A drop-in center for homeless youth, Columbus, Ohio

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We’re in contract for a new facility!

Yes, you read that correctly, the Star House has officially entered contract for our new facility! Our staff and Advisory Board, led by Terry O’Connell, have been hard at work raising the necessary funds to secure a larger, more efficient space to vastly improve our capabilities. The new location is a 14,000 square foot warehouse and is located near multiple bus lines for easy access for visiting youth. As an added benefit to our staff, volunteers, and visitors, gone are (or will be) the days of competition for parking near the house, as we will have our own parking lot!

Now, being in contract is not the same as owning the building. It still has to pass inspection and any code issues must be resolved. Once the sale is complete, we will be pleased to announce the new location. After that, before we’re ready for move-in day, it will require a significant amount of renovation, which also requires funding.

While the processes seems a little daunting, we are finding it impossible not to get just a bit ahead of ourselves in our excitement. This has been a goal of ours for a long time, so much so that you were probably growing a little tired of hearing about it all the time. So now that we’re finally so close, what do we have to look forward to when we switch locations?

Well, for starters, the designated space for youth will be greatly expanded, with a single-floor layout for easier monitoring and service. A larger kitchen will provide an opportunity for community engagement while preparing meals, helping to equip youth with better skills for self-sustainment. It will also include a larger eat-in area and living room area for increased socialization between volunteers and youth. We will also have an art room, a computer area, and a quiet room for relaxing.

One of the biggest issues with the current Star House is an overall lack of storage. The new location will feature additional space for food, clothing, hygiene items, and other donations. We are also looking into providing lockers for the youth, so they may have a safe space to store their belongings that allows them the ability to achieve productive goals without having to lug all of their stuff around with them.

About Us

Star House is a 24/7 drop-in center for homeless youth and youth in transition aged 14-24 that has been operating since 2006. We are proud to be a contributing member of the community, and are fortunate to be working with a traditionally underserved population.

Star House was named by founder Natasha Slesnick after a quote from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116, which says love “is the star to every wandering bark . . .”
Meet Our New Interim Director

Early this summer, Dr. Joseph Edwards stepped down as our executive director. Despite his relatively short stay here at Star House, his impact remains evident in our protocols and procedures. His insight from years of experience with youth, mental health, and addiction greatly improved our ability to serve our clients. His reputation and influence also helped to establish relationships with other organizations throughout central Ohio. Dr. Joe stepped aside to have more time with his amazing family. We wish him the best in his future endeavors.

While Joe will certainly be missed, we were fortunate to have Dr. Denitza Bantchevska step in as our interim director. Thanks to her, we have been able to continue operations without missing a beat. She is a great leader, providing guidance to staff members who draw from her wealth of experience in the academic and service worlds.

Dr. Denitza has a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Science from Ohio State and is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. She also holds a degree in Business Administration. Since 2005, she has worked extensively with homeless and substance-abusing populations as both a researcher and a clinician, demonstrating a strong commitment to recognizing and meeting their needs.

Dr. Denitza has been affiliated with Star House since it was founded in 2006, and has worked with homeless youth in Columbus as a therapist, research assistant, and project coordinator. She has worked effectively with university leadership, faculty, students, community staff members, and clients, striving to foster effective and innovative approaches toward improving some of today’s most acute social problems. Before taking over as interim director, Denitza was a vital part of our expansion of services. She had also been a boon to our efforts in improving the conditions and organization in the house. She even fixed the TV!

A Few More Goodbyes

One unavoidable difficulty in running and maintaining a program such as ours, let alone one staffed by so many wonderful students, is turnover due to graduation. We have lost several veteran monitors in recent months, and it’s impossible not to notice the hole in our hearts left by their departures.

Many of you who frequent the house may have already noticed the absence of Anne, Asha, Ashley, Brooke, Joe, Sabrina, and Sarah. It is clear to us that they all have bright futures ahead of them, but alas, we are sad to see them go.

However, one of our many blessings is our ability to attract a bounty of qualified and caring applicants for open positions. We have hired five new staff members: Sade, Heather, Soren, Jacob, and Donielle, who have quickly become a part of the culture of Star House. They have already made enormous strides in forming strong relationships with the youth, as well as the countless other duties that come along with being a monitor. A few more will be joining our ranks in the coming weeks, and we are excited to see what the future has in store.

A recent staff farewell party
Abundant Life Church Cookouts

At the beginning of the summer, Pastor Tom Vasllof and Bill Simpson arranged for the Abundant Life Church to host a monthly cookout in our backyard. They have proven to be a very reliable group, and have shown up on the last Sunday every month with food and games for the youth. So far, the cookouts have been a great success, and we’re excited to have them around for the rest of the warmer months.

“Our church serves those who have no helper in their life and look for places of greatest need,” said Pastor Tom, “so that’s one of the reasons why we chose Star House. Plus, the thought of helping young people is appealing to us. Knowing that somebody does care can be uplifting. We may only be one person in the world, but we can be the world to one person! Things have gone well, and it has been our pleasure. A few of the youth have really enjoyed playing corn hole with us, and we look forward to it."

Meet Cameron Smith

Meet Cameron Smith. For his ninth birthday party, Cameron collected donations for the Star House from his friends in lieu of birthday gifts. This was not the first time he used his birthday to collect items for those less fortunate than himself. He previously gave to other youth-based organizations, such as the Ronald McDonald House. This is the first time he chose us, and we are very grateful that he wanted to celebrate his birthday on our behalf.

Cameron’s mom came up with the idea of taking donations instead of receiving presents when she attended the party of her daughter’s friend and watched as they spent 45 minutes opening gifts. She believes our birthdays are better celebrated by experiencing them together, as opposed to worshipping one person. With that in mind, every year she supplies her kids with a list of potential charities they can make their donations toward. While other kids might begrudgingly accept, Cameron fully embraces the practice.

“I would feel selfish to open that many gifts in front of my friends,” said Cameron. “I have lots of stuff, and I want to give the youth a chance to experience what that’s like.” We owe a thank you to Cameron, who is entering the 4th grade this fall, for his donation as well as his kind words for our program. “Star House is awesome!” he said. “There aren’t enough places that help homeless youth, and as time goes on, we’ll only need more and more places like this.”
Volunteer Shout Out Section!

Unfortunately, we don’t have the space necessary to properly thank all our wonderful supporters, but we would like to make special mention to at least a few more contributors.

- Several volunteers from longtime supporter Grace Fellowship Church, who already provide 2 meals per week, have somehow increased their contribution. They have highlighted us as an organization to raise money for throughout the month of October, as well as organized smaller groups to do a clean up in the house and fix our kitchen sink.
- Chad Foust has continued his regular donations of large amounts of various hygiene items.
- Brian Baker has been coming in every Monday for the last several weeks to cook lunch for the youth. He has done an amazing job providing quality food, and has quickly become a favorite among the youth.
- Dewey Akers of Xenos Church has taken over responsibility for insuring the preparation and delivery of his group’s biweekly dinner.
- Fianna Eireman Motorcycle Club threw their annual cookout in September. They also contributed several donations and many of the youth are still wearing the wristbands they brought in.

Looking for a way to help?

As you may have inferred from our need for a larger facility, we have seen an enormous increase in traffic this year. Since June, we have averaged over 50 youth per day, and each month the average continues to grow. We have already served over 600 unduplicated youth this year, with new youth being introduced almost every day. We are very proud to have taken such an enormous step in our client base, but this all means that our supplies, donations, and volunteers are in greater demand than ever before.

If you are interested in assisting our services in any way, you have plenty of options. Please take a look at the needs list to the left and see if there is anything you can contribute. Those looking to go the extra mile could host a donation drive at work. Please schedule a time to drop off any donations so that we can have staff ready to assist you. We are also still in need of more meals provided to the house. It can be a very fun group volunteering experience, and offers a great opportunity to come in and spend time with the youth. If you would like to volunteer in the mentioned capacities, or have other ideas, please contact Sam Masters with the information provided below.

If you would like more information about volunteering, the Star House in general, or know of someone who would simply like to be added to our listserv, please do not hesitate to contact Sam Masters via his email at masters.104@osu.edu or by calling him at 614-432-5409.

Current Needs

In order of priority:
- Hats, gloves, and scarves
- Coats and jackets
- Boots
- Thick socks
- Men’s underwear (M-XXL)
- Women’s underwear (5-9)
- Backpacks
- Razors
- Shaving cream
- Hygiene Items
- Dishes and silverware
- Sleeping Bags

Star House

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