



Jane Prince & Khalique Rogers & Joe Nathan

Prioritize housing for homeless youth, families; listen to formerly, currently homeless youth

A Minnesota Affordable Housing Interview

February 21, 2019

United for Action: Dramatic Reduction in Youth/Family Homelessness cofounder Joe Nathan and members Jane Prince and Khalique Rogers ask for help from Civic Caucus members and readers, as well as others, as they discuss the folly of downplaying or forgetting the needs of homeless youth. They present data showing that the number of homeless Minnesota youth is significantly higher than generally suggested. They share real-life stories to illustrate the problems of homelessness among many youth and families that are not met by existing agencies. They share research and experience about the impact of homelessness on youth and recommend specific actions to help solve these problems.

Present

John Adams, Janis Clay (executive director), Paul Gilje, Randy Johnson, Lee Munnich, Jane Prince, Khalique Rogers, Dana Schroeder (associate director), Clarence Shallbetter, T Williams. By phone: Tom Abeles, Joe Nathan, Paul Ostrow.

Summary

United for Action: Dramatic Reduction in Youth/Family Homelessness cofounder Joe Nathan and members Jane Prince and Khalique Rogers are trying to bring the kind of focus to youth and family homelessness that has been given to housing individual adults, veterans and people with disabilities. They agree that it's vital to provide housing for individual adults, but present evidence that the extent of homelessness among children and youth has been dramatically understated. This has led, they say, to under-serving these children and families: Minnesota's future.

Prince, a member of the Saint Paul City Council, believes the problem is the lack of supply of adequate, deeply affordable housing for families in the metro area, especially in Saint Paul. Low-wage workers are facing a zero-vacancy rate at deeply affordable levels, she says, and there's a two-month waiting list for shelter housing. She notes that during the 2018-2019 school year, nearly 2,000 children were reported to be experiencing homelessness in Saint Paul district public schools, which was very likely an undercount. Homelessness reported so far this school year is on pace to exceed last year, she said.

Rogers, formerly homeless himself, is currently a University of Minnesota student and is creator of the life-skills consulting company Good Riddance. He explains that United for Action has been putting a spotlight on what homelessness is. The group brought young people who have experienced homelessness to a hearing of the Saint Paul City Council on May 1, 2019. This was the first time that the City Council had met to hear directly from the experiences of youth and families who have experienced homelessness.

Rogers believes policymakers must not make assumptions about what youth and families need, but must seek their recommendations. For example, though "couch hopping" from one friend to another, one extended family to another, is very traumatic, many young people prefer it to staying in a shelter. Young people described problems of theft, intimidation, unnecessarily rigid rules and assault they encountered in some shelters. They far prefer more permanent solutions, such as Prior Crossing and the new Ain Dah Yung facilities.

Nathan, director of the Center for School Change, expands on six words he says are crucial to discussing homelessness: **(1) Numbers:** There's a massive failure of accurate information on the number of homeless youth in Minnesota; **(2) Race:** Homelessness is partly an issue of dramatic inequity in Minnesota-especially involving African American and Indigenous people; **(3) Health:** Dramatically reducing youth and family homelessness will improve health and education outcomes; **(4) Learning:** Numerous studies point to the negative impact of homelessness on learning. **(5) Details:** People need to know what's happening on the ground; and **(6) Assets:** We must view our young people as assets, not as problems.

Nathan recommends four critical actions on homelessness that must be undertaken in Minnesota: **(1)** At least 50 percent of legislative bonding for new affordable, permanent

housing must be for youth and families; **(2)** Formerly and currently homeless youth and family members must be at the table whenever possible when decisions are made; **(3)** There must be a statewide effort for better coordination among agencies dealing with affordable housing and homelessness; and **(4)** We must recognize the talents, skills and insights of young people and give them opportunities to help solve this and other problems.

Nathan, Prince and Rogers also suggest other specific steps Civic Caucus members and readers and others can take to help homeless youth and families.

Biographies

Jane Prince is a Saint Paul City Councilmember, representing Ward 7 on the city's East Side, and is a member of United for Action. She was first elected to the City Council in 2015.

Prior to her service on the City Council, Prince served as public information officer for Saint Paul Planning and Economic Development; a legislative aide to Saint Paul City Council member Jay Benanav; a general practice attorney, representing clients on municipal land use, licensing and employment discrimination; and alumni relations director at Hamline University School of Law.

Her community and volunteer work includes serving as Saint Paul DFL chair from 1995 to 1997, a member of the Metro State University/Dayton's Bluff Community Action Team, co-chair of the Near East Side Roadmap/Economic Development Implementation Team, a member of the 3M Site Redevelopment Advisory Task Force and co-chair of the Diversity Committee for the Ramsey County Bar Association. She has served as a board member of several organizations: Metro Independent Business Alliance (Twin Cities/Buy Local), College Prep Elementary Charter School, Eco Education, Urban Roots and the Saint Paul Dispute Resolution Center.

Prince earned a B.A. at the University of New Hampshire, a J.D. at Hamline Law School, certification in dispute resolution from the Hamline University Dispute Resolution Institute, and a certificate from the Senior Executives in State and Local Government program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Khaliq Rogers is a member of United for Action and was formerly homeless. His family moved to Minnesota when Rogers was six years old. His whole family became homeless after failing to find affordable housing and running out of money to pay for hotels. Rogers, his siblings and his mother were able to get into a women's shelter, but they didn't accept fathers, so his father had to survive on his own. After a month in the shelter, Rogers' mother was able to get a Section 8 housing voucher, which allowed the family to move out of the shelter.

Currently a student at the University of Minnesota, Rogers has created a life-skills consulting company called **Good Riddance**, through which he works with organizations and businesses in the Twin Cities on social impact initiatives, advocacy and project management. He also creates lesson plans and does speaking engagements on a variety of topics. The company's mission is *to empower all young people-especially those who need it most-to develop a higher level of life skills in order to be successful members of their community.*

Rogers is a writer, a storyteller, a public speaker and an actor. He shares his talents among generations by facilitating life-skills sessions with middle-school, high-school and college-aged scholars. He recognizes that there is an opportunity gap in American schools. He experienced firsthand a curriculum and school system that did not represent his culture, language and history. Because of this, he has developed a passion for working with schools to inspire students of all backgrounds to foster a higher level of expectations for themselves.

Although Rogers has had the opportunity to work within the corporate world, he recognized that the spaces he was in were very much white, with a lack of diversity. For this reason, he has decided to get back to his roots within his community. Rather than **waiting for "Superman,"** Rogers created presentations and curriculum that reflect the demographics he is serving. After having local success, he decided to expand his brand by creating Good Riddance.

Rogers is a graduate of Gordon Parks High School in Saint Paul and earned an associate's degree from Saint Paul College. He is currently a student at the University of Minnesota studying business and marketing education, with a minor in business analytics.

Joe Nathan is director of the **Center for School Change**, a nonprofit he founded in 1988, and is cofounder of **United for Action: Dramatic Reduction in Youth/Family Homelessness**. United for Action works at the school, community and policy levels. The Center for School Change has raised more than \$30 million from a variety of foundations and the U.S. and Minnesota Departments of Education.

Nathan has spent the last 50 years as a public-school teacher, administrator, parent, newspaper columnist, researcher and advocate. He helped write the nation's first charter school law, which passed in Minnesota in 1991. In 1977, he was named as one of 50 outstanding young education leaders by the national education group Phi Delta Kappa for his work as an inner-city public-school teacher and administrator. He helped start and run the Center for School Change Leadership Academy for District and Charter Public Schools leaders.

He was selected by Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander to coordinate the 1985-86 National Governors Association report, *Time for Results*. With the help of a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, he directed a project with the Cincinnati Public Schools that increased overall high school graduation rates by more than 25 points and eliminated the graduation gap between white and African American students over a seven-year period.

Nathan was appointed by President George H.W. Bush to the President's Education Advisory Committee. He coordinated a National Governors Association project from 2007 to 2012 that worked with 16 state governors. He has presented invited testimony in 22 state legislatures and has given keynote addresses at the state conferences of 21 state charter school associations.

The *American School Board Journal* selected two of Nathan's books as "must reads" for school board members: *MicroMyths: Exploring the Limits of Learning with Computers* (1986) and *Charter Schools, Creating Hope and Opportunity in American Education* (1996).

He writes twice-monthly articles appearing in suburban and rural Minnesota weekly newspapers, reaching up to 400,000 readers. From 1989 to 2004, he wrote a weekly column for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*; during part of that time, he also wrote weekly columns for *Rochester Post Bulletin* and *Duluth News Tribune*. He has appeared on more than 400 radio and television programs.

He earned a B.A. from Carleton College and a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in educational administration and leadership.

Background

As part of its series of interviews on affordable housing, the Civic Caucus interviewed Joe Nathan, Jane Prince and Khaliq Rogers about homelessness among youth and families. Notes of all interviews in the affordable housing series, which started in October 2018, are available on the [Civic Caucus website](#).

About United for Action (UFA). Cofounded by Saint Paul educators/parents Nancy Bitenc and Joe Nathan, United for Action is a coalition of formerly and currently homeless youth and families, school district and charter educators, political leaders, medical professionals, parents and community activists. UFA has worked hard to share research and experience with homeless youth and families in various venues.

UFA's first major activity was to convince the Saint Paul City Council to hold a hearing or listening session on May 1, 2019. For the first time, the Council committed a full two-hour

policy session to listening to homeless youth and parents from both district and chartered public schools.

UFA has carried out a variety of other efforts. One UFA member met with parties of the [Cruz-Guzman desegregation lawsuit](#) and urged attention to youth homelessness as part of coordinated efforts to dramatically reduce achievement gaps. This led to UFA members meeting twice in 2019 with Attorney General Keith Ellison. The second time, Ellison and UFA produced a [podcast describing homelessness issues](#).

On February 10, 2020, Minnesota Public Radio hosted Rogers, Nathan and a state official in an [hour-long discussion on youth homelessness](#). UFA members also have spoken with legislators and staff of Governor Tim Walz/Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. In less than one year, UFA's efforts helped produce additional resources and new approaches in Ramsey County and Saint Paul. UFA also has helped some government officials and policymakers understand the far greater number of homeless youth and children than have been widely understood.

Discussion

1. Recommendations.

Joe Nathan, director of the Center for School Change and cofounder of United for Action (UFA), cited five critical actions on homelessness that must be undertaken to provide permanent quality affordable housing for Minnesota families and youth:

- At the Legislature, bonding for new affordable housing must meet the needs of homeless families. Nathan recommends that at least half of the bonding funding should be for permanent housing or youth and families with children. "When hundreds of millions of dollars are being proposed," Nathan said, "we *must* spend substantial money on housing for youth and families with children."
- Formerly and currently homeless youth and families need to be at the table where decisions are made. United for Action has urged that the new affordable housing advisory committee created by Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, along with foundations, include formerly and currently homeless youth. So far this has not happened. Rogers said legislative bills are being considered that assume needs, rather than first asking youth and families what they need.
- There must be a statewide effort for better coordination among agencies dealing with affordable housing and homelessness.
- There must be widespread understanding that this is a statewide issue. We need political leaders to know that.

- We need to recognize the importance of providing young people with opportunities to help solve problems like homelessness.

Jane Prince, Saint Paul City Councilmember and member of UFA, added that the City of Saint Paul must play a role in creating deeply affordable housing. "We need long-term solutions on the supply side," Prince said. "We need another Housing 5000 program."

Nathan, Prince and Khalique Rogers, formerly homeless and currently a University of Minnesota student and member of UFA, also included the following actions Civic Caucus members and readers and others interested in youth and family homelessness can take:

- Contact Minnesota legislative committee chairs Representative Alice Hausman, (Chair, House Housing Finance and Policy Division) at 651-646-6220 or rep.alice.hausman@house.mn and Senator David Senjem, (Chair, Senate Capital Investment Committee) at 651-296-3903 or sen.david.senjem@senate.mn . Encourage them to: (1) support the [Homes for All Agenda](#); (2) allocate at least 50 percent of legislative bonding for affordable housing to meet long-term housing needs of youth and families with children; (3) Expand the [Youthbuild](#) program in which high school students are building homes for homeless people, and/or create a new program supporting high schools and college courses currently building homes, but not for the homeless.
- Arrange for presentations from United for Action members to share information about this issue. Please contact Joe Nathan at joe@centerforschoolchange.org to discuss this.
- Encourage Minnesota foundations to include currently or formerly homeless youth on committees reviewing proposals to meet needs of homeless Minnesotans. Encourage foundations to make permanent affordable housing for families with children and youth a high priority.
- Encourage Minnesota's Professional Education and Licensing Board to include revisions currently being developed for teacher preparation that all prospective teachers learn how to use the skills, talent and energy of Minnesota youth via service learning.
- Follow United for Action on its [Facebook page](#) and consider attending UFA monthly meetings. Also, consider following [Homes for All](#), a statewide coalition that advances shared policy initiatives that lead to housing stability for all Minnesotans, and [Advocates for Those Unsheltered in St .Paul](#) , a Facebook group that facilitates communication among advocates and outreach efforts for those living without brick-and-mortar shelter in Saint Paul.

2. Supply of housing.

We do not have an adequate supply of housing in the metro area, especially in Saint Paul. Prince said seniors and empty nesters report their inability to downsize or cycle out of their homes because of a lack of adequate and affordable aging-in-place options. "It's a landlords' market," she said. "For deeply affordable housing, the market is so tight that landlords don't have to take Section 8 certificates, [rental housing-subsidy vouchers]."

Prince said there is a zero-vacancy rate in Saint Paul for low-wage workers earning at or below 30 percent of area median income. "And there's also a zero-vacancy rate for large families seeking three-bedroom units," she said.

"For the city, housing is a supply issue," she said. "Any long-term housing solution needs to include setting an aggressive goal for the development of new and deeply affordable housing."

Prince said that cuts in federal housing and mental health assistance beginning in the early 1980s have resulted in unprecedented numbers of unsheltered individuals with untreated mental illness and chemical dependency, many of whom are military veterans. [Governor Dayton's 2018 Housing Task Force report](#), though saying little about specific needs of homeless youth, pointed out the massive need for more affordable housing throughout the state.

3. Homeless youth and families.

The Twin Cities has not seen before the level of youth and family homelessness that exists today. Prince said youth experiencing homelessness include those coming from families in crisis, including poverty and abuse, as well as youth aging out of foster care. Families experiencing homelessness are predominantly working parents priced out of the local housing market. At the City Council listening session organized by UFA, parents reported discriminatory housing practices and the need for stronger tenant protection laws.

The shortage of affordable housing impacts working families. Prince said low-wage workers earning 30 percent or less of area median income are facing a zero percent affordable vacancy rate in the Twin Cities. With both cities recognizing the need to develop housing at this deeply affordable level, there are few financing tools to achieve this goal.

She noted that Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter announced in January a homelessness prevention program to provide a \$300 monthly supplemental rental-housing subsidy to families with children at seven Saint Paul elementary schools that offer wrap-around services to students and their families.

The most important role for the city in the housing crisis is to increase the supply of deeply affordable housing for working families. "This is an economic development issue," Prince said. "We need to create an adequate supply of workforce housing, so people who work here can afford to live here. It behooves the Twin Cities to avoid the trend of cities including San Francisco, Seattle, Austin and Nashville, where workers can no longer afford to live."

During the 2018-2019 school year, there were 1,972 homeless students in Saint Paul district public schools. Prince said this figure does not include students enrolled in Saint Paul charter public schools, including the High School for Recording Arts, where one-third to one-half of students are reported to be experiencing homelessness at any given time.

She said one Saint Paul student explained to the Saint Paul City Council that with no place to live, his family often doubled up with family and friends. He sometimes stayed at a cousin's apartment where drugs, guns and vermin threatened his health and safety.

Nathan said homelessness is a statewide problem. Nathan said the Wilder Foundation reports that one-third of homeless people in Minnesota are in Minneapolis or Saint Paul; one-third are in the suburbs; and one-third are in Greater Minnesota.

The numbers cited for homeless people include just the people who've said something or have been identified as living outside. Rogers said many people, especially homeless youth, are ashamed and don't know where to get help. In many cases they are "couch hopping," rather than living outside or in shelters.

Rogers said when he was six years old, his family moved to Minnesota to find better housing, but they had a terrible time and ended up homeless. (See beginning of Roger's biography above for more details.) "It's more expensive to be poor than to be stable," Rogers said. Poor people don't have the money to pay for the first and last months' rent and a security deposit, he said. Sometimes landlords charge application fees that are not returned if people don't get the apartment. "It creates an impossible situation," he said.

United for Action has been putting a spotlight on what homelessness is. Rogers said the group brought young people and parents who have experienced homelessness to a hearing of the Saint Paul City Council in 2019. This was the first time the City Council had met to hear directly from youth and families who have experienced homelessness. Rogers served as co-facilitator of the presentations. **District and charter educators collaborated** to identify young people who would testify.

Roger recalls that the young people provided the real-life stories never heard before in the City Council chambers. He said city councilmembers were stunned to learn that in the 2018-19 school year, there were more than 2,000 homeless youth in the city.

"We've been able to keep shelters open, but we want to provide permanent housing," he said. With help from [Youthprise](#), Rogers and two other formerly homeless youth have interviewed 20 metro-area homeless teens. He and his colleagues are compiling results of these interviews, along with their recommendations. Among the things they heard from homeless youth were the following:

- Dislike and, in some cases, fear of staying in shelters. Some homeless youth report theft, intimidation and assault has happened to them or their friends in shelters.
- Deep feelings of anxiety caused by staying with a friend or relative for a short time, and then needing to find another place to stay.
- Inability to find a place to stay, even when they contact authorities. There are substantial waiting lists for youth/young adult facilities such as [Prior Crossing](#) and the new [Ain Dah Yung](#) facility in Saint Paul.
- Feelings of shame that they are homeless.
- Difficulty in concentrating on school work. As one homeless student explained, "When you are stressed out about where you are going to stay, you can't focus on school."
- A challenge in knowing whom to trust.

We're looking at symptoms and not the ecosystem around homelessness. Rogers said we must look at education, income and jobs when looking at homelessness. Sometimes the parents of homeless youth have themselves been homeless in the past, he said. "How can we connect to resources and give them the support they need?" he asked.

Nathan listed six words crucial to discussing homelessness: (1) numbers, (2) race, (3) health, (4) learning, (5) details and (6) assets.

(1)Numbers: There's a massive failure of information on homeless youth in Minnesota. Nathansaid the widely used Wilder Foundation's count of homeless Minnesota youth significantly understates the number. Nathan said [Wilder reported 6,000 homeless youth in Minnesota](#) "on any given night." [Wilder reported](#) "at least 10,233 homeless people in Minnesota." Wilder acknowledges that "the actual number of unaccompanied youth is likely considerably higher."

Meanwhile, the Minnesota Department of Education reported more than 9,060 homeless youth in its [October 2019 count](#) . The MDE "one day in October" count for Saint Paul, for example, is less than 600, Nathan noted. But Saint Paul Public Schools reported that the district is serving about 2,000 homeless youth in the 2019-20 school year. So, Nathan said, the actual number of homeless children and youth could be two or even three times the 9,060 youth found on the MDE "one day in October" report.

Nathan pointed out that [the most recent federal report](#) found that in Minnesota, "Public school data reported to the U.S. Department of Education during the 2017-2018 school year

shows that an estimated 16,698 public school students experienced homelessness over the course of the year. Of that total, 490 students were unsheltered, 3,750 were in shelters, 1,193 were in hotels/motels and 11,265 were doubled up.

In [Star Tribune op-ed piece](#), Rogers, Nathan and two other authors agree that the number of homeless youth is far higher than the "one day in October" number of 9,000+ on the Minnesota Department of Education report card. In November 2019, UFA checked with 18 Minnesota school districts/charter schools about their homeless students. "Staff confirmed there are homeless youth everywhere," the authors said.

The op-ed lists seven of those school districts/charter schools and their reports of homeless students. Together, five of those seven reported a total of 2,701 homeless students during the 2018-2019 school year. The other two together reported 730 homeless students as of October 2019. For example:

- Anoka-Hennepin district: 625 homeless youths as of October 2019.
- High School for Recording Arts, a St. Paul charter: 120 homeless students in 2018-19.
- Long Prairie Grey Eagle: 38 homeless students in 2018-19.
- Minnetonka: 21 homeless youths in 2018-19.
- Osseo: 522 homeless youngsters in 2018-19.
- Princeton: 105 homeless students on Oct. 1, 2019.
- Saint Paul: about 2,000 homeless youths in 2018-19.

(2)Race: Homelessness is partly an issue of race. Nathan said that [Wilder found](#) African American and American Indian youth are 16 times more likely to be homeless as white youth. Rogers said there must be attention given to these issues.

(3)Health: Dramatically reducing youth and family homelessness will improve health and reduce health care costs. Nathan said Dr. Thomas Kottke of HealthPartners has cited research that reducing homelessness could positively impact health care costs. Kottke is part of UFA. Kottke has concluded, "Homelessness and housing insecurity not only reduce the effectiveness of health care and increase its cost; these problems serve as barriers to well-being for adults and children." See [article Kottke co-authored in The Permanente Journal](#) in November 2017.

(4) Learning. Nathan said numerous studies point to the negative impact of homelessness on learning. [One study](#) summarized research and found among other things, "homeless children experienced high rates of grade retention and absenteeism, significant behavior and emotional problems, and significantly lower scores on standardized tests of reading and math when compared to all students."

(5)Details: People need to know what's happening on the ground.

- Nathan described an encounter he and three other UFA members had with a homeless family they met at a Saint Paul restaurant at 5:30 p.m. in November 2019. The family-a mother, father and two young children-had spent the previous night on a cold floor in an unheated garage. They reported being homeless since June. Nathan called 211, United Way's emergency housing phone number. He was told there was no shelter that could accommodate the family unless the police were involved.

At first, the family didn't want to call the police, but eventually they relented and Nathan called. Two police officers arrived at 7:30 p.m. and tried unsuccessfully to find housing for the family. Two more officers arrived at 8:30 p.m. and were also unsuccessful. Two Ramsey County Sheriff staffers the group called arrived. Rogers said the police indicated the only way they could find a vacancy for the family would be if the mother declared there was a domestic abuse issue with the father. She was unwilling to do that. Finally, at 10:30 p.m., Nathan himself paid for a hotel room for the family overnight.

The next morning, Amber Gray, a Ramsey County Sheriff staff member, picked up the family and took them to a county intake center. But the center was understaffed that day, so no one could process the family. Then Gray called a church, which donated housing for two nights. Gray and her colleagues pooled their own money to pay for another night. Finally, after four nights, Ramsey County staff met with and placed the family in a shelter.

"We pleaded for help from government all over the metro area," Nathan said, but neither Ramsey County nor Hennepin County could help them.

- Nathan cited another incident in which a high school student/teen mother with two small children pleaded for help after being told she must leave a shelter in Minneapolis. The mother and children spent a cold January night in a car. For two days, one of the school's staff and Nathan worked with Ramsey and Hennepin County officials, trying to arrange for emergency shelter. He said there was never a clear explanation about why the mother and children had been told they had to leave. Both Ramsey and Hennepin Counties kept saying the family was the other county's responsibility. Again, Nathan paid for a motel room when this could not be resolved. After three days, a placement was arranged. "Is this what we want?" Nathan asked.
- Nathan said a third incident occurred on Christmas Day, 2019. Because the *Star Tribune* had published [an op-ed piece](#) that day written by Nathan and three formerly homeless youth, people were contacting him to ask how they could help people made homeless by the fire. Nathan called 211, the metro area homeless number, at 9:30 a.m. to find out how to help the fire victims.

Nathan said the response from the 211 operator to Nathan's question was "What fire?" Apparently 211 had not been informed about the fire that started very early in the morning. The 211 operator also told Nathan that Hennepin County officials would not be available until 1:00 p.m. that day.

- Nathan said another more systematic lack of coordination occurred in 2019 between a metro-area task force that identified shelter needs, the Legislature and the Department of Human Services. In February 2019, Nathan said, a Metro-Area Interagency Task Force concluded that the metro area needed 300 to 600 new homeless shelter beds. The 2019 Legislature earmarked an additional \$3 million to meet emergency needs of the homeless.

He said about \$1.8 million was allocated for the metro area and \$1.2 million for Greater Minnesota. The money was given to the Department of Human Services (DHS) to oversee. Greater Minnesota created 96 new shelter beds. But no new shelter beds were created in the metro area with the \$1.8 million. Instead, Nathan said, DHS spent the money on training for staff and other services at homeless shelters.

"That didn't meet the immediate needs of people sleeping outside or couch hopping," he said. "I have grave concerns about legislative -proposals that are not specific about ensuring that significant resources are devoted to meeting permanent affordable housing needs for youth and families."

(See Nathan's October 2019 piece ["DHS misses mark with \\$3 million to help homeless,"](#) which appeared in several APG East Central Minnesota newspapers.)

- Nathan said the Wilder Foundation has vacant land that [Ain Dah Yung](#), an organization that has developed supportive housing for young adults, tried unsuccessfully to buy. Now, he said, Wilder has notified community groups in its neighborhood that it plans to sell the land to a developer who might not include low-income housing in a proposed project.
- Nathan cited [Governor Dayton's 2018 Housing Task Force report](#) as both a positive and a negative. The report strongly urged spending substantially more money to meet the needs of homeless Minnesotans, he said, and recommended revising some policies. Those are positives, he said. The report noted, "One out of every four families in Minnesota is paying more than they can afford for housing."

Unfortunately, neither homeless youth nor educators who work with homeless youth were deeply involved in preparing the report, Nathan said. Thus, the report has little to say about the needs of homeless youth.

(6)Assets: We must view young people as assets, not just as problems. Nathan noted that students in the Anoka-Hennepin School District have been able to construct a three-bedroom home for \$100,000. He said the [Youthbuild program](#) operated by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development involves youth constructing new housing for homeless people and improving existing housing. He urged more funding for Youthbuild. He also urged that the Legislature create a pilot program to help high schools and colleges currently building homes to do so for homeless families.

Nathan urged that Minnesota teacher training include a component that trains all teachers in service learning and seeing youth as assets. "Too often, we view youth as deficits," he said. "Some youngsters need help, but we must make far better use of young people as assets." He cited [research by University of Minnesota vice president Andrew Furco](#) about the immense value of combining classroom work and community service.

So far, Nathan said, despite numerous requests, UFA has been unable to talk directly with the governor or lieutenant governor about having youth build housing for homeless people. "And we need youth at the table to make decisions," he said.

Policymakers must not assume needs, but must ask youth and families what they need. Rogers agreed with Nathan's point about youth being at the table where decisions are made. Rogers quoted the saying, "Anything done for us, without us, is against us."

3. Local initiatives.

Former Saint Paul Mayor Randy Kelly launched a housing effort in 2002, another time with low vacancy rates. Prince noted that Kelly, who served as mayor from 2002 to 2006, spearheaded a bold initiative known as Housing 5000, which attracted private and nonprofit developers, finance companies, foundations and others in the housing effort. She said the initiative required that at least 10 percent of the units in any city-assisted project had to be affordable at 30 percent of area median income (AMI) or below and 10 percent had to be affordable at between 30 percent and 50 percent of AMI. During Kelly's four years in office, Prince said, the effort spurred the development of over 5,000 housing units in Saint Paul, of which about 25 percent were within those deep affordability ranges, including supportive housing.

Saint Paul insisted that 10 percent of the housing in the Ford plant redevelopment be deeply affordable. Prince said that will amount to 400 units. And she pointed to a resolution passed by the Saint Paul City Council in July 2018 that called for specific actions and housing policies to create and preserve housing affordable at all income levels; address racial, social and economic disparities in housing; and create infrastructure needed to stabilize housing for all in Saint Paul. (See full resolution [here](#).)

Prince cited **Ain Dah Yung** ("Our Home" in Ojibwe) as an example of an organization providing housing for homeless youth. In January 2020, the organization opened Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung, 42 units of permanent supportive housing for American Indian youth ages 18 to 24 on University Avenue in Saint Paul. By mid-March 2020, the facility is full and has a waiting list.

There are two proposed housing projects in Saint Paul's Ward 7 (Prince's ward) that would provide approximately 130 rental units for people at or below 60 percent of area median income. Prince said that's not where the real need is, but noted that the

projects would include 10 large Section 8 housing units. Both projects have been proposed by developers of color, one of whom is new to Saint Paul. Despite Prince's stewardship of both projects since 2018, both have been stalled.

4. Lack of support for affordable housing.

There doesn't seem to be enough national political support for affordable housing. An interviewer made that statement and said none of the national candidates have talked about housing. "And you don't hear it locally," he said. Another interviewer agreed. "The presidential candidates talk about free health care and free college, but say nothing about housing," he said.

The effort for affordable housing must be connected with someone who will be a public-policy advocate on the issue, the first interviewer said. "No one has come forward to make it the public's agenda," he said. "We must find a way to build the political will to do something. There must be more risks taken there than ever before."

The interviewer said there must be economic incentives or developers won't take a risk to provide housing for young people and families. "There must be enough social incentives and social pressure to do something," he said.

How have people with disabilities and veterans achieved apparent success in housing and other services? An interviewer asked that question and added, "Some populations seem to be succeeding in the public dialogue."

Another interviewer commented that people with disabilities inspire sympathy, while veterans inspire guilt. "It's not out of pure love for veterans, it's out of guilt. With an all-volunteer military service, people are sent away to do our dirty work," he said.

Prince said United for Action is trying to create the same focus on youth and families that people with disabilities and veterans have had. The general public is unaware that 2,000 children are homeless in our Saint Paul Public Schools, she said. "One of the most important things UFA can do is shine a spotlight on this reality."

