services and the housing that they need so that they can interact and be productive.

And so, that's kind of where Denver is right now in terms of our plan. All of the information I'm talking about is available online, and so I can connect folks with the plan that we developed. But, we've really tried to make sure, and we'll continue over the next couple of years to really focus on the youth piece. And, you know, the final comment I'd have, and we can talk about this more, but we have a really good model in our country around what it takes for us to house a chronically homeless individual. And, you know, the outcome data for Housing First is very compelling. And if you were going to invest your dollars in terms of what's a good model for the chronically homeless, Housing First has really got some proven data that would suggest that that's a good use of dollars. On the youth homeless piece, I think that there is more work that we can do in that area. I think there are some really great examples around the country of some great homeless youth housing. Larkin Street and The Bridge and a number of different programs around the country have done some great work. But how do we really operationalize that and figure out what are some of the models that we should be adopting around the country that looks at that more streamlined approach to housing homeless youth, and the cost savings around that? The cost savings data I'm talking about really lumps that whole population together in terms of our jail census, but – and there's definitely some great anecdotal data in terms of the cost savings of incarceration and residential treatment versus housing a homeless youth – but I think the more that we could collaboratively approach some of those issues and try to get some better data to inform us in terms of how to work with this population, I think that that population would be well served by that effort. So that's kind of Denver in a nutshell.

BECERRA: Okay. Thank you, Jamie and Joan.

VAN LEEUWEN: Sure.

BECERRA: As a reminder to our listeners, if you're interested in asking a question, you can be added to the queue by pressing star-one, star-one, or you can email us with the email address in the dial-in information. I just wanted to ask a first question, then we'll see if there are listeners ready to ask others. But, for those – either for Joan or Jamie – for those listeners that are on the line that within their cities and communities are starting the discussions to, you know, confront the homeless crises in their cities, how would you recommend they – what steps can mayors and other leaders take to just become more knowledgeable to begin with on the homeless youth

population? Trends, numbers – A) to understand the gravity of what the issues they might be dealing with are, but also, B) to get a better sense for what those needs are in those communities. We like to speak a lot of, you know, process and collaboration and cities working in partnership with other agencies, but what are some of those agencies that can really help city leaders better understand the landscape themselves and what role they can play? Either for Joan or Jamie.

BICKWEAT: Jamie, you want to answer that, and I can back you up?

VAN LEEUWEN: Sure, I could jump on that. You know, we started to see a lot of momentum there – and this started five years ago – Urban Peak really started to reach out and kind of break down some of those barriers that exist, and they exist just because some of them have been institutionalized. You know, the police – when I was at Urban Peak, our staff at Urban Peak didn't want to work with the police because their impression was that the police just wanted to arrest our kids. And when I started meeting with the police, the police's impression was is that all that the Urban Peak workers wanted to do is hide the kids, you know, and neither one of those were really accurate. And when I talk about Denver's Road Home, I talk about it as a the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, but also the 10,000 cups of coffee – that we really got our police to start sitting down with our homeless outreach workers. And, you know, there's definitely areas where we're not necessarily doing the same kind of work. There're definitely areas where we had a lot of agreement. The police didn't really want to arrest our homeless youth, and were willing to work with our outreach workers more, and it was trying to figure out how do you educate folks? And, you know, we really started with the chief of police and the District Six commander, both of whom have been very supportive of the work that we've been doing in terms of fostering those relationships. They've been a great educational resource to get that on the radar screen of our community.

We did the same thing with the Downtown Denver Partnership, you know, our business community. And actually, I wrote my whole dissertation on this. With the public perceptions of homeless youth, the business community is actually very interested in seeing young people getting employed and getting jobs, and wants to be supportive. I think that they run into barriers when they're – obviously, if you have large concentrations of homeless youth in front of your business, it becomes an economic development issue for them. But, what we found when we dug a lot deeper was that they really were interested not in just moving them over into 17th Street or the 18th Street mall, they were willing to put resources in place to help them get jobs and to help them get housing. And so, you know, the Downtown Denver Partnership and our Business Improvement District has been a great vehicle for us to educate them, and they in turn are really educating their membership about not how to deal with homeless youth, but how to really partner with agencies that are really trying to house them and to provide them with services. I think that the Chamber of Commerce, by getting the president of the Chamber of Commerce out on a street outreach session to understand the issues better. What we did a lot of was getting some of our key community leaders, our city council people, our chamber leadership, our mayor or his chief of staff, out on the streets to do street outreach. That's where we were able to really start to build that awareness that this is a population that definitely is in need of services, and there's a better way for us to provide those services.

BICKWEAT: Yeah. And what we have done, we have been offering like runaway and homeless services for like 30 years. So the agencies that – the three lead agencies, the service providers that do that in Rochester are very well established and well respected at doing that. But, you know, in terms of any new community, I think what's important is to have all the key leaders in the group, some of those to – it's a service provider table, but then adding another, you know, the layer of like the political leaders and the elected officials, making a new awareness around that. And we've been around long enough that we've had to live through many campaigns and many changes in leadership, and it's reeducating that new leadership that comes on every four years or so and starting the same conversation over again. You know, working with the new chief of police and the new police officers that work the blocks that have the shelters and where the kids hang out. Our homeless youth population is not probably as visible as Denver is or a larger city would be. Like, our kids are – you know, though we do have 230 kids a day in the jail between the ages of 16 and 21, you know, and those kids, most of them belong in high school. And so, what we try to work together with service providers and as community members is to create initiatives that help continue to fund us and to continue to educate the community around what the needs are of those kids.

Most recently, one of our agencies, the Center of Youth Services, has started a Safe Place initiative, and that's been with the Runaway National Hotline from Kentucky. And that's been a great way to pull business partnership in and educate them about what the kids' needs are in kids asking for help, and how to appropriately do that with responders. And that's been a really broad effort to do that. We've worked really hard at developing and teaching positive youth development principles and guidelines for the community in terms of how to look at kids' strengths as opposed to just their deficits. And that's been a broad community effort to do that. We've worked with the participants in Ready by 21 with Karen Pittman to do that so that we're all coming from the same base of information about what kids need. And that's true for all kids, you know. The kids like not be called homeless. They like to be called kids with unstable housing situations or looking for a place to stay. So we try to include youth in on all our partnerships and in all our decision making and plans, because their perception of what their situations are is often very different than our adults.

BECERRA: Yes, that's good, that's an important point there at the end, engage them--with them as well. Here, our operator, I'm curious if we have any callers on the line.

OPERATOR: If you'd like to ask a question, please press star-one on your telephone keypad. That's star and the number one. We do have a question from Joe Robinson. Go ahead, Joe. Joe, your line is open.

J. ROBINSON: Hello?

BECERRA: Yes, Joe.

J. ROBINSON: Earlier you were stating about the – actually, I'm from Phoenix, Arizona, and the information that we could get in terms of emails, will there be a Web site that we could go to?

BECERRA: Yes, I believe Jamie referenced that their effort is accessible via the Web site. And what we will do is post a link on our site to make any resources available as well.

VAN LEEUWEN: Carlos, what I could do – this is Jamie from Denver. What I could do is I can send you our Web site, and I'll also send you some of the papers that were published on the homeless youth just as a reference, and some of the national research that we had done here in Denver, just so folks have access to that after today's call.

J. ROBINSON: Okay.

BECERRA: That'd be great.

J. ROBINSON: One of the problems I think we have here in Phoenix is that we're – and I know Denver is a very large city. I don't know, we have an area that is approaching a little over 1,200 square miles, and we have individual cities. And unfortunately, we, as a whole, are not very receptive to people who have issues outside of just the norm. It's, you know – we continue to have national issues. And I'm – one of the problems that I'm having is how do you have an issue – and especially one of homelessness in general and our youth population, in a large metropolitan area – and you have all of these people with different ideas and not enough leadership at the top to really get a handle on the specific issue of homelessness in general and to deal with our youth?

VAN LEEUWEN: Right.

J. ROBINSON: So I mean, it's rather frustrating for me.

BECERRA: Okay. Thanks for that comment. Do Jamie and Joan care to touch on the issue of leadership?

BICKWEAT: I know when I first started many, many years ago, I had – you know, I worked for the government, you know, and having homeless youth as part of our tourism plan was not really what people wanted to hear about, you know? So what I think we had to do first was to take a look at how could we count them? Like, how do we make them an entity that we can fold into our different plans, you know, so that – you know, if it's not counted and it doesn't – you know, we had to paint the picture. And I think we've really tried hard to paint them as kids, you know, like youth – because there are differences between young adults in a homeless situation than an older, chronic homeless person. Like pretty much what Jamie said, we really don't have a good picture of it and we don't have a model that needs to be – that's well, eclectic enough to fit all of their kids, you know, all their pictures in their situations.

So I think the first thing that would be helpful is for you to begin to come up with a count, you know? And get it wherever you can, aging out of foster care, the jail count, the schools, whatever it is, you know? And I think when you work in a large geographic area – like Monroe County, I work with all the towns. We have the City of Rochester and 18 towns. It's a little different strategy than working with just the city. You can do, you know – but it would be helpful to be able to do that. We do a couple of things. We do surveys in the schools. All the

schools use the McKinney-Vento question about have you experienced homelessness in the last year. We survey the kids every other year, so we began to have a database on that. And in those surveys, there is the CDC Youth At-Risk Behavior survey. We also include what are the kid's strengths in that. So we always try to, whenever we survey, is ask kids' strengths as well as ask kids, you know, what are the issues that they have yet to meet.

I think what's really important is for you to find some champions, like people that might be likeminded with you. And if you could just begin to find one or two other people that would begin to have the conversation with you and then begin to gather them, like Jamie said about collective partners, and presenting your case or a story or white paper to your leadership and see if they would see it to – you know, be able to make a case to make it worth their while to do that.

BECERRA: Okay. Thank you. Jamie, I know was curious, you had made a connection, and I was wondering if you can expand on it some. The link – and I know you've researched this issue or related issues – the link between youth homelessness and chronic adult homelessness.

VAN LEEUWEN: Yeah. I mean, I think that – I don't know if we've made the link around it. I think what we're really looking at, one of these things that our plan really intentionally built into the work that we're doing is we said that as we're moving people off the streets, let's make sure we're preventing new people from ending up on the streets. And I think that what we know – and if you start looking at some of Dennis Culhane's research that he did out of Philadelphia, especially most recently on the family thing – I think family homelessness is a really good indicator for us that, you know, it really tells us that the sooner we can get these individuals out of our shelters and into housing, we're really going to minimize some of the impact that homelessness has, and especially on our youth. The quicker we can intervene and rapidly re-house some of these young people, the less impact that street homelessness has on them, which I definitely think over time definitely can translate to chronic adult homelessness.

I think to the question that was asked, one of the interesting things is is that getting people excited or interested in homelessness is a little bit tricky. And there's – definitely the 30-some folks on the call today are all part of that choir that really feels strongly about this issue. How do you engage a community to say this is important to us? I think one of the things that we've seen on homelessness in general in Denver has been really digging into the fact that, you know, the mayor talks a lot about the fact that if you can't wrap your – you know, that at the end of the day we should have a homeless plan because it's the right thing to do. However, if you can't wrap your brain around the right thing to do, let's talk about the smart thing to do, that this is an economic development issue as well. And then, that's what really started to engage some additional leverage from our business community and from our council was the fact that not only is it a good thing to house homeless people, but at the end of the day we're going to spend money on homeless people regardless. You can spend your money on homeless people by letting them access your most expensive emergency services – your jails, your emergency rooms, your detox, your police calls – or you can use those dollars to help create housing for them so that they're moving indoors and transitioning off the streets. And that has been a way for us to really engage the community and engage some of the leadership to really do something about it. It's a little bit harder to turn your head when what we know is that with a chronically homeless individual, we're spending \$40,000 keeping them outside under a bridge, because when they get

a cold they go to our emergency room. And that's where I think that when we talk about where we could make some inroads, I think the more we can start digging into what is that same – we know that homeless youth are having a similar impact in terms of cost. They're expensive to put in – to incarcerate. They're expensive to treat medically if we don't have traditional medical services available to us. And so, let's figure out a better way in which to respond and to connect that population with services that will ultimately improve their quality of life.

BECERRA: Okay. Thank you.

BICKWEAT: Well, and it improves the quality of life of the whole community.

BECERRA: Yeah.

VAN LEEUWEN: Yeah, an excellent point. Yes.

BECERRA: Hera, any other questions?

OPERATOR: We have a question from Deborah Shore from Sasha Bruce Youthwork. Go ahead.

SHORE: Hello.

BECERRA: Hi, Debbie.

VAN LEEUWEN: Hi, Debbie.

SHORE: Hey. Hi, this is great. So glad to hear about both of these places, and I hope there are many more out there. We are trying hard to move towards a more comprehensive way that services are provided. But, I don't think we're quite there yet. So my question is what marks and what was required to bring together all of these different pieces to create a comprehensive service? We have wonderful services in our individual programs. But you are talking about something quite beyond the sum of its parts, so how did you get there, and how would you – what would be your recommendations about how to merge that process?

BICKWEAT: Do you mean on the service provider level or the whole community level, or both?

SHORE: I mean on the – I mean that you describe a comprehensive service system countywide.

BICKWEAT: Um-hmm. Well, in New York, we have a system called “youth bureaus.” And what it is is it's by legislation, and each county has a Youth Bureau which is a local planning and funding agency to create comprehensive services for youth. And so, I work for one of those. And so, we have that the state money flows down to the county level and then the planning process takes place at the local level. So we're fortunate in that way in New York to have that.

Unfortunately, it's been under a lot of fire with the economy today. We've been fighting to keep it, you know? But, in terms of how we do that comprehensive thing, we do a lot of – I mean, it sounds like what Jamie does but at the county level, is we meet a lot. You know, we spend a lot of time together. We have actually – we have agreements, like memorandum of agreements that we actually write. We come together as a group and we decide what, you know, our mission vision is and how we're going to operate and what we can agree upon. We have that among our youth shelters, and then we have it in terms of our – we have a larger homeless services network that brings together all the service providers that may provide services to homeless youth, families, and individuals. And they have a set of community standards that they've created amongst each other that they all sign every year. And they, you know, it's a sort of agreement of how they're going to operate with each other, how they're going to share information, how they're going to stretch to meet the clients' needs, and that everybody deserves to have, you know, a safe, caring place to live that will help support them reaching their potential. So, we have that on several different levels, you know, and in several different--in like the adult population in the different ways like that.

Then, what we do as a county and a city, we come together over different initiatives and actually work jointly to actually receive funding for things. We also have a 10-year plan for Monroe County, and the youth are included in that. And much like Jamie said, what we know is that our kids need housing. You know, we have many kids who do not have parent supports or legal guardians or aunts or uncles or cousins that can provide for them. So we try to create joint funding so that we can bring dollars down into the community so that we can work collaboratively together to reach the population's need. Some of our kids have done very well in our community. And so, when they choose to and they've been through our youth leadership process and our Youth Voice programs, they actually act as advocates for the services, too. So it's really impressive when a kid that, you know, grew up with us 10 or 15 years ago or 20 years ago, you know, is actually a leading member of our community.

BECERRA: Thank you. We have a question I was e-mailed in essentially two parts from Marcella Michele in New York City. First is how do family reunification strategies factor into either one of your communities' strategies, as well as what is being done to help homeless youth who are transgender, gay, or lesbian who have been disowned by a family member? So what specific strategies are there out there for those communities?

BICKWEAT: Jamie, do you want to talk to that, or you want me to?

VAN LEEUWEN: Yeah, I could talk to both of those. And Joan, you can probably bring a finer point to some of these issues. But, you know, on the – I'll take the latter one first, the LGBT issues. Actually, I'll include, Carlos, when I send you a paper that was recently – that we published on transgendered, gay, and lesbian youth. I think that one of the things that we found at Urban Peak when I was there, and it definitely is a challenge, is how do you make sure that you have the training and the support to be able to develop a working knowledge of how to respond to the needs of that population? And so, we had – we did a research study about three years ago that really demonstrated that LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) homeless youth are – while you know that the homeless youth population in general is at higher risk of everything, from substance abuse to prostitution to all the different variables that young people

run into on the streets, I think that what we found is that our LGBT homeless youth were at significantly higher risk than our homeless youth were for all of those things, and suicidality and all of those issues. How do you make sure that you have the clinical staff and the training and expertise to be able to respond to the needs of that population? Recently I've been meeting with some representatives from Lambda, and actually was on the phone with them earlier this morning to share some of our policies and really trying to make sure that – with Denver's Road Home we do a lot of training with our homeless providers around antidiscrimination policies – how do we make sure that we create as friendly of an environment, not just for our homeless youth but for our homeless adults who are LGBT? You know, I think it's an area where I think there's some really good work being done. I think that Lambda has some good best practice models in terms of how to integrate that into some of the work that we're doing here. But I think that there is a lot more work to be done in that area, and I think that we're going to have to continue to pay attention to that issue. And it should be in our plans and it should be in our contracts and it should be in our conversations with our homeless providers.

On the family front, you know, the only comment I'll make is that in the research that we did on homeless and runaway youth, and what we know is that if you're going to treat homeless and runaway youth, you're going to house homeless and runaway youth, if you don't factor in the family unification piece then you're missing a big piece of that in really understanding the family dynamics. That what we found in our research was that, you know, homeless, a homeless youth, when we start looking at their drug and alcohol use, when we ask them who the first person was that they used an illicit drug with, it wasn't one of their friends. It was with a family member. And so, knowing that a lot of the homeless youth that we see have families that are impacted with similar issues of mental health, substance abuse, and lack of resources, how are you connecting those families with the services that they need so that they can care for one another as you're going through that unification process? So I think that the family piece is a critical element to absolutely everything we do. And when we look at Denver's Road Home, it goes back to some of the comments that have been earlier today. How do you address that issue more holistically? You can't just deal with homeless youth. You have to deal with the whole system of care. And if you're not providing their family with resources – you could get a homeless youth clean and sober and provide them with that transition, but if they're still connected to their family and the family is all using and the family doesn't have services and support, then that young person is probably not going to stay stable very long. And actually, Debbie Shore from Sasha Bruce could probably enlighten that issue as well. There are some experts on the phone that see that firsthand.

BICKWEAT: Yeah, that's what I would say, too. I would add to that the transgender population, I think over the last maybe seven, eight years, has grown. I think that we've, you know, been learning partners in that. In New York City, where you're from, Green Chimneys is one of the programs that we work with in New York, and they've been a resource to me personally. But again – and then the family reunification, sometimes kids can't live with their families, but it doesn't mean that they don't have relationship with their families, you know? And so, that's always something to factor in. And that as they grow and become independent and gain more skills, you know, that sometimes they can go back home again. Sometimes what we're working at is maintaining a healthy relationship but not necessarily living together. And then, for us, the family always is a broad definition of family, you know, whoever those people

are, those significant others in the young person's life that can give them a sense of belonging and caring.

BECERRA: Great. Okay. Hera, another question from the audience?

OPERATOR: We have a question from Cynthia Robinson. Go ahead, Cynthia.

C. ROBINSON: Yes. My question was regarding the WIA participation, or focusing – partnering with WIA offices. How did you do that? Did you – do you sit on the youth councils and approach funding from that level? Or how did you get involved with WIA?

BICKWEAT: Well, some of us sit on – over the years, some of us have been on the youth council, the WIA council, you know? And, you know, then the other thing with that is that when RFP (request for proposals) came out, you know, that the programs or service providers that work with the population of kids that we're talking about, they actually geared – you know, did the research and geared the program to meet that population's needs. So, when they responded to the RFP, they specified the target population and the specific set of skills that they felt would benefit that population of kids.

C. ROBINSON: Did you do that by approaching it through the directive of US Department of Labor where they're focusing on at-risk youth?

BICKWEAT: Yeah. Yeah, out-of-school.

C. ROBINSON: For the shared youth vision?

BICKWEAT: Yeah. And it was – remember when they went from in-school to out-of-school, and there's more emphasis on out-of-school youth?

C. ROBINSON: Yeah.

BICKWEAT: And the struggle for us as a community was, well, how do you engage those kids? You know, how do you find them? You know, how do you do that?

C. ROBINSON: Right.

BICKWEAT: And so, what we looked to was we looked to the service providers that have had success at that for many years and, you know, worked with them to draft that.

C. ROBINSON: Great. Thank you.

BECERRA: Okay. Other questions from the queue?

OPERATOR: We have a question from Joe Robinson. Go ahead, Joe.

J. ROBINSON: Yes. We have a significant number of Native Americans who are homeless here in Phoenix, and some of them are youth, and I have a very difficult time reconnecting the Native Americans, especially if they live on the reservation. And also, we have a significant issue here in the Southwest with immigration and the ability to be able to communicate across the language, the English language, and to get people to come forward and also to get the services that are necessary without people feeling that they will be jailed.

BECERRA: Okay. Any comment, Jamie or Joan, on cultural issues and how you span those?

VAN LEEUWEN: You know, from Denver's standpoint, I think it's a great question. And I think it just goes back to – and it actually ties in, I was going to make a comment on the last question in terms of – you know, one of the challenges we had, and I actually had worked as a homeless provider for, you know, six years before I had moved into the public sector. And, you know, it is really cultivating and building those relationships across sectors. And I think that the government – you know, locally we've worked really hard with our nonprofit communities to really engage that dialog and that conversation so it's not as threatening and it's not – a lot of it is relationship building. You know, we built our relationship, and it requires both side of it. And when you're dealing – going back to the previous question around WIA, you know, we got to be very good friends with the folks at the government because WIA is not the easiest entity in which to navigate, especially when you're a nonprofit trying to figure out the bureaucracies of how to employ homeless youth. And so, you know, it was really building those relationships and figuring out where could we break down some barriers and where could we make things easier. I think the same thing comes in the nonprofit arena is how do you – and not everybody is excited about developing those relationships, but it's really trying to figure out the champions. We've been fortunate that our police chief and our district commander have been interested in coming to the table. But, a lot of that is just trying to figure that out so that you can break down some of those barriers and that there's less of a fear factor around being jailed. And that the more homeless youth can see that the community is much more committed to seeing them get employed and moving into housing than they are to see them, you know, going a more punitive route, the more powerful, I think, the work can be.

BICKWEAT: Yeah, one of the things we do for our broad based strategy in terms of developing community input and relationships and all that, we worked with the Search Institute in building a whole strength-based, asset-based initiative throughout the county in all the towns and stuff. And one of the partners in that that I've learned a lot from in working with the people of different cultures and different communities – you know, it sounds like you have many different sectors of the community – is ABCD Institute, asset-based community development work. You know, John McKnight's work and Jody Kretzmann out of Northwest University. And they do a lot of about how to involve citizenship. And so, what the ideal would be is if that, you know, the Native American community could, you know, meet their own children's needs and you'd listen to what their values and their goals around that for themselves are. And so, that Web site's easy to get to. It's www.abcdinstitute.org. And they have some great models to do that with.

BECERRA: Okay. We'll make sure to include that on our list of links as well. I'm curious. What level of collaboration with foster care agencies, whether state or at the county level, when

we're looking at tying into transitional and independent living programs for youth who are aging out of foster care, what does that look like, if they exist?

VAN LEEUWEN: You know, in Denver, we've really – the nice thing, Carlos, and it's a good question. I think that what we're doing more and more of, not just with our foster youth but across the agency, my office – you know, I work for Mayor Hickenlooper in Denver, but my office is at the Department of Human Services and I have a division here called the Office of Community Impact. How do we engage our human services workers and start cultivating the relationship between the Department of Human Services and our nonprofit providers to really look at ways that we can more collaboratively work together? That as we have young people aging out of foster care, what resources exist in the community, how do we contract with some of our nonprofit agencies to really minimize the impact that that transition can have on a young person? And so, we're doing a lot at the city level. We're doing more and more of it at the state level in terms of looking at one of – the previous manager of Human Services, who's now the mayor's chief of staff, really worked hard to figure out how do we get as many of our families reunified, going back to the family reunification question, to really dig into that issue of resources and providing families with resources so that young people don't have to be, you know, really stuck in the foster care system per se. And so, we've tried to really develop those relationships. And I think that we are always looking for new models and working with, you know, innovative organizations like Annie Casey to say what are some of the models out there that we should be looking at or employing that might work for Denver and work for the state that would make our service delivery system better?

BECERRA: Okay.

BICKWEAT: Yeah, that's a constant challenge. You know, we like--just like Jamie said the collaborative partners, I think the challenge is to get the different funding silos – you know, OMH (Office of Mental health), DSS (Department of Social Services), DDSO (Developmental Disabilities Services Office) – you know, all the different systems to – like, who owns the kid? Like, who's going to take the lead in terms of coming up with a realistic plan in terms of this young person reaching their potential? And so, I think it's a – I mean, there are many kids that do transition, you know? I think what we see often is the kids that don't, you know, the kids that fall through in the gaps. And it's a challenge. It's a challenge in today's economic times. It's a challenge in today's employment market, so that we try to teach the kids or give the kids opportunities and support so that they can, you know, gain the skills that they need so they can support themselves or at least partially support themselves, you know? So, that's a constant challenge for us. And every so many years, we bring everybody to the table in the room and say, "Okay, how can we do this better," you know?

BECERRA: Okay. Thank you. Hera, any final questions?

OPERATOR: We have a question from Robyn Causey. Go ahead, Robyn.

BECERRA: Hi, Robyn.

CAUSEY: Hi. How are y'all?

BECERRA: Good.

VAN LEEUWEN: Hi there.

CAUSEY: Did I just – hey, Joan. How are you?

BICKWEAT: Hi Robin.

CAUSEY: I'm in New York City. I'm the Runaway and Homeless Youth Coordinator for the City of New York and I oversee all the Runaway and Homeless Youth shelters here. And I just want to commend y'all. I feel so excited that y'all are even having this telephone call. We have just had our annual conference, and this is actually a comment to one of the callers that had a question. At our conference, which was on Tuesday, we invited seven young people who are residing in our transitional independent living programs and we had an open forum about family mediation and reunification. And then, we invited in experts because we believed that we could more in that area. And a lot of that work needs to be done when young people are in the crisis facilities so that we can work, you know, tirelessly to get them back home whenever it's possible.

And then, in terms of someone had mentioned about the work with LGBTQ youth, and New York City has just started a commission. The meeting was started yesterday morning. And so, we're meeting with many providers in New York City. We have like a roundtable where we're commissioned to look at the services for LGBTQ youth. And as y'all mentioned, one of the programs – and Theresa Nolan, who is the director of the program, is actually sitting on the commission with us. But, what we're doing is we're trying to look at all the reasons that young people leave home, and we're trying to develop long-term transitional independent living programs that address the specific reasons. And one of the things our commissioner has worked tirelessly to do since I've been here in 2005 is she's created two RFPs, and in those RFPs we make it very clear that, you know, it's not just about beds, it's about programs. And so, we are really big on youth development, the youth development principles, and we're seeing a lot of success with the young people who are in our programs. So, I just wanted to make that comment in case – since somebody had asked about the LGBTQ and the family mediation.

BECERRA: Thank you.

VAN LEEUWEN: Carlos, I'd like to add to that.

BECERRA: Sure.

VAN LEEUWEN: I mean, I think that that's – you can't underscore that point enough. I think that the – what's really, really important and what we've seen even at the, you know, from the macro to the micro level is how do you really, you know, how do you engage the population that you're serving? Our Homeless Commission included six homeless men, women, and youth on the commission. Our allocations process in which we put money back out in the community

includes formerly homeless individuals, both a youth and an adult. How do you really not just engage the voices so that you hear from them, but they really have a decision-making role in that process? I think that it's where we've really been able to create ownership and really look at best practices in terms of how to implement these kinds of system changes into our community.

BICKWEAT: I think the other thing is that face of the homeless, I think some – that word sometimes paints a picture of like an indigent man next to an oil can, you know, with torn off gloves. And I think what the kids need to see is that it's a safe place to go and it's a place to just ask for some assistance and direction. And so, I think it's how we coin it. It's the picture we present. And I think that makes a big difference in terms of who engages with us, whether that be the kids themselves or the leadership.

OPERATOR: We have another question from Robyn Causey.

CAUSEY: I'm sorry. It's not a question. I just wanted to make one more comment that I just – I wanted to point out that one of the things that – I was homeless when I was younger. I was orphaned at 17 years old. And the young people, what I found interesting when they were talking about on the panel discussion was exactly what Joan was just saying, the way we communicate with them. And they were saying that there is such – with the Internet and with text messaging and with the way they communicate with each other, that they think there's just a huge gap between the older generation of homeless and even just the older generation in general. And I'm not really that old, but they were calling me old, too. But, they were saying that now with Internet and then – the Internet just seems to give them so many possibilities, and many times they go looking for these possibilities only to find out that they're not real possibilities. So one of the, another thing that our agency is doing is now we're on Facebook. We're on MySpace. We're having Twitter. We're trying to do everything that we can do to communicate with young people on that level because so many young people are using that type of technology, and that's the way that they're being reached by other who are competing with us for their time.

BICKWEAT: Actually, you know, Robyn, the National Network for Runaway Services, you know, the Safe Places, they just started a text thing where the kids on their cell phone can type in 6996. I might have the wrong four numbers. And then, they can put their address in and they can get the safest place to go. And it's free. And it's you know, that's probably worth putting on the Web site, too, Carlos.

BECERRA: Yeah. No, that sounds important. New technology obviously needs to be involved.

BICKWEAT: Yeah. And I know some of the rural communities, you know, where kids have to drive long distances and stuff, you know, homelessness is such a different place for them that sometimes communicating through – like Robin said, through social networking is really a way to communicate with them.

BECERRA: Yeah.

BICKWEAT: Actually, today – I'm a government employee and I get emails from kids asking about places to go and stuff.

BECERRA: Really?

BICKWEAT: It's such a different way to communicate for me, because I always think, oh, I can't talk to them. It might mean that they might not get the message.

BECERRA: Right. Okay. Well, I think we're at the tail end and we're going to have to wrap up, although this has been very good dialog both with information and promising practices from Monroe County and the City of Rochester and the City of Denver. So we want to – I want to personally thank both Jamie and Joan for participating in our call today, and also thank all of you for listening in on the discussion. We will be posting some of these relevant links as well as the audio recording in case you have colleagues that are interested in also learning what we touched upon today. So with that being said, one final plug for those of you on the call that are interested in continuing to be engaged with the institute here at the National League of Cities, we do host the Municipal Network for Disconnected Youth, also known as MNDY, where we attempt to give you all useful information and resources and programming like this on how you can lead city efforts to reengage disconnected youth, including homeless youth. So with that said, I want to thank our participants and our listeners. Thank you all very much.

VAN LEEUWEN: Thanks, Carlos. Have a great day.

BICKWEAT: Thank you. Bye.

BECERRA: Take care. Bye-bye.