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## Grand Rapids Participatory Budgeting Youth Affordable Housing & Support Final Report

### Project Summary

In August of 2023, AYA (As You Are) Youth Collective was given an opportunity by the City of Grand Rapids to apply for fiscal support for Youth Affordable Housing & Support for the First and Third Ward communities. Later that fall, AYA was notified that we were selected for a grant award that would allow for implementation of proposed work with vulnerable youth over the course of the next 12 months. This report was assembled to report out on the accomplishments, findings and challenges experienced as part of the project implementation.

### Work Plan

**Goal 1: Support and encourage youth in their transition from homelessness to stability.**

Objective One: Number of youth experiencing housing instability receiving case management support: 20 in each ward

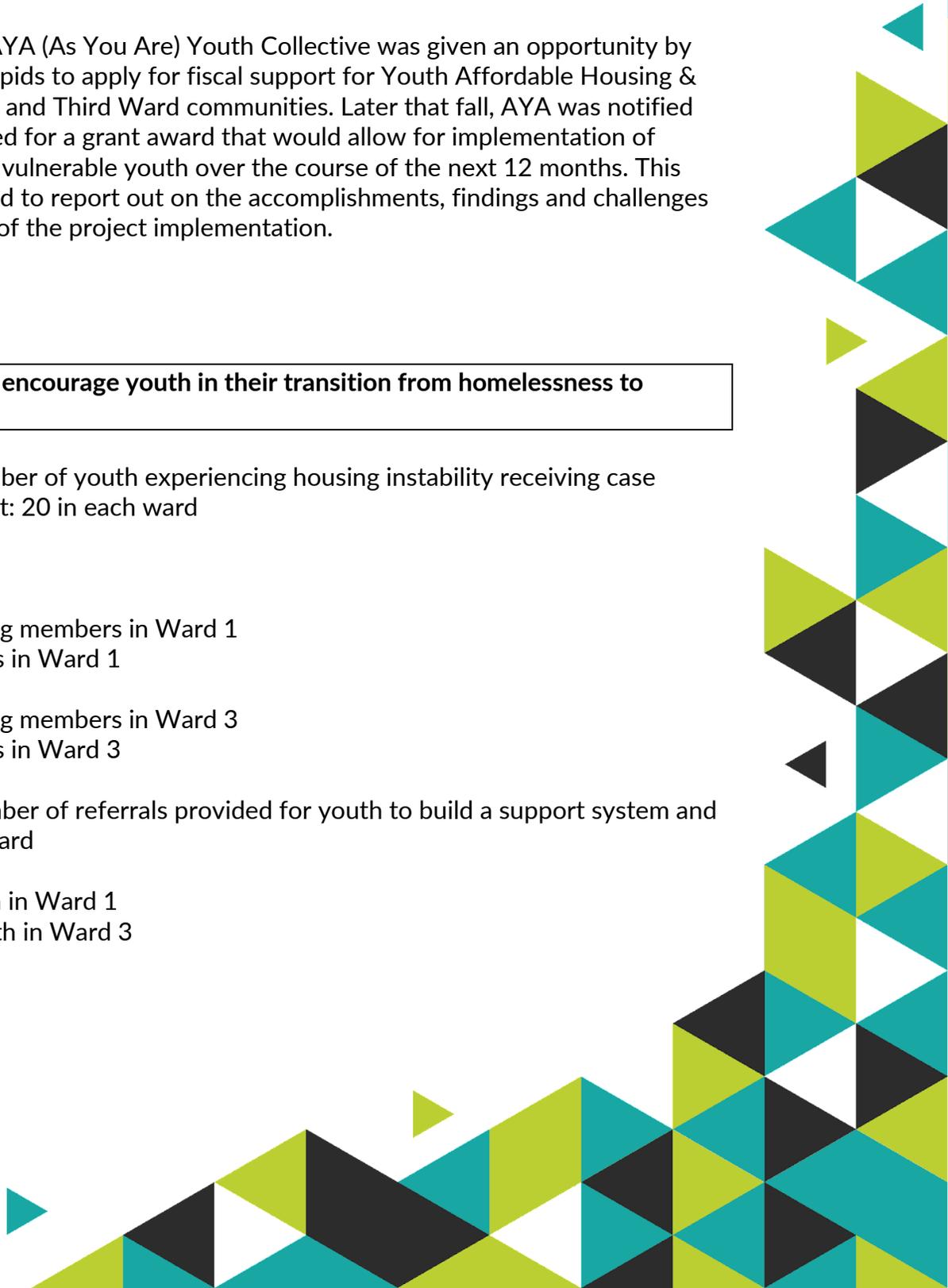
Results:

23 youth in Ward 1  
2 Supportive Housing members in Ward 1  
21 Drop-In members in Ward 1  
36 youth in Ward 3  
4 Supportive Housing members in Ward 3  
32 Drop-In members in Ward 3

Objective Two: Number of referrals provided for youth to build a support system and access: 25 in each ward

Results:

25 referrals to youth in Ward 1  
120 referrals to youth in Ward 3



Objective Three: Number of youth experiencing barrier removal and increased housing by connecting with the right people and programs in the community and stabilizing ongoing supports: 25 for each ward

Results:

23 youth in Ward 1

21 youth in Ward 3

**Goal 2: Provide community navigation and referrals to connect youth with needed services. (birth certificates, social security cards, etc.)**

Objective One: Number of youth that will receive support to obtain vital documentation needed: 50

Results: 141 youth

Objective Two: Number of youth that will be connected to transportation resources (bus passes, bikes, etc.): 35

Results: 189 youth

Objective Three: Number of youth to be connected to detailed housing stabilization plan outlining steps, timeline, and resource that will be housed: 35

Result: 50 youth

**Goal 3: Increase the number of long term affordable housing units available to youth in Grand Rapids.**

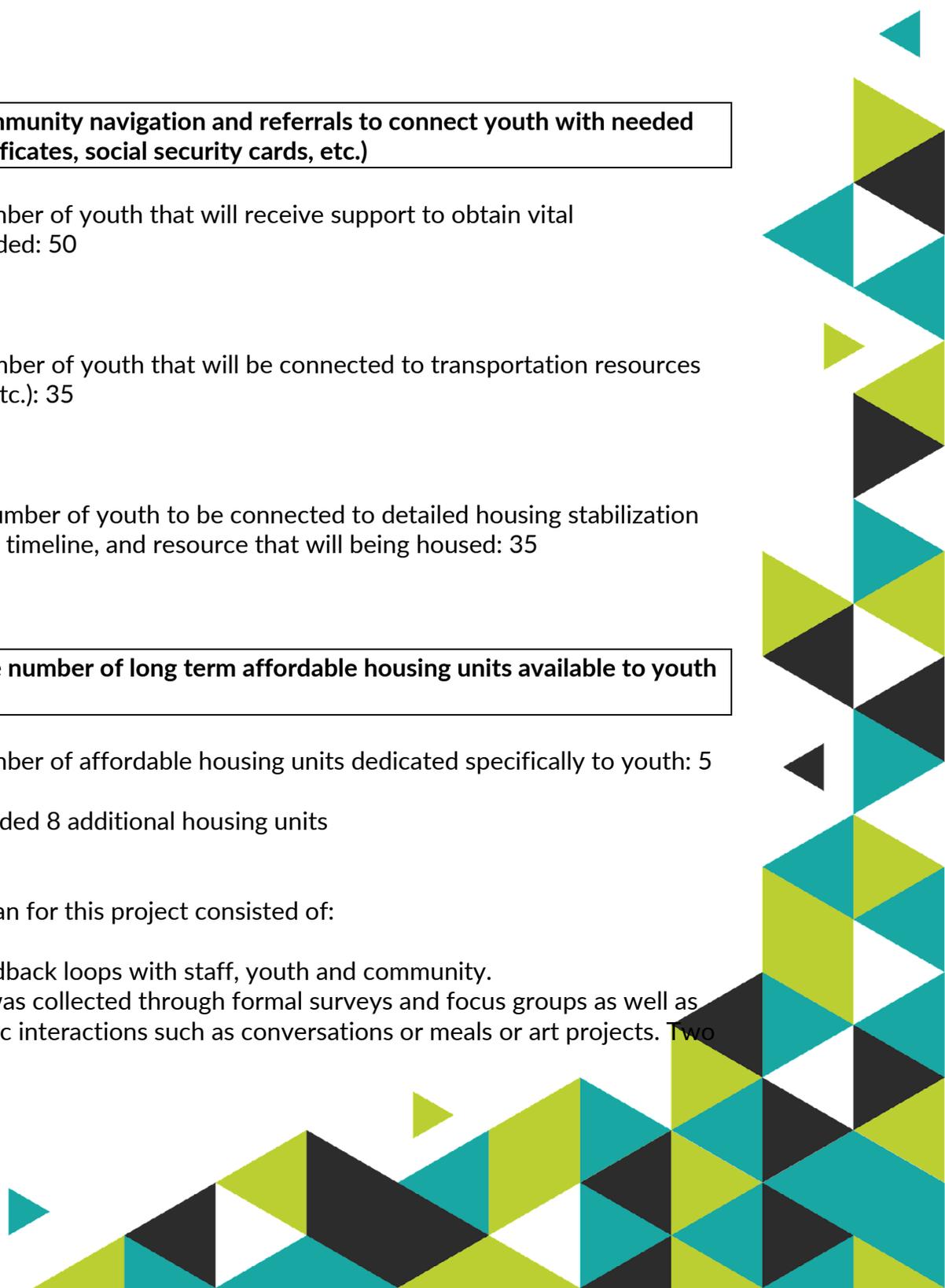
Objective One: Number of affordable housing units dedicated specifically to youth: 5

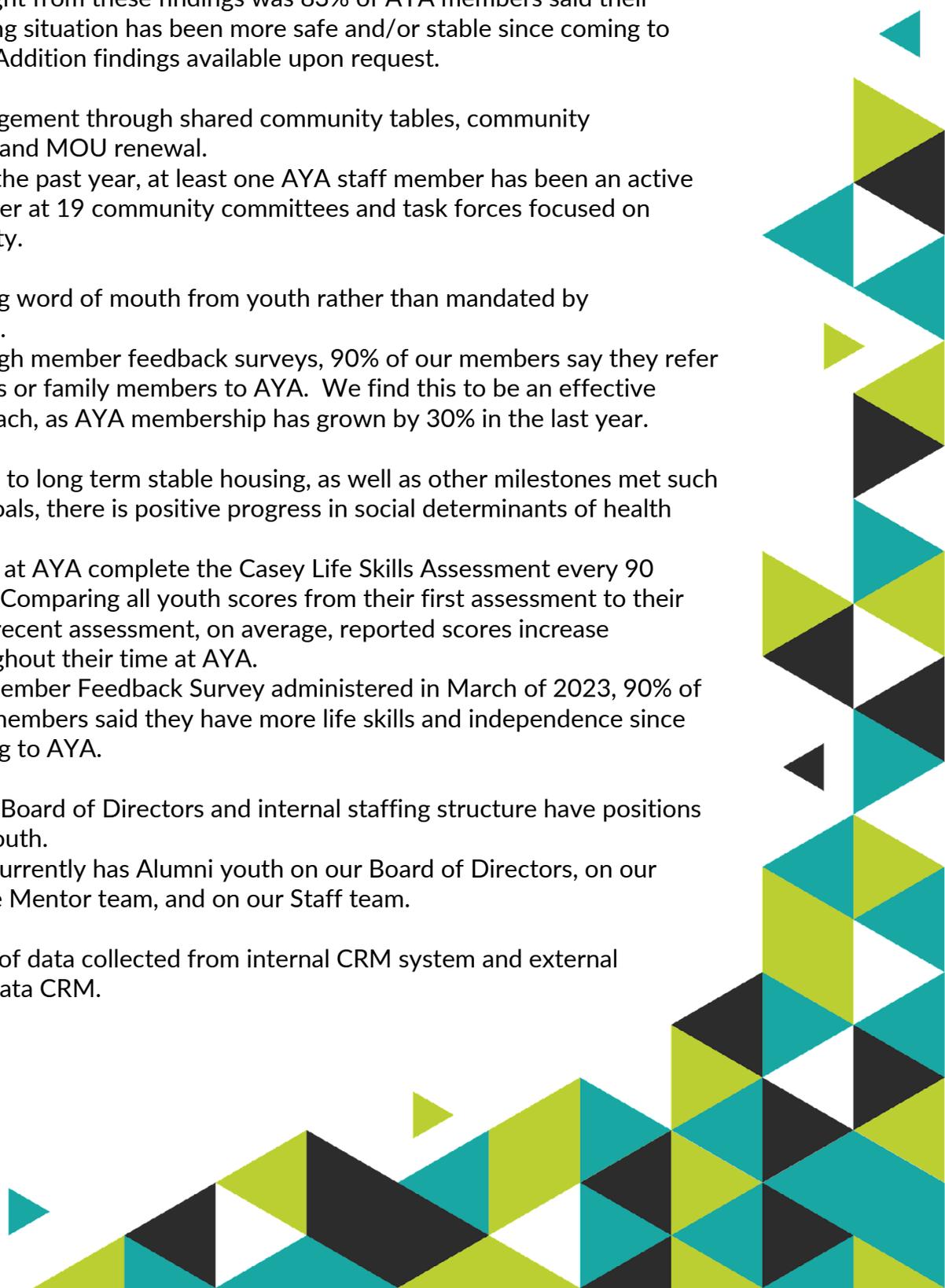
Results: AYA has added 8 additional housing units

### **Evaluation Plan**

AYA's evaluation plan for this project consisted of:

- 1) Ongoing feedback loops with staff, youth and community.
  - a. This was collected through formal surveys and focus groups as well as organic interactions such as conversations or meals or art projects. Two



- separate weeks of member feedback took place and included (a) user-friendly online surveys where youth were compensated for sharing their experiences, (b) focus groups at Drop-In, and (c) youth sharing feedback directly with AYA's CEO Lauren Gamelin-VanKeulen. One highlight from these findings was 83% of AYA members said their housing situation has been more safe and/or stable since coming to AYA. Additional findings available upon request.
- 2) Partner engagement through shared community tables, community assessments and MOU renewal.
    - a. Over the past year, at least one AYA staff member has been an active member at 19 community committees and task forces focused on stability.
  - 3) Referral being word of mouth from youth rather than mandated by professionals.
    - a. Through member feedback surveys, 90% of our members say they refer friends or family members to AYA. We find this to be an effective approach, as AYA membership has grown by 30% in the last year.
  - 4) If youth exits to long term stable housing, as well as other milestones met such as stability goals, there is positive progress in social determinants of health categories
    - a. Youth at AYA complete the Casey Life Skills Assessment every 90 days. Comparing all youth scores from their first assessment to their most recent assessment, on average, reported scores increase throughout their time at AYA.
    - b. In a Member Feedback Survey administered in March of 2023, 90% of AYA members said they have more life skills and independence since coming to AYA.
  - 5) Ensuring the Board of Directors and internal staffing structure have positions for Alumni youth.
    - a. AYA currently has Alumni youth on our Board of Directors, on our House Mentor team, and on our Staff team.
  - 6) Examination of data collected from internal CRM system and external community data CRM.
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- a. Data from our internal CRM system (Apricot) and external community CRM (HMIS) is audited for integrity every month by the Director of Program Quality.
- 7) Twice per year assessment of national best practices from 5 identified national think tanks on serving youth experiencing instability. Followed by adjusting AYA practices needed to be in alignment.
- a. AYA has utilized data and relationships with professionals from the following organizations to refine our processes and practices throughout the past year:
    - Point Source Youth
    - Youth Collaboratory
    - Chapin Hall
    - National Alliance to End Homelessness
    - Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project
    - HUD
    - Corporation for Supportive Housing

### **Summary of Learnings**

Throughout the Youth Supportive Housing & Support project, AYA has experienced significant success. The peer-to-peer referral system has proven highly effective, driving significant membership growth: a 30% membership increase from the year prior. Additionally, AYA's relational support approach continued to prove successful, as exhibited in consistently positive youth feedback. Community partner engagement has been consistent and AYA has acquired even more partners who would like to collaborate at Drop-In. Integration of alumni into leadership roles continues to create authentic representation and pathway modeling, as have alumni on our board, our mentor team, and our staff team. Finally, regular quality assessment and alignment with national best practices have influenced the formation of a Continuous Quality Improvement cross-functional work group at AYA, which has already propelled multiple improvements throughout the organization to more effectively and efficiently meet youth needs.

While the program has shown strong success, several areas present opportunities for continued development. The youth from Ward 3 were significantly more involved and achieved higher outcomes than the youth in Ward 1. We recognize that traveling outside of one's ward can be challenging when experiencing housing instability, so we see an opportunity for the expansion of transportation services to ensure AYA is accessible to all youth in Grand Rapids. Our targets for resource connections were

exceeded significantly. For example, we aimed to serve 35 youth in transportation connection and ended up serving 189. We also aimed to serve 50 youth in vital document recovery and we served 141. This proposes a challenge when we have a small team and limited resources. There is a definite need for capacity building as we continue to see increasingly high utilization rates.

The Youth Affordable Housing & Support project has demonstrated remarkable success in meeting and exceeding its core objectives. The program's strength lies in its comprehensive approach to youth support, combining immediate assistance with long-term stability planning. The strong feedback from program participants, coupled with concrete housing outcomes and community engagement, suggests a robust and effective program model that could be considered for expansion or replication in other areas.

For additional questions on this project please email [grants@ayayouth.org](mailto:grants@ayayouth.org)

Thank you for your time in reviewing this report.

