



# Safe Place in King County

**A review of a collaboration supporting  
runaway and homeless youth in King County**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Safe Place (NSP) is a program that seeks to ensure the safety of homeless and runaway youth by providing crisis intervention and prevention services, including emergency shelter and family reconciliation, when possible. NSP is currently being implemented in 40 states across the country.

As part of King County's Homeless Youth and Young Adult Initiative, YouthCare launched Safe Place in 2011 and, in 2012, expanded to include Auburn Youth Resources and Friends of Youth. Safe Place fits within the initiative's goal to prevent youth homelessness by preserving family connections when safe and appropriate and by engaging runaway youth/young adults before they become street-involved.

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*People come to the Y looking for help...staff who encounter young people didn't always feel that they had the tools or resources to respond appropriately. [Safe Place] makes them feel just a little more comfortable in dealing with the needs of people who walk through their door.*

—Senior Director,  
Young Adult Services Department,  
Seattle YMCA

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Safe Place in King County reaches out to youth ages 12-17 through direct outreach and by partnering with 28 local businesses and nonprofit organizations. Together, these partners provide over 1,800 Safe Place sites throughout King County, where youth can be connected to Safe Place. To access Safe Place services, youth can go to a Safe Place site or call the 1-800 number to be connected to staff at YouthCare, Friends of Youth, or Auburn Youth Resources who are available 24 hours a day, seven days per week,

365 days per year. Program staff assess the situation and needs of youth during these calls, and then offer to meet in-person and coordinate a safe placement to a parent/guardian, shelter, hospital, or detox facility. In addition, either in-person or via phone, staff also help clients develop a "safety plan" and provide referrals, resources, and supplies as needed.

With support from the Medina and Giddens Foundations, Cardea was engaged to conduct an independent evaluation of the first two years of Safe Place implementation in King County, using existing data collected by Safe Place program staff. Safe Place has established several primary program goals and benchmarks to evaluate the quality of services and success of the program. In this report, we evaluate whether these benchmarks have been met and describe client demographic, service, and outcome measures.

During each call, staff document over 100 demographic, service, and outcome measures on hard copy surveys. Staff also attempt to contact all clients 48 hours and 30 days after the initial interaction to collect a limited amount of data on short- and long-term program outcomes.

From August 2011 through August 2013, Safe Place provided services to 74 clients in King County. Client volume was low during the program start-up year, but increased beginning in the last quarter of 2012, when the program scaled up outreach to youth and recruitment of Safe Place sites. The program has been successful in reaching clients who are diverse in terms of age, gender, and race/ethnicity. The three most common referral sources are Safe Place sites, other community locations, and online via web searches. Safe Place clients face multiple, serious challenges. Many were kicked out by their parents or guardians. Over 60% have suffered physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. One in four comes from a family that is impoverished and/or lacks stable housing. One in five struggles with mental health challenges.



But, there is hope. Over 30% of clients called Safe Place for help before spending a night away from home. After placing the call to Safe Place, all but one client waited for Safe Place staff to arrive. Safe Place was successful in connecting 86% of callers with safe housing. Thirty percent (30%) of clients were successfully reunited with a parent/guardian. Over 90% of clients reached at 48-hour follow-up reported that they would use Safe Place again, if needed, and 100% said they would recommend Safe Place to a friend.

Safe Place is an important program to prevent and end youth homelessness in King County. Safe Place focuses on family reunification whenever possible. When going home is not an option, Safe Place connects clients to emergency youth shelters and other social service resources including case management, counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, transitional housing or independent living arrangements, as well as education and employment training. Together, these activities help to prevent the costly adverse outcomes of chronic homelessness and prepare youth to become productive members of their communities.

Runaway and homeless youth are often reticent to access services for fear that they will be turned over to police or their parents<sup>1</sup>. The increase in client volume in recent months and positive feedback from clients at follow-up indicate that Safe Place is successfully building relationships with youth in King County. We hope to see the program continue along this trajectory as the program grows and becomes increasingly well-known throughout King County.

## Program Goals and Evaluation Results

### 1. Assess immediate safety of client and, when needed, help client create a safety plan

Benchmark: Safety plans are created with at least 80% of youth who opt for phone-only response.

☒ Goal met: Safety plans were created with 87% of youth who opted for phone-only response.

### 2. Refer and transport clients to emergency shelter and/or safe housing services as needed

Benchmark: 70% of clients who opt for in-person response will be placed in immediate safe housing/shelter.

☒ Goal met: 86% of clients who opted for in-person response were successfully placed in emergency shelter and/or safe housing.

### 3. Provide all clients with effective crisis intervention services to ensure immediate safety

Benchmark: At 48-hour follow-up, 85% of clients placed report feeling safe.

☒ Goal met: Of clients with follow-up data, 82% felt safer once they'd entered the Safe Place site, and 100% felt safe with the Safe Place staff.

### 4. Engage homeless youth and build rapport and trust in Safe Place as a support system for crisis housing needs

Benchmark: At 48-hour follow-up, 85% of clients placed report that they would use the service again, if needed.

☒ Goal met: Of clients with follow-up data, 94% said they would use Safe Place again, if needed, and 100% said they would recommend the program to a friend.

## John, age 17

John completed a treatment program but was asked to leave his recovery house because he struggled with the rigid structure. His mother wouldn't allow him to return home. Desperate, he contacted Safe Place, saying that, without help, he would be forced to sleep on the streets. The Safe Place Coordinator met with him and secured a shelter bed at Auburn Youth Resources. Within one month, John found a job, was regularly attending recovery meetings, and reconnected with his mother. He reported that he viewed his shelter experience as time to prepare himself for turning 18 and going out into the world.

<sup>1</sup> Why They Run: An in-depth look at America's runaway youth, available at: [http://www.180orunaway.org/learn/research/why\\_they\\_run/report/](http://www.180orunaway.org/learn/research/why_they_run/report/)



## INTRODUCTION

### Background

According to the King County Committee to End Homelessness, up to 5,000 young people are homeless in King County at some point each year. While research indicates that youth are often homeless for a relatively short period of time, any experience of homelessness and crisis can make youth especially vulnerable to dangerous situations and people.<sup>1</sup>

National Safe Place (NSP) was established in 1983 as a program of the YMCA of Greater Louisville, KY. NSP is a national program that seeks to ensure the safety of homeless and runaway youth by providing crisis intervention and prevention services, including emergency shelter and family reconciliation, when possible. Due to the success of the program, NSP is currently being implemented in 40 states. The success of NSP has been reflected in the outcomes of youth when they exit the program. According to the 2011 NSP Annual Report, 90% of youth reported that Safe Place helped them to begin resolving their current situation<sup>2</sup>. By decreasing risk factors and building protective factors, NSP provides youth with alternatives to running away and homelessness.

As part of King County's Homeless Youth and Young Adult Initiative, YouthCare launched Safe Place in King County in 2011 and, in 2012, expanded to include Auburn Youth Resources and Friends of Youth. The Initiative has

three primary goals outlined in the Implementation Plan developed by over 100 stakeholders, including private philanthropy, organizations providing services to youth and young adults, government agencies, and homeless youth<sup>3</sup>. The three goals are: 1) Focus on prevention and early intervention; 2) Systematically assess needs of homeless young people and match them with effective services and housing interventions through coordinated engagement/entry; and 3) Coordinate data collection and reporting to measure progress and learn how to make changes, when needed. Safe Place falls under the first goal, and its objectives are to preserve family connections when safe and appropriate, and engage runaway youth/young adults before they become street-involved.

### Purpose of this Report

This report is an independent evaluation of the first two years of Safe Place implementation in King County, using existing data collected by Safe Place program staff.

### Program Description

Like NSP, Safe Place in King County provides runaway and homeless youth with crisis intervention and prevention services, including emergency shelter and family reconciliation, when possible. Any young person, age 12-17, in King County is eligible to use the program. Safe Place serves youth who are:

- Runaways
- Chronically homeless
- Fearful of returning home
- Displaced/expelled from their home/living situation
- New to Seattle/King County and without shelter
- In need of immediate assistance

To access services, youth can go to a Safe Place site or call the 1-800 number, and, within 45 minutes, a Safe Place Coordinator will arrive to provide assistance. In addition,

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<sup>1</sup> Committee to End Homelessness in King County. The homeless youth and young adult initiative: King County's community-wide response (2013).

<sup>2</sup> National Safe Place. 2011 annual report (2011) 4. Available from: <http://nationalsafeplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/2011-SP-Annual-Report-for-Web.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Priority Action Steps to Prevent and End Youth/Young Adult Homelessness (2012). Available from: [http://www.kingcounty.gov/~media/socialServices/housing/documents/YYA/2012\\_Priority\\_Steps\\_to\\_Prevent\\_and\\_End\\_Youth\\_Homelessness.ashx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/~media/socialServices/housing/documents/YYA/2012_Priority_Steps_to_Prevent_and_End_Youth_Homelessness.ashx)



youth can text Safe Place and be provided the address of the nearest Safe Place site. When dialing the 1-800 number, callers are connected to a Safe Place Coordinator at Youth-Care, Friends of Youth, or Auburn Youth Resources who is available 24 hours a day, seven days per week, 365 days per year. The Coordinator on duty covers calls from anywhere in King County.

The Coordinator assesses the situation and needs of youth during these calls. Youth or adults calling to request only referrals or resources are given the requested information, but are not considered Safe Place clients.

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*I like to be as transparent as possible...  
explain what I can and cannot do, where  
I can take them as far as shelters or back  
home. I think that really helps them know the  
boundaries of the programs...helps prepare  
them for wherever they may be going.*

—Safe Place Coordinator,  
Auburn Youth Resources

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If youth are interested in accessing services, program staff arrange to meet them at a Safe Place site or in a well-lit, populated public location (referred to throughout this report as ‘in-person response’). Upon meeting with the client, staff further assess the situation and discuss the client’s options and desired course of action. Program staff can coordinate a safe placement to a parent/guardian, shelter, hospital, or detox facility.

In addition, Safe Place staff provide phone-based support for clients who are not interested in reunification or shelter (referred to throughout this report as ‘phone-only response’). These responses often include developing a safety plan to equip clients to handle immediate safety issues they are facing, such as coping skills for sleeping on the streets (e.g., safest parks to sleep in) or de-escalation techniques

to handle an anticipated fight or abusive situation with a parent/guardian. Clients are also provided with resource referrals and encouraged to contact Safe Place again in the future.

Seeking to address the safety and other unique needs of youth in crisis, the services provided and coordinated by Safe Place in King County include:

- Immediate crisis intervention and emotional support
- Safety planning, coping skills and de-escalation tools for the youth and parent/guardian, as appropriate
- Assessment of the youth’s current situation and an understanding of safe and realistic options for safe placement
- Outreach supplies, such as food, blankets, jackets, backpacks, and hygiene kits
- Referrals to appropriate community resources to promote harm reduction, safety and family support

Safe Place partners with local businesses and nonprofit organizations in King County that volunteer to become Safe Place sites, each identified by visible Safe Place signage.

This network of sites provides youth with greater access to services, as well as temporary safety, until program staff

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*Staff responded very positively to Safe Place;  
it’s hard to argue against this program. Just  
the fact that we are out there and can help is  
a reward in itself for the drivers who partic-  
ipate and for all the people who participate  
in the program. One story of one youth being  
helped goes a long way.*

—Transit Operations Manager,  
King County Metro Transit

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arrive. Together, these organizations provide over 1,800 locations where youth may be connected to Safe Place services:

- King County Metro Transit
- King County Library System
- The YMCA of Greater Seattle
- Compass Housing Alliance facilities
- Seattle Public Schools' Interagency Academies
- Maple Valley Community Center
- West Seattle High School
- Chief Sealth High School
- Ingraham High School
- Roosevelt High School
- City of Snoqualmie
- Therapeutic Health Services
- Teen Feed
- United Way of King County
- Friends of Youth
- Auburn Youth Resources
- YouthCare
- Southeast Youth and Family Services
- Evergreen Health Emergency Department
- Kirkland Teen Union Building
- Old Redmond Fire House
- Covington City Hall
- Kent Youth and Family Services
- Tukwila Community Center
- Vashon Youth and Family Services
- St. Andrew's Lutheran
- Center for Human Services
- Issaquah Food Bank and Clothing

With growth of the Safe Place network, youth in crisis have greater access to immediate safety and shelter, as well as services that can support their future health and development.

## Program Goals and Benchmarks

Safe Place in King County established several primary program goals and benchmarks by which to evaluate the quality of services and success of the program. In this report, we evaluate the extent to which these benchmarks have been met, and describe client demographics, services provided, and outcomes.

### Program Goals and Benchmarks

- 1. Assess immediate safety of client and, when needed, help client create a safety plan**  
Benchmark: Safety plans are created with at least 80% of youth who opt for phone-only response.
- 2. Refer and transport clients to emergency shelter and/or safe housing services, as needed**  
Benchmark: 70% of clients who opt for in-person response will be placed in immediate safe housing/shelter.
- 3. Provide all clients with effective crisis intervention services to ensure immediate safety**  
Benchmark: At 48-hour follow-up, 85% of clients placed report feeling safe.
- 4. Engage homeless youth and build rapport and trust in Safe Place as a support system for crisis housing needs.**  
Benchmark: At 48-hour follow-up, 85% of clients placed report that they would use the service again, if needed.



## METHODS

As part of NSP, Safe Place in King County is required to document a core set of measures on all clients served. Measures include demographics, how the client heard about Safe Place, why the client went to a Safe Place site, the client's disposition after receiving Safe Place services, the source of the problem the client is facing, and whether safety planning was done. Follow-up surveys are also required to assess the quality of clients' experiences with Safe Place staff and whether clients felt safer after utilizing Safe Place services. These data are routinely reported to NSP.

For Safe Place in King County, more detailed evaluation instruments were developed to meet both national reporting requirements and local program evaluation needs. The enhanced intake form includes revisions to the national set of questions and response options, as well as some open-ended questions to collect more in-depth information about the client's situation at intake and what prompted the client to call Safe Place, services provided through Safe Place, and short- and long-term outcomes. Two versions of the form were developed, one for in-person responses, and one for phone-only responses. The two forms are very similar, but not all questions are asked on both forms. Individuals calling only for referrals or resources are noted in a separate list and are not considered Safe Place clients.

In accordance with NSP requirements, Safe Place in King County also implemented two follow-up surveys. The first, to be completed within 48 hours of accessing Safe Place services, documents clients' perceptions of their experience with Safe Place. In an additional 30-day follow-up survey, clients are asked about longer-term outcomes including their housing status and impacts of the Safe Place encounter on stress and family life. Most follow-up surveys are conducted by phone, with up to three contact attempts made for each follow-up time point. In all, the intake and follow-up surveys combined include 130 questions.

Data from hard copy surveys are compiled and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. For this report, the data were de-identified, and a unique client identification number was assigned to each client. For each client, the same unique identification number was used at intake and both follow-up time points.

De-identified data were transmitted to Cardea for analysis. Data were imported into SPSS 19.0, a statistical software package for data analysis. An extensive data cleaning process was used to identify missing data as well as any inconsistencies in the data. Open-ended responses were analyzed to identify recurring themes not captured by quantitative measures. Given the large number of measures collected for each client and challenges with missing data, some quantitative and qualitative measures were collapsed. Frequencies were computed for all measures, and bivariate analyses were used to explore associations between client demographics (age, gender, and race) and program outcomes. Bivariate analyses were limited, due to small cell sizes.

Additional data provided to Cardea included names and enrollment dates for all Safe Place sites, a list of referral/resource calls, and a list of community outreach events. To provide additional context for the report, Cardea conducted brief qualitative interviews with staff from the three partner agencies and three Safe Place sites.





## RESULTS

Since the launch of Safe Place in King County in August 2011, a total of 176 callers have used the Safe Place hotline. Of these, 74 were deemed eligible for the full scope of Safe Place services, and the remaining 102 called seeking only referrals or resources. While the requested information was provided to these 102 callers, this report describes the 74 youth who have used the full scope of Safe Place services.

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*Everyone thinks we'll advertise  
it on all the buses, and the youth will  
just flock to us.*

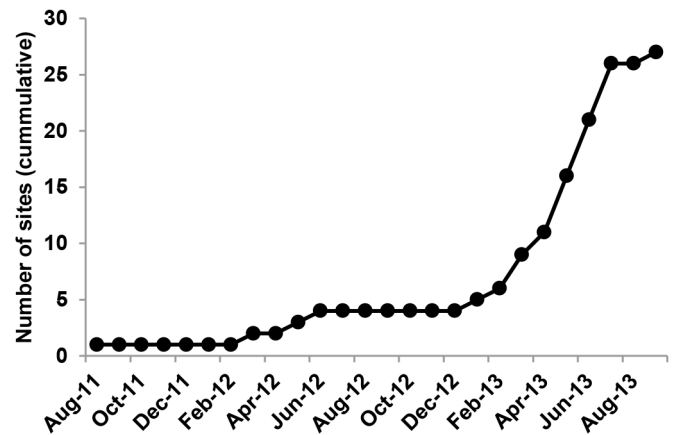
—Transit Operations Manager,  
King County Metro Transit

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During year 1 (August 2011-August 2012), start-up activities involved developing methods for recruiting and training Safe Place sites and piloting the program with King County Metro Transit, King County Library System, the YMCA, and Compass Housing Alliance. In the second year, Safe Place developed coordination and planning efforts between the three partner agencies, expanded recruitment and training of new Safe Place sites in the community

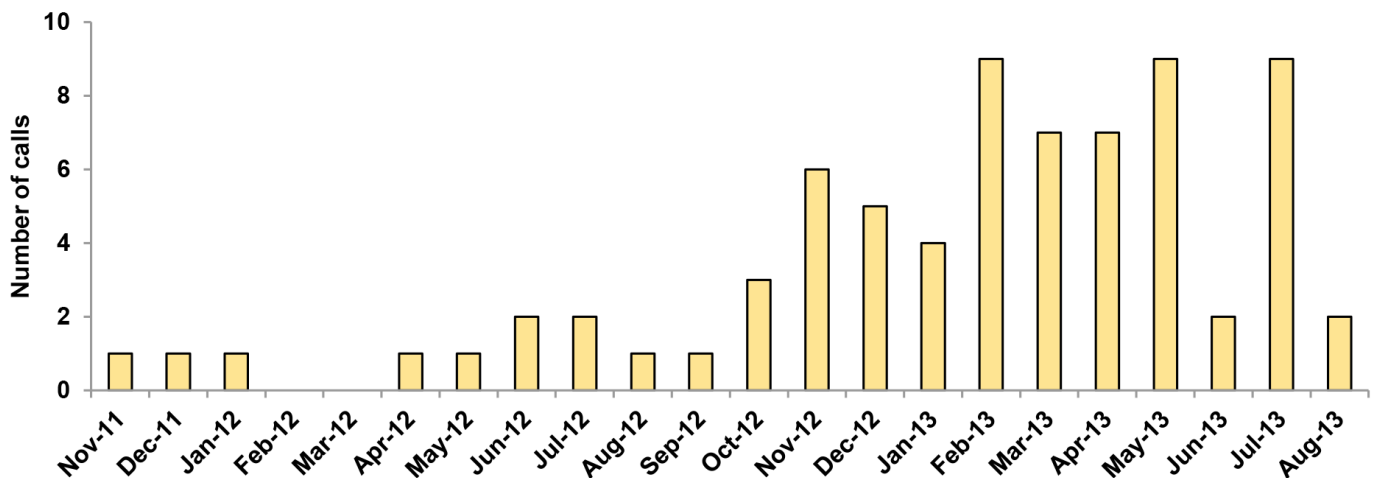
**Figure 1: Number of Safe Place sites**



(Figure 1), scaled up direct outreach to youth, and further developed and revised the data collection instruments. Safe Place staff organized 72 community outreach events to outreach youth directly. This growth corresponded with an increase in the number of youth served by Safe Place (Figure 2).

In August 2011, King County Metro Transit was the first agency to join as a Safe Place site. All Metro buses in King County function as mobile Safe Place sites, and drivers

**Figure 2: Number of calls per month (n=74)**





are trained to connect youth to Safe Place. During 2012, Compass Housing Alliance, the YMCA, and King County Library System became Safe Place sites. By August 2013, a total of 28 organizations had joined the program, providing over 1,800 Safe Place sites trained to connect youth to Safe Place.

Data were not collected as consistently during program start-up, and data collection instruments were still being revised until mid-March of 2013. Thus, several of the measures below do not include complete data for all clients. In particular, a significant amount of data was missing for the first 10 clients that utilized the program, and this is reflected in many of the tables below.

## Demographics

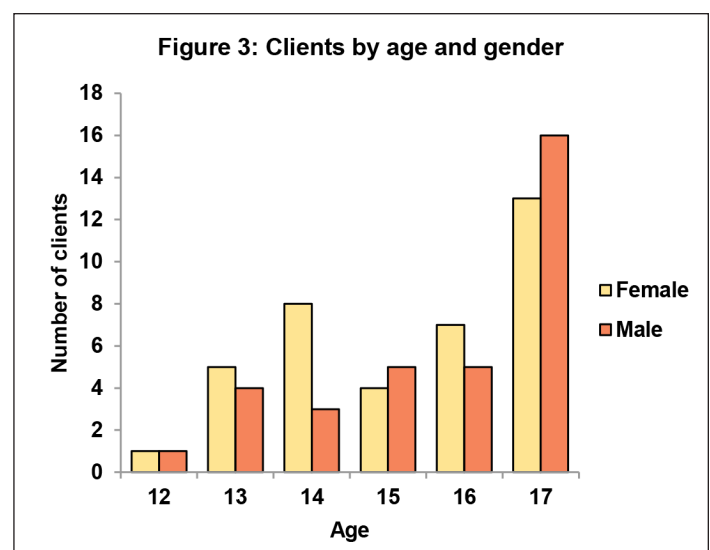
There were similar numbers of male and female clients, and one transgendered client. The median age was 16 for both males and females (**Figure 3**). In nearly 30% of cases, race was not collected, or the client declined to provide his/her race. The most commonly reported race was Non-Hispanic white (28%), followed by mixed race (14%). Data were not available to describe the racial breakdown among mixed race clients. Over 12% of clients were Non-Hispanic black, and nearly 10% were Latino. Clients' sexual orientation was not documented.

Clients were asked about their home zip code or the zip code of the area in which they most commonly sleep, if they were homeless. Zip code data were not consistently collected until May 2013. Therefore, zip code data were only available for 29 clients. Based on these data, clients were distributed throughout King County with the greatest concentration of clients residing in Seattle (**Figure 4, next page**). The most common zip codes were 98144 (4 callers), 98038 (3 callers), and 98116 (2 callers).

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Safe Place clients**

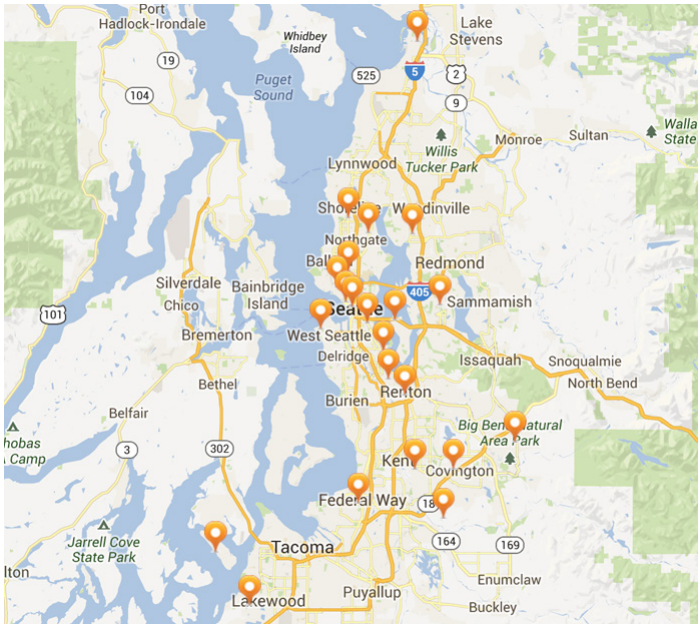
Demographics	Number	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	35	51
Female	38	47
Trans M to F	1	1
<b>Age</b>		
12-15	31	43
16-17	42	58
Out of range*	1	1
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Non-Hispanic white	21	28
Non-Hispanic black	9	12
Asian	2	3
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	1	1
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	3
Latino	7	10
Mixed race	10	14
Refused/Don't know	22	30

\*One client initially reported his/her age as 17, but later revealed he/she was 20 years old





**Figure 4: Distribution of client zip codes**



Clients were asked how they heard about Safe Place.

**Table 2** shows referral sources ranked from most to least commonly reported.

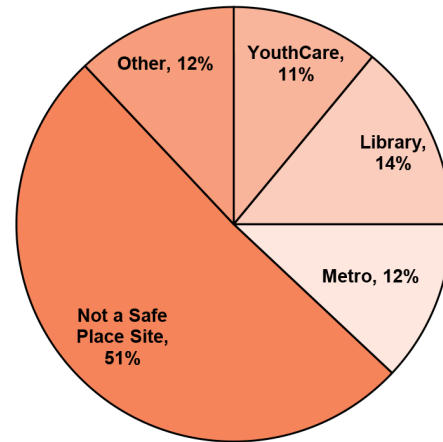
**Table 2: Distribution of referral sources**

Referral source	Number	%
Safe Place sites	23	31
Community locations	17	23
Online	13	18
Other	7	9
Friend	5	7
Unknown	6	8
Community outreach	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

Staff also documented where clients were located at the time they called Safe Place.

Nearly half (46%) of clients were at a Safe Place site at the time they called. The three most common Safe Place sites were the King County Library System (14%), King County Metro Transit (12%), and YouthCare (11%). Clients referred by YouthCare were either reached via YouthCare's

**Figure 5: Client's location when Safe Place was called**



outreach team while on the streets, or called Safe Place when exiting a YouthCare shelter program. Fifty-one percent (51%) of clients were not at a Safe Place site at the time they called.

### Client Situation at Intake

Clients were asked why they initially left home. The most common response was that the client ran away from home (42%). In 31% of cases, a parent/guardian told the client to leave home. In 10 cases, the client was still living with a parent/guardian and called Safe Place in King County either because of safety or other concerns. In two of these cases, the client's family was homeless. These data are presented in **Table 3**.

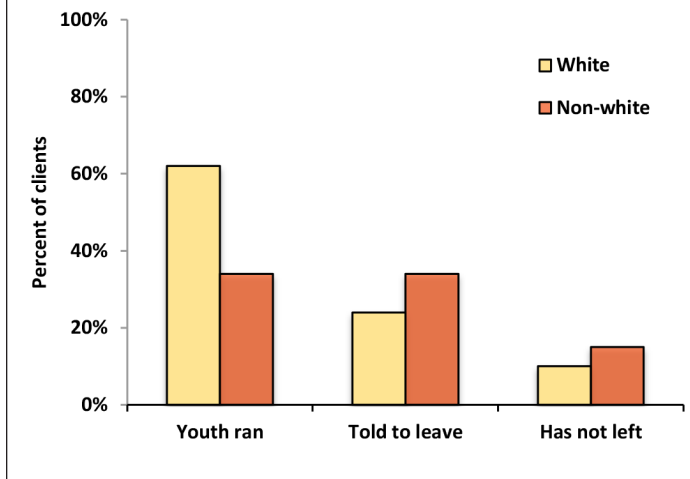
**Table 3: Client's reported reason for leaving home**

Reason for leaving home	Number	%
Ran away	31	42
Parent/guardian told client to leave	23	31
Client still living with parent/guardian	10	14
Missing Data	10	14

Although the numbers were too small to be statistically significant, females and white clients were most likely to report having run away from home, while males and non-white clients were more likely to report having been told to



**Figure 6: Reason for leaving home by race**



leave. Females and non-white clients were also more likely to be living with a parent/guardian at the time of the call. These data are presented in **Figure 6**.

The length of time that the client had been out of their home was documented for only 50% of clients. However, for those with available data on this measure, the length of time varied from zero days to over a year. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data fields was used to determine current housing status. These data are presented in **Table 4**.

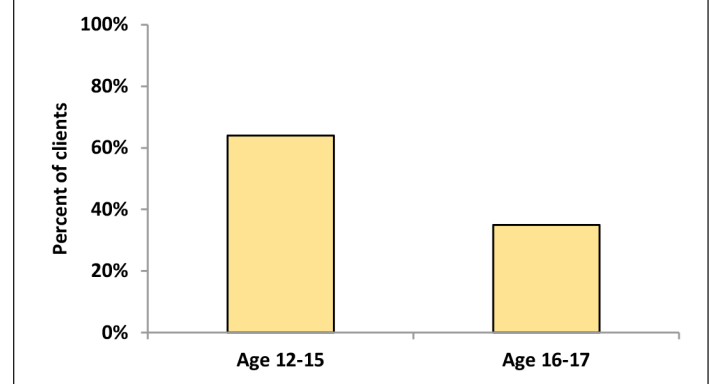
Over 30% of clients left home and called Safe Place the same day and, thus, had not yet spent a night outside of their home. An additional eight clients (11%) called Safe Place while they were still living at home. Five clients called because they were considering leaving home and/or were facing an abusive situation at home. Twenty percent (20%) of clients reported being homeless ('involved in street culture'), including two whose families were homeless. Another nearly 20% reported staying with friends or family other than their parent/guardian or 'couch surfing'. Four clients reported they had been staying at a facility (e.g., shelter, rehab, or hospital) and were in need of another place to stay. In three of the four cases, this was because they had reached the maximum time limit for staying at the facility.

**Table 4: Current housing situation**

Current housing situation	Number	%
Left home today	23	31
Homeless (involved in street culture)	15	20
Staying with friends/family	11	15
Couch surfing	3	4
Shelter, rehab, or hospital	4	5
Still at home	8	11
Other	2	3
Missing data	8	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

Youth age 12-15 were nearly twice as likely to be still at home or to have left home on the same day that they called Safe Place vs. having spent one or more nights outside of their home (**Figure 7**). This difference was statistically significant. Girls were also slightly more likely than boys to be still at home or have left home the day they called Safe Place, but the difference was not statistically significant.

**Figure 7: Percentage of clients who had not yet spent a night away from home**



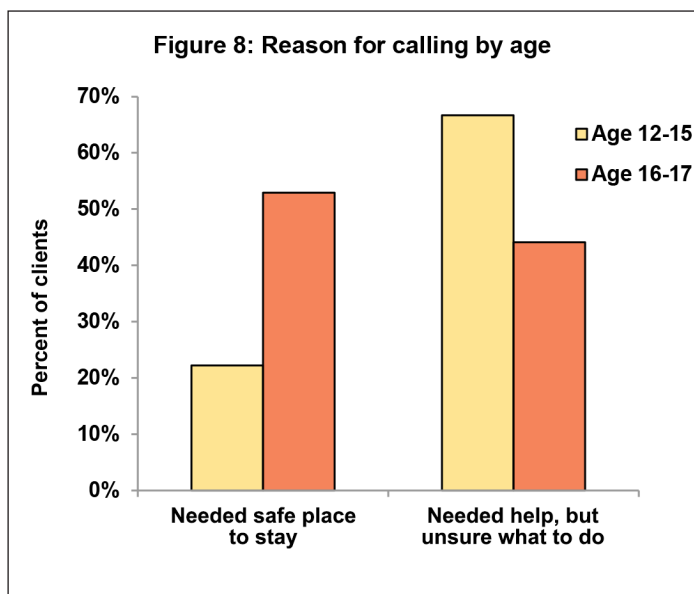
Qualitative data were categorized to assess client's primary reason for calling Safe Place. While these data were not obtainable for 18% of the clients, it is worth noting that about one-third of youth called specifically requesting a safe place to stay for the night. Another 45% called because they were in a crisis situation and didn't know what to do (e.g., had been kicked out or left by family or were concerned about safety issues at home).



**Table 5: Reason for calling Safe Place**

Reason for calling	Number	%
Needed safe place to stay	28	37
Needed help, but unsure what to do	33	45
Missing data	13	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

The large majority of youth age 12-15 called because they needed help, but were unsure what to do. In contrast, over half of youth age 16-17 were specifically looking for a safe place to stay (Figure 8).



For 62 clients, additional data regarding the challenges they and/or their families were facing were captured (Table 6).

Lack of safety at home was the most commonly reported challenge that clients were facing, with over 40% reporting that they left home due to safety issues. Specifically, nearly a quarter of clients reported emotional abuse, physical abuse, and/or neglect. Other common challenges included mental health issues, challenges with substance abuse by the client or family members, chronic homelessness, and being locked out and not allowed back in the home by an adult. Nearly 30% of clients also reported other challenges,

but detailed data were not available to better characterize these additional challenges. No data were specifically collected regarding clients' sexual orientation. There was only one specific textual reference to 'coming out' as a challenge clients were facing.

**Table 6: Reported challenges, youth and family**

Challenges reported*	Number	%
<b>Abuse/neglect</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>63</b>
Emotional abuse	19	31
Physical abuse	15	24
Sexual abuse	5	8
Neglect	13	21
Domestic violence at home	3	5
Unsafe at home	26	42
<b>Substance use issues</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26</b>
Youth substance use	8	13
Family substance use	9	15
<b>Family housing insecurity and poverty</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>
Family homelessness/insecure housing	9	15
Family poverty	12	19
<b>Other challenges</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>73</b>
Mental health	14	23
Bullying at school	6	10
Pregnant	1	2
Foster care	0	0
Chronic homelessness	13	21
Locked out (adult won't allow youth back in home)	13	21
Ran away from another housing program	4	6
Other	17	27

\*Many clients reported multiple challenges. Bolded categories include all clients that reported at least one of the challenges listed under that category.





Sixty-eight percent (68%) of clients age 12-15 reported abuse, neglect, or domestic violence, compared to 45% of clients ages 16-17. The difference was not statistically significant, which may be due to the small number of respondents. No differences were observed by white vs. non-white race or by gender.

Many clients reported facing multiple challenges. Half reported dealing with challenges across more than one of the bolded categories in **Table 6** (page 13). Over 25% reported challenges across three or more categories (**Table 7**).

**Table 7: Multiple challenges**

Number of categories	Number	%
1	31	50
2	16	26
3	9	15
4	6	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>

## Services Provided and Initial Outcomes

### *Phone-only response*

There were 16 calls made to Safe Place in which youth opted for phone-only response (22% of all clients). Data on services provided were available for 15 of these clients and are presented in **Table 8**. Due to the low number of phone-only responses, exact percentages were not calculated. In 4 of these 15 calls, shelter was not an option as either the parent/guardian was unwilling to give consent<sup>4</sup>, or the client was unable to request parental consent. In 2 of the 15 cases, Safe Place staff made referral calls to Child Protective

Services (CPS) and police on behalf of the youth. Twelve (12) of 15 clients were directed to other resources such as a youth shelter, drop-in day shelter, or case management. Safety planning was done with 13 of the 15 clients.

**Table 8: Safety plans and components**

Safety plan – phone-only response (n=15)	# of calls
<b>Safety plan</b>	
Yes	13
No	2
<b>Safety plan components</b>	
De-escalation techniques	4
Creating a behavioral contract	1
Making a plan for how the client will spend their day(s)	10
Discussing a safe place for the client to sleep	12

### *In-person response*

In 58 cases (78% of all clients), clients opted for in-person response. After explaining Safe Place services to the client, if the client indicated interest in meeting in-person with staff and discussing a plan, a Safe Place staff person was dispatched to meet the client and determine a safe option for the night. In all but one case, the client was present when the staff person arrived.

*It has been one of the best programs that I  
have had the great joy of being part of....*

*We hope Safe Place will be able to help  
more young people as the program becomes  
more widely known.*

—Education and Teen Services Coordinator,  
King County Library System

<sup>4</sup> The Becca Bill (RCW 13.32A) passed in Washington state in 1995 requires that youth shelter staff contact parents or police within eight hours of intake. A temporary revision extending the period from eight to seventy-two hours was passed in 2010, but expired in 2012. It was not renewed until July 2013. Information is available at: <http://www.uwcita.org/chapter-24-family-reconciliation-act-fra.html> and <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2013-14/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5147.SL.pdf>





**Table 9** describes where the client was placed. Eighty-six percent (86%) of clients were successfully placed in safe housing. Over 30% were reunited with a parent/guardian, and 55% were taken to a shelter.

**Table 9: Placement of youth at end of in-person response**

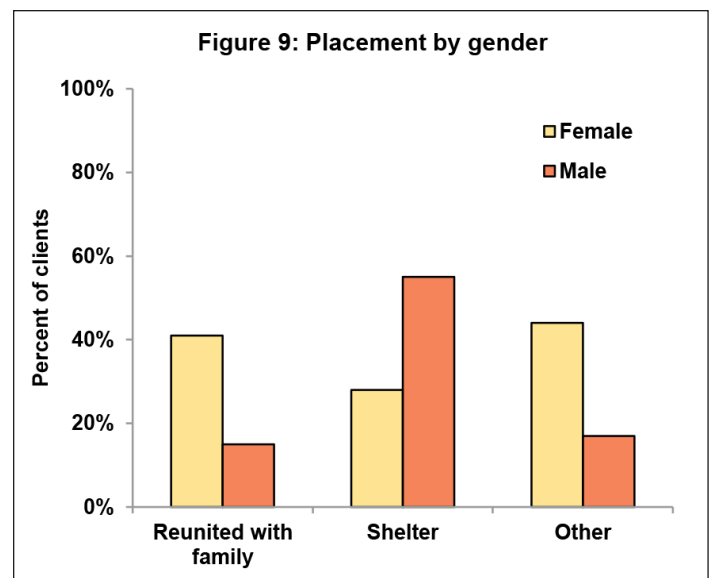
Outcome	Number	%
<b>Placement</b>		
Reunited with parent/guardian	18	31
Taken to a shelter	32	55
<b>Other Outcome</b>		
Opted to stay on streets	3	5
Opted to stay with another friend/relative	2	3
Not present when Safe Place staff arrived	1	2
Other	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100</b>

In four cases, staff noted that the client left the shelter within the first eight hours. One did not want to comply with shelter rules, and one was unwilling to contact a parent/guardian for consent. In a few cases in which clients were reunited with a parent/guardian, shelter was used as a temporary respite prior to returning home. Two parents were unwilling to give consent for the client to stay in shelter.

Of the remaining 14% not placed in safe housing, three percent (3%) of clients opted to stay with a different friend or relative<sup>5</sup>. In two of the three cases in which the client stayed on the streets, an adult at a non- Safe Place site had called Safe Place in King County on the client's behalf without consulting the client first. Two clients are coded as 'other'. In one case, the client was a ward of the state, and, therefore, Safe Place was unable to place the

client in shelter; rather, CPS planned to meet up with the Seattle Police Department (SPD) to locate an alternative placement. In another case, the client initially reported his/her age as 17, but later revealed he/she was 20 years old and was not eligible for services.

As shown in **Figure 9**, females were significantly more likely to be reunited with a parent/guardian (41%), while males were more likely to be placed in shelter (55%). This difference was statistically significant. Placement did not differ by age group or white/non-white race.



#### *Phone and in-person response*

During both phone-only response and in-person response, staff encountered barriers to placing clients in shelter. In six cases, clients refused to let parents be contacted for consent to stay in a shelter. In seven cases, parents refused permission to let the client stay in a shelter. In three cases in which clients were placed in shelter, staff noted that they were not able to place the client in the preferred shelter. In one case, all beds were full at YouthCare, Friends of Youth, and Auburn Youth Resources, so the client was taken to the Spruce Street Crisis Residential Center. At this location, youth must be signed into police custody, so it is primarily intended for youth who are found in dangerous situations by law enforcement, have a runaway report, or

<sup>5</sup> Safe Place's policy is not to release clients to anyone other than a legal parent or guardian. After meeting with the Safe Place staff, these clients decided to stay with a friend or relative and were able to arrange their own transportation.



are in violation of a curfew ordinance. In another case, after completing an assessment at the preferred shelter, the client was denied shelter due to having a 'run warrant' (i.e., runaway report on file) and having prior convictions of sex offenses. The client was then transferred to the Spruce Street Secure Crisis Residential Center. In the third case, Safe Place was initially contacted by SPD after CPS was unable to secure placement for a 17-year-old youth. Both Friends of Youth and YouthCare shelter beds were full. CPS approved Auburn Youth Resources' shelter, but Auburn Youth Resources is not funded to accept youth from within the state system. Ultimately, the client was not placed, and the CPS worker planned to meet up with SPD to locate an alternative placement.

**Table 10: Barriers to preferred placement**

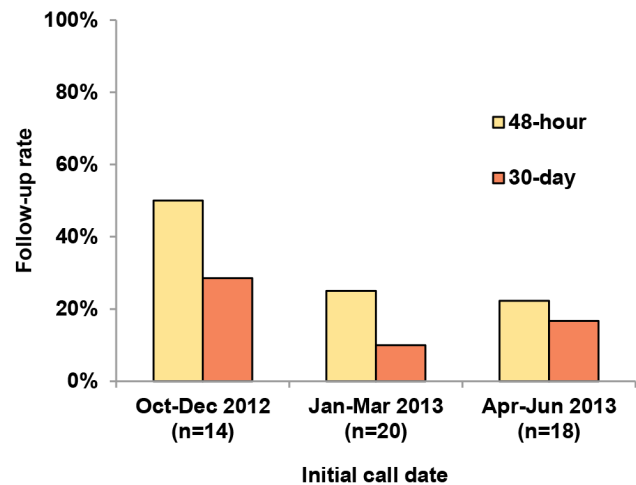
Placement barriers	Number	%
Youth refused to ask for parental consent	6	8
Parents refused shelter consent	7	10
1st choice shelter full	3	4

### Short- and Long-term Outcomes: Follow-up after 48 Hours and 30 Days

Low response rates were a major challenge to obtaining 48-hour and 30-day follow-up data. No follow-up data were successfully obtained prior to October 2012. Enhanced efforts to increase both 48-hour and 30-day follow-up rates were implemented in 2013 and included making up to three phone attempts per client.

Overall, 48-hour follow up data were available for 23% of clients (n=17), and 30-day follow-up data were available for 12% of clients (n=9). Quarterly follow-up rates from October 2012 through June 2013 are presented in **Figure 10**.

**Figure 10: Percent of clients with follow-up data**



### Sarah, age 17

Sarah, age 17, called Safe Place reporting that she and her mother scream at each other constantly, she couldn't take it anymore, and wanted to go to a shelter. Safe Place staff met her at McDonald's to discuss her situation and options. Initially, she opted to go to a shelter and called her mom to ask permission. Upon receiving the call, her mother immediately came to join them at McDonald's. As soon as they saw one another, they both started yelling loudly. Safe Place staff successfully de-escalated the situation, and then spent over two hours mediating, addressing the issues that lead to that day's crisis, and talking through what both of them needed to do in order to live together more peacefully. They created a contract that outlined behaviors and expectations and was signed by both mother and daughter. They agreed to contact Safe Place again if needed. To date, they have not sought additional help from Safe Place.



Despite the relatively low follow-up response rates, clients who provided follow-up data gave highly positive feedback about the program. Due to the low number of respondents, we did not calculate exact percentages for each response. However, the responses to date were overwhelmingly positive. As additional follow-up data are collected, we hope to see this trend continue.

Of the 17 clients with 48-hour follow up data, all 17 reported that Safe Place in King County had made a positive difference for them and that they would recommend Safe Place to a friend who was unsafe or needed help. Most (14 of 17) felt safer once they entered the Safe Place site, and all 17 felt safe with Safe Place staff. Fourteen (14) clients reported that Safe Place helped them start resolving their current problems. Sixteen (16) said they would use Safe Place again, if needed. Additional results are presented in **Table 11**.

**Table 11 – Client responses at 48-hour follow-up**

Questions (n=17)	# “Agree” or “Strongly agree”
It was easy for me to identify a Safe Place location.	14
It was easy for me to get to the Safe Place location.	14
The Safe Place location employees were welcoming and treated me with respect.	16
I felt safer once I entered the Safe Place location.	14
I felt safe with the Safe Place staff.	17
I feel that using Safe Place helped me start to resolve my current problems.	14
I feel that Safe Place made a positive difference for me.	17
I would use the Safe Place program again if I needed it.	16
I would recommend the Safe Place program to a friend who was unsafe or needed help with a personal problem.	17

Of the 10 clients with 30-day follow-up data, six reported that Safe Place made a positive difference for them 30 days after the initial intervention, and three had referred another youth to Safe Place. One client used Safe Place a second time during the 30-day interval. Additional results are presented in **Table 12**.

**Table 12 – Client responses at 30-day follow up**

Questions (n=10)	# “Yes”
Did client remain in their home for 30 days after their initial Safe Place stay?	6
Did client return to Safe Place shelter within 30 days since initial Safe Place stay?	1
Did client refer another client to Safe Place with 30 days after initial Safe Place stay?	3
Did client feel that Safe Place made a positive difference for them 30 days after their initial Safe Place stay?	6
Did client feel that their family dynamic was more positive 30 days after they left home?	1

*The youth are not necessarily informed. An adult can provide extra knowledge about services that can help them fulfill their particular goals...a voice on the phone there to listen and provide additional support until they have some sort of plan. [Safe Place] is a program that really advocates on the behalf of the youth, and puts choices and options in their hands that they may have not had before.*

—National Safe Place Liaison,  
Friends of Youth



## CONCLUSIONS

Cardea compared the results of these analyses for Safe Place in King County to available data for NSP<sup>3</sup>. Both nationally and in King County, Safe Place clients were evenly distributed by sex, and slightly more than half were age 16 and older. This is also consistent with findings from the National Runaway Switchboard's (NRS) Crisis Caller Trends report on 70,115 runaway youth<sup>2</sup>. Safe Place users in King County were more racially/ethnically diverse than the national average (57% non-white nationally vs. 72% non-white in King County).

Youth using Safe Place in King County face multiple, serious challenges. In King County, 63% of clients reported abuse and/or neglect, compared to just 7% nationally. An additional 23% of King County clients reported family poverty or housing insecurity. Nearly 1 in 4 Safe Place clients in King County reported mental health issues, and 1 in 5 said that their parent or guardian would not allow them back home. Nationally, 41% reported 'family problems', but a detailed breakdown of these problems was not available.

In an NRS survey of 83 runaway youth<sup>6</sup>, two of the three most common reasons youth cited for not accessing available services were not knowing where to find services and not knowing that services existed. Data from the first two years of Safe Place implementation in King County demonstrate an increasing trend in community awareness and promotion of Safe Place, and in utilization of Safe Place services. While nearly 30% of clients learned about Safe Place through designated Safe Place sites, the remaining 70% heard about Safe Place through friends, online, or another organization in King County that is not a designated Safe Place site. The past six months have also shown a rapid increase in the number of organizations signing on to serve

as Safe Place sites. Together, these trends suggest that youth in King County are becoming increasingly aware of Safe Place, and we expect to see continued growth in program utilization in the coming years.

In addition to the recent increase in utilization of Safe Place services in King County, clients with available follow-up data reported very positive experiences and outcomes. Of the 17 clients with 48-hour follow-up data, all reported that Safe Place had made a positive difference for them and that they would use Safe Place again, if needed, or recommend Safe Place to a friend who was unsafe or needed help.

When asked to describe their approach to interacting with youth, Safe Place staff touched upon many of the same characteristics that are described in the NRS report that youth need in order to feel safe and comfortable accessing services including<sup>6</sup>:

- Service providers should treat youth with respect.
- Service providers should be honest and direct.
- Service providers should 'suggest' rather than 'insist'.
- Service providers should be sensitive to emotional situations youth are going through.

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*Our goal is to inform youth of what their options are so they can make informed decisions and they can feel empowered about the decisions they're making...I also think our role is to listen to them. So many youth feel that they have not been listened to by their parents, family, social worker, or at school. I think it's important for us to hear what they have to say.*

—Safe Place Coordinator,  
YouthCare

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<sup>6</sup> Why They Run: An in-depth look at America's runaway youth, available at: [http://www.1800runaway.org/learn/research/why\\_they\\_run/report/](http://www.1800runaway.org/learn/research/why_they_run/report/)



- Referral processes should be streamlined, so youth don't have to make a long chain of phone calls.
- Programs should make it clear to youth that they will not be turned over to parents/authorities.

Overall, King County had higher rates of family reunification than NSP. In King County, 31% were reunited with a parent or guardian. Nationally, only 12% of clients were reunited with a parent/guardian, 5% of whom were placed in shelter before reunification<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the high family reunification rate, shelter may be the best option for some youth facing severe challenges at home. Safe Place staff noted challenges obtaining parental consent in 20% of cases — sometimes because youth were unwilling to call their parents, and other times because parents were unwilling to give permission for the youth to stay in shelter. Staff frequently noted concerns about clients' situations at home, and regrets that they had not been able to speak directly with a parent/guardian to work out a behavioral contract and/or connect them with family support services.

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*I wish I could have helped him find somewhere safe to stay until his situation at home has been investigated further.*

—Safe Place Staff

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The other barrier reported was that Safe Place staff were not always able to place clients in the most appropriate shelter. As more youth begin to access Safe Place, ensuring sufficient numbers of shelter beds, particularly under-18 shelter beds, is becoming increasingly important.

## Considerations

Over the last two years, Safe Place has clearly had a positive impact on runaway and homeless youth in King County. Safe Place clients face multiple, serious challenges. Many were kicked out by their parents or guardians. Over 60% have suffered physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. One in four comes from a family that is impoverished and/or lacks stable housing. One in five struggles with mental health challenges.

But, there is hope. Over 30% of clients called Safe Place for help before spending a night away from home. After placing the call to Safe Place, all but one client waited for Safe Place staff to arrive. Safe Place has met or exceeded all of its goals. Safe Place staff made safety plans with 87% of clients that did not want to be transported to safe housing, exceeding the goal of 80%. Safe Place connected 86% of clients with safe housing, far exceeding the goal of 70%. Safe Place provides effective crisis intervention services to ensure clients' immediate safety. Eighty-two percent (82%) of clients reported they felt safer once they'd entered the Safe Place site, and 100% felt safe with Safe Place staff.

### Christy, age 16

After leaving her boyfriend and abusive father, 16-year-old Christy had been sleeping under a bridge for three weeks. She learned about Safe Place when accessing services at the James W. Ray Orion Center. When she met with Safe Place staff, she reported that she wished to become re-connected to her legal guardian, an uncle living in a nearby city. Together, the Safe Place Coordinator and youth contacted her uncle, who readily agreed to allow her to return. Safe Place transported Christy to a meeting place near her uncle's home. Nearly two months later, Christy continues to live safely with her uncle and reports that things are going well for her and her family.





Together, these indicators suggest that Safe Place has met or nearly met the goal that 85% of clients report feeling safe. Ninety-four percent (94%) of clients said they would use Safe Place again, if needed, and all said they would recommend the program to a friend.

With larger numbers of clients and continued data collection, we anticipate that more in-depth analysis will be possible in the near future. Safe Place is currently working to improve data collection, and this is an important investment in ensuring that Safe Place continues to be responsive to the evolving needs of runaway and homeless youth.

During the last 12 months, Safe Place successfully reunited 18 clients with a parent or guardian, and two phone-only response clients agreed not to leave home after creating a Safety Plan. This prevented an estimated \$63,000 in shelter fees alone<sup>7</sup>. Another 25 clients were brought to an emergency youth shelter when family reunification was not safe or not possible, and hundreds of referrals to case management and other services were made to Safe Place clients and others calling for resources.

While there is no way to estimate the exact costs averted by connecting youth to emergency shelters, through YouthCare, Auburn Youth Resources, and Friends of Youth's emergency shelters, youth can be connected to case management, counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, transitional housing or independent living arrangements, as well as education and employment training. Together, this network of services not only prevents the costly

adverse outcomes of chronic homelessness, which have been estimated to range from \$7500 to \$40,000<sup>8-10</sup> per person per year, but also prepares these youth to become productive members of their communities.

The total annual cost of Safe Place in King County is \$260,000. In the first two years of the program, in addition to responding to calls and following-up with clients, significant resources were dedicated to marketing the program, building name and brand recognition among youth and social service organizations, and training new Safe Place sites.

Runaway and homeless youth are often reticent to access services for fear that they will be turned over to police or their parents. The increase in client volume and positive feedback from clients at follow-up indicate that Safe Place is successfully building relationships with youth in King County. Given the results to date, we anticipate that the program will continue along this trajectory as it continues to grow and contribute to King County's Homeless Youth and Young Adult Initiative.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on a cost of \$150 per youth per night at YouthCare's emergency youth shelter, and an average shelter stay of 21 days for youth under age 18 (based on data from Safe Harbors, King County's Homeless Management Information System)

<sup>8</sup> Poulin SR, Maguire M, Metraux S, Culhane DP. Service use and costs for persons experiencing chronic homelessness in Philadelphia: a population-based study. *Psychiatric Services* Washington DC. 2010;61(11):1093-1098.

<sup>9</sup> Culhane D, Metraux S, Hadley T. Public Service Reductions Associated with Placement of Homeless Persons with Severe Mental Illness in Supportive Housing. *Housing Policy Debates*. 2002;13(1):107-163.

<sup>10</sup> Flaming D, Matsunaga M, Burns P. *Where We Sleep: The Costs of Housing and Homelessness in Los Angeles*. Prepared for the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority; 2009. Available at: [http://www.economicrt.org/summaries/Where\\_We\\_Sleep.html](http://www.economicrt.org/summaries/Where_We_Sleep.html).