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## The Evaluation Plan for the LGBTQ+ Runaway & Homelessness Youth (LRHY) Outreach Program

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## ABSTRACT

The Evaluation Plan for the LGBTQ+ Runaway & Homelessness

Youth (LRHY) Outreach Program

By

Jade Matthews

June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

LGBTQ+ runaway and homeless youth are a vulnerable population at higher risk for survival sex, suicide, and sexual assault and rape than their heterosexual peers. The Alonzo A. Crim Center developed the LGBTQ+ Runaway Homeless Youth (LRHY) Outreach program to address the gap in homeless resources needed by the youth. This evaluation plan is being proposed to aid in the planning stage of the Street Outreach program. The evaluation presents a mixed design method and an external review of the program's data collection methods, such as pre-and post-test, focus groups, and outreach night reports. The evaluation findings would add to the gap in the literature surrounding LGBTQ+ youth in the Metro-Atlanta area experiencing homelessness. The findings could inform and influence current and future programming for this population in delivering appropriate resources and care to assist in eliminating youth homelessness and its associated harmful impact.

The Evaluation Plan for the LGBTQ+ Runaway & Homelessness  
Youth (LRHY) Outreach Program

by

Jade T. Matthews

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Youth (LRHY) Outreach Program

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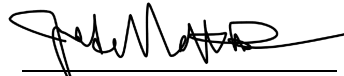
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## Introduction

### Background

The Alonzo A. Crim. Center tailored the LRHY Outreach program to support vulnerable youth, particularly LGBTQ+ youth, and to provide the tools necessary to prevent and reduce the harm caused by homelessness. The Crim Center's recognized the gap in LGBT youth homelessness resources. They believed the Center's model in other programs of engaging young adults to distribute program activities would work for a homeless youth outreach program. According to the report, *Missed Opportunities: Homeless Youth in America*, at least one in 30 youth between ages 13 to 17 experienced homelessness without a parent or guardian in 2017.<sup>1</sup> The *On the Streets: The Federal Response to Gay and Transgender Homeless Youth* report found in 2010 that between 1.6 million to 2.8 million young people were homeless in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Gay and transgender youth described in the report were represented at disproportionate rates of 20-40% even though they are among 5-10% of the entire youth population. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ youth of color are even more likely to experience homelessness compared to other youth, including their Caucasian LGBTQ+ peers.<sup>3</sup>

Homelessness can adversely affect youth's cognitive, social, physical, and behavioral development. Even brief experiences of homelessness can have lasting effects. These effects can present in emotional, behavioral, and health problems such as increased substance use and suicide risks.<sup>5</sup> Youth homelessness can impact school performance, such as poor academic grades and attendance, which can have an adverse effect on job security in adulthood.<sup>7</sup> Youth experiencing homelessness are at higher risks for survival sex, sexual assault, or rape.<sup>6</sup> The Atlanta City Government and Atlanta Homeless services have limited resources dedicated to homeless youth overall, and even fewer resources are allocated for the vulnerable population of LGBTQ+ youth. The LGBTQ+ Runaway and Homelessness Youth (LRHY) outreach program

hypothesized that the lack of resources might be due to limitations and restrictions of government funds for transgender youth and religious influence within other organizations. Even fewer resources are allocated toward preventing LRHY that would involve working with the families of the youth to remediate any disputes leading to the homelessness of the youth. These complex relations may escalate for the target population after the youth comes out to their families. The *Serving Our Youth 2015* report found that half of the youth received negative feedback from their families after coming out, and more than 25% of the youth were put outside their homes.<sup>8</sup> The LRHY outreach program decided to address both gaps— LRHY resources for movement out of homelessness and homeless prevention to eliminate LRHY in the Atlanta Metropolitan (Metro) Area.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The advisory board did not develop the LRHY outreach program using a specific theoretical framework. However, this evaluation proposal suggests the Socio-Ecological Model as a supporting theory regarding program development and implementation. The approach involves a four-level social-ecological model used by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>4</sup> The model has the individual focused on the core and expanded to relationships, community, and society. There is a consideration of the interactions both within and between the levels. The first level of the model focuses on the biological and historical factors of the individual within the target populations. The second level, relationships, investigates the individuals' inner circle or closest peers, family, or partners. Community is the third level and seeks to understand the settings in which individuals and their social relationships develop. The broadest and overarching level of the model is societal, which examines the factors that create the norms socially and culturally for behaviors. The LRHY Outreach Program touches all levels

of the model with approaches that address the needs of the target individuals, their relationships with the program staff and support systems, community engagement, and long-term societal perceptions. The different levels are displayed in *Figure 1.1* below.



Fig 1. Components of the Socio-Ecological Model <sup>4</sup>

This evaluation may utilize the socio-ecological theory in the future by examining the program's effects on the youth's family, community, and prevailing social norms. It will not be used for this evaluation proposal due to the limited resources and capabilities of the current evaluation team.

A more fitting theory for this paper would be the Stages of Change Theory or the Transtheoretical Model shown in *Figure 1.2*. The program seeks to move vulnerable youth out of homelessness that can be evaluated through the stages in theory: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.<sup>11</sup> Initially, the youth may be hesitant or unwilling to enter the homeless program, which would place them in the precontemplation stage. If they begin thinking about the benefits of joining the program to leave homelessness, they would be in the contemplation stage. Youth already thinking about ways to escape homelessness and have decided to receive help by entering the program would be in the preparation stage. The youth engaging in the program activities assisting them in obtaining long-term housing would be in the action stage. Finally, the program's overall goal is to have all youth in the maintenance stage where they can successfully remain in stable housing. The evaluation will seek to examine

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the extent to which the program can 1) identify the stage the participants are in and 2) move them to the maintenance stage of change.

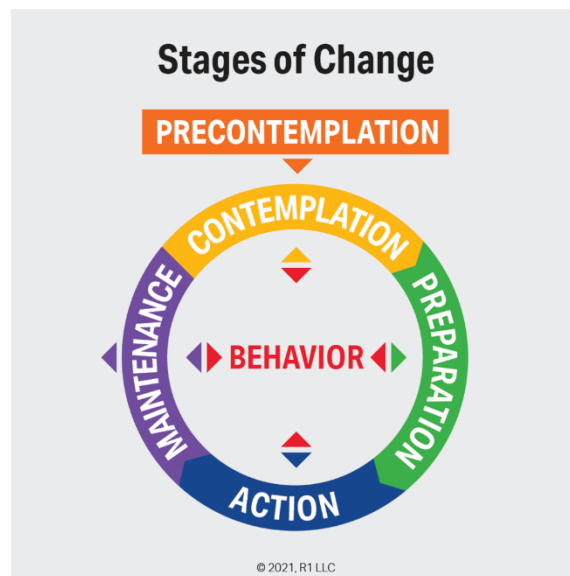


Figure 1.2 Components of the Transtheoretical/Stages of Change Model

## Purpose and Stakeholder Engagement

### Purpose of Evaluation

The purpose of this process evaluation is to examine the effectiveness of the implementation plan for the *LGBTQ+ Runaway Homelessness Youth Outreach* program. It will also assess the impact of utilizing young adults in the outreach volunteer roles to improve receptiveness of homeless youth engagement in homeless services. The evaluation findings will address youth challenges that hinder the LRHY ability to move out of homelessness not initially considered. The findings will also inform the more extensive evaluation of the program providing knowledge such as what determines success for the LRHY Outreach program. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Learning and Growing through Evaluation: Asthma Program Evaluation Guide was used as guidelines for this proposal.<sup>9</sup> The paper will examine stakeholder engagement, program components and outcomes, the evaluation design and data collection methods, evaluation findings usage, and budget. The steps from the CDC guidelines will be assessed based on feasibility, relevance, and appropriateness to the program's goals. The steps are shown below in *Figure 2*.



Fig. 2. CDC Program Evaluation Framework outlining the overarching areas covered in the evaluation proposal. <sup>9</sup>

### **Program Stakeholders**

Several stakeholders are interested in the program's outcomes and bring unique perspectives to the evaluation process. Stakeholders are categorized on their level of involvement in the evaluation process as primary, secondary, and tertiary shown in *Table A*. Primary stakeholders have direct engagement as part of the evaluation team. Secondary stakeholders contribute to the evaluation process as a source of data or provide data from the program activities. The overarching organization, sponsors, and affiliated partners are classified as tertiary stakeholders interested in the program's findings to utilize for their entities.

#### *Advisory Board*

The advisory board consists of individuals from various homeless or LGBTQ+-affiliated agencies that have committed to an oversight role in developing and implementing the LRHY Outreach program. The board includes the Director and Youth Advisory Board for Partners for Homes, Chris180, GSU Social Work Program, Associate Director of Point Source Youth, and Resilient Georgia. The board members have a primary role since they will also be on the evaluation team.

#### *Outreach Program Staff/Volunteers*

The LRHY Outreach program staff, VISTA members, and recruited street outreach volunteers have a critical role in implementing the program. They will serve on the planning team and directly involve the program participants to facilitate the activities. The staff consists of graduate research assistants, VISTA members, and young adult volunteers. VISTA members will have additional data from the mid-year feedback survey conducted by the AmeriCorps Commissioner

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during their compliance visit with the program. This group will serve as secondary since they will provide regular feedback for the evaluation. In combination with the participants, their input will help shape any adaptations needed post the initial planning period.

### *AmeriCorps VISTA Program*

AmeriCorps VISTA has impacted the United States and its territories since 1965 by aiding local organizations with financial and human resources. The program provides funding for the VISTA AmeriCorps members' compensation consisting of living allowances and a Segal Education Award to pay for various educational expenses. VISTA members can also earn federal non-competitive eligibility that would allow the members an advantage in the federal recruitment process. AmeriCorps VISTA program will be a tertiary stakeholder as a sponsor of the program and will be invited to the reporting on the program's progress. Additionally, they will be a secondary stakeholder due to their contributions to the data collection.

### *LGBTQ+ Homeless and Runaway Youth in Atlanta*

The target population of the program is homeless or runaway youth identifying with the LGBTQ+ community in the metro-Atlanta area. The youth have a secondary role in the evaluation and are the main data source for assessing the program's effectiveness. Their main interest in the program is to gain access to the services offered by the program.

### *Alonzo A. Crim Center of Urban Educational Excellence*

The Alonzo A. Crim Center of Urban Educational Excellence at Georgia State University (GSU) will serve as the lead organization for the program. It will be a tertiary stakeholder predominantly interested in the outputs and outcomes of the program. The Crim Center has been a hub for addressing the challenges present in the urban community in Atlanta, providing

outreach, research, and educational programs since 1996. They commit to reducing the gaps in the educational systems and uplifting underserved youth through mentorship. Additionally, the Crim Center has collaborated with multiple local and national organizations to provide the necessary financial and human resources in their mission of improving the urban education system and community.

Table A. Stakeholder Assessment and Engagement Plan

Stakeholder Name	Interest or Perspective	Role in the Evaluation	Evaluation Engagement Time Periods
Runaway and Homeless Youth	The program activities are designed for the participants. Their opinions would validate whether they feel they are getting help with their situation and provide the areas adjustments are needed to improve their experience.	Secondary	During the first connection, after engagement in program activities, and end of program participation.
Advisory Board	The advisory board has backgrounds in homeless service programs and with the vulnerable population. They are the planning team for the program.	Primary	Throughout the entirety of the evaluation process
Outreach Program Volunteers/Staff	The staff oversee the program's regular operations and will provide perspective on their direct experiences with the program activities as implementers.	Secondary	During intake and training—and street outreach shift.
AmeriCorps VISTA Program	Their interest is monitoring the program's ability to achieve its goals using the AmeriCorps VISTA members and performing their audits to assess this. Their report results determine whether they	Secondary and Tertiary	During intake, training, and AmeriCorps, mid-year compliance visit feedback report. Present during findings report meetings.

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	will continue funding the program.		
Alonzo A. Crim Center	Their interest is in establishing and maintaining a successful program to uphold the mission of their Center.	Tertiary	Findings will be reported at the end of each program year.

### **Cultural Competence**

The program must incorporate culturally competent practices to ensure the target population feels respected and included in the program's activities. Cultural competence is the interworking of behaviors, attitudes, and policies within an organization and among its professionals to allow an effective environment in cross-cultural circumstances.<sup>3</sup> The program has an advisory board representative of various beliefs, attitudes, and backgrounds that provide diverse experiences and expertise relevant to the target population and community partners throughout the implementation process. These multiple voices will also need to be reflected in the evaluation process, and proper distribution of power among the voices should be determined to minimize unbalanced influence over the planning and decision-making.

## Description of LGBTQ+ Homeless Youth Outreach Program

### **Program Components & Outcomes**

#### *Program Need*

LRHY Outreach program addresses gaps in the LGBTQ+ homeless youth population due to lack of funding or interest within the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The target population requires specialized needs due to circumstances such as access to mental health professionals and social workers with training and experience in LGBTQ+ familial disputes. For immediate care, the youth need assistance finding temporary housing and health care due to the associated risks with homelessness mentioned in the background. For long-term needs, the program provides resources to amend family relationships to improve the youth's chances of returning home. Assisting families with their relationships with the participant can be aided by community support. This would mean adjusting the community's attitudes and behaviors that could foster positive changes in the parents' attitudes and behaviors toward the participant. This evaluation is needed to assess the process for implementing the LRHY outreach program. In evaluating the process, the program can examine how well the different activities lead to the program's outcomes.

#### *Context*

Addressing homelessness can present various challenges, mainly due to interacting with individuals in such a vulnerable state. Homeless youth may feel they have complete autonomy over the decisions of their well-being and could present hesitancy to engage with the program for fear of losing the independence that their homelessness allows.

It may also be challenging for the program to regularly locate the LRHY in the area and follow up with them after the initial connection. The transient population must have a common physical

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location to communicate with the program between connections. Another possible challenge would be the already homeless epidemic in the Atlanta Metro area. There are a substantial number of homeless adults, and the volunteers will need to navigate discrimination so that individuals can qualify as participants in the program.

### *Target Population*

The target populations are homeless youth in the Atlanta Metro Area and their families with whom they previously resided, especially youth who identify with the LGBTQ+ identity.

### *Stage of Development*

The program has completed the dissemination to the entities collaborating and sponsoring the program, such as AmeriCorps, Atlanta City Government, and other homeless organizations in Atlanta. It is currently in its initial planning stage of implementation.

### *Activities*

The uniqueness of this program is the LGBTQ+-focused outreach and homeless care. The activities connect with the program by speaking with a program volunteer first. They will be introduced to the process needed to move them out of their homelessness. Individuals verbalizing their LGBTQ+ status are still stigmatized and discriminated against in society and their homes; this could prevent youth from having stable housing. Addressing the conflict in the household can allow youth access to stable housing and, with continuing support, avoid long-term family discord to prevent future homelessness. VISTA members will be trained in social work and related fields to provide family support services for these cases. Through awareness and community-based training, the program volunteers and staff will connect with the homeless youth through street outreach. As well as engage the families and community members within the youths' social network. The VISTA members will provide this training to equip community

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members working with youth in schools, community centers, and churches with knowledge and skills in LGBTQ+ sensitive care and practices.

### *Input/Resources*

Numerous inputs and resources, such as staff, money for outreach material, time, and partnerships, are needed for the program's implementation. The program has successfully secured the grant from AmeriCorps to fund 18 VISTA members that will be divided into three working groups for the project. These areas include Volunteer Recruitment and Training, Development and Marketing, and Resource Acquisition. The Volunteer Recruitment and Training group will identify and train volunteers for street outreach and lead the training for community-based awareness. The Development and Marketing group will develop and maintain partnerships, both funding, and resourceful entities, and engage the community in program efforts through social media campaigns. Finally, the Resource Acquisition group is responsible for building the outreach kits and the online system for entering and monitoring runaway and homeless youth during street outreach. Several outputs will be measured to assess program impact, including the number of connections made by the outreach team, outreach kits passed out, registered RHY in the system, and homeless youth utilizing health and housing services.

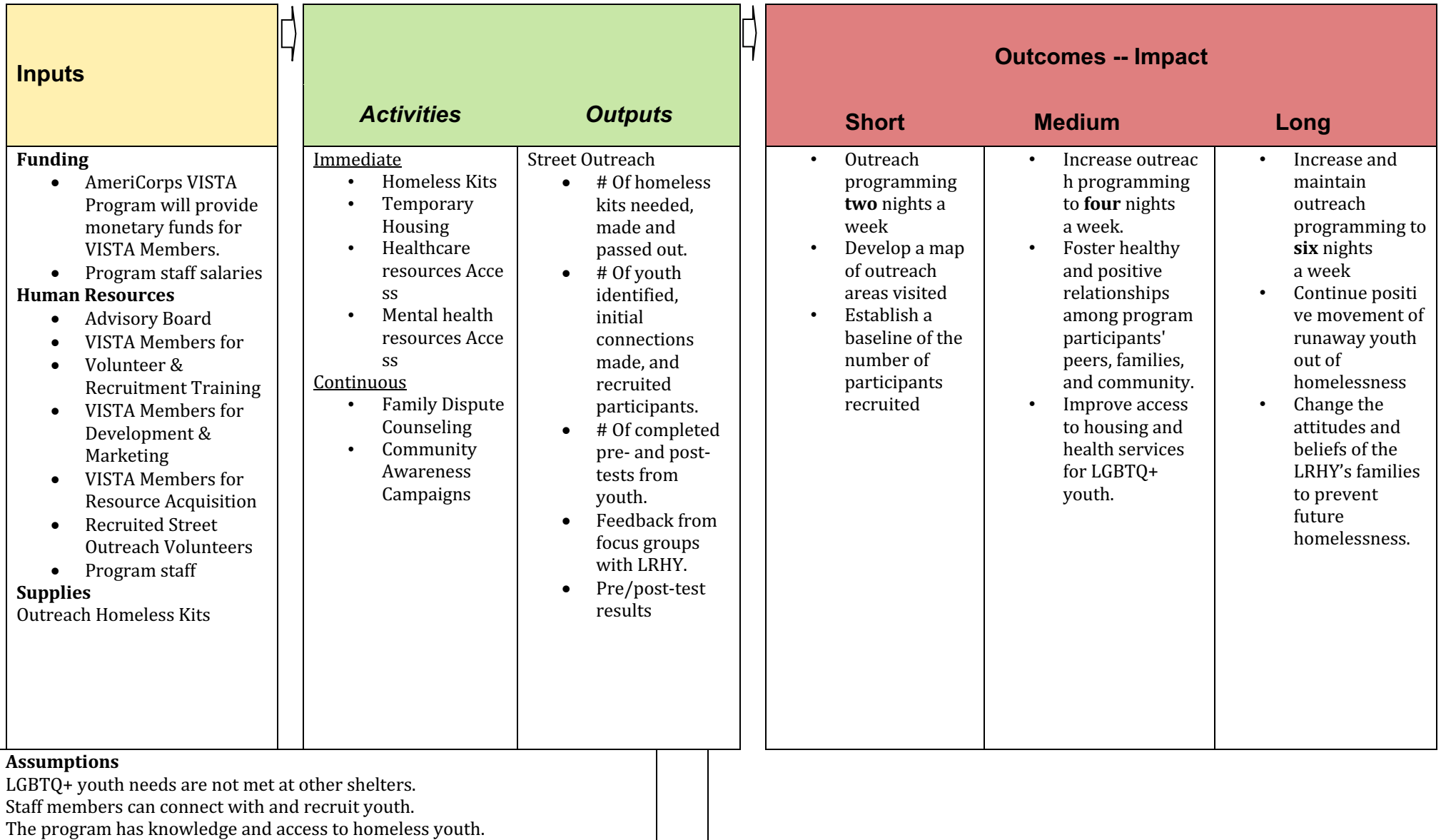
### *Outcomes*

The program's intended outcomes are short-term, intermediate, and long-term. The short-term goals are to launch outreach programming two nights a week, develop a map of outreach areas visited, and establish a baseline of the number of participants recruited. The intermediate goals are to increase outreach programming to four nights a week and foster healthy and positive relationships among program participants, their peers, families, and community members to develop meaningful support networks. The program also seeks to improve access to housing and

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health services for gender minoritized youth. The program's long-term goals are to increase and maintain outreach programming to six nights a week. As well as to continue the positive movement of runaway youth out of homelessness— and eventually change the attitudes and beliefs of the LRHY's families to prevent future homelessness. The Logic Model on the following page depicts the program's inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

# Logic Model



## Evaluation Design

### Stakeholder Needs

This evaluation report is designed to serve as a resource for the advisory team as they seek to document the progress and identify areas for improvement and success in the program implementation. The source of data collection will mainly be from participants; however, feedback will be documented from program volunteers, VISTA members, and other staff to assess program operations. The findings from the evaluation will be published to increase the knowledge regarding LRHY research in the Atlanta Metro Area.

### Evaluation Questions

The overarching evaluation questions will guide the assessments during the evaluation to understand whether the program is addressing the LRHY homeless dilemma. The following proposed evaluation questions were determined the three main goals during the stakeholder meeting:

- Is the LRHY Outreach Program able to effectively and efficiently sustain the implementation plan?
- To what extent does the LGTBTQ+ Outreach Program move LRHY out of homelessness and into stable housing in the Metro-Atlanta area?
- Are the LRHY and their family's relationships positively impacted by the program to reduce the likelihood of future homelessness?

### Evaluation Design

The evaluation will use a concurrent mixed method design where quantitative and qualitative data will be applied to inform the evaluation. The evaluation will be initially framed for a

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process evaluation since the program is still in the planning phases and will later transition to an outcome evaluation after the pilot period. The process and outcome evaluation will be a mixed method design involving both quantitative (outputs data and numerical and categorical survey results) and qualitative (interviewing summaries and open responses from reports and surveys) methods received from Program participants, staff, and VISTA members, and outreach volunteers.

## Gathering Credible Evidence

### **Data Collection Methods**

The process evaluation will use pre-post-testing to assess the program development and impact. For the evaluation process, the team will determine the post-connections surveys, street outreach night reports from program staff and volunteers, and focus groups. The evaluation team will need to first decide on what constitutes a connection with LRHY and then develop a simple survey after connections with program volunteers and staff that can be used for data collection. There will also need to be a standardized report format for staff and volunteers to be completed after each shift. The report will need to include the quantity of homeless kits required, made, and passed out, the quantity of youth identified, initial connections made and recruited participants, and the quantity of completed pre- and post-tests from youth. Group and individual focus groups can be a valuable tool for the program to gain a deeper understanding of how the program is affecting the LRHY or how it may not impact them. Since it will be less reasonable to interview all individuals, a decided number of interviews should be randomly selected using a random computer-generated system. A culturally competent and purposeful interview script should be developed and piloted to ensure accuracy.

The team will look to focus groups and pre-and post-test data collection methods for the outcome evaluation. The pre-test should be designed to include relevant demographic information selected by the evaluation team. The same standards should be applied to the outcome evaluation's focus group development as the process evaluation's focus group. Both data collection methods should allow the participants to indicate their level of engagement in health and homeless support services before and after participation in the program. Also, to remark on the nature of their familial relationships before and after participating in the program.

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Due to the limited funding for evaluation, this type of design is the least expensive and can create valuable data to assess if the program truly impacted the youth. While it can be effective in this manner, it may pose difficulties to administer both tests to all participants since it would require accurate and re. The pre-test will be issued during the first connection with the youth participant, and the post-test once they have moved out of homelessness.

### **Analysis & Interpretation**

The quantitative feedback from the program staff, VISTA members, and outreach volunteers from surveys, along with the LRHY data, will be analyzed using SAS version 9.4. Qualitative data will be collected, including group and individual interviews with the program staff, VISTA members, volunteers, and the LRHY. Additionally, there will be concise open-ended responses through developing a reliable and precise coding system to analyze thematically. The advisory board and possibly public health interns can derive preliminary conclusions from the data but should also consider an external reviewer's interpretations.

### **Indicators and Standards**

Specific indicators and standards are required to be met for sustaining grants such as the AmeriCorps VISTA. These are described as:

- Impact 2500 youth connections each service year measured through homeless kits given out.
- Partner with sites outlined in the grant for outreach programs that include partners for homes, Stand up for youth, and Chris180.

The program should produce additional indicators and standards after the pilot year when they can establish a baseline for the engagement of activities to establish specific and attainable goals for assessing their success with program goals.

Table B. Evaluation Data Collection Methods

Evaluation Question	Data Collection Method	Activities Needed
<p>1. Is the LRHY Outreach Program able to effectively and efficiently sustain the implementation plan?</p>	<p>Street Outreach Night Reports</p>	<p>Quantity of homeless kits needed to be made and passed out.</p>
		<p>Quantity of youth identified, initial connections made, and recruited participants.</p>
		<p>Quantity of completed pre- and post-tests from youth.</p>
	<p>Focus Group</p>	<p>Individual and Group interviews of program staff, VISTA members, and recruited volunteers</p>
<p>2. Is the LRHY receptive to the program activities and recruited outreach volunteers?</p>	<p>Post-connection surveys</p>	<p>Percentage of LRHY engagement in each program activity.</p>
		<p>LRHY briefly provide feedback on their encounter with the program volunteer.</p>
<p>3. To what extent does the LGBTQ+ Outreach Program move LRHY out of homelessness and into stable housing and health in the Metro-Atlanta area?</p>	<p>Pre/post-test</p>	<p>Health and homeless support services are offered and utilized by all needed LGBTQ+ runaway and homeless youth.</p>
	<p>Focus Group</p>	<p>Individual and Group interview with LRHY.</p>
<p>4. Are the LRHY and their family's relationships</p>	<p>Pre/post-test</p>	<p>The participants will indicate the nature of their familial relationships</p>

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positively impacted by the program to reduce the likelihood of future homelessness?		before and after participating in the program.
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## Evaluation Management

### Evaluation Team

While the current program does not have an established evaluation team, a suggested layout will be recommended in this proposal. There should be an evaluation Team Leader chosen to keep track of the evaluation. Additional roles like Data Collection Manager, Technical Reporter/Writer, Communication Manager, Organizer, and External Reviewer should be assigned. This will allow the program to keep track of and maintain evaluation reports throughout the timeline. The evaluation team members are not limited to the suggested positions in *Table C*. There can be advisory members from the planning team to serve in them if there is a lack of non-planning team individuals to fill them. If the advisory board finds they need more support in the evaluation process, they can illicit help from public health interns from Georgia State University. The planning team should carefully decide on the most appropriate and capable individuals available to fulfill each role so the evaluation can be done efficiently.

Table C. Roles and Responsibilities of the Evaluation Team Members

Title or Role	Responsibilities
Team Leader	This role requires evaluation knowledge and experience in all areas of an evaluation to give direction to the team and keep the evaluation process on track.
Data Collection Manager	This role will collect all data related to the evaluation in a secure location and monitor collection methods to ensure they are adequately performed.
Technical Reporter/Writer	This role needs a strong background in research journal writing to report the outcome evaluation and findings adequately. They will also serve as the editor and reviewer for sections written by other team members.
Communication Manager	This role is responsible for engaging the stakeholders and partners with the evaluation. They will need to be able to

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	send out communications for team meetings, meeting notes, and other records for the evaluation team.
Organizer	This role can be fulfilled by another team member or a team member who needs a low commitment position. They will keep all files and documents organized to reduce the chances of lost data or reports.
External Reviewer	This will be a position filled by a hired consultant that will review all data collected during the program to analyze and interpret to provide an unbiased report for the program.

### **Timeline**

There are three main stages of the implementation phase of the Outreach program: the planning stage, the pilot stage, and the adapted implementation stage. The planning stage has been taking part since early 2021 and will continue until Fall (September) 2022. The planning team began recruitment for staff and VISTA members in December of 2021. The pilot stage will commence in September 2022 and continue until September 2023. The evaluation team should be established within the year. It should meet to discuss any adaptations or changes made to the program to reduce deficiencies and add improvements found for better implementation of the activities. The evaluation team should have a check-in meeting every six months to monitor the process and data collection. Within six months of the 5-year period, the planning team should hire an external reviewer to be performed for the program.

### **Evaluation Budget**

The program did not allocate any funds in the budget for evaluation; however, the program director has indicated the advisory board could scale up to 5 percent of the overall program budget for the evaluation. The funding for the evaluation will most likely be provided from

money contributed by donors and sponsors. The GSU public health interns can assist in the evaluation to increase their experience and receive an education credit to offset the evaluation cost. It is incredibly beneficial for the program to allocate funding for an external reviewer for the 5-year period.

### **Evaluation Findings**

There is limited data surrounding LGBTQ+ youth in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area and even less so for the youth of color who identify with this population. The findings for the evaluation will provide more knowledge regarding the research gaps and could inform related existing and emerging programs for this vulnerable population. The findings will also inform the larger program evaluation by providing a foundation for the information gathered during the initial planning phase of implementation.

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