YES!

Founded and run by formerly homeless youth and their allies, the YES Drop-In Center provides a safe drop-in space for youth (age 14-25) experiencing homelessness. YES’s mission is to prevent and eliminate youth homelessness through the synergy of youth and ally partnerships.

At YES, staff work with youth to secure shelter and take the steps necessary to access safe and affordable permanent housing. YES facilitates access to resources and opportunities that most (housed) individuals take for granted: a place to meet immediate basic needs of food and clothing, receive mail, storage, access to laundry facilities, computer and phone usage, and, simply, a safe place to rest and decompress. YES also meets youths’ need for a sense of family and community; YES staff and youth gather together to celebrate youths’ birthdays, accomplishments, and holidays.

YES further serves as a one-stop-shop by offering in-house case management that includes assistance obtaining identification, enrolling in school, accessing public benefits, navigating criminal justice proceedings, accessing childcare, connecting to employment and housing, among many other things. YES also facilitates access to health care, mental health services, and legal services, which are often available onsite.

Last but not least, YES engages in system reform through youth consciousness-raising and leadership development, legislative advocacy, and our work with coalition partners.

Welcome to YES

What a busy and full year we’ve had! During our 2015 fiscal year (July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015), YES served 246 unique youth more than 3,500 times. We are so grateful to the many supporters who helped us keep our doors open for youth after we suffered fire damage during April’s unrest.

We see 25-35 youth each day, but we often find ourselves forced to turn youth away for lack of space. That is why we have spent much of the last year searching for a larger space better-suited for our growing needs.

In the coming year, we look forward to moving into a larger, more adequate space; serving more youth while improving case management outcomes; beginning to offer rapid rehousing and intensive mobile case management; developing better connections to paid training and employment; and supporting the development of safe and affordable housing through advocacy efforts. Stay tuned!!!
HOW YES HELPED YOUTH IN FY 2015

Youth come to YES in their own ways—some day after day while working toward housing, others stopping in briefly for supplies and referrals. In FY 2015 they came to YES for meetings with our mental health therapist, help navigating criminal justice proceedings, assistance with security deposits, help enrolling in college and navigating financial aid, and to attend and find support in LGBTQ activities. They came for leadership activities - trainings on telling their story while holding their power, to prepare testimony to deliver to legislators. Mostly, though, they came because they trust YES to support them during times of intense need. This year, we helped in areas like:

**Holistic Support:** Helped 111 youth develop individual action plans.

**Personal Wellness and Counseling:** Conducted at least 519 one-on-one counseling sessions including intensive crisis-intervention and harm-reduction support.

**Supportive Relationships:** Coordinated and hosted hundreds of sessions between youth, and lawyers/medical and mental health professionals, and other meetings off-site

**Documents:** Assisted at least 67 youth to acquire personal identification documents

**Transportation:** Provided hundreds of transportation tokens, and Driver’s Ed classes to 13 youth—all passed!

**Housing:** Connected 31 eligible youth to temporary (7) or permanent (24) housing. Helped more than half our youth research housing options and complete applications.

**Education & Jobs:** Helped 76 youth apply for jobs, resulting in youth acquiring 36 jobs; helped 53 youth connect to educational programs, with 29 youth successfully enrolled at the end of the fiscal year; partnered with Art with a Heart to offer job readiness programming to YES youth last summer, fall, and spring.

**Health Insurance & Benefits:** Assisted 75 youth to apply for public benefits, including health insurance; which resulted in at least 20 youth receiving benefits – others’ are pending.

**Youth Leadership Development:** Trained 12 youth who served as Peer Interns, Peer Advocates, Peer Case Managers and Youth Educators. Employed several formerly homeless youth during FY 2015, which included a handful of peer inters, a peer facilities coordinator, a peer advocate, and two peer case managers.

Men Supporting Men at YES

Men’s Group starts with a sheet of paper with a question and space for an answer on it. It is handed out to anyone who will take it. No one is allowed to write their name on it so when they are shuffled up and read out loud by each participant, no one can be judged about their opinion.

My personal best Men’s Group derived from the question “Why do Black Lives Matter?” One answer stuck out more than usual: “Black Lives matter to everyone except Black people.” That started a huge call for an explanation. The young man who wrote it said, “If it mattered so much to us why are we not protesting when we kill each other?” The consensus was totally against this statement, and he was encouraged to retract it. But 30 minutes later, the group was about 50/50 on the topic. It was amazing to me to see these young men discuss and reach powerful conclusions about such a burning subject.

In Men’s Group there are many debates and powerful emotions that most participants are learning how to manage. There is also a true trust between the men, who often remind new people, “what’s said in Men’s Group stays in Men’s Group.” They learn from each other and I learn from them all.
YES Staff Spotlight: Maia Gibbons

This year, YES created a new position for a Workforce Development and Education Coordinator who also participates in case management and hired the amazing Maia Gibbons to carry out this work. Through partnerships with outside organizations and one-on-one work with YES youth, Maia has been able to expand YES’s resources for youth looking for jobs or hoping to go back to school. Some highlights include:

- Developing a trauma-informed Career Readiness Rubric to allow YES to expand its on-site training capacity for youth hoping to attain employment.
- Outreach with college educators and employers in order to better educate them about the needs of disconnected youth.
- Developing a training specifically for financial aid administrators on how best utilize the tuition waiver and identify eligible students.
- Participating in a Baltimore City Workforce Development network called “TheCONNECT”
- Engaging with the Public Justice Center and the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (regarding tuition waivers for unaccompanied homeless youth).

Devron

After a chaotic adolescence that left him sleeping under a bridge in West Baltimore, Devron Buchanan was one of YES’s successful youth participants during our first year of offering services. He worked closely with staff to go to driving school, get his permit, and apply for and get his own housing. Increasingly throughout this time Devron made himself an invaluable member of YES’s community by volunteering to help the center and other youth. Therefore, he was a top candidate - and eventually chosen - for a paid 9-month internship with YES from Nov. 2013 to September 2014. As a Peer Intern, Devron answered YES’s constantly revolving door, patiently helped youth access clothing and hygiene supplies and did their laundry, and cleaned the center from top to bottom. He excelled as an intern such that he was hired on to fulfill these duties as a full-time employee for the year following the internship. As an employee he was also able to see his ideas into implementation, such as developing a new way for YES to manage the clothing donations. “Working with YES was a game changer for me. I learned to be humble and grateful for what I have and that I can be a difference-maker for other youth like me.”

Thank you, YES partners!

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Also, special thanks to all the other people who make YES possible, especially our volunteers and donors!
Weaving a Trauma Lens Into our Day-to-Day Practices

Last year, with the support of our Program Manager, YES began building a trauma-informed lens to our model. Since opening we have seen firsthand how the trauma youth have experienced is manifested as protective behavior—like appearing disengaged or erupting with anger—that may prevent them from taking full advantage of opportunities that come into their lives such as education, employment, and stable housing. When we say we are using a trauma lens, we mean we seek to support individuals in terms of what has happened to them instead of what is “wrong with” them.

YES has been actively developing our trauma-informed lens and practice by introducing a weekly psycho-educational trauma recovery group, a daily check-in, and infusing it into our supervision practices.

The weekly S.E.L.F. (Safety, Emotions, Loss, Future) group is led by a Peer and Program Manager partnership while encouraging co-facilitation by group participants. At first, youth avoided the S.E.L.F. group because it sounded too “touchy-feely.” Over time, however, youth have come around and youth use S.E.L.F. language when talking about how they feel in YES.

We also use a trauma-informed check-in for both staff and youth as they start each drop-in. Doing so supports youth to talk more about what happened to them rather than acting it out or feeling vulnerable or triggered at YES. Youth really seem to appreciate how it helps build community and ground them in the here and now.

Program supervision at YES also continues to evolve as an affirming, collaborative, strengths-based learning experience. Staff recognize that the stress and vicarious trauma from drop-in can become toxic if YES does not integrate self-care into our work.

These successes integrating a trauma-informed approach have helped YES youth and staff achieve important and tangible outcomes while building our sense of community!

YES is a fiscally sponsored by Strong City Baltimore, an independent 501(c)(3) organization. Strong City Baltimore provides fiscal sponsorship and human resource management for over 80 small and mid-sized non-profit groups in the city. Strong City Baltimore provides financial and administrative management services, including accounting, invoicing, payroll, audit, insurance, and human resources to YES.

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