

We have to talk about housing.

In 2018, Community Teamwork started devoting specific resources toward ending homelessness amongst youth and young adults. In the years since, we've served nearly 600 individuals who have struggled with homelessness or unstable housing, and we've learned some things along the way.

Our youth and young adults aren't always visibly homeless - in fact, it's often said that youth homelessness "hides in plain sight". About 44% of the youth we serve report "couch surfing", or staying somewhere that isn't a consistent home. For some those stays may be longer term, but for others it's a night, or a weekend, or few days. Then they're back to figuring out another couch, or a shelter bed, or a spot outside where they won't be disturbed. For some, it may mean staying in a location that they know is unsafe - where they've suffered abuse, or been exposed to substance use, or domestic violence. For too many, couchsurfing may mean doing what you have to do to survive - trading sexual activity or engaging in other risky behaviors for a place to sleep. Imagine not knowing if you'll have a place to sleep, or what you might have to do to get one. For too many youth, that's the reality of the situation every day.

Our youth and young adults are vulnerable, and none more so than our youth who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. One in five of the youth we served in the last year identified as LGBTQ+, and that's actually lower than national averages. Nationally, 40% of youth in homelessness identify as part of that community, and many still find themselves being asked to leave their homes after coming out. Many others are not safe to remain in their homes as they are. LGBTQ+ youth are at more than **double the risk of homelessness** compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Even more concerning is that LGBTQ+ youth had over **twice the rate** of early death among youth experiencing homelessness. They are at risk of assault or abuse both at home or in the streets. Being who they are, can literally be a death sentence.

Our youth come to us from everywhere in our region. It's early in 2022, and we've already seen youth from 18 cities in the Greater Lowell and Merrimack area. Cities, suburbs and rural areas all see youth falling into homelessness. Youth in homelessness can quickly become adults in chronic homelessness, and the longer someone stays homeless, the harder it is to get out. Working a full time job isn't enough to afford an apartment for most of the youth we serve, and working full time without a consistent place to sleep is nearly impossible. Without accessible, affordable housing, our region will continue to see our youth without a place to call home. If we want to end youth homelessness, we have to talk about housing.

Housing ends homelessness. We encourage anyone who wants to know more to check out <https://www.commteam.org/talkabouthousing/> for more information on how you can get involved, or email us at [talkabouthousing@commteam.org](mailto:talkabouthousing@commteam.org).

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