



# YOUNG ADULT EVICTION PREVENTION PROJECT

King County Bar Association's Housing Justice Project  
University of Washington's eScience Institute  
Legal Counsel for Youth and Children  
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# Young Adult Eviction Prevention Project: Executive Summary

In early 2019, the Raikes Foundation awarded planning grants to the Housing Justice Project (HJP), Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC), and the University of Washington's eScience Institute (UW), respectively. The planning grants aimed to bring together the three grantees ("Project Partners") to learn more about the intersection and experiences of young adults (ages 18-24) with eviction and how to best combine resources, connections, and areas of expertise to ensure that more young adults timely connect to legal advocacy to address housing law issues through the Home Base<sup>1</sup> eviction prevention initiative in King County, Washington.

The project's *Main Goals* included: (1) Develop a research plan to build understanding of the rate and experiences of young adults facing evictions, as well as the outcomes related to an HJP/LCYC service partnership; (2) Design a partnership model that combines HJP's court availability and expertise in housing law with LCYC's youth-centered, community-based legal services for young adults; and, (3) Connect with young adult service providers and young adults with lived experience to inform the research and service plan.

The project's *Key Learning Questions* included: (1) How can we best ascertain the number of young adults impacted by the eviction process when they often do not come to court or access legal services?; (2) How can HJP and LCYC best meld their models and areas of expertise resulting in an efficient use of resources and legal advocacy services that are easily accessible, holistic, and supportive of young adults?; and, (3) How can we best assess the effectiveness of an HJP and LCYC partnership?

## Data: Young Adults & Eviction

Existing eviction data through court records is severely limited in demographic detail. Both the State and County level court data has no information on age, race, or gender, making it impossible to determine exactly how many youth or young adults are facing eviction proceedings in court and whether subpopulations of youth and young adults are overrepresented in those proceedings.

Based on data that *is* accessible and provided by HJP, the Evictions Study for Washington State,<sup>2</sup> and US Census Data between 2013 and 2017,<sup>3</sup> the University of Washington estimates that the eviction filing rate among renters between the ages of 15 and 24 in King County is roughly 4.1%. In other words, roughly 4.1% of youth and young adult renters in King County face eviction proceedings in court.

Assuming that HJP's service record is demographically representative of the full population of eviction filings, we estimate that there were **roughly 1,297 eviction filings in King County for tenants between the ages of 15 and 24 between 2013 and 2017.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uwkc.org/fighting-homelessness/home-base/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://evictions.study>.

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau "ACS 2017 5yr, Table B25007. Tenure by Age of Householder." Social Explorer. Web. Sep. 16, 2019.

HJP estimates that roughly 100 young adults access services through HJP each year. Given the University of Washington’s eviction filing estimate, we would hope that HJP would see far more young adults accessing its services for eviction prevention support.

Through this work, the Project Partners aimed to better understand the barriers young adults experience in accessing HJP services and, ideally, create a program that would help young adults connect with HJP’s critical legal aid services and maintain their tenancy.

## Findings

The Project Partners hosted two focus groups—one with over a dozen representatives from social service agencies and the other with young adults and staff at The Mockingbird Society—to learn more about young adults’ experiences with eviction and how to better meet their needs regarding eviction.

The focus groups provided the following high-level feedback that inform the Project Partners recommendations below (a more comprehensive overview can be found in the full report):

- Many young adults are overwhelmed by the legal complexities involved in becoming a tenant, and they do not always understand their tenant rights and responsibilities, actions landlords can take against them, or the long-term consequences of those actions.
- Young adult tenants would like to have more financial literacy so they can maintain their tenancy.
- Young adults would like an advocate to walk alongside them as they become tenants (when signing a lease) and when they are facing challenges with a landlord (upon receiving a 14-day pay or vacate notice and through the show-cause hearing for eviction).
- Young adults want to access legal support, but find the current structures inaccessible: the hours are limited to the school and work day; the response time between when young people reach out for help is too slow or not responsive to their specific needs; services are not always available in multiple languages; services available only in the courthouse setting are not welcoming to young people; transportation to courthouse-based services can create a barrier for young people; and, the legal profession lacks the diversity of the client population that makes young adults feel welcomed to receive support.
- Young adults have a strong desire to self-advocate regarding landlord-tenant issues, but they need more real-time and developmentally appropriate education and advocacy materials to do so confidently and effectively.
- Young adults and service providers wish that support could be provided more holistically and earlier in the life of a young person—not just when they are facing eviction—as eviction is often a symptom of other issues: job loss, mental health, substance use disorder, etc. Current eviction support is not a true “prevention” program.



## Recommendations

The Project Partners recommend building a legal services model that marries HJP's housing and eviction expertise and pro bono attorney network with LCYC's community-based legal services and extensive experience representing youth and young adults. The Project Partners believe that bringing these components together will better serve young adults who may face eviction and are, thus, at risk of homelessness. The Project Partners support a program that:

1. Provides **holistic, youth-centered, community-based, legal services** to young adults who are at risk of experiencing homelessness due to landlord-tenant or eviction issues. The direct legal services provided would be both front-end (prevention) focused, as well as crisis (intervention) focused. This work would involve, among other things:
  - Creating an interagency referral system between LCYC and HJP to ensure all of the young person's legal needs are met.
  - Coordinating outreach and service delivery with local service providers to timely engage with young people in need and ensure their legal and non-legal needs are met.
  - Providing regular and ongoing training to youth and young adult service providers on how to issue spot potential drivers of eviction so that providers can timely connect young people with HJP so the tenancy can be maintained.
  - Providing direct legal counsel and advice to young adults on housing law and tenant rights before they sign a lease.
  - Engaging in mediation or negotiations with landlords who allege that young adults have violated the terms of a lease and are threatening the young adult with eviction.
  - Providing direct representation to young adults in eviction proceedings, as well as other civil legal aid matters including orders of protection, public benefits, restitution, court fees, medical debt, and other matters.
  - Ensuring that young adults are timely connected with Home Base so they can obtain funding to maintain their tenancy.
  
2. Develops and broadly distributes **youth-informed educational resources** aimed to increase young people's legal literacy on tenant rights and responsibilities, landlord duties, and eviction law.

The Project Partners suggest this work be accomplished through a staffing model of 1.0 FTE within HJP and 0.8 FTE within LCYC. Also, the University of Washington has independently created suggestions for supplementary research on improving access to available housing resources for both social workers and their young adult clients.

# Young Adult Eviction Prevention Project

## Background & Report Development

In early 2019, the Raikes Foundation awarded planning grants to the Housing Justice Project (HJP), Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC), and the University of Washington's eScience Institute (UW), respectively. The planning grants aimed to bring together the three grantees to learn more about the intersection and experiences of young adults (ages 18-24) with eviction and how to best combine resources, connections, and areas of expertise to ensure that more young adults timely connect to legal advocacy to address housing law issues through the Home Base<sup>4</sup> eviction prevention initiative in King County, Washington.

The project's *Main Goals* included:

1. Develop a research plan to build understanding of the rate and experiences of young adults facing evictions, as well as the outcomes related to an HJP/LCYC service partnership.
2. Design a partnership model that combines HJP's court availability and expertise in housing law with LCYC's youth-centered, community-based legal services for young adults.
3. Connect with young adult service providers and young adults with lived experience to inform the research and service plan.

The project's *Key Learning Questions* included:

1. How can we best ascertain the number of young adults impacted by the eviction process when they often do not come to court or access legal services?
2. How can HJP and LCYC best meld their models and areas of expertise resulting in an efficient use of resources and legal advocacy services that are easily accessible, holistic, and supportive of young adults?
3. How can we best assess the effectiveness of an HJP and LCYC partnership?

To inform our work and this report, the three grantees ("Project Partners") met monthly to discuss data and develop a research plan for engaging with young adults with lived experience and service providers regarding young adults' experiences with eviction. The Project Partners also communicated regularly by phone and email to stay updated on the project's progress and learning moments.

## Focus Groups

The Project Partners hosted two focus groups to learn more about young adults' experiences with eviction and how to better meet young adults' needs regarding eviction.

About 20 individuals who work at nonprofit housing, homelessness, and behavioral health agencies that serve young adults attended a focus group on August 5, 2019. Attendees included representatives from New Horizons, InterImCDA, Nexus Youth and Families, Accelerator YMCA, ROOTS Young Adult Shelter, Kent Youth and Family Services, FareStart, Lifewire, Friends of Youth, Youth Eastside Services,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uwkc.org/fighting-homelessness/home-base/>

YouthCare, PSKS, Atlantic Street Center, The Africatown Center, and the University of Washington School of Social Work.

Seven young adults and young adult staff members from The Mockingbird Society attended a focus group on August 15, 2019, where the conversation focused on young adults' experiences, as tenants and with the eviction process.

Learnings from our focus groups are outlined in the report that follows.

Recommendations and potential next steps were informed by what the Project Partners heard from young adults and services providers that work with young adults, as well as our collective expertise in housing, homelessness, legal services, and working with young adults.

## Young Adult Eviction: What We *Think* We Know

One of this project’s key learning questions was: How can we best ascertain the number of young adults impacted by the eviction process when they often do not come to court or access legal services?

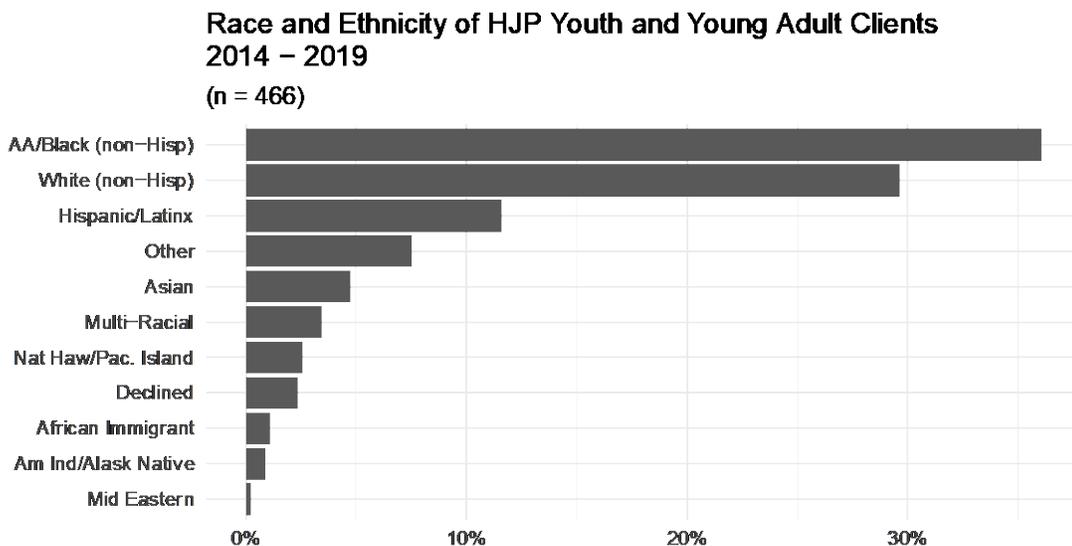
### Eviction Data

Existing eviction data is severely limited in demographic detail. The Washington State Courts track the names by party (e.g. defendant, plaintiff, attorney) involved in an unlawful detainer court case and the outcome of the case. The County Clerks hold the actual court records in electronic format. Both the State and County level data have no information on age, race, or gender making it impossible to determine how many youth or young adults are facing eviction from these data. However, administrative data from HJP and LCYC provide a rich, and representative narrative of the state of evictions for youth and young adults.

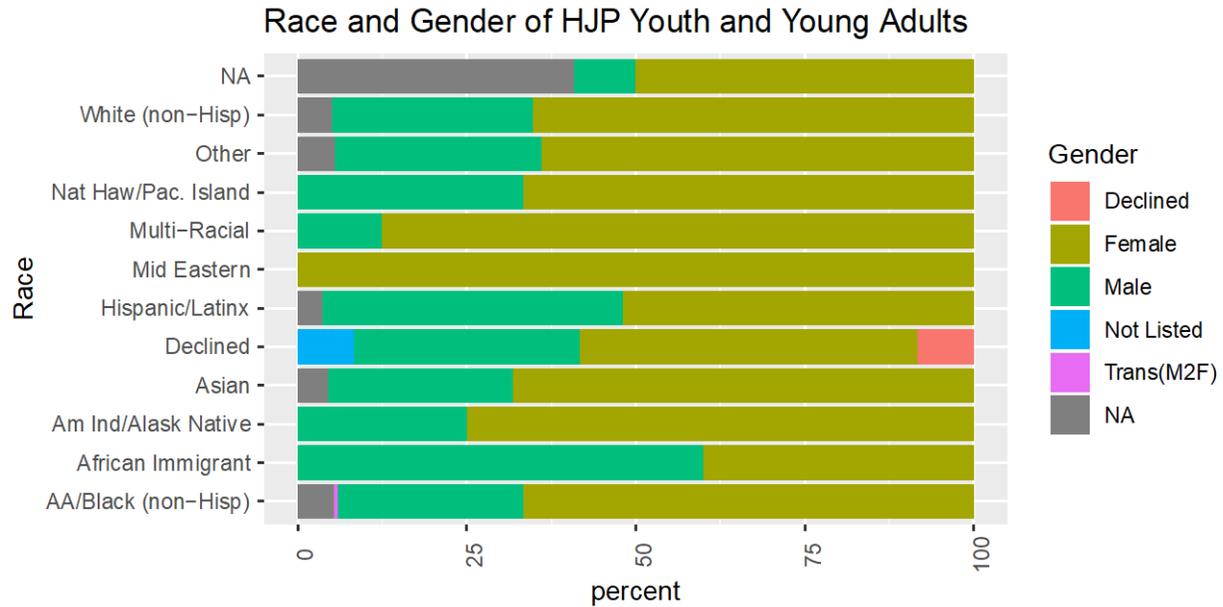
### HJP Data & Anecdotal Information

Between January 2014 and March 2019, 480 young adults visited the HJP, an average of close to 100 young adults each year. Most young adults accessing HJP are older—close to half of all young adult tenants served by HJP are 23 or 24 years old.

Most young adult tenants accessing HJP services are from Seattle, Kent, Renton, and Federal Way: 355 out of 480 young adults are from one of these four cities. Young adult female-headed households are more frequently accessing HJP than male-headed households: 308 female-headed households versus 141 male-headed households. Almost half of young adult households had children under 18 in the home with them (202). These children could be the children or dependents of the young adult head-of-household, or rather could be other relatives or roommates. Roughly 466 young adults identified their race and/or ethnicity with 36% identifying as African American (n = 168).



Data: The Housing Justice Project.  
Produced by Tim Thomas – University of Washington



Based on data provided by HJP, the Evictions Study for Washington State,<sup>5</sup> and US Census Data between 2013 and 2017<sup>6</sup> the University of Washington estimates that the eviction filing rate among renters between the ages of 15 and 24 in King County is roughly 4.1%. This estimate assumes that HJP’s data is representative of the population of eviction filings. Between 2013 and 2017, 3.7% (n = 31,649) of all King County renters (N = 362, 523) were between the ages of 15 and 24. During that same 5-year period, there were 24,467 eviction filings, which comes to an eviction filing rate of 6.7%. Between 2013 and 2017, HJP served about 8,609 households,<sup>7</sup> of which, roughly 456 (5.2%) households were between the ages of 15 to 24. Assuming that HJP’s service record is demographically representative of the full population of eviction filings, we estimate that there were roughly 1,297 eviction filings in King County for tenants between the ages of 15 and 24. This produces our eviction filing rate of 4.1% (1296.71 filings/31,649 yya tenants).

#### *HJP & Home Base*

Since Home Base started in April 2019, HJP has served 1,243 households—523 of these households received *financial assistance* through Home Base. Of the 1,243 households served by HJP, 64 had a young adult as head of household, and of these 64 households, 30 received financial assistance from Home Base.

Thus, of the 523 households that received financial assistance from Home Base since April 2019, 30 were headed by a young adult.

In the first quarter of Home Base’s operations, the average payment per household was \$3,608.79 and \$1,459.55 per person.

<sup>5</sup> <https://evictions.study>.

<sup>6</sup> US Census Bureau “ACS 2017 5yr, Table B25007. Tenure by Age of Householder.” Social Explorer. Web. Sep. 16, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> HJP’s data is most complete between 2014 and 2018. To compare these counts to the ACS 5-year period between 2013 and 2017, we estimate 2013’s service counts as the average HJP service count from 2014 to 2017 (6887/4 = 1721.75).

*Circumstances: Why are young adults facing eviction?*

In HJP's experience, most eviction cases are about nonpayment of rent, for both the general population and for young adults. Below are several themes that stand out as central causes of eviction for the young adults accessing HJP. The quotes below were gathered from the HJP legal assistants and/or attorneys, further explaining the various situations which led to the young adult facing eviction.

EMPLOYMENT

Job loss, underemployment, and transitioning to a new job can lead to young tenants falling behind on their rent and facing eviction. Many young adults described situations where, after losing a job and experiencing unemployment, they were able to find a new job, but had fallen behind in the meantime and could not get caught up before their landlord started the eviction process.

*"Tenant lost job and could not pay rent, got a part time job that did not pay all the time. Recently hired on with Starbucks and has been able to get caught up on rent. The eviction process started about the time she was hired at Starbucks."*

Pregnancy and children's health issues also lead to job loss, and therefore nonpayment of rent and eviction.

*"Tenant wasn't able to pay rent because she is pregnant and hasn't been able to work."*

*"Tenant gave birth in February and she has been suffering from postpartum depression since."*

*"Child has cerebral palsy and surgery was expensive, lost job because needed to take time off, and hasn't paid rent for two months."*



Injury and physical and mental illness also lead to job loss and difficulties paying rent.

*"In car crash, unable to work for six months."*

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence can present a variety of issues for young adult tenants—landlords become unwilling to work with a tenant in this situation, or the loss of a partner who was paying half the rent makes the unit become unaffordable.

*"Client experienced domestic violence, her ex-partner was coming around to the house looking for her. She has a restraining order. [Non-profit organization] was trying to pay her October rent, and the landlord refused to communicate with both (non-profit organization) and with client."*

*"Domestic violence present, abuser was living with her and paying part of the rent but left in January after leaving two fist-shaped holes in the wall."*

#### UNAUTHORIZED GUESTS & SUBLEASING

Young adult tenants can face eviction due to issues with subleasing and unauthorized guests. Tenants have run into problems both as the sub-lessor, and as the tenant subletting the unit. One tenant came to the HJP when they were “renting the home from the leaser who failed to pay rent to the landlord.” Tenants have also found themselves facing eviction when having guests, or being suspected of having guests, who were not authorized by their landlord.

*“Landlord requested proof that her partner does not reside/stay on premises. Client provided letter requested to show he lived elsewhere. Landlord did not accept clients’ letter as proof that he was not residing with her.”*

#### FIRST-TIME RENTER ISSUES

Many young adult tenants who access HJP are first-time renters, and therefore might not be familiar with their rights and responsibilities as renters.

*“Tenant was on 1-year written lease for his first apartment. He lost his job, but was worried about paying rent on time. He told landlord and roommates. He was told to leave within 2 days and locks were changed.”*

*“This is tenant’s first apartment and she has had difficulty understanding and planning her budget for herself and her 2 young daughters... tenant does not dispute that there has been an outstanding balance throughout the tenancy and tenant has been confused by the ‘snowball effect’ of the reoccurring late fees.”*

#### ROOMMATE ISSUES

Many young adult tenants live with roommates, which can lead to rent disputes and other eviction-related issues.

*“Tenant lives with other roommates where some have paid their share and some did not, causing the issue of the nonpayment of rent.”*

*“One of tenant’s roommates moved out, making it hard for him to pay rent.”*

#### OTHER REASONS

There are many reasons why a young adult tenant might find themselves facing eviction. In addition to the reasons listed above, young adults have accessed the HJP when facing eviction due to landlord retaliation, suffering financially after being the victim of theft, involvement with the criminal justice system, having issues with housing subsidies and programs, and withholding rent due to habitability issues.

#### LCYC Data

LCYC provides direct legal services to over 600 young people in King County on an annual basis through four main programs: child welfare, juvenile court, youth and family immigration, and youth homelessness. LCYC’s Youth Homelessness Program is youth-centered and community-based. LCYC has created strong partnerships with local schools, youth shelters, juvenile court, and service providers to

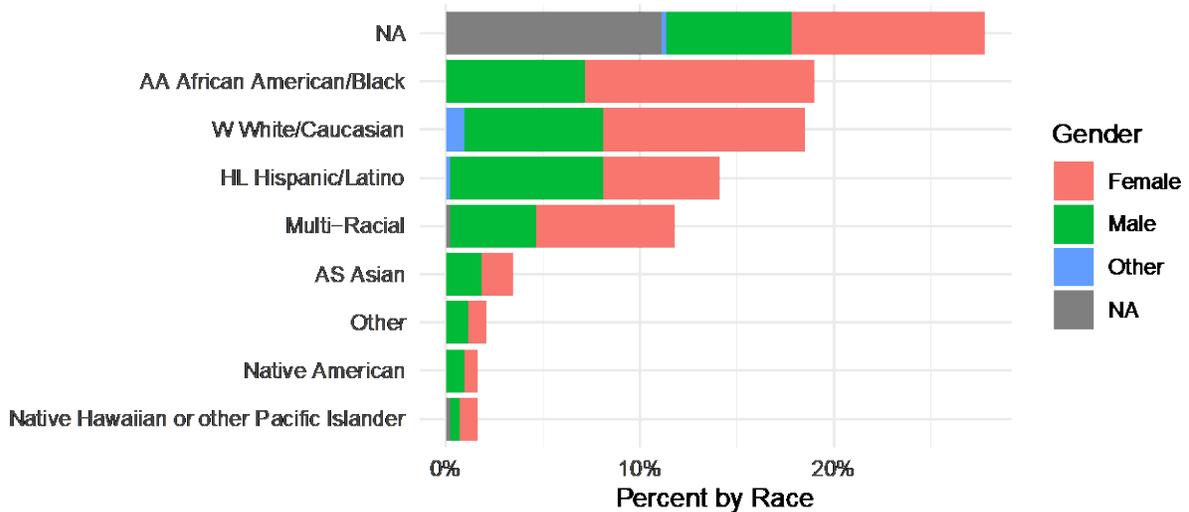
help increase the community’s legal literacy and provide timely, accessible legal services to young people, ages 12 – 24 years, who are or are at risk of experiencing homelessness in King County.

LCYC captures well over 250 variables for its clients including demographics, referral services, economics, family and housing conditions, and legal records. This bevy of detail provides an incredibly comprehensive look into youth and young adult experiences and conditions that relate to homelessness.

Between July 2016 and mid-September 2019, LCYC served 425 unique clients through its Youth Homelessness Program. From January through August 2019, 143 young people were referred to LCYC’s Youth Homelessness Program, and a record number of 33 referrals were submitted during the month of August 2019. Of the 143 referrals in 2019, 12 were self-referrals—the remaining 131 youth were connected to LCYC through a community partner such as Seattle Public Schools, juvenile court professionals, youth shelters, outreach centers, and other service providers.

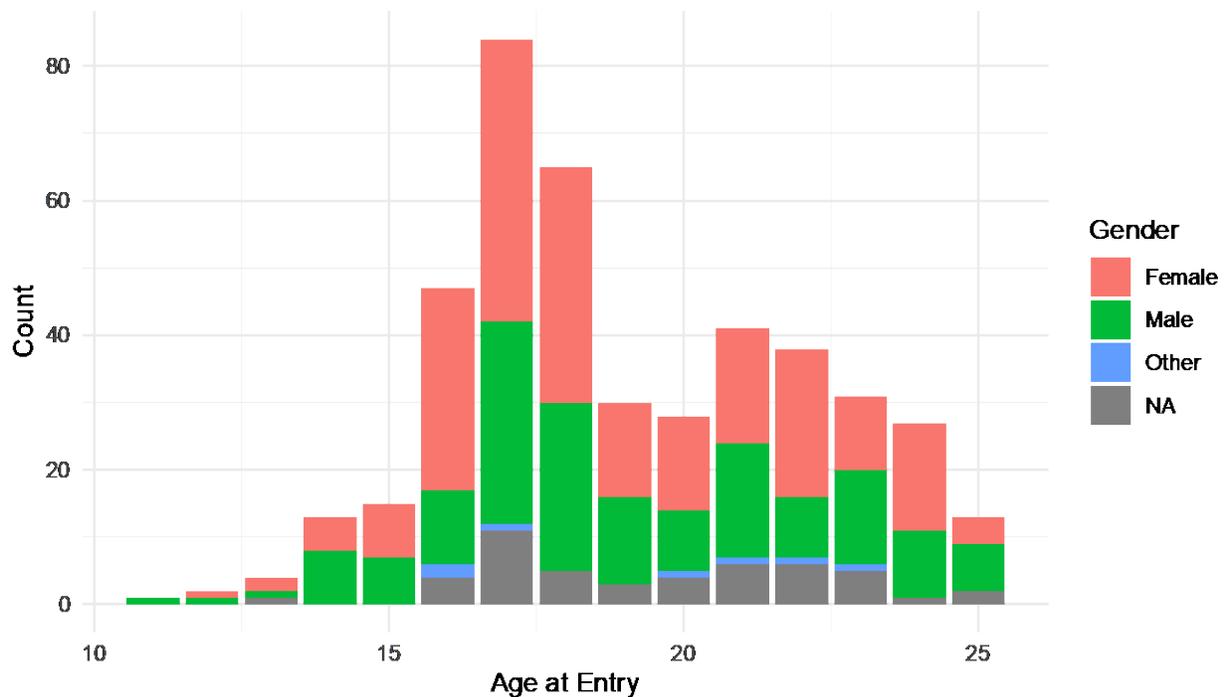
Of the young people LCYC has served who identified their race or ethnicity, the majority of young people were African American/Black (19%), White/Caucasian (18.5%), Latinx (14.1%), and multi-racial (11.8%). Asian, Native American, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander consist of less than 10% of young people served. The majority of LCYC’s clients identified as female (48.8%), while 38% identified as male, 1.4% as other, and 11.7% did not reply. The bar graph below (Figure 3) shows the breakdown of young people served through LCYC’s Youth Homelessness Program by race, ethnicity, and the respective gender identity breakdown within each category.

**Figure 3. Young People Served through LCYC’s Youth Homelessness Program by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender**



About 44.6% of those served through LCYC’s Youth Homelessness Program are between the ages of 16 and 18 at the time of entry. A majority of this group identify as female. About 25% are between the ages of 21 and 23 with a more even distribution of males and females.

**Figure 4. LCYC Age at Intake Distribution Broken Down by Gender**



Roughly 18% of young people served through LCYC’s Youth Homelessness Program self-identify as LGBTQ+. Over a third of young people served reported experiencing homelessness previously with their families, about 19% of those young people identified as White/Caucasian. Data collected by LCYC, based on reports from young people, also reflect crossover between child welfare, juvenile and criminal justice systems, and homelessness. Young people also reported a variety of challenges within their primary family homes such as substance abuse, unemployment, and domestic violence.

**LCYC CLIENTS FACE MULTIPLE LEGAL ISSUES**

In addition to the public and nonprofit systems young people must navigate, and the family challenges they face, most young people served by LCYC’s Youth Homelessness Program also face multiple legal issues. MEMConsultant’s independent evaluation of LCYC’s Youth Homelessness Program determined that young people faced:

*...an average of 2.4 legal issues. The most common legal issues were education, family law, housing, emancipation, and public benefits. The 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update, focusing on people 18 years and older, found that the average low-income household in the state of Washington faces an average of 9.3 legal problems.*

LCYC attorneys assist young adults with a variety of civil legal needs such as housing, family law, public benefits, warrants, orders of protection, gender and name changes, identification documents, medical debt, and identity theft. LCYC also partners closely with Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and Kids in Need of Defense to support young people seeking to change their immigration status.

# Focus Group Feedback

## Perspectives on Young Adult Eviction Causes

We asked attendees what their beliefs and experiences are around:

1. What causes young adults to get evicted?
2. Are there shared characteristics of young adults who get evicted?

The attendees provided perspectives on what causes eviction:



## Young Adults' Perspectives

- For young adults who participate in subsidized housing programs:
  - Landlords (LLs) or property management companies do not understand requirements of housing programs and pester young adults about the program they participate in. LLs distrust young adults in these programs and initiate eviction process for otherwise minor lease violations.
  - Housing program case managers or housing authorities who hold the voucher have poor relationships with private LLs. Young adults are on receiving end of that challenging relationship, and LLs initiate eviction process for otherwise minor lease violations.
- For young adults who live in housing that is managed by a property management company rather than an individual LL:
  - When young adults cannot form direct relationships with their LL, the property management company blames young adults for things that may be a neighbors' issue or other tenants in the same unit. No relationship with the LL means that young adults do not have the ability to communicate directly when things go wrong.
  - Information communicated by the property management company to LL is not always accurate and does not include young person's story, but LL is the one who initiates eviction proceedings based on what property management company staff report.
- Some young adult tenants do not have enough knowledge about tenant rights or responsibilities, and eviction becomes more likely.
  - Lack of knowledge is often due to LLs / property management company failing to present renter rights documents upon moving in. Tenants who do not know enough benefits the LL, and the LL / company intentionally keep the young person uninformed.
  - Even when provided tenant rights documents, these are long documents that include complex legal issues that young adults often do not understand. Tenants get overwhelmed with information and may not read the fine print—LLs take advantage of young adults' lack of renter experience.
  - LLs add fees without young adults knowing about it and knowing young adults may not fight it or know how to fight it. Unpaid fees lead to eviction.

- Some young adult tenants do not have enough financial literacy to maintain tenancy, and eviction becomes more likely.

*Additional note from young adults: LLs who know when a tenant is undocumented use that as a threat against the young person. LLs know undocumented young adults may be afraid of presenting themselves for services when they need help or face eviction.*

## Social Service Provider Perspectives

The providers offered the following perspectives on common causes of eviction among young adults:

- For young adults who are parenting as a couple, if one parent leaves the home or the relationship ends, the remaining parent cannot afford rent and is threatened with eviction.
- For young couples, if one person has a history of eviction or criminal record and a landlord will not approve them, the “eligible” partner signs the lease and the “ineligible” partner becomes an unauthorized tenant, and LL initiates eviction.
- Overly “present” LLs keep a close watch on young adults and identify otherwise benign housekeeping concerns to initiate eviction.
- Young adults are often overly generous by inviting friends who are experiencing homelessness or unstable housing to stay with them—multiple people living in the unit but are not on the lease triggers eviction.
- Young adults often do not understand their tenant rights or tenant resources, resulting in small issues becoming bigger issues.
- For young adults who have a criminal record and would otherwise be prohibited from re-joining their family, if the family makes the choice to allow them to re-enter the home, a LL may initiate eviction.



Providers also identified the following “shared characteristics” among the young adults they work with who have faced eviction:

- Majority youth of color.
- Majority are parenting.
- Young adults who struggle with substance use disorders. Absent adequate support, employment is jeopardized, and eviction is triggered.

## Perspectives on Existing Resources to Support Young Adults Facing Eviction

We asked attendees what existing resources are available to young adults to prevent eviction when they receive notice. Below is what young adults and service providers shared.

### Young Adults' Perspectives

- Young adults expressed that while they have heard about emergency eviction prevention funds, many young people do not know how to access those funds or what agencies administer them. They also shared that they do not feel calling 2-1-1 (a free confidential community service to help connect people with local services) is helpful to answer these types of questions.
- Young adults shared that they rely on the internet and social media to find resources regarding housing and eviction support. Specifically, they shared that they use Google to find resources or post on personal social media pages to: fundraise to help with rental costs / eviction prevention costs; crowdsource for information about where to look for help; or ask friends for places to stay if they get evicted.
- Young adults also reported looking to previous foster parents, DCYF social workers, and Employee Assistance Programs (if they are employed and are offered this program).

*We also asked young adults if they knew about the Housing Justice Project and the services it provides. The answer was a collective "no."*

### Social Service Provider Perspectives

- Providers expressed frustration that they can only offer financial support once a young person is given notice to pay or vacate their unit or when they receive a court summons for eviction. Providers added that this is **far too late** in the process, even if the young person and the provider knew 6-8 weeks before that the tenancy was at risk. There is **no financial resource** available to support young adult clients who are not currently but will inevitably face eviction.
  - The only exception to the inability to offer early financial support was to young adults who may meet some specific eligibility category (for example, a young person who is fleeing domestic violence).
- Providers noted that the lifetime maximum for financial support to young adults can be challenging given the high costs of living in King County. For example, one program can offer young adults \$2,300 over a lifetime, but that may not be enough to maintain the tenancy if there are fines and fees added on.
- Providers shared that the definitions around who they can help and when they can help them create confusion among programs. Some programs can only help young adults who are literally homeless, while others can help young adults who are imminently at risk of homelessness. This results in providers referring young adults to different programs when they wish they could just serve them at their own program and where the young person has an already-established relationship.
- With all the barriers to accessing eviction support early on, young adults lose momentum and hope and just stop trying to access support. They will leave the tenancy voluntarily or just deal with the eviction.

- Transportation is always a barrier for young adults, whether it is meeting an advocate or social service provider in the community or meeting a lawyer at the courthouse.
- Young adults typically want an advocate or case manager with whom they have an existing relationship to attend court with them. Advocates or case managers do not have the capacity to do that, especially when the meeting or court date is on short notice.
- Courthouses and lawyers are intimidating, and young adults typically have not had positive prior experiences in those places or with those professionals.
- Clinic hours for eviction support are challenging for young adults: restrictive hours during school or the workday, no childcare for young adults who are parents, etc.
- Working with an attorney can be challenging if the attorney is not used to working with young adults.
- Providers admitted there exists confusion and a lack of clarity around eligibility for certain resources, especially when it comes to serving young adults who are undocumented.
  - There is a need for a centralized website, database, or regularly updated matrix that providers can easily access to identify the various eviction support resources for young adults and corresponding eligibility requirements.
- Resources outside of King County are needed. Many young adults who have worked with housing case managers for years in King County are leaving King due to high cost of living. They become ineligible for resources when they move, but they still need them.

*We also asked service providers if they knew about the Housing Justice Project and its free legal services. The majority of providers in the room were not familiar with HJP. Service providers that did know of HJP, indicated that only a handful of young adults they worked had accessed HJP's legal services.*

## Perspectives on What an Ideal Legal Services Program for Young Adults Should Look Like

We asked attendees what an ideal legal services program for young adults should look like in addressing evictions. We asked them to also identify partners necessary to supporting the success of the model, and barriers young adults face that the program should address.

Below is what young adults and service providers shared.

### Young Adults' Perspectives

Reflections on previous experiences with lawyers:

- Too often lawyers will tell young adults to “just pay” even when they do not have money to do so or do not think they engaged in any wrongdoing and should have to pay.
- It is a “luck of the draw” on whether you get a good lawyer who knows how to work with young adults and understands the issues they face.

Reflections on what young adults need from a legal services model and in interactions with a lawyer:

- Need to work with someone who is knowledgeable about LL-tenant law, including low income housing program requirements that are designed to serve young people (Rapid Re-housing programs; Extended Foster Care; etc.).

- Need someone who is willing to “interpret” complex court documents into developmentally appropriate and thoughtful language.
- It would be ideal for young people to be able to connect with a lawyer at the 14-day notice point—young adults cannot wait until the court date to understand what is going to happen to their housing. **Quick response time** from a legal advocate who understands the process is critical.
- The fact that legal services are only available during limited clinic hours at the courthouse does not work for young adults. Clinic hours and support services need to be more accessible in every way: evening hours, weekend contact, and multilingual.
- The first meeting with a lawyer should NOT be at the courthouse. Young adults need to build trust with their advocate, which cannot happen for the first time at the courthouse.
  - This is especially true for undocumented young adults who do not feel safe going to the courthouse, even if it is to meet with a lawyer.
- Young adults need to know what documents to bring to court if they end up needing to appear. Lawyers need to know how to communicate with young adults about what to bring.
  - It is important for lawyers to understand that young adults who have been system involved might not have the necessary documents—transient in nature, disruptive, etc., means lack of access to documents or unable to obtain in timely manner.
- Young adults may not feel comfortable meeting alone with a lawyer. It is ideal for a young person to have a case manager, social worker, or other advocate with whom they have an existing relationship go to court with them and help bridge the gap between the lawyer, court process, and young person.
- All documents, including 14-day notice and summons, should be translated into multiple languages—accessibility is critical, and it is not accessible right now. Documents provided to young adults need to be in “non-lawyer language.”
- Young adults often need transportation support to meet with a lawyer or to get to court.



### Social Service Provider Perspectives

- To prevent young adults from getting to the point of eviction, we need a more proactive system, perhaps a community-based case manager, mediator, etc., that understands the legal system to be available to young adults who can negotiate or mediate between a young person and a LL. Work to build the relationship between the tenant and the LL.

- Once a young person is at imminent risk of eviction, there needs to be a **very responsive resource** for young adults—they need to be able to call or meet with someone ASAP upon receiving 14-day notice and/or summons.
  - Limited clinic hours on weekdays when young adults are at work or school is not ideal.
  - Meeting at courthouse is not ideal.
  - Explore phone or online support in addition to in-person meetings.
- Any legal services response system needs to be community-based—embedded within existing agencies where young adults are already receiving services. “In-house” attorneys would be great for both young adults and service providers who need to better understand the legal system generally.
  - Requiring young adults to go “one more place” to access legal services creates barriers for them to actually receive the help they need.
- Legal services staff need to be proactive in prevention outreach to young adults who are already on the rosters of housing programs.
- Legal services staff need to reflect the populations who are more likely to be evicted, particularly people of color.
- Legal services staff need to be able to serve non-English speakers, such as bilingual staff access to interpreters.
- Best for legal services staff to be mobile, meeting young adults where they are located. If not possible, young adults need assistance with transportation to meet with legal services staff.
- Young adults will often need childcare to meet with legal services staff. Find a place to meet that offers childcare or where the young person can keep their child with them.
- Young adults and social service providers need support during the lease signing phase of the tenancy—lawyers available during that early phase not only helps build positive relationships with lawyers, but also sets tenant expectations for young adults and case managers working with them.

## Perspectives on Upstream & Ongoing Tenant & Eviction Education

We asked attendees what upstream and ongoing tenant and eviction education should look like for young adults, including what curriculum or materials should be developed that will support young adults.

Below is what young adults and service providers shared.

### Young Adults’ Perspectives

- Young adults need resources via an app or available online—specifically on social media—where they can learn about tenant rights, responsibilities, resources to obtain and maintain tenancy, and emergency eviction support and resources.
  - Facebook ads
  - Instagram stories
  - Q&A style
  - Advocacy advice: how to self-advocate
  - Live feeds and permanent stories re: “I’m about to be evicted” (for example)
  - Financial support resources for young adults to access

- In multiple languages
  - Training and education focused
- Podcasts about housing, tenancy, etc.—from the perspective of young adults meant for young adults
- Need something that is quick and easy to read: refrigerator magnet, laminated card by front door, etc.
- Work with LLs to learn how to better engage with young adults. LLs should hear from young adults what they need regarding tenant rights and responsibilities.
- Housing agency staff need training and resource knowledge too—case managers should have knowledge about legal process young adults may face. Routinely check-in with young adults re: housing stability and knowledge of their rights.
- Peer Mentors for young adults who are housed—create networks for young adults in housing (tenant rights meetings, etc).
- Encourage young adults to get engaged in tenant unions.
- Get into the schools early: seniors in HS; seniors in college; community college—incentivize housing classes to help bridge the transition.

*Note: Whatever resources are developed should be informed by what Coordinated Care has done—great resources for young adults, great ability to reach young adults.*

### Social Service Provider Perspectives

- Resources available online and/or social media—put resources where young adults are already spending their time.
  - 90-second YouTube videos with content-specific topics (i.e., “I got a 14-day notice;” “I got a summons for eviction,” “My Landlord is threatening me with eviction,” etc.).
  - A separate app may not work for young adults—they are already on so many platforms, it may be best to embed the resources in digital spaces they are already accessing.
- Upon move-in, housing case managers should have something to give young adults that has “Just in Case” information regarding tenancy, eviction, etc.
- Social service providers need ongoing education about tenant rights and responsibilities, changes in LL-tenant law.
- Resources need to focus on tenants’ rights and responsibilities as well as financial literacy and budgeting so that young adults can maintain the tenancy.
- Whatever resources are developed, they should be shared broadly—partner with schools to target high school seniors, post-secondary schools and programs, and workforce development programs.
- Education materials should include tools on how to help young adults advocate for themselves with LLs and property management companies.
- Need to work with DCYF to ensure that young adults in Extended Foster Care have access to the resources. Social workers are not as knowledgeable about housing resources, LL-tenant law, eviction law, etc.
  - Work with DCYF on embedding some of this education material within the Independent Living Program, as well as EFC.



## Additional Reflections

- The providers and young adults expressed frustration that the discussion was focused on the very end of a long process—eviction is a symptom of other issues: job loss, mental health, substance use disorders, etc. Addressing eviction in court feels like just another “Band-Aid” on larger social issues. Providers and young adults encourage funders (public and private) to look at addressing larger system issues alongside creating more “prevention” programs.
- Providers and young adults would like to revamp the entire eviction process through the creation of a more human-centered design—mapping how the court system *should* be structured for low income, vulnerable people who are summoned for eviction proceedings.
- Service providers expressed a desire for the legal community to work more intentionally with service provider partners. Providers would love to have more in-house knowledge of recent legislation, etc. Providers can better work with and support young adults if the legal services community is more connected to the provider world.

## Recommendations & Next Steps

The Project Partners recommend the following next steps so our community can take collective action in improving services for young adults, preventing evictions and homelessness in King County.

### Fund a Legal Services Model that Marries HJP's Housing Expertise with LCYC's Community-based Legal Services Team

HJP has a robust team of staff and pro bono attorneys with expertise in housing and eviction law. LCYC has extensive experience representing youth and young adults, and has created a successful, youth-centered, holistic legal services model, which timely engages with young people in crisis in collaboration with community partners. Given the organizations' unique strengths, the Project Partners suggest building a program to:

1. Provide holistic, youth-centered, community-based legal services to young adults who are at risk of experiencing homelessness due to landlord-tenant or eviction issues. The direct legal services provided would be both front-end / prevention focused, as well as crisis / intervention focused;
2. Develop and broadly distribute youth-informed educational resources aimed to increase young people's legal literacy on tenant rights and responsibilities, landlord duties, and eviction law.

The Project Partners suggest this work be accomplished through a staffing model of 1.0 FTE within HJP and 0.8 FTE within LCYC. Additional funding would support the continued engagement of service providers and young people, as well as the development of short films and/or publications on housing law and tenants' rights.

### Direct Legal Services & Service Provider Partnerships

HJP and LCYC will partner to provide holistic, community-based, legal advocacy services to young people. LCYC will play an instrumental role in integrating HJP into the service provider community, which is the main source of referrals for LCYC's Youth Homelessness Program and has increased over time due to the strength of the partnerships: 21 young adults were referred to LCYC in 2016, 29 in 2017, 132 in 2018, and 73 January through August 2019.

LCYC will continue outreach at local youth shelters, outreach centers, and through engagement and education with young adults and providers on legal literacy. LCYC will timely identify and seamlessly connect young people to HJP for housing and/or eviction prevention services, while continuing to work with the young person on other civil legal aid uses such as public benefits, orders of protection, and family law. If a young adult connects with HJP first, HJP can assess whether the young person has other legal needs and refer them to LCYC for timely follow up services. LCYC has a similar cross-referral and joint representation model with Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, enabling young adults struggling with homelessness to more quickly access legal services on immigration issues.

LCYC and HJP will coordinate outreach, cross referrals, and service delivery to ensure the best use of existing resources and timely service, without causing confusion among service providers or young people regarding who they should call for help.

LCYC and HJP will continually connect with service providers to (1) ensure the legal and non-legal needs of young people are met; and (2) engage in presentations or learning circles to increase legal literacy among providers, as well as build attorney awareness of community resources and systemic challenges.

The HJP attorney who is dedicated to serving young adults will go beyond traditional HJP services in terms of the timing and location of services provided. Based on legal needs identified by young adults, the HJP attorney will assist young people at two critical points in the lifetime of their tenancy: (1) on the **front end of obtaining housing** so that they better understand the complex legal documents they are signing and to ensure they are aware of their tenant rights and responsibilities; and (2) at a time **when the tenancy may be at risk of eviction**, including from the time they are contacted by a landlord regarding an alleged lease violation to when they receive a 14-day pay or vacate notice, and through the show-cause hearing if a landlord pursues eviction.

Regarding the direct services work, the HJP attorney will:

- Provide legal counsel and advice to young adults on housing law and tenant rights before they sign a lease.
- Engage in mediation or negotiations with landlords who allege that young adults have violated the terms of a lease and are threatening the young adult with eviction.
- Provide direct representation to young adults in eviction proceedings.
- Ensure that young adults are timely connected with Home Base so they can obtain funding to maintain their tenancy.

The HJP attorney working on the project will provide direct services both at court and in the community, making services more accessible to young people and helping to further build the attorney-client relationship and legal literacy.

### Youth-Informed, Developmentally Appropriate & Accessible Educational Resources

LCYC and HJP will engage with young people, service providers, and public systems of care, to design and widely disseminate educational resources on eviction and housing law with young adults as the intended audience. Young adults will be invited to help develop the resources—identifying legal questions or issues the resources should address—and provide feedback on the format and accessibility. Resources may include one-page checklists, an online guide or PowerPoint, or a collection of short videos that are tailored to young people and accessible through social media or other forums.

HJP's expertise in housing and eviction law will inform the content of the educational resources. LCYC will help organize and engage service providers and young adults to obtain feedback on the resources. LCYC will also help coordinate the dissemination of the materials, with an emphasis on reaching young people and professionals involved in public systems of care: child welfare, juvenile and criminal court, behavioral health, and youth shelters or transitional housing. LCYC has years of experience and extensive connections with government and nongovernment organizations serving young people through these systems of care.

Ideally, both HJP and young people will be involved in launching the educational materials, potentially presenting at statewide trainings, such as the Children's Justice Conference and the Access to Justice Conference.

## Ongoing Young Adult & Provider Engagement

Providers and young people expressed interest in continuing to talk with each other about young adult housing and eviction prevention needs. They specifically asked if the Project Partners could reconvene the group to further discuss the issues raised during focus group sessions and digest what was learned from each other and brainstorm ways to better structure eviction prevention programs.

They also expressed interest in talking directly with funders about how funding requirements create unnecessary confusion, which impacts the young adults who rely on those programs.

The Project Partners suggest the HJP and LCYC partnership host ongoing meetings with housing and homelessness service providers and (separately) with young adults to discuss emergent housing needs, as well as upstream needs so that young adults are provided holistic legal and housing support.

## Evaluating Direct Services & Educational Resources

In regard to the effectiveness of service delivery—including intake and outreach—LCYC regularly engages in dialogue with community partners around what is working and what LCYC should modify. This model of open conversation and willingness to adjust throughout the project would be adopted for HJP and LCYC's joint work with service providers in King County.

LCYC and HJP can review quantitative data and feedback from young people and service providers to assess the success of a direct service partnership. Both organizations can continue to track the number of young people served, demographics, legal issues addressed, and other data points as outlined above. Additionally, HJP and LCYC can further assess how to best blend the information that is separately accessible to each organization. For example, with a signed release of information, LCYC and HJP could share information on clients and review the information as to shared and (anonymous) unshared young adult clients through Excel and Tableau. We would look to see if there are an increased number of referrals and referral sources. Additionally, we can report on the multiple other legal issues that LCYC is able to address for young adults whose housing legal needs are met by HJP. HJP may also consider tracking young adults who received services in understanding their lease agreements and whether those young people return for assistance with evictions. We may need to coordinate with service providers to find out more about young people's housing stability after receiving lease-signing help from HJP.

From an anecdotal perspective, we would aim to increase awareness of HJP's services among young adults and service providers, as well as their literacy around housing law and tenant rights. Increased awareness may occur due to HJP's direct services to young people or HJP's educational resources relied upon by young people and providers.

On a systemic level, we would look for a decrease in the number of young adults facing evictions, an increase in the number of young people connected to HJP to maintain a tenancy at risk of eviction, and a decrease in the number of young people experiencing homelessness within a year after exiting a public system of care due to increased front end support and literacy around tenant rights and housing law. Many factors come into these larger county and state numbers, but LCYC and HJP's project can help tip the scales of justice and housing stability.

## The University of Washington's Supplementary Research Suggestions

The University of Washington is committed to developing research that can identify the prevalence of youth and young adult (YYA) evictions and homelessness as well as provide insight on predictable risk factors that may allow providers to identify immediate risk. We believe that funding HJP's and LCYC's direct service is the most important endeavor from this analysis so that youth and young adults can avoid housing precarity now. Any research done by the UW would largely provide evidence-based research for their efforts, policy reform, or other longer-termed outcomes.

After reviewing data between HJP and LCYC and sitting in on focus groups, we believe there are several long-term research projects that can create an important impact on all individuals facing evictions and homelessness in general.

### Research Towards a Consolidated List of Service Providers & an Interactive Dashboard

One of the common themes raised by service workers and YYA is the extreme difficulty to navigate and access the various agencies with resources available to clients. By and large, time plays a crucial role in helping individuals stay housed. A number of agencies provide financial resources, either through grants or trusts, intended to help individuals experiencing housing precarity. However, to obtain these funds, a client needs to fit a specific set of characteristic or circumstance defined by the specific agency. For example, a client can access funds from one agency if they are under the age of 18, another agency if they are a domestic violence victim, or another agency if they are homeless for a minimum amount of time (e.g. one day). The combination of resources could greatly improve client outcomes; however, these requirements unintentionally increase barriers to accessing resources because service workers (a) may not know all participating agencies and their prerequisites, and (b) are unsure whether the agency's funding is still available for that quarter.

Services like 211 were developed to help navigate these agencies, however, there is a grand consensus among service workers and YYA that 211 fails on several levels—either with long wait times or ineffective guidance. An ideal system would be a limited-barrier provider model, such as HJP's Home Base where the only requirement to receive financial support for an eviction is that you have an unlawful detainer. These systematic barriers ensure that resources are not efficiently distributed to clients and create additional hurdles on the pathway to housing security.

To address this, the UW suggests a two-stage research and development project. First, develop a consolidated and annotated list of service providers, the resources they provide, and the rules they require to access their funding resources. This list would provide immediate benefits to both service workers and clients and would potentially have a substantial impact on reducing homelessness. This list could be created by graduate and undergraduate students, under the supervision of a faculty member, in a department like the School of Social Work, the Evans School of Public Policy, or another social science department that understands low-income services and providers.

Second, this provider list should be transformed into a secure electronic reference database and navigated through an interactive, online dashboard that is accessible to service providers and YYA. This dashboard could take the shape of an online form where a client's anonymous characteristics and circumstances are entered into the system (e.g. age, yes/no DV victim, yes/no homeless, yes/no race and gender, etc.) returning a list of providers that the client should contact given their situation. This dashboard would help optimize the search for resources and greatly reduce the time to receiving

financial support and service. This project should be conducted by a computer science department like the UW's eScience Institute, the iSchool, or another computer science department in collaboration with the department that created the list in the first step.

### Existing Research on Evictions in King County

LOSING HOME: The Human Cost of Eviction in Seattle:

<https://www.kcba.org/Portals/0/pbs/pdf/Losing%20Home%202018.pdf>

The Evictions Study: <https://evictions.study>

Forced Out: Race, Market, and Neighborhood Dynamics of Evictions:

<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/40705>

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