

RHYMIS: GOALS, TIPS & TRAPS

The RHY Technical Assistance Providers would like to emphasize to all grantees the importance of updating the RHYMIS database properly. What follows is a summary of the current strategic goals created by FYSB with some additional recommendations from the regional Technical Assistance Providers that may help you improve the accuracy of the RHYMIS data you submit. Our recommendations are based on interviews we recently conducted with 30 grantee agencies.

Many of the grantee agencies we interviewed told us that they believed their RHYMIS data-entry process would be improved if their staff knew how important accurate data is to the way RHY programs are perceived by oversight agencies, funders and policymakers. RHYMIS data was critical to the most recent PART (Program Assessment Rating Tool) evaluation of RHY programs conducted by the Office of Management and Budget in the Executive Office of the President, which found RHY programs to be “effective,” which is the highest rating level in the PART process. That designation could not have been made without accurate RHYMIS data.

GOALS

These are FYSB’s current performance goals, followed by our joint recommendations:

1. Goal: Increase the proportion of youth living in safe and appropriate settings after exiting ACF-funded Transitional Living Program (TLP) services.

An “unsafe exit” occurs when a youth leaves a program for:

- The street
 - An unknown place
 - A shelter (considered inappropriate – i.e., unsuccessful – for youth exiting TLPs only)
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- If a youth exit has been designated as “unknown,” but subsequent information about his/her living situation is discovered, grantees should update the record, even after the original data has been submitted.
 - If new information about a youth’s destination is learned within a month of the next transfer, the corrected data will be included in the next transfer.
 - In addition, it is recommended that grantee agencies create and implement formal updating policies and procedures that incorporate FYSB’s recommendations, ensure accurate data submission and minimize “unknown” and other unsafe exits.
 - Encourage staff who enter RHYMIS data to study the exit options carefully because there are many options and subsets of those options. Understanding the many options should reduce the number of “unknown” exits.

2. Goal: Increase the percent of youth who complete the transitional living program (TLP) by graduating or who leave ahead of schedule based upon a positive opportunity.

- When a TLP youth leaves before completing the program but is expected to return, we recommend that grantees NOT “exit” the case immediately. This applies to youths who would be considered “dropouts” or “expulsions” from TLP residencies if their departure were permanent.
- Sometimes youth are discharged involuntarily but placed in a safe setting and encouraged to come back after a cooling-off period or time out. Placement during these spells in a shelter and continuation of TLP services (such as counseling or assessment) on an outreach basis may benefit the youth and strengthen his/her chance for success later, upon return to the program.
- We recommend that staff do not file an exit report or close a case as a “dropout” or “expulsion” with “exit to shelter” (or other location) until it is clear the youth will not return. Of course, it is important to maintain a connection with the youth during the hiatus or to at least be aware of his or her whereabouts.

3. Goal: Increase the percentage of Transitional Living Program (TLP) youth who are engaged in community service and/or service-learning activities while in the program.

- Community Service/Service Learning is a broad category of experiences that expose young people to altruism, public spiritedness and the opportunity to give something back to the community.
- Service Learning is a very structured and sophisticated approach to this aspect of positive youth development, but there are many alternatives, some that may be affordable and simple to provide.

RHYMIS TIPS & TRAPS

Below is a list of the most recent RHYMIS data-entry issues, and suggestions about how to avoid problems and improve data quality.

1. Be aware of the choice and the meaning of the ‘residential/non-residential’ dropdown in the Basic Center Entrance Record.

- This dropdown, at the beginning of the Basic Center Entrance record, has the default of “residential.”
- The other choice is “non-residential.” If appropriate, you must change the record to reflect this choice.
- This question refers to whether the youth was a residential client (in other words, was provided with emergency shelter), or a non-residential client, such as an outreach or drop-in participant who may have received family mediation, crisis counseling, or other stabilization services without becoming a residential participant.
- Accurate, 100% completion of this question will increase the usefulness and meaning of BC data in the future because it will help us understand the outcomes and services provided to residential versus non-residential youth.
- Because the choice is either/or, youth who are initially served “non-residentially” but later enter the shelter will only be recorded as “residential” since the non-residential button will be de-selected when they enter the shelter.
- FYSB is working to make a small change in RHYMIS in an upcoming release that will provide much richer data about how BCPs are preventing risky behaviors and preserving families.

2. Learn how to create a history record when a youth re-enters a program after being exited.

- Once created, history records cannot be updated. If necessary, you must update previous exit information before generating a repeat entry and a corresponding history record. If the original record is accurate, do not update the record; simply review it and close it without saving or updating.
- A history record will not be created if the case, spelling or date of birth are not exactly the same as the original record.
- After a history record is created and the new entrance record is opened, do not close the new record without saving! Please be aware that you should save the new record even if you do not have all of the information you need to answer all the questions accurately. Closing the new record without saving it will cause the database to lose the link between the new record and the history record. As long as you save the new record, you will have no problem returning to update the new entrance record at a later time.

3. Although the database allows it, do not alter spellings of names or birth dates after the ID code has been assigned and the entrance record has been saved.

- Please do not alter spelling, case or birth dates after the ID code has been assigned and the record has been saved. We know that technically the software allows these changes, but making them negatively affects the quality of the data being submitted. If there is a major error, such as a year or more error in a birth date, consult with the RHYMIS technical assistance hotline (see contact information at the end of this document) about how to avoid or void the entry.
- Note that for the purposes of demonstrating overall effectiveness and performance of RHY programs, issues such as minor errors in spelling or birth dates have little significance. It is of course important to maintain accuracy in your case management records and other permanent files. However, the major

concerns in RHYMIS are demographic and referral information, exit circumstances, youth issues, services provided, follow-up, aftercare and other outcomes.

4. FYSB is gathering and analyzing aftercare statistics. Aftercare is a broad category of service that is important to include in your exit records for both Basic Center and TLP youth. Please complete question #17 of the second section of the exit record (“Services Provided”).

- Aftercare or transitional plans are required for all youth unless there are exceptional circumstances that prevent creating a plan.
- 17.1 through 17.10 are questions about aftercare services. Please consider all the options under #17 before making a selection.
- You may find this list useful as a source of ideas for various approaches to follow-up services. Program connections and mentoring services (18 and 19) are also useful in extending support to youth after they leave the program.
- Question 17.9 is “other” and 17.10 is “youth refused or declined any or all of the above aftercare services.”

5. RHYMIS uses the “date of last update” to determine when data is transmitted and included in the compiled federal database.

- Records that are updated after April 1 and October 1 will not be transmitted in the Federal Transfer that is due on the 15th of those months.
- To include current data on exited youth in your data transmissions, be sure to review records that may require updating prior to April 1 or October 1 (note that like most other dated software, RHYMIS uses the date on your computer to determine the date of record entries).
- If you review a record and do not make changes to it, be sure to close the record without saving it. There is a small “door” icon in the upper left corner of the record that will allow you to do this. Be aware that saving the record will establish a new updated date and this may result in a delay of the record being included in the aggregated data that is transmitted to the RHYMIS contractor. If there are changes that must be made in the record, however, do save it and establish a new updated date.

Information provided by:

Stan Chappell
Director, Division of Regional Operations
Family and Youth Services Bureau
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb
schappell@acf.hhs.gov
phone: (202) 205-8496; fax: 202-690-5600

Arlene Calabro
RHYMIS Technical Assistance
(888) 749-6474
rhymis_help@csc.com

Douglas Tanner
RHYMIS Safe Exit Project
Technical Assistance Coordinator
New England Network
dtanner@crocker.com
(978) 544-2067