

PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOMELESSNESS

Stacey Violante Cote: Who are CT's Runaway and Homeless Youth?

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Most of the time, the first questions I get asked are, “Who and where are these homeless youth in Connecticut?” In defense of people who are asking, this is not a state where we often see our homeless youth. We are not New York City or Seattle where young people are hanging out on the street. And also, in defense of people asking these questions, “who they are” is complicated.

The faces of Connecticut’s homeless youth are varied and many. Take Alex, whose mother was homeless so she sent him to live with his father, who kicked him out. He was sixteen and living in an abandoned building until friends took him in. Take Gabe, who is gay. He was separated from his family who was homeless. At eighteen he was living in a homeless shelter and trying to finish high school. After he was sexually victimized in the shelter, he left to live on friends’ and strangers’ couches.

Then there’s Olivia, who was previously in the care of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Her mother was in and out of incarceration. Olivia ran away from DCF care, had short stays with relatives, short stays in one of the few shelter beds for youth, and eventually drifted down state.

In 2010, homeless youth gained some traction when the legislature passed a bill to allow DCF to provide outreach, shelter and transitional services to homeless youth. However, the funding was suspended in 2011 and the problem remains unabated. A coalition between the Partnership for Strong Communities, Center for Children’s Advocacy, CT Coalition to End Homelessness and the Tow Foundation is taking steps to restore these critical services by funding the first-ever homeless youth study in CT.

This year-long project will interview youth to gather critical data and make systems recommendations. Getting serious about preventing homelessness and closing the achievement gap means understanding and meeting the needs of our homeless youth population. This study will help us do that.

<http://www.psychousing.org/news/stacey-violante-cote-who-are-cts-runaway-and-homeless-youth>

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