In October 2018, the mayor of San Francisco, in collaboration with Tipping Point Community, launched the Rising Up campaign to halve homelessness among people ages 18 to 24. To reach its goal, the program intended to provide rapid re-housing to 500 young people and prevent homelessness through problem-solving interventions for an additional 450. We spoke with young people housed by the Rising Up program to learn about their experiences. Overall, young people found safety and stability in their housing, saying that this was their primary goal for enrolling in the program. Young people also identified positive relationships with staff, opportunities for employment, and improvements in overall well-being as a result of participation in the program. Looking forward, many young people were concerned about the affordability of the units the program placed them in and whether they would be able to afford housing at the end of the program. Findings on the experiences of young people in Rising Up may be useful for multiple audiences, including funders, policymakers, and nonprofit service providers interested in or already supporting similar rapid re-housing programs for young people.

Background

In 2017, approximately 1,363 transition-age young people (ages 18 to 24) experienced homelessness in San Francisco on any given night (Applied Survey Research 2017). The City of San Francisco launched
Rising Up in 2018 with the goal of halving homelessness for these young people by 2023, meaning approximately 680 or fewer young people or would be experiencing homelessness during the 2023 point-in-time count. 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 prevent or quickly resolve their homelessness. For young people experiencing homelessness who are identified as needing more support, rapid re-housing helps them quickly move into housing with rental assistance. Young people receiving rapid re-housing receive housing search assistance, monthly rental assistance, and case management and other supportive services. Between July 2019 and September 2021, 247 young people have been rapidly re-housed through the program.

The collaborative structure of Rising Up is intended as a citywide, systems-level response to youth homelessness. It brings together a diversity of resources from 19 organizations (city agencies, nonprofits, and the San Francisco school district). San Francisco’s Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing is the lead public partner, leveraging public resources and coordinating across 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. Larkin Street Youth Services serves three roles, as the anchor nonprofit partner on the campaign (managing private fundraising efforts), as a part of the Rising Up Steering Committee (managing subawards of private funds to partner agencies), and as a service partner (providing case management to young people housed through the program and as a youth access point for problem solving, assessment, and navigation into housing). Four other organizations serve as Rising Up service providers: At the Crossroads, First Place for Youth, Five Keys Charter School, and 3rd Street Youth Center and Clinic. Figure 1 summarizes partners’ roles in the program. Additionally, young people are identified and assessed for program eligibility by six nonprofit service providers (also known as coordinated entry youth access points).
This brief is the second evaluation in a planned series on Rising Up as part of the Urban Institute’s evaluation of the Tipping Point Community Chronic Homelessness Initiative. In a prior report, we identified early program successes and challenges during the first year of implementation through interviews with program staff and partners (Gold et al. 2021). At the time, we found that Rising Up was on track to achieving its goal, with 188 young people housed as of November 2020 and the program enjoying early success in building a collaborative structure. Partners attributed early success to the program’s flexible design, the role of youth choice in housing selection, and strong relationships between partners, participants, and landlords. Partners also acknowledged challenges in meeting the full needs of young people in the program, particularly those who needed access to additional physical and mental health supports. Partners also noted that many young people were selecting housing units that were more expensive than had been anticipated, meaning the length of time young people could receive assistance was reduced. Finally, partners noted that roles were not clearly defined, leading to challenges coordinating service delivery for young people as they progressed through the program.
This brief presents findings from 10 interviews with young people in the rapid re-housing program. Our interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and focused on participants’ experiences in the program, their housing outcomes, and other outcomes related to employment, education, safety, and mental and physical health. We heard 10 unique stories that had common themes, summarized below. Only themes that emerged consistently across interviews are detailed below. Many unique experiences young people had in their lives and in the program are not captured in this brief; outcomes varied by length of time in the program, housing location, and service utilization. Common themes also emerged from these stories. We summarize these themes below and make recommendations for program improvements.

All five service provider agencies delivered contact information for young people they were serving who consented to participate in the evaluation. From these lists, we used a convenience sample for all interviews. Outreach was conducted to the young people served by every service provider organization, but the ultimate mix of interviewed young people was those who consented to participate in an interview during the data collection period of August to September 2021. In the end, we interviewed young people served by four Rising Up providers: At the Crossroads, Five Keys Charter School, Larkin Street Youth Services, and 3rd Street Youth Center and Clinic.

Interviewed young people were a diverse group with respect to race and gender; however, to protect the identity of young people, we will not provide individual-level demographic information or the number of young people interviewed by the provider, as this could allow readers familiar with interview participants to identify the young people with whom we spoke. Most of the young people were in their early 20s. The majority of respondents were Black, and our sample did not include anyone who was Latinx. Interviewed young people also represented those who have been served by the program at various times and for various durations: interviewees had been enrolled in the program from four months to two years. And all but one young person were in program-subsidized housing at the time of the interview. The young people we spoke with were also a mix of employed and unemployed. Because our interviews were conducted over the phone, young people we spoke with were more likely to have a working landline or cellphone (though we did speak with one young person who was using the phone of another household member). Our sample likely represents interviewees who were more likely to pick up a call from an unknown number and participate in a 45-minute interview at that time or at a similar time in the few days after initial contact. Throughout this brief, specific details about case circumstances are omitted to protect the identity of the young people interviewed.

Participants’ Experiences in Rising Up

Rising Up provides young people enrolled in rapid re-housing with assistance finding housing, up to $27,000 in rental assistance (including monthly rent and utility payments), move-in assistance, case management, and other supportive services. For all interviewed young people, help paying for housing was their primary motivation for enrolling in the program. Some young people also described the importance of pursuing education and employment goals, which they worked on with their case
managers. However, some young people indicated that they did not take advantage of other Rising Up services because they were either not interested or unaware of the program’s offerings.

Prior Living Situation and Enrollment in Rising Up

From prior data collection with Rising Up staff, we know that when a young person first enrolls in the program, they are placed on a waiting list until the program has availability to start a housing search. During this waiting period, young people shared that they lived in a variety of homeless and doubled-up situations. Because of the pandemic and the risks associated with congregate living, many described staying in limited-capacity emergency shelters or in San Francisco’s shelter-in-place hotels. Some were not able to find space in an emergency shelter and lived out of their cars or endured living unsheltered on the street. Young people who were able to double up with friends or family shared that they had local connections and support networks. The one young person who remained unhoused at the time of the interview had been staying in their car or at a friends’ house.

Some young people did not experience long waits before beginning their housing search. These young people explained their understanding that they were prioritized because of a chronic health condition, mental health crisis, or emergent health condition, or because they had been staying in a shelter-in-place hotel, which young people were aware the city was in the process of closing. For other young people we spoke with, the wait to begin looking for housing took up to a year or longer. One young person believed they were prioritized for Rising Up only after they reported the onset of a medical condition. They had previously spent the last year experiencing homelessness in their vehicle. The interview respondents who did have longer waits described the process as a “waiting game” and commented that it “required patience.”

Goals Young People Set in Rising Up

Interviewed young people said obtaining housing was their most important goal. Every young person we spoke with explained that they enrolled in Rising Up because they wanted a safe place to stay, ideally an apartment that they would be able to keep for a long time. Some young people expanded on this, noting that housing instability or homelessness had made it difficult to pursue education and stable employment in the past. These young people believed they needed to find stable housing before they would be able to pursue other goals.

In our prior reporting, based on interviews with Rising Up staff, staff shared that goal setting in Rising Up was youth driven (Gold et al. 2021). Interviewed young people confirmed this, explaining that they set their own goals in the program. One participant explained this by saying that their case manager would “never tell me what she thinks I need to do.”

Financial stability and independence were goals commonly expressed by most young people we interviewed. They did not want to worry about paying bills and discussed desires to live independently or with a significant other. In the short term, many young people set goals to find a job to help cover monthly expenses or maintain a current job. Some also identified longer-term career goals and
discussed the education and training required to achieve them, including certification programs, college, and graduate programs. Career goals were the one instance in which young people noted case managers provided more guidance around goal setting, particularly when it came to increasing financial stability. An example was when one young person explained that their case manager had sent them employment opportunities. The young person said they knew employment was something they should be working on, and they knew their case manager would help them if asked. But the young person did not pursue the opportunities sent by the case manager (though did not say why).

A few young people discussed a hope that the program would help them improve their independent living skills, including paying rent and bills on time and managing greater responsibilities. One respondent discussed a goal of improving their credit.

Most young people did not discuss any goals related to their physical or mental health. One participant explained that they wanted to focus on housing stability before pursuing any health-related goals. It should be noted that, because COVID-19 restrictions required all interviews to be conducted by telephone, young people may not have felt comfortable sharing more personal goals, such as those related to mental or behavioral health, with a research team member they had not met in person.

Finding Housing

Once young people began working with Brilliant Corners to find housing, most participants we spoke with found their housing unit in one to two months. Affordability was named as a top concern for many interview respondents. Some young people identified neighborhoods in cities “farther out” that are more affordable than the neighborhood where they are currently living, and many expressed frustrations that they were unable to settle in a more affordable neighborhood. Some of these young people expressed that they felt compelled by Rising Up to live in Oakland or San Francisco because they were only shown units in these areas and ran into barriers when they searched for units outside of these areas (e.g., landlords not accepting the Rising Up subsidy). Other locations young people perceived as more affordable include Antioch, Fairfield, Richmond, Walnut Creek, and Sacramento.

Multiple young people described refusing units that Brilliant Corners showed them because the units were out of their price range or budget. Many respondents also described neighborhood considerations when looking for a unit. Some valued living close to family and friends. Alternatively, one young person described wanting to find a neighborhood that would create more distance between them and the people in their life. Others discussed the importance of neighborhood safety. Young people also described other considerations in their housing search, including wanting a unit that was well maintained or wanting a unit that had parking available for tenants. These priorities aligned closely with those staff had identified in prior interviews as important to young people. Notably absent was any discussion before move in of preferred unit size, but some young people expressed openness to living in either studios or one-bedroom apartments.

As part of the established program design, Brilliant Corners shows young people up to three possible units. If a young person turns down all three units, they become responsible for finding their
own unit. Some young people struggled to find a unit through this process that fit their criteria and only selected the third unit they were shown knowing they would not be shown another. Multiple young people reported turning down units because they were too expensive. One described, “The rent they are showing me and apartments they are showing me isn’t reasonable.” Another young person explained that the process took patience to find the right unit at the right price. Others explained feeling a sense of urgency to find housing as quickly as possible and reported they selected the first unit they saw. Other young people we interviewed described looking for apartments on their own. One of these young people attributed taking this action because of a delay from staff at Brilliant Corners, who had only sent them one unit to look at (which was out of their price range). The young people who conducted independent housing searches reported difficulties finding landlords who would accept their Rising Up subsidy.

Despite reports from young people that they resorted to the third unit they were shown or undertook their own housing search, most respondents felt that the program worked hard to find them an apartment they liked. They discussed receiving support from staff. One participant described the Brilliant Corners staff person, saying, “She made sure that I liked the atmosphere, made sure I was comfortable.” Another described, “They gave us housing updates all the time and options for areas and what places looked like. And they were there to help us out with everything. And we found a home we really wanted.”

**Case Management and Other Services**

In addition to housing search and rental assistance, case management is a core component of Rising Up’s model. Young people receive this service through one of five providers: At the Crossroads, Five Keys Charter School, First Place for Youth, Larkin Street Youth Services, and 3rd Street Youth Center and Clinic. Case managers schedule a preliminary meeting to develop a case plan that covers housing stability strategies designed to help young people overcome barriers to obtaining and maintaining stable housing, as well as education and employment goals. Once the young person has moved into housing, meetings are intended to become more frequent (weekly, biweekly, or monthly) on the basis of the young person’s desire. Ongoing meetings are designed to check on progress toward goals, share financial information, and discuss rental payments.

Of the young people we spoke with who had moved into housing, all were receiving case management. Frequency of communication varied, ranging from twice a week to one hour every month to one hour every two to three months. The method of communication also took various forms, including text messages, phone calls, Zoom meetings, and in-person visits at a young person’s apartment. Many young people used multiple methods of communication throughout their time in the program.

Young people reported that conversations with case managers focused on goals, rental payments, and challenges they were facing in their housing. Nearly all young people said they spoke to their case managers about rental payments, including how much they planned to pay that month and how much money was left on their subsidy; one young person noted that their new case manager does not help
them track their subsidy and that they now track this themselves. Many young people also reported that their case manager used these meetings to talk about jobs, including helping them search for jobs and asking how they liked their current job. One young person’s case manager checked on whether they were continuing to access mental health services.

For young people, meetings with care managers also provided an opportunity to raise concerns about maintenance issues with their apartments, including problems with mold, water, or smoke detectors. One young person noted that they copy their case manager on any maintenance requests to their landlord to help get a response and keep their landlord accountable for fixing issues promptly.

Respondents trying to find employment reported that case managers provided job search and application assistance. Multiple young people spoke about their case managers sending them employment opportunities over email or connecting them with job fairs. Others discussed getting assistance to prepare for interviews, developing a résumé, and submitting applications. For young people who needed professional attire, case managers set them up with appointments at Dress for Success (though one young person noted that they would have appreciated further assistance getting additional clothing to wear to work). A small number of young people also expressed a desire for further assistance accessing jobs outside of the service sector.

Many young people also discussed receiving in-kind assistance from their case manager to help with basic needs, including assistance with transportation (BART pass or gift card for gas) and furniture to use when they moved into their apartment. Rising Up also helped young people with nutrition, including gift cards and connections to food programs that deliver produce. One young person noted that when they were in a crisis and unable to buy food, their case manager bought and delivered groceries to their apartment. And, young people nearing the end of their subsidy spoke with their case manager about where they would live and where they could access help when the program ended.

Participation in some of Rising Up’s other services was more limited. Some young people discussed “meeting with someone to help build credit,” including one young person who worked on building their credit in the program and was finally able to get their first credit card. However, others reflected that this service was less useful to them at this time because their primary goal was securing employment and increasing income. A small number of young people also discussed receiving help with their health through the program, including connections to mental health services and needed medical care; however, when asked about physical and mental health services, most young people said they were not interested. This was because they preferred to manage their health on their own, they already had connections to these services upon entering the program and did not need further assistance, or they did not feel comfortable speaking with Rising Up staff about their health.

Of note is that many young people interviewed did not appear aware of other services available through Rising Up. Multiple young people stated a belief that the program was only able to help them with housing and rental assistance. One young person said that the program wouldn’t be able to help them find a job but only provided help with rent and credit. Another expressed a goal of wanting to set
up a bank account and get access to food stamps but did not believe that the program would be able to help with either because they did not believe this to be the role of the program.

Experiences with Rising Up Staff

Most young people reported positive experiences with Rising Up staff. These young people felt that their case managers cared about them, wanted to help them, and were doing everything they could to support their goals. When describing their experiences with program staff, young people used words such as “awesome,” “thorough,” and “very helpful.” In interactions with staff, multiple young people reported that they felt heard, that staff respected their opinions, and that staff gave good feedback. One young person explained, “I feel like she is there to listen and is paying attention to what I have to say.” Young people particularly liked when case managers reached out to them, rather than being responsible for reaching out to case managers. One respondent noted that they hadn’t experienced outreach from case management in other programs but appreciated their case manager’s proactive style of communication.

Despite the overall positive comments, young people expressed some specific challenges with staff experiences. Multiple young people expressed a desire for case managers to reach out to them more often, with some noting that communication was more frequent earlier in the program (as much as two times a week) but became less frequent over time. This is often an intentional feature of programs—decreasing frequency of communication as a participant stabilizes in housing—but it appeared young people did not understand the reasons for this decrease and sometimes attributed it to a caseworker not caring about them. Additionally, one young person described an instance when their phone had been turned off, and communication with their case manager stopped entirely. Staff turnover also caused disruptions for young people. Many of the young people we spoke with had at least two case managers while they were in the program, and some had three or more. Young people expressed that changes in case managers made it difficult to feel understood and to make consistent progress on goals. Multiple young people discussed experiencing setbacks when a new staff person took over their case and took a few weeks or longer to get up to speed. In one instance, a young person said that they had stopped reaching out to their case manager altogether because the person had changed so many times. In addition, young people generally expressed confusion about the difference between the housing search navigator at Brilliant Corners and their case manager, and we believe that some perception of case manager turnover may be attributed to this handoff between organizations.

Housing Outcomes

As previously noted, at the time of our interviews, all young people but one were in housing subsidized by the program, meaning young people met their primary goal of accessing housing through Rising Up. Participants’ satisfaction with that housing varied for several reasons, but housing provided young people with other benefits.
Youth Satisfaction with Housing

Young people described a range of satisfaction with their housing. Most interviewed young people were satisfied with their unit and mentioned few areas for improvement in the quality of their housing, but some young people described living conditions that were less than satisfactory. One young person described their unit as uninhabitable, and one young person was unhoused at the time of the interview. When young people described concerns with their unit, they focused on its physical condition; affordability; proximity to transportation, friends, and family; noise; and relationships with neighbors and landlords.

When asked if their units had any shortcomings, young people did not want to be critical about their units, although they went on to identify areas that needed improvement. Often young people weighed the overall positive impact of their housing over what they determined to be minor imperfections in their living situation. One young person stated, “There are little downfalls. But I don’t think about them too hard.”

Physical Condition and Maintenance of Unit

The condition of units subsided by Rising Up varied. The size of the unit depended on the participant’s situation. Interviewed single participants all had studio apartments, partnered or parenting participants had large studios or one-bedroom apartments, and participants living with a sibling had two-bedroom apartments. Several young people living in studios described their unit as small but an adequate size for one person. No participants we spoke with said the overall size of their unit was inadequate for their current situation, although several young people imagined having a larger space in the future and one participant noted being particularly dissatisfied with the lack of storage space in their unit.

Some young people were less than satisfied with the responsiveness of their landlords, the age of their building, and the functioning of their appliances. Young people preferred living in well-maintained units with up-to-date appliances but described showers that leaked and ran cold water in the morning, public washers that were moldy, and buildings without elevators. Some young people described situations in which landlords were slow in responding to their maintenance requests, even after their Rising Up case manager intervened. One participant stated that the biggest drawback to their living situation was their landlord’s antagonistic behavior. In one case, a participant’s housing condition was so inadequate that they could not live in the unit, despite being required to pay monthly rental contributions from their subsidy.

Importance of Neighborhood

The majority of the housed young people interviewed were living in Oakland. Some lived in San Francisco, and one young person was living in an outlying neighborhood in the East Bay area. Access to transportation and relationships with neighbors were the most frequently mentioned neighborhood characteristics. Young people living close to public transit described their location as convenient. Others who did not live near public transit were challenged with transportation access—one participant
experienced difficulties commuting into the city at the hours required by their job and ultimately stopped work because of challenges with transportation in addition to their low pay rate.

Some young people found community in their neighborhood. When asked about their satisfaction with their neighborhood, relationships with neighbors were mentioned as a positive outcome of finding housing. One respondent described their neighborhood as “a good place to grow” because their neighbors were supportive and invested in their well-being. Another respondent described feeling safe in their neighborhood because their neighbors were friendly and looked out for each other. The young people valued living in quiet neighborhoods with relatively low noise or activity. Young people living near hubs of activity, next to transit centers or community gathering spaces, described being aware of increased noise and activity around their unit. One participant described a nearby major transit center as a place with regular criminal activity and a large police presence, which negatively impacted their living situation and sense of safety. Other location factors that contributed to youth satisfaction with their unit included proximity to friends and family and walkability.

Affordability and Sustainability

Almost all young people we spoke with indicated that they do not anticipate living in their current unit after the completion of the Rising Up program. In anticipation of the end of their subsidy, some young people are planning their move to a new unit in the upcoming months. Only one person we spoke with said they “should be able” to afford their unit with their level of current income after they spend down their subsidy, although they were prepared to make other plans if their financial situation changed.

The young people we spoke with started thinking about unit affordability and sustainability at the time they moved in. As noted previously, affordability was a primary consideration when selecting a unit during housing search. Respondents reported the costs of their studio apartments ranging from $1,700 to $1,900 per month. Most participants did not believe their unit was worth the cost of rent, however, because their subsidy covered the entirety or the majority of their rent, their unit was affordable for the time being.

Young people discussed how they considered their contributions to rent in relation to how long they could stay in their unit. Several young people are working on finding gainful employment to make rental contributions and increase the number of months they can afford to stay in their unit. Young people who were unemployed or underemployed noted that, although their subsidy covers the entirety of rent, it was challenging to pay utilities.

Some respondents expressed a desire to stay in their location for the long term because they found stability in their neighborhood and living situation, but the majority did not see their unit as a permanent home. For those who desired to stay in their unit, they expected to spend their entire subsidy and did not have a clear plan for rent payment after subsidy spend-down. Among young people who did not view their home as permanent, some were planning their move from their Rising Up unit at the time of the interview, while others were anticipating moving out at the end of their subsidy. The
next steps for the young people planning to move from the program included renting a room with a family member and moving with a friend to a more affordable unit. One participant was in search of other means of rental assistance to extend their time in their apartment. Multiple young people commented negatively about how housing search assistance was only available when they first enrolled in the program but was not available if they needed to move at the end of their participation.

Impact of Housing on Young People

The majority of interviewed young people reported that the housing provided by Rising Up increased their safety and stability as well as their ability to focus on other aspects of their life, including family, employment, and education. Several participants started new jobs or new education courses after finding housing through Rising Up.

Safety

Overall, young people felt safe inside their homes. Young people reflected particularly on the feeling of safety compared with their prior living situations, such as in unsheltered locations, in shelter or shelter-in-place hotels, or when living doubled up. Some young people shared that they still used old coping mechanisms in their home, such as blocking or wedging items in their doors to prevent anyone from entering even though no one had attempted to.

As previously noted, some young people commented on feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods; those located close to transport felt particularly exposed to some negative criminal or police activity. Other young people commented that their block was safe, but they were aware of safety concerns in nearby neighborhoods.

Education and Employment

Most interviewed young people were working, actively seeking employment, or both. Those employed were frequently in the services sector: security and cleaning were two of the more frequently named employment sectors. Some of the young people currently employed expressed frustration with their pay or the type of work they were performing. Those frustrated by pay also expressed concern that they would not be able to afford their unit once the subsidy ended.

The extent to which young people were engaging with their case managers to explore employment and education opportunities varied. Some young people were connected with their current employment through the program, while others had found employment through their own networks. Most young people said that their case manager helped them stay organized, ensuring that they were working to gain employment. Despite acknowledged efforts on case management, progress toward employment goals was not universal. One young person acknowledged that their case manager was sending them opportunities they were supposed to be pursuing, but they were not doing so at the time of the interview. Young people, those currently employed and unemployed, had career goals that sat outside
the types of employment they felt they currently had access to; these included professional positions in the medical, legal, and business fields. Young people, with only one exception, reflected that they did not feel that their caseworkers were able to connect them with the types of education or opportunities that would facilitate the development of these longer-term career goals.

Physical and Mental Health

Young people reported various physical and mental health challenges, some long term. Young people reported that these challenges interfered with employment and stability, but often commented that they did not believe that Rising Up could fix these problems, particularly long-term mental and physical health challenges. Some respondents reported receiving referrals for mental health services from their case managers, although few reported pursuing those services. Some cited the stigma regarding participation in therapy as the reason for not pursuing mental health services.

Most young people commented that the housing provided by Rising Up contributed to a feeling of safety and stability that improved their overall mental health. One young person summarized by saying, “I can go home and feel safe.” Respondents also shared that having a case manager they could rely on in a crisis was comforting. Despite the relief felt from being in housing and having the support of a case manager, some respondents reported lingering effects from traumatic events experienced during their time spent homeless or unstably housed. And, for young people suffering from housing-quality issues or anticipating a move because of affordability issues, these challenges were reported to increase stress and negatively impact mental health.

One young person highlighted the value of the gender-affirming care they received through Rising Up. Other young people reported that, while they were struggling with some physical health challenges, they did not approach their case manager for assistance. The primary reason provided for this was privacy: young people did not want to share their personal health information, particularly if it was related to gender identity. A smaller number of young people were not aware that the program may have been able to help with connections to health care.

Program Challenges

When asked about challenges faced throughout participation in Rising Up, young people discussed challenges with the affordability and long-term sustainability of housing, responsiveness of staff and landlords, and existing physical and mental health challenges they felt could not be resolved by Rising Up service providers.

The affordability of housing was a concern for young people throughout their participation, from the housing search phase to how much of their subsidy to use on a monthly basis to where to live at the end of the program. While obtaining housing was the primary goal for interviewed respondents, young people also shared that the units they were shown and ultimately chose were too expensive for them to afford without the subsidy and that determining how quickly to use the subsidy was stressful. Further,
for young people who had reached the end of the subsidy, they had to move to a more affordable situation. Some young people felt that they were not presented with housing options in what would have been more affordable neighborhoods. And, some young people were seeking more affordable housing arrangements at the end of the program, such as renting with a family member or sharing living situations.

A second common challenge young people reported was the responsiveness of Rising Up staff and their landlords. Participants noted responsiveness during housing search in particular, and young people also expressed some confusion about who they should contact at that time. As previously noted, participants faced challenges when staff turned over but in some instances, it seemed that young people experienced handoffs from Brilliant Corners to caseworkers as discontinuity in service. Young people, particularly those with housing-quality concerns, reported poor responsiveness from landlords to requests for remediation of those problems. This is a common complaint among people in subsidized housing and should not be interpreted as unique to Rising Up’s model.

Finally, as previously noted, participants faced a variety of physical and mental health challenges that were not resolved or assisted by the program. In some instances, this was attributable to young peoples’ hesitancy to reveal health challenges to their case manager. In others, this was the result of stigma attached to seeking help; even when referrals were provided, the young person did not pursue them. But, in some instances, the young people believed that the program would not be able to help even if they asked.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, young people served by Rising Up expressed gratitude for being part of the program. Interviewed young people felt safe and had stability in the housing they were provided through Rising Up. Perhaps the most telling positive response was that interviewed young people said they would recommend the program to a friend. On the whole, young people felt that the subsidy allowed them to afford housing, their case manager was a reliable support, and the program provided other needed connections and supports. However, young people expressed concern about being able to afford housing, particularly the units.

Interviews with young people also highlighted some areas of opportunity to improve program implementation:

- **Provide housing search support throughout the duration of the program.** Some young people indicated they had ongoing housing-quality issues and nonresponsive landlords. Other young people were facing moves as they approached the end of their subsidized support. All young people seemed to be under the impression that they could only receive housing search support at the beginning of the program. One way to further support young people would be to make housing search assistance available, or more explicitly available, throughout a young person’s participation in the program, and particularly at the end of the program, to promote housing continuity and limit the likelihood of a young person returning to homelessness.
- **Expand shared housing options for young people.** Young people reaching the end of their time in the program were planning to move in with family members or into other shared housing arrangements. As recommended previously, the program should consider setting up shared living situations with people who are not participants in the program. This flexibility would provide a more typical living situation for young people ages 18 to 24, give them an opportunity to live with someone who has not experienced homelessness, and broaden available housing and roommate opportunities.

- **Leverage employment resources across the full program.** The extent and types of employment and educational referral opportunities appeared to vary greatly across young people. Many interviewees felt they were not receiving connections to employment or education that would contribute to career goals or finding employment that would allow them to afford housing without the program subsidy. A first step to improving employment would be to standardize case manager resources so that all young people have access regardless of who their case manager is. Some of the connections case managers share are informal and from case managers’ own professional networks, as opposed to being program resources, in which case, it may be beneficial to map all resources available across case managers to maximize the reach of individual professional networks.

- **Increase proactive engagement and destigmatizing efforts around mental health supports.** Given the reported lack of pursuit of mental health services referrals, and sometimes even the hesitancy among participants to share health challenges with their case managers, we recommend developing targeted strategies to decrease the stigma regarding certain types of health care and to ensure that all participants are being actively engaged in the opportunities to access health care options. One strategy could include creating alternative pathways for participants with specific needs so that they could talk to a person aside from their case manager if they did not feel comfortable approaching a case manager.

Findings from interviews with young people are an important piece of Urban’s evaluation of the Rising Up program. They give insight into the on-the-ground experiences that young people have in the program. In the final year of the evaluation, we will use administrative data to understand housing, employment, education, health, and well-being outcomes for program participants.

### References


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