



STEPPING STONES

Helping West Virginia youth one step at a time.

A Better Life for Transition Aged Youth

As of 2020, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) estimated that there are over 7,000 West Virginia children in state custody, an increase of 67 percent since 2013. These numbers are rising at an alarming rate primarily due to the addiction epidemic that is paralyzing our State. Older youth find themselves in foster care, residential care facilities or homes without adequate support. Often the adults in their homes responsible for caregiving are addicted to substances and dependent on the children’s financial benefits for their own survival.

The Youth Transitions Project – Changing Lives through Hope and Partnership

The Youth Transition Project is building a foundation of full supports for vulnerable youth in need ages 16 to 21. Together with our community partners, Stepping Stones is building innovative new programs to stop the cycle of homelessness, addiction, poverty, incarceration and hopelessness.

The Youth Transition Project will provide housing, healthcare treatment, youth engagement, transition coaching, job exploration and experience, education and community involvement. The Project will include the development of a tiny homes community for youth as they age out of foster care and/or youth who experience homelessness, while providing needed experiential life skills, training, and well-being supports. With these additional resources, we believe our youth will be able to transition successfully to independence and thrive as adults.

It Takes a Village

The Youth Transition Project is a collaboration of community partners and an example of what’s possible through public-private partnerships.

The Addiction Crisis’ Impact on Foster Care

After a decade of decline, the number of children in foster care across the country began to rise in 2012, just as opioid deaths began to spike. A study from the federal Department of Health and Human Services reported that foster care populations increased by 10% between 2012 and 2016. The study attributed the increase to the rising number of overdose deaths among parents.

West Virginia, with the highest overdose rates in the nation, has seen the foster care population increase by 67% since 2013.

As of December 2019, West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources reported:

- Over 7,000 children in state custody.
- 924 in out-of-home care.
- 279 of Foster Care youth have been placed out-of-state

- Stepping Stones, Inc.
- West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Diversion and Transition
- Marshall University Sustainability Program
- Marshall University Social Work Program

- Coalfield Development
- Wayne County Board of Education
- Cabell Huntington Hospital
- Toyota
- Unicare Health Plan of WV
- Marshall University Center of Excellence in Recovery

- Spring Valley, Tolsia and Wayne High Career and Technical Education
- Braskem America Neal Plant
- Marshall University Psychology Department
- Green Bronx Machine
- WVU Wayne County Extension Family Nutrition Service

The Youth Transitions Project – Model Components



Housing: We are planning and building tiny homes to provide affordable and safe transitional housing for youth enrolled in the program. We're designing and building our tiny village with the heart, life experiences, and sweat equity of the youth's community — collaborating with community businesses, students in our county schools, and the recovery community with adults in recovery.

- A major focus of our housing will be to design and build energy efficient environmentally friendly tiny homes in partnership with our local high school career and technical education training programs.
- Inmates enrolled in the West Virginia Department of Education's Office of Diversion and Transition will construct some of these homes. This experience provides inmates with job training, skill development, and opportunities for moral rehabilitation while giving back to the community.



Food Security: Ensuring food security as well as increasing healthy eating habits are being addressed via the development of a hydroponic tower garden farm and greenhouse at Stepping Stones. This greenhouse will provide fresh vegetables year-round. Youth will be growing food not only for themselves as residents of the village, but they will also experience the gift of generosity by donating excess fresh vegetables to those in the area's homeless and recovery community who otherwise may not have them. Horticulture therapy is a powerful healing tool for youth who have experienced trauma in their young lives.



Addiction Prevention and Treatment: We want to ensure that youth have a voice and a choice as they work through treatment and sustain their own recovery. Proposed under the initial pilot is an innovative model that incorporates:

- Seven Challenges Substance Treatment approach
- Seeking Safety Trauma/Substance Treatment approach
- Quick and ready linkages to community behavioral health services



Financial Literacy: As participants learn to navigate the adult world, it is crucial that they learn to manage their limited resources effectively to ensure that their basic needs are met. This component will be included.



Education/Training/Employment Support: This area is critical to the Youth Transition Program. In partnership with the West Virginia Department of Education Office of Diversion and Transition, Wayne County Schools and Coalfield Development Corporation, youth will gain exposure to and practice in five disciplines: agriculture, woodworking, building demolition and remediation, tourism/hospitality and carpentry. Other supports range from assisting participants in navigating financial aid opportunities, to enrolling in training programs to exploring opportunities for career development.



Life Skill Application Support: Transition coaches and the whole program design help youth take information learned in classes and work experiences and provide opportunities to apply them in real life situations. As the experiential learning continues, the depth of life skill growth increases.



Medical Health/Mental Health Support: The Youth Transition Project plans to include onsite integrated health care so that youth become aware of their medical and mental health needs, resources available to help them, and how to responsibly manage their own health care.



Community Arts and Recreation: Opportunities will be provided for youth to explore music, painting, drawing, movement, spoken and written word, sculpture, and other media that are outlets for creative expression and greater connection. Plans are underway to restore a picnic shelter and a stage area to host such events in the tiny village.

