

OLDER YOUTH Playbook Summary

Concerns/Issues | Connecting to Solutions

Older Youth includes:

- Young Adults aged 18-26
- Youth & Young Parents aged 14-26

Playbooks: Nebraska Children's Connected Youth Initiative (statewide); Project Everlast Omaha (Douglas and Sarpy Counties); Project Everlast Lincoln/The Hub (Lancaster County); Opportunity Passport providers: Family Housing Advisory Services, Community Action of Lincoln/Lancaster County, Central Plains Center for Services/PALS (statewide), CAPWN & Panhandle Partnership (Panhandle counties), Blue Valley Community Action – Blue Valley (SE NE counties), Families 1st Partnership (Lincoln County), Norfolk Family Coalition (Madison County), Fremont Family Coalition (Dodge County), Hall County Community Collaborative, Omaha Home for Boys (Douglas County), Youth Emergency Services (Douglas County); LEAP (Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential grant for unconnected college students) partners (statewide); NEPG (NE Expectant and Parenting Grant for young adults) partners (5 counties – Douglas, Sarpy, Madison, Lincoln, Lancaster); Youth and young adults (YYA)

Themes and priorities common across communities:

Food and product supply insecurity

- Food insecurity and issue across the state (H3C, Douglas County, Project Everlast, Families 1st, Panhandle, LEAP)
 - Food distribution sites are often coordinated by the school system and limited to families with school-aged children or children under age 18
 - Young individuals, without children, ages 18-26 have limited options for food distribution
 - Young people rely on public transportation to access food pantries and distribution sites
 - . Public transit in smaller communities (Grand Island, Scottsbluff, North Platte) are operating reduced hours
 - . In urban areas (Omaha and Lincoln), public transit is unreliable and unpredictable
 - . Young people are not able to carry and transport 1-2 weeks' worth of food and supplies on public transportation during the directed health measure which is a particular challenge for young parents that are often transporting 1+ child(ren) on public transit while accessing pantries and food distribution sites
 - . There is a health risk using public transportation.

- Lack of affordable diaper and formula supply available in the community, particularly for WIC (Douglas County, Families 1st, Panhandle, LEAP, NEPG, YYA)
 - . Few supplies remain in stores for WIC purchase
 - . Supplies that do remain are often name-brand and more expensive diapers and formula and there is often “limit of 1”
 - . Supplies are limited at food banks and other community resources, for example, diaper banks.

Housing insecurity

- Anticipation that housing need will continue to grow as the pandemic carries on (Project Everlast, H3C, Madison County, Dodge County, Panhandle)
 - Youth and adult shelter capacity reduced with limited options for emergency housing for currently homeless or vulnerable youth (Panhandle, H3C, Douglas County)
 - . Physical space and staff capacity issues at shelters as COVID-19 cases and testing increase due to the need to quarantine/isolate positive and symptomatic clients (Panhandle, H3C), Douglas County)
 - . Limited or no available youth shelter space, with an anticipated increase in need (Blue Valley, H3C, Families 1st)
 - . Alternative housing options (e.g. hotels) unwilling to house youth and adults with COVID-19 symptoms or that need quarantine (Families 1st)
 - Lack of available and affordable housing options
 - . Lack of affordable housing was an issue prior to COVID-19, anticipate even greater need following pandemic (Douglas County, Lift Up Sarpy, Project Everlast)
 - . Increased need for flexible funding for rent and utility payments due to youth experiencing loss of income/employment; many youth using recent tax returns now, but will face economic hardship in 30-60 days (Families 1st, Douglas County, Project Everlast)
 - Evictions and utility shut offs are anticipated, despite moratoriums.
 - . Many youth and young adults were behind on rent and utility payments prior to COVID-19
 - College dorms closing, some youth forced to move from college campus (LEAP, Project Everlast, Panhandle)

Increased mental health needs due to social isolation, anxiety and fear

- Youth and young adults were previously at elevated risk for loneliness and disconnection within the community so an increase in isolation and lack of social connections due to COVID-19 pandemic may lead to increased mental health needs, unhealthy relationships, and risky behavior (Project Everlast, Douglas County, Families 1st, H3C, Madison County, Dodge County)
 - Anticipated increase in trafficking ‘grooming’ as young people are isolated and experiencing loss of income, which may lead to risky behavior such as survival sex (H3C) (Douglas County, Project Everlast)
 - Access to critical medication is reduced due to telehealth limitations and no access to transportation (H3C, Douglas County, Project Everlast)
 - For young adult parents: fewer “eyes on” vulnerable children daily and young parents dealing with stressors of parenting 24/7 with little-to-no in-home or kinship support, anticipated increase in abuse/neglect cases following pandemic (Blue Valley, Panhandle, Families 1st, Project Everlast)

- Youth and young adults report that telehealth options are difficult to access and lack relationship-building that is critical for youth interventions (Project Everlast) (Blue Valley) (Douglas Co.)
 - . Loss of face-to-face social supports (e.g. therapy, AA) may lead to an increase in suicide ideation, suicide attempts, and other mental health concerns

Unemployment and loss of income

- Youth and young adults are often in part-time or gig employment and many are in industries that have been the hardest hit by COVID-19 including food service, childcare, and retail (H3C, Douglas County, Madison County, Dodge County, Blue Valley, Families 1st, Project Everlast)
 - Many unconnected youth and young adults are living paycheck-to-paycheck with little-to-no savings
 - Many unconnected youth and young adults carry unsecured debt – student loans, medical debt, and credit cards
 - CARES Act relief payment and additional ‘Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (\$600)’ may make some young people not eligible for public benefits and Medicaid

Domestic and dating violence and labor and sex trafficking

- As youth and young adults are socially isolated, they may be sharing housing with perpetrators and/or in unhealthy domestic or dating relationships (H3C, Douglas County, Project Everlast, Families 1st)
 - Anticipated increase in trafficking ‘grooming’ as young people are isolated and experiencing loss of income, which may lead to risky behavior such as survival sex (H3C, Douglas County, Project Everlast)
 - Unable to connect with young people in-person and it’s not always safe for young people in unhealthy relationships to connect via phone or computer as they are in the home with the perpetrator
 - . Telehealth and virtual case management/coaching are not safe options due to living with perpetrator
 - Food and product delivery are not always an option for young people in unhealthy relationships due to living with perpetrator
 - Anticipated increase in drug and labor trafficking as sex trafficking market becomes strained due to social distancing guidelines
 - Domestic violence victims and young people in unhealthy relationships living with perpetrators are not considered “homeless” and do not qualify for many public housing support

Youth and young adults in state’s custody

- Young people in probation, foster care, B2i are a priority as they prepare for and transition into independence/interdependence during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Concerns about COVID-19 spread to youth and staff of youth in YRTC’s and group home settings
 - Youth exiting care or probation at age 16, 17 or 18 (and not entering B2i) or exiting B2i between April 1 and October 30, 2020 are vulnerable to the unstable economy, workforce, and housing

Youth and young adult parents

- Young parents people face specific challenges as they balance parenting (often in isolation), e-learning for them or their child(ren), loss of income, reduced food and product supply, transportation issues, and mental health concerns (NEPG) (Project Everlast) (Madison Co.) (Lincoln Co.) (Lancaster Co.) (Blue Valley)
 - Title XX childcare requires the child to be at the center or the parent must pay full price or lose their spot so young parents fear losing their Title XX spot as they cannot pay full price
 - Young parents that are isolated from support may turn to social media offers to help with childcare or “pop up” childcare options as they are desperate for help, leaving parents and children vulnerable to risky or unsafe childcare environments
 - Lack of affordable diaper and formula supply available in the community, particularly for WIC
 - . Few supplies remain in stores for WIC purchase
 - . Supplies that do remain are often name-brand and more expensive diapers and formula and there is often “limit of 1”. Supplies are limited at food banks and other community resources like diaper banks
 - Transportation issues remain a concern and transportation for young parents is a priority
 - . Young parents are not able to transport 1-2 weeks’ worth of food and supplies on public transportation during the directed health measure and transport 1+ child(ren) on public transit while accessing pantries and food distribution sites
 - . Car seat safety and installation services have been suspended and events cancelled
 - CARES Act relief payments are not being provided to individuals that owe child support, leaving many young parents (particularly young men of color that have fathered a child) without the cash benefit

Postsecondary education and career training

- Continuing education for youth and young adults is a priority (LEAP, Project Everlast, Panhandle, H3C, Lancaster County, Douglas County)
 - Technology and internet connectivity are needed for young students to continue postsecondary coursework, but many youth do not have access to laptops, tablets or Wi-Fi
 - . Many youth utilize publicly available Wi-Fi and computers prior to COVID-19. For youth that do have technology, they may not have home internet or may have connectivity issues.
 - . Access to free internet options are limited for youth and young adults as many require participation in public benefits (e.g. free and reduced lunch), require social security number, and require a credit check. Installation of these free services is backed-up due to demand.
 - College dorms closing, some youth forced to move from college campus
 - Vulnerable youth and young adults are more at risk of not completing postsecondary e-learning courses and career training due to COVID-19 disruption to traditional learning settings
 - . E-learning may be more difficult to vulnerable youth because of the stressors related to COVID-19 such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, childcare responsibilities, mental health concerns, and loss of income
 - . Some youth and young adults have anxiety about online e-learning or virtual communication is not preferable; most students thrive with in-person learning and 1:1 tutoring and academic support

Health and healthcare access

- Healthcare is a concern during the COVID-19 pandemic is a priority (Panhandle, Douglas County, Project Everlast)
 - Reduced access to contraceptives and reproductive health needs and STI testing due to clinics closing or reducing hours
 - Increased number of youth and young adults requesting support services funds for medication and anticipate need will continue to increase
 - Many youth and young adults are not Medicaid eligible and do not carry private insurance due to cost or unemployment
 - There is concern that if young people test positive for COVID-19 or need medical attention, this will lead to additional medical debt
 - Limited Medicaid coverage for telehealth services, including medication management
 - Youth and young adults lack accurate, but youth-friendly COVID-19 health-related information
 - They are trying to understand medical language being shared by CDC and public partners and evaluate risks and decide if they need to find work to gain income or stay home and follow the Governor’s recommendations. This creates more fear and anxiety.

Unique needs and disparities

Youth and young adults, ages 14-26

Douglas County Project Everlast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YES maternity group home will need to close if shelter-in-place is ordered which would leave 4 mothers and 4 infants without housing • 19 new (not previously served) young people looking for housing resources in one week at YES • Increase in severity of calls for help as young people are dealing with increased anxiety and fear • Increase of domestic violence hotline calls by 50% and severity of calls have increased, per law enforcement • Long waits for domestic violence victims in DV shelter to find and transfer to permanent housing (up to 36-months prior to COVID-19) and anticipate getting longer during and after pandemic • Young people coming out of correctional facilities have no access to phone or data/phone package to connect with resources
Panhandle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools not able to locate homeless high school students due to pandemic
Hall County and surrounding counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 65% of population have access to cell phones for telehealth services
Lincoln County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic violence shelter closed due to COVID risks (20-30 capacity) • Youth are having difficulty access housing that is affordable because the railroad sector drives up rental costs

Madison County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent, utilities and housing funding for youth residing in the college dorms at Northeast Community College • One of the food pantries had to shut down due to staff being immunocompromised and at risk • Shelter is operating at full capacity and domestic violence shelter is not accepting any new clients • Housing authority has 6-9 month waiting list and no inspections are happening • No local internet providers are offering free or reduced cost internet packages (Sparklight, Stealth, Century Link)
Custer County and surrounding counties (Sandhills Collaborative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Wi-Fi that is reliable due to extremely rural area. Many youth access free Wi-Fi from libraries and other public places, but all are closed.
Lancaster County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing authority is closed

Barriers that exist for people to access necessary services

- Access to free local internet options are not meeting the needs of youth and young adults because they require documentation of public assistance like free/reduced lunch, require a school-aged child in the home, require Social Security Number and require a credit check
- Internet providers are at overcapacity due to so much usage – particularly in rural areas
- Ensure that technology and connectivity support is not limited to families with school-aged children or college students. There are non-traditional students pursuing postsecondary education or training and single individuals with no technology to access public assistance and resources.
- Telehealth behavioral health providers are seeing a shortage of therapists using telehealth
- Telehealth and virtual case management/coaching are not always safe options for youth and young adults due to living in a home with an unsafe family member or partner or living with domestic violence perpetrator
- Need more flexible policies to relax public funding for housing resources that don't require young people to be currently or in imminent risk of "homeless"
- Need more flexible policies to relax public funding restrictions that require eviction risk or homelessness to pay utilities and rent
- Need to increase eviction notice by 5 days to allow more time for solutions
- Need HUD inspection waiver
- Need more flexible HUD-approved housing options to help young people "house-in-place" (e.g. ability to use HUD vouchers for college dorms, hotels, living with friends/family, etc.)
- Landlords need COVID-19 relief, so that they can be flexible with evictions
- Unemployment insurance application process and wait times are significant, leading to longer periods of loss of income. Need more capacity to manage applications and streamlined mobile application process (not just online that requires a computer)
- Need access to cash to encourage savings – perhaps through IDAs or CSA-type model -specifically for youth and young adults to create emergency funds and establish savings behavior
- YRTC's and group homes should not be a viable placement option for youth and young adults; halt new admissions to YRTC's and speed up discharge proceedings

- Put a hold on DHHS and probation placements in shelters and group homes
- Stop all mandatory exits from care for those 17 and 18 years of age and for those in B2i for 90-180 days
- Need federal debt relief for medical and student loan debt and other debt for young people
- Create a Title XX waiver that allows parents to hold their childcare center spot until they return to work or school without penalty
- Expand CARES Act provisions to allow undocumented individuals to receive cash relief and remove the provisions that individuals owing child support are not eligible to receive payment
- Need to create accelerated workforce training and credentialing to respond to the shift in high-demand jobs during and following pandemic (e.g. healthcare, technology, manufacturing, social services)
- Need more flexible Pell Grant options for college students (short-term Pell grants for short-term credentials in high-demand fields to accelerate the pipeline to workforce)
- Colleges need to collaborate with employers to create new ways to increase student access to paid, work-based learning (apprenticeships) as economy recovers because students will be less likely to find jobs in a competitive job market

Workforce capacity related barriers to serve people impacted by COVID-19

- Overall, smaller organizations report that staff do not have access to technology (or technology is out-of-date and old) necessary to work-from-home and many are using personal resources. Examples of technology or working supplies needed to support staff working remotely include laptop with camera, tablet, printer, toner, printer paper, increased data on phones, software (e.g. Zoom and HIPPA compliant Zoom), DocuSign (\$300 per signer), increased internet bandwidth on home internet, scanner or other scanning capabilities
- Homeless and DV youth and adult shelters need more funding for staff capacity to meet the anticipated need as COVID-19 pandemic continues past April 2020; concern that staff will become sick with COVID-19, reducing their workforce more significantly.
- Partners across all communities report a need for unrestricted flexible funds to support infrastructure costs, staff, increase staff capacity to serve the community, and cover expenses that they cannot even anticipate yet due to the pandemic
- Providers need access to legal consultation related to COVID-19 so that they can share accurate information with youth and young adults
- Need electronic signature and mobile application (not just online or fillable PDF) process for Participant Information Form (common referral) and Support Services Form and other provider forms that require signature

Barriers around serving specific populations (historically segregated neighborhoods, immigrant populations, LGBT youth)

- COVID-19 related health concerns for people living with HIV/AIDS (LGBTQIA+ and Trans communities) and may face discrimination of healthcare providers and less likely to seek medical attention for symptoms and testing
- Undocumented young people have a need for financial support, but they are often cut off from public support (e.g. stimulus check, COX internet, etc.)

Solutions being implemented or proposed

- Pairing seniors with unconnected older youth in the community to do weekly “check-in” calls with one another or older youth helping seniors with chores like grocery shopping, yard work, helping them with technology, etc. to reduce social isolation and increase social connections
- Ensure all unconnected youth and young adults have a cell phone with internet access
- Create more flexible options for food delivery services without age restrictions to reduce the need for public transportation to pick-up food; using ride share services and partnership for food delivery (e.g. Uber, Lyft)
- Hold virtual engagement activities, trainings and educational events to encourage social connections
- Designated WIC shopping hours at local grocery stores or offer online order with WIC benefits
- Allow flexibility of federal, state and local funds to serve vulnerable single adults

Other findings

- Many agencies rely on Census data for funding and Census marketing is being overshadowed with COVID-19 so there is a worry that Census data will be down, resulting in funding reductions
- Many communities recognized a need for marketing and education about stimulus checks and small business packages – specifically education to older youth, families and individuals about how to utilize their stimulus checks and not put off paying rent and utilities during the pandemic