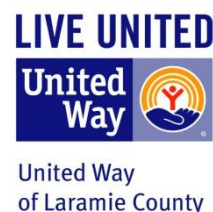


UNACCOMPANIED STUDENTS

By: Jaime Davis



Thanksgiving... a time of gratitude, where many of us count our blessings and express thankfulness for homes, family, food, health, and opportunity. For the unaccompanied youth in Laramie County, Thanksgiving is a reminder that they do not have a home, may not have safe or supportive families, and are struggling to find opportunity. Unaccompanied youth are homeless.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness states that “homeless youth face unique developmental challenges and vulnerability”; this is evidenced in the youth you struggle with school attendance and performance, access to college and career readiness support, and the number of youth who are attempting to work full-time jobs.

The United Way’s mission to foster hope and opportunity for everyone includes our unaccompanied youth – all youth should live in a safe environment and have access to resources that prepare them to succeed in school and life. Laramie County Community Partnership and Strong Families Action Team have implemented the Unaccompanied Students Initiative in order to provide safe and stable housing to help all students’ graduate high school. This initiative begins with temporary housing for unaccompanied youth, but also includes financial assistance, case management, mentor connections, and employment assistance.

Laramie County residents have responded with mixed results; some have collaborated with the Unaccompanied Students Initiative to support safe housing and educational resources, while others have recognized the need but been nervous about resources allocated within their neighborhoods.

We must unify our response! We all deserve a warm, safe place to be. The unaccompanied youth of Laramie County are worthy of an opportunity to complete their education and pursue their goals beyond high school. As a resident of Laramie County, it is my hope that all youth are able to celebrate Thanksgiving in a safe home, surrounded by people who care for them.

Together, let’s end homelessness for our youth.

References

<http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/youth>