



BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR STABILITY

Lora, made the comment quoted at right when she met first with staff. She had learned about Youth Outreach from a friend and stopped into the office on an impulse. Most youth who drop in for the first time do not make an appointment. They are wary of “programs”, having had too many bad experiences with systems as they grew up. We feel it is

important to break through the mistrust and establish a warm and welcoming atmosphere at the YO offices in order to maximize initial engagement with young people. Staff made a connection with Lora and by coordinating with DSS and the Teen Pregnancy & Parenting program, expedited Lora’s acceptance into a subsidized housing program for parenting youth. Lora continues to work with staff on skills for living independently.

This year, over 913 YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN TOOK ADVANTAGE OF OUR SERVICES, 758 RECEIVED OUTREACH SERVICES AND 155 WORKED IN OUR GENERAL PROGRAM. Having no stable place to call home, no financial resources, and very scant personal resources, youth like Lora desire to create a better life for themselves. Noticing that a friend has money to buy food, lives in a decent place, and has plans often moves a young person to re-examine her own life and become motivated to make change. Over 75% of the young people who work in our program have heard about us through other youth that have used our services.

The road is rarely smooth for our participants. Youth Outreach participants are some of the most disenfranchised members of our community; often seeing themselves as victims and rejected by their families, most have refused to “buy into” more traditional services. By the time they reach 17-18 years of age, their lives are dominated by chronic transience—a scenario that often leads to dangerous behaviors including violence, substance abuse, and illegal activity. They must overcome a multitude of barriers that range from a childhood marked by severe abuse, school failure, delinquency, substance abuse, and health issues. Despite the overwhelming picture this presents, our participants can and do overcome their life circumstances.

“I can’t stay there—I’m sleeping on the floor while people are walking through all night long and I know it’s not safe for a new baby.”

Lora, age 19

Darrien Small, left, pictured here with Mona Smiley, Youth Outreach Case Manager, and Dale Schumacher, Executive Director, celebrating Darrien’s graduation from the Housing Scholarship Program. Darrien used his time in the program to develop employment skills that yielded an excellent job and his own apartment. He plans on pursuing a degree in physical therapy. Mona has assisted Darrien in reaching his current goals and will continue to offer any support he may want as he moves into the future.



OUR RESULTS IN 2011

Youth Outreach served 913 youth and young adults.

758 participants: Outreach services [Duplicated count is 1149 participants]

155 participants: General Independent Living Program services

Age 16-20: 104 Age 21: 17 Age 22-25: 34 Gender: 54% female 46% Male

Single individuals: 74% Participants with children: 27%

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

83% of youth maintained stable housing. 79% of youth with a prior history of eviction, avoided further eviction.

32 youth were served in our Housing Scholarship Program. 15 youth had safe exits, 2 had unsafe exits and 15 are currently participating.

113 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 \$733,32 PUBLIC DOLLARS HAVE BEEN SAVED assuming these youth's subsidies were reduced by one year.

Education

86% of participants began working on educational goals.

The drop out rate fell by 12%, from 41% at admission to 29% at year end.

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

12 participants enrolled in post secondary school.

Employment

92% of participants worked on employment skills.

The unemployment rate fell by 23%, from 62% at admission to 39% at year end.

34 participants worked in paid apprenticeships with community mentors.

Increasing Healthy Behaviors

83% of participants increased their ability to follow healthy life routines.

88% of participants with substance/alcohol abuse issues, decreased use in terms of frequency of use and/or the intensity of the drugs used.

67% of delinquent participants decreased involvement with people participating in criminal activity.

84% of participants increased their awareness of their personal values including personal responsibility, honesty in relationships, and deferred gratification.

Self-Sufficiency

41 participants became self-supporting and 10 of these youth transitioned off of Public Assistance and avoided using benefits. AN ESTIMATED \$42,720 PUBLIC DOLLARS HAVE BEEN SAVED if one assumes that these youth's benefits were reduced by one year.



A graduate of our transitional living apartment program holds her certificate of completion with Executive Director, Dale C. Schumacher.



Our on site computer lab is a big draw for homeless youth. We encourage new youth to use the lab to locate housing and services and to relax and get to know staff.

Housing

The Housing Scholarship Program — A Transitional Living Program

For young people who have been couch surfing, trying to go to school or work a job is almost impossible. 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 and was added in the fall of 2008, fills a critical need for these youth. 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 now rent 16 scattered site apartments for youth living independently and served 32 YOUTH in 2011. 15 young people have exited the program safely last year and are living independently, 2 have had unsafe, unplanned exits, and 15 others 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.

For young people who enter our HSP, the newfound stability is a chance to catch up and accomplish goals that have been put on hold. Some of the HSP residents who have made great progress towards their goals include:

- Chet, age 20, who had been thrown out of his house last year and had been couch surfing for months. His homelessness last semester prevented him from doing school work, resulting in his being put on academic suspension at the community college. He has re-enrolled in school for the spring semester and will begin in January. He has a great work ethic and now holds down two jobs and consistently contributes to his savings plan.
- Sophie, age 18, was released from a drug treatment facility only to find herself homeless. She had never lived independently or had been responsible for managing her time or living space. Staff helped her with budgeting and life skills such as meal prep, laundry, and maintaining an apartment. Sophie had problems with boundaries and allowing guests to stay with her. Staff worked intensively with Sophie around boundaries and how to deal with people taking advantage of her. Sophie has maintained her sobriety and is finishing her first semester at community college. She is gaining confidence and a greater ability to set limits with friends and family.
- Tyler, age 19, had left home due to abuse and neglect and escalating instances of conflict between he and his parents. Tyler earned a GED prior to entering the TLP. He works two part time jobs and until recently, has not been interested in continuing his schooling. He is considering a trade school in downstate NY and is planning a trip to tour the campus of the school. Tyler's stable housing has allowed him to focus on the future, including resolving issues connected to his past. He is seeing a psychotherapist and is finding it very helpful, "At first I thought I would feel embarrassed and shy telling a stranger all of my family drama, but then I realized it's so much better telling someone who doesn't already know you. She doesn't judge me and I feel comfortable telling her anything." Tyler is really taking advantage of all of the support that YO and the HSP is offering him.



The Housing Scholarship Program was critical to this participant's ability to earn her college degree.



Learning all of the skills needed to live independently is a focus for both Housing Scholarship youth and also for participants in our non-residential independent living program. Participants like the young man pictured above enjoy trying their hand at making a variety of meals.

Kevin Rafferty — “Life is good, life is good for me right now.”

This story was published in our latest newsletter. It really shows what impact our non-residential services can have on a young person who wants to make changes in their life. We are pleased to share it in this report.

Sixteen year old Kevin Rafferty lived in a tent by Emerson Electric in August of 2000. While eating his regular meal at Loaves and Fishes, he heard about Youth Outreach. “Another kid told me that Youth Outreach could help me with personal hygiene stuff and I met Rick [case manager at Youth Outreach] and started going there 3-4 times/week, hanging out, using the internet. Rick really helped me through the whole situation.” The situation Kevin is referring to was being homeless and unemployed, having no one to turn to for food, clothing, and shelter.

We caught up with Kevin recently, as he took a break from his rounds as a US Postal Service Mail Carrier and spoke to him about where he was in 2000, what he is doing now, and what the future holds for him. “Where I am now has a lot to do with The Learning Web. They helped get me on my feet. Rick provided the direction and the friendship I needed then and I’m doing pretty well now. I was stuck in a rut. Didn’t have a path in life, didn’t know where I was headed, what I was looking for.” Kevin has come a long way from living in a tent. His journey is a testament to his tenacity and perseverance and his ability to use the opportunities, like Youth Outreach, that were offered to him.

“I met Rick at Youth Outreach and he told me what they could offer me; that he could help me find an apartment and get into college. During this time, Kevin met his wife, Jennifer. “I met her when she was a college student. She said you have to get your life together, and Rick helped me with that.” He got me enrolled in TC3 and while I was in school, I met a professor who I worked with doing stone masonry for 6 summers. I became a mason’s apprentice and then ran my own business for a couple of summers. That wasn’t really paying the bills. I had gotten married and needed something more secure so I got the job with the Post Office.” Kevin’s job with the Postal Service has brought him financial stability. Many years have passed since Kevin walked into Youth Outreach and he has indeed gotten his life together.

“I thank Rick all the time, I stop by and tell him, I wouldn’t be where I am now, I’d still be in a tent, homeless. Things are good, this program is great, I’m sure it’s helped a lot of people.” Kevin’s advice for youth who find themselves without a home or adult support and who want to live a stable life: “You’ve got to sacrifice and have real drive. You have to be like-- this is what I want. I want to better myself and you have to be willing to let everything else guide you. You’ve got to be willing to do the work. It’s hard.” Looking back, Kevin said, “there were plenty of times I fell on my face. I was like, this isn’t worth it. Now, it was all worth it. Looking back, I wish I’d taken different steps. Looking back, I wish I’d done it faster. But I’ve got time—I have another 80 years. I’m still young.” Kevin has a lot to look forward to in his future.

“My wife and I have been married three years now and have a baby on the way. We just bought a Victorian house. I did all of the painting and remodeled bathrooms. We’re trying to finish before our baby comes. We’ve travelled the world together—life is good, life is good for me right now. We expect Ethan Theodore Rafferty in 8 weeks—I can’t wait to meet him!

Kevin’s accomplishments are an inspiration. Not only has he built a life that is financially stable but he has built a loving family and a future filled with possibility.

“You’ve got to be willing to do the work. It’s hard. There were plenty of times I fell on my face. I was like, this isn’t worth it. Now, it was all worth it.”



Preparation for Employment

Lack of financial resources is often a major factor in housing instability. Finding a job is also a more complex task than it appears. This was the case with Lisa, age 17. Lisa moved from the south to be with her boyfriend. When they reached Ithaca, they had no place to stay and were homeless. She was denied access to the Emergency Shelter because her parents said that she was free to live at home. Lisa refused to go back home and she worked with YO staff to devise a plan that included safe short term housing.

Lisa needed to earn money so that she could contribute money to a friend who would let the couple stay with her. Staff assisted Lisa with a job search. Lisa filled out applications and prepared for interviews. Lisa also needed help getting her working papers and getting immunization records from her home town. Staff helped her acquire winter gear and clothing for a job. When she got an interview at Walmart, staff helped Lisa get to the interview and when Lisa was hired, staff helped her get the pre-employment drug testing done.

Lisa is now working and has resumed her education. Staff helped her register for school under the McKinney-Vento Act for homeless youth and Lisa is now connected to a tutor who is helping her prepare for her GED. Though the obstacles are great, Lisa is committed to working towards a stable future.

Staff assists many participants, like Lisa, in finding work. Young people secured unsubsidized jobs at businesses ranging from fast food chains and retail stores to senior living homes and hotels. 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.

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, 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.

34 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. Mentors at “entry level” sites have a higher tolerance for youth not showing up or not having a good work ethic. This allows staff to work with the young person and see if they can improve their performance and consistency. If the youth is able to improve, a higher level can be arranged. 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.

2011 Apprenticeship Sites

34 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



Exposure to professional office culture and to the myriad skills needed to be an administrative assistant was this apprentice's goal. She learned many software programs, office procedures, and most importantly, gained confidence and comfort in the professional sphere.

WORKING AS A TEAM — UTILIZING RESOURCES TO GET AHEAD

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.

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.

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.

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 by Youth Outreach this year.



Planned Parenthood facilitated a workshop for Youth Outreach participants this past fall at our offices.

2011 Services Provided & Referred

Activity	Provided	Referred	Activity	Provided	Referred
Basic needs	100%	62%	Family Work	23%	14%
Housing Services	100%	87%	Women's Support Group	5%	---
Case Management	96%	9%	Civic Participation Activities	17%	---
Independent Living Skills	100%	19%	Employment related	92%	67%
Life Skills Workshops	27%	---	Working Participant Support	32%	---
General Health Care	----	56%	Education	86%	74%
HIV/AIDS related	59%	28%	Legal	17%	14%
Substance abuse related	44%	21%	Recreation	40%	---
Counseling	90%	32%	Computer Learning Lab	96%	---
Transitional Living Program	21%	9%	Youth Development Activities	63%	----
Parenting Skills Training	23%	-----			

Paula, age 21, had been couch surfing with her partner, Tim and their 2 children. The family was very stressed and came to YO for help with housing and jobs. Staff helped them sign up for Section 8 with Tompkins Community Action and helped them develop employment skills. Paula apprenticed in an office and did very well. Her partner, Tim, was referred to Workforce NY where he secured a summer job. The money they earned helped them to pool resources for their portion of the rent when they received Section 8. Staff connected the family with the Ithaca Free Clinic for health care and with area food pantries and Loaves and Fishes for basic needs. Staff also assisted them with moving and getting household supplies. Staff helped Paula and Tim look for unsubsidized jobs, develop parenting skills, and manage a household. Though currently working minimum wage jobs, they are able to manage and the whole family, including the two children, appear much less stressed since having a stable home.

Each individual has different needs and our program cannot possibly provide all needed services. We enjoy excellent relationships with area service providers like those who helped us serve Paula and Tim. Our goal is to offer effective and efficient services and help young people to develop their own positive connections to services that they will be accessing.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

80 PERCENT of youth significantly increased their employment skills.

27 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: 72 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. 68 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:

“If you could help this young man as much as you’ve helped Jacob, that would be great. When I referred Jacob, I expected him to get some help. I did not expect him to be able to get an apartment and a job. That was one of the best referrals I have ever made!”

—High School staff comment to staff

Anecdotal Comments from stakeholders reflect program satisfaction cont'd:

“When I made the referral to your program, I was hoping Lonnie would have a place to live and someone to pay attention to him. I was surprised how much trust he developed with YO staff. Being able to trust was never Lonnie’s strong point. I’m hoping that now that Lonnie has graduated from your Housing Scholarship Program he stays in contact with Youth Outreach.”

—Probation Officer’s comment to staff

“I really appreciate this place [Youth Outreach]! I can come here and talk to any of the staff and you guys are always willing to help. You’ve helped me and Ginger [daughter] so much. I wish DSS was more like you guys.”

—Aubrey, Youth Outreach participant

“I have completely changed my life around, I don’t use drugs anymore and I am working. I wish my Dad cared enough to see the changes I have made.”

—Janell, Youth Outreach participant and new mother

“Thanks for paying attention. No one ever really looked at how I was doing at school.”

—Lee, Youth Outreach participant

“I expected this gentleman [apprentice] to be a pleasure, respectful, and hard working. In that sense, he met my expectations.”

—Youth Outreach mentor

“Working with Youth Outreach was great! [Staff] was responsive, understanding, helpful, and supportive. I look forward to working with her again!”

—Youth Outreach mentor