

# Shelter with Us

By Jill Robertson

In the last half of 2008 forty-two youth stayed at the Youth Haven Shelters. Youth who come into our program come with their own personal reasons as to why they are placed in shelter care, but each one of them have life circumstances that have left them, in essence, homeless. Some youth who have been removed from situations of abuse, neglect and or abandonment are experiencing out of home care for the very first time. For some, it is a safer alternative to couch surfing or living on the streets. Others are in the midst of a family crisis and need some space and help, while they and their family work towards solutions. At this time of crisis, Friends of Youth's emergency shelters prove to be a safe and stable place for them while their families, social workers, counselors, FoY staff and other caring community members work on finding them a more permanent placement.

Working with these youth you can't help but admire their tenacity and resiliency. They find support and build relationships with other youth in the program as well as find stability and compassion from the shelter staff. While the details of their situations vary greatly, often they find they have a lot in common; namely that they have all suffered a great deal of loss. With a lot of emotions and a great deal of stress, young people arrive at our shelters not knowing what to expect. At the Youth Haven Bellevue and Kenmore Shelter youth are often surprised to find a homey environment that provides them with opportunities to enjoy "normal" teen activities, while providing the structure they need. Youth are generally placed into our shelters for a period of two weeks to thirty days.

During that short time our goal is to help stabilize the youth, meet their basic needs, and connect them with people and resources that will follow them when they move on to a more permanent placement. Shelter staff advocate for positive change and placements that will help these youth thrive and be successful. For some, this means reunifying with their family or guardian with newly learned skills and understanding that will make it a better place to live. For others, it means moving to a new foster home that can better meet their needs. Some youth, particularly the older teens, successfully apply and move into transitional living programs where they can gain independent living skills in a safe setting. For the youth we serve, emergency shelter is a last resort but a necessary one. Most have other places they would rather be but the goal for our staff and the youth we serve is to make their transition time a positive experience and to equip them for a successful and permanent placement after they exit shelter.

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