

## Let's Talk: The Official NRS Podcast

Let's Talk w/ Kimberly Waller

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Christopher Smith (C): Thank you so much for tuning into Let's Talk, the Official Podcast of the National Runaway Safeline. The National Runaway Safeline, or NRS, is the federally supported National Communications System for runaway and homeless youth in the United States, providing crisis support and resources to over 125,000 youth, families and communities annually. I'm Christopher, The Communications and Graphic Design Manager for NRS, and I hope you'll learn as much as I do on this journey to elevate the voices of young people and youth-facing orgs as they share their stories and highlight the complexities and intersections that are witnessed by 4.2 million young people facing homelessness each year.

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Christopher Smith (C): Hello everyone and thanks for joining us for today's episode of the Let's Talk podcast. I am joined today by Kimberly Waller who is the associate commissioner for the family and youth services bureau- you may often hear me refer to them as FYSB. Good morning Kimberly!

Kimberly Waller (K): Good morning! Great to be here.

C: Thank you very much. How are you doing this morning?

K: I am doing fantastic and I have to say I am a big fan of podcasts generally and so very thrilled to be here as part of the Let's Talk podcast.

C: I love that, love that we are super excited about the podcast because these opportunities are to get to learn from people like you who have very, very clearly demonstrated the importance of working with youth in the community. It is really appreciated. So for those of us who are just getting to know you for the first time, can you tell us about the path that led you to being the associate Commissioner of FYSB and telling us what the Associate Commissioner would do?

K: Great question. I love hearing how people make it through their careers and where they end up and where they land. So as you mentioned, I am the (I'm still saying fairly new) associate Commissioner of the family and Youth Services Bureau. I started this job in December of 2021 so I'm coming up on my 6 month mark and so it's been a really great experience so far. The associate Commissioner of the family and Youth Services Bureau really serves as the political appointee lead for the Family and Youth Services Bureau. There are already a lot of career public servant leaders in family and Youth Services Bureau, so I really serve as the President's appointee over kind of the direction of the Bureau.

C: Really exciting to hear that you're actually appointed by the president. So how does that work?

K: So the administration for children and families (ACF) is an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. ACF has a number of political appointees across ACF and the family and Youth

Services Bureau has the Associate commissioner. The associate Commissioner is not a Senate confirmed position. It is a direct appointment from the President of the United States and my counterpart, the Associate Commissioner of the Children Bureau, which is all things child welfare, is also a direct political appointee. So there's two associate commissioners within this structure called the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF). We love our acronyms at the federal government! And so ACYF has a Commissioner so there are two associate commissioners. in the bureaus, who then report up to the Commissioner within ACYF commissioner, is a Senate confirmed position. They do not have currently a confirmation in place in that position, so we have an acting Commissioner right now, and so that is the structure of ACYF within ACF within HHS.

C: Wow. Alright, so now I definitely feel like we're going to get some really incredible information. I didn't realize the structure and how everything was laid out. So can you go back to telling us just about what led you to your current role?

K: So I was born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA, and was raised with a really strong connection to and very deep support from family and very close friends. And from that experience and from my experience growing up and throughout my career. It's really shown the importance of community and really the community is the thing that creates opportunity and opportunity for change and to dream and have pathways to achieve knowing though that not all communities have the same access to supports and services that create those pathways as a result of, of course, systemic inequities. Directly impact communities and families. Seeing those inequities that are really young age. I just knew from the time that I was a kid that I wanted to use my career to really empower communities and our and all of our neighbors. So I ended up going to college at the University of Pittsburgh and got my degree in social work, did my practicum placement, which for those not in the social work world is really an internship or a fellowship that you do kind of for some experiential learning opportunities. Used that placement and did that at a local legal aid and in Pittsburgh and that position, you know, legal aides do such incredible work, but learned a lot about some of the most complex challenges and barriers that are experienced by children and families, and the more that I delved into those individual cases and those individual struggles, the more I realized that it's really about reforming laws and regulations and policies that is going to truly begin our journey toward supporting all young people and families. And you know, I think one of the great things about this country is that it's our duty and it's our responsibility to always want more and want to change things for the better and want more equity and access for everyone across communities so took that experience and took my social work degree and went to law school. And since graduating back in 2011, I've spent my career kind of bouncing around on federal and state and local positions that all focus on reforming and improving legislation, regulation, policy impacting our most underserved communities. Starting with my very first position out of law school was in the United States Senate as a legislative assistant focused on Human Services policies, and then, of course most recently joining the family New Services Bureau as the Associate Commissioner, each of these positions really have continued to reinforce the importance and the, you know, powerful nature that communities have and so have just really been along quite a ride and excited to be here at FYSB.

C: One of my favorite things about this podcast is that I get to meet people like you who are real life champions for the rights of young people, and it sounds like you've been doing this for over a decade, is there anything in particular that motivates you to keep going?

K: That's a really good question and I love that term motivation, so you know, a lot of people that are in positions that focus on legislation or policy, I heard a lot from colleagues that they feel removed from the decision sometimes, but I've had the amazing opportunity to really to work and get plugged in directly to community and to working directly with young people. And honestly, I know that this is likely a bit of a cliché, but young people really are our future and most recently had the opportunity to work (I was in the Mayor's office and the District of Columbia) and supported the launch of the district's first Youth Action Board, and I watched that board row over the four years that I was in that position. And during that time had the opportunity to listen and learn, which is so important as policy makers and people in positions that make decisions around policy. I've had the opportunity to listen to, learn from people experiences and how their experiences shaped their passions and beliefs, and you know, sometimes you come to a decision where you think one thing is the right way but then you listen to somebody else in their experience and you kind of evolved because you realize that not one person experiences the thing that should make that choice. And so I've gotten to see some of those, you know, the work of the Youth Action Board on the local level go from ideas to really big change and if young people continue sharing their experiences and expertise and ideas, which I have no doubt they will, it will continue to motivate me to be in this space and to work in partnership to create the needed change that young people so deserve and so want.

C: I find that a lot of the organizations that we admire the most at National Runaway Safeline, they also work very closely at a local level. And it's great because those kids or those young people then have a good example of someone to motivate them, someone to look up to, someone to inspire them. Is there anyone in particular that inspires you in that way?

K: I've been a mentor in DC for about coming over, I think, over six years to a really awesome now, teenager in the District of Columbia. She was nine when I met her. She's now 16. And this mentor relationship has truly been fulfilling experience for both of us, especially for me. I've learned so much about young people and development, and, you know, the organization that I volunteer through and have been a part of is an organization that matches mentors and mentee's who's mentees are in the child welfare system. And so through this experience, I've watched my mentee experience "systems" that are really meant to protect and support kids and families, but are actually so challenging and hard to grow up in. But I've seen her resilience and her passion for life. And she has the brightest future of anyone that I know. And my mentee really inspires me on a daily basis in this role because I believe that my friendship with her helps me be a better policy maker and a better decision maker. And that's in a career space so let alone, you know, the career space and life to mentorship I think is truly a path forward to making this, making better decisions for everyone.

C: Is there any bit of knowledge that you've gained either in your career or maybe particularly through this mentorship that you think that everyone should know or is like one of those secrets to life?

K: Yeah. I mean, there are so many there. I think you know in, in leadership positions, putting yourself in a position of leading with empathy and making decisions with empathy. I think seeing yourself in kind of a position where you should really be thinking about your decisions through the lens of others and really taking a moment to think about and to learn from other people's experiences in these positions I think will really benefit decision making going forward and as others are in their careers really taking a moment to listen and learn and lead with empathy.

C: We recently were sharing some information online and one of our followers on Twitter dropped a lot of information on us about one of the organizations that was featured, just letting us know that, like, hey, this organization isn't necessarily doing the great work that it appears. You know, having that outlook I think is always welcome because we always want to grow, we always want to make sure that we are doing things that actually enable the people that we hope to serve. So I agree and take that advice wholeheartedly. Are there any particular pain points or roadblocks that you're currently facing in your work?

K: I think there are a lot of wonderful things about working in the federal government. It is an incredible entity and I think that, you know, I work with people in the family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and in the runaway and homeless youth program who are truly passionate public servants who believe in our mission of preventing and ending youth homelessness. But that being said, which is all wonderful, Federal government also moves a bit slowly given its size and you know the importance of the federal government being a stabilizing entity and there are a lot of steps necessary to effectuate change, especially big change. Some may refer to this as the bureaucracy that exists within federal government, but I am not new to the family and youth services bureau I actually served as a policy advisor in FYSB as a public servant from 2016 to 2018. So it's been helpful for me to come back into this great Bureau kind of knowing some of the ways to make change and to move things and it's been great to have a team that really has perseverance and creativity to creating this change. And then I would say as for challenges across the field, this is just really hard work and people dedicate their souls and their being to this work and for a number of reasons, including the impact of the pandemic, which has been devastating for many and a lot of organizations have struggled with staffing, with, you know, consistency of being able to remain kind of at full capacity given just some of the impacts of the pandemic (fatigue, feeling overworked, scarce resources) I can really feel the exhaustion from the field and from our partners. So, you know, I wanted to take a moment of course to offer gratitude to people doing this work and to our grantees. You are truly doing important work and we are committed to working alongside you and listening to you and supporting you in ways that we can, because this is hard work to do.

C: I'm fortunate to have the role that I do have. I work in communications, so I'm not on the front lines per se, but hearing the stories that come from like our crisis center or stories from other organizations that we work closely with, it's always really inspiring, especially when talking about COVID, which is something that we all experienced and can all relate to on that topic. Can you talk about the impact that COVID has had on young people and their runaway and homeless youth community?

K: Yes, absolutely. You know, I think all of us, as you mentioned, have seen the impact that the pandemic has had. It has had deep impacts and likely long lasting impacts on all our communities, but the pandemic has not impacted all communities in the same way, and some communities have had a deeper impact than others. You know, I was reading an article today about inflation and about jobs and employment access and wages and so just kind of understanding when I read those types of reports or, you know, see the data that's coming out understanding that oftentimes what is being experienced by youth and our RHY programs is compounded as compared to some of the other programs or communities. And so, one of the other things that I think has been a really important aspect of shifting the way that perhaps the RHY field sees things or the homelessness systems across our communities generally is the importance of focusing on prevention. There were a lot of communities during the pandemic that had decreased capacity and shelters because of perhaps an outbreak of COVID in a

shelter or an increased need from individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability. And so really thinking about this work from a prevention lens to include eviction prevention or family stabilization supports or services is something that I've been talking with my colleagues at the Children's Bureau and in the child welfare spaces. Really thinking about whole family supports and having an opportunity to connect young people who are perhaps experiencing instability or family crisis to kinship care and to families you know, in a broader perspective than kind of the traditional nuclear family. And then this probably goes without saying, but I think the importance of broad broadband and Internet access and connectivity can't be understated. After the last two plus years of really seeing the need for and access to the Wi-Fi and other types of technology, our RHY community and young people are leading in that space. And so I think that has been a really clear outcome that we're going to need to continue to invest in that space.

C: You're touching on some really hot topics with our organization, like the ability for young people to connect with us even more. More than ever. We've seen that as young as eight years old are reaching out to us with questions that suggest that they are at risk. And we know that this is because of COVID-19's impact on at home learning and kids having access all day long to the internet and things like that what are some things that are different now two years into the pandemic or what are some things that we've learned?

K: Yeah, I think kind of continuing with the theme of technology and Wi-Fi access and broadband access is I think you know, while generally speaking there was absolutely nothing good from the pandemic or from COVID, I think taking the lessons learned and applying it to future decisions is important of particularly things that maybe had. We could never have been just happening pre COVID that maybe we can take away from this experience and continue it going forward. One of those is this ability to provide services from a different perspective than face to face, in person and really meeting young people where they are which oftentimes is through social media or on a screen, and I think you know, finding creative ways to provide case management services, counseling or therapy. And while, yes, I think in person is still a really important, crucial component to service delivery, we know now that in order to even reach one person, meeting them where they are and having it be a safe space for a young person may be a virtual option to build that trust, to build that access. The other thing that I think has been a really, you know, interesting thing to learn from this experience is, you had mentioned, around in home at home learning and virtual spaces. You know, I think making sure that then we provide those services and that technology so that young people do have access to learning abilities, to services that may otherwise has been challenging for somebody to access, and then the other thing that I would love to share is I just had a conversation with an RHY provider that is typically serving more of a rural community, which is a very different service delivery and program model that is needed in an urban environment and so really seeing the benefits that providing some of these services both in person and virtually in rural communities where it may be very challenging for a young person to access a shelter that may be, you know, 100 miles away. And making sure that we're connecting in a virtual space to reach young people who maybe we hadn't reached before and providing safety planning for young people in those spaces as well.

C: You mentioned something that I thought was really lovely earlier, which was a community creates opportunity and saying what you're saying now is that we have to meet young people where they are. A lot of the people that we speak with- I also am a child whose first friend community was online. I wasn't like a lot of people in my real life, so that was a great way to find people who were like minded with the

increase of popularity of social media. Do you see any changes for the way that runaway and homeless youth service providers interact with you through those channels?

K: Yeah. I mean, I think knowing that resources exist and awareness of resources is kind of one of your first steps, right, making sure that people know that you're there and that you exist, that you are a resource for them to utilize. And I've seen certain organizations do awareness campaigns on Tik T.O.K. and do awareness campaigns on Snapchat and Twitter and Instagram and other social media platforms. So I think it's really opened the door to making sure that young people know that our resources are available and there for them is one. One thing that I've seen that I think is a pretty cool way to use social media, it also can provide an opportunity to connect with young people who may not necessarily feel comfortable or safe going to a shelter quite yet, or going to a drop in center quite yet. And so having the opportunity to actually communicate with somebody before entering an actual physical location. I've heard of some young people who connect with the case manager before stepping foot in a drop in center and then kind of shifting back to what we were talking about prevention being able to then connect with that young person before that crisis happens and if possible creating a service plan or you know, an prevention that they can help support that young person before their first experience of homelessness ever occurs.

C: Yeah, I agree. I agree with you obviously that's a very important point i like that the word prevention keeps coming back up because it is imaginable word i think that more people should familiar themselves with the term prevention term prevention and in a lot of cases, I wish it would have replaced the word awareness because it's more action driven and I love that people can. Shift what prevention is to social media for the exact reason that you gave is that it it again coming back to being able to meet young people where they are helping them bring those walls down and making sure that they're comfortable so that we can get the important information that will allow us to provide the resources and services that they actually need.

K: Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, you know, I agree on the prevention space. I think this has been something that a lot of thought leaders and a lot of young people have been talking to RHY and other organizations and programs about because prevention sometimes can be a really abstract term and can be used by two different people thinking they're talking the same about the same thing, and they're really not. And you know, I was on a webinar the other day where I, uh, a young person with lived experience and lived expertise was talking about what prevention meant to that person and they said, you know, prevention is not shelter. Prevention has to happen before that first experience of homelessness and you know, that got a lot of snaps around the table and it's, you know, it's important that we all, particularly in the youth space, really think together about what it means and what are the interventions that will help support a prevention. And then finding ways to fund that and support that and have that be part of our tools and continuum. Of course we are always going to need a robust crisis response system that is very important that we have accessible available shelter for any young person that is experiencing and almost starting crisis, but it's also really an exciting opportunity and thought to think about preventing that, that crisis from happening in the first place where possible.

C: now we've identified that prevention is obviously important going forward and I just know listening to your work history that having a youth voice included in the conversation is always going to be something that organizations should do to make sure that they're always on top of what's happening in the world.

What should RHY organizations be doing to stay ahead in other ways? And I'm thinking of ways to make sure that they don't become a relic of what they're causes so they don't become outdated.

K: yeah, that is a great question and a great point. You know, I was talking with our RHY leadership just yesterday actually about kind of a history (I'm a huge history nerd) and thinking about the history of this legislation, the runaway and Homeless Youth Act is what is the entity that funds RHY programs, and the RHY Act was initially passed back in 1974, and I would probably argue that there have been kind of limited changes to the legislation since then. 1974 was a long time ago and, you know, the systems have changed. What's available out there have changed, the relationship that we have with our upstream partners has changed. You know, in 1974, it was an incredible piece of legislation because it was the first piece of federal legislation that really addressed youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability. That was not a primary focus of other homeless services, funding streams, and so, you know, I think, for me, evolving with what communities look like now and you know, RHY providers have our experts in providing services to youth and young adults. So I think for me, it's really important to engage with your community and engage with your continuum of care. Your COC, which is another federal agency- the Department of Housing and Urban Development's main funding mechanism for almost all services funding communities. It's a community response to homelessness in kind of a local approach why providers have historically been part of success in many communities, and I think it's more important now than ever to be part of that conversation. We know that RHY programs are crucial resources for communities, but we are not enough to meet the need and the demand across the country, and so I think it's, you know, my first comment would be continue engaging with your serving partners and systems like Children's Bureau's child welfare systems like juvenile justice systems, schools and education partners. It's really important that we see ourselves as part of a whole community approach, it is not just one program that's going to be able to solve this going forward. And then I think you already made mention to this, but my other would be one of the priorities that I've brought to my role as Associate Commissioner; leading in partnership with Youth and Families with lived expertise. It is really important that young people be at the table identifying solutions and issue spotting. You know, where we may have blind spots. One of the cool kind of examples of this that I can share from my previous role is that we had our Youth Action Board help us with a couple of cool projects around giving guidance to youth serving programs on what safe and inclusive spaces looks like, even down to the nitty gritty of what wall color is a welcoming color and what artwork is going to show that you have a diverse and open space for all, and what quotes do you want to share. You know, to lead inspiration but so that you know, young people can see themselves in that space. And, you know, another example of doing that is we had our Youth Action Board provide guidance to youth serving organizations around their intake process, you know, how that's their first conversation that you have with the young person and how you make that process as accessible and as low barrier as you can so that those resources are available for all young people including, you know use of color, including humans, including youth who have welfare, general justice backgrounds; were all serving the same young people. And so making sure that we're just coordinating our systems and our services and programs and having youth lead in spaces around program development and program improvement.

C: you mentioned earlier evolving to kind of mirror the community and also I think the important part of bringing youth in is that it helps us diversify. It helps us identify inequities. What are some of your priorities related to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

K: That is a wonderful question. When I first joined the family and youth Services Bureau, I came with five kind of big bucket priorities. The first is FYSB workforce and work culture. I think ensuring that there is diversity across RHY service providers staffing leadership that there are you know opportunities for young people to see themselves in the staff and to connect in a way that is going to lead to meaningful service delivery and meaningful connection with your organizational program. And then the other four buckets of kind of priorities were coordination and collaboration, which we've kind of talked about the importance of engaging in your whole community... not one program is enough to meet the need of every community, the second or the third priority is equity diversity and inclusion. The family and Youth Services Bureau actually spent the first three months that I was in this role putting together our first racial equity action plan, and the plan really focuses and touches on a number of things, both internal to business processes and also external to encouraging and supporting works partners across the field and in communities to do this work too, because they have been doing this work for a long time and we need to be supporting each other along the way. In that plan there are components around how do we infuse racial equity, diversity and inclusion across our training and technical assistance that we provide to organizations. How do we ensure that? Organizations for applying for FRYSB funding have a racial equity component to the work that they're doing in their programs. How do we as an organization and across our organizations encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion in recruitment of staff in on boarding and in retention strategies of staff? And then the other two [buckets] are around leading in partnership with youth and families with lived expertise and data driven decision making, which are both really important tools to implementing racial equity diversity and inclusion and equity across all of our programs. So lots of conversations around how we use data to understand the impact of our programs and whether or not our programs are working in a way that is infusing equity across our programming/ So we've done lots of work and there is lots to do and we're excited to continue, you know, working with our programs in the field who are also leading in this space.

C: on the topic of programs and on the topic of, let's say, interagency collaboration. What are the types of programs that you found have been most successful in terms of keeping young people from being homeless or or at risk?

K: You know, there's kind of two necessary paths that need to develop and continue to develop at the same time. The first is this prevention component; providing interventions before a young person experiences homelessness. And then there's this kind of crisis response approach which is emergency shelter and it is transitional housing and rapid rehousing and permanent housing and you know, you kind of need an array of all of those resources across your community to be able to meet the needs of all young people. The runaway and homeless youth programs specifically funds a couple of really great models that can really start infusing and continue to infuse prevention across our communities. The first is our street outreach program which is meeting young people where they are in community and connecting with young people to develop service plans and service delivery and referrals were necessary. You know, we've talked a lot about this concept of meeting young people where they are and making sure that we've got mobility in the way that we're providing services is really important. And then I think the other component is drop in centers and having kind of this one stop shop opportunities so that young people have a place to go that's safe, that's inclusive, and available and really has all of the things that that young person is seeking that will help them remain home and identify family or supports where safe and stable to do so. But also connecting young people to that crisis response. Just that stability is not a possibility at that time. And you know, with all of these resources available in

communities, there really is this kind of path forward to ensuring that there's a prevention approach and intervention approach. There's a crisis response and kind of a drop in and outreach response and then permanent housing and housing stability at the end of that.

C: Are you finding that there are more programs being made available that are related specifically to mental health?

K: That's a really good question. I think that that is something that communities are driving towards and focusing on together. I know from my previous experience on the local level and deep connections with your mental health agency is really important. I think that there is an important component of RHY programs where the referrals are made for young people to access mental health and behavioral supports, therapy and counseling, but there's also ways to kind of braid funding and coordinate and partner with your behavioral health system to provide those services on site. And so there has been some really exciting models of RHY programs partnering with behavioral health systems and partners to really bring that to young people, oftentimes, you know, young people are going to benefit from having a safe space that they know where they're receiving their services or their counseling and it's in a space that's inclusive and welcoming for them and very youth focused and driven. So I've really, you know, referrals are always going to be a necessary component and an important component of programming, but they're definitely has been a shift in evolution of communities driving this kind of partnership and intersection where behavioral health is being provided on site with RHY providers.

C: For someone who's not involved with the RHY community or doesn't have an understanding of what the problems are that the youth are facing, what is the easiest - or I would rather actually say what's the most effective way for them to get involved or for them to engage their network? To get their network involved?

K: Yeah, that's a really good question. I think that I got two major responses to that. The first is, and I know I've kind of made mention of this throughout this discussion, but the first is learning about what resources exist in your community. You know, I think there's a lot happening in communities and so just taking a moment to listen and learn about what's going on in your community, one way to do that (that I would love to recommend to those listening to this podcast) is to learn about more continuum of care referred to as a COC. See this is again the HUD funded entity that's designed to promote community wide commitment to homelessness. Again, not one program, not one person is going to be able to solve this. It's a community response. COC'S have community lead boards so you could take a moment, learn from your COC board. Who's on the board? What are their priorities? How frequently do they meet? Where do they meet? Getting yourself plugged in and learning about that process. Many of RHY providers are part of this. Many CEO's have on their board live individuals with lived expertise or lived experience who are currently experiencing homelessness or formally experiencing homelessness on these boards. And then once you learn a little bit about the process, join the board. And be part of that. Be part of that network and advocate for resources for youth and young adults. It's so important that we have voices on those boards advocating for young people and advocating for funding to be specifically designated for young people. You can find information about your local COC on the Department of Housing and Urban Development's webpage, or I'm sure we can post some stuff alongside this podcast...

C: Oh yeah

K: ...to help you get connected. So that's kind of a system specific way of getting engaged and getting involved as really being part of your whole community response. And then the other part is see if you've got an RHY provider in your community. Connect with them and see what they need for support. I just talked to an RHY provider which (close to my heart) is launching a new mentor program and they're seeking volunteers in their community to serve as mentors. And you know, there are just really powerful ways that you can support organizations doing youth specific work. And so just encourage you to learn about your whole community's response and getting plugged in and advocating for youth and young adults and getting plugged in with specific programs or organizations in your community and seeing what it is that they need.

C: If you are listening to this and you're ready to get involved now, please look at the bio for this podcast. There will be a link for the continuum of care website there. One last question for you... What's one thing people should know about youth who run away or experience homelessness today? And actually, I lied I want a follow up question to that: What is one big misconception about youth today that you wish that you could erase from everyone's mind?

K: Yeah, that's a really great, great question to end on. I think my general response is that everyone's circumstances and experiences are different and understanding that everybody is bringing with them to the table past experiences that drive what it is that they think or believe, or what their passions are, or what their struggles are. And so, just remembering that everyone's experiences and how they've experienced their own experience of homelessness or housing instability is different, and so making sure that we are thinking about it in terms of diverse backgrounds and diverse experiences I think. The other thought that I had here is that you watch the news these days or you read a newspaper or you get plugged into a podcast that's talking about current events and we come to this with kind of a weakness lens at times and really not thinking about people from a strength based perspective. Every young person has so much potential and so much opportunity to create solutions and I just am excited to be in this role and excited to be in a position where I can create pathways for young people to help solve these really challenging problems together.

C: You said it before and I don't think it's a cliché: Youth are the future.

K: I agree, I agree

C: And any misconceptions?

K: I think that it is really important for people to understand that homelessness looks different for young people. In many situations young people, youth, and young adults are experiencing homelessness from the perspective of couch surfing or doubled up one night and then another night, they may find a park to sleep in, and then the next night they may find another friend's couch to sleep on, and the next night they may go to a shelter. Homelessness for youth is oftentimes hidden or invisible, and so making sure that we as community know that and understand that and respond accordingly by prioritizing tailored approaches to youth experiencing homelessness.