



Dr. Natasha Slesnick, Founder, OSU STAR House
Testimony to the Ohio House Finance Committee
March 24, 2015

Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Driehaus, and Members of the House Finance Committee— thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Dr. Natasha Slesnick, the founder of the Ohio State University STAR House, Central Ohio's drop in center for homeless youth.

I am here to respectfully ask for your continued support of the OSU Star House. Thanks to your support in the last biennium, the Star House was able to:

- Become a 24/7 facility so that youth can be safe at those times when they are most vulnerable – at night.
- Increase the number of unduplicated youth we serve from 438 in 2012 to 724 in 2014 – a 60% increase.
- Add a full time therapist and improve support services to better assist our youth while increasing research and experiential opportunities for OSU students and community volunteers.
- Increase the number of partnerships, volunteers and onsite providers offering stabilization services.

Because of the expansion of our services and increase in our onsite partners, we observed marked improvements among the youth, who visited the House, including:

- 40% who did not previously have employment were able to obtain a job.
- 30% enrolled in an education or training program.
- 50% received medical care.
- 50% accepted and received case management.
- 40% accepted and received substance use/mental health counseling.
- 20% of our youth obtained independent housing, even though we did not offer housing.

For a population known for hiding in the social margins by avoiding the system and its representatives, these numbers suggest that homeless youth can be re-engaged. Our findings also unequivocally show that youth want help, and the help we offer works. Because of last biennium's support, we are helping hundreds and hundreds of adolescents and emerging adults have a safe place to begin the reintegration process.

Due to the increase in the number of youth served, onsite providers, and staff, the current Star House space has become grossly inadequate. As a result, the Star House advisory board has raised \$1.2 million to date from the public and private sectors to purchase and renovate a new building. This new site will allow us to better serve youth by providing much needed space for additional services and resources, including a one-stop shop, social enterprise and housing first.

Your continued support in this biennium coupled with the new space will allow us to pursue our goal of becoming a statewide center on youth homelessness. The OSU Star Center on Youth Homelessness will:

- Offer free and inexpensive training and support to any agency serving or attempting to serve homeless or at risk youth in Ohio.
- Identify, through research and testing, best practices.
- Promote the use of best practices by partnering with agencies around Ohio and nationally.
- Advocate for cross-systems collaboration to increase efficiency and overall success in serving these youth.
- Provide a Best Practice Summit, bringing in national and local experts to encourage the use of best practices for youth in Ohio.
- Create materials promoting cultural competencies for any agencies that may serve homeless youth.
- Engage homeless youth and formerly homeless youth in advocacy and leadership.

- Serve as a support for agencies around the state seeking to obtain and analyze data on homeless youth. Star can serve as a data hub given its unique research expertise.
- Provide policy recommendations locally and nationally for ending youth homelessness.

In sum, I see an opportunity to end homelessness among youth through the first and only homeless youth services, training, advocacy and research (STAR) center in the country. Ohio can be the leader for the nation in being the first to end homelessness among its youth. Our success now will lead to the prevention of premature death, incarceration, hospitalization, and chronic adult homelessness.

Thank you for considering this request to continue state support to Ohio's Homeless Youth.