Testimony by Natalie Vetto  
YSB Member  
Education Subcommittee  
Public Hearing  
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Good evening Senator Abrams, Representative Rosario, the esteemed members of the Education Subcommittee of the Appropriation Committee, and other guests.

My name is Natalie Vetto, I am a senior at Cheshire High school, and I am here today to talk about how Cheshire Youth Services has helped me grow into the person I am today. I began going to the Cheshire Yellow House the summer before entering 5th grade. The Yellow House is a program run by the Cheshire Youth Services that provides social events for Cheshire residents that are in 5th through 8th grade. The Yellow House also offers reading support for kindergarten through 2nd graders and a science and math program for 4th through 6th graders. Every weekend, I spent my Friday and Saturdays at the Yellow House with my friends. We would play games, watch movies, eat pizza, ice cream sundaes, and just hang out. The Yellow House has always been a warm and welcoming environment where the staff made every child feel important and valued. I met so many different kids throughout the years and many of which I am still very close with today. The Yellow House provided volunteer opportunities which allowed me to give back the younger generations in my community.

While participating in these activities and events, I was always surrounded by very positive and outgoing people. Since we spent our weekends together, our parents and us knew that we would be in a safe and welcoming environment. Although all of us are on brighter paths, I personally know some people who, without the support we had, have made unfortunate life choices. My elementary school best friend happens to be one of the people that fell behind. We were always attached at the hip in class, at recess, and even in chorus, but she did not participate in any of the Cheshire Youth Service programs. In our Freshman year of high school, everything changed. While I was still spending my weekends at the Yellow House volunteering, she was spending hers drinking. She began slipping in her grades and very quickly gave up. She wouldn't come to school, she wouldn't hand in assignments, and she began hanging out with other bad influences. The best friend that I once used to play four square with was now a completely different person. Unfortunately for her, she became very negative and mean to so many people. She continues to fail classes and doesn’t know where her future will take her. While she was out partying, I was volunteering with one of my friends, Sara, who I met at the Yellow House back at my first event in 5th grade.

After volunteering for two years, the Cheshire Yellow House approached Sara and I asking if we would be interested in applying for a job. I was so excited, that I immediately went home to fill out the application. After having so many memories of going to these events, I was so happy to be a part of the memories of all of the new kids attending. I now spend my Friday and Saturday nights trying my best to be the role model that the staff was for me over 6 years ago. I enjoy
every second playing games, drawing, and talking with all of my kids and hearing about their friends, school, and other extracurricular activities. Some of my best high school memories are hanging out with these kids and reliving the fun Sara and I had so many years before. Without the Cheshire Youth Services, I honestly don’t think I would have met Sara. In addition, I would not have had the experiences that have prepared me for college, and a future career as a Pediatric Speech Pathologist. Cheshire Youth Services have left a positive impact on my life, and I know that with every program that they run, they are positively impacting every one of those kids as well.

Thank you for your time.