

RESEARCH REPORT

# Evaluation of Rising Up

## Early Program Successes and Challenges during the First Year of Implementation

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# Executive Summary

Homelessness among people ages 18 to 24 is a crisis in San Francisco. On any given night in 2019, more than 1,000 young people were experiencing homelessness, and three out of four were sleeping outside. These young people represent nearly 14 percent of the total number of people experiencing homelessness in the city. This situation is likely to worsen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In October 2018, the mayor of San Francisco, in collaboration with Tipping Point Community, announced the creation of the Rising Up campaign to respond to this crisis. The goal of Rising Up is to halve homelessness among people ages 18 to 24 by 2023 by providing rapid re-housing and employment services to 500 youths and preventing homelessness through problem-solving interventions for an additional 450 youths. Tipping Point invested in Rising Up as part of its Chronic Homelessness Initiative, which is intended to halve chronic homelessness in the city by 2023. Tipping Point considers Rising Up to contribute to the Chronic Homelessness Initiative through its housing of youths who are chronically homeless and because it potentially prevents other young people from becoming chronically homeless.

As of November 2020, Rising Up had rapidly re-housed 188 young people. Program data from the most recent 16 months show the program housed an average of 11 young people per month between July 2019 and November 2020. An additional 36 young people were also in housing search as of November 2020.

Rising Up is intended to create a citywide, systems-level response to youth homelessness in San Francisco and to bring together a diversity of resources from across partners. Partners reported the program is achieving this goal, with early successes in building a collaboration that has improved access and connections for young people to mental and behavioral health services. Partners are hopeful that they will be able to expand the collaboration to include more employment supports.

Partners credited the program's success to date to the flexibility inherent in its design, the role of youth choice in the housing selection process, and strong relationships and communication between partners, participants, and landlords. Emerging strategies within the program that partners reported are still under development but show promise include financial services, coordination of care for young people who move outside San Francisco, and fostering successful roommate situations.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Partners acknowledged challenges in meeting the full needs of young people enrolling in the program, particularly those of chronically homeless youths who

were also eligible for permanent supportive housing and needed access to additional physical and mental health supports. Partners also noted that young people selected housing units that were more expensive than had been anticipated, meaning the length of time youths could receive assistance was reduced. Finally, partner roles were not always clearly defined, leading to challenges coordinating service delivery for youths as they progressed through the program.

The COVID-19 pandemic created additional challenges for young people. Project partners reported that many who were employed lost their jobs, and youths who were unemployed struggled to secure work. Transportation became more challenging for participants because of safety concerns associated with using public transit. Partners also reported an increase in young people experiencing mental health-related issues, substance use, and intimate partner violence.

The pandemic also influenced the way the program operated. More program funding was used to support young people with day-to-day expenses, such as buying groceries or cleaning supplies. Communication between project partners became virtual, and many check-ins between young people and case managers that would have been conducted in person were held over the phone or socially distanced. Despite new challenges with in-person communication, staff still found ways to provide support to participants. In some cases, case managers conducted weekly or even daily check-ins to support young people suffering from severe mental health challenges as a result of the pandemic.

In this report, we review the funding and design of Rising Up and describe an initial understanding of overall program performance, highlighting early successes and examining the primary barriers encountered by the Rising Up partnership during the first year of implementation. We also offer recommendations for consideration by the partners that may help address ongoing challenges.

# Authors' Note

This report was updated on March 22, 2021. A new appendix lists the people who were interviewed for this report. Note 2 (page 27), which included information now shown in the appendix, has been shortened accordingly.





# Evaluation of Rising Up

The City of San Francisco launched the Rising Up campaign in 2018 with the goal of halving homelessness for transition age youths (ages 18 to 24) in San Francisco by 2023.<sup>1</sup> Rising Up plans to provide rapid re-housing and employment services to 500 youths and to prevent homelessness for an additional 450 youths. Rising Up, which is funded in part by contributions from Tipping Point's broader Chronic Homelessness Initiative (CHI), is a cross-sector collaboration bringing together local government partners, nonprofit service providers, and Tipping Point and other philanthropic funders. Program data going back to July 2019 show that Rising Up has rapidly re-housed an average of 11 young people per month. Project partners reported that as of November 2020, Rising Up had rapidly re-housed 188 young people and that an additional 36 young people were in housing search.

This report covers progress during the first year of Rising Up, exploring early program successes and challenges, and makes recommendations for the program as it goes into its third year of implementation. Our findings and recommendations are based on interviews conducted in late August and early September 2020 with Rising Up partners, including San Francisco city departments, nonprofit case management and housing services providers, and coordinated entry youth access points. In September 2020, we conducted 11 interviews across nine organizations with 16 frontline, supervisory, and leadership staff members involved in implementing the program.<sup>2</sup> These conversations focused on program goals, components, and services; organization roles and responsibilities; implementation progress so far; and early outcomes, successes, and challenges. Our estimates of the number of young people who have been placed in housing by Rising Up are informed by monthly and quarterly reports provided by Brilliant Corners, the program's housing partner.

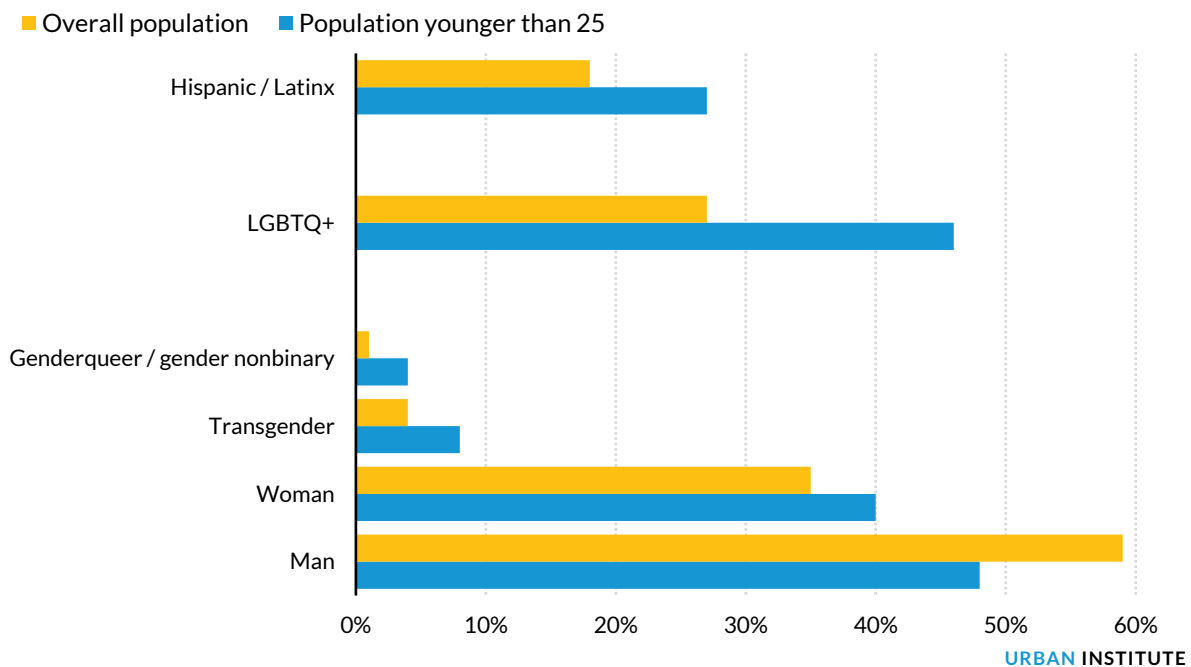
This report, the first in a planned series of reports on Rising Up as part of Urban Institute's evaluation of CHI, documents trends that emerged from our analysis of these interviews. Although young people participating in Rising Up have not participated in this evaluation to date, we plan to speak with them in 2021 for our year 2 report.

## Origins, Funding, and Design

Rising Up began as part of an effort by a core group of early partners to organize and raise funds to design a program to help the large number of young people who were experiencing homelessness in San Francisco and in urgent need of assistance. On any given night in 2019, more than 1,000 people ages 18 to 24 were experiencing homelessness in San Francisco (a 7 percent decrease since 2017), and three out of four were sleeping outside. These young people represent nearly 14 percent of the total number of people experiencing homelessness in the city.

Peer survey workers administered detailed surveys to a sample of youths younger than 25 about their demographic characteristics, location at the time of their housing loss, primary causes of homelessness, involvement with the foster care and criminal legal systems, physical and behavioral health concerns, experiences with violence and crime, and their access to housing, food services, and support networks.<sup>3</sup> Among survey respondents, similar shares identified as men or women,\* 8 percent identified as transgender, 4 percent identified as genderqueer/gender nonbinary, and almost half identified as LGBTQ+ (figure 1). More than a quarter of the respondents identified as Hispanic or Latinx, an overrepresentation compared with the overall homeless population in San Francisco. The majority of survey respondents identified as either Black or African American (24 percent), multiracial (22 percent), or white (21 percent) (Applied Survey Research 2017, 2019).

**FIGURE 1**  
**Selected Characteristics of Young People Experiencing Homelessness**  
**and the Overall Homeless Population in San Francisco**



**Source:** Applied Survey Research, *San Francisco Homeless Count & Survey Comprehensive Report 2019* (Watsonville, CA: Applied Survey Research, 2019).

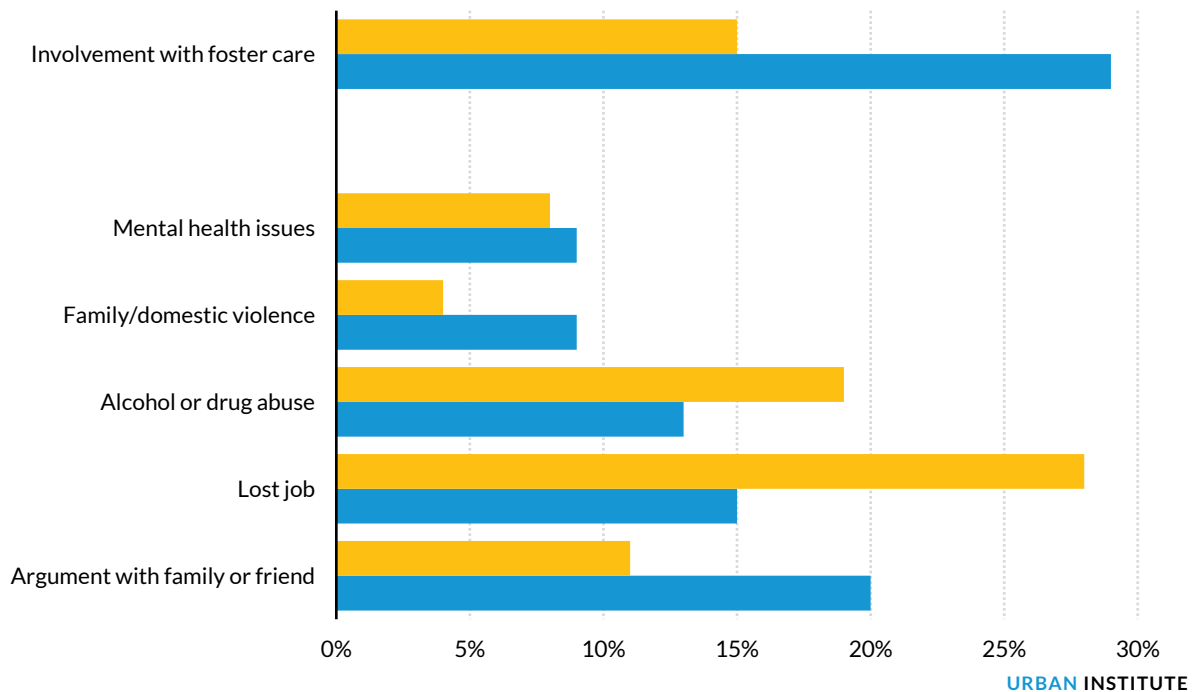
\* Although our data uses “male” and “female,” terms representing biological sex, we instead use “man” and “woman,” terms representing gender, in this report because they may better reflect how people self-identify. We acknowledge the terms’ limitations, however, and remain committed to employing respectful and inclusive language.

Compared with people ages 25 or older experiencing homelessness, people younger than 25 were more likely to identify arguments with family or friends and/or domestic violence as the primary cause of their homelessness (figure 2). They were also more likely to have been in the foster care system. Young people reported accessing several services, including emergency shelter services (30 percent), transitional housing services (21 percent), and food stamps through CalFresh (32 percent). More than half reported feeling unsafe in their current living situation, and 40 percent shared that they had been assaulted or physically attacked in the previous year (Applied Survey Research 2019).

**FIGURE 2**

**Prior Involvement with Foster Care and Primary Causes of Homelessness among People Experiencing Homelessness**

■ People 25 or older ■ People younger than 25



**Source:** Applied Survey Research, *San Francisco Homeless Count & Survey Comprehensive Report 2019* (Watsonville, CA: Applied Survey Research, 2019).

Respondents were asked a variety of questions, including questions on issues that could be barriers to maintaining stable housing, such as employment, education, and physical and behavioral health. The majority (65 percent) of the respondents reported living with at least one health condition, including two that were more prevalent than in the overall homeless population: psychiatric and emotional conditions (48 percent versus 39 percent) and posttraumatic stress disorder (43 percent versus 37 percent). Fewer than 4 in 10 respondents had completed high school, though more than half were enrolled in an educational or vocational program at the time of the survey. A quarter of respondents reported having a job, paid internship, or other type of employment.

In response to the large number of young people experiencing homelessness in San Francisco, Mayor London Breed announced the official launch of Rising Up in October 2018. Funding included an initial \$10 million investment (\$1 million in local general funds and \$9 million in state funds from the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council) into the campaign by the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) and approximately \$7.3 million in private funding, including a \$3 million investment from Tipping Point. Tipping Point is funding Rising Up as part of CHI, a \$100 million initiative to halve chronic homelessness in San Francisco over five years. Soon after the mayor's announcement, the partnership expanded to include cross-sector collaborators from local government partners, nonprofit service providers, and other philanthropic funders.

The collaborative structure of Rising Up is intended to create a citywide, systems-level response to youth homelessness in San Francisco and to bring together a diversity of resources from across partners (table 1). Nineteen organizations (city agencies, nonprofits, and the San Francisco school district) work together to make Rising Up a reality. The lead public partner is HSH, which leverages public resources and engages other city departments in the program. Tipping Point, a key philanthropic funder of the initiative, helps to coordinate the Rising Up Steering Committee (the program's governing body). Brilliant Corners functions as the housing partner and is responsible for housing location and acquisition, landlord relationships, and rental assistance administration.<sup>4</sup> Larkin Street Youth Services serves a dual purpose in Rising Up. Larkin Street is the anchor nonprofit partner for the campaign, charged with managing the private fundraising efforts. As part of the Rising Up Steering Committee, Larkin Street manages subawards of the private funds to partner agencies. Larkin Street is also a Rising Up service partner, functioning as a case management provider to young people housed through the campaign and as a youth access point for problem solving, assessment, and navigation into housing.

TABLE 1

## Rising Up Partners by Role and Organization

Role	Organization
Funder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Tipping Point Community</li> </ul>
City of San Francisco partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing</li> <li>■ Department of Public Health</li> <li>■ Department of Children, Youth and Their Families</li> <li>■ Office of Financial Empowerment</li> <li>■ Unified School District</li> <li>■ Human Services Agency</li> <li>■ Office of Economic and Workforce Development</li> </ul>
Nonprofit housing partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Brilliant Corners</li> </ul>
Nonprofit case management partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ At the Crossroads</li> <li>■ Five Keys Charter School</li> <li>■ First Place for Youth</li> <li>■ Larkin Street Youth Services</li> <li>■ 3rd Street Youth Center and Clinic</li> </ul>
Nonprofit conflict resolution partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Community Boards</li> </ul>
Coordinated entry youth access point partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Homeless Youth Alliance</li> <li>■ Huckleberry Youth Programs</li> <li>■ Larkin Street Youth Services</li> <li>■ LGBT Center</li> <li>■ LYRIC</li> <li>■ 3rd Street Youth Center and Clinic</li> </ul>

Source: Urban Institute analysis of interviews with Rising Up staff and review of program documents.

## Program Goals

Program documentation specifies that the program's goal is to reduce youth homelessness by 50 percent by 2023. In interviews, staff reiterated a goal of reducing youth homelessness through finding and maintaining stable housing. All respondents believed that the program would be successful if young people remained stably housed while they were enrolled in the program, and some also stated the importance of young people remaining stably housed after exiting the program, either in their current unit or through relocating to a new one. Some respondents also discussed the importance of young people increasing their economic self-sufficiency through the attainment of education and employment goals during the program, though the level of importance of this goal was not consistent across all partners. A core group of partners also saw the development of a systems-level response to youth homelessness as an important program outcome.

## Design and Services

The program is designed both as a homelessness prevention program (through the provision of problem-solving assistance) and as a rapid re-housing program. Through problem solving, young people are connected to resources to help prevent homelessness, if possible, or help them quickly exit homelessness. Rapid re-housing helps youths who need more support to quickly move into housing with rental assistance. Young people eligible for Rising Up rapid re-housing receive case management, housing search services, a monthly rental subsidy, and other supportive services.

### PROBLEM SOLVING

All young people who experience homelessness or are at risk of losing their housing and contact a youth access point are eligible for problem-solving assistance through Rising Up. In problem solving, a staff person has a conversation with the young person to explore possible ways to prevent homelessness, divert the person from the homelessness system, or rapidly resolve the person's homelessness. This conversation could include connecting the young person with mediation services, housing location assistance, or flexible financial assistance. Interview respondents indicated that Rising Up's funds were restricted to housing-related expenditures, though this restriction is not indicative of the entire city's problem-solving programming.<sup>5</sup> The young person could also be connected to move-in assistance, an eviction prevention program, or Homeward Bound (San Francisco's bus ticket program designed to reunite people experiencing homelessness with family and friends living outside of San Francisco who are willing to offer support).<sup>6</sup>

### RAPID RE-HOUSING

Rapid re-housing participants are eligible for up to \$27,000 in rental subsidy, designed to sustain a young person for up to three years in the program. This amount is based on the assumptions of a monthly subsidy amount of \$750 and that many participants will live with roommates to keep monthly housing costs low. Young people choose how much subsidy they use per month, and there is no requirement that they make monthly rental contributions. Participants who do not use the full amount as a rental subsidy by selecting a less expensive unit or contributing to their rental payment can receive the remainder of the \$27,000 (capped at \$7,500) after a full year in housing.

Brilliant Corners is responsible for helping all Rising Up participants identify housing units. Brilliant Corners helps young people secure market-rate rental units by contracting and building relationships with local landlords across San Francisco and the Bay Area. One of two housing specialists works with housing coordinators to find viable units for young people and negotiate rental amounts. A housing

coordinator works with participants to view units, buy furniture, and facilitate moving in. Brilliant Corners aims to house participants within 90 days of their housing orientation, when participants discuss their housing preferences with their housing coordinator and case manager.

Case managers schedule a preliminary meeting with new participants to complete an intake packet and, if the young person is interested, to create a case plan that covers education, employment, and other housing stability strategies designed to help young people overcome barriers to obtaining and maintaining stable housing. Case workers send the completed intake packet to Brilliant Corners to connect young people with housing navigators. Once the young person has secured housing, these meetings become more frequent (either weekly, biweekly, or monthly) based on the young person's needs and desire, with case managers typically meeting the young person at home (though these meetings have been virtual during the pandemic). Meetings may be used to check on progress toward goals and to collect financial information. Case workers can also help connect young people to various services within the program to support their financial, educational, and health goals.

Because Rising Up is a Housing First program,<sup>7</sup> young people are required to check in monthly with their case managers, but participation in other services (e.g., more intensive case management and goal setting, employment, education, or mental or behavioral health) is not a requirement of program participation. Monthly case manager check-ins can be conducted at the young person's home or in a location of the youth's choosing.

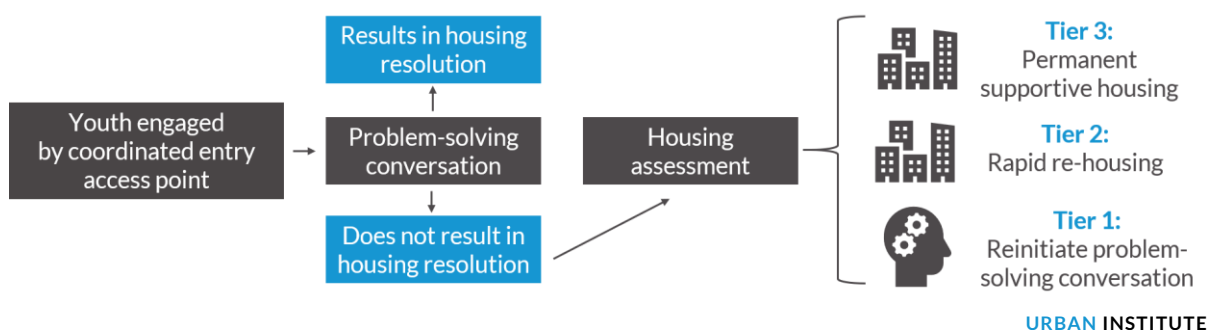
## Eligibility and Participants

Individuals ages 18 to 24 (or those 25 to 27 who accessed the homelessness response system when they were 18 to 24) who are experiencing homelessness in San Francisco are eligible for Rising Up. Homelessness includes several living situations:<sup>8</sup>

- living in a housing unit (with or without a lease), but experiencing domestic violence, sexual abuse, or physical abuse
- living in an unsheltered location (outdoors, in a vehicle, or in another place not meant for human habitation)
- living in an emergency shelter in San Francisco
- living in a housing unit (with or without a lease), but must leave either immediately or within the next 14 days and has nowhere to go
- living in a variety of locations, not consistently staying in one place

Coordinated entry access points engage young people by first offering them problem solving with the goal of preventing them from entering San Francisco’s homelessness response system (figure 3). If the problem solving does not lead to a resolution, young people will receive an assessment score that maps them to one of three tiered bands. The first band corresponds to lower assessment scores that make young people eligible for problem solving only and not housing resources. Access point staff will reinitiate conversations with these young people to again explore the problem-solving solutions outside of the homelessness response system. Young people with a sufficiently high assessment score are mapped to the second band: rapid re-housing through Rising Up. San Francisco allows young people who score high enough for the third band to be eligible for permanent supportive housing (PSH), but they may still choose to enroll in rapid re-housing. One respondent shared that many of these participants enroll in rapid re-housing through Rising Up due to longer wait times for PSH and the perception that they will be able to secure higher-quality housing through Rising Up.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Coordinated Entry and Housing Assessment Scores**



**Source:** Urban Institute analysis of interviews with Rising Up staff and review of program documents.

The minimum criteria established by the assessment score for rapid re-housing eligibility is relatively low—a period of homelessness that is not resolved with problem solving—but in practice, young people who are prioritized for Rising Up’s rapid re-housing program face more significant barriers to housing than this threshold. These barriers often include a significant history of homelessness, past experiences with domestic violence and intimate partner violence, mental health and substance use disorders, and/or little formal labor economy experience and rental experience.

## Governance and Funding

Decisions about Rising Up are made by the Rising Up Steering Committee, which is coordinated by a staff person at Tipping Point and includes representation from HSH, Larkin Street, Brilliant Corners, and the mayor’s office. The steering committee meets regularly to discuss the program budget and fundraising (including how best to allocate public and private funds), as well as to consider decisions

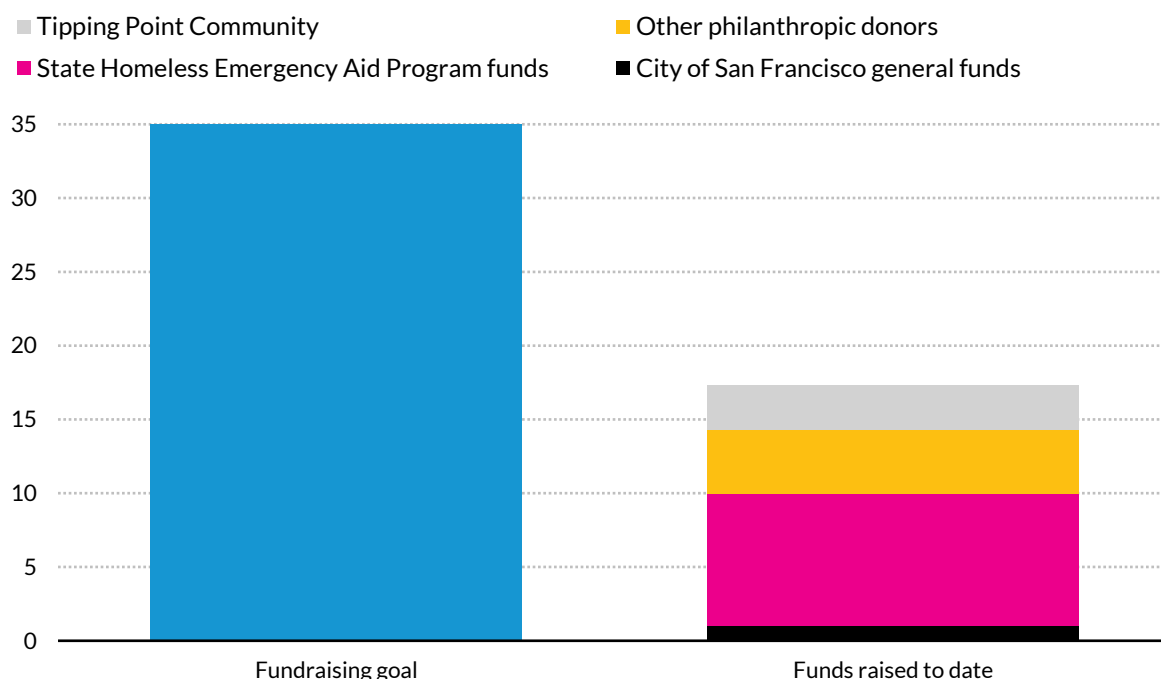


regarding program operations, services, and the contracting of new service partners. The steering committee also coordinates and communicates with all of the other organizations in the partnership.

Rising Up is funded through a mix of public and private funding (figure 4). The steering committee makes general funding decisions or recommendations. Public funding is allocated through a procurement process, and those contracts are overseen and monitored by HSH. The city has invested \$1 million in local general funds and \$9 million in Homeless Emergency Aid Program funds granted from the state by the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council. The Homeless Emergency Aid Program funds, set to expire on June 30, 2021, are currently being used to support rental subsidies, case management services, and operating costs. In addition to public funds, Rising Up has raised an additional \$7.3 million in private dollars. Tipping Point has contributed \$3 million of this \$7.3 million, and a few private funders have made additional contributions of varying amounts.

However, that \$17.3 million in public and private funding raised as of November 2020 falls short of the program's goal of raising \$35 million, which is the amount needed to provide rapid re-housing to 500 young people. Although fundraising has slowed during the COVID-19 pandemic, partners are still actively fundraising to reach their goal.

**FIGURE 4**  
**Rising Up Campaign Funding**  
*Millions of dollars*



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Source: Urban Institute interviews with Rising Up partners.

## Progress So Far

After more than a year of implementation, Rising Up has already affected the lives of young people participating in the program, as well as the broader system of programs and services that serve youths experiencing homelessness in San Francisco. Partners are hopeful the program may serve as a model for other cities interested in improving their coordination of responses to homelessness.

### Rising Up Is Successfully Housing Young People

As of November 2020, Rising Up had housed 188 young people, and an additional 36 young people were in housing search. Most participants lived alone and had their own lease, though some were placed in housing with roommates who were also participating in Rising Up. With social distancing measures and quarantining, access to safe and stable housing was more important in 2020 than ever before. Partners believed Rising Up played a crucial role in providing stable housing to young people during the global pandemic. Staff also mentioned the value of the program's ongoing ability to provide flexible and critical supports, including supporting direct expenses (e.g., so youths can buy groceries), letters of support to landlords (e.g., to help young people move into housing more quickly), and connecting young people to Social Security benefits or General Assistance. These elements helped support youths since the start of the program and were even more important during the pandemic.

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*We are going through a global pandemic, and you are giving people a year of relief.*

*—Rising Up partner*

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### Partnership Approach Leverages Broad Range of Services

Rising Up's model is designed to leverage the expertise and experience of partners already working in the community. In doing so, the program brought together a diverse set of government agencies and nongovernmental partners working across multiple sectors to ensure that young people have access to a broad range of services. A core set of partners believed that this collaboration contributed to the development of a systems-level response to youth homelessness and improved the city's capacity to coordinate care across various systems, especially in connecting young people to mental or behavioral health services. For example, staff can connect youths having a mental crisis with the transition age

youth system of care at the Department of Public Health. The program also can connect youths to financial empowerment resources and a dedicated financial coach available through the Office of Financial Empowerment.

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*As far as a wrap-around community existing...we are the village.*

*—Rising Up partner*

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## Contributors to Success

Respondents had various ideas about what has contributed to Rising Up's progress so far. They focused on aspects of the program model, including program flexibility, the importance of youth choice in housing search, financial services, and coordination of care for youths who move outside San Francisco. They also identified features of the partnership that have contributed to early success, including a shared understanding of the importance of ending youth homelessness, communication between housing navigators and youths, strong relationships with landlords, and the role that Tipping Point has played as a convener of cross-sector partners. Respondents were also enthusiastic about the growing role of youth voice in Rising Up decisionmaking.

### **Program Flexibility Allowed Rising Up to Serve Youths with Varying Levels of Need**

Many partners identified the program's flexibility as a critical element in helping them better serve young people, including those young people who also qualified for PSH and may not have been traditionally targeted by a rapid re-housing program. Partners also spoke about how the program is flexible in working with young people to identify goals that they believe will help them maintain their housing, including goals around employment and education.

Partners explained that Rising Up is a youth-driven process, with the case manager employing motivational interviewing techniques to identify additional details or potential barriers toward achieving certain goals. Speaking of these interactions, one partner explained, "[Youth are] driving the conversations." Another example given was that staff have access to flexible funding to purchase gift cards to give to participants to incentivize more frequent check-ins with case managers, which partners believed enabled them to help youths better maintain housing stability. The program also had the

flexibility to help re-house young people who needed to relocate after roommate situations were unsuccessful or if they had trouble in their original unit. Partners saw these and other measures of flexibility as a key reason why the program maintained strong enrollment across young people with varying needs.

## **Youth Choice Was a Key Consideration in Housing Search**

Partners expressed the hope that young people will be satisfied with their units, and they see youth choice in the housing selection process as a key ingredient for achieving that outcome. Many staff talked about the importance of listening to young people's narratives when making housing and service determinations. During the housing search process staff worked to ensure that housing options aligned with youth preferences. Partners perceived that young people consider housing affordability, location, size, and accessibility during housing search, and talked about how they help youths navigate those choices. For example, the program's goal is that no young person should be housed more than a 10-minute walk from public transportation, but exceptions are made when young people prefer housing that is more affordable but farther from transportation.

## **Financial Services Removed Barriers to Securing and Maintaining Housing**

Added to the partnership in April 2020, financial coaches work with participants as early as during the housing search process to help them expunge old debts and move more quickly into housing. Once young people have secured housing, financial coaches also help improve their financial literacy through assistance with personal financial management and budgeting. Many partners shared that these new services have been popular among young people and have had a positive impact on young people's housing stability so far. In one instance, a financial coach helped a young person expunge more than \$5,000 in debt.

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*Having a certified financial coach has literally changed some lives of these young people.*  
—Rising Up partner

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## Staff Felt Connected to the Goal of Ending Homelessness

Many program staff have lived experience with the homelessness risks that Rising Up participants face, making the role they play in ending youth homelessness one that is personally motivating. Staff expressed an urgency to their work, particularly around moving young people into housing during the pandemic.

## Strong Relationships Helped Young People Find Housing More Quickly

Although several partners noted that some participants faced more barriers to housing than others, many reflected that the program effectively helped participants overcome these barriers and move into housing quickly because of strong communication between housing navigators, young people, and landlords. Housing navigators helped the program identify units that might be a good fit, and Brilliant Corners maintained strong relationships with landlords through the provision of reliable rental payments, landlord mediations, and mediations with young people as necessary. In one instance, a landlord waived background checks on Rising Up participants, helping youths with no leasing history move into housing quickly.

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*I'm really proud with where we're at right now, and how quickly we're getting young people off the street and in a unit. Despite the pandemic, we're still housing young people.*  
—Rising Up partner

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## Tipping Point Was an Important Convener of Cross-Sector Partners

The majority of decisions about Rising Up programming, services, and governance are made through the steering committee, which is convened by a Tipping Point staff member. In this role, Tipping Point brings together cross-sector partners, facilitates discussion, and helps the partnership reach consensus. Because Tipping Point does not provide any direct services, partners believed it has a more impartial perspective than other partners and is well positioned to effectively convene and guide the Rising Up partnership. A core group of partners saw this structure as a key strength of the program, promoting equitable and inclusive decisionmaking.

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*Tipping Point has built a great community of service providers.*

*—Rising Up partner*

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## Early Challenges

Although the program has enjoyed early successes, some program design elements created challenges during implementation. The number of young people eligible for Rising Up exceeded the program's capacity to serve them, which contributed to delays enrolling and housing young people. Partners thought that a misalignment between the supports available through the program and the needs of the participants enrolled contributed to higher than anticipated program costs, program requirements that were challenging for some participants, and varying success in serving young people with different levels of service needs.

Other challenges related to the partnership and how organizations communicated with one another. Partner roles and responsibilities were not always clearly defined, leading to challenges in serving participants and confusion for young people. Challenges in accessing information about clients between enrollment and housing contributed to delays in moving youths into housing and made roommate matching difficult. The partnership also had difficulties in engaging other city agencies and leveraging employment services, as well as connecting youths to services outside San Francisco.

### Partners Disagreed about the Program's Successes and Goals

Success for participants in the program has not been well defined. Partners described successful outcomes for young people differently, ranging from personal development and increased self-confidence to measures of housing stability and regular rental payments. This disagreement speaks to a larger confusion about whether the primary goal of the program is ending youth homelessness or promoting economic empowerment. This disagreement created challenges for the program, as each goal requires a different approach.

### Rising Up Was Not Fully Implemented as a Shared Housing Program

A key challenge identified by partners was that the program lacked a system for successfully matching roommates. Young people had a limited number of potential roommates to choose from as a result of

the small numbers of youths at the same point in the housing search process at any given time and limited time to get to know potential matches. Many early roommate pairings failed because of interpersonal conflicts, resulting in participants needing to find new housing and potentially double-paying rent until their old unit was filled. The relocating of former roommates, combined with new program participants choosing to live alone, resulted in a higher share of young people living alone than initially planned for by partners. This increase in participants living alone led to higher monthly housing costs than anticipated during program design, as costs were calculated with the assumption that most participants would have roommates. Another consequence of participants living alone was that the pace at which the program housed new participants was slowed, as Brilliant Corners was forced to prioritize relocations. Move-in expenses were also higher than expected, because when many participants chose to live alone, the program lacked sufficient funds to fully furnish empty apartments.

Partners are taking steps to address these challenges, including bringing on Community Boards as a new partner to provide mediation, training, and conflict resolution services. Partners also plan on tweaking the program model, prioritizing roommates of current participants in the intake and enrollment process, as well as requiring that youths opt out of having a roommate (rather than the current model, which requires them to opt in).

## **Program Design Did Not Match the Needs of All Participants**

Based on the program design and eligibility criteria, many staff expected that program participants would have fewer barriers to housing than the population that was actually enrolled—young people who qualified for both Rising Up and PSH. This challenge, which was exacerbated by partners' lack of agreement on a broadly defined target population, contributed to a situation in which the program struggled to support participants who had more barriers to housing and greater service needs than initially anticipated. In particular, staff mentioned needing additional mental and behavioral health supports both for youths in crisis and to support longer-term mental health needs.

Another challenge related to partner experience. Some staff expressed concerns that varying levels of experience working with populations similar to the Rising Up population made it difficult for staff to locate or contact young people after they had been matched with a housing coordinator. Partners also explained that the program sometimes struggled to find landlords who would rent to participants with a relatively high number of barriers to housing. Some landlords required a minimal credit or rental history or were less willing to work with young people suffering from mental health challenges or with a history

of substance use. These challenges caused delays in housing young people and increased the length of time young people experience homelessness.

### **Redundancies in the Enrollment Process Were Challenging for Participants**

Partners noted several challenges around their impressions of young people's experience in Rising Up. Reflecting on the various steps from enrollment to housing selection, partners pointed to how young people were asked many of the same questions multiple times with different organizations. These questions were often intimate and potentially traumatic for young people to recount, probing on topics of previous sex work, family trauma, and substance use.

### **Young People Who Moved Out of San Francisco Had Limited Connections to Rising Up Services**

Young people who moved out of the city may continue to use services in San Francisco. However, the cost of traveling longer distances to access services created added financial strain, sometimes contributing to youth disengagement from services. Partners also cited challenges connecting young people to resources closer to their new housing, particularly around leveraging employment resources. Moves outside San Francisco also created distance between young people and their support networks, contributing to an existing legacy of people of color moving outside of the city where many of them were born.

Coordination of mental health services for those who moved out of San Francisco was limited but shows early promise. One of Rising Up's partners, the San Francisco Department of Public Health, is a resource for young people who experience mental health challenges and live in San Francisco by connecting them to mental and behavioral health services. This department has also served an important role by connecting young people who move out of San Francisco to additional resources through the provision of training and consultation services to Rising Up staff. These services, which have helped case managers better support young people in accessing new benefits outside of San Francisco or in creating a plan for coordinating ongoing therapy, are particularly important because MediCal benefits depend on location of residence. The San Francisco Department of Public Health also offers a crisis line to staff and young people who need immediate help.



## Young People Struggled to Make Housing Choices That Partners Believed Would Support Long-Term Stability

Rising Up partners advocated for youth choice and supported program participants' ability to make decisions on their own. Partners commented that the program's empowerment model led to greater participant satisfaction with the program and with their housing. Although the choices young people made reflected their priorities, those choices have strained the sustainability of the program and may negatively affect outcomes for participants. As noted above, in selecting housing units, youths balanced conflicting priorities, including affordability and accessibility to work, support networks, and transportation. Partners explained that many young people preferred housing in San Francisco so they could be closer to social and familial networks. This led to higher monthly housing costs, which caused some youths to spend their \$27,000 subsidy more quickly than others. The majority of participants chose privacy and independence, many choosing to live in one-bedroom apartments without a roommate. Even though a majority of participants were employed, partners reported that most youths opted to have their subsidy cover their full rent, further contributing to higher monthly housing costs. Partners indicated that they engaged youths in discussions to help them navigate these choices. Partners expressed fears that the high subsidy spend-down rate would force young people to exit the program sooner and that the higher monthly housing costs would cause more participants to exit into homelessness.

## Affordable Housing Options Were Often Less Safe and Less Sustainable

Most affordable housing options were found outside San Francisco, and many were in less safe neighborhoods. Partners expressed concerns that such areas could unfavorably remind young people of their childhoods. They worried that they were putting young people in unsafe situations, and they questioned the sustainability of many of these housing choices.

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*I think there's a problem with giving a young person full choice because they can make a bad one, and we want what's best for them. So I think we struggle with watching them make a decision we don't necessarily agree with.*

*—Rising Up partner*

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## Rising Up Lacked Adequate Employment Services for Program Participants

Although the initial design of the program included an employment provider partnership, Rising Up did not have a service partner focused on employment services for participants. The program partnered with two government partners, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development and the Office of Financial Empowerment, but partners thought Rising Up should be doing more to connect young people to employment opportunities. Some partners explained that employment assistance is a gap in the broader service landscape for San Francisco and that the city lacks strong options for connecting young people to work. The program has taken steps to address this challenge by funding one employment position for a young person, though partners believe more needs to be done.

## Partners Were Confused about Roles and Responsibilities

Partners shared that distinctions between the housing navigator and case manager positions were sometimes unclear. In particular, staff reported that individuals serving in one role were often asked to take on the responsibilities of the other. When this happened, staff did not feel they had sufficient background or training to successfully serve young people in the area outside their expertise. This situation also created confusion among youths, who were not always sure who they should reach out to during the program. Partners also lacked clarity about the role that other organizations played within the partnership, particularly when it came to program governance. Although the core group of partners seemed to have a strong understanding, more distant partners understood less about how decisions around programming and services were made. Partners were also unclear about how they should provide feedback. Sometimes when feedback was given, no visible changes were made.

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*I think there's a certain level of specialization that's necessary when you're serving young people.*

*—Rising Up partner*

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## Partners Had Insufficient Communication about Young People in Rising Up

Some staff found it challenging to access information about their clients from people working in other partner organizations. This problem was pronounced during the early steps of the program, when multiple organizations worked together to identify, refer, enroll, and house young people. For example,

staff commented that youths had little information about when they should expect to hear back from case management providers, and staff struggled to communicate program expectations to newly enrolled youths. This challenge was especially acute because high demand for the program meant that many eligible young people had to wait weeks and sometimes months before being contacted by a case manager. Similar challenges contributed to situations in which case managers did not know which young people served by other organizations had been connected to a housing navigator to begin their housing search, leading to fewer roommate matches. Partners also pointed to varying degrees of responsiveness and outreach style across staff, leading to situations in which, for example, housing viewings were scheduled or canceled with little advance notice.

Partners noted that the structure for communication included a large number of partner meetings but that those meetings were not necessarily helpful in addressing communication challenges. Partners' meetings, which occurred at frequencies from weekly to biweekly to monthly, focused on coordination across organizations and case conferencing. One respondent noted, "We spend a lot of time, about 40 percent, attending this little meeting and that little meeting and attending case conferences that...staff don't find helpful."

### **The Number of Young People Eligible for Rising Up Outpaced Program Capacity**

Partners shared that although many young people qualified for Rising Up, the program was limited in its ability to enroll new participants because of staff capacity and the desire to keep manageable caseloads. This lack of program capacity contributed to delays between when young people qualified for the program and when they actually enrolled and first met with a case manager or housing navigator. One partner shared that recently between five and seven Rising Up slots had been released per week and were divided among the six transition age youth access points. One access point indicated that they may have between 10 and 15 young people eligible for a single Rising Up slot. After the pandemic began, the program prioritized young people who had emergency housing vouchers in hotels. Before the pandemic, partners determined how to prioritize young people themselves, considering acuity of need, assessment score, and the length of time a young person spent waiting for housing.

### **Restrictions on Problem-Solving Assistance Limited Services Provided**

The requirement that problem-solving assistance be used only for housing-related expenses sometimes made it difficult for partners to serve young people with other urgent needs. For example, a partner shared that the only thing one participant needed was a car to travel outside the city to live with family.

In another instance, more flexible funding that helped pay for weekly groceries would have let a young person stay in housing. However, increased program restrictions made these types of nonhousing expenses impossible. Partners were also frustrated that funding could not be used to help youths with more immediate needs, such as hunger.

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*If somebody is hungry, we can't just feed them. If somebody's looking for transportation, we can't provide it. And those are a lot of the needs of a young person in a problem-solving situation.*

*—Rising Up partner*

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## **Problem Solving Was Not Adequately Tracked and Monitored**

All young people who appeared at an access point were provided with problem solving first, before being considered for the rapid re-housing component of Rising Up. However, the program did not have metrics in place to adequately measure the outcomes of youths who received this form of assistance. Partners expressed concerns that they were providing a service to youths but had little understanding of either its short- or long-term outcomes.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations below are designed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of Rising Up, improve young people's experiences in the program, and strengthen the partnership and its communication across all the organizations involved.

### **Increase Program Effectiveness and Efficiency**

- **Require a minimum rental contribution.** Most federal rental programs require that households pay for their housing, including many rapid re-housing programs (Batko, Gillespie, and Gold 2019; Burt et al. 2016; Gubits et al. 2013). For many rental programs, this contribution is typically 30 percent of a household's income (after deductions), with many programs requiring a minimum of \$25 to \$50 per month even if this amount exceeds 30 percent of a household's

income (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2017). Establishing a minimum rental requirement will help youths stay in the program longer by slowing the pace at which they spend down their rental subsidies. It may also increase the likelihood that they will exit to stable housing, as they will have access to stable housing and supportive services in the program for a longer period of time. This requirement is also an opportunity for program staff to help youths establish habits that will make it easier for them to maintain stable housing in the future (e.g., assistance with setting up a checking account, transferring money, and strategies to remember making on-time payments). Partners could consider requiring a 30 percent income contribution or alternative approaches, such as a graduated subsidy in which youths are expected to pay a small amount at the start of the program that builds to 30 percent over time.

- **Expand roommate opportunities.** In addition to prioritizing potential roommates during enrollment and changing the default so that participants are entered into the roommate matching pool, create more opportunities for young people to meet with one another before roommate selection. More frequent and early communication between potential roommates will help young people identify better matches. Once roommate decisions are made, new roommates should participate in a facilitated discussion with Community Boards to come to an agreement about how they will live together, such as the division of household chores and policies around guests. Finally, consider more flexible housing solutions. For example, if the funding source for housing subsidies permits, explore whether shared housing with someone outside of Rising Up would be better for participants. This flexibility would provide a more typical living situation for young people ages 18 to 24, could give youths an opportunity to live with someone who has not experienced homelessness, and would broaden available housing and roommate opportunities.
- **Track and monitor basic outcomes.** Establish a standardized system for data collection to track rapid re-housing performance outcomes. The National Alliance to End Homelessness publishes three national benchmarks and standards for rapid re-housing quality: exits to permanent housing, returns to homelessness, and time from referral to housing (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2016). Monitoring outcomes for young people who receive problem solving is also important. Identify key metrics and establish systems for monitoring performance. Be willing to make necessary course corrections to ensure that youths who receive problem-solving services end up in stable housing.

- **Expand tracking and monitoring beyond basic outcomes.** If partners are interested in understanding Rising Up's success as a chronic homelessness prevention strategy, the project team would need to create a comparison group from among young people who do not participate in Rising Up and measure how rates of chronic homelessness compare for both groups after participants exit the program. However, this comparison might be challenging to implement because youths in the comparison group may also receive other interventions that prevent chronic homelessness, and the number of young people who receive no services or interventions might be very low. If partners are interested in understanding participants' physical and behavioral health conditions and connections to care across service providers, they could consider the regular use of a universal tool, such as the Connecticut Supportive Housing Assessment/Acuity Index<sup>9</sup> or the Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix.<sup>10</sup> Such an approach would increase the administrative burden on service providers, require a high level of coordination across project partners, and require the collection and analysis of the data by a central partner to be successful.

## Improve Youth Experiences in the Program

- **Streamline enrollment.** Reduce duplication in the questions asked during enrollment by evaluating intake forms; identify questions that only need to be asked once; and ensure that responses to sensitive questions are absolutely essential to the current case activities. In some cases, a single intake conversation with a new participant and multiple staff may be appropriate if a group intake is not intimidating or uncomfortable for the young person. Examine and set performance benchmarks, such as the time it takes for participants to move from intake to referral and from referral to moving into housing.
- **Align program goals with the needs of all participants.** From conversations with Rising Up staff, it seems that the majority of Rising Up participants experienced chronic homelessness at the time of their enrollment. For this population, the program should prioritize securing stable housing, providing the support young people need to maintain that housing, connecting them to public benefits, and establishing a plan for longer-term stability. In some cases, partners should consider a long-term plan that includes a housing voucher if the young person cannot maintain stable housing at the end of the Rising Up subsidy. Consider that some of the original program goals around employment and education may not be the primary concern for these participants until some of these more basic needs have been met.

- **Add supports for clients with mental and behavioral health challenges.** Although the current model leverages the existing system of public services in San Francisco and the larger Bay Area, additional funding may be needed to effectively support clients with mental and behavioral health needs. Increasing the budget for behavioral health coordination will make it easier for staff to leverage existing behavioral health resources and will facilitate more regional connections for young people moving out of San Francisco. Some clients with more severe mental and behavioral health challenges may need additional support beyond coordination. Consider adding a mental health and counseling services provider to the partnership with a more formal role. Participants could have access to a full-time, dedicated crisis counselor who could support participants through emergencies and connect them to more regular therapy. This new partner could also be invited to participate in the Rising Up Steering Committee, providing guidance and recommendations on broader program goals and challenges with a mental and behavioral health perspective. Alternatively, partners could fund clinical support with existing service providers, either through expanding existing clinical staff and resources or creating them.
- **Explore additional opportunities for connecting youths to employment.** Current literature on rapid re-housing shows that successful programs focus on increasing income within a short period of time (Batko, Gillespie, and Gold 2019). Research also suggests prioritizing short-term trainings that focus on sectors that are successful and located near where the young people live. Consider revisiting plans for an employment service partnership. An employment service provider could collaborate with case managers and the Office of Financial Empowerment's financial coach to locate employment opportunities for young people that would outlast their participation in the program. It may be necessary to identify a partner in San Francisco, as well as additional partners in other areas where many participants are finding housing.
- **Create more opportunities for youth feedback.** To date, young people have not had much voice in program-level governance or decisionmaking. However, beginning in fall 2020, a Rising Up participant attended steering committee meetings. That same young person will also sit on the CHI community advisory board and will be paid for the time spent attending both meetings. Program staff saw this youth participation as a positive step forward for the initiative and hoped that it will help shed light on early program challenges. For example, the participant may be able to provide more insight into why young people have not been contributing to rental payments. Going further, partners could establish more frequent and regular opportunities for all participants to provide feedback on the program. For example, partners could consider constructing an annual survey that would be administered to participants by their case

management providers. Survey responses may help partners troubleshoot program challenges and hold the program accountable to its goals. Consider also having another Rising Up participant, in addition to the one in place for fall 2020, attend steering committee and CHI advisory board meetings in a paid capacity.

## Strengthen the Partnership and Communication

- **Work toward a single vision of Rising Up across all partners.** Decide on the key program goals; ensure these goals are communicated with all program partners and are well targeted to the population being served; and identify the inputs needed from each partner to achieve these goals. Ensure that goals are specific enough that they can be measured. For example, should the goal of ending homelessness for 500 transition age youths be measured by having them housed while they are in the program or for a period of time after they exit?
- **Clarify partner roles and responsibilities.** Create a clear framework for the Rising Up partnership model, including program governance, defined partner roles, and expectations around organization responsibilities. The framework should describe how decisions are made about the direction of the program and the best way for organizations to provide feedback. Establish expectations for how feedback will be addressed.
- **Improve partner communication.** Convene all partners regularly so those who are not members of the steering committee will feel connected to the process of program implementation. Partner meetings should include a discussion of goals, timeline, and how all partners can support next steps. Meetings are also a good time to check in on communication and whether more or less frequent meetings are needed at any given time. Prioritize leadership staff for these meetings, allowing frontline and supervisory staff to focus on providing direct service to clients. Also consider creating a program practice group that consists of direct service supervisors. This group would be responsible for reviewing process outcomes and policies and could help establish program standards or recommend them to the steering committee.
- **Provide targeted training for partners and frontline staff.** Participants who qualified for both rapid re-housing and PSH and chose to participate in Rising Up face more barriers to housing and may have greater service needs than other participants. Consider providing targeted training to staff members with less experience working with this population to ensure they are prepared to effectively serve these young people.



## Evaluating Next Steps

This report is the first of at least two planned publications focused on the early successes and challenges of the Rising Up program. Next year, we will focus on monitoring program performance and understanding early outcomes for young people. Additional topics for investigation include lease-up and exit rates, understanding referral pathways and timelines, the structure of how youths are spending down the subsidy, and service structure and usage. To understand outcomes for participants, we will analyze participant-level data collected by HSH in the ONE System to understand outcomes related to housing stability, employment, and education. We will also speak with young people to help tell the story of Rising Up and to explain puzzling findings in the data.

# Appendix. Interviewees

TABLE A.1

People Interviewed for This Report, by Organization

Organization	Name	Role	Interview date
At the Crossroads	Charles Lerner	Executive Director	9/4/2020
At the Crossroads	Demaree Miller	Program Director	9/4/2020
Brilliant Corners	Jamila Clay	San Francisco Housing Platform Program Supervisor	9/15/2020
San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing	Alan Guttirez	Housing Subsidy Team Manager	9/2/2020
San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing	Alison Schlageter	Youth Program Manager	9/10/2020
First Place for Youth	Shona Baum	Director of Programs, Alameda and San Francisco Counties	9/9/2020
Five Keys Charter School	Dorick Scarpelli	Vice President of Programs and Partnerships	9/3/2020
Huckleberry Youth Programs	Jackson Bowman	Director of Health Services	9/3/2020
Huckleberry Youth Programs	Katie Reisinger	Director of Health and Safety	9/3/2020
Larkin Street Youth Services	Sherilyn Adams	Executive Director	9/9/2020
Larkin Street Youth Services	Timo Agee	Program Manager	9/8/2020

**Note:** Five additional people were interviewed but preferred not to be named.

# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The City of San Francisco defines transition age youth as young adults ages 18 to 24 who are transitioning from public systems (like foster care) or are at risk of not making a successful transition to adulthood. More information is available at <https://sfmohcd.org/transition-age-youth-housing>.
- <sup>2</sup> The findings from these interviews reflect the perspectives of 16 staff members working at the nine organizations where we conducted interviews. These views may not be shared by all members of the partnership. A list of interviewees is in the appendix.
- <sup>3</sup> In 2019, the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing engaged a social research firm, Applied Survey Research, to conduct the 2019 San Francisco Homeless Point-in-Time Count & Survey, a point-in-time enumeration of individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness or residing in temporary shelter. A follow-up qualitative survey was conducted to understand the experiences and demographic characteristics of those people who had been included in the enumeration. The enumeration and follow-up survey included a separate analysis for several subpopulations, including people younger than 25. Although that group included unaccompanied children younger than 18 who were not eligible for Rising Up, the survey mirrored the population eligible for the program as most (95 percent) were transition age youths ages 18 to 24.
- <sup>4</sup> Brilliant Corners is also involved with other components of CHI, including providing housing assistance for the Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool and the Moving On Initiative.
- <sup>5</sup> Depending on the funding source, some cities allow flexible funding to be used for nonhousing-related expenses (such as assistance with transportation, food, or employment supplies). More information is available at [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Housing-Problem-Solving-July-2019.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Housing-Problem-Solving-July-2019.pdf).
- <sup>6</sup> When Rising Up began, HSH had just designed their problem-solving approach. Since then, this form of assistance has continued to evolve to become better defined, structured, and funded. As such, the problem-solving approach described in this report reflects the state of that program as of December 2020, and it may not reflect what problem-solving assistance looked like when Rising Up launched nor how it may evolve after this report is published.
- <sup>7</sup> A Housing First approach prioritizes housing assistance for people experiencing homelessness without requiring residents to meet any other preconditions.
- <sup>8</sup> See “[San Francisco Coordinated Entry Standards](https://hsh.sfgov.org/services/coordinated-entry/continuum-of-care-adult-coordinated-entry/),” on “Adult Coordinated Entry,” San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, accessed January 11, 2021, <https://hsh.sfgov.org/services/coordinated-entry/continuum-of-care-adult-coordinated-entry/>.
- <sup>9</sup> More information about the Connecticut Supportive Housing Assessment/Acuity Index is available at <http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AssessmentAcuityIndex-Guidance-Manual-REVISED-2018.1.29.pdf>.
- <sup>10</sup> More information about the Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix is available at <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/1562/self-sufficiency-matrix-using-hmis-to-benchmark-progress-sample/>.

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