

POINT SOURCE YOUTH

Host Home Handbook

A sustainable guide for
youth-centered implementation



We know deeply that host homes are, at their core, about connecting people with one another and facilitating neighbor-to-neighbor, person-to-person solutions to youth homelessness. There is power and magic in this. The following resources in this handbook are compiled from our partners and build off of the gems and lessons they've learned along their host home journeys. Please use them, adapt them, share them — these resources are now yours, too!

We are grateful to the partners whose work is featured in this Handbook — Hetrick-Martin Institute, SPY, Avenues for Homeless Youth, Second Home, and SHIP of Fredrick County — for their sharing. We also want to take a moment to acknowledge the learning and growing we have done in partnership with host home programs throughout the country. Collaborating in caring community with each person who has dreamed up and implemented host homes strengthens this intervention and keeps it dynamic and responsive. We have everything when we have each other!



Thank you to our national community of host home providers:

Alaska

- Choosing Our Roots – Statewide, Alaska, AK
- Matsu Host Homes - Matanuska Susitna Borough, Alaska AK
- Arizona
- Youth on Their Own, Tucson, AZ

California

- 5 Cities Homeless Coalition, Grover Beach, CA
- SF LGBT Center, San Francisco CA
- SAC LGBT CA
- Home Start - San Diego, CA
- IEHP - San Bernadino, CA
- Jovenes
- Larkin Street Youth Services
- Valley Oasis
- Safe Place for Youth
- LGBT Center of LA

Florida

- Capital Tee, Tallahassee, FL

Georgia

- Georgia Balance of State - Rural Georgia, GA

Hawaii

- RYSE

Illinois

- Chicago

Indiana

- Trinity Haven

Maryland

- St Ambrose - Baltimore MD
- SHIP of Fredrick Co.
- Springboard

Massachusetts

- Barnstable Co, MA Host Homes MA
- BAGLY - Boston MA
- City of Boston - YAB MA

Minnesota

- Union of Youth – Northfield, Minnesota, MN
- Avenues for Homeless Youth

New York

- Hetrick Martin Institue's (HMI)
- Office of Children and Family Services

North Carolina

- Housing Options for Students (HOST) Host Home Program for North Carolina Students- Raleigh, NC

Oklahoma

- OKC Host Homes, Oklahoma OK

Oregon

- Second Home - Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
- Hearts With A Mission (HWAM)
- J Bar J
- Safe Families for Children - Baker County Eastern Oregon
- Alternative Youth Activities - Coos County on the Southern Oregon Coast
- Kindred Partners - Portland Safe Place for Youth - Venice Beach, CA
- Christians as Family Advocates
- A Family for Every Child

Pennsylvania

- Valley Youth House - Philadelphia, PA
- Western PA Contium of Care - Rural PA
- Crawford County Mental Health Awareness Program (CHAPS)- Meadville, PA
- Westmoreland Community Action, PA
- Thurston Together - Washington PA

Rhode Island

- Family Services of Rhode Island

Tennessee

- LeBonheur Children's Hospital - Memphis, TN

Washington

- Room One - Rural Washington WA

Welcome

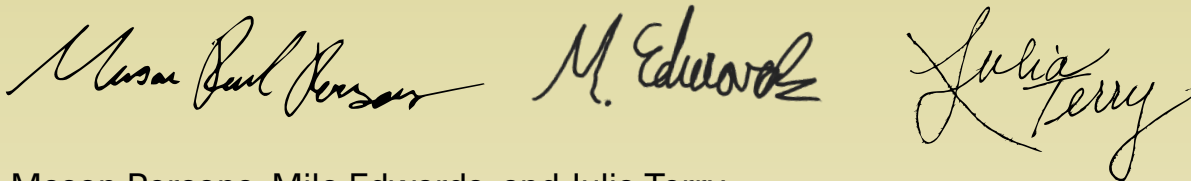
Welcome to Point Source Youth's Host Home Handbook, a creative project that builds upon previous framework and knowledge to prepare potential host home programs and future hosts for every facet of the host home experience.

Envisioned and co-authored with the expertise of two young people who both have lived experience in host home programs, Mason Persons (he/mason) and Milo Edwards (he/him), and supported by the experience of an older adult, Julia Terry (they/themme), this new handbook is a demonstration of the power of youth-led work, solidarity, and the transformative potential within each of us working together to build strong host home program structures by co-creating safe and empowering environments for all young people involved.

During this process, we evaluated previous resources and identified essential information that was needed to provide a value-driven foundation for host homes. We agreed that we wanted to create a resource that intentionally centered the experience of young people, providing best practices for important ideas including understanding the emotional impact of being hosted, constructive disruption of power dynamics, and the significance of mutually beneficial relationship building that is the primary element of a Host Home program. We discussed in detail what did and did not work about our time being hosted and applied that knowledge to this new handbook.

We hope that as you read this handbook, you begin to have a better understanding of what it means to create a host home program that is grounded in the experience of young people. We emphasize in the handbook the importance of having young people involved at every step of the way, and we believe this handbook is a great foundation that leads by example. Through our shared stories, lessons learned, barriers dismantled, and triumphs celebrated, we hope to encourage confidence, power, and a sense of agency in every reader.

In community,

Three handwritten signatures in black ink are displayed horizontally. From left to right: 'Mason Paul Persons', 'M. Edwards', and 'Julia Terry'.

Mason Persons, Milo Edwards, and Julia Terry

Contents

Welcome	4
A Proven Intervention: Host Homes	8
Foundational Elements of Sustainable Programs	10
Host Home Program Values	11
Values of Host Homes Checklist	11
Equity, Engagement, and Affirming Youth Voice	13
Host Homes Support Diverse Communities	14
Youth Investment & Engagement	14
Youth-Centered Values	15
Understanding Your Position on Youth Leadership	16
Defining Non-Participatory Actions	17
Anti-Adultism Assessment	18
Youth Choice in Action	20
Possible Barriers	21
Mental Health & Safety Considerations	22

Community Buy-In	24
Support System Worksheet	25
Community Buy-In	26
Demystifying Mutual Aid	28
Leveraging Resources	29
Partnerships and Funding	29
Building Your Host Homes Team	30
Fundamental Roles	31
Value Alignment	32
Understanding Foundations & Boundaries	33
Virtual Service Delivery	34
Meaningfully Engaging Hosts	35
Engaging Hosts	36
Portrait of a Super Host	37
Maintaining Hosts	39
Assuring Equity in Hosting	39
4 Tips to Center Equity in Host Recruitment and Retention	41

Sustaining Your Program	42
Policy Support in your Community or State	43
Deeper Dive into Cost Effectiveness of Programming and Funding Needs	43
Feedback Loops and Evaluations	44
Highlights	47
Conclusion	48

SECTION 1:

A PROVEN INTERVENTION: HOST HOMES

Host homes have their roots in community care practices and are more than simply housing youth. **Host homes are a living arrangement where a community member with space in their home offers a shared living space to a young person experiencing housing instability.** Host home programs and community volunteers seek to build authentic relationships that create a more profound sense of belonging for youth who have experienced disruption to their stability.

Host home programs build upon the cultural wisdom of caring for one another that thrives within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities and communities of color. The primary goal of a host home program is to provide a safe, welcoming, space for young people to organize their pathway to exiting homelessness on their terms.

Short-term host homes may provide 6+ months of housing where the young person has time to safely consider their next steps toward their future goals (while also recognizing that 6 months isn't a very long time to prepare.) With the support of engaged providers who unconditionally offer support that young people believe will help them to flourish.

A host home provides a safe and inviting living space that affirms and trusts young people. Successful host home programs are simple and flexible, highlighting the ability to create individualized interventions. Healthy hosting relationships focus on reciprocity, listening, and trust-building. Hosts honor the independence of participants while supporting and respecting the boundaries they set related to safety and well-being. They create space and provide support for participants to learn how to navigate and resolve their own challenges rather than telling them what to do. Young people may be offered optional support services, however, they are not a requirement for participation. **Host programs are youth-centered, flexible to be individualized, and scalable (able to expand and grow in reach).**

Successful implementations of short-term host homes have generally been volunteer-based programs, with stays lasting from three to six months; other successful implementations have been created with flexibility to address community needs that have existed in the short-term housing system. Providing short-term host homes is a cost-effective and successful model for preventing youth homelessness in a wide range of cases.

Foundational Elements of Sustainable Programs

Learning from host home programs nationwide, including those that have been firmly rooted for decades and those that are seeding programs from scratch, we have discovered that there are foundational elements that build sustainability into host home programs. This handbook provides a high-level overview of these elements:



Youth Investment: centering your program in a value system by and for young people while affirming their autonomy and creating space for choice.

Community Buy-In: building on the legacy of grassroots (localized and collectively led) organizing to implement a program that works for your unique community of care.

Staff Selection: supporting staff roles that are sustainable and integrate best practices.

Host Engagement: seeking out, engaging, and retaining volunteer hosts.

This handbook will also provide best practices for building sustainability within your program model, including seeking policy support, exploring diverse funding streams, and understanding the importance of ongoing evaluation.

Host Home Program Values

As organizations think about implementing host homes in their community, or improving their current program, they must take time to assess the values that drive the intervention and how it fits the organization's current values and culture. We've adapted the below checklist from the host homes program at Avenues for Youth. Please utilize the *Values of Host Homes Checklist* to examine how your organization follows/expands on these principles.

Values of Host Homes Checklist

- We seek to recognize and challenge systems of power that perpetuate barriers and injustices in young people's lives (such as racism, classism, gender-based discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia — the fear or dislike of anything which is perceived as being foreign, different or strange; and more), and we are aware that not all young people get equitable results through the same hard work under these systems
- We approach youth work through a lens of social justice and youth empowerment
- We value, embrace, and seek out diversity in all its forms
- We believe in supporting young people with intention, and creating space for them to wholly and freely live into their racial or ethnic identity, religious affiliations, or lack thereof, gender identity, or sexual orientation
- We acknowledge that a young person's sexual and gender identity may change throughout their lifetime, and embrace any and all evolutions
 - *Example:* A young person who identifies as straight or a specific gender when they are referred into the program may begin to or continue to examine their sexual orientation or gender identity at any time.
- We believe in trauma-informed, healing-centered, and harm-reduction-focused strategies that affirm a young person's strengths and agency
- We believe in leading through example and strengthening shared leadership with young people throughout your organizational structure
- We understand that all people will sometimes make choices we disagree with, and we acknowledge the young person's right to make those choices for themselves. We believe this requires older adult partners to engage deeply in honoring every young person's autonomy.
- We understand that choices young people make about sexual activity or other behaviors might be different from those we might wish or expect for our own children and we do not fill or seek to fill a parental role for the young people in the program
- We believe that young people benefit from living with adult collaborators who are aware of the inherent power dynamics of the host home model and strive to minimize the misuse of power
- We believe it is the responsibility of all adults engaged in a host home program to actively engage in recognizing, interrogating, addressing, and dismantling their own internalized presumptions about power in order to continually build safety and trust with young people

“Health is not a privilege it’s a human right. Housing is a human right — being housed, adequately housed. That’s the way our society should be . . . We don’t have to live in an unjust world. We don’t have to accept that.”

— Ronald Johnson, Co-Founder, Point Source Youth

SECTION 2:

**EQUITY,
ENGAGEMENT,
AND AFFIRMING
YOUTH VOICE**

Host Homes Support Diverse Communities

Across the country, host homes are being implemented in diverse environments. In urban, densely populated communities, short-term hosting limited to a few days or months can provide a necessary diversion from streets or shelter systems. Although it takes more than a few days to build trust and feel safe, this intervention helps young people to stabilize while temporarily connecting them to a support system as they seek permanent housing connections. In rural communities where social services and housing may be harder to come by, host homes capitalize on one of the most valuable resources of a community, the people.

As support for structured host home programs has grown, so have the methods of reaching specific populations. Some programs focus on the needs of students as they complete secondary education or transition to a trade school or academia, such as Second Home in Oregon. Programs that focus on the needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ young people leverage the unique experiences of Ballroom community, such as Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York city, or prioritize connecting 2SLGBTQIA+ young people with other members of the queer community like Avenues for Youth in Minneapolis. While some programs focus on new connections, others, like SHIP of Frederick County, seek guidance from young people to locate extended family of origin or chosen family.

Youth Investment & Engagement

Host home programs that center on young people as agents of change in their own lives are tasked with putting ideas into action. This begins with collaborative investment in **young people as decision-makers**. Authentic youth investment and engagement rely upon nurturing trust-building and youth-led decision-making. From a macro perspective, this means that young people must be involved and leading at all levels of program creation and implementation. For some ideas related to programmatic youth leadership development, please refer to our [National Youth Mentorship & Empowerment Initiative Handbook](#). On a micro level, young people direct the process of their own hosting experience, in collaboration with trusted staff. The best building blocks for this process center on shared values.

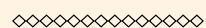
Ultimately, the power of youth programming lies in building relationships with young people that are based on continued interaction & investment.

Youth-Centered Values

All individual young people bring unique abilities and strengths to your program. Recognizing that youth have a kaleidoscope of perspectives, youth-centered host homes work diligently to listen to young people and actively incorporate their feedback or radical new ideas. The strength of this program, which values the autonomy of young people, is reflected in reciprocal relationship building between youth and staff/volunteers.

Adults who participate in host home programming as system representatives, agency staff, volunteer Hosts, or trusted collaborators and mentors must be willing to share power with young people. **Sharing power means that you are committed to remaining in a position of curiosity while reflecting on how adultism shows up in your own actions.** This requires active listening practices, the desire to be a lifelong learner, and the integration of your new knowledge into the actions you take.

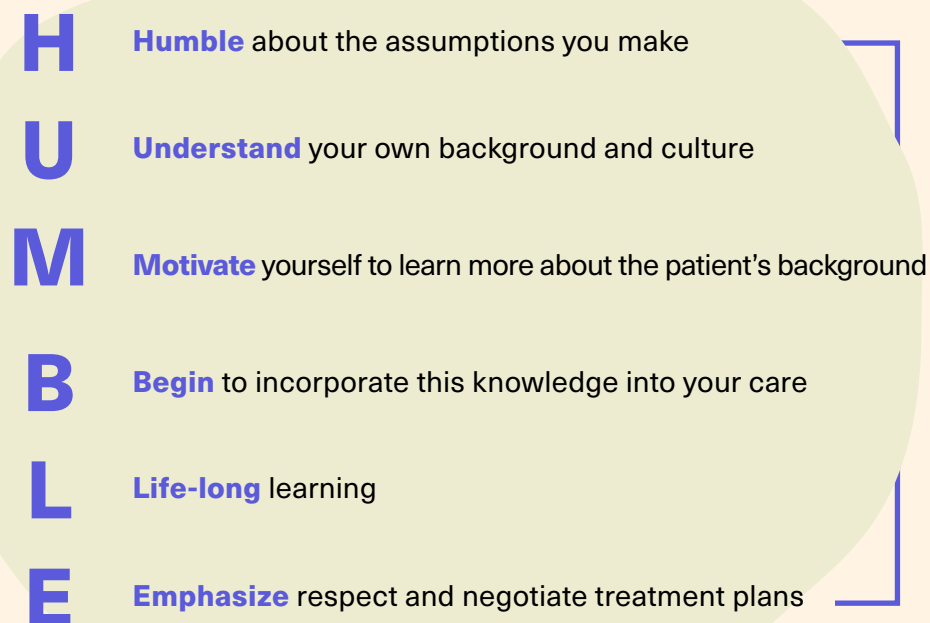
It is the responsibility of the host home program to create brave spaces that recognize and respect the autonomy and value of youth voices, demonstrating that youth contributions are welcomed. This begins by evaluating and revising every component of programming to make it accessible to young people. On the following two pages, you'll find a brief organizational assessment developed by Point Source Youth that can help you understand your growing edges around dismantling adultism.



1 Borkan, Jeffrey & Culhane-Pera, Kathleen & Goldman, Roberta. (2009). Towards cultural humility in healthcare for culturally diverse Rhode Island. *Medicine and health, Rhode Island*. 91. 361-4.

Ultimately, the power of youth programming lies in building relationships with young people that are based on continued interaction and investment. When young people share their experiences and ideas, it is in the pursuit of stabilizing and thriving in their own lives rather than meeting the expectations of a time-limited project.

CULTURAL HUMILITY MODEL (HUMBLE)¹



Understanding Your Position on Youth Leadership

Young people with lived experience have the best ideas for improving the systems they interact with — when we center their voices, creativity, and ideas in building those systems, not only will young people thrive but our programs, policies, and systems will drastically improve. Every community building a new youth led program will have its own strategies to bring this to life, and this guide outlines some of the fundamental principles and practices we believe lead to high-quality youth leadership in this process.

Adulthood describes the systems of privileged attitudes and behaviors that adults have over those of young people.

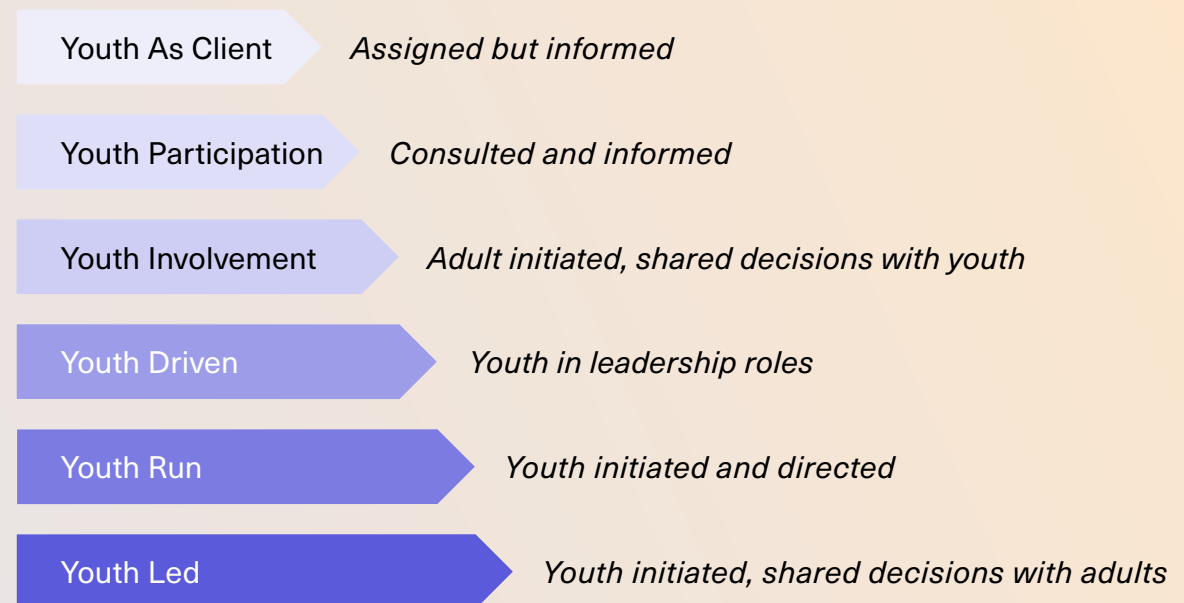
Adulthood is driven by behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people and, therefore, entitles them to act upon or on behalf of young people without their agreement.

DEGREES OF PARTICIPATION

NON-PARTICIPATION



YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

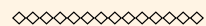


Adapted from Hart, R (1992) Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship

We understand that organizations and individuals are at different stages of development when it comes to engaging with young people as leaders. Offered below is some framework adapted from the Young Wisdom Project of the Movement Strategy Center² (2004, p. 16) to help map where you are in your youth leadership journey.

The higher the level of youth participation and leadership grounded in authentic collaboration that you are able to attain, the greater the possibility of creating truly transformative interventions. For further direction on growing your organizational understanding and engagement with young people as leaders, please reach out to partnerships@pointsourceyouth.org and find out how we can collaborate.

Youth Led	Young people are in all major leadership roles including executive positions, and the majority membership of the board of directors, with appropriate support from adult collaborators.
Youth Run	Young people fill the majority of staff positions and manage the day-to-day operations of the organization.
Youth Driven	Young people have substantive, meaningful roles in leadership positions, including governance and programming.
Youth Involvement	Young people provide regular input into program decision making.
Youth Participation	Youth input into program decision-making is occasionally solicited by adult workers
Youth as Client	Young people are 'served' by adults and have no input into program decision making.



2 Young Wisdom Project. (2004). Making Space Making Change. Oakland, CA; Movement Strategy Center.



Defining Non-Participatory Actions

Manipulation: Using young people without concern for their well-being or input to sell a product or message that may not benefit them.

Decoration: The presence of young people is used to show 'involvement' without significant contribution such as youth announcers, performers, or specific guests without meaningful engagement.

Tokenism: Using one young person to represent all young people.



ME, MYSELF

- Am I encouraging young people to share their ideas or just their stories?
- Do I believe that young people have a critical perspective on how our homelessness system really functions?
- Have I taken actions I can name that reflect that?
- Do I actively ensure young people are treated with respect and have space to share their honest perspectives?
- Do I feel comfortable challenging and productively dialoguing with young people?
- Do I feel personally responsible for holding the groups I am in accountable for listening to and actively partnering with young people?

UNDOING ADULTISM WHILE WE BUILD OUR PROGRAMMING

- Do young people feel comfortable speaking and sharing their opinions? How do we know?
- Do young people feel empowered to disagree with the group?
- Are we making key program decisions without young folks?
- When young people say their ideas, are we listening to them without getting defensive?
- Are older folks listening to young people's ideas when they challenge an existing policy or procedure?
- Are we putting young folks' ideas into practice? Can you name some specific ideas you have put into practice?
- Are we making sure that we are not leaving anyone in our group behind in conversations?
- Are there community agreements for the space young people are being invited to join?
- Is the authority of young people as dissenters, decision-makers, and leaders upheld by older adult partners?
- Are young people able to influence and change the physical or virtual space (music, power points, flags that represent them, etc)

UNDOING ADULTISM WITH YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

- Do I feel like a partner with the young person?
- Am I using my positional authority and power to regularly remove barriers for the youth participants?
- Do I find myself making judgments based on age about how capable youth participants are of maintaining housing?

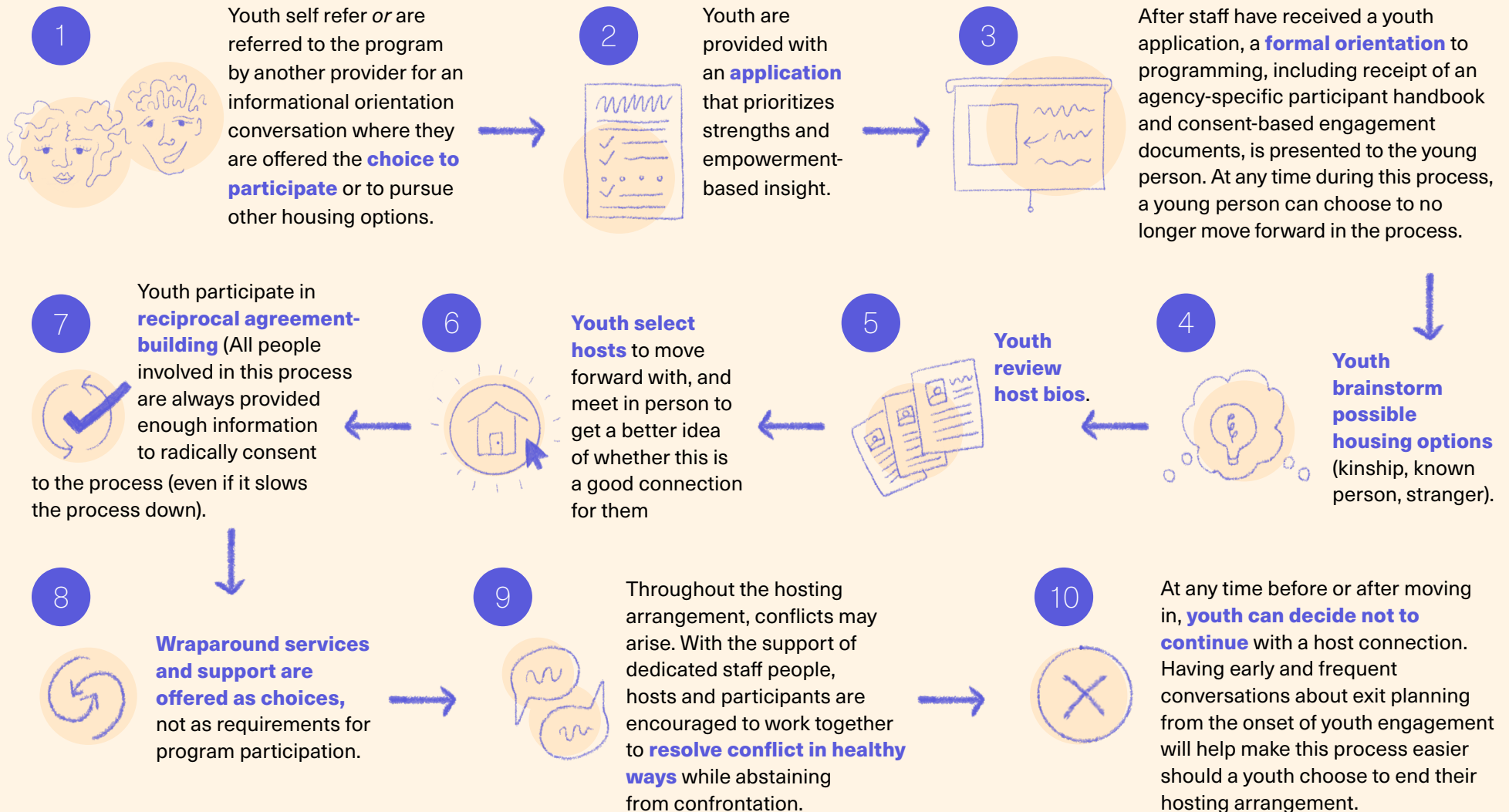
**Sharing power means
that you are committed
to remaining in a
position of curiosity
while reflecting on
how adultism shows up
in your own actions.**

Youth Choice in Action

Participants lead the process in all aspects of a host home model. In practice, this means that throughout the flow of engagement with young people, they are provided choice, space for consent, and the opportunity to change course as they see fit.

IMPLEMENTATION: ENGAGING YOUTH

Relationship is the intervention! Here's an infographic on what youth engagement might look like when a young person is seeking to be hosted.



Possible Barriers



When structuring a program around active youth choice and leadership, there may be barriers that arise. Staying aware of these barriers and challenges and proactively addressing them helps to create a more responsive host home program platform.

- During the referral portion of program engagement, participants may not find that **adequate options** exist for their housing stabilization. They may feel like engaging in host home programming is the only option available. This can create the feeling of being stuck.
- **Inadequate staff training** can result in de-prioritization of youth voice in favor of how the system is currently functioning.
- Some systems miss the empowerment practice of **brainstorming** already existing support systems. Many kinship-based hosts will be unable to participate in this model without adequate resources, due to intersecting system barriers.
- Lack of adequate **hosting options** limits participants' ability to have choice in determining the best host fit. Please see the [Host Engagement section](#) of this handbook.
- While youth can decide not to continue with a host connection, this can feel **difficult or impossible** with limited hosting options and limited housing options, leaving participants in a compromised position that doesn't feel safe.
- Staff may face difficulties in holding hosts, staff, and other older adult partners **accountable** for actively dismantling power dynamics, as laid out in reciprocally created housing agreements and program materials.
- There may be times when either the participant or host may want to **discontinue** this agreement. This can happen even if everyone feels like they started off with all the information they needed. Please see the [Mental Health section](#) for some tips on safety planning for these situations.
- Whether intentionally or subconsciously, hosts may view themselves as **saviors** of young people. They may feel owed something or personally wronged in times of conflict.
- People might get into hosting because they do not have, or are not able to have children of their own. Although it is understandable that someone may want to use hosting as a course to having children in their home, this does create a specific power dynamic that can become harmful and **paternalizing**.

Keep in mind that there may be times when a hosting connection doesn't work out. Our primary focus when this is the case is to support the participant as they transition out of the space into another space. Any needs of the host can be circled back to after the participant is safely resettled. With these possibilities in mind, exit planning should be a part of the process from the beginning of your engagement with participants and hosts, so that all parties feel grounded in what to expect from the process.

Mental Health & Safety Considerations

Mental well-being is important to feeling secure in oneself and feeling like you have something to contribute to a group or one's community. It is not uncommon for individuals who have experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences to seek some form of behavioral health support at some point during their lives. Below are five ways to approach mental health and safety considerations while working with young people in a host homes program.

1. Support young people with **resources and wrap-around services** while they consider whether they are interested in exploring behavioral health therapies.
2. Western psychotherapy's deep historical roots are grounded in white supremacy and have often equated race and queer+ identities with mental illnesses. Vibrant and affirming queer identities, racial identities and cultural practices that reject cis-heteronormative white supremacy as the status quo are often met with homophobia, transphobia and racism. Instead of being **celebrated, supported and safely affirmed**, they're routinely diagnosed as problems/issues/illnesses. These oppressive practices are normalized and met with little accountability. This continues to create harm for young people seeking behavioral health support.
3. Understand that accessing behavioral health therapies can often be a **challenge** for many individuals, so proceed with care, intention and equity while working with young people.
4. Explore **inclusive** forms of ancestral and traditional healing and embrace diverse approaches to well-being such as yoga, ayurvedic medicine, acupuncture, and restorative healing practices.
5. Ensure young people have access to **youth-centered community** and youth-only spaces catered to their interests and age range.

Create brave spaces & respect the autonomy and value of youth voices.

In many ways, Covid-19 and our global response to the pandemic highlighted existing gaps within our systems of mental health support and amplified the need for meaningful and intentional connections. Paired with the impact of the pandemic on feelings of isolation, despair, and hopelessness, it is clear that a strengths-based approach to trauma-informed and healing-centered care is critical to support young people, and all people, in their right to safety and care.

The continued effect on young people's mental wellness is demonstrated by the disruption to protective factors such as daily routine, social interactions, access to robust mental health supports, and a sense of belonging and possibility. Of note is the research that indicates young people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ are more likely to report increased symptoms of depression than their heterosexual counterparts.³ The experiences of self-harm and suicidal ideation has similarly increased among Black and Indigenous young people during the COVID-19 Pandemic.⁴ Simply put, we cannot delay proactive responses for mental wellness and safety considerations. While access and connection to robust mental health services is important to the holistic well-being of young people, so too are the interventions we can conduct in community models of care.

Much of the foundational elements of a host home program are built on supportive factors for healing in community together. This is part of the reason you will see that values-driven decisions play such an important role in every aspect of this intervention. For young people, having an integral part in establishing the values and norms of a program helps to create a sense of shared experience.



3 Kamal, K., Li, J. J., Hahm, H. C., & Liu, C. H. (2021). Psychiatric impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic on U.S. Sexual and gender minority young adults. *Psychiatry Research*, 299, 113855. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113855>

4 Bridge, J. A., Ruch, D. A., Sheftall, A. H., Hahm, H. C., O'Keefe, V. M., Fontanella, C. A., Brock, G., Campo, J. V., & Horowitz, L. M. (2023). Youth suicide during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Pediatrics*, 151(3), Article e2022058375.

SECTION 3:



COMMUNITY BUY-IN

Support System Worksheet

List the names of the people in your life you can turn to for support

Case Worker

Brief description of relationship

Strengths

Their qualities and the role they play for you

How they can help

Specific ways they might be able to help

Name

Brief description of relationship

Strengths

Their qualities and the role they play for you

How they can help

Specific ways they might be able to help

Name

Brief description of relationship

Strengths

Their qualities and the role they play for you

How they can help

Specific ways they might be able to help

Name

Brief description of relationship

Strengths

Their qualities and the role they play for you

How they can help

Specific ways they might be able to help

Host

Brief description of relationship

Strengths

Their qualities and the role they play for you

How they can help

Specific ways they might be able to help

A supportive system of care is one of the best safety nets young people can have. It is important that host home programming facilitate spaces for young people to be able to visit with friends or trusted safe people while in a host home. Young people enter into programming with a variety of existing relationship connections. Supporting participants as they maintain those relationships while growing in their own strength and power to sustain healthy connections helps to ensure that feelings of isolation are minimized and the sense of being part of a community is nurtured.

Despite all efforts to ensure that a hosting connection is solid and supportive, there may be instances when a participant finds it necessary for their own sense of well-being to leave a hosting situation. Participants have noted that uneven power dynamics perpetuated by hosts and rooted in a lack of accountability has led to re-traumatization and a feeling of being stuck.

It is also important to discuss and identify intervention practices around personal safety that are required of the program by law in comparison with intervention practices that the participant believes will support their wellness. Through navigating complicated life events in a supportive community, participants, hosts, and program staff can engage in 'meaning-making', the process of how people construe, understand, or make sense of life events, relationships, and the self, together. This includes co-developing a deeper sense of who we are, why we are here, and what we have to contribute to the shared relationship. Our ability to support the holistic wellness of one another increases our collective capacity for imagining a healthy, bright future of possibility and hope.

Community Buy-In

Building community support throughout the inspiration and implementation process of a Host home program centers the program sustainably in a collaborative model. In addition to youth-driven programming, resource mapping of community members, partner agencies, and funders allows you to identify values-aligned partnerships and to creatively collaborate for efficiency within the system of response.

One way a supportive staff person can ensure that a participant has a concrete sense of safety is by making collaborative safety conversations part of the process from the onset of their orientation to the host home program.

A helpful structure for setting the expectation for safety conversation includes creating space for young people to understand the options and recourse already considered by the host home program and brainstorming what real safety means for the individual participant. If a hosting situation sours, having ongoing conversations about what we need to experience a sense of safety is a supportive factor in encouraging individual and collective ability to change personal conditions. This can also be a starting point for exploring the safe and trusted network of support a young person may have already built.

See the [Host Engagement section](#) of this manual for more insight into connecting with hosts.

“We should not think of our protective instincts as ‘selflessness,’ rather as a connectedness that facilitates reciprocal care. By not abandoning people, we contribute to a culture where we, ourselves, are less likely to be abandoned.”⁵



5 Hayes, K. E., Kaba, M., Schenwar, M., & Walia, H. (2023). *Let this radicalize you: organizing and the revolution of reciprocal care*. Haymarket Books.

Demystifying Mutual Aid

For generations, the social toxins of racism, homophobia, and transphobia have impacted our communities. In response, communities of color and 2SLGBTQIA+ people have leaned into the power of relationship-building and community care. These kinship systems draw upon significant cultural values, including sharing, caring for others, and understanding that all things are related. This is where the seed of hosting was planted — through informal networks of currently and historically marginalized communities sharing resources of knowledge, guidance, mutual respect, and concrete items. We understand that each person has gifts to offer and to receive, asking for and providing support allows interdependence to strengthen, and that we have all that we need when we have each other — through cooperation we grow in our capacity to contribute to the greater good.

Mutual aid is a continual practice of building community and connection. It is about getting needs met, not only with financial support but with other resources as well. Some examples of mutual aid include sharing a meal, offering a ride, clothing swaps, and connecting people to resources you have vetted for reliability. Host homes are mutual aid in action — hosts offer resources (stable, safer, affirming housing) and youth offer knowledge. By hosting a young person, hosts open themselves to the opportunity to learn, in a practical and personal way, how trauma influences and informs a young person's lived experiences. It's important to unpack and interrogate your own experiences of comfort in comparison to what a young person needs to feel safer and at ease transforms your capacity to be in community with others. A co-living environment engages the household members in observational learning in their relationships.

Engaging Community



Begin by making a list alongside youth leaders, naming organizations and people in your community who are trusted by young people. Remember that young people may have had interactions with various systems that have left them feeling disenfranchised or unsafe, regardless of whether you as a provider have a positive experience of that system.



Some places to consider reaching out to include educational systems (students, staff/faculty, and parent/teacher associations), community leaders or organizers, social service agencies, cultural organizations and members, and faith-based organizations. Ask young people for guidance on who to approach. It is essential that when moving forward in community partnership, your value systems are aligned.

For example, partnering with an alternative school may honor the flexible approach that participants often need when navigating housing re-stabilization. Selecting a faith-based organization to partner with that is openly affirming and supportive of queer and trans community members can provide examples of spiritual leaders and community living authentically in alignment with religious beliefs. Working alongside cultural organizations that support chosen family and community care offers an opportunity to bond in shared ideals.

Leveraging Resources

When host home programs draw upon already established community connections or forge new relationships, they bring communities together in the shared desire to support young people in their journey toward stability. One way programs have invited public buy-in is by hosting a community conversation centered on discovering together how the community already supports young people whose housing has been destabilized. If your program is established, inviting youth who have been hosted to attend as program ambassadors provides an opportunity to share the benefits and potential challenges that may arise. It's important to note that in a gathering such as this, **exploring the informal support systems and understandings that community members have with one another can be an excellent way of mapping out the existing lines of support and identifying where there are needs.**

Partnerships and Funding

As host home models have shifted from an informal community care response to a more formalized structure, new funding opportunities have arisen. When considering approaching funders, the power of a Youth Action Board or other youth leadership positions will be a guiding voice for your project in being able to demonstrate authentic intergenerational collaboration. Many communities have used federal dollars from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Health and Human Services to pilot a host home project. Furthermore, they have leveraged those dollars to solicit state and local government and philanthropy support for their projects. It may be helpful to identify a champion of host home programming who is positioned to advocate in your state legislature for supportive funding. Host home programs that rely on mixed funding streams and actively build donor relationships with individual members of the community have been able to experience greater stability.

Thinking creatively about partnerships with other youth-serving organizations can also open up shared funding possibilities to support wrap-around services for participants and hosts alike. Soliciting regular donations from area businesses to support outfitting host homes with furniture, providing special activities for the participant and host to engage in, or creating move-in baskets of essential items and exit baskets as a thank you to participants and hosts allows for in-kind donation to offset other costs an organization may incur. Explicitly seeking funding from funders that are supportive of openly anti-racist, pro-queer programming is also crucial. One former hosted participant notes that a drop-in center where they were employed lost funding when pride flags were displayed.

Essentially, allowing imagination and innovation to lead your organization toward partnerships that center on the needs amplified by youth leaders can result in a vital and thriving network of financial and material support.

SECTION 4:



BUILDING YOUR HOST HOMES TEAM

An essential component of success for host home programs is identifying the right people to support implementing this service model. From developing the staff roles to selecting the best people for the position and thoroughly and continuously offering training and learning opportunities, staff selection can transform your organization. **Intentionally inviting your youth leaders in to participate in co-developing the job descriptions, co-interviewing candidates, and providing ongoing feedback regarding training needs and professional development for the staff is one way to continue centering youth-led decision-making in your host homes program.**

Fundamental Roles

Best practices suggest hiring, at minimum, two staff members for a host homes program: a program coordinator focused on engagement with hosts and overarching program needs, and a case manager focused on direct service support of participants and engagement with youth leaders. Each position is geared towards ensuring the success of the participants and the host homes program. The program coordinator is charged with maintaining the overall program and serving as the main contact for hosts. This means the program coordinator will maintain weekly contact with the host to provide support, consultation, and if needed mediation. The case manager will provide the same weekly support for young people living in host homes and will amplify youth voice throughout programming.

In alignment with youth-centered values, some additional roles to deeply consider include peer navigators and coaches. These positions provide a youth-centered approach to skill development, health relationship techniques, and mentorship. All of these positions are best suited to hiring staff with lived experiences who are reflective of the populations served by the program and the peer navigator position can be an entry point of employment for hiring youth with lived experience. For more information on the current best practices for hiring young people with lived experience, please see the [Point Source Youth Handbook Hire Youth: Best Practices for Peer Navigators 2023](#).

Value Alignment

When agencies focus on finding people who share the values of hosting as a concept, service delivery is more efficient and effective. To get you started, we recommend that you seek staff who believe that:

- **Young people need to lead the process.** Young people are the experts in their own lives and supportive adults must follow a young person's lead. Staff need to be able to engage with this idea as an intentional process, where all adults are called on to regularly check their biases, recognize their privileges, unpack their adulthood, and move into constantly deepening spaces of support. The effectiveness of the guidance that is provided will be directly impacted by how fully you embrace following the lead of young people.
- **Radical consent**, or the experience of all people being well-informed and enthusiastically agreeing to a decision, is a continual process of exploration and agreement and must apply to all decision-making that impacts more than oneself.
- **Coercion is not consent, ever.** Bullying, pressuring, or forcing people into consenting to agreements is not acceptable, and understanding the power dynamics between staff and participants is vital in disrupting the potential of coercive aspects in service provision.
- **Harm Reduction applies broadly** as a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences, grounded in justice and human rights. Staff need to be able to focus on positive changes and working with people without judgment, coercion, discrimination, or requiring that they change their life.
- Cultural responsiveness and relevancy is an **essential** part of all relationship building.
- **Cultural responsiveness** is understood as the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures. It requires respect, curiosity, and the ability to listen closely.
- It is important to recognize and be responsive to **intersecting identities**. Staff can identify that identity markers (e.g., "female" and "Black") do not exist independently of each other and that each informs the others, often creating a complex convergence of oppression.
- **Reducing barriers** is an integral component of effective service. Staff must be able to work with participants to identify barriers or challenges and creatively problem-solve, within the framework of low-barrier work that strives to be no barrier.

Understanding Foundations & Boundaries

Participants and hosts agree that an essential part of ensuring great supportive services is ongoing training for staff. We believe that host homes are an intervention that is dynamic and ever-changing. Regular refresher trainings also keep staff grounded in best practices and innovations. Youth-led trainings focused on becoming a co-conspirator and supporter of transgender, gender-queer, and queer young people, disrupting and dismantling ableism, and understanding and addressing power dynamics set the foundation for staff to engage in learning from young people. Building upon existing community-led trainings to focus on trauma-informed and healing-centered engagement, investing in anti-racist practices, and indigenizing spaces leverages the roots of mutual aid practices to ensure staff participate in lifelong growth. Remember that organizational policies are an excellent place to build in clear boundaries — for example, best practices indicate that staff should never serve as hosts.

Youth-led, youth-developed, and youth-centered ongoing training is the most productive method of ensuring that staff, hosts, and participants are supported throughout the hosting experience.

Young people are the experts in their own lives.

Virtual Service Delivery

Virtual service delivery has changed dramatically since we collectively experienced the Covid-19 pandemic. While it is clear that virtual spaces cannot replace in-person interactions indefinitely, providers have built tools for service delivery that can be used to **reduce barriers** for people in rural service areas and increase opportunities for connection for all young people participating in programming.

Access to hotspots, computers, tablets, phones, and phone minutes for program participants increases the likelihood that connections to programming can be maintained and that participants will have access to the online resources needed to thrive. In rural and lower-income communities, **offsetting the cost of internet connection** or boosting the reliability of that service will increase the opportunities for connection. As this healthy interdependence relies on the available resources, communities should continue to **print materials** and utilize mail services to get information out.

Virtual recruitment spaces, learning communities, and support spaces for host and participants are all tools that have sustained host home programs through times when in-person meeting was not possible. In addition, programs pivoted to utilize confidential online virtual space for case management from a distance, mobile notaries, and regional volunteers for fingerprinting processes or certification of agreements.

The availability and flexibility of virtual platforms for connection is transforming the ways we support one another, from regular affinity building between case managers and participants, to outreach and behavioral health support.



SECTION 5:

MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING HOSTS

Engaging Hosts

Hosts are an essential part of the host home program. Effectively engaging hosts requires creativity and may be challenging. **Our best words of advice are to be patient and take a step back to think of the strengths of the community you live in and how your organization operates.** Turn to young people to help identify informal supports that are already occurring, then build on that power by holding a community forum. This is a great starting point for introducing host homes as a model of community care. Building on the idea that we already understand how to care for one another and helping a community name the work they are participating in while sharing the resource, structure, and connection of your programming builds investment.

Participants agree that being able to brainstorm potential hosts by working with a case manager to identify their natural support people, discover whether hosting is an option for one of those trusted people, and reduce possible barriers to hosting is ideal. This pre-existing trusted relationship would fall under kinship models, where participants select chosen family or extended family of origin and the agency staff introduce the program to these trusted adults. This can also be a great starting place for tapping into community friend groups with shared value systems and building out your network of possible hosts for new facilitated connections. Youth-directed relationship mapping can also identify other protective factors in a young person's life.

Creating safer spaces for young people to thrive in a host home will also include screening prospective hosts. Part of the best practice in many hosting models is the ability for a host to pass a state and federal background check. It is important to note that in many circumstances, background checks may not be the best screening tool or the only way a program might seek to understand if a host connection will be appropriate. For example, a youth-identified kinship connection may benefit from screening that relates to the relationship the host and participant already share. In some instances, a prospective host may have a documented history that would preclude them from hosting. **Looking at each possible host and their history with a holistic lens is vital.**

Remember that background checks are only one part of understanding whether an interested individual will make an excellent host — there are many components to safety that will not be flagged by this screening. Thorough vetting based on building relationships with hosts followed by ongoing education and frequent contact with staff are essential components of supporting wellbeing in a hosting model.

Most programs look to their state's barrier matrix related to crimes against another person (sexual violence, domestic abuse, or homicide) to determine the baseline barrier to hosting. It is important to create robust policy that allows for people with a history of non-violent offenses to host. This sets the stage for transparent conversation and trust building.

Portrait of a Super Host

An ideal host is a trusted adult with space to be able to provide a young person harbor while they consider their next steps. They are not “perfect” — everyone will make mistakes, and everyone has the potential to be harmful or triggering toward a young person.

Acknowledging that there is no perfect connection will help you create services to support the relationship-building process between a youth and a host. To strengthen the qualifications of a host, youth must be connected to the decision-making.



**INVITE
YOUNG
PEOPLE IN
TO LEAD**

Maintaining Hosts

Host home relationships are built on mutual consent. Setting boundaries and agreements from the beginning allows all involved household members to maintain realistic expectations. Around the same time a young person moves into the host home, designated staff will help facilitate the creation of a mutual agreement about each person's expectations and responsibilities to each other. This often includes abstract ideas like respecting each other's privacy and boundaries, as well as concrete ways of demonstrating that respect, like describing when it is okay to enter the participant's bedroom. The host home and participant will discuss expectations about everyone's contributions to household chores and review house rules regarding quiet times or the use of common areas. These agreements will vary based on the circumstances of the home and youth or young adult. This agreement must be co-constructed to disrupt perceived and real power hierarchies. It also provides an opportunity for staff to endorse the hosting relationship as a supportive community connection based on mutual learning, disrupting possibilities for ableism and encouraging healthy communication. Setting role expectations early in a hosting connection affirms the boundaries needed to build mutually beneficial connections.

Some ongoing connections to build into your programmatic practices include:

- Regular weekly check-ins with a dedicated staff person
- Virtual group learning activities
- Facilitated peer network space
- Appreciation moments
- Seasonal care packages

Ongoing maintenance is important, this includes group meetings and community-building, networks of peers, care packages/ appreciation moments, foreshadowing stipends and centering equity.

Assuring Equity in Hosting

As has been mentioned, a challenge may arise around engaging hosts whose intersectional identities are reflective of the youth participants. It can be helpful to have a committee focused on the engagement of hosts who reflect the cultural and lived identity experiences of participants. You may choose to begin by speaking with a focus group of young people in your programming to learn what they are looking for in a host and focus your outreach with these qualities in mind. If your hosting pool is predominantly affluent, white, cisgender hosts, conducting outreach with the intention of engaging queer and transgender people, Black, Brown

or Indigenous families, or lower-income households may help to broaden your pool of potential connections. Prioritizing host connections with chosen family that young people have identified as safe is a best practice when possible. Offering a stipend to hosts makes hosting more accessible to people who otherwise would not have the expendable resources to support another person. Young people have indicated that transparency around the purpose and amount of stipend a host receives offsets any concerns that people are hosting purely to be compensated.

Sample Financial Assessment of Hosts

Consider each of the statements below. For each statement, decide whether it is something you "sometimes", "always," or "never" experience.

1. I often worry about my monthly bills and utilities *

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

2. I worry about debt or loans currently in my name. *

0 points

- Sometimes
- Never
- Always

4 Tips to Center Equity in Host Recruitment and Retention

1

Be Generous: Provide host stipends and financial support at a rate that considers the impact of cost of living, and inflation, and encourages host participation from historically under-resourced community members.

2

Assess Need: Develop an equity scale that allows for financial assessment of the household in order to create a foundation for stipend disbursement.

3

Scale Your Stipend:

Use a sliding scale host stipend designed to prioritize hosts who may otherwise lack some of the necessary resources to support another person in their home.

4

Make It Optional: Hosts can be provided the opportunity to decline stipends should they choose to because they have the financial resources to serve without the additional funds.

SECTION 6:



SUSTAINING YOUR PROGRAM

Policy Support in your Community or State

Sharing already existing housing stock through host home programming positively impacts our larger housing response system — it organically builds density in neighborhoods while reducing the number of people seeking individual rental units. It is an intervention that concurrently impacts prevention and reduces the number of unhoused people by nurturing a support network that helps prevent future experiences of housing instability and chronic homelessness. In addition, it advances the well-being of older adults and young people by nourishing intergenerational relationships and reducing isolation. State policy support related to host home programs can be essential in addressing homelessness in communities across the United States. In recent years, several states have implemented or fiscally supported host home programs, including Maryland, Oregon, and Washington. These states have passed legislation or guidance governing rules, regulations, and provisions related to the establishment and operation of host homes.

Legislation related to host home models typically focuses on creating a framework within which a household can provide a room for another person in their home setting. Most recently, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has been funding and supporting the integration of interventions such as host homes. Policy support for host home models has grown significantly in recent years in response to the growing need for safe and supportive housing for homeless youth. With the continued support of policymakers, host home programs can become even more effective in helping young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness transition into adulthood and become self-sufficient.

Deeper Dive into Cost Effectiveness of Programming and Funding Needs

Host homes are a cost-effective housing solution. Since young people stay in existing homes and apartments, there is minimal brick-and-mortar investment needed to get a program started. The model is flexible to the community and decentralized, making it easier to implement across regions, from urban to semi-urban and rural. In Minnesota, a program found that housing a young person through hosting cost 50% less than the costs associated with housing a young person via a traditional shelter model. Across the country, host home programs are able to operate on extremely limited budgets, paying a nominal stipend only to offset the costs of supporting an additional person in a household.

Engaging with funding sources that are flexible to meet the real needs of programming remains essential. Building reimbursable activities into your annual budget can assist with meeting the cost of moving costs or sanitation supplies. Keeping some funding flexibility in order to shift and meet program needs as they arise and to plan for basic repairs will allow you to ebb and flow as needed based on the emergent needs of hosts. As part of relationship building, prepare to have funding or in-kind donations available for move-in gifts, activity gift cards, and quarterly group dinners to build affinity within the program.

Feedback Loops and Evaluations

Goal: Your first step should be to revisit the goal(s) that were set out for the organization and the program. This is the foundation of the evaluation.

What did the program hope to accomplish? This may include the # of youth served, to strengthen youth engagement. When creating an organization or programmatic goal, whatever it is that you will be using to measure your levels of accomplishment, be sure to include youth members in the process.

Questions to Consider: In addition to assessing the respective goals for your organization and programs, consider these basic questions when developing effective evaluations:

1. Are youth and staff aware and connected to the goals? Were youth and program staff involved in the creation of these goals?
2. Are youth taking an active role in the organization?
3. What is the goal of the evaluation and how do you intend to use its findings and recommendations?

Method: Evaluations can be done in writing, via surveys, or during individual or group discussions. It's all about what your participants feel comfortable with, but it's also important to have options. Be sure to:

- Obtain youth participants' feedback before they leave. Consider sending an anonymous electronic evaluation to all organization members and youth a few times during the year to get their feedback.
- Hold listening sessions to allow members, officers, and advisors of your organization to provide their input and voice in planning and implementing goals, programs, projects, and activities.

It is never too soon to create and implement feedback loops to invite insight from the youth participants, hosts, and staff involved in programming. Feedback allows for refinement and transformation of programming, both from a staffing perspective and from a participant experience. Host home programs thrive when they are responsive to the community that surrounds and supports them. Pathways for real-time communication of needs as well as reflections on experiences, will produce data-driven outcomes for all programs and amplify the unique knowledge base and skill set of the community of providers and young people that engage with this intervention. Youth leaders will have insight into the effective and creative use of current technologies, creating brave spaces for young people to engage in transforming the programs that serve them.

A good way to know if your organization is on track when implementing host homes using an authentic youth-driven lens is to perform **yearly evaluations**. Taking time to evaluate the progress, challenges, and success of your program can help you analyze if your organizational values are aligned with your program goals. Organizations should take the time to perform yearly evaluations. These should include all relevant parties/participants of the program.

Collecting Information: Creating a Feedback Loop for Youth



Determine how you want to collect the information; this must be done meaningfully in a way that doesn't cause harm to those providing feedback.

Individualized 1-1 interview

- This can be done virtually or in person, according to the preference of the youth.
- Program staff should not administer the interview as it may affect the youth's perspective. This is also the best approach when working with minors to protect confidentiality.
- Lean on your YAC or Peer Consultants.

Survey or questionnaires

- Invite youth to create and review surveys and questionnaires before implementing them.

Cohort/group 4-8 participants

- Create a 2-minute presentation to inform youth of the goal and the purpose of their feedback- Don't forget about confidentiality!
- Engage youth in their feedback by creating questions and collecting information openly for all to have a collective response (PowerPoint helps).

Place power and resources into the hands of young people

Engage your whole community in caring for one another

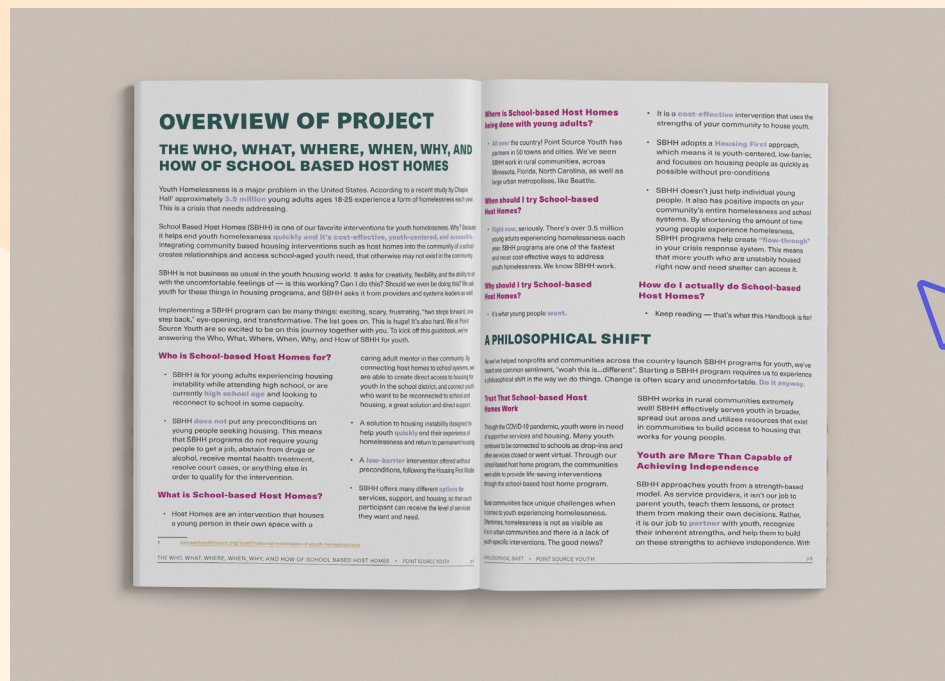
HOST HOME PROGRAMS

Create opportunities to advance youth leadership

Build on natural support systems

Highlights

Host home programs place power and resources into the hands of young people, creating opportunities to advance youth leadership, build on natural support systems, and engage your whole community in caring for one another. The contents of this handbook provide a guide to the foundational aspects of programming. For practical samples of some essential documents, please stay tuned for addendum, which will be released throughout 2024. Our guidebook on implementing a [school-based host home program](#) contains important information about collaborating with school districts.



Thank You

You've reached the end of the handbook — but Point Source Youth is still here! The Point Source Youth team is excited to support you on your host home journey. We believe that host home programs are a critical piece of the community response to youth homelessness. As such, we are here to do whatever it takes to make sure that you feel affirmed and supported while using host homes in your community! We have your back for the messy and magical, and no question or concern is too small to discuss with us. Please use us as a resource!

We can answer any possible questions (it's worth repeating that none is too small!), connect you to peer organizations, invite you to our learning collaboratives and symposia, and add sections to this handbook based on your feedback. We pride ourselves on being flexible and partner-centered, because we believe that is what it will take to do our part in ending youth homelessness. We look forward to hearing from you!

Please email us at partnerships@pointsourceyouth.org for support inquiries.

