

## OPINION

# Viewpoint: Helping homeless youth requires quick, responsive and local intervention

Michele Corey and Angela Parth, guest writers    Published 12:53 p.m. ET March 4, 2020 | Updated 3:28 p.m. ET March 4, 2020

Over 13,000 youth grades eight and above report being homeless in Michigan in 2018-2019 – an experience that makes the traditional pathway to adulthood incredibly hard. Thankfully, we know how to provide support to young people in crisis if we commit to adequately funding programs that are at the forefront of this critical work.

Unfortunately, the reality is that homeless youth are often out of sight and difficult to track.

Teens and young adults are left to sleep on a friend's couch, in a car, in a playground. Without means or support, sometimes having underdeveloped life and coping skills, they can be easily victimized. Tragic outcomes can result when a young person runs away from home, is kicked out, left unsheltered due to family economic upheaval or ages out of foster care with nowhere to go.

At 14, 18 and even 24, brain development and critical executive functioning and decision-making skills aren't fully developed. Factor in trauma and stress and it becomes clear why quick, responsive and local intervention is critical.



**Michele Corey is vice president of programs for Michigan's Children.** (Photo: Courtesy photo)

It's not unusual for a runaway and homeless teen to spiral more quickly from one bad situation to another and descend into mental health crisis, run-ins with law enforcement, crippling substance abuse and chronic homelessness.

Across Michigan advocates, activists and providers in runaway and homeless youth programs are tirelessly working to help our community's young people when they're in crisis, and to help prevent homelessness in the first place. But it's a heavy lift without the necessary resources required to address complex issues and prevent the huge emotional and societal costs of short-term and chronic homelessness.

We were honored to join members of the Michigan Network for Youth and Families, represented by 19 agencies providing services to runaway, homeless and at-risk youth in Michigan, at the Capitol this week to talk with policymakers about their critical work, successes, and the need for more resources to stabilize the lives of young people in Michigan.



These programs have made significant strides in preventing homelessness with just-in-time services that prevent youth from experiencing additional system involvement. Statewide, nearly 40 percent of youth served receive prevention services. Emergency shelters play an important role. With family reunification and stabilization a primary goal, it is heartening to see that an overwhelming 95 percent of youths discharged from emergency shelters are reunited with their families! Equally important for their future well-being and success: 88 percent of those who have accessed an emergency shelter stay enrolled in school.

Youth and adult representatives from the Livingston Family Center and The Connection Youth Services are among those attending. Last year, they provided 41 youth with emergency, safe shelter and transitional living. The street outreach team provided outreach and prevention services to 204 youth facing a housing crisis

Angela Parth is the director of Livingston Family Center, The Connection Youth Services and is a board member of the Michigan Network for Youth and Families. (Photo: Courtesy photo)

or who were at-risk of running away.

Sadly, too many counties in Michigan are under-served by these unique programs, and recently programs have closed because dedicated public dollars are inadequate to cover the cost of serving youth and families with complex mental and physical health.

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Stagnant funding has also led to the loss of valuable and uniquely qualified staff. Isabel's story helps to illustrate the need for local-based shelters for teens and the supports and services that help them get on their feet and moving toward a viable future.

Two years ago, Michigan provided a modest increase – for the first time since 2001 – from \$1.5 million to \$2 million. This increase, while significant, is not enough to bring back closed programs or meet the increased needs of youth and families.

To keep pace with increasing demand for services, we're seeking an increase of \$3 million in state funding. Join us in asking your state lawmakers to play a bigger part in helping our children and families in crisis.

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