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## Sanctuary for young and homeless

*S.L. center offers food, shelter and other aid for 'throwaway youths'*

By [Angie Welling](#)

Deseret Morning News

On any given morning, some 500 young Utahns wake up on the streets of Salt Lake County. That is, if they slept at all. Many will stay awake all night, mostly for safety reasons.

It's what 21-year-old Ben did for several months earlier this year: stay awake at night and go to the Homeless Youth Resource Center during the day for food, shelter and to catch up on his sleep.

Ben was back at the center Tuesday, his first time after five months away. He doesn't consider himself homeless now, just "struggling." And this center, 655 S. State, is where he turns when he finds himself in need.

"I usually come here when I'm struggling, find me something to eat," Ben said.

Ben had more company than usual on Tuesday, competing for limited space with dozens of government officials, community advocates and donors during a two-hour open house meant to raise awareness about Utah's homeless youths.

"It is important to realize that everyone does not have a happy home situation," said Barbara Sullivan, board chairwoman for Volunteers of America, which runs the center.

The Homeless Youth Resource Center serves youths ages 15 to 22. Of the 470 people served last year, all reported a history of verbal, physical or sexual abuse prior to becoming homeless. Nearly all of them report being "throwaway youths" rather than runaway youths, and 75 percent have been involved in the state's foster care system.



Amy Stocks, a youth advocate at the Homeless Youth Resource Center, giggles with 1-year-old Jaden.

*Sarah Ause, Deseret Morning News*

Kathryn Lindquist is a longtime donor to the Homeless Youth Resource Center, as well as other youth-oriented organizations. She has always made the donations in the name of her son, who is now 24 years old. And though he's far from homeless, Lindquist wants her son to feel a connection to other youths who didn't have the opportunities he had growing up.

"He's always just kind of on the edge, and I want him to be very conscious of the young people who don't have the choices that he has," she said. "I know how tenuous the connection to home can be for some young people."



Boo Stewart and program manager Teresa Stocks at the center, which served 470 people last year.

*Sarah Ause, Deseret Morning News*

Lindquist visited the center Tuesday for the first time in years. While she noted the sparse surroundings — the building used to be a garage and still has a distinct warehouse feel to it — she appreciated the personal touches, such as the youths' own artwork and photography on the walls, and the young staff's energy.

"I'm impressed that there are people that make it go," she said, "who are here and offer their personal warmth and caring."

The drop-in center is open Mondays from 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Tuesdays through Fridays from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. There, youths can eat meals and take food to go, get hygiene products and clothing, watch television and attend group

sessions on various subjects. They can also receive voluntary case management at the center, which served 269 youths last fiscal year.

"They're not pushy," Ben said of the staff members, who are generally in their 20s and able to relate easily to the clients. "They're there to listen, if you need somebody to talk to. They're cool people."

Each weekday the center also runs a street outreach program, which provides basic items to youths living on the streets and offers transportation to the drop-in center and referrals for other services. Between July 1, 2005, and this June, the mobile program served 184 homeless youths, 60 percent of whom accepted a referral for their human service needs.

The goal is to get the youths off the streets and into a safe environment before they turn to prostitution or other dangerous behaviors, said Nicole Campolucci, director of outreach services.

"Every day that a youth stays on the streets is more dangerous to them because to survive on the streets, you have to do things you otherwise wouldn't do," Campolucci said.

Volunteers of America officials would like to operate the drop-in center and street outreach program on weekends, as well, but figure that would cost another \$162,585 a year. The two programs now operate on an annual budget of \$406,465. The resource center operates a third program, a transitional home in downtown Salt Lake City that has the capacity to serve seven women between the ages of 16 and 19.

The Homeless Youth Resource Center runs on a mixture of federal, state and local funding, and private grants. It also relies heavily on donations, both monetary and in-kind, such as food, clothing and hygiene items.

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Teresa Stocks hands over 10-month-old Aiden Fackrell to Jeremy Garcia at the Homeless Youth Resource Center.

*Sarah Ause, Deseret Morning News*