



Photo Provided
Showing off their winning trophy in the 2019 Wheeling SleepOut Boxed-In Design Contest are members of the Glow Chicks, from left, team captain Irene Harvey, Leslie Prince, Amy Pyle, Velvet Elkins and Michelle Harriman. The 10th annual Wheeling SleepOut will be virtual this year with a Home for the Holidays theme on Dec. 4.

LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

SleepOut Aims To Stamp Out Youth Homelessness

WHEELING — While many older teens are worrying about online classes, COVID-19 and college applications, some are wondering whether they'll have a roof over their heads tonight.

In one year, about 550,000 youth experience homelessness, according to National Alliance to End Homelessness. Fifty percent of youth facing homelessness are unsheltered and sleeping outside, in a car or somewhere not meant for human habitation.

To help combat local youth homelessness, Youth Services System Inc. is hosting the 10th annual Wheeling SleepOut on Dec. 4. Due to COVID, the event is virtual this year.

The SleepOut is an awareness and fundraising campaign for the YSS Transitional Living Program that offers housing, mentoring and life skills training for youth ages 17-21 who have aged out of foster care or are otherwise facing homelessness.

"We are blessed to have the programs and incredible staff to help youth battle homelessness and staff to save youth from homelessness and guide

them to independent living," said Terra Crews, YSS Special Events coordinator.

"Tasha" is one of those youth. She was in the foster care system since birth and was physically and emotionally abused growing up. She was sent to a boarding school at age 10. When it was shut down, rather than being welcomed home she was placed in a shelter. At 17, she went to live with a family friend, but was sent to live at Crittenton Services in Wheeling when she became pregnant. While there, she graduated early from high school and enrolled in college. Now 21, Tasha attends nursing classes at West Virginia Northern Community College while working at a local nursing rehabilitation center and caring for her 3-year-old son.

Please see SleepOut, Page C5

Facts About Homeless/Runaway Youth

- Between 1.6 and 2.8 million youth run away in a year. (Hammer et al, 2002, Greene, 1995)
- Individual or family risk factors during adolescence predicted homelessness as young adults.
- Youth who ran away from home multiple times, those with nontraditional family structures, parental health issues preventing work, or low educational achievement were at increased risk of homelessness.
- Two factors reduced the risk of homelessness among youth: being Hispanic and having parents who are supportive but permissive in their parenting style.
- Running away from home once decreases the likelihood that a youth will graduate from high school by 10%.
- Running away from home multiple times decreases the likelihood of completing high school by 18%.
- 47% of runaway/homeless youth indicated that conflict between them and their parent or guardian was a major problem.
- Over 50% of youth in shelters and on the streets reported that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving but

Source: youthservicesystem.org

Wheeling Sleepout Home for the Holidays

WINDOW DISPLAY CONTEST

Team up with YSS to raise funds for youth facing homelessness.

Decorate your window for a chance to win Peoples Choice Award!

Register for the WSO-Home for the Holidays here:
www.youthservicesystem.org



Beginning November 20th, folks will visit your store front to view your window then head to www.youthservicesystem.org to vote for their favorite window!



Windows must be decorated according to the theme (Home for the Holidays).

Lights encouraged!



Questions? Contact Terra at tcrews@ysswv.com or 304-940-6899

SLEEPOUT

Continued from Page C1

"It's hard to balance student, employee and mom duties, but I'm making it happen," Tasha said. "I love the life God has blessed me with and the support I get from YSS, Youth Opportunities Unlimited and more." Youth Opportunities Unlimited is a YSS program in conjunction with WorkForce West Virginia that helps youth find and sustain employment.

This year's theme is Home for the Holidays. The theme reflects the fact that YSS is home for all the youth in its residential programs, including Transitional Living, two emergency shelters and the Ronald C. Mulholland Juvenile Center. Also driving the theme is that, with COVID-19, more people may be staying home for the holidays. Finally, while SleepOut participants usually build their cardboard structures at the Miracle League Field in the I-470 Sports Complex, this year they will be building them at home, submitting videos of the structure for the judges.

"Our virtual events have been successful this year. Although we miss coming together for special events we are thankful to continue our tradition for our youth virtually," Crews said.

The goal for the SleepOut is to increase awareness and raise \$100,000.

"We've set the highest goal in Wheeling SleepOut history because we need to. Youth homelessness is a growing problem. Without

the support from our community we would not be able to do what we do for youth facing homelessness."

Registration is now open for the Boxed-In Design Contest, where participants build a cardboard structure and compete for prizes. New this year is a window display contest for local businesses. The peer-to-peer fundraising competition also is underway. Sponsorships are welcome. For information, please visit www.youthservicesystem.org/events. For questions, email Terra Crews, tcrews@ysswv.com or call 304-218-2834.

About Youth Services System Inc.:

Youth Services System Inc. is committed to responding to the complex needs of youth at serious risk. For 46 years, Youth Services System, Inc. has reached thousands of youth and their families with our shelter, residential, community-based and professional services. Together with youth and their families, we work to improve their physical and emotional well-being, to address the debilitating effects of abuse, addiction, and trauma, and to build the skills and connections they need to be successful.

Supported by a volunteer Board of Directors, dedicated staff, and faithful community support, Youth Services System, Inc. makes an impact in the lives of youth. For more information, visit www.youthservicesystem.org.