



March 27, 2020

### **YouthHarbors Program COVID-19 Impact**

At this time, all YouthHarbors Case Managers are working remotely from their homes and busy reaching out to each other to share resources and information to help individual students navigate this challenging time. Using video conferencing/call platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and FaceTime, they have regularly scheduled individual and groups meetings with the YouthHarbors Program Director, Jonathan Regis. Bring the team together more frequently has the added benefit of people staying connected to the changing needs and landscape of the times we are all living.

Each Case Manager is also actively communicating with as many of their students, school and community collaterals as possible thru mobile device messaging applications, email, phone, and video calls. Specifically, communication with students prove challenging right now as some suddenly have inactive cell phone numbers or do not have their own personal mobile devices all together and rely on other peoples accounts to connect with their Case Managers.

Above all, the biggest concern so far centers on the loss of job wages due to the retail and restaurant services closing in Massachusetts. Specifically, undocumented students are hardest hit as many of their jobs are acquired "under the table". Without income, maintaining housing is at risk. Getting rental assistance implemented quickly has its own challenges in that there are multiple steps and forms needed to establish rental agreements and verification of the student/landlord relationship (all excellent business practices in normal times). The added barrier for some students is the reluctance to be associated with YouthHarbors due to the perceived stigma of being involved with a homeless prevention program. For others, current living arrangements would actually be jeopardized if a formal rental agreement were pursued directly with the landlord as some students live in spaces where they are known only to the host tenant and not the necessarily the landlord. In those cases the Case Managers work to find a better housing situation, which may take time.

The schools are now closed until May 4 which further leaves students on track to graduate without a clear path or timeline as to when they will complete the school year. While schools are doing their best to engage students in virtual classrooms, for many of our YouthHarbors students this is the biggest barrier, second to housing stability. Many schools are using learning platforms that are cell phone and mobile device friendly. Some students are attending school each day for meals and coordinating on site with teachers to fax, print, and email school assignments.

Regarding food assistance, Case Managers notice the reluctance students have around accessing local food banks despite having heavily relied on their Case Managers for this type of direct relief when school was in session.

During a YouthHarbors team call on 3/25/2020, these needs were noted by the Case Managers and Program Director:

- Gift cards for
  - Groceries - Market Basket, Shaw's, Stop and Shop, Target, Walmart, and popular convenience stores)
  - Pharmacies – CVS, Walgreens
  - Public transportation - MBTA Charlie Cards for bus and train fare, Uber, Lyft
  - Cell phone minutes
- Pay per use cell phones
- Internet plan
- Tablets/ Laptops
- Rental assistance

We appreciate everyone thinking about our YouthHarbors students at this time! Please contact Kim Thomas at [kthomas@jri.org](mailto:kthomas@jri.org) if you have any questions.

Thank you!

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