

2021-2023 Strategic Plan

THE
COVE
HEART OF TEXAS, INC.
Ending Youth Homelessness



Ending Youth Homelessness

Mission:

The Cove is a nurturing drop-in center designed to provide a safe space for high-school aged youth experiencing homelessness to access the resources they need to thrive.


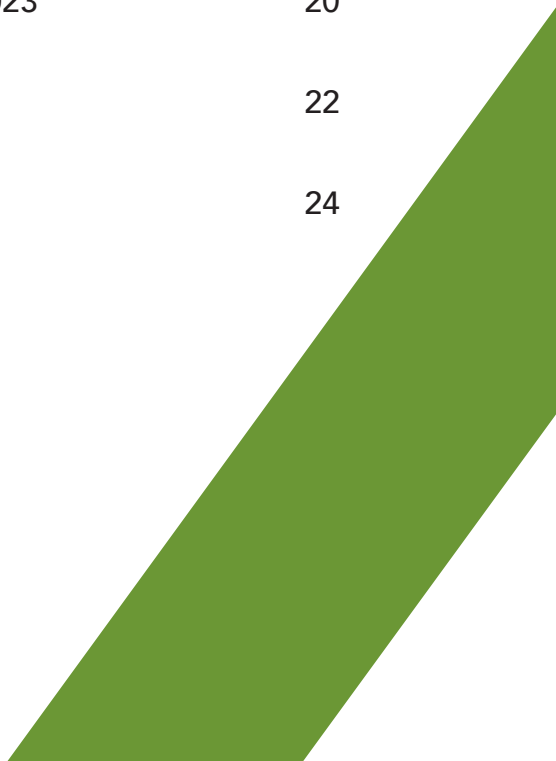




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Organizational Background & History

The Cove, Heart of Texas' mission is to prevent and end youth homelessness in Central Texas. The Cove opened its doors in October 2016 to provide afterschool supportive services to Waco Independent School District (WISD) high school students identified as McKinney-Vento homeless: those lacking Fixed, Adequate, or Regular housing. Since that time, The Cove has provided supportive services to 256 young people, with 93% of seniors served graduating from local high schools.

In 2012, after working as Homeless Liaison for Waco Independent School District, Cheryl Pooler saw a huge problem. As she met with student after student who had been abused, abandoned, or kicked out of his or her home, she knew that they needed a safe place to go after the school bell rang each afternoon. She knew that these students needed support to succeed and that, without intervention, these young people could fall through the cracks into chronic homelessness.

Cheryl started researching best practices around the country and found that an afterschool teen nurturing center was what Waco needed to ensure that

students were empowered to both graduate high school and be prepared for independent living. In the summer of 2015, Cheryl Pooler and community volunteer Rosemary Townsend co-founded the Cove, a safe place for youth experiencing homelessness to thrive.

The Cove aims to prepare high-school-aged youth for self-sufficiency, divert young adults from the formal homeless response system, and provide social support in a nurturing drop-in center environment.

In a community like Waco, Texas, with a sustained and high poverty rate of over 30%, families and individuals that are asset-limited and income-constrained skirt the edge of homelessness on a cyclical basis. These individuals often bounce from one living arrangement to another—sometimes changing housing locations and school districts three or four times a year. When a youth lacks Fixed, Adequate, and Regular (FAR) housing, is doubled up, or living in a place unsuitable for human habitation (an abandoned building or car), they are considered homeless by federal and educational definitions.

Since 2016, Cove has provided supportive services to 256 young people, with 93% of seniors served graduating from local high schools.

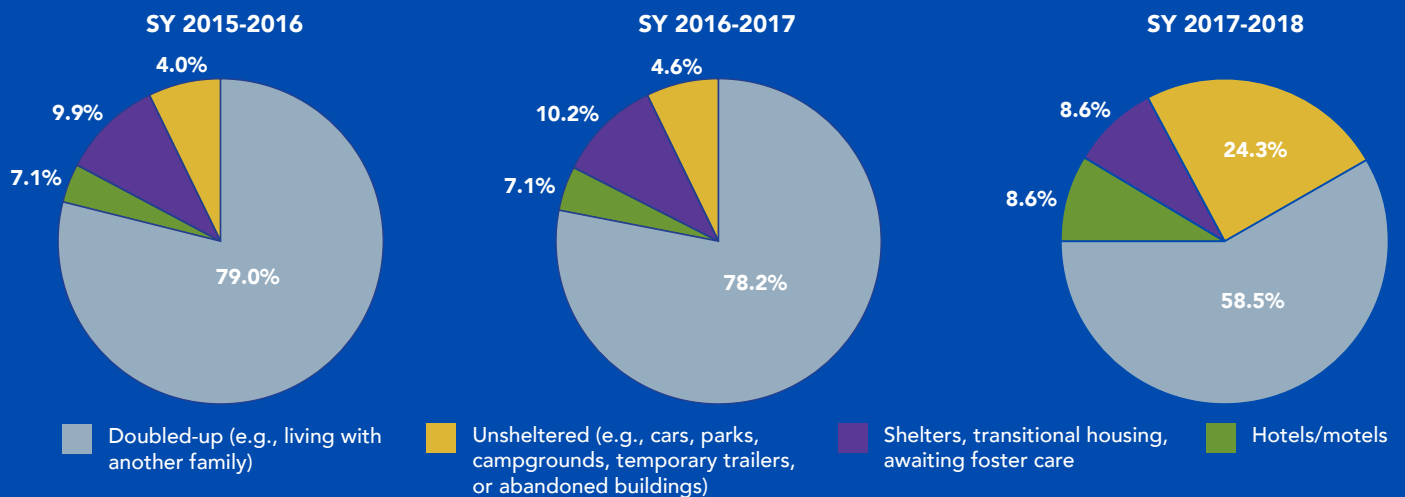


Organizational Background & History

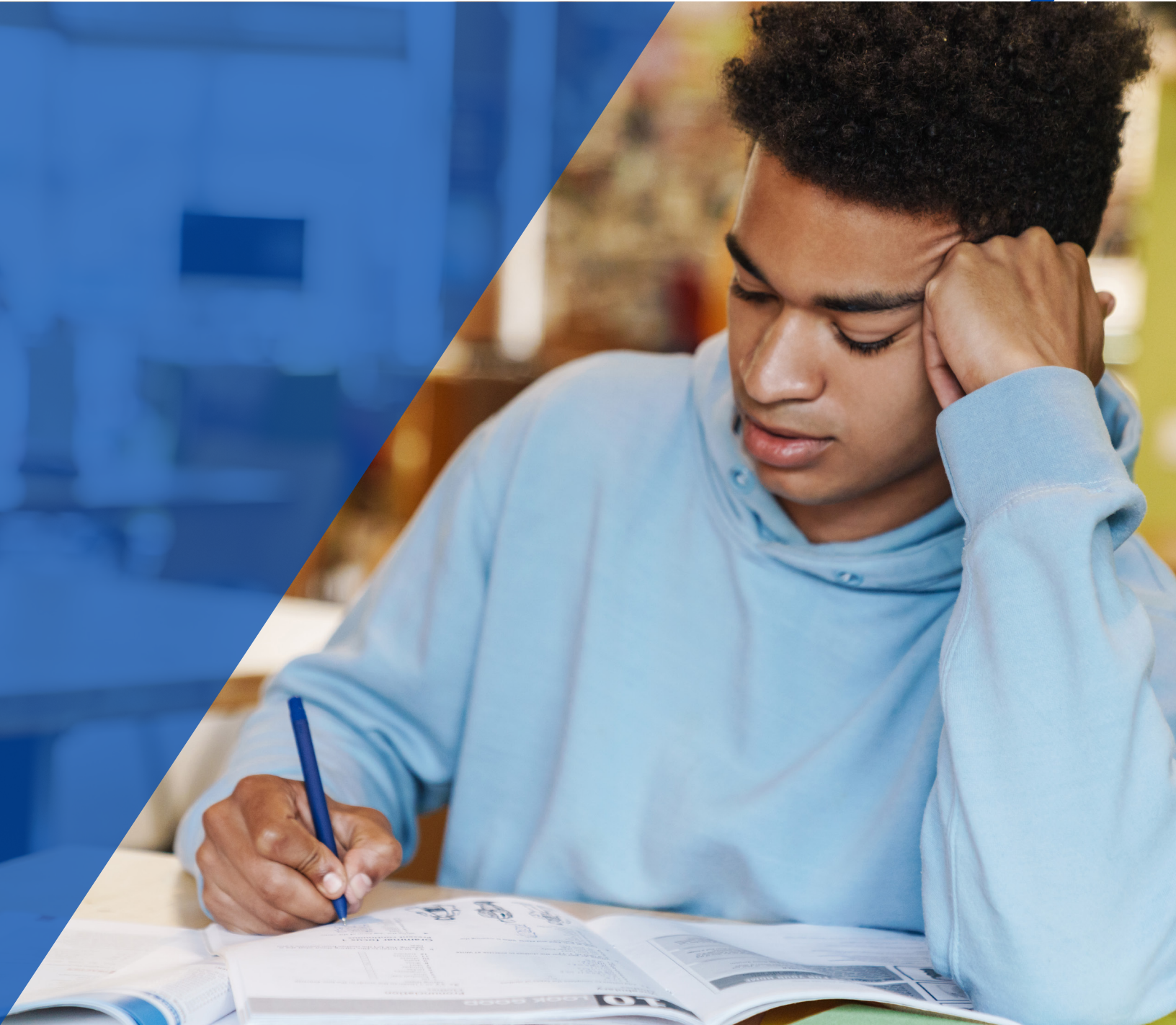
Systemic factors that contribute to youth homelessness include increased local housing demand with low affordable housing stock, systemic racial inequities, poor school performance, underdeveloped public transportation, and too few living wage jobs. Individual factors that contribute to youth homelessness include family instability, childhood trauma, sexual & emotional abuse, and family violence (Cowen, 2017; Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness, 2017; Tobin, 2016). These dynamics layer upon one another to create a complex web of factors within which young people experiencing homelessness must operate.

Public school data reported to the U.S. Department of Education during the 2017-2018 school year shows that an estimated 231,305 K-12 public school students in Texas experienced homelessness over the course of the year, which was 4.3% of total enrollment (USICH, 2020). Of that total, 56,174 students were unsheltered, 19,797 were in shelters, 19,942 were in hotels/motels, and 135,392 were doubled up. That number is up from 111,177 homeless students identified in 2016 – 2017, which was a total of 2.1% of total enrollment for the year.

Percentage of homeless children/youth enrolled in public schools by type of primary nighttime residence



During the 2017-2018 school year, an estimated **231,305 K-12 public school students** in Texas experienced homelessness.



Organizational Background & History

The Heart of Texas region consists of 77 school districts dispersed among six counties. During the 2017-2018 school year, public school homeless liaisons within Bosque, Hill, Falls, Freestone, Limestone, and McLennan Counties identified and reported a total of 3,318 homeless children enrolled, including 696 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. Of the 696 enrolled unaccompanied youth, an estimated 97.9% (681 students) were doubling up/couch surfing, 1.1% (8 students) were in shelter, 0.6% (4 students) were unsheltered, and 0.4% (3 students) were in hotels/motels. The top five needs identified among youth were: dental care, transportation, life skills training, permanent housing, and tutoring.

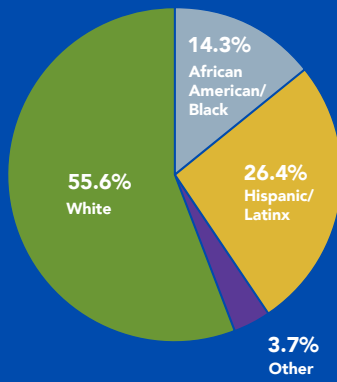
Both nationally and among young people accessing services at The Cove, African American students are overrepresented among young people experiencing homelessness. In McLennan County, 14.3% of the population identifies as African American/Black; 26.4% as Hispanic/Latinx; 3.7% Other; and 55.6% White. In 2018, of the 76 students served at The Cove, approximately 75% identified as African American, 10% as Hispanic/Latinx, 5% as Other (Two or

More Races), and 5% White. The Cove serves African American students at nearly twice the proportion of African American students identified as homeless in WISD, and more than 3 times the proportion of the African American population in McLennan County.

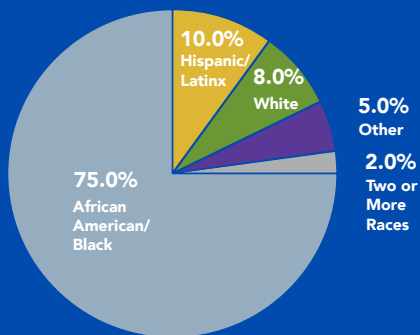
Apart from targeted and systemic support for young people experiencing homelessness, the probability of a bright future is very slim. The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness states that “stability is the key” to improving homeless students’ graduation rates (ICPH, 2018). And the lack of a high school diploma is the number one risk factor for adult homelessness (Chapin Hall, 2019). While developing permanent housing solutions are key to addressing youth homelessness, the interventions of early identification, diversion, and family support have shown promising to reduce engagement in the formal homeless response system and adult homelessness (Building Changes, 2018). The Cove offers a nurturing, safe environment where high-school aged young people in the Heart of Texas region can access the basic supports they need to graduate high school and prepare for self-sufficiency.

McLennan County Population Compared with The Cove's Students

McLennan County



The Cove



Promising Results

In an April 24, 2018 article on Teen Hopefulness in the Baylor Focus Magazine, one Cove scholar shares about her experiences: “The first time I came to The Cove, I was terrified. It was a new place. I was scared. But everybody was so nice, and it was hard to be afraid after that...The Cove has helped a lot with support in all stages, whether it be mental and needing someone to talk to and swing your ideas by, as well as a cool place to hang out after school. I’m getting encouraged to do my homework and graduate. I’m not used to that. It if wasn’t for The Cove, I probably would have already dropped out. The Cove has been telling me, ‘You can do it.’ Encouragement is exactly what I needed.”

In the 2019 – 2020 school year, The Cove conducted a program evaluation in partnership with Assistant Professor Sarah Schnitker, of Baylor University’s Department of Psychology and Neuroscience. Cove students were surveyed on 28 Positive Youth Development constructs like integrity, emotional regulation, and hopeful future

orientation. They were asked questions like, “When I feel angry or frustrated, I can often use those feelings to do something good.” Or “When things don’t work the way they used to, I look for other ways to achieve my goals.” Of the socioemotional competencies assessed, integrity and emotional regulation increased significantly among students over time. Emotional redirection, hopeful future orientation, and self-regulation showed slight, but not statistically significant growth over time, suggesting that these competencies may change more slowly than others.

Young people regularly accessing The Cove exhibited positive and significant growth in both cognitive engagement and planning & decision-making. Across time, students reported a significantly more positive climate at The Cove; meaning that as students spent more time at The Cove, they felt students treated each other with more respect, that other youth cared about them, and that adults prevented teasing & bullying.

“I’m getting encouraged to do my homework and graduate. I’m not used to that. If it wasn’t for The Cove, I probably would have already dropped out. The Cove has been telling me, ‘You can do it.’ Encouragement is exactly what I needed.” -Cove Alumni

Strategic Planning Process & Findings

In August of 2019, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded a \$2.2 million grant to the Heart of Texas Homeless Coalition for a Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP) for the Heart of Texas region. The Cove was awarded a 2-year, \$355,000 grant to extend The Cove's reach to any high-school aged youth in the region who needs supportive services. With this opportunity to serve the six-county region, The Cove intentionally considered how to expand its impact over the next three years. To this end, The Cove partnered with Mission Capital, a nonprofit capacity-building organization, to guide The Cove through a strategic planning process in 2020.

Beginning the Strategic Planning Process

In February 2020, The Cove began its strategic planning process with a few internal planning sessions and a work session of board and staff. During the strategic planning work session, The Cove created a shared understanding of youth homelessness in Waco and McLennan County, including the regional data and systemic responses to address homelessness, informed by the work of the Heart of Texas Homeless Coalition. Board and staff gained clarity around the strategic growth opportunities for the Cove related to YHDP and assessed those opportunities against their own understanding of their strengths and

vision for The Cove. The board and staff identified key criteria and considerations to evaluate strategic growth opportunities that were grounded in the organization's values. Lastly, the board and staff determined key questions and concerns to evaluate for the broad range of strategic growth opportunities as well as key stakeholders and partners to connect with in order to better understand the implications and needs surrounding each strategic growth opportunity. Based on the recommendations from the staff and board, The Cove then moved into a comprehensive information gathering stage in the early spring of 2020.

Information Gathering

The Cove underwent an intensive information-gathering process to inform its strategic direction that focused on understanding the needs of the community, potential opportunities for The Cove and identification of the organization's strengths and areas of growth. To ensure diverse perspective from community stakeholders, the Cove used a variety of approaches to gather data and feedback to inform its plan. 50 community leaders were invited to respond to a series of questions related to The Cove's unique niche, opportunities for growth, and organizational strengths. Cove board members, volunteers, community partners, school district administrators, government representatives, staff, community foundation representatives, and donors were invited to participate. There were 39 total responses, which represents a 78% response rate.

Specific key stakeholders invited to participate in The Cove's strategic planning survey included:

- Baylor University
- Child Protective Services, Region 7
- City of Waco, City Manager's Office
- Communities In Schools of the Heart of Texas
- Heart of Texas Region MHMR
- HEB

- ICF
- Magnolia Foundation
- McLennan County, Commissioners' Court
- McLennan County, Juvenile Probation Department
- Methodist Children's Home
- Normnot Academy
- Point Source Youth
- Prosper Waco
- St. Alban's Episcopal Church
- St. Paul's Episcopal Church
- STARRY Counseling
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- Texas State Technical College
- Unbound Waco
- United Way of Waco-McLennan County
- Waco Independent School District: District Leadership
- Waco Independent School District: Greater Waco Advanced Health Care Academy
- Waco Independent School District: University High School
- Waco Independent School District: Waco High School

**Please note that this list reflects those invited to participate in The Cove's strategic planning survey. Due to the confidential design of the feedback process, we are unable to confirm which groups actually completed the survey.*

There were 39 total strategic survey responses, which represents a 78% response rate.


Strategic Planning Process & Findings

Additionally, Mission Capital consultants conducted seven individual phone interviews with community stakeholders, including former Cove scholars, community partners, and funders. In these interviews, consultants had an opportunity to ask more in-depth questions related to The Cove's reputation in the community, unique challenges, and recommendations for strategic growth. The Cove also extended interview invitations to elected city and county officials but were unable to complete formal interviews with each individual invited. The individuals that participated in interviews were:

- Felicia Goodman, Executive Director, Cooper Foundation
- LouAnn Arterburn, Class of 2021 Counselor, Waco High School
- Nicole Wiscombe, Continuum of Care Administrator, City of Waco
- Nicole Wynter, Senior Director of Community Investment & Operations Staff, Waco Foundation
- Rachel Freeman, The Cove Graduate
- Trena Cooper, Student Case Manager, Baylor University
- Trey Oakley, President/CEO, Methodist Children's Home

Finally, a focus group with members of the Cove's Youth Action Board was conducted in March 2020. The full Youth Action Board was invited to the

focus group with participation from two members that were recent graduates from the Cove. Due to COVID-19, the focus group was facilitated by phone to ensure safety and accessibility for participants. The focus group questions center around understanding The Cove's strengths and areas for growth, The Cove's impact and future priorities and overall experience with services and referrals. Included in the themes summary was initial research of national peer organizations to inform The Cove's next steps for strategic growth. The organizations included in initial benchmarking were: After8toEducate in Dallas, Texas, Safe Place for Youth (SPY) in Venice, CA, Homeless Youth Connection in Avondale, AZ and Youth On Their Own in Tuscon, AZ. These organizations were identified based on services offered (both similar to The Cove and services that the Cove had discussed in strategic planning as potential options to grow into), and the age of youth served by the organization with a preference for organizations that were specifically serving high-school aged youth. Included in the initial benchmarking discussions were how organizations define and measure impact, track student outcome measures, as well as staffing structure, job descriptions, and organizational funding patterns. This information was summarized and presented to the Cove's board in April 2020.



The focus group questions center around understanding The Cove's strengths and areas for growth, The Cove's impact and future priorities and overall experience with services and referrals.

Fortunately, while the data gathering process was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of community responses were gathered prior to shelter-in-place orders in March of 2020. Adjustments were made, where needed, for social distancing and virtual meetings, but the content of the process maintained its integrity. The Cove's Board of Directors has accommodated for potential changes in the strategic plan by including intentional steps to test various strategic scenarios against the new reality that living with COVID-19 will bring to the social sector.

Understanding Key Themes and Findings

During the information-gathering stage, several themes emerged that would provide handrails to help The Cove take informed next steps for growth. By compiling information from key Cove documents, feedback from board and staff during the strategic planning session, survey responses, feedback from interviewees and insights and recommendations from Cove graduates and Youth Advisory Board members, the Mission Capital consultants identified themes for The Cove's consideration in strategic planning.

These themes were divided into four major areas: Vision & mission, Unique value proposition, Strategic direction and Organizational growth. The themes reflect comments and insights from a broad range of stakeholders and are inclusive of all of the feedback gathered and not the perspective of one individual group or person. As part of the strategic planning process, the board and staff involved in strategic planning received a detailed Themes Summary that outlined the themes with qualitative data and detailed explanation of each theme statement. Below are the high-level themes shared with The Cove leadership in April 2020.

Key Themes

Vision and mission

1. The Cove has a broad vision of ending youth homelessness in Central Texas, but there are narrower, long term impacts in students' lives that The Cove should clarify
2. Stakeholders are hungry for both anecdotal & numerical data to underscore the effectiveness of The Cove's mission

Unique value proposition and strategic niche

1. The Cove provides a uniquely nurturing environment with committed volunteers and staff
2. The Cove currently fills a critical need in the Waco community, and there is an opportunity for The Cove to expand its definition of whom they serve as it grows and scales to meet needs

Strategic direction and future opportunities

1. The Cove should expand its service area & reach
2. The Cove should provide housing options or partner with others to do so
3. Collaboration with nonprofits and governmental entities will be key to sustainable growth
4. The Cove should consider adding additional services such as healthcare & extended hours of operation

Organizational growth

1. The Cove should invest in developing a sustainable business model
2. As The Cove grows, its operations should become more developed and effective
3. The Cove should emphasize continuous quality improvement that incorporates ongoing feedback

Strategic Planning Process & Findings

Determining The Cove's Goals and Priorities for the Next 3 Years

The Cove Board of Directors met in April 2020 to review the Themes Summary Findings, discuss strategic priorities for The Cove over the next three years and determine key questions to ask peer organizations during benchmarking interviews. Based on input from The Cove's Board of Directors and staff, the organization drafted a high-level strategic plan that outlined the organization's goals and strategies to accomplishing those goals over the next three years. Following the development of the high-level strategic plan, The Cove set out to learn from peer organizations through benchmarking interviews. The Cove staff participated in interviews with four peer organizations nationwide:

- Youth On Their Own- Tucson, AZ
- Homeless Youth Connection- Avondale, AZ
- Safe Place for Youth- Venice, CA
- After 8 to Educate - Dallas, TX

Upon completion of the benchmarking interviews, The Cove received a detailed report about each organization and the key findings from each interview. Some of the key findings and takeaways included:

Youth On Their Own - Tucson, AZ

- Utilizes monthly stipends and cash assistance for youth for bills
- Created an online portal for youth to

log-in for resources and to connect to staff which has been critical in their expansion of the number of youth they can serve

- Leverages partnerships for basic needs such as access to free vision, dental and reproductive health; vouchers from thrift stores for clothing and barbers providing haircuts; partnerships with the University of Arizona to support transition students to college as examples

Homeless Youth Connection- Avondale, AZ

- Have a Host Family program for youth under 18 by getting parental consent; not through Department of Child Safety
- Expanded to serve multiple districts and have been successful by partnering with the McKinney-Vento liaisons and drafting MOUs with districts
- Used the Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix to assess youth outcomes but felt that the results were partial and have transitioned to using readiness skills assessment instead
- Partner with local companies for employment program which guarantees interviews to youth in program; they also partner with a local organization to provide trauma-informed training to employers to better support youth in those

Safe Place for Youth- Venice, CA

- Currently use two systems to track youth one through HUD and one HMIS but looking to transition to the HUD system only
- They will bring in paid speakers and basic needs on a schedule during the day while they are open
- Have a Host Home program but are in the 2nd year of implementation; Feel like they've been successful be designing it as a bridge and only temporary housing for those that have a clear goal for a permanent housing option

After 8 to Educate - Dallas, TX

- A new, multi-sector partnership with facility provided by Dallas ISD, operations run by After8toEducate as an umbrella organization for both drop-in center activities and desired housing for youth
- Implement family reunification plans but don't have a lot of data on the overall success
- Focuses on putting youth on a path to a 4-year degree but also incorporates job training resources



Strategic Planning Process & Findings

From 2021 - 2023, The Cove will expand its reach to engage high-school aged youth experiencing homelessness in the six-county Heart of Texas region, beginning with McLennan County. As a youth-dedicated nurturing drop-in center, The Cove will become a dynamic hub for young people to access the basic resources they need to thrive, divert from the adult homelessness response system, develop relationships with safe adults, and develop the tools they need to gain self-sufficiency as adults.

During August and September 2020, the Cove brought together strategic planning work groups comprised of both board and staff liaisons to confirm the strategic planning goals and strategies and to identify key performance indicators to measure success over the lifetime of the plan and potential action steps to accomplishing each goal. By incorporating the feedback and recommendations from the strategic planning work groups, The Cove finalized their strategic plan for approval of the Board of Directors in November, 2020.

Thank you to The Cove's 2020 Strategic Planning Board Workgroups:

Impactful Programs

- Cheryl Pooler, Personnel Chair and Co-Founder, The Cove
- Denise Anderson, Board Member, The Cove
- Jill Van Zee, Board Member, The Cove
- Sonia Shah, Director of Youth Services, The Cove
- Tara Dalco, Nurture Center Coordinator, The Cove
- Trenia Cooper, Board Member, The Cove

Key Partnerships

- Amy Jimenez, Programming Chair, The Cove
- Kayleigh Cunningham, Assistant Director, The Cove
- Lakia Scott, Board Member, The Cove
- Lute Barber, Board Member, The Cove
- Stephen Orr, Finance Chair, The Cove

Long Term Sustainability

- Alicia Burns, Board Member, The Cove
- David Brennan, Board Chair, The Cove
- Jeremy Mocek, Board Member, The Cove
- Kelly Atkinson, Executive Director, The Cove
- Rosemary Townsend, Fundraising Chair and Co-Founder, The Cove
- Shelly Spinks, Board Member, The Cove



Strategic Goals and Objectives 2021-2023



IMPACTFUL PROGRAMS

Clarify The Cove's impact in young people's lives and in the Heart of Texas region.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1.1: Effectively define, track, and measure success for young people who engage at The Cove.
- 1.2: Assess and articulate the longer-term impacts The Cove has on young people who accessed The Cove as minors.
- 1.3: Ensure Youth Voice is centered in The Cove's work, informing programs and strategy through continued utilization of the Youth Advisory Board.
- 1.4: Advance racial diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as LGBTQIA+ diversity values in The Cove's programming, using culturally competent and trauma-informed strategies and practices.



KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Build key organizational relationships to support and extend The Cove's mission in the Heart of Texas region.

OBJECTIVES:

- 2.1: Extend partnerships to include new school districts in the Heart of Texas region who will identify and refer high-school-aged youth experiencing homelessness to The Cove.
- 2.2: Expand The Cove's efforts to locate and identify high-school aged young people experiencing homelessness in the 6-county region, including youth who may not be enrolled in school.
- 2.3: Develop a robust referral system to connect youth with supports that address their educational, housing, socioemotional and physical health needs.
- 2.4: Connect young people with supportive relationships and services to aid in the transition out of high school, into self-sufficiency.



LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Broaden the community's engagement with addressing youth homelessness and invest in organizational capacity to lead community change.

OBJECTIVES:

- 3.1: Educate community stakeholders, funders, and community partners about youth homelessness and engage key constituencies in strategies to address it.
- 3.2: Promote youth voices and share stories from Cove students and graduates, shifting the narrative from sympathy to empathy to action.
- 3.3: Recruit, train, and retain diverse staff, volunteers, and board members, using culturally competent and trauma-informed strategies and practices.
- 3.4: Increase diverse funding sources that are renewable year after year and/or that reflect multi-year commitments.

Mission: The Cove is a nurturing drop-in center designed to provide a *safe space for high-school aged youth experiencing homelessness* to access the resources they need to thrive.



Measuring Success

Continuous improvement and evaluation are important to The Cove. Key performance indicators have been identified to demonstrate progress during the lifetime of the strategic plan. Below are the key performance indicators for each goal area.



GOAL 1: IMPACTFUL PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS: Clarify The Cove's Impact in young people's lives and in the Heart of Texas region.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Self-sufficiency of Cove students
- Successful completion rates ("on track to graduate" and graduation)
- Youth survey responses - satisfaction with Cove services
- Percentage of young people who move from "contact" with The Cove to "engagement"



GOAL 2: KEY PARTNERSHIPS: Build key organizational relationships to support and extend The Cove's mission in the Heart of Texas region.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Number of youth served by The Cove
- Number of school districts served by The Cove
- Number of referral agencies actively engaged in partnership with The Cove
- Number of safe housing referrals for youth



GOAL 3: LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY: Broaden the community's understanding of youth homelessness and invest in organizational capacity to lead community change.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Balanced revenue portfolio target vs. actual
- Audience Reach through media post and website tracking
- World Class Board member self-assessment ratings
- Board, volunteer, and employee belonging & satisfaction survey responses



GOAL 1: IMPACTFUL PROGRAMS

Clarify The Cove's impact in young people's lives and in the Heart of Texas region.

Objective 1.1: Effectively define, track, and measure success for young people who engage at The Cove.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Define what success looks like for a student who engages at The Cove (key outcomes), based on assessment of trauma, vulnerability scores, and level of engagement at The Cove.	VI-SPDAT, Youth Coordinated Entry process, HMIS processes	DYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2021
B. Identify and consistently utilize research-based assessment tools to track and measure youth outcomes at The Cove in the areas of education, housing, socioemotional wellbeing, and health, including preventing homelessness and promoting housing stability.	VI-SPDAT, Youth Coordinated Entry process, Eligibility and Intake/assessment processes for The Cove	AD, DYS	Fall 2020	Spring 2021
C. Collaborate with partner districts to consistently collect, measure, and report on relevant student outcomes like attendance rates, students "On track to graduate," grades, and graduation rates.	Internal processes for information-sharing and data collection/reporting for The Cove and partner districts	DYS	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
D. Assess root causes and landscape trends of youth homelessness in Central Texas post-COVID and ensure that Cove services and strategies are effectively meeting the priority needs of youth.	Participation in national alliances, conferences, research	ED, AD	Spring 2021	Fall 2022

Objective 1.2: Assess and articulate the longer-term impacts The Cove has on young people who accessed The Cove as minors.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Invest in research partnerships to collect youth outcomes data for youth as a result of receiving supportive services at The Cove during high school.	Funding and university partnerships for research	AD, ED	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
B. Track housing outcomes for Cove youth after they graduate high school.	Internal processes, dedicated staff to follow up with graduates	DYS, ADYS	Spring 2021	Ongoing

Objective 1.3: Ensure Youth Voice is centered in The Cove’s work, informing programs and strategy through continued utilization of the Youth Advisory Board (YAB).

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Ensure a Cove staff or intern supports the work of the YAB by convening, training, promoting youth engagement.	Dedicated staff, transportation and leadership development for youth	DYS, APDYS, PSS	Spring 2021	Ongoing
B. Track housing outcomes for Cove youth after they graduate high school.	Funding	AD, DYS	Spring 2021	Ongoing
C. Remove barriers to youth participation by providing transportation to/from events.	Funding and dedicated staff	ED, DYS, NCC	Fall 2020	Ongoing
D. Create opportunities for Cove alumni to become paid staff members.	Funding for dedicated positions, recruitment and leadership development for youth	ED, AD, DYS	Spring 2021	Ongoing

Objective 1.4: Advance racial diversity, equity, and inclusion (REDI), as well as LGBTQIA+ diversity values in The Cove’s programming, using culturally competent and trauma-informed strategies and practices.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Host listening sessions to create space for youth expression of their racial experiences; utilize lessons learned to inform Cove programming.	Dedicated staff, REDI training and support	DYS, APDYS	Spring 2021	Ongoing
B. Assess feasibility of paying for volunteers/mentors of color to serve at the Cove on a regular basis.	Funding, needs assessment, recruitment	AD, NCC	Spring 2021	Fall 2021
C. Maintain and expand Search Institute’s Developmental Relationships training for Cove volunteers.	University partnership, dedicated staff	NCC	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
D. Maintain and expand Cove mentorship programs to create individualized opportunities for youth to engage in safe relationships with volunteers/mentors with similar lived experience in the areas of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.	Dedicated staff, volunteer training and support	NCC	Spring 2021	Spring 2022
E. Prioritize cultural and artistic expression through promoting art, music, poetry, etc. at The Cove.	Community partnerships, dedicated staff	DYS, APDYS	Spring 2021	Ongoing

GOAL 2: KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Build key organizational relationships to support and extend The Cove's mission in the Heart of Texas region.

Objective 2.1: Extend partnerships to include new school districts in the Heart of Texas region who will identify and refer high-school-aged youth experiencing homelessness to The Cove.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Create a board-level workgroup for District Representatives to engage more deeply with The Cove and shape future district-level expansion.	Board committee, dedicated staff time, community partnerships	ED, Exec Committee	Spring 2021	Fall 2022
B. Assess and prioritize key factors for expansion into new high school districts, based on scope of student need, administrative support, and financial viability.	Dedicated staff time	AD, ED, DYS, District Representative Board Workgroup	Spring 2021	Fall 2022
C. Build partnerships with key stakeholders in Region 12 to engage district homeless liaisons in the Heart of Texas region, communicate Cove services, and develop identification and referral pathways for youth experiencing homelessness.	Dedicated staff time, community partnerships	AD, ED	Spring 2021	Ongoing
D. Establish Memorandums of Understanding with at least two new school districts each school year for service provision to homeless youth.	Dedicated staff time, data collection and reporting processes, community partnerships	AD, DYS, District Representative Board Workgroup	Fall 2021	Fall 2023

Objective 2.2: Expand The Cove's efforts to locate and identify high-school aged young people experiencing homelessness in the 6-county region, including youth who may not be enrolled in school.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Build partnerships with key stakeholders in communities (school districts, Communities in Schools, administrators, Department of Family Protective Services, juvenile justice, mental health providers, churches, libraries, transit systems, etc.) to develop identification and referral pathways for high-school-aged youth experiencing homelessness in the Heart of Texas region.	Dedicated staff time, outreach efforts, marketing pieces	AD, DYS, District Representative Board Workgroup, YHDP Partner Agencies	Fall 2020	Fall 2023

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
B. Investigate platforms and develop media, marketing, and outreach campaigns to reach youth experiencing homelessness in the Heart of Texas region.	Marketing contractors, dedicated staff time, community partnerships	ED, YHDP Partner Agencies, CRC	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
C. Investigate virtual solutions for service provision to youth in the Heart of Texas region who need Cove services, but may have trouble accessing The Cove in Waco.	Dedicated staff time, technological support, transportation	AD, DYS, YHDP Partner Agencies	Spring 2021	Spring 2022
D. Invest in developing transportation partnerships to increase accessibility for youth in the Heart of Texas region who need Cove services, but who lack reliable transportation.	Community partnerships, Funding, thorough assessment	AD, ED, YHDP Partner Agencies	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
E. Maintain and extend organizational partnership with MHMR's Youth Crisis Respite House, to provide emergency shelter for youth ages 14-17.	Referral pathways, community partnership, transportation	AD, DYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
F. Extend The Cove's hours of operation to include daytime hours to reach additional high-school-aged youth in the Heart of Texas region.	Dedicated staff time	AD, DYS, ADYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2023

Objective 2.3: Develop a robust referral system to connect youth with supports that address their educational, housing, socioemotional, and physical health needs.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Create more opportunities for community organizations to provide wraparound services at The Cove, including health care, mental healthcare, dental care, eye care, and more.	Community partnerships, Funding	ED, DYS, ADYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
B. Develop a youth-focused Coordinated Entry Access Point at The Cove by training assessors who actively engage the Heart to Home Coordinated Entry housing process.	Community partnerships, dedicated staff time	AD, DYS, YHDP Partner Agencies	Spring 2021	Fall 2023

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
C. Investigate opportunities to engage existing or start new mentorship programs to connect mentors with Cove youth who want one. (including civic groups, church groups, Chamber LEAD program, corporate partners, Baylor, etc.) Specifically invest in key partnerships with historically black panhellenic organizations to connect youth of color with mentors of color.	Community partnerships, dedicated staff time, volunteers	NCC, DYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
D. Expand the Cove's workforce development & life skills program, exploring the possibility of paid work internships for youth in partnership with corporations and civic organizations.	Community partnerships, dedicated staff time, transportation	NCC, DYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
E. Investigate opportunities to maximize The Cove's commercial kitchen in relation to nutrition services career pathways for youth.	Dedicated staff time, thorough assessment, community partnerships	DYS, ADYS, NCC	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
F. Invest in deepening emergency, transitional, and permanent housing options for minors in the Heart of Texas region, in partnership with collaborative local agencies.	Dedicated staff time, community partnerships	DYS, ADYS, AD	Fall 2021	Fall 2023

Objective 2.4: Connect young people with supportive relationships and services to aid in the transition out of high school, into self-sufficiency.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Strengthen partnerships with local colleges and universities, certificate programs, and workforce development programs to create realistic pathways for youth to transition out of high school into sustainable resources for work or higher education.	Community partnerships, dedicated staff time	NCC, DYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
B. Investigate opportunities to engage existing or start new mentorship programs to connect long-term mentors with Cove youth who want one. (including civic groups, church groups, Chamber LEAD program, corporate partners, Baylor, etc.)	Community partnerships, dedicated staff time	NCC, DYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2023

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
C. Provide access and linkages to formal and nontraditional, culturally relevant higher educational opportunities for youth who desire it.	Community partnerships, dedicated staff time	NCC, DYS	Fall 2021	Fall 2023
D. Invest in robust Cove Alumni communications to allow for stronger, more longitudinal relationships with Cove graduates.	Dedicated staff time, data collection and tracking processes	ADYS, DYS, NCC	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
E. Conduct an annual Cove Alumni "homecoming" event.	Dedicated staff time, data collection and tracking processes	AD, DYS, NCC	Spring 2021	Fall 2023



GOAL 3: LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Broaden the community's engagement with addressing youth homelessness and invest in organizational capacity to lead community change.

Objective 3.1: Educate community stakeholders, funders, and community partners about youth homelessness and engage key constituencies in strategies to address it.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Create high-quality, full-color messaging tools to provide the compelling and clear story of The Cove's mission, needs, stories, and results via The Cove's website, social media platforms, Cove facility and print collateral.	Marketing partnership, Funding, Dedicated staff time	ED, CRC, Marketing firm	Spring 2021	Spring 2022
B. Develop and execute an annual marketing and messaging strategy encompassing all print and media forms, including electronic and digital platforms at The Cove for storytelling.	Marketing partnership, Funding, Dedicated staff time	ED, CRC, Board	Spring 2021	Spring 2022
C. Hold quarterly small group "soiree" events with donors or potential donors to tell The Cove's story and promote stakeholder engagement and giving.	Dedicated staff time, board member engagement	ED, CRC, board	Fall 2020	Fall 2023
D. Partner with community organizations to provide educational events at The Cove to educate on youth homelessness.	Dedicated staff time, community partnerships	ED, YHDP Partner Agencies	Spring 2021	Fall 2023

Objective 3.2: Promote youth voices and share stories from Cove students and graduates, shifting the narrative from sympathy to empathy to action.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Provide consistent staff support to convene the Youth Advisory Board on a quarterly basis, at minimum.	Dedicated staff time	PSS, ADYS	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
B. Develop Cove Alumni who serve as advocates and storytellers to advance The Cove's mission by speaking at events and participating in community messaging efforts.	Youth development, dedicated staff time	DYS, ED, CRC	Spring 2021	Fall 2023

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
C. Research best practices for experiential/simulation learning experiences to educate community members about youth homelessness and identify potential returns on investment.	Dedicated staff time	Social Work Interns, DYS	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
D. Conduct a SWOT analysis on the feasibility of a Youth Homelessness Art Book.	Dedicated staff time	ED, Board, Social Work Interns	Fall 2021	Fall 2022

Objective 3.3: Recruit, train, and retain diverse staff, volunteers, and board members, using culturally competent and trauma-informed strategies and practices.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Invest in annual Race Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion training for volunteers, staff, interns, and board members.	Race Equity trainer, Funding	AD, ED	Fall 2020	Fall 2023
B. Develop organizational relationships with local NAACP, LULAC, and CenTex Hispanic and African American Chamber of Commerce, as well as historically black panhellenic organizations.	Dedicated staff time, community partnerships	NCC, DYS, CRC	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
C. Invest in professional development for staff on an annual basis, including goodness-of-fit recruitment tools, personal development employee plans, and flexible work arrangements.	Staff training, funding, dedicated staff time	AD, ED	Fall 2020	Fall 2023
D. Develop staff and board annual review processes to include Race Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion indicators of growth and success.	Dedicated staff time	AD, ED	Spring 2021	Spring 2022

Objective 3.4: Increase diverse funding sources that are renewable year after year and/or that reflect multi-year commitments.

Action Steps	Resources Needed	Responsible Party	Projected Start	Projected Completion
A. Define targets for a diversified revenue portfolio relative to annual budget, to include annual grants, renewable grants, corporate sponsorships, individual giving, and municipal budgets.	Best practices research	ED, FM, Board	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
B. Identify feasible funding strategies to include School District financial and in-kind support relative to students served and Cove services provided.	Best practices research, dedicated staff time	ED, DYS, Board	Spring 2021	Spring 2022
C. Host at least one annual event each year, with opportunities for corporate sponsorship and recognition.	Dedicated staff time	ED, CRC, Board	Fall 2021	Fall 2023
D. Conduct regular research to identify potential funders which align with The Cove's mission and activities.	Dedicated staff time	ED, Social Work Interns	Spring 2021	Fall 2023
E. Develop a Cove Advocate fundraising plan to recruit community members who will give annually and participate in recruiting other individuals to do the same.	Dedicated staff time, board engagement	ED, Board, CRC	Spring 2021	Spring 2022
F. Develop value proposition that identifies the needs, benefits, and legalities of an endowment.	Best practices research	Board Sustainability Committee	Fall 2021	Fall 2022



GOAL 1: IMPACTFUL PROGRAMS

Clarify the Cove's impact in young people's lives and in the Heart of Texas region.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI): The metric to let you know how you are doing working towards your goals but anchored in your strategies. Often defines the outcome or "to what end" the action is driving.

KPI	Baseline Metric	Frequency of gathering data	Targets for FY 2021	Notes
Self-sufficiency	2019 pilot study = 68% (13/19) of students showed growth in one or more domain areas.	Quarterly	To see 75% of engaged students increase in self-sufficiency in at least 2 domains from entry to exit	Youth Services team will complete a self-sufficiency assessment upon engagement with a youth and upon exit (approx. 90 days)
Successful completion rates (on track to progress to the next grade level)	Unknown	Quarterly	To see 75% of youth served on track to progress to the next grade level or graduate.	# that graduated & # on track to graduate - this metric comes from the school districts on a 6-week basis.
Graduation rate	2020 = 86%	Annually	To see 90% of seniors engaged, who are graduation-eligible, graduate.	This number is determined each June.
Student Satisfaction with The Cove services	2019 BU Psychology & Neuroscience pilot = Across time, students reported significantly more Positive Climate at The Cove	Quarterly	To see 90% of youth served be satisfied or very satisfied with Cove services each time they visit the Nurture Center	The Cove will set up an iPad at the front door, where youth can pick a happy face or sad face to give daily feedback on their satisfaction with services that visit - or use Kahoot on youth phones
Percentage of young people who move from "contact" with The Cove to "engagement"	Approx. 50%	Quarterly	To see 50% of youth served in any school year move from contacts to engagements	Engagement= 3x or more; Contact= 3x or less; Contact and engagement data is tracked in HMIS.

GOAL 2: KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Build key organizational relationships to support and extend The Cove's mission in the Heart of Texas region.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI): The metric to let you know how you are doing working towards your goals but anchored in your strategies. Often defines the outcome or "to what end" the action is driving.

KPI	Baseline Metric	Frequency of gathering data	Targets for FY 2021	Notes
Number of youth served	46	Quarterly	75 young people	Unduplicated youth & Visits (Total contacts)
Percentage of total youth served who are unaccompanied	Approx. 40%	Quarterly	50% of total youth served	Unaccompanied = "experienced homelessness without a parent or guardian". This question is answered by each youth in our intake process & tracked in HMIS.
Number of school district partnerships developed	1	Quarterly	3	Districts with signed MOUs and Districts in progress/ conversation for MOUs
Number of community agencies actively partnering in-house at the Nurture Center"	3	Quarterly	6	Number of agencies providing services at The Cove; HMIS can track community agency referrals as a separate metric. These partners are regularly providing services to youth in-house at The Cove.
Percentage of youth served who were exited to safe and appropriate housing	Unknown	Quarterly	To see 75% of total youth served, exited to safe and appropriate housing	This exit data should be gathered approx. every 90 days for each youth receiving services and entered into HMIS). Safe housing options = Youth Crisis Respite,

GOAL 3: LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Broaden the community's understanding of youth homelessness and invest in organizational capacity to lead community change.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI): The metric to let you know how you are doing working towards your goals but anchored in your strategies. Often defines the outcome or "to what end" the action is driving.

KPI	Baseline Metric	Frequency of gathering data	Targets for FY 2021	Notes
Balanced Revenue Portfolio	FY 2019 = 34% - Individuals; 29% - Private Foundations; 2% - Corporate Gifts; 8% - Civic Organizations; 8% - Government grants; 15% In-kind	Quarterly	28% - Individuals; 18% - Private Foundations; 4% - Corporate Gifts; 15% - Civic Organizations; 33% - Government Grants; 2% - Prior year released from restriction	Diversified funding (long-term sustainable funding); Donor Retention rate. Red light = any revenue stream dips below 50% of projected or of previous year's revenue to date. Red light = if any one revenue stream exceeds 60% of total revenue
Audience Reach- media, communications, & website engagement	Open rate of e-newsletters = 34%	Quarterly	45%	Develop website engagement tools
Board Engagement: Reflected in board self-assessment	58% self-assessed Gold Star ratings; 42% assessed Good ratings	Annually	90% Gold-star rating using annual self-assessment	Annual self-assessment based on board participation agreement
Volunteer Satisfaction	Unknown	Annually	90% of volunteers report high levels of satisfaction with Cove participation	Volunteer survey conducted upon end of semester engagement
Sense of belonging among board	67% strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging on the board; 33% agree	Annually	90% of board members report high levels of belonging	Annual self-assessment based on board participation agreement
Sense of belonging among staff	Unknown	Annually	90% of staff members report high levels of belonging	Anonymous annual survey, with opportunities for comments and discussion

ACRONYMS

MCH	Methodist Children's Home
MHMR	Mental Health, Mental Retardation
YHDP	Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program
HUD	Housing & Urban Development
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
WISD	Waco Independent School District
LULAC	League of United Latin American Citizens
TBRI	Trust-Based Relational Intervention
YAB	Youth Advisory Board



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Ending Youth Homelessness