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Salt Lake County opens a new door to homeless youth

Facilities » Beds and showers are among the entities.

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Salt Lake County hopes to encourage more homeless youth to take advantage of its youth services programs, through a new entrance and a relaxed intake system targeted toward youth 18 and under, officials announced Wednesday.

A bed, shower, laundry, meals and counseling are available for homeless youth at its new Homeless Youth Walk-In Program.

Homeless youth numbers in Utah have risen rapidly in recent years, leaping to more than 800 annually, according to a count by Volunteers of America. The VOA runs a small drop-in center on State Street in downtown Salt Lake City. Many youth spend a portion of each day there, but the facility is not open overnight.

Community agencies are scrambling to devise additional solutions. The county has added a walk-in entrance to its juvenile receiving center at 177 W Price Avenue (3610 S). The center is in the same facility where youth accused of misdemeanors are taken by police, and where youth ages 8 to 17 can stay in a crisis residential shelter.

"We're trying to reach out to the youth and let them know we are a safe place," said Tammy Champo, a youth services spokeswoman.

By law, officials are obligated by law to report the youth's status to their legal guardian within eight hours of their arrival at youth services. The receiving center will still make reports, but not as quickly as in the past. "If they're just wanting to come for an hour or two, they can," she said.

Many homeless youth are unwilling to stay at the downtown homeless shelter, The Road Home, because they're afraid to be around so many adults or fear being reported to their parents if they're younger than 18.

Youth who want to access the county's new walk-in program can call 801-269-7500 to be picked up.

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