



pathfinders
Empowering Youth. Changing Lives.

Pathfinders Overview

For more than 50 years, Pathfinders has brought safety, hope and healing to youth and young adults facing homelessness, sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking, crisis and other trauma through innovative and transformational services.

Our mission is “**empowering youth – changing lives.**” Our vision is to provide a more meaningful voice for youth in crisis and ensure all youth are safe, healthy, independent, successful and valued.



Pathfinders Services

Supported Housing

Pathfinders helps young adults experiencing homelessness find, secure and sustain safe housing. We utilize a Housing First approach and believe housing is an essential tool for success, not a reward for program compliance. Once housed, we support our young adults as they address trauma, enhance their mental well-being and work toward lifelong stability.

Runaway & Homeless Youth Services

We offer a wide array of services for youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability including emergency shelter; street outreach; a Drop-In Center offering basic needs services like food, showers, clothing and laundry; case management; employment, education and mental health services; and sexual health and wellness education.



Education

Pathfinders operates the Southeastern Education Center, a behavioral reassignment middle school. Our trauma-informed approach to education provides access to mental health and wraparound services with the goal of scholars returning to their schools of origin.

Clinical Services

Our team offers support to youth and young adults living with mental health and/or substance abuse diagnoses to reduce negative mental health symptoms, develop life skills and transition into adulthood.

Anti-Sexual Violence Services

Pathfinders serves and advocates for young people who have experienced or are at high risk of sexual abuse, exploitation or trafficking. In addition to individual and group therapy for youth who have been sexually abused, our staff offer accompaniment for youth who have experienced sexual exploitation as they access medical, legal and social services.

Centering Youth in Our Work

Pathfinders' program structure encourages youth empowerment and promotes youth as partners in the design and delivery of the services they receive. Here are just a few ways this translates to our work:

- A Youth Advisory Board helps determine messaging, training content and key partnerships in our Youth Anti-Sexual Violence work.
- Pathfinders' Board of Directors includes a former Pathfinders youth, individuals with lived experience and those who work within the systems our youth engage.
- All programmatic staff interview with a panel of young people prior to receiving a job offer.
- Our housing program uses a scattered-site model to ensure youth voice and choice when selecting their home.
- All services are voluntary and free.



Issues Impacting Our Work

Youth & young adult homelessness is extremely prevalent in Milwaukee.

- An estimated 15,000 young people aged 25 and under experience at least one episode of homelessness annually in Milwaukee, with hundreds on wait lists for housing support.
- 1 in 3 youth aging out of foster care will be homeless within 2 years of exiting the system.

Homelessness leaves youth and young adults vulnerable to exploitation.

- Within 72 hours of experiencing homelessness, 1 in 3 youth will trade sex to meet their basic needs (food, shelter, etc.).
- 21% of homeless young women and 10% of homeless young men had been trafficked for sex, with even higher rates among LGBTQ+ youth.
- Milwaukee is known as a national hub for human trafficking. Shared Hope International gives Wisconsin an "F" based on the state's laws supporting trafficking youth survivors.

Poverty & systemic racism are at the root of young adult homelessness.

- In Milwaukee County, nearly 1 in 4 children live in poverty, with a rate 3x more likely for Latino and 4x more likely for Black children, compared to white children.
- More than 27% of Black/African American families in Milwaukee County are living below the poverty level, a percentage nearly 5x higher than white families.

Learn more and get involved by visiting PathfindersMKE.org

