

Examining a Drop-in and Case Management Model for Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LINK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we were interested in understanding the long-term impact of youth homelessness interventions by assessing YouthLink's enhanced drop-in and supportive case management model.

Using integrated administrative data available through Minn-LINK (e.g., housing, education, court involvement, use of financial support programs) for 1,229 youth experiencing homelessness, this study assessed outcomes over six years. When compared with similar youth, the youth who visited YouthLink experienced improved outcomes over six years on housing and education but were more likely to use General Assistance in the final year of observation and have slightly higher financial program costs over six years. More intense relationships between case managers and youth, encouragement of normative social behaviors, and focused work on specific transformative topics improved outcomes, especially in housing and education.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This study found that the case manager relationship affected young people's outcomes. Specifically, the study focused on the **intensity of the case manager relationship** (how often youth were meeting with case managers), case management that focused on **supporting normative social behavior** (behaviors that allow young people to successfully navigate relationships and roles in their lives), and case management that was focused on **addressing a particular issue** (e.g., education, court, housing). In your experience, which of these aspects of case management do you think have the greatest impact on young people, and why? What other elements of case management might be important?
2. This study examined a variety of outcomes for young people, ranging from housing to education, from juvenile justice to financial program use (e.g., EA, SNAP). With the exception of reduced felony convictions, researchers found inconsistent effects on juvenile justice and financial program use outcomes. What has been your experience in supporting positive outcomes for clients in these areas? From a practice perspective, what are some of the barriers or challenges to helping young people navigate these systems or services?
3. In this study on youth experiencing homelessness, between 35-50% of young people had prior child protective services experience and between 20%-35% had previously been in out-of-home care. From a social work perspective, what are some approaches or practices you can employ in your practice to support young people who are unstably housed in your practice context? Are there existing solutions or programs in your area that can help?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. A glaring issue in Minnesota is the over-representation of people who are Black or American Indian in the homeless population. What are the structural factors that led to this situation? What is our role as practitioners and members of the community? What are solutions from a policy and systems perspective?
2. The study found that YouthLink's drop-in and case management model (which includes the onsite Youth Opportunity Center) was effective in supporting positive youth outcomes, especially in housing and education. How could this service model be made more widely available to young people? From a macro lens, what are the policies, practices, and structures that support the service model featured in this study?