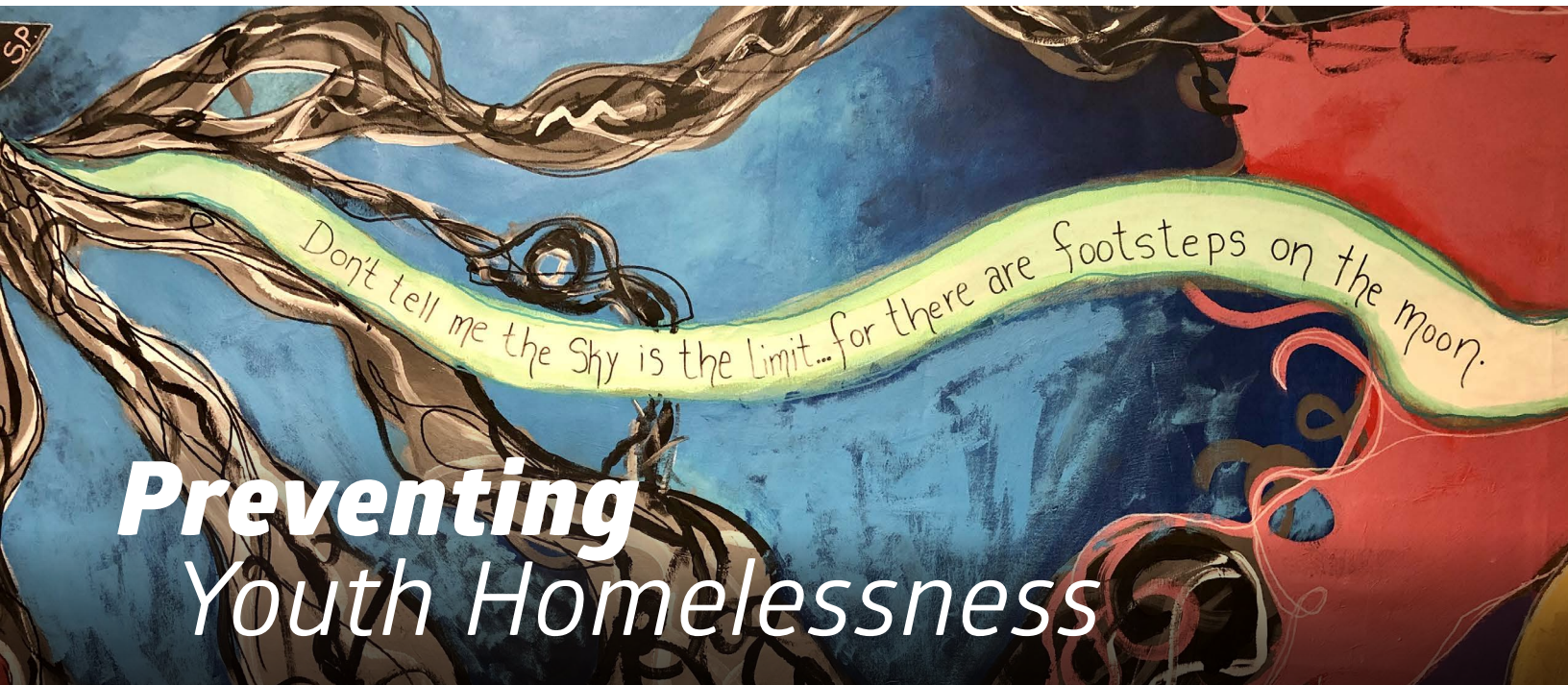




**Boys &  
Girls Aid**

FALL 2021

# Connect



## Preventing Youth Homelessness

**IMAGINE YOU ARE OUT RUNNING ERRANDS ON A RAINY** afternoon, picking up groceries, or going to the post office, and you find yourself at a red light. You look around through the swipes of the windshield wipers and see a young person experiencing homelessness. You wonder how did someone's child end up here?

### WHY ARE YOUTH HOMELESS?

There is a myriad of reasons why youth are homeless. In the 2019–2020 school year 21,080 students in Oregon were identified as homeless. These are young people living in poverty who do not have safe or healthy family bonds and have experienced severe neglect. When there is enough of a disruption at home, they believe seeking unknown shelter is a better solution.

These young people have limited practical life experiences. This lack of experience is detrimental to finding stable housing. A young person does not know who to turn to for help in leaving homelessness. They are concerned about their very basic needs such as where their next meal will come from or where they will be sleeping. There are

**These young people do not know what services exist to help them or how to utilize them.**

organizations and services youth can access, but often these young people do not know these services even exist or how to utilize them.

Access to state issued identification, credit history, reliable phone service and an address are things many of us take for granted. However, all of these are needed to rent housing, officially be paid at a job, and open a bank account. A young person who is homeless typically lacks most or all these needed life components. When youth can access services, they are within a system that is designed to serve an adult population. For instance, many community-sanctioned homeless camps, which tend to be safer and better organized, do not allow individuals under the age of 18. Homeless youth are facing barriers and difficult situations all the time in their everyday lives.

The correlation between youth homelessness and foster care is prominent. A 2019 report by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago on the ways youth in foster care become homeless had four primary findings:

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# Creating a Positive Impact

*Letter from Suzan Huntington, President & CEO*

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**I'M BLESSED TO SEE ANOTHER SEASON** and share the good work of Boys & Girls Aid with you. I'm sure you would agree with me that the last 19 months have been harrowing but also hopeful. The staff at Boys & Girls Aid never missed a step when working with the children and young adults we serve. All our facilities have remained open, and services provided to the best of our capability in the moment. I am honored to work amongst dedicated staff and foster parents. You helped us have the ability to serve our clients in the best way we could, and I am grateful for you.

So much of the last 19 months have been a spotlight on the deficits and needs of our local communities. More than 20,000 students in Oregon were homeless this last year. There are still more than 8,000 children living in Oregon foster care. And 70% of foster care youth who age out of the system without the support of a family will find themselves homeless in the coming year. These issues existed prior to the pandemic, but are now amplified. Boys & Girls Aid is working to ensure we create a positive impact across Oregon. In this issue, you'll read about our new homeless prevention program. What I appreciate about the opportunity to offer prevention services

is that we are preventing one more young adult from living in their car, camping in a park, or sleeping on the sidewalk. When you know where you'll be sleeping, and that you'll be safe, it's easier to continue your education, stay employed and have your basic needs met. It's clear, those we serve will have better outcomes for housing, employment, education, and more when basic needs are met. Housing can seem simple yet it is quite complex, and has the potential to change the trajectory of every young person we serve.

Keeping children and young adults safe is at the core of Boys & Girls Aid. We were founded in 1885 with a mission to do just that, keep children safe and connect them with families who care, support and love them. Thank you for your commitment to our work and for believing those we serve can have a better life. Wishing you and those you love a wonderful holiday season.

With gratitude,

Suzan Huntington, Ed.D.  
President & CEO



## Leave a Legacy

YOU CAN HELP US CONTINUE TO BUILD FAMILIES and create lifelong connections for children by leaving a legacy for generations to come by including Boys & Girls Aid in your estate plans. Send me an email to learn more, [shuntington@boysandgirlsaid.org](mailto:shuntington@boysandgirlsaid.org).



Young adults at Boys & Girls Aid Safe Place shelter.

**FINDING 1:** NEARLY 45% OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS HAVE SPENT TIME IN FOSTER CARE.

**FINDING 2:** THERE ARE MULTIPLE PATHWAYS FROM FOSTER CARE TO HOMELESSNESS.

While the most common thought is youth become homeless after aging out of the foster care system, it is also true that foster youth become homeless after reunification with their birth families and after adoptive placements. The cause of this disruption is based on the facts that the trauma experienced in the family or by the child have not been resolved and over time the cycle of seeking shelter elsewhere can continue.

**FINDING 3:** YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WHO HAVE BEEN IN FOSTER CARE DIFFER FROM THEIR PEERS WHO HAVE NOT.

This study found that, “Specifically, those who had been in foster care were more likely to have spent time in juvenile detention, jail, or prison; more likely to identify as LGBTQ; less likely to be in school or employed; and more likely to be receiving government assistance such as food stamps.” Combined, this makes leaving homelessness even more difficult.


**FINDING 4:** MANY YOUNG PEOPLE PERCEIVED THEIR ENTRY INTO FOSTER CARE AS THE BEGINNING OF THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE WITH HOMELESSNESS AND THEIR FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT WAS OFTEN PART OF A LARGER PATTERN OF INSTABILITY THAT INCLUDED HOMELESSNESS WITH THEIR FAMILY.

From the outside we may view foster care as a stable solution for youth experiencing abuse and neglect in their home, but foster care is likely to be a continuation of instability for young people, especially when the experienced trauma is not managed.

While this study offers insight into homelessness for young people, it is true that each young person has unique needs and circumstances that brought them to homelessness. Often all the components and situations mentioned above work against each other, leaving young people within a maze that keeps them experiencing homelessness.

#### HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

Since 1975, Boys & Girls Aid has been serving runaway and homeless youth, providing shelter services for 50–150 youth per year in host homes and our shelter facility. We know there is much more to be done. To best serve youth in Oregon currently experiencing homelessness, a visible path out of homelessness must be established for young people. This means having a well-developed network of qualified organizations and programs ready to serve homeless youth.

The next step is making sure youth who need services know there are people and organizations ready to help. Organizations like Boys & Girls Aid who serve homeless youth must provide individualized care to every youth because each person has a unique background and lived experiences. We are accomplishing this with our new homeless prevention specialist. This position works with youth who are on the verge of homelessness to discover their individual needs, and then assists them in seeking out and obtaining resources and services that will help empower them to prevent homelessness. While the issue of youth homelessness may seem overwhelming, Boys & Girls Aid is committed to finding solutions and paths that lead to better outcomes. 

Information in this article is cited from the following sources: Dworsky, A., Gitlow, E., Horwitz, B., & Samuels, G.M. (2019). Missed opportunities: Pathways from foster care to youth homelessness in America. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago · National Alliance to End Homelessness. State of Homelessness: State and CoC Dashboards · Oregon.gov: McKinney-Vento Act: Homeless Education Program. 2019-2020 Homeless Student Data.



# Youth Homelessness in Oregon

There are about  
**21,000 homeless students**  
in Oregon schools (2019–2020)

**Oregon ranks 4<sup>th</sup> highest**  
in the nation in our count of homeless youth



Nearly 45% of young people  
**WHO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS**  
have spent time in foster care

## Reasons youth become homeless:

- Physical/and or sexual abuse in the home
- Drug/alcohol addicted parent
- Poverty
- Thrown out due to their sexual orientation
- Mental illness or substance abuse



Boys & Girls Aid serves up to  
**150 homeless youth**  
and runaway youth per year in host  
homes and our shelter facility



## CLIENT STORY

**“You and the baby can stay, but I’m so sorry, it’s against the rules for teen boys to stay in the shelter.”** Luke remembered watching his mother’s face drop when the shelter manager spoke these words. Since Luke was 10, he and his mom have not had a stable living situation. They have moved in and out of apartments, in and out of their car and in and out of friends’ homes. His mom has had several boyfriends and now, he has a baby sister to worry about as well. Over the last six years, living in chaos beyond his control, Luke has fallen behind in school, doesn’t have many friends and is depressed.

At 17, Luke doesn’t see a positive outcome to his situation. Now, at another shelter, Luke is surprised he cannot stay but is relieved his mom and sister will be safe. Luke assured his mom he had some friends he could stay with, and with tears in her eyes and no other options, she entered the shelter. Luke managed to couch surf at a few friends’ houses, and then a resource at school told him about the Boys & Girls Aid Safe Place shelter.

Luke arrived at Safe Place lost, angry and not sure what to expect. It’s been a few weeks since Luke arrived at the shelter, and he is doing better. His basic needs such as food and hygiene are being met, he’s working on his mental health, attending school regularly and with the support of Safe Place staff seeking a part-time job. His journey isn’t over and there are challenges ahead, but his trajectory has changed from a life of fear and homelessness to a life of hope and possibility.

**Every child**  
DESERVES A FAMILY.



**Connor**  
ADOPTED  
2016

"Without Boys & Girls Aid,  
I would not be a parent and  
would not have the best  
kiddo in the world!"

—Eryn White



**Boys &  
Girls Aid**

*Support a child in need.  
Give today.*

[boysandgirlsaid.org/donate](https://boysandgirlsaid.org/donate)

# On the

# BRINK: *Overcoming Youth Homelessness*



**Tammy Brown**

*Homeless Prevention Specialist  
at Boys & Girls Aid*

A conversation with Tammy Brown, our Homeless Prevention Specialist, to discuss the experiences and obstacles of homeless youth and how we work with them to provide resources and hope.

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### **How did you start working with homeless youth?**

I have been a social worker for more than 20 years. My journey helping people experiencing homelessness started when I took a seasonal position at a 24-hour shelter in Beaverton that housed 30 people. I enjoyed seeing the pieces coming together for the younger people at the shelter through access to resources such as transitional housing, treatment programs and housing placement services. It was awesome to see their successes as they made real changes and found housing options.

### **Why is Homeless Prevention an important program?**

Homeless prevention, especially for youth, is important to prevent them from experiencing chronic homelessness throughout their later years into adulthood. My position provides hope, information and resources in a proactive manner that helps young people avoid being in a situation where they have no place to sleep and live safely. I work with them when they are on the brink of being homeless and this prevention work is critical and will shift the trajectory of their lives.

Teen clients who received housing services at Safe Place.



### What is the primary focus of your work?

I work in three main areas, 1) I focus on young people who are about to experience homelessness, 2) I canvas areas where young people frequent to hang flyers about the services available, and 3) I spend time with staff at community resource centers and other organizations to make sure they are aware of the homeless prevention services at Boys & Girls Aid.

### What are the biggest obstacles for youth experiencing homelessness?

Homeless youth feel lost and there is no real system of care to help them. They genuinely don't know where to go for help for their specific needs. Family relationships also change for youth as they get older, and this tends to increase the risk of them being kicked out of the home. Families who are already in crisis see the older youth as 'old enough' to deal with the real world. Other factors such as a youth's past evictions, no rental history, or criminal background can be big barriers to safe housing solutions.

Homeless youth are young and learning. If they don't know better, they can't do better; they haven't had the role modeling they need to find success. They need someone to come alongside them, to mentor and teach them; making it a less overwhelming process to handle on their own. They also need help with basic life skills such as budgeting, how to rent and be a good renter. They need encouragement to stay in school or if they are done with school, help on how to find a job that can help generate enough income for housing whether that be alone or with a roommate.

**My position provides hope, information and resources in a pro-active manner that helps young people avoid being in a situation where they have no place to sleep and live safely.**

### Can you share a story about a client's success utilizing the resources we offer and your help?

I worked with a young woman who had a one-week-old infant and another child under two. She reached out because she had back rent due, and she could not return to work yet after having her baby. There was no way she could pay her back rent, let alone her current rent. The Homeless Prevention Program assisted her with paying her back rent. We helped her with other support and resources, and she was able to go back to work, maintain her housing and continue paying her current rent.

Just having someone to talk to and assist financially gave her encouragement and help to move past what could have been a potential eviction causing more debt and the loss of a home for her and her children. Mostly, I find the young people I work with need a break, someone to help with one thing to make their lives easier and have some guidance. Life looks better when you know you can live safely with your children.

### What is the #1 thing you want people to know about homeless youth?

Homeless youth are not criminals, and they aren't all mentally unstable or addicts. They have been living in a pool of circumstances that are mostly not their doing. Homeless youth have been homeless with their families for a long time. Some kids have been in and out of homelessness for a decade before they find themselves homeless as young adults. They have a lifetime of experiences that are not stable. They have learned to get by, but they do want better for themselves. Youth who are homeless have dreams of working jobs where they can live safely. They want to have families of their own and they want to make a meaningful impact in the community. 🌱



# Boys & Girls Aid

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