



Volunteers of America®  
Utah

## Youth Resource Center

In May 2016, Volunteers of America, Utah (VOA) opened a new **Youth Resource Center (YRC)** to better serve our community's homeless and at-risk youth, ages 15-22. The 20,000 square foot facility is open 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. The Center provides 30 emergency overnight shelter beds, three meals served daily, shower and laundry facilities, basic needs items and a myriad of case management services including housing placement, mental health counseling, continued education coordination, legal services, job seeking assistance and referrals to other necessary community services.



### The Need

In 2016, there were over 2,000 unaccompanied homeless youth enrolled in Utah public schools, according to the State Office of Education. These are our most vulnerable members of society—young and inexperienced individuals, who lack the support, love or resources associated with home. Many have suffered abuse at the hands of those who are supposed to protect them or have been kicked out because they have become pregnant or they identify as LGBTQ. Others are struggling with mental illness or have aged out of public systems like foster care. Once homeless, these youth are likely to become victims of further abuse and exploitation. VOA aims to stabilize our clients and connect them with the services they need, so that homeless youth don't become chronically homeless adults.



### Who We Serve

- In FY 16-17, the YRC served 689 unduplicated individuals.
- 25% have been in the foster care system.
- 21% report that they identify as LGBTQ.
- 16% are parents.

Of these clients, 91% received basic need items and 91% received information and referrals to other community services. 46% of youth at the YRC stayed in the overnight shelter, and 53% received case management services or completed a Self-Reliance Plan. Of those receiving case management, 32% exited to community housing programs and many others are currently working toward housing.

### Our Approach

The YRC operates on an engagement-based shelter model, requiring youth to participate actively in their own goal setting and progress through Case Management services. Every day, any young person can walk through our doors and have immediate access to food, basic need items and a safe space. Once youth are off the streets and their basic needs are met, our staff works with them to assess their background and specific needs, building relationships of trust. We prioritize placing youth into safe and stable housing and also provide counseling for mental illness, trauma and substance abuse as well as help youth obtain identification and resolve legal matters. Then we work with youth to set goals and help them progress in a plan toward self-sufficiency. We work to break down any barriers to our clients' success, whether housing placement, counseling, education completion, legal services or job training. We walk beside them on the path from homelessness to self-sufficiency.

## Get Involved

Our **Volunteer Program** expanded tremendously last year and has grown to over 3,200 volunteers contributing more than 19,000 hours of service at the Youth Resource Center.



Our YRC kitchen is led entirely by volunteers who prepped, cooked and served almost 50,000 meals last fiscal year. These volunteers are also providing the youth with role models—strangers who come in and demonstrate to the youth that there are adults in the community who care. Our volunteers aren't strangers for long. They connect with the youth and demonstrate commitment to them through wholesome meals prepared and served with love. This is a popular volunteer opportunity, and our meals are scheduled 3-4 months out. The youth enjoy interacting with the adults and always look forward to seeing who is cooking and what's for dinner. Our dining room has unexpectedly turned into a wonderful gathering place for staff, volunteers and our clients.



Our donation program is also volunteer led and 260 groups helped process in-kind donations and maintain the center. Donations are used agency wide for our Homeless Outreach Program, Young Men's and Women's Transition Homes, the Youth Resource Center, our Adult Detoxification facility and at our Cornerstone Counseling Center. This is a collaborative community program, as we share our donations with other agencies in need.

Background-checked volunteers provide individual mentoring for homeless youth, teach classes, assist clients with job skills training and provide tutoring for educational help, lead health, wellness and recreational classes. Licensed attorneys provide pro bono legal services through our Homeless Youth Legal Clinic. These dedicated volunteers allow our staff to spend more one-on-one time with the youth working on their goals.

## Financial Contribution

The Youth Resource Center is growing and evolving to meet our community's needs, and we have seen our young clients overcome the barriers they face with the support of our staff and services. Your gift will have an immediate and significant impact on the continuation of this project. More than 60% of the YRC's funding comes from individuals, foundations and corporations. The generosity of community members like you is transformative for our programs, our clients and our community as a whole.

For more information about volunteer opportunities, donations and other ways you can help, please visit

[voaut.org](http://voaut.org)