

# New services for homeless, at-risk youth

**By Aria Shephard Bull**  
Mason County Life

For at-risk and homeless youth between the ages of 15 and 24, there often is not a place they feel they can safely turn to for services.

“Often they will not go to a shelter for adults because when they’re there, their things are stolen or they’re victimized or trafficked,” said Scott Hanauer, CEO of the nonprofit Community Youth Services in Olympia. “Anecdotally, we hear it’s safer on the street than where they came from.”  
Thanks to new fund-

ing from the Washington State Department of Commerce’s Office of Homeless Youth, Community Youth Services is expanding its offerings in Mason County.

The nonprofit has brought its evidence-based Street Youth Services program to Mason County, where caseworkers connect with homeless youth to meet both immediate needs, such as those for food, shelter and clothing, and long-term goals, such as getting a job or finding permanent housing.  
As part of the program, Community Youth

Services partnered this month with the City of Shelton to offer after-school recreational time once a week for young people, now available from 2-4:30 p.m. every Tuesday at the Mason Transit Authority Transit-Community Center in Shelton.

Community Youth Services also has a new office at the transit-community center for its Transitional Aged Youth program, which focuses on mental health intervention for 15-to-24-year-olds.  
“These programs really work well together,” said Lyrsi Polanco, de-

velopment director for Community Youth Services. “We recognize that some youth might need services from both programs and they really do complement each other.”

Community Youth Services was founded in 1970 and offers more than 20 different programs for at-risk youth in Thurston County, Polanco added.  
The nonprofit branched out to Mason County several years ago and now five of its programs service this county, including those focused on family preservation, juveniles in the criminal justice system,

therapy for high-risk, aggressive and antisocial youth, and therapeutic foster care.

Community Youth Services also operates a young adult shelter in Olympia that often houses Mason County youth who can’t find safe housing options in their area.

The young adult homeless population differs greatly from older adults who are homeless, Hanauer said, and many turn to the Olympia young adult shelter because they have nowhere else to go.  
“Sometimes at shelters they get misidentified as

having the same issues as older adults, where homelessness is often driven by alcoholism or drug abuse,” he said. “With this population, they’re actually running away from situations worse for them than homelessness, like abuse or neglect.”

Any young person entering any of the programs will be connected to other services and programs they might need, Hanauer added.  
“Because of the number of programs in our continuum of services, it doesn’t matter what door our youth enter,” he said. “If they need mental health, they can get that, if they need family pres-

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ervation services, they can get that, if they need foster care, they can get that. There's no wrong door."

The Street Youth Services program, as well as many of the other programs, includes a case management component, where youth get help securing permanent housing, finding jobs, getting an education or meeting some other type of need, whether medical, dental or mental health-related.

About 25 to 33 percent of the 114 young people the nonprofit worked with last year for these wrap-around services came from Mason County.

The \$45,000 in funding that the nonprofit received from the state will go directly toward outreach for Street Youth Services in Mason County, including for the after-school recreational time.

"The outreach can happen anytime during the day, but we know young people on the street don't often have anything to do," Hanauer said. "A component of the outreach is to get them involved in the after-school activities that we have started to offer."

The after-school recreational time started on Aug. 2, but program organizers understand it will take time to build a reputation and following among Mason County youth.

Staff will provide recreational opportunities, such as basketball, badminton, board games and crafts during the recreational time and will also provide case management and information on services and referrals to local and regional services.

If needed, staff can provide transportation using a Community Youth Services vehicle or bus passes to help youth reach appointments and connect them to local resources.



PHOTOS BY ARLA SHEPHARD BULL

Community Youth Services now has an office located on the second floor of the Mason Transit Authority Transit-Community Center on Franklin Street in downtown Shelton. The nonprofit offers services such as mental health therapy for youth ages 15 to 24 and after-school programming and case management for homeless youth.



Community Youth Services staff that work in the Transitional Age Youth Program can meet with young adults in therapy rooms at the nonprofit's new office space, pictured here, or out in the community where youth might feel more comfortable. The nonprofit offers a variety of other services.

By having an office in Shelton now, the nonprofit also hopes it will be able to branch out and reach youth in North Mason as well.

The nonprofit works with researchers from the University of Washington and Portland State University to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs and to receive training for staff on the brain development of 15- to 24-year-olds.

"We're learning a lot about this target population," Hanauer said. "They're not children and they're not adults. Their impulses are different, their actions are differ-

ent and their brains are different."

Community Youth Services is planning an open house at its office, from 4-7 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 22, at the Mason Transit-Authority Transit-Community Center in Shelton, to share more about its programs.

For more information on Community Youth Services, visit [communityyouthservices.org](http://communityyouthservices.org) or contact Lynsi Polanco at 591-5121 or [lpolanco@communityyouthservices.org](mailto:lpolanco@communityyouthservices.org).

To set up an appointment or seek help or services from Community Youth Services, call 943-0780.