

WWW.AYAYOUTH.ORG

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

AYA Youth Collective is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing support and services to youth aged 14-24 who are experiencing housing instability.



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AYA VALUES, MISSION & VISION

MISSION: We create communities, rooted in belonging, for youth experiencing instability to own their future.

VISION: A society where all youth have support, stable housing, and belonging.



Authenticity

We ask. We listen. We keep things real. The more we know and share, the better prepared we are to take actions that break cycles of homelessness and disrupt systemic injustice. We make progress together.

Inclusion

Every person has inherent dignity and worth to share with others. We celebrate youth of all backgrounds and identities as they are and bring their whole selves to the intentional communities we create together. We recognize the unique voices, perspectives, and realities of every individual and work to build youth-centered and personalized support.

Agency

Every person has power and choice. We honor the journey that youth are on and nurture their resilience to act on their strengths. We support healthy opportunities that lead to their thriving.

Community

Every person needs connection to thrive. Through the presence of caring peers, advocates, and mentors, youth can build the relationships they need to be seen and understood. Youth have equitable access to resources critical to their wellbeing that grow their circles of support.

A LETTER FROM OUR CEO



Hello!

I am so grateful to be writing this letter. If you're reading this, you're either interested in AYA's impact in Grand Rapids for young people, or you're a longtime supporter. Either way, **I am thrilled to share with you that AYA is growing and staying true to its mission — we are daily creating communities, rooted in belonging, for youth experiencing instability to own their future.**

In the next few pages, you'll find plenty of **data, stories, and information about AYA's ongoing efforts** to support young people and prevent youth homelessness, but what I hope you leave with is this: **Youth homelessness poses a significant challenge in our community, and we are confident in our strategy to tackle it.** Our method is both simple and complex: Relationships come first. Once trust and genuine connection are established, we can better understand the unique circumstances

that led a young person to their current living situation, enabling us to assist them in navigating their individual path to stability. **Our process is proven. And young people are finding long term stability through resources, relationships, and housing found at AYA.**

Throughout this report, you will also read how **AYA has intentionally expanded its services and community collaborations.** Tapping into one another's expertise is crucial for both our organization and the wider community. We are proud to be in relationship with over 30 community partners, all engaging within AYA's Drop-in Center and Supportive Housing. It has been really important to us that we have strong relationships with most youth serving organizations in town. When community experts come to AYA, a place where youth feel safe and known, transformative work happens. And we see it daily.

Thank you for caring about this work and our mission. We know that we can make an indelible difference and generational change when we intervene in the lives of young people – especially those who have experienced the most vulnerable situations, the most marginalization, and the most oppression. **Thank you for walking alongside us as we walk alongside AYA youth.**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lauren Gamelin VanKeulen". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Lauren Gamelin VanKeulen
AYA YOUTH COLLECTIVE

WHY AYA YOUTH COLLECTIVE?



**We know, that over
200 youth (14-24)
sleep outside or in
emergency shelters
every month in Kent
County.**

**AYA Youth Collective and over 30 Community Partners
are determined to do something about it.**

Highlighted Community Partners

- ◆ Arbor Circle
- ◆ Mindful School of Yoga
- ◆ HealthNet
- ◆ Goodwill Pathfinders
- ◆ Red Project
- ◆ Puertas Abiertas
- ◆ Full Circle Driving Academy
- ◆ Upcycle Bikes
- ◆ Catherine's Health Center
- ◆ The Sources
- ◆ Riverside Guitar
- ◆ Maternal Infant Health at Cherry Health
- ◆ Strong Beginnings at Cherry Health
- ◆ CoC
- ◆ ICCF
- ◆ Mel Trotter
- ◆ Family Promise

AYA'S POINTS OF ACCESS

We meet youth exactly where they are and support them in achieving their goals.

Through low barrier access to our Drop-in Center, we develop relationships, creating access to resources, with the most vulnerable youth, through advocacy, mentoring, and a variety of programming options. With additional support through Supportive Housing and DCTs, long-term stability can be achieved and cyclical homelessness avoided.

Our Guarantee to Youth

You are the author of your story. We will treat you with dignity and respect and provide you with a space to belong.



Drop-in Center

Our Drop-in Center is open five days a week and sees about 600 youth a year. Aside from the 14 to 24 age parameters, AYA requires no application process to immediately start receiving resources. As members, AYA youth can receive fresh meals, have access to creative outlets such as our recording studio and yoga room, and connect to trained professionals such as licensed therapists, financial consultants, housing specialists, and more.



Supportive Housing

Since 2012, AYA has successfully housed over 90 young people. Comprised of 12 homes, each home can house one youth per bedroom - totaling 35 available rooms. Affordable rent and a legal lease can provide youth with a much needed legitimate rental history they may need as they move up and on. Not only do youth have access to fully furnished and affordable housing through this program, but each home has a House Mentor whose role is to provide additional support to the youth as they navigate the responsibilities of living in a home.



Community Housing

Housing assistance can come in many forms — whether it be finding housing through partnering organizations or working with local landlords to house youth through various voucher programs.

AYA Housing specialists walk youth through the various resources throughout the community. AYA knows we cannot be all things for all people, so we eagerly accept the opportunity to collaborate so more young people can be stably housed.

OUR INITIATIVES

AYA builds initiatives based on the input and direct feedback of AYA members. With this data, AYA is focused on 4 key supportive resources that provide wrap-around services meeting health and social needs.



Comprehensive Health

Connecting youth to various health resources to learn more about their own health and reduce barriers to accessing healthcare.



Supportive Employment

Enabling youth to take hold of their future by introducing youth to employers and ensuring youth have the skills necessary for a fulfilling career.



Alumni Network

Offering a continued connection to peers and companions youth have made during their time at AYA Youth Collective.



Transportation

Providing reliable and safe transportation so youth can secure gainful employment and independence.

QUICK YEAR IN REVIEW

OCT

- ◆ Acquired New Land for Jefferson Housing Development Project
- ◆ Presented Comprehensive Health Initiative at the Michigan Health Endowment Fund Conference

NOV

- ◆ Thanksgiving Celebration at Drop-in and within AYA homes
- ◆ Awarded Torch Award for Ethics from the Better Business Bureau
- ◆ AYA Member trip to Comic Con Grand Rapids

FEB

- ◆ Formalized partnership with Catherine's Health Center
- ◆ Increase in Wellness Providers with a Focus on Soft Skills
- ◆ Drop-in Team Became More Efficient in Risk Assessment

MAR

- ◆ Started Parenting Days at Drop-in
- ◆ Continued Streamlining Process for Youth to Receive Resources
- ◆ Reached \$20,000 Granted to Youth Through DCTs

JUN

- ◆ AYA Admin Offices moved to 300 State St
- ◆ Important Representation of AYA at Grand Rapids Pride Fest and Rock the Block
- ◆ Hired Supportive Programs Manager

JUL

- ◆ Supportive Housing Manager spoke to Point Source Youth in New York City
- ◆ Advocates, Advancement, and Grants & Compliance Staff Hired
- ◆ AYA Pool Party with Members at MLK Pool

DEC

- ◆ Awarded 2 Million in ARPA funds for the Comprehensive Health Initiative
- ◆ Holiday Parties at Drop-in and within AYA homes
- ◆ Began partnership with Upcycle Bikes

JAN

- ◆ YHDP - Youth Housing Demonstration Project started
- ◆ Full Circle Driving Academy starts teaching driver's training at Drop-in
- ◆ Successful Financial Audit with No Findings

APR

- ◆ Successful 2023 Coming Home event in which Alumni Alex Wood was Keynote Speaker
- ◆ Maintained Drop-in Support Through Key Staff Transitions
- ◆ Saw an Influx of New and Consistent Volunteers

MAY

- ◆ 3 New House Mentors and 1 Youth Advocate Hired
- ◆ AYA Staff Instructed Camp Blodgett about Trauma Informed Care
- ◆ AYA Staff Presented at Corporation for Supportive Housing

AUG

- ◆ Property Coordinator Hired
- ◆ Gained More Partnerships with Local Businesses through In-kind Donations
- ◆ Successful Golf Outing
- ◆ Hosted Annual Health Fair at Drop-in

SEP

- ◆ Hired 1st Ever Peer Mentor (Member to Mentor!)
- ◆ Wonderful Concert in the Park Celebrating our Community
- ◆ Crossed 550+ Mark for Youth Seen per Year



MEMBER TO MENTOR

Enrique, AYA Alumni, returns to mentor AYA Youth.

Enrique never considered he'd live in an AYA home again after graduating from the Supportive Housing program. And now he's back, but this time as a mentor.

When Enrique lived in an AYA home (then known as 3:11 Youth Housing), he was being mentored by Lauren and Jon VanKeulen. He built a strong relationship, that would be tested by times of

AYA MENTORS

provide consistent support and guidance while assisting young people in the transition to adulthood, including building life skills and navigating relationships. House Mentors expose youth to information and opportunities that can help them make constructive choices about their lives. Mentoring requires time, patience, and consistency. The communities of home are built through weekly house dinners, shared experiences, and daily interactions. AYA Youth Collective recognizes that having stable housing is only the start of long-term stability. It's through community that youth begin to rebuild their circles of support and achieve interdependence.

hardship, but would prove itself strong and enduring. So much so, that he's kept in touch with Lauren and Jon, even after he moved out and continued to live in stability.

Stability doesn't always mean easy, however. And Enrique would tell you that he still needed continued growth even after leaving AYA. The growth was good albeit difficult, and Enrique



**AYA Operates
12 Homes
throughout
Grand Rapids**



**Supportive
Housing
Program can
house up to
35 Youth**

spent a lot of time on self-discovery, reading and learning about the psychology of humans, social tendencies, love, acceptance, and the pursuit of happiness.

Lauren and Jon saw this growth in Enrique and recognized that this was exactly the type of influence and wisdom that AYA youth would benefit from.

“When I was younger, Lauren and Jon tried to understand where I was coming from, and even though they went through some hard times as teenagers too, it was different. I knew they wouldn’t fully get it since they didn’t have the same lived experience as me.”

For Enrique, and the youth he mentors, this is key to the work. Enrique acknowledges that when you’re young, life is difficult and you find yourself skeptical of anyone helping you as you don’t fully know their intentions and may have been hurt before by well-meaning organizations or misinformed individuals.

AYA claims to be a safe place. And as a youth that has worked through the Supportive Program himself, he can vouch for it. When asked what makes AYA a safe place, Enrique points to the value of Authenticity. “It’s a free place - there’s no judgment going on. They’re not giving you that first fake impression. They don’t change the

way they present themselves. They’re not selling a fake dream here. Some days are good, some days are incredibly difficult.” And when youth are going through those difficult days, it’s the staff and mentors that can make the difference. Enrique says that it was Lauren and Jon that first showed him empathy and now he can continue that path by showing empathy to the next youth.

“You don’t know what someone’s going through. You gotta give them love first. And that’s how I feel about the youth.”

Enrique is now the Peer Mentor at the AYA Cherry House. He loves fishing, car culture, and spending time with his son. One of his favorite personal mantras is, “If you’re not uncomfortable, you’re not growing. And there’s no success if you’re not growing.”

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAM

AYA operates 12 homes. Each home is a place where youth can rest, recharge, heal, take action steps towards their goals, and achieve milestones along the way. Residents sign leases and pay roughly \$300 a month for a private room in a shared home with fellow AYA Members.

AYA VALUES IN ACTION

COMMUNITY

Peer Mentoring

Starting this past year, Charles, AYA's Supportive Housing Coordinator, is supporting youth who have shown interest in walking alongside their peers as they navigate the journey towards housing stability.

Peer Mentors share similar roles to House Mentors, assisting in House Dinners, building the desired home culture, and social support for youth living in the home.

AUTHENTICITY

Representation

Within staff, mentors, and the AYA board, AYA believes in the importance of representation — not only as people of color, or those within the LGBTQ+ community, but also folks who have lived experience with homelessness and other types of housing instability. This brings understanding through every level of the organization and is the catalyst for more meaningful relationships, along with educated and empathetic decision-making.

INCLUSION

House Dinners

Once a week, House and Peer Mentors, alongside those who are living in the home, prepare a meal, enabling the residents and mentors to eat together. These inclusive dinner gatherings provide genuine moments of social support and encouragement for relationship building amongst the housemates and mentors. Everyone has a seat at the table. AYA believes these meals are one of the main contributing factors to the success of the Supportive Housing program.

AGENCY

Youth Voices

Change is inevitable when AYA wants to grow to become more accommodating, with the addition of new staff and departments and amend programs to become more efficient. However, by including youth in the decision-making and amplifying their voice, we make more inclusive and appropriate decisions.

[See How AYA is Listening →](#)

YOUTH VOICED DETERMINATION

Youth voices are heard through daily conversations, polls, AYA Board and Youth Action Board involvement, and routine surveys. Here are some findings from a recent survey amongst AYA members.

Positive Reviews

When asked how well AYA's team has met their needs, 95% of youth stated well or very well. Diving a bit deeper, we find that all negative responses are due to low availability of housing resources and opportunities for youth county-wide.

More Housing

Members say the AYA team is good at providing resources, helping, being flexible, accommodating, listening, communicating, and honoring youth agency. For what we could do better, they said we could offer more housing options, be available for more hours, offer support after moving out, and provide more counseling/therapy.

Relationships are Key

When asked what housing options we should invest in, nearly all of the youth chose options that were either shared/community housing or had support staff/mentor. This is encouraging because we know that relationships are key to success and the youth are saying they'd rather have supportive housing than independent housing.

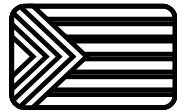
WHO WE SEE

Each year, we track the demographics of youth to ensure levels of accessibility and to confirm known risks amongst marginalized communities.



69.5%
BIPOC

There is an **overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)** amongst AYA Members and those experiencing homelessness. While Kent County is only made up of 27.7% BIPOC, 69.5% of AYA Members are BIPOC.



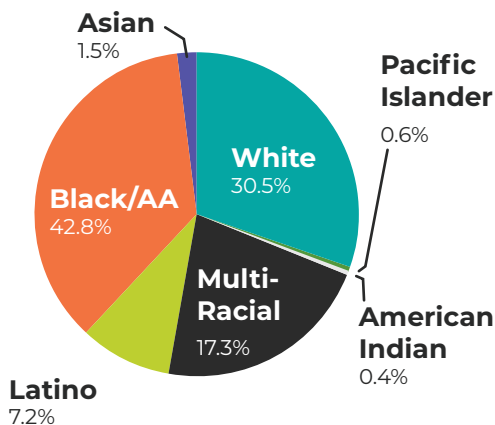
34%
LGBTQ

There is an **overrepresentation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) youth** amongst AYA Members and those experiencing homelessness. While Michigan is only made up of 4-7% of LGBTQ+ folks, 34% of AYA Members identify as LGBTQ+.

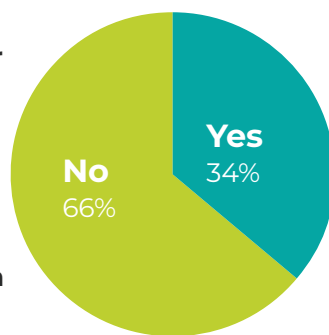


29%
with a Disability

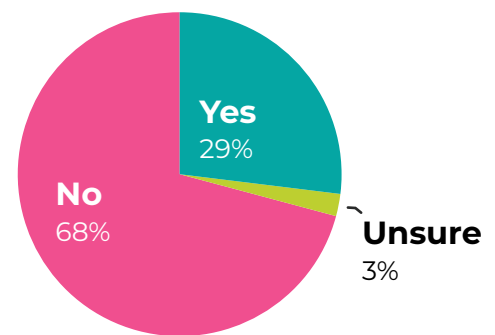
There is an **overrepresentation those with a disability (physical or cognitive)** amongst AYA Members and those experiencing homelessness. While Kent County is only made up of 7.9% of those with a disability (under 65), 29% of AYA Members self-disclose having a disability.



RACE
RACIAL IDENTITY OF MEMBERS



LGBTQ+
MEMBERS IDENTIFYING AS LGBTQ+



DISABILITY
MEMBERS SELF-IDENTIFYING AS DISABLED

2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS LOOKING BACK

AYA Leadership set annual goals for our organization. Below are goals met and exceeded between October of 2022 and September 2023!



20

Additional Youth Served with DCT Funds

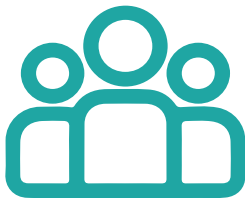
DCT, Direct Cash Transfers, consistently prove themselves to be a sustainable option for youth simply needing financial assistance to avoid or alleviate episodes of homelessness. Thanks to our amazing Youth Advocates and Community Housing team, we had the funds in place and process needed to serve 33 with over \$24,000!



7

Key Hires for Program Expansion

With key hires like additional Youth Advocates for Drop-in and Program Quality, Grants, and Advancement staff, AYA can walk alongside more youth, ensure programs are steadily funded, and then collect data to ensure such programs are useful and efficient.



150

Monthly Donors

Thanks to a generous community, AYA reached its goal of 150 Monthly Donors. Monthly Donations are incredibly important in creating a reliable source of funds in between needed fundraisers and grant support.



50%

of Meals Donated at Drop-in

Reached our goal of 50% of meals donated to Drop-in — an average savings of about \$300/week. These meals, provided by amazing donors, free up time and funds for AYA to support youth in even more creative ways.

LOOKING FORWARD

We've heard from AYA youth - they need more housing options and are continuing to experience barriers outside of AYA. Here are a few ways AYA will be focused on addressing these critical points in 2023 and beyond.

MDHHS is now at Drop-in Full Time

As of October 2023, a dedicated MDHHS Eligibility Specialist, Rachelle Blauwkamp, is now stationed at AYA's Drop-in Center to provide unwavering support to youth facing significant challenges.

According to AYA's VP of Programming, KJ Tucker, "The top three barriers that youth say they experience are fear of the system, stigma that they experienced in prior engagements with the healthcare system, and transportation. Once a young person visits AYA long enough and feels safe, we're seeing them actually connect with providers and establishing relationships, which leads to long-term stability, especially with providers like MDHHS at the table."

AYA's Housing Team is Growing!

A 1.3 Million dollar grant from the Youth Housing Demonstration Project (YHDP) has allowed AYA to hire Kasey Powlenko, previously a Drop-in Youth Advocate, for the role of Housing Resource Specialist. Additionally, we've been able to hire Martel Posey as a Housing Youth Specialist and Colin Dick as a Housing Navigator. Kasey, Martel, and Colin's addition to the AYA Housing Team allows the team to focus more efforts on finding new processes to get youth rapidly housed. This includes focusing efforts on collaborating with private landlords, tapping into YHDP funds to help offset the cost of rental units, and connecting with local organizations to expand housing choice.

Growing From 9 to 12 Houses!

YHDP Funds and important partnerships with ICCF, Mel Trotter, and Family Promise have allowed AYA to master lease 3 additional properties we can then rent to AYA members at significantly reduced rates — increasing AYA's capacity to house 25 youth to 35.

These homes, although owned by partnering organizations, will be completely folded into AYA's Supportive Housing Program with the same structure, social supports, mentorship, and community goals in place.

CALL TO ACTION

JOIN

THE

COLLECTIVE

AYA Youth Collective is Looking for 500 Recurring Donors in 5 Years.

Recurring donors help youth experiencing instability by providing dependable support for sustained programming and planning. AYA's recurring donors also received special swag and more in-depth insight into our work throughout the year.

Help make this possible
by Joining the Collective.
**Become a recurring
donor at any amount.**



Scan Here
to start your
recurring gift.

FINANCIALS

| Source of Revenue | Amount | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| General Contributions | \$761,983 | 32% |
| Corporate Sponsorship | \$244,827 | 11% |
| Foundations & Grants | \$833,525 | 35% |
| Program Revenue | \$51,217 | 2% |
| In-Kind Donations | \$218,689 | 9% |
| Miscellaneous | \$257,356 | 11% |
| TOTAL | \$2,367,597 | 100% |
| | | |
| Expenses | Amount | Percentage |
| Youth Programming & Support | \$1,761,339 | 73% |
| Management & General | \$293,858 | 12% |
| Fundraising | \$344,794 | 15% |
| TOTAL | \$2,399,991 | 100% |

AYA Staff

Andy Allen (he/him)

Vice President of Advancement

Kendra Avila (she/her)

Supporting Housing Manager

Rachelle Blauwkamp (she/her)

Eligibility Specialist

Madelynn Bursley (she/her)

Supportive Programs Coordinator

Nokomis Clarey-Schultz (she/her)

Advancement Coordinator

Tiffany Clarke (she/her)

Vice President of Grants and Compliance

Stephanie Collier (she/her)

Director of Program Implementation

Cierra Craig (she/her)

Supportive Programs Manager

Rosie Cusack (she/her)

Youth Advocate

Colin Dick (he/him)

Housing Navigator

Sara Field (she/her)

Drop-in Coordinator

Sabri Hasan (they/them)

Youth Advocate

Jacqueline Holder (she/her)

Grants & Finance Manager

Krista Josephson (she/her)

Vice President of Finance

Li Kaplan (she/her)

Community Housing Manager

Crystal Kitten (she/her)

Director of Program Quality

Korey Mills (he/him)

Drop-in Manager

Julius “Juice” Montgomery (he/him)

Youth Advocate

Ja-Quari Moore-Bass (he/him)

Youth Advocate

Anthony “Tony” Ochoa (he/him)

Advancement Manager

Martel Posey (he/him)

Housing Youth Specialist

Kasey Powlenko (he/him)

Housing Resource Specialist

Charles Sanders (he/him)

Supportive Housing Coordinator

Rodney Seaberg (he/him)

Property Management Coordinator

KJ Tucker (she/her)

Vice President of Programs

Mark Tucker (he/him)

Vice President of Operations

Liz Welch (she/her)

Administrative Assistant

Lauren Gamelin VanKeulen (she/her)

Chief Executive Officer

Mentors

Atti Bets (they/them)

Brown Peer Mentor

Khadijah Brown (she/her)

Union House Mentor

Mark Hadley (he/him)

Naylor House Mentor

Candee Martin (she/her)

Lafayette House Mentor

Enrique Mercado (he/him)

Cherry Peer Mentor

Kessia Graves (she/her)

Logan House Mentor

Board

Marcos Esparza (he/him)

Greenville Asset Management

Missy Jackson (she/her)

Board President

The Vantage Group

Mike Keller (he/him)

Booking.com

Julius Lema (he/him)

Bissell

DL McKinney (they/them)

Grand Valley State University

Jeremy Payne (he/him)

Cascade Engineering

Shawn Perdue (he/him)

Herman Miller

Corinne Sprague (she/her)

Warner Norcross +Judd

Micalah Webster (she/her)

Henry Ford Health

Alex Torres (he/him)

Merck Pharmaceuticals

Todd Van Haren (he/him)

SecurAlarm



320

PRIVATE
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Please
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AYA YOUTH COLLECTIVE

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