

## **Bishop's Editorial on Homelessness, Duluth News Tribune**

### **Youth and Homelessness**

**Millions** around the world and in our community have just celebrated Easter which celebrates not only the resurrection of Jesus, but the power to live a new life; one that moves beyond self to bless others.

There's a place in our community I visited recently that seeks to bring just that to our youth year round. It's called Renaissance, which means "rebirth" - a place run by Lutheran Social Service that offers safe sleep at night, support and direction from trusted adults during the day and hope when there seems to be none in sight.

I've been there before and am proud of their work. Young people there find acceptance, stability, discipline and accountability. Their descriptions of the kind of homeless and hopeless life they ended up living prior to Renaissance always move me to the deepest part of my soul. And they always make me think more deeply about community.

We know what works to help these young people find stability and make the transition to independence and adulthood. Duluth needs to be a place where that support and hope are woven throughout our community. In our community, an estimated 150 youth are on the street and feel that they are unable to go home.

Here's where some of the youth we serve said they stayed at night in a recent survey:

In apartment building stairwells, in their cars, in other people's cars, garages, empty houses, under school bleachers, tents/campgrounds--all unsuitable places for kids on their own to sleep with safety. For youth, it's especially critical to catch them early so they can avoid homelessness-a situation left untreated that can last years into adulthood.

State investment in affordable housing is essential to provide a bridge to safe living situations and hope for a better life for people struggling with mental illness, unemployment and no place to call home. It's also important for youth. Right now, there's a \$100 million bonding proposal that calls for housing infrastructure and general obligation bonds to build affordable housing and shelter. Lutheran Social Service plans to apply for a small portion of these bonds to build a groundbreaking new facility for youth called The Center for Changing Lives in Duluth. It will serve as a model for supporting our young people in other communities in Minnesota.

That's why I am urging our legislators to fully support \$100 million in bonding for affordable housing and make it a priority. This is not only about human dignity and the well-being of our kids, but will also provide a much-needed venue to boost our economy with new jobs.

The reality is, we really can't afford not to make this investment. What we do right now can have life-long implications, not only for youth but also for our community.

It's estimated that youth who fail to graduate from high school, for example, could cost the community \$750,000 over a lifetime in lost tax revenues, health care costs, incarceration and social services.

I've worked with young people all my life. I have seen what happens when adults take genuine interest in loving, understanding and helping mentor young people, especially those who are hurting. Think what these young people could add in our community in creativity, hard work and brain power. According to research conducted by Wilder in 2012:

- Youth experience an \$11,543 increase in annual wages in their first year after leaving homelessness.
- A high school graduate's lifetime earnings are \$476,000 higher than a dropout's.
- Society receives a return of over 4:1 for every dollar invested in supportive services for homeless youth.

Ask your legislators to support \$100 million in bonding for affordable housing that will create sorely-need housing for people who truly need it, including our kids, right here in Duluth. Let's help youth find healthy transitions off the streets toward a healthy, productive future and bring the hope and abundant life God intends for all God's children.

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