



# State budget cuts hit home at The Depot

By Kevin Webb on May 1, 2015 in [Lead News, News](#) · 0 Comments

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While the state struggles to address its budget problems, a recent round of cuts to social service programs has swept the legs out of one of Darien's most impactful youth programs and could spell further trouble for The Depot moving forward.

Hartford's latest round of emergency budget cuts call for reduced funding for the state's 102 Youth Service Bureaus and the elimination of related enhancement grants. A total of \$1,309,568 would be cut from the YSBs in each of the next two years.

Connecticut's Youth Service Bureaus are community-based non-profit organizations responsible for intervention, treatment and follow-up services for local youth. Funding is provided through municipal, state and private means, requiring regular fundraising to ensure that programs are provided for.

"People don't realize that we're the Youth Services Bureau, they recognize us as the teen center," Depot Director Janice Marzano said. "What they don't get is that these programs all have to be funded and one of our strongest programs, for helping kids and seeing results, was GNO – Girl's Night Out."

During Girl's Night Out, The Depot hosts women from FIRP, the Families in Recovery Program operated by Liberation Programs. FIRP is a residential program that helps pregnant or parenting single mothers with treatment and keeps them in the lives of their children. Marzano said GNO was one of the most successful programs hosted by The Depot, and that the \$6,200 provided to Darien as a part of the state's enhancement grant had been used exclusively for the funding of Girl's Night Out. Without the grant, last month's GNO program will be the last.

For reference, the Community Fund of Darien's Thriving Youth Task Force Survey of Student Resources and Assets identified adult role models as a resource reflected by just 39% of the town's young people. Additionally, 71% of Darien High School seniors reported using alcohol in the last 30 days, with 55% also having used marijuana over the same span.

"When you're a teenager right now, drugs and alcohol are a major factor in what path you take in life, and these women have taken that path and can relate their experience to the girls" Stamford Youth Services Director Terry Drew said.

"We used to work with them, it was the most powerful thing we did."

While Stamford does not have a teen center of its own, Drew and the Youth Services Bureau provide for approximately 2,500 individual youths in the city. The enrichment grant was split between a number of programs there, including the Restorative Justice Center, which works to establish effective practices for discipline in safety in the community and educate children and families on juvenile law. With \$1.3 million in pending cuts, Drew said that the YSB will be unable to provide its programs to as many as 1,000 of those currently enrolled.

Both Marzano and Drew warned that the cuts would heavily impede on the ability of Youth Service Bureau's to provide for the children involved. Millions of



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cuts from the state's social service programs have forced the YSBs to do more with less support.

"You're taking everything from us, that's what's happening little by little... and yet we're still expected to provide our services and provide a safe place for kids, on what?" Marzuno asked "You keep taking it."

Meanwhile, the need and demand for quality youth services remains even in towns without a propensity for at-risk kids, as evidenced by Darien's asset survey. The Depot continues to offer a wide variety of programs, many of which are self-sufficient as a result of youth-organized fundraisers. However, as the potential loss of Girl's Night Out and other programs shows, help is still needed.

"I think communities don't realize how important the programs for kids are early on, until later, and those are always the programs that get cut," Drew said. "And they're the ones that should never. They're building their future leaders, and if we keep taking those resources away from the table then you're stripping the foundation."

Marzuno asked that the community take notice of how the budget cuts will impact The Depot, and step forward to protect one of Darien's most vulnerable resources.

"Be a caring adult, take interest in what's going on in your town," she said. Your town has a teen center, and we have great programs."

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