NIGHTSTOP EVALUATION FINDINGS
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Foreword

The Nightstop Program has been a huge and welcome addition to the housing options we provide to young people who come to 360°kids. In York Region—with its extremely low vacancy rate, a severe shortage of rental units, and one of the highest housing costs in the province—a program like Nightstop makes great sense. It has been a win-win situation for the youth and the community—young people who have nowhere safe to sleep can get a private and safe place to be for the evening while community hosts are able to “give back” by volunteering unused rooms in their homes to temporarily house young people in need. Nightstop therefore is a very cost-effective approach as it diverts young people from going to shelters in the first place. We are grateful for the partners who have made the program such a tremendous success in the pilot phase, in particular, the York Region District School Board, and for the support of United Way, DePaul, and Raising the Roof.

Clovis Grant,
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
360°kids
Executive Summary

This report is a review of 360°kids Nightstop Pilot. As an external evaluator, Raising the Roof partnered with 360°kids to utilize data collected over the course of the pilot and analyze it to illustrate the success of the program, review ways to strengthen Nightstop, and adapt it more suitably for a Canadian context. The goal of this report is to highlight Nightstop as an option when seeking preventative solutions.
Main Findings

- Overall, the Nightstop Program is perceived positively;
- 93% of youth said being in the host's home was better than they expected;
- All youth respondents attributed an improvement in their mental health to Nightstop;
- Volunteer hosts felt more knowledgeable about homelessness and what leads youth to leave home after engaging in Nightstop training;
- Volunteer hosts felt prepared to host youth as a result of: thorough training; an effective instructor; and regular check-ins with a 360°kids Nightstop Project Coordinator;
- Adaptations to adjust to a Canadian context are necessary, such as accommodating for backyard pools, regional transit systems, and distance between towns where youth may need support and where volunteers are available;
- Creating a more stable option in addition to the night-by-night model such as a Supportive Lodging model would strengthen Nightstop.
Introduction

Nightstop is a shelter diversion program that provides a safe and comfortable place for youth to stay in a moment of crisis. Community organizations work with volunteers who are willing to host a young person in crisis and have a spare bedroom. All volunteers are vetted and trained through a comprehensive system before commencing their volunteering role with Nightstop. Youth in crisis are matched with volunteer hosts in their community and stay with these hosts on a night-by-night basis as they work with a case worker to find permanent housing solutions. Youth are eligible to participate if they are 16-26 years of age, considered “low risk”, and do not have a history of serious crimes. The first Nightstop opened in 1987 in Leeds and there is now a network of 33 Nightstops around the UK. Depaul UK is the accrediting body that is responsible for the strategy, quality, and development of all Nightstop programs. They assess the quality of each service every two years and provide ongoing support and development.

360°kids in York Region, Ontario has brought the Nightstop program to Canada and has made adjustments to make Nightstop fit a Canadian context while keeping the strategy and quality set out by Depaul UK. Youth in the Nightstop program are provided with wrap-around services through connections with all the other services 360°kids has to offer such as counselling, education supports, and employment supports. Hosts in York Region provide youth with a private room with a bed, healthy meals, and do laundry for the youth when they come to the hosts’ home. Additionally, volunteer drivers have been added to the Canadian Nightstop to accommodate for York Region's large geography and limited transit system.
Raising the Roof has partnered with 360°kids to evaluate the pilot of the Canadian Nightstop program. The goal of the Nightstop evaluation is to provide proof of concept for Nightstop and to assess ways in which Nightstop can be strengthened for Canadian communities. With this information, 360°kids and Raising the Roof can support other communities in future implementations of the Nightstop program, in addition to strengthening the current program in York Region.
“One day a neighbour saw Ben with his boyfriend, Nick, at the park and told Ben’s dad about what they saw.”
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Ben, 17, has been hiding the fact that he is bisexual from his dad since he understood his sexuality at 14 years old. One day a neighbour saw Ben with his boyfriend, Nick, at the park and told Ben’s dad about what they saw. Ben’s dad insisted that he breakup with Nick because he refused to have a queer son and would not have someone like that in his house. Ben lied about breaking up with Nick to buy himself some time and looked for a way to get out of the house. Ben found Nightstop and was able to stay with a host family as he and the Nightstop team worked on solidifying plans for Ben to move in with his aunt.
“They remember a time when their home was busy and full of life. As empty nesters, they miss this feeling.”
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Alex and Christina have three children who have all grown up and moved out of the house. They remember a time when their home was busy and full of life. As empty nesters, they miss this feeling. Alex also remembers when an old high school friend of his regularly needed a place to sleep because her mom’s boyfriend would kick her out of the house when he stayed over. Thinking about how close to the heart the issue of homelessness was for Alex, he and Christina looked for ways to help young people experiencing homelessness. The couple found Nightstop and realized that they could easily support a young person in need by providing one of their empty bedrooms and a safe place to stay. Alex and Christina have hosted 3 young people and are excited to see them at the next Nightstop social to hear about how they are currently doing.
“Her favourite part of the job is hearing from the young people after their first night in the Nightstop program.”
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Kelly is a Youth Worker at 360°kids and has worked with many young people in need of support. Kelly believes that many young people who have reached out for help would not do well with traditional services like shelters or transitional housing. She believes that some of these young people would experience better outcomes in a warm and supportive environment. Learning about the Nightstop program, Kelly has taken on the role of a supportive staff member. She steps in and takes shifts where people seeking out the Nightstop program would connect with her. She does this on an as needed basis when the Nightstop Program Coordinator is unable to do this. Kelly helps with connecting young people to host families. Her favourite part of the job is hearing from the young people after their first night in the Nightstop program. She notices such a change in demeanor and energy that she knows even one night in the program can do a lot of good for a young person.
Methodology

Youth

Of 63 youth who have been referred to 360°kids, 16 have been served in the Nightstop program, for a total of 192 bed nights.

All 16 youth were asked to fill out feedback forms, three were interviewed, and seven responded anonymously to an online survey. The interview questions were designed using the risk assessment form. During an intake meeting, this form is used to determine youth’s eligibility to be part of Nightstop.

With such low participation in the interviews, a decision was made to create an online retrospective pre- and post-survey, which asked about their experiences before and after Nightstop.

The survey questions were designed based on information collected from the interviews; this is to ensure a fuller understanding of youth’s experiences in the program is captured.

An analysis determined whether youth believe that differences in their familial relationships, mental health, legal history, and substance use behaviours can be attributed to taking part in the Nightstop program.
Volunteers

Of the 131 individuals who attended volunteer information sessions; 24 hosts applied to the Nightstop program; 20 volunteer homes were trained, and 14 graduated to become vetted hosts. 11 of these hosts are currently active. A new addition to the volunteer team is a Nightstop driver who was also screened and trained. 6 host volunteers took part in a focus group facilitated by representatives from Raising the Roof and 360°kids. Hosts responded positively to the option of an anonymous online survey that was proposed in response to informal feedback about the focus group. 7 volunteer hosts responded to the online survey regarding their experiences with Nightstop, their perspectives on how Nightstop can be more effective, and what they like about the program.

131 individuals attended information sessions.

24 hosts applied to the Nightstop program.

20 volunteer’s homes were trained. And 14 hosts were vetted.

6 host volunteers went through a focus group.

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PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS THROUGH COMMUNITY HOSTING
Program Personnel

Four staff members were interviewed to provide insight on their perspective of how the Nightstop program is going. Two of the staff are directly involved with the program while the other two are staff that support the program when extra help is needed. Additionally, two students completing their post-secondary program placements with the 360°kids Nightstop program were also interviewed to include a different personnel perspective on the program.
Results

Youth
All three of the interviewed youth felt supported and comfortable taking part in the Nightstop program. Though there were some challenges, they associated positive outcomes with the program. Two interviewees felt that a lot has changed after Nightstop. One young person noted,

“It was an opportunity to self-care for myself and take care of myself the way I want to.”

another reflected that:

“after Nightstop, I have more confidence. Yeah, because my mom used to say bad things to me. Yeah, and like now I have people who take care of me and counseling with [her counselor at 360°kids].”

The youth interviewed identified issues with some of the rules, such as limited access to the internet, inability to leave their items at the host home, and having to contact the hosts through Nightstop. Despite these limitations, one young person still believes that

“things would’ve got harder.”

NIGHTSTOP
Preventing homelessness through community hosting
“It’s a good program for kids in my situation. Nobody wants to go to a shelter or a youth home. Being a young girl, I was kind of scared of that idea, I would’ve rather died than go in there. Those were my thoughts. There are people in worse situations than I am, so I never wanted to take up space for just not getting along with my family.”
She goes on to say,

“It’s a good program for kids in my situation. Nobody wants to go to a shelter or a youth home. Being a young girl, I was kind of scared of that idea, I would’ve rather died than go in there. Those were my thoughts. There are people in worse situations than I am, so I never wanted to take up space for just not getting along with my family.”

Specifically, in referencing the host’s homes, youth consistently noted that they felt welcomed and respected. One respondent appreciated that “[the hosts] would ask me what I wanted to eat for breakfast and lunch, and they would ask about my feelings (like if I was sad or happy)”. The youth were willing to respect their hosts’ wishes and in return, found that the hosts were very accommodating. One young person shared that,

“It was very comfortable! I didn’t feel like uncomfortable at all. I smoke cigarettes. And Jacquie told me that some volunteers don’t feel comfortable with smoking cigarettes. And I was like ‘okay I won’t smoke on their property if they don’t like it’. But the volunteers were okay with it. A good match was made by Nightstop in this case as this youth was placed with a host family that was comfortable with them smoking outside.”
“It was very comfortable! I didn’t feel uncomfortable at all. I smoke cigarettes. And Jacquie told me that some volunteers don’t feel comfortable with smoking cigarettes. And I was like ‘okay I won’t smoke on their property if they don’t like it’. But the volunteers were okay with it. A good match was made by Nightstop in this case as this youth was placed with a host family that was comfortable with them smoking outside.”
Results from the feedback forms indicate that 43% of youth said that they would have slept rough had they not been in Nightstop, and 93% of youth said being in the host’s home was better than they expected. Online survey responses reveal that 85% of youth rated their overall experience with the program as very good.

When asked about the program one young person said,

“There was all benefits. I was brought into a more permanent home that I couldn’t have done without Nightstop.”

Another young person noted both the benefits and challenges.
“Benefits: Quick process. Taught me things I can use now and later in my everyday life. Helped me find stability and a positive, constant routine. Helped me find my way and get on my feet. Showed me the good in people. Best thing I ever came across. Challenges: I felt like I didn’t fully understand what it was in the beginning. Not many people know about it. Found it very hard/difficult to leave hosts’ home in the end.”

This shows that it is important for the Nightstop team to reach out to the community and share information about the program so that more youth may benefit from it.

Some added benefits that youth experienced as part of the Nightstop program were: access to the 360°kids’ Hub and moving to the Residential Youth Homes Program where they can live more independently after Nightstop; paid bus fare; extra clothes; toiletries; and a bagged lunch for when they have to leave the host’s home.

Additionally, 85% of respondents said they felt comfortable engaging in conversation with the hosts, and 71% rated their experience in hosts’ homes as very comfortable. Youth were asked if Nightstop played a role in their primary strengths, family relationships, mental health, legal history, and use of substances.

5 of 6 respondents said it played a role in their primary strengths, 3 of 5 respondents said it played a role in their family relationships, 6 of 6 said Nightstop impacted their mental health, 1 of 5 respondents said Nightstop impacted their legal history, and 1 of 5 said it impacted their substance use.
5 of 6 respondents said that Nightstop has played a role in their primary strengths.

3 of 5 respondents said Nightstop has played a role in their family relationships.

6 of 6 said Nightstop impacted their mental health.

1 of 5 respondents said Nightstop impacted their legal history.

1 of 5 said it impacted their substance use.
These results may be attributed to the short-term nature of the program. A longer-term model would be valuable in determining the different impacts on things like substance use and legal engagement. One young person stated that,

“I used to be scared of trying new things but Nightstop has made me feel more open to new opportunities that will help me. My mental health has been better for the time I’m at a host home because I’m not in my own home where stress is triggered.”

In regard to youth’s mental health, 33% of youth said their mental health was good or very good prior to Nightstop, while 83% of youth said their mental health was good or very good after Nightstop.
Volunteers

Volunteers had a generally positive response to the Nightstop program and seemed adamant that this program is an important one. They understood that housing is hard to come by and that they

"are going to make a difference in providing [the youth] shelter for even just a night and allowing them to sleep in a bed and giving them good food."

Additionally, volunteers felt responsible for the youth in their community as they imagined their own children in the circumstances that lead youth to leave home. Volunteer hosts also discussed previous misconceptions they had and the reactions their families had when they decided to host youth with Nightstop. Family responses included concerns, such as the risk associated with letting strangers in their home, how "troubled" the youth may be, and the idea that the program is scarier than it actually is. The group generally felt that they were much more knowledgeable about homelessness and what leads youth to leave home than they did before joining Nightstop and engaging in the training.

Volunteers had important feedback regarding the benefits and drawbacks of Nightstop in Canada. Volunteers felt prepared to host youth as a result of: thorough training; an effective instructor; and regular check-ins with a 360°kids Nightstop Project Coordinator. Hosts regularly connected with youth; however, this does not imply that youth will get along with every host family. One youth, for instance, did not get along with the host family of one home but got along very well with another. This illustrates the importance of connecting youth with families they feel comfortable with. In some instances, the same youth can react very differently in different host homes.
In response to the concept of Nightstop Plus, which allows youth to stay in the Nightstop program for longer than the 3-week limit, volunteers responded positively by suggesting that

"[Nightstop Plus] would be easier because it's more of a routine."

Most of the drawbacks that volunteers identified were related to restrictions based on the rules of the program, such as not being able to drive the youth or the need to vet people interacting with the youth, even if only for a short time. Overall, volunteers did feel that the program was a “fantastic idea” and that the organization should continue reaching out to involve more young people and prospective hosts. One host noted that she would like [her] daughters to be able to visit [her] home with their boyfriends, but they can't because the youth is there. [Her] daughters have not been vetted and neither has their boyfriends.

When responding to the online surveys, all hosts noted that Nightstop helped them learn about homelessness in York Region. All hosts stated that Nightstop works for York Region and have provided some suggestions for improving the program. Eighty-three percent of volunteer hosts noted that a drawback of the program was the requirement for youth to take their belongings with them every day. One host suggested youth be scheduled at a host home for more than one night at a time, so they can leave their belongings in the home between nights with the same family.

All respondents felt positive about their own relationship to the program where they all said their experiences were good or very good in regard to emotional support, level of information received, and availability of timely responses. One host suggested it would be helpful for hosts to be provided with:
for hosts who may go a while between instances of having a young person in their home. When asked about taking part in the model that lasts longer than 3 weeks, hosts either said they would be willing or interested in learning about how this model might work.

33% of respondents said they would be willing to host a youth for months rather than just weeks. One specific concern was whether they would be able to have family and friends in their home while hosting a youth with this longer-term model.

Hosts were asked about what would be helpful in encouraging their continued participation in the program. One host simply stated that we: “keep the program going”.

Volunteers were also asked how they would discuss the program with prospective hosts. One host said that:

“this program helps keep youth off of the streets where they could be in dangerous situations. By inviting youth into host homes, we are demonstrating that the youth matter regardless of their previous life experiences and that people do care about them. Obviously, you may feel some anxiety about opening your home to a youth, but it probably pales in comparison to the anxiety that the youth feels entering your home.”
Another host pointed out that:

“[the program] hardly impacts your daily/nightly routine. In fact, the more natural the situation for the youth, the better. They don’t need to be entertained.”

This can help minimize any fears or concerns future hosts have as they see that current hosts feel very comfortable with their role.

Program Personnel

Program personnel had a unique perspective of the Nightstop program through their interactions with volunteers, youth accessing the service, and their knowledge of the mechanics of the program. Staff described the strengths of the program pointing out the support from DePaul, the organization in the UK that has been running Nightstop successfully for over 30 years. One staff member mentioned that DePaul provides guidelines, procedures, and tools for the program while also allowing for 360°kids to maintain organizational procedures. The use of existing community resources is another strength of the program so:

“In York Region, we have a ton of larger family homes that have vacancies...and their kids have grown up and they're gone... We're reusing, repurposing housing stock that's in our community.”
Benefits to the youth participants were also discussed. From one staff member:

“I think the strongest benefits are making connections to community and positive adult role models. So many times when kids are homeless they find themselves alone or in institutions, whereas when they have these family connections, if they stay a few weeks in this family home, they’ve now met a family in the community that, if they stay, might stay friendly and might be a resource in future. So it doesn’t have to be just temporary, you never see the kid again type of scenario. And it may be, and that’s ok too. So I think one of the best benefits is they have a sense of what a caring family feels like.”

Though youth and hosts cannot exchange personal information, Nightstop socials are an opportunity for hosts and youth to reconnect and for hosts to take time to be that resource mentioned above. In addition to the benefits of any program, challenges, and drawbacks are expected. Specifically, the fact that the youth have to take their things with them.

“Some youth have a hard time with that because they still in essence feel a bit homeless in that they don’t have a place where they can drop their things.”

Both staff believed lack of resources in regard to staffing and volunteers were a challenge for the program, illustrating the struggle of young people not being allowed to stay with the same family for too long but having a limited number of families to support these young people. The lack of natural connection between the host and the youth was seen as a challenge as policies provide barriers that include the inability for
youth and hosts to directly contact each other, inability for youth to use the internet, and lack of stability in homes as the youth move around. Transit across such a large region was also noted as an issue. Since some towns (Newmarket, Aurora, Richmond Hill, and Keswick) require many more hosts, young people from these areas may have to be transported to towns not accessible by transit because that is where hosts are available on a particular night.

Staff discussed the importance of the Supportive Lodging model complementing the Nightstop model. Having both programs allows for youth who only need a few nights of support and youth who need longer-term support to experience the family environment and relationships that Nightstop provides.

"Supportive lodging gives that kid a family, that they can go to university and college, but now they have a connection, they have that actual network of support, that safety net, that maybe they can come home to Christmas dinner there…And we always talk about how do we build that network of support, beyond 360°kids? We can’t be there their whole lives, we need to build that safety net in the community, and this was a great way to do it."

Over the course of the Pilot, the Nightstop program has evolved since the beginning of the pilot in 2017. As one staff member mentions:

"Now that we’ve had quite a few youth use the program, and have hosts that have experienced hosting with youth from various backgrounds and with various needs, whether training new hosts or talking about the program, I’m coming from that experience. Hosts are now coming into the program with more information than they would have received from when we first launched Nightstop, which is creating much more comfortable hosts when they commence the
training or accept their first youth. They have that much more knowledge to be able to go into the program and know what to expect.”

As staff became more familiar with the guidelines that DePaul laid out, the way the program was laid out had flexible interpretations of these guidelines to better fit the Canadian context. Specifically, one staff member noted the importance of gaining volunteer drivers as taking public transit across such a large region is difficult. Backyard pools and possible rules around use while a young person is at a volunteer home were also noted as distinctly particular to Canada and adaptations to Nightstop were made with the Health and Safety board for these adjustments.

Child and youth workers based out of 360°kids drop-in center have taken a supportive role in the Nightstop program. They both take part in the Nightstop program on an as-needed basis. They take part in the intake of new young people, reach out to hosts, and arrange connections between youth entering the program and the homes they will be staying in. These support staff highlighted strengths of the program such as the focus on safety for both the youth and hosts as well as the needs of the young people accessing services. However, some drawbacks were noted.

Specifically, support staff mentioned that there needed to be more hosts and staff available. More hosts are necessary to ensure young people in the Nightstop program can stay near their schools, homes, and places of employment. More staff are needed to ensure that the program runs smoothly when the Program Coordinator is away. Support staff suggested that more information and education on the program and the youth involved would help improve the program. One support staff member noted that educating hosts about the youth they would encounter as part of the program can help with host's confidence to take in different and more diverse youth. Another support staff member suggested the development of a manual or other documentation to help those who take on Nightstop relief shifts know what to do, who the hosts are, and what is involved in Nightstop. Though there is an existing Nightstop
coverage document, a more comprehensive document is needed for any staff who are not regularly embedded in the Nightstop program.

Post-secondary students working toward completing degrees and diplomas in the social services field have worked to support the Nightstop program. Students noted strengths of the program, highlighting that Nightstop is a program that prevents homelessness and diverts young people from experiencing the shelter system. Students also noted that increased knowledge of Nightstop has helped the program evolve in that

“a lot of kids hearing about the program are then coming to us themselves rather than through a referral partner. So, self-referrals which has helped grow the program.”

When asked about challenges with the program, one student acknowledged the challenge of not being able to accept some youth because of the criteria that needs to be met. This respondent recalled feeling desperate when youth cannot be accepted into the program while knowing that any alternatives they suggest to the youth are not guaranteed. The suggestion of training hosts in mental health first aid was mentioned by one respondent.

“[360°kids] could start accepting youth who have some mental health needs. Maybe not as many coping strategies but then our hosts are then trained in this aspect and if they ever come into a crisis while at the host home, they
have some training, some information that can help them in that situation."

By expanding the criteria for eligibility, more youth may be eligible for this program that allows for same night service.

Even with staff being transparent with the young people schedules, throughout their time in Nightstop, (i.e. letting youth know in advance when an opening will be available in another 360°kids service), one student noted the night-by-night design of the program can be unstable and stressful as youth wonder:

“Am I going to get into the residential program, am I gonna have somewhere to stay tonight?”

Transportation was highlighted as another drawback of the program as the distance between a young person’s home town and the only available host home for one night can be considerably far.
“This program helps keep youth off of the streets where they could be in dangerous situations. By inviting youth into host homes, we are demonstrating that the youth matter regardless of their previous life experiences and that people do care about them. Obviously, you may feel some anxiety about opening your home to a youth, but it probably pales in comparison to the anxiety that the youth feels entering your home.”
Discussion

The feedback provided by youth, volunteers, and program personnel provides an opportunity for learning and adapting Nightstop to a Canadian context. A large concern was the short amount of time that youth are allowed to stay in the program and Supportive Lodging may be a way to deal with this concern. Although there was some struggle with limitations from the rules like not being able to contact hosts directly, unable to use host's Wi-Fi, and unable to leave personal belongings behind, the hosts and youth made the best of the situation. Contacting each other through Nightstop also enables the Nightstop team to be kept aware of everything that is happening with the youth and the hosts. When extending some young people's stay past a week at a particular host home, Nightstop program personnel will ask the host if they are willing to sign a Wi-Fi usage agreement with the young person and allow them to leave their belongings in the home.

Some concerns were noted with the extent of vetting that hosts family and friends need to go through in order to be in the home at the same time as the youth. Although hosts pointed out that there has to be a level of trust that they won't allow in anyone who would harm the youth, it is also important to remember that the youth are in vulnerable circumstances and their safety is paramount. Further communication might help hosts understand why this vetting process is so necessary, however, adaptations may be specific to the Supportive Lodging aspect of the program where hosts and young people are a lot more familiar with one another.

The thorough training received positive feedback from the hosts and could be seen in the comfort level of the youth. Families who wanted to support their communities and were trained how to do so have helped with the smooth transition for youth joining the program. All three of the youth shared how comfortable they felt on their first night in the program and program personnel discussed the importance of a warm transfer to ensure this comfort. Discussion among the hosts as to how they
welcomed the youth in their own ways may support new hosts on the first night. Though youth and hosts got along well, for the most part, the rare occurrence with an incompatible match can be easily dealt with. As more hosts join the program, there will be more options in placing youth that may allow for selecting a better fitting host home for each youth.

Additionally, youth are able to read through the profiles of prospective hosts before they decide on which home they would like to go to. Outreach and educating York Region about the importance of this program will help with building a network of Nightstop volunteers. As the Nightstop program personnel reach out and present at schools, more young people learn about the program. This may include young people at risk of homelessness and young people who may have a home with a room to spare. The important information to share about Nightstop to anyone in the community, especially with prospective hosts and youth is that many youth who have been part of Nightstop have experienced positive outcomes, the interactions between youth and hosts are regularly comfortable and respectful, and the process of welcoming a youth into one’s home is a lot less scary but a lot more impactful than it may seem.

“The most important thing is that we get away from institutions; youth don’t thrive there. I think that a family environment is really key, and a great way to get the community involved. People always wonder what they can do to help. Well, here’s what they can do: take a young person into your home to feed and care for them for a brief time. It costs a lot less than to house a youth in an institution and it’s so much better for the youth. Young people belong in families, not institutions!”