Youth of Kalamazoo

We are the youth of Kalamazoo. We come from different neighborhoods, different schools, and different backgrounds. We have different thoughts, inspirations, ideals, and future plans. But we are here today to come together and ask the City of Kalamazoo to stand with us in solidarity.

Along with everyone else, youth are facing an increasingly difficult and challenging future. It is a pinnacle time in world history and we are coming-of-age right in the middle of it. To say that it isn't scary would be a lie. We are worried for our parents and grandparents, we are worried for our siblings, we are worried for our friends, neighbors, and community. We are worried for ourselves and each other.

In these uncertain and anxiety-ridden times, we are here to demand that adults and people in charge take a close look at what is going on in the lives of youth, and what resources are available to us. Listen to us when we say we need more support. Listen to us when we say we don't feel as though you take us seriously. Listen to us when we ask for space to learn and grow. Make room for us to be seen and for our voices to be heard.

There is a mental health crisis in this country, and it is only going to get worse as we move through the collective trauma we are all facing right now. Youth are often the victims of the lack of mental health help and support. We are put into juvenile justice programs and criminalized, given ineffective treatment, and launched into a cycle of probation violations that never seem to end. Our community is made safer by providing resources and services to youth, NOT CRIMINILIZING US.

We want there to be a better understanding of how mental health impacts our behaviors. We want access to therapy where we will be advocated for; for therapists to work with us and listen to us. We want our feelings and experiences to be validated by the adults in our lives. Too often what we say is ignored because of our age. This is oppression. Just because we are young does not mean we don't understand ourselves and our lives. Sometimes we need help and support to express our thoughts and emotions, and we want adults in our lives that we can trust to help us express, interpret, and regulate these things.

We are human and we make mistakes. When we do make mistakes, instead of immediately putting us in through the juvenile justice programs, we want a chance to do community service and to participate in youth programs focused on growth and healing. We want to feel invested in our community as members who matter and who can make change. When we see adults confirming that we matter, that our voices are heard, and that our ideas have potential to make real and lasting change, we will WANT to do good things for our community.

We stand here today, tired, scared, and weary. But we are STRONG. We are SMART. We are RESILIENT. And we matter. They say the youth of today will become the leaders of tomorrow, but we want a seat at the table NOW. Listen to us, we are sure you will learn a thing or two.

2020 Staff

Angell, Jill-Director of Operations
Beachy, Kim-Office Coordinator
Boston, Latrieva-Family Services Manager
Cochran, Rachel-Family Care Coordinator
Coleman, Lisa-Child Welfare Family Support Partner
Helmuth, Bethany-Youth Support Specialist
Hicks, Robin-Family Support Partner
Hunter, Storm-Youth Peer Support Specialist
Kudzia, Michelle-Youth Peer Mentor
Muraoka, Caitlin-Youth Peer Support Specialist
Parmenter, Marge-Family Support Partner
Petersen, Corrie-Family Support Partner
Robbins, Tina-Executive Director
Roeder, George-Transition Peer Support Specialist
Shack, Isaiah-Youth Peer Support Specialist
Smith, Arieanna-Transition Peer Support Specialist
Smith, Christina-Youth Involvement Coordinator
Terry, Clay-Family Support Partner
Turner, Sarah-Intern
Vega-Pietri, Frances-Family Support Partner/Community Services Coordinator
Waterman, Pam-Family Support Partner

Our Values

ASK Family Services values Integrity, Diversity, Empowerment, Partnership and Empathy

ASK Family Services:

* Will be honest, ethical, and respectful with each other, our families, our youth and our community.
* Is responsible and accountable for our actions.
* Acts as a good steward of agency resources.
* Focuses on services driven by families and youth.
* Seeks, develops and nurtures partnerships with families and local, state and national organizations with similar missions.
* Listens for understanding, so each person knows they are not alone.
* Connects with families and youth through our own unique lived experiences by creating honest, emotional space to meet people where they are.
* Promotes inclusion of people with diverse backgrounds and life experiences.
* Fosters a community where equal opportunities are available.
* Embraces the differences among us to strengthen the whole.
* Encourages and practices resilience, seeking opportunities to learn and grow both personally and professionally.