



Minnesota Host Home Network

Thanks to Our Donors!



Researcher Khalid (Kay) Adam speaks to guests at our spring house party about his interviews with staff who work with youth aging out of foster care, which revealed their struggles to support youth in making ongoing connections with caring adults. Jan Kleinman and Fadil Santosa were our gracious hosts.

We appreciate all those who have stepped up to generously support our work in the past year — whether through a recurring monthly contribution, a one-time gift as part of a matching grant program, or a collection offering from their spiritual community.

And thanks too to all who came out to our third annual Lowbrow Giveback Monday held in conjunction with Avenues for Homeless Youth! We had a yummy good time!

Individual Contributors

Khalid (Kay) Adam
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Director's Report

Let's Hear It for Persistent Optimism!

What's the #1 issue facing youth who are homeless? "Loneliness," Frankie said, which even I was not entirely prepared to hear. Sure, I extoll the transformative power of caring relationships for homeless youth, but somehow, actually hearing a youth admit to loneliness—that's pretty stark ... and vulnerable.

How to respond? It can be tempting to sidestep. Coming face to face with the unmet primal need for human connection can be wrenching. But the MANY webinar, where I "met" Frankie, actually gave me hope. (MANY is a national network promoting innovative practices to serve vulnerable youth.) Frankie, a peer navigator at Tumbleweed, which serves homeless youth in Phoenix, had been helping other youth build Circles of Support, giving them the courage and tools to reach out and reconnect with caring people from their past.

I wanted to learn more and I'm excited to report I'm just back from visiting Tumbleweed, where I had the opportunity to observe Bob Luft, who directs the Circle of Support program, conduct a "boot camp" for youth. My big takeaway was Bob's stance of persistent optimism. He believed — even when the youth themselves were skeptical — that there were people in their lives who not only cared about them but would be willing to show up for them.

"So do you have people you'd like to invite to a meeting?" Bob asked a young man who'd generated a list of people during the boot camp.

"Yeah," he said, "but they won't come."

"That's two different things," Bob observed. The young man explained that the people he'd listed were either working all the time or lazy. Bob devoted some time to strategizing: What if the Circle of Support meeting were held on a Saturday? Or there were two meetings — one on each side of town? He acknowledged the logistical challenges, but then Bob did something that I don't think always happens. He asked: "It would mean something to you if they came, wouldn't it?" And the young man with the dyed blue Afro slowly nodded yes.

Confronted by formidable defenses constructed to keep deeply vulnerable feelings at bay, Bob had persisted. Validating that underlying very human need felt powerful — and hopeful.

— Jacqueline White

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Please Note

Our original fiscal sponsor, MAP for Nonprofits, merged with Nonprofits Assistance Fund, which gives us access to an even fuller array of services. The new entity is named Propel Nonprofits.

We welcome your donations. Kindly make checks payable to "Propel Nonprofits" with "MN Host Home Network" in the memo line and mail to:

Propel Nonprofits
One Main Street SE, Suite 600
Minneapolis MN 55414

[Or donate easily online through GiveMN.](#)

We greatly appreciate your support!

Opening Doors in Elk River



Minnesota Host Home Network director Jacqueline White (center) with staff, volunteers, and board members from Open Doors for Youth.

We're excited to partner with Open Doors for Youth, a drop-in center for youth experiencing homelessness in Elk River, a semi-rural city north of the Twin Cities. The organization recently received Homeless Youth Act funding from the state of Minnesota to hire their first executive director and institute a Circle of Support approach. At a recent planning session, Open Doors co-founder Marilyn Olson observed, "Not having housing options available for our youth means we have to think more creatively. It makes sense to focus on their relationship resources."

The Struggle to Facilitate Caring Adult Connections

Thanks to funding from the Graves and Sauer foundations, the Minnesota Host Home Network conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with staff from the 15 agencies that receive Healthy Transitions Homeless Prevention funding. One benefit offered by the state program, which aims to prevent homelessness in youth aging out of foster care, is to identify and develop "at least one permanent connection to a caring adult."

We found that staff not only struggled to support the youth in identifying permanent adult connections, but that there was confusion about who would even count as a permanent connection. For example, many staff listed paid positions, such as case manager or counselor, as a possible permanent connection when those relationships, while often very helpful, are by definition time limited.

Network director Jacqueline White authored a report detailing our findings, surveying the relevant research literature, and recommending training to identify and support relationships with caring adults the youth already knows. To obtain a copy, contact her at jw@jacquelinewhite.net.

Read All About It! Spreading the Word About Our Work

- Working with our Huddle participants, the Minnesota Host Home Network developed Six Best Practices for Host Homes, which were published in *CW360°* (Spring 2017), the journal of the Center for the Advanced Study of Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota. See "[No One Can Thrive Alone: Exploring the Host Home Option](#)"
- A comprehensive Washington State report, "[Research and Recommendations on Host Home Programs](#)," profiles the Minnesota Host Home Network and the Twin Cities GLBT Host Home Program, while also noting that there is no entity "coordinating host home work at the national level. There is also no existing body of literature that sets objective standards for host home programs or any longitudinal studies to determine host home program efficacy." That's something we are determined to change!
- University of St. Thomas Professor Ande Nesmith, our advisor on The Interview Project, presented a session at the Council on Social Work Education, Oct 20th, in Dallas, on our interviews with youth in informal hosting arrangements. The big take-away? The youth find the arrangements deeply meaningful, often describing them in terms of family.

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