

Youth Homelessness Awareness Day April 28th 2026 Vermont State House

Youth viewpoint:

Let me share the story of a young single mother who came to our program through a referral from our local Coordinated Entry team. She spent nearly three years without stable housing while raising two small children. She couch surfed with family and friends, relied on the state motel voucher program, and most recently spent several months in a shelter. She was hanging on by a thread.

Homelessness doesn't just mean lacking shelter, it can block every other path forward. During her three years unhoused, she was unable to focus on anything but survival; this meant she couldn't complete her education or pursue meaningful employment. When you're in survival mode, you cannot plan. You cannot grow. You cannot parent the way that you want to.

After she was referred to our Housing Navigation program, a Case Manager helped her apply for a youth rapid rehousing subsidy. Shortly after being approved for the subsidy, her Case Manager went out on medical leave. As the Case Manager's Team Leader, I stepped in to ensure continuity of care and worked with multiple community partners to identify available rental units and see the process through to completion.

She moved into a 2-bedroom apartment with her children on April 1st. When I recently checked in with her, she told me that moving into her own apartment has been "*life changing*." She said she can finally breathe again and that she's no longer stuck in survival mode. She's now making plans to earn her high school diploma, find work, and save for a car. She reports that her children are thriving. The difference in her voice from our first conversation to our most recent one was evident. She sounded happy and hopeful.

Housing is not the finish line for her; it is the starting line. Without a stable place to sleep, nothing else is possible. With it, everything becomes possible. It truly took a village to house this family. There are young people all over our state right now who are where this young mom was; they're surviving but they're not thriving. Her story shows that they don't have to be stuck there.

My viewpoint:

My name is Heather Getty, and I serve as Team Leader of Adolescent Services at NCSS, the designated mental health agency for Franklin and Grand Isle counties. I have spent over 15 years working with adolescents in this region and have been in my current role for 10 of those years.

In recent years, I've witnessed a troubling rise in the severity of mental health symptoms among our youth. The barriers they face in accessing care are significant and deeply interconnected: inadequate transportation, insurance gaps, a shortage of qualified providers, and a lack of affordable housing, to name only a few.

When a young person is living with housing insecurity, or their family is, it touches every part of their life. When you don't know where you'll be sleeping tonight, or whether you'll need to pack

up everything and leave without warning, it becomes nearly impossible to focus on schoolwork or get yourself to a therapy appointment to address your anxiety or depression. Substances often offer an appealing escape from a reality that feels unmanageable.

My team has walked alongside youth who were forced out of their homes because of their gender identity or sexuality, or because family conflict had escalated to the point where staying was simply not safe. We've worked with young people who want nothing more than independence and employment yet find themselves navigating a family history that taught them to distrust service providers and to be careful about earning "too much," for fear of jeopardizing the benefits that barely sustain their household.

These young people are also up against systemic barriers that are rarely acknowledged. Many are not yet of legal age to sign their own paperwork or enter into a housing agreement independently. They depend on parents and guardians who are themselves overwhelmed by mental health challenges and financial hardships. They exist in an impossible in-between: too young to fully fend for themselves, yet old enough that adults in positions of authority often extend them little grace or compassion.

Landlords are reluctant to rent to them, citing inexperience and the absence of credit or references. Without access to a reliable, legally registered vehicle, they cannot obtain a driver's permit or license which only further compounds their obstacles. They end up missing appointments, unable to access a job, and in some cases, an inability to complete their education.

These are not isolated problems. They are interlocking ones. When youth are in a stable housing situation and have access to reliable transportation, they're able to attend school and get jobs. They're able to contribute to their communities and engage fully in their lives. Healthy youth contribute to the overall wellness of the communities they live in.