Youth Solutions Council Agenda

November 12, 2026
9:30 am - 11am

Youth Solutions Council Vision: We are committed to youth-led solutions, envisioning a collaborative network to increase viable housing options, eliminate barriers, and apply equitable standards of care within our community.

Attendees: Lauren VanKeulen, Shelby Sichta, Stacey Datena, Maddie Martin, Alyssa Anten, Myracle Watkins, Shakerah McRae, Courtney Salisbury, Noah Davis, Celina Lee, Tanise Clipper, Dani Shields, Jules Kusneske, Stephanie Collier, Alonda Trammell

Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions: *Name, organization and what brought you here today, check-in?*
- Service Provider Headlines
    - Youth BFZ Dashboards
    - Extending Rocks to January
- Review Progress on This Quarter's Rocks Based on 1 Year Goals
    - **Prevention and Diversion:** Identify a strategy and recruit X number of former foster youth who are interested in mentoring current foster youth.
        - Lead: Shakerah McRae
        - YAB Point of Contact: Myracle Watkins
        - Miracle Project Informational Presentation
    - **Access:** Start the groundwork and research for a dedicated resource "hub" by understanding timeframe, cost, and community buy-in and feedback.
        - YAB Lead: Noah Davis & Courtney Salisbury
    - **Youth-Centered Approach:** Have social media up and running, ensuring all posts honor youth but do not exploit their stories.
        - YAB Lead: Piper
    - **Education and Employment:** Compile a list of what skills-building programs exist for career development/education readiness and evaluate them: What exists, Are people connecting, Is it enough?
        - YAB Lead: Moe Barnes and Celina Lee
- Vote for top issues and solve
- Next Steps/Adjournment

To Do List Review:

- **Group:** Share Myracle Project information, like/share/engage with social media. Help recruit potential members. Help get donations and get other people involved in the fundraiser. All on the website.
- **Group:** Follow Kent County YAB on social media.
- **Providers:** Prepare for sharing a headline (if applicable) at the next meeting on anything relevant they are seeing in the sector.
- **CoC Staff:** Share data related to youth homelessness in the state/region with YSC.
- **CoC Staff:** Create "wear green day" content.
- **CoC Staff:** Order the green tshirt and collect orders.

- **Maddie:** Add Myracle's presentation to next month's YSC agenda.
- **Maddie:** Share Myracle's website and social media information to YSC to share with their networks.
- **YAB:** Create & share a tshirt design with the CoC by Wednesday at 12 PM.
- **YAB:** Make a list of what needs to go in each backpack.
- **Courtney, Noah, Lauren, and CoC:** Meet to discuss the resource hub.
- **Lynn:** Share the SE Michigan Youth Resource Hubs Google Map with the YAB.
- **Myracle:** Prepare for a presentation on The Miracle Project at next YSC meeting.
- **Tanise:** Connect with Piper for sharing social media and content creation for Wear Green Campaign
- **Stephanie:** Reach out to contacts from Leadership GR.

Issues List

1. YSC leadership lacks time to offer additional support
2. Attendance, keeping YSC providers at the table.
3. SNAP and Medicaid Changes for Youth
4. Youth HOPE Month t-shirt design
5. Ongoing t-shirt sales
6. Tokenization of YAB
7. ~~Youth Hope Month backpack side~~
8. YAB taking on majority of the work

To Do List:

- **Alonda, Stephanie, and Shakerah:** connect to discuss FYI vouchers.
- **Maddie:** Share Miracle Project website & social media
- **Maddie:** Share Kent County YAB social media
- **YAB:** Finalize list for backpacks and dates, share with group
- **Courtney and Shelby:** Connect on backpacks.
- **Tanise:** Send dates for compiling backpacks
- **Tanise:** Send a sign up sheet and items between meetings, including issues, dates, etc.
- **Group:** Consider 1-2 rocks for next quarter that this whole group could contribute to.

Youth Solutions Council Minutes

September 10, 2026
9:30 am - 11 am

Youth Solutions Council Vision: We are committed to youth-led solutions, envisioning a collaborative network to increase viable housing options, eliminate barriers, and apply equitable standards of care within our community.

Attendees: Lauren VanKeulen, Shelby Sichta, Stacey Datena, Maddie Martin, Alyssa Anten, Myracle Watkins, Shakerah McRae, Courtney Salisbury, Noah Davis, Celina Lee, Tanise Clipper, Dani Shields, Jules Kusneske, Stephanie Collier, Alonda Trammell

Agenda:

Welcome & Introductions: ***Name, organization and what brought you here today, check-in?***

Service Provider Headlines

Lauren explained that this is a new standing agenda item designed to give providers an opportunity to share current trends, challenges, and updates from their work in the field.

AYA Youth Collective Updates:

- AYA is wrapping up its TAP program and has exhausted funding for its cash assistance prevention grant. Through this funding, AYA provided approximately $150,000 in assistance to 40 young people, helping them maintain housing and prevent homelessness. AYA is actively seeking additional funding sources, as the program has proven highly beneficial, though securing funding in the current landscape is challenging.
- AYA's Drop-In Center will host a holiday dinner on November 24 from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The same event is planned for Christmas Eve.
- AYA currently has additional Family Unification Program for Youth (FYI) vouchers available. Providers working with youth who are aging out of foster care are encouraged to reach out regarding potential eligibility.

Grand Rapids Housing Commission (GRHC) Updates:

- Shakerah shared that 55 youth are currently housed through the GRHC FYI Voucher Program. GRHC is seeking additional vouchers and is building a list of eligible youth to support a future HUD request. Providers are encouraged to submit the names of youth experiencing homelessness who have current or prior involvement in foster care, as HUD requires names before vouchers can be issued. GRHC currently has 42 eligible youth identified and is seeking to expand the list. There is no cap on the number of vouchers that may be requested. Eligible youth are generally ages 18-24 who exited or are transitioning from foster care and were in foster care on or after age 14.
- Stacey asked whether youth entering the homeless response system are being identified for FYI voucher eligibility, noting that agencies often serve the same youth. Alyssa added that she can run a Coordinated Entry report to identify potentially eligible youth.

- Lauren shared that AYA Youth Collective received a letter of support from the Youth Action Board (YAB) for a grant application. If awarded, the funding would support a dedicated staff position to oversee youth participating in the FYI Voucher Program.
- The FYI Voucher Program provides housing assistance for up to three years. Participants enrolled in the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program may receive an additional two years of assistance. Efforts are underway to transition participants to Housing Choice Vouchers at the end of the five-year period to avoid a loss of housing assistance.
- Alonda asked whether resources are available to help youth locate housing after receiving a voucher. Stephanie shared that housing search assistance is available through staff at AYA's Drop-In Center and agreed to connect with Alonda and Shakerah after the meeting.

Arbor Circle Updates:

- Dani shared that federal reporting requirements now require more detailed income information. While outreach staff are not historically expected to collect this information during initial outreach, they are now being more intentional to ask youth more direct questions about income. Lauren asked whether informing youth about this change in advance would be helpful, and the YAB agreed to discuss it at their next meeting.

Covenant House Updates:

- Stacey shouted out Myracle for coming to Covenant House's candlelight vigil to share her story and said it was received very well by the community.

Youth BFZ Dashboards

Alyssa shared that Youth BFZ dashboards will be a standing "headline" agenda item. She explained that providers serving youth enter data into HMIS, which is then aggregated into the dashboard. As of the end of October, there were 420 active youth in the system. Alyssa noted that this trend has remained relatively stable over the approximately one year that data has been tracked.

The dashboard also tracks youth experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The number peaked at 291 in September 2026, followed by a sharp decline in October due to 68 individuals exiting the system. These changes are reflected in the inflow/outflow charts. Alyssa noted that the goal is to see more exits than entries. Most exits are categorized as "inactive," meaning the destination is unknown, which Alyssa noted is not uncommon. A smaller number of youth exited to housing placements, while some became ineligible after turning 25 years old.

- Lauren asked how homelessness is defined within the dashboard data. Alyssa explained that the dashboard includes unaccompanied youth ages 14-24 who have either engaged with outreach, stayed in shelter, or completed the Community Housing Connect form. Youth who are couch surfing or considered at risk of homelessness are not included.
- Courtney asked about the red line on the dashboard. Alyssa explained that it represents the "improvement median." After 12 months of data collection, BFZ analyzed the data and identified the threshold that would indicate a meaningful community-level

improvement if reached. The current improvement median is 366. Lauren noted that setting reduction goals based on this benchmark can help measure progress over time.
- Alyssa emphasized that Kent County is one of the few counties nationwide with a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of its youth homelessness data. She noted that, several years ago, there were concerns about the reliability of local counts, making the current level of data confidence especially valuable for demonstrating community need and advocating for resources.

Extending Rocks to January
Current rocks will be extended to January due to the holidays. New quarter rocks will be established in the new year.

Review Progress on This Quarter's Rocks Based on 1 Year Goals
Prevention and Diversion: Identify a strategy and recruit *X* number of former foster youth who are interested in mentoring current foster youth.

- **The Miracle Project Informational Presentation**
  Myracle presented The Miracle Project, an initiative built on the belief that "being an adult does not mean being alone." The organization's mission is to break the cycle of foster care and instability by transforming lived experience into leadership. The initiative envisions a future where no young person currently in or formerly involved with foster care has to navigate life alone. The Miracle Project is a community-based mentorship and support program that connects youth currently in or exiting foster care with older peers and mentors who have similar lived experiences. Modeled after a "big brother, big sister" approach, the program seeks to build authentic, family-like relationships, foster connection and community, and support young people as they work toward stability, independence, and their personal goals.
    - Myracle shared findings from a survey of individuals with lived experience in foster care. Most respondents reported feeling unsupported during their transition to adulthood, reinforcing the need for mentorship and community connections.
    - Lauren asked how providers could best support and promote the initiative. Myracle encouraged members to share The Miracle Project's website and social media channels broadly and to identify additional opportunities for outreach and promotion. Myracle added that she is leading much of the initiative independently and would welcome guidance, support, and technical assistance from community partners.
    - Jules asked about the screening process for mentors. Myracle explained that prospective mentors currently complete a Google Form but noted that she is exploring options for certified background checks. She acknowledged the challenge of balancing program development, safety considerations, and administrative responsibilities while operating largely on her own.

Access: Start the groundwork and research for a dedicated resource "hub" by understanding timeframe, cost, and community buy-in and feedback.

Courtney recently met with Alyssa and Lauren to discuss future YAB priorities. They decided to focus on strengthening connections with other Youth Action Boards (YABs) through an existing collaboration website and discussed contributing Kent County YAB information to the platform with the long-term goal of developing it into a statewide YAB resource hub.

Youth-Centered Approach: Have social media up and running, ensuring all posts honor youth but do not exploit their stories.
Tanise said this rock has been completed and mentioned YAB has been posting content leading up to Wear Green Day on Nov. 13. The group said it was great content and fun to see.

Education and Employment: Compile a list of what skills-building programs exist for career development/education readiness and evaluate them: What exists, Are people connecting, Is it enough?
Celina connected with Stacey and received an update from Maddie on the status of the Rock. Outreach has begun to universities, and Celina plans to send follow up messages. The project is focused on gathering information that is not already publicly available online and organizing findings into a centralized website resource.

Vote for top issues and solve

Issue Decided: The backpack aspect of the campaign is unclear.
The group discussed concerns that the backpack component of the campaign remains unclear. Courtney shared that planning has been difficult without a defined budget. Lauren shared the fundraiser generated roughly $1,200 for YAB will determine how to allocate the remaining campaign funds, with approximately $1,200 currently available.

Courtney expressed a preference for launching the effort in December rather than November, given the timeline. Dani suggested that January or February may be an even stronger launch window, noting that distributing backpacks after the holiday season could help the campaign stand out from other seasonal resource efforts.

Stacey asked for additional context on the backpack initiative. The group clarified that the goal is to assemble hygiene kits and other essential supplies in backpacks for youth experiencing homelessness. Discussion included a recent communication from Kent ISD, opportunities to leverage resources through Storehouse of Community Resources, and the possibility of involving providers in packing events. The current goal is to prepare 365 backpacks, though no volunteer packing date has been established.

- Tanise shared that members of the Facebook group Rosebuds have expressed interest in supporting the campaign and have already begun collecting backpacks and supplies.
- The group reached consensus to move forward with the backpack initiative. The YAB will determine how to allocate the remaining campaign funds, with approximately $1,200 currently available.
- Tanise shared that the YAB's next steps are to finalize the backpack supply list and establish campaign dates at its next meeting. Once completed, the list will be shared

with partners to identify organizations willing to contribute supplies or support implementation.

Another Issue: YSC Leadership lacks time to offer support.
The group discussed concerns about leadership capacity and the level of support available for advancing YSC and YAB priorities. Jules emphasized the need for clarity around when providers should step in and when they should step back.

- Courtney shared that many YAB members are balancing other life responsibilities and do not have the same professional experience or capacity as providers. She noted that offers of support from providers would be helpful. Courtney believes workload should be a shared responsibility between YAB and service providers. She noted that Rocks were initially intended to have both a YAB lead and a provider lead, but many have become primarily YAB-driven, which has created challenges.
- Alyssa acknowledged that working with Rocks has been a learning experience for everyone. Alyssa believes that now having a better understanding of the group's capacity and operating style will help inform the development of more realistic and achievable rocks in January, which may alleviate some of the current tension. Tanise and Lauren agreed that capacity should be a key consideration when setting future priorities and expectations.

Next Steps/Adjournment

To-Do's:

- **Alonda, Stephanie, and Shakerah:** Connect to discuss FYI vouchers.
- **Maddie:** Share Miracle Project website & social media
- **Maddie:** Share Kent County YAB social media
- **YAB:** Finalize list for backpacks and dates, share with group
- **Courtney and Shelby:** Connect on backpacks.
- **Tanise:** Send dates for compiling backpacks
- **Tanise:** Send a sign up sheet and items between meetings, including issues, dates, etc.
- **Group:** Consider 1-2 rocks for next quarter that this whole group could contribute to.