

## **Boston Youth Sanctuary 2014**

### **Who We Are:**

Boston Youth Sanctuary (BYS) is a therapeutic after-school program for youth ages 6-11 that have experienced traumatic events or circumstances in their lives. BYS works with children and families from the Boston community and provides clinical and case management services designed to improve youths' functioning in home, community and academic settings. BYS works to address the needs of children across all life domains by providing wrap-around services to them and their families in one centralized location.

### **Mission:**

Boston Youth Sanctuary provides a safe and nurturing environment where at-risk youth are encouraged to express themselves positively and gain sustainable coping skills that aid in academic, community and home life success. Youth that attend the BYS Program will graduate feeling empowered and better equipped to face the challenges that arise in their daily lives.

### **About BYS Youth:**

Youth enrolled at BYS are residents of Boston ages 6-11. Enrolled youth may present with a variety of mental health issues including but not limited to PTSD, ADHD, Depression, and Anxiety. They need not have a formal diagnosis of PTSD but must have a mental health diagnosis that is impacted by the trauma they have experienced. BYS youth come from a variety of academic settings and familial structures, and BYS is committed to meeting children and families where they are.

### **Services Offered at BYS:**

- Therapeutic/Activity Groups
- Individual Therapy
- Expressive Arts Therapy.
- Educational Advocacy
- Case Management
- Nutrition and Health
- Six-Week Enrichment Series

BYS strives to incorporate the concept of the "whole child" into all aspects of its programming. To treat the whole child BYS believes that its youth must be supported as children, students, family members, community members, artists, athletes, and as survivors of trauma. It is this belief that has led BYS to create a model that emphasizes the importance of the child as whole, their family, and their community. BYS's programming reflects BYS's values ranging from its choice to provide free private transportation for youth because BYS understands that access to reliable affordable transportation compounded with community safety concerns would make it impossible for most of our youth to attend BYS in its absence. BYS opts to use local small businesses to manage its facility needs, food services, transportation, because it believes that part of supporting the whole child is supporting and strengthening the communities in which they live. BYS is committed to providing its youth and families with culturally competent and services that value each family and child's individual belief system and experience. BYS is committed to providing its youth with a variety of enriching activities taught by community members; this year those activities included trauma sensitive African drumming and hip hop dance classes. BYS is committed to supporting its youth's through a variety of channels that support healing, positive identity development, and social and emotional health.

We intend to support BYS programming specific to developing the identity of its youth through visual art, gymnastics, dance, and cooking/nutrition groups. These offerings support youth in their healing by helping them develop their identities beyond that of a trauma survivor. BYS provides a safe space for them to express themselves, build trusting relationships with adults, successful friendships with peers, and a supportive environment to share and process their experiences. One day this year while a staff person sat on the floor drawing with youth during a free block one of them stated, "Did you know that my brother got killed? He was stabbed." Before the adult could respond the other children around her began discussing their own experiences with lost relatives and community violence and offered one another support and acceptance that was remarkable. BYS is committed to providing children with a space where they can heal with one another, learn from one another, and support one another. BYS believes that meaningful healing relies on focusing on the whole child, and its successes during its pilot year support that commitment.