

*Destination: Home 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary Celebration*  
Thursday, December 13<sup>th</sup>  
10 am – Central Library, Browning Rooms A & B

## **Homeless Youth Council 2007 Report**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share with you the excitement and at times inspiring success that the Homeless Youth Council has been able to achieve in one year. As the co-chair, along with Patty Avery, of the Homeless Youth Council, I have had the wonderful opportunity to engage in conversation with over 30 different organizations in Vanderburgh County and our state legislators.

I would like to give you a brief update on what the council has been able to achieve in one year. We met in January and formed three subgroups after discussing issues of defining homelessness, experiences working with homeless youth or those at risk for being homeless, and risk factors associated with becoming homeless. The three subgroups were: Community Education; Continuum of Services; and Community Models—which researched successful, evidence-based models addressing homeless youth issues.

As a council, we struggled with attempting to identify an accurate number of youth who are homeless. Based on an expanded definition, Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation identified approximately 362 homeless students in the 2006-07 school year, with about 1% of the school population identified as unaccompanied youth. We identified several agencies that serve homeless youth. Yet, many of these youth are referred to these services due to the youth's involvement with law enforcement or the court system. In addition, many of the prevention services in the community are not specifically focused on homeless youth and addressing their basic survival needs.

With our information from the Homeless Youth Council, we advocated for a study committee at the state level utilizing several of our own state legislators. A committee, chaired by Representative Dennis Avery and vice-chaired by Senator Becker, spent the summer studying missing and homeless youth issues. Rep. Suzanne Crouch also served on the committee. As a council we are incredibly thankful for their support and intense questions at the state level regarding services for homeless youth, access to those services, and funding for homeless youth services. Several recommendations from the Interim Study Committee on Missing Children address many of the same issues we have found in Vanderburgh County. These recommendations include developing a regional homeless youth system to assist others in accessing information on programs and services and a mechanism to calculate an accurate number of youth who are homeless in the state. The recommendations also include allowing youth from 16 to 18 years old to access shelter and services without parental permission and to stay in a shelter for up to 72 hours before contacting parents.

Since the Interim Committee's report was published, the local Homeless Youth Council has been focusing on our own recommendations that we will make to the Commission on Homelessness on January 10, 2008. The council looks forward to the challenge of clarifying our recommendations for Vanderburgh County in light of how the entire state is looking at the issue of homeless youth. And that is what makes our collaborations so exciting! Never underestimate the power of a group of people—they can change a community, one youth at a time!