

Hello, my names Ronald, but I prefer to be called JR, and I'm a part of the Vermont Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project's Youth Action Board. The Demo project is a 2-year initiative to increase capacity in Vermont to make youth homelessness rare, brief and one-time. The Youth Action Board is a committee of youth ages 16-25 with lived experiences advising the Demo project.

I'm here today to express to you how important it is to focus on youth homelessness. It is an ever so real crisis happening day to day, preventing many youth or young adults from living a happy and successful life. To put things into perspective on a single night in 2016 alone, there were 35,686 unaccompanied homeless youth throughout all of the United States. 31,862 of these individuals were youth between the ages of 18 to 24 in 2016, while 3,824 individuals were youth under the age of 18, 70 of which being Vermont residents. That's 70 youth or young adults sleeping outside, in their cars, in a tent or even couch surfing, doing whatever they had to do to keep a roof over their heads and survive. 70 youth or young adults that needed help, or assistance, and had the voice to speak up, but weren't heard, in OUR state. Now I know this statistic doesn't specifically pertain to JUST Vermont, but a number like 35,686 is just baffling to think about let alone imagine. These are youth that may never be stable, may never get the chance to live what most call a "normal" life, may never be heard or understood. All because youth these days are overlooked and seen as children for lack of better terms.

Which is why it's important for their voices specifically to come into play when making Youth Homelessness rare, brief, and non re-occurring. Without the voice of those with personal lived experience coming into play, or experience in general, how will we know what solutions are actually effective, whats working, or whether or not youth homelessness is becoming scarce?

In my time working with the YAB (Youth Action Board) I've come to realize that despite being in a big meeting room, with individuals that may seem intimidating (due to employment status) our voices as youth are never diminished or overlooked. We are confidently able to speak about not only what drives us, but why it drives us, and the best part is, our voice is recognized, realized, and responded to in a healthy and cohesive manner.

I hope in working with YAB, that someday I'll be able to look at youth my age or younger, and say YOU CAN live a happy life, and YOU CAN rest assured that you will be safe, happy, and healthy, because Vermont has worked to make a better life, and better opportunities for you and other potentially at risk/ (or?) homeless youth. I hope that one day Vermont Youth will be able to look at potential homelessness, and say "I got this, I have help, and the resources to get me through this rocky patch in life"