

# CLOSEKNOT

LOVING YOUTH OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

## *Director's Report*

**If Home Is Where the Love Is....**



### **Strengthening Chosen Families**

We're aiming to have our first research paper ready to submit to peer-reviewed journals by the end of the summer, but folks attending the Point Source Youth Symposium at NYU on June 17-19 can get an advance peek. CloseKnot researcher Mallory VanMeeter, a PhD student at UW-Madison, will be presenting our findings as part of the [Family and Kinship](#)



*Our director, Jacqueline White, unfurls the banner with our new name at the "reveal" celebration at Butter Bakery Cafe.*

We wanted a name that would tell folks right away that we don't look at youth homelessness as youth "houselessness," as we don't believe that simply providing shelter solves the problem. What a youth facing homelessness lacks is a place where they are cherished and know they belong—and that place is created by

[Strengthening 101](#) workshop. Our look at informal hosting arrangements reveals that many take on the qualities of a chosen family—and can benefit from external support.



## Upcoming Huddle

Come join other community volunteers, social service staff, and young people with lived experience in a learning community as we explore together how we can love youth out of homelessness!

**Monday, July 29, 1-3 pm**

Neighborhood House  
179 Robie Street East, St Paul  
(following the quarterly meeting of the Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force from 9 a.m. to noon, also at Neighborhood House)

Contact Jacqueline at [jw@closeknit.us](mailto:jw@closeknit.us) for more information or to RSVP.

A big thanks to the Sauer Family Foundation for underwriting CloseKnit's Huddles in 2019!

## Our Advisory Board Debuts

We're thrilled to welcome [Kelly Drummer](#), executive director of Migizi, and [Steve Thomas](#),

people who can commit to being in the youth's life for the long term.

We think our new name "CloseKnit," our logo with its big red heart, and our tagline, "Loving youth out of homelessness" tells that story. Let us know what you think—and visit our website at [closeknit.us](http://closeknit.us) (which we're continuing to upgrade).

A special thanks to all who came to our "reveal" event and especially to The Friendly Quartet, the Minnesota Orchestra musicians who volunteered to share their talents and regaled our supporters with a truly world-class rendition of Mendelssohn's string quartet in E minor, opus 44 #2, as well as a sublime interpretation of Gershwin's "Someone to Watch Over Me." They are Ben Odhner, first violin; Kenneth Freed, second violin; Sifei Cheng, viola; and Silver Ainomäe, cello.

We're so grateful to our sponsors: HGA, which shared their marketing and design expertise with us pro bono through their [Community Design Workshop](#), and then underwrote the banner, swag (refrigerator magnets, anyone?) and refreshments for the "reveal" celebration. And [Butter](#), which baked the from-scratch treats, generously provided the space, and offers job training to youth at risk of homelessness! We encourage you to stop by the bakery cafe at 37th and Nicollet in Minneapolis for a yummy meal.

## A Letter to MN Youth Stakeholders

*from Andrea Simonett,  
the point person on youth homelessness  
at the MN Department of Human Services*

I am sharing with you research just released by The Youth Outcomes Project (YOP), a collaboration between Youth Collaboratory, Chapin Hall, six federal agencies, and a number of leading researchers, practitioners, philanthropists, and youth with lived experience. The research provides guidance and promotes consensus on what and how to measure within the four broad core outcome areas identified in the [USICH Framework to End Youth Homelessness](#).

To-date there has been no consensus about how to evaluate how well our services are impacting the core outcomes outlined in the Framework: **stable housing**, **permanent connections**, **social-emotional well-being**, and **education and employment**. This research provides a set of metrics communities can use to help facilitate consistent data collection related to core outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness.

We will be considering how we can incorporate this research in the

cofounder of Better Futures, as inaugural members of the CloseKnit Advisory Board. And we're also pleased that our former board member Iris Castro, a business and social work student at the University of St Thomas, will continue sharing her wisdom with us as an advisory board member.

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## We Give Heartfelt Thanks

We're deeply grateful to our departing board members Andrea Jenkins, who's busy as vice president of the Minneapolis City Council, and Josephine Pufpaff, who's traveling extensively in her position as national director of systems improvement and youth homelessness for the Youth Collaboratory (formerly MANY).

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## Join Our Board!

CloseKnit seeks board members who are passionate about catalyzing system change for youth facing homelessness by championing lasting relationships with the caring adults already in their lives. Expertise in system change, program development, and nonprofit finance and fundraising are especially welcome. People who are of color or indigenous, who identify as LGBTQ, who have lived experience of youth homelessness, and/or have served as a host, either in a formal program or informally, are also especially welcome. Please contact [Craig Cox](#) for more information.

data reporting, collection, and evaluation of the Homeless Youth Act (HYA) program in the near future. I would love to hear feedback, reaction, and ideas that the report generates, and any suggestions you have on the use of this information in our work in Minnesota.

The full report, information on upcoming webinars [Wednesday, June 5, and Thursday, June 13], and other background information can be found at the link below.

<https://youthcollaboratory.org/youth-outcomes-project-release>

Thanks,  
[Andrea](#)

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## Huddle Camaraderie

At our last Huddle, folks from Duluth, Northfield, Madison, WI, and the Twin Cities metro heard staff from Open Doors for Youth in Elk River describe the "Circle of Support" approach they're piloting. Funded by Homeless Youth Act dollars, the approach helps staff identify and strengthen "natural supports" in the lives of the youth.

The importance of providing a forum so that folks from across the state can gather was brought home by this note we received from Luther Brown, the host homes case manager for Lutheran Social Services in Duluth:

"Just wanted to thank you for facilitating the Closeknit Huddle as well as the incredible name reveal at Butter Bakery on Sunday night. It can be a lonely journey advocating for at-risk youth, and I am so grateful for the new friendships that I found through these events. The shared resources and experiences were useful and encouraging, especially the Permanency Continuum and 'Who's There For Me?' diagram. Finding fellow workers who can offer concrete examples of successful interaction with homeless and at-risk youth is an incredible support as I continue to work on behalf of the kids in Duluth."

## Capstone Kudos



*MSW students with professor Curry (second from right). Viorica Poteras is second from left.*



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### Donor Spotlight

We were honored to receive a very generous donation and this note from Julie Neraas:

"Instead of giving smaller amounts to more organizations, I decided to give nearly half of what I will contribute this year to CloseKnit because it is addressing two critical needs of our time: homelessness and the connection, support, and belonging that young adults need and deserve. Thinking of young people being alone and homeless in our cruel winters makes me crazy, especially because this need not be so. I am grateful to CloseKnit for its important work."

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### CloseKnit Supporters

Our thanks for recent donations from:

Karen Heegaard &

Chuck LeGros

Julie Neraas

Catharine Reid Fund

(through Headwaters  
Foundation for Justice)

Daniel Sellers

Tim Schuster

Debi Tenner

Everyone who attended our  
"Reveal" party

MSW students at California State University, Sacramento, who wrote their capstone papers under the guidance of Assistant Professor Susanna Curry could choose to delve into CloseKnit's interviews with couchsurfing youth and their adult hosts. We welcomed the opportunity to expose these aspiring social workers to the realities of these often under-the-radar arrangements.

As Viorica Poteras, who plans to practice social work in a school setting and hopefully become a homelessness liaison, shared:

"For me, the biggest takeaway was how detrimental housing instability can be for educational achievement. Stabilizing informal housing arrangements early on can help build that transitional bridge between teen years and a more successful adulthood."

At CloseKnit, we could not agree more! Please join us in sending out a big congrats to these newly minted social workers!

And our monthly donors:  
Craig Cox & Sharon Parker  
Mary Hinz  
Jan Kleinman  
Jerry Lane  
Aaron Zimmerman

## Champion Love!

Consider a donation.

[Click here](#) to donate to  
CloseKnit through Propel.

Or be old school, and write a  
check. Kindly make checks  
payable to “Propel Nonprofits”  
with “CloseKnit” in the memo  
line and mail to:  
Propel Nonprofits  
One Main St SE, Suite 600  
Minneapolis, MN 55414

All donations are fully  
tax-deductible.

### Our Vision

Communities embrace youth facing homelessness,  
prioritizing their deep human need for connection and belonging.

### Our Mission

We catalyze system change for youth facing homelessness by championing lasting  
relationships  
with the caring adults already in their lives who are not their service providers.  
We develop strategies to fortify these life-giving connections  
and advocate for investing in their transformative power.

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