



Shaw House News

FALL 2021

Employee Spotlight: Interview with Lexie Fowler, Special Projects Coordinator

What attracted you to working with homeless youth?

I first heard of the Shaw House during my junior year field experience class at UMaine. I had never heard of, or really thought of, a youth homeless shelter existing. After researching the Shaw House website, I was more interested in learning about homeless youth. Once I started working here, I quickly realized the need the youth have for support in their situations and the necessity there is to address youth homelessness in the Bangor community.

Can you share with me a time, in the field that has been hard to see, a trend that is a bit upsetting?

Often times youth arrive that are homeless and have needs that the Shaw House cannot meet, resulting in referring the youth for services. Youth that are referred for services are faced with long wait times which is the hardest part for the youth. While waiting, they are exposed to negative influences outside of the Shaw House which result in risky activities which lead to ambivalence to continue engaging in services. This ambivalence leaves them stuck and unable to navigate out of their homelessness. When this happens, youth can remain at our shelter until they age out and continue experiencing homelessness for years to come.

What do you think homeless youth need from staff who work with them?

Homeless youth need staff to be compassionate, trauma-informed, consistent, and approachable. Most of the youth have had damaged relationships with adults and this is their first chance to experience positive relationships, so it's important that staff are people the youth can go to for support and be treated with unconditional positive regard. Every youth served has experienced trauma, therefore having staff that are trauma-informed is necessary for the population.



What do you think homeless youth need from the community at large?

From the community, homeless youth need acceptance, compassion and understanding. Many youths express wanting to tell the community "what homeless kids are really like." They feel the pressure of societal stigma daily, they are out-casted, misunderstood, and neglected by the views of others in their community. Youth feel that they are discriminated against when trying to get employment because of their home address they must report to the business. This deters them from continuing to pursue employment. If they felt more accepted in the community it would empower them to continue working towards their goals.

Homelessness is really hard because it is about disconnection. It is a breakdown of those things that are supposed to protect the life of a child and then it's about a world often too busy to notice. Homelessness often highlights the strength of the young person experiencing it. It takes strength to try again, to persist, to not give up. Especially when it seems like people can't, or don't want to notice you. Because of the existence of the Shaw House, this incredible young man was not only 'noticed' but guided towards a path of safety and independence. And more importantly he was given the experience every youth should have – the experience of being cared for and cared about.

Shaw House 'Happenings'

Shaw House Night:

Shaw House hosted a pizza and tie dying event at the end of June and invited both current and former youth to attend. Around 13 youth were present, they gathered in our parking lot for pizza and caught up with former youth. After eating pizza, youth took part in tie dying shirts for themselves and a tapestry for the shelter.

First Council Meeting:

Shaw House developed a Youth Advisory Council in the early summer. The first meeting, which took place at Applebee's, consisted of eight youth currently receiving support from Shaw House. Thank you to the youth who have joined the council, and for your eagerness to share ideas! It was inspiring to see the youth become empowered by the council objectives!



Creative and Movie Nights:

Shelter youth have been engaging in either a Movie Night or Creative Night each week at Shaw House. Yummy snacks and drinks are provided by Hope for Homeless each week. The youth either relax with the lights off eating popcorn and watching a movie, or spending the evening relaxing, creating artwork together. Favorite movies they have watched lately are Venom and Kidnapped. Some of the favorite creative activities have been painting stars, making penny boards, drawing, and coloring.



A Day in the World at the Shaw House

By Sean Scovil, LCSW, LADC – Clinical Director



It was the hottest day of the summer. A dozen youth came in. They had been invited, as current guests and those who had received services in the past, to share their ideas about how to better the system. As we visited in the Union Street sun, the world went on around us.

The sirens of rescue vehicles from the nearby fire station, traffic from commuters headed home, pedestrians walking pets or heading home from work, and airplanes overhead. It was 100° and busy in Bangor.

Youth trickled in red-faced and hot. They came from all over, on foot, by bus, dropped off. Some had been staying in a tent nearby, others were staying on any sofa they could find, one was not wearing shoes. Another found out that we were making T-shirts, and asked if he could have a shirt to wear, as the one that he had on was tattered and falling off. One had run a quarter mile in the heat to keep from missing the bus back to town.

An adult pedestrian, clearly suffering from the heat stopped and asked for a bottle of water. After the staff provided him with one, one of the youth ran over and provided him with a second. "I know what it is like to be in a jam," he said to the man.

Cold water bottles sat on ice next to hot pizza. A circle of outreach workers and shelter staff and youth smiled and talked. Clothing and shoes were provided. Health screens were completed. A worker talked privately with a youth about hydration, another about options for quitting smoking.

Amid it all, there was laughter and connection and fun as youth who had been away from the shelter caught up with staff and friends about their memories and experiences. Youth made recommendations for making the program better. Others agreed to join a youth advisory board for the coming year. It was Shaw House at its best.

"Positive developmental relationships are essential for the health and well-being of homeless youth. Healthy relationships with adults are an essential part of positive youth development that can give homeless youth the ability to take control of their lives."
(Rhyclclearinghouse.gov)

Outreach

Over the summer, the Shaw House Streetlight Outreach team has been able to hold Outing Days for youth who are willing to attend. Most recently, the team has gone to the Bangor City Forest Orono Bog Board Walk, Pushaw Lake, and the UMaine Zillman Art Museum. Youth enjoyed the fresh air away from Downtown Bangor at the bog walk and had a blast catching and releasing frogs! It was a beautiful day at Pushaw Lake when they went, youth were able to swim and enjoy the environment. Four youth joined the team in going to the Art Museum, they walked around to see all of the exhibits and enjoyed time away from the shelter. The Outreach team is going to continue weekly Outing Days as long as the weather permits.



Open Table

Through three decades of supporting youth experiencing homelessness, Shaw House has learned that a key to youth success lies in the commitment and quality of their natural support system. This connection to community is crucial for the long-term viability of a youth's transition to independence because it provides companionship, role modeling, guidance, and a safe place within which the youth may continue to better themselves. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of youth that experience homelessness lack these natural supports, often leading to challenges and a feeling of disconnection. In response to this critical need, Shaw House has partnered with Open Table, a national model that connects youth with community members that are willing to provide support and resources directly to youth.



In the Open Table model, trained volunteers come together to meet with the youth one hour per week, drawing upon their own resources and networks to positively impact the youth – who is referred to in the Open Table model as the 'friend.' Volunteers around the table each represent a domain area as it pertains to daily living – housing, finance, healthcare, education/ occupation, community life, and transportation/insurance. These assigned areas do not necessarily require that the Table Member has an expertise in that area, but is simply willing to seek out and access the networks of other people, resources, and information to support their Friend's life plan. Support provided is determined by the life plan of the youth which outlines their goals. By drawing upon their own connections, resources, skills, expertise, and knowledge, the volunteers provide direct support and/or resources to the youth to assist them in reaching their goals. One Open Table consists of 5-6 volunteers and is dedicated to one youth, and serves the youth for approximately 9-12 months – or until the youth reaches the goals on their life plan.

If you would like to make the difference, please contact us today to become an Open Table member! Call Lexie at (207)941-2974 or email her at alexisfowler@shawhouse.us.

Ways you can help MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

*Help us spread the word about job openings at Shaw House! We are looking for individuals to join our team and assist us in carrying out our mission of supporting youth experiencing homelessness. Those interested can contact us at hr@comcareme.org. A variety of positions are available.

*Donations of gift cards in small denominations to fast food chains for us to provide youth as incentives. With Christmas approaching, department store gift cards in larger denominations to assist with purchasing Christmas gifts for youth.

*Join an Open Table!



Interview with Mikayla

What led you to the SH?

"Before I came here, I was living in an apartment on my own. I ended up getting a roommate and everything went downhill. If people want roommates they need to be careful as a lot of stuff can happen that's not good – like your money can go missing and stuff like that. Before that, I was living in a foster home. I was in foster care for all of high school."

The first time you came to the Shaw House, what were your thoughts?

"I had expected it to be a lot of rambunctious teens. But it wasn't. All the people here are like a family. We treat each other like siblings. "

How long have you been at the Shaw House?

"I have been at the Mason Place [the Transitional Living Program of the Shaw House] since January 29th."

What do you hope for over the next year?

"I am currently in college for substance abuse counseling and am looking to get my own place. My goal is to come back to Shaw House as a Residential Counselor to work with youth. It is hard living on the streets. I think I could make people feel welcome here because I know what it is like."

If you were speaking to adults, what would you want them to understand?

"If you get to know the youth, they are not bad people. Some of them are just in a bad situation and don't know how to express how they are feeling. All their emotions are pent up because they had no place to go and ended up here. They are in a vulnerable situation and just need a chance. Don't judge a book from its cover."

How do you think youth at the Shaw House feel the community sees them?

"I think the community sees us as bad people, rambunctious. They get bad images from us. But in reality we are just teens, we are just trying to live out our childhood and get used to the whole adulting situation[becoming adults]. We don't have anyone to help us except for the staff at Shaw House. Most of the kids here didn't have their parents growing up, and had to learn everything on our own."

How has Shaw House helped you?

"They have helped me get into college, and they have classes where they help teach you how to be independent (i.e. budgeting, etc.), and you receive a stipend for attending to help provide you with some spending money."

What might you say to people who are considering working at the SH?

"You are probably going to get bad vibes from us all here but we are actually a great bunch of people. Some people just have a harder time explaining their emotions and talking to new people, so they may come off as rude at first. But once you get to know them, they are a group of great people and care about each other and the staff."





We need you.

Shaw House is the proud recipient of grant funds through the Youth Homeless Demonstration Project, a project that is designed to assist states in transitioning youth from homelessness through providing rental assistance and/or transitional housing options. In addition to receiving housing assistance, youth will receive support from a Youth Transition Coordinator – a compassionate and empathetic individual who will be by their side as they navigate their journey towards self-sufficiency and independent living.

Many youth who seek the support of the Shaw House have little to no support system. As such, the Youth Transition Coordinator will play an instrumental role in partnering with the youth to overcome the day to day challenges that all of us likely experienced when we ourselves transitioned to adulthood.

Side by side with our sub-recipient, Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP), we will support homeless youth across 53% of the state in Penobscot, Piscataquis, Hancock, Washington and Aroostook Counties.

In order to pull off this massive effort, WE NEED YOU! We are seeking 3 full-time Youth Transition Coordinators (YTC's). YTC's will work remotely (from their home), and spend a large majority of their time supporting youth within the community and within youth's apartments. We have openings in Bangor, Dover Foxcroft, and Ellsworth.

We are also seeking Residential Counselors and Overnight Residential Counselors to work at the Shaw House. As you are aware, the employment market in Maine is extremely scarce at this point in time. WE NEED YOU to help us in carrying out our mission of supporting homeless youth.

Please join us in our effort!
To apply contact hr@comcareme.org

What is one thing about youth homelessness that you would want others to know?

“It’s a challenge.”

“Making a simple decision isn’t always easy.”

“Take decisions of opportunities offered.”

“It’s hard to find a place [to live] because there are no apartments.”

“If you don’t take advantage of services, you’ll just sit here.”

“You need a lot of socks.”

A Word from the Executive Director

- David McCluskey



When I sat down to write this letter, I began thinking about what a remarkable year it has been. I am certain those reading this newsletter could not have imagined that in March of 2020, we would still be immersed in a global pandemic. Unfortunately that is exactly where we are. It is easier than ever to dwell on the doom and gloom, what we can't do anymore, and what has changed. I would encourage you to rather focus on what is going well and the good that is happening despite the virus.

We have adjusted well and maybe some would say reinvented how we do the things. It is different for certain and we have more to take into consideration when venturing out, but for the most part, we still do the things we have always enjoyed - just with a little more time and more awareness. Not that I don't wish we could go back to what feels like a care-free, pre-pandemic way of life. Like you, there are few things I wish more for. But here we are.

The reinventing, awareness, and careful consideration is a part of the service provision at Shaw House. With remarkable employee dedication, diligent efforts, support from community members, and assistance from businesses and foundations, Shaw House has remained in operation – sheltering and supporting youth experiencing homelessness.

Despite the pandemic, the employees of Shaw House continue to persevere. Despite all that has happened this past year, not one day of providing three meals a day and snacks has been missed. Not one day has gone by that Outreach has not been in the community helping youth. Not one day has the Day Program not been open to help someone with food, medical needs, information, or case management services. And, not one day has the Shelter or the Transitional Living Program closed their doors to a youth who has no other place to go. Shaw House employees may not feel remarkable at all. Like the rest of us they are tired of all this. But the truth is, they ARE remarkable. They are amazing people who are mission focused to do the very best they can to help youth day in and day out despite the risk COVID 19 presents.

The employees at Shaw House are joined by countless other shelter employees across the state. A service industry that, instead of closing doors, opened many more so those sleeping outside could come inside. Those needing to recover from COVID symptoms could have a warm and dry place to get healthy. Courageous people who are mission driven to help those who have nothing. If we all look close enough, wonderful things are happening all around us. For over a year now, teachers, hospital workers, first responders, and other service providers decide each day to lean in rather than walk away.

If you are reading this letter, it means that you or your organization in some way contributes to the Shaw House mission of serving homeless youth. Your support is always needed and very important so we say a heartfelt,

→ Thank You



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www.theshawhouse.org

Supporting Maine's Homeless Youth

Monetary donations to support the Shaw House can be made through PayPal at **info@shawhouse.us** or by check to: Shaw House, Attn: Finance Department
P.O. Box 1578, Bangor, ME 04401

Other items needed:

1. **Low value gift-cards** (\$5 value) to Dollar Tree, Dunkin Donuts, McDonald's, etc. to be used as incentives for youth
2. **Heat and Eat items** such as Chef Boyardee canned goods, soup, etc. and packaged food/snacks to be used when conducting Outreach to provide youth living on the street with food that they can eat easily.
3. **Hygiene items**
4. **New undergarments** (adult size sports bras, boxer shorts, underwear, socks, etc.)

November is Homeless Youth Awareness Month

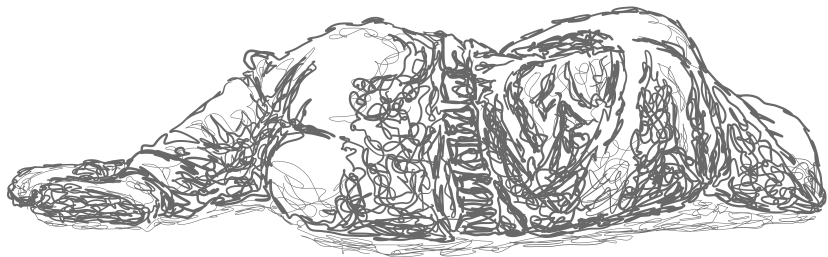
Did you Know?

1 in 30 adolescent minors (13 - 17) and **1 in 10** young adults (18 - 25) endures some form of homelessness in a year.

Learn more from the Chapin Hall Voices of Youth Count Study.

According to an ACF/FYSB Street Outreach Program Study, 24.7% of youth surveyed reported physical abuse/assault as the reason for becoming homeless.

Verbal abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse before the age of 18 are all correlated with higher run away rates. Additional research is available on the NRS website.



References and to learn more about youth homelessness:

<https://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/national-estimates-of-youth-homelessness/>

https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/housing-reports/2017-2018-state-fiscal-year-homeless-statistics.pdf?sfvrsn=eb32bd15_4