



# Seeds of Change

lutheran metropolitan ministry

2023 Volume XXX Issue 2

THE YOUTH SPEAK EDITION

## LMM is a SAFE PLACE for ALL youth



For the young adults in Greater Cleveland experiencing adversity – housing instability, food insecurity and limited social supports – we ask all of our supporters and friends to see them, hear them, and please do not give up on the people who will shape the future of our region.

Some of these youth are aging out of foster care, without the family supports needed to experience a safe emancipation. Others have shared with their family that they identify as LGBTQ+, and have been kicked out of their home due to lack of acceptance. Even worse, there are many young adults who are parents and the financial burden of another mouth to feed is overwhelming for families living in poverty.

On behalf of the LMM Board, staff, funders and faith partners, please remember that **THESE YOUTH ARE MORE THAN THEY HAVE BEEN TOLD**. They are members of our communities. They deserve to gather together and get the help that they need in a welcoming, residential area. These youth do not bring crime to the City of Cleveland. They bring vibrance, diversity, and empowerment..

This is our **Youth Speak!** edition of Seeds Newsletter. We challenge our readers, our neighbors in Ohio City, and people in positions of influence to learn more about our Youth Resiliency Services, plans for the Youth Drop in Center (YDIC), and to meet some of the young people impacted by our work. Learn how you can help LMM empower youth in crisis to find peace and seek justice.



LMM is one of just a few organizations in northeast Ohio on the National Safe Place list. A Safe Place provides access to immediate help and supportive resources for youth in need.

# YOUTH DROP-IN CENTER

The first of its kind in northeast Ohio, the future Youth Drop-In Center (YDIC) will be a place of respite and safety for young people seeking housing stability.



The trauma of housing instability can prevent young people from meeting their basic needs and developing into responsible adults. A youth drop-in center is a place where young people between the ages of 16 to 24, who are striving for the stability of a home, can utilize this resource while working to achieve their goals. The YDIC is an initiative of A Place 4 Me, operated by LMM, and in partnership with Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland and the REACH Youth Action Board. Building upon our continuum of youth resiliency services, LMM will proudly serve as the operating partner.

The proposed future location of the Youth Drop-In Center (YDIC) at 4100 Franklin Blvd. is still opposed by a small group of neighbors based on unfounded fears of how young people experiencing housing instability allegedly will conduct themselves. Despite overwhelming support for the YDIC from the Ohio City community, a few neighbors filed a lawsuit earlier this year with intent to tie up building owner and YDIC operator, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry (LMM), in an expensive legal battle and prevent the agency from providing fundamental services to the youth in our community who need it the most. Jones Day Cleveland is stepping up to support LMM's mission... for free.

## LMM Youth Resiliency Services Perspective

*Lisa Smith, Vice President, LMM's Youth Resiliency Services*



### **What qualifies LMM to operate the YDIC?**

We look forward to operating the new Youth Drop-In Center, and our history and existing work with young people in crisis has prepared us to do so effectively. Through a Youth Resiliency program, LMM has provided services to youth and young adults (YYA) experiencing homelessness and housing instability for more than 34 years. In addition to providing a safe, welcoming, and trauma informed environment, we have a well-trained staff experienced in providing individuals in our care with basic needs and accessing necessary community resources and supports. These seasoned youth program elements prompted LMM to respond to a Request for Qualifications to serve as operator of the YDIC. The YDIC is a much needed resource that will bridge an existing gap within the Cuyahoga County Continuum of Care (CoC). At a time when the service systems are overwhelmed, this new resource is needed more than ever.

### **How does LMM work with youth that present behavioral challenges/difficulties?**

LMM works with youth presenting behavioral challenges/difficulties by having a well trained front-line staff and volunteers experienced in working with individuals impacted by trauma. Additionally, we have licensed clinical staff and a nurse practitioner available 24/7 to assist staff in addressing any mental health and/or substance use issues that may arise.

### **What is driving youth to LMM at present?**

Youth referred to LMM come to us a result of being in the foster care system, involvement with juvenile court, or experiencing homelessness. Whether youth are referred from County systems or as a result of homelessness, the primary reason for youth needing services is the result of family dysfunction, to include, but not limited to, abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and parent-teen conflict.

### **What is LMM's present commitment to youth facing adversity in Greater Cleveland?**

LMM's Youth Resiliency Services (YRS) provides shelter and housing interventions to youth who are challenged by housing instability and perilous situations within their family or personal support system. The interventions include emergency shelter to youth ages 13 to 17, semi-independent (transitional) and independent (permanent) housing to youth ages 16-21. YRS also provides an array of social services, activities and supports for the young people we serve, ensuring their physical, social and emotional needs are met. Everything from continuation of their academic achievement, extracurricular activities, transportation and linkage to medical appointments and mental health services, personal care and hygiene items, and more are made available to our residents. LMM is committed to radical hospitality for the youth we serve. We have a mission level commitment to young people, and a strong history of implementing programs to respond to the challenges of persons experiencing homelessness.



# Youth Perspective

## SHAJUANA & KOURTNEY

**Meet Shajuana** (she/her): As a young person who experienced homelessness multiple times in her life, Shajuana came out of foster care and found stability in the form of a generous scholarship to attend college and receive room and board. Now, this young professional is an advocate for bringing the first Youth Drop-In Center (YDIC) to Cuyahoga County. The project has encountered significant resistance from the immediate neighbors, who fear the young people we hope to serve will bring violence and criminal activity to their neighborhood. Our **Fearless Leader** wants the residents of Ohio City to know there is more to the YDIC than the stereotypes people fear.

**Meet Kourtney** (they/them): Humanizing their personal experience of homelessness is at the forefront of many conversations they have. Now, our **Community Connector** is taking youth homelessness by storm, using skills and experience as a peer navigator to connect young people seeking stability with resources, information and social circles. Along the way, they are making sure that the myths about young people who need help finding a safe place to live are debunked by sharing their own story and the facts that affirm young adults who face adversity want to contribute to their community.

**What has most excited you about the proposed Franklin Blvd. location? Why?**

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**Shajuana:** I was really excited about the location because of the neighborhood. It's close to downtown, it's accessible, the neighborhood is growing, businesses are booming, and there is an opportunity for young people to be part of a community. Young adults experiencing homelessness are also usually experiencing a lack of sense of belonging, lack of community, and lack of resources. The Franklin Blvd location provides a sense of community in a vibrant location.

**Kourtney:** I was excited because it was so close to home. I already live in the neighborhood and now I could refer people to the drop-in center. There are a lot of resources in this area already that I tell people about and now I could add this to my list. I also liked the location being accessible by bus because there is more than one bus route to get there.

**What has most disappointed you since the announcement of the location? Why?**

**Kourtney & Shajuana:** Some of the neighbors aren't as warm as we hoped, with a small group speaking out against us, so that is heartbreaking. That being said, we are so grateful for our many supporters in the community who have spoken up for us. If we could bake each of them a cupcake, we would!

**What is something you want others to know about you and your experience that is not being heard?**

**Kourtney & Shajuana:** We are still working hard to open the drop-in center, and we can really use resources to serve young people. Young adults are still experiencing homelessness whether we open a drop-in center or not. Even without a physical place, we can still provide young people with resources, and we need all the support we can get. The bottom line is: We still need a drop-in center; We are still working to build a drop-in center; And we still need resources and support. The need is now.

**What is a way you would have used a drop-in center while you were experiencing homelessness?**

**Kourtney:** A drop-in center is greatly needed for young people. One of my peers I know is experiencing housing instability and is in a wheelchair, and it is hard for them to access resources. Having somewhere accessible and welcoming to get resources would really help them. Being able to use an accessible shower would be really helpful.

**Shajuana:** If I had been able to use a drop-in center, I would have used it for showering and for hygiene items. As a teenager, I had bad reactions to soaps that weren't meant for my body. Being able to access hygiene products meant for me, do laundry, and have one stable place to get something to eat when I needed it would have made a big difference.

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# A Place 4 Me Perspective

*Christie Sozio, Assistant Director, A Place 4 Me*

## **Describe what A Place for Me (AP4M) does and how the drop-in center project came about.**

AP4M believes every young person deserves a place to call home. Using a collective impact approach, we work toward our mission to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness in Cuyahoga County. To achieve this goal, we focus on three interconnected areas: systems-change, authentic youth partnership, and direct services to young people. Each of these areas has contributed to identifying the need for a drop-in center. Cleveland is the only major city in Ohio that does not have a drop-in center, making it a key missing piece of our system-response to youth homelessness in Cuyahoga County.

AP4M's youth action board, REACH, consists of young people who have personally experienced housing instability. Since 2017, REACH has been at the forefront of advocating for a youth drop-in center. They've explained how having a drop-in center would have helped meet their needs when they were experiencing homelessness and tirelessly advocated for a drop-in center to help others. We also hear from young people we support with direct services that the current system isn't meeting their needs. They've shared their need for a safe place to be that is not a shelter, where they can have something to eat, rest, charge their phones, do laundry, take a shower, and connect with needed resources all in one place. The establishment of the drop-in center aims to address a significant gap in our existing system, a gap that has been recognized by young people with firsthand experience navigating it.

## **Who will utilize the YDIC?**

The youth drop-in center will serve young people ages 16 to 24 working towards housing stability. Each will be a unique individual with hopes and goals that the drop-in center team will help them accomplish. Based on the young people AP4M currently works with and national youth homelessness data, we know the drop-in center will serve young people coming from a variety of situations. About a quarter of those using the drop-in center will be young parents, working on housing stability not only for themselves but also for their children. Some young people will have experienced foster care, and may need supportive adult connections in addition to housing.

We also know that some groups of young people will be over-represented among young people using the drop-in center. Almost 80% of the young people AP4M serves are Black/African American, compared with 30% of the county's population. These young people face additional challenges such as the impacts of systemic racism, the legacy of redlining, and racial discrimination in hiring. Young people who are part

of the LGBTQ community, especially young people who identify as transgender or non-binary, are also overrepresented. These young people experience additional safety concerns including anti-transgender violence and a lack of affirming spaces. The drop-in center is intentionally being designed to meet the needs of young people who are part of these historically marginalized groups and work towards equity.

## **We know a few neighbors have led a charge, legally and socially, against the drop-in center coming to fruition at 4100 Franklin. Talk about the stigma of youth homelessness. What is it, and what is it not?**

It is crucial to recognize that homelessness among young people is not a personal failure or a reflection of character. Young people experience homelessness for a variety of reasons, including aging out of a system, losing a job without a safety net, mental health challenges, fleeing violence, and simply coming from a family struggling with poverty that cannot continue to provide for a young person once they legally become an adult. None of these reasons are personal failures on the part of the young person; they are systemic failures that our society has accepted.

The young people we work with are smart, resilient, resourceful, strong, and capable people who are working hard to achieve what many people are privileged to have – a home, a career, and a support system. Experiencing homelessness can be extremely difficult and demoralizing. It takes a great deal of time to decipher our current system of resources, jump through hoops to obtain documentation, and call landlords and social services providers. Young people are often scared to even share that they are experiencing homelessness, afraid of how people will perceive them and afraid of how they will be treated. If we can support these young people while also reducing systemic barriers, they will be able to achieve their goals and contribute powerful things to our community.

Read more on Christie's perspective in her guest blog for LMM.



# RADICAL HOSPITALITY REALIZED

## Renovations to the Youth Shelter Girls' Bathroom Now Offer a Welcome Space to Prepare for the Day

Nothing says *"I'm ready to face the day!"* to a young person like spending a few fun moments making faces in front of the mirror, after a hot shower, as they dress for the day.

**Thank you, LMM supporters and friends;** your generosity made these moments of youthful mayhem – and joy – possible.

The renovation of the girls' bathroom at our youth shelter, also known as "Westhaven," was completed early this year. Now, young ladies in our program have access to a bathroom that honors their dignity, with a beautiful space that they can gain the confidence they need to prepare for the day.

"Young people in our program are with us because they need a lot of encouragement and acts of kindness as they face a variety of challenges with their mental health, personal safety and overall well-being," said Lisa Smith, the Vice President of Youth Resiliency Services. "It means the world to them to get dressed

in a space that gives them a peaceful start to what will hopefully be a good day, after what may have been a long stretch of time without one."

The boys' bathroom was renovated in 2021, and the staff of our Youth Resiliency Services (YRS) program soon after began receiving requests from the girls in our care; they insisted that the same treatment be done to their restroom.

The Development Team and staff from YRS worked together to share this need with LMM donors, who showed up with strong support! Your donations, which totaled more than \$50,000, have enabled LMM to fully realize radical hospitality for all the youth that we serve.





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216.696.1132

To add, delete or change your address, contact 216.696.1882 or [mail@lutheranmetro.org](mailto:mail@lutheranmetro.org).

## LMM is a Good Neighbor to Have!

Join us for one of these two community engagement events, where we are working to keep our neighborhoods in Ohio City and Campus District clean!

### OHIO CITY, INC. NEIGHBORHOOD CLEAN UP

Join OCI, in partnership with LMM and the Youth Drop-In Center collaborative partners, as we spruce up the area!

#### Saturday, August 19

10:00 AM - 12:00 PM  
Registration 10:00 AM  
Celebratory Social 12:00 - 1:30 PM  
4100 Franklin Blvd., Cleveland, OH 441143

### TEAM UP TO CLEAN UP 2023

Join us for a day of community building, gardening, art, a neighborhood cleanup, a cook out and more!

#### Saturday, August 26

9:00 AM - 1:00 PM  
Registration from 8:45 AM - 9:00 AM  
2100 Lakeside Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114

**RSVP: [LBailey@lutheranmetro.org](mailto:LBailey@lutheranmetro.org)**

Visit [www.lutheranmetro.org](http://www.lutheranmetro.org) for more information

