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## **Ending Local Youth Homelessness**

(EVANSVILLE, IN)-The Homeless Youth Council today presented to the Commission on Homelessness 14 recommendations to address and bring an end to homelessness among young people in our community. At the start of last year, the Council was assembled and charged with this task after it was determined that not enough was known about the issue of youth homelessness in Evansville and Vanderburgh County.

“In order to prevent homelessness among Indiana youth, we must critically examine the structures we have in place,” said Patty Avery, Co-chair of the Homeless Youth Council. “Strengthening these structures and seeking new ways to connect youth to services can help reduce homelessness among the kids.”

The Homeless Youth Council gathered data about the prevalence of homelessness among young people, researched best practices in other communities, and mapped out strategies for increasing community awareness. The Council then came up with a list of recommendations which primarily address youth without parents or family, between the ages of 13 and 23.

Since addressing youth homelessness is part of *Destination: Home*, the overall ten-year plan to end homelessness in Evansville and Vanderburgh County, these recommendations mirror the approach of *Destination: Home*.

The first recommendations involve gathering data to help develop a plan to end youth homelessness. They include a better method of counting the number of homeless youth, and a better mechanism for tracking youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The second set of recommendations revolves around preventing youth homelessness. The Homeless Youth Council recommends strengthening existing community programs designed to better parenting skills, as well as raising awareness and addressing abuse and

neglect issues. Another proposal involves creating a plan for youth who age out of the foster care system and those released from juvenile detention centers and child caring institutions.

In its third set of recommendations, the Council is also calling for an increase in the amount of affordable housing, because unstable housing has been cited as a factor in future youth homelessness. “It is important to have affordable housing so that all families can create a safe, nurturing environment for their children instead of having them face life on the streets,” said Mayor Jonathan Weinzapfel. “The City has been making a concerted effort to make more affordable housing available. Several hundred new units have been built, but more are still needed.”

Evansville is the only city of significant size in Indiana that doesn’t have a Drop-In Center or some sort of emergency shelter for youth. The Council recommends the development of a center that includes both outreach services and an emergency shelter.

The fourth and final set of recommendations involves increasing support services to help homeless youth. The Council suggests developing permanent supportive housing for homeless youth, and increasing their access to educational opportunities and employment training. They recommend getting more information into the hands of youth who are aging out of foster care about funds and services that are available to them. “It is important that homeless youth receive the support they need and know where to turn when they need information,” said Commission Chairman, Troy Tornatta. “We need to make sure that these teens and young adults are able to get the necessary help that will put them on a positive path toward success in life.”

Finally, the Homeless Youth Council says an ongoing Homeless Youth Coalition should be formed to implement these recommendations. That Coalition would then develop three and five years goals for ending youth homelessness and serving those at risk.

To review the full recommendations from the Homeless Youth Coalition, or for more information on youth homelessness and the strategies of *Destination: Home*, visit [www.destination-home.info/hyc.htm](http://www.destination-home.info/hyc.htm).