

New York State Town Hall Session
Syracuse, New York

The Salvation Army of Syracuse Area Services has been providing services to low income people since 1883. In 14 different locations nearly 30,000 individuals are provided the assistance they need to improve their challenging life situations. This includes frail elders in our Adult Day Center, infants to 12 year olds in our four Child Care Centers, children and families at risk because of abuse and neglect, teen mothers at risk of infant mortality, runaway and homeless youth, and juveniles involved in the justice system.

Because of the diversity of the program services the Syracuse Salvation Army provides, the New York State Budget impacts our organization and the populations in many ways. However I would like to concentrate on two areas; support services to the homeless youth and the needs of children and families in our child welfare system.

The allocation for runaway and homeless youth funding through OCFS has not increased in 20 years. Other funding resources targeted for the homeless leave out the special needs of the homeless youth population. In recent years homeless funding in New York State has concentrated on the development of permanent housing. This neglects the issues and needs of young people. The physical space to live in is only a small part of the needs of homeless youth. Additional resources designated for long-term supports for homeless youth is needed. Increase in New York State OCFS runaway and homeless youth funding is needed and we recommend to increase Supported Housing for Families and Young Adults (SHFYA) by \$1.5 million. New York State needs to be committed to some of its most vulnerable homeless individuals, homeless youth on the street.

The correlation between foster care and homelessness is well accepted and understood. Over 80% of the young people in our homeless youth system and nearly 90% of adults in the adult homeless shelters have foster care histories. Foster children are the responsibility of the State. We know that children who grow up in poverty do better than children who grow up in foster care. The New York State foster care system is meant to be a short-term alternative while families receive the services they need. Providing the resources to families involved in the child welfare system is a must. If this system of care is adequately supported and needed services are available to children and their parents, then we are able to prevent a number of very serious and more costly issues; such as homelessness, juvenile crime, teen pregnancy and violence in our neighborhoods. The New York State budget process needs to assure each county is investing adequately in the prevention of as well as the treatment of child abuse and neglect. The State must provide adequate rates for our foster care programs to ensure quality of care for the time children need to be in out of home care as well as support services for the foster child's family.

Working together we can build a healthier New York for all of its citizens.

Linda M. Wright,
Executive Director
The Salvation Army
315-479-1326
lwright@use.salvationarmy.org