

# TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Creating a plan to end youth homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador

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Youth homelessness is a persistent and growing problem throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. The causes of youth homelessness are wide ranging and complex, often involving issues related to childhood trauma, mental health, addictions, poverty, disrupted education, and a lack of safe and affordable housing. In addition to the tremendous cost to youth and their families, there is also a significant cost to society in terms of lost productivity, health care, justice and corrections, education and other areas. The issues behind youth homelessness are inherently complex. Without a unified and integrated approach between community and government there will continue to be a growing number of youth in our province who fall through the cracks and into homelessness. Once there, many youth run the risk of falling into long term cycles of homelessness as they enter adulthood. In the instance of young families, there is also the risk of homelessness being perpetuated across generations.

Many Canadian communities have taken steps to create plans to end youth homelessness. It is our belief that through careful review of these plans, open dialogue with peers, and a focus on learning, that we can do the same in Newfoundland and Labrador. On December 4th and 5th, 2014, with the support of local and national partners, the first ever Community Planning Institute on Youth Homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador was held in St. John's. This institute was an opportunity to learn from communities across the country and to see how we can mobilize our own energies, creativity, resources and political will to ensure that every young person has a safe place to live and a supportive community to care for them.

The objectives of the institute were:

1. To obtain a clear understanding of the causes, impacts and costs of youth homelessness
2. To learn how other Canadian communities are planning to end youth homelessness
3. To frame out what a Newfoundland and Labrador plan should include
4. To lay the foundation for the development of a unified and integrated response to preventing and ending youth homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador

In an effort to seed such a vision, the forum brought together senior officials of all three levels of government, service agencies working in the field of homelessness across Canada, groups representing youth and Aboriginal members, post-secondary educational institutions, the business community and other interested persons and organizations.

This document outlines a path forward in mobilizing our efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness in our province. Specifically, as we look ahead, strategic partnerships and processes must:

- ▶ Identify leadership to develop, critique and implement a plan
- ▶ Capture our common understanding and knowledge of the issue
- ▶ Aggregate existing policy initiatives related to youth homelessness
- ▶ Collaborate with government through cross-departmental committees
- ▶ Coordinate with local plans to end homelessness within the province
- ▶ Form national partnerships for guidance, expertise and efficiency
- ▶ Aggregate existing data on youth homelessness
- ▶ Host community conversations and consultations
- ▶ Engage youth in all parts of the process



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Choices for Youth has taken the lead in organizing the Community Planning Institute on Youth Homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador; compiling the findings in consultation with community, provincial and national partners; and in building this report. As an organization that has been working with the at-risk youth population for 25 years, we are well positioned to bring expertise, rally partners and facilitate dialogue. We do, however, recognize that no single entity can bring about the systemic and fundamental changes needed to end youth homelessness in NL. It is with humility, hope, and a belief in possibility, that we present this report as a collaborative initiative. Our intention is to spark a discussion of the issues, challenges and opportunities relating to youth homelessness that ultimately leads to coordinated action. This is an exciting opportunity for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador to be part of a growing national movement committed to taking a strategic approach to tackling homelessness in Canada.



# A PROBLEM WITH A SOLUTION

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The creation of youth homelessness is just that – a creation. It is born out of a series of complex factors that contribute to the tragedy of youth not having a roof over their head. Although we may never eliminate every risk that youth are exposed to, we do have control over our responses and the systems that we put in place to support youth long before they become entrenched in such a crisis driven life. Youth homelessness has huge human and economic consequences for both youth and the communities they live in. Ultimately, coming to this realization also brings with it an understanding that we do not have to accept it as an unsolvable reality in our community, our province, or our country.

If we created the problem, we can create the solution. This report outlines a way forward in developing a plan to prevent and end youth homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador.

“ If we created the problem, we can create the solution.

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS DEFINED

When we say “young people who are homeless”, we are referring to those:

“Between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers and importantly, lack many of the social supports deemed necessary for the transition from childhood to adulthood. In such circumstances, they do not have a stable or consistent residence or source of income, nor do they necessarily have adequate access to the support networks necessary to foster a safe and nurturing transition into the responsibilities of adulthood.”<sup>1</sup>

## THE REALITY OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

To paint a clear picture of what is meant by complex, youth who become homeless, or who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless, may have experiences that include: family breakdown, childhood trauma, addictions, mental illness, poverty, extreme

“ A sense of crisis, a constant element of survival and limited options create a terrain that is difficult for anyone to navigate, let alone youth who are still learning to become adults.

forms of violence and abuse, disrupted educations and involvement with child protection and other systems. As a result, youth are left lacking the most basic life skills necessary to navigate an increasingly challenging adult world. The majority of youth who are homeless have had many of these experiences concurrently. It is rarely the case that youth have just one area of their lives that have created such an extreme crisis. Two specific groups that are overrepresented in the homeless youth and at-risk populations are those who identify as LGBTQ and youth who are Aboriginal. The shocking reality of youth homelessness is one fraught with basic survival in the most extreme situations.

<sup>1</sup> Gaetz, Stephen, “Solutions: Youth Homelessness”, Homeless Hub, York University, <http://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/solutions-youth-homelessness>



## A PROBLEM WITH A SOLUTION CON'T.

This generates a crisis-driven lifestyle for many youth who subsequently resort to functioning day to day or even hour by hour because that is all they can cope with at any moment. A sense of crisis, a constant element of survival and limited options create a terrain that is difficult for anyone to navigate, let alone youth who are still learning to become adults. In this reality, decisions are focused on the immediate basic needs of food, safety and shelter rather than the medium or long term goals for healthy lives.

“ Youth do not choose to be exposed to significantly higher rates of sexual exploitation, or victimization by extreme violence that often comes with being homeless.

This reality also stands in stark contrast to the assumption that people choose to be homeless, or in the particular case of youth, that they are rebelling against the rules at home. Youth do not choose to be exposed to significantly higher rates of sexual exploitation, or to the victimization by extreme violence that often comes with being homeless. They do not choose to experience dramatically poorer nutrition and physical health, or the severely compromised mental health that often comes with being homeless. In light of the knowledge of how youth homelessness happens over time, we know that youth simply do not choose homelessness.

As highlighted by the *Vancouver Foundation Transitions Survey* completed in 2013, youth aging out of systems of care has been identified as a critical point in the path of youth becoming homeless. Comparatively, the study looked to explore the perceptions of stakeholders and the public in setting expectations of these youth in living independently after they were exited from care. Essentially the fundamental question became “*how is it possible to expect vulnerable youth to navigate an adult world at an age that very few of us would expect of our own children and youth?*”<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, young people transitioning out of government care need access to housing, education, skills training, employment, financial literacy, lifetime relationships with adults and community networks. (Vancouver Foundation Transitions Survey 2013)

Despite the undeniable truth of youth homelessness, if it is created by a series of circumstances and conditions that we can identify, then we can create a solution – a plan.

<sup>2</sup> Vancouver Foundation, “Fostering Change”, Vancouver Foundation’s Youth Homelessness Initiative, [https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/documents/YHITransitionsSurveyResults-Report\\_08102013.pdf](https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/documents/YHITransitionsSurveyResults-Report_08102013.pdf)



# A PROBLEM WITH A SOLUTION CON'T.

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN ST. JOHN'S AND THROUGHOUT NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

In Canada, there are approximately 65,000 homeless youth. This represents the fastest growing and most underserved segment of the homeless population across the country.

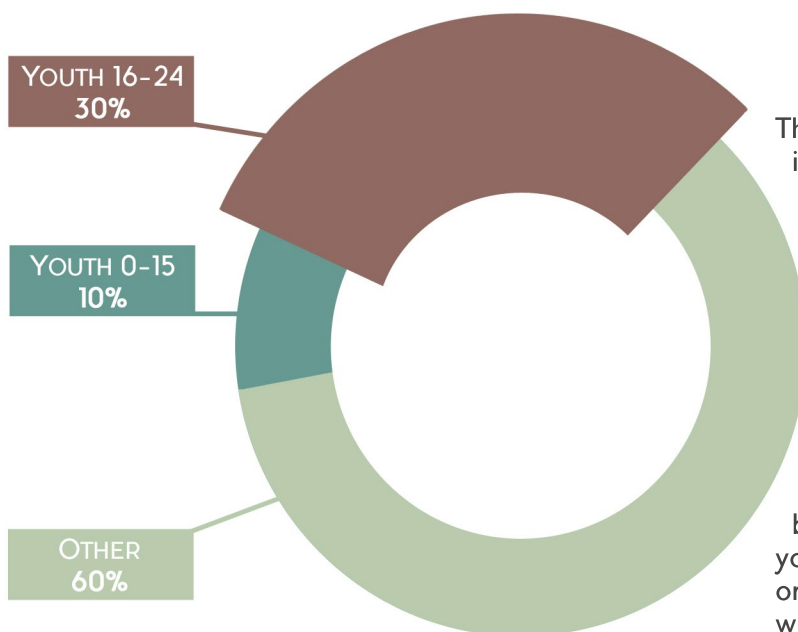


30% of the homeless population in St. John's are youth.

In Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), while many of these at-risk youth congregate in city centers – the issue is truly provincial in scope.

According to *End Homelessness St. John's*, shelter statistics from 2012 reveal that youth ages 16-24 comprise 30% of St. John's emergency shelter population. This is 10% higher than the national average and a number that has been cited as growing.

### HOMELESSNESS IN ST. JOHN'S, NL



This 30% represents 231 unique individuals between the ages of 16-24 who accessed shelter beds in St. John's. When expanded to include children and youth between the ages of 0-24, the percentage jumps to youth representing a total of 40% of the homeless population in St. John's. These are conservative numbers that do not reflect those turned away due to shelters being at full occupancy, or any youth who are sleeping on the street or without stable housing (e.g. youth who are couch-surfing).

They also do not include the number of youth who are living in unsafe, unstable living circumstances (e.g. being sexually exploited) in order to have a roof over their head.



It is important to acknowledge at this point that there is a lack of data across the country on the full extent of youth homelessness. What we do have, however, is reliable data from emergency shelters and other sources that can give us an indication of the scope of the issue. In NL, the same shortfalls impact our ability to capture the magnitude of the issue in a nuanced way. This is a reality that needs to be addressed and should be included in a formalized plan to end youth homelessness in NL. To get a truly accurate picture of the problem of youth homelessness in this province, there is a need for an effective cross system data collection tool and Point-in-Time counts. Having consistent access to this information is critical in both understanding the extent of the issue across the province as a starting point, and measuring the effectiveness of the plan put into place to end youth homelessness and prevent it from happening in the future. This lack of provincial data must not deter progress and the development of a plan – it has to become a part of the plan.

The demographics of at-risk youth in St. John's can be taken as representative of youth from across the province, with many youth travelling to the city in search of support and opportunities, or in some cases to escape untenable home/community environments. Once again, NL is not unique in this respect as it is well researched and documented that many youth experience homelessness in this way. As a result, the data for St. John's serves as a valuable starting point.



# A COMPLEX ISSUE THE PATH INTO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Choices for Youth (CFY) is a St. John's based organization actively tackling the issue of youth homelessness, and helping at-risk youth secure stable housing, education and employment. Between April 2013 and March 2014, the organization worked with over 700 young people. In the past 12 months, that number has risen to over 1000. These youth, who are coming from all parts of the province, represent a multitude of complex issues which directly contribute to their crisis driven realities.

Referring to research across the country, we can also determine that the path into homelessness is relatively predictable and therefore preventable. Key determinants of this research, recently released in the *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness (2015)* report, and statistics from CFY are shared in the table below.

"The core issues affecting a lot of young people are related to family breakdown, childhood trauma, poverty, addictions and mental health – many of which can lead to housing instability and homelessness. If we can support youth in addressing these real barriers in their lives, things quickly start to improve. They become more stably housed, are more likely to go to school – if they're in school they're more likely to go to work... eventually what we see is that these young people begin realizing their potential and setting themselves up for healthy and successful transitions into adulthood."

-Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director at Choices for Youth

## STATISTICS OF YOUTH AVAILING OF CFY SERVICES (2014)

Source: CFY Outreach & Youth Engagement Program

- 63% past or current involvement Child Youth Family Services
- 67% unstable housing in family or origin
- 66% currently reliving unstable housing
- 82% dropped out of school
- 75% mental health issues
- 67% co-occurring mental health and addictions
- 74% addictions issues
- 72% unemployed or have never been employed
- 75% past or current involvement with the criminal justice system
- 69% repeat use of shelter (recurring homelessness)

## FACTORS LEADING TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Source: Alberta Plan to Prevent and Reduce<sup>4</sup> Youth Homelessness

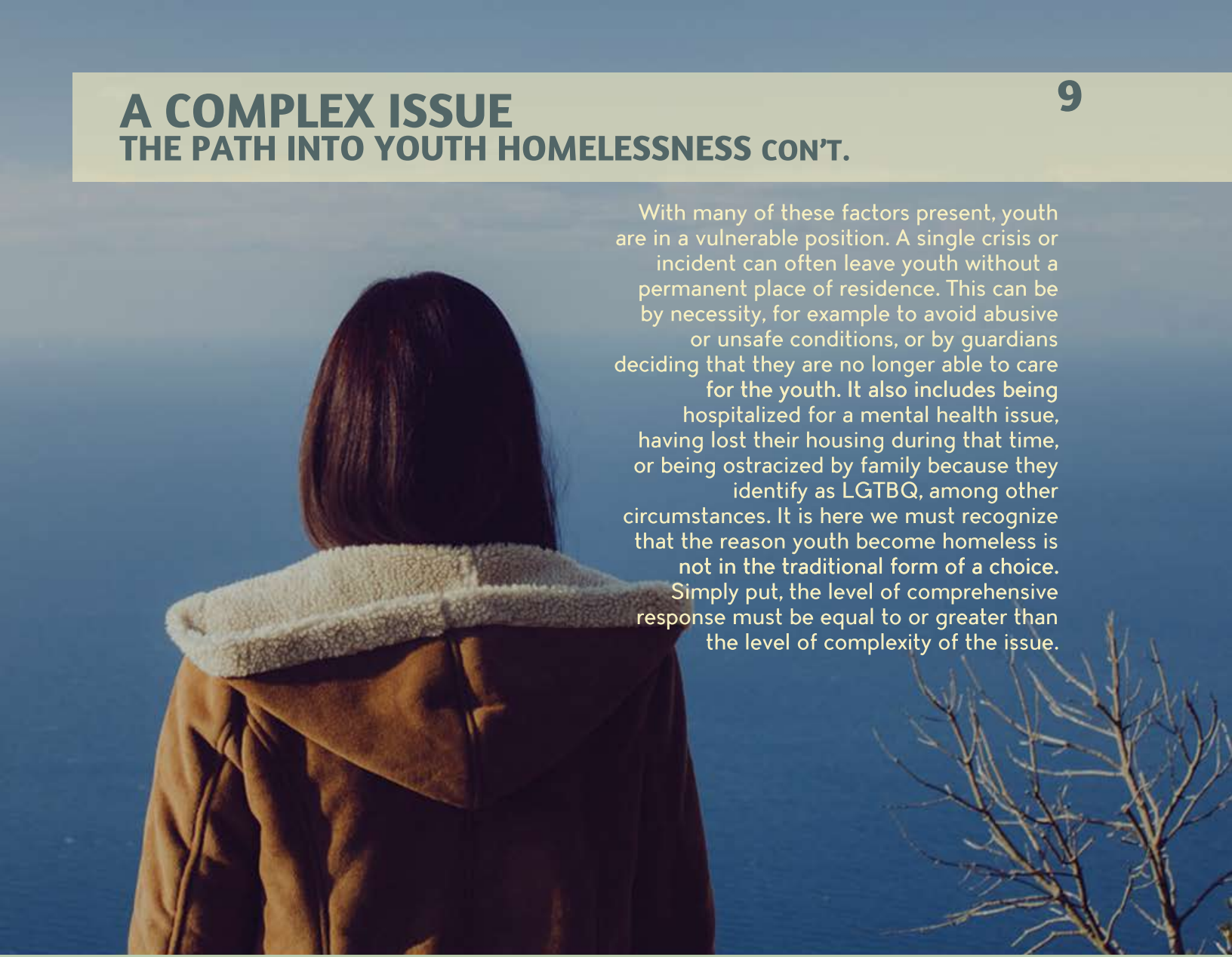
- Experience with the child intervention system
- A history of family conflict and instability
- One or more mental health conditions (present in the youth or a family member)
- Alcohol and/or substance abuse issues (present in the youth or a family member)
- Low-income or poverty stricken families
- Exposure to abuse or other victimization
- Previous episode of temporary homelessness

<sup>4</sup> Government of Alberta, "Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness", Government of Alberta, <http://vibrantcanada.ca/files/plan-to-prevent-and-reduce-youth-homelessness.pdf>



## A COMPLEX ISSUE THE PATH INTO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS CON'T.

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With many of these factors present, youth are in a vulnerable position. A single crisis or incident can often leave youth without a permanent place of residence. This can be by necessity, for example to avoid abusive or unsafe conditions, or by guardians deciding that they are no longer able to care for the youth. It also includes being hospitalized for a mental health issue, having lost their housing during that time, or being ostracized by family because they identify as LGBTQ, among other circumstances. It is here we must recognize that the reason youth become homeless is not in the traditional form of a choice. Simply put, the level of comprehensive response must be equal to or greater than the level of complexity of the issue.

Once a youth becomes homeless, they face further risks related to delayed social and developmental progress due to the vast array of negative consequences involved. This directly impacts their ability to develop life skills and independence, and further contributes to their reality of becoming entrenched in homelessness. Studies also suggest that the longer an individual is homeless, the more difficult it becomes to change their situation, and in some cases leads to long term chronic homelessness or repeated cycles of hospitalization or incarceration. In addition, these youth are faced with stigmatization and marginalization - being continuously discriminated against which further entrenches them in homelessness.

Housing limitations and cost are also contributing factors to youth homelessness. According to Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, renters across the province spend on average 39.3% of their income on housing alone.<sup>5</sup> This represents not only a substantial financial barrier for those looking for stable housing, but also has a significant impact on the stability of individuals and families already renting. As noted above, youth also face a significant housing barrier because of the stigma of simply being youth.

<sup>5</sup> NL Housing, "Annual Report 2009-10", Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, <http://www.assembly.nl.ca/business/electronicdocuments/NLHousingAnnualReport2009-10.pdf>



To address the issues that entrench youth in cycles of homelessness and create barriers to individual success, we must embrace a Housing First approach which is adapted to meet the unique needs of youth.<sup>6</sup> This approach acknowledges the tremendous

“ There is a need to shift our thinking, resources and investment away from such emergency responses and toward a strategy that focuses primarily on prevention, and on housing and supports.

need to house young people as quickly as possible, and provide a cohesive system of supports. This not only mitigates further issues from arising, but also alleviates the associated stressor of being homeless. Once housed, intensive models of support invariably lead to increased engagement, increased options, increased stability and independence, and ultimately a more successful and healthy transition to adulthood.

In addition to a Housing First Framework for Youth,<sup>7</sup> we must also re-examine traditional approaches to homelessness. Such efforts have focused on providing emergency services – shelter, food, clothing, etc. Although critical components, on their own they are insufficient and do not address the scope of the issues broadly enough. There is a need to shift our thinking, resources and investment away from such emergency responses and toward a strategy that focuses primarily on prevention, and on housing and supports.

When comparing such traditional responses to the medical field, it is difficult to imagine health care being delivered exclusively through emergency departments. Like responses to homelessness, emergency care is a necessary crisis response – not a long term care option.

## TRADITIONAL RESPONSE



## STRATEGIC RESPONSE



<sup>6</sup> Gaetz, Stephen, “A Safe and Decent Place to Live | Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth”, Report 12, Homeless Hub Report Series, York University, [http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HFFWYouth-FullReport\\_0.pdf](http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HFFWYouth-FullReport_0.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Gaetz, Stephen, “A Safe and Decent Place to Live | Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth”, Report 12, Homeless Hub Report Series, York University, [http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HFFWYouth-FullReport\\_0.pdf](http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HFFWYouth-FullReport_0.pdf)



## ADULT HOMELESSNESS IS NOT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Another critical component in shifting the response to youth homelessness is the importance of recognizing that systems cannot simply take adult responses and apply them to youth issues. To do so fails to recognize that youth are developmentally distinct from the adult population. As well, the causes and circumstances which have lead youth to homelessness are unique and subsequently require unique responses. This is noted in the recently released (Feb 2015) *Ending Homelessness in NL*, specifically identifying that youth need different approaches to support and service delivery.

## ADDRESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

A strategic plan to end youth homelessness must address all three areas from the perspective of youth: Emergency Response, Prevention, and Housing and Supports.

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE

While investments in prevention strategies, as well as housing and supports is critical to ending youth homelessness in NL, emergency responses must be swift, adequate and connected to a larger system of supports. The primary focus is to provide responses which will involve youth in this part of the system for as short a time as possible. Using the health care system for comparison –emergency centers will always be a necessary component, but they do not on their own serve the public in providing better health for individuals. Family doctors, nutrition, exercise, physiotherapy, long-term care facilities, prescriptions and rehabilitation are examples of how emergency systems in health care are connected to a larger system of support. The existence of these supports does not eliminate the need for emergency service centers.

Similarly, in the case of youth homelessness, emergency response remains a critical component. Youth in crises can range from family breakdown, suicidal ideation to couch-surfing, from shelter stays to missing a rental payment. Any strategy to end youth homelessness must address these crisis situations and assist youth to rapidly transition into a broader, more cohesive system of support.

### PREVENTION

An increased focus on prevention translates to an analysis of factors that exist upstream to the problem. Addressing these root causes could materialize in efforts to reduce poverty, improve access to Early Childhood Education, create educational programs in the areas of LGBTQ awareness/supports, improve access and awareness of mental health and addictions supports, implement strategies for school retention, connect families to a continuum of supports, foster parenting skills, better support for Aboriginal communities, strengthen anger management and conflict resolution skills, etc. as examples.

There is also a need to take stock of how existing systems contribute to youth homelessness. For example, an integrated systems approach to prevent youth from being discharged from child protection, criminal justice and mental health institutions could drastically reduce the number of youth falling into homelessness.



## **PREVENTION con't.**

Legislative tactics can also be applied to help with prevention. For example, to reduce the likelihood of youth becoming homeless, child protection legislation reform could aim to include:

- ▶ Raising the age to which youth are entitled to care and support.
- ▶ Allowing youth to enter care of child protection services up to the age of 18 and allowing youth who leave care to re-enter, if they choose.
- ▶ Enhanced supports to youth transitioning to adult systems.
- ▶ Ensuring that youth have access to funding for post-secondary education beyond the age of 18, and that they are made aware of it when they come into care.
- ▶ Providing transitional funding to assist youth leaving care to obtain stable housing, if necessary.
- ▶ Strengthening families through reunification, counselling or mediation.

Finally, prevention strategies are also critical at the point where a youth is about to become homeless. This kind of early intervention approach would include:

- ▶ Collaboration and cooperation (a team approach) between various supports available to the youth.
- ▶ Right matching of services (person-centered).
- ▶ Keeping youth in their original communities.
- ▶ Contextual case management (e.g., attention to culture and ensuring flexibility).
- ▶ Responsive engagement (e.g., relationship building and advocating for support).
- ▶ Coordinated and well-managed systems.
- ▶ Evaluation for success (including support and training).



# A SHIFT IN APPROACH CON'T.

## HOUSING AND SUPPORTS

A focus on housing and supports requires that strategies using a Housing First Framework for Youth are invested in and given time to mature. This approach helps homeless individuals move into independent and permanent housing, with no preconditions, and then provides them with additional services and supports as needed. The core principles for applying this approach for youth are:<sup>8</sup>

1. Immediate access to housing with no preconditions
2. Youth choice and self determination
3. Positive youth development orientation
4. Individualized and client-driven supports
5. Social and community integration

With traditional Housing First, there is an immediate focus on enabling independent living. The Housing First Framework for Youth takes a different approach and provides a continuum of housing options and choices including: helping youth to return home, providing permanent supportive housing, and/or providing transitional housing.



Figure 2 - Housing First Framework for Youth (from Gaetz, Stephen, "A Safe and Decent Place to Live - Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth")

<sup>8</sup> Gaetz, Stephen, "A Safe and Decent Place to Live | Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth", Report 12, Homeless Hub Report Series, York University, [http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HFFWYouth-FullReport\\_0.pdf](http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HFFWYouth-FullReport_0.pdf)



An effective Housing First Framework for Youth would require specific supports:

## HOUSING SUPPORTS

- ▶ Help in obtaining housing
- ▶ Housing retention
- ▶ Rent supplements
- ▶ Support when things go wrong
- ▶ Aftercare

## ACCESS TO INCOME AND EDUCATION SUPPORTS

- ▶ Income supports
- ▶ Training
- ▶ Employment
- ▶ Education

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SUPPORTS

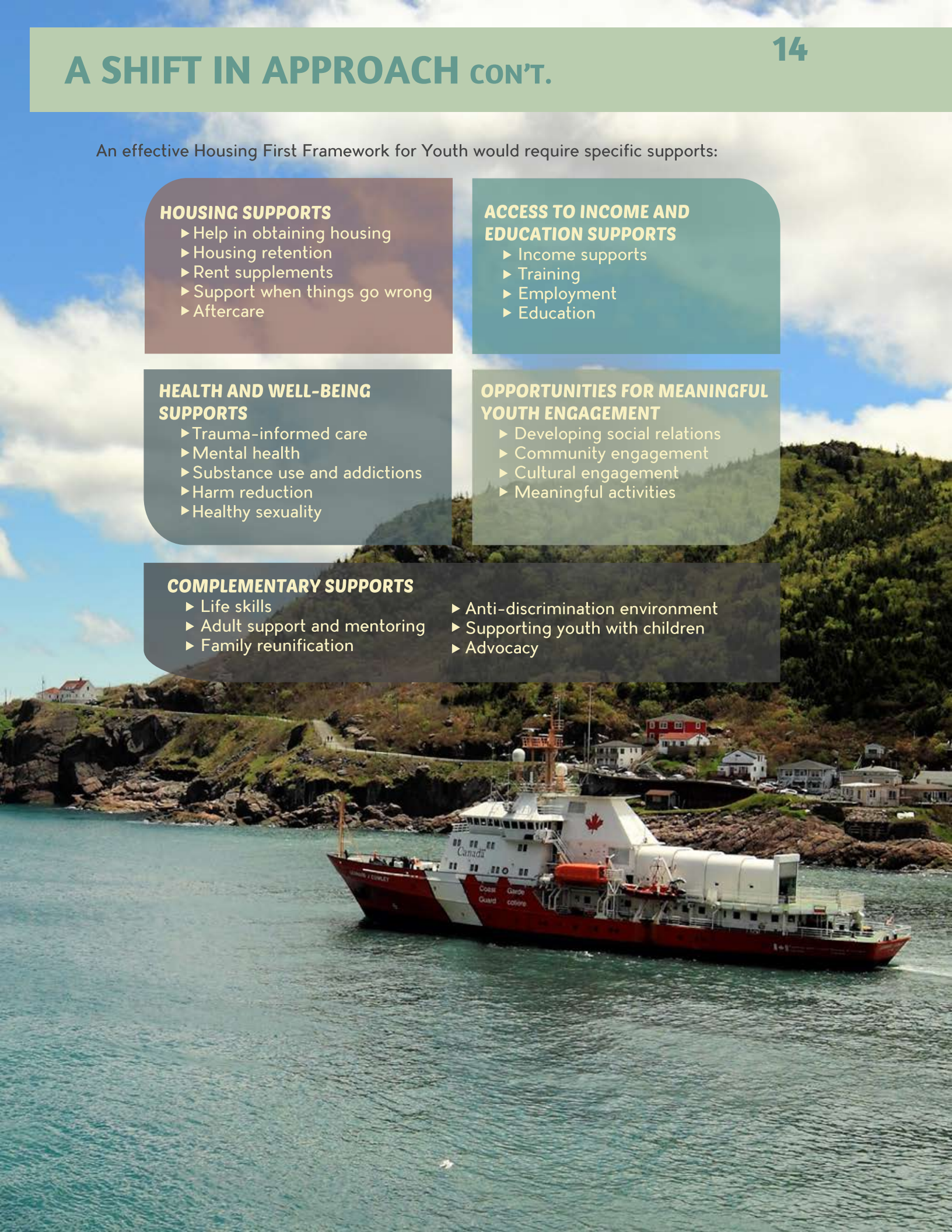
- ▶ Trauma-informed care
- ▶ Mental health
- ▶ Substance use and addictions
- ▶ Harm reduction
- ▶ Healthy sexuality

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- ▶ Developing social relations
- ▶ Community engagement
- ▶ Cultural engagement
- ▶ Meaningful activities

## COMPLEMENTARY SUPPORTS

- ▶ Life skills
- ▶ Adult support and mentoring
- ▶ Family reunification
- ▶ Anti-discrimination environment
- ▶ Supporting youth with children
- ▶ Advocacy





# MAKING A PLAN CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

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## COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

Given the cross cutting nature of youth homelessness, there are many organizations, individuals and government departments representing various perspectives, holding specific insights and able to leverage key stakeholders. To end youth homelessness in any province, coming together should focus on two main components:

1. Building capacity and knowledge sharing
2. Systemic change to public policies impacting youth homelessness

The nature of a community plan, developed in a collaborative and broadly engaging process should exist as a dynamic document that is able to evolve based on changing needs. To achieve this, the plan should incorporate continued evaluation and ongoing assessment of outputs and outcomes.



“No single entity, organization, or even level of government can end homelessness. It’s not about shelters retooling or the housing sector doing more - it’s about prisons not releasing people without a release plan. It’s about child and youth welfare not delivering individuals into the adult system without the necessary bridging supports—this is where we see significant entry points into homelessness.”

“There are certainly economic, fiscal, and tax policies that affect the housing market more broadly, but there are systemic issues in areas like corrections, child and youth welfare, and family court where there are family disputes or family breakdowns- all of these situations mean someone is moving on, and someone is needing to relocate and find new housing.”

“It’s been a creation of many hands, and it takes all those many hands to craft an effective response to the problem. It takes trust, understanding, and respect to bring those silos together.”

- Bruce Pearce of End Homelessness St. John’s



Youth homelessness is a complex social issue that requires many people working together to build and sustain healthy relationships and capacity in families and communities to reduce and prevent the issue.

### **ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT**

- ▶ Establish a shared vision, provincial priorities and policy directions amongst all ministries.
- ▶ Facilitate collaboration among individuals, families and communities to prevent youth homelessness through education and awareness.
- ▶ Support the provision of coordinated and integrated supports and services at the community level.
- ▶ Provide the legislative and policy framework and funding support to address youth homelessness.
- ▶ Support opportunities to share knowledge between policy-makers, academics and service providers.
- ▶ Support existing best and promising practices and innovative research and programming.
- ▶ Ensure healthy transitions across the system of care for youth.

### **ROLE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS/NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES**

- ▶ Deliver front-line services and supports.
- ▶ Collaborate to share best practices and research, and help to identify emerging trends.
- ▶ Work with government to identify needs, issues and strategic directions.
- ▶ Inform and influence government priorities.
- ▶ Identify promising practices and research opportunities.
- ▶ Inform and influence community change.
- ▶ Other funding providers/foundations.

### **ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

- ▶ Provide leadership and modeling for a broad range of private sector champions.
- ▶ Provide skills training and employment opportunities.
- ▶ Support the development of affordable housing options.
- ▶ Engage and support employees in building healthy relationships.
- ▶ Provide charitable and philanthropic giving.
- ▶ Support employees to be engaged on the issue.

### **ROLE OF INDIVIDUALS - YOUTH, FAMILIES, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBOURS**

- ▶ Take personal responsibility for individual wellness and healthy relationships.
- ▶ Become engaged citizens to prevent and reduce youth homelessness in NL.
- ▶ Learn how to identify youth at-risk of homelessness and what can be done about it.
- ▶ Support employees to be engaged on the issue.

### A UNIFYING FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL POLICY

A unifying framework is critical to ensure that the aspirations and values of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are reflected in the way we approach the development and implementation of social policy. With these aspirations in mind, the Youth Homelessness Community Planning Institute (convened by Choices for Youth in December 2014) along with this report, serve as a starting point for working towards a plan. Additionally, *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness* (Alberta's Youth Plan) provides an invaluable resource to further guide our planning work here in Newfoundland and Labrador. *Alberta's Social Policy Framework* outlines the following outcomes which have been leveraged within their Youth Plan:

- ▶ **Safe** – Live free from fear of abuse and violence.
- ▶ **Healthy** – Achieve the highest attainable standards of health and well-being.
- ▶ **Secure and Resilient** – Support themselves and their households through safe work and career opportunities, with access to effective income supports when in financial need.
- ▶ **Lifelong learners** – Develop the knowledge, skills, and commitment to learning necessary to realize their potential and participate in society.
- ▶ **Included** – Feel welcome in community where they live, learn and work.
- ▶ **Active and Engaged** – Explore opportunities to participate in recreational activities and cultural experience, and to engage in Albertan society.

It is our recommendation that a similar framework, built upon existing work such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Provincial Health Plan, be implemented in Newfoundland and Labrador. Initial reflections on this suggest that such a unifying framework social policy should focus on:

- ▶ Health and Well Being
- ▶ Inclusion and Empowerment
- ▶ Safety and Emergency Response
- ▶ Opportunities, Learning and Personal Growth
- ▶ Continuous System of Supports to Maximize Individual Potential



### STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND PROCESSES

The development of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador requires coordination, commitment and most of all a belief that the objective is indeed possible. This translates into extensive work, numerous conversations and consultation of experts, as outlined below.

#### WHY FOCUS ON YOUTH?

Youth are in the process of transitioning to adulthood. In many cases they may not have acquired the social, personal and life skills needed for independent living.

Youth often avoid the current homeless-serving system out of fear of authorities.

Youth have needs and access requirements for supports that are uniquely different from the system aiding adult homelessness.

For youth under the age of 18, the situation presents an added layer of complexity with obligations and involvement of families and government care.

Interventions with youth represent an opportunity to avoid long-term, unhealthy entrenchment in cycles of homelessness.

#### IDENTIFY LEADERSHIP TO DEVELOP, CRITIQUE AND IMPLEMENT A PLAN

- Engage key stakeholders, influencers and decision makers
- Foster understanding that ending youth homelessness is possible
- Determine strategic contribution of all leaders in developing a plan

#### CAPTURE OUR COMMON UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE ISSUE

- Evaluate what we know about the issue and best practices (e.g. the plan must be provincial in scope and adopt a Housing First Framework for Youth)
- Form principles of agreement for moving forward

#### AGGREGATE EXISTING POLICY INITIATIVES RELATED TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

- Review governmental publications such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Provincial Health Plan
- Invite existing special committees to provide recommendations for the plan (Mental Health & Addictions, Crime and Community Safety)

#### COLLABORATE WITH GOVERNMENT THROUGH CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEES

- Government should establish cross-departmental committees to play an active role in the development and implementation of a plan to end youth homelessness in NL

### **COORDINATE WITH LOCAL PLANS TO END HOMELESSNESS WITHIN THE PROVINCE**

- Where such local plans exist or are under development, seek to ensure alignment of efforts and coordination of resources to end youth homelessness (e.g. Ending Homelessness in NL, End Homelessness St. John's Community Plan, etc.)

### **FORM NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR GUIDANCE, EXPERTISE AND EFFICIENCY**

- Invite national agencies with expertise and experience in tackling youth homelessness to the table. A number of these agencies, such as the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Raising the Roof, Eva's Initiative's Mobilizing Local Capacity and the National Learning Committee, are already supporting existing work and are ready to take the next step
- Refer to their guidance and expertise on national research, and other plans to end youth homelessness across Canada

### **AGGREGATE EXISTING DATA ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

- Review what we have
- Evaluate availability, accessibility and gaps
- Determine what is missing and agree on methods to acquire it in the immediate and on-going basis

### **HOST COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS**

- Engage public in dialogue around the issue
- Engage related agencies (e.g. violence against women, sexual health)
- Learn from communities over-represented in youth homelessness (e.g. LBGTQ and Aboriginal)
- Engage other sectors (other provincial bodies, economic agencies, community foundations)

### **ENGAGE YOUTH IN ALL PARTS OF THE PROCESS**

- Create inclusive spaces to consult at-risk and homeless youth
- Allow lived experiences of youth to direct key components of the plan
- Develop multi-format approaches to consult with youth (meetings, online forms, panels, etc.)

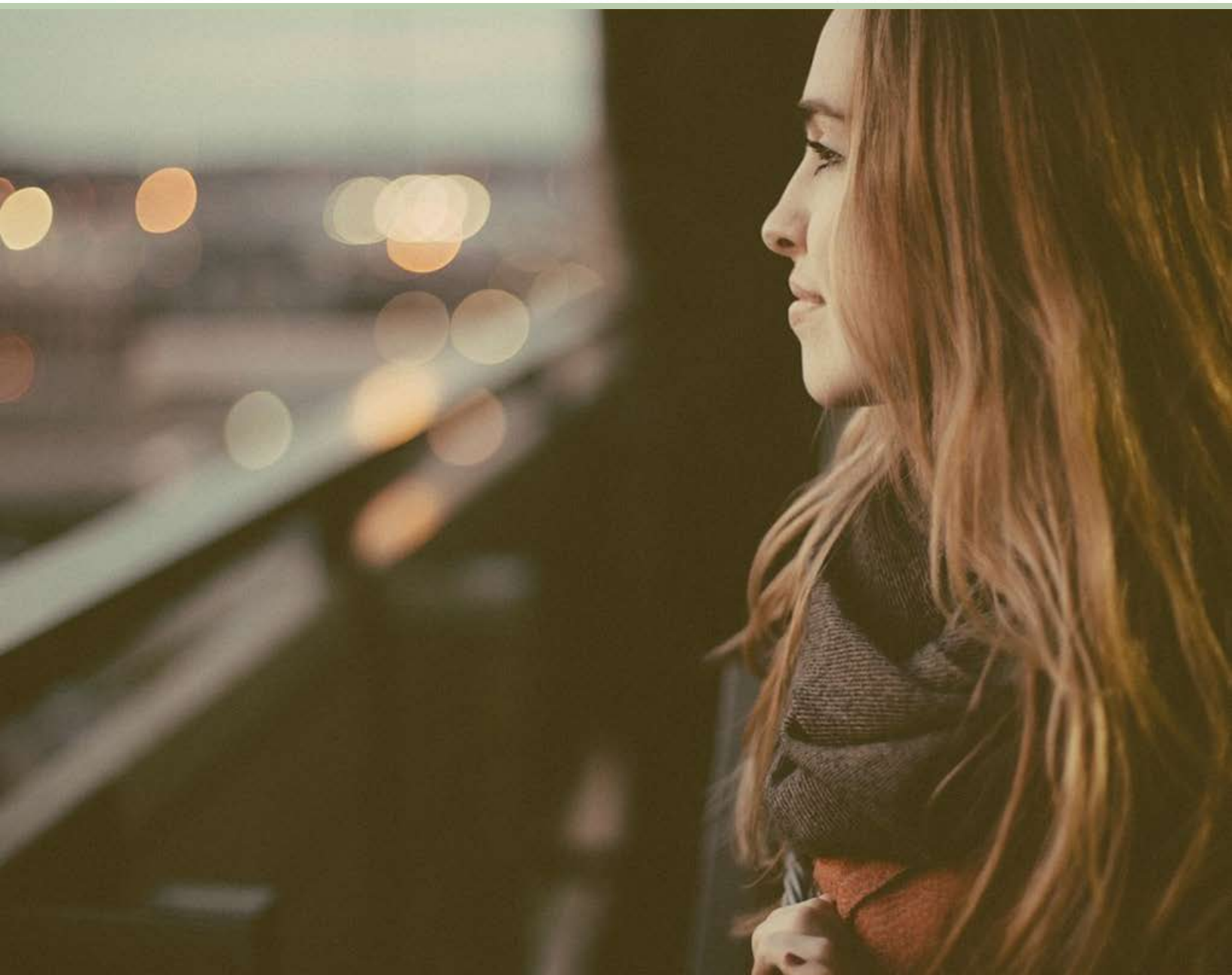
### **AMPLIFIED RISKS FOR HOMELESS YOUTH**

- Development of new social networks with other street-involved youth
- Loss of connections with the education system
- Exposure to substance abuse and potential exploitation



Youth homelessness is a preventable tragedy. It is the result of a collection of otherwise effective systems that together, fail to provide a comprehensive response to the issue. Above all, it is clear now that through the voices of youth; through inspiring examples in other communities; through the promise of progress we've made – it is only through full partnership between government, citizens, and community that we can achieve the goal of ending youth homelessness in our province.

There is an opportunity here to work with partners across the country and put in place a plan for the most vulnerable youth in our communities – to create the solution. We must seize it.











## Additional Resources on Youth Homelessness

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness  
The Homeless Hub  
Youth Housing Toolkit  
Youth Employment Toolkit  
Preventing Youth Homelessness  
The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014  
A Safe & Decent Place to Live:  
Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth  
[www.homelesshub.ca/](http://www.homelesshub.ca/)

Government of Alberta  
Youth Homelessness Initiatives  
A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness  
[www.humanservices.alberta.ca](http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca)

Raising the Roof  
Humans for Humans | Changing the Conversation  
[www.humansforhumans.ca/](http://www.humansforhumans.ca/)

## Municipal and Rural Initiatives

Kamloops | A Way Home - Homelessness Action Plan  
<http://www.kamloopshap.ca/>

Yellowknife | Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Plan  
[www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/Community-Advisory-Board-on-Homelessness.asp](http://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/Community-Advisory-Board-on-Homelessness.asp)

Kingston & Frontenac County | 2014 Report on Housing and Homelessness  
[www.cityofkingston.ca/residents/community-services/housing/homeless](http://www.cityofkingston.ca/residents/community-services/housing/homeless)

Wellington Country | 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan  
[www.wellington.ca/en/socialservices/10-Year-Housing-and-Homelessness-Plan.asp](http://www.wellington.ca/en/socialservices/10-Year-Housing-and-Homelessness-Plan.asp)

Winnipeg | A Plan to End Homelessness  
[www.unitedwaywinnipeg.ca/reports-publications/](http://www.unitedwaywinnipeg.ca/reports-publications/)

Brandon | 2014-2019 Community Plan for Homelessness  
[www.brandonhomelessness.weebly.com/research](http://www.brandonhomelessness.weebly.com/research)

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# A Way Home | Working Together to End Youth Homelessness in Canada



## Working Together to End Youth Homelessness in Canada

A Way Home is a major national effort to significantly change the course of youth homelessness locally and across the country. The Program draws on the resources of this unique partnership to:

- Build community awareness about youth homelessness
- Support and assist communities to develop and implement plans that will prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness
- Facilitate linkages and foster effective networks and collective action to combat youth homelessness
- Promote systemic change to Canadian public policies impacting on youth homelessness

A Way Home is actively working in or has helped to facilitate work in:

Brandon, MB  
Kingston, ON  
Province of Alberta (Plan to End Youth Homelessness)

Yellowknife, NWT  
Winnipeg, MB

Kamloops, BC  
Saint John, NB

Wellington County, ON  
St. John's, NL



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