



Melissa Golpe / Covenant House Michigan

Kiarra Crowder, 18, studies for her GED. She left her abusive home in August and came to Covenant House, where she is able to learn skills.

# AGENCY IS LIFELINE FOR HOMELESS YOUTHS

BY CATHERINE JUN  
The Detroit News

*Detroit* — Michelle Nelson, 21, says she struggled for years with alcohol addiction, triggered at 13 years old, which resulted in her being homeless.

Nelson came to Covenant House Michigan, a facility in Detroit for homeless, runaway and at-risk youth.

"I was in denial (before) and I didn't want any help," Nelson said.

Nelson is one of several dozen young adults at the center. The faith-based agency provides emergency shelter to 18- to 21-year-olds as well as residential programs with educational and vocational classes to keep youth off the streets for good.

As the winter months approach, the nonprofit is putting out an alert to homeless youth, a population estimated to exceed 5,000 throughout the state. A candlelight vigil scheduled Thursday is meant to raise awareness of their plight.

"These kids fail in life because families have fallen apart," said Sam Joseph, executive director of Covenant House Michigan. "There's no direction, there's no discipline, there's no love.

"We teach them coping skills and teach them that there's people who care about them."

Nelson is now in Narcotics Anonymous, employed at McDonald's and hoping to enroll in a nursing program by spring.

Many in the program have aged out of the foster care system. Some would be living in cars, parks or abandoned houses if they were not there.

Kimani Anderson left his father's house last month after conflict with his father and uncle. He slept in an abandoned truck and local park.

"I got tired of waking up cold in the middle of the night," said Anderson, 18.

The Detroit teenager says his upbringing — being brutally beaten by his father's belt and a broomstick, and later raised in a gang-ridden neighborhood — toughened him. He had gotten into countless fist fights, fled for his life and seen friends get shot to death.

A friend referred him to Covenant House, where he now takes classes on anger management and listening. A facility van transports him to two jobs and staff and volunteers help him study for his GED.

The facility, which has 75 beds and three charter schools, tries to attract troubled youth before they end up in adult homeless shelters, where they could become chronically homeless.

Kiarra Crowder, 18, said she'd been in foster care for years because of some verbal abuse and neglect issues at home. She left for good in August.

"I thank God that I'm here with a safe and sound place to lay my head," Crowder said.

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## Young and homeless in Michigan

■ Covenant House Michigan will hold its 12th Annual Candlelight Vigil on Thursday evening to bring awareness and offer support to the more than 5,000 homeless youth in the state.

■ The event will begin at 6 p.m. and feature testimonials as well as songs and prayers. Agency staff at the event will accept hats, gloves, toiletries and financial donations. Covenant House is at 2959 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

■ For more information, call (313) 463-2005 or go to [www.covenanthouse-mi.org](http://www.covenanthouse-mi.org)