



# BUILDING COMMUNITY FOR YOUTHS WITHOUT HOMES

By Elizabeth Dobbins

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*Community Teamwork Inc. Director of Youth Services Amanda Mallardo and Division Director for Housing & Homeless Services Carl Howell stand in the space in CTI's Dutton Street building that will become Mill You.*

**LOWELL** » A shower. A washer. A dryer. Services. And, hopefully, community.

That's what Community Teamwork, Inc., or CTI, hopes to offer at Mill You, a center opening on the first floor of 167 Dutton Street. Organizers say it will provide low- barrier services to homeless — or at- risk of becoming homeless — youth between 16 and 24 years old.

"A lot of times for young people they struggle to connect with other community resources or identify providers that they trust," said Amanda Mallardo, CTI director of youth services. "It's hard for them to go to appointments, or take the steps necessary. ... This space gives them the opportunity to have a safe environment."

Mill You is expected to open as early as the September. Currently, CTI is renovating the space on Dutton Street using a \$ 250,000 grant from the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation.

The sum covers a portion of the building's ongoing \$ 699,000 renovation. The building, called the Youth Opportunity Center, already has classrooms and a workshop for teaching construction skills to youth. In addition to Mill You, the

organization hopes to add a kitchen for teaching culinary skills, install more offices on the third floor and upgrade the elevator.

Carl Howell, CTI division director of housing and homeless residential programs, said the concept for Mill You developed during a youth homelessness summit last year.

“ We’ve really uncovered that it’s not just homelessness,” he said. “ There’s a lot of other services that are needed for youth in the city.”

The space will provide a place for youth to connect with others in similar circumstances, taking the isolation out situations facing many in the community, Mallardo said. It will also be a way to connect teens and young adults to financial education, housing, food, family mediation, and mental health and substance use services, according to Howell and Mallardo. Some services will be provided through CTI, others will be through other organizations in the city.

“We want to make sure we’re stabilizing these young people so they can transition out of here and have those supports long term,” Mallardo said.

She said CTI is consulting with youth to see what they need and determine specifics, like Mill You’s hours. The space will not be used overnight for housing.

A count of the city’s homeless population conducted this summer by the city found about 75 homeless individuals in the city, according to Kathleen Plath, CTI’s director of development and marketing. Half are under the age of 34.

This school year, a count of homeless students by Lowell Public Schools — which uses a broader definition of homelessness such as students in shelters or sharing housing “due to economic hardship” — found 825 homeless students, or about 5 percent of the district’s population.

Howell said counts may vary, but youth homelessness in on the rise.

Earlier this year, City Manager Eileen Donoghue started a task force to address homelessness in the city. The focus of that program is more on single adults over 24- years- old, but CTI is collaborating on the initiative, according to Howell.

“ I think one of the strong connections will be really linking Amanda’s team ( at CTI) to the Lowell Transitional Living Center to really help provide a youth-focused support to that population and to get them off the streets,” he said. *Follow Elizabeth Dobbins on Twitter @ ElizDobbins*