BOLD STEPS BY ALL: The Larkin Street Way
The mission of Larkin Street Youth Services is to create a continuum of services that inspires youth to move beyond the streets.

We will nurture potential, promote dignity, and support bold steps by all.
Since 1984, Larkin Street Youth Services has been committed to helping youth experiencing homelessness move beyond the street.

In the early 1980s, Larkin Street was founded by a group of church members, neighbors, and merchants concerned about the growing number of young people living on the streets in San Francisco’s Polk Gulch neighborhood. What began as a volunteer-run drop-in center and modest street outreach program has grown into San Francisco’s largest nonprofit provider dedicated to ending youth homelessness. Today, we serve thousands of young people annually through our continuum of services.

Three out of four youth who complete one of Larkin Street’s housing programs graduate with the tools they need for long-term stability.

Our success rate in helping young people experiencing homelessness get off the street for good testifies to a simple truth: given safety, housing, compassion, guidance, and enough positive options, young people can find their own solutions.

WE BELIEVE ALL YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE THE CHANCE TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AND CONTRIBUTE THEIR BEST TO THE WORLD.

For every young person that exits street life, society saves more than eight times the cost of Larkin Street’s services.
“EVERYONE HAS A DIFFERENT REASON FOR BEING HERE, BUT THE SAME GOAL TO SUPPORT THE YOUTH.”
LARKIN STREET’S STRATEGIC POSITION

WHAT WE DO
We get youth off the streets for good. We’re working to end youth homelessness, so it is rare, brief, and one-time. We’re changing lives here in San Francisco, and we’re changing policies at City Hall, the State Capitol, and in Washington, D.C. We’re making sure that youth have a voice in the decisions that affect them.

HOW WE DO IT
We offer a continuum of services that inspires and empowers youth to find a permanent pathway off the streets, out of poverty, and into independence. We provide access to services and opportunities for youth to make the best possible decisions for themselves.

WHO WE DO IT FOR
We serve youth, ages 12 to 24, who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness in San Francisco.

WHY WE DO IT
We do this work because everyone deserves the chance to reach their full potential.

WHEN WE DO IT
We work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to make sure that youth experiencing homelessness have access to what they need to be successful.
Larkin Street believes that every young person experiencing homelessness deserves a future off the streets.

We help youth establish the building blocks for long-term success in four key life domains: housing, wellness, education, and employment. With every young person, we instill the hope that the following outcomes are possible:

» Safe and stable housing is the foundation on which they can build a brighter future

» Physical and emotional wellness supports their resilience and equips them for long-term success

» Two years of education post-high school opens up new opportunities and puts them on a career pathway

» Self-sustaining employment is the key to long-term economic self-sufficiency and permanently breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty
“YOUTH REMIND ME THAT THERE IS HOPE FOR OUR CITY.”
WHAT MAKES LARKIN STREET DIFFERENT?

“Connection to the street, a voice of the community”

WE GET YOUTH OFF THE STREETS FOR GOOD
Our goal is to end youth homelessness, not interrupt it. We take the long view with the young people who walk through our doors. We build trust, we ask questions, and we encourage youth to make their own decisions with the right supports to be successful. We instill hope, so youth can move beyond crisis and envision a different life for themselves. This process takes time, it takes commitment, and often, it takes a non-linear path.

We encourage youth to take healthy risks, we support them when they fail, and we celebrate their success. We encourage youth to advocate for themselves, and we create opportunities to do so at Larkin Street and in the wider world. Together, we look at the systemic issues that keep disconnected youth from being successful, and we advocate for policies that will create more opportunity.

WE MEET YOUTH WHERE THEY'RE AT
Youth need space to develop trust, and they need support to make healthy decisions. Larkin Street believes in reducing barriers instead of creating hurdles. We do not impose arbitrary or punitive rules or set unreasonable expectations that make youth feel unwelcome, unworthy, or unsuccessful. We take a harm reduction approach, giving youth the information and tools they need to be safe when they engage in risky behaviors, and we give them the support to change those behaviors over time.

WE ARE OUTCOMES-DRIVEN
We believe in the potential of every young person who walks through our doors. Our continuum supports incremental progress toward four long-term outcomes: safe and stable housing, physical and emotional wellness, two years of post-secondary education, and self-sustaining employment. No matter what a young person is facing when they walk through our doors, we meet them there, and help them to develop the building blocks they need to create a permanent pathway out of homelessness.

WE ARE INCLUSIVE
We don’t just tolerate differences, we celebrate them. We are intersectional and we understand homelessness as a social justice issue that disproportionately affects youth of color and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. We actively and intentionally reject racism, elitism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and xenophobia. We cultivate a culture that is inclusive and equitable by design.

WE ARE ADAPTABLE AND CONTINUALLY STRIVING TO IMPROVE
Every young person we serve is unique, with their own history, strengths, and barriers to success. There is no “one size fits all” approach, so we are committed to keeping our services adaptable and individualized. Likewise, the needs of San Francisco’s youth aren’t static – they shift and evolve as youth adapt to the world around them. We must constantly explore better, smarter, more efficient ways to achieve our mission. We are intentional about assessing how well we are doing, acknowledging what we can do better, and identifying ways to improve.
WE ARE A LEARNING ORGANIZATION
We use data to constantly reflect on, analyze, and improve our impact. In our individual relationships with youth, we use assessment tools to identify youth needs, match services to those needs, and measure each young person's progress toward their goals. As an organization, we use data to assess where we are doing well, understand what we can do better, and strive always to respond to the evolving needs of homeless and runaway youth.

WE USE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES
Larkin Street strives to create a strong sense of community and belonging. When you are part of a strong community, you are accountable for its wellbeing. We take a restorative rather than punitive approach to our work with youth, asking them to repair harm when damage has been done instead of denying them services.

WE ARE MOVING THE NEEDLE BEYOND LARKIN STREET
Our impact extends beyond the youth we serve directly in San Francisco. We are informing stakeholders and advocating for policies that will improve the lives of youth experiencing homelessness at the city, state, and national levels. We find opportunities to be at the table – on advisory groups, boards, and through conferences and convenings – and have an influence.

WE PUT A SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH VOICE
Young people experiencing homelessness are the experts, and their input is critical to our work and to the broader community. We depend on youth to tell us how we’re doing and to inform stakeholders about their needs. We do not tokenize their experiences; we genuinely seek their input and leadership.

WE INVEST IN LEADERSHIP
We embrace a leadership philosophy that is collaborative and empowering. When our goals are clearly articulated and every staff member has the tools they need to do their job with confidence, then we all have the authority to take risks and make sound decisions.

“I appreciate the realness and compassion of my coworkers, and the strength of our clients. There are so many wonderful people who walk through these doors.”
CORE OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The following ten principles encompass Larkin Street’s values. We expect our staff members to embody these principles and hold one another accountable to them.

“Here, and long after I leave Larkin Street, I vow to stand in the gap, do no harm, uplift, empower, enlighten, and give youth what I wish I had.”
Larkin Street Youth Services values the best interests and unique needs of each young person we serve. We are sensitive to the issues that affect each young person’s life and we make a commitment to provide the services that will best meet each young person’s needs.

“Our youth are our future leaders and opportunity for our society to heal.”
Relationships

Larkin Street Youth Services values our relationships with youth, staff, volunteers, donors, the local community, and the community at large.

We value relationships based on trust and respect because the relationships we forge in our work help to create pathways towards moving youth beyond the streets.

Privacy

Larkin Street Youth Services values the utmost confidentiality between staff and clients. We respect our clients’ right to privacy, and, in providing services, we insist that confidentiality is guaranteed.
Larkin Street Youth Services values integrity. We hold ourselves accountable for the decisions we make and the actions we take. We commit to act with integrity in all aspects of our work – programmatic, fiscal, and administrative.
Respect

Larkin Street Youth Services values respect in all of our relationships and in all aspects of our work. We foster an environment where respect is constant and reciprocal. By building an environment of respect, we also build a place of acceptance, safety, and security for everyone in the Larkin Street community.

Commitment

Larkin Street Youth Services values our mission to create a continuum of services that inspires youth to move beyond the street. We will nurture potential, promote dignity and support bold steps by all. We make a commitment to work hard in order to actualize this mission.
Larkin Street Youth Services embraces diversity within our staff, volunteers, and the young people we serve. We value an agency where people of all backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, ages, sexual orientations, religions, classes, abilities, and races are welcomed.
Larkin Street Youth Services values the philosophy of harm reduction. We commit to supporting youth as they move away from harmful choices and situations by promoting health and well-being.

Harm Reduction

“The front line of crisis is the forefront of change.”

Larkin Street Youth Services values the unique and creative contributions of our staff and volunteers. We expect staff members and volunteers to make a commitment to our mission and to speak up and take risks in the sharing of ideas. In return, we value one another’s contributions.

Staff & Volunteers
Larkin Street Youth Services values honest communications, transparency in our actions, a commitment to inclusiveness, and, where possible, shared decision making.

“I work for Larkin Street because I have a passion for helping young people find their voice, express their truths and be their authentic selves.”
OUR COMMITMENT TO YOUNG PEOPLE IS ALWAYS AT THE CENTER OF OUR WORK.

“Everyone deserves respect, opportunity, and independence.”

CORE COMPETENCIES OF OUR STAFF
Larkin Street puts its values into action through our competent and committed staff members. We have identified a set of competencies that serve as both the expectation and the measure of how well we’re doing individually and collectively to serve young people. Our commitment to young people is always at the center of our work.

Larkin Street staff members are:
» Passionate and mission-driven
» Client service oriented
» Human services literate
» Invested in relationships
» Emotionally intelligent
» Collaborative
» Accountable
» Leaders by example
» Responsive
» Outcomes-focused
» Resilient
» Technology literate
» Risk-takers
» Adaptable
LARKIN STREET’S CONTINUUM OF CARE

First, Larkin Street seeks to engage youth, so they can resolve the immediate crises in their lives.

Then, we help youth stabilize so they can envision a future beyond the streets.

Finally, we support long-term sustainability, so youth are equipped with all of the building blocks they need to stay off the streets for good.
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<th><strong>Outreach and Engagement</strong></th>
<th><strong>Health and Wellness</strong></th>
<th><strong>Housing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Larkin Street Academy: Education, Employment, and Arts</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Street Outreach:</strong> our Outreach team offers food, socks, harm reduction toolkits and other referrals to young people in need on the streets. <strong>Drop-in Centers (Haight Street Referral Center/Engagement and Community Center):</strong> our two drop-in centers are safe spaces for young people, offering meals, hygiene supplies, showers, laundry, group activities, case management, counseling and referrals to additional programming.</td>
<td><strong>Medical Clinic:</strong> free comprehensive primary care, sexual health services, and HIV and Hepatitis C prevention and testing. <strong>Case Management:</strong> coordinated and individualized navigation of Larkin Street programs, behavioral health services, community resources, and other supports. <strong>Behavioral Health:</strong> brief and longer-term therapy to help youth identify and manage behavioral health symptoms.</td>
<td><strong>Diamond Youth Shelter:</strong> one of only two emergency shelters for youth under the age of 18 in San Francisco. <strong>Lark-Inn Shelter:</strong> San Francisco’s only emergency shelter for ages 18 to 24.</td>
<td><strong>YouthForce:</strong> immediate access to paid work on supervised work crews. <strong>GED Tutoring:</strong> one-on-one and small group tutoring for the high-school equivalency exam.</td>
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<td><strong>Residential Aftercare:</strong> case management for youth who have exited or aged out of our housing services for up to one year to support them in reaching their goals.</td>
<td><strong>Geary House</strong> and <strong>1020 Haight:</strong> two-year congregate housing programs. <strong>Castro Youth Housing Initiative:</strong> a two-year scattered-site housing program for LGBTQ youth. <strong>Assisted Care/After Care:</strong> Congregate and scattered site housing, plus an onsite HIV specialty care clinic for youth who are HIV-positive. <strong>LOFT2 and LEASE:</strong> Congregate and scattered site housing for current and emancipated foster youth.</td>
<td><strong>Edward II, Ellis Street Apartments, and Routz:</strong> long-term supportive housing with onsite case management, with a focus on youth with mental illness at Routz. <strong>Pathways:</strong> a graduated rental-subsidy program helping youth afford their own apartments.</td>
<td><strong>Career Readiness:</strong> individual and classroom-based counseling and training on resume development, interview skills, and career exploration. <strong>Financial Literacy:</strong> individual and classroom-based counseling and training on budgeting, credit, savings, and debt-reduction. <strong>Bridge Academy:</strong> classroom-based college readiness curriculum. <strong>Learning Centers:</strong> six-month, classroom-based curricula to prepare youth for careers in high-growth industries.</td>
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<td><strong>Core Curriculum:</strong> 8 modules designed to build the baseline skills that form the building blocks for long-term outcomes across housing, wellness, education, and employment.</td>
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<td><strong>Art Program:</strong> hands-on visual, performing arts and design training, along with professional community engagements, including our annual Performing Arts Night. <strong>Youth Advisory Board:</strong> a cohort of Larkin Street youth clients, working with a staff ally, to effect policy change at Larkin Street and in the broader community. <strong>College Success:</strong> one-on-one counseling on enrollment, credit transfer, financial aid, and scholarships resources to support post-secondary persistence. <strong>Internships:</strong> real-world work experience.</td>
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“We are working on the issues that matter the most, and creating a future that is more inclusive and just.”