



YW
youthworks
:a safe place to be

2024
Annual Report



HELPING ENSURE ALL YOUTH
HAVE A *SAFE* PLACE TO
BELONG AND *BE HEARD*

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Melanie Heitkamp, LCSW
Executive Director
mheitkamp@youthworksnd.org

Dear Friends & Supporters:

Almost 38 years ago, I found a home at Youthworks. It was the agency that offered me the opportunity to do the prevention work I believed in. Before coming to Youthworks, I spent 7 years, investigating Child Abuse and Neglect. I saw the missed opportunities to truly help families before they felt totally helpless. Parents who wanted to be good parents but just didn't have the skills or role models in their own lives to be the people they wanted to be. I became a social worker to help people not judge them or accuse them. Youthworks offered me that opportunity to do the work I believed in.

Youthworks is a place where prevention is possible; a place where we can serve families and youth trying to overcome obstacles of poverty, discrimination, and family conflict. At Youthworks, youth and families can receive support not judgement from adults who see their strengths not their deficits. It is a place that upholds the knowledge that trauma, depression and suicide are preventable; a place where youth can walk in the door and feel safe, regardless of who they are. At Youthworks, youth are accepted and feel they matter.


Today, our youth are expressing fear and uncertainty about where they fit into the world, about whether they are judged and excluded for who they are. Now, more than ever, we are called upon to keep our youth safe and feeling hopeful about their future. Our Youthworks staff, donors, volunteers, and partner agencies offer that light and hope that brought me to Youthworks years ago.

My parents taught me from the time I was little, "you are no better than someone else and you are no less than someone else." Stand up for people who are bullied. Do not remain silent. I haven't always lived up to that guidance, but I sure have tried my best. May 30 2025, will be my last day as Executive Director of Youthworks and the beginning of my retirement. It seems fitting that I end my career with remembering these values and vowing to continue to fight for those who need us, even in retirement.

The agency's mission and vision are in good hands with our next Executive Director, Mark Heinert. Mark has been my Youthworks partner in this work for more than 25 years. I have made few decisions without seeking Mark's advice and guidance. He is a kind and dedicated leader who understands the need for advocacy when youth lack the platform to voice their fears. He upholds the values and beliefs that our youth and staff can count on. He is a positive leader- both at Youthworks and in the communities we serve. The agency is in good hands.

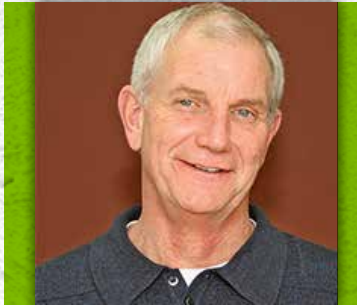
Thank you to my current and past Board of Directors, staff, managers, community partners and donors who believe in what we do at Youthworks. Thanks to Doug Herzog, the founder of our agency, for taking a chance on me and believing in my ability to carry out his vision for youth. Most importantly thank you to the youth and families who trusted me with their pain and who shared their hopes and dreams of belonging and happiness. Youthworks will always be in my heart.

Melanie Heitkamp
Executive Director



FOR YOUTH TO HAVE THE
SUPPORTS AND RELATIONSHIPS
THEY NEED TO **THRIVE** IN
COMMUNITIES THAT **VALUE** THEIR
VOICE AND EXPERTISE

THE BOARD of



DAN ULMER
CHAIR PERSON



MIKE EGGL
VICE CHAIR PERSON



ERIN OBAN
MEMBER SINCE 2017



MELODY STAEBNER
MEMBER SINCE 2021



SASHAY SCHETTLER
MEMBER SINCE 2023

MY WHY:

"I am happy to be a part of the board because Youthworks serves as a foundation for youth that would otherwise not have support that so many of us take for granted."

-Vice Chair Person, Mike Eggl



RENAE AAFOR
MEMBER SINCE 2024

DIRECTORS



CARLEE MCLEOD
TREASURER



JESSICA SIDERS
SECRETARY



MELISSA BLISS
MEMBER SINCE 2023



BRYAN HARRIS
MEMBER SINCE 2023



THOMAS HILL
MEMBER SINCE 2023

MY WHY:

“When Ward County lost its resource for the emergency shelter care for at risk, runaway and/or behaviorally challenging youth, the Human Service Zone experienced a very real crisis situation. A search for another local service provider produced no replacement and HSZ workers were providing care for these teens in the office building, taking turns working nights and weekends beyond their normal work day. We reached out to YouthWorks, looking for whatever assistance or advice they could provide. Youthworks could have said their plate was already full, providing an ever-growing number of programs to meet the needs of teens in Bismarck and Fargo. However, as seems to be their way, Youthworks not only joined the discussion... they stepped up and stepped in to our community, establishing an emergency shelter in MInot and working to grow their services in a community desperately in need of all they have to offer. When Melanie came to me and asked if I would serve on the board, I knew it was my turn to step up and say yes.”

-Board Member, Melissa Bliss

YOUTHWORKS STAFF

THIS LIST REFLECTS STAFF MEMBERS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF OUR MISSION DURING 2024.

BISMARCK

MELANIE HEITKAMP, LCSW - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NATHAN WANGLER, CPA - CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
MARK HEINERT, LBSW - ASSIST. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LAUREN BOSCH, B.S. - HR MANAGER
EMILY YANISH, LPCC - DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
KIM EKART, LMSW - GRANTS MANAGER
AMY BOYD-BOLME, LMSW - PROGRAM MANAGER
SARA EASTMAN, LMSW - PROGRAM MANAGER
ANITA BOHNER, LMSW - PROGRAM MANAGER
ANGIE HARPER, LBSW - AT-RISK SERVICES
KENNEDY DREWIS, LPCC - ANTI-TRAFFICKING SERVICES
YESENIA DE ARCOS, A.A., A.S. - AT-RISK SERVICES
BAILEY ACKERMAN, B.S. - PREVENTION SERVICES
LUCAS WALZ, B.S. - PREVENTION SERVICES
DAKOTA KOTTSICK, A.S. - PREVENTION SERVICES
JAY SCHAFFER, B.S. - HOMELESS SERVICES
LONNIE WISE SPIRIT - HOMELESS PROGRAMS
LEX WILLIAMS, B.S. - HOMELESS SERVICES
JEFFERSON JACOB - HOMELESS SERVICES
TONIA RIDES HORSE, B.S. - HOMELESS SERVICES
STEPHEN GEFROH, A.A. - HOMELESS SERVICES
SIERRA DERINGER, LMSW - ANTI-TRAFFICKING SERVICES
ASHLEY WILLIS, MSW - ANTI-TRAFFICKING SERVICES
BETTY LEINGANG - ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT
ARISTA BREKKE, AAS - ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT & GRAPHIC DESIGNER

**Youthworks staff also includes Guardian ad Litem, Shelter Workers, Mentors and Interns all of whom are integral to the agency, the services we provide, and the youth we serve*

FARGO

THOMAS COOK, M.ED. - PROGRAM MANAGER
MATTHEW BENSON-TUFF, B.A. - PROGRAM MANAGER
NICHOLE GUBBELS, LBSW - PROGRAM MANAGER
NYA CHAKIN, LPCC - AT-RISK SERVICES
CIERRA TROSEN - AT-RISK SERVICES
KARLEE LIDDLE, B.S. - ANTI-TRAFFICKING SERVICES
CHELSY LAFRINIÈRE, B.S. - ANTI-TRAFFICKING SERVICES
SADIE SHEPPARD, B.A. - CULTURAL SERVICES
MATT JOHNSON, B.S. - CULTURAL SERVICES
KAREE AMIOT - HOMELESS SERVICES
JAKE KING, B.S. - HOMELESS SERVICES
CASEY BJERK, A.A. - PREVENTION SERVICES
LEXX FRANCIS, BFA - PREVENTION SERVICES
J'NEIL GIBSON, A.A. - BEYOND THE GAME
SAM ROGSTAD, LBSW - BEYOND THE GAME
EMILY HANSEN, BSW - SCHOOL BASED SERVICES
CAITLIN REITEN, B.A. - SCHOOL BASED SERVICES
NANCY ANDERSON - ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

MINOT

CARRIE EVANS, J.D. - ANTI-TRAFFICKING SERVICES
ANGELL PATNAUDE - HOMELESS SERVICES
SHEYLA SANCHEZ - HOMELESS SERVICES
ALESHIA LUCY, B.S. - AT-RISK SERVICES
JENN BAILEY, A.A. - AT-RISK SERVICES

GRAND FORKS

ANN HERBECK, B. ED. - SCHOOL BASED SERVICES

DICKINSON

MELISSA ANDERSON - AT-RISK SERVICES



Youthworks is a United Way agency.

AGENCY OVERVIEW

In 2024, Youthworks continued its critical work with homeless, runaway, trafficked and at-risk youth throughout North Dakota. Youthworks was successful in obtaining funding from the state of Minnesota to expand homeless services into the Moorhead community. Three transitional housing units, with six available beds were added, and additional supports were developed in partnership with Moorhead Public Schools. In Bismarck, Youthworks also added a program specifically to focus on the prevention of trafficking for girls. This program has focused on education and positive connection for at-risk teen girls. As we look to the future, Youthworks continues to pursue funding that will allow expansion of prevention-focused programming, as the organization strives to be a safe place for all youth to belong and be heard.

IN 2024

YOUTHWORKS SERVED **1,356**



YOUTH IN NORTH DAKOTA'S COMMUNITIES



SHELTERED

322

YOUTH



284

YOUTH ENGAGED IN ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

6,571 CONTACTS WITH YOUTH ON THE STREETS AND IN SCHOOLS



37,773 HOURS
OF SUPPORT PROVIDED





HOMELESS PROGRAMMING

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND RAPID REHOUSING

Youthworks' homeless programs offer young adults the opportunity to build healthy, productive lives with the guidance and support of caring adults. Our Transitional Housing programs—operating in Bismarck, Fargo, and Minot—include specialized services for pregnant and parenting youth through the Parenting Pathways initiative. These programs provide safe, stable housing and a comprehensive network of supportive services to foster independence and long-term success. Youth receive assistance with education, life skills development, parenting support, and employment readiness, all designed to strengthen core competencies and empower them to transition confidently out of homelessness and into self-sufficiency. At exit, youth can access temporary rental assistance through the Rapid Rehousing initiative.

YOUTH HOUSED

91

NIGHTS OF SHELTER

12,820



YOUTH SERVED

363

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING IN MOORHEAD

In November 2023, Youthworks expanded youth homeless programming into Moorhead, MN with funding through the Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Office of Economic Opportunity. Youthworks added six Transitional Housing beds in three furnished units to house homeless young adults. Additionally, outreach services and supports were developed in collaboration with the Moorhead Public Schools to help ensure Youthworks staff is present at the Moorhead Career Academy to help support homeless students as they continue their education and work toward graduation. Youthworks welcomed the first youth into Moorhead Transitional Housing units at the end of 2023.

STREET OUTREACH

Youthworks' Street Outreach Program and Drop-In Center provide access to survival supplies and caring support for youth experiencing homelessness. Services are primarily offered in the Fargo/Moorhead area, with additional outreach and support provided in Bismarck.

Outreach staff meet youth where they are—on the streets, in parks, in schools, and other community spaces—building trust through consistent presence and compassionate engagement. Establishing relationships and offering immediate assistance make the program a critical first step toward stability and a pathway out of homelessness.

6,406 CONNECTIONS
201 ENGAGED IN FURTHER SERVICES AFTER
BEING OUTREACHED TO IN THE COMMUNITY



EMERGENCY SHELTER & SUPPORT SERVICES

SHORT-TERM CARE & ASSESSMENT CENTERS

Youthworks operates 24/7 Short-Term Care and Assessment Centers (STCACs) in Bismarck, Fargo, and Minot, offering safe, supportive spaces for youth in crisis. These centers serve young people who have run away, been asked to leave home, are experiencing homelessness, have been cited by law enforcement as delinquent, or have been identified as children in need of services. The STCACs provide emergency shelter in moments of instability, helping youth stabilize and take the first steps toward long-term safety and well-being.

At the heart of the STCAC model is individualized support. Each youth receives an immediate needs assessment, case management, counseling, and other wraparound services. Youthworks collaborates with the young person and their family to build hope and craft a personalized plan for a more stable future.

Youthworks continues to support families even after a youth's stay in the STCAC through its Family Counseling Program. This program offers short-term counseling and mediation, helping families find healthier and more productive ways to manage conflict and reconnect.

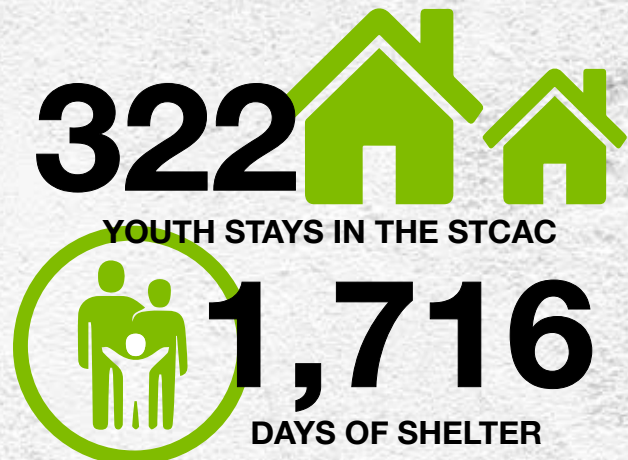
The STCAC in Minot also provides care for youth in the custody of the child welfare system. While most referrals into the program come from community partners, youth are always encouraged to contact Youthworks directly for safe shelter and support.

SPECIALIZED RUNAWAY SERVICES, INCLUDING PREVENTION

Youthworks' Runaway Program provides emergency services to runaway youth and their families, including crisis intervention, temporary shelter, food, and essential hygiene supplies. In addition to addressing immediate needs, the program offers reunification services and counseling to help rebuild family relationships and support long-term stability.

Youthworks also offers prevention services for youth who are considering running away, helping them explore alternatives and access resources before a crisis escalates. The program works closely with both youth and their families to understand the underlying issues that contribute to running away—often including parent-child conflict, lack of validation, and concerns about abuse or neglect.

As the only designated runaway service provider in North Dakota, Youthworks is a proud partner of the National Runaway Safeline, ensuring that young people across the state have access to trusted, life-saving support when they need it most.





VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES

ANTI-TRAFFICKING SERVICES

Youthworks' Anti-Trafficking Program provides a safe, supportive space for youth who have experienced—or are currently experiencing—human trafficking. This program empowers survivors to set and pursue their own goals, whether that means securing housing, finding employment, reconnecting with family, or learning how to live independently—free from the control of traffickers for the first time.

Each young person is supported by trained specialists and counselors who understand the complex, often hidden impacts of trafficking. Survivors are met with compassion and without judgment, ensuring they feel seen, heard, and valued. Comprehensive services may include intake and assessment, counseling, intensive case management, transportation assistance, survivor leadership opportunities, and referrals to additional resources.

Through consistent, trauma-informed support, the Anti-Trafficking team walks alongside survivors as they build safe, healthy, and self-directed futures. Youthworks also extends its impact by providing training and technical assistance to law enforcement agencies, schools, and other youth-serving organizations, helping communities respond more effectively to trafficking.

HOUSING FOR YOUTH SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Youthworks' Continuum of Housing Program for Youth (CHPY) provides safe, stable housing specifically for survivors of human trafficking (ages 18 – 24), along with comprehensive support services to help them regain independence. The program operates five apartment units in Bismarck and Fargo, offering a secure environment where survivors can begin healing and rebuilding their lives.

In addition to housing, CHPY offers intensive case management, life skills groups, and mentoring tailored to the unique needs of trafficking survivors. This supportive framework allows young adults to focus on personal growth and achieve their goals, whether related to education, employment, or emotional well-being, while working toward long-term independence.

VICTIM OF CRIME ACT (VOCA) PROGRAMMING

Youthworks' VOCA program ensures that youth who have been the victim of a crime have access to the supportive services necessary to ensure their safety and well-being. Services include mentorship, counseling, victim support & advocacy, and case management. Both VOCA & anti-trafficking services are available statewide, with program staff traveling to meet youth and their families for services.



PREVENTION SUPPORT

As the agency works towards its 2023-2026 Strategic Plan goals, Youthworks is excited to build upon current prevention efforts--helping ensure all youth have a safe place to belong and be heard. Below are some of the prevention efforts currently underway:

BRIDGES

Youthworks offers a daytime program providing meaningful activities for students suspended or expelled from school. Services include an intake/assessment, homework assistance, and service to the community. While in this program, students engage in positive behavior while learning the value of serving others. This service is offered to Fargo and West Fargo students. In 2024, Bridges served 88 youth.

BEYOND THE GAME (BTG)

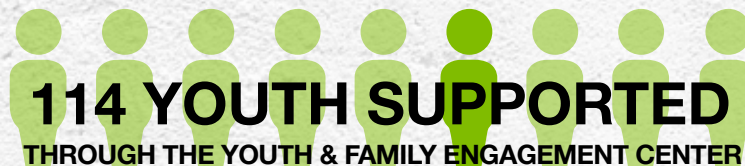
The Beyond the Game (BTG) program is a multifaceted program sponsored by Youthworks for youth ages 11-18 and in grades 6-12 who may be dealing with issues of single parenting, low socio-economic status, social justice issues, motivational issues, identity needs, and youth who may have difficulty in group situations. The program focuses on Athletic Performance, Health and Wellness, and Youth Advocacy and Development. BTG served 51 youth in 2024.

YOUTH & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT CENTER

The Youth and Family Engagement Center provides early intervention and prevention services designed to help youth and families strengthen their relationships and thrive together. As a community-based resource, the Center offers a safe, welcoming environment where families can connect, grow, and access support—without requiring formal system involvement.

The Center serves youth and families who are not yet involved in systems such as juvenile court, child welfare, or CHINS, and those who are just beginning to engage with them. Programming includes daytime, after-school, and summer sessions, mentoring opportunities, and connections to cultural and community-based organizations—all provided at no cost.

Participants may also be referred to other Youthworks programs that can further support their goals and well-being when appropriate.





GROUP WORK

Youthworks offers a diverse range of group programs across North Dakota to support the social, emotional, and behavioral well-being of youth and their families.

In Fargo, current group offerings include:

- **Ogimaa** (formerly N8V Youth Circle): A culturally rooted group for school-aged Native American youth
- **Evolve**: A supportive space for LGBTQIA+ young adults (ages 18–24)
- **Summer Youth Group**: Activities and peer connection for middle and high school youth
- **Anger Management**: Skill-building sessions for youth and their families to address conflict and emotional regulation
- **Life Skills Groups**: Interactive sessions where youth can develop practical skills while connecting with peers

These group programs are designed to meet youth where they are, offering safe, affirming spaces to grow, connect, and build resilience.

In Bismarck, the following groups are available:

- **Friends of Mothman**: A community group for LGBTQIA+ young adults (ages 18–24)
- **Beautiful Spirit**: A cultural support group for school-aged Native American youth
- **Summer Youth Group**: Connection, learning, and growth opportunities for middle and high school youth
- **Anger Management**: Conflict resolution and communication-focused support for youth and families
- **Life Skills Groups**: Hands-on sessions to help youth build essential life skills in a supportive environment

Additional Locations:

- **Anger Management Groups** are also offered in Minot and Grand Forks
- **Life Skills Groups** are additionally available in Minot

Yield
GIVING
OPENCALL

AWARDEE

Our deepest thanks go out to McKenzie Scott and Yield Giving for the generous donation of \$1,000,000 in unrestricted funds in 2024. This gift will help Youthworks to expand our work throughout North Dakota, in pursuit of our mission: to ensure that all youth have a safe place to belong and be heard.

LOCAL GIVING. LOCAL IMPACT

YOUR DOLLARS AT WORK

While Youthworks' obtains the majority of its funding through federal grants and state contracts, strong donor support is critical to sustain and expand our mission throughout North Dakota. All donations stay local to North Dakota, and are put to work in meeting the needs of the homeless, runaway, trafficked and at-risk youth served by the agency. Donations made to Youthworks' allow for flexibility in funding otherwise unmet needs for the youth and families we serve or meeting current priorities. Additionally, local donations may be used as required match for our federal grant funds, bringing in as much as \$10 for every dollar donated. As Youthworks' works to meet its goals of expanding prevention efforts throughout North Dakota, local donations will be essential to launch new programming.

Youthworks' has worked to improve the ease of the donation experience, as many avenues are available for donors that wish to support the agency. Donations may be received via Youthworks' website, Facebook, Venmo or delivered to your local Youthworks' office. Youthworks' also receives gifts via donor advised funds, corporate match of employee contributions, and bequests.



↑ ↑ ↑
SCAN HERE
TO DONATE



\$1,301,318*

RAISED IN 2024

**1,000,000 FROM YEILD GIVING*



1,345

DONATIONS



\$81,433

RAISED ON GIVING HEARTS DAY



150+ VOLUNTEERS



1,200+ HOURS

OF VOLUNTEERING IN 2024



YOUR GIFT, YOUR WAY.

1

Make a one-time or monthly monetary gift online, via credit card or your bank account, to support Youthworks work across North Dakota and Western Minnesota.

2

Donations to Youthworks Parenting Pathways program qualify for a generous tax credit on your North Dakota income taxes.

3

Recommend a grant to Youthworks from your Donor Advised Fund (DAF).

4

Donate to Youthworks Endowment fund, helping ensure the organization is financially sound, now and in the future.

5

Donate hygiene supplies; non-perishable food items; school supplies; household supplies; or diapers and formula. These items are needed by youth in our programs year-round. Gently used clothing for teens and young adults is collected from April-July of each year as well.

MY WHY:

“The weight of the world should never be allowed to crush the young before their lives become their own.”

-Donors: Andy Brandvold and Amber Dew

Please reach out to our Development Director, Emily Yanish, with any questions about donations and charitable giving plans. She can be reached at eyanish@youthworksnd.org. Please consult your tax professional regarding your specific giving plans and tax advantages.



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