



# The Learning Web

Youth Outreach Program 2012 Annual Report January - December 2012

## YOUTH OUTREACH PROGRAM

### RESILIENCE & RESOURCES = STABILITY & SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Like most of the homeless youth who seek help at Youth Outreach, Jared, quoted at left, was in dire need of support. Jared's Mom had thrown him out of the house one night after he got into an argument with her boyfriend. The fights had gone on for more than two years and his Mom had made her choice clear—and that choice was not Jared. He lived on the streets for a couple of months when he heard about Youth Outreach. Jared's quote says it all. He recognized that he needed help and he did the work, using the support and resources received at Youth Outreach, to make significant change.

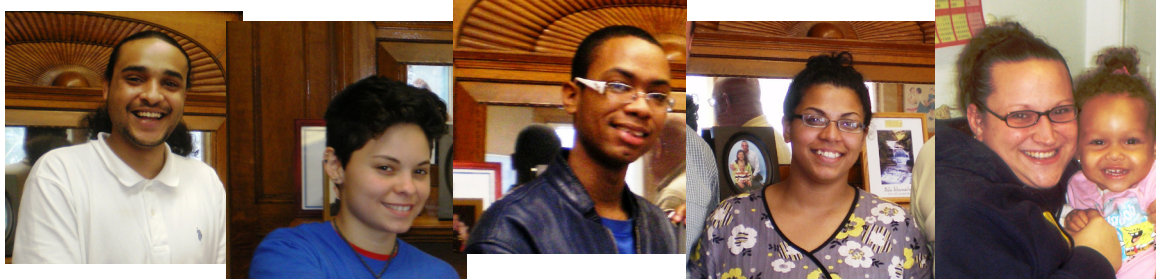
"I appreciate all you have done, you helped me and so I needed to help myself. You aren't suppose to do all the work."

Jared, age 19

It is indeed a partnership at Youth Outreach. Each youth must make a commitment to their own growth by working hard to make use of the services, support, and resources that we have to offer. Staff match that commitment with the full range of tools that we have available—from basic supplies and parenting training to job search support and the Housing Scholarship Program. Our participants show incredible resilience and most work very hard to achieve a better life. **THIS YEAR, 387 HOMELESS YOUTH WERE SERVED BY YOUTH OUTREACH. 289 YOUTH RECEIVED DROP IN/OUTREACH SERVICES AND 98 RECEIVED GENERAL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM SERVICES.**

Jared worked with staff on relationships, setting limits, time management, career planning, and employment skills. He participated in two successful apprenticeships, one with a college sports trainer and another at a local health club. Jared applied for and was accepted into our Housing Scholarship Program (HSP). In the HSP, Jared worked with staff to develop a budget, learned what a clean and organized apartment looks like, dealt with maintenance problems in the apartment, developed good relationships with his neighbors, set limits with his girlfriend, and developed his creative skills. Jared accepted all of the support available at YO. He has since "graduated" from the HSP and no longer needs the services of Youth Outreach. He lives and works independently and is well on his way to creating a satisfying and self-sufficient life for himself.

### *Faces of Self-Sufficiency*



## OUR RESULTS IN 2012

Youth Outreach served 387 youth and young adults.

289 participants: Outreach services [Duplicated count is 867 participants]

98 participants: General Independent Living Program services

Age 15-17: 7 Age 18-20: 55 Age 21-24: 36 Gender: 56% female 43% Male 1% transgender

Single individuals: 72% Participants with children: 26% Families with no children: 2%

100% of youth were homeless upon program admission.

At either a youth's discharge or by year's end, the following milestones were achieved:

### Housing

76% of youth secured stable housing. 75% of youth with a prior history of eviction, avoided further eviction.

25 youth were served in our Housing Scholarship Program. 14 youth had safe exits, and 11 are currently participating.

73 participants were eligible for Section 8 housing vouchers but avoided using them. With staff help, youth located other safe housing options that they could afford and did not use this benefit.

AN ESTIMATED \$486,132 PUBLIC DOLLARS HAVE BEEN SAVED assuming these youth's subsidies were reduced by one year.

### Education

The drop out rate fell by 13%, from 38% at admission to 25% at year end.

8 participants earned their GED's or high school diplomas.

9 participants enrolled in post secondary school.

### Employment

89% of participants worked on employment skills.

The unemployment rate fell by 27%, from 75% at admission to 48% at year end.

38 participants worked in paid apprenticeships with community mentors.

### Increasing Healthy Behaviors

81% of participants increased their ability to follow healthy life routines.

84% of participants with substance/alcohol abuse issues, decreased use in terms of frequency of use and/or the intensity of the drugs used.

76% of delinquent participants decreased involvement with people participating in criminal activity.

75% of participants increased their awareness of their personal values including personal responsibility, honesty in relationships, and deferred gratification.

### Self-Sufficiency

28 participants became self-supporting and 3 of these youth transitioned off of Public Assistance and avoided using benefits. AN ESTIMATED \$10,728 PUBLIC DOLLARS HAVE BEEN SAVED if one assumes that these youth's benefits were reduced by one year.



A resident of our transitional living apartment program catches up on school work at the desk in her apartment



Healthy recreational activities are an important focus of Youth Outreach. These YO participants enjoyed a picnic at Stewart Park with YO staff and other youth on a beautiful day this past summer.



YO staffers (left, Rick Alvord, right, Mona Smiley), award YO parenting participant a parenting training certificate of completion. Parenting youth learn positive parenting skills and basic child development that enhances their ability to parent.

## Housing

### The Housing Scholarship Program — A Transitional Living Program

Not knowing where you can sleep and having no regular place to store your belongings wreaks havoc with a healthy routine. The Housing Scholarship Program (HSP), which resides within our Youth Outreach Program fills a critical need for these youth.

“ Thank you for giving me my second chance.”

Program services and financial support to cover rent and utilities are offered for 12 to 18 months to assist residents to amass the attitudes, skills, and behaviors necessary to maintain stable housing; identify and pursue an educational and career pathway that will provide a livable wage; and become productive, stable, and contributing members of our community.

We rent 16 scattered site apartments for HSP residents, serving 25 HSP YOUTH IN 2012. 14 young people exited the program safely in 2012 and are living independently. 12 of those youth completed the program while 3 youth left before completion. 11 youth are currently residing in the program and are working toward educational and employment goals. The response from local landlords has been very positive and supportive and the number of youth applying for the scholarships has far exceeded our capacity.

The following piece was written by an HSP graduate and was delivered to the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency Board this past fall. This youth's commitment and work ethic made it possible for him use our resources to reach his goals.

First of all I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for not only giving me the opportunity to take part in this program but for the tools and support I needed to accomplish my long and short term goals. Just about 3 years ago my life was spinning quicker out of control then you could ever believe. I lost my mother who was my only support [passing away unexpectedly], I was on felony drug court for criminal possession of marijuana with the intent to sell and was driving illegally daily but did that stop me no. I continued to sell large amounts of marijuana to support myself. This is what I learned at a young age— sell this, support yourself easily, so I did. I violated probation and was sent to shock not even 4 months in.

Shock and this program saved my life, shock taught me the tools I needed to succeed and the Learning Web gave me the foundation to start a life I only dreamed of. All I did while on parole was worry about how I was going to support myself legally while couch surfing, filling out application after application. If it wasn't for the support I received from the Youth Outreach program giving me the motivation and confidence to stay on the right path and be successful, I would have given up, stopped going to C.A.R.S., stopped checking in with the Youth Outreach and gone back to the lifestyle I now despise.

It's hard enough being a young adult but one with very little family support and no place to live without any hope of good things to come is far worse. I eventually was hired at the Country Club of Ithaca where I devoted all my time and effort into working my way up from the bottom as a dishwasher to now one of the top three waiters employed there. I shortly after was accepted into the Learning Web's apartment program and since have restored my license, am employed full time, have legal money saved, am planning on going to college very soon for hotel restaurant management and was able to even take time off work to participate in classes focusing on money management, credit, debt and much more at the Alternatives Federal Credit Union and Cornell Cooperative Extension. I no longer worry about where I am going to stay and will never have to; I have managed to save enough for a first, last, security deposit and extra because of this program. 3 years ago I would have never agreed to meet you here. Do you know how blessed I am to be here in front of you talking about my success rather than pleading my case in front of a judge and hoping for the best.

My mother was only around to see the downfall of her son but if she was here today she would be thanking you all more than you can ever imagine. Not only am I, but my family is now proud of me for all the right reasons and I have you to thank for giving me not only the financial relief but your case managers deserve the recognition as well. They put up with a lot of troubled young adults who just need a little direction to make a significant impact in their lives and future. I may be almost done with this program but I will always remain a familiar face in there office. Thank you for giving me my second chance.

## Growing Up Too Fast = A Crash Course in Independent Living

Youth Outreach (YO) non-residential services support homeless youth who, finding themselves without adult support, want to make significant changes in their life. Young people get help finding housing, re-entering school, finding a job— learning all of the skills that they need to live independently. Like all Learning Web programs, skill building is taught through hands-on, real life activities. Staff are invited into participants' lives and act as role models, much like parents in functional homes teach their children how to negotiate life. From accompanying a youth to a doctor's appointment, demonstrating how garbage tags work, how to sort laundry, or how to get a learner's permit, staff and participants work together to increase a youth's life skills. Activities are designed to respond to the needs of each young person, both their immediate needs and their long term needs. The following vignettes illustrate the range of activities offered by Youth Outreach.

### Covering the Basics

19 year old, Mira, found herself on the streets after she was ejected from an apartment she was sharing with a friend. Youth Outreach (YO) staff helped Mira access one-time help from the Dept of Social Services and obtain a security deposit from Catholic Charities. Mira and YO staff completed a successful apartment search with Mira moving into a studio apartment. With stable housing Mira was ready to work. She had little experience and was offered a YO paid apprenticeship as an administrative assistant that developed her work skills. Staff assisted her with referrals to unsubsidized work and Mira successfully landed a job. Mira worked hard at her job and asked for help in learning how to manage her money so that she could assure that she had enough to keep her housing. YO staff worked with her on weekly budgeting and Mira developed solid skills in making her scant resources stretch to cover her basic expenses.

Dogged by anxiety and fears that overwhelmed her, Mira faced the fact that she needed professional help. YO staff facilitated a referral to the Tompkins County Mental Health Clinic. She was mature enough to know that therapy was important in taking care of herself and she made a commitment to counseling.

Mira experienced much growth while she participated in Youth Outreach; she gained confidence in herself, developed skills in home keeping and money management, acquired employment skills and a job, redefined and improved personal relationships, and increased her overall levels of responsibility and accountability.

### Developing Integrity & Character

Monique, age 18, arranged her living room so that her kitchen table was in the center with chairs. She arranged a place setting for each dinner guest that included silverware, a dish, a bowl, a cup and a napkin. Monique was excited to have guests and wanted her apartment to feel comfortable when her "Dinner Club" (an activity that promotes house keeping skills and a healthy social atmosphere for participants) guests arrived.

Earlier in the day, Monique and YO staff shopped for the ingredients to make corn chowder and she had prepared the dish with care. Her dinner guests, YO staff and 2 other YO participants, Nate, and Paulette, enjoyed the chowder and Monique proudly supplied them with the recipe. Paulette remarked that she would make it over the holidays.

Though learning to plan and prepare a meal is important, there is more to living independently than cooking and paying your bills. Being independent is also about living up to one's potential, being a positive, contributing part of the community, being a mature, caring, and honest person. Staff are always looking for teachable moments, whether it's while driving a youth to a job interview or helping someone move into a new apartment, staff take advantage of opportunities to delve into areas involving character development. Staff can respectfully comment on a youth's actions and choices, reflecting to participants, for example, that what one says and one does needs to be congruent. Group activities, like Monique's dinner club, generate conversations relevant to participants and develop maturity and self-reflection.

Monique's dinner was a success in all respects. Everyone liked the food and had a relaxed and comfortable time at her apartment. But of more significance were the conversations that transpired between the dinner partners! Topics discussed included:

"Everything you teach me,  
I'm teaching my brother."

YO participant

Remarking to staff about sharing his  
newfound skills with his younger brother.



- Choosing your friends and objectively judging if they are a positive or negative influence in your life. Both Monique and Paulette talked about their respective boyfriends. They feel as if they have not looked at their relationships objectively because if they did they would have to admit that the boyfriends have been negative influences in their lives. All acknowledged how difficult it is to balance the need to be with someone with the need to take care of oneself.
- Trust and honesty and what that has looked like in their lives. Nate shared that in his life he has been betrayed many times and that has led him to be suspicious and that he does not trust until a person has proved themselves to be trustworthy. Monique agreed with this philosophy. Paulette talked about having the opposite philosophy— she starts with trust until a person shows that they are not trustworthy. Everyone agreed that some people are such good liars that it's hard to tell until something bad/dramatic happens. Significant adults in these young people's lives have broken trust with them and it will take a long time for them to learn how to develop a healthy trust in the people close to them.
- Surprises about being a young adult. The group talked in regards to how busy they need to be to cover all that they need to do and that just figuring out what they need to do and how to work with a schedule was new to them. Monique credited the housing program with helping her learn to work within a schedule. She talked about when she was in high school and was not certain she would graduate. It was a life saver that YO arranged for a tutor but in order to use the help, Monique learned that she had to conform to a schedule of when the tutor was available. Everyone felt that one good thing about Youth Outreach was that staff helped them figure out what they needed to be doing to be successful in their own life.
- The importance of finding inspiration in your life. Monique, Paulette and Nate all agreed that inspiration could be found in many forms and that you just have to be open to being inspired. They said that they found inspiration from friends, family, music, reading, coworkers, people they met in drug treatment, and even from their case manager.

Just like all of our lives, the life skills activities are a crazy quilt of practical skill building, character building, and a heavy dose of inspiration from wherever it can be found.



Youth Outreach Dinner Clubs teach practical cooking and home keeping skills and provide a venue for healthy conversation and socializing.

### Cornerstones of Self-sufficiency: Education & Employment

Finishing high school and moving on to post secondary education is an important focus for our participants. 38% of participants had dropped out of school before entering YO. 13% had re-engaged in school by the end of the year and 8 had graduated from high school or earned their GED's. Meeting with a guidance counselor, securing school supplies, arranging for a tutor, developing a sense of career possibilities are some of the things that YO staff offers our student participants. Encouraging a healthy routine and good nutrition are also essential ingredients of staff support.

Of course, education leads to improving employment options. Reinforcing this concept with youth helps them commit to the demands of school. Developing a sense of career and employment possibilities can be the spark that inspires a youth to work hard to get ahead. Subsidized work experience in the form of a paid apprenticeship is an integral part of YO employment services. For young people who are not job-ready, a stipended apprenticeship allows them to learn about the work world and learn about their work skills while in a supportive environment. Since mentors who open their workplaces to young people do not pay the apprentice a wage,

“I am serious about getting my GED, I want to go to college and set a better example for my son”

Manny, YO participant

they do not expect the youth to produce at the level of someone on their own payroll. The young person is a “student” and can make mistakes and learn at a pace that is appropriate to their developmental level. The experience is structured with expectations and like any employee, the apprentice must meet the conditions agreed upon in the Learning Agreement that is designed by YO staff, the apprentice and the mentor.

38 participants undertook stipended apprenticeships this year. For youth who are low-skilled, we have “entry-level” apprenticeships at such sites as a soup kitchen, a health club, and a construction salvage company. These beginning level apprenticeships are utilized when youth have not demonstrated dependability or the social skills expected at our higher level apprenticeship sites. Several apprentices succeeded at high level apprenticeships in law offices, educational settings, and social services. Apprentices get a taste of what a satisfying job is and feel more motivation to include a future education/training in their plans. A successful try-out apprenticeship can result in unsubsidized work.

Staff assists many participants in finding work. 75% of participants were unemployed before entering YO. By year end the unemployment rate decreased by 27% to 48%. Young people secured unsubsidized jobs at businesses ranging from fast food chains and retail stores to senior living homes and child care centers. Working participants receive support to maintain and grow in their employment. Ithaca is a very difficult place to find work for our participants as there is an abundance of highly educated, underemployed people due to the colleges located here.

“I want to get a job in the building trades—  
[apprenticeship] was a good experience--  
met lots of contractors. I have a feeling of  
accomplishment, more confident.”

Travis, YO apprentice

“I love working with the apprentices. They come  
with all different skill levels. [Apprentice] was a  
pleasure to have with us because his people skills  
are wonderful, he was willing to do whatever was  
asked of him and he was enthusiastic.”

Learning Web Mentor

“I learned I could have goals. I  
learned that I am a good person. . .  
I’ve learned to trust more.”

Laura, YO apprentice

### 2012 Apprenticeship Sites

38 youth participated in apprenticeship experiences in several fields such as:

Law

Office assisting

Retail sales

House salvage

Arts & Theater

Food prep

International Studies

Sports training

Early childhood education

Clothing design and sewing

Social science research

Youth recreation

## Developing the Whole Person— Enrichment Activities



Community Service allows young people to experience giving back to their community



A trip to Howe Caves opens up a youth's concept of the world outside of Ithaca.

Youth Outreach youth participated in the 2011 Independent Living Survey Project 3 (ILS3) that examined the scope and nature of youth homelessness in Tompkins County. Through this unique university/community partnership, a research model was created that involved Youth Outreach youth participants as researchers in all aspects of the project, from designing the tools and methodology, to recruiting subjects, collecting the data, interpreting the findings, and presenting results to key community stakeholders. Youth participation was integral to the success of this project: it enabled us to gather data on a hard-to-reach population, deepened understanding of the findings, and led to increased community awareness and system level change. This approach has been an effective strategy to promote positive youth development, advance knowledge, impact policy, and improve services for homeless youth.



Youth ILS3 researchers take the Human Subjects Training needed to administer surveys.



ILS3 youth researcher joined the ILS3 team to present research findings to the New York State Youth Development Team Meeting in Albany, NY October 2012.

**WORKING AS A TEAM — COMPLEX NEEDS REQUIRE A NETWORK OF RESOURCES**

Maria, age 17, was squatting in her mom's apartment while her mom was receiving long term care in a psychiatric hospital. Her mom's Section 8 was not available to her and the landlord was terminating the lease. When a DSS caseworker called Youth Outreach, Maria had already been missing a lot of school and had nowhere to go. Maria did not want to go into foster care. Woven throughout the Youth Outreach Program design is the premise that each young person will be the architect of their "Plan for Independent Living." All aspects of the Youth Outreach Program start with the participant—each young person gives voice to their interests, needs, and goals. This was the case with Maria—and it required many service providers to honor Maria's wishes while making sure that she was safe and cared for.

Tompkins County has many resources that help our participants become self-sufficient. Staff are facilitators and advocates who connect youth with resources and activities of importance to the youth. We believe that the more positive adults involved in a youth's life, the better. Staff make every attempt to coordinate and collaborate with other formal service providers and any informal networks within which a youth may be connected. Maria and her YO case manager developed a plan of action and the case manager brought in other resources that would help Maria reach her goal of independent living.

Maria's YO case manager was in contact with a team of people: the Ithaca Housing Authority regarding her mom's Section 8 case; the property manager at her mom's apartment complex regarding the eviction; her DSS caseworker regarding benefits that Maria could receive; Renee, a friend of Maria's mom who initially housed Maria after the eviction; Maria's boyfriend and his adoptive parents, the Smith's, who were also providing her with housing after she was asked to leave Renee's home; and Maria's school guidance counselor and the high school's Assistant Principal. With all of these resources, Maria decided to apply to our Housing Scholarship Program, and was accepted. The road is still rough for Maria. She has had a lot of anxiety about living alone and has spent much of her time at the Smith's. The Smith's, however, have told Maria that they cannot allow her to stay any longer. Maria's YO case manager has connected Maria with mental health services and introduced the possibility that supportive housing through Lakeview Mental Health Services may be a better match for Maria right now. They will be working together to explore the options and decide what is best for Maria.

As illustrated with Maria, often it requires a lot more than just one agency to meet a youth's needs. Just offering referral information to a young person is not enough---staff facilitate a personal connection between the youth and the referral source. Youth Outreach acts as a mentor for participants, advocating for them and teaching them to be their own advocates. Maria has a lot of work to do before she achieves her goals and with all of the services available, she has a much better chance of reaching them. Using the resources of Youth Outreach and other county service providers, our participants build healthy, productive, and self-sufficient lives. The table below outlines activities provided and referred

**2012 Services Provided & Referred**

Activity	Provided	Referred	Activity	Provided	Referred
Basic needs	100%	73%	Family Work	33%	12%
Housing Services	100%	89%	Youth Development Activities	73%	---
Case Management	96%	5%	Civic Participation Activities	51%	---
Independent Living Skills	100%	6%	Employment related	90%	71%
Life Skills Workshops	29%	---	Working Participant Support	57%	---
General Health Care	----	61%	Education	91%	77%
HIV/AIDS related	69%	53%	Legal	27%	18%
Substance abuse related	42%	23%	Recreation	38%	---
Counseling	83%	28%	Computer Learning Lab	86%	---
Transitional Living Program	25%	11%	Parenting Skills Training	39%	---



## Taking a Good Look at Ourselves – Program Evaluation

Programs are only as valuable as they are useful to the people they serve. Ours are no different. We take seriously our commitment to evaluate all of our programs and services and the staff who work for our agency.

100 PERCENT of program objectives were achieved this year.

77 PERCENT of youth secured and maintained safe, stable housing for 6 to 18 months and transitioned responsibly from one housing situation to another.

75 PERCENT of those youth with a history of eviction, avoided further eviction.

85 PERCENT of youth demonstrated increased ability to follow healthy routine.

84 PERCENT of youth with substance /alcohol abuse issues decreased substance use in terms of frequency of use and/or the intensity of drugs used.

74 PERCENT of delinquent youth decreased involvement with people participating in criminal activity.

80 PERCENT of youth met all of their personal financial responsibilities.

83 PERCENT of youth significantly increased their employment skills.

35 PERCENT of youth were self-supporting.

Though this is an important measure of program and agency performance, it is only one piece of the picture. We look to our most important stakeholders: youth participants, agency staff, and the community adults who volunteer their time to work with our young people for feedback about the quality and relevance of our services and the performance of our staff. In the Youth Outreach program, we do not send parent evaluations out as most young people are alienated from their parents and do not want staff to contact a parent. We gather regular feedback about the apprenticeship services through the use of apprenticeship evaluation forms. We were very pleased with the feedback we received from apprenticeship evaluations this past year. Despite the fact that some apprentices have a difficult time fulfilling the goals of an apprenticeship, many apprentices were able to make a commitment, and their mentors' evaluations reflected satisfaction with the program and staff in almost all cases: 80 PERCENT of apprentice evaluations indicated that the youth met or exceeded their apprenticeship goals and were provided information about career options in the field of interest they explored. 88 PERCENT of mentor evaluations indicated that apprenticeship goals were met or exceeded and that their apprentice increased or significantly increased her/his knowledge of the duties, responsibilities, training, and qualifications of the career field explored.

## Anecdotal Comments from stakeholders reflect program satisfaction:

"I am thankful for this apprenticeship. I will add it to my resume once I complete it and receive my certificate!"

— Terry, Youth Outreach participant

"The paperwork that I receive from DSS and Sect. 8 can be so confusing, thanks for helping me understand and process everything."

— Lila, Youth Outreach participant

## Anecdotal Comments from stakeholders reflect program satisfaction cont'd:

“Being accepted into the Housing Scholarship Program is a major accomplishment. This is the best chance that I have to save money to move to NYC and study fashion. Thank you so much!”

—Mia, Youth Outreach Participant

“[I’m leaving the program early because] I’ve had all the help I need to get on my own two feet. Mona, Rick and Larry are the greatest. I couldn’t have done all that I have without them. The Learning Web really changed my life.”

—Justin, Youth Outreach Participant

“I learned a lot about what kind of training and supervision a young person needs to be successful from the times I met with you [YO staff] and my apprentice to do the learning plan and performance rating.”

— Youth Outreach Mentor

“I like working with you and your program. We have the same things in mind in terms of preparing somebody to be a good employee.”

— Youth Outreach Mentor

“[YO staff] is OUTSTANDING. He is very proactive, gentle, yet firm when he needs to be, encouraging to the apprentices. I find him a delight to work with!”

— Youth Outreach Mentor

“You [Youth Outreach] provided me with a stable place to live and I was able to transition back to the community...I graduated Drug Court and got to try college and even though it didn’t work out at school I learned that I have to be more focused and avoid certain people...you got me a job and even though I was laid off, I was able to save money that paid for my new apartment. Who knows how it would have worked out if I left rehab and had to struggle on my own but, I know it would not have worked out as well. I know I will be successful and I learned a lot about life while in the housing program.”

—Keith, Youth Outreach Participant

Introducing Youth Outreach Case manager to a student : “This is a person [case manager] who can help you in many ways but especially be a person you can depend on to listen and help you figure out what should happen next.”

— School Guidance Counselor

“I have seen you connect with kids that are resistant to connecting with any adult. This kids a little lost he has no one, I hope you’ll at least be able to meet with him when he is discharged.”

— Cayuga Medical Center Psychiatric Social Worker