

October 1, 2024

# CLCL Foundation Restores Runaway Safe Housing After 16-Year Absence

Services Return to Ocean and Monmouth County on January 1, 2025

**Toms River, NJ – October 1, 2024** – Today, CLCL Foundation announced that the new 501(c)(3) received the Federal Grant for a Basic Center Program, a youth shelter for emergency housing for runaway and homeless youth. The grant is administered by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) under the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB). This funding is to provide 4 beds to local Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) under 18 years, who may stay for up to 21 days' time without parents' approval. The 1974 Runaway Youth Act decriminalized runaway youth and authorized the funding of Basic Center Programs, like the one CLCL Foundation is opening in January. The original Act has been reauthorized in Congress and updated as needed; what began as 14 days guaranteed safe harbor at runaway youth shelters, grew to 21 days in the 2008 update.

“It is the honor of a lifetime to announce that after a 16-year hiatus, Safe Haven access is restored by a former runaway youth, whose December 2001 bed was paid for by this same FYSB Basic Center Program (BCP) grant,” said deSousa, founder and Board Chairperson.

## Choose love. Celebrate life.

Choose love. Celebrate life. A Foundation for Youth and Families, Incorporated was named after the life mantras of Andrea C. Viggiano, a Toms River high school teacher who brought a young deSousa to safe shelter and then sought guardianship, later approved just days before Christmas. The organization was founded by deSousa in December 2023.

It was formed for the explicit purpose of restoring Safe Haven (via BCP) to Ocean and Monmouth County youth under age 18. At the time of their founding, the previous Emergency Youth Shelter had been closed for 155 days. “We are re-establishing runaway Safe Haven access, something not available in Ocean and Monmouth since 2009. We are also debuting other Pilot Programs designed to support youth and families as a way to prevent crises, such as runaway behavior, homelessness, or poverty-based maltreatment allegations,” said deSousa, now Board Chairperson for the organization.

The other founders who joined deSousa in her quest to restore the very Haven that saved her own life as a teenager, all have experience working with this population. Founding Board Members include Lisa Scala, Board Treasurer, who worked at the previous youth shelter for 23 years and was the Primary Residential Counselor on staff the night deSousa ran away; it was Scala who completed her intake paperwork. deSousa grew up and returned to college in hopes of working at the same shelter that helped her, which she did in 2013. It was then that Lisa Scala became

deSousa's supervisor during her two part-time and one full-time position as a Residential Counselor.

The pair brought other experienced Residential Counselors with them, including Leslie Brower, Board Secretary, with 8 years' experience working with this at-risk youth population and an experienced art teacher. Kelsy Wetmore only crossed paths with deSousa for a year, but became a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), and a Licensed Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LCADC) dedicated to you, and acting as CLCL's Professional Liaison. Kathleen DeLorme, Community Liaison, has 23 years of experience working with these specific at-risk youth populations and has also known deSousa since she was 17. Together these professionals bring over 57 years combined experience working with this population. The five were then joined by long-time youth volunteer, Jennifer Santa Maria, an artist and Master of Arts Teacher in Art Education and specializing with students with disabilities. The six professionals brought over 33 years of education and over 30 years of community volunteer work.

Over time, deSousa added more people to her Advisory team, including Lauren LeMay, a licensed resource parent in Ocean County and one of the few who accept adolescent foster youth. LeMay and deSousa went to Toms River High School South together, both graduating in 2002. Catherine Petty heard about what deSousa was trying to create and joined as the Advisory Board with LeMay. Petty is a Master of Social Work and is currently the Program Administrator for the Children's Home Society of NJ. Other Advisory Board members have been unable to stay on due to the time commitments of a working Board but have helped pave the way including Dr. Breeden-Balaam and Chelsea Stack.

## The Tree House Program

CLCL Foundation will be debuting their BCP as a Pilot Program, intended to evaluate the effectiveness of their innovative solutions to ending and preventing youth homelessness. "Problems have solutions," deSousa said. "Research and best practices make very clear what shows evidence of working – and Basic Center Programs protect runaway youth from danger on the streets, from the need to sleep on sofas, and from trafficking risks that occur within 48 hours of running away from home."

CLCL Foundation's program – dubbed the Tree House – is based in a core commitment to provide the latest evidence-based and trauma-informed approaches mandated by best practices, while also tracking how effective an improved model may be in securing long-term stability for runaway and homeless minor youth. CLCL Foundation will have 4 of their shelter beds paid and reserved for runaway and homeless youth under 18, but plan on creating a 12-bed facility. This will leave 8 beds available for other youth and young people experiencing homelessness or crisis in Ocean and Monmouth County. The shelter will provide case management, family support, and other innovative services beginning January 1, 2025.

## Creating Community-driven Change

In addition to the Tree House Program, CLCL Foundation offers many innovative solutions to youth and family problems. According to their website's mission, CLCL Foundation seeks to provide a haven of support and resources for at-risk youth and the community at large. Its core

services include a “Warm Line”, Community Groups, Home Share Solutions to prevent 18–24-year-old homelessness, and the on-site youth shelter – dubbed The Tree House Program. These services will offer evidence-based, trauma-informed triage services, in a judgement free, safe, and nurturing environment. Our mission is to empower youth and families in crisis, bridging the gap to vital resources and uplifting our diverse community through genuine partnerships and coalition building. We strive to foster growth, resilience, and a sense of belonging for youth and families before, during, and after crisis.”

deSousa has been adamant since the beginning of her crusade, that: “Only together can we ever have enough wisdom to do this the right way, the better way. Community-driven change does not happen without Community!”

CLCL Foundation is a registered nonprofit in New Jersey and all donations are tax deductible under 501(c)(3) status. More information can be found at their website: <https://CLCLFoundation.org>.

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