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COHHIO SECURES \$2.2 MILLION GRANT TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN SOUTHEASTERN OHIO

Southeastern Ohio is one of only four rural areas in the country to be awarded federal grants to implement innovative approaches to ending youth homelessness, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced recently.

Local homeless agencies in Athens, Vinton, Meigs, Jackson, and Gallia counties will be eligible for a portion of HUD's \$2.2 million Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program grant to help address a problem that is largely out of view in rural parts of the state.

The Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) submitted the grant application along with the Ohio Development Services Agency (ODSA) on behalf of the homeless system that includes southeast Ohio. COHHIO, a non-profit agency working to end homelessness throughout Ohio, will serve as the lead agency, collaborating with local partners to create a coordinated community plan and develop new projects to prevent and end youth homelessness in the five-county region.

A variety of local and state stakeholders will participate in the planning process, including homeless service providers, schools, child welfare agencies, youth advisory boards, the Ohio Department of Education and other community partners.

COHHIO staff will also help implement local projects that address the many challenges facing homeless youth in rural communities. As a demonstration project, the local initiatives to fight youth homelessness will be closely monitored to assess their effectiveness.

"This grant will help us figure out the best ways to meet the needs of homeless youth in rural communities. The lessons we learn from this pilot project could be applied more broadly throughout rural Ohio and even at the national level," said Erica Mulryan, COHHIO's Continuum of Care Director. "We're honored to have this opportunity to develop policies and programs that could advance efforts to end youth homelessness throughout the country."

Mulryan said the federal funding, which becomes available early this year, will be used to support the development of new local projects that use proven methods to reduce homelessness, like supportive housing and rapid rehousing. The grant money could also be used to fund new and innovative approaches to combat youth homelessness in the community.

In addition to HUD funding, local homeless service agencies participating in the project, including Sojourners Care Network, a homeless youth provider based in Vinton County, and Integrated Services for Behavioral Health based in Athens, receive state support through the Ohio Housing Trust Fund. The Trust Fund is the primary source of state funding for local homeless service providers throughout the state.

“This federal grant is a great example of how the Ohio Housing Trust Fund helps leverage federal funding for local agencies who are working every day to house the most vulnerable members of our community,” said Rich Games, co-executive director of Sojourners. “We look forward to partnering with COHHIO and other agencies to devise an innovative plan to end youth homelessness in our community.”

Homelessness among youth often stems from domestic violence, behavioral and mental health issues, and/or personal safety concerns for LGBT youth. In addition, transition age youth up to age 24 often encounter a variety of barriers when trying to get help through the traditional adult homeless service system.

High poverty, high unemployment, and the opioid crisis make southeastern Ohio particularly challenging for youth struggling to find a safe place to live. Since 2009, the number of children in Ohio’s child welfare system has increased by about 19 percent, while agency funding has dropped by 17 percent.

Youth who have “aged out” of the foster care system are particularly at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking. A survey by Sojourners found that 95 percent of foster care youth come from families where one or more adults in the home abused substances and all experienced some form of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.

ODSA is the HUD-designated lead agency and contracts with COHHIO to manage the Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care, which coordinates funding and planning efforts for the state’s 80 non-urban counties. COHHIO’s Youth Housing Initiative works to reduce barriers that prevent Ohio’s homeless youth and young adults from gaining access to housing, services and stability through furthering advocacy, training and education.

More information: [HUD news release](#) on Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program
[HUD website](#) on Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program