
A checklist for service providers and program facilitators

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Public safety net programs can serve as a stabilizing buffer to meet people's core needs and help them weather a crisis. But this web of programs has substantial gaps that leave many people without the supports they need. This is true for people of all ages, but young people face a unique set of challenges related to their age and developmental stage that make these gaps even more harmful.

As young people transition from adolescence to adulthood, access to food, housing, health care, and income can shape their life trajectories and determine whether they meet their full potential. Despite their resourcefulness and resilience, young people without sufficient income and who cannot rely on family support to meet these basic needs may find safety net programs essential. But many safety net programs—including food, cash, and housing assistance—are not set up to accommodate young people's development stage or life circumstances, such as instability in living arrangements or limited access to personal documentation.

Individuals and organizations that connect people with safety net programs can take the following steps to better help young people access and navigate these supports and set them up for long-term success in life.

**SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE IN NAVIGATING SAFETY NET PROCESSES**

- **Designate staff who work specifically with young people** and who understand the unique challenges they face.
- **Invest in peer support networks** to leverage the expertise of other young people or slightly older adults who have navigated these programs.
- **Conduct youth-focused outreach** by working with young people to reach out to their peers, using social media, and working with trusted intermediaries.
- **Connect with other organizations** that offer different services to create a mobile app, database, map, or pamphlet that shows where to get help.
- **Guide young people** in understanding and complying with programs by explaining application questions and program requirements and helping them obtain and safely store personal documents such as birth certificates and social security cards.

**KEY CHALLENGES YOUNG PEOPLE FACE IN ACCESSING SAFETY NET SUPPORTS**

Safety net policies and practices do not reflect young people's needs. It is hard for young people to know what benefits exist or how to access them. Application processes are complicated and difficult to manage. Safety net policies and processes do not recognize the developmental and life stage realities of young people. Safety net programs do not sufficiently recognize mental health issues.
EMPOWER AND SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISIONMAKING
- Teach young people how to navigate the system and fill out an application, rather than doing it all for them.
- Include young people in the decisionmaking process about your efforts to support young people’s access to safety net benefits.
- Treat young people as collaborators with important perspectives, and respect and listen to their advice.

BUILD RESPECTFUL AND TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE
- Make sure staff members working with young people show respect, empathy, and genuine care for their growth.
- Recognize the importance of mental health and trauma-informed services. Approach young people’s needs holistically, and help them access mental health resources.
- Build systems of mutual trust and relationship-building that support young people, even when they make mistakes. Apply harm-reduction approaches that lessen social or physical consequences and ensure young people feel safe and respected.

ADDITIONAL READING
REPORT
Young People’s Lived Experiences with Safety Net Programs: Insights from Young People and Youth-Serving Organizations
Heather Hahn, Lauren Farrell, Amelia Coffey, and Gina Adams https://urbn.is/3lr0rnA

BRIEF
Stabilizing Young People Transitioning to Adulthood: Opportunities and Challenges with Key Safety Net Programs
Gina Adams, Heather Hahn, and Amelia Coffey https://urbn.is/3tnRCxc

ADDITIONAL PROJECT RESOURCES
Young People and the Safety Net https://urbn.is/3DhNfYl