**YES in FY16**

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

YES is recognized in Baltimore City as a primary stakeholder on youth homelessness, in no small part because of our role in identifying homeless youth who are on their own, otherwise unknown, and invisible. YES is actively involved in counting and surveying youth to gain a more accurate understanding of Baltimore’s homeless youth. YES staff and youth recently participated in Youth REACH Maryland, helping to count 1,421 homeless youth in Baltimore in 2015.

YES continues to play a role in:

- Identifying homeless youth in our day to day work and through the frequently inaccurate counts that must rely on a point-in-time measurement.
- Taking accurate histories of homeless youth, which often involve not only homelessness, but issues related to poverty and family conflict—including neglect, abuse, divorce, incarceration, and mental illness. Many (45% in FY15) youth at YES have been involved in the child welfare system.
- Finding youth who are at most risk for increased exposure to violence, gang recruitment, and sexual and other abuse. Studies estimate that within 72 hours of hitting the streets, one out of every three runaways will be forced to engage in commercial sex work – trading sex for money, shelter, and food.
- Helping homeless youth – especially the most vulnerable among them – through all the steps needed to achieve stability and wellness, in the ways that they define these things.

**What Does YES Do?**

YES provides a safe, youth-friendly space for homeless youth ages 14 through 25. At YES, youth can:

- Meet basic needs, receive financial assistance for security deposits or transportation, and establish supportive relationships with peer and allied staff;
- Become engaged in case management to access identification, benefits, health/mental health services, education/training, employment, housing, and more;
- Access other resources: part-time therapist, weekly visits from mobile health clinic, mobile case management, and bi-weekly visits from a legal service provider;
- Receive support accessing and retaining jobs, resume help, and tutoring; participate in classes such as yoga, art, or nutrition; and engage in youth leadership/advocacy opportunities; and
- Beginning in October 2016, access YES’s first Rapid Re-Housing Program – a new program based on national models, and Baltimore’s only rapid-rehousing program for youth.
How YES Helped Youth
In FY16

YES staff work hard to build and sustain trusting relationships with youth who, through life experience, have learned to be guarded. Both peer (formerly homeless) and allied (without homeless experience) staff reinforce the role of supportive relationships in establishing stability. These relationships offer a platform for YES’s case management and connection to long-term resources.

During FY16, YES:

- Served 212 youth through more than 4,500 contacts.
- Provided more than 1,414 staff counseling sessions.
- Coordinated and hosted at least 500 sessions between our youth and visiting practitioners (health, mental health, targeted case management, & legal).
- Assisted eligible youth in applying for public benefits and medical insurance.
- Assisted eligible youth in applying for identity documents, such as birth certificates, social security cards, and photo identification cards. At least 42 documents were received.
- Connected at least 25 youth to mental health services, either through our on-site mental health therapist or through another provider of their choice.
- Connected nearly 40% of our youth to job readiness, training, and/or employment opportunities. 39 youth became employed with our assistance during this period.
- Provided education assistance (help navigating access to high school and/or college/financial aid) to 51 youth.
- Provided free Driver’s Education to 13 youth.
- Provided housing assistance to interested youth and connected 6 youth to temporary housing and 24 youth to permanent housing.
- Provided trauma/toxic stress/self-care training to staff and ran several 12-week sessions of S.E.L.F. (Safety, Emotions, Loss, and Future) psycho-educational trauma recovery group.
- Brought all full-time staff above Baltimore City’s housing wage of $16.37/hour.

“The incredible connection that youth [get] to make toward healing. The connection to staff, the connection to other youth, the connection to the community—that’s what keeps me here.”

--Patricia Cobb Richardson

Not every story is a “success” story, and as a staff member at YES, I am prepared to face those situations. But our success’ stories help sustain us.

One success story is about a group of youth who had been living on the streets. They had formed their own family unit—facing the challenges of homelessness together and looking out for each other. They were resilient and resourceful, but also clearly operating in “survival mode.” They wanted jobs but the skills that they developed to help manage the chronic stress of poverty, the indignity of being ignored, isolated, and the struggle for belonging were at odds with what it takes to become employed.

They had developed skills that helped them cope with loss of families, schools, and social supports. Those skills however did not protect them from becoming disconnected from their senses of self, their own humanity and that of others. While these young people came to YES for help finding jobs, the real work of YES was in helping the group (re)connect. This connection came by helping them balance their sense of autonomy with their need for safety and stability. Gradually, the re-connection they needed was developed by helping them to problem-solve, increase their tolerance for frustration, manage their emotions, and learn to be intentional in their actions.

Success was in engaging this group that had been disconnected (emotionally, socially, and otherwise) and helping them to form broader connections—and be part of something beyond themselves—that will enable long-term stability. This kind of success story helps to brighten our days at YES.

Patricia Cobb Richardson is YES’s Program Manager and a student and teacher in trauma recovery and resiliency.
Ciera Dunlap

Ciera was born in New York and raised in West Baltimore. She grew up with her mother and siblings until fifth grade, when she went into foster care. In foster care, Ciera was abused. Her experience is among the worst examples of a social service system in extreme and dangerous dysfunction. Even great social workers can’t erase the sad outcomes of out-of-control caseloads and declining resources. When Ciera just couldn’t take any more, she ran away. She was 11.

Ciera bounced around from wherever her mother was staying, to her grandfather’s house, to the street. She was completely traumatized by her experience. She was essentially homeless until 2012, when she was able to move into a housing program. Although she completed the program successfully, she did not receive the housing conversion voucher she needed and became homeless again.

There was, however, a light at the end of the tunnel. Ciera found a case management job at YES and was able to make enough money to rent an apartment with her boyfriend. She is now a Case Manager Supervisor at YES, where she has been working for two years. “I get some of the toughest clients,” said Ciera. “I start by building relationships and trust, after that it becomes easier to help. Helping others become independent makes me very proud.”

YES Staff Spotlights: Pamela Nathaniel

My story does not run down a straight path. I was born and raised in East Baltimore in a single-parent home. My mom worked a couple of jobs to support five children. Although my dad didn’t live with us, he was my hero. He owns two businesses and works really hard.

My parents weren’t together, but I always admired them because they worked as hard as they could to support us. However, the family continued to struggle and as a result I wound up in foster care. I missed my mom and dad terribly. During that time, I tried hard to be successful in school, but because of the foster home situation I began to miss a lot of days. The foster parents weren’t bad people, but they were complete strangers. Contact with my parents was limited. I felt very alone.

After I graduated from High School, I went into Independent Living, but after three years I was no longer able to afford my apartment. After that, I didn’t have my own place to live and became homeless. I was still working at minimum wage and less than forty hours. It just wasn’t enough to live on. It was a low point in my life. But something good was just around the corner.

I became affiliated with “Public Allies” last September. I was trying to figure out how I could go to school and plan a good career path for myself. They helped me navigate school and work. They helped me get a full time job at YES. I also began attending University of Baltimore in the fall with a concentration in human services. Helping others is my calling, and I’m on the right path to accomplish that goal. Working at YES puts me in direct contact with the young people I know I can help because of my own life experiences.

By: Pamela Nathaniel

Thank you, YES partners!

During FY16, YES was funded by the Mayor’s Office of Human Services: Homeless Services Program; Baltimore Community Foundation’s, Leonard & Helen R. Stulman Charitable Foundation, and the Youth Leadership for Change Grants; Associated Black Charities; Abell Foundation; Battye Charitable Trust; Annie E. Casey Foundation; Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Archdiocese of Baltimore; Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation; David and Barbara B. Hirschhorn Foundation; Merritt Properties; Bank of America; OberKaler; Open Society Institute Baltimore; John. J. Leidy Foundation; Zanvyl and Isabelle Krieger Fund; and Fund for Change. Thank you for your invaluable partnerships! Also, special thanks to all the other people who make YES possible, especially our volunteers and individual donors!
YES and Art with a Heart

YES has built and refined a partnership with Art with a Heart (AWAH) over the past three years. YES contracts for AWAH to provide their paid 6-week, 4 hour/day, “Jobs Program” to YES youth three times a year. In the program participants create marketable art for HeARTwares, AWAH’s retail store and social enterprise. Through daily projects, participants engage in a program with concrete expectations and structure, work in a store, meet and engage customers, and learn to comply with expectations and procedures of a workplace. AWAH’s program is a great entre into the structure of work for many YES youth and youth get the rewards of creating and selling their art wares!

Critical Housing Needs – Grants from OberKaler and Krieger Fund

Housing vouchers for people who have experienced long-term homelessness and have disabilities have dried up again in Baltimore City, leaving those whom YES had in the pipeline with little recourse but the Drop-In Center. This leaves YES in the position of having to assist all youth - even those with serious barriers - to access housing in the private market. Luckily, Security Deposit Sponsors can make a huge difference.

Saving enough for a security deposit is a difficult hurdle for most young people - and it's almost impossible if you're experiencing homelessness. This past year, with the help of a grants from OberKaler and the Krieger Fund, YES was able to help 24 youth access vouchers and other permanent housing by providing up to $500 a piece for security deposits.

Housing-Focused Case Management

One of YES’s most important strategies to support youth is providing “bridge” services between homelessness and housing opportunities. YES does this by providing significant assistance preparing youth for the handful of housing opportunities in Baltimore, and connecting them with housing in the private market. YES connects youth to housing through Baltimore’s “Interim Match Process” which involves assisting youth to collect their documentation of income, three identification documents, proof of disability, and proof of literal homelessness and homeless history, and then helping them navigate the Housing Authority or other programs to which they are matched. For youth who do not qualify for this type of housing, YES supports them to secure affordable rooms or apartments by helping them search for units and connect to landlords, fill out and pay for applications, providing security deposits, and helping them access furniture and supplies. YES is also on the cusp of starting Baltimore’s first Rapid Rehousing Program for homeless youth. In FY17 YES will provide up to nine months of rental assistance to 10 youth. These youth will also receive mobile case management to help them access sustainable income and supports needed to successfully maintain housing.

OUR HISTORY

YES was the brainchild of youth who participated in the Baltimore Homeless Youth Initiative (BHYI), a coalition that was focused on increasing the capacity of the community to serve homeless youth. Youth leaders identified the need for a comprehensive drop-in center in a central location in Baltimore and emphasized the importance of staffing the center with formerly homeless youth. YES opened its doors in October 2012.

YES’S UNIQUE MODEL

YES’s success is grounded in the expertise of homeless youth. Thus, the center is staffed by formerly homeless youth and allies, and YES invests heavily in developing the capacities of homeless youth. In order to ensure that every aspect of YES is informed by this perspective, YES developed and practices a participatory and transparent decision making model. This is the outgrowth of the consensus-based decision making model YES used for our first three plus years of operations. Participatory decision-making, whereby staff collectively discuss potential changes to policies and procedures, our advocacy involvement, and tough issues with youth, provides an avenue for YES to value the perspectives and experiences of all staff.

Youth Empowered Society (YES)