

HAWAII NEWS

Homeless youth will find support at new drop-in center

By [Talía Sibilla](#)

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MICHELLE BIR / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

Jachyia Keoloha-Keaulana and Nick Thompson walked around homeless encampments Friday in Waianae as part of the outreach efforts of Residential Youth Services & Empowerment.



Leeward Coast youth who are living on the street will finally have a nearby resource hub when Residential Youth Services & Empowerment opens its first youth-focused drop-in center in the region.

The nonprofit organization plans to open its Waianae center in October on a part-time basis with daytime hours, moving toward a more frequent schedule as it builds staff to serve the roughly 70 teen and young adult clients on the Leeward Coast already receiving outreach services.

Although not an overnight shelter, the drop-in center will be a place where 14- to 24-year-olds can find resources and support. Located at 85-888 Farrington Highway, Room 202, services will include legal support and help with recovering vital documents, filing for food stamps and finding employment.

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It will also offer a place to get out of the heat, eat and explore cultural activities.

According to its [website](#) , RYSE was founded in 2018 and provides safe and temporary shelter and a range of services, including counseling and mentoring, education and life skills training, and case management and advocacy.

Nick Thompson, outreach and diversion program manager, said the new center will help youths take steps toward ending their homelessness. Its Leeward Coast location means clients will not have to travel to RYSE's Kailua drop-in center in Kailua, inaccessible for most without a car.

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“We currently outreach about 70 clients from Nanakuli to Makaha,” Thompson said. “We see them on a fairly consistent basis about once a week, but the plan (for the center) will entail beefing up our staffing out of that location and having a home base so that we can outreach that area more often.”

Thompson said many of their clients in the community “couch surf” or camp along the Leeward Coast. RYSE outreach teams visit them where they’re camped, providing basic needs such as food, water and hygiene kits. Beyond that, more individual care is provided when needed.

“As far as connecting with services, that’s when it gets very individualized,” Thompson said. “We have clients in that area that are experiencing homelessness and are pregnant, so we’re connecting them with health care to make sure they’re doing everything they can to stay healthy during their pregnancy.”



“We have other clients that are seeking employment and so we help them build resumes and get jobs.”

Waianae Neighborhood Board Treasurer Calvin Endo spent his teenage years in public housing and moved to Waianae in 1980. He said youth homelessness is a “big issue” in the area and a drop-in center is exactly what the community needs.

“This drop-in center is a start to getting to know these kids in the hopes to get them into a longer program,” he said. “With Waianae kids especially, if you don’t build a relationship with them where they can trust you, they’ll never follow you for help.”

Endo, who used to work at Waianae High School as a parent-community networking coordinator, said he recognizes “a lot of the young guys that live on the beach, unfortunately.”

“Some of our kids in Waianae have been traumatized because of dysfunctional homes. Any time a kid is traumatized, you might not see the results until they hit their teenage years and their brains short-circuit when making decisions,” he said.

RYSE cultural liaison Stone Perez lives in Waianae and said she lived on the street intermittently as a teenager and would visit drop-in centers to find safety.

“I used to go to the (Youth Outreach) House in Waikiki,” she said. “When I was there, it was a safe space for us.”

Perez said drop-in centers open youths up to opportunity, and she’s looking forward to having a space to hold cultural activities to provide a sense of cultural identity.

“We’re really big on teaching about Waianae — what is here, what was here before,” she said. “It’s really important that they connect to where they live.”



Jun Yang, state Office of Homelessness and Housing Solutions director, said he supports “anything to help our young people move into a permanent situation, successfully being a part of the community and building a future that they want — a resilient future.”

RYSE is filling a critical gap for youth without family support, Yang said. He said he recently visited a drop-in center in Hilo, where he saw firsthand how it served as “a way to engage young people, many of whom are exiting the foster care system without real support and stability.”

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