



Colorado Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month 2008 Summary Report

Leading public and private human service organizations in Colorado worked together to successfully create a public awareness campaign in support of National Runaway Prevention Month 2008. The primary partners included The Colorado Department of Human Services, The Colorado Department of Education, Family Tree, Inc., Mile High United Way, Stand Up for Kids, The GLBT Community Center of Colorado, Urban Peak and Volunteers of America. These organizations worked tirelessly for many months preparing for a successful prevention and awareness campaign for Colorado. The primary goals of Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month are:

- To increase awareness of the issues facing homeless and runaway youth; and
- To educate the public about the solutions and the role it can play in preventing and ending youth homelessness.

Partnering organizations for Colorado Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness hosted several events throughout the month. During the last week of the month, local community groups were encouraged to plan donation drives, volunteer recruitment activities or other awareness raising activities to benefit local youth serving organizations. A fact sheet on youth homelessness in Colorado was developed that gave a summary of the primary issues facing homeless youth and directed community members and media to opportunities for involvement.

Events

Statewide Kickoff Event

Approximately 250 people, including youth, public policy makers, community members, and direct service providers, attended a kick-off event for Colorado's Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month in Denver on November 6th. The event took place outside on the downtown campus of Urban Peak, a local homeless and runaway youth service provider. The event included a resource fair for homeless youth as well as a proclamation signing ceremony.

A total of 80 homeless youth and an additional 19 previously homeless youth attended the event. Homeless youth received information about accessing education, employment, housing, shelter, and emergency services. Basic medical care, food and other necessities were distributed to the

homeless youth in attendance. Each youth received a backpack stocked full of food, school supplies, and toiletries. Hats, scarves, and hygiene kits were also distributed to the youth in attendance. Demographic information collected at the event showed the following:

- 45% of the homeless youth in attendance reported spending the previous night in emergency shelter;
- 18% reported spending the previous night on the streets, under bridges, in abandoned buildings or other places not fit for human habitation;
- 19% reported having psychiatric or emotional problems;
- 6% of the youth surveyed reported having a developmental disability;
- Almost 50% of the youth surveyed had been homeless for less than 3 months, while the remaining 50% reported having been homeless from 4 months to up to 5 years;
- 40% reported having experienced homelessness three or more times in the past three years;
- Over 35% of the youth surveyed reported that they left home as a result of family problems and abuse or violence in the home; and
- 75% of youth who were sleeping outside or who were staying temporarily with friends reported that they were not attending school.

Support from public policy makers was garnered as Colorado Governor Bill Ritter Jr. and Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper issued and signed proclamations designating the month of November 2008 as Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month in Colorado at the kickoff event. A similar proclamation issued by and Colorado Springs Mayor Lionel Rivera was announced at the event. In addition, a formerly homeless youth shared the story of his journey from homelessness to self-sufficiency with the audience. Other speakers at the ceremony represented sponsoring agencies such as the National Runaway Switchboard, the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Department of Education, Urban Peak, and the Downtown Denver Business Partnership. Approximately 180 green light bulbs were distributed to community members during and following the event as a part of the National Runaway Prevention Month's Green Light Project. Through the Green Light Project, community members raised awareness of youth homelessness by installing green porch lights during the month of November.

Homeless and Runaway Youth Provider Training Forum

The Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Human Services co-sponsored a full day training forum on November 7th for homeless education liaisons from local school districts and homeless youth direct service providers from across Colorado. The forum was attended by close to 100 participants. Morning workshops covered topics such as: how to create safe spaces for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender (GLBT) homeless and runaway youth, suicide intervention and prevention, and homeless education grant training. During the afternoon, the Prevention Specialist from the National Runaway Switchboard trained the full group on the "Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum". Each participant was received a copy of the National Runaway Switchboard "Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum".

"Queer Streets" Film Screening and Discussion Panel

On November 11th, Rainbow Alley, Urban Peak and the Social Justice Living and Learning Community at the University of Denver hosted a screening of the documentary film *Queer Streets*. *Queer Streets* is a short documentary that takes a hip, gritty look at the reality of life on the streets for GLBT youth in New York City. Approximately 20-30 people attended the screening. A panel discussion/talkback followed the screening. Panel members included:

- A Colorado GLBT youth who has experienced homelessness;
- A staff member from Rainbow Alley, at GLBT drop in center;

- An outreach worker from Urban Peak, a runaway and homeless youth outreach, shelter, housing and supportive services agency; and
- An outreach organizer for Prax(us), an anti-human trafficking agency serving homeless youth.

Jefferson County Schools Service Learning Projects

During November, Family Tree Gemini, a runaway youth shelter and outreach agency, worked with 3 local high schools in Jefferson County to conduct a sock, cereal, and clothing drive. Two schools participated in a “no shower” day and a “donate your lunch money to a school cause” day. In addition, Family Tree Gemini staff conducted a total of 3 community presentations and 10 classroom presentations on the “Dangers of Running” and where to go for help. A homeless/runaway youth awareness and outreach booth was set up at one of a high school resource fair for parents and students in Jefferson County.

Denver Workforce Symposium on Working with Homeless Youth

The Denver Office of Economic Development - Workforce Development, Youth Services organized a Symposium on working with Homeless Youth. The purpose of the event was to bring together service providers from around the area who struggle in providing workforce related services to homeless youth. A panel of local experts was assembled that included the presentation of research data as well as presentations from service providers in the areas of workforce development, education, health and human services, mental health, and social justice. While this event was originally intended to provide training primarily to staff and contractors of Workforce Development, Youth Services, there was an overwhelming interest from the community for this event. Youth Services was able to work with Denver Parks and Recreation to relocate the Symposium location to a larger facility to accommodate participants. In light of the more diverse participant base, Youth Services also felt it was important to identify a moderator for the event who could serve as a neutral axis for the discussion. As a result, Becky Ditchfield from 9-News agreed to moderate the event. On November 12, 132 people attended the Symposium on working with Homeless Youth. This was an important event for the Youth Serving community across the Front Range, with participants traveling from Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, and Morrison, Colorado. While Workforce Development, Youth Services staff members continue to analyze survey data, feedback from this event has been overwhelmingly positive.

El Paso County Service Learning Project

The newly formed El Paso County Department of Human Services, Youth Leadership Board decided to conduct a food drive for the month of November for Urban Peak Colorado Springs, a local homeless and runaway youth service agency. The food drive was conducted through local schools. Youth Leadership Board members attended an interactive presentation on youth homelessness as a part of this project.

Urban Peak and Stand Up for Kids – Virgin Mobile, Homeless Youth Television Campaign

With the rising popularity of reality shows, Virgin Mobile launched HYTV: Homeless Youth Television, in hopes that this online campaign would help take a look at what “reality” really is by taking the premise from some of the most popular reality shows of the day, and turning them into a look at how life is on the streets. “Meal or No Meal,” one of the shows in the campaign, shows what it is like to be on the streets and not know where your next meal is coming from. When sponsored, donations were directed to homeless youth organizations including Urban Peak and Stand Up for Kids, two organizations working in Colorado. This campaign was a unique step forward in getting the word out about the problem of homelessness and street youth, and gave a new and creative way to help the cause. The Virgin Mobile website offered several opportunities for the public to support homeless youth including sponsoring the online television shows, and even opportunities for the public to post their own videos online to generate donations for

homeless youth agencies. This campaign helped give young homeless people the shelter, counseling, health care, nourishment, and future they deserve. Details can be found at: www.homelessyouthtv.com.

Urban Peak Colorado Springs “Building Futures, Building Lives”

The 8th Annual “Building Futures Building Lives” was a special and unique way to honor the youth of Urban Peak, and hear the stories of six individuals that have done what it takes to make “Real Change” in their lives. It also served as an opportunity for individuals and companies, whether long-term supporters or new to Urban Peak, to come and meet some youth, while taking part in an interactive experience that enabled them to get a better understanding of what Urban Peak does, and homeless youth awareness in general. This year, Urban Peak partnered with the Colorado Springs Conservatory who wrote and performed a theatrical / musical piece reflective of the lives of homeless and runaway youth. On November 6th, 250 attendees came to learn and celebrate the accomplishments of six youth, and give thanks to this year’s community leader award to the Price Family. For the past three years, the Price Family has been an instrumental part in the success of Urban Peak Colorado Springs. From preparing the evening meal every Sunday night, to generating awareness for runaway and homeless youth through the Teen Feed Program, the family has put the cause of youth homelessness on the top of many people’s minds, and continues to provide Urban Peak with the resources we need to fight this national problem.

The Mile High Council’s “Hats for Homeless Youth”

The Board of Directors of The Mile High Council, a local agency providing mental health and substance abuse services, sponsored the first annual “Hats for Homeless Youth” event to benefit Urban Peak homeless youth on Friday, November 7. Invited guests were asked to bring donations of suggested toiletries or warm hats, gloves, socks, etc., for homeless youth. Food and drink were served. Approximately eighty people attended the event. Some guests who worked in offices gathered donations from their entire office. It was estimated that \$7,000 worth of donations were given to support homeless youth.

Bridging the Gap Java and Juice

On November 13th, Bridging the Gap at Mile High United Way hosted an event for current and former foster youth called “Java & Juice”. The event was a facilitated youth dialogue on youth homelessness. The facilitators from the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Human Services utilized activities from the National Runaway Switchboard’s “Let’s Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum” to aid in the discussion. Current and former foster youth from across the Denver metropolitan area as well as Elbert and El Paso counties participated in this event.

Stand Up for Kids “Funds for Kids”

The newly reorganized Denver chapter of Stand Up for Kids hosted a happy hour fundraiser and awareness event on November 19th called “Funds 4 Kids” Happy Hour to benefit Stand Up for Kids – Denver Chapter.

Bridging the Gap Service Learning Project

On November 22nd, Bridging the Gap at Mile High United Way sponsored a service learning project. Bridging the Gap at Mile High United Way youth and staff served a Thanksgiving meal for the youth of Rainbow Alley, a local GLBT drop-in center that serves many homeless youth in the Denver area. The current and former foster youth participating in the project had the opportunity to learn about the many facing GLBT homeless and at-risk youth.

Homeless Education Public Service Announcement

A public service announcement sponsored by the Colorado Department of Education aired on local television during November. This announcement provided information about homelessness and the educational rights of homeless children and youth.

Volunteers of America 5K Charity Run

On November 16 the 1st Annual Wash Park 5K Charity Run was held, benefiting Volunteers of America: Bannock Youth Center. The run raised money to help complete the Bannock Youth Center (BYC) remodel project. The BYC serves homeless youth and assists them with their housing and service options. Youth in transitional housing programs meet at the facility to develop life skills. The remodel project will upgrade the 50 year old facility, including upgrades to the kitchen, restrooms and meeting space. Details can be found at: www.washpark5k.com.

Turkey Trot – Homeless Youth Awareness Booth

Mile High United Way provided booth space at their annual ‘Turkey Trot’, an annual 4 mile walk/run event held on Thanksgiving Day. The event helps to raise funds that support homeless and human service programs in the Denver metropolitan area. More than 7600 runners participated in the event. The booth offered information on youth homelessness in Colorado as well as opportunities for community members to get involved in solutions.

For more detailed information on Colorado Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness Month, please visit: <http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/shhp/Homeless-Youth.htm>