

Bob Mecum

Bob Mecum has served as Chief Executive Officer of Lighthouse Youth Services since 1978. Under Bob's watch, Lighthouse has grown from a runaway shelter to become a \$27 million statewide multi-service youth and family service organization. Bob began his career as a live in counselor in a half way house for adult felons, then became a probation officer, and served as the Assistant Director of the Butler County Youth Service Bureau. In 1976, Bob joined Lighthouse Youth Services as the Director of the Lighthouse Runaway Shelter before his promotion to CEO in 1978.

As the President and CEO, Bob has responsibilities for all aspects of the organization including planning, resource and program development, staff recruitment and development, financial management, proving quality services and advocacy for the mission.

Lighthouse has grown from an agency servicing 16 youth on a daily basis in two residential programs to a statewide organization serving an average daily population of 450 children, youth and families in residential programs; 140 students per day in Lighthouse charter schools; and over 1,900 families in Lighthouse family service programs each day.

Lighthouse has received significant national recognition for its work in the areas of runaway and homeless youth; juvenile corrections; Independent Living; and Foster Care.

Lighthouse has pioneered the development of many programs and services for youth and families. Bob has testified in Congress, at the Ohio State Legislature, and has been featured in or contributed to numerous national publications including Reader's Digest (Feb, 2004); New York Times; Washington Post; People Magazine; and various youth and family professional journals.

Lighthouse receives ongoing support from the following federal agencies and federal programs:

- DHHS FYSB
- FEMA
- Department of Labor
- WIA
- HUD
- Medicaid
- Department of Justice

Bob has been involved in advocacy and field advancement work for decades. He was a founder and Board Chair for the National Network for Youth from 2008-2010. He is a founder and currently Vice Chair for Advancing Evidence Based Practice.

Bob earned his BS in Business Administration at the University of Cincinnati and his MS in Corrections from Xavier University. He is married with three adult sons and two grandchildren.

Homeless Youth Programs Are Highly Leveraged Investments

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I began working with runaway and homeless youth 40 years ago and there has never been anything like USICH to coordinate the federal government's response to homelessness. I would especially like to thank Secretary Sebelius and Commissioner Samuels for visiting us this spring in Cincinnati.

In 1976, I came to Lighthouse to serve as the director of our runaway and homeless youth shelter, one of the first DHHS funded shelters in the country. Today, with federal financial support through HUD, HHS (both FYSB & SAMHSA), ED, SAMHSA, and DOL, we provide a full complement of street outreach, shelter care, in home family support services, and transitional living services for youth ages 12 through 24.

Earlier this year, we opened our city's first shelter and day program for 18-24 year old homeless youth. At this shelter, we serve a fairly unique subset of the homeless population, 25% of whom have aged out of the child welfare system and 25% or more who are LGBTQ youth.

On any given day, we now have capacity to offer shelter and transitional housing for 150 youth. A grant from SAMHSA has helped support a Functional Family Therapy Team and an ACT Team....both well researched evidence based services which enable us to reconnect young people with their families and to offer the mental health treatment services so many of them need on terms and in locations that work for our youth and their families.

A DOL Grant funds the Lighthouse Civic Justice Corps, through which we are offering older youth an opportunity to serve their community while learning job skills and getting opportunities for full time private sector employment.

In Cincinnati, our public school system offers services to homeless youth with funding from ED. An on site Project Connect staff person who works in our youth shelter has provided invaluable assistance to make sure that our residents and those who we encounter through street outreach are able to continue their education. On any given day, there are about 400 homeless youth in our public school system who are couch surfing, either on their own or with their families. Under current HUD rules, these young people do not meet the HUD definition of homelessness such that we are not able to extend transitional living services to them. A clarification or rule change to include these youth would enable the system of prevention and care for these homeless youth much more effective.

RHYMIS national outcome data consistently reports positive cost benefit from federal investments in all three primary programs of the RHY Act. When the grantees operate all three of these concurrently.... street outreach, shelter services, and longer term transitional living programs...these agencies often provide amazingly high yield low cost services which yield major benefits....not only for the young people themselves but also for the local public child protection system and for the HUD funded local continuum of care for homeless adults and families .

Here are some examples:

FYSB funded Street Outreach Programs, employing informal "street smart" approaches with street youth, effectively reach those young people and families who fear or mistrust the formal child welfare systems.

Street outreach workers are very effective in getting kids off the streets and into safe “youth friendly” shelters. The FYSB funded youth shelters offer 24/7 365 direct access help for young people on the streets who often will not directly engage with the local child welfare system. A policy change for RHY programs to enable them to use street outreach grant funds for both outreach and aftercare services would extend our reach without additional funding required.

At the other end of the service continuum, RHY funded Transitional Living Programs offer longer term housing and self-sufficiency preparation for older homeless youth – at least 20% of whom are entering homelessness following their discharge from the child welfare system. While many of these youth have aged out of the child welfare system into homelessness, others planfully exited the system of public care but became homeless at a later time.

In effect, the Transitional Living Programs often serve as a low cost high yield essential aftercare service for child welfare graduates who remain disconnected from their biological families.

Good decisions are driven by good data collection systems. Given that so many FYSB grantees are also HUD grantees, we must merge RHYMIS and HMIS. The technology to integrate these systems has been documented through a pilot project in Cincinnati. This technology merge saves staff time and just provides better data for both HUD and HHS.

The ACF has the authority to rapidly initiate state by state conversations between the public child welfare system and RHY funded grantees. Out of these efforts will undoubtedly emerge well considered strategies for demonstration projects to enable states more flexible use of existing federal dollars. Child welfare system investments in these RHY programs can insure success for the local public child welfare agencies to restore families, to keep children safe and to improve outcomes for older youth aging out of care.

Likewise, HUD has the authority to encourage the local Continuum of Care leaders to engage with locally funded RHY grantees to insure that homeless system of care considers the needs of older homeless youth as they develop their local system’s plan to eradicate homelessness.

Finally a word about employment. Exciting work is underway through DOL to demonstrate the efficacy of the Civic Justice Corps in its efforts to connect “disconnected” youth to the basic structures of responsible adulthood. The Civic Justice Corps connects youth not only to jobs but also to the very basic principles of citizenship. This is but one example of what DOL can do to eliminate the barriers homeless youth often face when seeking assistance through the more traditional WIA funded programs.

Thank you for this opportunity. We truly appreciate your commitment to homeless youth.

Bob Mecum