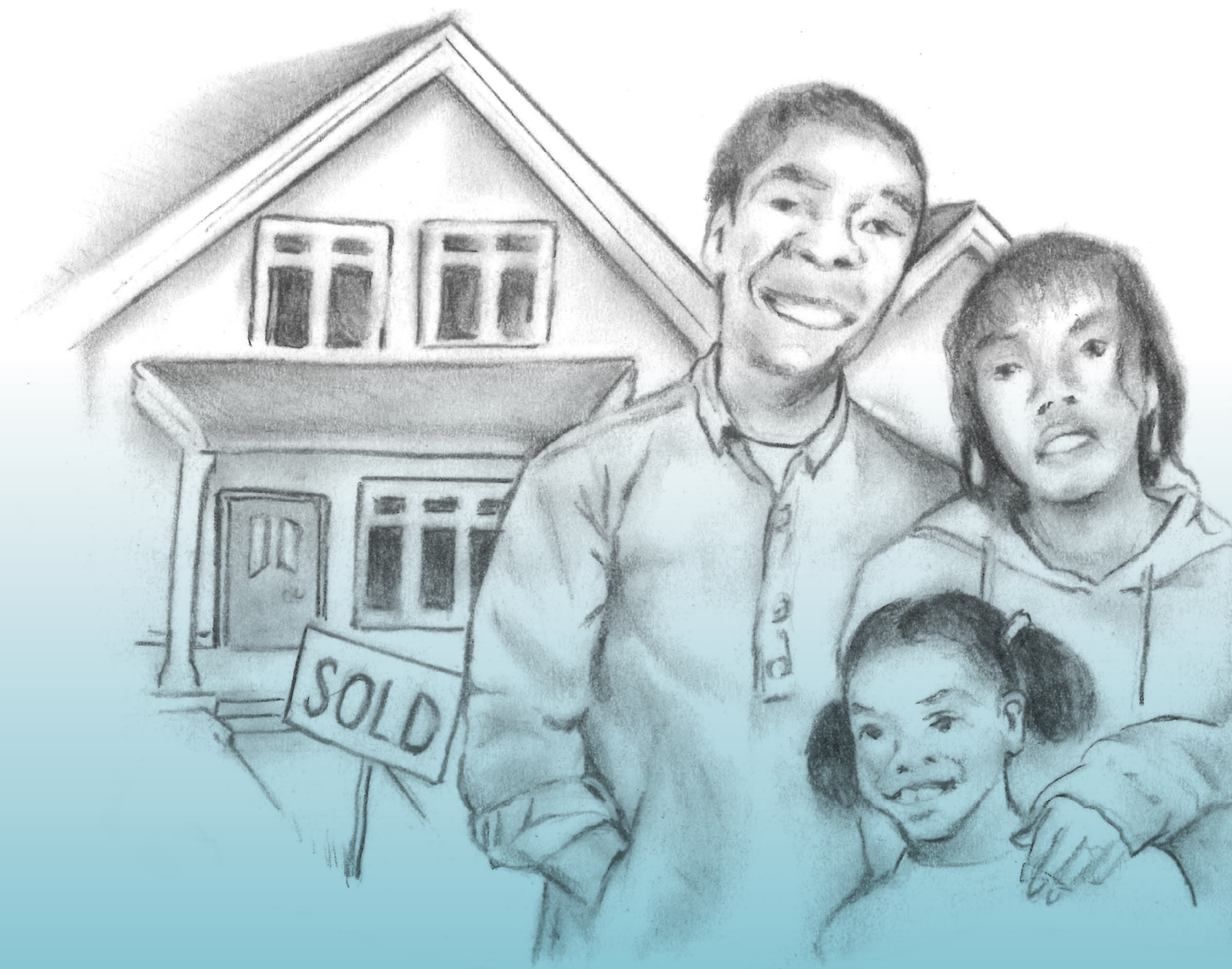


CHAPTER 4

Provide Safe and Stable Housing



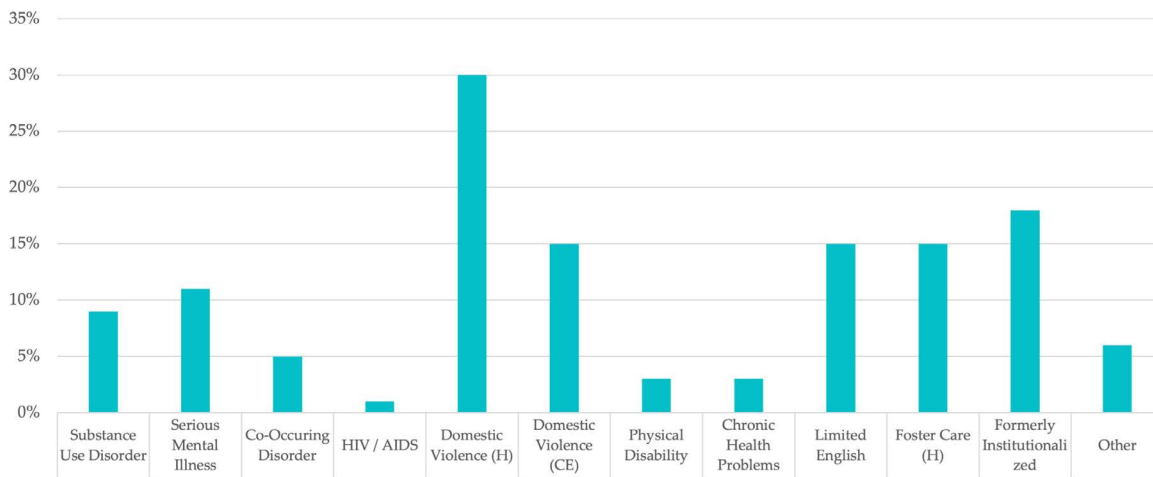
Housing is essential to promoting safety and stability for emerging adults. The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan identified the necessary components to support housing programming and opportunities for emerging adults (see Appendix A).

HOUSING INSTABILITY

Too many system-impacted emerging adults lack a stable and safe living environment. Safe and stable housing allows emerging adults to focus on employment, education or training, and moving towards their goals. However, in 2023, there were **362 emerging adults who experienced homelessness** and 119 emerging adults who experienced homelessness as part of their family unit, for a total of 481 emerging adults (this report did not specify between system-impacted or not) in the broader metropolitan DC region. **This represents a 40% increase since 2019. Single unhoused emerging adults represent 10% of all unhoused single adults in the region.**

These unhoused emerging adults in the region are more likely to have certain negative life experiences and vulnerabilities. The chart below shows that the second-most-common life experience of unhoused emerging adults is having been institutionalized, meaning leaving a juvenile detention center or other carceral facility. Percentages in the chart are of the full research population.

UNHOUSED EMERGING ADULTS IN THE DISTRICT METRO REGION LINKED WITH HEALTH CHALLENGES, SUBSTANCE USE, & VICTIMIZATION

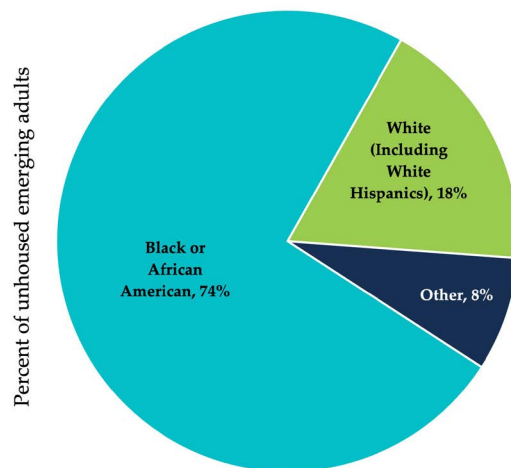


Source: Council of Governments, Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the Annual Point in Time Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness (2023).

Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive; It is possible for an emerging adult to be counted in more than one category. "CE" found under Domestic Violence indicates a "Current Episode"; "H" found under Domestic Violence and Foster Care indicates "History".

Additionally, 74% of unhoused emerging adults in the DC region in 2023 were Black or African American and 18% were white, which includes Hispanic individuals.

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE DISTRICT METRO REGION HARMS EMERGING ADULTS OF COLOR



Source: Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, *Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the Annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness (2023)*.

These data point to a bigger issue, namely the lack of affordable housing in the District. Recent studies highlight a **shortage of more than 30,000 housing units** to meet the needs of the District's more than 54,000 extremely low-income renters. While oriented in the right direction, the District's 2019-2025 goal of **establishing 12,000 affordable housing units** meets less than half of the need for affordable units. Rents in the DC area **rose between 4% and 6% in 2022 and then another 1.6% to 2% in 2023**. Currently, an **annual salary of \$73,520 is required for a two-bedroom apartment** at fair market value. This salary is linked to employment opportunities that are not yet available to most system-impacted emerging adults.

The District needs housing programming specifically designed to engage system-impacted emerging adults. Programming should emphasize preparing for self-sufficiency through phased programs for independent living (i.e. starting off in a group environment with skills building to create stability for independence); skills-building programming for independent living (i.e. cooking, cleaning, budgeting, banking); mixed-use living spaces that create community environments for living and working, and connecting family with resources to increase family housing stability. Programming should also prepare participants for eventual home ownership (i.e. rent-to-own opportunities).

HOUSING MODELS

System-impacted emerging adults require safe, stable housing, particularly upon re-entry into the community, to support them in achieving their goals and preventing recidivism. Young people need support through onsite mentors and a structured yet familial environment. Finally, wraparound services are necessary to support readiness and advancement.

The **Young Men Emerging (YME)** unit in the Central Treatment Facility in the DC Department of Corrections, can serve as one such housing model out in the community. At the YME, incarcerated emerging adults are paired with a mentor who is an older resident at the jail who can guide them. The YME unit was created in 2018 by two founding mentors and followed a structured, cohort-based



approach that incorporates daily programming, such as morning circle and educational offerings. The mentors created a welcoming and empowering environment through an open layout and gathering space, a sense of belonging, and by prioritizing people-first language. They set expectations and held mentees accountable to follow the structure while also supporting them.

We need more programs like YME everywhere. The correctional system can mess people's heads up where they become more troubled than when they went in. We need more therapeutic environments where people are behind you and supporting you so that you don't keep coming back. When you give young people the right environment, the space and time to cultivate them and motivate them, they thrive. - Trevon

While the goal of the YME unit is to prepare emerging adults for a positive transition back into the community, it is not enough to ensure success in the community. Mentees who have exited the program and returned to the community with a new plan and a different way of being have found, over time, that the challenges and pressures in DC related to housing, safety, and stability actively work against their plans.

I'm nervous about the unknown, not knowing if I am going to fail. I want to be able to stay calm and stay on the right path and not put my foot back in the streets and take fast money; there's a lot of temptation. - Amir

Appropriate housing is an essential component of a successful reentry. Emerging adults who leave incarceration and return to the same neighborhood where they come from are more likely to feel unsafe and experience pressure to return to their prior peer groups and activities that led to interaction with the criminal legal system.

Another successful residential model in the District comes from the **Maya Angelou Public Charter Schools**. For the past 20 years, Maya Schools has provided housing during the week for young people ages 14-20. They currently rent five single-family houses in different neighborhoods across the District – three for young men and two for young women – with up to eight young people in each home. A trained counselor serves as the house parent to run the house and create a safe, welcoming, and familial environment. Programming such as family meals, field trips, and workshops provide tools for life readiness. Young people sign a cooperation agreement that identifies their needs and goals while clarifying expectations and rules. Maya Schools has seen great success with this structured and supportive housing model; students who participate demonstrate more resiliency, set new goals for their future, learn to hold themselves accountable and support others, and are more likely to go to college and work (according to information shared in a 2023 personal interview).

Other emerging adult housing models from around the country can inform this work. Examples include **Project Rebound's** John Irwin House in Orange County, California, which was started in 2018 as a transformative housing community for formerly incarcerated university students. It includes supporting services such as mentorship, life skills, and tutoring. **Ujamaa Place** in St. Paul, Minnesota, provides holistic transformation opportunities for young Black men experiencing inequity at the intersection of race and poverty and helps them achieve connection, stability, and personal success. (See additional models in Appendix B: Chapter 4 Housing Programs.)

LIVED EXPERIENCE: DC'S SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

JPI, StrategyForward, and partners interviewed 20 system-impacted emerging adults in 2023 across local carceral facilities and the community about their experience and who they are. Here is some of what they shared:

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION?

I stay with different people - my child's mother, sister, and cousin. - Amir

I'm living in a halfway house but am hoping to go home to live with my mom. - Omari

I've grown up in the trenches my whole life. I grew up with my mother and no father so I've kind of always had to provide for myself and my mom. - Idris

I bounce between girls' houses. - Kofi

I live with my mother, sister, and my niece. I grew up in the hood but lately my neighborhood has been getting gentrified. I have a pretty good living situation and stable home. - Dario

I currently live with my mother and brother and have made strides to get my own permanent housing. - Deion

I come from a good family. It was a well put together household - mother and stepfather. It will benefit me to try and get my own place since I'm of age now. - Trevon

When I'm released, I hope to live with my mother. She is trying to move now. She doesn't want me to be in the same environment and fall into the same habits and obstacles I was facing before. - Jamal

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL SAFE?

Moving out of my community where there is a lot of chaos. Having a fresh start. - Lamar

No one can feel safe anywhere. You have to be on point always. - Zane

Belonging in the community. - Trevon

Being away from DC makes me feel safe. - Darius

At the Masjid, I feel safe. - Omari

Being able to travel with my job and see different areas of the DMV, and being around people that help me stay out of trouble and who understand me all makes me feel safe. - Tariq

When I'm not in the streets. Being at home with my family or when I'm out of town. - Idris

I want to go somewhere and be comfortable that I'm not going to run into people. - Tyree

Being away at college makes me feel safe. - Deion

Right now, nothing makes me feel safe in DC. - Amir



PRIORITY: PROVIDE SAFE AND STABLE HOUSING

The District needs a similar model for our emerging adults in the community. In this safe and supported place, emerging adults can live, learn, and prepare for future independent living in a supported environment. **An emerging adult housing model** at the most basic level would be a small group of emerging adults, perhaps five to ten, living together in a safe and supportive environment, with active guidance and leadership from mentors, access to education and workforce training, and wraparound support to address mental/physical/social health, trauma, and other life skills and needs. For the District to provide emerging adult housing options for those in the community and newly returning to the community, start by considering the following factors:

- 1. Housing type:** Consider multiple housing options to meet the different needs of emerging adults. This could include:
 - **Familial style living for a small group:** Rent homes in safe neighborhoods across DC that can serve as a home setting for a small number (4-6) of emerging adults, similar to the Maya Schools residential program.
 - **Affordable units in apartments:** Set aside space in new apartment buildings for a mentor and 4-6 emerging adults.
 - **Family housing:** Provide family housing options for emerging adults who are young parents seeking to live with their children and significant other or who have responsibility for family members. Family units would be separate from other housing units in DC locations.
- 2. Leadership:** Have each home managed by a coordinator and supported by a trained mentor who was system-impacted and who lives with and guides the emerging adults, similar to the YME model. An on-site mentor is essential to the program's success.
- 3. Structured, familial environment:** Set clear expectations for the behavior and participation of residents, which includes pursuing education and/or workforce training. Have residents sign a cooperation agreement. Balance the structure with support and engagement, such as creating a welcoming space, holding morning meetings and family meals, and facilitating group interaction.
- 4. Programming and services:** Bring in programming and services or have the home paired with the closest recreation or community center to connect the home setting to programming and services. Provide learning onsite with both life and work skills. Incorporate fun activities.
- 5. Screening:** Screen prospective residents for fit with the program and other residents to ensure a safe and positive environment. Develop an application and interview process. Get references from Credible Messengers and others.
- 6. Incentives:** Incentivize participation and progress by providing stipends for residents that can be applied toward current living needs and future independent housing.
- 7. Transition:** Use this emerging adult housing to facilitate and enable a smooth transition to independent, successful living that is stable, safe, and sustainable. Use funding, programming, and support to focus on this.



FIRST STEP: DEVELOP A HOUSING FUND TO SUPPORT EMERGING ADULTS

Housing for emerging adults must be prioritized. In the short term, a housing fund would focus on emerging adults in need of placement upon release from incarceration and to prevent or address homelessness. In the longer term, a housing fund would support emerging adults as they prepare to transition away from needing public support.

- 1. Set aside a budget line item for housing emerging adults.** Set aside a portion of existing housing resources in the District for emerging adults. More re-entry housing options are needed for emerging adults. Begin to work towards the longer-term supportive housing options addressed in the priority above.
- 2. Utilize existing short-term housing options.** Provide initial housing vouchers as a stop-gap, but recognize that short-term vouchers are insufficient on their own. Emerging adults need longer-term housing options and pathways to independent living.
- 3. Make safe housing and neighborhoods a priority.** Recognize that safety and stability go hand in hand. Help young people who would like to move out of high-risk neighborhoods by providing options in safer neighborhoods, new apartments and housing developments, and potentially beyond DC within the greater DMV region.



This is a single chapter from the full report, **Building a Brighter Future: A Plan to Invest in DC's Emerging Adults**. Please visit the [report's landing page](#) to access other chapters and the appendices for each chapter.