



NEWS

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Youth In Need Recognizes National Runaway Prevention Month with Original Theater Production

ST. CHARLES, Mo., Nov. 20, 2009 — It's a quiet epidemic here in St. Louis. According to the St. Louis Homeless Census, approximately 5,500 children and teens under the age of 18 are homeless in St. Louis each year, and because there are so many homeless youth, even children, the average age for a homeless person in St. Louis is estimated to be as low as 9.

November is National Runaway Prevention Month, and Youth In Need has been teaming up with St. Louis County Youth Programs to develop *Out of the Shadows*, an original theater production being created to raise awareness of the issues facing runaway and homeless youth.

"A lot of times, people don't see homeless youth because they are in the shadows," said Kendra Elliott, Youth In Need's Street Outreach Manager. "Sometimes you might see youth asking for money or selling drugs on the street. But that's not the whole story." Through *Out of the Shadows*, the 16- to 24-year-old GED students in the St. Louis County Youth Programs hope to change that perception and bring a voice to a hidden issue.

Stories emerged from discussions in a writing skills workshop. Elliott encouraged the students and helped compile the stories that eventually became the script for *Out of the Shadows*. The production touches on a range of heavy issues that are putting a generation of runaway and homeless youth at risk: drug use and abuse, forced prostitution, suicide, family conflict and issues of sexuality.

The youth are in charge of every aspect of the production, from set design and construction to directing and acting. "The students hope this production helps people realize that homeless youth are not just statistics. Each one is a person with skills, hopes and dreams that are often overshadowed by their circumstances," Elliott said.

Out of the Shadows will be performed during a free presentation at 7 p.m. on Nov. 24 at Xavier Hall on St. Louis University's campus at 3733 West Pine, St. Louis, MO 63156.

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Youth In Need is an eastern Missouri regional agency serving more than 10,000 children, teens and families each year with residential group homes, homeless street outreach, education, counseling and support groups, foster care case management and infant, child and family development programs. Youth In Need's mission: ***Believing in the power of potential, Youth In Need's mission is to provide nurturing environments and educational opportunities so children, youth, and families will find safety and hope, achieve their goals, and build a positive future.*** Youth In Need's programs and services are funded, in part, by its 2009 Children's Partners, including Monsanto as the exclusive Principal Partner. Visit www.youthinneed.org for a complete listing of Youth In Need's Champion, Guardian, Trustee and Patron Partners.

Runaway and Homeless Youth by the Numbers:

- 12- to 17-year-olds are at a higher risk of becoming homeless than adults.
- 80 percent of homeless girls reported sexual abuse.
- 34 percent reported sexual abuse before leaving home, and 43 percent reported physical abuse.
- 32 percent of runaway and homeless youth have attempted suicide.
- 28 percent have been solicited to trade sex for food, shelter or drugs.
- The ration of homeless males versus females is split evenly; however, females are more likely to seek services.

Source: National Runaway Switchboard

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