Assessment of Groundwork and PRO Youth Programs: Executive Summary

David Fine, PhD
Sarah Salomon, MPH
Amanda Winters, MPH, MPA
Olivia Lutz, MPH
Wendy Nakatsukasa-Ono, MPH

CARDEA
Training, Organizational Development and Research

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CARDEA
Training, Organizational Development and Research

INTRODUCTION

In the blog "Ending Youth Homelessness: A Call to Action Forty Years in the Making", William H. Bentley, Associate Commissioner of the Family & Youth Services Bureau and Laura Zeilinger, Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, highlight four needs for youth to transition from homelessness to safe and stable housing. These four needs include: 1) permanent connections with caring and supportive adults; 2) opportunities to reconnect with family and repair relationships (if doing so is safe and appropriate); 3) education and employment services and supports; and 4) programs that promote their social-emotional well-being and deal with issues common among youth experiencing homelessness.

In King County, Groundwork and PRO Youth provide critical services in the continuum of care for youth experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of losing their housing. Historically, these programs have served similar populations, yet their objectives, structure, and size are distinct.

Groundwork is a wraparound program launched in 2010 with funding from United Way of King County (UWKC). As defined by the National Wraparound Initiative, wraparound is an "intensive, individualized care planning and management process…[that] aims to achieve positive outcomes by providing a structured, creative and individualized team planning process." Clients must strive to access safe, permanent housing; set additional goals; and remain in the program until they have achieved all of their goals. In King County, there are two Groundwork providers—Catholic Community Services of Western Washington (CCS) and Friends of Youth.

Launched in 1994, PRO Youth is a countywide program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), with matching dollars from the City of Seattle General Fund. PRO Youth helps homeless youth transition to safe, permanent housing through work with trained case managers who support them in accessing housing and other critical resources. The City of Seattle coordinates the PRO Youth consortium, which includes five service providers—Auburn Youth Resources, CCS, Friends of Youth, Therapeutic Health Services, and YouthCare.

In September 2014, Raikes Foundation engaged Cardea to conduct an assessment of Groundwork and PRO Youth to foster ongoing learning and collaboration among providers serving homeless and at-risk youth. Key questions included:

- Who do Groundwork and PRO Youth currently serve?
- What outcomes are achieved and at what cost?
- What type of youth is each program best serving?
- Who should these programs serve?
- How should youth and young adults be referred to each of these programs in the future?
- How should they be targeted?

Cardea used a mixed methods approach for this assessment that included retrospective analysis of quantitative data, cost-effectiveness analysis, and qualitative analysis of key informant interviews.

METHODS

The primary data sources for this assessment included:

- Groundwork and PRO Youth client intake and exit records from January 2010–September 2014, accessed from Safe Harbors, King County's Web-based Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
- Supplemental data for subsets of Groundwork and PRO Youth clients, provided by CCS and YouthCare, respectively
- Semi-structured interviews with Groundwork and PRO Youth administrators and service providers from Auburn Youth Resources, CCS, City of Seattle, Friends of Youth, Multi-Service Center, Neighborcare Health, Therapeutic Health Services, UWKC, and YouthCare
- Data on Groundwork and PRO Youth program costs for 2011–2014 provided by CCS, UWKC, and City of Seattle, and additional cost estimates derived from national literature in the field

HMIS intake records included client demographics, situational and health characteristics, financial/income information, and service usage outside of Groundwork and PRO Youth. HMIS exit records included housing, school enrollment, and employment outcomes. Supplemental data from CCS and YouthCare captured additional client characteristics including sexual orientation, foster care history, and legal involvement. CCS also provided measures of client goals, confidence in their skills and the Groundwork wraparound process, and social networks. All information was captured by client self-report, facilitated by staff beginning at program intake.

This analysis focused on two primary outcomes that measured clients' housing status at program exit: 1) stably housed, per HUD's definition; and 2) stably/transitionally housed, as recommended by a Technical Working Group that supported this assessment **(Figure 1)**. Additional outcomes included employment and school status at program exit, as well as return to documented homelessness six months after exiting Groundwork or PRO Youth.

Analysis of HMIS and supplemental agency data employed standard statistical procedures, including frequencies, cross tabulations, multivariate logistic regression, and propensity score matching.

Cost-effectiveness analyses was conducted from the perspective of all funders of homeless youth services in King County, and considered a broad range of direct costs that included all cash and in-kind resources supporting Groundwork and PRO Youth. The cost-effectiveness analysis also included indirect costs associated with client housing status at program exit and benefits other than housing, projected for six months post-program.

Figure 1. Definitions of housing outcomes

Stably Housed*

Permanent supportive housing

Staying or living with family, permanent tenure

Staying or living with friends, permanent tenure

Rental by client

Owned by client

* As defined by HUD

+

Transitionally Housed

Transitional Living Program

Staying or living with family, temporary tenure

Staying or living with friends, temporary tenure

=

Stably/ Transitionally Housed

KEY FINDINGS

Groundwork and PRO Youth serve diverse youth facing serious challenges

> *Almost 90% of my clients have a mental health issue and all have seven or more significant barriers, like substance abuse, mental health issues, criminal involvement, sexual exploitation, etc.… Some have as many as twelve barriers.*

Collectively, Groundwork served a total of 205 and PRO Youth served a total of 1,556 clients during the assessment period (January 2010–September 2014). Groundwork and PRO Youth client populations were comparable with respect to age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Clients ranged in age from 15-24 years, with 90% aged 18 or older. Over 60% of clients were youth of color, and about one-quarter of clients identified as LGBT.[1]

Based on HMIS intake data, youth reported many challenges, including history of homelessness, mental and physical health problems, and substance use issues. One in three were living on the streets or in emergency shelter prior to enrollment, and two in five had a history of long-term or recurring homelessness. Sixty percent (60%) reported one or more health problems. Interviews with key informants suggested that Groundwork sees a higher proportion of clients with more complex needs. HMIS data corroborated that Groundwork clients were more likely to report long-term or recurring homelessness and health challenges. Groundwork clients also had higher rates of legal involvement.[1]

Clients entered the program with a variety of resources. About half of clients were living with either family or friends, although Groundwork clients were housed more often with family, while PRO Youth clients were more likely to live with friends. Over half of clients were receiving public benefits (e.g., food stamps). Nearly half had earned a high school diploma or GED, and one in five was employed. One in five Groundwork clients had previously enrolled in PRO Youth.

The prevalence of some demographic and situational characteristics varied by agency. For example, the percentage of clients that were youth of color ranged from 53%–90%, the percentage of clients that lived in emergency shelter prior to program enrollment varied from 6%–43%, and the prevalence of health challenges ranged from 33%–73% across participating organizations.

---

[1] Sexual identity and legal involvement are not required HMIS measures; data for these measures were provided by YouthCare and CCS only.

Both programs show positive outcomes for youth

Key informants perceived that both programs support youth in moving toward stability. They described PRO Youth as a foundational program that helps clients address their goals and Groundwork as a program that empowers clients to build skills within supportive networks.

The data corroborate these perceptions. By the time they exited the program, two-thirds of all clients were in stable/transitional housing; most (45%) were living in HUD-defined stable housing, and the remaining 21% were in a Transitional Living Program or living temporarily with family/friends.

Groundwork and PRO Youth differed on client duration in the program, success at getting clients into housing, and types of housing placements at exit. The median program participation was 34 weeks for Groundwork and 24 weeks for PRO Youth. Based on a statistical model that adjusted

for differences in the demographic and situational characteristics of each program's clients, Groundwork clients had twice the odds of exiting to stable/transitional housing, compared to PRO Youth clients. In both programs, the most common housing placements were housing with family and rental by client. Groundwork clients were more likely to exit to stable housing, while PY clients were more likely to exit to transitional housing (**Figures 2 and 3**).

Other program outcomes were comparable across Groundwork and PRO Youth. Over half of all clients (58%) were either employed or in school at exit. Six months later, only 6% and 6.5% of Groundwork and PRO Youth clients, respectively, had returned to HMIS-documented homelessness.[2]

---

[2] Return to homelessness was defined as one or more nights in an emergency shelter or a new entry into a Transitional Living Program after having exited Groundwork/PRO Youth.

Figure 2. Housing status at program exit by program
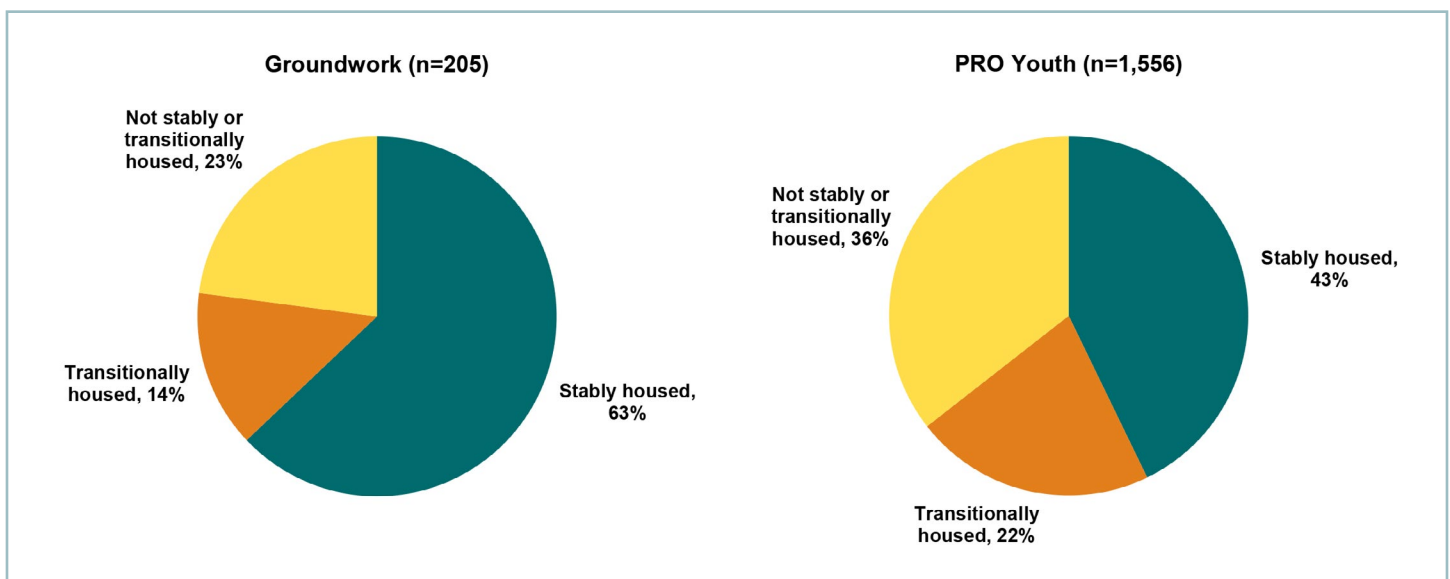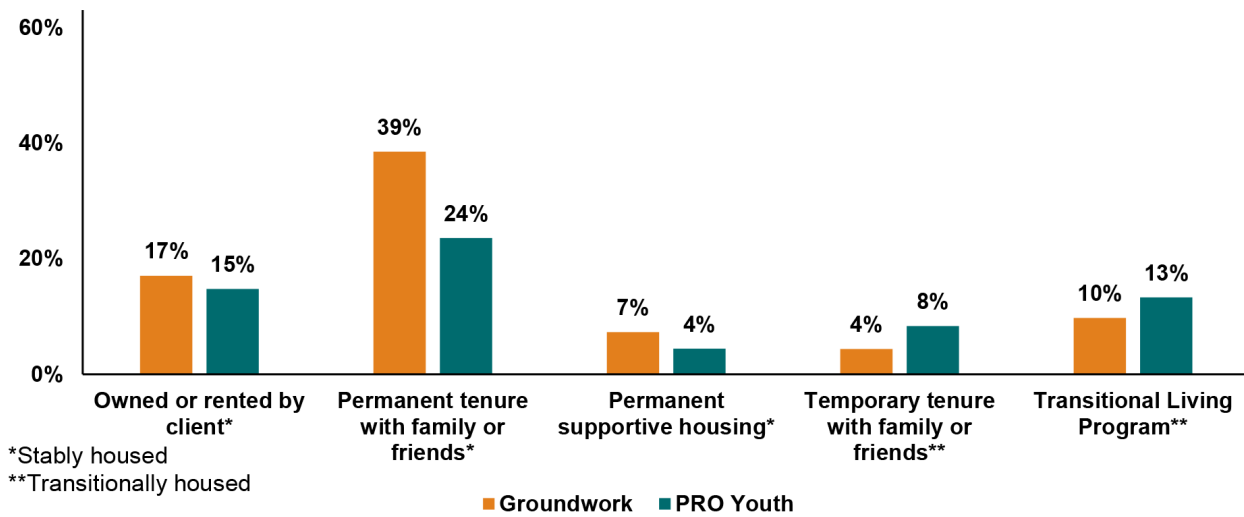

Groundwork (n=205)
- Not stably or transitionally housed, 23%
- Transitionally housed, 14%
- Stably housed, 63%

PRO Youth (n=1,556)
- Not stably or transitionally housed, 36%
- Stably housed, 43%
- Transitionally housed, 22%

Figure 3. Exits to stable/transitional housing by program (n=1,761)

*Stably housed
**Transitionally housed

Legend: ■ Groundwork ■ PRO Youth

Category	Groundwork	PRO Youth
Owned or rented by client*	17%	15%
Permanent tenure with family or friends*	39%	24%
Permanent supportive housing*	7%	4%
Temporary tenure with family or friends**	4%	8%
Transitional Living Program**	10%	13%

Both programs are cost effective, but in different ways

Comprehensive analyses demonstrated that the programs' relative cost-effectiveness depends on the outcome of interest **(Table 1)**, despite key informants' perceptions that Groundwork was a more costly program. Groundwork was more cost-effective than PRO Youth per stable housing placement, while PRO Youth was more cost-effective per stable/transitional housing placement. Overall, PRO Youth was more cost-effective per youth served, but daily cost per youth was lower for Groundwork than for PRO Youth.

While the analysis methods accounted for differences in the relative size of each program, it is not possible to say if these results would hold if programs changed their scales or primary objectives. The short-term nature of the analysis also likely underestimates each program's benefits.

Table 1. Cost-effectiveness estimates for Groundwork and PRO Youth (net present value)

Estimates	Groundwork	PRO Youth
Total cost per youth served	$10,998	$8,431
Total cost per youth served per day	$46	$51
Total cost per client stably housed	$17,435	$18,889
Total cost per client stably or transitionally housed	$14,254	$12,577

Intake characteristics identify youth who might benefit from intensive services
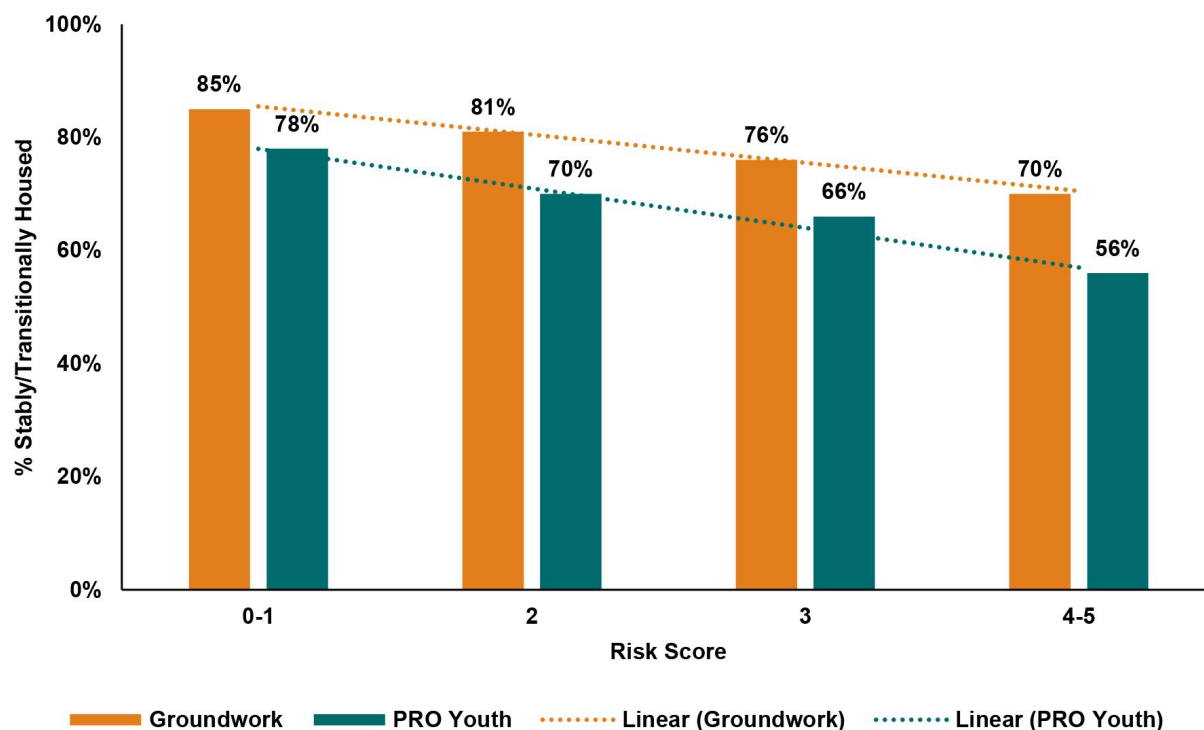
Based on HMIS intake records, it was possible to predict which clients would be most likely to attain stable housing by the time they exited the program. Intake characteristics that predicted continued homelessness included male gender; living on the streets, in shelters, or with friends; no receipt of public benefits prior to program entry; not accessing health/human services prior to Groundwork/ PRO Youth; and unemployment or not attending school.

Based on these factors, a risk index was developed to help identify clients that may need additional support to successfully obtain housing and to differentiate these clients from those who are likely to succeed in either program. The higher a client's risk score, the less likely that client was to obtain stable housing. Both Groundwork and PRO Youth serve clients who are likely to succeed and others

that may benefit from additional support; however, both lower and higher risk clients tended to have better housing outcomes in Groundwork than they did in PRO Youth **(Figure 4)**.

Although the risk index used all available HMIS measures and predicted housing outcomes, it was not precise enough for formal triaging of clients at program intake. Many clients who scored lower on the risk index did not get into stable housing, suggesting there are additional unmeasured or undocumented factors that are important for program success. Therefore, the risk index alone would not be sufficient to suggest a mechanism for triaging clients into Groundwork or PRO Youth. The predictive power of the risk index might be improved by standardizing data collection procedures across agencies and capturing information about client motivation, self-efficacy, and social support networks, as well as bed availability and service delivery.

Figure 4. Risk index as a predictor of housing outcomes (n=1,761)

Key informants suggest capitalizing on program synergies

Key informants stressed that Groundwork and PRO Youth are important resources that work synergistically to support youth in entering housing and achieving stability. Despite differences, both programs strive toward similar goals and have positive outcomes for a diversity of youth.

As a countywide program, PRO Youth has the capacity to serve a large number of youth, with a consortium that provides opportunities for support and skill-building for case managers. As a wraparound program, Groundwork builds on youth's strengths and fosters self-efficacy. Key informants perceived that Groundwork and PRO Youth could work well in concert, capitalizing on each program's unique strengths and limitations.

> *The relationship between programs could be strengthened…. Both programs are excellent resources that serve homeless youth well.*

> *Groundwork could be a second step. If a [youth] is in PRO Youth for 6 or 9 months, and it's not really working, but they are engaged, Groundwork might be a good fit to address barriers…. We're all working for the same goal…. there are limited resources, but I think there could be more collaboration.*

LIMITATIONS

Our assessment had several limitations. First, HMIS captures a limited set of client measures. Second, many of the HMIS measures are broadly defined (e.g., mental health problems) and based on client self-report rather than validated screening instruments. Finally, the information reported through HMIS does not cover services provided to clients in each program.

In addition, client characteristics and levels of missing data varied across agencies. The variation across agencies may be due to providers serving different populations and/or a function of differences in how agencies and their staff interpreted HMIS measures or implemented data collection. Finally, due to the small number of clients across Groundwork and some PRO Youth providers, detailed analyses by agency and year were not always possible.

CARDEA
Training, Organizational Development and Research

CONCLUSION & CONSIDERATIONS

Groundwork and PRO Youth provide complementary services to address the serious challenges facing homeless youth in King County. Both programs show positive outcomes for youth with comparable cost-effectiveness, although Groundwork was more successful at getting youth into stable housing.

HMIS data and key informant interviews support the idea of capitalizing on synergies between Groundwork and PRO Youth to better meet the diverse needs of youth. In particular, they support aligning PRO Youth's capacity to serve large numbers of youth, with Groundwork's wraparound process that offers flexibility to provide more intensive interventions to youth experiencing complex challenges.

Within the context of the *Comprehensive Plan to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in King County by 2020 – 2015 Plan Refresh*, key stakeholders are considering options to support the success of Groundwork and PRO Youth and capitalize on the synergies between these programs. Options include positioning PRO Youth as a first-tier response strategically tied to coordinated entry, with Groundwork as a second-tier response for youth with higher needs and for those who have not succeeded in PRO Youth.

As funders and providers consider regional developments, ongoing efforts to enhance data collection will be critical to ensuring success and sustainability. For example, this assessment suggests that data collected during program intake could be used to guide triaging. However, additional measures in HMIS would be necessary to optimize such a system.

Finally, programmatic changes should be accompanied by efforts to enhance program evaluation and quality improvement activities. Considerations include enhanced training and quality assurance protocols for agency staff related to data collection, piloting of additional measures beyond those required by HMIS, and integration of routine opportunities to share and discuss program data and outcomes with local agency management and direct service staff.

CARDEA
Training, Organizational Development and Research