

# Homeless Youth Services Continuum

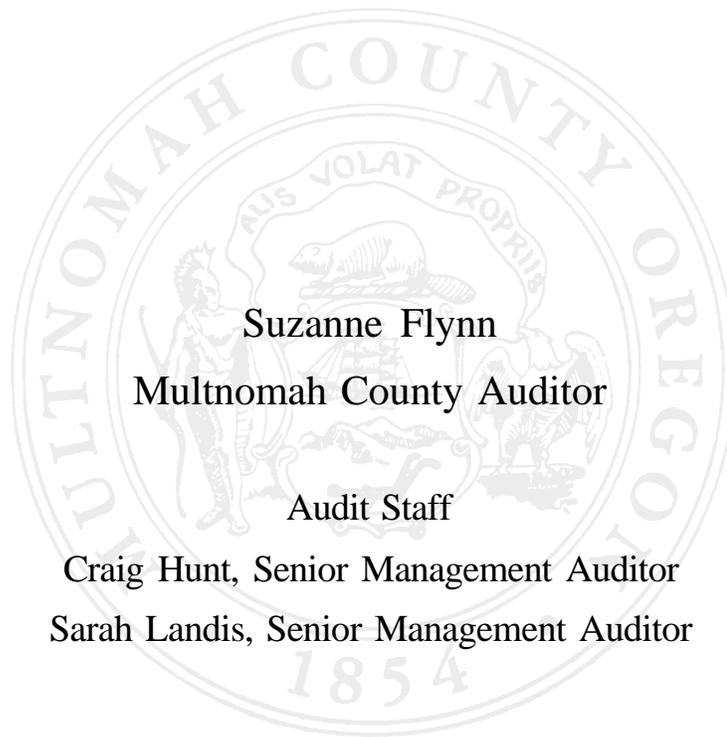
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Review of System Outcomes

November 2001

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contains active links.



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**From:** Suzanne Flynn, County Auditor

**Date:** 10/26/2001

**Re:** Review of the Homeless Youth Services Continuum

The attached report covers our review of a major redesign effort of homeless youth services initiated in 1998. In response to public attention and criticism, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners accepted responsibility to plan, implement, and coordinate a new system for youth. At the time of the redesign, this Office was asked and committed to audit this service system at a later date. This review is intended to fulfill that commitment.

We found the current service system to be substantially strong. For the most part, accountability, cooperation between contractors and the County, the quality of client data, and funding have all improved. Because the system's capacity for self-evaluation and critical review is fairly strong, we chose not to look at service outcomes but did examine the strengths and weakness of the system in meeting its intended outcomes.

Our recommendations address weaknesses we found. It is our opinion that, if these weaknesses are not addressed, there is a risk that the service system might once again fall into disarray. This could result in a decrease in effective service delivery to youth who so desperately need these services.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance extended to us by the management and staff of the Department of Community and Family Services and participants in the Homeless Youth Service Continuum.

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## Summary

Multnomah County contracts to provide services for approximately 1,000 homeless youth per year in downtown Portland. Services include immediate relief off the streets; crisis, short term, and transitional housing; case management; and structured daily activities.

In 1998, the homeless youth system was criticized for being fragmented and lacking accountability. Public pressure to improve services to homeless youth in the downtown area resulted in the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee by the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners. The Committee created the current framework for a continuum of services for downtown homeless youth. The model was based on research and best practice and was the combined work of local experts who were familiar with homeless youth issues in Portland. We believe this model holds much promise in addressing the problems confronting homeless youth in Portland.

Our review compared the current Downtown Homeless Youth Service Continuum (the Continuum) to the model established by the Ad Hoc Committee. We focused on the system-level outcomes of the model and assessed risks to the Continuum based on these goals.

We found that much progress has been made to create a system that is accountable and measurable. There is a strong evaluation function to facilitate continuous improvement and data-based decision making. The Continuum attempts to maximize the use of public and private dollars. A Homeless Youth Oversight Committee (HYOC) was established to provide additional community accountability. Finally, we found that services have likely been strengthened by improved collaboration among providers.

We also found significant weaknesses in the Continuum that may affect its ability to fully achieve the goals of the Ad Hoc Committee. We are concerned that the County and other stakeholders may not have the long-term commitment to the Ad Hoc Committee's model that is necessary to realize its full potential. The philosophical foundation established by the Ad Hoc Committee, the Youth Development Model, has not yet been fully implemented and will require additional infrastructure support. At the management level,

confusion and contradiction exist about responsibility, authority, and direction among the County, providers, and the HYOC. Distrust and lack of cooperation have sometimes stifled the progress of the Continuum.

The County's approach to leadership in the Continuum influences the success of services to homeless youth. While some think the County should assume a more authoritarian role, we believe that the viability of the system is placed at risk without a collaborative partnership between the County, providers, and the HYOC. Without such partnership, the homeless youth system could disintegrate into its previously fragmented state.

We found that other management improvements are also needed. For example, in order to take full advantage of evaluation information, a concentrated follow-up effort is needed. Stronger linkages between the Continuum and outside service providers must be created in order to help youth reach positive outcomes. Clarity about the intended service population is also needed.

Despite these shortcomings, we believe that all of these challenges can be addressed within the existing framework with some effort on the part of all parties to realize the expectations set out during the design process.

## Background

The current configuration of services for homeless youth in Multnomah County, known as the Downtown Homeless Youth Services Continuum, is the result of a major redesign effort initiated in 1998. At that time, existing homeless youth services received a great deal of community and media attention and were criticized for a perceived lack of accountability and leadership. Inadequate client data, inconsistent enforcement of community laws, insufficient funding and facilities, and lack of an overall mission, plan, and consistent philosophy were also cited as concerns.

In response to this criticism, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners accepted the responsibility to plan, implement, and coordinate a new comprehensive homeless youth service system. The Board directed the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee, comprised of interested community, business, and government representatives, to develop the model on which to base contracts with service providers in the community. The service continuum designed by the Ad Hoc Committee was to have the following attributes:

- Be accountable to funders and the community.
- Outline clear, measurable objectives and outcomes for service programs and for the system.
- Be flexible and recognize that a variety of programs and approaches are needed to address the needs of homeless youth.
- Allow for a continuum of services.
- Maximize the effective use of available resources.

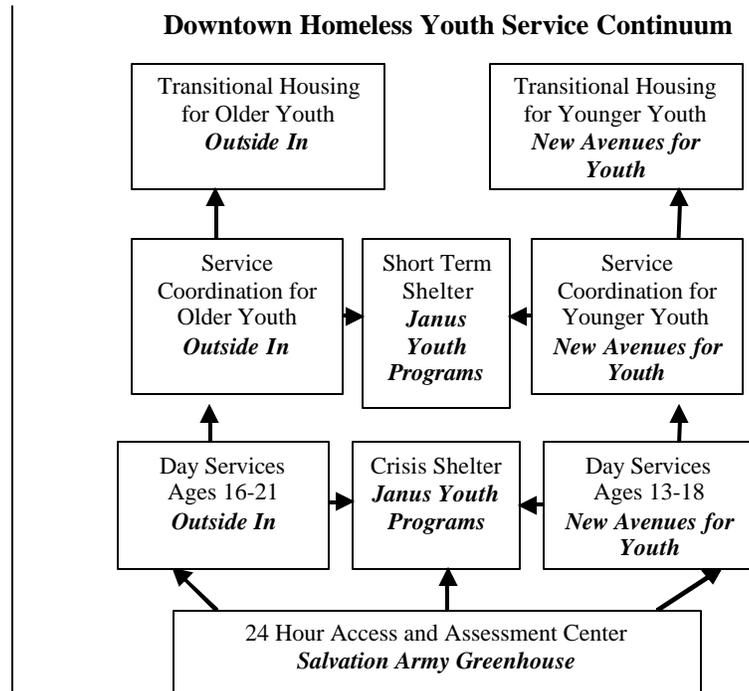
The work of the Ad Hoc Committee culminated in the recommendation of a service design model to the Board. This model identified a core set of services and a range of additional services necessary for youth to have immediate access to resources and safety off the streets. The ultimate goal of the system is for youth to successfully transition off the streets and become productive members of the community. Providers were to use the Youth Development Model (YDM) as the unifying service delivery philosophy. YDM is

a research-based approach to service design and provision that emphasizes youth assets, self-governance, and building on youth's strengths. Please see the Appendix for further information on the Youth Development Model.

The Board accepted the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee in full and agreed to fund core services for homeless youth. A request for Proposal (RFP) was sent out and responses from providers were received in November 1998.

Concerns about the contract awarding process resulted in the Board of Commissioners directing selected providers to come to agreement amongst themselves on how services would be divided and coordinated between them. The result was as follows:

Exhibit 1



The County's Department of Community and Family Services (DCFS), Division of Community Programs and Partnerships, is responsible for managing contracted services to homeless youth. The Division provides oversight, monitoring, and daily contract administration to the four contractors who serve this population. The DCFS Office of Planning, Development, and Evaluation provides evaluation services to the Continuum. Services to youth include:

- basic needs and relief services
- 24 hour common space
- screening
- assessment
- crisis shelter
- case management/service coordination
- short-term shelter
- transitional housing

In January 2000, DCFS convened the Homeless Youth Oversight Committee (HYOC). Members of this Committee include representatives from the downtown business community, youth representatives, staff from services associated with the Continuum, and other interested stakeholders.

The Continuum represents a significant increase in public resources commitment and services to youth. At the beginning of FY1999, there were only two providers and approximately \$820,000 contracted through the County. In FY2001, the four providers received about \$2.6 million from local public sources. Approximately 30% of these funds comes from the City of Portland and primarily pays for housing. The remaining 70% comes from the County General Fund. The Continuum served approximately 1,000 homeless youth in FY2000.

## Scope and Methodology

Our review was initiated in response to a 1998 request by the Citizens Crime Commission and the Association for Portland Progress to follow up on recommendations made in their report "Services to Homeless Youth in Portland." Because their report resulted in major changes to existing services, the Auditor's Office decided not to initiate an audit at that time. Instead, we waited until the new Continuum was designed and sufficient time for implementation had elapsed.

The scope of this review was limited to identifying risks and assessing progress made toward system-level outcomes by the Continuum. We did not review the work of specific providers or client outcomes but focused instead on factors contributing to the overall success of the Continuum.

We interviewed stakeholders, providers, and DCFS staff including the Continuum Coordinator, department management, and the evaluation team. We spoke with directors and other management staff of each of the four provider agencies, a consultant, and County Commissioners. We also interviewed nearly all members of the Homeless Youth Oversight Committee, including staff from the Citizens Crime Commission and the Association for Portland Progress, youth representatives, staff from the City of Portland, a representative from the Housing Authority of Portland, the Commander of Portland Police Bureau's Central Precinct, and a representative from Juvenile Justice. We reviewed the original report published by the Citizens Crime Commission and Association for Portland Progress, the Ad Hoc Committee report, evaluation reports, relevant legislation, contracts, program instructions, the Request for Proposal, Homeless Youth Oversight Committee meeting notes, best practices literature, budget documents, a prior contracting audit, monitoring reports, and other pertinent documents and reports.

This review was conducted in accordance with the general standards section of Government Auditing Standards.

## Results

Our review compared the current Downtown Homeless Youth Service Continuum (the Continuum) to the model established by the Ad Hoc Committee. We focused on the system-level outcomes of the model and assessed risks to the Continuum based on these goals. As identified by the Ad Hoc Committee in their redesign work, the system-level goals for the Continuum are:

- Collaborative partnership is established to design the homeless youth service system.
- Shared accountability throughout the community for homeless youth service system and outcomes is developed.
- Community resources are acquired and mobilized to address homeless youth issues.
- A homeless youth service system exists which has a consistent philosophy and is research-based, outcome-based, integrated, accountable, measurable, comprehensive, and efficient.

Overall, we found that the Continuum has made substantial progress toward meeting the system level goals established in its design. However, we identified a number of weaknesses in the Continuum that could prevent it from fully meeting these outcomes:

1. There is a lack of clarity around the roles and expectation of the County, providers, and the Homeless Youth Oversight Committee.
2. Management of the Continuum is not in alignment with the characteristics of partnership-based contracts.
3. The Youth Development Model has not been fully implemented.
4. The Continuum lacks procedures for following up on evaluation information and available data.
5. Improvements are needed in linkages to outside systems.
6. The intended service population needs clarification.

System Outcome:  
Collaborative  
Partnership

This outcome covers how parties within the Continuum will work together. The original wording called for collaboration in the design of the Continuum, a phase which concluded at the end of the Ad Hoc Committee's work. However, we found that collaboration and partnership were intended to be defining characteristics of the Continuum that extended beyond the design process. Moreover, we believe that a strong collaborative relationship holds the best possibility of attaining identified outcomes and providing effective services to youth. Current practice is not fully aligned with a partnership arrangement.

The Request for Proposal for contract bids states that "all selected organizations shall collaborate as partners in the delivery of service in order to assure success of the programs in meeting contract outcomes and system goals." It also characterizes the relationship between the County and providers as "emphasiz(ing) partnership among providers and with the Department."

Characteristics of a  
Partnership

For the purposes of human services contracting, the County's Contract Policy Team defined partnership as "a collaborative relationship between Multnomah County and . . . (providers) in which all parties contribute resources toward the achievement of a common social goal." In a partnership, decisions made by the County should be based on strengthening working relationships and ensuring the service delivery system's viability. In contrast, when providers are considered vendors, the County exercises more control in a competitive environment, where price is the main criteria.

This does not mean that the County has no recourse over providers that fail to comply with contract or partnership terms or that providers have no path for resolution of disputes with the County. Partnership implies a two-way street in which partners hold each other to the terms of their agreement by working toward shared goals in a common framework and by constantly and critically assessing their progress toward these goals. According to the County Auditor's 2000 audit on human services contracting, "a framework that includes clear boundaries and common goals is the most effective way to protect the integrity of contracting relationships."

Based on the recommendations made in this audit, the Contract Policy Team developed criteria for distinguishing between partnership and vendor contracting situations.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Partnership</b>	<b>Market (vendor)</b>
<b>Nature of goal to be achieved</b>	Achieving the goal requires collaborative involvement of government and public stakeholders	The goal can be achieved by governmental contracting for service provision
<b>Availability of providers</b>	Fewer providers available	Sufficient number of qualified providers-- consumers can make choices among providers
<b>Continuity of services</b>	Highly disruptive for clients to change service provider	Clients not significantly affected by service disruption
<b>Clarity of outcomes, difficulty of the service</b>	Outcomes are more difficult to define	Outcomes can be clearly defined and measured
<b>Mix of public-private funding available</b>	Increases total resources available	Contracting has no impact on total funds available for services
<b>Philosophy for service delivery</b>	Favors a more collaborative approach	Favors cost-efficiency
<b>History and politics</b>	High level of commitment to community delivery of services	Low level of commitment to building community-based service delivery capacity
<b>Provider dependency on government entity funding</b>	Government entity funding makes up a significant portion of provider's budget	Government entity funds insignificant portion of operations.
<b>Cost of services</b>	Market principles do not apply; cost minimization is not the objective of the contracting relationship	Lowering cost based on competition is a priority

We found that the Homeless Youth Continuum appears to meet all nine criteria for a partnership in design, but does not always achieve these in practice.

Elements of Partnership in the Homeless Youth Continuum

Language in the RFP emphasizes partnership and collaboration, but simultaneously gives the County a very controlling role. Such contradictions lead to confusion among providers and could serve to undermine the practice of the partnership by granting the County too heavy a hand. For example, the RFP states that there will be a joint management structure, but that providers will operate within a coordinated system managed by the Department. It also states that “funder oversight is intended to provide consistent direction, technical assistance, problem-solving, and outcome focus to the system

operations,” but also that the Department will be directly involved in agency personnel decisions and assume a “stronger leadership role” than it had in the past.

We found several examples of the County’s role in relationship to providers that indicate a more authoritarian role than is necessary in a collaborative partnership where authority and ownership are shared. Similarly, we heard examples of providers excluding the County from service planning and collaboration activities. Such practices are not in alignment with expectations of a partnership. They serve to create an environment of distrust and cause breakdowns in communication that undermine the contracting relationship.

The benefits of collaboration are many. Research indicates that youth benefit from multiple approaches and a wide variety of services. The current configuration could provide this diversity of services and approaches. Collaboration necessitates a high degree of involvement and investment in the success of the Continuum by all involved. Having all providers working together also allows for coordinated data and information sharing, giving policy makers and managers a more complete picture of the homeless youth population and better tracking of youth outcomes.

Failure to align the contracting relationship to a partnership model poses a number of risks to the viability of the system and to the youth who receive services. Without participation from all providers, service diversity and continuity could be jeopardized, leveraged resources could be lost, and parallel or duplicate systems could be running. There is also a risk of weakening the community-wide safety net and spreading resources too thin to have an impact if the system once again becomes fragmented and uncoordinated. Lack of collaboration between providers and the County could lead to further distrust and frustration, micromanagement of agency operations, and poor communication. Finally, there is a strong risk that, without good collaboration, the homeless youth system will revert to the state it was in before redesign. Then, lack of leadership, accountability, data, and results-orientation lead to community frustration and, ultimately, to a total revamping of the system.

Based on the criteria identified by the Contract Policy Team, the intent of the Continuum designers, and best practices in both homeless youth services and human services contracting in general, it is the Auditor’s Office’s opinion that collaborative partnership is the best approach to contracting for these services. The County’s relationship with providers

should be characterized by the sharing of resources, responsibilities, risks, and benefits according to a mutually agreed-upon arrangement. A healthy tension may exist, but in a functional system that tension is characterized by the commitment of all parties to good communication and achieving mutual goals. Progress has been made in developing collaboration among providers since the redesign of the Continuum, but must be improved between the County and providers.

Overcoming Barriers  
to Collaboration

There are a number of barriers to full implementation of a partnership model. Principal among these are outside pressure for the County to assume a controlling role in Continuum management and the inability of the County to demand that providers and HYOC members participate in a true partnership. Part of the resolution of this tension could be achieved by clearly defining the process and roles for resolution of conflict within the partnership. The Auditor's Office recommended that a formal process for dispute resolution be established in the Human Services Contracting audit.

One possible model for the Continuum would be for concerns about services and provider performance to be worked out first among providers and the County in an atmosphere of collaboration and with the goal of moving the Continuum forward. Issues that could not be resolved at this level would then be brought to the attention of the HYOC, which could issue recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. The role of the Commissioners, including the County Chair, would be to support the results of conflict resolution that had followed due process and not to intervene in that process. The final recourse would then be for the County to sanction providers, terminate contracts, or renegotiate the terms of those contracts.

System Outcome:  
Shared Accountability

We identified seven mechanisms built into the Homeless Youth Continuum to ensure system and provider accountability. These elements are: defined partnership roles and responsibilities, broad scope of accountability, role of the Homeless Youth Oversight Committee, program coordination and monitoring, evaluation function, established performance measures and data availability, and fiscal monitoring.

Because many elements of accountability are in place, this system outcome has been largely attained, especially regarding accountability at the level of the contracts. However, clarification of roles and expectations is needed to reach the full potential of shared accountability at the system level.

Defined Partnership  
Roles and  
Responsibilities

An effective accountability structure requires clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of each party in the system. This is especially true in a partnership environment where expectations are based on give and take between the County and providers. In terms of partnership expectations, we did not find evidence of a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. Service expectations and contract requirements were clear, but system-level definition of partnership responsibilities, such as planning, ongoing system development, oversight, and policy development, were not specified. These partnership expectations need to be defined for providers, the County, and the HYOC.

Scope of Accountability

A major focus of the Continuum design was to create an outcome-based system of services. According to the shared accountability system outcome, accountability for attaining outcomes in these areas must be jointly shared by the County, providers, the HYOC, and service providers outside of the immediate downtown Continuum.

The Ad Hoc Committee identified outcomes on a number of levels: basic, youth, community, system, and overall outcomes. After reviewing these outcomes and the services funded by the County, we concluded that providers can only be held directly responsible for the basic level of outcomes. These focus on immediate provision of relief services, enforcement of community expectations (laws and regulations), creating relationships with youth through engagement and service coordination, and linking youth to appropriate services. Providers also play a crucial role in ensuring the success of the Continuum under system outcomes and in working to create strong linkages to services in other outcome areas. See the Appendix for the complete outcome framework.

Specific youth outcomes are also identified in the areas of sexual health, substance abuse, mental health, physical and dental health, education, housing, and employment. Most of these fall outside the scope of public funding of the Continuum, with the exception of City funding for housing and some contributions toward specialized alcohol and drug treatment. Positive outcomes in each of these areas are critical steps toward the ultimate goal for youth to leave the streets and become productive members of the community. However, providers are limited in the control they have over these outcomes by lack of funding for them or by difficulties in creating linkages with existing services systems. These issues arose most often around alcohol and drug treatment, mental health, runaway, and adult homeless services.

The Continuum is not a self-contained solution to youth homelessness. The problems that youth face by the time they become homeless and those that they develop while living on the streets are numerous, complex, and intertwined with one another. The promise of achieving long-term outcomes for youth lies in addressing all of the factors that are preventing them from being able to leave the streets, and for this the Continuum must rely on providers of other services.

Improving connections to outside services is an area where members of the HYOC could provide positive contributions and fulfill a role of fostering the homeless youth system. Many HYOC members represent other service systems, such as adult homeless, state foster care, alcohol and drug treatment, and health care. Heightening the communication between the Continuum and these representatives could create improvements in coordination between systems. The HYOC has identified such linkages as a priority in their current workplan and the Auditor's Office supports their effort to improve this aspect of accountability.

Role of the Homeless Youth Oversight Committee

The addition of the HYOC in January 2000 enhanced the accountability structure of the Continuum by making provisions for community-level oversight. It also complicated the relationship between the County and providers and further confused the definition of roles and responsibilities within the Continuum. The Auditor's Office believes that the HYOC holds promise to benefit the Continuum, but this potential cannot be realized without clarification of its role, authority, and scope of work. We recommend that the HYOC adopt a mission that allows it to exercise some control and direction over system-level concerns with the Continuum as well as foster its success by supporting and advocating for its work.

A review of relevant literature indicates two primary functions for boards of directors. They may be incorporated to serve in an advisory capacity in which they can guide the work of the organization but do not have authority to direct it. Alternatively, boards may have a statutory responsibility that includes legal authority over the organization, financial responsibility, and accountability for organization performance.

Regardless of its statutory or advisory role, boards share a number of common responsibilities. They set or recommend broad policies, prioritize the work of the organization based on pre-established plan or principles, provide leadership in funding and linkages with other services, identify issues, resolve disputes, monitor progress toward

identified outcomes, advocate for the organization, and account to the public for its performance.

The HYOC fits neither of the roles identified in the literature. First, there is no organization for the HYOC to direct or advise. Instead, the HYOC oversees a loosely knit set of agencies, each with its own board of directors to which it is accountable. Responsibility for funding and setting policy for homeless youth services lies with the Board of County Commissioners. Having the County Chair actively involved in the HYOC helps bridge this authority gap but does not entirely span it. The HYOC has no force of authority over agencies and can only influence the Continuum through its input and relationship to the Department and its communication with the Board of County Commissioners.

The HYOC has suffered from lack of clarity about its purpose, scope of work, and general authority. It operates without a charter or formal authority. Based on review of HYOC meeting notes, we were unable to ascertain the purpose of or charge to the HYOC. There is also no reference to a committee of this sort in documents such as the Ad Hoc Committee Report, Board Resolutions, the RFP, or the Continuum contracts. In an interview, the Division Director who oversees the Homeless Youth contracts said that the HYOC was incorporated to ensure that the Continuum was implemented as it was intended and to provide accountability in its oversight and monitoring role. However, during interviews HYOC members were unable to identify a clear purpose for the committee and did not generally feel that it has been an effective means of overseeing the Continuum.

According to some interviewees, the tone of the HYOC's work has frequently been antagonistic toward providers and has sometimes delved into the administrative business of individual agencies rather than focusing on the system-level concerns that are more appropriately in its realm. History and deep-rooted differences in philosophy have produced a great deal of distrust within the system. The HYOC has not issued written recommendations, plans for follow up on evaluation findings, or formal statements of policy advocacy that could do much to inform the Board of County Commissioners, Department management, and providers alike.

Recognizing its shortcomings, the County and the HYOC have recently made efforts to review the HYOC's purpose and to develop a workplan for the year. These are positive steps toward formalizing the way the HYOC does business that will increase its efficiency and effectiveness. However, the issue of purpose and scope of authority have not been

resolved. Without clarity of role and power, the HYOC will continue to operate in an environment of uncertainty and its decisions or recommendations may not have the force they need to bring about change in the Continuum.

Program Coordination  
and Monitoring

The duties associated with program coordination and monitoring are the front line in the relationship between providers and the County. This role is filled by a Program Development Specialist (PDS) within the Department of Community and Family Services. This staff member is also in charge of daily contract administration, coordination of services among providers, support of the HYOC, program development, data collection, grant support, technical assistance, and periodic monitoring visits that result in written reports and recommendations for improvement or contract compliance. Further, the PDS also has responsibilities with other service contracts besides those for homeless youth.

We are concerned that the responsibilities of this position may be too broad for him/her to be fully effective. On one hand, the PDS is responsible for coordinating and advocating for the system. On the other hand, the PDS must act as a neutral monitor and enforcer of the contract and the directives of the County and HYOC. The inherent conflict in these roles could confuse providers and staff and reduce the effectiveness of each role. This is not an issue unique to the homeless youth system. These conflicts appear to be problematic throughout the County among staff who are assigned to similar roles in different programs or fields. We advise the County to work on clarifying the role of the PDS and to address these contradictory roles.

Established Performance  
Measures and Data  
Availability

Performance measures and data collection/availability are strong accountability mechanisms in the Continuum. The contracts with providers establish basic performance measures and specify data collection for each measure. Data collection systems are also strong given the outcome orientation and extensive evaluation efforts underway. Performance measurement and data collection are discussed in greater detail in the "System Outcome: Continuum Design" section below.

Evaluation Function

The evaluation function is the most important accountability piece for the Continuum. Established performance and outcome measures as well as extensive data collection provide a foundation upon which to build accountability. Approximately 1.5 FTE are dedicated to this effort. In the three-year lifetime of the new Continuum, one evaluation has been conducted and another is in process. Although much scrutiny

is occurring, this function should be improved through formal follow-up on evaluation results, as described in the "System Outcome: Continuum Design" section below.

Fiscal Monitoring | DCFS has fiscal monitors that perform a variety of functions to help ensure financial accountability. All providers with contracts exceeding \$50,000 must pre-qualify by having their organizational structures, accounting systems, and internal controls examined by the County. Fiscal monitors perform compliance reviews and provide technical assistance. Annual audited financial statements are collected and analyzed and provider billings are monitored.

System Outcome:  
Community Resources | The Ad Hoc Committee also identified a system outcome to increase the public and private resources for services to homeless youth. Available resources have grown dramatically. However, connections to outside services and community resources should be strengthened. Providers do much of this work, but it could also be a role for the HYOC.

County/City Resources | Since the implementation of the redesigned Continuum in 1999, there has been a significant increase in the public resources dedicated to homeless youth services. City of Portland and Multnomah County funding grew considerably between FY1999 and FY2001, from \$820,000 to \$2,584,000. This increase in spending has led to a number of new services and enhancements to existing ones, including service coordination/case management, 24-hour access and assessment center, permanent emergency and short-term shelters, age and development-oriented groupings, more transitional housing, and capacity to serve more youth.

The newly redesigned system has also improved by bringing together the resources, knowledge, and experience of diverse agencies. Interviewees report that, while tensions still exist, the level of collaboration between providers is far better than they could have expected and is contributing to better services. They also report that increased spending has resulted in improved and expanded services to youth.

Other Resources | The County requires a 15% match from providers. This additional funding from private resources is intended to support and enhance public funds. It also spreads out the responsibility for providing services since businesses and the local community also benefit from a reduced presence of homeless youth on the streets. To date, a number of significant private grants have been secured to help build transitional housing and provide alcohol and drug services.

However, we also heard concerns from interviewees about the ability of the Continuum to effectively link to outside services and resources, especially in the areas of alcohol and drug treatment, health care, mental health, and employment services. Limited resources, budget cuts, and changes in the service systems on which the Continuum is dependent necessitate a high level of communication between homeless youth providers and other systems, as well as advocacy for the particular needs of homeless youth within other service systems.

System Outcome:  
Continuum Design

The final system-level outcome for the Continuum identifies system characteristics recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee. It calls for a system that has a consistent philosophy and is research-based, outcome-based, integrated, accountable, measurable, comprehensive, and efficient. Many of the elements of this system outcome are in place, but others require further attention. Specific findings for each element are presented below.

Consistent Philosophy

A major focus of the redesign effort was to establish a unified philosophy among providers. The Ad Hoc Committee used principles from the YDM to develop their recommendations and incorporated the model into their guiding principles. YDM is a research-based approach to services that emphasizes youth assets, self-governance, and strength building. It was intended to be a central component of the Continuum, serving as the philosophical glue that held the various providers together regardless of their different service orientations. Based on interviews, we did not find a consistent philosophy among stakeholders toward service provision. See the Appendix for specific characteristics of the YDM to be implemented.

Despite its prominence in the planning and design phases of the Continuum, the YDM has not been systemically implemented, according to interviewees. Individual agencies may have incorporated the model into their service design and daily activities to varying degrees, but there has been very little effort to work on implementation systemwide or to ensure that each agency has put the model into operation effectively. Minimal training was provided early on, but there is no ongoing training available for new staff. Checking on YDM implementation does not appear to be a large part of the County's regular monitoring and evaluation activities.

Lack of philosophical congruity within the system poses a risk to Continuum stability, service consistency, continued collaboration, and quality of programs for youth. The YDM, while it would serve as a consistent, umbrella philosophy, allows for a multiplicity of approaches

and services that are critical to meeting the needs of diverse youth. Because the success of the Continuum is largely dependent on providers working with, rather than against one another, the importance of a unified philosophy is central. However, responsibility for funding, training, and overseeing the implementation of the model is unclear.

Research- and Outcome-Based

The original design of the Continuum was strongly rooted in research and had a highly developed system of outcomes to which it would hold providers accountable. However, we found that the integrity of this work is jeopardized through insufficient system implementation and disagreement over outcomes.

The Ad Hoc Committee based its design work on local and best practices research, particularly in its adoption of the YDM as the unifying philosophy. As discussed above, interviewees stated that this model has not been thoroughly implemented.

It also identified an array of services that are necessary to help youth reach the final outcome of successful transition from the streets. For each of these service areas, the Ad Hoc Committee identified outcomes that are intermediate steps toward the larger goal of transitioning off the streets. Data are collected on most of these outcomes by the County and quality information is made available by an ongoing evaluation effort. This data collection is critical in the effort to monitor attainment of outcomes and performance of the homeless youth service system.

While the evaluation function of an outcome-based system is strong in the Continuum, there is no formal definition of what an outcome-based system is, leaving many questions for providers, monitors, and decision-makers alike. For example, which outcomes are providers directly accountable for? Which are dependent on other service systems? What are the consequences when outcomes are not achieved, for youth and for providers?

Although this system outcome has a strong foundation, we believe that the Continuum is at risk of losing ground without a more concentrated effort at implementing best practices and clarification of outcome accountability.

Integrated

After receiving redesign recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee, the Board of County Commissioners decided to fund basic services to homeless youth, leaving other critical services to other agencies to address. This means that Continuum providers must work closely with others to ensure that services are adequate and responsive to the particular needs of homeless youth. Much work has been done

on this issue and the Continuum continues to address it by improving linkages with outside agencies. This is covered in greater detail in the "System Outcome: Shared Accountability" section above.

The Board also approved the distribution of homeless youth services between the four separate agencies, some of which have historically had contentious relationships. The attainment of this system outcome is largely dependent on the degree of collaboration these agencies can achieve in order to assist youth in transitioning between programs and providers at different points in their progress through the system. While noting their remaining differences, interviewees universally thought that collaboration and integration had improved dramatically within the Continuum since its inception. It appears that this system outcome has been largely realized and work is ongoing to improve collaboration and integration both inside and outside the Continuum.

Accountable

The Continuum has many characteristics of effective accountability, including evaluation capacity, fiscal monitoring, community oversight, available data, performance measures, and program monitoring. Together, these elements create accountability at various levels, from day-to-day administration of contracts to community and political accountability.

However, accountability within the Continuum could be greatly strengthened by more clearly spelling out the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of providers, the County, and the HYOC. We encountered a great deal of confusion among interviewees around how decisions are made, who is responsible for policy versus daily management decisions, and what are the expectations of different parties.

Measurable

We found the Continuum to have adequate capacity to measure, report, monitor, and evaluate its efforts because client outcomes were established at each level of the system and significant resources were dedicated to evaluation. As a result, the Continuum is constantly generating information about itself through a number of channels, including electronically shared client files, a consolidated client database, monitoring, information gathered for the HYOC, and ongoing evaluation.

Despite much effort to measure the success of services, we found few formal structures in place to take action on findings and recommendations. This is a significant weakness in the system and speaks to the lack of clarity around accountability and the roles within

the Continuum. As a result, there are missed opportunities in following up on the information gained from these measurement efforts.

Comprehensive

As described above, the Continuum generally provides only basic services. It relies on connections with other service providers to reach outcomes identified as critical to youth success by the Ad Hoc Committee. The degree to which the Continuum is comprehensive depends on the quality of linkages to other services such as schools, health clinics, alcohol and drug treatment, and mental health services.

There was concern among interviewees that hardcore homeless youth, a large subpopulation of the homeless youth community, are not being adequately served by the Continuum. Many perceive the downtown system as accepting youth who may be more appropriately served elsewhere, such as in runaway programs or foster care, while failing to reach the hardcore homeless some believe the system was supposed to serve. There are discrepancies between the definition of the intended service population in the Request for Proposal, which calls for all homeless youth to be served, and the perception among stakeholders, who generally identify hardcore homeless youth as the priority for services.

Decision makers must determine whether the intended population includes all homeless youth, whether other populations such as runaways should be served in the Continuum, and whether subpopulations within the homeless youth community should receive priority before the system can provide the most effective services. Such distinctions are critical in designing and delivering appropriate services because youths' needs are different depending on the length of their homelessness and the severity of associated problems.

While progress has been made, this system outcome needs definition and follow-up to ensure attainment. There are current efforts underway to research this issue and to more clearly define the intended service population.

Efficient

We did not look at this issue in depth. However, we noted that the current system does contain duplication, some of it intentional to the design, such as service coordination and transitional housing split between two agencies according to developmental maturity of clients. Some degree of duplication may provide for multiple approaches to meet the different needs of individual youth.

## Recommendations

Based on our analysis of the Homeless Youth Continuum's attainment of identified system outcomes, the Auditor's Office recommends a number of steps be taken and issues addressed. It is our intent to follow up on these recommendations until each is addressed or failure to address them warrants our conducting further audit work. The responsibility to implement these recommendations lies with the entire Homeless Youth Continuum: the Department of Community and Family Services, the Homeless Youth Oversight Committee (HYOC), and the four provider agencies.

1. Bring management of the Continuum into alignment with established criteria for partnership-based contracts to increase the likelihood of achieving mutual goals.
2. Clarify the role of all the parties to the Continuum to strengthen partnerships.
  - A. Clearly spell out the expectations of County leadership, management, and staff regarding their responsibilities in the partnership with providers.
  - B. Define expectations of providers in working with the County, the HYOC, and other providers regarding their responsibilities in the partnership.
  - C. Adopt a mission for the HYOC that allows it to both ensure the effective implementation of the original system design and support the Continuum to expand and improve.
  - D. Establish a clear purpose, set parameters of authority, operational bylaws, and formal leadership for the HYOC to ensure its effectiveness.
3. Improve linkages to outside systems and providers of other services to homeless youth to increase the likelihood of youth attainment of outcomes.
4. Implement the Youth Development Model to ensure service quality and shared philosophy.

5. Establish procedures for following up and taking action on findings from evaluations, audits, monitoring reports, and other research conducted to maximize the benefit of knowledge gained from these efforts.
6. Clarify definition of intended client population, including prioritization of subpopulations, if appropriate, in order to increase the effectiveness of services.

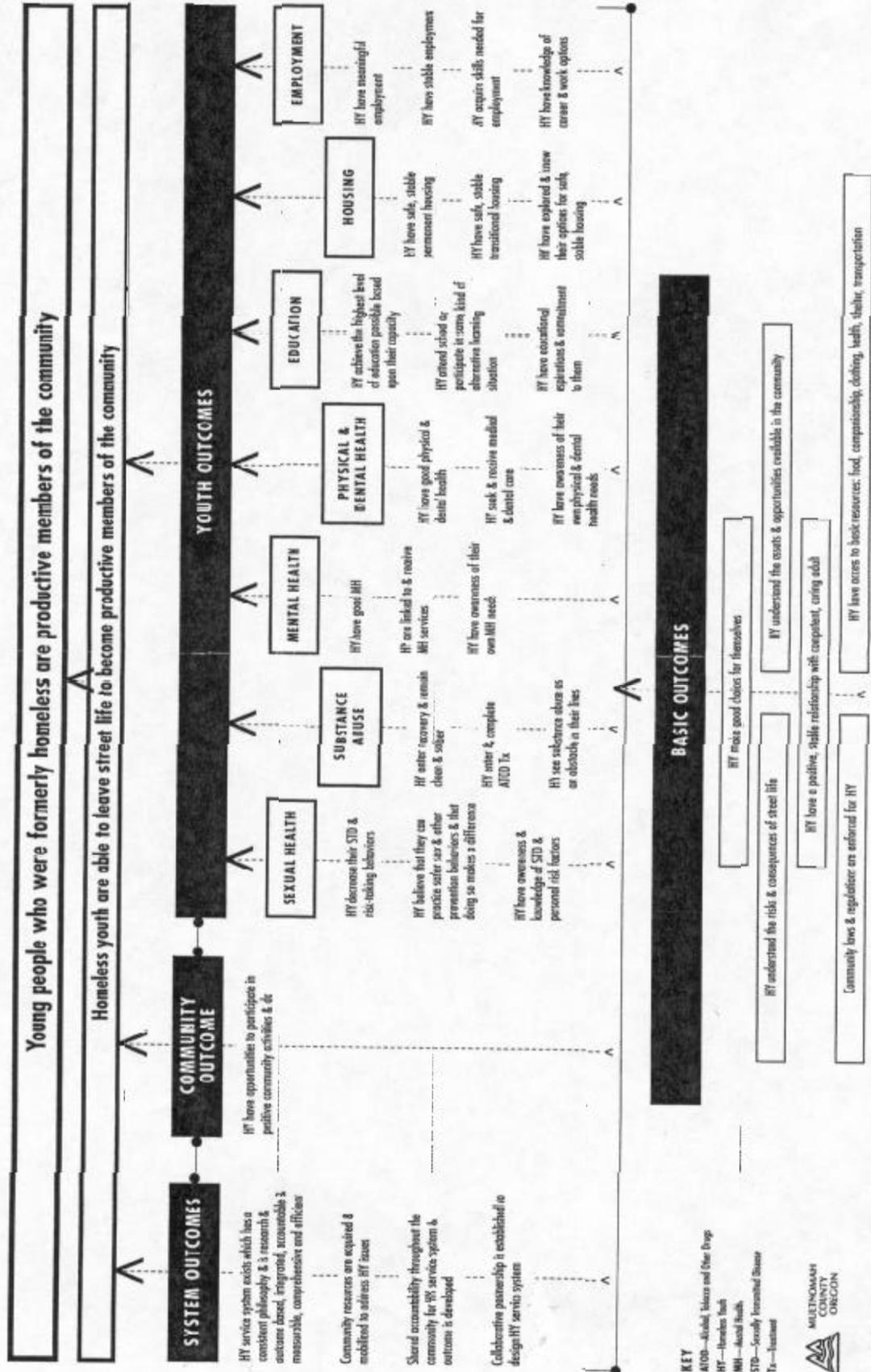
# Appendix

## Youth Development Model Characteristics

Program instructions that accompany contracts with Homeless Youth Continuum Services providers stipulate that the Youth Development Model be implemented in each agency. Specifically, services must be provided in such a way that:

- Assures the safety of the youth
- Connects the youth to and involves them in supportive communities, schools, and neighborhoods
- Enforces community expectations, boundaries, and regulations with youth
- Results in a decrease in unhealthy risk-taking behaviors, e.g., smoking, using alcohol/drugs, unprotected sex, etc.
- Develops leadership skills and positive interactions among youth by involving them in service decision-making and self-governance
- Provides support and supervision to individuals in a mentoring and individualized manner that builds on the youths' strengths and abilities
- Helps youth attain their appropriate developmental level in terms of decision-making and life skills
- Makes available positive peer and adult relationships in order to promote age-appropriate social development and competence
- Results in individuals having a positive view of themselves and their future
- Connects the youth to educational/vocational programs where they succeed
- Results in youth leaving the streets for stable housing, supportive income, and a productive life in the community

# DESIRED OUTCOME FRAMEWORK for DOWNTOWN PORTLAND HOMELESS YOUTH SYSTEM



# **Responses to the Report**



## Diane M. Linn, Multnomah County Chair

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October 30, 2001

Ms. Suzanne Flynn, Auditor  
Multnomah County  
501 SE Hawthorne Boulevard, Room 601  
Portland, OR 97214

Dear Ms. Flynn:

Thank you for the information included in the **Review of the Homeless Youth Services Continuum**. Your assessment will be of assistance to our Department of Community and Family Services and to our external partners as we continue to work together to find solutions to help homeless youth find their way off the street into safe, healthy lives.

### Recommendation 1.

The concern surrounding the County's role as a funder, an enforcer and as a collaborative partner is an issue the County faces in more than just this particular instance. I am interested in further exploring the question of how we establish true partnership-based contracts and how it would apply to this Continuum.

### Recommendation 2.

Having a clear understanding of the roles of all parties to the Continuum is important. The role of the Homeless Youth Oversight Committee (HYOC) was particularly singled out in your report. It is my understanding that the role of the HYOC is that of policy adviser to the Board of County Commissioners on this issue. The HYOC recently appointed leadership and adopted a work plan. With their self-redirection I am optimistic that their role will become clearer to them.

### Recommendation 3.

The main strength of the Continuum is the ability of the partners to work together to bring in additional resources and linkages to provide services in drug/alcohol, mental health, education, and job-readiness. Over the last fiscal year the Continuum has added links to the Portland Police Bureau, The Gates Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to name a few. I support these partnerships fully and I hope to assist our partners in further leveraging the strengths of our Continuum to bring in even more resources.



Recommendation 4.

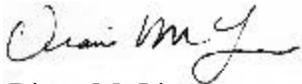
The Youth Development Model is critical to the success of the youth in our Continuum of services. If youth are to be successful they must be involved in a meaningful way and utilization of the Model is the key. The youth we serve must be involved in self-management, consulted regarding programs, and more youth should be engaged on the HYOC to help make policy recommendations.

Recommendation 5. and 6.

The HYOC works continuously with DCFS's Office of Planning, Development and Evaluation to track and manage data that is collected in the Continuum. The HYOC and the Continuum must aggressively utilize the data to make informed policy recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. By utilizing the growing pool of data we will be able to effectively target our limited dollars into services to the most vulnerable youth.

Your analysis is thorough and I agree basically with the recommendations made. I appreciate the opportunity to address them. I also recognize that more aggressive, specific changes in the Continuum are necessary and we are working with the department to pursue those.

Sincerely,



Diane M. Linn,  
Chair