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Youth Hope Month - Spotlight Article - Project Hope Alliance - 1800RUNAWAY.ORG

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Project Hope Alliance Empowers Youth Experiencing Homelessness to Accomplish their Dreams

Deploying a Long-term Model of Care

In Orange County, California, Project Hope Alliance is working every day to end the cycle of homelessness, one child at a time. Working alongside their education partners, Project Hope Alliance embeds case managers directly on school campuses to provide youth and families with guidance, emotional support, financial assistance, basic resources, and essentials such as school supplies. Their work is rooted in building trusting relationships with kids and their families while removing barriers caused by

homelessness so kids can thrive in school and in life.

Project Hope Alliance supports 400 kids experiencing homelessness from kindergarten to age 24 as well as their family, touching the lives of over 1,100 individuals. They strive to end generational homelessness through education and empowerment because when kids experiencing homelessness graduate from high school, they are 400% less likely to experience homelessness as adults. After all, 95% of youth in their program graduate high school, compared to the California state average of 74% for youth experiencing homelessness.

By seamlessly weaving services into a student's daily routine at school, Project Hope Alliance has also had the correlating ability to reduce shame, fear, and disjointed services. PHA's site-based approach has become a model of best practice for serving students and their families who experience homelessness.

Additionally, the organization has ensured strategic partnerships are a core component of their model of care. Project Hope Alliance is partnering with the Orange County Department of Education and school districts to create a coordinated strategy to build lasting systems of support for youth experiencing homelessness. This work includes gathering data to align partners around unmet youth needs and developing a shared plan to improve outcomes such as attendance and graduation rates. Through collaborative

training and utilizing best practices, PHA and its partners aim to build consistent, sustainable systems of support across districts.

Honoring Youth Voice and Choice

In partnership with the nonprofit EverFree, Project Hope Alliance has implemented an international research-based assessment tool called Freedom Lifemap. Originally designed for survivors of human trafficking and exploitation, the tool has been adapted to support youth experiencing homelessness.

With Freedom Lifemap, instead of case managers completing assessments on behalf of youth, as is common practice, the youth themselves take the lead. Freedom Lifemap reflects a fundamental shift in how support services are delivered – from a system that does things for youth to one that works with them.

Youth evaluate their own well-being across 51 indicators within six life domains, including safety, health, housing, education, relationships, and financial stability.

At intake, and again six months later, youth rate their status using a simple “red, yellow, green” system. They then collaborate with their PHA case manager to set priorities, connect to relevant services, and track progress. This visual and intuitive process gives youth a framework to understand their strengths and challenges while also recognizing and

celebrating their accomplishments.

“Many students are surprised by the number of ‘greens’ in their results, and they recognize this as proof of their resilience and ability to keep moving forward,” said Shelby Feliciano-Sabala, EdD, MSW, Chief Partnership Officer at Project Hope Alliance. “For our staff, the insights gleaned from the assessment help guide case planning, help identify safety risks, and ensure support is centered on each young person’s unique goals and aspirations.”

Beyond its day-to-day impact, Freedom Lifemap also provides valuable data to inform and strengthen Project Hope Alliance’s programs. Dr. Feliciano-Sabala shared, “at its heart, the tool is about dignity. It helps keep youth at the center of everything we do and honors each young person’s story, passion, and potential.”

Showing Youth They Are Seen During Youth HOPE Month

As a new partner in Youth HOPE Month, Project Hope Alliance is shining a light on youth experiencing homelessness. Throughout November, they are posting on social media to raise awareness and inspire action. On November 13 (Wear Green Day), staff, volunteers, and youth across the community will show their support for young people by dressing head-to-toe in shades of green. Project Hope Alliance is already looking ahead to deepen its impact

in 2026 and beyond.

For more information about Project Hope Alliance, visit

<https://projecthopealliance.org/>.

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