

2023 Budget Reallocation Testimony – Northeast Kingdom Youth Centers

Matt Kiley : Introduction (10 Seconds)

- Newport Community has identified need, vision, and response with 16 members of an Advisory Council.
- Introduce Chase as a member of the student Advisory Council.

Chase : Youth Voice (1.5 min)

The northern Vermont community, especially the town of Newport, is void of accessible, affordable, and an accepting space for teens. We have a need for a space where our community can flourish, and The Hive can fulfill that role. The Hive, which stands for Help Include Voices Everywhere, will create a safe, open, and creative space for teens of Newport City. A community for students to gather without the added pressure of school. This will be a place where they can develop and learn, cultivating a productive and inclusive community.

The student body needs an outlet for expression and community building. A stronger generation of teens creates a more tightknit and caring community for all. Our council of students from all areas of the NEK give a voice to our future generation and provide a space for new ideas.

To be part of this process assures the opinions and values of those who utilize the space will be heard and taken seriously.

Elizabeth: Program Development (1 min)

Hello, my name is Elizabeth Emmett and I am the Director of Family, Youth and Early Education programs at NEKCA (Northeast Kingdom Community Action) serving Caledonia, Orleans, and Essex Counties. Our youth focused programs hold contracts with AHS, DCF, DOC, and Elevate Youth to provide specific youth services throughout the NEK. However, none of these contracts allow for supervised youth spaces or prevention activities like the HIVE.

According to the most recent Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey completed in 2021, young people in middle and high schools are reporting higher rates of experiencing bullying, vaping and alcohol use, and poor mental health – with self-reported BIPOC and LGBTQ+ identities most often scoring higher for risk and harm in almost every category.

Like Chase said, we know that young people need voice and space to build those community connections, adult mentors, and opportunities in their extracurricular time to thrive. However, those opportunities are often hardest to access in our most rural communities in the NEK and our agency has seen the harmful effects on young people and their families who struggle to find the support they need to navigate all the stressors of adolescent development.

We also know, because data supports as much, that youth centers work both nationally and in Vermont, in doing exactly that prevention work. They are effective spaces for prevention, but they are underfunded and hard to financially sustain.

Our NEK youth providers are requesting that any unspent funds from 2023 in the amount of \$100,000 particularly previously allocated for substance misuse programming through the recent opioid or marijuana tax funding streams, or for mental health supports, or general prevention and support for youth that is leftover be reallocated to the development of these youth centers, including the HIVE in the Northeast Kingdom to support young people in Caledonia, Orleans, and Essex counties.

Thank you for your time and attention.