



Annual Report

2021



Cześć Namaste, Namaskar
Konnichiwa Ciao Shalom Salām
Hola Hello! Annyeonghaseyo
Bonjour Sawubona
Anyoung haseyo Aloha Hallo



Hello! Thank you for taking the time to read AYA's Annual Report. It genuinely means a great deal to us. In some ways, AYA is a merger of two non-profits that both started as pseudo-experiments. 10 years ago, we began with an \$11,000 budget and two people wearing "all the hats." Today, we're an organization of nearly 20 employees and a \$2 Million budget, supporting hundreds of 14-24 year olds annually, making even more connections to community and housing resources. So I'm thrilled to share what this past year has been for us. We continue to build AYA within a community that is still navigating a pandemic, experiencing inflation and a housing crisis, and is seeing a growing population experiencing homelessness. But as an organization, we're stronger than we ever have been. And we have so much growing yet to do.

Lauren VanKeulen



Our Mission

We create communities, rooted in belonging, for youth experiencing instability to own their future.

Our Vision

A society where all youth have support, stable housing, and belonging.

Our Values

Authenticity

We ask. We listen. We keep things real. The more we know and share, the better prepared we are to take actions that break cycles of homelessness and disrupt systemic injustice. We make progress together.

Inclusion

Every person has inherent dignity and worth to share with others. We celebrate youth of all identities and backgrounds as they are and bring their whole selves to the intentional communities we create together. We recognize the unique voices, perspectives and realities of every individual and work to build youth-centered and personalized support.

Community

Every person needs connection to thrive. Through the presence of caring peers, advocates and mentors, youth can build the relationships they need to be seen and understood. Youth have equitable access to resources critical to their wellbeing that grow their circles of support.

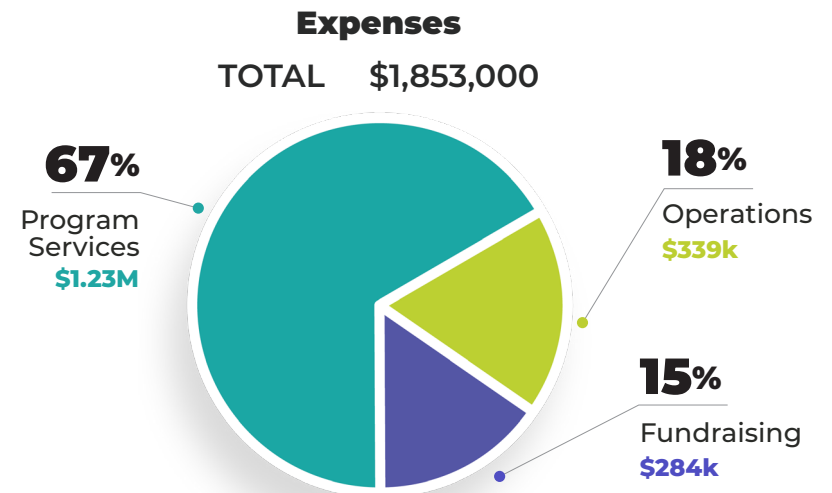
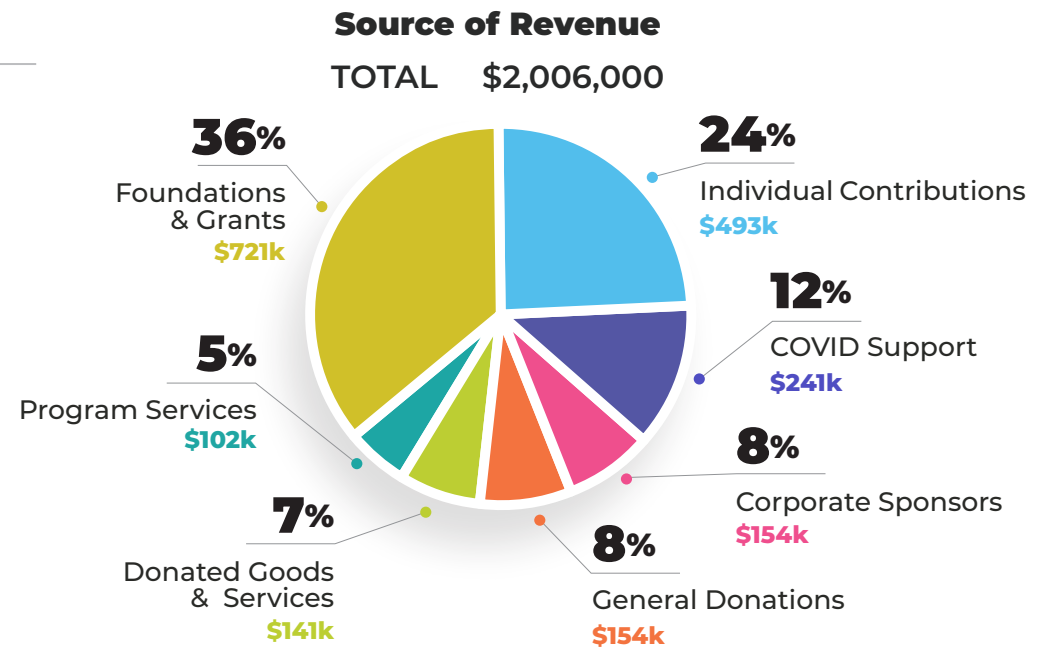
Agency

Every person has power and choice. We honor the journey that youth are on and nurture their resilience to act on their strengths. We support healthy opportunities that lead to their thriving.

Financials

Despite the challenges of the pandemic and economic concerns, AYA continued growing to better serve the youth in our community. During AYA's FY21 we purchased two houses that will house a total of 6 youth and completed major renovations on a house acquired in FY20 that is now housing 4 youth. Our Drop-In and Housing teams ensured every youth had access to our full spectrum of resources, pivoting as needed for the everchanging times. All of this could not have happened without the vital support of the community around us. AYA continues to maintain the diverse funding streams both HQ and 3:11 Youth Housing had. When AYA as an organization has stable funding we are able to consistently support our youth and maintain momentum for growth. Thank you to all of you who have supported HQ or 3:11 and are continuing to support AYA! We could not have achieved the growth we have seen without you.

For our new donors, don't worry, we are not done growing. We are continually listening and learning how we can better support the youth we serve and we have plans to expand the programs we offer to help even more youth in achieving long-term stability.



Capital Spend

House Renovation	\$125,000
Acquisition of 2 Houses	\$660,000



What We Know

At AYA, we know that data is not objective. Looking at the demographics of the youth attending drop-in, we see an overrepresentation of youth of color, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth in the foster care system. Without the collection and acknowledgment of this data, we cannot tailor our services to be effective, culturally conscious, or holistic at the core.

AYA uses a cloud-based software to track youth demographics and engagement (number of visits, basic demographics, connection points, referrals, etc) and the action steps taken, milestones achieved and barriers experienced as it relates to our 6 core focus areas: vital document recovery, education, employment, transportation, health, and housing. This software allows us to pull reports on real-time data, cross-reference various fields, and adjust case management strategies quickly.

We know that there are even more youth who are not AYA members who are couch-surfing, living in unstable and unsafe situations, and are at-risk of experiencing homelessness.



We are continually listening and learning how we can better support each unique youth we serve and plan to expand the programs we offer to help even more youth in achieving long-term stability.



What is AYA Doing?

AYA engages in this critical work by curating a continuum of youth-specific services from prevention to various interventions. Providing a streamlined, one-stop-shop for youth to engage in services and be connected to housing resources is crucial in changing the trajectory of their lives. We do this through two primary avenues: our drop-in center, and our long-term supportive housing program.

Drop-In

At our drop-in center, basic needs (i.e. showers, laundry, food, hygiene) are met and trust is built with AYA staff, allowing youth the opportunity to engage in various supports like vital document recovery, education and employment resources, transportation, housing assessment and referral, and culturally appropriate therapy, health care, and wellness activities.

Housing

AYA's 9 homes provide 25 units of safe, stable, and supportive housing. Youth pay \$300 per month in rent and utilities, with an opportunity to receive a scholarship towards their rent and security deposit upon moving out. Youth sign leases to foster ownership and responsibility of the property. On-site House Mentors provide guidance as youth navigate real-world situations, such as employment, money management, and fostering healthy relationships while creating a sense of community through weekly house dinners and holiday celebrations.



Drop-in Center



Weekly House Dinner

An Introduction to the Innovation Department

Our vision is to create equitable access to opportunities that support young people as they find health, long-term stability, and connection.”

Innovation Department Guiding Principles

Youth-Centered

Does it support youth? Is it what youth need/want?

Additive

Will not compromise team capacity or critical resources

Mission Driven

Pushes the mission and vision of the organization forward

Responsive

We will be data driven and focused

Nimble

Collaborative across the organization - adjusting to needs

Transparent

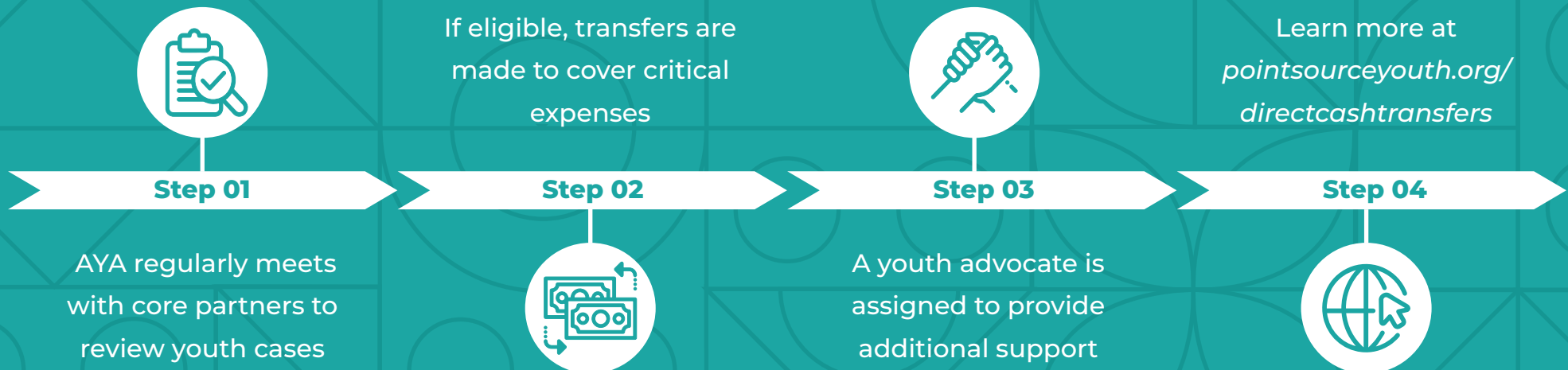
It will be very clear how and who can access initiatives

PROGRAM SUCCESS

Since AYA's inception in 2020, we have grown several pilot programs into thriving initiatives. Many of these programs began as scrappy, underfunded ideas that proved to be critical in breaking the cycles of homelessness for youth. Additionally, many of these programs were collaborative efforts with other organizations in Grand Rapids. Here are some of these programs that we'd like to highlight:

Direct Cash Transfers (DCT's)

An emerging model for rapid rehousing are Direct Cash Transfers, or DCT, which is an equitable, scalable, empowering and effective intervention for youth. Because cash transfers allow youth to create their own solutions, they can also avoid some of the structural racism, biases, and insensitivities that can emerge in more rigid shelter and transitional housing program models (e.g., accommodations that feel unsafe or unwelcoming to people with specific racial/ethnic identities, sexual orientations, or gender identities).



Comprehensive Health Initiative

We know there is a chasm between youth and accessible health care. To combat this, we created the Comprehensive Health Initiative, or CHI. This program addresses the social determinants of health by breaking down the inequities of the health care system for those already balancing the weight of poverty, complex health challenges, racism, and homelessness. By decreasing compounding trauma through crisis-intervention services, culturally appropriate mental and behavioral health services, and safe and stable housing, health outcomes will improve. CHI has become even more critical as a result of the pandemic and the increased mental health needs youth have experienced.

Project Activities + Timeline

1. Physical Health Navigation + Access

- ▶ Enrollment in appropriate health insurance plan
- ▶ Connection to a primary care and/or oral health provider and initial appointment support
- ▶ Preventative health care, testing and education through HQ nurses station
- ▶ Medication assessment, advocacy + coordination
- ▶ Partners: Health Net of West Michigan, Family Health Center at Grand Valley State University, The Red Project

2. Mental + Behavioral Health

- ▶ Real-time, youth-specific crisis support
- ▶ Relational transition to more traditional therapy models
- ▶ Substance use screening and support
- ▶ Low-barrier access to support for domestic violence/sexual assault/stalking/exploitation

3. Holistic Wellness, Stigma Reduction + Social Connections

- ▶ Targeting POC and LGBTQ+ populations through a diverse team
- ▶ Exposure to a wide variety of health, wellness, and coping strategies
- ▶ Events and group opportunities to normalize health and wellness practices

4. Addressing Social Determinants of Health

- ▶ Drop-In Services: Youth crisis support and basic needs
- ▶ Transportation, food security, vital document recovery, child care, education and employment supports
- ▶ Safe, stable, non-time limited, supportive housing AYA

5. Direct Cash Transfers

- ▶ See previous page



Staff Success



DL and Lauren's 40 Under 40 Award

The Grand Rapids Business Journal (GRBJ) annually announces the recipients of the “40 Under 40” award, which is given to 40 individuals making a difference in West Michigan. This award has been given to over 600 different individuals since 2002. In 2021, **two** AYA Staff persons received this award: CEO, Lauren Van Keulen (she/her) and our previous Director of Drop-in, DL McKinney (they/them). Both have made such a positive impact on our community, and AYA is so thankful and honored to have Lauren on our team and to have worked alongside DL!!



Lauren's 50 Most Influential Women Award

The GRBJ also awards the “50 Most Influential Women Award” to those impacting West Michigan in a powerful way. This award salutes influential women business owners, leaders, policy-shapers, and decision-makers. AYA is grateful to have our CEO, Lauren Van Keulen, be one of the recipients in 2022!

Q's Story



Q and mentors

Q is an amazing young man and AYA Alum. Q is also an exemplary human being that showcases the power of what circles of support can do. Q joined AYA in one of our AYA homes about three years ago. With the support of his amazing mentors, Adam and Mary, as well as guidance from AYA's Chief Innovation and Housing Officer, Jon Van Keulen, after two years, he was ready to move out on his own. But as so many of us know, the housing market in Grand Rapids is incredibly competitive and inaccessible to many.

That's when Q, Adam, Mary, and Jon thought, **"Why not just build a new home?"**

Many times that aforementioned question is never acted on, but one such local construction company decided to step in and help turn this dream into a reality. Fast forward to today, after 25+ community partners, countless hours from project managers and volunteer groups, and the unbelievable support from his AYA mentors - Q is officially living in his new home that he framed himself! Not only that, but Q was able to provide a place for family and friends to live as well.

While this is a macro-example of what can happen when many hands agree to supporting youth in Grand Rapids, we're fortunate to see countless instances similar to this on a daily basis at AYA. The youth we interact with show amazing resilience and dedication, and with circles of support, we see youth thrive.



Q's House

Where are we going?

While so much has been accomplished in the last two years, there is still a substantial amount of work to be done. There is a great need for supportive, transitional housing that exceeds AYA's capacity, and our community lacks a long-term, cohesive strategy that connects youth experiencing homelessness to resources and long-term stability as a whole.

We envision a community where every youth in crisis has access to housing and resources to facilitate their thriving. We strive to disrupt cycles of poverty, and serve as a gold standard for youth engagement. To accomplish this, we have identified several target benchmarks for AYA's.

AYA's 5 Year Targets



**\$4M Raised
Per Year**



**100 Housing
Units Accessed**



**Accommodate
up to 700 Drop-In
Members Per Year**



**90% of Youth Attain
Long-Term Stability**

A group of four diverse young adults are walking across a blue steel truss bridge over a river. From left to right: a Black woman with glasses and a black top, a white man in a white shirt, a woman with long dark hair and glasses wearing a white top and a red and black plaid shirt tied around her waist, and a man with a beard wearing an orange t-shirt. They appear to be in conversation. The background shows a multi-story building and some greenery.

“[AYA] is welcoming. The warmth of the community is noticed right away. Each person gets to show up how they are.”

Mary Anne*, AYA Member

How Can You Help?

At AYA, “helping us” is going to look very different for each of those who support us. Truthfully, a better question to ask might be: “What is your greatest available resource during this stage of life?” Is it time? Is it money? Is it energy? Is it something else entirely? When walking alongside youth, we are always asking “How can we best support in order to help young people achieve long term stability?”

The easiest and most impactful way to help is to become a recurring donor. Donate \$25, \$50, \$100, or \$200 a month. Your money may be going towards basic needs, vital documentation recovery, a new mattress, or in-home counseling services. But if money isn't your greatest available resource, then connect with us and create a donation drive. We are always in need of new shoes, coats, shorts, hygiene products and more - it simply depends on the season. If that doesn't make sense during this time, then volunteer with us. We cook a hot meal for 50 members at Drop-In each and every day, and we would love for you to purchase catering or bring in a meal. We also need people to clean our Drop-in Center. As we prepare to host youth every single day, we want to create a dignifying space, and we need your help to do that.

AYA's mission is to create communities, rooted in belonging, for youth experiencing instability so that they can own their future. But AYA is not going to achieve this mission without you. So as you think about how to support AYA - or any non-profit organization for that matter - think about how you can uniquely help. And then act!

We are incredibly grateful for your support. If you have any questions, you can always email us at advancement@ayayouth.org.

Sincerely,

The AYA Team



Thank You!

We talk a lot about breaking the cycles of homelessness and creating circles of support for youth - but we can't do that without partner organizations, corporate sponsors, and individual donors. We want to take a moment and thank each and every one of you for believing in AYA's mission.

And a special thank you to our Community Partners and our recurring donors!

**Some names have been changed out of respect for privacy*

