



News Release

For more information, contact:

Jim Blanchard
jamesbl@ayr4kids.org, 253.939.2202
Grace Reamer
grace@friendsofyouth.org, 425.869.6490 x320
Liz Trautman
elizabeth.trautman@youthcare.org, 206.204.1407

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National Safe Place Week Celebrates success of youth program in King County



Young people in crisis are increasingly turning to Safe Place in King County, a network of youth service agencies and community sites that is celebrating its success during National Safe Place Week March 17-23.

King County Safe Place is part of a national network of more than 20,000 partnering businesses and community locations that display the yellow diamond Safe Place sign. As youth enter the designated Safe Places and ask for help, trained staff members connect them to the appropriate youth shelter for assistance.

Safe Place was launched in King County in August 2011 as a collaboration of three agencies:

- Auburn Youth Resources in south King County,
- Friends of Youth in north and east King County, and
- YouthCare in Seattle.

Since then, more than 90 young people have accessed services through Safe Place partners and agencies. Just since October, trained staff from the three youth services agencies have responded to 28 individual requests for help through the Safe Place program. Nearly half of the youth went to emergency shelters, and others were reunited with families or were referred to facilities such as hospitals. The 28 youth represented an equal number of girls and boys, and their average age was 15.

Young people connect with Safe Place for many reasons. Often they don't feel safe at home, such as 17-year-old Penelope. She was couch-surfing with acquaintances because of her fear of returning home. Initially, she wasn't

emotionally prepared to live with another family, but she had an uncle who was willing to take her. Penelope and her Outreach Counselor called Safe Place and requested assistance with family reunification. Working as a team, the Counselor, Safe Place Coordinator, and Penelope called the uncle and negotiated and facilitated Penelope's plans to move to his home. A month later, Penelope reported that she had re-enrolled in school and most importantly, feels safe living with her uncle.

As awareness of the program and the number of Safe Place sites have grown, requests for help are increasing, said Friends of Youth CEO Terry Pottmeyer.

"It is encouraging that young people in crisis are increasingly turning to service agencies for help, instead of trying to survive alone on the streets where they are vulnerable to predators," Pottmeyer said. "The Safe Place collaboration has proven remarkably successful at finding alternatives for youth with few options, and the King County program now is one of the largest Safe Place networks in the country."

YouthCare Executive Director Melinda Giovengo concurred. "As young people become aware of this program, we are seeing that we are reaching not just first-time runaways, but even those young people who have been out on the streets for some time, or who have run from neglect and abuse several times and do not know where to turn. When we can provide them a safe place to stabilize, we see that they are making positive, healthy choices and working to reunify with their families."

"We are fortunate to have capacity to shelter South County youth referred to us through Safe Place," said Jim Blanchard, Executive Director of Auburn Youth Resources. "Our countywide partnership allows youth to get connected to help in their own community, and that often means returning home or finding refuge with another family member. Although youth seldom stay in shelter more than a few days, our shelter is consistently nearly full, and long-term funding is needed to keep it operating."

The three youth service agencies will participate in outreach activities during National Safe Place Week, such as providing information tables at several Metro Transit locations. In addition, the partnership launches a new social media effort today with a special Facebook page at www.facebook.com/KingCountySafePlace featuring daily news updates, photos and client stories of success during the week.

National Safe Place Week serves to increase awareness about the importance of youth safety and the dangers young people face when they feel they have nowhere to go or are in crisis situations. It also highlights the Safe Place program, which brings together businesses and volunteers to provide help and safety for youth facing abuse, neglect, bullying or serious family problems. Nationally, the Safe Place program has helped more than 285,000 youth since its inception in 1983 and currently serves more than 1,500 communities across the country. It is managed by 140 youth agencies in 41 states and the District of Columbia.

During National Safe Place Week, local Safe Place partners are working to get new sites involved. Expansion of the program is made possible by a generous grant from United Way of King County to fund outreach. Existing Safe Place sites that help get children and teens off the street and linked to shelter, counseling and services, include:

- Metro Transit
- Compass Housing Alliance facilities in Shoreline and Renton
- King County Library System
- The YMCA of Greater Seattle
- Maple Valley Community Center
- West Seattle High School
- Seattle Public Schools' Interagency Academies

About the Partner Agencies

Auburn Youth Resources was established in 1973 by a group of concerned parents, educators, and governmental leaders to address the growing problem of drug abuse among South King County youth. Since then, AYR has grown into a regional provider of mental health, homeless youth outreach, shelter, and housing, as well as substance abuse services, serving children, youth, and families of King and Pierce Counties. For more information, please visit www.ayr4kids.org.

Founded in 1951, **Friends of Youth** delivers a comprehensive range of therapeutic services for youth and young adults encompassing 20 program sites to provide safe places to live and emotional support for youth in challenging circumstances. Serving youth ages 12-24, Friends of Youth's Homeless Services stretch from Snohomish County south to Renton and east to Duvall, Snoqualmie, and other east King County cities. For more information, please visit www.friendsofyouth.org.

Since 1974, **YouthCare** has been a leader in providing effective services to homeless youth in Seattle/King County. From a three-bed shelter, our programs have expanded to include a continuum of services including outreach, basic needs, case management, emergency shelter, transitional housing, education, and employment training programs serving young people ages 12-24. For more information, please visit www.youthcare.org.

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*Auburn Youth Resources, 816 F Street SE, Auburn WA, 98002 * 253-939-2202 * www.ayr4kids.org*

*Friends of Youth, 13116 NE 132nd St., Kirkland, WA 98034 * p 425.869.6490 * f 425.869.6666 * www.friendsofyouth.org*

*YouthCare, 2500 NE 54th St., Seattle, WA 98105 * p (206) 694-4500 * www.youthcare.org*