

Life Skills Foundation Proposal for Government Support to Establish a Young Adult Resource Center (YARC) in Durham

January 2016

Background

The Life Skills Foundation (LSF) is a Durham non-profit organization with the mission to provide housing, life skills, job training, and mental health services to at-risk and homeless young adults (primarily 16-22). It developed as an offshoot of Carolina Outreach, to co-house and expand its Independent Living Program (ILP). The ILP serves approximately 90 young adults per year and operates 12-week group sessions and other individualized supports that focus on developing employment, finance, health, education, and other independent living skills. It also manages a three bedroom house and three apartment buildings in Durham to provide temporary supportive housing for these individuals. These services are supported through multiple funding streams, including a seven-year collaboration with the Durham Department of Social Services to support and provide housing for youth aging out of foster care.

Carolina Outreach and the LSF have been key partners with the BECOMING Project to support youth who are facing significant challenges in making the transition to adulthood. BECOMING is supported by a six-year grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and is housed at Alliance Behavioral Healthcare. Its goal is to help improve the system that supports 16-21 year olds in Durham County who have mental health and other life challenges. Through trainings, events, groups, and ongoing collaborative activities in the community, BECOMING has worked to increase Durham's capacity to support this population effectively. Through identification and engagement of youth with support needs, the project has assisted hundreds of youth in connecting to mental health and other services, and has nurtured leadership skills that have empowered youth and family members to have a greater voice in the community.

With BECOMING's federal grant ending in September 2016, a focus of the project and its partners is helping to ensure that the continuing infrastructure is as strong as possible to meet the support needs of this population. Based on conversations that LSF and BECOMING have had with youth, families, and community partners, and reflections on lessons learned over the years about community service gaps, it is clear that Durham would benefit greatly from a drop-in resource center to simplify, expand, and sustain youth and young adult-friendly services in the County. We envision it as a place that imposes as few restrictions as possible for community members to receive assistance, that is responsive to all immediate crisis and longer-term transition age life needs (education/literacy, employment, legal, mental health, physical health, substance use, interpersonal relations and communications, economic competence and assistance, parenting and child care assistance), that emphasizes the development of strengths to meet future needs, and that serves as a coordinating hub for the broad range of services that are available now in Durham and that can be developed in the future. Centers serving similar functions currently fill important roles in other communities (some of what Haven House does in Raleigh is a local example), and research on homeless young adults has indicated that drop-in

centers are utilized more than emergency shelters,¹ and that they contribute to significant improvements in mental health, substance use, and days housed.²

We propose to establish this center as a comprehensive community resource that is managed and operated by the Life Skills Foundation. This document outlines the steps taken so far to develop this concept, and the support we are seeking from local government sources.

Planning/advice/support process for development and implementation of the Center

- Description of Advisory Board formation
- Founding principles and structure
- Goal Statement with description of vision for role of this group
- Description of workgroups
- Participant involvement to date
- Unified vision for Center as embodied in diagram that Board developed together

Services envisioned for the Center with staffing projections

We envision three tiers or “levels” of services that are available to youth in the community. The first level of service would entail urgent needs, including clothing, food, shelter, and physical and mental health services. The second level of service would include connection into the groups, daily activities, and supports offered to all youth at the YARC. The third level includes serving as a resource for the community.

Intake and Assessment: All young people entering the YARC will be greeted and welcomed by center staff, ideally a peer who has been trained and has the skills to do so. If this is the young person’s first time at the YARC, they will meet with an intake specialist upon arrival, in order to assess their needs and reasons for coming to the YARC for services. This intake specialist will be a clinical social worker. The intake process will be as thorough and brief as possible, while collecting necessary information, such as consent forms, and immediate needs such as assessing housing security, access to food and clothing, and determining physical and mental health needs. The Intake specialist will goal-set with the youth, as well as ‘triage’ youth in order to meet as many needs as possible as quickly as possible.

Level 1

Emergency Food, Clothing, and Shelter: Food security and access to nutritious meals is a concern for the population that the YARC will serve. The YARC will have a clothing closet, food pantry, and kitchen available for the young people who access the center. The YARC will develop partnerships with DERC or other charity thrift stores (Durham Rescue Mission, TROSA) to procure vouchers or donations for clothing and other necessities. The YARC will also develop connections with local restaurants and grocery stores to have access to leftover foods. Needs for this area include a refrigerator, oven, microwave, and a food storage/kitchen area. In addition to having access to adequate food and clothing, youth will be encouraged to learn the skills necessary to be able to run the kitchen, developing work experience and responsibility.

¹ National Network for Youth (2015). *What Works to End Youth Homelessness?* Retrieved from <https://www.nn4youth.org/learn/>.

² Slesnick, N., Kang, M. J., Bonomi, A. E., & Prestopnik, J. L. (2007). “Six- and Twelve-Month Outcomes among Homeless Youth Accessing Therapy and Case Management Services through an Urban Drop-in Center.” *Health Services Research 43:1 Part 1*: 211-229.

YARC staff will track of how many times youth access food and ensure that they have access to the services that they qualify for, including food stamps. The YARC staff will also assess the housing stability of each youth and connect them with housing resources, such as shelters, coordinated intake

Level 2

Immediate Connection/Non-emergency Needs: After the initial meeting and intake/goal-setting session, youth may be connected to level 2 services based on the goals expressed by the youth who come into the YARC. Youth will be offered participation and potential leadership in groups and programs that will be held throughout the day to meet various needs. Groups will include budgeting and personal finance, education and literacy, mental health, substance use, Independent living skills, support groups, sexual health and pregnancy prevention, employment readiness, art, and communication skills. Youth will also be connected with the various agencies and professionals that are co-located on site. Partnering agencies may include SaySo, LINKS, Health Department, Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act, mental health and counseling providers, a medical provider, and the LGBTQ Center, etc. The YARC will be a “one-stop shop” for these youth to receive connection to needed services, as well as follow-up from YARC staff to ensure that the connection has been made. The goal is also for youth to take on ownership roles in the various groups and activities held at the YARC, developing valuable skills in leadership, peer mentoring, and ensuring that the services offered at the YARC are beneficial to youth.

Level 3

Community Resource: One of the main goals of the YARC is to be the key resource in the community in regards to Transition-Age Youth (TAY). The YARC will serve as a source of complete and up-to date clearinghouse of information and referrals for youth, families, service providers, and the larger community about resources for TAY.

YARC staffing needs

- Executive Director/Development
- Program Coordinator
- Volunteer and Communications Coordinator (must be able to maintain Interactive website and social media presence)
- 2-3 Clinical social workers, capable of intakes, one lead social worker
- 3 Resource Consultants
- Director of recreation/security person
- Maintenance
- Security
- Peers (greeters, reception, kitchen, etc.)

YARC volunteer needs

We hope to have opportunities for businesses and corporations to give to the YARC in a variety of ways, including donations, building upkeep, teaching or leading groups, and external internships.

Desired location characteristics

The location of the YARC must be convenient to visit for transition age youth, and needs to be in a part of the city where everyone will feel comfortable and welcome. Therefore we are seeking a building that is centrally located near a bus stop, and are looking to avoid locations

that are seen as being part of specific neighborhoods. A building downtown within walking distance of the Bus Station would be ideal, with the next level of desirability being spaces in other areas of the city that receive heavy bus traffic and use by people throughout the County (e.g., a mall like Northgate, shopping plaza area like Lakewood, or development like Golden Belt).

It is essential that the look and feel of the building (both exterior and interior) is inviting, not intimidating, and that it have the following core features: private meeting rooms for individuals and groups, an open lounge/commons area with computers for access to online resources, an activity/training area with computer capacity, and appropriate restroom space. Additional desirable building features are:

- Some kitchen capacity (refrigerator, stove, microwave)
- Laundry space
- Shower and dressing area
- Storage and mailbox capacity
- Outdoor space for recreation activities
- Parking

Our initial, rough estimate is that the indoor building space would need to be between 2,500 and 5,000 square feet.

Equipment needs

- Desks and chairs for 4 to 8 staff
- Desks and chairs for 2 to 5 professional guests and others
- Computers for 4 to 8 staff
- At least 2 computers for visitor use
- Phones for 4 to 8 staff
- Filing cabinets and shelving
- Copier/printer/scanner/fax with backup
- Large table and chairs for meeting room to accommodate 8 to 20 participants
- Computer projection equipment and writing board for meeting room
- Couches and comfortable chairs to accommodate 8 to 20 people
- Appropriate equipment to fit kitchen, laundry, showering, storage, recreation, etc. capacities

Draft budget

- Multiple scenarios (without any building, building donated, maintenance donated, maximize in-kind staffing, smallest functional Center) – To be generated based on staffing projections and location descriptions

Request from government partners

- Concise, specific requests for support concerning building (identifying possible spaces in open, government-owned buildings such as the old social services building), equipment, staff funding, coordination of services – To be drafted based on prior information