



Safe Place in King County

**A review of a collaboration supporting
runaway and homeless youth in King County**

Sarah Salomon, MPH

Wendy Nakatsukasa-Ono, MPH



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Safe Place Staff



- Olivia Herring, Safe Place Coordinator
- Morgan Silverman, LICSW, Homeless Prevention Program Manager
- Hedda McLendon, MPH, Director of Programs
- Courtney Markle, MPH, Data & Quality Assurance Manager



- Claire Petersen, Safe Place Coordinator
- Sara Zajac, MSW, South King County Youth Shelter, Program Manager
- Sarah Christiansen, Director of Residential & Outreach Services



Friends of Youth

- Jay Doran, MSW, Shelter & Outreach Program Manager
- Karina Woodruff, National Safe Place Liaison
- Derek Wentorf, Director, Homeless Youth Services

Support for this report and the Homeless Youth and Young Adult Initiative generously provided by

MEDINA FOUNDATION

Thomas V. Giddens Jr. Foundation

Additional acknowledgements for support of Safe Place in King County

King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert
 King County Department of Community and Human Services, Community Services Division
 Thomas V. Giddens Jr. Foundation
 United Way of King County

Cardea team

David Fine, PhD, Vice President
 Kyle Matsumoto, MPA, Project Coordinator
 April Arevalo, MPA, Research Manager
 John Perkins, PhD, Training Manager
 Eric Wheeler, Graphic Design
 April Pace, JD, President/CEO



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Safe Place (NSP) is a program that seeks to ensure the safety of homeless and runaway youth by providing crisis intervention and prevention services, including emergency shelter and family reconciliation, when possible. NSP is currently being implemented in 40 states across the country.

As part of King County's Homeless Youth and Young Adult Initiative, YouthCare launched Safe Place in 2011 and, in 2012, expanded to include Auburn Youth Resources and Friends of Youth. Safe Place fits within the initiative's goal to prevent youth homelessness by preserving family connections when safe and appropriate and by engaging runaway youth/young adults before they become street-involved.

People come to the Y looking for help...staff who encounter young people didn't always feel that they had the tools or resources to respond appropriately. [Safe Place] makes them feel just a little more comfortable in dealing with the needs of people who walk through their door.

—Senior Director,
Young Adult Services Department,
Seattle YMCA

Safe Place in King County reaches out to youth ages 12-17 through direct outreach and by partnering with 28 local businesses and nonprofit organizations. Together, these partners provide over 1,800 Safe Place sites throughout King County, where youth can be connected to Safe Place. To access Safe Place services, youth can go to a Safe Place site or call the 1-800 number to be connected to staff at YouthCare, Friends of Youth, or Auburn Youth Resources who are available 24 hours a day, seven days per week,

365 days per year. Program staff assess the situation and needs of youth during these calls, and then offer to meet in-person and coordinate a safe placement to a parent/guardian, shelter, hospital, or detox facility. In addition, either in-person or via phone, staff also help clients develop a "safety plan" and provide referrals, resources, and supplies as needed.

With support from the Medina and Giddens Foundations, Cardea was engaged to conduct an independent evaluation of the first two years of Safe Place implementation in King County, using existing data collected by Safe Place program staff. Safe Place has established several primary program goals and benchmarks to evaluate the quality of services and success of the program. In this report, we evaluate whether these benchmarks have been met and describe client demographic, service, and outcome measures.

During each call, staff document over 100 demographic, service, and outcome measures on hard copy surveys. Staff also attempt to contact all clients 48 hours and 30 days after the initial interaction to collect a limited amount of data on short- and long-term program outcomes.

From August 2011 through August 2013, Safe Place provided services to 74 clients in King County. Client volume was low during the program start-up year, but increased beginning in the last quarter of 2012, when the program scaled up outreach to youth and recruitment of Safe Place sites. The program has been successful in reaching clients who are diverse in terms of age, gender, and race/ethnicity. The three most common referral sources are Safe Place sites, other community locations, and online via web searches. Safe Place clients face multiple, serious challenges. Many were kicked out by their parents or guardians. Over 60% have suffered physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. One in four comes from a family that is impoverished and/or lacks stable housing. One in five struggles with mental health challenges.



But, there is hope. Over 30% of clients called Safe Place for help before spending a night away from home. After placing the call to Safe Place, all but one client waited for Safe Place staff to arrive. Safe Place was successful in connecting 86% of callers with safe housing. Thirty percent (30%) of clients were successfully reunited with a parent/guardian. Over 90% of clients reached at 48-hour follow-up reported that they would use Safe Place again, if needed, and 100% said they would recommend Safe Place to a friend.

Safe Place is an important program to prevent and end youth homelessness in King County. Safe Place focuses on family reunification whenever possible. When going home is not an option, Safe Place connects clients to emergency youth shelters and other social service resources including case management, counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, transitional housing or independent living arrangements, as well as education and employment training. Together, these activities help to prevent the costly adverse outcomes of chronic homelessness and prepare youth to become productive members of their communities.

Runaway and homeless youth are often reticent to access services for fear that they will be turned over to police or their parents¹. The increase in client volume in recent months and positive feedback from clients at follow-up indicate that Safe Place is successfully building relationships with youth in King County. We hope to see the program continue along this trajectory as the program grows and becomes increasingly well-known throughout King County.

Program Goals and Evaluation Results

1. Assess immediate safety of client and, when needed, help client create a safety plan

Benchmark: Safety plans are created with at least 80% of youth who opt for phone-only response.

Goal met: Safety plans were created with 87% of youth who opted for phone-only response.

¹ Why They Run: An in-depth look at America's runaway youth, available at: http://www.180orunaway.org/learn/research/why_they_run/report/

2. Refer and transport clients to emergency shelter and/or safe housing services as needed

Benchmark: 70% of clients who opt for in-person response will be placed in immediate safe housing/shelter.

Goal met: 86% of clients who opted for in-person response were successfully placed in emergency shelter and/or safe housing.

3. Provide all clients with effective crisis intervention services to ensure immediate safety

Benchmark: At 48-hour follow-up, 85% of clients placed report feeling safe.

Goal met: Of clients with follow-up data, 82% felt safer once they'd entered the Safe Place site, and 100% felt safe with the Safe Place staff.

4. Engage homeless youth and build rapport and trust in Safe Place as a support system for crisis housing needs

Benchmark: At 48-hour follow-up, 85% of clients placed report that they would use the service again, if needed.

Goal met: Of clients with follow-up data, 94% said they would use Safe Place again, if needed, and 100% said they would recommend the program to a friend.

John, age 17

John completed a treatment program but was asked to leave his recovery house because he struggled with the rigid structure. His mother wouldn't allow him to return home. Desperate, he contacted Safe Place, saying that, without help, he would be forced to sleep on the streets. The Safe Place Coordinator met with him and secured a shelter bed at Auburn Youth Resources. Within one month, John found a job, was regularly attending recovery meetings, and reconnected with his mother. He reported that he viewed his shelter experience as time to prepare himself for turning 18 and going out into the world.