

Homeless and Runaway Youth

The Problem

Homelessness among young people is a serious problem. Homeless youth, often referred to as unaccompanied youth, are youth under the age of 18 who are not being cared for by a parent, guardian, legal custodian, or foster parent. These youth do not have a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The National Runaway Safeline estimates that on any given night there are approximately 1.3 million homeless youth living unsupervised on the streets, in abandoned buildings, with friends, or with strangers. Unaccompanied runaway and homeless youth are at higher risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health problems, substance abuse, and death. **It is estimated that 5,000 unaccompanied youth die each year as a result of assault, illness, or suicide.**

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Yearly Comparison Report of Homeless Student Enrollment, the number of homeless unaccompanied youth in Dane County is increasing. This disturbing trend reinforces the need to expand the array of services available to these youth.

2012 Dane County Youth Assessment

- 849 high school students in Dane County reported being kicked out of home by their parents within the last 12 months
- 934 high school students in Dane County reported running away from home in the last 12 months

The Research

Studies have shown that:

1. One in seven young people between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away
2. Youth ages 12 to 17 are more at risk for becoming homeless than adults
3. 75% of runaways are female
4. Over 50% of homeless youth report that their parents knew of or facilitated their exit from the family home

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5. Approximately 1 in 3 youth will be approached for sex in exchange for money, food, shelter, or drugs within 48 hours of leaving home
6. Runaway and homeless females ages 14-17 have pregnancy rates of 48% compared to 10% for those who are housed
7. 75% of homeless and runaway youth have already or will drop out of school
8. 46% of runaway and homeless youth reported being physically abused, 38% reported being emotionally abused, and 17% reported being sexually abused by a family or household member
9. 20 - 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ

Service Gaps in Dane County

One of the most significant gaps in services for unaccompanied runaway and homeless youth in Dane County is the lack of temporary shelter. Temporary shelter facilities for these youth have the following primary objectives:

- Provide a safe non-judgmental environment for youth to get off the streets
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment to identify each youth's needs and connect youth with resources to meet these needs
- Help youth re-connect with school or other educational opportunities
- Assist youth with finding employment as applicable
- Assist youth in returning home or with developing a plan for obtaining other safe long-term housing
- Prevent youth from developing a long-term pattern of homelessness

Addressing the Needs

Briarpatch Youth Services is committed to bringing a shelter for runaway and homeless youth to Dane County. This eight (8) bed shelter will be part of the agency's services for runaway and homeless youth ages 13-17. The agency's new headquarters at 2720 Rimrock Road in Madison includes space for the Briarpatch Youth Shelter as well as space for the agency's other services for youth and families. The youth shelter will open when operating funds for program have been secured.

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