



CitySquare

TRAC Program

Strategies utilized by an AOI National Awards Program winner to help youth acquire and maintain permanent housing after aging out of foster care

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About the AOI Housing Award

The Aging Out Institute (AOI) National Awards Program recognizes organizations for the work that they are doing to help foster youth age out of foster care and into independence successfully. Housing is a key success factor for all youth, but because of their difficult childhood and the inherent challenges of being part of the foster care system, foster youth struggle with homelessness and unstable housing (i.e., couch surfing) significantly more than their non-fostered peers. In an effort to impact the homelessness statistics of foster youth, AOI celebrates and shares the strategies that are effective in helping youth acquire stable housing. This year, the recipient of the 2018 AOI Housing Award is CitySquare for their Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) program.





About CitySquare's Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) Program

Program Overview

CitySquare began in 1988 as a small food pantry founded by a Dallas businessman with the support of his friends and church. At that time, the goal of CitySquare was to create a source of hope for those in need in the city of Dallas. Thirty years later, CitySquare has grown to be one of the most effective social service organizations in the city.

The mission of CitySquare's Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) Program is connecting young people, aged 14-24, who are transitioning from foster care toward self-sufficiency with individualized support, planning, and access to community services.

TRAC's goal is to increase the number of young people who have the necessary skills and resources to successfully transition to adulthood by empowering their progression to independence. TRAC provides services to assist these youth with crisis intervention, housing, education, and employment.



TRAC Services Include:

- *Rental Assistance:* This assistance is short-term and designed to stabilize housing and prevent episodes of homelessness.
- *Transitional Housing:* This service provides shared, short term housing for homeless youth.
- *Rapid Rehousing:* This service provides permanent housing for homeless youth.
- *Permanent Supportive Housing:* This service provides permanent housing for youth who are homeless and have documented disabling conditions.

Program Structure & Roles

In addition to housing, TRAC brings together community resources and intensive case management services to serve as the Texas Department of Family Protective Services (TDFPS) Region 3 provider of Aftercare Case Management and services, as well as Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Life Skills Training, and Employment Readiness Services.

TRAC serves as the subject matter expert on transition services and is knowledgeable in assisting youth with obtaining the following resources:

- TDFPS Preparation for Adult Living Unit (TRAC is the sole provider in TDFPS region 3)
- Extended Foster Care & Supervised Independent Living
- Tuition & Fee Waivers
- Education & Training Vouchers
- Transitional Medicaid

Services begin with comprehensive case management. Case managers engage youth in a goal setting process that identifies barriers that must be addressed and services that aid in creating a path to independence. Youth who are homeless or are on the brink of homelessness are screened and referred by their Case Manager to the appropriate agency.

TRAC staff works with the youth to set Individualized Goal Plans, but the youth are held responsible for moving their goals forward. They demonstrate the skills they have learned during apartment inspections, housing meetings, grocery shopping, laundry completion, and paying their rent on time. Even those who receive assistance through TRAC must pick up the check and deliver it to the landlord as if they were paying their own rent.

Youth Participation Requirements:

TRAC Housing provides its services to at-risk young adults, ages 18-24. Each specific service has its own participation requirements:

- *Rental Assistance:* This assistance is available to youth who participate in case management and are working, enrolled in a higher education program, or are actively working a career plan.
- *Transitional Housing:* This service has a preference for youth exiting state foster care with no housing options or have become homeless after leaving foster care.
- *Rapid Rehousing:* This service has a preference for parents escaping domestic violence and former foster youth.
- *Permanent Supportive Housing:* This service has a preference for former foster youth.

Staffing

Title	Number of Positions	Details about Position
Management	3	The Director is responsible for all fiscal and financial reporting. The Assistant Manager is responsible for clinical operations. The Housing Manager is responsible for housing programming.
Coaches	3	Coaches are responsible for direct client service provision.
Case Managers	7	Case managers work closely with the youth to help set goals and provide external agency referrals when needed.
Administration	2	Administration staff is responsible for writing checks and rental assistance documentation.
AmeriCorps	3	AmeriCorps members are positioned to provide mentoring and support.
Internships	3	Interns are utilized to provide case aid and support.
Outreach	1	Outreach specialists connect with unsheltered youth.

Partnerships

TRAC benefits from partnerships with organizations throughout the state:

Texas Department of Family & Protective Services contracts to provide Chaffee funding and aftercare support.

Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance, Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, Dallas/Collin & Tarrant/Parker Continuum of Care provides infrastructure for housing providers.

Housing and Urban Development contracts to provide transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing.

MDHA Youth Committee works in partnership with other youth providers of housing services to move a comprehensive agenda forward in the community.

Fort Worth and Dallas Housing Authority services agreements with the local housing board to prioritize former foster youth for housing vouchers.

Texas Workforce Commission contracts to provide workforce programming for youth, and memorandums of understanding used to prioritize foster youth for services.

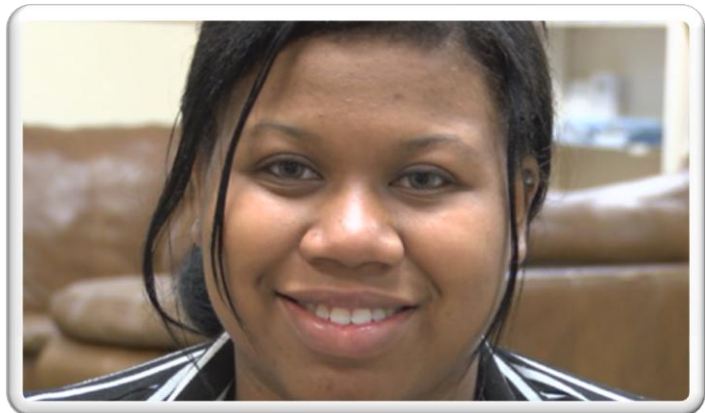
Dallas County Community College District manages agreements to enroll former foster youth through appointed liaisons on the various campuses.

Dallas and Tarrant Minor Domestic Sex Trafficking Coalitions facilitates partnerships to combat child sex trafficking in these communities.

Staff Training/Preparation

All staff must have at least a bachelor's degree and two years of paid, full-time work experience with youth.

Once hired, staff receive in-depth training on motivational interviewing, trauma-informed care, transitions theory, and youth engagement.



Research Foundation

Texans Care for Children - Transitions to Adulthood for Texas Foster Youth (2013):

This policy briefing and the recommendations help guide the TRAC program's work and service delivery. The areas addressed include:

- Expanding housing options for transitioning youth
- Increasing funding for transition program staff and services to meet demands of a growing foster youth population
- Transition centers to provide youth with easy access to a variety of services in order to transition successfully and Independent housing
- Supportive housing to allow youth to practice independent living skills while they transition to independence
- Other programming within TRAC, like life skills classes, employment training, workshops, support groups, education assistance, and special events

The Student Experience

Knowledge/Skills

TRAC offers many opportunities for youth to gain knowledge and build skills. Below are several examples:

Decision Making: Youth make all decisions regarding their life choices. Youth are never self-prescribed a treatment plan. All case management is provided via a life coaching methodology such that the staff members are simply there to support youth as they work through their own decisions.

Goal Setting: All youth set goals in an individualized transition plan. This plan is then updated either monthly (if the youth is in crisis) or quarterly (if the youth is safe and stable). Youth can visibly see their progress toward goal attainment.

Handling Failure: Failure is seen as a normal part of life. Just as successes are celebrated, the program also provides a safe place to go when failure occurs. Youth find a caring adult at TRAC to discuss what happened and how to correct it and move forward.

Leadership Skills: Youth are invited to be a part of the Regional Leadership Coalition, which often meets at the TRAC center. Youth who demonstrate leadership skills are identified for opportunities to share their experience with various workgroups.

Learning Balance:

Active Learning = 75%

Passive Learning = 25%

Characteristics/Attitudes

TRAC also helps youth build character and positive attitudes that will help them succeed in life. Below are a few examples:

Confidence: Youth are addressed by name at the center. This simple act instills confidence in the youth that they are worth knowing.

Creativity: Youth expression is welcomed at TRAC. Youth are free to express their artistic abilities, as well as find a safe space to self-identify.

Desire for Learning: Youth who identify education as one of their goals are immediately referred to the education program that can assist them with locating the appropriate school and helping with enrollment and retention.

Integrity: Because youth are held accountable for their actions, nothing is ignored. The program aims to help the youth become self-sufficient. For that reason, hard conversations are engaged, including issues of integrity. Youth understand that their choices become a reflection of the person they want to be.

Optimism: Through life coaching, the staff models positive thinking to the youth.

Perseverance: Youth often have a hard time locating affordable apartments or employment. The program continues to assist the youth until a breakthrough occurs. Throughout this process, youth are actively engaged and kept on track for success.



Relationship Building: Because the program is often the only transition center for current or former foster youth, reunions regularly occur on the premises. Youth are encouraged to build relationships with others utilizing the center and the various groups therein.

Resilience: Like perseverance, resilience is taught over time, but the youth themselves are more likely to teach this skill to staff.

Self-Awareness: Like integrity, this is often discussed directly with the coaches during check-ins. These hard conversations help youth see themselves as others see them.

Self-Reliance: Youth exiting systems of care often learn that these systems are there to save the day. Once a youth leaves, it is a fast, harsh lesson to learn that the only person responsible for your housing, eating, and well-being is yourself. TRAC believes that youth must learn this quickly in order to move to self-sufficiency, so staff are trained not to enable youth.

Funding

Funder	Annual Amount	Purpose
HUD	\$283,920	All expenses for the Permanent Housing Program
HUD	\$160,347	All expenses for the Transitional Housing Program
TDFPS	\$138,000	All expenses for the Short-Term Rental Assistance
HUD	\$95,520	All expenses for the Rapid Re-Housing Program
Anonymous Foundation	\$75,000	Cash match for case management staffing
United Way	\$35,000	Cash match for staffing for housing programs

Marketing

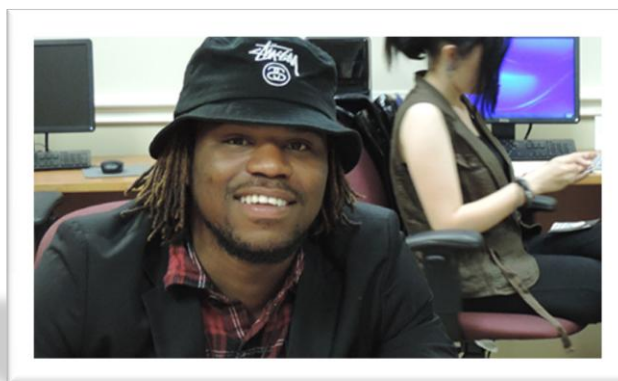
The TRAC program is the provider of PAL Life Skills training in Region 3, so all youth in a 19 county radius hear about TRAC services in those classes. TRAC communicates its services through the following efforts:

- The program has a website with an online referral option.
- Youth learn about the program from their foster parent, child placing agency, CASA, or other interested community partners.
- The program is presented at various training opportunities in the area.
- Youth are referred from the various shelters, outreach teams, and ISD liaisons.

Measures of Youth Success

During Program

While in the program, the youth's progress is tracked toward goal attainment on at least a quarterly basis. Cash and non-cash income attainment is also tracked quarterly. This includes both paid employment and access to benefits like Medicaid, SNAP, and other supports.



Success is measured by the number of youth working or on track toward a living wage job, in school, or actively working with the Workforce Advocate. Metrics are also recorded for how many youth are in safe, stable housing.

After Program

Upon exit, the youths' moves toward permanent housing options are tracked. Additionally, changes in their income from entry are tracked. The youth's progress is tracked for at least three months upon exit to monitor stability.

Program Results

75% of unduplicated youth who are no longer in paid foster care and receive case management services are enrolled in an educational or vocational program, are employed or actively seeking employment.

80% of the youth who received assistance through TRAC housing are stabilized within three months of their first assistance.

Continual Program Improvement

CitySquare holds focus groups with youth, conducts satisfaction surveys, and reviews the outcomes on an annual basis. For instance, 5 years into their THP program, they completely restructured to provide more independence and create a program model that is very different from most other transitional programs. They do not have live-in staff, nor do they have many program entry requirements. Youth are simply expected to be able to live safely with others and immediately engage in workforce services. What this might mean is no drug tests, except as they would impact employment ability.

Challenges

Government funding is always a potential challenge or barrier as it can shift depending on politics. The Texas Child Welfare System is in a current state of flux, which also impacts funding, resources, and services. Housing resources are extremely limited, particularly in the Dallas area.

There are fewer apartments available at fair market rent, making affordable housing resources competitive and virtually non-existent. Youth programs at CitySquare are often competing against internal programs for funding resources and community access. A lean operation can lead to burn out and feelings of scarcity.

TRAC Housing consistently houses the youth that other housing providers decline to serve. For this reason, the housing programs are structured to fit the most difficult to serve youth. Nearly every youth in the program has some sort of documented disability, severe trauma, and/or criminal history.

Lessons Learned

The following are program approaches that have been implemented in order to best meet the needs of the youth they serve:

- The program attempts to screen youth in and not out. To support the variety of needs, the program operates a flexible design that facilitates shifting the youth to the best support system for them as they progress on their journey.
- The program model is voluntary and driven by a youth's need, motivation, level of engagement, and interest. There is no time limit or requirement for frequency of youth participation. They can access support daily, if they choose, or have much less frequent contact and support.
- The program assumes that youths desire for success and independence. The program's role is to provide them the needed tools to attain that when possible.
- The program's role is to coach youth towards their definition of success and provide them needed guidance along the way.
- The program assumes that youth will make mistakes, errors, and misjudgments on their path to independence, but will eventually succeed. However, this will not be a linear or predictable process. The program's flexibility is crucial to meeting the needs as they develop and change.



L-R: Madeline Reedy, TRAC Senior Director; Dr. John Siburt, President & COO; Treva High, TRAC Housing Coach; Portia Johnson, TRAC Housing Coach; Larry James, CEO

Aging Out Institute would like to thank the following people for their support of the 2018 AOI National Awards Program:

We also want to thank the individuals who donated toward the fundraiser that enabled us to launch our awards program in 2018:

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THANK YOU!

The judges of the Housing category who devoted a significant amount of time and effort to help design the awards program process and tools, review the applications in the Housing category, and make the difficult decision about which organization should receive the award this year:

Dr. John DeGarmo
Consultant, Speaker,
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The Foster Care Institute



Courtney Dowling
Dir. of Residential Services
Wichita Campus at ACH
Child & Family Services at
Ft. Worth, TX



The Housing category sponsor that took a chance on a new awards program because they saw the need to come together to help foster youth who are aging out of care:

SPARKROCK

<https://www.sparkrock.com>

And a special thank you to all the organization representatives who took the time to fill out an award application and let us know about the great work they are doing!





MISSION: AOI promotes resources and strategies that help youth age out of foster care and into adulthood successfully.

VISION: To improve national outcomes for youth aging out of care by identifying, sharing and encouraging the widespread use of effective strategies for helping foster youth transition to adulthood.

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