

Open Doors

Host Home Manual

Family and Children's Services of Ithaca
Youth & Outreach Services

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Table of Contents

Staff Listing and Contact Information	Page 3
Introduction	Page 4
General Information about Runaway and Homeless Youth	
About Open Doors	
General Guidelines	Page 7
Guiding Principles	Page 8
Volunteer Host Home Requirements	Page 9
Training Requirements	
General Requirements	
Reimbursement	
Host Home Reporting and Records	
Confidentiality	
Mandated Reporting	
When a Youth is Placed in Your Home	Page 13
Youth Placement Procedure	
Guidelines on Physical Nurturing	
Discipline	
Working with LGBTQ Youth	
Monitoring Placements	
On Call Policy	
Discharge Conference	
The Youth's Family	
Medical Emergencies	
Travel with Youth	
Insurance	
Supervision	
Religious Practices	
Telephone Recommendations	
School Attendance	
Money for Youth	
Community Resources	

Open Doors Contact List

General Open Doors Information and Referral: (607) 288-2834. Use this number if you are having trouble reaching the Open Doors caseworker assigned to the youth in your care.

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Open Doors Supervisor

Daytime phone: (607) 273-7494 x526. Phone calls only. No texting available for this number.

After 6 pm, before 9 am: (607) 239-7845. Text or call.

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Open Doors Runaway and Homeless Youth Caseworker

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Introduction

The Host Home manual is intended to be a practical source of information for you. Its scope covers what host parents are expected to know and to do when providing placement for runaway and homeless youth. The contents of this manual will compliment what you have learned in orientation and clarify your vital role in providing a host home.

Host Homes, also known as interim families, are a temporary shelter model approved by the New York State Office for Children and Families to provide temporary crisis shelter for youth who are homeless or have run away. Host Homes are a model that maintains a youth in a family setting while in crisis, allowing the youth to maintain connections with key supportive figures, experience safety in a familiar environment, and avoid institutionalization and further trauma. Host Homes are frequently used in rural counties such as our own when the demand for emergency shelter does not meet that of larger cities, and allow communities to provide a safety net to vulnerable youth without the prohibitive cost of a 24- hour staffed shelter.

Three purposes are served by this manual:

1. Host Home policies, procedure and role description
2. Comprehensive information about host family responsibilities to the youth and the program.
3. Guiding principals for the assessment, prevention and resolution of problems/situations involving youth placed in your home.

Implicit throughout this manual are values and attitudes that characterize host home families.

- Respect for each youth's dignity and individuality
- Capacity to empathize with a youth's struggles, accomplishments, sadness and joys
- Belief in the importance of growth and development of knowledge in working with youth.
- Acceptance of the impact of life experiences on a youth's feelings and behavior according to age and stage of development.

General Information about Runaway and Homeless Youth in Tompkins County

According to the New York State 2012 Runaway and Homeless Youth Annual Report, Tompkins County has the fifth highest count of runaway and homeless youth per calendar year, of any County in New York State. At 615 incidents of youth seeking either residential or non-residential assistance, Tompkins demonstrated more need for services to runaway and homeless youth – more than double, in some cases – than counties that are home to larger cities with higher populations. Additional data on characteristics of runaway and homeless youth comes from the 2011 Independent Living Survey Project, a study conducted by a collaboration of the Tompkins County Youth Services Department, the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University, and the staff and young adult participants in the Youth Outreach program of The Learning Web, a local nonprofit.

225 youth, aged 25 and under, provided input to inform housing and human services providers and planners with a portrait of runaway and homeless youth (RHY) in the County. In the Independent Living Survey, more than one in four RHY (28%) said they were currently staying at more than one place; some listed as many as 5 places: “Though the majority of youth indicate they are currently living in one place, a closer look uncovers both the instability of their housing and the poor conditions in which they live. These youth are staying with a parent one night and getting kicked out the next. Like their counterparts in communities across the country, homeless youth in our county piece together their housing using every possible resource and network. Short periods of adequate housing are intertwined with periods of inadequate, unsafe housing, and no housing at all.”

RHY remain fairly invisible in Ithaca, our only city, and the rest of Tompkins County. Only 12% reported stays in the nonprofit-run Emergency Shelter, and some included places not meant for human habitation (10% outside, and 7% in both vehicles and abandoned buildings). The majority indicated living in “someone else’s house” (63%), in “multiple people’s houses” (63%), and “with other relatives” (41%). In Tompkins County, youth homelessness manifests itself as long-term couch surfing.

Upon intake, meeting other basic needs with the youth is important; the NY State OCFS reported Basic Needs as second only to case management among services provided¹. Hunger was identified high among Basic Needs; 40% of RHY reported skipping meals, and 27% reported not eating for at least one whole day due to lack of money or food. Stabilizing basic needs such as these – and immediate health and danger concerns – will be the first priority of the Open Doors program.

Much of the work of our program will focus on strengthening youth and their connection to their families and the community. Tompkins County’s high runaway and homeless youth count is a duplicated figure, and the reported patterns and habits of RHY in our community suggest that repeat incidents of running away or being kicked out of a home are common, and much needed. Not surprisingly, 55% of RHY Youth aged 15-20 reported conflict with parents as being a main reason for leaving home; 25% reported being kicked out. “Stressors such as parental abuse, parental substance abuse, clashes with step parents, and non-compliance with rules contributed to a disintegration of the parent-child relationship” that often occurs in earlier adolescence, starting for many around ages 10-12, and builds for a period of two or more years.

In F&CS’s experience working with troubled young people - including those designated as Persons In Need of Supervision - we know that leaving home is a last resort and a symptom of underlying problems. Working with the family to identify ways to improve communication and resolve conflicts will help reduce repeat episodes of homelessness and improve the youth’s chances of healing trauma.

Adolescence is a time of transition to independence, but for runaway and homeless youth, the independence is tried too early. More than 1 in 4 runaway and homeless youth statewide indicated needs in living skills, and trying to learn these on their own while undergoing the crisis of no permanent residence, recovering from the trauma of abuse, and/or actively abusing drugs or alcohol is next to impossible for many. Unfortunately, in Tompkins County 19% indicated

they had no identifiable support network, no person to turn to for help, no one they could trust. Still, the runaway and homeless youth in the Independent Living Survey cited dreams for a normal life – “to go to school, start a career, and develop relationships. Almost half want to pursue a "Career/Job" and 40% plan to "Pursue Education”.

About Open Doors

Open Doors is funded primarily by the Tompkins County Youth Department through a combination of designated state funding and county funds. We provide services to youth up to the age of 21 who have runaway or are at risk.

There are two components to our service:

Outreach/ Consultation:

- Warmline access during business hours for Providers, School personnel, Families and Youth for consultation and information gathering regarding Runaway and Homeless Youth issues
- In person and telephone consultation with youth regarding obtaining basic need resources – food, shelter, hygiene items, etc.
- Targeted outreach by invitation to youth and families at risk or experiencing runaway and homelessness issues

Case Management/ Temporary Housing:

- Short term case management and crisis management focused on youth goal achievement
- Mediation and family counseling
- Referrals to ongoing services
- Involvement in youth development activities and groups
- Temporary shelter placement in volunteer host homes

General Guidelines

Thank you for volunteering your home and yourself to the Open Doors program. Now that you are a member of our team, you may be wondering what happens when the first call comes in from one of the staff to ask you to shelter a youth in crisis.

Before you are called, a number of processes have already taken place. The youth has spent time with Open Doors staff. The presented problems are discussed and an effort is made to reunite the youth and his or her family if staff are confident that the youth's safety is not in danger. A screening intake process is completed that will help determine whether or not the youth will be accepted for the program services.

If host home placement is the appropriate choice, we will review existing host home availability and contact the host family considered to be best fit for the youth. This fit is determined by location of presenting youth, current school district and previously determined host family parameters. We will then call you to ask if you are able to place the youth in your home and provide you with information about the youth needing placement. If it is not convenient for you at this particular time, please feel free to say no. We will call you again.

When a youth comes into placement, he or she will sit down with Open Doors staff and go over the program rules and expectations. Upon entering your home, staff, youth and yourself will examine the contract further and discuss any rules particular to your home. These rules are added on the Open Doors contract. It is generally a good practice to keep these rules close to the same rules your own children have. A copy of the signed contract will be given to the host home family and the youth and our staff will keep a copy.

- Remember this is a time of crisis for the youth. Rigid rules with no flexibility could result in additional tensions and frustrations for the youth.
- Give the youth clear feedback
- Please do not converse with the youth's natural family or guardian
- All placements are temporary, no more than 30 consecutive days
- The primary goal of the program is reunification of the youth with their family whenever possible

Needless to say, each youth and situation is unique. We have attempted to anticipate as many situations that you will be dealing with as possible. However, we know that problems may arise which have not been covered. You have been chosen because of our confidence in your ability to deal with the unexpected. We do not expect you to handle crisis by yourself. You will have phone access to Open Doors staff 24 hours a day. We strongly encourage you to call anytime you have a doubt or question.

Guiding Principles for Host Home Families

- When there is serious doubt about whether a proposed placement of a youth will work out, the host home parent should not agree to place that youth in their home. The reason for the feeling of doubt doesn't have to be clear or specific; it could be an intuition that is beyond rational analysis. Placements that are not successful are traumatic for everyone concerned, especially the youth.
- Offering a snack to the youth just placed in your home is important. It will comfort the youth and help the youth perceive the host home as friendly and interested in welcoming them into the home.
- Youth coming into care may be in a state of great dependency. The attachment to the agency staff and or you as host home parent is natural, temporary reaction to the dependency the youth is experiencing.
- Please give the youth a tour of your home and show them where they will sleep, where the bathroom is and laundry.
- Encourage the youth to talk with Open Doors staff about any problems or concerns that may be difficult to understand or resolve.
- Host parents can help the placed youth overcome communication problems and learn better communication skills by setting an example of how to listen more effectively, how to empathize, how to disagree without arguing, how to avoid using words that trigger emotional reactions, how to be objective, how to share different ideas and to encourage creative use of critical thinking.

Volunteer Host Home Family Requirements

Host Home family qualifications

- Individuals will be 21 years of age or older.
- Families will be able to provide a safe environment and understand the unique needs of runaway and homeless youth.
- Host family will be sponsored by Family and Children's Services of Ithaca as a certified provider for runaway and homeless youth.
- Host family attends a two hour orientation program which provides information about the operation of the program and the care of runaway and homeless youth.

Application Process

Interested candidates will complete an application to include:

1. Information regarding any prior certification issued to the candidates for the purpose of boarding youth, by the Office of Children and Family Services (formerly NYS division for youth).
2. A sworn statement from each member of the candidates household who is 18 years or older, stating whether the individual has ever been convicted of a crime and confirming that everything on the application is true.
3. Married individuals should file one application but shall provide separate supporting documentation.
4. Host home family candidates and all adult household members shall be screened through the statewide central register of child abuse and maltreatment.
5. A physical exam noting overall health and stating the individual is free from communicable diseases.

Home Study

Open doors staff will conduct a comprehensive home study made up of the following elements:

- Initial review of all information provided in the application
- Two interviews of the candidates; one in the home with all household members
- Inspection of the candidates home based on the following criteria:
 - safety
 - physical plant and structure, size
 - ability to accommodate youth (and dependent children if applicable)
 - location and neighborhood
 - proposed sleeping arrangements for youth
 - cleanliness

The program director will forward all of the required documents first to the county youth bureau and then to OCFS per requirements and procedures. Pending OCFS review of the documentation, the Host Home candidate will receive an operating certificate from OCFS.

Training Requirements

The program coordinator will arrange for four hours of training to each family within six months after certification. A minimum of four hours of training will be provided to the host home family each year of certification. Program staff will document the trainings in each family's record or file.

Training will cover a variety of relevant topics, including but not limited to:

- HIV awareness and education
- Adolescent behavior
- Communication skills
- Juvenile Justice system
- Drug Use and behavior
- Crisis management
- Physical, sexual and emotional abuse

General Requirements

Host Home families provide a safe haven and supportive living environment for youth who for a variety of reasons are not able to or choose not to remain with their own family. Some general expectations of host home families are:

- Involving the youth in family activities
- Respect for the privacy and confidentiality of the youth and family
- Prohibit neglect, maltreatment, physical and psychological abuse of the youth
- Provision of three nutritious meals a day
- Permit and support youth to have reasonable visits with friends and family
- Permit each youth to make phone calls
- Support and encourage the youth to participate in recreational and community activities
- Provision of adequate supervision to the youth
- Provision of a private sleeping area for the youth (no more than two youth of the same gender in one sleeping area)
- Provision of a closet, dresser or other storage area for youths personal possessions
- Provision of bathroom and laundry facilities in sanitary condition
- Properly secure and store any firearms to prevent access to them by the youth

Reimbursement

Open Doors may reimburse families for expenses incurred and documented by the family as follows:

- Prior approval by program staff for purchase
- Tax exempt form is used
- Receipt signed by youth or host home family and given to program staff
- Upon receipt of the documentation, reimbursement will be given.

A small daily stipend is offered to host homes for each night a youth spends in your home. This stipend is not meant to cover the full cost of housing feeding, and transporting a youth, but to ameliorate any potential financial burden on host home families.

Host Home Family Reporting and Records

The program director shall be responsible for providing OCFS an annual report regarding the status of each host home family based on the compiled record for each individual home.

The record for each host home will contain the following documents and information:

1. Copy of the home study report and application package as well as the following attachments:
 - Host Home Certification
 - Family's sworn statement, background check results
 - Summary of interviews
 - Documentation of pre service training
 - Reference checks
 - Statement of health
 - Host Home evaluation, assessment, and diagram of home
2. Original operating certificate issued by the OFCS
3. Photocopy of any other valid operating certificate currently held by the family
4. Chronological listing of all youth housed in the home
5. Assessment of each youth's stay in the home including the interview with the youth prior to discharge and meeting with their host home family after each discharge.
6. Documentation of training provided to the family
7. Copies of all written correspondence and verbal correspondence with the family, such as emails, evaluation forms, concerns or complaints of the host home family, etc.
8. Ongoing written evaluation of the family's ability to provide services to homeless / runaway youth and cooperate with Open Doors staff

Confidentiality

Because we are working with many other people, it is extremely important that personal matters pertaining to the youth, their family, etc. are held in the strictest confidence. It is especially important that the names of the youth who have resided with you are not shared with the community at large. This does not mean that if you are in public that you should ignore the people that you and the youth come into contact with. Introduce the youth on a first name basis as a friend that is staying with you. You and the Open Doors staff are bound by legal and New York State Office of Children and Family Services regulations not to release any information to anyone outside the program without specific written consent by the client.

The only exceptions to this policy are:

- Cases where there is a medical emergency where the life of the youth is in danger.
- The disclosure of information to appropriate State or local official in connection with a report of child abuse, neglect or maltreatment and any subsequent investigation conducted pursuant to such a report.

For the host family's protection and to avoid any potentially upsetting situations for the youth, the name and address of all volunteer host homes are kept in the strictest confidence. This rule is stressed to all youth before they are placed in host homes.

If a youths family finds out the locations of a host home where the youth is placed and arrives at your home, contact the police first and then Open Doors staff. Treat the incident as if a stranger came to your door. Do not allow them into your home.

Mandated Reporting

Host home families are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect in the State of New York. That means if a youth or someone else discloses to you that they have experienced or are experiencing an abusive or neglectful situation we are required to notify the state abuse hotline. It is the policy of Open Doors that host home families should notify the program first if they concerns about abuse or neglect of a youth in their care. The program staff and host home will discuss together who will file the report and next appropriate steps.

Host home families are also mandated reporters of institutional abuse or neglect. If you believe that a youth has suffered abuse or neglect while in the care of another host home or by agency staff, you are required to inform the New York State Justice Center at 1-855-373-2122.

When a Youth is Placed in Your Home

Youth Placement Procedure

When Open Doors receives a request for service from a youth or a community person, what happens?

For any request for shelter for a runaway or homeless youth, an Open Doors staff member will meet with the youth to determine whether or not the program is appropriate. If a youth can be served without having to be placed in housing, we provide any indicated intervention ourselves or make appropriate referrals to community agencies.

If a youth is in need of shelter, Open Doors will consider the following factors when making their determination for shelter:

- The youth's characteristics and needs.
- The school that the youth attends (we want to try to keep each youth within their school district). Sometimes this may not be possible and will require a youth to be placed outside their school district. School districts are required to provide transportation to youth.
- Host home characteristics. Some families might be better able to handle youth with certain types of presenting problems than others. This is not to say that some host homes are not as capable as others, but rather we acknowledge we all have some limitations, likes, dislikes and flexibility. Also, the preferences of each host home family are considered with regards to youth age, gender and sexual orientation.
- During intake procedure the youth needs to agree to have his or her parents contacted within 24 hours of their placement within a host home by Open Doors staff. The youth is also required to comply with all expectations and rules within their youth contract. The youth agrees to work on their situation with Open Doors staff and his or her family.
- Open Doors staff will call a prospective host to ascertain availability. If space is available, staff will bring the youth to the host home. Once there the youth, Open Doors staff and host family will review the program goals and expectations and finalize the youth contract.
- Open Doors staff will complete a clothing checklist at the time of placement.
- Open Doors staff will remain at the host home until the youth begins to feel comfortable, an hour or so.

Guidelines on Physical Nurturing of Runaway / Homeless Youth

One of the characteristics of most runaway / homeless youth is that they are vulnerable to the actions of other people. Part of the host homes parent responsibility is nurturing. You can begin

this right away after a youth is placed in your home. Regardless of their situation, our young people need support, compassion, and empathy as they deal with the crisis of leaving home. The vulnerability of a runaway or homeless youth makes it important that the host family ask the youth before hugging them or other physical contact. Conversations should take place in common areas of the home rather than private spaces. Making clear boundaries with the youth is one way to protect their vulnerability.

Discipline in Your Home

When a youth is placed in your home by Open Doors staff a behavior contract is reviewed and signed by both you and the youth. The behavior contract covers general expectations around behavior and responsibilities while in your home. It is appropriate for you to add responsibilities or expectations similar to those of your own children if applicable (i.e. everyone does their own laundry, or no cell phones during meals, etc.) If you are having trouble with a youth adhering to the behavior contract, please contact the Open Doors staff. If a youth cannot abide by the behavior contract, they may not be appropriate for host home placement and we will work with them to find alternate housing. *Under no circumstances should you use physical discipline (hitting, spanking), confiscate the youth's possessions, or restrict access to basic needs such as food, bathrooms, etc.* Remember these youth have experienced trauma and they are likely to be highly reactive to a perceived threat, whether real or fantasy.

Working with LGBTQ Youth

The experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/ Questioning youth highlight the need for education, training, and resources for working with this population. Below are a few facts and statistics from the available research.

- Many LGBTQ youth face neglect or abuse from their families of origin because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. One study found that over 30% of LGBTQ youth reported suffering physical violence at the hands of a family member after coming out.
- In terms of sexual orientation: 84.6% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 40.1% reported being physically harassed, and 18.8% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- In terms of gender expression: 63.7% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 27.2% reported being physically harassed, and 12.5% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their gender expression.
- 74% of transgender youth reported being sexually harassed at school, and 90% of transgender youth reported feeling unsafe at school because of their gender expression.
- As a result of lack of acceptance and abuse in the home and at school, a disproportionate number of youth living on the streets are LGBT. The National Network of Runaway and Youth Services estimates that between 20-40% of homeless youth are LGBT.
- Many LGBTQ youth — 26% according to one study — are forced to leave their families of origin as a result of conflicts with their parents regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- LGB young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to

report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse, compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection.¹⁰

- 33.2% of transgender youth have attempted suicide.¹¹
- 29.1 percent of LGBT students missed a class and 30 percent missed a day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe in their school. LGBT who experienced more frequent harassment had lower grade point averages than those who were harassed less frequently. Another study found that 28% of LGB youth dropped out of school due to peer harassment.
- Research suggests that LGBTQ youth in foster care need a range of physical and mental health services as well as educational supports and services, but that they confront barriers in accessing these services because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Tips for Host home families working with LGBTQ youth:

- Do not assume you know the youth's sexual or gender identity based on dress, mannerisms, or other observable details
- Respect the youth's need to keep their sexual or gender identity private
- Don't be surprised if the youth chooses you to come out to. Host home families can often serve as "practice" for difficult conversations the youth may need to have with their own family
- Deal with feelings first. Many LGBTQ youth feel alone, afraid and guilty. You can assist by listening, thus allowing them to release feelings and thoughts that are often in conflict.

Monitoring Placements

When a youth is placed in a host home, Open Doors staff will call the volunteer family daily to answer any questions or concerns that they may be having. Open Doors staff will want to talk with the youth to make sure he or she is satisfied with their placement. We will meet with the youth in person at least once a week, but more often it will be multiple times as we work on the youth's reunification plan. The host family will be asked to assess some of the youth's attitudes and behaviors. You will be given a host home evaluation to complete and return to Open Doors. Youth are also given evaluation forms. Generally the evaluation forms include the following:

Host evaluations of the Youth

- Relationships and behaviors with other children, parents and visitors
- Attitudes toward authority, work, discipline
- participation in activities around the home and community
- Emotional adjustment and maturity
- Personal traits: honesty, self-control, etc.
- Is the host family uncomfortable about anything with the youth

Youth evaluation of the Host Home and Program

- How is the home physically?
- How are the meals?
- How is your room?

- How is the family treating you? privacy, chores,
- Are you uncomfortable with anything about the host home or the family?
- Has the program staff helped you and how?
- Did you accomplish your goals?

Open Doors staff will contact the host family for a follow up interview following the end of each placement. We will also meet with the host family should the need arise at anytime during the youth's placement in your home.

On Call Policy

Program staff are available 24/7 to host home families when a youth is in your care. During business hours, attempt to contact the youth's worker first, then the program supervisor, then the director. When a youth is placed in your care we will give you reminders of who you can call and how to reach them. Examples of situations when you should contact us are:

- The youth is experiencing extreme distress or behaviors such as threatening to harm themselves or another
- You do not feel you can maintain the youth's safety in your home
- You or a family member are not able to provide supervision to the youth
- The youth has left your home without permission or your knowledge
- The youth is experiencing a medical emergency
- The youth is under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Any situation when you are not sure what the best solution or next step might be, or are unsure of how to handle

Discharge Conferences

Discharge conferences will be held with each youth prior to their leaving a host home family, to evaluate the successes and challenges.

Subsequent to the youth's discharge from the interim family, a follow up interview will be held with each host home family to assess the success of the youth's stay. This interview is required prior to any future youth placement in the home and may be done face to face, email or by phone.

The Youth's Family

It is program policy that host families never engage in conversation with the youth's parents/ legal guardians. It is not the responsibility of the host home family to become engaged with the youth's natural family. You are providing a respite service for the youth and do not have a direct responsibility to mediate between the youth and his or her family. It is not the intention of the Open Doors program to make all decisions concerning a youth in placement. The youth's parents are to continue being responsible for decisions pertaining to their child. Therefore, some events, such as school functions, dating rules, etc., need to be cleared with parents. Open Doors staff will be responsible for talking with parents and relating permission or concerns to host families as the need arises.

We value your opinions concerning the program and any youth placed with you. The host family can observe and influence the youth's behavior on a daily basis. The input of the host family is therefore essential to the staff's understanding of the youth.

Once the youth leaves your home, it is our policy that you refrain from contacting the youth and his or her family. The youth needs time to readjust to being at home and work on improving the home situation. The host family needs to notify Open Doors staff if a youth makes frequent contact with the host family after leaving their home.

Medical Emergencies

Host home families are never to give youth any medications, even over the counter drugs, without checking with Open Doors Staff.

Medical history

You will be advised of the available past medical history of the residential youth by Open Doors staff. Once a youth is placed in your home, you should keep staff advised of his or her health status.

Emergency Medical Care

For emergency medical care, severe illness or an accident requiring attention:

- Call 911
- Call Open Doors Staff
- Make a plan where staff will meet you and the youth
- Open Doors staff will contact the youths' parents/guardians
- Volunteer host parents are not to sign any forms at the hospital

Youth trips with Host Parents

Open Doors staff need advance notice in order to obtain the parent/guardian's permission and signature to take a youth placed in your home on a trip out of state. You will need to provide the following information: location, address, phone numbers, length of stay and expected return date.

Insurance

We recommend that all families providing care to youth placed in their home retain homeowner's or renter's insurance to protect themselves against any damages that might result from a youth's behavior. Obviously, accidents do happen, just as they do with your own family. However, occasionally, a child may act out and damage or steal your property. These situations sometimes occur as a result of limited supervision. Most often they occur as a result of the child expressing anger toward self, host home family or natural family. Please be aware that most

insurance companies require that a police report is made for compensation to be given. For your protection, youth placed in your home are never allowed to drive your motorized vehicles.

Supervision

The Open Doors Program is mandated to provide 24 hours supervision of all youth placed in their home. Therefore, you must be responsible and remain with the youth at all times while he or she is placed in your home. When this is not possible, Open Doors staff will provide alternative arrangements.

Religious Practices

Each youth placed in the Open Doors Program has a right to practice his or her own religion. While the youth may be of a different religious orientation than the host family, it is the obligation of our program to facilitate and or provide transportation to the youth's church.

Telephone Recommendations

Youth will often have a cell phone that they use when they enter placement. The Open Doors Staff will assess whether access to the phone may be detrimental to the youth's safety or to the confidentiality of the location of the host home. If that is the case, we may offer the youth access to a burner phone. Cell phone usage rules should be similar to those of your own children, i.e. no phones after midnight, etc. If you have concerns about the youth's usage of the cell phone, discuss your concerns with Open Doors staff. Do not attempt to confiscate the phone. The youth has come to you with very few belongings and ways to reach out to the people they do have that they trust, and to take the phone away risks further trauma to the youth.

School Attendance

All youth placed in your home who are already enrolled in school will be expected to attend school on a daily basis. If the youth is not in school, Open Doors staff will make provisions for the youth to be involved in some other type of activity. If this is not possible, the youth will be required to remain with the host home family during the day or be supervised by Open Doors staff.

Money for Youth

Host home families are not to provide youth placed in their home with spending money or school lunch money. The program will make the free lunch program available for the youth. You may also pack a lunch for the youth to take to school. Host families are not to buy cigarettes for any youth that smoke. If a youth needs money for some reason or activity, notify the Open Doors staff. We will work some arrangement with the youth or their parents.

Community Resources

As part of the comprehensive assessment and service planning process, staff will identify available youth services and as necessary assist youth in obtaining services.

A list of frequently used resources for runaway and homeless youth will be compiled and given to host home families to assist. Tompkins County 211 is also an excellent way to determine what resources may be available.

Each host family shall also be provided with a list of emergency numbers for youth to use.
