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The Center for Young Adults—YMCA of Greater Seattle



"The Center is really different, it's really warm. I expected it to be just another part of the system, but it wasn't. Now I go there all the time and get the help I need. I feel really good about being a part of it."—Richie, age 18



The Center for Young Adults works within a transition collaborative through Casey's Seattle Field Office. Collaborative partners include Casey, YouthCare,

TreeHouse, Mockingbird Society, and the Children's Administration. Along with mutual collegial support of respective programs, the partners collaborate on a calendar of offered events and workshops that are free to participants including recreational outings, cooking classes, money management sessions, and more.

The Center's services are originally founded from assisting with the housing and employment needs of homeless youth and cover four key areas: housing, education, employment, and life skills. Enrichment activities are offered, as well as special projects including Individual Development Accounts—the opportunity for participants to save toward advancement goals.

The Center provides a gateway to DSHS services for youth transitioning from foster care and is exploring best ways to expand into mental health services in the near future with a possible onsite therapist program. Onsite medical and dental services are being considered.

The Center staff is comprised of resource specialists in education, career development, and experiential learning, all with generalist knowledge of available community resources. Staff continually learns through practice and response to the developmental needs of the youth. Program expectations are made clear, while the dynamic nature of the youths' lives is respected. One participant shares,

"I was done with foster care and wanted to be on my own, be independent. But honestly, being in the YMCA is the same as freedom. You're not a kid; you're treated like an adult. They give you the freedom you need and you have to learn how to take care of your responsibilities."—Velma, age 19

The Center's three program areas are:

- **Young Adults in Transition (YAIT)**—Supportive housing for homeless young adults aged 18-24 (since 1983)
- **Independent Living Program (ILP)**—Transition support to youth referred by the DSHS Division of Child and Family Services
- **Transitions**—Supportive housing for young adults aged 18-23 who live in King County, Wash. and have spent significant time in foster care. Participants work with a YMCA case manager, pay a portion of income in rent, and live in shared homes or scattered site apartments subsidized by The Center, gradually taking over payment of rent and bills as they become self-sufficient.

The Center's community center/café presence has been in operation for just over a year. The space has been consciously designed in collaboration



with its actual participants, incorporating warm colors, nice furniture, and an inviting ambiance. The message conveyed to youth is: your presence and experience are valued here. June 2008 marks 15 months in operation for The Center. Benchmarks include:

- 1,000 membership cards given out to date.
- 65-75% of participants have experience in foster care.

Senior Director Sean Walsh, YMCA Young Adult Services, describes The Center as a continuum of successes. He shares that young people come in admitting they are having a truly hard time, they become thoroughly engaged, and they progress on to jobs and increasing independence. He relates that, "One of the greatest successes is to see youth using their voices to help themselves, and then help others." Looking forward, Sean continually considers how to serve more people and be more innovative.

For more details about The Center's programs, download their brochure and newsletters at right. Contact [Sean Walsh](#) at (206) 749-7545.

Task and Topic Rollups

For your information

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