

# Rockland's Project Turning Point youth shelter faces closure

Written by Khurram Saeed  
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Jovan Manning of Children's Village gives a tour of the group's Project Turning Point shelter for runaway and homeless youth in Valley Cottage Oct. 25, 2012. ( Peter Carr / The Journal News )

### Key numbers

- Project Turning Point 24-hour hotline: 877-540-7680
- Rockland County Youth Bureau (for shelter information or to make a donation): 845-638-5166

Jovan Manning of Children's Village gives a tour of the group's Project Turning Point shelter for runaway and homeless youth in Valley Cottage Oct. 25, 2012. ( Peter Carr / The Journal News )

### VALLEY COTTAGE —

Rockland's only shelter for homeless and runaway youths could close in the coming months without new funding.

Officials of Project Turning Point learned this month that the federal Department of Health and Human Services turned down its \$160,000 funding request, even though it provided the shelter with nearly \$500,000 over the past three years. The federal grant makes up nearly a third of the shelter's operating budget.

The shelter, based in a former group home in a quiet Valley Cottage neighborhood, serves people from the ages of 14



Brad Inskip of Children's Village, left, gives a tour Thursday of the group's Project Turning Point shelter to Rockland County Probation Director Kathi Tower and Legislator Ed Day.

to 20.

About 75 young Rockland residents used the shelter in 2011, spending an average of 12 to 15 days, said Roger Williams, director of shelter services for the Children's Village. The Dobbs Ferry-based nonprofit contracts with the county to operate Project Turning Point.

"We're working really hard to keep the doors open," Williams said.

Shelter and county officials held an open house on Thursday in hopes of rallying support and funding from lawmakers and other people with influence.

Marianne McCarney-Haesche, assistant director of the Rockland County Youth Bureau, spoke with a representative for U.S. Rep. Nita Lowey, who said the congresswoman would work with the county to appeal the federal department's decision.

Obtaining funding on the federal level was the shelter's "best hope," she said.

McCarney-Haesche said she has been "extremely and overwhelmingly pleased" since the Children's Village began running Project Turning Point in 2009. She cited its excellent results, operations and employees who worked diligently with young people having problems at home or without a place to live. Staying at the shelter is strictly voluntary and police, schools, friends and county agencies typically provide referrals.

"There's nothing like this in the county," McCarney-Haesche said.

The goal is to reunite families but also to ensure the young people don't end up in more expensive systems like criminal justice or foster care, Williams said.

Children who are 14 or 15 years old can stay in one of the shelter's four bedrooms for a respite of up to 72 hours. Those 16 and older can stay up to 30 days adhering to strict supervision as social service workers and counselors work with their parents or guardians.

If that is not a safe or practical option, the young people can also move in with a friend. Williams said 80 percent of the youngsters return to a family member or friend. Others enter the military.

The shelter can accommodate up to six young people at once, although it usually has no more than four. On Thursday, a 20-year-old woman staying at the shelter left a white stuffed animal against her bed's pillow. Aside from her purse, she had few other belongings in the bedroom, one of four in the shelter.

Even though the shelter's federal funding ran out on Sept. 30, officials were not notified until this month that they wouldn't be getting any more money. The Youth Bureau, the county's Department of Social Services and the Children's Village have cobbled together more than \$60,000 to keep the shelter open through the end of the year.

Joe Abate, director of Rockland County's Office for Community Development, might also be able to secure \$60,000 in federal Housing and Urban Development money for the shelter next year, which McCarney-Haesche said would buy the shelter a little more time, possibly three months.

State funding for the program has decreased 25 percent the past two years, officials said. County funding may not be an option, they said.

DSS Commissioner Susan Sherwood said her department provides \$200,000 a year to pay for two state mandated services at the shelter: a respite bed and crisis intervention.

If the shelter were to close, those services would still have to be provided but that might mean placing local young people in Westchester or Orange.

"Money is going to have to be found to keep this program as full as it is," Sherwood said.

The irony, officials said, is that the federal government gave the Children's Village \$100,000 this year to purchase a recreational vehicle to conduct street outreach in the Lower Hudson Valley.

"But we can't do outreach if we don't have a shelter to take them too," McCarney-Haesche said.