



COMMUNITY ACTION

Supportive housing program helps Cayuga County young adults become independent

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In January of 2012, the Cayuga Seneca Community Action Agency received funding from the state of New York to operate a transitional living program for homeless young adults, ages 18-25. The New York State Supportive Housing Program for Young Adults is supported in part by funding through the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance, through tenant rents, and through donations received from the community at large with a vested interest in the ever-increasing homeless population of Cayuga County. The transitional house is located within the city of Auburn and provides housing, case management and supportive services for youth who, for whatever reason, may find themselves with nowhere to go.

Many youth entering the program have lost the connection to family, school and other vital support networks that can traditionally pave the way toward a successful transition into adulthood. The lack of support leaves many of these youth vulnerable to academic failure and unemployment, thus creating a downward spiral into homelessness, crime, substance abuse and exploitation. Transitional living programs such as NYSSHP provide the stability and support needed for many of our program participants to begin to work on self-defined goals and a myriad of personal successes that can lead to self-sufficiency in their adult lives.

To date, NYSSHP has provided housing and support to 36 homeless young adults ranging in age from 18 to 23 years. Participants are able to remain in the program for up to two years, thus ensuring that upon leaving, they have developed the skills to live independently and move on to the next phase of their lives. Referrals to NYSSHP come from a number of local organizations, including the Auburn Enlarged City School District, the Cayuga County Department of Health & Human Services, Chapel House, the Cayuga County Department of Probation and the Rescue Mission. Some youth entering the program are self-referred or have been identified by friends as individuals in need of housing.

The NYSSHP program specialist meets with participants at least once a week, providing case management services that address each youth's unique needs. Through the case management services provided, program youth are referred to community partners such as the Cayuga Works Career Center, the BOCES Center for Learning, Domestic Violence Intervention and Cayuga Counseling Services. The specialist is on-hand to make sure that participants understand the basics of job interviews, housekeeping, banking services, money management, self-care, scheduling and keeping appointments and basic time management skills. These are skills that can position a young adult for success when taking on the responsibilities that come with adulthood.

Of our more recent program participants, two are high school students, one is a college student who graduated from high school while in the program, and four are currently employed. Two

young women in the program are beginning to look for permanent housing and plan to share an apartment; both came into the program as homeless runaways who had lost their connection to family. Several youth in the program have made great strides in re-establishing connection to their families; this is one of the most rewarding outcomes we see. Once safely and stably housed, there is often a willingness to begin to repair damaged relationships and reconnect.

While we've had a number of success stories during NYSSHP's first few years of operation, not all youth are successful in the program. Many find the program too restrictive, some manage to find housing more suited to their lifestyles and, sadly, some are asked to leave for a variety of reasons. However, NYSSHP is the first program of its kind in Cayuga County that offers a safe alternative for youth who struggle with homelessness and provides an opportunity for those wishing to break the cycle of homelessness a starting point for success.