

Riverbend City ® Activity

Choosing a Task Force Candidate

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Introduction

You are a case worker at Riverbend Community Action, a Human Services organization that provides services for struggling individuals and families in the mid-sized metropolis of Riverbend City. Your manager has asked you to represent your organization at a newly formed community task force, the Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force. This task force has been formed to deal with crisis levels of youth and teen homelessness in the Ruby Lake neighborhood of Riverbend City.

The Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force has met several times, and it needs a leader. The group has found a candidate they think may be an excellent choice, but they're not sure if she's interested—and if she's not, they may need to interview additional candidates. They need your

feedback on which leader to choose, and they also need feedback on how to best equip the chosen candidate for success.

Scene 1

Email from April Nguyen

From: April Nguyen, Manager, Riverbend Community Action

Subject: Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force

Thank you so much for your willingness to meet with the newly formed Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force. As you know, there's been an alarming spike in rates of teen homelessness in the Ruby Lake neighborhood.

This task force is choosing a leader, and they could use your feedback on this process. The task force is excited about Alyssa Ashmore, the Director of the Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth. I'd like for you to attend Alyssa's interview. As an outside set of eyes, you may have some good insight into whether she really is as good a candidate as they think. Also, if Alyssa is not interested, then the group will have to interview some additional candidates, and they will need your feedback on these candidates as well.

To help you get started, I've attached a Riverbend City Free Press article that provides background information about the issue of teen homelessness in the Ruby Lake neighborhood.

Thank you again for your eagerness to participate on the task force, and best of luck!

— April

Online Article

Out at Home: Youth Homelessness on the Rise in Ruby Lake

Written By: Laurie Boyette (lboyette@rcfpress.com)

Ashley Garcia, 15, loves theater. She's been in school plays every year since her freshman year at Ruby Lake High School. She's been practicing hard for her audition for the upcoming production of *High School Musical*. "I want to play Gabriella," said Ashley. "That's my dream."

Does she have any other dreams?

"Well, yeah," says Ashley. "I want my mom and me to live in our own apartment again."

Ashley and her mother, Kristina Garcia, 32, have been living in the Helping Hands House—a homeless shelter—for the past three months. Prior to that, they were living at various relatives' homes—and before that, in a vehicle.

And Ashley is by no means alone. According to Bruce Greenberg, Superintendent of the Riverbend City School District, homelessness among students in the district is up an estimated 20 percent from five years ago. In sections of city that serve poorer students, that percentage is even higher.

And in the Ruby Lake neighborhood, where Ashley lives? "We estimate that youth and teen homelessness is up by about 40 percent over the last five years," said Greenberg. "There's not a student or teacher in that district who doesn't interact regularly with homeless students, whether they know it or not."

"This is nothing less than a crisis," added Greenberg.

So why are so many young people in the Ruby Lake neighborhood homeless? Ashley Garcia represents one category of homeless youth: those who are homeless along with their parents or other family members. "Homelessness in Ruby Lake has everything to do with neighborhood poverty," explained Nathan Williams, job training director at the Ruby Lake One-Stop Center. "This neighborhood never recovered from the Great Recession, or from the exodus of manufacturing jobs that at one time were a mainstay in Ruby Lake."

This is the situation that Kristina Garcia—Ashley's mother—finds herself in. Last year, when the Schneider Paper Company closed its doors and moved operations to Bangladesh, Garcia lost her job as an assistant floor manager. Garcia, who dropped out of high school when she became pregnant with Ashley, is now working as a part-time cashier at the Chicken Hut.

"There's no jobs in this part of town," said Garcia. "Nothing that pays even close to what I was making. As a single mother, I used to be able to provide for me and my daughter without much help from anyone. Now, I can't even keep a roof over our heads."

Garcia has applied several times for a job training program at the One-Stop Center. Unfortunately, as Williams explained, funding for these programs have been cut drastically in recent years. "The city has chosen to invest in other kinds of employment programs," said Williams. "Now, we're only able to accept a fraction of our applicants. And, at this point, we're only able to accept applicants who have a high school diploma or equivalent."

However, youth with struggling families aren't the only ones who lack a stable home. "There's a truly alarming number of teenagers in this community who run away from home, or who have been thrown out," said Corinne Ackley-Brown, a social worker at Ruby Lake High School.

The reasons for this are numerous. They include drug and alcohol abuse—including a growing number of cases of opiate abuse. In some cases, kids with addictions are leaving home; in other cases, they are fleeing drug and alcohol abuse in their homes. Other kids are fleeing physical or emotional abuse—or foster homes.

Another common reason for homelessness in Ruby Lake is teen pregnancy. "This neighborhood has had one of the highest teen pregnancy rates for years," said Ackley-Brown. "Many of the students in this neighborhood come from traditional Catholic, Hispanic families. In many families—most families, in fact—families step in and support pregnant girls. But I've seen far too many cases where teen pregnancy results in a girl being on the street."

In addition, according to Superintendent Greenberg, a growing number of students throughout the district are on the streets because they are gay or transgender. "These days, kids are increasingly open about their sexual orientation or gender identity," said Greenberg. "That's led to increased acceptance. We have Gay-Straight Alliance support groups in many of our high schools and even middle schools. But not every teenager has a family that supports LGBT kids, and sometimes this means that kids who don't keep silent are on the streets."

Alyssa Ashmore, the director of Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth, agrees. "I've never seen so many LGBT teens come through our doors than we have in recent years," said Muscarella. "These teens often suffer from depression and anxiety, and are at high risk for suicide."

According to Superintendent Greenberg, the school district is taking the issue of youth and teen homelessness very seriously. "This is among our top priorities to address in the coming year," said Greenberg. In the Ruby Lake neighborhood, the school plans to partner with the newly formed Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force.

"We have an obligation to our students that extends beyond the classroom," said Greenberg. "When students don't have their basic needs met—including the need to have a stable, safe home—they cannot live up to their potential as students."

Scene 2

Ruby Lake Office

The Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force is ready to interview Alyssa Ashmore, the Director of the Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth. You should sit in on the interview and see what you think of this candidate.

Alyssa Ashmore

Director of the Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth

Resume experience:

Current:

- Director of the Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth (5 years)
- Assistant Organizer, Riverbend City Regional Youth Services Conference (past 3 years)

Previous:

- Director, Brown Trout Bay Youth Center (3 years)
- Assistant Director, Brown Trout Bay Youth Center (2 years)
- Task Force Leader, Brown Trout Bay Youth Homelessness Committee (2 Years)

I'm so glad to have the chance to discuss this position with you! As you know from my resume, I directed a similar youth homelessness task force in the city of Brown Trout Bay a few years back. I have 10 years of leadership experience in group homes, and I'm currently the director of the largest group home for teenagers in Riverbend City.

In my experience, one of the most important functions of a task force leader is to make sure task force members feel empowered to make a difference. You have to keep team members motivated. That's especially important when you're working with an issue like youth and teen homelessness, where the statistics and the real-life cases we see are so disheartening and overwhelming. That's not always an easy thing to do, but I'm proud to say that the Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth has an employee and volunteer turnover rate that is significantly lower than average for a group home. I think motivation is one of my strong points.

If I become the leader of this task force, I plan to emphasize the need for a balance between finding ways to help individuals find emergency resources, while also looking for strategies to prevent kids from becoming homeless in the first place. We always need to be thinking about systemic problems in the community as a whole, and how these problems impact individuals. I also think it's very important to make sure the collective expertise of our task force is as broad as possible. Does anyone on this task force have expertise in working with LGBT youth—and transgender youth in particular?

Scene 3

Informal Feedback

Mark Tucker

Group Home Supervisor

Alyssa's well known throughout town as being a leader and an expert in group home care. I've emailed her a few times with questions and she's always willing to take the time to answer them. She has an incredibly positive attitude.

Chelsea Jenkins

Crisis Intervention Counselor

I attended the Riverbend City Regional Youth Services Conference this past year—which she helped to organize. The conference was terrific, and Alyssa was a keynote speaker. Her talk was all about setting professional boundaries with youth and teen clients. Boundary setting is one of the hardest parts of my job, and the advice she gave was so helpful!

Jason De La Cruz

Foster Care Coordinator, Hennsey County

I had the chance to speak with Alyssa in-depth at the Riverbend City Regional Youth Services Conference. I was very impressed with her depth of understanding about youth homelessness. She really understands the intersections between individual behavior and societal influence. I strongly think she would steer this task force in the right direction, with a focus on making systemic changes in the community.

Elizabeth Fine

Guidance Counselor

I spoke with Alyssa's references. They were glowing. All three of them talked about what a great motivator she is—how she's able to get her employees and volunteers to stick with it, even though working at a group home can be very discouraging and upsetting. They also talked about what a great communicator she is—that she's direct and makes her expectations known. She sounds like an exceptionally positive leader.

Reflection Questions

Now that you've had a chance to speak with Alyssa Ashmore, do you think she would make a strong leader of the Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force? Explain why or why not.

Your response:

This question has not been answered yet.

Scene 4

Email from Mark Tucker

From: Mark Tucker, Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force member

Subject: Alyssa Ashmore

I want to thank you for participating in our interview with Alyssa Ashmore. Your feedback on her qualifications was very helpful.

We offered Alyssa the position of Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force leader. Unfortunately, she turned us down. She said she had too many other obligations in her professional and personal life and didn't feel like she had enough time to devote to our task force. The Task Force members were very disappointed to hear this! We thought she was, for the most part, the perfect candidate.

Fortunately, we have three other candidates for the position. The Task Force does not have a strong preference for any of these candidates, and we would really appreciate your input. Would you mind attending our interviews and making a recommendations?

Thanks much!

— Mark

Scene 5

Further Interviews

Here are the other candidates for the position of Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force leader. See what qualifications each candidate has and learn about their backgrounds. When you are finished, you will be asked to recommend one of these candidates to the task force.

Tim Gunderson

Assistant Manager, Riverbend Community Action

Resume experience:

Current:

- Assistant Manager, Riverbend Community Action, 3 years
- Assistant Organizer, Riverbend City Regional Youth Services Conference (past 2 years)

Previous:

- Assistant Director, Lindner Hills Teen Community Haven, 4 years
- Case Worker, Linder Hills Teen Community Haven, 4 years

I have quite a bit of leadership experience in human service leadership and teen homelessness. I've helped to organize the Riverbend City Regional Youth Services Conference for the past two years—working alongside Alyssa Ashmore, which has been a real honor. I'm also enrolled in a human services management doctoral program at Beck University. My dissertation is going to be about developing efficient protocols for helping kids with addictions.

I feel passionate about this issue. Teen homelessness is an epidemic. Once a kid gets trapped in the cycle of homelessness, it's very hard to escape. We need to secure more resources for dealing with this problem so we can help kids break out of this cycle. There are so many issues—from addiction, to prostitution, to PTSD. The public has no idea how much these kids are suffering. Helping these kids get better—that needs to be our priority.

Shelly Rodriguez

Group Home Assistant Director, Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth

Resume experience:

Current:

- Assistant Director of the Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth (19 months)

Previous:

- Intern, Ruby Lake Youth Oasis
- Paralegal, various firms, 16 years

I'm a career changer. I worked as a paralegal for 15 years, and I just didn't feel passionate enough about it. Then I started volunteering at a teen crisis center, and it blew my mind what these kids were going through. I had no idea how many of them wind up in prostitution, or with HIV, and as victims of sexual assault, and how often they struggle with addiction. And for LGBT teens, all of the statistics are even more grim. I kept talking to these kids and couldn't believe what they were saying. As a parent, I still can't believe that there are parents who would throw their own children out on the streets because of their sexual orientation. Or their gender identity.

After volunteering for a while, I just knew that I'd finally found my calling. I earned my master's degree in social work and interned at Ruby Lake Youth Oasis, and then I was so honored to land a position as the assistant director of the Washington Avenue Crisis Center for Youth. Being able to work with Alyssa Ashmore as a mentor has been life-changing. And being able to work with such a wide variety of kids who represent all categories of teen homelessness—well, I've just learned so much.

I feel that one of the things I've learned from Alyssa and my time at Washington Avenue is the ability to maintain healthy boundaries while still earning the trust of these kids. And I've also learned a lot about the homelessness issue as a whole. It's so important to not look at these kids as broken—the system is broken, not the kids. If I were the leader of this task force, I would want to focus on two interrelated things—finding ways to enable kids to get the help they need now, but also finding ways to collaborate with the community as a whole to make larger changes.

Amira Abdi

Case Worker and Assistant Director, Hennsey County Department of Health

Resume experience:

Current:

- Case Worker, Hennsey County Department of Health
- Instructor, Human Services program, Riverbend Community College

Previous:

- Case Worker, Linder Hills Teen Community Haven, 5 years
- Case Worker, Caring Heart Center, 3 years

I am so passionate about this issue. It hits very close to home for me. One of my sisters was homeless for almost a year. We had a rough upbringing—there was abuse, there was addiction, much of that because my parents were refugees from Somalia and my father has PTSD because of some terrible war experiences. He passed away last year, and ... I'm sorry. It's hard to talk about my father. I was the lucky one though. My sister's experiences on the street—well, it's very

painful to talk about, but she fell into prostitution very quickly and became part of a human trafficking ring. She got out of that with her life, but now she's HIV-positive and is dealing with PTSD because of these experiences.

So anyways, as you can see, this issue is personal to me! I've made a career out of doing everything I can to help homeless teens and to prevent others from winding up on the street. I also am working on my doctorate in Human Services Management at Beck University, and I'm a part-time instructor at Riverbend City Community College. I teach a class about issues related to homelessness, and that's been such a powerful experience. I have students crying in my class on a regular basis. And I feel that because of my academic background, I understand homeless issues on both an individual and a societal basis. As task force leader, I want to focus both on helping individuals and trying to affect change in the community.

I love my job at Hennsey County, especially the leadership component of it. I'm a very hands-on leader and go out of my way to talk to my team regularly about how they are feeling. It's so important to keep everybody motivated in a field like this. I encourage everybody to talk about the kids they're working with so that we can all help each other. I was a very hands-on caseworker too— some might say too much so, but frankly, I think case workers need to be very hands-on or these kids won't trust us. I think it's more dangerous to be too distant from these kids than to worry about being too friendly.

Scene 6

Informal Feedback

Select each individual to hear their feedback on the second round interviews.

Mark Tucker

Group Home Supervisor

Tim is passionate about this issue, and he definitely has a lot of relevant leadership experience. I'm impressed that he worked with Alyssa Ashmore to help organize the Riverbend City Regional Youth Services Conference. That's a high-profile conference—and a big conference, which demonstrates his leadership experience. My concern is that I know people who worked with Tim. They feel he has a top-down management style and that he isn't a very collaborative leader.

Shelly was an intern at my group home while she was a graduate student. I know she doesn't have a lot of experience, but based on my time working with her, I think she could be a good fit for us. Shelly is very motivated and committed to this field. Her high level of motivation was contagious when she was an intern, and I'm sure she brings that to the table as a leader. And she's had the opportunity to assist Alyssa Ashmore at Washington Avenue. That's priceless.

I really like Amira. She's obviously very passionate and committed to this issue. I'm impressed that she's getting a doctorate and teaching courses related to this issue. But some of the things she said in her interview made me uncomfortable. Leading off with such a detailed description of her family issues? I mean, I get it. I had a rough upbringing too, and that's part of why I went into this field. But it's important to maintain professional boundaries.

Chelsea Jenkins

Crisis Intervention Counselor

I'm so impressed with Tim's level of experience—and the fact that he's working on a doctorate. His dissertation topic is definitely relevant to this task force! And I can tell he's passionate about teen homelessness. But is he the best choice for this task force? He was my supervisor briefly when I was at Lindner Hills Teen Community Haven. He wasn't a terrible boss or anything, but he wasn't a great communicator. And he wasn't the best at keeping people motivated. This is a discouraging field, and you need leaders who can keep people motivated.

It does concern me that Shelly doesn't have a good deal of experience. However, the fact that she's been the assistant director at the largest group home in the city for a year and a half does count for something. I know that Washington Avenue serves a very diverse population, including LGBT kids, and kids with addictions. She's got her boots on the ground, that's for sure!

I worked with Amira at Lindner Hills briefly. I have such mixed feelings about her as task force leader. On the one hand, she has some outstanding leadership skills. Great organizational skills, great skills at getting people motivated—plus she's one of the most genuinely nice people I've ever met. The problem with Amira is that she has boundary issues. She gets way too close with clients sometime, and it kind of sounds like she does the same thing with employees.

Jason De La Cruz

Foster Care Coordinator, Hennsey County

In my opinion, Tim seems stuck in the medical service delivery model. The language he uses about how teen homelessness is an "epidemic," and how we have to help teens get "better"—that bothers me. I want the leader of this task force to focus in part on larger systemic changes that have to happen in this community to prevent homelessness. I'm not getting from Tim that this is a priority.

Does Shelly have enough experience, or understanding of teen homeless as a systemic issue? I don't know if she does or not. She certainly has experience helping kids find emergency resources. Eighteen months as a group home assistant will give you that. But does she understand the kinds of community changes that need to happen to make a difference?

I appreciate Amira's compassion and her academic background. I'm impressed that she has a strong understanding of the link between individual cases and societal issues. And I'm excited to see a Somali woman in a leadership position in her organization. Yes, she has some boundary issues. But we can coach her on that, can't we? She brings so much to the table.

Elizabeth Fine

Guidance Counselor

I'm not sure what I think about Tim. On the one hand, I'm very impressed with his experience—both academically and as a leader. On the other hand, I get the sense that he's a little jaded. Will he have the skill set to motivate people on the task force to delve into this disturbing issue?

Is Shelly skilled at maintaining professional boundaries? We don't have any evidence that she's *not* good at this. But I'm a little nervous having someone in charge of this task force who doesn't have that much of a track record in this field. She does have an awful lot of enthusiasm, though. I think she would be successful at motivating other team members.

I want to like Amira. But I see red flags with her that may overshadow her accomplishments. Maintaining boundaries with both clients and employees is paramount, and I hear her saying that this isn't as important as building relationships. I hear where she's coming from. I have kids in my office all the time who are suffering, and sometimes I just want to cry and hug them. But I can't. And ultimately, that's not what they need.

Conclusion

You've finished the interviews.

Time to decide who will be the Task Force head.

Reflection Questions

Who will you choose to head the Ruby Lake Teen Homelessness Task Force?

Your response:

This question has not been answered yet.

Why did you choose this candidate?

Your response:

This question has not been answered yet.

What strengths does this candidate bring?

Your response:

This question has not been answered yet.

In what areas is this candidate not as strong? With this in mind, what actions would you recommend to help this candidate excel as the Task Force leader?

Your response:

This question has not been answered yet.

Credits

Subject Matter Expert:

Pamela Klem

Interactive Design:

Marty Elmer

Interactive Developer:

Dre Allen

Instructional Design:

Judi Gronseth

Media Instructional Design:

Naomi Rockler Gladen

Project Management:

Marc Ashmore, Andrea Thompson

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