

June 2018

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PERFORMANCE PROJECT

835 W. Addison St. Chicago, IL 60613 www.WeSayYEPP.com



Dear Community Advocate,

My name is Bonsai Bermúdez and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Youth Empowerment Performance Project. It is my passion to work with LGBTQ young people who are healing from trauma and experience housing instability. Please allow me to share with you the daily realities of our work at YEPP and what I hear on a regular basis from young people who hide in plain sight on the streets. Some have lost the hope to reach their dreams or to even just to stay alive.

“I was so hungry – I didn’t know what else to do. I just went into the store and stole some food. I know it was wrong, but I was starving. Luckily, I wasn’t caught this time or else I would’ve been in deep [trouble]. You know this is not a part of my character, I just needed to eat something.”

When dealing with lack of family care or housing instability, this is just one of the many realities that LGBTQ young people face everyday - 24/7. They come to the YEPP to find a safe space, to find support, to heal, and to find ways to move **positively forward** in life through trauma-informed guidance and care.

“On my way to rehearsal, I got attacked on the bus by a group of guys that were making fun of [my trans-womanhood]. After getting punched in the face, I fought back to protect myself, my dignity. No one around me tried to stop them or help me; I was there by myself fighting for my life.”

These are true stories! And there are countless more examples of what these young people must survive 24/7. Many of them have no place to go and have no support system from which to get the proper help they deserve.

The numbers don’t lie.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, between 500,000 and 2.8 million youth experience homelessness each year. A whopping 40% of them identify as LGBTQ. Of this group, 43% were forced by their parents to leave home because of their orientation or gender identities, while 46% left because of physical abuse, and 58% reported having been sexually assaulted. Please take a moment to let that sink in.

They are also TWICE as likely to attempt suicide (62%) than their heterosexual peers experiencing homelessness (29%). In the years I have personally had the honor to support this precious community, more than 10 young people surrounding those we serve have killed themselves.

For 7 years now, we have served LGBTQ young people experiencing homelessness to stay grounded, find ways to conquer their struggles, and to succeed in life. When we started, YEPP was a grassroots idea with an arts-based focus. But we have actively grown into to a more broad support hub, which reaches out to any street-based youth who need health services, education, employment, food, friendly support, or even a fresh pair of socks. More than a theatrical organization giving voice to the stories of survival, YEPP has become a bustling hive of activity, with 6 staff warriors, battling against the hostility of the world we share with you. Fearlessly, we go where the need takes us - 24/7.

However, we need your help to make our efforts go even further!

So, I write to you today with an urgent request.

I ask that you to help recognize the daily struggle of the young people who are physically and emotionally exhausted. Our team asks for your financial help to keep the doors open. The need continues to grow, more so now than ever, and we try not to limit the access we can provide to the most basic things. We survive on only a few generous grants and donations, so it's very difficult for me to say: ***"now we need more"***.

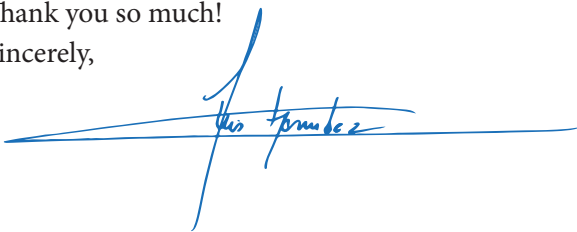
Our work continues 24/7 and we hope to raise \$15,000 so that we can stay afloat. You are an incredible part of our small but growing network of supporters upon whom we rely to keep our work alive. This is a very critical time for us to keep the engine running and the momentum moving. Please do what you can to help us.

Because of this need, we have developed a **24/7 campaign** to help raise awareness to this human indecency happening around us and give you a way to directly serve those who need. It's a simple way to help combat a complex problem.

I humbly thank you in advance for your contribution and your willingness to become aware of this devastating reality. Your donation will go **DIRECTLY** our participants as provisions of food, transportation, housing and education support, health and safety resources, and a safe space to heal and grow, among other critical expenses.

Thank you so much!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bonsai Bermúdez", is written over a horizontal line.

Bonsai Bermúdez

YEPP's Executive and Artistic Director

P. S. If you wish to explore other ways to support YEPP's mission, please email us at **info@WeSayYEPP.com**. We accept donations of clothing and other basic needs, household items, gift cards, and even the opportunity for you to cook a hot meal and share it with the group of participants along with your own story.



Here's how you can make a donation:

- Send a check or credit card payment in the envelope we've included (no cash, please!)
- Make an electronic donation online through our website – www.WeSayYEPP.com