

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE June 23, 2020	Contact: Lauren VanKeulen, CEO 616.217.4113 info@3-11.org
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Two Grand Rapids Nonprofits Merging to Help More Youth in Crisis Move Toward Stability

**3:11 Youth Housing and HQ Runaway & Homeless Youth Drop-In Center Merging to
Break the Cycle of Homelessness Together**

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN—Today two Grand Rapids area nonprofit agencies with a shared purpose announce a merger: 3:11 Youth Housing and HQ Runaway & Homeless Youth Drop-In Center have come together to provide circles of support for youth facing homelessness.

While this decision was made prior to COVID-19, this pandemic has highlighted the disparities that youth experiencing homelessness face, disproportionately impacting communities of color and low-income neighborhoods. The stark racial inequities are made very clear in housing and homelessness in Kent County. Approximately 80% of youth accessing drop-in at HQ and housing at 3:11 are people of color, yet they make up 41% of the population. HQ and 3:11 have continued to provide support to youth during this pandemic, from virtual supports and teletherapy to grocery delivery and rent assistance. This merger is even more essential now, providing cohesive support and stability in the face of such unprecedented times.

Since 2012, 3:11 has provided housing to more than 50 young people, ages 18 to 24. With support from mentors and housemates, participating youth build life skills and relationships. Ninety percent of participants go on to find stable housing, reach educational goals and secure full-time employment.

HQ opened in 2014 to create a safe and affirming space for youth, ages 14 to 24, to find rest, build relationships, and connect to vital resources while navigating instability or homelessness. In its six years of operation, HQ has served more than 1,400 youth members.

“Housing insecurity is complex, and 3:11 and HQ have partnered for years to address its many dimensions,” said Lauren VanKeulen, founding Co-Executive Director of 3:11. “As a unified organization, we can create a more connective, cohesive experience for youth on their journey toward housing and stability.”

VanKeulen will lead the new organization as its CEO with a leadership team that combines staff and board members from both founding organizations. In addition to streamlining the experience of the youth they serve, the team expects to increase their reach and impact, and develop opportunities for the future, including new housing options and innovations in youth resources.

Shandra Steininger, Co-Founder and Executive Director of HQ, will complete her service to the organization on June 30, 2020, in order to relocate to Phoenix, Arizona, to be nearer to family. Steininger played an active role in planning the merger and will continue to be a resource to the new leadership team during this transition.

“The merger is the result of a months-long process of research, listening sessions and planning,” said Steininger. “The staff and board of 3:11 and HQ, as well as our members and 3:11 mentors, have been very thoughtful about what we’d like to see for the future. As I take the next step on my own personal journey, I do so with great confidence in this shared work.”

More than 80 youth per night experience homelessness in Kent County each year, according to the community Point in Time Count, and we know this is grossly under representative of the actual need. As a unified organization, we will have the resources, diversity and strength to play a more significant role in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

“We envision a Grand Rapids community where every young person can count on strong relationships and stable housing as a foundation for their future,” said VanKeulen. “This organization is dedicated to this vision, and we have greater capacity than ever to help young people move from crisis to stability alongside our many great partners and supporters in this area.”

The merged organization will create safe space for young people in crisis to belong, be themselves and build a future. The organization creates circles of support for 14- to 24-year-olds facing homelessness or instability in the Grand Rapids area—from drop-in opportunities to rest, recharge and meet everyday needs in a caring community to safe, affordable housing with peers and mentors who partner in their transition to stability. We are here to help young people connect to the resources, relationships and housing they need at any point on their journey.

Organization leaders will be available for interviews the week of June 23. Please contact Lauren VanKeulen at info@3-11.org.

If you are between the ages of 14 and 24 and would like to be connected to one of our advocates, please contact us at www.hqgr.org, www.3-11.org, or (616) 217-4113.

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Caption: Shandra Steininger, Co-Founder and Executive Director at HQ, and Lauren VanKeulen, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director at 3:11 Youth Housing, call the community to action at the organizations’ joint event in 2019.



Caption: Board and staff members from both organizations gather for a photo at Connecting the Dots 2019



Caption: Kendra Avila, Youth Housing Coordinator at 3:11, and D.L. McKinney, Program Director at HQ, partner to share more about both organizations with the public.