

**7. Discuss the philosophy or clinical/service approach that guides your work (or candidate's work) with clients (20 possible points, please limit your response to 350 words):**

I work with students at Malden High School who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and are unaccompanied, or without the support of a family, and are struggling to finish high school while also working in order to provide for themselves. One of the greatest challenges of working with these youth is that currently, social service systems do not accommodate them. By law they are considered adults; yet in reality, high-school-age youth have unique developmental needs, and adult homelessness systems are not designed to meet these needs. In Massachusetts, there are no emergency shelters specifically for youth. Adult shelters have discouraged the use of their facilities for youth placement, stating that "this is a scary place for an eighteen-year-old." My clients are also ineligible for certain adult benefits. For example, they are ineligible for the Section-8 housing vouchers because, according to HUD regulations, only heads of household may apply for Section-8 housing vouchers, and head of household cannot be a full-time student.

In addition, society is not particularly accommodating of this demographic. Landlords are reluctant to rent to youth and employers are reluctant to hire youth. Being high school students, they are able to work only part time, tend to have a short work history, and do not yet have a high school diploma. Therefore, the jobs that are available to them are limited and typically low-paying. The cost of housing is significantly higher than what these youth can afford. For instance, if affordable housing is calculated as one third of one's income, then youth working twenty hours per week at \$8.50 per hour can afford to spend no more than \$227 per month on housing.

To our knowledge, Rediscovery's YouthHarbors program is the first in the nation to address the housing needs of unaccompanied youth in school. Because there is no existing program model to work from and because there are very few systemic and financial supports in place for this population, my work requires me to be creative and resourceful. I negotiate with landlords to reduce rent, establish community connections to help connect my clients to jobs that would be otherwise unavailable to them, and help my clients to come up with unconventional ways to reduce their living expenses.

The most important part of my work is establishing a strong trusting and supportive relationship with my clients, because it is essential that they are fully involved in every part of this process, and that I work *with* them instead of *for* them. This experience allows them to get to know their own strengths and to develop their skills, and empowers them to be able to accomplish similar tasks on their own in the future. My philosophy is that success breeds success, and that facilitating successful outcomes for my clients now will increase their confidence in their ability to be successful in the future.

**8. List the outcomes that you are working to help your clients achieve (20 possible points, please limit your response to 350 words):**

I work to help unaccompanied high school students who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to obtain stable housing and to become able to sustain this housing long-term on their own, thus reducing the risk of future homelessness. Being stably and permanently housed, in turn, enables clients to step out of “survival mode” and to keep academic goals high on their priority list. Finishing high school and obtaining a diploma opens doors to opportunities of higher paying jobs, and further educational, vocational, and professional development. Finishing high school is necessary in order to achieve long-term program goals, such as increased lifetime income, a higher standard of living, and a decreased likelihood of incarceration, poverty, and long-term dependence on government assistance.

**9. List the activities you engage in with your clients to help them achieve those outcomes (20 possible points, please limit your response to 350 words):**

Safe, affordable housing is obtained with short-term financial assistance from YouthHarbors. As the financial assistance is gradually withdrawn, I work with clients to increase their capacity to provide for themselves. Basic needs are addressed first. I facilitate access to food banks, furniture banks, coats and clothing donations as necessary. I connect clients to additional resources, such as SNAP/Food Stamps, SSI/SSDI, MassHealth, WIC, fuel assistance, etc., and teach youth to navigate government systems and apply for services. Accessing these services is especially important to full-time students, as they are only able to work part-time. Immigration issues that affect clients’ access to services are addressed when appropriate – for example, clients may be assisted with a citizenship application or referred to the appropriate agency to assist with more complex matters.

In order to be able to sustain their housing after YouthHarbor’s short-term financial assistance, clients must strive to increase their earned income. This may include working to obtain new employment, better pay, or more work hours. I assist clients with resume writing, coach them in job-seeking and interview skills, and refer them to educational and job training opportunities, as well as connect them to subsidized job placements. Another important part of achieving self-sufficiency is learning the skills to manage one’s finances. Therefore, clients are taught to budget and assisted with credit repair and debt management, bill paying, checkbook balancing, and other financial literacy skills.

Interpersonal skills are an equally important part of remaining stably housed. Therefore, I work with clients to improve their knowledge of tenants’ rights and ability to diplomatically negotiate with landlords and housemates. These skills are important in all stages of housing – from communicating with landlords and prospective housemates during a housing search, to working through conflicts that may arise during tenancy, to the processes involved in vacating a unit, such as giving sufficient notice, asking for the return of a security deposit, or notifying utility companies of the change of residence.

**10. Describe what you track with each of your clients to know you are successful – i.e., being effective (outcomes) (20 possible points, please limit your response to 350 words):**

I track three core outcomes as indicators of success. The first is that clients are in stable, permanent housing, the second is that clients are on track toward increasing self-sufficiency, and the third is that students continue to attend high school regularly with a clear path toward graduation. The success indicators are determined differently for each client, and are typically tracked in terms of educational and professional progress, such as obtaining a high school diploma, enrolling in college, a vocational or job training program, or obtaining new, higher-paying employment. Another important component of attaining self-sufficiency for full-time high school students who are working only part-time is accessing additional services, such as SNAP/Food Stamps, SSI/SSDI, fuel assistance, etc. These services are utilized while youth are finishing school, as a stepping stone toward a long-term goal of eliminating dependence on government assistance.

**11. Describe what you track with each of your clients to know you are doing high quality work (for example, quality indicators ) (20 possible points, please limit your response to 350 words):**

The main indicator of the quality of my work is whether my clients are in stable housing, how quickly I am able to find them such housing, and the affordability of the housing, which can be calculated as up to one third of one's total income. Each client's plan to increase income and self-sufficiency is different, depends on their individual goals and ambitions, and therefore has unique quality indicators. Rediscovery, Inc uses ETO (Efforts to Outcomes) case management software to track clients' goals, tasks, and progress. In addition, information about clients' housing, earned and unearned income, and access to benefits is obtained and recorded at in-take, at mid-program evaluations every three months, and at discharge from the program.

I conduct frequent outreach to each of my clients. I may visit them at their homes to help them make a list of items in their apartment that need repair for the landlord, drive them to see a potential apartment, or meet them in the library to work on creating or updating their resume. In addition, I have an office at Malden High School where I make myself available to my clients during school hours. I find that the more interaction I have with my clients, the more attuned I can be to changes in their affect, and get intuitive clues about how my clients are doing. Frequent interaction also allows me to develop a supportive relationship with my clients, in which they feel compelled to share their dreams and their struggles with me and to seek me out for support. The quality of my relationships with my clients is an equally important indicator of the quality of my work.

### **Non-anecdotal evidence of effectiveness**

Since the YouthHarbors program began its operation in October of 2009, six out of the eight Malden High School students who were identified as homeless are now housed as a result of my work. For two of these six clients, housing was obtained within two days following the intake. Of the two of the eight students who were identified as homeless but are not currently in housing obtained through my services, one has recently lost the housing (which had been obtained with my assistance) due to non-compliance with the landlord's rules, and another has been taken back in by his family and is not currently homeless.

The housing that I have obtained for my clients meets habitation quality standards and is priced not only below market rate but also below the cost of some similar subsidized and public housing units. Thanks to the cooperation and generosity of landlords who support my work, one of my clients pays \$308.33 per month plus utilities in an apartment share, another client pays \$400 per month including heat, hot water, electricity, A/C, wireless internet, and cable TV in an apartment share, and yet another pays \$400 per month including all the aforementioned utilities in a fully furnished apartment share.