

Youth Drop-In Center

A PLACE OF RESPITE AND SAFETY

for young people seeking housing stability



Youth and young adults who are facing housing instability need support. Currently, the community's only immediate support option for young people experiencing housing instability is a referral to a shelter. **Many young people disengage from the system entirely because they feel unsafe, unwelcome, and disrespected in a system not designed for them. Young people need services, not shelter referrals.** We can do better for young people in our community.

A Place 4 Me, the community's initiative to prevent and end youth homelessness, has partnered with Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, young adult leaders, local funders and service providers to introduce a youth drop-in center, where young people seeking housing stability can find respite. The center will be the first of its kind in Cuyahoga County.

Visiting a drop-in center feels like stopping at a library or a café. Young people are welcomed at the door and invited to explore at their leisure or with staff support. A guest will find many amenities, including a fully stocked kitchen, restroom & shower facilities, open common space with comfortable furnishings, communal tables, books, games, TVs, WIFI, and plenty of outlets for charging devices.

There are offices for staff, including peer navigators who have lived through experiences of housing instability and case managers from community agencies. There are computers and resources for job searching, connecting to services, or browsing the internet. Young people may do laundry. The center hosts regular support groups and programming to practice wellness, creative expression, and try new skills.

The experiences at the drop-in center are specific to the needs of youth and young adults. Young people who have lived through periods of homelessness have designed the center's services, resources, and overall atmosphere.

Young people striving for housing stability are more than twice as likely to use drop-in centers than shelters.¹

Young people utilizing services within drop-in centers demonstrated improved social-emotional well-being and sustained connections to services, critical elements on the path to stable housing.²

The development of the Youth Drop-In Center is endorsed and supported by core partners of A Place 4 Me:

- REACH Youth Action Board
- YWCA Greater Cleveland
- EDEN, Inc.
- FrontLine Service
- Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry
- Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services
- Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services
- Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland
- Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative
- Ohio Healthy Transitions Project

Youth Drop-In Center

GUEST PROFILE



We are guests at the drop-in center. Here's what we want you to know about us:

We are in a crucial stage of growth.

From around age 10 to about 25, we discover, learn from, and adapt to the world around us. We build resilience and develop interests, passions, and meaningful goals that shape our adult lives. **Our developing brains are well suited to these tasks, but too often, the systems that serve us are not.** Adults supporting young people must transform dysfunctional and discriminatory systems to ensure we have every opportunity to become a force for good in our communities and society.

We are seeking community and acceptance.

Young people often report severe family conflict as the primary reason for their homelessness. Some may be rejected or abused by their families because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Nationally, 40 percent of young people experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+.

We have places to sleep overnight.

Nearly 75 percent of the young people who came to the county's Coordinated Intake office reported staying with family or friends or were based at a shelter but looking for a better solution. **Center staff will work with us to ensure we are heading to a safe place to sleep. The drop-in center will provide those stepping stones to achieving housing stability and meeting other goals during the transition to adulthood.**

We know what it means to feel welcome.

We know when we are not welcome, and we love a space designed with us in mind. We're dealing with real challenges every day and still want to access the same areas that many of our peers do. Feeling safe and comfortable inside and outside of a place is paramount.

We are students and graduates.

Many college students struggle to meet their basic needs, including food and housing. A national survey found that 9% of university students and 12% of community college students experienced homelessness. Many more students, including 36% of university students and 51% of community college students, were identified as housing insecure during the past year.

We are parents.

About a quarter of young people experiencing homelessness under age 24 are parents of small children. More than anything, we want our children to feel loved, supported, and stable, and we need immediate access to a place that will help us provide that.

The Youth Drop-In Center will operate with five core values, as named by the REACH youth action board:

- Youth leadership & partnership
- Racial & LGBTQ equity
- Hospitality
- A highly relational service model
- Low-barrier access

¹Pedersen, E.R., Tucker, J.S., Kovalchik, S.A. Facilitators and barriers of drop-in center use among homeless youth. *J Adolesc Health*. 2016 Aug; 59(2): 144-153. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4958549>; ²Morton, M. H., Farrell, A. F., Kugley, S., & Epstein, R. A. (2019). *Evidence Summary: Outreach Interventions for Youth Homelessness*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.