

**City of Tumwater-TOGETHER! Contract**  
Host Homes Pilot Program Quarter 3 Report

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**Funding Period:** October 2021 – October 2023

**Report Period:** July 2022 – January 2023

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### **Program Description**

The Host Homes model is an alternative to shelters and transitional housing services for unstably housed young people at-risk of entering young adult chronic homelessness. This model is an example of place-based youth homelessness prevention, meaning that the program supports the young person in their own community.

TOGETHER! Host Homes Pilot Program supports unaccompanied (not in the care of a parent or legal guardian), unstably high school students in the Tumwater School District in Thurston County Washington. The pilot program serves adolescents and young adults ages 13-21. This program operates independent of the Child Welfare system and is one of the few if not only program in the continuum of services to youth to offer youth a choice for participation.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Accomplishments**

The Host Homes Pilot program launched in January 2022 and received two student referrals in February-May 2022. During the 3rd quarter, we received 2 Host applications who housed 2 students from Tumwater High School and 1 student from River Ridge. The following is a list of accomplishments:

1. The Host Homes Pilot Program is fully staffed and approved applications for the first student participants and host families.

During May 2022, the Host Homes Director who developed the pilot program left and hired a replacement Director, Tami Lathrop. Tami came with over 8 years of experience working in child welfare and nonprofit organizations. She hired a Program Manager who works directly with Host families and a Youth Case Manager who supports the students in the program.

Host Homes received 4 student referrals from the North Thurston Public School District and 2 student referrals from the Tumwater School District. Of the 6 student referrals,

we approved and housed 3 students, 2 students withdrew their applications, and 1 student is currently working on their intake and contracts to be approved into Host Homes.

Of the 3 students who were housed, 1 had to leave due to high mental health needs, and 2 are still housed (1 THS, 1 River Ridge).

2. What we have learned since launching and implementing the program with our first participants.

We initially projected housing 10 students from the Tumwater School District each year. While we are still committed to meeting this goal, we found that recruiting Host families and student referrals has been much slower than we anticipated. Part of this is due to bringing on all new staff to the Host Homes Program which took some time to onboard and train them in their new positions. Another issue was simply working towards educating the community about what our program is and recruiting hosts and students to be the first participants of a brand new program. We underestimated how challenging it would be during our first year of piloting.

To address these issues, we essentially started from scratch in terms of outreach. We found that going out in the community to individual counselors, teachers, churches, clubs, and organizations has been a slow but effective strategy to build trust. We also learned that some people did not want to refer students until they knew we had a Host Home to place them in. We were able to explain that students entering our program without an identified Host Home would still benefit the student by building their relationship with the case manager, completing intakes and training, and receiving support from the program while they wait for a match.

3. Outreach and Marketing Efforts

Host Homes created new marketing materials to use for social media, presentations, and print materials. We were highlighted in an article for The Olympian and Thurston Talk, created podcast episodes for TOGETHER!'s Thrive Podcast, and made a commercial. These have all proved to be very helpful for recruiting hosts—4 host applicants applied because they had seen our program in The Olympian.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, we have tabled or presented to the following:

- Tumwater City Council
- Tumwater Rotary Club
- Lacey Police Department
- North Thurston Public Schools Counselors

- North Thurston Public Schools Family Navigators
- Tumwater School District Golf Event (hosted by TOGETHER!'s Community Schools Program)
- Back to Basics event for Tumwater School District (hosted by TOGETHER!'s Community Schools Program)
- ASHHO Cultural Bazaar (3 events)
- Virtual Info Meetings for the public (4 events)
- Met with several individuals from churches, schools, and nonprofits in our community.

There have been no significant changes to our project development or implementation since we were awarded the grant.

### **Challenges**

1. Recruiting Host families – as described above, this has been a challenge but we received 3 host applications in the month of December from our efforts put forth in the Fall. We feel that we are now seeing the results of our efforts and are confident that we will continue to see more and more applications.
2. Student Referrals – we hoped to receive more referrals but understand that it takes time to build trust for a pilot program. We have setup visits to the high schools by our Youth Case Manager alongside the Community Schools Managers in the Tumwater high schools and hope this will build trust and gain opportunities for students to get to know us.
3. Staffing – during the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, we had 3 new staff join Host Homes and essentially were brand new to the program. It took a few months to get the team onboarded and trained, but are currently in a place where we can fully function and support a robust Host Homes program.