

Creating a Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Cuyahoga County:

The Implementation and Early Promise of *A Place 4 Me*

*Supported with a grant from the Butler Family Fund, this report describes and assesses the launch of **A Place 4 Me**, a coordinated solution to prevent and end youth homelessness in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. The broader purpose of the paper is to stimulate discussion and action among others who seek to prevent and end youth homelessness through cross-sector collaboration, resource realignment, and systems change. The paper was prepared by Ann Woodward Consulting LLC with input from key informants representing all aspects of the development and implementation of A Place 4 Me.*

Introduction

A Place 4 Me (AP4M) is an energetic cross-sector community collaboration to prevent and end youth homelessness in Cuyahoga County, with particular focus on young people transitioning from foster care.

A Place 4 Me was launched in 2014 with core funding support and technical assistance from the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (Jim Casey Initiative), a national initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation dedicated to achieving better outcomes for foster youth. The strong commitment of the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and a consistently high level of youth engagement are essential factors in the integrity and promise of A Place 4 Me.

AP4M quickly enlisted a broad set of community stakeholders with a shared vision of achieving better outcomes for vulnerable youth. AP4M established a cross-sector steering committee of decision makers, invested in expert leadership, and mobilized practitioners across the youth service spectrum from foster care, mental health, housing, mentoring programs, and youth development. Together these stakeholders developed a set of ambitious recommendations that were formalized in a *Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Cuyahoga County*.

A Place 4 Me exemplifies an approach known as *collective impact*: a model of collaboration that occurs when organizations from different sectors agree to solve a specific social problem by using a common agenda, aligning their efforts and using common measures of success.ⁱ

Collective Impact

Collective Impact is the commitment by different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. The concept was introduced in *Collective Impact*, the 2011 Stanford Social Innovation Review article written by John Kania and Mark Kramer.¹

In their article the authors urge organizations to actively coordinate their efforts and work together to create lasting solutions to large-scale social problems. The collective impact approach contrasts with the common approach of “isolated impact” when organizations work alone to solve social problems.

The collective impact concept emphasizes the importance of cross-sector collaboration to make meaningful and sustainable progress on social issues.

The concept includes five major criteria:

Common Agenda: Sharing a vision for social change, all participating organizations (such as government agencies, non-profits, community members) develop a common definition of the problem and a coordinated approach to solutions. *The vision of A Place 4 Me (AP4M) is to prevent and end youth homelessness in Cuyahoga County, and each participating organization takes action towards reaching this goal.*

Shared Measurement System: Using a short list of key indicators, participating organizations agree on ways to measure and to report success. *AP4M will measure its success by reductions in the number of homeless youth and young adults.*

Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Stakeholders from different organizations and sectors coordinate activities through a reinforcing action plan. *As the County Division of Child and Family Services extends the work of its Emancipation Unit, for example, it will draw upon community organizations with expertise in homelessness prevention.*

Continuous Communication: To build trust and to inform learning and strategy, there are frequent communications among key stakeholders. *In its first phase, AP4M’s Steering Committee and working group meetings were reinforced with regular email updates and two major community convenings to share progress and invite additional participation. Local radio coverage extended public awareness of the community effort to prevent and end youth homelessness.*

Backbone Organization: Support is provided by independent staff dedicated to the initiative. The staff guides vision and strategy, supports aligned activity, establishes shared measurement practices, builds public will, advances policy, and mobilizes funding. *The Steering Committee of AP4M, which included DCFS, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, and a technical consultant from the Jim Casey Initiative, selected the YWCA of Greater Cleveland as AP4M’s backbone organization. The AP4M Director is employed by the YWCA and in that role leads AP4M’s strategy and activity.*

¹ John Kania and Mark Kramer, *Collective Impact*, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2011
http://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

Leading indicators of success in AP4M's first phase:

- Development and community launch of a Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Cuyahoga County that reflects input from nearly 70 individuals representing 30 organizations
- Continuous inclusion of youth advisors in the planning process
- Specific changes in where and how young people seeking shelter are supported to find the best solution for their situation
- The launch of Opportunity Passport™, a signature program of the Jim Casey Initiative designed to boost the economic security of foster youth through financial capability education and matched savings accounts
- A *Youth Count* design that more accurately counts the number and characteristics of vulnerable youth and young adults in Cuyahoga County

Indicators of aligned investments in concerns central to AP4M:

- During the first year of implementation, DCFS created and staffed an Emancipation Unit to increase the capacity of the agency to work with young people between the ages of 18 to 21 who had recently been terminated from DCFS custody.
- The past year saw a greater commitment than ever before to extend foster care across Ohio to age 21. State legislation made great progress in 2015 thanks to powerful advocacy from young people and caring adults.

This assessment reviews the planning process and first phase of implementation of A Place 4 Me over sixteen months through August 2015. The paper describes the approaches taken, factors that support AP4M's success, challenges faced, and results to date. *Lessons learned* may be useful for other jurisdictions intent on improving outcomes for vulnerable young people, including preventing and ending youth homelessness and achieving better results overall for young people leaving foster care. Finally the paper highlights the promise of AP4M as it enters the next phase.

The Context for Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness

Homelessness in the United States is now widely perceived to be a symptom of cross-systems failure that no one entity can solve on its own.

Homelessness among isolated youth and young adults is especially jarring in a society that idealizes early adulthood. Less likely than other age groups to seek shelter or supportive services, these young people are often alienated from their families, economically vulnerable, and prone to find themselves in high-risk situations. Particularly at risk of homelessness are youth transitioning from the foster care system, most often at age 18, without family or institutional supports. At a time these young people should be completing their education and entering the workforce, they too often lack a safe and stable place to live and the personal backup systems that provide most young Americans with support in their transition to self-sufficiency. Since 2001, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative has worked to change policy and practice across the country to achieve better outcomes for this vulnerable population.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

The mission of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (Jim Casey Initiative) is to ensure that young people between the ages of 14 and 26 make successful transitions from foster care to adulthood.

To reach its key goals, the Jim Casey Initiative promotes youth engagement, conducts evaluation and research, builds public will to improve policy, and creates community partnerships. The Jim Casey Initiative creates opportunities for young people to achieve positive outcomes in permanent relationships, education, employment, housing, health, financial capability and social capital. Created in 2001, the Jim Casey Initiative is a national initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, with major funding partners the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and The Sherwood Foundation. Local funders are partnering with the Initiative in 17 locations across the U.S.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and A Place 4 Me

Now close collaborators, the Jim Casey Initiative and other sponsors of A Place 4 Me originally were connected by an insightful consultant who saw the potential in their partnership. “One of the terrible outcomes for young people leaving foster care is their high rate of homelessness,” says former Initiative consultant Ira Cutler. “There was such a successful history in Cleveland of pulling people together to reduce chronic homelessness, and such concern about the issue of youth homelessness across our sites, that I became a strong advocate for including Cuyahoga County in the Jim Casey Initiative with the hope and expectation that learning to prevent and end youth homelessness would benefit all our sites.”

In 2014, A Place 4 Me became the 18th Jim Casey Initiative site. Prior to approval of its implementation of the Jim Casey Initiative model, A Place 4 Me completed an extensive application process. This included an Environmental Scan that documented current data on the County’s foster youth, recent information on youth homelessness, and policy and practice issues related to youth aging out of care. For every prospective partner, the Environmental Scan ensures that the target community has vetted its own capacity and commitment to achieving better outcomes for youth. The process demonstrates a community’s ability to ensure leadership to bring key stakeholders together with/and on behalf of young people transitioning from foster care, use data to make decisions, to authentically engage young people in the change process, and to recognize the kinds of policies, practices, partnerships and resources that will be required to create and sustain systems change. The Environmental Scan also becomes a roadmap with milestones by which partners measure their progress.

In 2015, AP4M reached another milestone with the implementation of Opportunity Passport™ the Jim Casey Initiative’s signature program. Opportunity Passport™ provides financial capability education and matched savings accounts for foster youth. “*Train the Trainer*” sessions began in the spring. The first 20 young people have now completed their training and have their own matched savings accounts.

The Jim Casey Initiative provides ongoing technical assistance and support to its sites, peer learning opportunities and an annual site convening. In November 2015, A Place 4 Me will share its progress with the Initiative’s other sites, and will have the opportunity to learn from other locations facing similar challenges.

www.jimcaseyyouth.org

The last decade has seen increased attention to “working upstream,” preventing rather than reacting to the crisis of homelessness, and making homelessness episodic, rare and brief.

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) report *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* (2010) provides a roadmap for joint action by the 19 USICH member agencies along with local and state partners in the public and private sectors to end homelessness for children, families and youth by 2020. The USICH *Framework to End Youth Homelessness* (2013) further articulates the core outcomes for homeless youth as stable housing, permanent connections, education or employment, and social-emotional wellbeing. The *Framework* also calls for a data strategy to understand the scale of the problem, and a capacity strategy to better align youth-serving systems to reach these outcomes.

Social services for young people administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) include the Runaway and Homeless Youth programs and the states’ child welfare systems. Unaddressed weaknesses in these HHS systems, or in the juvenile justice system, can route young people into the world of adult homelessness. The prevention of youth homelessness is a growing interest at HHS. In recent years HHS has funded demonstration programs to identify promising prevention and intervention practices.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) efforts - including rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and a range of supportive services to stabilize vulnerable people in housing - have reduced the numbers of chronically homeless adults in the U.S. The results are less satisfactory for other populations including emancipated youth and young adults.

A significant milestone in legislation to achieve better outcomes for young people leaving foster care is The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* of 2008. Informed by research showing that lifetime earnings increase \$2 for every \$1 spent on keeping foster youth in care beyond age 18, *Fostering Connections* set new standards such as requiring that transition-age youth be actively involved in transition planning, and allows states to claim partial federal reimbursement for the costs of caring for and supervising eligible foster youth until their 21st birthday. By the end of 2014, 22 states and the District of Columbia had enacted legislation to extend foster care beyond age 18.

Across the country enormous challenges remain.

Homelessness and Child Welfare in Ohio

In Ohio, Cuyahoga County is at the forefront of initiatives to reduce homelessness. Similar efforts across the state have had very positive results.

Findings of the 2013 Ohio Homelessness Reportⁱⁱⁱ (from the 2013 *Point in Time Count*, a statistically reliable, unduplicated count of homeless persons in a community, in sheltered or unsheltered locations, during one day) present the following data for Cuyahoga County in comparison to statewide data.

Cuyahoga County led the state in reducing chronic and veteran homelessness between 2012 and 2013.

- 19% decrease in chronic homelessness in Cuyahoga County vs 16% reduction statewide
- 6% decrease in veteran homelessness in Cuyahoga County vs 4% reduction statewide

- 3% decrease in homelessness overall in Cuyahoga County vs 12% reduction statewide, an outcome affected by an increase in family homelessness in Cuyahoga County from 2012 to 2013

No count of youth homelessness was included, reflecting that in 2013 HUD was only beginning to find accurate ways to count homeless youth, who are less likely than adults to be easily identified.

Ohio is one of only twelve states with a state supervised, county administered child welfare system, and ranks last in the nation for state spending on child welfare as a proportion of total child welfare spending.ⁱⁱⁱ Federal dollars pay the vast majority of child welfare costs in Ohio, with the State of Ohio providing just 10 cents of every dollar spent on child protective services, mostly from the general revenue fund.^{iv} The balance is dependent on local funding. Following enactment of the federal *Fostering Connections* legislation, Ohio has allowed county-level decisions to extend foster care to age 21 for eligible youth, at county expense. There is a current effort to enact a bill in Ohio with advocacy to ensure that the state, rather than the counties, provides the required IV-E matching funds.

Cuyahoga County's local control of its child welfare system has fostered innovation.

Highlights include:

- Implementation of the Family to Family model of engaging family members in placement decisions
- The commitment of the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services to partner with the Jim Casey Initiative and local stakeholders in the AP4M community planning process to prevent and end homelessness for young people
- Participation in a Pay for Success program, which enlists private funders in the effort to reduce child welfare costs by reducing the length of involvement in the system for families in which the primary caregiver is experiencing homelessness or is unstably housed

The Readiness to Address Youth Homelessness in Cuyahoga County

With a focus on systems change, policy innovation, and collaboration, leaders in Cuyahoga County were primed to address youth homelessness.

Key decision makers were enthusiastic about advances in federal policies that target upstream solutions to homelessness and prevent other negative outcomes for young people. Evidence of statewide progress in reducing homelessness for other populations set a positive context for state, regional and county action. In Cuyahoga County, where approximately 150 young people age out of foster care annually, leaders were aware that better resource alignment would support successful transitions to adulthood for these young people.

Cuyahoga County brought five major tactical advantages:

1. ***A local funder with a long-term vision and a systems change focus.***

Established in 1996 as a healthcare conversion foundation with a long-term focus on improving community health, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland works to improve the lives of those most in need with special attention to families, women and

children living in poverty. Following early years acting in response to community needs, the Foundation shifted in 2006 to emphasize system change initiatives.

“The Sisters of Charity Foundation has a long history of questioning how things could change to produce better outcomes,” says Susan Neth, Executive Director of Frontline Service and member of the A Place 4 Me Steering Committee. “They identify an issue, provide resources, and see the work through.”

Ending homelessness in Cuyahoga County is among the Foundation’s current strategic goals. To meet this and other goals, the Foundation promotes systems change and builds organizational capacity through collaboration, community engagement, and convening.

“Homelessness has been a significant priority for us since 1999,” says Susanna Krey, president of the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland. “We’ve supported the increasing focus on homelessness prevention, while at the same time 600 units of permanent supportive housing have been created to meet the needs of those who have no other choices. But during that time we’ve seen more young people entering the system who don’t have the resources to be independent. We want to learn from what’s worked in decreasing chronic and family homelessness, and apply those learnings to preventing homelessness for young people.”

“It’s not short term work,” adds Ms. Krey. “We were an early adopter of the ‘engaged philanthropy’ model. Our process is to identify an issue, articulate current thinking, and look for those who can test some new ideas and possibly become a partner in a new model. We believe in collective impact – that systems change requires many stakeholders to collaborate and to change how they think and act. Every collective impact project requires a champion, so we invest in a partner. We act as a neutral convener with a purpose. We continually look for evidence that things are changing in the right direction. And we look for ways to push the work to be even more effective.”

2. *A broad exploration of how young people become homeless, and of the gaps in local capacity to solve the problem.*

In its exploration of youth homelessness, Foundation staff first approached the county child welfare system in 2007. That year the Foundation also made a small planning grant to the YWCA Greater Cleveland to explore the feasibility of creating supportive housing for homeless youth. This seed funding eventually resulted in Independence Place, a property offering 19 apartments with supportive services for homeless young people, many of whom had been in foster care.

During this time the Foundation also entered into early conversations with the Jim Casey Initiative. Discussions centered on common elements in the Foundation’s work to end youth homelessness and the Initiative’s aim to improve housing stability for youth exiting foster care. The organizations began to explore how collaboration, including the Foundation’s accessing the strategy and structure of the Jim Casey Initiative, might extend the effectiveness of both organizations.

Several exploratory funding rounds followed, focusing on innovation in services to end homelessness among families and youth. In 2011 the Foundation issued a *Request for Proposals* with an emphasis on grantee collaboration and innovation in service models. The *RFP* targeted homeless and at-risk youth, including youth exiting foster care. By 2012, the

Foundation was deeply engaged with pilot efforts to improve results for young people in Cuyahoga County and also was sharing its learnings with other funders across the country.

3. A track record of reducing chronic homelessness.

Cuyahoga County has a history of policy innovation in reducing homelessness. The County's Housing First initiative has reduced chronic homelessness by 76% since 2006 by relying upon a collective impact strategy that continually brings stakeholders together, asks them to implement proven practices, and measures results. This work has been supported by a cross-sector public-private collaborative including four city and county agencies, foundations, corporate partners and the United Way.

4. A focus on data and a local data infrastructure.

USICH's 2013 *Framework to End Youth Homelessness* made a priority of creating a more accurate count of homeless youth. Cuyahoga County was one of nine sites selected nationally to conduct a *Youth Count*. It was as challenging in Cuyahoga County as elsewhere to fully grasp the scale and context for youth homelessness because young people don't generally access adult homeless services or shelters. The 2013 *Youth Count* engaged two community partners to survey young people seeking services over a five-day period. In that short window of time, partners counted 129 youth who fit the HUD definition of homelessness and 269 students age 18 and older who fit the McKinney Vento definition of homelessness. For the first time, a question was included in the survey about involvement with foster care: 28% of the homeless youth had a foster care history. Over the six month period from July 1 to December 31, 2013, a much longer period than covered in the *Youth Count*, the County Office of Homeless Services documented service delivery to 432 homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 25.

A significant asset is an increasingly robust Integrated Data System at the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University. In 2013 researchers began a cross-systems longitudinal study of ninth graders from the Cleveland Metropolitan School Department, tracking the incidence of their involvement with child welfare, juvenile justice and the homeless systems. Early analyses document the very high rates of other systems involvement among young people with a history of foster care.^v In Cleveland the data structure provides a useful baseline for assessing progress following interventions such as AP4M.

5. "Partnering muscle."

Perhaps most important for Cuyahoga County's readiness to embrace the effort to prevent and end youth homelessness is a well-developed *partnering muscle*.

A vital national partner in Cuyahoga County is the Jim Casey Initiative. Working relationships among the leadership of DCFS, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, and the Initiative developed over time. The focus on achieving better outcomes for homeless youth was informed by the uniquely difficult path of foster youth. Stable housing had been identified by the Jim Casey Initiative as a key outcome of successful transition planning for youth exiting foster care. The Initiative believed much could be learned from applying a housing-specific lens. In addition, the Jim Casey Initiative was interested in adding a site in Ohio to strengthen legislative advocacy for a *Fostering Connections* program to extend foster care to age 21 statewide.

In addition to the recognized cross-sector success of decreasing chronic homelessness, a significant cross-agency planning effort predated the launch of A Place 4 Me. In 2013 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families released a request for applications for *Planning Grants to Develop a Model Intervention for Youth/Young Adults with Child Welfare Involvement At-Risk of Homelessness*. In Cuyahoga County a powerful cross-sector partnership was created to pursue federal funds for this high impact system change initiative.

The Planning Grant's goal to improve outcomes for youth with foster care experience who are homeless, or at risk of being homeless, spoke to the key interests of major stakeholders in Cuyahoga County. The Sisters of Charity Foundation served as a neutral convener for the planning process. The Planning Committee included the County Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS); Frontline Service (which operates the coordinated entry system for those seeking homeless services); the YWCA Greater Cleveland (which opened the first permanent supportive housing development for young people in Cleveland); and many others. DCFS took a leadership position in the collaboration.

Early Commitments

A Place 4 Me takes shape and direction in the grant planning process.

The name and structure for A Place 4 Me, and the designation of the YWCA as the backbone organization for collaboration, were accomplished as part of this 2013 HHS grant application process. This application built upon earlier collaborative work, engaged committed partners, and built momentum for the AP4M initiative to move forward.

The Planning Committee has confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of its collaborative proposal.

Although the application was not selected by HHS, the committee members persevered to continue and extend this important work. Their resolve and tenacity were essential to supporting early progress. The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland would consider supporting the YWCA to hire a project director for AP4M, and would loan a program officer to the initiative to support the initial stages of the work. DCFS, Frontline Service, and the YWCA were fully committed to continuing their collaboration.

Then-DCFS Director Patricia Rideout, who brought many years of foster care policy and practice development from her consulting work at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, was committed to improving results for young people exiting care. Ms. Rideout had been instrumental in developing the Family to Family Initiative and its team decision-making model, which engages system-involved youth and families in placement-related decision making, and was deeply committed to youth engagement in their own transition planning. “I became involved when I heard the Jim Casey Initiative was interested,” Ms. Rideout says. “A huge part of the appeal of being part of Jim Casey was their advocacy support for the work to extend foster care in Ohio to 21. As part of the statewide directors association I knew that support for the extension was uneven, and I was looking for an advocacy boost. This is a huge values issue for me. It goes to the heart of what we say we want for a huge group of young people.”

The planning committee agreed on a new direction for the work ahead: to create a *Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Cuyahoga County*. A focus on the important subpopulation of youth exiting foster care enlisted important partners from philanthropy, a key public agency, and leading nonprofit service providers.

Local leaders welcome the opportunity to join efforts with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

Discussions continued among DCFS, the Sisters of Charity Foundation and other leaders in AP4M with the Jim Casey Initiative. As a result, the local decision was made for AP4M to pursue an application to join the Jim Casey Initiative.

Becoming a Jim Casey Initiative site is demanding. An initial application is vetted strenuously, and a series of milestones must be reached before an application is approved. The upsides of membership are seed funding, extensive technical assistance, and a proven *Toolkit for Action*. These provide each site with guidance, direct support, and access to a network of professionals in other jurisdictions equally committed to this work.

In contrast to other Jim Casey Initiative sites, AP4M did not place an exclusive focus on youth exiting foster care. Instead AP4M focused on preventing and ending homelessness for all young people, with particular attention to the vulnerable group of foster youth in transition. In this way AP4M offered the Jim Casey Initiative another model to test how its approach could support a community effort to end homelessness for young people, and potentially to aid other Initiative sites to prevent homelessness for their youth in transition. The collaboration strengthened the agenda of DCFS, supported a more powerful advocacy agenda, and brought resources for implementing a community plan to end youth homelessness.

There was celebration in October 2014 when AP4M was approved as the Initiative's 18th site.

Affiliation with the Jim Casey Initiative adds significant value in A Place 4 Me's first phase.

1. *Commitment from the Division of Children and Family Services*

The Jim Casey Initiative's credibility facilitated the commitment by DCFS to be an active partner in achieving better outcomes for young people leaving foster care, including stable housing.

2. *Youth engagement*

The expression "nothing about us without us" captures the wish of young people to inform their own present and future, and is a hallmark of the work at every Jim Casey Initiative site. Having young people speak for themselves about their experiences, and what would make a difference, builds a powerful foundation for advocacy and action.

3. *Technical assistance and consulting*

Since its inception in 2001, the Jim Casey Initiative has developed deep expertise in policies and practices that result in better outcomes for youth exiting foster care. When the Jim Casey Initiative considers adding a site, they provide a *Toolkit for Action* paired with hands-on technical assistance. Partnering with the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative was contingent upon the successful completion of the Environmental Scan and approval of an Implementation Plan that incorporated the Jim Casey Initiative's five core strategies:

- Youth engagement
- Partnerships and resources
- Research, evaluation and communication
- Public will and policy
- Increased opportunities

4. *The Opportunity Passport™ Program*

Opportunity Passport™ provides enrolled youth with financial capability training and benefits including a modest stipend and a matched savings account. Equally important to ensuring youth's continued success, those enrolled in Opportunity Passport™ receive quarterly check-in contacts from adults. In addition, Opportunity Passport™ enrollees respond to a semi-annual online survey on education, employment, housing, permanence, health, financial capability and social connections. The data allows the Jim Casey Initiative to review progress and document improvements that support its policy agenda.

From Theory to Action: Early Implementation

At the earliest stages, the commitment of high level decision makers is essential. To propel the initiative forward, significant leadership decisions are made.

In Cuyahoga County it was crucial to create a coordinated vision among a network of policy makers, service providers and youth. AP4M's Steering Committee included the YWCA Greater Cleveland, Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Frontline Service, the Sisters of Charity Foundation and a consultant from the Jim Casey Initiative. The Steering Committee selected the YWCA Greater Cleveland as the initiative's backbone organization in recognition of its commitment to supportive housing and services for young people who had become homeless. The Sisters of Charity Foundation assigned a program officer and with another private funder provided the resources to hire a Director for A Place 4 Me.

In January 2014, the Steering Committee hired AP4M's Project Director. This seasoned professional brought deep experience in child welfare policy and practice, strong connections with DCFS and Case Western Reserve University, and a passion to achieve better outcomes for young people.

An Environmental Scan highlights current data and identifies system gaps.

The Steering Committee requested that the Director begin by creating an Environmental Scan to establish a baseline for AP4M and to inform the strategic planning process. The Environmental Scan followed a format tested by the Jim Casey Initiative over many years. The Scan identified available data and resources, noted the gaps, and documented the participation of key partners including young people. Together the Environmental Scan and its follow-up Implementation Plan, which also followed a template provided by the Jim Casey Initiative, contributed to a roadmap for better coordination and alignment of resources for at risk youth in Cuyahoga County.

Young people contribute to developing the vision for AP4M and its Environmental Scan by identifying the obstacles to their success and solutions that would make the most difference.

Members of the DCFS Teen Advocate Group Youth Council (TAGyc) played a key role in ensuring that young peoples' voices were heard. As one example, in an early discussion about the kinds of housing young people wanted, one young woman said she would be glad to share an apartment but had no idea how to find a roommate or landlord willing to rent to her. Such real life illustrations of practical support needed by young people informed the vision and goals of AP4M in crucial ways.

Staff researches other efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness.

A compelling prototype was found in the King County (WA) *Comprehensive Plan to End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness*. Because King County's work (which began in 2011) predated AP4M, King County's early investors and staff had learnings to share, including:

- The important role of the lead agency
- The necessity for hiring a project director rather than adding this work to another job

- The critical role of philanthropy as convener and investor in systems change, in raising awareness and in supporting continuous learning
- The effectiveness of peer consultation: for example, King County staff was willing to discuss their own process, provide advice, and share lessons learned.

The Pathway to a Community Plan

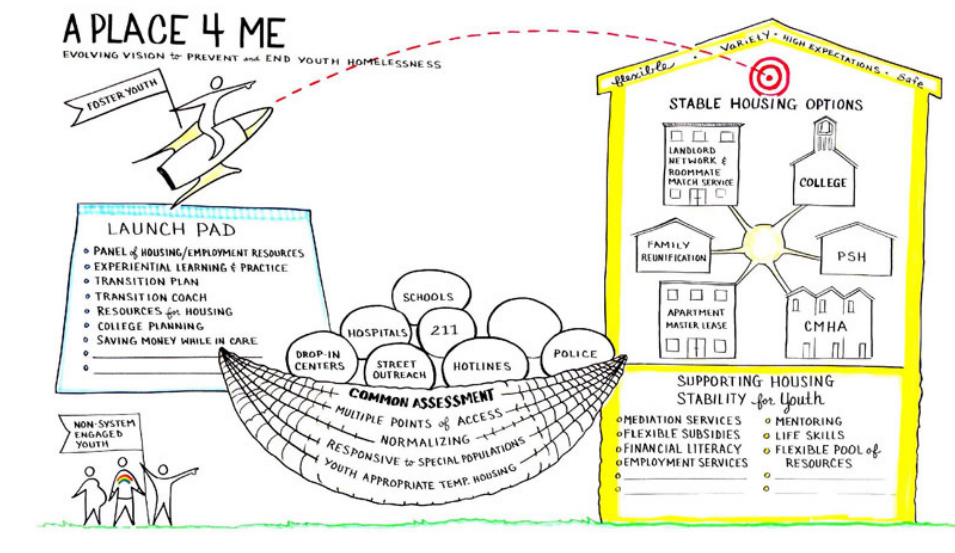
A vision for A Place 4 Me is created in a series of key stakeholder meetings.

In April 2014, the Housing Solutions Task Force began its work. Along with several nonprofit housing organizations, multiple youth-serving systems were represented, including DCFS, the school system, juvenile justice, mental health, youth development organizations, and those serving homeless and runaway youth. To encourage creativity, members were asked to set aside what they knew about constrained systems and funding streams. They developed a vision for AP4M based on three guiding principles^{vi}:

- Think creatively
- Imagine how systems for both youth and adults collaborate to seamlessly serve youth in transition
- Elevate the voice of youth we are hoping to serve: “Nothing about us without us.”

The initial visioning work is spontaneous and informal. Young people make major contributions at each step.

Ideas were captured on sticky notes arranged on a wall. A skilled graphic recorder captured that vision as a poster with a compelling representation of the components required to prevent and end youth homelessness. Expressions on the poster became common language to describe the initiative’s goals as articulated by youth: they needed a **safety net**, **stable housing**, **supportive services**, and a **launch pad** to assist their transition to independence.



A Community Convening broadens the base. Youth participants, local stakeholders, and representatives from multiple public agencies and nonprofit organizations meet to learn about the vision for A Place 4 Me and sign up to make the vision a reality.

In June 2014 the Task Force was ready to present its vision to the community. A two hour Community Convening brought together over 100 local stakeholders with representatives from the Jim Casey Initiative, the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Young people co-presented the vision of A Place 4 Me. Their compelling presentation revealed the need for additional planning in four key areas:

Safety Net to identify and connect youth in housing crisis:

Community providers should coordinate and align services in a safe, responsive and non-stigmatizing outreach process to prevent homelessness among youth and/or quickly resolve a young person's housing crisis.

Stable Housing to increase availability of appropriate housing options for youth:

Varied age-appropriate, stable housing options are required to meet the unique needs of individual youth. With a secure place to live, young people are better positioned to reach their full potential.

Supportive Services to help youth maintain stable housing:

Services should maximize youth choice, be flexible, incorporate real-time life skill coaching through mentoring relationships, and help build resiliency and dignity through second chance opportunities.

Launch Pad to support young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood:

Youth should participate in their own comprehensive planning where the needed resources – especially for housing – are identified and obtained before they leave foster care.

At the conclusion of the convening, all participants were asked to sign up for one of four working groups to delve into these issues more deeply.^{vii}

The Jim Casey Initiative Symposium on Assuring Stable Homes introduces this work to other Jim Casey Initiative sites, advocates and funders.

The Symposium, *Assuring Stable Homes*, took place in Cleveland on the day following the Community Convening in June 2014. Sponsors in addition to the Jim Casey Initiative were the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, Melville Charitable Trust and Butler Family Fund. Jim Casey Initiative sites from across the U.S. shared their own challenges and strategies to assure that youth leaving foster care had stable places to live, and learned about Cuyahoga County's plans. Many local stakeholders from both public and private sectors, as well as local and national funders, attended the Symposium. A Jim Casey Initiative Housing Brief, *From Foster Home to Homeless: Strategies to Prevent Homelessness for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care* documented the prevalence of the problem, suggested strategies to achieve greater alignment between systems, and raised issues for ongoing discussion.

To continue to sweep people into an open and transparent process, and to facilitate systems change, Steering Committee members and working groups identify promising initiatives and specific gaps in services for youth.

During this process there was active outreach to new people and organizations. A focus on the need for better data, including a reliable count of homeless youth, underscored the challenges of developing effective interventions.

The Steering Committee now was reconstituted as an oversight body. Steering Committee members included DCFS, Frontline Service, YWCA Greater Cleveland, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, and the Jim Casey Initiative technical consultant. The Committee decided to maintain a lean membership until the AP4M plan was more developed, at which point it would re-engage Task Force representatives from education, employment, juvenile justice and other systems serving vulnerable young people. The Steering Committee maintained focus on the challenges of identifying and counting the youth and young adult homeless population, creating a data agenda to capture progress and positive outcomes for each of the four goals, and engaging other funders in AP4M.

Between August 2014 and May 2015, working groups corresponding to AP4M's four goals identified promising efforts already underway, specific gaps that could be filled, issues requiring a more strategic approach, and needed steps to facilitate these changes. A charter for each working group stated its purpose, timeline and scope of work based on the Housing Solutions Task Force goals. At monthly working group meetings, the first task was to identify and understand current efforts that might overlap with AP4M's vision and goals, to reach out and invite other stakeholders to join AP4M, and to reduce duplication of effort.

The ***Safety Net*** working group focused first on improving practices for coordinated entry, the means by which individuals or families seeking homeless services are assessed and referred to the best match for their situation. Working group members believed that locating the centralized intake function in the adult men's shelter (called by several interviewees "a scary place") was a barrier for youth and young adults to seek services. By November 2014, Frontline Service had decided to move its entry point to a neutral and more central location, a move that was completed in February 2015.

A shared commitment to diverting as many young people as possible from the homeless system led to concrete suggestions for changing questions young people are asked when they appear for services, such as whether they have had foster care involvement, and/or if there is an adult the service provider can call on the young person's behalf. Discussion began about a pilot effort to reunite unaccompanied young people with a family member whenever possible. Research also began on *host home* models in other parts of the country that provide temporary housing for youth.

The ***Stable Housing*** working group started with information sharing. DCFS had recently signed an agreement with the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority for priority access to apartments for young parents aging out of foster care, up to age 21. College Now, a local provider, was working with young people who had come from foster care to college and had nowhere to stay if dormitories were closed. This program was then introduced to the DCFS transition planning staff.

A theme arose of reunifying young people with family members as a means to prevent homelessness. The working group also explored what it would take to work more effectively with

private landlords. A local agency, EDEN, already employed housing locators to work with landlords renting to formerly homeless adults and families. The practice could be adapted for working with landlords who might rent to young people: EDEN's representative knew that over 50% of the heads of families prioritized by the homeless service system for rapid rehousing were younger than 24 years old.

Provider members agreed that current resources were insufficient to assist young people with housing search, to help them pay rent and to provide the supports needed for them to remain stable in their housing if problems occur, as can happen with young renters new to independent apartment living.

The **Supportive Services** working group's focus was wide ranging. A discussion of job search and job training resulted in a presentation on changes to the federal *Workforce Investment Opportunity Act* to better serve young people up to age 24. Other topics were tenancy support (see also the Stable Housing working group); mentoring; financial capability training and the need for flexible resources that could be tapped to help youth in crisis maintain housing.

The **Launch Pad** working group focused on how young people in foster care could participate more powerfully in their own transition planning. This would include more comprehensive advance planning for needed resources, such as housing, before their emancipation from care; and how youth who had been emancipated could better access follow up services. A special focus was to find ways to better ensure young people exiting foster care would have all the documentation they need to rent an apartment, apply for a job or a driver's license.

“It was important to handle naysayers in the beginning,” says Elizabeth Nekoloff of DCFS. “We all had to make it clear that this effort was different and say how we were going to make it work.”

Active Outreach Engages New Stakeholders

With active outreach by group members, each meeting brought new people to share their work and their ideas. While this created an ever-present need to introduce new people to the vision, the process engaged nearly 70 individuals from 30 organizations in setting strategic priorities for A Place 4 Me.

The porous boundaries of the work groups offered the opportunity for continuous learning among peers.

Joseph Jackson of DCFS comments, “Our focus on permanency includes stable housing for young people exiting care. It was important to be present to tell others about DCFS policy, and for all of us to see how our practices align.”

Intersecting boundaries and new participants also brought the challenges of overlapping topics. For example, did support for housing search belong more with support services or with stable housing? A working group member notes, **“The solution was to recognize the overlap and lift up the best ideas from both teams.”**

An Effective Communications Agenda Furthers the Work

A strong communications agenda was required to manage this broad effort while building momentum and engaging new stakeholders. Communication needs seemed to expand daily. All participants had to be kept informed. Key aspects of the Jim Casey Initiative such as the

Environmental Scan and Opportunity Passport™ required new outreach and the development of specialized material. Presentations for key external meetings were required to introduce and build interest for the community plan to prevent and end youth homelessness.

Particular documents became especially important communications tools. The July 2014 Environmental Scan summarized the local environment for vulnerable young people and identified local resources and gaps in the capacity to improve outcomes for this population. The Environmental Scan's conclusion powerfully stated AP4M's purpose:

“One resounding finding from the Environmental Scan is that there are limited options currently available to help at-risk young people in our community secure and maintain housing. It will take each involved system to agree to look at the problem holistically and think creatively about eliminating barriers to existing resources in our individual systems, and to identify new resources if our forces are joined. A theory of change is that by collaborating we will have more resources to bring to bear on those in the homeless pipeline. Each system involved will explore the assets they have, and together we will learn what new resources can be leveraged from existing or new allocations.”^{viii}

Staff presented the Environmental Scan to the County Conference on Social Welfare and to stakeholder groups such as the Youth Committee of the Cuyahoga County Continuum of Care. These presentations increased the numbers of people who were aware of and excited about the initiative, and took an interest in its progress.

Local media are engaged at milestone moments

The local public radio station WCPN on several occasions featured A Place 4 Me, including interviews with executives from the Jim Casey Initiative, the Sisters of Charity Foundation, the AP4M Director, and formerly homeless young people. They spoke compellingly about the need to find better cross-system solutions to prevent and end homelessness for this vulnerable population. These broadcasts aired at key times in the initiative's lifecycle. Programs on the mornings of the community convenings elicited spirited discussion and feedback on the goals and priorities of AP4M, and enlisted new members into the AP4M community planning process.

A particularly important principle of the communications agenda was “no surprises for partners.” This principle was demonstrated with close attention to both general messages and specific statements that mentioned the partners. For example, in advance of the Community Convening in June 2014, Task Force members had the opportunity to review and offer edits to all materials. The same process was honored with working group members prior to the second Community Convening in July 2015. Follow-up calls were made to ensure all partners' input was invited and honored.

Staff provoke and manage “creative impatience”

It took ten months for the four working groups to develop their recommendations, a process in which a great many people returned again and again to discuss what should and could be done, and share perspectives on priorities to improve results for a very vulnerable group of young people.

Practitioners are passionate about youth development and know how quickly time passes. Every month can make a huge difference in the life of a young person. Youth development practitioners bring a sense of urgency and know the best time for change is NOW. AP4M's effectiveness was due largely to its ability both to provoke the creative impatience that grows

from this sense of urgency, and to manage this impatience by continuously returning to AP4M's collaborative vision and celebrating successes along the way.

“Egos had to be checked at the door,” says one working group member. “No one could be a credit-monger” adds another.

There were many successes during this time. Central intake was moved to a neutral and more youth-friendly location. Opportunity Passport™ training was held, young people were enrolled and 20 first-time bank accounts were opened. Powerful advocacy created traction for HB50 to extend foster care to age 21 in Ohio. Within DCFS, more capacity was brought to youth transition planning by creating an Emancipation Unit. A more robust *Youth Count* methodology also was developed.

Local partners deepen AP4M's data agenda

It is notoriously difficult to count homeless youth. They tend to be invisible to public systems and are less likely to think of themselves as homeless when moving from one couch to another, staying short times with family members, friends, or even strangers. These behaviors can contribute to their vulnerability. Surveys report a high percentage of homeless young people have traded sex for food or a place to stay, and have lacked access to basic health services.

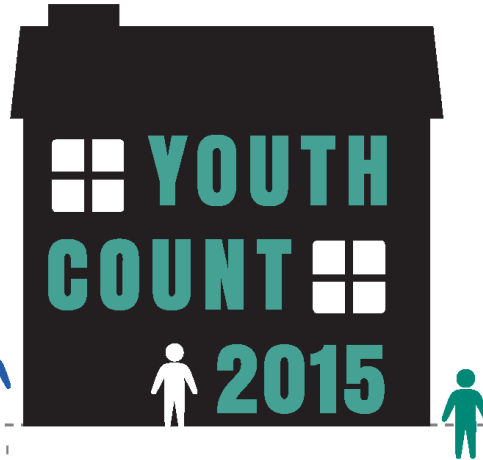
Yet much of the success of national efforts to reduce chronic homelessness, and more recently veteran homelessness, can be traced to counting the number of homeless individuals at different points in time. Documenting reductions associated with certain interventions has built support for implementing more effective practices, and has brought associated funding.

Baseline data for Cuyahoga County's youth and young adult homeless population was required to understand the scale of the problem. In addition, DCFS wanted to know how often young people exiting foster care in Cuyahoga County were becoming homeless, and plan more effectively for youth transitions.

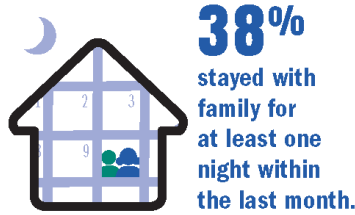
The County Office of Homeless Services oversees the federally-mandated Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and took a keen interest in how to better capture an accurate reading of the number of young people who could be identified as homeless or unstably housed. HMIS reported a total of 432 homeless youth served in 2013. This provided an annual baseline although there was little descriptive information about the incidence or duration of their homeless episodes. The 2013 *Youth Count* was a good start on developing a better system. Despite conflicting definitions of homelessness and acknowledged counting challenges, the *Youth Count* was 129 youth aged 18-24. All agreed it should be possible to address this finding with a plan to prevent and end youth homelessness.

When the *Youth Count* was reprised in June 2015, the count was identical: 129 homeless youth. This time, with a more structured approach involving numerous community providers surveying young people over a five day period, a more comprehensive picture emerged. Their average age was 20; they were disproportionately young people of color (83% in the count vs. 36% in Cuyahoga County); 81% of homeless unemployed youth were looking for a job; 49% had experienced jail or detention; 40% had experience in the foster care system; 32% self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning; 30% had children. Thirty percent had had contact with a family member or foster family member within the last month, creating hope among researchers for permanent relationships for those and potentially many other homeless youth.

A PLACE 4 ME partners recently supported an effort to understand the prevalence and characteristics of homeless and unstably housed youth (ages 15 to 24) in Cuyahoga County. Youth Count 2015 took place June 1 through June 6 at 18 community partner sites, which collected 584 surveys that captured the following data.



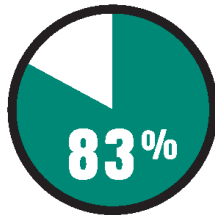
129 youth identified as unaccompanied, homeless and unstably housed during this point in time:



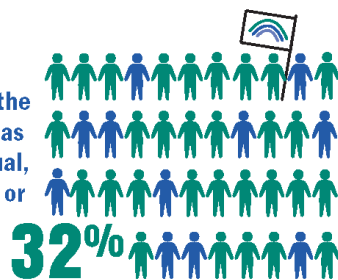
83% are young people of

COLOR

(36% of Cuyahoga County residents are people of color.)



41 youth (32%) of the 129 self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning.



Survey comparisons:

	348 Youth:	Never been homeless
	129 Youth:	Unaccompanied, homeless & unstably housed
Foster care experience	40%	26%
Aged out of foster care	27%	13%
Ever been to detention or jail	49%	28%
Exchanged food, drugs, or sex for a place to stay	19%	5%
Unemployed	67%	52%
Not enrolled in school	70%	42%
Have children	30%	19%
Dealing with mental health issue	21%	13%

Complementing Cuyahoga County's *Youth Count* is a study by the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at the Mandel School at Case Western Reserve University. The study seeks to understand how involvement in the foster care and juvenile justice systems relates to high school graduation and early adult outcomes. The research targets young people entering ninth grade in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and follows their progress until age 21. An early analysis^{ix} documents that youth with foster care experience are more than four times likelier to receive homeless services than those with no foster care experience. Those who had been charged with delinquency during high school (more likely if a young person is on the street) were more than seven times likelier to have jail episodes by age 21 than those never charged with delinquency. A total of 250 young people had experienced homelessness. This seemed a number that could be reduced by effective prevention efforts.

Launching a Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Cuyahoga County

A series of key recommendations shapes the comprehensive Strategic Plan. A Community Convening invites participants to prioritize the recommendations.

The working groups concluded their meetings by producing the *Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Cuyahoga County* including a set of 20 strategic recommendations for action.

On July 9, 2015 over 100 stakeholders gathered in Cleveland for a Strategic Planning session. A panel of young people described how AP4M was making a difference, noting how the Opportunity Passport™ program taught financial skills and helped them open their first savings accounts. Working in small groups, participants discussed which strategic recommendations should be acted upon first, and were given the opportunity to vote on the priorities for the year ahead. Four specific strategies were prioritized in the next phase of AP4M, one from each group's recommendations:

- Temporary housing/host homes and family reunification (Safety Net)
- Housing location and stabilization supports for youth (Stable Housing)
- Transition support services/case management and a flexible pool of resources to draw upon in crisis (Supportive Services)
- Youth-driven, inclusive transition planning (Launch Pad)

This convening also served as a closing recognition event for the nearly 70 people who gave so much of their time to the working group process.

A Funders Breakfast the following morning engaged national foundations (the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Butler Family Fund and the Kresge Foundation) with local funders to discuss how to move these strategic recommendations forward. The local funders expressed appreciation for the depth of community participation in the plan, recognized the importance of the issues, asked for clarification on the actions needed, and agreed to meet again to discuss an action and funding agenda.

Approximately two weeks later, AP4M publicly announced its priorities. A Community Partnership Board would be created to oversee the initiative going forward. Everyone who attended the convening was invited to participate in implementation working groups. By creating a new oversight body, AP4M could reengage systems that had been active in the original Task Force (e.g., schools, juvenile justice) but had not participated in the working group process. AP4M was learning from other Jim Casey Initiative sites that have established cross-system Community Partnership Boards to hold themselves accountable to goals much broader than a single organization's Board of Directors could oversee.

“Now is when the detailed work begins”

Engagement of local funders was accelerated as a result of the launch of the Strategic Plan. Setting four primary action strategies and directly engaging national funders with local philanthropy stimulated potential investment in AP4M's infrastructure and in new services. In August 2015, AP4M invited local providers to develop four specific proposals to address AP4M's priority issues and opened dialogue with several new funding sources about how best to align resources.

“The Plan is a stepping stone,” says a key contributor. “The work continues to evolve as we engage funders, focus on the specifics of implementation, and bring this work to scale. In the months ahead we'll build on the planning process. Now is when the detailed work begins.”

Lessons Learned in the Implementation Phase of A Place 4 Me

Key lessons emerged throughout the first phase of A Place 4 Me. These learnings are relevant for communities working to end youth homelessness, and for other community initiatives with diverse partnerships and complex challenges.

1. *Set a clear goal and be prepared to adapt it in the spirit of collaboration.*

A Place 4 Me's original tagline was Housing Solutions for Young People. As the collaborative planning process lifted the voices of young people and other stakeholders, it became clear that both housing solutions and broader strategies were needed to support youth transitioning to independence. As a result, at the end of the first phase there were few new “housing solutions” (housing units), and a more comprehensive range of strategies has been identified for AP4M's second phase of implementation.

2. *Select a well-respected and neutral convener.*

The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland is highly regarded for its commitment to systems change and its collaborative approach. A small, faith-based, mission-driven foundation, it has been recognized nationally for seeding the effort that led to significant reductions in chronic homelessness in Cleveland. Its stature positioned the Foundation to call upon key decision makers in public systems to participate in the visioning process and the AP4M Steering Committee. The Foundation's role during implementation was to underscore the collaborative nature of AP4M and hold all partners accountable for their commitments.

3. *Engage key decision makers and partners early and appropriately.*

Enlist different partners for different planning tasks. For example, agency leaders approached by professional peers may agree to attend two sessions of visioning work

rather than monthly Steering Committee meetings. Yet other partners may be willing to attend ten months of working group meetings. Target the highest level decision makers in the most crucial roles. AP4M's Steering Committee consisted of DCFS, the Jim Casey Initiative, Frontline Service and Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland. High-level partners from the Office of Homeless Services, School Department, Enterprise Community Partners and others were engaged in visioning work. All interested parties were invited to participate in working groups.

“If someone else called me to ask about this, I’d say you have to make a commitment to participate,” says Elizabeth Nekoloff of DCFS. “Jump in feet first. Bring an open mind. Be prepared to have some tough conversations. And expand your horizons to believe in what could be.”

4. ***Establish principles.***

Chief among AP4M's principles is the inclusion of young people in the planning process. The primary focus on achieving better results for youth lifted the vision of participants above the common frustrations and limitations of existing programs.

5. ***Take risks.***

Realize that risks will be seen differently by larger organizations than smaller ones for whom funding competition is especially intense. Would partners maintain a commitment to time-consuming systems change work without new resources? Strong leadership commitments have been maintained and AP4M's work has progressed well. In addition, there was some risk for both A Place 4 Me and for the Jim Casey Initiative to join their efforts. Their goals, while overlapping, were not identical. The advantages included the Initiative's significant consulting resources, and the benefit of pairing the AP4M community launch with the Initiative's Symposium *Assuring Stable Homes* to strengthen the local sense of being part of a larger national movement.

“It takes time to build the kind of trust we needed. We were building the plane while we were flying it,” says one Steering Committee member.

6. ***Expect the unexpected.***

During the implementation phase of AP4M, a new County Executive was elected, creating uncertainty about public leadership and direction. Within the same period, the DCFS Director left the position. She was followed first by an Acting Director from a higher level of government who was in the role for a month, and then by an Interim Director from within DCFS before a new permanent Director was appointed. Loss of momentum during these transitions is inevitable (interviewees used such words as “hiatus,” “lull” and “void”).

Leadership changes in public agencies are common. These circumstances underscore the importance of building strong relationships with administrators at the next tier who remain through these changes and continue to lead from within the organization.

During the same period, a decision was made to bring the Jim Casey Initiative back to its original home at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and to bring its lessons to other aspects of the Foundation's work. With new leadership and a revised agenda, the Jim Casey Initiative's work with its sites may shift, with an impact that remains to be seen.

7. ***Create a work plan with milestones.***

Systems change is long hard work. By segmenting the work, milestones can be recognized and celebrated. It requires strong staff leadership to move group discussion to action, and such action can be facilitated by deadlines. Several examples include:

- a small number of key stakeholders created the vision for AP4M
- the vision was presented at a Community Convening where initial participants were recognized
- new participants were invited to join working groups to develop implementation strategies
- the completion of the Environmental Scan and the launch of Opportunity Passport™ became avenues for communication, education and advocacy
- the Community Convening introduced the 20 strategies developed by the working groups, recognized member contributions, and enlisted attendees in recommending the highest priorities for action
- plans announced in July 2015 to create a Community Partnership Board enable new and renewed commitments of AP4M partners

8. Hire full time dedicated staff.

The AP4M Director's high level of credibility and child welfare system knowledge ensured well informed and effective communications with DCFS. The Director's effectiveness was enhanced by the assigned Foundation Program Officer.

9. Seek low-hanging fruit.

Look for existing practices that can be replicated or adapted. Examples include replicating the role of housing locators now working with homeless families to work with youth; or pairing the resources of College Now with the transition team at DCFS.

10. Accept that progress is not linear and may remain uneven.

Even with consensus, months can go by for implementation to occur: the move of central intake took three months; a grant to experiment with family reunification took six. The launch of Opportunity Passport™ required fundraising for matched savings accounts for youth before fundraising was complete for basic AP4M operations. Even with passionate advocacy in 2014 for extending foster care to age 21 statewide, the goal was not shared by all counties in Ohio, or fulfilled by the state legislature.

11. Recognize that success can generate an escalating workload.

AP4M created a culture that all who share the vision are welcome. Staff was increasingly stretched with an ongoing Steering Committee and four working groups, rising expectations for implementation of brand elements like Opportunity Passport™ and growing demand for external communications. Consider the administrative demands inherent in conducting regular meetings, tracking next steps, following through between meetings, responding to partners, engaging in technical assistance, and maintaining the relationships with young people that keep them engaged in the process.

12. Communicate well and widely. Engage the media.

AP4M began with a powerful graphic representation of its vision. That poster became an important communications tool both externally to describe AP4M, and internally to clarify working group goals and tasks. Local radio interviews with leaders and formerly homeless young people built understanding and support among a broad audience. Frequent public presentations with partner agencies underscored the collaborative nature of the work. As partners and local hosts for the Jim Casey Initiative's Symposium *Assuring Stable Homes*, DCFS staff were recognized for their commitment to AP4M,

shared their learnings, and became better informed about how other Initiative sites successfully engage youth in their own transition planning.

13. Data counts.

AP4M faced head-on the difficulty of trying to count the number of homeless or unstably housed youth in their community. Otherwise how could AP4M know if the numbers were reduced over time? AP4M was joined by the Office of Homeless Services that knew better data on at-risk youth in the “pipeline to homelessness” could help divert youth from streets or shelters and produce better outcomes. Similarly, the Center for Urban Poverty Studies at Case Western Reserve University was enthusiastic that research on early adult outcomes could reach a new audience and have ready application through AP4M.

14. Celebrate.

AP4M partners set aside for the greater good the normal desire to claim credit for successes along the way. They worked constructively across organizational boundaries and agreed to maintain a collaborative vision of preventing and ending homelessness for the youth of Cuyahoga County. Thanks were shared, participants were applauded, and the next call to action was announced.

The Promise of A Place 4 Me

With a shared vision of preventing and ending youth homelessness, AP4M has united key public and private leaders in Cuyahoga County with members of the community. This collaboration has demonstrated the power of collective impact to actively address intractable social and systems problems that are beyond the ability of any one or two systems of response.

An open and transparent planning effort brought nearly 70 youth and adults into dialogue about potential solutions and ensured broad ownership of AP4M’s vision and direction. The many young people who took central roles in the planning process developed their leadership skills while providing a reality check to adults with limited understanding of these young peoples’ circumstances.

Through a structured process, AP4M elicited powerful and well-informed ideas for action. The most meaningful 20 recommendations were compiled into a Strategic Plan, enabling the community to set priorities and seek the resources to make them a reality.

AP4M’s alliance with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative exemplifies the ways AP4M sought opportunities for partnership. Becoming a Jim Casey Initiative site propelled AP4M into adopting a tested implementation framework, and affiliated AP4M with 18 other sites intent on achieving better results for young people. Within the Initiative network AP4M’s focus on stable housing outcomes for youth exiting foster care holds the promise to inform related practices and partnerships across the country.

The ongoing commitment of the County Division of Children and Family Services is apparent in the engagement of the new DCFS Director, who brings direct experience of the Jim Casey Initiative from a prior leadership position in another state.

Entering its second phase, AP4M clearly has built the momentum that attracts talent and resources. AP4M is poised to ignite changes in attitude and practice that promise to make episodes of youth homelessness in Cuyahoga County rare and brief.

In the months ahead, AP4M will need to engage with additional public systems such as juvenile justice, workforce, and education. Challenges include identifying funders to support demonstration projects in AP4M's four priority areas, continuing to sharpen the focus on data, and strengthening the AP4M infrastructure. As other jurisdictions launch their own efforts to end youth homelessness, Cuyahoga County can join King County WA and others in a learning community dedicated to assuring stable homes for youth. Practices that reduce youth homelessness in these counties may inform policy efforts on the local, state, regional and federal levels.

Most important, as A Place 4 Me moves forward, young people in Cuyahoga County will experience fewer housing crises, and can focus on their own development into thoughtful, compassionate, healthy, educated and productive citizens.

Key Informant Interviews

Annie E. Casey Foundation	Patricia Rideout
Case Western Reserve University, Mandel School	Claudia J. Coulton, PhD
Cleveland Mediation Center	Kirby Broadnax
Cleveland Mediation Center	Ed Boyte
Cleveland Mediation Center	Jeremy Gardner
Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Families	Elizabeth Nekoloff
Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Families	Joseph Jackson
Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services	Ruth Gillett
Eden, Inc.	Elaine Gimmel
Frontline Services	Susan Neth
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative	Ira Cutler
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative	Julie Winegard
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative	Ann Jefferson
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative	Sandra Wilkie
King County Committee to End Homelessness	Megan Gibbard
Raikes Foundation	Katie Hong
Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland	Susanna Krey
Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland	Leslie Perkul
Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland	Angela D’Orazio
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	Jennifer Ho
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	Kevin Solarte
U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness	Jasmine Hayes
YWCA A Place 4 Me	Kate Lodge
YWCA of Greater Cleveland	Margaret Mitchell

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Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Practice Pathways Tool
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ⁱ John Kania and Mark Kramer, *Collective Impact*, Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2011.

ⁱⁱ 2013 Ohio Homelessness Report, Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio

<https://www.cohhio.org/files/2013%20Ohio%20Homelessness%20Report.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ A Place 4 Me Environmental Scan, YWCA of Greater Cleveland, 2014. Page 2. A link to the Scan can be found at www.ywcaofcleveland.org

^{iv} Ibid.

^v *Predictive model of homeless services use and jail episodes of CMSD 9th grade cohorts between age 18 to 21* shows youth with foster care experience are more than four times more likely than others to use the homeless system. From presentation by Dr. Claudia Coulton, July 9 2015 at the YWCA of Metropolitan Cleveland

^{vi} The visioning process is more fully described in Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness in Cuyahoga County: A Strategic Plan, July 2015. A link to the Plan can be found at

www.ywcaofcleveland.org

^{vii} Ibid, pages 3-4.

^{viii} A Place 4 Me Environmental Scan, page 3

^{ix} Claudia Coulton, Case Western Reserve University presentation “Effects of Foster Care and Juvenile Justice Involvement on Early Adult Outcomes: A Study of Cleveland’s Youth” July 9, 2015 at YWCA of Greater Cleveland