



HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT **HOMELESS STUDENTS IN** **AMERICA'S PUBLIC** **SCHOOLS**

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Promotor Pathway Program – LAYC and Partnership with Project Hope

Temporary participation in a short-term program is not enough to address the obstacles facing homeless and disconnected youth. In response, the Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) in the Washington, D.C. metro region created a new intervention model to address the needs of this population. LAYC's Promotor Pathway is a long-term, intensive client program that pairs youth with a mentor for up to six years. The goals of the Promotor Pathway Program are for youth to:

- Earn a high school diploma or the equivalent and enroll in post-secondary education;
- Secure and retain employment with long-term career potential; and
- Gain the skills necessary to lead a happy and healthy life.

Youth in the program are assigned a Promotor, who serves as a mentor, case manager, community health worker, and advocate. Promotors work closely with youth to link them to the services they need to achieve their goals, and intentionally seek to foster a trusting relationship with their mentees. Case managers carry a cell phone constantly so they are accessible to their mentees 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For youth experiencing homelessness, long-term, readily available support by a single advocate offers much-needed stability and support.

Since 2008, LAYC's Promotor Pathway has shown evidence of success, including:³⁹

- Connecting 148 youth with stable housing;
- Securing 188 youth a job;
- Re-enrolling 55 youth in school;
- Helping 19 youth graduate from high school, while another 37 obtained their GED;
- 19 youth enrolled in post-secondary education.

LAYC will announce further findings of effectiveness later this year. The success of LAYC's Promotor Pathway has brought national recognition and inspired other nonprofits across the nation to adopt the same intervention model.

Partnership with Project Hope Alliance & Newport-Mesa Unified School District

Jennifer Friend, CEO of the California-based Project Hope Alliance, first heard of LAYC's Promotor Pathway in 2015. After learning about the success of the program, Friend was determined to bring the model to Orange County, CA, where more than 32,000 children are struggling with homelessness.

Friend herself experienced homelessness, and was particularly drawn to the program because of its inclusion of youth up to age 24. Friend understood the intense uptick in support that students

require once they advance on to college if they are to persist and complete their degree.

The Newport-Mesa Unified School District Promotor Pathway operates out of Newport Harbor High School and will support up to 50 homeless youth from the time they are a freshman in high school until they reach age 24. The office is located in a more secluded area of the school so that students can maintain anonymity when coming in, while still being in close proximity so that transportation is not an issue. The program is funded and staffed by the Project Hope Alliance.

The program recruits students who can benefit from their services through referrals from teachers and school staff. As more students have felt the positive effects Promotors have had on their lives, they have brought friends and family members who they think could benefit from the program, too.

In addition, the church across from Newport Harbor High School houses a drop-in center, and has begun to refer students to the Promotor Pathway office at Newport Mesa, as well. Joining together with the faith community has had strong positive impacts. The church community provides students with the anonymity they wish, as well as a safe space. The opportunity for Project Hope Alliance to have a physical presence at the church allows them to leverage the resources of the faith community in addition to the resources of the school district. These types of school/community partnerships also provide Project Hope staff with the benefit of having only one physical office (at Newport High School) while still maintaining a presence at other brick and mortar spaces, such as churches. This allows Project Hope to invest money in resources and services rather than physical space.

Project Hope Alliance knew that LAYC's model of intentional case management and youth advocacy would bring necessary change to how homeless students are supported in Newport-Mesa Unified School District. Project Hope Alliance has worked to educate the school community on the prevalence of student homelessness in their district, and unify them around addressing the problems these students face. As Friend said, "People are not rallied to solve a problem that they don't know exists." Showing the broader community that their children attend school alongside students experiencing homelessness has helped to change the culture across the district to be more understanding towards homeless students.

Project Hope Alliance currently focuses on rapidly rehousing families into stable places. Once rehoused, they use this housing as a hub to engage families in education, mentoring, and advocacy activities to focus on ending the cycle of homelessness through the children they are serving today. The Project Hope Alliance is excited to see how the evolution of the Promotor Pathway Program will fit into this focus as it moves forward.